

From: Ruth Parker

Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2020 2:46 PM

To: [list of recipients redacted]; Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fw: Zuhdi Jasser on Viewing Islam through "the Lens of Liberty and Enlightenment"

Joe Biden has said that he will have Muslims serving at every level of his administration. The first two videos in this email explain why this may not necessarily be a good idea, especially for those of us who believe that women are and should remain the equals of men.

----- Forwarded Message -----

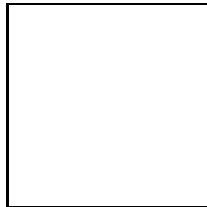
From: Middle East Forum

To: Ruth Parker

Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2020, 11:26:13 AM PDT

Subject: Zuhdi Jasser on Viewing Islam through "the Lens of Liberty and Enlightenment"

[View this email in your browser](#)



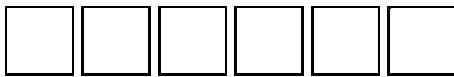
Zuhdi Jasser on Viewing Islam through "the Lens of Liberty and Enlightenment"

by Marilyn Stern

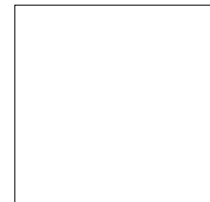
[*Middle East Forum Webinar*](#)

October 16, 2020

<https://www.meforum.org/61656/jasser-on-islam-liberty-and-enlightenment>



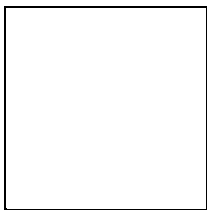
Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, president of the [American Islamic Forum for Democracy](#) (AIFD) and cofounder of the [Muslim Reform Movement](#), spoke to participants in an August 21 Middle East Forum Webinar ([video](#)) about his life as an American Muslim embracing "liberty and freedom" and



the need to challenge the "red-green axis" that unites the far left and Islamists in the United States.

Jasser's activism is rooted in his upbringing. His parents, Syrian Muslims who escaped Baathist tyranny to settle in Wisconsin, instilled in Jasser a "personal relationship with God," rather than "a loyalty for collective Islam or the faith itself," and a belief in American democracy, which "gives every person an individual right to have that relationship with God and to interpret Islam the way they feel they should."

Jasser recounted his university experience where Islamist organizations on campus (e.g., the Muslim Students Association) promoted a form of Muslim identity that "wasn't about faith ... [but] rather about their political agenda and especially their anti-Israel motives, their antisemitism, and was pretty much dominated by the Palestinian movement."



Zuhdi Jasser at a reunion on board the USS *El Paso* in October 2019.

Jasser's view of religion through "the lens of liberty and enlightenment" was further accentuated while serving in the U.S. Navy, during which he earned his medical degree. In contrast, the "normative" Islam being taught "in most of the mosques" is viewed through an "anti-Western, anti-American lens and not through one that is God-centric."

Jasser established AIFD in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks to address the "root cause of Islamist radicalization" by countering "the Islamic state concept and its instruments of Sharia" and instead advancing "pro-American, pro-liberty, anti-radical left" commitments in American Muslims. Although Muslim clergy may control "normative" Islam in the U.S., Jasser believes there is a "significant plurality" of Muslims who "don't go to mosque and have come to the West in order to escape ... that control."

Jasser's hope of attracting huge numbers of Muslims to AIFD's counter-Islamist banner did "not come to fruition." He sees this as a result of Muslims in America being complacent. "They've not seen Islamists as a threat to them here, so they're not waking up against it."

"The vast majority of [American] Muslims ... are not spoken for by anybody."

Consequently, Jasser focused his attention on developing future Muslim leaders,

cofounding the Muslim Reform Movement and working with other Muslim activists doing similar work. Jasser believes "the vast majority of Muslims are still a constituency that are not spoken for by anybody. ... Hopefully, we can grow our bandwidth to do that."

"We need to empower ... anti-Islamist, pro-liberty, pro-freedom Muslims that speak out against anti-Semitism ... [and] the misogyny ... interpreted from the Koran and Hadith, [and who] speak out against the hate and bigotry ... associated with the Black Lives Matter movement and others that are ... hijacking our faith community."

Jasser's prescription for combatting the red-green alliance includes the U.S. government programming with Muslims who project an anti-

Islamist narrative, media platforms devoting more access to anti-Islamist Muslims, and university programs teaching "why reform is necessary" in Islam.

Jasser sees the far left, which is essentially

The far left is essentially "advocating for the Islamist agenda."

"advocating for the

Islamist agenda," as a major obstacle. Leftists and Islamists share an aversion to religious liberty and have "common enemies ... those who believe in freedom and the state of Israel." At some point "they'll end up fighting one another" if and when "they've destroyed ... [their] enemies," but until then "they're going to work together." The Democratic party, while "marginalizing the political Islamists" more than the far left, is nevertheless "embracing the more radical, anti-police" imams because it has "a bigotry of low expectations for our clergy."

On foreign policy, Jasser reviewed the "major inflection points" that have unfolded post-9/11. Though he supported the U.S.-led occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, both underscored that "there's no military solution to the problem of political Islam" and that "prolonged wars [are] not a way to change ideas." Jasser said it's up to the secular liberals in Muslim countries to "build their own states," but advocates for U.S. policies to "empower anti-Islamists." The Arab Awakening showed that ordinary Muslims aspire to democracy and are willing to take on dictators, but it also showed that power vacuums created by the collapse of tyrannical regimes are exploited by societal forces that are the best organized, namely Islamists who spent decades organizing in the mosques.

The recent advent of the UAE-Israel agreement is a positive development that may spread to Morocco, Bahrain, Oman and perhaps Saudi Arabia. With this opening, Jasser is hopeful these countries will begin to "marginalize the Muslim Brotherhood." He believes that freedom-loving Muslims in countries like the UAE and Oman will have to go through a "stepwise process" with "benevolent monarchs ... in which civil society can get built." However, eventually these benevolent monarchs "are going to have to give away some of the reins to democracy, to real liberty," he cautioned. "We can't be credible as reformists if we say we're against theocracy but we're pro-secular dictatorship or pro-tyranny of some kind."

Marilyn Stern is communications coordinator at the Middle East Forum.

Related Topics: [Moderate Muslims](#), [Muslims in the United States](#) *This text may be reposted or forwarded so long as it is presented as an integral whole with complete and accurate information provided about its author, date, place of publication, and original URL.*

[Forward to a friend](#)

Copyright © 2020 *Middle East Forum, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#)

