

MUSLIM REFORM MOVEMENT

IMPACT: The Muslim Reform Movement is an international coalition of Muslims that purportedly seeks to counter the ideology of Islamism by reforming Islam. The coalition and its members leverage ‘insider’ Muslim identities to advocate surveillance against Muslims, to support anti-Muslim laws and policies, and to validate the claims of organizations and individuals that espouse anti-Muslim conspiracy theories.

- The Muslim Reform Movement (MRM) is a bipartisan coalition launched in December 2015 by thirteen Muslims from the U.S., Canada, and Europe. The aim of the global initiative is to “defeat the ideology of Islamism” or “politicized Islam” and **“reclaim the progressive spirit with which Islam was born in the 7th century to fast forward it into the 21st century.”**
- MRM was convened by its parent organization, The American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD), during the inaugural *Muslim Anti-Islamism Summit* at the National Press Club. The conveners of the summit sought to “drive long overdue reforms against Islamism within The House of Islam” and “address the ideology of Islamism and ways of countering its influence and promoting liberty and universal human rights.”
- MRM originally began as The American Islamic Leadership Coalition (AILC), a group of over 35 Muslim leaders from the U.S. and Canada. **AILC publicly launched “with its support of the March 10, 2011 congressional hearings on ‘The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community’s Response’”** and aimed to “bring the ideas of modernity, reform, diversity, and genuine pluralism to Muslims across North America.” According to AIFD’s 2017 tax return, AILC evolved between 2010 and 2015 to form MRM.
- Following the inaugural summit in December 2015, the founding signatories of MRM released a **Declaration for Muslim Reform**, which outlines the movement’s goal of reform based on “peace, human rights, and secular governance.” The declaration was then posted on mosque doors and “sent to thousands of Muslim leaders across the United States.” The purpose of the declaration was to not only outline MRM’s vision for reform, but to also provide an “unmistakable firewall” that delineates Islamists and Muslims dedicated to reform.
- **Many Muslims have challenged the notion that Islam needs the reformation MRM calls for.** Steven Zhou, a Toronto-based journalist, wrote in *Al Jazeera America* that those who call for reformation “do not present an adequate understanding of Islamic jurisprudence” and “a genuine understanding of how Muslim scholars have approached scriptural interpretation.” **Mehdi Hasan, a political journalist and author, has criticized calls for reform as “ahistorical” and attempting to “impose a neatly linear, Eurocentric view of history on diverse Muslim-majority countries in Asia or Africa.”**
- Since its launch, the founders of MRM have carried out media appearances to publicize the initiative and insist on the need to reform. Three of the most vocal signatories of MRM are Zuhdi Jasser, Asra Nomani, and Raheel Raza. Asra Nomani, previously a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, made headlines in 2016 after writing in the *Washington Post* that **as a liberal Democrat, she voted for Donald Trump**. Nomani has also previously supported the religious and racial profiling of Muslims at airports and stated that “our sense of political correctness has kept us from sensible law-enforcement strategies that look at Muslims, mosques, and Islamic organizations.”
- **Zuhdi Jasser is the founder of AIFD, and according to the Center for American Progress (CAP) Fear Inc. report, “lacks any policy or academic expertise in Islam and promotes conspiratorial claims that radical Muslims have infiltrated America.”** On the one-year anniversary of MRM, Jasser wrote an article in *Asia Times* titled “The Muslim Reform Movement: Even more necessary a year in.” In the article, he called on “those Muslims who choose not to be a

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part of our Muslim Reform Movement and its Declaration to come clean and explain to the world why not.” In June 2013, two months after the Boston Marathon bombing, then congressman **Mike Pompeo commended Jasser’s AIFD for speaking out against terrorism “in a clear and consistent way.”**

- Raheel Raza is the founder of [Muslims Facing Tomorrow](#), an organization that seeks to “reclaim Islam, as the word itself means, securing Peace for all people, and to oppose extremism, fanaticism and violence in the name of religion.” Furthermore, Raza is a senior fellow at [The Gatestone Institute](#) and joins Jasser as a member of the advisory board of [The Clarion Project](#). **Both of these institutions advance anti-Muslim sentiments through online content and materials.** Gatestone has published articles about Muslim migrants and refugees bringing “highly infectious diseases” to Germany, a “jihadist takeover” of Europe leading to a “Great White Death,” and Muslims transforming entire German neighborhoods into “no-go zones.” Meanwhile, Clarion maintains a repository of documentary films which it describes as “expos[ing] how radical Islamists use terrorism, murder, subjugation of women, indoctrination of children, religious persecution, genocide of minorities, widespread human rights abuses, nuclear proliferation and cultural jihad — to threaten the West.”
- In addition to Clarion and Gatestone, **the founders of MRM have used their insider profile to collaborate with organizations that validate their anti-Muslim claims.** MRM has been mentioned in the [Center for Security Policy \(CSP\)](#), [Quilliam](#), and [The Middle East Forum \(MEF\)](#). Founding signatory [Usama Hasan](#) is on the advisory board of [Quilliam](#), while Jasser has been featured regularly in [CSP](#) and received funding from [The MEF](#).
- Most recently, MRM was cited in a hearing of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in July 2018 titled “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Global Threat.” Jasser mentioned the initiative in his testimony. He called on the committee to “lift up diverse pro-liberty, secular reformist Muslim voices beginning with our Muslim Reform Movement and its allies within the Muslim community who are anti-Islamist” and to “**use that strategy and our Declaration of our Muslim Reform Movement to identify allies within Muslim communities across the world.**”
- **Jasser has also proposed using the Declaration of Muslim Reform as a mechanism to vet refugees entering the United States.** In a January 2016 interview with national security consultant and radio producer [Lisa Benson](#), Jasser stated, “We think that our declaration will be a firewall to be used by Homeland Security, to be used by those trying to vet refugees, to figure out which movement, in Syria and Iran or elsewhere, are [*sic*] on our side versus those who are against us.” Lisa Benson was called on by Steven Emerson, the founder of the Investigative Project on Terrorism, days after 9/11 to “spearhead the efforts to find the private funds necessary to go underground into American mosques..”
- In a May 2016 interview with journalist and radio producer [Terry Gilberg](#), **Jasser further stated that the Declaration “basically is what Americans should use to vet Muslims that are working with us and those that are working against us,”** and “if they don’t believe in that declaration that’s sort of the endpoint that is the root cause of radicalization.” Terry Gilberg has criticized affirmative action and the consideration of race in college admissions, has claimed that reparations for slavery is an ask for another form of welfare, and questioned why it is immoral to build a wall along the southern border of the United States.
- MRM was additionally cited in a June 2017 hearing of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs titled “Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism.” In her testimony, Nomani provided eight policy recommendations from MRM, which included calling out “the ideological threat of Islamic

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extremism,” promoting “a public dialogue about the reforms needed in Islam,” and supporting “the Muslim Reform Movement and reformers around the world.”

- **MRM rejects the term Islamophobia. Instead, its founders believe the best way to counter anti-Muslim bigotry is for Muslims to lead reform efforts and combat Islamism from within the faith.** During the launch of MRM, Raza [stated](#), “We are Muslims and this is why we call this the Muslim Reform Movement, because we cannot be slapped with the label of Islamophobia. We are speaking from within the faith, from a love of the faith.” In an article with *Spectator Australia* titled “Why we need the Muslim Reform Movement,” Jasser [stated](#), “As our fellow citizens and social media platform contacts begin to see us as indispensable leaders for freedom, for our Constitution, and for our nation state identity, anti-Muslim bigotry will melt away.”
- According to AIFD’s [2017 Form 990](#), **one of the goals of MRM is to “shift the whole of society’s approach in counterterrorism from the current Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) to a more strategic Countering Violent Islamism (CVI).”** In his [testimony](#) before The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Jasser stated that leaders of MRM would agree that looking just at violent extremism is “too nebulous” and “nonspecific.” Jasser has also [proposed](#) that non-violent Islamism “be a matter of routine surveillance” and that “authorities do not need warrants for this type of surveillance.” When the Trump administration [released](#) its new National Strategy for Counterterrorism, AIFD [welcomed](#) it for its “precise identification of the issue of radical Islamist ideology.”
- **MRM has denied that the Muslim Ban discriminates against Muslims and has welcomed it as a necessary security measure.** In March 2017, Asra Nomani published an article titled “[Stop the hysterics over 'Muslim ban 2'](#)” in *The Hill*. She argued that “the new order is a necessary band-aid on the very real ideological threat of Islamic extremism” and “the hysteria around a ‘Muslim ban’ is irresponsible and dangerous.” Raheel Raza, in a video [published](#) by the Clarion Project titled “The Truth About the Muslim Ban,” stated that the ban is “about region, not religion” and “if a region exports terror, their people will be stopped at the door.” In June 2017, Zuhdi Jasser also participated in an interview with *Fox Business* where he stated that “it’s not a Muslim Ban; it’s about six countries that happen to be Muslim-majorities” and “as a Muslim, there’s nothing more pro-Muslim or pro-Islam than making sure jihadist, ISIS sympathizers, Islamists are not allowed in.”