

# ZUHDI JASSER

**IMPACT:** M. Zuhdi Jasser is a Syrian-American physician, author, and commentator. He is the founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD) and a co-founder of the Muslim Reform Movement (MRM). Jasser has used his organizations to call for a reform within Islam and “inoculate” Muslim Americans with ideas of liberty and patriotism, reinforcing harmful notions that Muslim Americans must prove their devotion to their country. Jasser has also leveraged his insider identity as a Muslim to advocate increased monitoring of Muslim communities, Countering Violent Islamism (CVI) programs, and ideological vetting of refugees before Congress, at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), and through media appearances.

- M. Zuhdi Jasser is a first-generation Muslim American whose parents emigrated from Syria in the 1960s. He received a medical degree from the Medical College of Wisconsin while servicing in the U.S. Navy in the 1990s.
- Jasser is also the author of *A Battle for the Soul of Islam: An American Muslim Patriot's Fight to Save His Faith* (2012). A review in Publisher's Weekly described the book as “anecdotal and alarmist.”
- **The Center for American Progress (CAP) lists Jasser as a “validator” in the “Islamophobia Network.”**
- Jasser founded the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD), whose mission is to “advocate for the preservation of the founding principles of the United States Constitution, liberty and freedom, through the separation of mosque and state” in 2003. Based in Phoenix, Arizona, AIFD describes itself as “the most prominent American Muslim organization directly confronting the ideology of political Islam.”
- AIFD has received financial contributions from Daniel Pipes' Middle East Forum, the Alan and Hope Winters Family Foundation, the William Rosenwald Family Fund, and the Middle Road Foundation and Abstraction Fund. Among donations from peer organizations, AIFD has received \$5,000 from the Center for Security Policy and \$10,000 from the Clarion Fund, later renamed the Clarion Project. AIFD also received \$100,000 from Foster Friess, a conservative financier who supported former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum's presidential bid, arguing that Santorum is “incredibly versed in one of the number one issues of our time—and that is violent Islamic extremism.”
- In June 2013, two months after the Boston Marathon bombing, then-Congressman Mike Pompeo praised Jasser and AIFD in a speech on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives.
- Jasser is also co-founder of the Muslim Reform Movement, 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.” Central to the MRM is its Declaration of Muslim Reform, which outlines the coalition's goal of reform based on peace, human rights, and secular governance.”
- **Jasser has 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.” In a May 2016 interview with journalist and radio producer Terry Gilberg, he further stated the declaration **“basically is what Americans should use to vet Muslims that are working with us and those that are working against us.”** Benson and Gilberg have both served as radio hosts on Phoenix, Arizona's KKNT 960 The Patriot, where Sebastian Gorka and Dennis Prager also serve as hosts.
- Jasser sits on the advisory board for the Clarion Project, and narrated the Clarion Project documentary film *The Third Jihad: Radical Islam's Vision for America* (2008). The aim of the film is to reveal “how Islamist extremists, driven by a religiously-motivated rejection of Western values” are attempting to “overcome the Western world” through “cultural jihad” as a means to infiltrate and undermine Western society from within.”
- In March 2012, Jasser was appointed by then-U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which had been criticized for “an anti-Muslim bias [that] runs through the commission's work.” Jasser served two terms until May 2016.
- In June 2011, Jasser testified in favor of the See Something, Say Something Act of 2011 before the Subcommittee on the Constitution of the House Judiciary Committee. The controversial bill granted immunity from civil liability to

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individuals who report suspicious activity in relation to terrorism. Jasser argued that the bill was necessary in order to give “citizens the legal protection they need ... [and] to peel away reasons for any pauses between when [they] ‘see something’ and ‘say something’ to law enforcement.” In reference to the obstacles to reporting, he also explained that a culture of fear “has become the prevailing politically correct culture in response to the threat of Islamist terrorism.” In an August 2011 op-ed in *Huffington Post*, journalist Feisal G. Mohamed criticized the bill for **limiting “the right to seek redress for false accusations” and argued that “existing cooperation with law enforcement can be easily derailed if a community perceives itself to be under attack by the law and its officials.”**

- In June 2016, Jasser testified before a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing chaired by Senator Ted Cruz titled “Willful Blindness: Consequences of Agency Efforts to Deemphasize Radical Islam in Combating Terrorism.” Jasser argued that **the “national security policy of refusing to say that ‘Islam currently has a problem’ is dangerous”** and that “the only way to right this deep misdirection is to shift the center of axis from Countering Violent Extremism to Countering Violent Islamism.”
- During the first of Rep. Peter King’s (R-NY) hearings on radicalization, in March 2011, titled “The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and the Community’s Response,” Jasser stated that “the U.S. has a significant problem with Muslim radicalization ... [and] I’m Muslim and I realize it’s my problem and I need to fix it.” Jasser also argued for an “ideological offense” into Muslim communities and promoted his Muslim Liberty Project which **“looks at inoculating Muslims with the ideas of liberty.”**
- According to Center for American Progress’s (CAP) Fear, Inc. report, **the hearings were used to promote “debunked myths about Muslim American communities.”** The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and a coalition of over 40 human rights and civil liberties organizations wrote a letter to King prior to the hearing, warning that it risked **“chilling fundamental First Amendment freedoms of religion, speech, and association.”**
- During a subsequent hearing in June 2012 titled “The American Muslim Response to Hearings on Radicalization within Their Community,” Jasser dismissed criticisms of the initial hearing, denounced the term Islamophobia, and **called on the armed services to “declare a moratorium on all Muslim requests for conscientious objector status claimed on the basis of their Islamic faith.”** Jasser has additionally testified for the hearings “Anti-Semitism: A Growing Threat to All Faiths” in 2013, “Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror” in 2016, and “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Global Threat” in 2018.
- As a board member for the American Conservative Union (ACU), Jasser has regularly presented at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) since 2014. During CPAC 2018, Jasser **called on President Donald Trump to create a Commission on Radical Islamic Terror** and asked the audience to reach out to their representatives and tell them that “we need to shift CVE [Countering Violent Extremism] to CVI [Countering Violent Islamism].” He also urged the government to “look at immigration through the lens of not letting Islamists come here but letting those who embrace our values.”
- During a CPAC 2017 panel titled “Global Threats and Violent Extremism,” Jasser once again expressed his hopes of seeing the government’s policy of CVE transformed to CVI. He also stated that **“it’s very important that we not give American Muslims sort of a pass as ... [a] minority group in America”** and proposed that the MRM Declaration be used as a safeguard **to avoid being “deceived by Muslims who say we’re just anti-terror.”** Jasser also presented during “How Patriotic American Muslims Defy Radical Islamists” at CPAC 2016, “Can Islam and Democracy Co-Exist?” at CPAC 2015, and “What Should be America’s Place in the World in 2017...After Obama?” at CPAC 2014.
- In addition to the Clarion Project, Jasser has collaborated with several individuals and organizations that spread anti-Muslim sentiment. Jasser hosts the podcast Reform This! on Blaze Media, which is co-founded by Glenn Beck. According to the CAP Fear, Inc. report, Beck **“regularly engages in fear mongering and hate against Muslims on his program.”** In an episode titled Lookout Kids ...The Islamophobia Monster Is Everywhere!, Jasser argues that “[Islamists] use the term ‘Islamophobia’ ... to condition [individuals] that being anti-American is pro-Islam, [and] being pro-American is anti-Islam.” In another episode titled “Islamic Schools: 9 Questions every American should be Asking,” Jasser shared questions people can ask the Islamic schools in their states to help “discern whether the school is an Islamist separatist factory or whether it’s simply a faith-based American parochial school.”

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- Jasser is recognized as an author on the website of the anti-Muslim blogging platform, Gatestone Institute. In a 2008 article on the Gatestone Institute website, Jasser promoted his narration of Clarion's documentary "The Third Jihad" and protested that "we have yet to challenge Muslim thinkers to explain whether they believe in American exceptionalism and the humanitarian preference of societies rooted in freedom and liberty over Islamism."
- In 2008, **Jasser was recognized by CSP as a "Defender of the Home Front."** He has also been featured as a guest for Frank Gaffney's Secure Freedom Radio (SFR) on multiple occasions. During an SFR episode on "no-go" zones, Jasser answered a question about the Somali community and law enforcement in his hometown of Phoenix stating, "It's concerning in that there are no programs to assimilate them, to work with them in reform, [and] to teach them what it means to be an American."
- In March 2011, Jasser appeared with Gaffney on a segment for *Fox Business News* defending Rep. Peter King's hearings against a representative from the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR). Jasser minimized discrimination against the Muslim community, stating, "What brilliance of our enemies to cloak their political ideology in a religion and then we, because ... of fear of stigmatizing a minority, don't address the solution." Gaffney stated that "the vast majority of those who are waging jihad for the purpose of bringing Sharia here to America ... are Muslims."
- Jasser has **argued in support of increased police monitoring and presence in Muslim communities**, and has stated that "if police are telling us Muslims that they're not going to monitor, and they're just going to wait until those last few days when they put on vests and become suicidal and militant, [then] this is suicide." In March 2012, he thanked the New York Police Department (NYPD) for doing "a lot of the work we as Muslims should be doing, which is monitoring extremism, following extremism, and helping counter the ideologies that create radicalization in our communities." According to ACLU, the NYPD Intelligence Division has in the past "singled out Muslim religious and community leaders, mosques, student associations, organizations, businesses, and individuals for pervasive surveillance that is discriminatory and not conducted against institutions or individuals belonging to any other religious faith." In March 2016, Jasser appeared on *NewsMax TV* speaking in support of Ted Cruz's call for increased monitoring in Muslim communities.
- In a June 2017 interview on *Fox Business*, Jasser defended protestors taking part in an anti-sharia march. He claimed that the protestors "want the media to wake up to how sharia law is stuck in the 13th century." He further claimed that "American modernization of sharia hasn't happened and we Muslims are asleep because the left gives them a pass and they say sharia means Islam and Islam is peaceful."
- In 2010, Jasser supported state legislation banning sharia in Oklahoma. Speaking on behalf of his organization, he stated: "As Muslims dedicated to modernity, reform and our one law system in the west and in the United States, AIFD applauds the people of Oklahoma for passing State Question 755 and making 'the legal precepts of other nations or cultures' off-limits to Oklahoma courts and specifically denying the use of Sharia Law." **The anti-sharia legislation was later deemed unconstitutional and the state was barred from implementing the amendment.**
- Jasser has **lamented not being recognized by mainstream media networks as a voice of authority for Muslim Americans**. In July 2016, AIFD sent a letter to the heads of *ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, the New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* "informing them of [its] disappointment in their apparent bias and their role in allowing Islamists to dominate." Jasser further stated on SFR that "we're rejected ... [and] the reformists don't have the control and the influence in media, in universities, [or] in government."