

# The Adventures of Asking Muslim Reformers to Categorically Choose between Western Laws and Islam

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On January 7<sup>th</sup> *Jihad Watch* published my article titled “93% of Muslim Public Officials Would Not Express Support for the Constitution They Swore to Uphold.”<sup>[1]</sup> This article was a result of a survey of four questions I had sent to eighty Muslim public officials across the United States. With each of the four questions the Muslim public officials were presented with scenarios and asked to choose between the United States Constitution and American laws, or Islamic Doctrine. The results were dismaying because although each of the eighty had taken an oath of office that included swearing to support that Constitution, only six Muslim public officials would specifically state that they supported that Constitution and American laws over Islam Doctrine.

As the results from that survey were coming in, I thought it would be interesting to present the same type of questions to some of the prominent Muslims who have been

publicly aspiring to reform Islam. Such aspiring reformers are found both in the United States and in Canada. Their reformation goals seem to focus on making the religion of Islam more compatible with modern times and Western laws and values.

For the American Muslim reformers I used the same questions I had sent to the eighty Muslim public officials. For the Canadian Muslim reformers, I used three questions that involved the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and one question that involved the *1833 Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies*.<sup>[2]</sup>

If the goals of these Muslim reformers actually are what they are claimed to be, then in theory one would think that there would unanimous support among these reformers for the Western laws of their respective countries over Islamic Doctrine. Unfortunately, the reality turned out to be quite different.

### **American Muslim Reformers**

There are a number of aspiring Muslim reformers in the United States. I chose the following seven:

Qanta Ahmad  
Soraya M. Deen  
Mike Ghouse  
Zuhdi Jasser  
Rabia Kazan  
Asra Nomani  
Shireen Qudosi

On January 1<sup>st</sup> I sent the following e-mail to the each of the above listed American Muslim reformers:

*Since you are a Muslim who has expressed concerns about some of the current teachings found in Islamic Doctrine, I am interested in your responses to each of the following questions:*

**No. 1:** *Will you go on record now and state that our 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment right to freedom of speech gives the right to anyone in the United States to criticize or disagree with your prophet Muhammad, and will you also go on record now and state that you support and defend anyone's right to criticize or disagree with your prophet Muhammad, and that you condemn anyone who threatens death or physical harm to another person who is exercising that right?*

**No. 2:** Our 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment guarantees freedom of religion in the United States. As part of that freedom, anyone in the United States has the right to join or leave any religion, or have no religion at all. Will you go on record now and state that you support and defend the idea that in the United States a Muslim has not only the freedom to leave Islam, but to do so without fear of physical harm, and will you also go on record now and state that you condemn anyone who threatens physical harm to a Muslim who is exercising that freedom?

**No. 3:** According to the words of Allah found in Koran 5:38 and the teachings of your prophet Muhammad, amputation of a hand is an acceptable punishment for theft. But our U.S. Constitution, which consists of man-made laws, has the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment that prohibits cruel and unusual punishment such as this. Do you agree with Allah and your prophet Muhammad that amputation of a hand is an acceptable punishment for theft in the United States, or do you believe that our man-made laws prohibiting such punishments are true laws and are to be followed instead of this 7<sup>th</sup> Century command of Allah and teaching of Muhammad?

**No. 4:** According to the words of Allah found in Koran 4:3, Muslim men are allowed, but not required, to be married to up to four wives. Being married to more than one wife in the United States is illegal according to our man-made bigamy laws. Do you agree with Allah that it is legal for a Muslim man in the United States to be married to more than one woman, or do you believe that our man-made laws prohibiting bigamy are true laws and are to be followed instead of this 7<sup>th</sup> Century command of Allah?

I look forward to your responses.

Soraya Deen and Asra Nomani soon responded. They individually addressed each of the four questions and unambiguously expressed their support for the U.S. Constitution and American law over Islamic Doctrine in all four questions.

Having received no other responses, on January 8<sup>th</sup> I sent the above e-mail again to each of the five who had not responded. That same day I received a response from Zuhdi Jasser.

**Zuhdi Jasser:** Over the years Zuhdi Jasser and I have had numerous public disagreements about the nature of Islam. Here is his reply to my January 8<sup>th</sup> e-mail:

*Steve- your reporting on our reform work in the past has been far less than objective and far less than professional fit only for the NYT. This quiz out of left field (after years of your false reporting on our work) is obvious anyways to any honest broker with regards to what my answers would be if you look at the body of my (our) work. But God only knows what the malign intent is of your quiz so no i [sic] will not engage with you on this after your track record with us.*

*Regardless I believe Asra answered you what our answers would be providing you far more courtesy than you deserve apparently not knowing who you were and all the ignorant damage you've tried to inflict on our work in the past few years. I've copied...so you don't misrepresent my response.*

*good day. [sic]*

Later that same day I replied, asking Jasser to provide the “facts” to support his libelous claim that I had falsely reported on his work. With regard to the four questions, I looked at some of his “work” and found:

1. Criticizing Muhammad: Jasser was on record as stating that everyone had a right to criticize “Islam.” I pointed this out and asked him if he was also then willing to specifically state that everyone had the right to disagree with and/or criticize his prophet Muhammad, and would he condemn anyone who threatened death or physical harm to another person who was exercising that right?
2. The Right of Muslim Americans to Leave Islam: Jasser was on record as supporting the right of individuals to have a religion or not have a religion; he also believed that apostasy was not a crime. I pointed this out and asked him if he would then specifically support and defend the idea that in the United States a Muslim had not only the freedom to leave Islam, but to do so without fear of physical harm, and to also go on record and state that he would condemn anyone who threatened physical harm to a Muslim who was exercising that freedom?
3. Amputation for Theft: Jasser was on record as stating that this punishment “may be reinterpreted as a metaphoric severing from society.” I pointed this out, stating that it may be interpreted that way, or it may be interpreted literally. I then asked him if he believed that our man-made laws prohibiting such punishments were true laws and were to be followed instead of this 7th Century command of Allah and teaching of Muhammad, regardless of how it was interpreted?
4. Muslim Men can have up to Four Wives: Jasser was on record as stating that all of his “Muslim friends” (and by inference Jasser too) considered this verse of the Koran to apply only to the 7th Century. I pointed this out and stated that it therefore would be very easy for him to state that our man-made laws prohibiting bigamy are true laws and are to be followed instead of this 7th Century command of Allah.

I did not receive a reply from Jasser. Although I did discover that at some point he had blocked me from his *Twitter* account.

**Shireen Qudosi:** The second time I sent the e-mail to Qudosi it could not be delivered. So I decided to contact Qudosi on her *Twitter* account. I was unable to do so because at

some point she had blocked me from her account. I have not received any reply from Qudosi.

I have not received any replies from Qanta Ahmad, Mike Ghouse, or Rabia Kazan.

### **Canadian Muslim Reformers**

There are Muslims in Canada who aspire to reform Islam. I chose these six:

Tarek Fatah  
Tahir Gora  
Hasan Mahmud  
Raheel Raza  
Sohail Raza  
Salma Siddiqui

On January 1<sup>st</sup> and again on January 8<sup>th</sup> I sent the following e-mail to each of the above Canadian Muslim reformers:

*Since you are a Canadian Muslim who has expressed concerns about some of the current teachings found in Islamic Doctrine, I am interested in your responses to each of the following questions:*

**No. 1:** *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms consists of man-made laws. Section 2(a) of that Charter states: Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: freedom of conscience and religion. In the 1986 court case Edwards Books and Art Ltd. the Canadian Supreme Court noted that freedom of conscience included the right not to have a religious basis for one's conduct. The Canadian Supreme Court also has ruled that Section 2(a) protects atheists, agnostics, and skeptics. Will you go on record now to support and defend the idea that under the man-made laws of Canada a Muslim in Canada has the freedom to leave Islam without fear of physical harm, and to also condemn anyone who threatens physical harm to a Muslim who is exercising that freedom?*

**No. 2:** *According to Koran 33:21 your prophet Muhammad is the timeless example and standard of conduct for Muslims and Koran 59:7 commands Muslims to obey him. Your prophet Muhammad said that beheading and crucifixion are acceptable punishments for Muslims who leave Islam. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom consists of man-made laws, and Section 12 of that Charter prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. Do you agree with your prophet Muhammad that beheading and crucifixion are acceptable punishments for Canadian Muslims who leave Islam, or do you believe that*

*Canadian man-made laws prohibiting such punishments are true laws and are to be followed instead of this 7<sup>th</sup> Century teaching of Muhammad?*

**No. 3:** According to the words of Allah found in Koran 5:38 and the teachings of your prophet Muhammad, amputation of a hand is an acceptable punishment for theft. But Section 12 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, which consists of man-made laws, prohibits cruel and unusual punishment such as this. Do you agree with Allah and your prophet Muhammad that amputation of a hand is an acceptable punishment for theft in Canada, or do you believe that Canadian man-made laws prohibiting such punishments are true laws and are to be followed instead of this 7<sup>th</sup> Century command of Allah and teaching of Muhammad?

**No. 4:** According to Koran 33:21 your prophet Muhammad is the timeless example and standard of conduct for Muslims and Koran 59:7 commands Muslims to obey him. Your prophet Muhammad bought, sold, and possessed slaves, and allowed the Muslims around him to do the same. But in 1833, the Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies, a man-made law, received royal assent and became law throughout the British Empire. Do you agree with your prophet Muhammad that Canadian Muslims are allowed to buy, sell, and possess slaves, or do you believe that the Canadian man-made law prohibiting slavery is a true law and is to be followed instead of this 7<sup>th</sup> Century teaching of Muhammad?

*I look forward to your responses.*

On January 8<sup>th</sup> Hasan Mahmud replied. He addressed each of the four questions and unambiguously expressed his support for the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and Canadian law over Islamic Doctrine in all four questions.

**Salma Siddiqui:** On January 8<sup>th</sup> I also received the following response from Salma Siddiqui:

*I did receive your 1st message, choose [sic] not to respond! Your message was curt, no introduction and why you are approaching me?*

*I am on record as to where I stand, don't [sic] need to be tested by you. If you choose to have decent dialogue, I am ready to engage? [sic]*

That same day I replied:

*I have written extensively about Islam over the years (six books and numerous articles and brochures) and think it is important for non-Muslims to get a better understanding of Islam.*

*I started out the e-mail explaining why I was contacting you. It would no doubt take many hours to research your positions on particular issues, so I thought it would be easier to simply ask you for your position on these four specific questions.*

*I look forward to your responses.*

I have not heard back from Siddiqui.

I have not received any replies from Tarek Fatah, Tahir Gora, Raheel Raza, or Sohail Raza.

## **Conclusion**

We constantly hear from aspiring Muslim reformers the claims that their goals are to modernize the religion of Islam and make it more compatible with Western laws and values. Although there appears to be virtually no support for this in the Muslim American community,<sup>[3]</sup> it has nevertheless created an expectation among many non-Muslims that Islam is a religion that can be truly adapted to Western laws and values and consequently can join Christianity and Judaism as a religiously integral part of Western society.

With these claims of Muslim reformers in mind, one would think that all of these reformers would therefore have no qualms about choosing Western laws over Islamic Doctrine. Unfortunately, the reality is quite different. As we have seen, of the thirteen prominent Muslim reformers contacted, only three responded specifically stating that they supported Western laws over Islamic Doctrine in each of the four questions.

Zuhdi Jasser and Salma Siddiqui took the “check my record” approach. I went along with that approach for Jasser because I have written numerous articles about him and his understanding of Islam, and had those resources ready at hand. With Siddiqui I realized that, as I stated in my e-mail to her, it could take hours to research her positions. In contrast, any of these Muslim reformers should have been able to provide a definitive answer to each of these questions so there would be no doubt about the nature of their choices between Western laws and Islamic Doctrine. After all, if one’s “record” showed support for Western laws over Islamic Doctrine, answering so for each of the four questions would have been simple, left no room for ambiguity, and taken little time.

The fact that in addressing these four questions only three of the thirteen prominent Muslim reformers would go on record categorically supporting Western laws over Islamic Doctrine is rather curious. It makes one wonder if some of the ideas of reforming

Islam are predicated on a certain amount of Western accommodation to certain unique aspects of Islamic Doctrine.

**Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of six books about Islam. His latest book is *Islamic Doctrine versus the U.S. Constitution: The Dilemma for Muslim Public Officials*.**

[1] <https://www.jihadwatch.org/2020/01/93-of-muslim-public-officials-would-not-express-support-for-the-constitution-they-swore-to-uphold>

[2] The questions I used for the American and Canadian Muslim reformers are from Chapter 10 and the Appendix of my book, *Islamic Doctrine versus the U.S. Constitution: The Dilemma for Muslim Public Officials* (Washington D.C.: Center for Security Policy Press, 2019); <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2019/12/03/csp-press-releases-primer-on-islamic-doctrine-versus-the-u-s-constitution/>.

[3] Stephen M. Kirby, “Muslim Reform Group Reached Out to 3,000 US Mosques, Got Only 40 Responses,” *Jihad Watch*, February 24, 2017, <https://www.jihadwatch.org/2017/02/muslim-reform-group-reached-out-to-3000-us-mosques-got-only-40-responses>.