



American Islamic Forum for Democracy

Statement

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Military lecturer on Islam wrong but U.S. cannot afford to overreact *Polarization of Islamic issues damaging efforts at understanding the Islamist threat and the need for Islamic reform*

PHOENIX, AZ (May 17, 2012) – Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser, a devout Muslim and the president and founder of the [American Islamic Forum for Democracy](http://www.aifd.org) (AIFD) issued the following statement regarding the current controversy over a training course at the Military's Joint Forces Staff College at Norfolk, VA and the bigger picture of materials and experts our government uses to understand the ideological threat we face.

“The Joint Forces Staff College at Norfolk, VA is an important institution in the U.S. military and serves a vital role of preparing the next generation of military leaders. Having had the pleasure of guest lecturing at the college in 2007 and 2008, I can attest to the professionalism of the institution and my respect for the training it gives the men and women of the U.S. Military officer corps heading into theater and who will be leading our military for years to come.

At AIFD we believe the Staff College presents an invaluable and all too rare opportunity for our officer corps to get a firm foundation and understanding of the war of ideas against militant Islamist extremism and all of its nuanced components. Recent revelations that some of the lecturers presented slides arguing for an “all -out war” against Islam among other troubling assertions are disappointing on many levels. As a former Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy, I believe tactically such a sentiment and course of action is completely untenable and creates a sizable enemy that the U.S. simply does not have today. It also alienates our most valuable allies – reformers within the Muslim community who are ready to openly take on the radical ideologies discussed in those slides.

As an American Muslim some of the lecturer's slides and statements fly in the face of the central premises of the hard work that we are doing at the American Islamic Forum for Democracy to bring true reform to the practice of Islam. In short some of the slides and teaching materials from Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Dooley's lecture that have been displayed in the media are not only inaccurate with regards to the Islam every Muslim we work with practices but when taught as “the” Islam can create a sense in our military leaders that no Muslims are our allies- a sense that has no place in the training of our military. In the end they make bringing the real solution from within the “House of Islam” that much more difficult.

However, the corrective course of action we take at this point is just as crucial to protect our military members from the equally suffocating harness of political correctness. This ping pong match between the extremes of “all Muslims are our enemy” and “all Muslims are victims” is stifling the conversations that need to be had to fix the very real threat that Muslims who adhere to a militant form of Islamism present. At AIFD we do in fact recognize that the “Islam” of jihad, violence, Al Qaeda, Wahhabism, and political Islam is A version of Islam but it is **NOT** our Islam. That distinction, that central hope does not seem to be given in the slides released and as usual it is missing from the uproar from groups such as CAIR, the Arab American Association, Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Center for American Progress.

In the wake of the revelations regarding Lt. Col. Dooley's slides we are already hearing cries for the [retraining of all of the service members](#) who have gone through the course and [unscrupulous connections](#) being made between this course and the Quran burning incident and the troops who desecrated the remains of Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. CAIR has recklessly pedaled this incendiary information on [Al Jazeera](#) which is often quite unfriendly media to our military and American interests. The Muslim grievance mill of CAIR combined

with some of their colleagues on the left have wasted no time in using this incident as an opportunity to smear the military and to fear monger within the Muslim community that there is a vast right wing conspiracy plotting against American Muslims. Lawrence Korb from the Center for American Progress went as far as to recklessly claim on the [BBC](#) that this event occurred because the U.S. military has elements who are overly influenced by Christian Evangelicals who believe that the U.S. is at war with Islam. Korb asserted that the military is more conservative than the broader public and that is what created the atmosphere for this type of course to be able to exist.

The reaction of some of these groups to the information released completely ignores the fact that there is a very real theo-political threat to our country. While some of the materials have proven to be inappropriate and reckless, these critics completely miss that those concepts simply are an equal and opposite reaction to the dangerous Islamist apologetics of denial that have filled the media and government policy advisories. How quickly Islamist groups and many in the media forget the case of Louay Safi who was relieved from training service members at Fort Bliss in Texas? Based on reporting from the *Dallas Morning News*, the Army suspended his contract because of his connections to the [American Islamist movement](#). Safi had been in charge of certifying Muslim chaplains for the US Military on behalf of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), while teaching at Fort Bliss. In an internet posting after the Fort Hood massacre he whitewashed Islamism and blamed Hasan's extremism on "the systematic demonization of marginalized groups."

Whether Islamists like Safi who dismiss Islamism and paint Muslims as victims or lecturers like Lt. Col. Dooley who target an entire faith and its adherents, both approaches are doomed to certain failure. The politically correct atmosphere in the military and in our country, however, has prevented an adequate balanced public vetting of the core threats our service members and citizens face domestically and abroad.

We need to have a happy medium. The military should not use material or lecturers that see all Muslims as the enemy and should not use the lowest hanging fruit of Muslim organizations which are Islamists or apologists for Islamist movements. They should instead begin to work with Muslim organizations that truly have our national security interests at heart, such as the growing [American Islamic Leadership Coalition](#). Great Britain did the same when they found that they were working with the wrong organizations. They realized that their PREVENT program failed because they worked predominantly with Islamist groups and didn't side with organizations that were liberal and secular minded. Prime Minister Cameron has since called for a "muscular liberalism" when working with Muslims.

As our government addresses these training issues both within the military and similarly with questions that have been raised regarding the FBI and [NYPD](#) training programs, it is imperative that these evaluations are not done in a vacuum and that they are not directed by organizations that look at this problem through the lens of Islamism and Muslim victimhood.

Similar to how Chairman Peter King addressed the House Committee on Homeland Security hearings on Muslim radicalization, we desperately need to develop a national strategy that understands the theo-political movement (Islamism) that threatens us while also balancing the fact that the solution to this threat comes from within the Muslim community and by supporting Muslim organizations who embrace secular, liberty minded governance.

About the American Islamic Forum for Democracy

The American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization. AIFD's mission advocates for the preservation of the founding principles of the United States Constitution, liberty and freedom, through the separation of mosque and state. For more information on AIFD, please visit our website at <http://www.aifdemocracy.org/>.



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