

An IPT Investigative Report:

Zaid Shakir

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Introduction

Zaid Shakir is a co-founder of Zaytuna College in Berkeley, Calif., which seeks to become “America’s first accredited Muslim institution of higher learning.”¹ The college seeks “to restore broad-based and pluralistic scholarship to its proper place as a central priority of Muslims.”²

Shakir, 54, was born Ricky Mitchell.³ He converted to Islam in 1977 while serving in the U.S. Air Force.⁴ A Berkeley native, he graduated from American University and received a master’s in political science from Rutgers University, where he says he was active in South African divestment campaigns.⁵



He is a highly popular figure among American Islamists and frequently speaks at Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and Muslim Students’ Association (MSA) events.⁶ He is widely quoted in the mainstream media.

In 2006, the *New York Times* describes Shakir as among a group of “leading intellectual lights for a new generation of American Muslims looking for homegrown leaders who can help them learn how to live their faith without succumbing to American materialism or Islamic extremism.”⁷ Three years later, he was invited to the National Prayer Service for President Barack Obama’s inauguration.⁸ In May 2010, he participated in the “Building Bridges” seminar at Georgetown University hosted by Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.⁹

An examination of Shakir’s writings and speeches, however, shows a man prone to conspiracy theories that veer toward extremism. Though his speaking style often is elliptical and rambling, and many of his points are not clearly defined, Shakir expresses doubts about who was responsible for 9/11 and other terrorist attacks. He defends terrorist groups such as Hizballah and hopes for a day in which America is a Muslim country ruled by Islamic law. Shakir also has a long record of portraying the United States as an evil force in world affairs.

American society “is sinful and constitutes open rebellion against Allah,” he says.¹⁰ Shakir also suggests that Muslims could “take over” the United States if they were better organized.

As we will detail below, he sees “glaring weaknesses and inconsistencies in the official narrative”¹¹ about the 9/11 attacks and allows his writings to be republished by a website devoted to 9/11 conspiracy theories. He attacks the United States for “terrorism that is being inflicted on the people of the world.”¹² He says the Koran “gives no indication” that compromise is possible between Allah and “the false beliefs and systems innovated by man.”¹³

Hizballah’s 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut was not an act of terrorism, Shakir argues. He suggests that “Zionist” forces and the FBI were behind the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. He made light of the 9/11 attacks and the July 7, 2005, London transit bombings, and he has suggested that it would be acceptable for Muslims to attack U.S. military forces.



9/11 Account’s “Glaring Weaknesses”

Shakir has questioned whether Muslims bombed the World Trade Center in 1993, and raises questions about the official 9/11 narrative. He emphatically argues that 9/11 has been used as a pretext to target Islam in America.

“9/11 has been used by both the government and a significant segment of the Christian Right in this country, along with their allies, to launch a war on Islam,” he wrote in an op-ed on his blog, *NewIslamicDirections.com*.¹⁴ “That war can generally be described as a war on Islam itself, its beliefs, its Prophet, peace be upon him, and its people.”

Shakir’s op-ed was republished by *Pilots For 9/11 Truth*,¹⁵ an organization that questions the official account of 9/11.¹⁶ In the article’s footnotes, Shakir indicates the story behind the attacks is an open question. “This article will not examine what actually happened on 9/11,” he writes, “although the glaring weaknesses and inconsistencies in the official narrative call for such an examination. For those seeking greater clarity concerning the events of that day see David Ray Griffin, *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*.”

Griffin is a prolific writer who questions whether Islamist terrorists carried out the attacks. Griffin has argued that the collapse of the Twin Towers was most likely caused by explosives placed throughout the towers, and that the Bush Administration had foreknowledge of 9/11.¹⁷ “Even many Bush opponents will find these charges ridiculous,” *Publishers Weekly* said in reviewing an earlier 9/11 book by Griffin.¹⁸

Other postings on the *Pilots* site dispute whether senior U.S. government officials had prior knowledge of the attacks and whether a Boeing 757 actually hit the Pentagon.¹⁹

“I don’t really know what happened on 9/11,” Shakir said at a March 2008 CAIR fundraiser in San Diego.²⁰

Nearly two decades earlier, Shakir questioned whether Muslims were responsible for the first World Trade Center attack—a 1993 truck bombing that killed six people. With multiple Muslim suspects in custody, Shakir argued that the alleged conspirators were set up:

“Considering the available information, it is the view of some observers that the WTC bombing was undertaken by the Zionist forces to give proof to their allegations concerning the magnitude of ‘Islamic fundamentalist’ terrorism, and as a pretext to intensify their anti-Islamic propaganda campaign in the U.S. media.”

[...]

“The recent bombing of the World Trade Center (WTC) has produced anti-Islamic elements in this country and an opportunity to launch a vicious propaganda campaign against Islam and Muslims. This campaign has been so calculating that one immediately suspects it could not have risen accidentally.”²¹

The theory appeared in the June/July 1993 issue of *Inquiry*, a magazine published by Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operative Sami Al-Arian, who at the time was an electrical engineering professor at the University of South Florida. The magazine frequently featured reports about the PIJ and other radicals.²²

In a 2001 speech at the Zaytuna Institute, Shakir suggested the FBI had a role in the 1993 bombing: “What are the consequences of so-called ‘Jihad in America?’ What are the consequences of acts like the World Trade Center bombing, which of course was aided and abetted by our good friends at the FBI?”²³

In taped remarks delivered before a British audience, Shakir made a joke about jihadist terror attacks that killed and maimed thousands of people in the United



States and the United Kingdom. “After 7/7—see, we have 9/11, you have 7 to 7—you put ‘em together, you have 7-11,” Shakir said, drawing laughs from the audience.²⁴

Muslims Can't be Terrorists

Shakir has repeatedly criticized the actions of what might be described as lone-wolf jihadists. In an article published a week after the Nov. 5, 2009, Fort Hood massacre, he quoted a Muslim scholar in suggesting that Fort Hood is an example of “vigilante treachery” that has no place in Islam.²⁵

“It should be clear that a Muslim is not allowed to transgress against [a] non-Muslim as long as he or she resides in their lands under their protection,” Shakir wrote. “Any aggression from their quarter is unsanctioned treachery. If they feel that they can no longer accept the perceived or real abuses or injustices of the host people then they are obliged to leave that land if remaining there would push them into acts of violence or aggression against the host community.”²⁶

But despite evidence that that Nidal Malik Hasan, the accused Fort Hood killer, was a radical Islamist with connections to jihadist imam Anwar al-Awlaki, Shakir rejected the notion that the massacre indicated a problem with Islam.

“However, if the recent history of this country is any indication, those few have been less in number and responsible for far less carnage than the ‘few’ from the non-Muslim population, the postal workers, high school or university students, or the random individuals who have snapped and gone on to wreak havoc in our society,” Shakir wrote. “One of the great tragedies in this situation is to view the crime Major Hasan is being accused of as a specifically Muslim problem.”²⁷

In Shakir’s view, no genuine Muslim can be a terrorist. He dismisses the idea that Islamist terror poses a threat, telling a September 2005 Muslim Students Association convention in Chicago: “...there’s a whole myth that, you know, global Islamic terrorism is a threat to our civilization. That’s garbage...a handful of irresponsible terrorists aren’t going to threaten anybody.”²⁸

Terrorism is “random, indiscriminate violence against a civilian population or a segment of a civilian population to affect a political outcome,” he said.²⁹ Since the Koran bars Muslims from fighting noncombatants, “a Muslim cannot be a terrorist,” Shakir said.³⁰

Reaction to the 1982-83 war in Lebanon shows that Americans fail to grasp who the real terrorists are, Shakir argued. While Israel “indiscriminately targeted” civilians in Beirut “with every known conventional ordnance short of nuclear bombs...no one views this as terrorism,” he complained.³¹

“By contrast, Hizballah’s bombing of the Marine barracks in 1984 [the suicide attack, which killed 241 U.S. Marines serving as part of a United Nations peacekeeping force was actually in October 1983] is viewed as one of the greatest acts of terrorism directed against Americans,” Shakir said.³²

“So how we perceive things, and how things are presented to us, goes a long way in how we view this phenomenon” of terrorism, he added.³³ Shakir’s formulation omitted a number of salient facts – that Israel was targeting armed terrorists operating out of densely populated civilian areas and the fact that the Marines attacked by Hizballah were members of a peacekeeping force.³⁴

During his 2001 speech at the Zaytuna Institute, Shakir distinguished between “terrorism,” which he said he opposes, and jihad, which he described as “fighting the combatant forces of the enemies of Islam.”



Terrorism can be “a random action by a solitary actor” or a small group that is typically aimed at civilians, he said. Jihad, by contrast, is “a communal action” sanctioned by an authorized religious authority.

The enemies of Islam falsely equate the two, Shakir said. Some Muslims, for example, claim to be hijacking airplanes as part of a jihad. But Islam “doesn’t permit us to hijack airplanes that are filled with civilian people, noncombatant people,” Shakir said. “If you hijacked a plane filled with the 82nd Airborne, that’s something else.”³⁵

And if these wrongs and many others aren’t corrected you don’t have to worry about al-Qaida... You have to worry about Allah.”³⁷

Speaking to the same conference in Toronto a year later, he praised the late Malcolm X for forcing the United States “to come to grips with the circumstances of slavery and genocide, oppression and military aggression.”³⁸

Unless a voice like Malcolm X’s emerges to force America to come to grips with it today, Shakir added, it won’t do so:

“And the aggression will continue. And the finger of blame will be pointed at all of those real or imagined terrorists scattered all over the world, and no mirror will be held up to see the terrorism that is being inflicted and has been inflicted on the people of the world because of the policies of the United States of America. It is your responsibility to hold the mirror up to America, and say, ‘Look in the mirror and see who you are. You are no better than those you are pointing the finger at.’”³⁹

Anti-Americanism and Moral Equivalence

In his writings and speeches, Shakir often depicts the United States as an evil force in world affairs. It is a nation born through genocide that wages wanton slaughter during wartime. “I believe that the U.S. war machine is the single greatest threat to world peace,” he wrote in November 2009.³⁶

In a December 2004 speech at the “Reviving the Islamic Spirit” convention in Toronto, Shakir warned that America faced divine retribution if it failed to change its ways:

“Allah doesn’t love oppressors,” he said. “And less so here, but here it’s relevant, but more so in my country the United States. We have a responsibility to warn those in power. And that’s jihad. If you talk about jihad [Arabic]—the best jihad is the word of truth in the face of a tyrannical ruler. That if you don’t stop this oppression, if you don’t stop murdering people unnecessarily, if you don’t stop erasing cities like Fallujah off the face of the earth, if you don’t stop contaminating lands for the rest of possible life on this earth, with depleted uranium. This is a sinister, backdoor use of atomic weapons...”

On numerous occasions, Shakir suggests that there is no moral difference between terrorist attacks targeting civilians and civilian deaths resulting from U.S. military actions such as World War II and the current conflict in Afghanistan.

On May 1, 2010, Faisal Shahzad, a Muslim citizen of the United States, attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square. The plot failed when the device malfunctioned, generating smoke but no explosion. Shahzad later pled guilty to 10 terror-related charges in connection with the plot and was sentenced to life in prison.⁴⁰

The attempted attack was not an act of jihad, Shakir wrote in a column five days later. Instead, it was “a mirror image of the godless murderous mayhem and carnage this country has inflicted on the innocent civilians of many Muslim countries.”⁴¹



“Human history has shown how quickly we can begin a free fall into murderous madness once we have entered upon the path that justifies murdering innocent civilians and other noncombatants,” Shakir wrote. “If the American military and the warmongering interests supporting it are guilty in this regard we condemn them in the strongest terms, and if our fellow Muslims are guilty we must likewise condemn them.”⁴²

On July 7, 2005, four suicide bombers blew themselves up in coordinated attacks on London’s transport system. At least 52 civilians died and more than 700 were injured in the attacks on three underground trains and a bus. That day, Shakir wrote an op-ed denouncing the 7/7 attacks while suggesting they were no different morally from the tactics used by the West in the war on terror.⁴³

“This is a war being guided on both sides by self-righteous murderers whose motives and proclamations mirror each other,” Shakir wrote. “Each side sees God as being exclusively with them. That being the case, the restraint and judiciousness urged by Christian and Islamic theology to guide the execution of war is cast aside with wanton impunity. Each side manipulates a vulnerable public to create a climate that allows for the perpetuation and the inevitable escalation of the ongoing slaughter. Each side serves the right to use the spectacle of indiscriminate violence to ‘Shock and Awe’ the opposition, yet will deny that its tactics can be described as terrorism. Each side sees their civilian population as hapless innocent victims, while the suffering innocent civilians on the other side are acceptable collateral damage.”⁴⁴

Shakir blasted the leaders of Western democracies

assembled for a G-8 summit in Edinburgh, Scotland, that day for vowing to fight terrorism. “The leaders of the Western powers continue to imply that they will fight violence with more violence of their own. If current events are any indicator of future developments, such a policy will only serve to beget yet more terrorism.”⁴⁵



Aftermath of the 7/7 Terrorist Attacks

American military tactics in World War II—including the massive bombing raids on German and Japanese cities and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—are a fixation in Shakir’s narrative. In his view, the bombings visited morally unacceptable suffering upon civilian populations.

It was part of Shakir’s response to the Fort Hood massacre in November 2009. Major Nidal Malik Hasan is accused of murdering 12 of his fellow soldiers and a civilian contractor during a shooting rampage. Shakir argued that such attacks “have no Islamic sanction, neither in principle nor from a tactical point of view.” The shootings “only give credence to those foul elements who desire to justify ongoing wars against Muslim populations.”⁴⁶

Shakir expressed “my deepest condolences to the families of the dead and wounded” at Fort Hood.⁴⁷

In the next sentence, however, Shakir added: “There is no legitimate reason for their deaths, just as I firmly believe there is no legitimate reason for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Afghani civilians, who have perished as a result of those two conflicts. Even though I disagree with the continued prosecution of those wars, and even though I believe that the U.S. war machine is the single greatest threat to world peace, I must commend the top military brass at Fort Hood, and President Obama, for encouraging restraint and for



refusing to attribute the crime allegedly perpetrated by Major Nidal Malik Hasan to Islam.”⁴⁸

He added that Muslims who support Fort Hood-style attacks do not understand that “fanatical elements” in the West “will use such attacks to argue for a full-blown assault on Muslim lands.”⁴⁹

“Little do those Muslims realize that they are encouraging elements that would bomb Afghan towns and villages with the same insane impunity that was visited on places like Tokyo, Dresden, Hamburg [and] Berlin during World War II,” Shakir wrote.⁵⁰ His article was reprinted by the Islamic Society of North America as an example for Muslims to follow.⁵¹

Some Muslims questioned ISNA for encouraging Muslims to follow Shakir’s lead. Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, a former lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy and president of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD), termed Shakir’s response to the massacre “pathetic.”⁵² Jasser said: “As an American Muslim, I was profoundly offended by his first paragraph [about the U.S. war machine] demonstrating his and thus ISNA’s disdain for our military.”⁵³

In a December 2009 speech at Claremont McKenna College in California, Shakir blamed the Fort Hood massacre on the availability of guns in America. He claimed (without providing evidence) that some Americans were seeking to use Fort Hood to smear Muslims as “a menace to this society” in order to “severely curb or constrain the rights of Muslims.”⁵⁴

Dismissing evidence that Hasan was an Islamic radical⁵⁵ inspired by Yemen-based jihadist Anwar al-Awlaki,⁵⁶ and that Hasan frequented jihadist websites, Shakir suggested that Fort Hood was not substantively different from gang violence in American cities or the April 2007 massacre of 32 students at Virginia Tech.⁵⁷

Shakir used Fort Hood to frame a larger indictment of

the United States as a violent country with a history of “genocide.” “I prefer to look at [Hasan’s rampage at Fort Hood] as an opportunity for us in this country as Americans to begin a national dialogue on the pervasiveness of violence in our society,” Shakir said. “Because I would argue that our infatuation with violence – we were born in genocide as a nation – we are the only nation on the face of the earth... who have used an atomic weapon, not once but twice. We have been engaged in an unending succession of wars, at least in the last 25 years or so. As a society we shoot ourselves down in the streets like dogs.”⁵⁸

Shakir ridiculed the notion that American Muslims should speak out against extremists and said that “just as we have to challenge the unparalleled violence here in this country...we have to challenge the violence we are responsible for visiting on others” around the world.⁵⁹

In April, the left-leaning journal *In These Times* asked a group of activists, academics and policymakers to explain why many Muslims want to harm the United States.⁶⁰ To a large extent, these Muslims “are simply a microcosmic mirror image of the extremist violence perpetrated by a hegemonic state dominated by elites that have reserved the right to use high-tech military machinery to systematically decimate countries, rip apart their social fabrics and directly or indirectly kill hundreds of thousands of people as has happened in Iraq,” Shakir wrote.⁶¹

These jihadists fail to understand that their violence is empowering dark political forces in the United States who are searching for a pretext to kill Muslims, Shakir said. The jihadists “probably have never stopped to reflect on how that [jihadist] violence is used by neo-fascist pundits and politicians to advance a climate of fear and misunderstanding that makes it more likely that even ordinarily well-meaning Americans will support policies that will lead to more bombing, maiming and murdering of Muslims – and eventually others – around the globe.”⁶²



Likening Americans to Nazis

In an Oct. 24, 2007, blog posting, Shakir reacted sharply to President George W. Bush's use of the term "Islamic fascists" to describe jihadists bent on mass murder. Bush first used the terminology after U.S. and British authorities foiled a plot to blow up planes over the Atlantic Ocean.⁶³

"Now, as we are in the midst of what its right-wing architects are calling 'Islamofascism Week,' it behooves us to ask, 'Who are the fascists?'" Shakir wrote.⁶⁴ The real fascists were Bush and the "neoconservative movement," rather than the jihadists plotting to blow up planes.⁶⁵

"If we consider the nature of fascism, we can see that the ideology driving the agenda Mr. Bush is pushing shares far more with the fascist movements of the 20th Century than any of the Islamic groups or states he and his political allies seek to condemn," Shakir wrote. "Consider that one of the principal innovations of the fascist movement, introduced by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, and perfected by his principal propagandist, Joseph Goebbels, was the 'big lie.' The basic premise of this idea was that if one tells a big enough lie often enough and with adequate conviction, most people will hold it to be true, for the average person does not believe that anyone would have the audacity to lie so brazenly. Therefore, what is being alleged must be true."⁶⁶

One example of the "big lie" technique is the suggestion "that so-called Islamic Fascism threatens Western Civilization," Shakir wrote. Jihadist organizations pose no such threat, he said, because they lack powerful armies and nuclear weapons.⁶⁷ For example, " Hamas calls for the liberation of Palestinian lands not the physical elimination of the Jews."⁶⁸

That's not true. A Palestinian Media Watch paper entitled "Kill Jews for Allah" includes numerous examples of Hamas calls to murder Jews dating back

to 1988, including a video urging Muslims to kill Christians and Jews "to the last one." There are other Hamas statements declaring that "the extermination of the Jews is good for the inhabitants of the world" and urging Muslims to "Kill a Jew – go to heaven."⁶⁹

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"By drawing a link between Islamic movements and fascism, the symbolic leader of those movements, Bin Laden, in the eyes of the western [sic] public, can be linked to the symbolic leaders of the totalitarian menaces of the past century, Hitler and Stalin. Hence, evil can be given a tangible 'face' which can serve as a symbolic representation of the totalitarian menace those movements allegedly embody," Shakir wrote. The same dubious "process of vilification and negative 'branding' has been clearly illustrated in the campaign against Ahmadinejad...[who] has been transformed into a symbol of the evil Islamic enemy."⁷⁰



Mixed Messages on Jihad and Islamic Supremacism

Shakir has offered strikingly different messages to different audiences regarding Muslims who favor radicalism and jihad.

“Islam teaches a balance in all of our affairs, so it’s not a religion that’s amenable to extremism,” Shakir said in a July 2010 YouTube video issued by the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC).⁷¹

As mentioned earlier, Shakir also said in a 2005 sermon that “a Muslim cannot fight noncombatants,” and therefore, “by definition a Muslim cannot become a terrorist.”⁷²

On other occasions, Shakir has made statements appearing to justify jihad in order to make Islam the dominant religion in the United States. In an article entitled “Muslim Involvement in the American Political Process,” Shakir wrote that Islam presents an “absolutist” agenda:

“The relevant point for Muslims is that Islam presents an absolutist political agenda, or one which doesn’t lend itself to compromise, nor to coalition-building. The Islamic world view presents the world as a place where there is a struggle between forces which are diametrically opposed to each other... Truth opposes falsehood”⁷³

He continued:

“Allah’s true *din* [religion] challenges the false beliefs and systems innovated by man. The Qur’an gives no indication that compromise is possible between these forces.”⁷⁴

American Muslims need to keep open the possibility of resorting to “extrasystemic” options, Shakir said, citing examples that included the 1989 coup that brought Islamists to power in Sudan; the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution; and armed struggle in Afghanistan that had created the “Possibility of Islamic rule” in that country.⁷⁵

“Entanglement in politics would also severely limit the ability of Muslims to engage in radical extrasystemic political action. Once a commitment is made to advance one’s cause by working within the system, it would be virtually impossible to subsequently rebel against that system, or to even challenge its legitimacy. The elimination of an extrasystemic option would be disastrous to Muslims if we consider that every major Muslim political gain in modern history has been achieved through extrasystemic political action,” Shakir wrote.⁷⁶

For example, “Islamic rule in Afghanistan has been made possible by a more than twelve-year long armed struggle: 1980-1992.” He added that in 1989, “The fledgling Islamic regime in the Sudan came to power as the result of a coup” and between 1977 and 1979 “The Islamic Republic of Iran was established in the aftermath of a major revolution.”⁷⁷

Shakir denounced the concept of separation of religion and state:

“Any secular political system, especially a highly bureaucratized one, works to eliminate morality and ideological principles from the agenda of any group trying to achieve its goals through that system.”⁷⁸

Shakir also warned Muslims against making common cause with Jews and Christians:

“As Christians and Jews of this country have rejected the divine law and created their own secular system of a rule, the legal and political system of America is sinful and constitutes open rebellion against Allah.



For a Muslim to join with the Jews and Christians in this system is to join them in their rebellion against Allah. Allah explicitly orders against this.”⁷⁹

During his 2001 speech at the Zaytuna Institute, Shakir said Muslims in America should be “laying the administrative and logistical infrastructure, putting that into place so that if we did have to fight—physically—we could translate that fighting into tangible political gains.” Muslims are fighting and dying in many places around the world, “but there’s very little tangible political benefit as a result of that fighting and dying,” Shakir said.⁸⁰

Shakir added that if better organized, Muslims could “take over this country...in a very short period of time. So, we’ve got a lot of foundational work to do and we must do if we’re serious about the task that is before us.”⁸¹

As noted earlier, a June 2006 *New York Times* profile entitled “U.S. Muslim Clerics Seek a Modern Middle Ground,” portrayed Shakir as being among “leading intellectual lights for a new generation of American Muslims looking for homegrown leaders who can help them learn how to live their faith without succumbing to American materialism or Islamic extremism.”⁸²

In that story, Shakir said that after visiting the Syrian city of Hama—where tens of thousands of people were massacred after revolting against President Hafez Assad in 1982—he abandoned the idea of armed struggle.⁸³

But when asked about his past, Shakir told the *Times*: “To be honest, I don’t regret anything I’ve done or said.” He added that “I had to go through this stage to become the person that I am, and I’m not willing to negate my past.”

Shakir went on to say he hoped that the United States would be a Muslim country ruled by Islamic law, “not by violent means, but by persuasion.”

“Every Muslim who is honest would say, I would like to see America become a Muslim country...I think it would help people, and if I didn’t believe that, I wouldn’t be a Muslim. Because Islam helped me as a person, and it’s helped a lot of people in my community.”⁸⁴



Shakir’s remarks drew sharp criticism from non-Islamists like AIFD Chairman Jasser, who said they were “a blatant endorsement of Islamism (theocracy) over Americanism (anti-theocracy).”⁸⁵

Islamists like Shakir, Jasser continued, “are rabidly anti-American from their fear of pluralistic liberty. They are too insecure to give Muslims or any citizens

the opportunity to be free and to choose whether to sin or not. Can mainstream American thought afford to be naïve and uncritical about this central theme of Islamist movements?”⁸⁶

Shakir’s worldview also has drawn criticism from what might be described as the American Muslim left. Ahmed Nassef is editor in chief of “Muslim Wakeup!” a



website founded in 2003 “to protest oppression, bigotry and racism” and to oppose “the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the massacres of the people of Bosnia, and U.S. aggression in Iraq, Libya and Somalia.”⁸⁷

According to his biography on the MWU website, Nassef served three years as “president of UCLA’s Muslim Students Association, one of the nation’s largest.” His career also included staff positions with groups that included Jobs With Peace, the Committee for Justice, the Los Angeles Coalition Against US Intervention in the Middle East, and the Los Angeles National Lawyers Guild.⁸⁸

In a posting on his website, Nassef questioned whether Shakir’s writings on subjects such as guerrilla warfare and the separation of religion and state were moderate and urged him to disavow them. “I feel someone with his position of responsibility needs to make an unequivocal statement that he no longer holds to those beliefs,” Nassef wrote.⁸⁹

But even if the imam were to repudiate some or all of his radical views, caution would probably be warranted. Shakir has spoken approvingly of the Prophet Mohammad’s use of rhetorical deception to lull enemies into a false sense of security. Mohammad and his companions “said that we used to smile in people’s faces and we were cursing them in our hearts,” Shakir said in a video distributed at the December 2004 “Reviving the Islamic Spirit” convention in Toronto.⁹⁰

“So they were presenting one face to repel the wickedness of people,” Shakir said. “He said it’s not wisdom that you don’t treat people with good and kindness [when] you find no recourse until Allah (may he be exalted) makes for you a way out. So, this is a whole area of Islam governing our interaction with our enemies or people who oppress us when we are in a state of weakness.”

With his view that America poses a threat to world peace and that true Muslims cannot be terrorists, Shakir’s

opinion of the 2009 shooting death of a Detroit imam is not surprising. Imam Luqman Abdullah opened fire as FBI agents moved in to arrest him on variety of weapons and conspiracy charges.⁹¹ His shots killed an FBI canine, but his gun was pointed toward advancing agents. They returned fire, killing Abdullah instantly.⁹² According to a criminal complaint, Abdullah preached offensive jihad to his followers, envisioning a breakaway Islamic state within America.⁹³

He also repeatedly told followers to be armed and to never surrender peacefully to law enforcement.⁹⁴ Law enforcement videotapes from the shooting show Abdullah was the only suspect to ignore agents’ orders to surrender peacefully. He hid in a doorway, concealing his hand in his clothing.⁹⁵

“One could debate the Imam’s political ideology, just as one could debate if the Imam would have ever been moved to a point where he would have become involved, unprovoked, in an act of violence against the state,” Shakir wrote. “However, if agents of the state had not infiltrated his mosque and set in motion the series of regrettable events that culminated in his death he would still be alive today. That is a fact beyond dispute.”⁹⁶

Shakir dismisses the notion that Abdullah was an Islamist extremist as “a caricature.” Abdullah’s death was “a brutal murder” which made him “an unsuspecting victim” in the war on terror, Shakir wrote in the spring of 2010.⁹⁷

America’s war on terror isn’t necessary, Shakir believes, because the country can survive any terrorist attack.

“Granted, if al-Qaida-type terrorists were able to deliver a nuclear or dirty bomb to a U.S. city, that would be far from trivial,” he wrote, “but even that most unlikely event would not of itself lead to a takeover of the U.S. state. In the name of such wild fears, U.S. wars have been launched that have led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, fueling immense, justifiable anger against the United States.”⁹⁸ ■



ENDNOTES

1. "Our History," Zaytuna College, http://www.zaytunacollege.org/about/our_history (accessed Dec. 17, 2010).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Shakir Interview with Bill Moyers, "Bill Moyers Journal," PBS, June 22, 2007, <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06222007/transcript2.html>.
4. Biography of Zaid Shakir, Zaytuna College co-founder, http://www.zaytunacollege.org/about/board_of_trustees (accessed Dec. 28, 2010).
5. *Ibid.*
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