

Pro-Israel Muslims Seek Alternative to Radical Islam as a Means for Peace



A Palestinian child wearing a Hamas headband aims a toy gun during a rally after Eid prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on July 28, 2014. While such scenes are a manifestation of radical Islam, a growing number of pro-Israel Muslims are seeking an alternative path that they hope will lead to peace with the Jewish state. Photo: Sliman Khader/Flash90.

JNS.org – Jews around the world were inspired last month when Arab-Israeli teenager Mohammad Zoabi cloaked himself in an Israeli flag and spoke into a bedroom video camera, “I am an Israeli and will remain an Israeli. Israel will remain a Jewish and a democratic country.”

What few realized is that within days after the video went viral, Israeli police arrested three men in his own family for plotting to cause him harm in retaliation for the piece. His cousin, Arab Knesset member Hanin Zoabi, called her young cousin “a sleazy, mixed-up kid who has identity issues.”

Still, more voices like the young Zoabi’s have emerged in the month since the kidnapping of three Israeli teens and the weeks since the launch of Operation Protective Edge. Young Bissan Salman, an Israeli Arab from Ramla, blogged on July 23 that she refuses to choose between her Arab and Israeli friends.

“My tears choose the side of peace,” she wrote. “We are tired to hear about more killings. We are tired to run every time we the sirens. ... Don’t judge, pray. Pray for this to be over.”

But as the operation wages on and the rockets continue to plummet on the state of Israel, these young voices are lost. But there is another voice, a growing one, that is bubbling above the surface. That voice has little to do with Israel and everything to do with fighting Hamas. It is the voice of Arabs—Muslims, really—calling on their peers to fight the inexorable advance of political Islamism over Islam.

Dr. Qanta Ahmed, author of *Land of Invisible Women: A Female Doctor’s Journey in the Saudi Kingdom*, told *JNS.org* while the media focuses on the war in Israel, similar wars are being waged across the world. Islamism, she said, is the driving force between Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) and Iraqi government forces, between the Pakistani Taliban and the Pakistani Army, the Afghan Taliban and would-be Afghan democratic leaders, Nigeria’s Boko Haram Islamists and the Nigerian government, and between Jama’at Al-Nursa rebels and the Syrian regime.

“Muslim militaries are not held to global condemnation in the way the Israel Defense Forces must face—despite their targeted attacks, pre-strike warning and efforts to contain civilian deaths,” said Ahmed.

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser—founder and president of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD), which

works to provide a platform for Muslim Americans who advocate for liberty, freedom, and the separation of mosque and state—expressed similar sentiments. AIFD has brought together a group of dozens of U.S. Islamic groups to form the American Islamic Leadership Coalition. To be a member, agencies have to sign on to a list of 17 principles. The last of the principles is recognition of the state of Israel.

“I don’t believe Israel is a religious issue for Muslims,” Jasser told *JNS.org*. “ Hamas and other radical Islamic groups have propagandized the issues for decades and the latest conflict demonstrates that. It is constant warmongering. Hamas creates, starts these wars, commits acts of terror, and then uses the war as a platform to say all its grievances are Israel’s fault.”

Jasser said that while he hopes Israel deals a heavy blow to Hamas, he does not believe the war will have any long-term impact because the war is not about Israel, but rather “about Hamas and their corrupt ideology.”

“You can compare it to drug addiction, which leads to violence,” he said. “Well, if you say the problem is the violence and you stop the violence, it won’t work. It is the drug addiction that leads to the violence. We believe the gateway drug here is political Islam.”

Jasser’s group tries to stay quiet on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because he does not want to feed the international belief system that if that crisis was solved, it would be the solution to global terrorism.

“As a Syrian, I can tell you, nothing is further from the truth. [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad displaced and killed hundreds of thousands of people and Israel had nothing to do with it,” he said.

Tawfik Hamid is a former member of the Jamal Islamiyah terrorist organization. Thirty years ago, he broke from its grip to move to the U.S. and begin a fight against radical Islam. Recently, he founded the International Center for Countering Radicalism (IC4CR.org). He told *JNS.org* he believes radicalism needs to be fought on multiple fronts.

First, he said, more accessible modern and peaceful interpretations of the Quran are needed. Next, accurate information is required; hate, said Hamid, is often based on misinformation that is being taught Islamic schools and mosques.

Additionally, Hamid said, the world should use behavior modification techniques, like having “more negative reinforcements to stop them from doing terror acts.”

Terrorist organizations deprive their followers of anything beautiful, such as color, art, music, fashion, etc. Over time, Hamid explained, the followers become unable to appreciate beauty, and this makes them more receptive to “extremely ugly things.”

“It is like if someone destroys the receptors on their tongue, they cannot distinguish between good and bad tasting things,” said Hamid. “This is what happens. We need to reintroduce the beauty.”

Ahmed, Hamid, and Jasser said they are frustrated by the international media, which offers sensational sound bites and ignores the full picture.

“Many people look at what is happening in Gaza as if Israel is the aggressor. But when you think deeply, Egypt offered a cease-fire and Israel immediately accepted it. It was supposed to start on July 5 at 9 a.m. Hamas refused the cease-fire. The full responsibility for any killings after July 5 lies with Hamas,” Hamid said.

He added that Hamas accuses Israel of ethnic cleansing of Muslims, and the U.S. of being anti-Islam. But he said what is not reported is the number of mosques that exist in both Israel and America.

“If this was the case, if they were anti-Islam, why would they allow these mosques and Islamic schools to be built? Compare the numbers to the synagogues and churches in the Muslim world—there, these places are being destroyed,” said Hamid, who noted that anti-Semitism in the Arab world has been on the rise over the past decade. Jasser suggested that anti-Semitism might be as high as 90 percent among Arab nations.

A recent Pew Research Center study of Muslim world perceptions of Hamas found that support for the terrorist organization in general was on the decline. But Jasser said the study should be taken with a grain of salt.

“This is no silver lining unless we find an alternative to Hamas—not just we [as] Muslims, but the West. President [Barack] Obama has been missing in action, and if a vacuum is created it will be filled with Arabism or Islamism,” said Jasser.

“This is the beginning of change, but Arabs that think like I do, they are very few,” Hamid said. “That does not mean these views could not one day dominate, but they need to be empowered.”

Hamid’s www.facebook.com/ModernQuranInterpretation webpage has 2 million “likes.” He surmises that 10 years ago, that number would have been only 200.

“If we can support this momentum, it can change,” he said.

For now, though, Operation Protective Edge continues, and in the end, Israelis and Palestinians, are likely both to lose, said Ahmed.

“Israel is fighting an impossible battle, on one front with nihilist political Islamists who willingly lead their populations to slaughter in the interest of religionized war for fictionalized spiritual gain rather than true political solution,” she said. “An on another front, waging other battles with an international media reflecting an increasingly ignored and biased public opinion.”

Ahmed added, “The sooner media commentary can be broadened to explain political Islamism, diplomatic and political powers globally can begin to plan the true long-term freedom of the

Palestinians... a lasting liberation from the stranglehold of Hamas's political Islamism.”

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