

The Mosque and the “Moderate” Imam

☒ It has become conventional wisdom, at least in the so-called mainstream media and other liberal circles, that Feisal Abdul Rauf, the imam who wants to build a mosque near Ground Zero, is a moderate.

A headline in Time magazine calls him “The Moderate Imam Behind the ‘Ground Zero Mosque.’”

A New York Times blog says he is a “moderate Muslim.”

Walter Isaacson, the head of the Aspen Institute, says Rauf has “promoted a moderate and tolerant Islam.”

These are just a few examples. There are many, many more.

And I have no doubt that Rauf is moderate, by Muslim standards. But where does he fit in by American standards?

This is the same imam, who just 19 days after September 11, 2001, explained the attacks this way in an interview with Ed Bradley on 60 Minutes: “I wouldn’t say that the United States deserved what happened, but the United States’ policies were an accessory to the crime that happened.”

Yes, in the Arab world that probably would be considered “moderate.” But let’s translate: *“I am against this sort of terrorism, the Imam seems to be saying, but I understand why it happened. In part, America brought this on itself.”*

Such an understanding doesn’t make the United States an accessory to anything. But it does make the imam himself an accessory to the crime he sort of, kind of, deplures.

Can you imagine any decent person 70 years ago saying, *“I don’t condone lynching or any other violence against Negroes.”*

That certainly is wrong. But I understand why those white folks do it. Federal government policies drive people to do bad things and therefore those policies are an accessory to the crime."

After the terrorist attacks in London in 2005, then-Prime Minister Tony Blair met with key members of Parliament and said that while government, obviously, had a role in stopping terrorism, law-abiding Muslims had an even bigger role. A Pew Research Center poll had come out showing that while 70 percent of Muslims questioned said they never support suicide bombings, a sizable minority – 24 percent – said sometimes they did. The numbers troubled Mr. Blair.

"My view in the end is you cannot defeat this extremism through whatever a government does," Blair said. "You can only defeat it if there are people inside the [Muslim] community who are going to stand up ... and not merely say, 'You are wrong to kill people through terrorism ... but actually, 'You are wrong about your view about the West; you are wrong about you sense of grievance.'"

"This whole sense of grievance and ideology is wrong," Blair said, "*profoundly* wrong. There may be disagreements that you have with America, with the U.K., with the Western world, but none of it justifies not merely the *methods*, but the *ideas* that are far too current in parts of the [Muslim] community. Now my view is that until you challenge that at its root, fundamentally, then you're always going to be left with a situation where people kind of say ... 'Look we understand why you [terrorists] feel like this and you know we can sympathize with that, but you're wrong to do these things.' You're not going to defeat it like that. You're only going to defeat it if you say: 'You're actually wrong if you *feel* those things.'"

(Note: I heard the speech on tape and the italics indicate Blair's emphasis.)

It was a brilliant analysis by a leader who wasn't afraid to speak the uncomfortable truth. Here in America, Imam Rauf understands why the terrorists do what they do. That's why he believes American polices are "accessories to the crime." And that's why he is part of the problem, no matter how many times the media call him a 'moderate.'

A few years ago I wrote a book called *Crazies to the Left of Me, Wimps to the Right*, and in one chapter I wrote about the annual convention of the Islamic Society of North America which, in 2006, was held in Chicago.

A poll was conducted at the convention that asked: "Is the American government at war with the religion of Islam?" Sixty-eight percent of the Muslim-Americans said yes.

"Did Muslims hijack planes and fly them into buildings on 9/11?" was another question. Only 38 percent said yes; 45 percent said no.

What about America's invasion of Afghanistan right after we were attacked? Was it justified? Eighty-one percent said it was not justified.

I entitled the chapter, "The 'Moderates' Are a Little Nutty, Too."

Yes, it was only a straw poll and only 307 Muslims took part. And it would be nice to think that these Muslim-Americans represent only a small percentage of Muslims living in this country; that they speak only for the delusional wing of Islam. But I fear that would be wishful thinking. And remember: Everyone who took the poll in Chicago – every one! – was an American citizen.

This tells us something about so-called "moderate" Muslims. It tells us that the word has different meanings depending on where you stand. So, yes, in some places and by some standards, Imam Rauf is a moderate. But not here and not by

American standards.