

Don't Attack the Messenger

Greg Noakes' report on a panel at the Heritage Foundation (Sept.-Oct. 1994) in which I participated twice quotes Abdu-rahman Alamoudi (executive director of the American Muslim Council in Washington, DC) attacking me. I would like to answer his statements.

First, Mr. Alamoudi derides my report that the Iranians have called for a reinterpretation of the ritual stoning of three pillars at Mina, outside Mecca. This is part of their turning the pilgrimage (*hajj*) from a purely religious exercise into a political one. Mr. Alamoudi found my talking about this "deeply offensive." Well, blame the Iranian radicals for it, don't get mad at me for reporting it. Here's a sample from the Iranian media, a commentary as broadcast in stilted English by the Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran on May 3, 1994:

"Alongside religious and worship proportions, *hajj* rituals also seek to explore and examine the problems and difficulties of the Islamic community in various political and social areas, and to talk out plans to counter the enemies of Islam...the important point is the gathering of the world Muslims in the ceremonies of deliverance from infidels [i.e., the stoning ritual], which enjoys special status and importance in *hajj* rituals...During these ceremonies, the Muslims come together and publicly voice their detestation towards the polytheists and the oppressors throughout the world."

Second, Noakes quotes Mr. Alamoudi saying "Pipes is known to be against Islam, period." Not true, period. I am not against Islam, nor am I for Islam. As a historian and a policy analyst it's not my business to be for or against religions. Rather, I study Islam to interpret it and explain it.

Here's a challenge for Mr. Alamoudi: produce a single piece of my writing where I express anti-Islamic sentiments. (I can provide him with a bibliography to help him track down all my publications.) If he finds one, I'll duly apologize. If not, he apologizes. Game?

That said, I am indeed against something: fundamentalist Islam. This radical ideology has dangerous implications for both the Muslim world and the United States. I reject fundamentalist Islam for political, not religious reasons. And, as Mr. Alamoudi of course knows, you don't have to be non-Muslim to be anti-fundamentalist. Thus, Said Sa'di, the secretary-general of an Algerian secularist party, recently declared that "We should not give in [to the fundamentalists] because if we made the slightest concession, all our freedoms would be threatened." Or, as Taslima Nasrin of Bangladesh puts it, fundamentalists are "spreading darkness in many parts of the world."

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This is an appropriate place to correct an error in our Nov.-Dec. 1994 issue in which we listed Mr. Pipes' residence as Washington, DC instead of Philadelphia.