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## Where Things Stand with *Mosque Alert*

By Jamil Khoury



Where do things stand with *Mosque Alert*? As you may recall, *Mosque Alert* is a play I'm writing that tells the story of two suburban American families living in Naperville, Illinois - one family's Christian, the Baker family, and the other family's Muslim, the Khan family. The Baker's and Khan's find themselves torn apart by a proposal to build a mosque in their community.

Description notwithstanding, I have not embarked on what you may call a "normal" playwriting process. Not by a long shot. Silk Road Rising designed

*Mosque Alert* as a nine step, online, interactive new play development and civic engagement project. Our idea was to marry the playwriting process with public advocacy. In creating a virtual forum, we would enable participants to act as co-writers and critics in the development of a new play-in-progress, and we'd empower civic conversations around Islamophobia, freedom of religion, and national security.

For an introduction to some of the characters and ideas you will encounter in the play, please click the image below and *Meet Mosque Alert* (20 min. 58 sec.).



Indulge me a little history. On September 8, 2011, *Mosque Alert* was officially launched at a luncheon for over a hundred guests in the elegant Heritage Room at The Union League Club of Chicago. We selected the September time frame to coincide with the ten year commemoration of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and to highlight the persistence of anti-Muslim prejudice, now most manifest in resistance to the building of mosques. A little over two years later, we have completed four of the nine steps in our first-of-its-kind process.

The project now boast two video essays, twenty four character video blogs, and nine conflict scene videos. The videos have been engaged by over 12,000 people around the world and have been screened at numerous colleges and universities, often before audiences of several hundred people. To date, over 400 virtual participants have engaged with the material on the Silk Road Rising website, on youtube, and via private emails. Participants have responded to questions I've posed and have posted their own comments and questions to which I have responded.

Eventually, *Mosque Alert* will emerge as a full length stage play and after that will be made into a video play, docudrama, or feature film. Our hope is to produce the stage play in the Spring of 2015. I also anticipate continued development online and may be introducing a few new characters via character video blogs.

As a playwright, the level of public engagement I have experienced with this project has been invaluable. I have benefitted enormously from the insights, input, and anecdotes of my co-writers and responders, and I have learned a great deal about audience perceptions, wants, and worries well before writing my first



I highly recommend our nine step process to other playwrights out there. Feel free to use it. **Online new play development and civic engagement are a perfect match!**



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