

[A Thousand and One Fatwas](#)

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On Saturday, 24 February 2007, the online daily, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* published a lengthy article with the title, "*Fuqaha al-Tajheel wa Fatawi Hasab al-Talab.*" A literal translation would go like this: "*The Fuqaha of Ignorance, and Fatwas to Order.*" I have taken the liberty of giving it this title, "*A Thousand and One Fatwas.*"

The columnist began with these words:

*"The most recent popular occupations in the Arab world are that of a **Faqih** (a legal expert, plural is **Fuqaha**), or a **Da'iyah** (religious propagandist), or a **Mufti** (the person who issues legal opinions, mostly on ethical matters, his opinion is called a **Fatwa**; its plural in Arabic is **Fatawi**.) The qualifications of such persons are: an awareness of the presuppositions of the Islamic faith, plus a memorization of certain Qur'anic texts, as well as an acquaintance with some useful Hadiths. Their pronouncements are readily accepted by illiterate people who number around 65% of the Arab population."*

The article is lengthy, and so I share with the readers of FFI, those salient points that the author cites to prove his thesis regarding the proliferation of this popular and unhealthy type of Islamic "occupation." He cited several Fatwas that are utterly irrational.

1. **Forbidding or Legalizing Private Lessons**

The article related a case in 2004 when the Egyptian Ministry of Education requested guidance from the country's Mufti, about providing some students with private lessons in those subjects where they happen to be weak. His *fatwa* stated "*that private lessons given by teachers of government schools should be forbidden outside those schools.*" Another fatwa contradicted the above-mentioned one by stating that "*if those lessons were not obligatory, and took place within the schools, and the tutor did not overcharge the student, then private lessons were all right.*" The author went on pointing to the ridiculous nature of the whole discussion that preoccupied the Egyptian press; while such urgent problems as the population explosion, and the shortage of food supplies, hardly received any attention. He added that Egypt's inability to feed its population makes it dependent on American aid, which amounts to around two billion dollars a year!

2. **A Fatwa Forbidding Football (Soccer)**

It took 36 pages to cover a fatwa that forbids football. The argument boiled down to the fact that the game was invented by the **Kuffar** (plural for **Kafir**, i.e. an infidel.) It was supported by a reference to a Hadith of the Prophet who had supposedly declared: **“Man tashabbaha biqawmen, fahuwa minhom”**, i.e. He who imitates others, becomes like them! If this is the case, the author of the article asked, *“Why shouldn’t these Muftis forbid the use of the Internet and the computers as well? And if soccer is **haram** (forbidden), how come that it is the most popular sport in Egypt, and in Saudi Arabia?”*

3. A Fatwa Forbidding Sitting on Chairs

In introducing this specific **fatwa**, the columnist remarked, *“This is not a stale joke, but a legal fatwa coming from a **Da’iyat** known as **Um Ins*** and who has her own website! She posted these words: **‘Warning: chairs, benches, and large cushions are forbidden, Allahu Akbar!’** In the body of her Fatwa, we read: **‘One of the worst habits in our great nation is the use of chairs.’** She listed three reasons why chairs are haram. **‘First, our righteous ancestors never used chairs. Had chairs been good, our beloved Prophet would have used them.’** The columnist remarked that *“**Um Ins** forgot to mention that none of the products of technology, such as electricity, gas, cars, airplanes, telephones, refrigerators; were ever used by our Prophet and his immediate followers. Is she really sitting on the floor as she issues her fatwas for her website on the Internet”?**

*“**Second, she stated in her fatwa that ‘chairs are a Western invention. To use them and be impressed by them implied being equally impressed by their manufacturers who are from the West. How can we ever be impressed by Westerners when they happen to be our enemies?’***

The third reason mentioned by this lady for forbidding the use of chairs is shockingly weird; I must be very circumspect in translating it. [Jacob Thomas]

‘The use of a chair or a large cushion causes the person to be relaxed; so when a woman sits on a chair her legs assume a position that makes her sexually excited, and this attracts men or jinns**, to have sex with her ... Thus, for a woman to sit on a chair, is a wicked matter, and is tantamount to committing adultery.’

The columnist continued, *“The fourth reason given by **Um Ins** for refraining to use chairs is that **‘by sitting on the floor, a Muslim remembers Allah, and this increases his spirituality as he confesses the greatness of the Creator.’**”*

4. A Fatwa that Legalizes Lying and Giving a False Testimony

Our columnist related another bizarre fatwa, “*There is a three-page fatwa that gives the green light for a Muslim to lie. This is based on a Hadith: ‘Lying is permitted in the following cases: when a man may lie to please his wife; or during war, or when it brings about reconciliation among people.’*”

5. An Opinion that Forbids the Use of the Letter X, such as in “Explorer”

The columnist in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* related this unbelievable story:

*“This is not a joke, but I read about this legal opinion in a Saudi newspaper. A businessman applied to the Saudi Ministry of Commerce to copyright a computer program that he called **Al-Mustakshef (Explorer)**. His application was turned down because the letter X looks like a cross, which would not sit well with Saudis! The businessman wondered why did the Ministry of education not bar the use of the plus sign +, and the multiplication sign X, as well, since both would remind people of the cross?!”*

6. A Fatwa against Learning English

Another example was cited in the article about an absurd fatwa, this time regarding the use of a foreign language among Muslims.

“Again, I am not telling a joke! It happens to be an official fatwa coming from a sheikh that forbade the teaching of English. It was based on a claim by an Islamic jurist ‘that the Arabic language forms the banner and glory of Islam; thus, it is not lawful for a Muslim to speak in another tongue! A person who wants his child to learn English, for example, would be condemned on the Day of Judgment.’”

7. A Proliferation of Fatwas that Charge People with Apostasy

*“Certain sheikhs and propagandists have specialized in issuing fatwas that charge all kinds of people with apostasy. One sheikh compiled a list of **‘The Apostates in the Arab World.’** Seventy prominent Arab writers (Christian and Muslim) are mentioned in this list; and they are all considered worthy of death!”*

Finally, a fatwa was issued declaring that ‘Al-Sharq al-Awsat Newspaper is an apostate publication!’”

The columnist commented: “*Nothing remains halal*** for a Muslim; he must now keep himself secluded in a corner of a mosque, without leaving it for a moment!*”

*“In conclusion, how can we fail to realize why our nation is lost? It has been left behind in the onward march of scientific and technological advances that are taking place everywhere else in the world. Having shared some of the **Fatwas of Darkness and of Ignorance**, I cannot help but cry out: **O my Allah, where is our nation heading to!?**”*

This much I shared with the readers of FFI, a portion of the article on the proliferation of fatwas and muftis in the Arab world. I don’t feel that I can add any more comments to this impassioned article that describes so well the pathetic and hopeless state of affairs, not only in the Arab world, but throughout the entire length and breadth of **Daru’l Islam**.

* **Da’iyat Um-Ins**: A lady propagandist for Islam who calls herself **Um** (mother) **Ins** (Arabic for humans, the very opposite of **Jinn**)

** **Jinn**: According to the Qur’an, there are three categories of intelligent beings: **Angels** (both good and bad), **Jinns**, and **Humans**. Jinns may be either good or bad.

*** **Halal**: Arabic for lawful and permitted things, relating to food and ethical matters.