

IS ISLAM A RELIGION OF VIOLENCE OR PEACE?

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Edward Archer allegedly shot Philadelphia policeman Jesse Hartnett in his patrol car on January 7, 2016. According to Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney, Islam had nothing to do with the shooting. However, Archer told police, "I follow Allah. I pledge my allegiance to the Islamic State, and that is why I did what I did."ⁱ The FBI is investigating the shooting as a terrorist attack, according to FBI Director James Comey.

This attack followed the recent San Bernardino massacre perpetrated by ISIS sympathizers. President Obama responded to that attack by addressing America from the Oval Office. Mr. Obama stated: "Muslim Americans are our friends and neighbors, our coworkers, our sports heroes—and yes, they are our men and women in uniform who are willing to die in defense of our country."ⁱⁱⁱ

He called on American Muslims to do more to counter radicalism in their religion and country. And he called on all Americans to resist profiling and discrimination against Muslims.

The success of his appeal rests on the degree to which Islam is a religion of peace. There are between five and eight million Muslims living in America, and 1.6 billion Muslims around the world. If some Muslims believe that ISIS and other terrorist groups accurately represent Islam, there is cause for great concern.

So, is Islam a religion of violence or peace? How is the answer relevant to the growing threat of terrorism we face in America and around the world?ⁱⁱⁱ

The teachings of Islam

The Qur'an was revealed by Muhammad in two phases. The first (AD 610–622) was given when he lived in Mecca and is thus known as the "Meccan phase." It counsels moderation with injunctions such as:

- "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Q2:256).^{iv}
- "To you be your Way, and to me mine" (Q109:6).

Scholars count 124 such Qur'anic injunctions for Muslims to tolerate those who do not share their faith. Many people describe moderates as "Mecca Muslims."

When Muhammad led his followers to Medina in AD 622, they established the worldwide Muslim community known as the *ummah*. Here the prophet began proclaiming a second, more militant theme. He required Muslims to defend Islam from attack: "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for

God loveth not transgressors. But if they cease, God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (Q2:190, 192).

Then he began calling his followers to initiate violence against non-Muslims. Here we find the so-called "sword verses": "Fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them. . . . Fight those who believe not in God" (Q9:5, 29). Many describe radical Muslims as "Medina Muslims."

How do Muslims reconcile the Medina theme (violence in the name of Islam) with the Mecca theme (religious tolerance)?

The doctrine of "abrogation"

ISIS and other militant jihadist organizations follow the doctrine of "abrogation" (from the Latin *abrogatio*, a legal annulment under Roman law). This doctrine is based on the Qur'anic statement, "None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar" (Q2:106). The doctrine of abrogation is typically understood to mean that later revelations supersede earlier teachings. Three other verses also acknowledge abrogation:

- "When We substitute one revelation for another,--And God knows best what he reveals (in stages),--they say, 'Thou are but a forger' but most of them understand not" (Q16:101).
- "God doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book" (Q13:39).
- "If it were Our Will, We could take away that which We have sent thee by inspiration" (Q17:86).

One *hadith* (a statement from a later account of Muhammad's life) states that "the Messenger of God abrogated some of his commands by others, just as the Qur'an abrogates some part of it with the other."

The doctrine of abrogation is central to the issue of terrorism in Islam, because verses cited by militant jihadists come from later teachings and contradict earlier exhortations to tolerate non-Muslims. As we will see, moderates believe that these later teachings were authoritative only in the seventh century as Islam was being established. Radical Muslims disagree, claiming that the later revelations require them to defeat and enslave or kill all non-Muslims.

Medina Muslims

Surah ("chapter") 9, called "Ultimatum," is essential to our discussion. Commentators agree that Muhammad received it in AD 631, the year before his death. Some believe it to be the last chapter of the Qur'an to be revealed, while others believe that it was penultimate. Since it came so late in the prophet's life, those who believe in abrogation would clearly view it as superseding other revelations regarding conflict with non-

Muslims. With regard to war, it would abrogate the 124 earlier Qur'anic statements calling for tolerance of non-Muslims.

Contemporary Muslim scholar Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti:

The verse [Q9:5] does not leave any room in the mind to conjecture about what is called defensive war. This verse asserts that holy war, which is demanded in Islamic law, is not a defensive war because it could legitimately be an offensive war. That is the apex and most honorable of all holy wars. Its goal is the exaltation of the word of God, the construction of Islamic society, and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth regardless of the means. It is legal to carry on an offensive holy war.^{vi}

Following the doctrine of abrogation, here are some of the verses in Surah 9 seen to replace earlier statements requiring toleration. They are used to justify the actions of ISIS and other militant jihadists:

- "Moderate" Muslims are to be attacked: "Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites and be unyielding to them; their abode is hell, and evil is the destination" (Q9:73).
- Christians are to be conquered: "Fight those who believe not in Allah . . . even if they are of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizyah [tax] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (Q9:29).
- Unbelievers are to be killed unless they repent: "Slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captive and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush, then if they repent and keep up pray and pay the poor-rate, leave their way free to them" (Q9:5).
- Those who die in *jihad* are guaranteed paradise: "Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs in return is the garden of Paradise: they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth . . . then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme" (Q9:111).

In addition, these sections are also considered to abrogate earlier teachings on tolerance and further define radical Muslims' actions:

- Enemies are to be crucified or otherwise tortured: "The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His messenger and strive to make mischief in the land is only this, that they should be murdered or crucified or their hands and their feet should be cut off on opposite sides or they should be imprisoned; this shall be as a disgrace for them in this world, and in the hereafter they shall have a grievous chastisement" (Q5:33).
- Women captives can be raped: "All married women are forbidden unto you save those captives whom your right hands possess. It is a decree of Allah for you" (Q4:24).

As you can see, ISIS and other militant jihadist organizations have significant Qur'anic support for their torture and slaughter of all who oppose them. David Bukay concludes his important article on terrorism and abrogation:

Some Muslims may preach tolerance and argue that jihad refers only to an internal, peaceful struggle to better oneself. Western commentators can convince themselves that such teachings are correct. However, for learned Muslim scholars and populist leaders, such notions are or should be risible. They recognize that, in practice, there is compulsion in Islam. They take seriously the notion that the Qur'an teaches not just tolerance among religions, but tolerance among religions on the terms of Islam. To understand the challenge of the current Islamist revival, it is crucial for non-Muslims and moderate Muslims alike to recognize that interpretation of Islamic doctrine can have two faces, and that the Medinan face may very well continue to overshadow the Meccan face for a major portion, if not the majority, of contemporary Muslims.^{vii}

To the degree that Bukay is correct, the "sword verses" may continue to compel some Muslims in America and around the world to support ISIS and other militant jihadist organizations. For "Medina Muslims," these organizations are acting in obedience to the Qur'an and serving the cause of global Islamic expansion.

In this light, al Qaeda and ISIS are neither unique nor exclusive as terrorist organizations. There are dozens of other radical Islamist groups around the world that share their ideology and aims. And their number is growing.

Mecca Muslims

On the basis of our discussion thus far, should we conclude that Islam is a violent religion? Not necessarily, for two reasons.

First, many Muslims either reject or modify the doctrine of abrogation. Some believe that each verse of the Qur'an must be accepted as equal in authority. Others accept abrogation, but believe that each verse of the Qur'an must be interpreted in its original context, including the "sword verses" (see more below). Still others accept abrogation, but do not apply it to Surah 9 and other militant verses in the Qur'an. In their view, the "Mecca" verses on tolerance must be used to interpret the "Medina" verses on violence.

Sheikh Abdur Rehman was Chief Justice of Pakistan, with degrees from Oxford and the University of Punjab, and a PhD in law from Cairo. In his view, the teaching of Q2:256, "let there be no compulsion in religion," is central to Islam today.^{viii}

Second, moderate Muslim scholars locate Surah 9 in the historical context of Arabian Pagans who broke a covenant with Arabic Muslims. They interpret the injunction to initiate violence as applying only to this enemy, not to the larger non-Muslim world.

Many apply this reasoning to the broader military actions undertaken by Muhammad and his early followers. In their view, such actions were necessary to establish and defend Islam, but are not binding on Muslims today. They would interpret the "sword verses" cited above in this way.

Their approach would be similar to that taken by Christian scholars in understanding God's command for the Jews to kill the Canaanites (cf. Deuteronomy 20:17). We believe that this injunction was necessary to establish the nation of Israel in its "promised land," but do not view it as binding on us today. Rather, we see this command as a principle (we must not compromise with sin) rather than a precept (we must find and kill Canaanites).

As an example of moderate Islamic teaching, note a 2014 open letter to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State. Written by more than 120 of the world's top Muslim scholars and leaders, it states that "it is forbidden in Islam" to kill the innocent, to reintroduce slavery, to force people to convert, to deny women or children their rights, to torture, to disfigure the dead, or to declare a caliphate "without consensus from all Muslims."^{ix} The eighteen-page letter refutes ISIS theology point-by-point from the Qur'an.^x

To summarize: Radical Muslims believe that the Qur'an requires them to initiate violence against all who do not accept their ideology. The doctrine of abrogation can be used to justify their position, making it attractive to many Muslims around the world. However, moderate Muslims reject this use of the doctrine. They argue that the "sword verses" were necessary for establishing Islam in the seventh century, but are no longer binding on Muslims today.

The history of Islam

As we have seen, the Qur'an was revealed in two periods. While Muhammad was teaching in Mecca (AD 610-22), his revelations were conciliatory toward non-Muslims. When he moved to Medina to establish the *ummah* (the global Muslim community), he taught that Muslims were permitted to defend themselves. As the *ummah* became stronger, he then taught that Muslims were to initiate violence against non-Muslims.

Do his actions justify militant jihadism today?

Muhammad as a militant jihadist

In *Radical Islam: What You Need to Know*, I describe Muhammad's military actions in some detail.^{xi} To summarize: After the prophet moved his followers to Medina in AD 622, he began leading them in raiding parties against their enemies. He undertook at least nineteen different military expeditions and fought personally in eight of them.

Muhammad killed as many as 3,000 people, including 800 Jewish men of the Banu Qurayza tribe in AD 627. He led his fighters to assault Mecca, where they slaughtered the soldiers of his own tribe, the Quraysh. He had other opponents executed as well.

His teaching and example led his early followers to initiate military violence. According to Muslim historian Ibn Kathir (AD 1301–73), the first caliph ("successor") of Muhammad used the "sword verses" to justify fighting anyone who did not convert to Islam or pay religious taxes to the Muslims. Islam grew during its first century of expansion in large part through military conquest and the subjugation of non-Muslims.

Muhammad as a moderate

While Muhammad is seen by many as the first militant jihadist, there are other ways to interpret his life and legacy. Moderates claim that he turned to violence only when the Quraysh and other tribes began threatening him and his followers. For instance, the Jews he executed in AD 627 were, according to some historians, guilty of breaking an earlier covenant with him. In other words, they were punished for treason, not for their religion.

During the Battle of Khaybar in AD 629, Muhammad ordered a man who "had custody of the treasure" to be tortured until he disclosed its location. Then he was executed. However, when the people of Khaybar surrendered to him, he spared their lives.

In short, moderates see the militant jihadism of Muhammad and his early followers as essential for the establishment of the *ummah*, but not as a model for Islam today.

Islam today

How does the contemporary practice of Islam relate to our question? Five facts should be considered:

One: Islam is not necessarily incompatible with democracy.

According to surveys, substantial majorities of Muslims want to live under democratic governance. They want freedom of speech to be guaranteed in their countries, and want women to have the same legal rights as men. The "Arab Spring" was birthed out of such a desire for Western-style democracy.

While only one in four Muslim-majority countries is led by a democratically elected government, many of these nations were subjected to colonial rule for centuries. Many Muslim countries were created after World War II and are only a few decades old. And it is worth remembering that medieval Christianity was also not democratic, as church leaders appointed secular rulers and enforced religious dictates.

Functioning democracies in Muslim-majority nations such as Turkey and Indonesia show that radical Muslims who seek to impose *sharia* (Islamic holy law) on all citizens are not the only expression of Islam.

Two: Surveys indicate that militant jihadists are a small minority of the larger Muslim world.

According to a Gallup poll, only seven percent of the global Muslim population can be considered "radical" or militant jihadist.^{xii} This finding does not mean that seven of every 100 Muslims in America are militant jihadists. The percentage would be much higher in Egypt or Saudi Arabia and much lower in Morocco or America.

This percentage is still frightening, of course. Seven percent of 1.6 billion Muslims is 112 million militant jihadists. This is an enemy three times larger than the combined forces America faced in World War II. But it is a small percentage of the larger Muslim world.

A recent study by the Pew Research Center discovered these interesting facts about American Muslims:

- Only forty-two percent believe the Qur'an to be the "Word of God; should be taken literally." Thirty-one percent say it is the "Word of God; not take everything literally."
- Only twenty-two percent consider themselves to be "conservative" politically.
- Only twenty percent believe "there are clear standards for what is right and wrong." Seventy-six percent believe that "right or wrong depends on the situation."
- Only thirty-seven percent say they look most to religion for guidance on right and wrong. Fifty-eight percent look to common sense, science, or philosophy and reason.^{xiii}

Clearly, the vast majority of American Muslims are not persuaded by militant jihadist ideology.

Three: Militant jihadists have killed vast numbers of Muslims.

It is difficult to claim that militant jihadists accurately represent all Muslims when they are killing vast numbers of their fellow Muslims. Any Muslim who does not accept the authority of ISIS is killed or enslaved by them. And Muslims around the world have been murdered by other militant jihadist groups such as Boko Haram and Al Shabaab.

Four: Moderate Muslims are helping in the fight against radical Muslims.

According to Gallup, tips from the Muslim-American community are the largest single source of initial information to authorities about terrorist plots.^{xiv} After the San Bernardino massacre, the executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Los Angeles stated, "The Muslim community stands shoulder to shoulder with our fellow Americans in repudiating any twisted mind-set that would claim to justify such sickening acts of violence."

The American Islamic Congress is another moderate Muslim group fighting militant jihadist ideology. Its Statement of Principles includes the following:

- American Muslims must champion pluralism and condemn all forms of intolerance.
- American Muslims must be ambassadors to the Muslim world.
- American Muslims must champion the rights of minorities in the Muslim world.
- American Muslims should participate in the democratic process and work towards civic engagement.^{xv}

Five: Militant jihadist acts in Muslim nations are not necessarily motivated by Muslim theology.

Manal Omar recently wrote an article for *Foreign Policy* titled "Islam Is a Religion of Peace."^{xvi} His argument in brief:

The complicated truth of the matter is that the extremist violence that has overtaken a majority of Muslim countries, including Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan, is the product of complex political and social circumstances. They include colonial legacies and more modern great power politics—and the artificial borders that they bequeathed the region. The violence is perpetrated by official structures that favor a few over the many, and the collapse of government institutions. Religion, certainly, is part of the mix, especially in fragile nations or under authoritarian regimes, but that comes into play not because of the nature of the faith but because of the way it is abused and manipulated.

However, as we have seen, radical Muslims can claim significant warrant from the Qur'an for their violent actions. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, writing the counterpart to Manal Omar's *Foreign Policy* article, titles her essay, "Islam Is a Religion of Violence."^{xvii} In her view, "The fundamental problem is that the majority of otherwise peaceful and law-abiding Muslims are unwilling to acknowledge, much less to repudiate, the theological warrant for intolerance and violence embedded in their own religious texts."

To conclude this section, it is clear that millions of Muslims around the world are not militant jihadists. In fact, Gallup's research indicates that the vast majority of Muslims have not been "radicalized." At the same time, radical Muslims can cite significant Qur'anic and historical precedents for their violence. To deny this fact is to ignore Islamic theology and history. As we will see, such a denial also counteracts significant ideological hope for peace in the future.

Extremism in other world religions

It seems to be conventional wisdom in Western culture that Islam is no more violent than Christianity or other religions. Is this true?

The Crusades

Critics often point to the Crusades in claiming that Christians have been just as violent as ISIS is today. Skeptics like Jay Michaelson consider those who suggest otherwise to be

part of a "right-wingnut controversy."^{xviii} But the story is far more complicated than Michaelson suggests.

In the years leading to the First Crusade, the Muslim caliph, Abu 'Ali al-Hakim, destroyed 30,000 churches, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.^{xix} According to historian Thomas F. Madden, "The Crusades to the East were in every way defensive wars. They were a direct response to Muslims aggression—an attempt to turn back or defend against Muslim conquests of Christian lands."

He states that the Crusades were "a response to more than four centuries of conquests in which Muslims had already captured two-thirds of the old Christian world. At some point, Christianity as a faith and a culture had to defend itself or be subsumed by Islam. The Crusades were that defense."^{xx}

Madden notes that the word "crusade" is modern, and that those we call Crusaders saw themselves as pilgrims "performing acts of righteousness on their way to the Holy Sepulchre." In his view, "the reconquest of Jerusalem . . . was not colonialism but an act of restoration and an open declaration of one's love for God." He adds that Muslims who lived in territories conquered by Crusaders "were generally allowed to retain their property and livelihood, and always their religion."

So who is right: Michaelson or Madden? Were the Crusades the ultimate affront to Christian morals and an example of militant jihadism? Or were they a defensive struggle against Muslim aggression and a necessary step to protect Christendom from imminent collapse? Actually, there is truth in both positions.

The Crusaders routinely slaughtered groups of Jews they encountered on their way to the Holy Land. In addition, their treatment of the non-Christian inhabitants of Jerusalem after they took the city in the First Crusade was nothing short of barbaric.

As one account describes the carnage after the battle, "It was necessary to pick one's way over the bodies of men and horses. But these were small matters compared to what happened at the Temple of Solomon (where) . . . men rode in blood up to their knees and their reins." The witness continues: "Indeed it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies."^{xxi}

The Crusaders killed everyone in the city who did not claim to be a follower of Christ, burning the Jews who sought refuge in the synagogue and showing no mercy to women and children. While the Crusades as a whole were not as barbaric as the scene inside Jerusalem's walls, it would be inaccurate to say that the treatment of the Holy City's inhabitants was an outlier.

That said, Madden's characterization has some merit as well. There were two primary reasons why the papacy and the European kings decided that it was necessary to retake the Holy Land, both in response to Muslim aggression.

First, when the Seljuk Turks took control of Jerusalem from the Muslim group that had previously held the city, they began persecuting Christian pilgrims who made their way from Europe to worship at the Holy City. By the tenth century, bishops had begun organizing trips to the Holy Land that could grow as large as 7,000 travelers.^{xxii} When these pilgrims faced persecution, those who were able to return did so with tales of trials and tribulations that greatly disturbed those in power.

Second, Christian leaders were responding to pleas for help from the Eastern Emperor Alexius I. By the eleventh century, Muslim forces had taken several key cities in the Byzantine Empire and were beginning to threaten the capital as well. Pope Urban II saw their plight as an opportunity to reunite the Eastern and Western halves of the church and began preaching and writing on the need to take action against Islamic aggression.

One such sermon from Urban II characterizes the spiritual motivation that led so many to risk and sacrifice their lives for the perceived cause of Christ:

I say it to those who are present. I command that it be said to those who are absent. Christ commands it. All who go thither and lose their lives, be it on the road or on the sea, or in the fight against the pagans, will be granted immediate forgiveness for their sins. This I grant to all who will march, by virtue of the great gift which God has given me.^{xxiii}

In addition, we should note that Muslims during the Crusades were also barbaric in their treatment of Christians and Jews. For instance, the Turks slaughtered German and French prisoners captured in the First Crusade unless they renounced Christ and converted to Islam. In 1187, the Muslim leader Saladin ordered the mass execution of all the Hospitallers and Templars left alive.

While Hollywood movies have portrayed Saladin as humane and gracious toward Christians when he retook Jerusalem, he actually planned to massacre them all. He changed his plan only when the Christian commander of Jerusalem threatened to destroy the city and kill all the Muslims inside its walls. Saladin then allowed Christians to buy their freedom or be sold into slavery.^{xxiv}

The lesson of the Crusades is not that violence is inherently part of the Christian faith, but that religion can motivate people to do unspeakable things if they believe their actions are part of a higher calling. If we condemn the atrocities committed by medieval Christians, shouldn't we do the same with radical Muslim terrorists today?

The Inquisition

Another painful chapter in Christian history concerns the Inquisition, which began in the 1250s. As with the Crusades, heinous acts were committed. However, it was a defense of Christian orthodoxy rather than Christendom that motivated these actions.

Most of the condemned were required to complete a pilgrimage, pay a fine, or wear a colored cross on their clothing for a period of time. However, some confessed heretics received life imprisonment. Those who refused to recant were typically handed over to secular authorities; many were then burned at the stake. And torture was often used to extract confessions from the accused. During the Spanish Inquisition, which began in 1478, at least 2,000 were burned at the stake, though some scholars place the number much higher.^{xxv}

In the Inquisition, as with the Crusades, religious leaders used the Christian faith as a tool for advancing their own agendas. Jesus' ethic of love and forgiveness was ignored. As with racism and slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, church leaders have sometimes failed horrifically in their calling to represent Christ to our culture.

Such actions are not consistent with New Testament principles. To the contrary, they violate biblical mandates to forgive our enemies (Matthew 5:43–47), do good to those who do us harm (Matthew 5:38–42), and honor the authorities (Romans 13:1–4).

By contrast, as we have seen, militant jihadists act in obedience to Surah 9 and other "sword verses" that explicitly call Muslims to initiate violence against non-Muslims. While moderates disagree with militant jihadists' interpretation of these verses, they must admit that such teachings are basic to Islamic theology and history.

Other religions

In 2013, violence by Buddhist nationalists against the minority Muslim Rohingya population in Myanmar killed 300 Muslims and displaced up to 300,000. In Sri Lanka, monks participating in the Bodu Bala Sena ("Buddhist Power Force") have initiated anti-Muslim rallies and violence.

In India, more than 10,000 people have been killed in anti-Muslim violence initiated by Hindu nationalists. Since India's independence from Britain, religious groups continue to conflict with each other over the identity of the nation.

Jewish nationalists have perpetrated violence against Palestinians; one Jewish nationalist assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. One extremist group called the Hilltop Youth are reportedly using violent means to expand Israel's official borders today. They seek to establish a state modeled on the Hebrew Bible and appoint a king. Two Jewish extremists were charged on January 3, 2016, in an arson attack in July 2015 on a Palestinian family's home. The attack killed an eighteen-month-old and his parents, leaving behind a four-year-old.^{xxvi}

Such atrocities are fodder for "angry atheists" such as Richard Dawkins, who claims that religion is the root of all evil, and Christopher Hitchens, who argued that "religion poisons everything." But those who claim no religion are not immune to terrorist agendas. Atheist Joseph Stalin was responsible for fifty million deaths between 1924 and 1953 (excluding wartime casualties). Atheist Mao Zedong was responsible for the death

of between forty-nine and seventy-eight million people. Atheist Vladimir Lenin killed four million men, women, and children.

To summarize: This brief survey of atrocities committed by followers of various religions and no religions shows that terrorist acts perpetrated by radical Muslims may or may not be the fault of the ideology they embrace. The racial atrocities committed by the KKK were not the fault of all Christians, any more than 9/11 was the fault of all Muslims.

Practical applications

While moderate Muslims are in the majority, radical Muslims continue to perpetrate violence around the world. As we have seen, the ideology espoused by these terrorists is resonating with many Muslims around the world. How should we respond?

Consider three strategies: ideological, military, and spiritual.

Ideology

British Prime Minister David Cameron, speaking recently on the issue of extremism, noted:

In the past, governments have been too quick to dismiss the religious aspect of Islamist extremism. That is totally understandable. It cannot be said clearly enough: this extremist ideology is not true Islam. I have said it myself many, many times, and it's absolutely right to do so. And I'll say it again today.

But simply denying any connection between the religion of Islam and the extremists doesn't work, because these extremists are self-identifying as Muslims. The fact is from Woolwich to Tunisia, from Ottawa to Bali, these murderers all spout the same twisted narrative, one that claims to be based on a particular faith.^{xxvii}

Mr. Cameron is right on both counts. Millions of Muslims reject militant jihadism. But militant jihadists believe they are acting as good Muslims. How can this ideological battle be won for the cause of peace?

In addition to the "Mecca Muslims" (peaceful) and the "Medina Muslims" (militant jihadists), Ayaan Hirsi Ali sees the rise of a third group she calls "modifying Muslims." They "promote the separation of religion from politics and other reforms. Although some are apostates, the majority of dissidents are believers, among them clerics who have come to realize that their religion must change if its followers are not to be condemned to an interminable cycle of political violence."^{xxviii}

How can we encourage them? Prime Minister Cameron:

It is an exercise in futility to deny [that militant jihadists claim to be Islamic]. And more than that, it can be dangerous. To deny it has anything to do with Islam means you disempower the critical reforming voices; the voices that are challenging the fusing of religion and politics; the voices that want to challenge the scriptural basis which extremists claim to be acting on; the voices that are crucial in providing an alternative worldview that could stop a teenager's slide along the spectrum of extremism.

These reforming voices, they have a tough enough time as it is: the extremists are the ones who have the money, the leaders, the iconography and the propaganda machines. We need to turn the tables.

We can't stand neutral in this battle of ideas. We have to back those who share our values.^{xxix}

Mr. Cameron proposed a Counter-Extremism Strategy that will give funding, protection, and political representation to Muslim reformers in Britain. He announced plans to create a new community engagement forum so he can hear directly from those who challenge extremism. And he challenged broadcasters to give reformers a media platform as well.

I agree with Mr. Cameron: We must do all we can to encourage "Mecca" and "modifying" Muslims. ISIS and other militant jihadist groups are employing social media and other rhetorical strategies to great effect, convincing thousands of Muslims that theirs is the true Islamic cause. So long as militant jihadist ideology continues to gain followers, this global threat will continue to escalate.

One example of moderate Muslims confronting radical Muslims occurred recently in Kenya. A group of Al-Shabaab terrorists attacked a bus headed toward Mandera (a town on the border with Somalia and Ethiopia). They demanded that the travelers separate themselves into Muslims and non-Muslims. However, the Muslim passengers sheltered the Christians, even giving some of them hijabs. They stood up to the terrorists, stating "If you want to kill us, then kill us. There are no Christians here." The terrorists were forced to flee.^{xxx}

As we encourage Muslims who are countering militant jihadist ideology, we must also counter media strategies aimed at Western recruits. For instance, ISIS produces an online magazine designed to recruit more fighters. Called "The Islamic State Report," it offers an idealized look at life within its envisioned Islamic State.

ISIS also produces high-quality videos appealing to young Muslims in the West to join their cause. Most of its materials and speeches are translated into a variety of Western languages. One expert calls its media propaganda "a calculated campaign that would put American social-media-marketing gurus to shame."^{xxxi}

It is vital that we support moderate Muslims as they respond to militant jihadist ideology. The latter will likely not respect theological arguments voiced by non-Muslims. We must

do much more to encourage moderate Muslims and give them a platform for persuading other Muslims around the world.

Military

A second aspect of our response to militant jihadism is military. Clearly, we must defend innocent people from the military expansion and violence perpetrated by ISIS and other radical Muslim groups. But there is a larger reason for military engagement as well.

ISIS claims that it is fulfilling the will of Allah in establishing its caliphate in Syria and Iraq. Its military successes and expansion have fueled this rhetoric. By the same token, military victories against the group help counter and defeat its ideological agendas. The weaker ISIS becomes, the less attractive its efforts to convert others to its cause.

Spiritual awakening

A third, especially vital aspect to countering militant jihadism is spiritual. As we have seen, ISIS and other terror groups believe they are fulfilling the Qur'an and advancing Islam. Many are willing to die for their beliefs and, in fact, embrace what they consider to be martyrdom for their cause.

However, like all Muslims, they have a high view of Jesus as a prophet. They believe that he was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, ascended to heaven, and will return at the end of history. They consider him to be one of their six most important prophets, along with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad.

Now Jesus ("Isa," as he is known in Arabic) is appearing to Muslims around the world in visions and dreams. As a result, more Muslims have become Christians in the last fifteen years than in the previous fifteen centuries. (For more on this remarkable phenomenon, I highly recommend Tom Doyle's fascinating book, *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?*^{xxxii})

Praying for Muslims to meet Jesus has never been as urgent as it is today. I urge you to find and join such a prayer network.^{xxxiii} In addition, please join me in praying daily for 100 million Muslims to come to Christ in 2016. And join me in praying daily that Jesus would be revealed to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the leader of ISIS), Ali Khamenei (Iran's Supreme Leader), and other Muslim leaders around the world.

As you pray for Muslims to find Jesus, ask the Lord to show you how you can become involved in other ways. Ask God to open doors to Muslims in your community, workplace, and school. Ask him to use your influence to share God's love with Muslims. Pray about joining mission trips that share the gospel with Muslims around the world. Support ministries working with Muslims. Define your personal Acts 1:8 strategy for advancing the gospel in the Muslim world.

Conclusion

The rise and popularity of ISIS and other radical Muslim groups constitutes a significant threat to Americans and the rest of the world. The goal of such groups is nothing less than global conquest. ISIS spokesman Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani has declared:

We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. This is His promise to us; He is glorified and He does not fail in His promise. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market. . . .

So mobilize your forces, O crusaders [Western forces]. Mobilize your forces, roar with thunder, threaten whom you want, plot, arm your troops, prepare yourselves, strike, kill, and destroy us. This will not avail you. You will be defeated. This will not avail you, for our Lord, the Mighty, the Prevailing, has promised us with our victory and your defeat.^{xxxiv}

Encourage "Mecca" Muslims as they confront their enemy. Fight ISIS and other terrorist groups, both to defend innocent victims and to defeat their ideology. And join the spiritual movement that can end this threat by bringing its deceived followers to the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

Is Islam a religion of violence or peace? In a very real sense, the answer depends on us.

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- ii Barack Obama, "Address to the Nation by the President," *whitehouse.gov*, December 6, 2015 (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/06/address-nation-president>, accessed 29 December 2015).
- iii It is beyond the purpose of this paper to explore the history and beliefs of Islam and the Islamic State in detail. For more, please see my *Radical Islam: What You Need to Know* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Elevation Press, 2011); and "The Islamic State: What You Need to Know" (<http://www.denisonforum.org/store/download/19-the-islamic-state-what-you-need-to-know>, accessed 30 December 2015).
- iv I employ "Q" as short for "Qur'an" when citing the Muslim holy book.
- v Muhammad Abu al-Husain Muslim bin al-Hajjaj al-Nisapuri, *Sahih Muslim* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 1971), book 003, no. 0675, cited by David Bukay, "Peace or Jihad? Abrogation in Islam," *Middle East Forum*, Fall 2007 (<http://www.meforum.org/1754/peace-or-jihad-abrogation-in-islam>, accessed 29 December 2015).
- vi Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, *Jurisprudence in Muhammad's Biography* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2001), pp. 323-4, cited in Bukay.
- vii Bukay.
- viii Ibid.
- ix "Executive Summary," Letter to Baghdadi (<http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/>, accessed 29 December 2015).
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- xii Dalia Mogahed, "The Battle for Hearts and Minds: Moderate vs. Extremist Views in the Muslim World," *Gallup World Poll Special Report* (<http://media.gallup.com/WorldPoll/PDF/ExtremismInMuslimWorld.pdf>, accessed 28 December 2015).
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- xv "AIC's Mission and Principles," *American Islamic Congress* (<http://www.aicongress.org/aics-mission-and-principles/>, accessed 30 December 2015).
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- xxii Ibid., 186-7.
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