

# Endless Jihad: The Truth about Islam and Violence

*Jihad.*

It was once a word unfamiliar to American ears. But in recent years it has become all too familiar. The actions of Muslim militants and terrorists have seared the word into American consciousness.

Yet even with thousands of innocent civilians killed on American soil by Islamic terrorists, the full significance of the Muslim concept of *jihad* has not been gasped by the American public.

In the days after September 11, 2001, American leaders rushed to portray Islam as a peaceful religion that had been "hijacked" by a fanatical band of terrorists. One hopes that these assurances were merely tactical—that nobody was meant to believe them and that they were meant to assure the Muslim world that the inevitable American reprisals were not directed at their religion as a whole.

If the world Muslim community perceived America as attacking Islam in general then the duty of every Muslim to fight for his religion—the duty of *jihad*—would have been invoked on a broad scale. The war against terrorism, instead of simmering with occasional flare-ups, like the Cold War, would have boiled over into a global conflagration, with the Muslim countries of the world—1.2 billion strong—mobilizing against America and the West.

Muslim apologists also rushed forward to assure the public that Islam was a peaceful religion. They disingenuously declared that the word *Islam* means "peace." And they tried to portray the terrorists as a fringe group outside the mainstream of Islam.

These were lies.

The usual meaning of *Islam* in Arabic is not "peace" but "submission." And if the terrorists were so far outside the mainstream, why did Muslims all over the world burst into joyful, spontaneous celebrations when the hijacked jetliners slammed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? Why are Islamic governments afraid to show "too much" public support for the war against terrorism? Further, why are all the governments that covertly support terrorism centered in the Muslim world?

The truth is that Islam is not a religion of peace. This is not to say that every Muslim is violent at heart. Many are not. Muslims have the same aspirations for living peaceful

lives that people have the world over. But they also have the same potential for violence as others, and Islam as a religion and an ideology seeks to exploit that potential.

Though there are millions of Muslims who want peaceful relations with the West, millions who aspire to live in free societies like America, there nevertheless remains a deep and powerful strain of violence within Islam, and it is important that Americans understand it.

They will have to face it in the future.

## The Muslim Worldview

To understand the connection between Islam and violence, one must understand certain facets of the Muslim worldview. One of the most important is the fact that, according to the historic Muslim understanding, there is no separation between religion and government—what in Christianity would be called the separation of church and state. We are not speaking here of the secularist idea that the state should marginalize religion and discourage people from voting their consciences as Christians. We are talking about the idea that church and state are not the same *thing* and that they have different spheres of activity.

This idea of a separation between religion and government is not characteristic of most peoples in world history. It is a contribution to the world of ideas that was made by Christians—indeed, by Christ himself. In his book *Islam and the West*, historian Bernard Lewis explains:

"The notion that religion and political authority, church and state, are different and that they can or should be separated is, in a profound sense, Christian. Its origins may be traced to the teachings of Christ, notably in the famous passage in Matthew 22:21, in which Christ is quoted as saying: 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.' This notion was confirmed by the experience of the first Christians; its later development was shaped and in a sense even imposed by the subsequent history of Christendom. The persecutions endured by the early Church made it clear that a separation between the two was possible."

During much of Christian history church and state were united in that each Christian state had an official church, whether it was the Catholic Church or one of the Orthodox or Protestant churches. In many countries that is still the case. Nevertheless, the awareness remained that the two institutions were distinct and had different functions and different spheres of legitimate authority. They could in principle disagree and go their separate ways when necessary.

Most peoples in world history have not shared this understanding. In most societies, religion and government have been inseparably linked. This is true in Muslim society as well. Lewis explains:

"In pagan Rome, Caesar was God. Christians were taught to differentiate between what is due to Caesar and what is due to God. For Muslims of the classical age, God was Caesar, and the sovereign—caliph or sultan—was merely his viceregent on earth. This was more than a simple legal fiction. For Muslims the state was God's state, the army

God's army, and, of course, the enemy was God's enemy. Of more practical importance, the law was God's law, and in principle there could be no other. The question of separating church and state did not arise, since there was no church, as an autonomous institution, to be separated. Church and state were one and the same."

This means that, in the historic Muslim understanding, Islamic society is or should be a theocracy—a society in which God himself is the monarch, reigning on earth through subordinates.

In the earliest days of Islam, the subordinate was the prophet Mohammed, who founded Islam and conquered the Arabian Peninsula. Thereafter the subordinate was the caliphs and in the centuries after Mohammed's death they expanded Muslim society by conquering peoples as far west as Spain and as far east as India. In the process, they absorbed half of Christian civilization. Eventually, the power of the caliphs waned, and new leaders—such as the Ottoman sultans—were the subordinates. Throughout it all, God himself was regarded as the ruler of Islamic civilization.

## Islam as Ideology

That Islam sees itself as a theocracy has enormous ramifications for how it regards itself and for the behavior of Muslims.

First, it means that Islam is not only a religion. It is also a political ideology. If the government of the Muslim community simply *is* God's government, then no other governments can be legitimate. They are all at war with God. As a result, Muslims have typically divided the world into two spheres, known as the *Dar al-Islam*—the "house of Islam" or "house of submission" to God—and the *Dar al-Harb*, or "house of war"—those who are at war with God.

Second, it means that Muslims have believed themselves to have a "manifest destiny." Since God must win in the end, the *Dar al-Harb* must be brought under the control of Muslim government and made part of the *Dar al-Islam*.

Third, since the *Dar al-Harb* by its nature is at war with God, it is unlikely that it will submit to God without a fight. Individual groups might be convinced to lay down their arms and join the Muslim community by various forms of pressure—economic or military—that fall short of war. In history some groups have become Muslim in this way, either fearing Muslim conquest, desiring Muslim military aid against their own enemies, or aspiring to good trade relations with the Muslim world. But many peoples would rather fight than switch. This has been particularly true of Christians, who have put up more resistance to the Muslim advance than have pagan and animistic tribes.

Because of the need to expand God's dominion by wars of conquest, Islam's ideology imposes on Muslims the duty to fight for God's community. This duty is known as *jihad* (Arabic, "struggle, fight"). Although it is binding on all Muslims, it has been particularly incumbent on those on the edges of the Muslim world, where there was room for expansion. Only by continual *jihad* could the manifest destiny of Islam to bring the world into submission to God be fulfilled.

As eminent French sociologist Jacques Ellul notes, "*Jihad* is a religious obligation. It forms part of the duties that the believer must fulfill; it is Islam's *normal* path to expansion."

A fourth and final consequence of Islam's view of itself as a theocracy is that in theory all Muslims should not only form one religious community but should be subject to one government as well—God's government, a kind of Muslim superstate. Yet this has not happened. Muslims have been ruled by different governments since the early days of Islam.

## Ideology Meets History

The fact that Muslims are not united under a single government is due to a variety of historical factors. As Muslim territory expanded the problems with the idea of uniting all Muslim peoples under a single government became all too obvious. Islam grew from a tribal base, and tribal societies are not known for stability. The factions and rivalries that are inherent in such societies manifested as Islam grew and made it difficult to keep Muslims under a single head.

Another factor that kept a stable Muslim superstate from developing is the fact that—especially in a pre-technological world—local areas have to be governed locally. Large empires have had to cede large amounts of autonomy to local governments, and therein lay the seeds of their eventual dissolution. As local governments grew in power, they desired more and more autonomy, desiring eventually to throw off the yoke of their masters and to be truly independent.

As a result, even in the classical period of Islam the Muslim community was divided politically, with rivalries between various parties—for example, between the Ottomans and the Persians, who maintained a tense and sometimes violent rivalry for centuries. The conflicts within the Muslim community helped slow its expansion and helped lead to stagnation and decay.

A threat also was growing in the non-Muslim world.

Europe for centuries had been terrified by the Muslim advance, with continual warfare on its borders to the west and to the east as Christians struggled at first to check the Muslim advance and later to reclaim their homelands.

The fight was not easy for Europe and, for a long time, it did not go well. Lewis notes of medieval Christendom: "Split into squabbling, petty kingdoms, its churches divided by schism and heresy, with constant quarrels between the churches of Rome and the East, it was disputed between two emperors and for a while even two popes. After the loss of the Christian shores of the eastern and southern Mediterranean to the Muslim advance, Christendom seemed even more local, confined in effect to a small peninsula on the western edge of Asia which became—and was by this confinement defined as—Europe. For a time—indeed, for a very long time—it seemed that nothing could prevent the ultimate triumph of Islam and the extension of the Islamic faith and Muslim power to Europe."

As chronicler of Muslim expansion Paul Fregosi notes, "'From the fury of the Mohammedan, spare us, O Lord' was a prayer heard for centuries in all the churches of

central and southern Europe. Fear of the *jihad* has not entirely vanished even now, particularly among peoples who have known Muslim domination." Muslims conducted raids to capture slaves as far west as England and Ireland. They attacked Iceland. And they plunged deep into Europe.

They captured Sicily and invaded the Italian mainland. "Naples, Genoa, Ravenna, Ostia, and even Rome itself were all for a time pillaged or occupied by the Saracens. Human beings became a cheap and abundant commodity. In Rome, in 846 . . . the Muslims even looted the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul, and the pope had to buy off the invaders with the promised tribute of 25,000 silver coins a year. Pope Leo IV then ordered the construction of the Leonine Wall around the city to protect St. Peter's from further assault."

The threat continued for centuries, with Muslim forces laying siege in 1529 and 1683 to Vienna, the capital of the Holy Roman Empire, located in the heart of Europe.

But as Islam stagnated, new doors opened to Europe, particularly through the discovery of the New World and the vast material resources it offered. As Europe grew economically, technologically, and militarily through its colonies and the rise of global trade, the balance of power shifted, and the Islamic world became vulnerable.

Even before the discovery of the New World, Christians in both western and eastern Europe had begun to reclaim their conquered homelands from Muslim dominion, and the tremendous new resources that Europe had at its disposal as a result of the Age of Exploration only made things worse for Muslim aspirations to world political supremacy. Their own governmental structures—particularly the Ottoman empire—began to lose power and disintegrate, with Europeans stepping in to take control as colonialization progressed.

For three centuries the Muslim world lost ground, and by the first half of the twentieth century almost all of it had been reduced to being colonies or protectorates of European powers.

Lewis notes, "By 1920 it seemed that the triumph of Europe over Islam was total and final. The vast territories and countless millions of the Muslim peoples of Asia and Africa were firmly under the control of the European empires—some of them under a variety of native princes, most under direct colonial administration. Only a few remote mountain and desert areas, too poor and too difficult to be worth the trouble of acquiring, retained some measure of sovereign independence."

What was the Muslim reaction to this alarming sequence of developments?

## Shock and Awe

In the seventeenth century it had begun to sink into Muslim consciousness that something was desperately wrong in the world. Though Muslim society had previously been more advanced economically and in some ways culturally than European society, it began to dawn on Muslim leaders that the barbarian infidels of Europe were catching up and in certain ways were ahead of Muslim society.

It is difficult for Westerners to realize just how crushing a realization this was, but it was devastating given Muslim self-perception.

The triumphal advance of Islam seemed to confirm to Muslim minds that they were the chosen of God and that civilization itself was identical with Islam, with only ignorant barbarians and infidels outside its borders.

In *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*, Bernard Lewis notes that Christian Europe was seen "as an outer darkness of barbarism and unbelief from which there was nothing to learn and little even to be imported, except slaves and raw materials. For both the northern [European] and southern [African] barbarians, their best hope was to be incorporated into the empire of the caliphs, and thus attain the benefits of religion and civilization."

Shock and awe thus were the responses of Muslims as they saw their civilization collapsing and their former enemies—Christian Europeans—seizing control of their homelands. How could this happen? How could God's people suffer such a reversal of fortune? How could their former might be so completely outclassed by the overwhelming economic and military might of Christendom, whose religion was their only serious rival for the role of a world faith?

Angry about the present and fearful of the future, Muslims began a process of introspection, explains Lewis.

"When things go wrong in a society, in a way and to a degree that can no longer be denied or concealed, there are various questions that one can ask. A common one, particularly in continental Europe yesterday and today in the Middle East, is: 'Who did this to us?' The answer to a question thus formulated is usually to place the blame on external or domestic scapegoats—foreigners abroad or minorities at home. The Ottomans, faced with the major crisis in their history, asked a different question: 'What did we do wrong?'"

A debate followed, with various Muslims trying to analyze and propose remedies for the developing situation. "The basic fault, according to most of these memoranda, was

falling away from the good old ways, Islamic and Ottoman; the basic remedy was a return to them. This diagnosis and prescription still command wide acceptance in the Middle East."

These twin explanations for the recent misfortune of Islam—that it was caused by a failure to observe Islam in its pure form and by the malicious meddling of foreigners (first Europeans and now Americans)—bode ill for tomorrow.

## The Clash of Civilizations

European domination of the Muslim world was short-lived, ending in the 1960s with the close of the de-colonialization that followed World War II. Yet it had an enormous effect on the Muslim psyche.

This effect was somewhat muffled by the Cold War and the tense balance of power between the Western and Soviet spheres. The new Muslim states—the borders of which had been largely and not always skillfully drawn by the withdrawing colonial powers—were too weak to be assertive and fell into the orbits of either of the United States or the Soviet Union. Nationalistic assertiveness was subsumed during the tense, global standoff.

But with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, matters changed. At first, some hailed the event as "the end of history," but other, wiser observers pointed to new dangers in the world, including Islamic militancy.

Samuel Huntington, director of Harvard University's John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, presciently warned that the end of the Cold War would lead to a period he referred to as "the clash of civilizations." A major flash point he envisioned in this conflict, unsurprisingly, was between Islam and the West.

"After World War II, the West, in turn, began to retreat; the colonial empires disappeared; first Arab nationalism and then Islamic fundamentalism manifested themselves. . . . [The] centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent. The Gulf War left some Arabs feeling proud that Saddam Hussein had attacked Israel and stood up to the West. It also left many feeling humiliated and resentful of the West's military presence in the Persian Gulf, the West's overwhelming military dominance, and their apparent inability to shape their own destiny."

Huntington noted a common consensus that an inevitable clash between Islam and the West, a clash initiated by the former, was soon to come: "On both sides the interaction between Islam and the West is seen as a clash of civilizations. The West's 'next confrontation,' observes M. J. Akbar, an Indian Muslim author, 'is definitely going to come from the Muslim world. It is in the sweep of the Islamic nations from the Maghreb to Pakistan that the struggle for a new world order will begin.'"

That confrontation came with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the inauguration of the war against terrorism.

What did the terrorists hope for?

They hoped for a conflict with the West that would end the long, dark winter that Islam has experienced. They hoped that the fortunes of their religion and civilization would be reversed. They hoped for a war that would smash the might of the West and allow a wave Islamic revolutions to sweep away the worldly tyrants ruling Muslim nations. They hoped for a return to purer, stricter Islam, free of Western corruption and values. They hoped that the blessings of God would descend upon their civilization, allowing it to return to its rightful place at the head of nations, with a resurgence of Muslim nationalism that would give birth to the Islamic superstate that long had eluded them.

And they hoped for a new wave of expansion that would allow Islam to establish its destiny of bringing the entire world under Muslim control. In the famous al-Qaeda "dinner conversation" found on videotape in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden expressed the view that the war he initiated would lead to a wave of Muslim expansion not seen since the religion's first century, when it consumed half of Christian civilization.

These dreams of a renewed, purified Islam, of the overthrow of existing Muslim governments, of a triumphant smashing of the West, and of expansion through a new *jihad* are far from confined to bin Laden and his terrorists. They are the dreams that inspire the seething rage of "the Arab street," which so often breaks forth into violent demonstrations at political events beyond its control.

## Taming the Dragon?

Within the Muslim world, government officials have been trying to cling to power in the face of rising anger on their streets. Trying to buy time, they have funded radical Islamic schools, media establishments, and even the terrorists themselves, hoping to direct and diffuse ineffectual Muslim rage toward the West as a scapegoat.

The West has responded with the war against terrorism, which Muslim governments would like to see succeed in ridding their society of its most radical elements, which seek their overthrow. Yet they hesitate to support the war too much lest they hasten their own demise through coup d' etats.

Some in the West have suggested trying to cure the economic roots of the dissatisfaction and despair in Muslim society that contribute to radicalism and terrorism. The problem is not lack of wealth. Many Muslim countries are oil-rich and have had money in abundance for decades, yet the elites have refused to pursue policies leading to greater economic prosperity for their populaces. Instead, they have enriched themselves and shut their own people out of economic development.

Many in the West have proposed trying to spread freedom and democracy in the Muslim world, thinking that greater political involvement and opportunity would help dry up the roots of terrorism.

While democracies generally have done better helping secure economic development for their populations, it is unclear how freedom and democracy could be brought to the Muslim world. It would mean effective regime change in the countries in question, and it is unlikely that many countries would change their own regimes voluntarily, though some might be pressured into making reforms in this direction. To introduce any form of truly representative government in many countries would require armed intervention, as it did in Afghanistan.

There is then the question of how democracy could be sustained in the Muslim world. Muslims have no historical experience of Western freedom and democracy. Middle Eastern society is still largely dominated by tribalism, which has a tendency to subvert the democratic process, with one tribe coming into power and then brutally suppressing its rivals.

The only halfway democratic Muslim country is Turkey, which actually is a country where the military holds power but does not govern. It allows political parties to vie for and exercise governance within Turkey, but only on condition that they do not transgress limits set by the military.

If genuine democracy were achievable, what would the results be? Given the current state of the Arab street, the results would not be pretty. In his analysis, Samuel Huntington argued:

"Many Arab countries, in addition to the oil exporters, are reaching levels of economic and social development where autocratic forms of government become inappropriate and efforts to introduce democracy become stronger. Some openings in Arab political systems have already occurred. The principal beneficiaries of these openings have been Islamist movements. In the Arab world, in short, Western democracy strengthens anti-Western political forces."

The introduction of freedom and democracy to the Muslim world is thus fraught with problems and, in any event, is not a solution to problems in the short term.

One thing that can be done in the short term—as illustrated by the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq—is the use of military force. Could this help? It certainly has dealt a tremendous blow to the al-Qaeda terrorist network, even though that organization is not yet out of business.

Some have argued that the use of military force will inflame Muslim hatreds and produce a new crop of terrorists. Undoubtedly some Muslims will become terrorists on the pretext that the West has used force. But then some Muslims would become terrorists if the West didn't use force. Indeed, to a significant degree the al-Qaeda terrorists of September 11 were the product of the view that the United States was a faltering, weak superpower that could be defeated just as the Soviet Union had been humiliated in Afghanistan.

Muslims respect strength. They cheer whoever displays it. Regardless of how many times their towns change hands during an armed conflict, the populace will turn out to cheer their newest liberators, whether they are genuinely on a mission of liberation or not.

Due to its effectiveness in dealing at least temporarily with problems in the Muslim world, the use of military force in finding a long-term solution is likely to be essential. It certainly must be wielded with discretion and in keeping with the Church's just war doctrine, but its use is likely unavoidable. It also is certainly not sufficient. Military force will have to be used in conjunction with other initiatives, including diplomatic and economic ones.

But is a solution achievable?

## Paradise and Power

Can the historic connection between Islam and violence be broken?

Some would argue that it can. After all, our own forebears in Christendom were more violent than we are. Europe was riven by conflict between petty kingdoms for centuries, but eventually a society developed from it that is stable and not at constant war with either itself or its neighbors. Perhaps Muslim society could be led or forced down the same path.

Perhaps. But the proposition is not quick, easy, or certain.

The development of a stable Europe took centuries of bloody conflict that finally wore out the resolve of Europeans to keep killing each other and prompted them to try a different path. This was not achieved until, in the first half of the twentieth century, Europe underwent two massive convulsions of violence, the First and Second World Wars. Key to both of these was the intervention of the United States, which at the end of the Second World War pacified Europe and refused to let its states continue to pursue their bitter, historic rivalries in ways that could destabilize Europe and lead to another war.

Post-war Europe also was united by an outside threat: Soviet Communism, which dominated Eastern Europe. It was the continued presence of U.S. forces in Western Europe during the Cold War that helped protect it from Soviet invasion while new, more healthy political and economic ties were developing between its states as they sought to form a united front against the Soviet threat.

The sequence of events that led to the current state of affairs in Europe is unique and may not be repeatable. Trying to force the Muslim world down the same path is an uncertain proposition, and, even if it could succeed, it might well require the same dramatic military interventions and conflicts as the pacification of Europe. It might require world wars and cold wars.

And then there is a factor that makes the pacification of Islam less likely than the pacification of Europe.

## The Roots of Muslim Violence

It is simplistic to characterize any of the major religions as being strictly "of violence" or "of peace." As Solomon pointed out, "For everything there is a season; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time for war, and a time for peace" (Eccles. 3:1, 3, 8). That's the way life works in a fallen world, and every religion capable of serving as the basis of a culture has recognized both the need for peace and the need for the use of force in certain circumstances.

Sects that are totally pacifistic have to rely on the good graces of others who are willing to use force to protect them, while sects that are totally given over to violence do not survive long since they kill themselves off or are broken up by their neighbors as a matter of self-protection. For a religion to serve as the basis of a culture, it must seek to preserve peace but also be willing to use force. All major religions tend toward this mean.

Yet some religions are far more prone to violence than others. Among the major religions, Islam is by far the most violent. This may be seen by comparing it to the religions most closely related to it, Judaism and Christianity.

Though belief in the true God goes back to the dawn of mankind, Judaism in its traditional form was founded by Moses, who, if evaluated politically, could be considered a warlord, leading the tribes of Israel toward the Promised Land and the conquest that would follow. The Old Testament contains numerous commands to use violence to protect and promote the nation of Israel. This potential for violence is reigned in, though, by the fact that Judaism is a religion for just one ethnic group confined to one territory.

Christianity, by contrast, is a universal religion, meant for all peoples in all countries. It has much greater breadth, and much lower intrinsic potential for violence. Its founder—Christ—was a martyr, who refused to fight to save his life. Though the New Testament acknowledges that the Old Testament revelation is from God, it does not contain new commands to use violence, as Christianity was not to be allied from its birth to a state in the way Judaism was.

The fact that in Christianity church and state are distinct means that as a religion Christianity has less potential for violence since it is not called upon to use force in the way a state is. This, coupled with Jesus' own example and his "love thy enemy" teachings (e.g., Matt. 5:44), gives Christianity less innate potential for violence.

In contrast, Islam's founder was a warlord who rose from nowhere and who by his death was the undisputed master of Arabia Peninsula. The holy book he produced is filled with commands to use violence in the service of its religion and nation. This potential for violence is similar to that possessed by Judaism except it is immensely augmented by the fact that Islam views itself, like Christianity, as a universal religion meant for all peoples in all countries. It also makes no distinction between church and state and is thus a political as well as religious ideology.

As a result, Islam has been willing to employ violence on a massive scale, as illustrated by the first century of its existence, when the Islamic Empire exploded outward and conquered much of the known world.

The attitude of Islam toward using violence against non-Muslims is clear. Regarding pagans, the Quran says, "Slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful" (Surah 9:5). This amounts to giving pagans a convert-or-die choice.

Regarding violence against Jews and Christians, the Quran says, "Fight against those to whom the Scriptures were given as believe in neither God nor the last day, who do not forbid what God and his messenger have forbidden, and who do not embrace the true faith, until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued" (Surah 9:29). In other words, violence is to be used against Jews and Christians unless they are willing to pay a special tax and live in subjection to Muslims as second-class citizens. For them the choice is convert, die, or live in subjection.

The Quran also has stern words for Muslims who would be slow and reluctant to attack unbelievers: "Believers, why is it that when you are told: 'March in the cause of God,' you linger slothfully in the land? Are you content with this life in preference to the life to come? . . . If you do not go to war, he [God] will punish you sternly, and will replace you by other men" (Surah 9:38-39).

And, of course, there is the promise of reward in the afterlife for waging *jihad* in this one: "Believers! Shall I point out to you a profitable course that will save you from a woeful scourge? Have faith in God and his messenger, and fight for God's cause with your wealth and with your persons. . . . He will forgive you your sins and admit you to gardens watered by running streams; he will lodge you in pleasant mansions in the gardens of Eden. This is the supreme triumph" (Surah 61:10-12).

It must be pointed out that there are people of peace and people of violence in all religions. There are violent Christians. There are peace-loving Muslims. Changing historical circumstances do much to bring out tendencies toward violence and peace

among the followers of different religions. Yet, even when these qualifications are made, it is clear that Islam as a religion and an ideology has by far the greatest tendency to violence.

There are, indeed, many Muslims who desire peace, but, their views often do not count for much in Muslim society. Author Serge Trifkovic notes: "Some critics may object that this account of Islam in the modern world does not pay much attention to Islamic moderation, to the everyday wish of everyday Muslims for a quiet life. This is not because such moderates are rare, but because they are rarely important. Religions, like political ideologies, are pushed along by money, power, and tiny vocal minorities. Within Islam, the money and the power are all pushing the wrong way. So are the most active minorities. The urgent need is to recognize this. Our problem is not prejudice about Islam, but folly in the face of its violence and cruelty. And in any case, the willingness of moderates to be what are objectively *bad Muslims*, because they reject key teachings of historical Islam, may be laudable in human terms but does nothing to modify Islam as a doctrine."

The prospect of modifying Islam's doctrine regarding violence is problematic. Although some Muslims in history have tried to "spiritualize" the Quran's declarations regarding violence, there is always a countervailing fundamentalist push to return to the sources of Islam and take them literally.

Indeed, this reaction is what characterizes the Wahhabite movement that dominates Saudi Arabia and inspired Osama bin Laden's ideology. Philosopher Roger Scruton notes that in the Wahhabite view, "whoever can read the Quran can judge for himself in matters of doctrine."

This attitude, which is tantamount to an Islamic version of *sola scriptura*, is likely to prove as durable in Muslim circles as it has been in Protestant Fundamentalist circles. As long as that is the case, there will be fresh waves of Muslim "martyrs" willing to take the Quran's statements on killing literally, apply them to today, and then hurl themselves into combat with whomever they perceive as "the Great Satan."

## Conclusion

We have seen the roots of Islamic violence in the life and teachings of Mohammed. We have seen that world events have conspired to place Islam and Christianity in a conflict of civilizations that has stretched from the sixth to the twenty-first century.

What the future holds is unknown. What *is* known is that Islamic civilization has a strong tendency to violence that stretches back to the days of Mohammed and that has begun to flare up in resurgent terrorist and revolutionary movements.

The conflict with militant Islam may last a long time—centuries, potentially—since even if curing Muslim society of its violent tendencies is possible, it would involve ripping out or otherwise neutralizing a tendency that has dominated Muslim culture since the days of its founder.

This is not an easy task, for Muslims willing to make the change would be portrayed as traitors to their religion, amid renewed calls to practice Islam in its original, pure, and more violent form in order to regain the favor of God. The signs of the times suggest that we are, indeed, in for a "clash of civilizations" that will be neither brief nor bloodless.

But what also is known is that God has a plan for history and that his grace can work miracles. It is yet possible that—through one means or another—God will bring about a more peaceful world in which militant Islam either is not a threat or nowhere near the threat that it is today.

If this is to happen, our cooperation with God's grace will require prayer, courage, resourcefulness, and a realistic understanding of the threat we are facing. Until then there can be no illusions about Islam and its endless *jihad*.

*Source: <http://www.catholic.com/documents/endless-jihad-the-truth-about-islam-and-violence>*