

Is Islam Peaceful or Violent: Comparing Islam and Christianity to Reveal the Propaganda of Terrorism

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Abstract:

Islam within the world today is associated with many ideas both good and bad. Islam is an old religion that is very misunderstood in the minds of many westerners today; it has moreover been degraded and associated with violence, war, and actions that are inhumane because of recent events. This is a problem on the world stage because of religiously motivated terrorism and the links that have been forged, wrongly so, by terrorist groups. The questions often asked is “Is Islam a violent religion” or “Why does their religion cause Muslims to hate us.” The sad part is often these questions are not even asked; most people just assumed these are true because Muslims are different and they see that the terrorists on television are often Muslim. Islam, however is not violent or inhumane, it is a religion based upon peaceful principles and loving commandments. This paper will compare Islam to Christianity in hope of establishing similarities; it will give a deeper understanding into what is to be a Muslim; and finally how the terrorist are using a peaceful religion to motivate Muslim into violent acts of terrorism.

This paper was inspired by the *A Common Word Between Us and You: A Global Agenda for Change*, a two-day conference held at Georgetown University in October 2009 and the writings of Professor John Esposito, Georgetown University.

Introduction

Religion is a sacred entity in many cultures. Throughout history and even today these cultures have worshiped many gods, prayed to many statues and stones, and sacrificed animals and people in honor of their different gods. In the earliest recorded times polytheism and paganism were the most dominant forms of religion. This way of life lasted for thousands of years, and led to many different forms of celebrated and worshiped gods. During these times war was limited and focused on food plots, watering holes, and enlarging one's tribe. The idea of religion and war being reciprocal in cause and effect was beyond the comprehension of any of these early tribes.

Out of this multitude of civilizations and religions, the Jewish faith was formed, thereby marking a significant change in the World's future. Out of monotheism was born Christianity, which became the faith of the Roman Empire and to date, boasts the largest following of any religion in the world. The second of the three largest monotheistic faiths and also the most recent to be created is Islam. Christianity and Islam are admittedly both followed by very diverse flocks; whereas the Jewish faith is not. This is primarily due to the idea that both Christianity and Islam attempt and were successful in spreading their faith around the world through missionary zeal by the respective followers.

The importance of religion is different for everyone and can be used to explain such diverse actions as a reminder of home, a reason to wake up and even an understanding of the world's problems. For example, some people use their religion as a way remain connected to home, so they always have a piece of their past with them, wherever they might go. Some sects of society even see religion as encompassing every

aspect of existence. To them religion is the reason for being; they were put on earth to praise, please, and worship their one chosen God. Others see religion as the problem for all the world's failings. They blame it for every horrible act between humans. This is because all-too-often many religious groups commit inexcusable acts against mankind and proclaim them in the name of their religion, no matter how this might pervert their core religious beliefs. These differences have created divisions between people.

It is easy to dismiss something when one feels one has nothing in common with another's beliefs. Conversely, it is hard to dismiss something as foolish or insane, when common threads are viewed and understood in line with one's own beliefs. The basic needs of people and life are so similar in so many ways, yet it is logical that individuals see differences between each other when assessing the world around them. The problem is when these differences are exaggerated, or perhaps even born in times of great despair and lead to hatred, genocide, and large scale war for no better reason than misunderstanding or a common fallacy. Sadly this is basic human nature and has been this way for thousands of years. This paper and those to come are offered as an attempt to educate, inform, allow, and perhaps foster into a world that is filled with often ill advised fanatics, zealots, and politicians and thereby provide a better understanding of basic religious principles, whether in Islam or Christianity.

This paper will specifically contrast and compare Christianity and Islam. It will study the similarities, commonalities and actions of peoples from both religions, with a heavy emphasis on the commonalities between the two in its attempt to disprove common fallacies believed by either side and thereby show the propaganda of terrorism. Because of this, it is with an open mind that one should venture into the heart of this study which

builds on the comparison of Islam and Christianity to then assess Islam's capability to modernize. With this foundation, the second section of the paper will consider the reasons why even terrorists use false Islamic rhetoric to promote violence in the world in the name of God. It will be argued that the world of religious terrorism is very broad and encompasses a multitude of areas, including domestic and foreign policy, military action, international religion relations, and U.N. responses to human rights violations.

The definition proposed in this paper for religious terrorism is a fairly simple one: religious terrorism is the act/attempt to induce fear, panic, hatred, and disruption in the pursuit of a religious and political goal. This definition can then be dissected and advanced into much greater detail to provide a more comprehensive understanding of one's idea of religious terrorism. For instance, one might say religious terrorism is simply terrorism motivated by religion in the pursuit of a political goal. This is absolutely true, but it is indifferent because it fails to elaborate upon the greater differences of what might be characterized as old and new forms of terrorism. The fact remains that religious terrorism is a religious group motivated and controlled by false rhetoric that comes from leaders who are in pursuit of a political goal. Using tactics that target civilians, which include women and children, military targets and any other target that may produce a measurable body count or inspirational feeling in the hearts of believers; all in the attempt to inspire hatred, gain political favor, and kill their enemy.

The common thread in the woven cloth of religious terrorism is Islam. It is by far the most misunderstood religion by westerners. Islam is often mischaracterized as a very violent and merciless religion, because of its affiliation with Middle Eastern terrorism. As shown in the beginning of the paper, however, this could not be further from the truth.

Islam is and always has been a peaceful and merciful religion. The fact is that Islamic extremists in the Middle East who use terrorism as a means to an end are in reality not practicing the true Muslim faith. They believe and preach a version of Islam so extreme and misinterpreted to the point they preach false and fabricated made up rhetoric. This is not Islam, nor is it condoned by the majority of the worlds practicing Muslims.

Islam and Christianity

Islam means a strong commitment to God; it also shares the same Arabic root as the word salaam meaning peace (Esposito, 2007, 7). The discussion of Islam as a peaceful religion or one of violence is very controversial topic. Islam is one of the most prominent religions of the world and has been since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, its founder. Talks of terror, unexplainable violence, and a misunderstanding of the people and culture have long been issues with Europe and now the World.

Understanding Islam is the key to truly knowing whether this religion is peaceful or violent. Islam is an Arabic word meaning peace, security, and surrender. One who practices Islam is known as a Muslim, which means one who submits (to God). There are over 1.2 billion Muslims throughout the world, all who believe in a single God called Allah. Oneness is a word often associated with Muslims: oneness of God, mankind, and message. To say Islam is a religion of unity is difficult to dismiss (Canan, 2004, 9).

Muslim theologians say Islam is the pathway to which one may attain peace through the commitment to God's will. This meaning has importance because Muslims believe any man throughout history who met these criteria was a Muslim. So by this train

of thought the Prophet Muhammad was not the first Muslim. Rather Adam was the first Muslim as well the first man and first prophet of God (Esposito, 2007, 7-8). Beyond this statement, however, the Prophet Muhammad was the most influential and significant figure within the religion.

The Prophet Muhammad was responsible for bringing Islam to the world stage. The most revered and thought about Prophet of Islam; he was a man, a religious leader, a politician, and a warrior. Muhammad was born into a world of materialism, and became a poor and misfortunate as an orphan. The heights this young orphan would reach may be surprising. He found success as a merchant, husband, father, political leader, and the most influential Prophet of God to the Islamic religion he would become. As claimed by Goldschmidt (1999, 24), “we know far more about Muhammad than we know about Jesus.” Based on the level of advancement in Arabic culture and the strength of its records, this is easily understood. During the Golden Age of the Muslim Empire translations of Greek and Roman literature into Arabic was a common practice. Advancements in political society, medicine, and the keeping of records also contributed to our preservation of history of Europe in the dark ages.

In the early years of Muhammad’s life, the traditional code of Muruwwah (ideal behavior of a Muslim) was still being taught. In that pagan society, bravery in battle and giving to those in need were respectable moral codes, just as they are today. Although these codes originally worked to create a harmonious society, the greedy and immoral life of merchants began to affect the society. The people and particularly the children began to view bravery and alms giving differently primarily because Meccan leader were no longer following it (Goldschmidt, 1999, 25). The tendency for them to become greedy

and self-centered soon overshadowed the original intent of this doctrine, and this situation troubled Mohammad.

Muhammad believed that Christians, Jews, and Hanifs (monotheism sect) might hold the answers to Meccan problems. After all, Arabs in this day believed in polytheistic animism, rather than the ancestor worship that was slowly becoming less of a force. Arabs were more apt to fear imagined genies or invisible creatures than a God, and conversions to Christianity and Jewish faith was became more and more common. Some also converted to hanifs, yet another monotheism religion.

The first revelation that Muhammad received began in the year 610. This angel known as Gabriel came to visit Muhammad in the month of Ramada (Arabic month). Gabriel wanted Muhammad to read,

In the name of thy Lord who created,

Created mankind from a blood-clot

For thy Lord the most generous;

He has taught by the pen

Taught man what he knew

(Qur'an, 96:1-5)

Muhammad was freighted by Gabriel and began to yell that he could not read, but again the angel ordered him to continue reading as he embraced Muhammad in a hug. After seeing Gabriel in all directions, Muhammad returned home and asked his wife

Khadijah to cover with him in a warm coat. After he calmed down he then again seen Gabriel and told him

O thou who are shrouded in thy mantle,

Rise and warn!

Thy Lord Magnify,

Thy robes purify,

And from iniquity flee!

(Qur'an 74:1-5)

Muhammad's wife had a cousin who was a Hanif or Christian (it's argued both ways). The cousin assured Khadijah that Muhammad was not crazy, but in fact was a long-awaited Prophet. Muhammad was to warn Arabs of the Day of Judgment, the same day spoke of by Jewish and Christian followers. Muhammad almost shirked the responsibility of the great task. Then, after he received no angelic messages for an extended period, Muhammad began to feel God had abandoned him. When new Revelations began to come to him, he knew his mission was real. (Goldschmidt, pg)

Islam and Christianity Similarities

Understanding how and from where the religion of Islam originated is extremely important. It allows for the examination of the composer of the religion and the Muslims who practice it. As this is also true with Christianity, parallels can be forged between the two religious traditions. Valuable resources from which to gain a basic knowledge of Islam is the book *The Everything Understanding Islam Book* is a valuable resource. For Christianity, a similar would be *The Everything Understanding Christianity Book*. Both books are very easy to read and provide concise information of the religions.

Five Pillars of Faith

The Islamic religion centers on the Five Pillars of Faith: Declaration of Faith, Daily Prayer, Charitable Giving, Fast of Ramadan, and Pilgrimage to Mecca. Islam, as stated earlier, is fundamentally based upon a monotheistic foundation. The first pillar is that one must declare one's faith in God. This is known as the shahaada, and it is repeated throughout a Muslims life. This is done by saying "La ihaha illa Allah wa Muhammad ar-rasulullah" ("There is no god worthy to be worshiped except Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah").

The declaration of faith is much more than just a statement or something done without thought or feeling. The declaration should be noticeable by a Muslim's actions and their daily life. As the Qur'an states (47:19): "know, therefore, that there is no god

but Allah, and ask forgiveness for your faults, and for the men and women who believe. For Allah knows how you move about and how you dwell in your homes.” The declaration is all one must do to convert to the faith of Islam, the statement affirms one’s belief in one god who is Allah and also that Muhammad is the final messenger.

The Islamic declaration of faith, is remarkably similar to the foundational Christian belief wherein all one must do is ask Jesus to come into one’s heart and be one’s personal savior. It is the single most important part of both religions; because it proves the point in that both religions are truly monotheistic, and believe that faith and worshipping their one true God is the absolute most important part in their chosen religions. “For God so love the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he is not believed in the name of God’s one and only son.” (John 3:16-18)

By using the basic principles of Islam and Christianity, the similarities shared between the two could help to keep either religion from dismissing the other without further reading and understanding. Humans are far less likely to discriminate against another when they appreciate their similarities. This theory directly parallels this authors quest to find common ground between both Islam and Christianity with the hope of creating a balanced dialogue with no double standard to ultimately reach a peaceful understanding that with time will motivate our government and alternate political view so as to eliminate the West vs. the Middle East mentality. Humanitarian aid and education must be priorities for West to give to the Middle East.

Just as Christians come together to worship churches on the principal house of worship, for Muslim is the Mosque comes from the Arabic root word masjed; the base of the word is the root S-J-D which conveys the act of bowing. Within the Mosque there are no statues or objects that may lead to a form of idolatry. The rooms are very spacious and decorative. Often Mosques will have contain Middle Eastern calligraphy and wall designs that are most beautiful. Muslims are allowed to pray other places as long as the places they choose are clean. It is favored that Muslims pray with a congregation.

Daily prayer is especially important to Muslims; it is done five times a day and allows Muslims to connect with God, gather strength, guidance, and peace of mind. It is the central act of all Muslims in which they prayer directly to Allah without an intermediary. Prayer is both mental and physical with a series of movements, expressing adoration, submission, and praise to Allah. Following prayers, Muslims return to everyday life and the constant struggle of the greater Jihad within. The timing of the prayers are important to Muslims as the prayers create a continuous thought process and reminder of all things for which one is thankful for. The times designated for MUlsim prayers are:

- Fajr-Is performed before sunrise
- Dhuh-Is performed just after midday
- Asr-Is performed in the late afternoon
- Maghrib-Is performed after sunset
- Isha-Is performed in the late evening

Christians pray daily, but not all pray at designated times some pray at every meal, when they wake and before bed. Often Christians perform “spot” prayers; this is where

they meet other people throughout the day and they will pray for them after the meeting or finished seeing them. Some Christians have set times to pray throughout the day or just when they feel particularly emotional, or when something that has happened is worthy of God's thanks.

The next basic principle of Islam is charitable giving. Giving charitably is encouraged by both religions and in both there are various accepted ways to give. Both religions recognize acts such as volunteering your time to aid in homeless shelters, planting a tree so that an animal or person can benefit from it, or even lending an ear to listen to another as a way to give. One's heart, one's time, and one's effort to be a good Christian or Muslim is what matters, even the smallest good deed is considered charity. In Islam, this is known as the giving of Zakat, whereas in Christianity, it is known as Tithing. Charitable giving stems from the belief by both religions that the bounties and blessing come from God, and religious people have a responsibility to give back to those who are less fortunate. As stated in 1 Samuel 8:15 tithing is calculated as giving 10% of the Christians income. However the true spirit of this tradition is found in Malachi 3:10 "Bring who whole tithe into the store house, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." Zakat is calculated by giving 2.5% of your wealth after the deduction of expenses.

Muslims recognize a number of the Christian biblical prophets and also learn many of the same Old and New Testament. These include the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark, David and Solomon, Mary and Jesus, and the Ten Commandments. The Quran preaches racial equality, and Muslims believe the creation of diversity in beliefs,

traditions, and cultures were Gods intentional plan thus a sign of God's wisdom (Esposito, 2007, 8-10)

Fasting is very common in religions around the world, specifically Islam and Christianity. The Fast of Ramadan is done once a year by the Islamic world. This is a period during which Muslims fast for entire month, so they may gain an intense spiritual devotion during the daylight hours when they are not allowed to eat. While experience thirst and hunger, they are better able to identify with those who have little to drink and eat with in the world. The month of Ramadan is conducted on the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, and normally last for 29 or 30 days.

A typical day for a Muslim during Ramadan would start with an early meal before daylight, typically a light meal of just enough food to nourish the body for the day. After that predawn prayers commence and then on with daily life. As the fast continues Muslims strive to be their best as hunger, thirst, and other conflicting emotions from the fast set in. When the sun sets, Muslims gather into a congregation or family together to break the fast. This is typically done by eating dates and drinking milk. Once sunset prayers are finished Muslims sit down to eat an evening meal before bed.

In the Bible, fasting is the act of abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Fast should be something that should be performed personally and should not be used to attract attention. There are many types of fasts. A total fast is abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, and from water. Partial fasting is having certain foods eliminated from your diet or when and how much you eat is managed closely. The 40-day fast Jesus accomplished was done by eating no food and drinking only water, this is the most common fast in the Bible. As said fasting is a private matter between you and God, done

to bring one closer to him spiritually. Other benefits include humility, understanding of the feeling of hunger, and when the fast becomes extremely hard to continue the experience of benefit of faith in God to get one through the fast, gives one strength to get through other difficult times.

The final Pillar of Faith is the Pilgrimage to Mecca (present day Saudi Arabia) that is supposed to be done by every Muslim at least once, provided the Muslim is capable financially and physical of making the trip. This pilgrimage is known as Hajj to Muslims.

Preparing for *Hajj* is as important as the journey itself. First Muslims must shed all sign of wealth and status by wearing solid white garments known as *ihram*. This garment symbolizes equality and purity; when wearing the *ihram* one enters a state of devotion and peace. Violence of any kind is strictly forbidden. Once Muslims have arrived they announce it to everyone and God by saying, “Here I am, Oh God, at your Command! Here I am at your command! You are with out associate! Here I am at your command! To you are Praise, grace, and dominion! You are without associate!”

The first day *Hajj* Muslims travel from Mecca to Mina a small village east of the city. There they pray day and night from the Qur’an. The Second day Pilgrims leave Mina to go to Arafat. They spend the entire day near the Mount of Mercy asking for forgiveness. From Arafat they move to an open Plain known as Muzdalifah where they spend the night praying. On the third day pilgrims return to Mina with small pebbles that they collected from Muzdalifah. In Mina they throw the stones at pillars that represent the seduction of Satan. From here pilgrims return to Mecca and perform seven turns around Ka’aba, the house of worship built by Abraham. Finally the pilgrims walk seven times

between two hills near Ka'aba, Safa and Marwa. This is done to remember Abraham's wife Hajar, because of her journey to find water for herself and her son, before a spring welled up for her in the desert. Lastly the pilgrims drink from this ancient spring.

Jesus in Islam

The story of Jesus is told in the Qur'an and the Muslims believe Jesus was a great prophet, but do not believe Jesus was divine in any way, or that he was the son of God. It is believed by the Muslims that Jesus was sent just as many prophets before to confirm the laws received by Moses and to have them fulfilled. "And in the footsteps (of previous Prophets), we sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel; therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Torah that had come before him-a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God" (Qur'an 5:46) The Qur'an recognizes that Jesus had no human father and it recognizes the miraculous pregnancy of Mary, but just as Adam from the garden of Eden had no father and was not considered the son of God neither Jesus.

The foundational belief of Christian is that Jesus was the son of God, and part of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). This is no doubt an important difference between the two religions, but in no way should cause an overwhelming hatred or dismissal of the other because of a difference. Both religions call for all people to love one's God and one's neighbor. If we follow these teachings and love our neighbors,

differences and grieves should be overcome because God of both religions teach us to not to hate or discriminate but to love.

Middle Eastern Problems Arise

Modernity was pursued by the Middle East successfully to a point. The Ottoman Empire was a highly advanced military and political society. Ottoman armies expanded their lands into Asia, North Africa, and Europe, developing small governmental societies in these regions. This was accomplished because of the size of the Ottoman Empire and the inability to place political authorities in these remote regions. This alone demonstrates an advance political system. The advancement continues with palace schools where they trained young men for the army, revenue service, and branches of the governmental service. Building on Lybyer's influential 1913 work *The Government of the Ottoman Empire*, Rustow concludes from this that "the system was for its time remarkably rational, purposeful, tolerant, and adaptable."(Rustow, 1965:173; see also Lybyer, 1913)

The contemporary problems faced by the Middle East began far earlier than the first terrorist attacks on the West, most notably during the 1970's. The rejection of modernity began in the early 20th century around World War I, which ultimately seemed to be accompanied by a rejection of the West. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Muslim world was greatly disrupted. It went from having maintained a state of greatness, to having almost no influence within the world, seemingly within just a few years. Many questioned how did this happen and why Muslim fortunes were were

reversed in such a dramatic fashion. As expressed by Esposito, “had Muslims failed Islam or had Islam failed them” (Esposito, 1999, 47).

When faced with oppression, hardship, or a loss of status, most of humanity naturally will revert back to a society that they trust. Men fight for myths not truths says Ralph Peters. Myths of the Islamic golden age are most seductive, and this time period is extremely important to Muslims. It is often looked back upon with reverence and serves as a goal to be reached in modern times. During times of strife and confusion hope is what keeps human going. For Muslims this hope holds true in a time period far different from the one they face now. The golden age was a time when there was justice and kindness, peace and prosperity, and when mans greater attributes prevailed at least in their opinion. (Peters, 220, 1998)

This root of all of the fear, dissension, and hardship is due to one concept, change. Change is feared by all, on many levels, and in many situations. Throughout history people have changed as our civilizations were developed for better and for worse. Humans have changed the world, over and over, but reflecting on the change of ourselves is astonishing that our actions all the way down to our table manners are the same. Humans long for preservation and bringing back old orders and habits that relevant to us. Especially in a time that is less than perfect, and when those old ways remind us of better, stronger, and more satisfying times. This proves true when many great leaders have rallied people around nationalism, religion, and historic power to commit great atrocities (peters, 221, 1998). Examples of this are endless, go as far back as the Crusades, Napoleon, Hitler and Italy in world war, and most recently Osama bin Laden.

The world today is situated firmly in a constant circumstance of change, confrontation, and misunderstanding. The Middle East is a region plagued by poverty, diseases, and an extremely poor and therefore inconsistent education system. Much like the Middle Ages response to the fall of the Roman Empire is the Middle Eastern response to the success of the West.

Modern Islamic reform is just a response to the success of the West and threat of colonialism. As the West advances and globalism expands and heightens the Middle East can not ignore the West. Therefore the Middle East has to find away to deal with culture, religious, and global advancement issues and how Islam will unfold as one of the world's predominant religion is separate, but indeed link. "For most of these reformers, the renaissance of the Muslim community was the first step to national independence or liberation from the hated yoke of colonialism- the restoration of Muslim power"(Esposito, 1999, 53).

The West advocates complete separation between religion and state, and especially politics. Religion in the West is considered a private decision, privately practiced, should have no impact on the government. However that is a western view of religion and state not that of Islamic Modernist. Esposito states "Islamic modernists believe that Islam and modernity, particularly science and technology, are compatible, so that Islam should inform public life without necessarily dominating it" (Esposito, 2002, 44). He goes on to explain the differences between conservatives and Fundamentalist. Islamic Fundamentalist advocate going back to earliest teachings of Islam, compared to the conservatives who essentially just want the reimplementation of Islamic laws in the past (Esposito, 2002, 44).

The events being played on today world stage are simply the debate over how to more forward in a time that is very difficult and confusing to the Islamic Middle Eastern region. “The people of the Middle East are increasingly aware of the deep and widening gulf between the opportunities of the free world outside their borders and the appalling privation and repression within them” (Lewis, 2003, 119). The struggle within Middle Eastern regimes is both complex, and perplexing to people within these states. People are becoming angry towards their rulers and those who want to keep power for themselves. Protest in Iran are beginning to emerge, and countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan call America a Friend. From hardliners who want to see an Islamic state emerge and believe the problem within the Middle East is that of Modernity. To others who truly feel the repressions of these closed states are calling for change and advancement (Lewis, 2003, 119).

Dankwart A. Rustow (1965:172) says “it becomes clear upon closer reflection that modernity and tradition are never fully distinct in reality that the political culture of even the most modern countries is in fact a blend of traditional and modern traits.” During the time of the Ottoman Empire the ruling elite of the classical period were mainly Christian converts from the Balkans; just as well the prominent Young Turks and Kemalists in our century were from Macedonia.

Throughout history both Islam and Christianity have flourished in each other’s predominate region. This again should reinforce the idea that it is not the religion that prevents modernity coming towards these nations who are mostly Muslims. Tradition which is related to modernity must be cohesively combined when transforming to a globalized society. “Turkey therefore must include an examination of the ‘modern’

elements of Turkish 'traditional' culture as well as of the 'traditional' features surviving into the 'modern' period." (Rustow, 1965:173) This approach is one that countries who are facing tradition and modernity problems should give a stepping stone; and a leap over the fear of losing there culture and history in their attempt to bring modernity and a better life for their people.

Clear and concise is not good wording when talking of any change. It is definitely not good wording when involving a billion years of history and a religion that is culture in a specific region. Reform has come in many shapes. Lately a push for fundamentalism has been an active pursuit of older more conservative Muslims. This involves the reestablishment of an Islamic state, which involves much disagreement and ambiguity about correct form it should take. Esposito states that revivalist who often pursue this idea will based it on four components. This reform consisted of four main components. One was that Islam was the Solution. Two, a return to the Qur'an and the prophets example of a good Muslim was the method. Three was the goal, which was a community governed by Gods revealed law, the Sharia. Forth was that all who resisted, Muslim and non-Muslim were enemies of God. This reform soon turned to militant reactions which lead to a natural state of Jihad (Esposito, 48, 199). On the surface, many aspects of these political goals are completely compatible with Islam and not necessarily in opposition to democratic development. However, when approached by extremists, who naturally espouse an extremist view, this program has the potential to be highly detrimental to their ongoing political development.

Radical Islamic Ideology and its Appeal to Terrorists

Staying within the parameters of tradition of Islam is essential to Islamic extremists. These radicals use all means to interpret Islam in a fanatic and extremely conservative form. Fanatics believe they must defend their beliefs at all cost and violent are common. Fanatics and extremists have little tolerance for those who believe differently than themselves (Whitaker, 2002, 109-110). This leads one to understand that fanatics fear the loss of legitimacy in their on organizations and areas of operation if they begin to compromise with those they call enemies. It is so because extremist by definition preach and believe that they themselves are right and all other views are wrong. Extremist act on the principal that compromise means two things, there is more than one way to view a situation (i.e. meaning they are not the only ones who's right); and secondly that they are not as passionate and as dedicated as they preach. In either instance compromise lessens their importance to their followers

Knowing what a fanatic is important to understanding radicalism. Being radical is an extreme departure or separation from the usual or traditional. Simply put, Radicalism is the state of being radical. What is it that is drives Muslims to become radical? At the moment, political domination and occupation of the West is seems to drive the Islamic extremist (Esposito, 2007, 91).

The final section in this paper seeks an understanding how Islamic extremist use extreme conservative interpretation of Islam to motivate, recruit, and sustain a formidable resistance against both religious and humanitarian forces, as well as military forces. It should be understood that though this is one interpretation of Islam, it in a sense is widely

frowned upon and utterly hated in the eyes of most Muslims. These terrorist have manipulated a deeply cultural, historically prominent and peaceful religion, with the use of false rhetoric seeking both political and religious power. This goes to the heart of the problem, since the principle of Islamic reform has all too often been approached and advanced through radical fanaticism. It is therefore clear why the political development of Islam has been hindered.

According to Islamic scholar and prominent activist in interfaith dialogue M. Fethullah Gülen “In Islam, killing a human is an act that is equal in gravity to unbelief” (Gulen, 2004, 1). This seems to contradict the most basic principle of radical terrorists, but even this statement does not give sufficient gravity to true Islamic practices. For example, in an interview with M. Fethullah Gulen, he stated that:

- No person can kill a human being.
- No one can be a suicide bomber.
- No one can touch an innocent person even in a time of war.

Islamic law and/or tradition even holds that children and/or people who worship in churches are to be unharmed. This has been repeated throughout history; Prophet Muhammad said it in the Qur’an. Abu Bakr the first Rightly Guided Caliph said it as well as the Sultan Mehmet II (an Ottoman Sultan). So where does the problem originate?

Gulen elaborated that in Islam an individual cannot declare war, nor can a group or organization declare war, only the state can declare war. While it is possible for a man to say that he declares war on someone, or to say that he should kill this man because he supports Christianity and threatens to weaken Islam, a simple declaration does not initiate

war. It is very difficult to declare war, a state must declare war or there is no war (Gulen, 2004, 2-3).

In Gulen's opinion there is no longer an Islamic world. There are more Muslims in some places and fewer in others, but Islam has become a culture rather than a faith that is followed truly. "One of the people whom I hate most in the world is Osama bin Laden, because he has sullied the bright face of Islam. He has created a contaminated image. Bin Laden replaced Islamic logic with his own feelings and desire" (Gulen, 2004, 3).

Osama bin Laden has indeed lied to his followers directly. His insistence that followers of Islam must kill infidels even at the expense civilian life is a direct and obvious perversion of true Islam. He has many Islamic scholars back him up and created similar rhetoric, all in the name of Ali and calling for jihad.

Jihad is the term for total effort, exertion, and endurance that each Muslim demonstrates in order to be bestowed with the pleasure of God. This also includes individual efforts to keep carnal desires at bay, and the effort to make Islam known to more people. Jihad can at times manifest in physical or violent struggle if Muslims are attacked or have clear intelligence that they will be attacked. The Prophet Muhammad himself commanded or sent selected followers to command more than 60 battles. In none of those battles were Gods messengers on the attack. All of the actions of Al Qaeda the killings of civilians, the suicide bombings, and airplane high-jacking must originate from a central authority if they do not the actions are simply the execution of person wishes of the group or organizations who committed the actions. The Prophet Muhammad set clear rules for engagement in Jihad. Treating the enemy with mercy, the prophet has never

intended to crush his enemy. The ban on torture and respecting the enemy's dead were all very important to the prophet in a time of war. (Aktan, 2004, 26-31)

Muslims and others, who believe that Jihad was created solely for the protection of homelands and Muslims, are simplifying and minimizing the greatness of Islam and Jihad. The Qur'an and the long and dynamic history of Islam proves this to be false. Rather, this idea has been created with the coming of the modern age, and is truly alien to the Islamic consciousness. The land itself serves no value to Muslims other than it is where the authority of Allah was established and where faith is followed, earning the land the title "homeland of Islam".

Clearly that in the defense of the "homeland of Islam" is not the defense of land. It is the defense of the Muslim culture, its beliefs, and its very way of life. However a look within the parameters of jihad reveals this is not the ultimate goal of jihad. The ultimate goal Jihad is establishing Divine authority within the region.

Islam a Complex Tradition under Attack

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 the death of 3,000 innocent people forced the United States government to make very tough decisions for the country. Government leaders have attempted to make it clear that the responses to September 11 were not about attacking Islam, but that of terrorism.

Within the confines of the global war on Islamic terrorism, it has become clear that Islam as a general religion has become under attack because of actions beyond the

control of mainstream Muslims. This is a problem because the war on terrorism is not even really about terrorism any longer. As explained by Thomas Friedman, “in some circles, it is no longer about Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, or any other terrorist faction. It is not a religious issue, and Islam’s history, cultural, values, principles, and compatibility with modernity are under scrutiny” (cited in Patterson, 2001).

The most obvious aspect of this quote shows that terrorism is not a religious issue, although it is couched in its terms. To say that terrorism is a religious issue within Islam is an attack on the religion as a whole instead of a sect of people. To attack Islam is to dismiss an entire religious group of people that spans from white and black America, Indonesia, Eastern Europe, North Africa, Britain, and the Middle East. Terrorism includes tactics used by a small sect of religiously motivated extremists, who claim to kill in the name of God, but in all reality, kill in the name of power. Understanding that a fight against terrorism is not one that will be won simply by destroying the enemy is imperative to the reality of this struggle.

The issue is whether the culture of the Middle Eastern region will allow modernity to set in and thereby allow its people to accept globalism.

In the New York Times, Salman Rushdie wrote an opinion piece, *Yes this is about Islam*, where he said “there is a need for Islam to become depoliticized and for it to presume secularist-humanist principles in the tradition of modernity” (cited in Patterson, 2001).

The Middle East is in a position to allow modern Islam into its old ways, but the question still remains how to balance the two. Islam, as a religion, is undoubtedly capable of modernization. One must look only as far as the examples of Saudi Arabia, Turkey,

Egypt, and Eastern Europe. The religion itself is not the problem. The hindering factor is that of an extremely large and historically conscious people that do not want to lose their culture and history to modernity.

Their concern has validity, but yet change must come from within the Islamic society. Rushdie is both an insider and an outsider, He was condemned to death by Iran, while the Islamic society took action, for the Publishing of the Satanic Verse. This novel involves a story of Muhammad being told a false revelation by Satan. According to Rushdie's story, Muhammad did not know that Satan was the one who gave him this message. Muhammad then recited the revelation, in which later he discovers the message comes from Satan and discredits it. The message foretold by Satan, said that there were three goddesses that could be intermediaries between man and God. In the end Muhammad received new revelation that these goddesses were imaginary (Esposito, 2002, 136).

Islam has tried modernity and failed in some places and succeeded in others. Turkey, Esposito says is the only Muslim country to pursue a completely secular path (Esposito, 2005, 169). Turkey is a good example of success, Turkey is a country trying to enter the European Union and it has implemented a law banning the wearing of head covers. In response, a debate emerged over whether it is any more democratic to ban the wearing of head covers, as it would be to enforce the wearing of head covers. This is a very democratic type of debate; show not only the versatility of Islam, but its adaptability to the West.

The success of Turkey as it evolves should stand as a beacon towards both Westerns and Arabs who believe Islam is ill-compatible with Modernity. Turkey's

progress contrast with countries like Afghanistan, which fell victim to outside forces like the Taliban; who desire to claim the country and impress an extreme conservative Islamic way of life on its peoples. The Taliban is oppressive form of radical governance halted the very rapid and independent democratization of Afghanistan.

Religious faith that is depoliticized ceases to be what the terrorists claim it to be. Most Western analysts see that the Islamic terrorists believe in and enforce the use a perverted sense of true Islam. These analysts understand both the history and peaceful nature of Islam and do not identify the terrorist actions with these peaceful, historic, and sought after religion. They understand that Muslims, as a whole, are a very peaceful and tolerant people, who seek to live without conflict, as do other educated and peaceful peoples. The importance of fighting the war against terrorism is obvious, though religious bigotry must seen for what it is and should be avoided. It should be duly noted that both Christians and Jews have dark-cornered past, and these pasts help equalize these religions with Islam in that all three religions have regrettable part in their histories. It is only that the most recent dark blemish has been on Islam and neither of the other two religions. So regardless of one's feeling of Islam, it is pure bigotry to blame the religion of Islam as a whole for the acts of the terrorist (Shmuel, 2004).

Conclusion

As John F. Kennedy gave the world timely advice “Whatever you do, you would be well-advised to practice stern discipline and vigorous, unremitting effort. For high qualities and great achievements are not merely matters of chance or birth. They are the product of long and disciplined toil.”

This is what it will take to nullify the effects and growth of terrorism.

When fighting terrorism, especially the fight against fanatical religious terrorism, it is not simply enough to conquer objectives, cut supplies, and kill the terrorist. These self proclaimed freedom fighters (or Jihadist) feel they are called to a deeper revelation when fighting. They seek more than to drive the West out of their land or to kill infidels; although this is an important part to their struggle.

Understanding both John F. Kennedy’s message and also religious fanatics are key to see the deeper picture. The fight against religious fanaticism will be long, and the only way to win is with “vigorous, unremitting effort” to a higher purpose, not based in religious dialogue alone, but on the concept that all men are created equal, and all have certain inalienable human rights.

We will do well to remember that great “achievements are not merely matters of chance or birth, but they are the product of long and disciplined toil.” Religious terrorists are not concerned with death, so to kill them does not further peaceful governance. Certainly the killing of individual terrorist will at times be necessary. The bigger picture

remains bridging the gap between intercultural ideas and religions, between governments, and globalization.

For some, life's burden is far heavier and more complicated than for others. Often in life it is easy to forget the history that has led to our present day situation. The West and Christianity had a slow struggle to a great globalized and civil existence. The past of these two range from the dark ages, where the lack education, hygiene, poverty, and societal chasms were far greater in the West than anywhere else, and to the Spanish Inquisition, and total domination of Europe by the Catholic Church. A dark past lies.

From these harsh times were born the revitalization of free will and choice. Change birthed a nation called America, where at times persecution and racial hatred were more prevalent here than anywhere else. With a history of slavery, child labor, and even sexual orientation prejudices, America continues to grow and evolve. America's present is because of events and conditions through so many years of wrong. Today Americans enjoy medical promise, social acceptance, education, and a place where your voice can be heard and ones fortunes changed.

Halfway around the globe, however is a region comprised of Muslims and desert. A region with a glorious history and echo ancient tradition of a 1000 years ago; is harboring hopes of change. It is not Islam that prevents the Middle East from changing. This religion is peaceful, loving, and accepting of all cultures. Islam is compatible with any government its followers choose. True Islamist will not seek a government forged in defiance of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Life in the Middle East has the potential to flourish in the 21st century just as it did in the earlier years. The comparison between the Middle East and Europe, in the years of

the Crusades to the West and the Middle East now contains many similarities. It is as if time has circled so that the regions have reversed roles. Modernity is possible and even probable since Middle Eastern countries survival now depends on its interconnectedness to the world. Life in the Middle East is hard, and the burden carried by these individuals is greater than our understanding.

Consistently faced with poverty, lack of shelter, education, food, and just an overall bad quality of life; gives rise to terrorist, insurgents, and extremely aggressive versions of Islam. These are the problems facing the Middle East and the World today. As shown by this paper Islam is not the problem with the Middle Eastern situation. It is a healthy part of their culture and is as much a part of that as the sand on the ground. To put blame on Islam for the lack of development and rise of violence is oversimplifying the situation and degrading what true Islam is. Poverty, underdevelopment, and violence go hand and hand. It is seen all over the world in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic lands. Do not blame a religion for what humans are responsible for.

This paper is simply a prelude to an upcoming paper explaining deeply the issues of modernity and globalism, insurgency, counterinsurgency, and terrorism in the Middle East. The paper will include the Western role in the Middle Eastern regions pursuit of a globalized secular society. Finally it will speak on the foreign policy of America both the pros and cons of our international actions of the last 10 years.

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