8 Words Every
Non-Muslim Should Know

ARABIC

for

UNBELIEVERS

PETER
TOWNSEND

Contents

Introduction

Here's a little experiment: Think back for a moment to every single *'Good Boy/Girl Turned Jihadi'* story you've ever read or seen on television. What was the one constant in all of them?

I would suggest that you will find some kind of 'but then' statement in all such narratives. Statements like:

- *'He was just a regular guy but then he converted to Islam'*
- *'He used to hang out with the guys but then he started going to the mosque regularly'*
- *'She was not very devout but one day she started wearing the headscarf and broke off all relations with her friends'*

Statements like these are significantly at odds with the prevailing discourse surrounding Islam in our society. We are constantly told from a variety of directions that Islam is a 'religion of peace' and that those who invoke it to justify violence misapply its essentially tolerant teachings. In response we have to ask: Why is it that converting to Islam, or becoming a more devout Muslim, so often lead to a burning hatred for unbelievers? Shouldn't becoming more attached to a peaceful religion cause us to become more peaceful as a result?

No doubt those who are anxious to hold the 'Islam means peace' line will be quick to assure us that these stories are aberrations and that the very predictable trajectory to *jihad* followed by so many can be explained away by stating that those who follow this path do so based on a misunderstanding the true nature of Islam. To which we have to ask: How is it that so many millions of people over the centuries have 'misunderstood' Islam in exactly the same way? Could it not be that there is something in the essential teaching of Islam that is motivating the actions of the *jihadis*?

It is almost impossible to ask that last question in most Western societies without being immediately branded as an 'Islamophobe'. Asking critical questions on the link between Islam and violence is perhaps one of the strongest taboos in our society. With this book I am going to ignore this taboo and tackle this question head on by critically examining the teachings of Islam regarding those who reject its message. I am going to do this by introducing readers to 8 Arabic words or phrases that are directly relevant to this topic. The interpretation of these words will be based on the classical sources of Islam (the Qur'an, *hadith* and *sunnah*). Not a single non-Muslim source will be quoted. I will, instead, simply allow the foundational texts of Islam to speak for themselves.

This book will be narrowly focused on the issue of Islam and unbelievers and should not be seen as a comprehensive critique of the truth claims of Islam. For this I ask you to turn to my much more comprehensive work *'Questioning Islam - Tough Questions and Honest Answers About the Muslim Religion'*. You can find it here: http://www.qi-book.com

Thanks for reading!

Peter Townsend
October 2014

Some Possible Objections

I will be arguing in this book that Islam contains some teachings that should be deeply disturbing to non-Muslims and that these teachings are often the direct cause of violent acts. This is obviously something that will make some of those more familiar with the kid-gloves treatment of Islam in our society deeply uncomfortable. Certain classic responses to this kind of argument can, therefore, be expected. Allow me to briefly discuss these objections before we have a look at '*Arabic for Unbelievers*':

'Questioning Islam in this way is hateful and bigoted'. This charge is deeply ironic. Muslim preachers and teachers regularly question other faiths and ideologies in the most searching terms and in a free society it is their right to do so. What is deeply troubling, however, is that when the compliment is returned (i.e. when Islam is questioned) charges of 'hate' and 'bigotry' almost inevitably follow. Let me state it as plainly as possible: *Questioning an ideology is not the same thing as hating people.* My work is about subjecting Islam to a searching critique, not about stirring up hatred against anyone. I have in the past issued an open invitation to readers of my work which I want to repeat here: If anyone can point out an instance of 'hatred' directed at specific members of the Muslim community I would be more than happy to issue a full apology and retraction. This is simply not what my work is about.

'You are being racist'. I am still waiting for a satisfactory answer to the question that I immediately ask when I hear this: 'What 'race' is Islam again?' Islam is a religion not a race. The Qur'an's verses of violence should concern all non-Muslims, whether they are quoted by an Arab or by a blonde, blue eyed, convert (the 'White Widow', Samantha Lethwaite, for example). It should also be noted that some of the most vocal critics of Islam come from non-Western ethnicities (e.g. Sikhs, Hindus, Black Africans). Are they also being 'racist' by asking uncomfortable questions?

'You are just being 'Islamophobic'. I regard the almost inevitable cries of 'Islamophobia' whenever something critical of Islam is being said as nothing more than an attempt to stifle free and open debate and, therefore, as a form of censorship. A phobia can be defined as an irrational fear. It will be made abundantly clear throughout this book that there are certain aspects of the teachings of the Qur'an that could have significant negative consequences for those who reject its message. Pointing out and being concerned about this fact cannot in any way be described as a 'phobia' and should rather be viewed as an entirely realistic reaction to what is being read. I therefore much prefer the term 'Islamorealism' to 'Islamophobia'.

'There are violent passages in other texts as well'. I am constantly amazed by how often I get this reaction when I discuss the fact that many passages in the Qur'an mandates violence against unbelievers. My work is not aimed at promoting any other faith or ideology, merely to question Islam. I do think, however, that simply comparing the Qur'an to other religious texts misses the point for the following reasons:

- Lazy moral equivalence will bring us nowhere. Even if it can be proved that the violent passages in other Scriptures are still in force and that there are millions of people willing to act on them (which would be a tall order indeed) their existence will still not get the Qur'an off the hook. *'Look over there, they're also doing it'* is a debating technique that belongs in the school playground and is discarded by most children when they learn that each action or conviction must be evaluated on its own merits not simply in terms of how it compares with something else.

- The second point that I normally make when challenged with the 'they're just as bad' response is that Islam has a near monopoly on religiously inspired violence here and now at the beginning of the 21st century. It is all well and good to point to events like the Inquisition as past examples of how other traditions besides Islam engaged in

religiously inspired violence but Catholic authorities burning people at the stake is not quite the problem that we're facing at the moment is it? So yes, let's have a debate about history but let us also recognize that in our own century the vast majority of those who commit acts of violence with scriptural quotations on their lips belong to the Muslim faith. I can almost hear the 'But, but, but...' at this point. *'But what about the KKK?'*, *'But what about Westboro Baptist Church?'* To which I will simply respond that the global jihad killed more people on a single day (11 September 2001) than the KKK did in its entire history. The Westboro Baptist Church, while certainly holding to a hateful ideology, has not killed a single person that I'm aware of. So yes, these examples deserve our condemnation but let us also be realistic and honest about the real source of the vast majority of acts of religiously inspired violence in our world at the moment.

- It is, thirdly, the case that literalism is still mainstream within Islam. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism all experienced a variety of reform movements that moved many of the adherents of these religions (in many cases a majority) away from literal understandings of their faith. Islam has never experienced such a movement, at least not a successful one. Literalism, therefore, reigns supreme in the vast majority of mosques and Muslim institutions of higher learning. In fact, anyone who would like to propose innovative interpretations to soften the hard edges of Islam's teaching on unbelievers is, therefore, quite likely to be met with the serious charge of committing the ultimate theological sin, namely *bidah*, or introducing innovation.

- It should, lastly, be pointed out that the violent verses of the Qur'an carry immense theological weight. This is not necessarily the case with other Scriptures. The violent passages in the Torah, for example, form part of an extended historical description with no indication that eternal commands are being given. This is very different from the

Qur'an because of a theological device called the 'Law of Abrogation'. This is based on Qur'an 2:106: "*None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that Allah Hath power over all things?*" The law of abrogation states, following this verse, that there are some verses in the Qur'an that have been superseded by later ones. Applied to the issue of peace and war this is very significant. The earlier (chronologically) parts of the Qur'an were 'revealed' in Mecca when Muhammad was the leader of a small beleaguered minority. Chapters from this period are, therefore, filled with pleas for tolerance and statements promoting peaceful co-existence. The later chapters were 'revealed' when Muhammad was at the head of an army in Medina and actively campaigning for control over the Arabian Peninsula. As would be expected, chapters from this period are much more belligerent towards unbelievers. In fact, the 'newest' chapter of the Qur'an (Chapter 9) is also the most violent. There are, therefore, some Muslim theologians who argue that Qur'an 9:5 (the so-called '*Verse of the Sword*') abrogates all preceding verses counselling peaceful coexistence with unbelievers. Because of this the violent verses of the Qur'an are regarded not merely as historical curiosities but as some of the most important and authoritative verses in the entire book.

'I have good Muslim friends and they are not violent at all'. In response to this we have to ask: Does the existence of your Muslim friends somehow magically erase the violent verses from the Qur'an'? Your Muslim friends are no doubt great people to hang out with. The fact is, however, that by maintaining strong friendships with non-Muslims they are in direct violation of a clear Qur'anic command: "*Let not the believers Take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than believers: if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah*" (Qur'an 3:28) The fact that your friends are flagrantly disobeying the Qur'an means that they are, therefore, perhaps not the best people to use as yardsticks as to how a devout Muslim should act. It should also be noted that Qur'an 3:28 qualifies the ban on non-Muslim friends with

one exception '*except by way of precaution, that ye may Guard yourselves from them*'. In other words, Muslims are allowed to feign 'friendships' if it can protect the Muslim community in some way (i.e. through convincing them that the intentions of the community is entirely peaceful).

'It is only a 'tiny minority of extremists' who support acts of violence'. Let me state it as bluntly as possible: Yes there are moderate Muslims (often their 'moderation' consists of ignoring the Qur'an) but Islam itself is not a moderate ideology. Those who chose to act on literal interpretations of the Qur'an and traditions can, furthermore, not be described as a tiny minority. Survey after survey has shown that significant percentages of Muslims worldwide are not 'moderate' and support the principle of participating in *jihad* for the advancement of Islam. Even if we peg active supporters of violent jihad at a ludicrously low percentage (10%) the resulting cohort cannot be described as 'tiny' by any stretch of the imagination as it will be 130 000 000 strong (based on a global Muslim population of 1.3 billion). That's more than the entire population of all but a handful of countries. If that many people are willing to take up arms for the sake of Islam (or materially support those who do) we as non-Muslims have a massive problem and we will have to face up to it rather than live in denial.

You're reading the Qur'an out of context. This charge is particularly ironic given that it is, in fact, those who want to push the 'religion of peace' line who are regularly guilty of this. We are, for example, often told that the Qur'an states that there is '*no compulsion in religion*' (Qur'an 2:256) What we are not being told is that Muslim scholars believe that this verse was abrogated by more belligerent ones (most notably Qur'an 9:5) 'revealed' while Muhammad was waging war against the Meccans. How about Qur'an 5:33 (*To kill one person is to kill all of humanity*)? Strangely those who quote this heart-warming sentiment never read the full verse as it makes exceptions for those who 'make mischief in the land'. Their punishment? They are to be murdered and crucified. So much for 'quoting out of context'!

The 'quoting out of context' charge is furthermore particularly ironic in light of the fact that deducing context from the Qur'an is very difficult and in many cases impossible. Consider the following:

- The Qur'an contains 114 chapters (or Suras) arranged roughly from longest to shortest with the exception of the short first chapter (the *Fatiha* or 'Opening'). This arrangement means that chapters often bear very little relation to preceding and following ones.

- Determining context is made even more difficult by the fact that there are not many narrative passages in the Qur'an. Instead, the standard format is a series of declarations by Allah without the provision of statements specifying the time or situation that the declarations refer to. Muslims scholars attempt to solve this problem by pointing to hadiths (traditions) that claim to supply the context for particular passages. The problem is, however, that these were written down more than 200 years after the events are believed to have occurred. Many of these traditions also offer contradictory explanations of context, for example, Sunni and Shi'a hadith collections that provide radically different contextual accounts.

- On a slightly more philosophical level, it is worth pointing out the inherent problem with taking refuge in context when one deals with a supposedly eternal book. Most orthodox Muslims believe that the Qur'an was uncreated and that the earthly Qur'an is simply an exact copy of Allah's eternal word. To excuse or explain parts of the Qur'an by referring to historical context is therefore highly problematic. If the Qur'an is indeed Allah's eternal guidance to mankind, human beings should be able to follow it at all times and under all circumstances.

Having said all of the above, I will take great care in this book to take context into account wherever possible. I will do this through reliance on the Arabic text and constant reference to verses following and preceding the

ones that I will be discussing. I am convinced that I consistently quote and discuss Qur'anic verses within their proper literary context.

'It does not really matter what the Qur'an say Muslims are free to believe what they want'. A version of this argument was recently aired by the American actor Ben Affleck. He seemed to suggest that Muslims simply make Islam up on the fly and that the actual teachings of the religion are of secondary importance. This kind of statement is so patently ridiculous that it almost does not need refuting but let me just say the following for the sake of clarity:

- Viewing truth as something relative may be rather trendy in certain intellectual circles in the West. Transferring these chic postmodern sentiments to the entire Muslim world is, however, totally absurd. I think it is fair to say that the vast majority of Muslims do not view their faith as a kind of 'pick and mix' that they choose to believe and apply, or not, on a daily basis.

- It should secondly be pointed out that theological innovation (*bidah*) is enshrined as a very serious sin in orthodox Islamic teaching. *Bidah* is viewed as such a serious violation that one who persistently engages in it may be declared an apostate from Islam with all the very serious consequences that this entail (see the section on apostasy). Literal understandings of the Qur'an as enshrined in the opinion of the classical commentators are therefore, quite literally, enforced on pain of death.

- It is, lastly, the case that even if the above points were not true (i.e. that Muslims were, in fact, free to believe and act exactly as they wished) millions of Muslims around the world are choosing to go with ultra-literal interpretations of the texts of Islam and nurture a burning

hatred towards unbelievers based on these interpretations. Attempting to wish away these facts by Western elites who because of their own life experiences cannot begin to fathom that religion can exert such a powerful influence on people are misguided, and frankly, dangerous.

Let us now, without any further ado, turn to the teachings of the Muslim religion as it applies to unbelievers.

1. كافر (Kufar) - Unbeliever

Being called an unbeliever is perhaps not such a bad thing. On some level it is obviously simply a statement of fact (i.e. this person has not submitted to Islam). When, however, you stop to read the Qur'an's descriptions of unbelievers it is clear that Allah hates them with a burning passion and that he often counsels his followers to do the same.

So despite its much vaunted tolerance, Islam takes a very dim view of those who have not submitted to it. This hatred is especially apparent in the chronologically later chapters of the Qur'an and also in many *hadiths*. Unfortunately for the non-Muslims of the world, the later parts of the Qur'an carry more theological weight than earlier revelations because of the Islamic 'Law of Abrogation' *(naskh)* which teaches that later revelations supersede earlier ones.

Some non-Muslims are quite surprised at the level of invective included in the Qur'an as a supposedly 'holy book'. Here are just a few examples of the scorn that the Qur'an pours on those who do not follow Islam (or who merely pretend to). According to the Qur'an unbelievers are:

Diseased: *In their hearts is a disease; and Allah has increased their disease: And grievous is the penalty they (incur), because they are false (to themselves)* (Qur'an 2:10)

Perverse: *We have sent down to thee Manifest Signs (ayat); and none reject them but those who are perverse* (2:99)

Stupid: *The parable of those who reject Faith is as if one were to shout Like a goat-herd, to things that listen to nothing but calls and cries: Deaf, dumb, and blind, they are void of wisdom.* (2:171)

Untruthful (and should therefore never be believed): "*And believe no one unless he follows your religion.*" (Qur'an 3:73)

Open Enemies: *For the Unbelievers are unto you open enemies.* (Qur'an 4:101) because of this unbelievers must never be befriended by Muslims: "*Let not the believers take for friends or helpers unbelievers rather than believers.*" (Qur'an 3:28)

To be avoided: "*Follow what thou art taught by inspiration from thy Lord: there is no god but He: and turn aside from those who join gods with Allah.*" (Qur'an 6:106)

Never to be befriended: "*Let not the believers Take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than believers: if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah*" (Qur'an 3:28)

Beasts in the sight of Allah: *For the worst of beasts in the sight of Allah are those who reject Him: They will not believe.* (Qur'an 8:55)

Polluted: "*O ye who believe! Truly the Pagans are unclean*"(Qur'an 9:28)

Not worthy of mercy: "*Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard (ruthless) against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves*" (Qur'an 48:29)

It should be stressed that this is just a small sample of the verses of the Qur'an that express a loathing of unbelievers and speak of them in the most insulting ways possible. It is important to note that many of these verses speak of unbelievers in general and not only of the particular unbelievers the Muslims happened to be fighting at the time. They, therefore, continue to influence the attitudes of Muslims to this day.

In addition to all of the insults heaped on non-Muslims, the Qur'an constantly reminds unbelievers that they will experience an eternity of terrible tortures in hell. For example: "*But as for those who disbelieve, garments of fire will be cut out for them; boiling fluid will be poured down on their heads; Whereby that which is in their bellies, and their skins too, will be melted; And for them are hooked rods of iron* (Qur'an 22:19-21) It is no exaggeration to state that this is one of the major themes of the Qur'an. The fate of unbelievers in hell is discussed in more than 500 verses in 87 chapters (out of 114). Believing that the non-Muslims you have contact with have been created to fuel the fires of hell will probably not raise them in the esteem of most Muslims.

To all of the above can be added the many incitements to violence against non-Muslims, e.g.: "*I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved, so strike [them] upon the necks and strike from them every fingertip.*" (Qur'an 8:12) and calls for their subjugation: "*Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*" (Qur'an 9:29) Can it be any wonder that many non-Muslims have come to the conclusion that the Qur'an represents a form of extreme hate speech directed at those who reject the message of Islam?

As noted above some readers may respond to the proof of Islam's deep disdain for unbelievers presented above by stating that they have Muslim friends who treat them with respect and courtesy. This may indeed be the case but the reason behind the friendship of these Muslim people is probably the fact that they choose to act on natural human instincts and ignore this aspect of the teaching of Islam. The attitudes and actions of individual Muslims do not, however, for one moment take away the existence of the verses listed above. They are there in the heart of the Qur'an, ready to be discovered by any Muslim who may ask whether the way

he or she thinks about non-Muslims and interacts with them is pleasing to Allah.

Deeply embarrassed by the Qur'an's descriptions of unbelievers some Muslims attempt to claim that the term *kufar* does not apply to Jews and Christians as they are part of a special category ('People of the Book'). This does not hold water as many of the descriptions of the *kufar* are very general and include everyone who rejected Muhammad's message, something that the Jews and Christians certainly did. It should also be noted that being called 'People of the Book' was in many ways a mixed blessing. This will become apparent in the next section.

2. أهل الكتــــاب ('Ahl al-Kitāb) – 'People of the Book'

Anyone who has ever been to one of the mosque 'outreach' events to which non-Muslims in the West are periodically invited will be very familiar with the term 'People of the Book'. This is the special category in which monotheistic believers (Jews, Christians and Sabeans) are placed according to the Qur'an. This is supposedly 'proof' that adherents of these religions have nothing at all to fear from the presence of Islam. There are, however, a number of problems with this soothing sentiment. Consider the following:

A significant proportion of the population of the West cannot be described as 'People of the Book' by any stretch of the imagination. There are, of course, many people in all Western countries who do not identify with any faith (e.g. atheists and agnostics) as well as many people (e.g. Buddhists and Hindus) who would be classed as idolaters by Islamic theology. These people cannot in any way be classed as 'People of the Book' and fall under the very harsh judgment regarding the treatment of 'total' disbelievers. So even if it could be proved that the 'People of the Book' enjoy equality with Muslims according to traditional Muslim theology (which is certainly not the case as we shall see) this would still leave a massive percentage of society as implacable enemies under Muslim teaching.

Those called 'People of the Book' are not exempt from Allah's curses and contempt. Any person who believes that the 'People of the Book' simply follow an alternative path and should, therefore, be accepted as equals with Muslims will swiftly be disabused of that notion upon opening the Qur'an. Here are some relevant verses:

- *Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion. Say: "The Guidance of Allah,-that is the (only) Guidance." Wert thou to follow their desires after the knowledge*

which hath reached thee, then wouldst thou find neither Protector nor helper against Allah (Qur'an 2:120)

- *Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors* (Qur'an 3:110)

- "*But on account of their breaking their covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard; they altered the words from their places and they neglected a portion of what they were reminded of; and you shall always discover treachery in them excepting a few of them; so pardon them and turn away; surely Allah loves those who do good (to others).*" (Qur'an 5:13)

- "*O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust.*" (Qur'an 5:51)

- "*Say: O People of the Scripture! Do ye blame us for aught else than that we believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed aforetime, and because most of you are evil-livers?*" (Qur'an 5:59)

- "*They do blaspheme who say: "Allah is Christ the son of Mary." But said Christ: "O Children of Israel! worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord." Whoever joins other gods with Allah,- Allah will forbid him the garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong-doers be no one to help.*" (Qur'an 5:72)

- *Those who reject (Truth), among the People of the Book and among the Polytheists, will be in Hell-Fire, to dwell therein (for aye). They are the worst of creatures* (Qur'an 98:6)

- "*You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers to be the Jews and those who associate others with Allah,*" (Qur'an 5:82)

The hadiths predict the total destruction and forced conversion of the 'People of the Book'. According to the hadith collections the 'People of the Book' are headed for a terrible fate, not only in eternity but also in the here and now:

- *Allah's Apostle said, "By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely (Jesus,) the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind justly (as a Just Ruler); he will break the Cross and kill the pigs and there will be no Jizya (i.e. taxation taken from non-Muslims).* (Sahih Bukhari 4:55:657) The reference to the absence of jizya' at the end means that Christians and Jews will be forced to accept Islam and that there will, therefore, be no non-Muslims left to pay this tax.

- The Qur'an harbors particular hatred for the Jewish people, even stating that some of them were turned into 'apes and pigs' (Qur'an 7:166). The hadith carries this hatred to a murderous pitch: *"Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: The last hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him; but the tree Gharqad would not say, for it is the tree of the Jews"* (Sahih Muslim 4:41:6985) Far from being an ancient curiosity this hadith is regarded as normative by millions of Muslims. It is, for example, included verbatim in the charter of Hamas.

The 'People of the Book' are not exempt from being targets of jihad. It should be clear by now that there is not a lot of benefit associated with the dubious status of 'People of the Book'. Perhaps they could at least feel safe from Muslim attack? Not so: "*Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, **(even if they are) of the People of the Book,** until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."* (Qur'an 9:29) This verse calls for violent attacks

against Jews and Christians until they become Muslims or are subjugated and 'feel themselves subdued'. It is part of the last chapter of the Qur'an (chronologically) and thus carries immense theological weight, to the extent that many theologians believe that it abrogates all earlier verses calling for peaceful co-existence with Christians and Muslims.

The 'People of the Book' are to live as second class citizens under Islamic rule. Qur'an 9:29 makes it clear that the 'People of the Book' should be subjugated and that they should 'feel' their subjugation. Their position in an Islamic dispensation is, therefore, certainly not one of equality but one under which they will constantly be reminded of their inferior status. This was formalized in the institution of the *dhimma*, which is where we turn next.

3. ذمي (Dhimmi) – Protected Person

In the previous section we saw that the 'People of the Book' cannot in any sense be seen as the equals of Muslims according to Islamic teaching. They are, in fact, to be fought until they are 'subdued and feel themselves subdued' (Qur'an 9:29). This subjugation is not merely theoretical. Islamic law contains detailed instructions on how society should be ordered so that the subjugated peoples will be kept in their proper place. This was done through the institution of the '*dhimma*' or pact of protection. A person living under this dispensation was called a '*dhimmi*' (or protected person).This sounds like a wonderful arrangement but it will quickly become clear that the kind of 'protection' in view here is of the kind commonly offered by the Mafia.

The institution of dhimmitude manifested itself in different ways across the Muslim world. For example, in some societies only Jews and Christians could live ad as *dhimmis* with pagans or other unbelievers offered the choice between conversion and death. Other Muslim societies extended the *dhimma* to all non-Muslims. Despite these differences all applications of the *dhimma* have been designed to ensure the supremacy of Islam over every aspect of society. To this end the following features were common in the way the *dhimma* was applied:

- *Dhimmis* had to pay a special tax (the *jizya*) as mandated in the Qur'an. The payment of this tax was often accompanied by ritual humiliation (e.g. a slap in the face) so that they 'could feel themselves subdued' (Qur'an 9:29). In some Muslim societies the rates of *jizya* was set so high that it kept the *dhimmis* on the edge of bankruptcy and starvation.
- *Dhimmis* had to wear distinctive clothing or some other mark of identity so that they could not be mistaken for Muslims.
- *Dhimmis* were restricted in terms of how freely they could worship. They were not permitted to ring bells, their churches or synagogues

could only be repaired with official permission (this was often withheld) and they were forbidden from attempting to share their faith with Muslims.

- *Dhimmis* did not enjoy equality before the law. Any lawsuit between a Muslim and a *dhimmi* was tried under Islamic law (*shari'a*). *Shari'a* gives more weight to the testimony of a Muslim. This means that Muslims could act with legal impunity towards *dhimmis*, knowing that they will always come out on top in court.

We may be tempted to regard the institution of the *dhimma* as some kind of historical curiosity. This is very wide off the mark for three reasons:

- The idea of dhimmitude is founded on the Qur'an itself and the Muslim worldview, therefore, teaches Muslims to regard those who do not share their faith as inherently inferior.

- Although it is not often called dhimmitude the basic ideas behind the institution still inform laws across the Muslim world. Many non-Muslims living in Muslim societies will recognize their own position in the bullet points listed above.

- It has been widely reported that the 'Islamic State' (ISIS) gave minorities in territories they conquered the choice between converting to Islam and paying a tax. Many Western commentators used this as 'proof' of how un-Islamic they are. The reader will, however, by now be aware that their demands were not novel or un-Islamic but entirely consistent with the principles of dhimmitude.

4. جهاد (Jihad) – Struggle

The Arabic word '*jihad*' simply means 'to struggle'. Many Muslim apologists, therefore, claim that the word is completely misunderstood in the West and that some kind of peaceful inner struggle is in view here. This claim will be discussed in more detail below but let me just say for the moment that the expression '*jihad in the way of Allah*' (*al-jihad fi sabil Allah*) always carry the connotation of physical struggle within the Qur'an and hadith. It is the dangerous idea in other words that all means possible, including violence, should be used to increase the dominion of Allah.

Any discussion of the possible relationship between Islam and violence is bound to be controversial, especially since there are such entrenched convictions on this issue in both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. It is my intention with this section to deal with this question as calmly and dispassionately as possible by simply referring to the sacred texts of Islam itself. In the process I will argue that Muslims are indeed commanded to wage war and commit acts of violence for the sake of the spread of Islam. I want to urge readers from the outset not to 'shoot the messenger' if they do not agree with this conclusion but to instead have a long hard look at what the texts themselves say. It could be that the problem is not with me at all but with what Islam has taught from the beginning.

This section will be made up of three distinct parts:
1) An overview of the teaching of the Qur'an on the use of violence against unbelievers
2) An evaluation of the relative authority of the Qur'anic texts advocating violence; and
3) A discussion of the three most common counter-arguments that are often employed when a link between Islam and violence is asserted.

4.1. The Qur'an's Violent Verses

The Qur'an contains a large number of verses explicitly calling for violent attacks against unbelievers, so that the dominion of Islam can be extended. The fact that, thankfully, most modern Muslims choose not to consistently act on this part of the Qur'an does not cancel out the existence of these verses. Those who do choose to act on such verses are, in fact, quick to point out that the so-called moderates are being unfaithful to the teaching of the Qur'an by preferring peace with unbelievers to obedience to clear Qur'anic commands.

Before we look at some of the violent verses of the Qur'an, it is worth remembering that they occur in a supposedly eternal book. The commands can, therefore, not be wished away by taking the context in which the verses were supposedly revealed into account. Determining the exact context is, in any event, close to impossible. Even if we accept the contexts provided by the 'Occasions of Revelation' (*Asab al-Nuzul*) literature, it will quickly become clear that a very large proportion of the violent verses of the Qur'an were not 'revealed' in circumstances where the commands to violence can be interpreted as calls to act in self-defense. These verses frequently deal with what can only be described as aggressive offensive warfare. These commands are, furthermore, often open ended (i.e., not limited to certain enemies or certain circumstances) and can therefore be interpreted as commanding perpetual warfare against unbelievers.

With this in mind let us now turn to a small selection of the verses of violence found in the Qur'an. While reading these please keep in mind that there are many more verses like these scattered throughout the book:

"Slay!" because disbelief/rebellion is worse than slaughter: The following verse was supposedly revealed not long after Muhammad and his small band of followers migrated to Medina. They were not under attack at this stage and the verse is, therefore, a direct command to engage in offensive warfare by calling on the Muslims to return to Mecca to kill the unbelievers:

"And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have Turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter...And fight them on until there is no more Tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, Let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression." (Qur'an 2:191 and 2:193) The word translated with 'tumult and oppression' above is the Arabic word *fitna* which in the context of the Qur'an can refer to disbelief or to the rebellion and disorder that follows disbelief. So the Muslims are here called upon to continue fighting and slaying until the *fitna* is over and people turn to Islam. The implications of these verses are chilling. They teach Muslims that it is a worse sin to be in a state of *fitna* (i.e. in rebellion against Allah) than to kill those in that state.

Fight! Even if you hate doing it: It is interesting to note that even some of Muhammad's companions sometimes baulked at the amount of killing that he required them to do. When some Muslims were reticent to go out on yet another raid to steal from non-Muslims, the following verse was conveniently 'revealed': *"Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not."* (Qur'an 2:216) Again we see a community not under attack (so self-defense cannot be claimed) urged by Muhammad to fight and kill for the sake of Allah.

Fighting for Allah is one of the best things a Muslim can do: Some modern Muslims are very fond of stating that jihad primarily refers to a spiritual struggle against the self. This claim will be discussed in more detail below. For the moment we can note that this sentiment is clearly contradicted by Qur'an 4:95 where it is plainly stated that physical fighting for the sake of Allah has the highest priority. It is clear from the context that what is called for here has nothing 'spiritual' about it since the disabled, who can engage in a spiritual but not a physical struggle, are specifically exempted: *"Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled - and the mujahideen, [who strive and fight] in the cause of Allah*

with their wealth and their lives. Allah has preferred the mujahideen through their wealth and their lives over those who remain [behind], by degrees. And to both Allah has promised the best [reward]. But Allah has preferred the mujahideen over those who remain [behind] with a great reward." (Qur'an 4:95)

Fighting should be associated with terror and even mutilation: Allah makes it clear in the Qur'an that terror is a major part of his strategy against the unbelievers and that his followers should be instruments of that terror: "*I will instil terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them.*" (Qur'an 8:12) This is about as far from a 'spiritual struggle' as it is possible to get. Mutilation of the bodies of enemy combatants (alive or dead) is recognized as a very serious war crime (e.g. Geneva Convention IV, Additional Protocol 11). Yet, here we see Allah 'The Merciful' command it as part of a strategy for 'instilling terror into the hearts of disbelievers'. This verse also explains the fondness that modern jihad fighters display for beheading as a favorite method of execution. They did not simply pluck this from thin air. They are, instead, attempting to be as faithful as possible to a direct Qur'anic command to 'strike above the necks' of their enemies.

Fight to subject the unbelievers. Chapter 9 is by far the most violent chapter of the Qur'an. It was also one of the last chapters to be 'revealed'. The significance of this will be spelled out below. The first ultra-violent statement of this chapter reads as follows: "*But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, an seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.*" (Qur'an 9:5) The Muslims are here commanded to engage in open-ended warfare against the pagans. Should this be understood in the context of self-defense? Not according to this verse. The unbelievers are to be fought until they accept Islam! Look closely at the statement towards the end. They are to be fought

until they "*establish regular prayers*" and "*practice regular charity.*" This may seem rather innocuous until you look into the Arabic words used. They are *salah* (for prayer) and *zakat* (for charity). These words refer to 'Islamic Prayer' and 'Islamic Charity' (part of the Five Pillars of Islam). The implication is, therefore, that conversion to Islam is here stated as a clear military objective.

Fight even the 'People of the Book'. We have already seen that modern Muslim apologists are very fond of pointing to the special link that is supposed to exist between Muslims and the 'People of the Book' (Jews and Christians). It is clear from the Qur'an, however, that this relationship is never seen as one of equality. According to the Qur'an, Muslims should always occupy the top spot and Christians and Jews should be fought if they are not willing to acknowledge Muslim dominion over them. This is how the Qur'an expresses this idea: "*Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*" This verse clearly calls for violent attacks against Jews and Christians until they become Muslims or are subjugated and 'feel themselves subdued'.

It should be noted, once again, that these verses are far from the sum total of what the Qur'an has to say on the topic of violence in the name of Allah. They are, instead, merely a representative sample. We cannot read these verses without coming to the conclusion that perpetual warfare against unbelievers is a key part of the message of the Qur'an. This leaves the question as to the relative authority of the violent verses. Are they merely historical curiosities, or do they carry theological weight in the way Islam subsequently developed?

4.2. What Theological Weight Do the Qur'an's Violent Verses Carry?

Some readers may think that the violent verses are merely historical relics that played no role whatsoever in the subsequent development of Islam. Nothing can be further from the truth! This aspect of the teaching of the Qur'an is regarded as fundamental to their understanding of their faith by orthodox Muslim theologians. There are primarily two reasons, discussed below, for this. Namely: a) The violent verses are all comparatively 'new' and b) The priority of violence for the sake of Allah is confirmed in many sound *hadiths*.

The violent verses abrogate peaceful ones instead of *vice versa*. Reference has already been made to the fact that the violent verses of the Qur'an have generally been revealed later than the peaceful verses. The most likely reason for this is that Muhammad had to speak the language of peace while he was the leader of a small beleaguered minority in Mecca. His tiny movement was in no position to resist the military might of the Meccan pagans and his pleas for peace and tolerance can, therefore, be read as pleas towards the powerful majority to live in peace with the weak Muslim minority. As soon as Muhammad gained control of a military force upon his move to Medina, his rhetoric changed however. Now the violent verses start to come thick and fast as Muhammad spurs his forces on to conquer and fight in the name of Allah. This chronology is hugely significant in light of the so-called 'Law of Abrogation': "*None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that Allah Hath power over all things?*" (Qur'an 2:106) According to this law where two verses contradict each other, the more recent one cancels out (abrogates) the earlier one. In general terms, it can be stated that passages 'revealed' in Medina will always abrogate passages 'revealed' in Mecca if there is any conflict between them. All of this means that the violent verses can lay claim to a higher degree of scriptural authority than the more peaceful ones. Those who argue for violent interpretations, therefore, have a much firmer theological footing to base their arguments

on. This is a rather chilling thought when viewed from a non-Muslim perspective but it will not do to stick our heads in the sand and pretend that the Qur'an is all about peace, coexistence and love.

The message of the violent verses is confirmed by several sound hadiths. The sound *hadiths*, upon which so much of Muslim faith and practice are based, make it clear that the verses in the Qur'an that call for violence are far from historical curiosities. Many individual *hadiths* confirm the extremely important role of violence in the spread of Islam in ways that confirm and even expand the message of the violent verses of the Qur'an. The following is a representative sample:

Non-Combatants are Legitimate Targets: Some Muslim apologists claim that the verses of violence in the Qur'an are softened by the fact that they are mostly presented in the context of military campaigns. The violence, or so it is claimed, can therefore not be described as indiscriminate. This is directly contradicted by several traditions wherein Muhammad expressed a total lack of sympathy for the death of non-combatants by stating that women and children should be seen as part of the community that is being fought. The can therefore be seen as legitimate targets. Here is an example: "*The Prophet was asked whether it was permissible to attack the pagan warriors at night with the probability of exposing their women and children to danger. The Prophet replied, "They (i.e. women and children) are from them (i.e. pagans).*" (Sahih Bukhari 52:256) This hadith is a favorite of those who commit atrocities in the name of Islam during which innocent victims are killed. It justifies their actions by making it clear that there are no real 'innocents' when a community is targeted by the followers of Islam.

The Muslim community will remain at war with unbelievers until the end of the world: The following hadith is rather sobering and should act as a wake-up call to those who believe that a perpetual peace treaty is possible with those who take the Qur'anic verses of violence seriously: "*Three things are the roots of faith: to refrain from (killing) a person who utters, "There is no god*

but Allah" and not to declare him unbeliever whatever sin he commits, and not to excommunicate him from Islam for his any action; and jihad will be performed continuously since the day Allah sent me as a prophet until the day the last member of my community will fight with the Dajjal (Antichrist)" (Abu Dawud 14:2527)

Salvation can be gained through fighting for Allah: In one of the absolute favorite hadiths of modern jihad fighters Muhammad declared: "*Know that Paradise is under the shades of swords*" (Sahih Bukhari 52:73)

Violence can even be perpetrated against fellow Muslims who are less than enthusiastic in their observance of Islam: In an alarming hadith Muhammad ordered the burning alive of some Muslims who were not prompt in coming to prayer: "[Muhammad said:] "*I decided to order a man to lead the prayer and then take a flame to burn all those, who had not left their houses for the prayer, burning them alive inside their homes.*" (Bukhari 11:626) If nothing else, this barbaric act must have caught the attention of the rest of the Muslim community and will have cemented Muhammad's reign of terror even further.

4.3. Attempts to Whitewash the fact that the Qur'an teaches Violence against Unbelievers

The strong position granted to the verses of violence and their confirmation and expansion in the *hadiths* should make it very clear that they are central to an orthodox understanding of Islam. Any attempt to ignore this represents a denial of the clear meaning of the text of the Qur'an and the *hadiths*.

Many modern Muslims are deeply uncomfortable with the bloodthirsty verses of the Qur'an and attempt to provide evidence that the message of the Qur'an is actually one of peace and love. The three most common arguments in defense of this position are:

- The word *jihad* actually refers to an inner spiritual struggle.
- The Qur'an says that to kill a single human being is to kill all of humanity
- The Qur'an states that there should be 'no compulsion in religion'

Is 'Jihad against the self' the most important form of Jihad?

Many Muslim apologists promote the idea of 'greater' and 'lesser' *jihads*. According to this belief, striving (the word *jihad* means to strive) against the desires of the self is considered the greater *jihad*, which makes '*Jihad in the Way of Allah*' (fighting for Allah) the lesser *jihad*. This idea is based upon a story mentioned in a 12th Century book *The History of Baghdad*, by Yahya ibn al 'Ala', who said:*"We were told by Layth, on the authority of 'Ata', on the authority of Abu Rabah, on the authority of Jabir, who said, 'The Prophet returned from one of his battles, and thereupon told us, 'You have arrived with an excellent arrival, you have come from the Lesser Jihad to the Greater Jihad - the striving of a servant (of Allah) against his desires."*

The first thing to note is that the first time this hadith appears is in the 12th century. A full five centuries after Muhammad died! It is totally absent from the major hadith collections namely Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Dawud, Tirmidhi, etc. The idea that 'inner struggle' is the primary form of *jihad* also directly contradicts the Qur'an. In Qur'an 4:95-96, it is made clear what the most important form of *jihad* is: *"Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled - and the mujahideen, [who strive and fight] in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives. Allah has preferred the mujahideen through their wealth and their lives over those who remain [behind], by degrees. And to both Allah has promised the best [reward]. But Allah has preferred the mujahideen over those who remain [behind] with a great reward."*

It is because of the above that the classic scholars of Islam dismiss this *hadith* and its very shaky chain of transmission as 'weak' or 'fabricated'. Some examples:

- Ibn Taymiyyah: *This hadith has no sources and nobody whomsoever in the field of Islamic knowledge has narrated it. Jihad against the disbelievers is the most noble of actions and moreover it is the most important action for the sake of mankind."* (Al-Furqan p. 44-45)
- Al Bayhaqi: *"Its chain of narration is weak. (Da'eef)"*

The 'inner struggle' *hadith* is also contradicted by several *sahih* (sound) *hadiths*. Examples could be multiplied, but I will restrict myself to a sampling from the most celebrated and trusted collections (Sahih Bukhari , Sahih Muslim and Sunan Ibn Majah):

- Abu Hurayrah narrated: *"The Prophet was asked: 'O Rasoolullah! What deed could be an equivalent to Jihaad Fi Sabeelillaah (Fighting in the Cause of Allah)?' He answered: "You do not have the strength to do that deed." (The narrator said): They repeated the question twice or thrice. Every time he answered: "You do not have the strength to do it." When the question was asked for the third time, he said: "One who goes out for Jihaad is like a person who keeps fasting, stands in prayer (constantly), (obeying) Allah's (behests contained in) the Aayah (of the Qur'an), and does not exhibit any lassitude in fasting and praying until the Mujaahid returns from Jihaad Fi Sabeelillaah ('Jihad in the Way of Allah' i.e. fighting)."* (Sahih Muslim 4636)

- *Abu Hurayrah narrated: A man came to Allah's Messenger and said, "Guide me to such a deed as equals Jihaad (in reward)." He replied, "I do not find such a deed." Then he added, "Can you, while the Mujaahid has gone for Jihaad, enter your masjid to perform Salaat without ceasing and observe Sawm without breaking it?" The man said, "But who can do that?"* (Sahih Bukhari 4:41)

- *Allah's Apostle was asked, "What is the best deed?" He replied, "To believe in Allah and His Apostle (Muhammad). The questioner then asked, "What is the next (in goodness)? He replied, "To participate in Jihad (religious fighting) in Allah's Cause."* (Sahih Bukhari 1:2:26)

- *It was narrated that Amr bin Abasah said: "I came to the Prophet and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, which Jihad is best?' He said: '(That of a man) whose blood is shed and his horse is wounded."* (Sunan Ibn Majah 2794)

It should be clear from the above that the idea that *'jihad against the self'* is the most important form of *jihad* has no basis whatsoever in orthodox Islamic teaching. The reason why so many modern Muslims latch on to a very weak *hadith* with this message, written half a millennium after the death of Muhammad, has nothing to do with a desire to remain faithful to the clear teaching of Muhammad but it is rather a desperate attempt to get away from it.

The troubling message of the 'most peaceful verse in the Qur'an'.
Whenever it is asserted that Islam teaches violence against unbelievers, Islamic apologists are usually quick to respond by stating that the Qur'an teaches that to kill an 'innocent' is to kill all of humanity (Qur'an 5:32). The first thing to note is that this statement is not authentically Islamic at all as it was plagiarized from the Jewish Midrash. It is, furthermore, interesting that apologists almost never quote this verse in full (so much for reading the Qur'an 'in context').

Qur'an 5:32-33 actually reads as follows: "*On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person - **unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land** - it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then although there came to them Our messengers with clear signs, yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in the land. The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite*

sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter." (Qur'an 5:32-33)

It should immediately be obvious that this verse is not a blanket condemnation of all forms of killing. Those who spread 'mischief' in the land are by no means innocent and should be killed. A lot will therefore hang on what 'mischief' actually means according to the Qur'an. Let us now turn to the two most venerable books of *tafsir* (interpretation) in Sunni Islam. The two collections in question are accepted as authoritative to the extent that Sunni Muslims who reject their interpretations of the text of the Qur'an can be accused of teaching *bidah* (innovation), making them heretics!

- Tafsir Ibn Khatir: *The Meaning of Mischief/Corruption - Their **mischief is disobeying Allah**, because whoever disobeys Allah on the earth, or commands that Allah be disobeyed, he has committed mischief on the earth).*
- Tafsir Ibn Abbas: *Whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, **or because of idolatry**, it shall be as if he killed mankind.*

To state it as plainly as possible: The traditional interpretations of this text equate 'mischief' with unbelief. Muslim scholars tend, in light of the above, to restrict the application of this verse by stating that it teaches that **Muslim life** is sacred. Unbelievers can, therefore, not expect any protection from this verse.

This is confirmed by a *hadith* in Sahih Bukhari where this principle is explicitly stated: "*Allah's Apostle said, "I have been ordered to fight the people till they say: 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah.' And if they say so, pray like our prayers, face our Qibla and slaughter as we slaughter,**then their blood and property will be sacred to us**.*" (Sahih Bukhari 1:8:387) So what if you are not 'innocent' by being an idolater? The next verse (5:33) spells out your fate. Those who '*make mischief in the land*' should be '*killed, crucified and have limbs amputated*'! It is deeply ironic that a verse

advocating the violent death of unbelievers is cherry picked for a single noble sounding (and plagiarized!) statement and that this is then presented as a stirring call for peace and tolerance.

Should there indeed be 'No Compulsion in Religion'?

One of the favorite verses of those claiming that Islam actually preaches peace towards unbelievers is Qur'an 2:256: "*Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.*" This verse was 'revealed' when Muhammad's movement was not yet in the ascendency and it should therefore be seen as a plea for tolerance on behalf of the Muslims. It cannot be understood as a principle to be applied by Muslims when they are in power.

This is confirmed by the fact that it is contradicted by several later revelations. One example of a contradictory verse is Qur'an 8:39: "*And fight them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah. And if they cease - then indeed, Allah is Seeing of what they do.*" Note that conversion to Islam ('*Until all religion is for Allah*') is here indicated as a military objective, which makes a mockery of '*no compulsion in religion*'. A contradiction like this can only be resolved through an application of the 'Law of Abrogation' where the later revelation replaces the earlier one. Thus, the later "*fight until all religion is for Allah*" (Qur'an 8:39) trumps the earlier "*no compulsion in religion.*" (Qur'an 2:256)

In summary: The Qur'an is full of incitements to violence against unbelievers. These incitements carry immense textual and scriptural authority and every effort by so-called moderates to explain them away fails miserably. This, unfortunately, is a reality that every non-Muslim will have to come to terms with.

5. ‎الحـرب دار‎ (Dar al Harb) - The Land of the Sword

Recently a photograph appeared of a building in an area under the control of the Islamic State (ISIS). On it the following statement was spray-painted: *"The Islamic State will not have borders, only fronts!"* This succinctly captures the venerable Islamic idea that the world is divided into two abodes 'The Land of Islam' (*Dar al-Islam*) and 'The Land of the Sword' (*Dar al-Harb*).

Unlike the other words and concepts in this book the phrase 'Land of the Sword' cannot be traced directly back to the Qur'an and hadiths. It is, rather, an attempt by later generations of Islamic scholars to define and codify the attitude of the residents of the lands of Islam towards those who have not submitted to the message of Muhammad (see for example the pre-eminent Sunni manual of jurisprudence *'The Reliance of the Traveller'*[1]). As such it became the primary way in which millions of Muslims view the world.

The main point of the 'House of Islam/House of the Sword' division is the fact that Muslim lands should never be content to live in perpetual peace with countries and territories bordering them. Temporary truces may be entered into but *'The Reliance of the Traveller'* makes it clear that Muslim rulers and individuals living in territories bordering that of unbelievers should strive hard to extend the geographical spread of Islam. Hence the ISIS graffiti stating that there can only ever be 'fronts' and not borders.

Is the 'House of Islam/House of the Sword' division simply an antiquated curiosity from the history of Islamic jurisprudence? Certainly not! A simple look at an atlas will clearly demonstrate that it is a perilous thing to be living in a country dominated by unbelievers bordering a state dominated by Muslims. As Samuel Huntingdon famously pointed out in his book 'The Clash of Civilizations and the Coming World Order': *"Islam has bloody borders."*

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[1] Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Masri & Nuh Ha Mim Keller. (1997). *Reliance of the Traveller: The Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law Umdat Al-Salik.* (p. 944, w43.2). Beltsville, MD: Amana Corporation.

The following is a very brief rundown of areas where Islam borders territories dominated by followers of other religions or ideologies and the resulting conflicts:

- *Islam bordering African Christianity and Tribal Religions:* Insurgency by Boko Haram in Nigeria, decades long jihad in southern Sudan, repeated attacks by Al-Shabab in Kenya.
- *Islam bordering Hinduism*: Decades long conflict on the Indian-Pakistani border and in Jammu and Kashmir.
- *Islam bordering Eastern Orthodox Christianity*: Bloody insurgency in the Caucasus (e.g. Chechnya)
- *Islam bordering Chinese Civilization*: Ongoing campaign by Muslim rebels in the Western Xinjiang province of China.
- *Islam bordering Southeast Asian Buddhism*: Bloody insurgency in southern Thailand, launched by those who would like to secede from Thailand to create an Islamic state.
- *Islam bordering Judaism*: Decades long *intifada* with strong theological overtones (e.g. Hamas denies the right of Israel to exist based on the Qur'an and hadith).
- *Islam bordering Southeast Asian Catholicism*: Intractable and bloody conflict in the southern Philippines, again with the ultimate aim of setting up an Islamic state.

This very brief and incomplete rundown should make it clear that Huntingdon was entirely correct in his assessment that '*Islam has bloody borders*'. The idea of the 'Dar al Harb' is, therefore, still alive and well. In fact, one of the most reliable predictors of the likelihood of a border conflict is the presence of a Muslim majority neighbor. This power of the idea of Dar al-Harb to inspire such conflicts should be honestly acknowledged by those seeking to manage and contain such conflicts.

6. ردة (Riddah) – Apostasy

The next word we will be looking at is particularly relevant to those non-Muslims who are thinking of converting to Islam.

The essential intolerance of Islam is nowhere more apparent than in the way that Islam treats those (apostates) who abandon it. The Qur'an makes it clear that abandoning Islam is a very serious sin. It, therefore, contains many blood curdling reminders that those who do so will suffer a terrible fate. One example: *"Lo! Those who disbelieve after their (profession of) belief, and afterward grow violent in disbelief: their repentance will not be accepted. And such are those who are astray. Lo! Those who disbelieve, and die in disbelief, the (whole) earth full of gold would not be accepted from such a one if it were offered as a ransom (for his soul). Theirs will be a painful doom and they will have no helpers."* (Qur'an 3:90-91) The fact that threats like these were even necessary is quite interesting. Could it be that a very large number of people saw through the prophet and that the only way they could be persuaded to remain committed to Islam was through this kind of dire threat?

The *hadiths* make it clear that the 'painful doom' reserved for apostates is not merely a matter for eternity, but some of it must also be meted out by Muslims on this side of the grave. Some examples:

- Muhammad issued a chilling command on how apostates should be treated by the Muslim community: "*Whoever discards his Islamic religion, then kill him."* (Sahih Bukhari 4:52:260)

- Muhammad felt so strongly about the possibility of apostasy that he made apostasy from Islam one of only three circumstances under which a person who had previously cited the Islamic confession of faith can be killed: "*Allah's Apostle said, "The blood of a Muslim who confesses that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that I am His Apostle, cannot be shed except in three cases: In Qisas for*

murder, a married person who commits illegal sexual intercourse and the one who reverts from Islam (apostate) and leaves the Muslims." (Sahih Bukhari 9:83:17)

- The *hadiths* also contain many examples of Muslims willing to carry out the punishment of Allah against apostates: "*Narrated 'Ikrima: Some Zanadiqa (atheists) were brought to 'Ali and he burnt them. The news of this event, reached Ibn 'Abbas who said, "If I had been in his place, I would not have burnt them, as Allah's Apostle forbade it, saying, 'Do not punish anybody with Allah's punishment (fire).' I would have killed them according to the statement of Allah's Apostle, 'Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him.'* (Sahih Bukhari 9:84:57). Another example: "*Narrated Abu Musa: A man embraced Islam and then reverted back to Judaism. Mu'adh bin Jabal came and saw the man with Abu Musa. Mu'adh asked, "What is wrong with this (man)?" Abu Musa replied, "He embraced Islam and then reverted back to Judaism." Mu'adh said, "I will not sit down unless you kill him (as it is) the verdict of Allah and His Apostle*" (Sahih Bukhari 9:89:271)

There can be no doubt at all, in light of the evidence presented above, that the prescribed Islamic punishment for apostasy is death. This is not merely an archaic teaching that has long ago been dispensed with. All four Sunni legal schools as well as orthodox Shi'a doctrine agree that apostates should be executed. This is demonstrated by the fact that people are often tried (and executed) for apostasy in countries where Islamic law (*shari'a*) is the law of the land. Even in places where *shari'a* is not consistently applied, apostates often live in fear of vigilante action from Muslims eager to carry out Muhammad's wishes.

The teaching that apostates should be killed is without parallel in any other religion or belief system. It is only Islam among the faiths and ideologies of the world that demands death for abandoning it. It should also be noted, as the *hadith* quoted above make clear, that the punishment for apostasy does

not only apply to those who were born into Islam but also to those who converted to Islam and then decided to turn their backs on it.

This aspect of the teaching of Islam should be of particular concern to those who are thinking of converting to Islam. They need to know that, while entry into Islam is relatively easy, leaving Islam is not such a simple matter. Those who leave can, instead, be in real peril. This fact should cause everyone, including those born into Islam, to pause and reflect on what Islam's ruling on apostasy tells us about the religion. What are we to make of a faith whose founder decreed that those who follow it should be kept inside through the use of death threats? At the very least, it should tell us that Muhammad was not certain that proof and argument would be sufficient to keep devotees loyal to Islam.

7. شريعة (Legislation) - Islamic Law

Islamic law is commonly known as *shari'a*. *Shari'a* is much more than a legal code. It seeks to govern every aspect of the life of the Muslim (and in fact of the whole world) as it is presented as the perfect Law of Allah. Non-believers should, therefore, take care to familiarize themselves with the provisions of shari'a, especially as it pertains to the treatment of unbelievers.

It is obligatory for Muslims to follow *shari'a* in all of its ordinances. Allah, in fact, declares those who decline to operate according to his law as stepping outside of the fold of Islam: "*If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) Unbelievers*" (Qur'an 5:44-45) This means that for the devout Muslim any legal system that does not have *shari'a* at its core will be totally unacceptable. The Qur'an says as much: "*Judge thou between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, but beware of them lest they beguile thee from any of that (teaching) which Allah hath sent down to thee.*" (Qur'an 5:49-50)

This point is further reinforced in the following *hadith* where it is stated categorically that a Muslim is absolutely forbidden from obeying laws and decrees that are not in line with *shari'a*: "*Narrated 'Abdullah: The Prophet said, "A Muslim has to listen to and obey (the order of his ruler) whether he likes it or not, as long as his orders involve not one in disobedience (to Allah), but if an act of disobedience (to Allah) is imposed one should not listen to it or obey it.*" (Sahih Bukhari 9:89:258)

The unassailable position that *shari'a* is supposed to hold in the minds of Muslims is, to say the least, highly problematic. This is because *shari'a* is significantly at odds with modern sensibilities, human rights and all non-Islamic legal codes. Adherence to *shari'a* is, therefore, bound to place a Muslim community where it is widely followed on a collision course with the non-Muslims around them.

Pointing out all the ways in which *shari'a* is incompatible with modern values and human rights will probably require a separate book so a few very important examples will have to suffice. In general, it can be stated that *shari'a:*

- Criminalizes actions that are not crimes under other jurisdictions
- Commands actions that are crimes under other jurisdictions
- Is fundamentally unfair in its treatment of witnesses
- Imposes cruel and inhuman punishments.

Each of these points will be briefly discussed below.

7.1. *Shari'a*'s Wide Net of Criminality

It should be understood that *shari'a* was designed to control every aspect of the lives of society and individuals. It is for this reason that certain actions which in many parts of the world would be legally neutral are depicted as firmly on the wrong side of *shari'a*. The following are, for example, regarded as serious crimes under *shari'a*:

- *Apostasy* (i.e. leaving the Islamic religion). In some jurisdictions where shari'a is consistently applied, apostates can expect the death penalty.

- *Free Speech.* Blasphemy is regarded as a very serious crime under shari'a. Criticism of the prophet is regarded as especially serious. In line with Muhammad's treatment of his critics most *shari'a* codes demand the death penalty for blasphemy.

- *Adultery.* The traditional *shari'a* punishment for adultery is stoning, this despite the fact that this punishment is mandated by the hadith collections and not the Qur'an.

- *Consumption of Alcohol and Games of Chance.* Shari'a law in this area is based on Qur'an 5:90: "*O you who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divine arrows are only an infamy of Satan's*

handiwork. Leave it aside that you may succeed." First offenses are generally punished with a whipping with more serious consequences for repeat offenses.

- *Homosexuality. Shari'a* codes differ on the severity of punishment for acts of homosexuality but not on whether homosexuals should be punished. On the latter, they are in complete agreement. Many *shari'a* codes demand the death penalty for homosexuality.

Many other examples could be supplied of actions that would normally not attract the attention of most legal systems but are crimes under *shari'a.* It should be emphasized that these 'crimes' are still aggressively prosecuted in the Islamic world. Because of this many examples of people losing their lives because of apostasy, blasphemy, adultery and homosexuality in the 21ˢᵗ century Islamic world can be cited.

7.2. *Shari'a*'s Illegal Commands

In addition to regarding certain normally non-criminal acts as crimes, *shari'a* also positively commands certain actions that would normally be viewed as crimes. Some examples:

- *Domestic Violence:* The Qur'an is clear men should beat their wives if they persist in disobedience: "*Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them.*" (Qur'an 4:34) Wife beating is therefore perfectly legal and even actively encouraged under *shari'a* codes.

- *Sex Discrimination: Shari'a* follows the Qur'an's instructions on inheritance and rules of evidence. According to this a woman can only

inherit half of what a man can (Qur'an 4:11) The testimony of a woman is also worth only half of that of a man (Qur'an 2:282) Shari'a therefore entrenches gender inequality by recognizing the legality of discrimination against women.

- *Underage Sex:* Because of Muhammad's personal example and the clear teaching of the Qur'an, *shari'a* codes do not include adequate restrictions outlawing sex with minors. It is, on the contrary, the case that any effort by governments in the Muslim world to bring the age of consent in line with international standards is bound to be met with fierce resistance by Islamic religious establishments.

- *Slavery:* The Qur'an and hadiths do not contain a single condemnation of slavery but treat it as a fact of life. Add to this Muhammad's personal example as a slave owner, and it will quickly become clear why *shari'a* does not contain any provisions outlawing slavery. While it is true that slavery is not prevalent within the modern Muslim world, this is certainly not due to any restraining effect exerted by *shari'a* based legal systems.

7.3. The Fundamental Inequality of *Shari'a*

One of the most important principles for a legal system to be regarded as just is equality before the law. In other words, the testimony of any witness should be of equal value to that of any other witness. A system where the value of a person's testimony is diminished simply because of who they are, e.g. a woman or a non-Muslim, would rightly be regarded as fundamentally unfair by most right-thinking people. Yet this is exactly how *shari'a* operates. Not all people who stand in the witness box are equal, not by a long shot. The testimony of a woman under *shari'a* is worth only 50% of that of a man (see above). Think of the implications this would have in rape cases. If it is the word of a man against that of a woman he will always come out on top under *shari'a* rules of evidence. Inequality before the law also extends to non-Muslims. Under some *shari'a* codes, non-Muslims are

absolutely forbidden to testify against Muslims. Under others, their testimony will be valued at a certain percentage of the value of the testimony of a Muslim. This means that non-Muslims will always have the decks stacked against them in lawsuits where they have to testify against a Muslim.

7.4. *Shari'a*'s Barbaric Punishments

Modern human rights principles identify 'cruel and unusual punishment' as one of the most basic and fundamental violations of human rights. Unfortunately, Islamic law mandates exactly this kind of punishment for a variety of offenses, some of which would not be regarded as crimes in other jurisdictions. These punishments include:

Amputation: There are two verses of the Qur'an (and plenty of hadiths) that mandate the removal of limbs for offenses against Islamic law. They are Qur'an 5:33: "*The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter*"; and Qur'an 5:38: "*As to the thief, Male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example, from Allah, for their crime: and Allah is Exalted in power.*"

Stoning: Although not directly mandated in the Qur'an, stoning still forms part of the shari'a legal codes. This is because of the insistence of Muhammad's wife Aisha (supported by Caliph Umar) that the Qur'an once contained a verse commanding the stoning of adulterers (Sunan Ibn Majah, Book of Nikah, Hadith Number 1934).

Crucifixion: Executing criminals through crucifixion is an ancient and barbaric practice that amounts to terrible torture before the victim dies. Yet it is commanded as a punishment in Qur'an 5:33 (see above) and is therefore an acceptable punishment under shari'a.

This section merely skimmed the surface as far as the incompatibility of *shari'a* and modern values is concerned. It should be sufficient, however, to convince the reader that the application of Islamic law is certainly not a recipe for utopia but that it will instead inevitably lead to the entrenchment of inequality, injustice and cruelty.

8. تقيـــة (Taqiyya) - Dissimulation

When it comes to ethics and morality, most people would rank truthfulness very high among the values they would like to aspire to. Islam's relationship with truth and truthfulness is rather complex but we can, at the very least, say that Muslims are not required to tell the truth under all circumstances and that deceit is sometimes actively encouraged. This is the case because Muhammad advocated a system of ethics where the guiding question is: 'What will be good for Islam in these circumstances?' The guiding question is, therefore, not 'What is true'? Because of this it is perfectly permissible to tell lies and half-truths, especially if they are told to non-Muslims, if this can serve the interests of Islam.

The principle of using deception to further Islamic interests is very firmly established in the Qur'an. The following texts form the basis for the doctrine of *taqiyya* (dissimulation or deception) as an acceptable part of Islamic morality:

- *"Anyone who, after accepting faith in Allah, utters Unbelief,- except under compulsion, his heart remaining firm in Faith - but such as open their breast to Unbelief, on them is Wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a dreadful Penalty."* (Qur'an 16:106) This verse establishes the principle that a Muslim can lie about being a Muslim if he believes that he will be harmed if his Muslim identity becomes known. Qur'an 40:28 provides an example of someone who hid his faith in this way. This principle is, as we shall see, extended in the *hadiths* to what might be termed offensive deception, gaining people's trust by pretending not to be a Muslim and then harming them.

- *"[This is] An announcement from Allah and His Messenger, to the people (assembled) on the day of the Great Pilgrimage,- that Allah and His Messenger dissolve (treaty) obligations with the Pagans.* (Qur'an 9:3) This verse is breathtaking in its cynicism. Solemn treaties, probably

sworn in the name of Allah are simply dissolved by declaring that Allah and Muhammad are free of obligations to unbelievers. This establishes the principle that treaties, oaths and promises need only be kept if they are advantageous to Muslims. If an advantage can be gained by disregarding such obligations, the opportunity should be taken to do so for the sake of Islam. Muslims are, furthermore, assured that Allah will not hold "thoughtlessness in oaths" against them. (Qur'an 2:225)

- *Let not the believers Take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than believers: if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah: except by way of precaution, that ye may Guard yourselves from them.* (Qur'an 3:28) This is the infamous verse whereby Muslims are commanded not to befriend non-Muslims. There is one important exception, however. They can befriend them "by way of precaution" as a means of "guarding against them." This text is widely interpreted as teaching that Muslims are allowed to pretend they are friends with non-Muslims as a means of safeguarding their own position in society.

What all the verses quoted above have in common is that they teach Muslims that truth is not something fixed, but that lies and deception may sometimes be employed for the good of Islam. This conclusion is strongly confirmed in the *hadiths* where plenty of examples are presented of Muslims being praised for deceitful actions that strengthened the Muslim cause. Some examples:

- Sahih Bukhari (52:269) quotes Muhammad as saying "*War is deceit*". The following *hadiths* then go on to show how the principle of using deceit in war can be applied. Sahih Bukhari (52:271) is particularly revealing: "*The Prophet said, "Who is ready to kill Ka'b bin Ashraf (i.e. a Jew)." Muhammad bin Maslama replied, "Do you like me to kill him?" The Prophet replied in the affirmative. Muhammad bin Maslama said, "Then allow me to say what I like." The Prophet replied, "I do (i.e. allow*

you)." Note carefully what happened here: One of Muhammad's followers asks for permission to lie, and it is immediately granted to him. What happened next is described in Sahih Bukhari (53:369). Bin Maslama goes to the person marked for death by Muhammad and pretends that he is deeply disillusioned by the 'prophet'. In this way, he gained the person's trust and was admitted into his inner circle. After the 'friendship' was firmly established, Maslama asked Ka'b whether he could smell the perfume on his head, an act that could only take place between trusted friends. Trusting his 'friend', Ka'b allows this and is immediately grabbed and killed! "*War is deceit*" indeed.

- Muhammad allowed his followers to enter into peace treaties on the basis of false information. This principle is stated in Sahih Bukhari 49:857: *Narrated Um Kulthum bint Uqba: That she heard Allah's Apostle saying, "He who makes peace between the people by inventing good information or saying good things, is not a liar."*

The idea that it is perfectly acceptable to lie under certain circumstances was not only applied to relations with non-Muslims. Husbands and wives are also allowed to lie to each other for the sake of their relationship. How this kind of deception will lead to good outcomes is not explained: "*Ibn Shihab said he did not hear that exemption was granted in anything what the people speak as lie but in three cases: in battle, for bringing reconciliation amongst persons and the narration of the words of the husband to his wife, and the narration of the words of a wife to her husband (in a twisted form in order to bring reconciliation between them).*" (Sahih Muslim 33:3603)

That dissimulation on this scale is actively commanded is deeply worrying from a non-Muslim perspective. Deceiving us can be viewed as a positive virtue and this fact should at the very least cause us to critically evaluate the truthfulness of statements regarding the intentions of those following Islam in our communities.

What can be done?

I am afraid that the picture that I have painted of Islam's view of those who do not follow its teachings in '*Arabic for Unbelievers*' is not a happy or sunny one. I make no apology for this. It is far better to face up to uncomfortable truths than to wish them away or dismiss them with pious platitudes like the tired '*Islam is a religion of peace*' line.

This obviously leaves us with the question on how us unbelievers should respond.

While the response to the violence and hatred towards unbelievers that are part and parcel of the Qur'an can take many forms there is one form that it certainly **should not** take. Unfortunately this is often exactly the response of our political leaders: Denial.

Whenever yet another atrocity in the name of Islam occurs we are almost immediately assured by our leaders (most of whom have probably never even picked up a Qur'an) that 'This has nothing to do with Islam'. Much handwringing about 'addressing the causes of radicalization' will also inevitably follow. When it is pointed out that the 'causes of radicalization' can often simply be a close adherence to the core texts of Islam (the Qur'an and hadith) those voicing this obvious fact will often be shouted down with cries of 'Islamophobe'!

How much longer can we afford to be blind and deaf to the existential threat that the application of Islamic teaching on unbelievers poses to the lives and wellbeing of non-Muslims? How much more evidence (from the text of the Qur'an and from the lived experience of millions) have to be piled up before we honestly face up to the fact that we have a massive problem on our hands?

So if denial is not a viable solution, what is? I would suggest that a thoroughgoing critique of the truth claims of Islam has to be right at the top of the list of possible responses. If the theological superstructure of Islam

can be successfully challenged, secondary aspects of its teachings (i.e. how it views unbelievers) also immediately become suspect. To put it another way: Undermining Islam will make the world a safer place for non-Muslims.

Unfortunately decades of censorship through 'political correctness' have placed Islam essentially off-bounds in terms of criticism. It is believed that probing too deeply into the beliefs of others must somehow be insensitive, intolerant or even 'hateful'. Unfortunately many members of the Muslim community strengthen this erroneous perception by denouncing all criticisms of Islam as personal attacks against them and their communities. This is a classic 'have your cake and eat it' scenario because these same followers of Islam would often have no problem with vigorous criticism of other faiths and ideologies.

How to get beyond this? Well, we must simply affirm that questioning beliefs is not the same thing as hating human beings and get on with the task of subjecting Islam to a vigorous and forceful critique. Only when non-Muslims can confidently recite some of the many contradictions in the Qur'an or point out the questionable aspects of Muhammad's biography will this task be complete. Only in a world where Islam cannot be preached without many unbelievers immediately responding with well-argued and compelling counter arguments will the world be made safe for us unbelievers.

Instead of this kind of searching critique of Islam far too many people continue to insist 'This is not about Islam', thus ensuring that the true root cause of radicalization and violence (the Qur'an and hadith) remain undisturbed. We cannot afford to continue in this misguided way!

This is one of the primary reasons why I wrote my book '*Questioning Islam*'. In it I subject Islam to the kind of critical scrutiny described above by asking:

- Can the traditional Islamic historical accounts be trusted?
- Is the Qur'an a 'Perfect Book, Perfectly Preserved'?
- Was Muhammad indeed a 'Beautiful Pattern of Conduct'?

These are the kinds of questions that should constantly be on the lips of those who are confronted by the resurgence of Islam all around our world. May I, therefore, strongly encourage you to get a copy of *Questioning Islam* as a means of educating yourself to ask these questions in ways that will fundamentally challenge the truth of Islam?

You can get your copy of *Questioning Islam* at: http://www.qi-book.com

Thanks for reading '*Arabic for Unbelievers'*
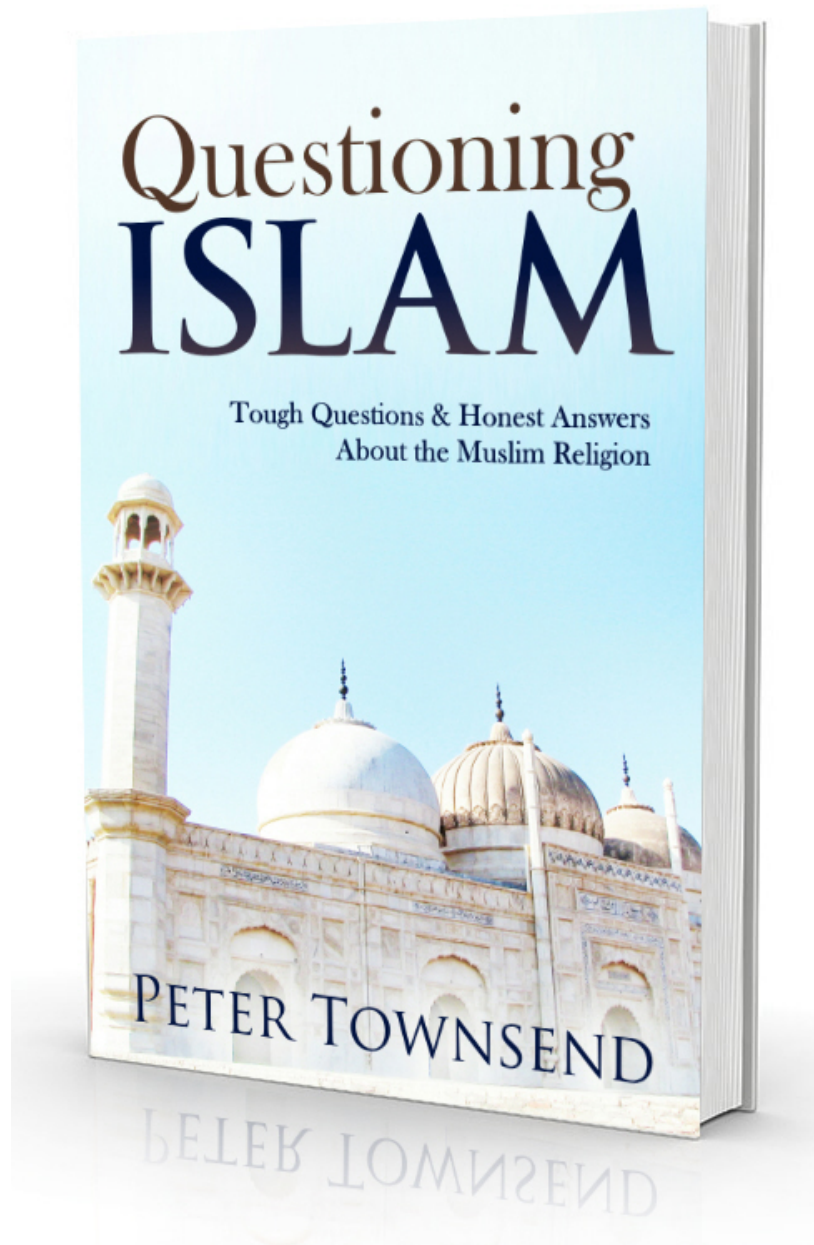
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Responding to the truth-claims of Islam will be one of the most important challenges of the 21ˢᵗ century. Equip yourself for this task by reading '*Questioning Islam*' by Peter Townsend

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