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THE BLOG

Targeting Muslims Is the Real Threat to Peace

🕒 12/29/2015 10:17 pm ET | **Updated** Dec 29, 2015



Seyed Hossein Mousavian

Head of Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council (1997-2005)



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Years from now, historians will likely look back at this period in American history as one of heightened prejudice amongst a significant portion of the public and shortsightedness amongst many political leaders. You do not even have to stretch the rhetoric of some Republican presidential candidates too much to [spot](#) metaphors comparing Islam to Nazism! However, in this seeming contest to see who can be the most Islamophobic between the GOP presidential candidates, frontrunner Donald Trump has clearly outdone the rest.

Donald Trump's [comments](#) that Muslims should be banned from the United States, while not representative of what all Americans believe, reflect the [negative view](#) of Muslims that most Republicans have. Trump's rhetoric and the perception that many Americans have of Muslims in a way hits at the heart of the reason for the detrimental nature of many U.S. policies towards the Muslim world. The root problem is that while politicians like Trump and Rubio are often quick to demonize all Muslims and blame them for acts of terror, little to no effort is given to really understand the root causes and motivations for such terrorism. With such a mentality, it is impossible to pursue a truly effective counterterrorism policy.

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Nevertheless, Trump has paradoxically [asked](#) the right question, saying in a recent *CNN* interview: "We have to find out where does this hatred come from ... We have to find out why and where is it coming from." Trump is correct that the perception of the United States in the Muslim world, [particularly](#) in the Middle East, is extremely negative. To get at the root of why this is so, however, requires one to make a critical assessment of U.S. policies and actions in the region over the past several decades.

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The consensus among serious observers of the Middle East is that the reasons for antipathy in the region towards the United States are multifold, having to do with: the United States' unconditional support of Israel and its expansionary and oppressive policies against the Palestinians; propping up of a host of unrepresentative, corrupt and repressive dictatorships throughout the Middle East and North Africa; and widespread military intervention in the Muslim world, from drone attacks that have [claimed](#) tens of thousands of civilian lives to whole-scale invasions that have [cost](#) the lives of hundreds of thousands of Muslims. [Nearly 80 percent](#) of the people living under the Palestinian Authority and Hamas qualify America as an "enemy." About 85 percent of Egyptians and Jordanians and 73 percent of Turks, all key U.S. allies in the Middle East, have a [similar opinion](#). Polls [show](#) that 7 of the top 10 countries that view the United States most unfavorably are Muslim countries, while only 1 of the top 10 countries that view America the most favorably is Muslim.

These above-mentioned drivers of radicalization have allowed extremist groups in the Muslim world to gain some degree of support, particularly in weak or collapsed states like Libya, Iraq and Syria. Of these terrorist groups, what American decision makers most need to understand is that there is another common thread between them that is in fact the critical ingredient to their very formation. This is Wahhabi Salafism, the [ideology](#) of all jihadist terrorist groups, a puritanical Islamic sect that disdains the other branches of Islam -- whether Shia or the four traditional schools of Sunni Islamic thought (Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi'i) -- and is based in and exported by a key U.S. strategic ally: Saudi Arabia.

To counter the threat of terrorism, strategies should be adopted that address these causal factors that have given birth to terrorist groups from the self-proclaimed Islamic State to Al Qaeda and Boko Haram. Casting blame on the whole religion of Islam is not only nonsensical, but also immensely counterproductive. Further, senseless acts like [H.R. 158](#), a bill that was recently signed into law that requires individuals from 38 normally visa-exempt countries to attain a visa to enter the United States if they have travelled to Iran since 2011 or are dual-Iranian nationals,

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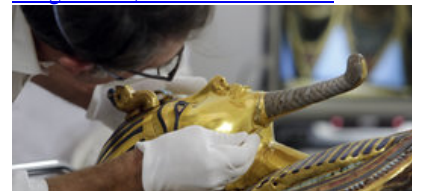
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not only does not aid in the fight against terrorism, but also threatens to undermine the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal. If the Iran deal were to be scuttled in such a fashion, the region would certainly plunge into further instability.

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Casting blame on the whole religion of Islam is not only nonsensical, but also immensely counterproductive.

By targeting Iranians in this fashion, this law represents another bizarre and pointless measure adopted by the United States in order to ostensibly counter the threat of terrorism. Not a single perpetrator of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, or the various international terrorist attacks since then, whether in Paris or San Bernardino this year or the 7/7 London bombing or any other similar attack, has been Iranian. On the contrary, most of the people who have committed these atrocities are from countries allied with the United States, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan -- countries this H.R. 158 did not mention at all.

While Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps is at the forefront in the fight against ISIS and Al Qaeda in the Middle East, three new pieces of Iran-related sanctions [legislation](#) have also been proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives in recent weeks against the IRGC. Such sanctions legislations will limit the impact of sanction relief agreed within the nuclear deal, limit Iran's ability to fight ISIS and Al Qaeda and stymie any chance for broader outreach between Iran and the United States. Such a reality would increase U.S. tensions with the Muslims world sharply as well.

The threat of terrorism is real not only for the United States, but also for the states of the Middle East and the whole world. As such, the best way to marginalize this threat now is not to frame religion as contributing to terrorism, but as a tool to end it. If mobilized effectively, religious leaders can be more effective in the fight against terrorism than any political leaders or military/intelligence operations. This is due to that fact that Islam is explicitly against terrorism, with the Quran (Surah 5, verse 32) [declaring](#): "if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land -- it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind."

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The best way to marginalize this threat now is not to frame religion as contributing to terrorism, but as a tool to end it.

I offer a proposal for political leaders in the United States and across the world to counter the immediate threat posed by ISIS and other similar groups. In order to deny these terrorist organizations any religious legitimacy whatsoever and



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effectively organize the masses of the Middle East and beyond against them, Muslim religious leaders from the center of Sunni learning (Al-Azhar University in Cairo) and the Shia theological centers of Qom, Iran and Najaf, Iraq should meet with the imaginative Pope Francis to promote religious unity, harmony and discuss ways to control religious extremism.

With this religious backing and authority, political leaders of all the relevant countries should then hold meetings to develop a common, coordinated strategy against terrorist groups, based on the recommendations brought forth by the prominent religious figures. This path of enhancing religious dialogue will marginalize extremist voices and allow for groups like ISIS to be defeated in a lasting way.

Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian is a scholar at Princeton University and a former Iranian diplomat. His latest book, "Iran and the United States: An Insider's view on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace" was released in May 2014.

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**Walter Richards** · New York, New York

The reality is that there are too many fundamentalist Muslims who while not actually terrorists do agree with the radical ideology. Europe right now is having problems with Muslims immigrants. they don't intergrate into Eurpoean society and there are many instances of out and out conflict. The radicals, of which there are quite a few million view Muslims with different interpretations of Islam as non Moslem apostates. Getting together Muslim groups to fight terrorism would not work since those with extremeist views don't view the others as Muslims

Like · Reply · 26 · Dec 30, 2015 7:08am

**Minhaz Mallu**

Walter Richards the reason why europe has a lot of immigrants at the moment is due to wars that have been occuring since 2002. Does the iraq/afghan war come to mind? Then u have fighting in libya, egypt, syria and probably other neighbouring countries aswell. Maybe thats where all the refugees are coming frm. Look at what these wars were based on, TOTAL LIES, and which leaders went to war which started all this. They the true culprits and terrorists. They should be held accountable.

Like · Reply · 8 · Dec 30, 2015 11:39am

**Muhammad Hamzah** ·

This topic is above your intellectually challenged bigotry mate!

Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 30, 2015 12:21pm

**Walter Richards** · New York, New York

Minhaz Mallu The problem with Muslim immigrants was already in the news before the recent immigrant crises, as far back as 2005

Like · Reply · 5 · Dec 30, 2015 4:24pm

[Show 10 more replies in this thread](#)**Bill Hall** · General Fu** Up at McDonald's

I do not think blame is being put upon the entire religion, though some media talking heads would have you believe that. It is beyond dispute that RADICAL muslims are causing turmoil all over the world. Moderate muslims are doing not nearly enough to offset this in the eyes of most non muslims. Because of this lack of pushback by the moderate muslims non muslims are made suspicious of all muslims. They are creating an atmosphere of doubt as to what the muslim religion is really all about and just what its long range goals are.

Like · Reply · 19 · Dec 29, 2015 11:57pm

**Lee Partyer** · London, United Kingdom

"...though some media talking heads would have you believe that." But millions ARE believing it, Bill. That's the problem...

Like · Reply · 4 · Dec 30, 2015 10:53am

**Sun Diata**

Bill Hall..the other side of the story.....

It's also beyond dispute that the foreign policies, illegal invasions, and the forceful spreading of so called democracy by western nations via bombing campaigns, are causing global turmoil. Western electorates are not doing nearly enough to offset this in the minds of Muslims. Because of the lack of pushback by western electorates against their governments, Muslims are also made suspicious of all non Muslims.

The difference being western media influences and washes over the minds of many non Muslims with it's 'we can do no wrong' rhetoric, whereas many Muslims think for themselves and look at what's going on in the world to see what's really happening in order to feel

that way.

You can't look at just one side of the story, unless you're a daily fail reader.

Like · Reply ·  6 · Dec 30, 2015 12:31pm



Peter Jacob

Sun Diata

Like · Reply ·  2 · Dec 30, 2015 6:04pm

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Kevin Charlton · Stuttgart, Germany


Nothing about the support that Iran gave to the Shias in Iraq which caused the post war coalition to fall apart and drive the Sunnis towards ISIS. No discussion about Iran's continued sponsoring of radical terrorist groups across the world that have targeted westerners, Isrealies and Jews in places such as Argentina and Bulgaria. Not a mention of the call by the Iranian leadership to destroy Isreal with nuclear weapons. Not a whisper about the Iranian continued persuit of weapons of mass destruction in violation of UN mandates. No acknowlegment of the Iranians massive violations of civil rights of gays, women, and religious minorities within Iran.

Like · Reply ·  16 · Dec 30, 2015 8:48am



Avner Montemayor · Tel Aviv, Israel

Well said

Like · Reply ·  2 · Dec 30, 2015 9:56am



Yvonne Pennink · Gemeentelijk Lyceum v. Meisjes, HBS-B

And no mention of the fact that the enmity between the various factions of Islam has existed from the inception of Islam itself, or that assissination to get rid of one's opponents has been an honored tradition going back the same period of time. The whole blown up fake outrage that protecting one's nation and citizens targets all people of a certain religion, and the religion itself, is far-fetched nonsense. There is, as usual, blame-laying against others, in this case the US, an no acknowledgement of the source of these issues, which lie in Islam, its many factions, the hatred between those ... See More

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Minhaz Mallu

Yvonne Pennink so who went to war to afghan/iraq based on total lies? Corruption runs through america like blood runs through my body. Several CIA SCANDALS, POLICE BRUTALITY, CORRUPTION WITHIN THE GOVT, come to mind. "Make the world a better place and start with yourself". I think the same would apply to u aswell and every other human being on the planet so dont go saying that to somebody else.

Like · Reply ·  2 · Dec 30, 2015 5:22pm

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Walter Duff · College of Life

As a white european with a non religious background, who can trace family roots back 1200 years, I object to an invasion of muslim people coming to my country where they do not intergrate nor do they respect my culture. I would prefer them to stay where they belong. I do not care about religion, any, period. Intelectually, gods are a hindrance to progress of mankind. If there was a natural disaster, with people in need of comfort and shelter, then yes its the right thing to accomodate - pending the rebuilding of their homes. However, man made disasters such as human conflict emanating from gre... See More

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Russell Max Person · Homeschool Father of Alex at Stay-at-home parent

This article says nothing about why islamic terrorists attack Americans and others. The author states that the vast majority of Muslims hate the US. We know that Iran has been supporting terrorism for a long time. Remember the Barbary Pirates? Remember the Turkish genocides of 1915-1921. Muslims have been at war with Christianity for hundreds of years.

Like · Reply · 14 · Dec 30, 2015 12:44am



Seth Victor

muslims have been at war with civilizations for most of the last 1400 years.

each time i read what the apologists say just reinforce my belief that it is not a religion but a form of government or at best a death cult. why we continue to allow emigration of people who do not believe in our form of government is beyond sanity

Like · Reply · 3 · Jan 1, 2016 12:11am



Yvonne Pennink · Gemeentelijk Lyceum v. Meisjes, HBS-B

Seth Victor You are correct. I am a legal immigrant. Became a naturalized US Citizen. We had to wait, we had to qualify, we had to have means, sponsors, proof that we would not depend on social services, etc., etc. and our records, health. political, etc. were thoroughly investigated.

Like · Reply · Jan 12, 2016 2:40pm



Chris Rolitsky · Yellow Springs, Ohio

"In order to deny these terrorist organizations any religious legitimacy whatsoever and effectively organize the masses of the Middle East and beyond against them, Muslim religious leaders from the center of Sunni learning (Al-Azhar University in Cairo) and the Shia theological centers of Qom, Iran and Najaf, Iraq should meet with the imaginative Pope Francis to promote religious unity, harmony and discuss ways to control religious extremism."

Muslim religious leaders the world over have supposedly already condemned Islamic terrorist attacks, to no avail. How is adding the "imaginative Pope Francis" going to help? This sounds like more dawah disguised as interfaith dialogue.

Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 31, 2015 11:00am



Stephen Scheufler · Taxpayer at None

Hey. The Pope kissed the Qur'an. Did that help? Are any Islamic prelates planning to reciprocate? I'll spare you the suspense, no matter how many Popes humble themselves (at least two in 20 years), that ain't gonna happen. Modern Islam is inherently extreme-chauvinistic at its base.

Like · Reply · 1 · Dec 31, 2015 9:48pm



Linda Zachri · Mount Royal University

Stephen Scheufler - it might make you feel better if you learned more about Islam and found out that the majority don't even recognize any equivalent of a "prelate". On the other hand most Muslims would have no problem with kissing a Bible.

Like · Reply · Jan 1, 2016 9:47am



Gerard Julien

targeting muslims is exactly what ISIS wants from us so Trump and all the right wing racist/haters and bigots in the western world are just doing that ! Now guess who the real internal enemy is !

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 31, 2015 3:33am · Edited



Alfred Siolufres

how do you know 'exactly' what they want?


Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 31, 2015 7:24am



Alvin L Howard



Good luck with this proposal. We aren't a people predisposed to the kinds of assessments you're suggesting especially when self criticism is involved. But don't stop trying. We have been known to change our minds though the process is often quite painful.

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Cameron Morris · Owner at Revolve Integrated Business Solutions

Yea, French authorities should totally put the thousands of weapons they found back in the Mosques that were hiding them.

Like · Reply ·  10 · Dec 30, 2015 12:29pm



Robert Derbenti

Boko Haram, ISIS, etc kidnap and enslave school girls because they are upset with Islamophobia in the United States!? Who thought that one up?

Like · Reply ·  10 · Dec 31, 2015 1:14am



Bob Mann

Go back to sleep Robert please

Like · Reply · Dec 31, 2015 9:39am

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