

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CIAR)

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

https://www.cair.com/op_ed/a-word-of-truth-on-jihad-and-islam/

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Nihad	<p>By Nihad Awad Word Count: 810</p> <p>There is a growing attempt by some commentators to label the recent bombings in Boston as jihad and to blame the deadly blasts on a non-existent concept they call radical Islam.</p> <p>I call radical Islam non-existent because radicalism or extremism is not permissible in Islam. Islam prohibits extremism and an essential part of the faith is moderation. A more accurate term might be Al-Qaeda ideology.</p> <p>The Quran, Islams foundational holy text, states clearly: We made you to be a community of the middle way, so that (with the example of your lives) you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind. (Quran, 2:143)</p> <p>The Quran also states: O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can best protect</p>
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both. (Quran, 4:35)

There is no such thing as radical Islam, but there are radical Muslims just as there are extremists of every other religion or belief.

But theres a huge difference between the existence of radical individuals and a religion that permits radical beliefs or actions. These radicals certainly do not represent the teachings of Islam or the behavior or beliefs of mainstream Muslims.

In one Islamic tradition, called a hadith, the Prophet Muhammad said: Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, the nights.

In recent years, we have seen the term jihadist come to be used as if it means a person who kills people out of a religious motivation, but this is terribly inaccurate.

Jihad does not mean holy war. Literally, jihad means to struggle, strive and exert effort. It is a central and broad Islamic concept that includes struggle against evil inclinations within oneself, struggle to improve the quality of life in society, struggle in the battlefield for self-defense (e.g., having a standing army for national defense), or fighting against tyranny or oppression.

For the sake of accuracy and to avoid spreading false information about a major world religion, extremist Muslims who commit crimes should be called criminals or, in cases where the definition fits, terrorists. We should not legitimize their actions by calling them jihadists, even if they attempt to call themselves by that label and seek a false religious connection or justification. These criminals should not be honored with a religious label.

Islam allows legitimate self defense, but prohibits the killing of innocent people, even in times of war or conflict. Aggression is never permitted.

And fight in the cause of God those who fight against you, and do not commit aggression. Indeed God does not love those who are aggressors, (The Quran, 2:190).

So yes, there are some Muslims who have extreme views, or mental illnesses, or political grievances, or a host of other reasons that lead them to kill people, and this is not only a tragedy and a crime but an egregious violation of the principles of Islam.

The difference between Muslim killers and killers from other backgrounds is often the way they are described by the media and viewed by the public: with Muslim killers, the crime is almost always attributed to their religion.

Because the word terrorism is used almost exclusively to describe crimes whose perpetrators are Muslims, you might think that a majority of mass killings and acts of terrorism in the U.S. were committed by Muslims. But when we look at the facts, that perception does not hold up.

In a well-known hadith, a man asked the Prophet Muhammad, What is the best jihad? to which Prophet Muhammad replied, Speaking a word of truth to an oppressive ruler.

The constant misuse of terms like jihad and radical Islam is offensive to the truth and is counterproductive to our nations efforts to achieve security. It is time we all speak a word of truth by applying the proper labels to criminals and their acts of violence, no matter their religious background.

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ISLAM-OPED: A Word of Truth on Jihad and Islam

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