

Congressman Peter King's hearings on the alarming radicalization of young Muslims has met a firestorm of criticism. I would agree with some critics that these hearings should explore all domestic terrorism rather than just Islamist, including domestic fascist and armed racist cults. However, we cannot pretend that there is no Muslim problem.

Two important Muslim witnesses at the hearings include Dr. Zhudi Jasser and Asra Nomani. Jasser is founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, which urges Muslims to assume the responsibilities of democracy along with its rights, respecting US law above Sharia. Asra Nomani, a Wall Street Journal correspondent and much in demand Muslim author, absolutely agrees. She has staked her own claim with a fight for women's rights within Islam.

Islam is a religion, but it has always been more: a way of life that includes not only private belief but communal as well. Therein lies the problem. The documents that govern Islam (Koran, Hadith (sayings), and sharia (religious law) were not written down until well after the death of the Prophet and his circle. It is very difficult for religious scholars, not to mention practicing Muslims themselves, to determine the original intent of the Prophet—a problem not faced by any of the other great religions.

Judaism has a clear line of evolution and change, from fierce tribal beginnings to a universal monotheism; it supports a variety of interpretations, from traditional to modern, pious to atheist. Christianity, an offspring of Judaism, has gone through many phases and internal wars, but the initial messages of Jesus remained unchanged. The problem for Christians was to live up to those spiritual, loving, and peaceful words of their faith's charismatic founder.

Islam had a founder with two very different lives. The first ten years of his ministry were as a missionary, a spiritual man driven by his belief in one God. His last ten years were spent as military leader with the mission to convert all Arab tribes by force, if necessary, to create a Community of God. This process was bloody, often genocidal, and terrible—until Mohammad was able to return to Mecca as an unquestioned Arab religious and political dictator. He died before seeing the spread of his faith.

Muslims who think of themselves as a peaceful community draw their religious sources from the Prophet's first ten years. During that period, he preached tolerance, love of learning, and all of the other peaceful pronouncements that they cite today.

However, Militants, who can quote scripture too, derive their theology from the last ten years of the Prophet's life. It is here that they quote the Prophet as saying that they should offer conquered people a chance to convert, and if they don't, kill them and take their women into slavery. Here we read that Muslims should hunt down polytheists everywhere (Hindus, for example) and kill them. It is here that we find \223death for blasphemy\224 and cutting off hands and feet of thieves. It is here that Jews are described as descendants of apes and monkeys. And it is here that the blueprint is spelled out for conquering the world until everyone worships Allah.

The Islamist militants, when confronted with the religious contradictions between the earlier and later Mohammad, say that the later was the \223final word,\224 canceling out the conciliatory and peaceful earlier Mohammad.

Muslims who adhere more to the early Mohammad have a better chance of integrating into modern society. Some suggest purging Islam of all sorts of constructs that no longer valid, such as the blasphemy laws and the unjust subjection of women. But every time someone proposes such a thing, as did the late Governor of the Punjab Province in Pakistan and a Christian Member of Parliament, they are targeted and murdered, to the cheers of and street mobs and Islamist lawyers.

Supporters of the later Mohammad cannot really prevail. They have outraged not only their Western targets (9/11, etc.), but even more moderate Muslims. Islam faces internal warfare far more dangerous than the radical war against the modern world.

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