



Written by [James Heiser](#) on August 12, 2016

Review of Former Muslim Hirsi Ali's Latest Book, "Heretic"

To a degree which would have been almost unimaginable a few decades ago, Islamic terrorism is driving domestic and foreign policy throughout the Western world in general, and the United States in particular. Statists have used the threat of terrorism to justify a wide range of infringements on constitutional liberties, as neoconservative geopoliticians have used the blood and treasure of the United States in the latest iteration of perpetual war for perpetual peace, insisting that the West is not at war with Islam, but only Islamists, all the while being surprised when the latest round of "moderate Muslims" to be armed by the United States suddenly become "Islamic extremists." Meanwhile, every attack by a "lone wolf" terrorist who "just happens to be a Muslim" is followed by declarations that his actions do not reflect on "real Muslims."

In her latest book [Heretic — Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now](#), former Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali has the integrity to point out the fundamental flaw at the root of all such obfuscations:

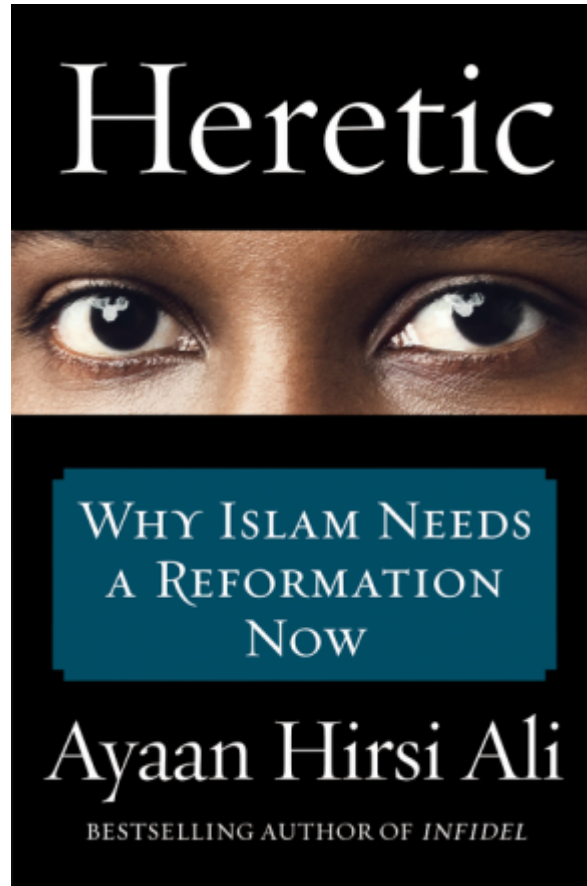
For more than thirteen years now, I have been making a simple argument in response to such acts of terrorism. My argument is that it is foolish to insist, as our leaders habitually do, that the violent acts of radical Islamists can be divorced from the religious ideals that inspire them. Instead we must acknowledge that they are driven by a political ideology, an ideology embedded in Islam itself, in the holy book of the Qur'an as well as the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad contained in the hadith.

Let me make my point in the simplest possible terms: Islam is not a religion of peace.

And Hirsi Ali acknowledges that the West can no longer afford to ignore the philosophical flaw that has directed the last decade and a half of foreign policy:

A 2013 analysis of the so-called black budget suggested that the United States has spent more than \$500 billion on various intelligence agencies and efforts from 2001 to 2013. The economist Joseph Stieglitz has calculated the cost of the military intervention in Iraq to be between \$3 and \$5 trillion.

This strategy is unsustainable. For one, the United States cannot afford to continue fighting a war of ideas solely by military means. Second, by ignoring the ideas that give rise to Islamist violence





we continue to ignore the roots of the problem.

Rather than getting lost in the details of the formation of each Islamist organization, Hirsi Ali targets the reason why such organizations never lack for willing recruits: Islamist terrorism finds its justification in Islamic theology.

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The argument in this book is that religious doctrines matter and are in need of reform. Non-doctrinal factors — such as the Saudis' use of oil revenues to fund Wahhabism and Western support for the Saudi regime — are important, but religious doctrine is more important. Hard as it may be for many Western academics to believe, when people commit violent acts in the name of religion, they are not trying somehow to dignify their underlying socioeconomic or political grievances.

Hirsi Ali makes it clear that not all Muslims advocate such a violent expression of Islamic doctrine. She makes a three-fold distinction between Muslims, not based on the ancient theological distinctions of Shiite, Sunni, and Sufi — but between “Medina Muslims,” “Mecca Muslims,” and “Modifying Muslims.” “Medina Muslims” are those who are actively supportive of, or involved in, acts of Jihadist terrorism, “Mecca Muslims” “are loyal to the core creed and worship devoutly but are not inclined to practice violence,” and “Modifying Muslims” “are the Muslim dissidents.”

It is this third group that Hirsi Ali addresses in *Heretic*, but it is here that one encounters a fundamental flaw in her book: Describing herself as such a “Modifying Muslim,” she makes it clear that she does not subscribe to the tenets of Islam at all, declaring, “A few of us have been forced by experience to conclude that we could not continue to be believers; yet we remain deeply engaged in the debate about Islam’s future.” However, clearly signaling that she does not believe in the religion which she is critiquing, why would an adherent of that religion want to implement her reforms, which one might reasonably conclude would perpetuate similar unbelief in other adherents?

A second major problem with her overall argument is rooted in the lesson to be drawn from her own experience in Europe: In short, Muslim immigrants will lie regarding their reason for coming to the West. In her words:

When I arrived in Germany, I walked around the clean streets of Düsseldorf, pondered my options carefully, and shortly thereafter took a train from Bonn to Amsterdam, claiming to be a Somali asylum seeker fleeing the civil war, but in reality fleeing my arranged marriage and the wrath of my family and clan for breaking the marital contract my father had made.

... I ended up at a refugee screening camp, was granted asylum, worked hard to get off welfare and learn Dutch, received a university degree, and ended up writing, debating, and then being elected to the Dutch Parliament.

It is hard not to think of the current crisis in Europe which has been caused by the influx of countless numbers of Muslims. While the author of *Heretic* may not have proven a threat — and, indeed, has been the very model of a Muslim converting to a post-Enlightenment European Rationalist philosophy — her admission regarding her false claim of asylum may understandably give the reader occasion to pause.

Hirsi Ali has very specific notions regarding her five proposed reforms to change Islam by eliminating the following aspects of that religion:

Muhammad’s semi-divine and infallible status along with the literalist reading of the Qur’an, particularly those parts that were revealed in Medina;



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The investment in life after death instead of life before death;

Sharia, the body of legislation derived from the Qur'an, the hadith, and the rest of Islamic jurisprudence;

The practice of empowering individuals to enforce Islamic law by commanding right and forbidding wrong;

The imperative to wage jihad, or holy war.

Each of these proposed reforms has its own chapter in this book; the author is thorough and systematic in her examination of these five proposed reforms from the standpoint of a European Rationalist who has a thorough understanding of the historic beliefs of Islam. But Hirsi Ali acknowledges that, for all of her analysis and advocacy, there is little chance that the very countries where the Islamist view is most dominant will see such reforms implemented:

There is probably no realistic chance that Muslims in countries such as Pakistan will agree to dispense with sharia. However, we in the West must insist that Muslims living in our societies abide by the rule of law. We must demand that Muslim citizens abjure sharia practices and punishments that conflict with fundamental human rights and Western legal codes. Moreover, under no circumstances should Western countries allow Muslims to form self-governing enclaves in which women and other supposedly second-class citizens can be treated in ways that belong in the seventh century.

Yet that is not enough. We must also address and reform Islam's most powerful social tool: the informal grassroots enforcement of its strictest religious principles in the name of commanding right and forbidding wrong.

The very policies that Hirsi Ali used to gain residence in the Netherlands are now being used by waves of Muslim immigrants to flood Europe and form the very enclaves of which she warns. And, by her own estimate, the ideology of "Modifying Muslims" is not carrying the day:

For the moment, measured by four yardsticks, the Medina side seems to be winning. One is the scale of individuals leaving the Mecca side and joining the Medina side (what in the West is called "radicalization"). The second metric is attention: the Medina Muslims attract media attention through statements and acts of violence that shock the world. The third metric is resources: through zakat (charity), crime, the violent seizing of territory and property, support from rogue states and petrodollars, Medina Muslims have vast resources.... The fourth metric is one of coherence. In many ways this is the most important advantage the Medina Muslims have over the Modifier Muslims. The latter are faced with the daunting — and dangerous — task of questioning the fundamentals of their faith. All the Medina Muslims have to do is pose as its defenders.

The very notion of an Islamic Reformation is dubious as a path to eliminating Islamist ideology, because "Reformations" are intended to be a return to founding principles; thus, for example, the Christian Reformations of the 16th century — Lutheran and Calvinist — were based in the notion of a return to biblical principles. Hirsi Ali's great opponent is the Mohammed of Medina — the later Mohammed, who pursued a path of bloody Jihad. Christian Reformations are intended to be a return to Christ's teaching; an Islamic Reformation, if it were a Reformation, would be a return to Mohammed's. *Heretic* does not propose a Reformation, but apostasy, from Islam. How many Muslims will respond favorably to a call to abandon Islam in order to save it?



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Heretic — Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now, by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, New York: HarperCollins, 2016, 272 pages, paperback.



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