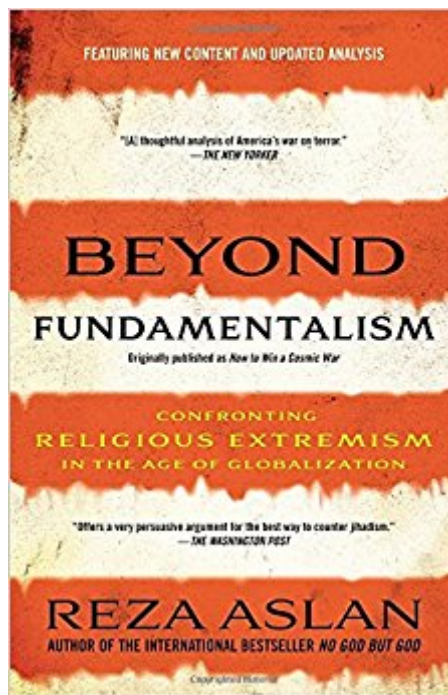




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Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism In The Age Of Globalization



Synopsis

• (The Washington Post) • from the bestselling author of *Zealot* and host of *Believer* The wars in the Middle East have become religious wars in which God is believed to be directly engaged on behalf of one side against the other. The hijackers who attacked America on September 11, 2001, thought they were fighting in the name of God. According to award-winning writer and scholar of religions Reza Aslan, the United States, by infusing the War on Terror with its own religiously polarizing rhetoric, is fighting a similar war "a war that can't be won." *Beyond Fundamentalism* is both an in-depth study of the ideology fueling militants throughout the Muslim world and an exploration of religious violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. At a time when religion and politics increasingly share the same vocabulary and function in the same sphere, Aslan writes that we must strip the conflicts of our world of their religious connotations and address the earthly grievances that always lie at its root. How do you win a religious war? By refusing to fight in one. Featuring new content and updated analysis • Originally published as *How to Win a Cosmic War* • [A] thoughtful analysis of America's War on Terror. • "The New Yorker" • Offers a very persuasive argument for the best way to counter jihadism. • "The Washington Post" • [Reza] Aslan dissects a complex subject (terrorism and globalization) and distills it with a mix of narrative writing, personal anecdotes, reportage and historical analysis. • "San Francisco Chronicle" • Aslan is not only a perspicuous, thoughtful interpreter of the Muslim world but also a subtle psychologist of the call to jihad. • "Los Angeles Times" • [A] meaty analysis of the rise of Jihadism . . . dispels common misconceptions of the War on Terror age. • "San Jose Mercury News" • It is Aslan's great gift to see things clearly, and to say them clearly, and in this important new work he offers us a way forward. He is prescriptive and passionate, and his book will make you think. • "Jon Meacham, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Lion*

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Customer Reviews

This book offers an informed critique of good-and-evil dualisms on both sides in the war on terror. Terrorists and their opponents share an "us against them" conception of reality that vilifies the enemy as irredeemable and suited only for destruction. Political estrangement and isolation nurture the cosmic dualism inherent in violent jihadist ideologies, argues Aslan (creative writing, Univ. of California at Riverside; *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*). But a similar dualism lies behind ill-founded American responses to terrorism. In quick, informative surveys, Aslan takes readers through the origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, zealotry in ancient Jewish and contemporary (evangelical Christian and Zionist) forms, the history of Islamic jihadist distortions of Islamic teaching, and the repressive postcolonial governments that nurture such radical ideologs. But Aslan is hopeful: radical groups moderate their ideologies when they are drawn into the political process, and a new U.S. administration may adopt a more enlightened foreign policy. Aslan's suggestions are simple but not simplistic. Recommended for all readers interested in viewing the war on terror from this alternative perspective. —Steve Young, McHenry Cty. Coll., Crystal Lake, IL

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Aslan's thoughtful analysis of America's war on terror argues that the nation's jihadist enemies believe the conflict is taking place on a spiritual, a cosmic plane and thus cannot be lost. Only by denying the terrorists their good-versus-evil religious narrative can the United States keep the war grounded and winnable. Certainly this is good advice, although, given President Obama's abandonment of his predecessor's Manichaean foreign policy, it may have been overtaken by recent events. Far more interesting is Aslan's agreement with Bush on the question of democracy. He distinguishes Islamist nationalist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah from global jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda, and contends that recognizing the former as legitimate participants in the democratic process will undermine support for unyielding war. It's an appealing, if unproved, claim. Copyright ©2008 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker

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This book continues where "No god but God" left off, providing a detailed analysis of political Islam, and showing how it differs from orthodox forms of the religion. The parts I found most interesting were the discussions of the impact of colonialism on both Islamic cultures and the psyche of individual Muslims. A must read for anyone hoping to understand the roots of both violent and non-violent forms of extremism.

A very interesting but now somewhat dated book about religious fundamentalism and what motivates the people who join these movements. The book was completed just as Barack Obama was beginning his presidency. I'd like to see an updated version of these ideas Reza Aslan writes about. Essentially the author contends that radical religious fundamentalists of all stripes are not interested in defeating and ending their fight, but continuing an unending war of good versus evil. They have no plan for after the war. Although his observations seem to fit the Al Qaida model, I'm not sure whether it fits the ISIS model. Author Aslan is a keen and knowledgeable observer of religious extremism. His thoughts and writings are well worth reading and pondering.

This is an excellent book highly recommended as it clarifies many issues surrounding misunderstood terms like Islamists versus for instance jihadists or ISIL. The author has good historical and objectively written accounts of the formation of the state of Israel and the correspondingly complex issues which revolve around its survival as a nation amidst very conflicting Arab sentiments.

Aslan presents a picture of the fundamentalist's worldview, and demonstrates how it is common in every fundamentalist group, regardless of belief system. He describes the origins of mistrust and hatred that lead to fundamentalism, and offers actions that can defuse the destructive results of it. More than ever, it is important to bring people with disparate belief systems into the public arena, to empower them as part of the governing process. Where the radical minorities have been made part of the decision making process, participation in violent, underground movements has decreased. A book worth reading.

This is a powerful book that helps make sense out of a troubling region. I travelled extensively in the Middle East when I was young and was invited into the Madrassas and mosques by the Imams. I

had (at that time) open and stimulating conversations with one and all in the Islamic community. Thus I was puzzled by the complete volte face of the culture during later travels there while I was with the United Nations. Reza Aslan has put together an argument that I think finally makes sense out of what has seemed so incomprehensible.

Having read and enjoyed "No God but God" I decided to read this book and Zealot also (separate review) - Kindle editions. I found this to be informative and well thought out, although possibly slightly out of date now given the IS issue in Syria and Iraq. Still, this is a worthwhile read. My one problem is that approximately 25% of the book is taken up with references.

Reza Aslan's *Beyond Fundamentalism* is an incredibly interesting read that reminds us that the current "War on Terror" that the United States is involved in is by no means an isolated or completely unusual event and in fact could be described as a "cosmic war." Cosmic war, which he defines as a religious conflict fought on a higher plane as well as on earth where one side (or both) truly believes that they are acting on behalf of God, is un-winnable as only faith can conquer by defeating evil, and with faith there is no compromise. Aslan presents an argument that Jihadism is a social, not religious, movement, and that it has sociopolitical causes such as the shifts from secular nationalism to globalization to ultra-nationalism as a fear reaction to globalization of today. Aslan offers a reminder that from the Jews of the Old Testament to the Crusades, cosmic wars have always been fought, but he also provides us with a compelling solution: just don't participate. In a war you can't win the only answer is to make sure it never starts through mutual respect (easier said than done...). I highly recommend this book for anyone who is interested in actually understanding the root causes of the political situation between the western world and the Middle East. My only critique is I wish he'd said a little more about the differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, but I'm sure that is included in his other book, *No god but God*, which I am looking forward to reading soon.

Big fan of Aslan's work. He works hard to put forth some definitions on terms that help give vocabulary to a discussion that often fails to pick up on nuance. I know a lot of people will disagree with his stance, but I think this book is a great representation of the intellectual side of this argument - beyond the PC nonsense that's so easy to dismiss, Aslan's work creates a much more substantial case for understanding and tolerance.

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