

1. Introduction

In Western nations the people are flooded with images of radical Muslims burning flags of Israel and America and of innocent citizens being killed by explosives or suicide bombers.

In the Arab world the people are flooded with images of Western armies entering Muslim nations, overthrowing governments and killing innocent citizens by airplane bombs.

Thus, a vicious circle has come into being, where both sides justify their behavior by the immorality of the opponent. How did all this start? And more importantly: how can we get out of this?

2. Differences in perspective

In order to understand the tensions, let us consider a recent example. On September 30, 2005 the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 caricatures of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, including one by Kurt Westergaard.

With his contribution, Kurt wanted to expose those fanatics who refer to sayings of their prophet in order to justify bomb attacks, murders and other atrocities. He explained, "In the months leading up to the publication of the cartoons, Islamists had launched one attack on Danish free speech after another. A well-known author had been unable to find an artist who would dare to illustrate a children's book on Muhammad. A concert was stopped by radical Muslims who claimed that music is un-Islamic. The culmination came when a lecturer of Jewish descent at Copenhagen University was abducted in broad daylight by a gang of Arabs and severely beaten for having recited from the Koran as part of his course. Nothing similar had happened during the university's more than 525 years of history."¹

The publication of the caricatures eventually led to big demonstrations in Muslim nations, where more than one hundred people were killed and several Danish embassies torched.

Many Westerners didn't understand how some drawings could lead to such violence and many Muslims didn't understand why the Danish government didn't apologize.

At the surface the following difference can be seen. In the West democracy is held in high esteem. This means that governments can only function within the parameters of the law. Freedom of speech is deeply embedded in the law. In the Middle East, the citizens are used to autocratic governments. Nothing happens without her approval and the rulers stop anything they are not pleased with. In the eyes of many Muslims, the Danish government not only condoned the publication of the caricatures, she even approved of and fully supported it. Cultural differences also play a role. In the West individual freedom is a high value, while in many countries the reputation and well-being of the group is most important. A Westerner doesn't consider someone else's individual expression a threat to himself, but an Easterner sees individualism as an expression of selfishness and deterioration of unity.

Yet, for many in the West this is not a satisfactory explanation of all the violence that took place in different Muslim nations. They see what took place in Denmark before the publication as

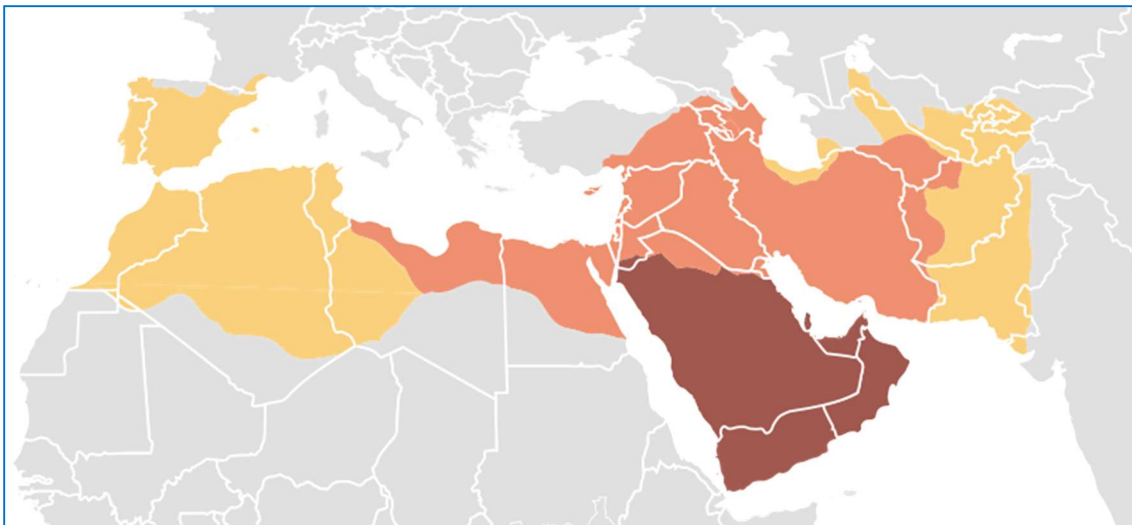
grave injustice and don't want to be dominated by extremist Islamic groups in the West. What could be the underlying causes of the tensions and violence?

3. The mission

The adherents of the Islamic faith have a clear mission: the establishment of one worldwide Muslim nation.² An important verse from the Qur'an is Sura 9:33: "It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion, although they who associate others with Allah dislike it."³ According to the teaching of Islam, Mohammed is the last prophet sent by God and he received a message for the whole world. It is up to his followers to implement Islamic law worldwide.⁴

4. The outcome

During the life of Muhammad, the Islamic faith spread over most of the Arabian Peninsula in just one decade.⁵ During the next thirty years, the religion spread to Libya in the west, Iran in the east and Turkey in the north. In the subsequent period of almost one century, North Africa, Spain and Portugal submitted to Islam and the Muslim community stretched to India in the east.



- Expansion under Muhammad, 622-632
- Expansion during the Rashidun Caliphate, 632-661
- Expansion during the Umayyad Caliphate, 661-750⁶

In 749 AD the Abbasids from Iran defeated the Umayyad army and gained power over the Islamic state. Under their leadership Islam experienced her Golden Age, during which the religion spread into Asia all the way to Indonesia. In the 16th century the Ottoman Sultanate emerged, reaching far into the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. The Turks also conquered parts of Europe and established Islam in the Balkan. Thus the Muslims were well on their way to fulfill their mission.

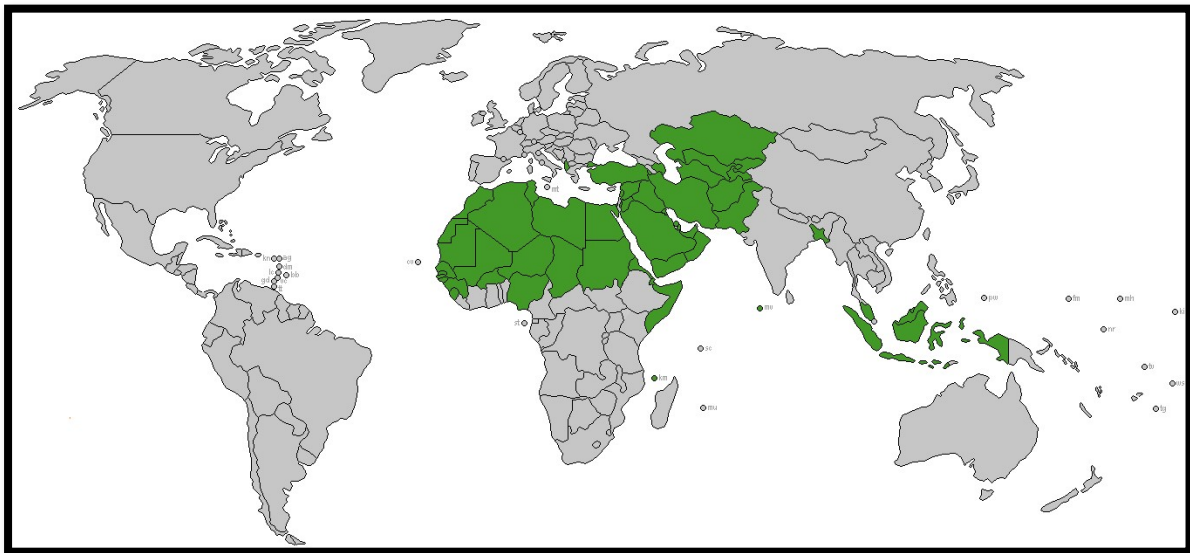
5. The reversal

During that same period West-European nations began to trade with far away countries. In order to protect the trade, colonies were established, eventually leading to the control over whole peoples. In the 19th century more and more Muslim nations were colonized and after the First World War, Great Britain and France had so much power in the Middle East that they effectively determined what happened.

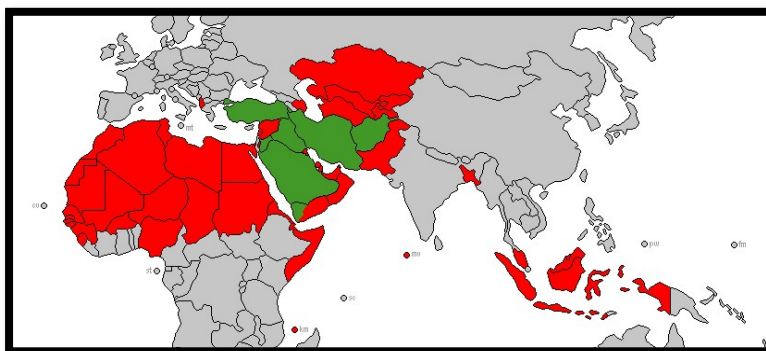
The military and political superiority of the Western countries only increased and today the influence of the West in the Muslim world is undeniable. This can be seen in the following areas:

a. Politics:

This is a map of the Muslim world, where all countries with a Muslim majority are colored green.⁷

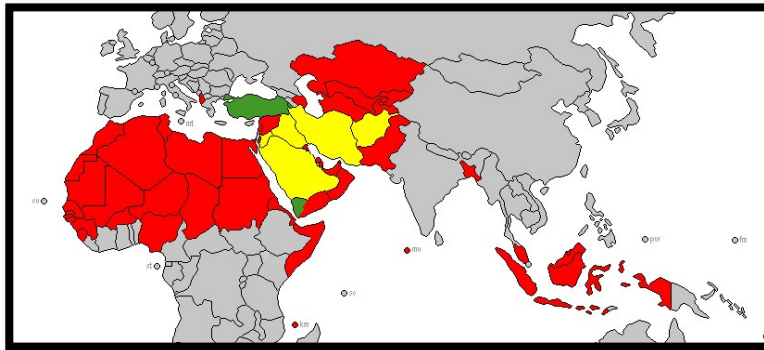


The Muslim nations which have been colonized for a period during the last two centuries are in red. For decades they were controlled by Western (Christian) powers.

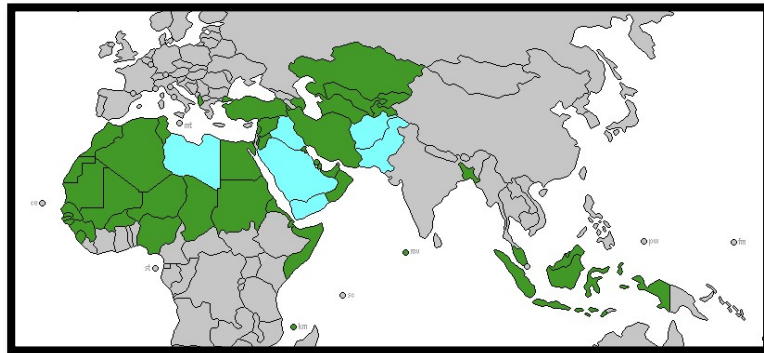


Muslims feel rejected

The yellow colored countries were not colonized, but were subjected to tremendous influence of Western countries in the 20th century.



Finally, some Western nations have recently had or still have an aggressive military presence in the blue colored Muslim countries.



That means the West is a dominant power in the Muslim world, despite the fact that the Muslims have the mission to submit the whole world to Islam. Perhaps the climax is that some land which belonged to them (at least that is what they believe, because they ruled it for centuries), has been taken from them and given to their arch enemy, the Jews. To the Muslims this was a very humiliating decision by the Western rulers.

b. Military

No Muslim country has an army that comes close to the power and technical capacity of the U.S. and Israel and other countries.

c. Religious

According to statistics there are about 2.4 billion Christians and approximately 1.9 billion Muslims in the world.⁸ That means the Muslims still have a long way to go in subjecting the rest of the world to Islam; after 1400 years they're not even the majority.

d. Technically

Cars, airplanes and computers are designed and built in the West and in Asia. No Muslim country has the capacity to do that and all of them are fully dependent on non-Muslims.

e. Science

Seldom does one hear about scientific advances taking place in the Muslim world. And when they happen, the question is who deserves the credit for them. It could be Muslims, but it could equally be minorities of other faiths, just like in the Islamic Golden Age.⁹ Sheikh Abdul Majid Al-Zindani, a well-known Muslim scholar in Yemen, claims to have a successful medical treatment for AIDS, but he is not willing to let it be tested and examined by scientists.¹⁰ Thus his claim remains unproven and even in the country itself, not all believe him.

f. Economically

If the Islamists were successful, then the Dinar or Riyal would have been the strongest currency in the world. Now, however, the U.S. dollar is the main currency of international trade. At one time several countries were considering switching to the Euro, but after the crisis, their confidence in the currency collapsed. However, no one has such confidence in the currencies of the Middle East.

g. Language

According to Islam, Arabic is the heavenly language in which God revealed His will. In that case it should be the most used language by now. There was indeed a time when Muslims made great progress, and today there are people all the way from Morocco to Iraq and Sudan who speak Arabic. However, Chinese, English, Spanish and Hindi are spoken by larger indigenous groups than Arabic, and the most important international language is English.

h. Culture

The Muslim world is flooded with Western music and films. Many young people reject their traditional music and dance and follow Western fashion, even in their clothing. There are almost no artists from the Arab world who achieve world fame and in sports their performance hardly counts either. While the Arabs ought to be the trendsetters, they take on Western ways or integrate them with their own traditions.

6. The result

Although in the first centuries the Muslims were well under way to fulfill their mission, today's picture is very discouraging. Indeed, it is a great shame and humiliation to be failing in so many areas and they are aware of that. It is as if God has rejected them and left them behind. How should they deal with that? At least three types of reactions can be distinguished:

a. Violence against the West

Several groups pursue the practice of a pure form of Islam. By returning to the roots, they hope to gain God's favor and spread Islam. They rely on Qur'anic verses that contain the call to use any means in defense of Islam. An example is Sura 9:123: "O you who have believed, fight those adjacent to you of the disbelievers and let them find in you harshness. And know that Allah is with the righteous."¹¹

The violence of the Islamists in Denmark mentioned earlier fits the doctrine of jihad.¹² The duty of jihad also applies to Muslims in the case of enmity against Islam in non-Islamic countries.¹³ It must be noted that not every imam or Muslim adheres to this. Just as Christians hold different interpretations about different issues, like leadership in the church, there are various interpretations about the Qur'anic references to jihad in Islam.

b. Revenge on Christian minorities

Some groups take revenge on Christians in Muslim countries, who have to pay the price for Western powers exerting their influence in the Middle East. Just like the governments in Muslim countries are considered Islamic, many Muslims believe that Western governments are Christian. They see the Christians in their own country as accomplices of the enemy and therefore responsible for what they perceive as injustices against Islam.

c. Hopelessness and apathy

The vast majority of Muslims simply want to live in peace and have sufficient resources to properly care for themselves and their families. For them, violence is not a solution to spread Islam and they are tired of the warring parties in their home countries that are fighting each other, with or without violence.

All their life they have heard that Islam is the solution to all the problems in the world and that Islam is the religion of peace. Seeing that the reality is not consistent with the teachings they are not convinced wholeheartedly. They keep a low profile and try to make the best of their lives, often under the pressure of intimidation by extremists.

Example: *Innocence of Muslims*

An example of these three reactions can be seen when the movie *Innocence of Muslims* appeared on the internet in the summer of 2012.¹⁴ After the Arabic version was discovered in Egypt, the following happened:

- i. Some Muslims attacked American embassies and other diplomatic targets in different Islamic countries.¹⁵
- ii. Others took out on Christians in Egypt, Niger and other countries.¹⁶
- iii. And the majority? On September 16th, 2012 a demonstration was organized in front of the American Embassy in the Netherlands.¹⁷ The newsreader mentioned that 80 protesters had come, including 40 Salafists. That begs the question: Where were the other 850,000 Muslims living in the Netherlands?

7. Biblical perspective

The reactions can be classified as follows: violent and nonviolent. Both of these reactions are also found in the Bible among two peoples who later were called Arabs. Already in the 9th century BC the descendants of Ishmael were called Arabs and a few centuries later other nations were included as well, among whom the Edomites, the descendants of Esau.¹⁸ Their ancestors, Ishmael and Esau, had something important in common: Ishmael was the firstborn, but he was not the son of promise and not the heir of his father's possessions. At God's command he was even sent away and experienced deep rejection by his father (Genesis 21:8-14). Esau too was the firstborn of his father, but he received a prophetic message that he would serve his younger brother (Genesis 25:23). So both ancestors experienced rejection as firstborn. That is not to say that God didn't love them. On the contrary. He blessed both with land and with many offspring.¹⁹ How did they respond to God?

Of Ishmael we read that 'God was with him' (Genesis 21:20). This is a wonderful expression which centuries later received deep meaning in one of the names of the Messiah, Immanuel, which means: "God with us."

God was with the young man. That points to Ishmael being faithful to the God of his father Abraham. He responded with submission, in spite of the rejection he had experienced.

In contrast, Esau did not care much about God's ways. He sold his birthright for some porridge, married two pagan wives and later planned to kill his twin brother Jacob. The same negative attitude can be seen in Esau's descendants, the Edomites, when they refused the Israelites passage through their country. And when the people of Judah were taken into exile in the 6th century, what did they do then? Instead of fighting against the enemy with them, they killed their own brothers (Obadiah 1:8-14). They wanted the land of their brothers and reacted violently.

Today we see both reactions among the (Arab) Muslims. Some act in the spirit of Esau and show little respect for life. They want to exterminate all the Jews and have no compassion for women and children. They don't shrink back from using violence in order to spread Islam and thus fulfill their mission.

However, the majority responds nonviolently, in the spirit of Ishmael. They want to live and let live.

8. Reactions in the West

Westerners react in different ways to the violence that happens both nearby and far away.

- Some far-right wing groups react aggressively to the Muslims in the West and thereby eschew violence.
- Others try to ward them off through political channels.
- Still others seek ways to shame them, just like the filmmaker of *Innocence of Muslims*.
- There are also those who quietly hope that the Muslims will be overcome by disaster.

- Finally, there are people who welcome the Muslims as fellow citizens and wish them peace.

The biggest impact comes from the negative reactions and they have in common that they follow the Law of Moses, namely "eye for eye, tooth for tooth." This continues the vicious circle of mistrust toward each other and hurting each other.

9. A proposal for peace

An interesting parallel can be found in the history of the Israelites. At the beginning of our era they had terribly failed in their mission to make the greatness of God known to the world. They were subjected to a wicked ruler and formed a weak minority military and linguistically. Some militant insurgents fought against the foreign powers and a group of fanatical religious leaders tried to preserve whatever was Jewish. The Lord Jesus saw the people as sheep without a shepherd and had compassion on them.²⁰

Likewise, God wants the followers of Jesus to be compassionate toward the rejected, whether they want it or not. He wants to use them to bring the Muslims back to His father's heart. Some extremists may be even closer to Jesus Christ than we realize; after all, they take their mission, and thus faith in God, seriously. The question is whether they have met a true Christian; whether they know the difference between what they see of the West through the media and sincere followers of Jesus Christ.

10. Conclusion

The media usually gives a biased view by focusing on groups that use violence to reach their goals, while the majority of Muslims are trying to lead a peaceful life. Even then, the visible aggression is partly the result of the despair and shame experienced by Muslims, because they fail in their mission and because of the rejection they often experience by Westerners.

Violence usually leads to more violence and is therefore not the solution to lasting peace. God gave the greatest example in Jesus Christ, who willingly came to the earth to save us, even though we did not welcome Him as the Lord of the universe.²¹

I would ask you as fellow Christian to follow His example, by forgiving those who have hurt you in whatever way and lovingly approach all Muslims who cross your path.

May they taste, through our lives, that God does not reject them, but rather deeply loves them. May they come to real peace with God; then lasting peace will also come to the conflict areas in the Middle East.

NB:

Who knows you're in for a nice surprise? Indeed, it is remarkable how many Westerners, who have come to know Muslims personally, through their work, school or neighborhood, are often

impressed by their friendliness and hospitality. Although these Muslims frequently experience rejection by Western society, they choose life.

¹ creepingsharia.wordpress.com/2009/10/01/kurt-westergaard-why-i-drew-the-muhammad-cartoon/

² The World Islamic Mission speaks of 'One Ummah' which means: 'one [Islamic] nation.' www.wimnet.org/

³ *Sahih International Translation, accessed at quran.com*

⁴ One of the goals of the website missionislam.com: To remind Muslims of their responsibility to participate and support their brothers and sisters in Islam who are striving on a daily basis to fulfil the commandment of Allah (Most Exalted is He) in making La illaha ilallah the law of this world, (insha'Allah).

www.missionislam.com/mission/index.htm

⁵ According to other sources part of the peninsula was Islamized under the leadership of Muhammad. The rest converted under his successor Abu Bakr. See nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geschiedenis_van_de_islam

⁶ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spread_of_Islam

⁷ mapfrappe.blogspot.nl/2011/04/muslim-world.html

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations

⁹ During the Islamic Golden Age major developments took place in the fields of mathematics, medicine and philosophy. Many Muslims attribute this to the positive influence of Islam. However, it was the non-Muslims, many of whom were Christians, who contributed to this. In fact, during the Golden Age of Islam, the religion was less strictly enforced, thus leaving room for people to endeavor in these areas.

¹⁰ 'The Yemen Observer tried several times to get blood tests for a patient treated by the sheikh's medicine, to get proof that the patients were positive for HIV when they checked in for treatment. We also demanded copies of the blood test results during and after the treatment, to confirm that the patient is AIDS/HIV negative. Dr. Hassan said that everything is still confidential and can't be disclosed at the time being.'

armiesofliberation.com/archives/2006/12/12/who-to-test-zindani%E2%80%99s-aids-herbal-cure/

¹¹ Saheeh International

¹² 'Literally, "extraordinary efforts", "utmost exertion," or to "strive hard;" but in strict Islamic terminology, fighting with arms, primarily to give ascendancy to the Word of Allah, meaning, to establish His lordship on the earth, where none is worshipped but Allah, and none is obeyed but Allah.'

islamicencyclopedia.org/public/index/topicDetail/id/500

¹³ 'Jihad becomes obligatory (Fard `Ayn) on every able-bodied (male) Muslim in the event of the land of Islam being attacked and conditionally obligatory (Fard Kifayah) when hostilities are taking place in the lands of the enemy.'

Source: ibid

¹⁴ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Innocence_of_Muslims

¹⁵ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactions_to_Innocence_of_Muslims

¹⁶ 'One Christian man, Monier Hanna, said he saw two Christian women in Helwan being harassed over the film by Muslim men last week: "They were telling the women they are responsible for the film." A Christian journalist in the country, Caroline Kamel, wrote in an Egyptian newspaper on Friday (14 September) that she and her family had come under attack at a bus station in Cairo and another city as a result of *Innocence of Muslims*. Threats have been made against Christians in Sudan, which has seen some of the most violent protests. Muslims descended on the German and US Embassies in Khartoum on Friday following a call by a prominent cleric on state radio for them to do so.'

barnabasfund.org/UK/News/Archives/Concerns-for-Christians-amid-violent-protests-over-anti-Islam-film.html

'A church in Zinder, Niger, was attacked by Muslims in protests against the anti-Islam film, *Innocence of Muslims*.'

barnabasfund.org/UK/News/Archives/News-in-brief-04-October-2012.html,

¹⁷ www.nu.nl/binnenland/2910960/tientallen-demonstranten-museumplein-anti-islamfilm.html

¹⁸ See Study Origin of Arabs

¹⁹ See Study Land for Ishmael

²⁰ Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34

²¹ John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16