



Crafty Bastards[®] Update

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Calls for Reform of Islam Face Tough Battle

Calls for a reformation and peaceful revolution away from violent interpretations of the Quran are emerging from within the Muslim world but are unlikely to produce tangible results in the near term. Prominent leaders and scholars are referencing the peaceful sections of the Quran, denouncing the increasing tide of “religiously justified” violence, and partnering traditional Muslim beliefs with those in the secular world. Some influential leaders also are denying that the Quran propagates violence.

- Islamic scholars, government leaders, and activists have begun to call for Muslims to reform Islam and hold accountable the acts of its most violent adherents. Advocates for change demand that Islam reform and disavow the key beliefs used to justify violent acts, similar to how Christians and Jews gradually consigned the most violent parts of their religions to the past¹.
- The fundamental problem with Islam to date, according to a Somali-born American, is that the majority of peaceful Muslims have been unwilling to acknowledge or repudiate the religious warrant for intolerance and violence claimed to be embedded in the Quran². That appears to be changing with the advent of calls for accountability and counter-messaging from within Muslim populations.
- In a mid-March interview in the Wall Street Journal, Egyptian President Ahmed Fattah al-Sisi³ stated that the real Islamic religion grants absolute freedom for everyone—believers and non-believers. Islam does not advocate killing others because they do not believe in Islam, nor does it dictate that Muslims have the right to dictate their beliefs to the whole world, according to al-Sisi. In addition, prominent Egyptian Islamic scholars and clerics supported al-Sisi’s comments.
- Despite these attempts, insurgent movements and their sympathizers are likely to view the establishment’s reform efforts as empty rhetoric in the service of the Crusader Power, the

¹ Hirsi Ali, Ayaan, “Why Islam Needs a Reformation,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 2015.

² Ibid.

³ Stephens, Bret, “Islam’s Improbable Reformer,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 2015.



US. Al-Sisi's repression of the Muslim Brotherhood means that insurgent forces calling for a restoration to a so-called "pure" and original version of Islam will be redoubled in their commitment to the promulgation of their view and to his overthrow. Moreover, "reform" proposals are floated more for the client than the people: They are intended to keep the West's support for the regime, especially US funding for the Egyptian military.

Simultaneously, the United States should enter into its own revolution of thought. Rather than a violent upheaval like we are seeing in other parts of the world, Blue could see a peaceful transformation that leads to more globally relevant and publicly supported policies worldwide, according to several workshop participants.

- Blue needs to reclaim its place of honest-broker, trusted ally, and "beacon of light" by standing steadfast against specific threats to its security while taking actions that are explainable and consistent with its values.
- Successful implementation of this reform would require incorporating the "others"—repressed individuals, technologically savvy outliers, and non-democratic governments holding differing, but non-threatening, worldviews.

A key logjam in halting the conflict between the US and its allies on one side and violent Islamic extremists on the other, however, remains the long track record of American support of dictatorships across the Sunni heartland, what purifier Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood call "apostate regimes." The US can continue to ignore this source of recruitment for the insurgencies, but the continued support for those regimes is unlikely to urge insurgents to come to the table or reconsider their current impetus.

- The US must help established Arab regimes destroy the insurgency within Islam, regardless of the low chances of success. The attraction of radical and sometimes violent forms of Islam has been seen in the ability of the self-proclaimed Islamic State to recruit Muslims and in the electoral victories of the Muslim Brotherhood, HAMAS, and Islamist parties in Algeria. Faced with few options, the US should decide what America's level of exposure will be in a Middle East that is in the violent process of sorting itself out.