10 Common Myths of Islam

David Cameron - English Prime Minister

"Many Muslims I’ve talked to about these issues are deeply offended by the use of the word ‘Islamic’ or ‘Islamist’ to describe the terrorist threat we face today … it is mainstream Britain which needs to integrate more with the British Asian (Muslim) way of life, not the other way around.

Muslims often complain of popular "misconceptions" about their religion in the West.

We took a hard look, however, and found that the most prevalent myths of Islam are the ones held by Muslims and Western apologists. The only glaring exception to this is the misconception that all Muslims are alike (they aren't, of course), but even Muslims often believe this as well, as evidenced by the various contrary factions insisting that they are the true Muslims, while those who disagree with them are either infidels, hijackers, or hypocrites.

Don't be fooled! Hear the myths, but know the truth.
**Islam Means ‘Peace’**

**The Myth:**

Lesser educated Muslims sometimes claim that the root word of Islam is “al-Salaam,” which is “peace” in Arabic.

**The Truth:**

An Arabic word only has one root. The root word for Islam is “al-Silm,” which means “submission” or “surrender.” There is no disagreement about this among Islamic scholars. al-Silm (submission) does not mean the same thing as al-Salaam (peace), otherwise they would be the same word.

Submission and peace can be very different concepts, even if a form of peace is often brought about through forcing others into submission. As the modern-day Islamic scholar, Ibrahim Sulaiman, puts it, "Jihad is not inhumane, despite its necessary violence and bloodshed, its ultimate desire is peace which is protected and enhanced by the rule of law."

In truth, the Quran not only calls Muslims to submit to Allah, it also commands them to subdue people of other religions until they are in a full state of submission to Islamic rule. This has inspired the aggressive history of Islam and its success in conquering other cultures.

**Islam Respects Women as Equals**

**The Myth:**

The Quran places men and women on equal foundation before Allah. Each person is judged according to his or her own deeds. Women have equal rights under Islamic law.

**The Truth:**

Merely stating that individuals will be judged as such by Allah does not mean that they have equal rights and roles, or that they are judged by the same standards.

There is no ambiguity in the Quran, the life of Muhammad, or Islamic law as to the inferiority of women to men despite the efforts of modern-day apologists to salvage Western-style feminism from scraps and fragments of verses that have historically held no such progressive interpretation.

After military conquests, Muhammad would dole out captured women as war prizes to his men. In at least one case, he advocated that they be raped in front of their husbands. Captured women were made into sex slaves by the very men who killed their husbands and brothers. There are four Quranic verses in which "Allah" makes clear that a Muslim master has full sexual access to his female slaves, yet there is not one that prohibits rape.

The Quran gives Muslim men permission to beat their wives for disobedience, but nowhere does it command love in marriage. It plainly says that husbands are “a degree above” wives. The Hadith says that women are intellectually inferior, and that they comprise the majority of Hell’s occupants.
Under Islamic law, a man may divorce his wife at his choosing. If he does this twice, then wishes to remarry her, she must first have sex with another man. Men are exempt from such degradations.

Muslim women are not free to marry whom they please, as are Muslim men. Their husband may also bring other wives (and slaves) into the marriage bed. And she must be sexually available to him at any time (as a field ready to be “tilled,” according to the holy book of Islam).

Muslim women do not inherit property in equal portion to males. This is somewhat ironic given that Islam owes its existence to the wealth of Muhammad's first wife, which would not otherwise have been inherited by her given that she had two brothers and her first husband had three sons.

A woman's testimony in court is considered to be worth only half that of a man's, according to the Quran. Unlike a man, she must also cover her head - and often her face.

If a woman wants to prove that she was raped, then there must be four male witnesses to corroborate her account. Otherwise she can be jailed or stoned to death for confessing to “adultery.”

Given all of this, it is quite a stretch to say that men and women have “equality under Islam” based on obscure theological analogies or comparisons. This is an entirely new ploy that is designed for modern tastes and disagrees sharply with the reality of Islamic law and history.

**Jihad Means 'Inner Struggle'**

**The Myth:**

Islam's Western apologists sometimes claim that since the Arabic word, Jihad, literally means “fight” or “struggle,” it refers to an “inner struggle” rather than holy war.

**The Truth:**

In Arabic, "jihad" means struggle. In Islam, it means holy war.

The Quran specifically exempts the disabled and elderly from Jihad (4:95), which would make no sense if the word is being used merely within the context of spiritual struggle. It is also unclear why Muhammad and his Quran would use graphic language, such as smiting fingers and heads from the hands and necks of unbelievers if he were speaking merely of character development.

With this in mind, Muslim apologists generally admit that there are two meanings to the word, but insist that “inner struggle” is the “greater Jihad,” whereas “holy war” is the “lesser.” In fact, this misconception is based only on an single hadith that Islamic scholars generally agreed was fabricated.

By contrast, the most reliable of all Hadith collections is that of Bukhari. Jihad is mentioned over 200 times in reference to the words of Muhammad and each one carries a clear connotation to holy war, with only a handful of possible exceptions (dealing with a woman's supporting role during a time of holy war).

**Islam is a Religion of Peace**
The Myth:

Muhammad was a peaceful man who taught his followers to be the same. Muslims lived peacefully for centuries, fighting only in self-defense, and only when it was necessary. True Muslims would never act aggressively.

The Truth:

There shouldn't be any argument over who the "true Muslim" is because the Quran clearly distinguishes the true Muslim from the pretender in Sura 9 and elsewhere. According to this - one of the last chapters of the Quran - the true believer "strives and fights with their wealth and persons" while the hypocrites are those who "sit at home," refusing to join the jihad against unbelievers in foreign lands.

In truth, Muhammad organized 65 military campaigns in the last ten years of his life and personally led 27 of them. The more power that he attained, the smaller the excuse needed to go to battle, until finally he began attacking tribes merely because they were not yet part of his growing empire.

After Muhammad's death, his successor immediately went to war with former allied tribes which wanted to go their own way. Abu Bakr called them 'apostates' and slaughtered anyone who did not want to remain Muslim. Eventually, he was successful in holding the empire together through blood and violence.

The prophet of Islam's most faithful followers and even his own family soon turned on each other as well. There were four caliphs (leaders) in the first twenty-five years, each of which was a trusted companion of his. Three of these four were murdered. The third caliph was murdered by those allied with the son of the first caliph. The fourth caliph was murdered in the midst of a conflict with the fifth caliph, who began a 100-year dynasty of excess and debauchery that was brought to an end in a gruesome, widespread bloodbath by descendants of Muhammad's uncle (who was not even a Muslim).

Muhammad's own daughter, Fatima, and his son-in-law, Ali, who both survived the pagan hardship during the Meccan years safe and sound, did not survive Islam after the death of Muhammad. Fatima died of stress from persecution within three months, and Ali was later assassinated by Muslim rivals. Their son (Muhammad's grandson) was killed in battle with the faction that became today's Sunnis. His people became Shias. The relatives and personal friends of Muhammad were mixed into both warring groups, which then fractured further into hostile sub-divisions as Islam expanded.

Muslim apologists, who like to say that is impossible for today's terrorists to be Muslim when they kill fellow Muslims, would have a very tough time explaining the war between Fatima's followers and Aisha to a knowledgeable audience. Muhammad explicitly held up both his favorite daughter and his favorite wife as model Muslim women, yet they were invoked respectively by each side in the violent civil war that followed his death. Which one was the prophet of God so horribly wrong about?

Muhammad left his men with instructions to take the battle against Christians, Persians, Jews and polytheists (which came to include millions of unfortunate Hindus). For the next four centuries,
Muslim armies steamrolled over unsuspecting neighbors, plundering them of loot and slaves, and forcing the survivors to either convert or pay tribute at the point of a sword.

Companions of Muhammad lived to see Islam declare war on every major religion in the world in just the first few decades following his death - pressing the Jihad against Hindus, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists.

By the time of the Crusades (when the Europeans began fighting back), Muslims had conquered two-thirds of the Christian world by sword, from Syria to Spain, and across North Africa. Millions of Christians were enslaved by Muslims, and tens of millions of Africans. The Arab slave-trading routes would stay open for 1300 years until pressure from Christian-based countries forced Islamic nations to declare the practice illegal (in theory). To this day, the Muslim world has never apologized for the victims of Jihad and slavery.

There is not another religion in the world that consistently produces terrorism in the name of God as does Islam. The most dangerous Muslims are nearly always those who interpret the Quran most transparently. They are the fundamentalists or purists of the faith, and believe in Muhammad's mandate to spread Islamic rule by the sword, putting to death those who will not submit. In the absence of true infidels, they will even turn on each other.

The holy texts of Islam are saturated with verses of violence and hatred toward those outside the faith, as well as the aforementioned "hypocrites" (Muslims who don't act like Muslims). In sharp contrast to the Bible, which generally moves from relatively violent episodes to far more peaceful mandates, the Quran travels the exact opposite path (violence is first forbidden, then permitted, then mandatory). The handful of earlier verses that speak of tolerance are overwhelmed by an avalanche of later ones that carry a much different message. While Old Testament verses of blood and guts are generally bound by historical context within the text itself, Quranic imperatives to violence usually appear open-ended and subject to personal interpretation.

From the history of the faith to its most sacred writings, those who want to believe in "peaceful Islam" have a lot more to ignore than do the terrorists. By any objective measure, the "Religion of Peace" has been the harshest, bloodiest religion the world has ever known. In Islam there is no peace unless Muslims have power - and even then...

*Islam is Tolerant of Other Religions*

**The Myth:**

Religious minorities have flourished under Islam. Muslims are commanded to protect Jews and Christians (the People of the Book) and do them no harm. The Quran says in Sura 109, "To you, your religion. To me, mine."

**The Truth:**

Religious minorities have not "flourished" under Islam. In fact, they have dwindled to mere shadows after centuries of persecution and discrimination. Some were converted from their native religion by brute force, others under the agonizing strain of dhimmitude.
What Muslims call "tolerance," others correctly identify as institutionalized discrimination. The consignment of Jews and Christians to dhimmis under Islamic rule means that they are not allowed the same religious rights and freedoms as Muslims. They cannot share their faith, for example, or build houses of worship without permission.

Historically, dhimmis have often had to wear distinguishing clothing or cut their hair in a particular manner that indicates their position of inferiority and humiliation. They do not share the same legal rights as Muslims, and must even pay a poll tax (the jizya). They are to be killed or have their children taken from them if they cannot satisfy the tax collector’s requirements.

For hundreds of years, the Christian population in occupied Europe had their sons taken away and forcibly converted into Muslim warriors (known as Jannisaries) by the Ottoman Turks.

It is under this burden of discrimination and third-class status that so many religious minorities converted to Islam over the centuries. Those who didn’t often faced economic and social hardships that persist to this day and are appalling by Western standards of true religious tolerance and pluralism.

For those who are not “the People of the Book,” such as Hindus and atheists, there is very little tolerance to be found once Islam establishes political superiority. The Quran tells Muslims to “fight in the way of Allah” until “religion is only for Allah.” The conquered populations face death if they do not establish regular prayer and charity in the Islamic tradition (ie. the pillars of Islam).

Tamerlane and other Muslim warriors slaughtered tens of millions of Hindus and Buddhists, and displaced or forcibly converted millions more over the last thousand years. Islamists in Somalia behead Christians. In Iran, they are jailed.

One of the great ironies of Islam is that non-Muslims are to be treated according to the very standards by which Muslims themselves would claim the right to violent self-defense were the shoe on the other foot. Islam is its own justification. Most Muslims therefore feel no need to explain the ingrained arrogance and double standard.

There are about 500 verses in the Quran that speak of Allah’s hatred for non-Muslims and the punishment that he has prepared for their unbelief. There is also a tiny handful that say otherwise, but these are mostly earlier verses that many scholars consider to be abrogated by the later, more violent ones.

As for Sura 109, any true Quran scholar will point out that the purpose of the verse was to distinguish Islam from the gods of the Quraysh (one of which was named "Allah") rather than to advocate religious tolerance for non-Muslims. At the time that he narrated this very early verse, Muhammad did not have any power, and thus no choice but to be "tolerant" of others. By contrast, there was no true tolerance shown when he returned to Mecca with power many years later and demanded the eviction or death of anyone who would not convert to Islam. In fact, he physically destroyed the cherished idols of the people to whom he had previously addressed in Sura 109.

If tolerance simply means discouraging the mass slaughter of those of a different faith, then today’s Islam generally meets this standard more often than not. But, if tolerance means allowing people of other faiths the same religious liberties that Muslims enjoy, then Islam is fundamentally the most
intolerant religion under the sun.

**Islam is Completely Incompatible with Terrorism**

**The Myth:**

Islam is completely incompatible with acts of terrorism. It is against Islam to kill innocent people.

**The Truth:**

Islam does prohibit killing innocent people. Unfortunately, you don't qualify.

Even though many Muslims earnestly believe that their religion prohibits the killing of innocent people by acts of terrorism, the truth is certainly more complicated. This is why Muslims on both sides of the terror debate accuse the other of hijacking Islam while insisting that they are the true believers. It is also why organizations that commit horrible atrocities in the name of Allah, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, receive a significant amount of moral and financial support from the mainstream.

In fact, the definition of "terrorism" in Islam is ambiguous at best. And the definition of an "innocent person" in Islam isn't something that Muslim apologists advertise when they say that such persons aren't to be harmed. The reason for this is that anyone who rejects Muhammad is not considered to be innocent according to Islamic teaching.

Consider that a great deal of the Quran is devoted to describing the horrible punishment that awaits those who refuse to become Muslim. How then can Muslims say that the subjects of divine wrath are innocent persons?

The most protected and respected of all non-Muslims are the dhimma, the “people of the book.” Specifically, these would be Jews and Christians who agree to Islamic rule and pay the jizya (tribute to Muslims). Yet, the word “dhimmi” is derived from an Arabic root that means “guilt” or “blame.” [“...the dhimmi parent and sister words mean both 'to blame' as well as safeguards that can be extended to protect the blameworthy" Amitav Ghosh, "In an Antique Land"].

So, if even the dhimma have a measure of guilt attached to their status (by virtue of having rejected Allah's full truth), how can non-Muslims who oppose Islamic rule or refuse to pay the jizya be considered “innocent?”

Even within the Islamic community there is a category of Muslims who are also said to bear guilt – greater, even, than the average non-believer. These are the hypocrites, or "Munafiqin," whom Muhammad referred to in the most derogatory terms. A hypocrite is considered to be a Muslim in name only. They are distinguished from true Muslims, according to the 9th Sura, by an unwillingness to wage (v.81, 86) or fund (v.121) holy war. True believers fight and are harsh to unbelievers (v.123).

The Muslim terrorists who frequently kill "other Muslims" in the name of Allah do so believing that their victims are Munafiqin or kafir (unbelievers). This is a part of Sharia known as takfir, in which a Muslim can be declared an apostate and then executed for their role in hindering the expansion of Islamic authority. (A true Muslim would go to paradise anyway, in which case he or she could hardly
be expected to nurse a grudge amidst the orgy of sex and wine).

In addition to the murky definition of innocence, there is also the problem of distinguishing terrorism from holy war. Islamic terrorists rarely refer to themselves as terrorists, but usually say that they are holy warriors (Mujahideen, Shahid, or Fedayeen). They consider their acts to be a form of Jihad.

Holy war is commanded in the Quran and Hadith. In Sura 9:29, Muhammad establishes the principle that unbelievers should be fought until they either convert to Islam or accept a state of humiliation under Islamic subjugation. This is confirmed in the Hadith by both Sahih Muslim and Bukhari.

In many places, the prophet of Islam says that Jihad is the ideal path for a Muslim, and that believers should “fight in the way of Allah.” There are dozens of open-ended passages in the Quran that exhort killing and fighting – far more than there are of peace and tolerance. It is somewhat naïve to think that their inclusion in this "eternal discourse between God and Man" was of historical value only and not intended to be relevant to present-day believers, particularly when there is little to nothing within the text to distinguish them in such fashion.

Combine the Quran's exhortation to holy war with the ambiguity of innocence and a monumental problem develops that cannot be patched over by mere semantics. Not only is there a deep tolerance for violence in Islam, but also a sharp disagreement and lack of clarity over the conditions that justify this violence - and just whom the targets may be.

Even many of those Muslims who claim to be against terrorism still support the “insurgency” in Iraq, for example, and often entertain the allegation that there is a broader “war against Islam.” Although American troops in Iraq were trying to protect innocent life and help the country rebuild, Muslims around the world and in the West believe that it was legitimate for true believers to try and kill them.

Enjoying the sanction of holy war, the Mujahid thus reasoned that it is permissible to attack fellow Iraqis – the ones helping the Americans - even if they are part of a democratically-elected Iraqi government. These non-combatants and combatants alike are believed to be the “Munafiqin” or "Takfir" assisting the enemy "Crusaders."

Although we use Iraq as an example here, this is the same rationale that is ultimately behind all Islamic terror, from the Philippines to Thailand. Wherever the Muslim religion is a minority, there are always radicals who believe that violence is justified in bringing Islam to dominance - just as Muhammad taught and set by example in Mecca and other places, such as the land of al-Harith.

And what of the so-called “innocents” who suffer from the bombings and shootings? Even in Muhammad’s time they were unavoidable. The much-touted hadith in which Muhammad forbade the killing of women, for example, also indicates that there were such casualties in his attacks on other tribes.

If there is any doubt that he believed that the forbidden is sometimes necessary, it should be put to rest by an incident in which Muhammad’s men warned him that a planned night raid against an enemy camp would mean that women and children would be killed. He merely replied “they are of them,” meaning the men.

This is the slippery slope opened by the sanction of holy war. What starts out as the perception of a
noble cause of self-defense against a supposed threat gradually devolves into a "let Allah sort them out" campaign through a series of logical steps that are ultimately justified by the sublime goal of Islamic rule.

Islam is not intended to co-exist as an equal with other religions. It is to be the dominant religion with Sharia as the supreme law. Islamic rule is to be extended to the ends of the earth and resistance is to be dealt with by any means necessary.

Apologists in the West often shrug off the Quran's many verses of violence by saying that they are relevant only in a "time of war."

To this, Islamic terrorists would agree. They are at war.

*Islam is a Democracy*

**The Myth:**

Islam is compatible with democratic principles. The religion itself is a democracy.

**The Truth:**

A democracy is a system in which all people are judged as equals before the law, regardless of race, religion or gender. The vote of every individual counts as much as the vote of any other. The collective will of the people then determines the rules of society.

Under Islamic law, only Muslim males are entitled to full rights. The standing of a woman is often half that of a man's - sometimes even less. Non-Muslims have no standing with a Muslim. In fact, a Muslim can never be put to death for killing an unbeliever.

The Islamic state is guided by Islamic law, derived from the Quran and Sunnah. A body of clerics interprets the law and applies it to all circumstances social, cultural and political. The people are never to be placed above the Quran and Sunnah any more than man should be above Allah.

It is somewhat debatable as to whether there are any states in the Muslim world that qualify as actual democracies. There is no denying, however, that the tiny handful that are often held up as democratic nations are ones in which deep tension exists between the government and religious leaders, as the latter often complain that democracy is an idolatrous system imposed on them.

Islam does not facilitate democracy.

*The Quran is the Muslim Counterpart to the Bible*

**The Myth:**

The Quran is to Muslims what the Bible is to Christians (and the Torah to Jews).

**The Truth:**
The Quran only contains what is presented as the literal words of Allah - as relayed by Muhammad. It can be compared to a manufactured text that includes only the words of Jesus (the so-called “red-letter” verses) extracted from their New Testament historical context and then randomly mixed together (the chapters of the Quran are arranged by size and themes are rarely consistent even within each chapter).

By contrast, the Bible contains history and biographical detail. For example, there is nothing in the Quran that details Muhammad's life, whereas the Bible contains four books that present all that is known about the biography of Jesus. Another distinction is that when the Bible commands violence - as it does in a handful of Old Testament verses - the intended target is explicitly defined within the passage, leaving little doubt that it is a recounting of history and not an open-ended command for anyone else to do the same.

Despite the rhapsody with which Muslims sing the Quran's praises, there is an obvious reason why only a minority have actually bothered to delve deeper than an occasional sporadic perusal through its pages. The random arrangement of verses and near absence of context makes it difficult to understand. For this reason the Quran is rarely printed without the incorporation of voluminous commentary (that usually expresses the personal preferences of the translator).

In fact, the Muslim counterpart to the Bible is the Quran, Hadith and Sira combined.

The Hadith is a collection of anecdotes and historical snippets of Muhammad's life based on the relayed narrations of those who lived with him. Unfortunately, authenticity varies. But the most dependable compilers are agreed by Muslims scholars to be Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, followed by Abu Dawud. It is on the Hadith that Islamic law (Sharia) is based.

The Sira is the biography of Muhammad's life. Again, there are reliability issues which would appear somewhat bewildering to Christians, given that the gospels were well in place within the first few centuries following the crucifixion - which preceded Muslim history by over 600 years. Still, the most reliable biography of Muhammad was compiled by Ibn Ishaq, who wrote about 150 years after his death. His original work survives only in what was "edited" by a later translator (Ibn Hisham, who admitted that he filtered out several accounts that were of a distasteful nature).

A failure to recognize that the Bible is only comparable to the Quran, Hadith and Sira together often leads to faulty accusation and misplaced analysis.