

Islamism, Islamofascism, and Islam?

by G. Murphy Donovan (December 2014)



“I have been ordered by Allah to fight against the people until they testify...etc.”

Internet journalism could be the ideal public forum. Anybody with a computer can write, read, or comment on what is written. *Disqus.com* now captures commentary, authors, and content links. The feedback loops on the internet make print journalism, in contrast, look like a one-way mirror. Conventional journalists write, you read. Problem? Write the editor where most letters/commentary gets tossed in the circular file.

All literature should be a conversation of sorts. With the internet, critical readers and real-time feedback, over time, should make for better writers. Maybe even better ideas. Of course, the democratization of essaying is not without hazard.

You have a regular opportunity to make an ass out of yourself in public. Indeed on an off day, you might even read like the *NY Times*, *Rolling Stone*, or the *Washington Post*. Alas, the internet is also a bit like your school report card, or your rap sheet, a matter of permanent record.

Then there are trolls! Loosely defined, a troll is a reader who surfs the web looking for an argument. Their commentary is often, but not always, abrasive, rude, and hostile. Comments, like content, usually have editors to screen the obvious abuses. Sometimes the commentary is simply arbitrary. Nonetheless, objection to a single word might spawn a comment thread or a fusillade of like-minded vitriol.

“Islamism” is one of those words.

Words matter. Alas, neologisms come into the language all the time, especially when the drama index is high. Ironically, polemicists on the Right and Left abhor words like Islamism.

Liberals think the word unfairly links radicals or terrorists with religion. Some on the Left, team Obama for [example](#), would have you believe that mayhem in Mohammed’s name has nothing to do with Islam, a little like claiming that the Crusades were sponsored by Rotarians. The thought police at the White House, at CIA, and even at the Associated Press have stricken

words like Islamism from their vocabularies by fiat. The Left, traditionally believes that candor, or the action that truth might require, will make a problem worse. Appeasement is an honored liberal idiom.

Conservatives, on the other hand, suspect the “ism” is a hedge, a reluctance to call a spade a spade. Some on the Right would have you believe that Islam and its adherents are coherent; a kind of terror, rhetoric, and religious monolith.

Here ends are confused with means. The objective of imperial Islam may be monoculture. Yet, with 1.5 billion followers, realities will always be at odds with utopian dreams. The Shia/Sunni schism, for example, has plagued the *Ummah* for 1300 years. To suggest that all Muslims are militant radicals, or terrorists, is a little like confusing the bulls with the dairy cows.

In fact, with a word like Islamism, both sides are wrong. We might capture the dilemma by suggesting that the Left has its head in the sand while the Right has its head where the sun seldom shines. Arabs, Muslims, and the Islamic Press use words like [Islamism](#). Why is that?

Islamism, as opposed to Islam, suggests movement and militancy. You might think of Islamists as Muslim crusaders. Such distinctions are self-evident when militants are parsed from the so-called “moderate” majority. That majority in turn are happy to be separated from the swords, shooters, and beards. Unfortunately, these asserted distinctions do nothing to moderate the menace.

If only ten percent of Muslims (150 million) are militant, then the threat is substantial by any measure.

Neologisms are born when ordinary language fails to capture a phenomenon or an idea. Terms like Islamism and “Islamofascism” fill a void of meaning. Yes, the majority are not terrorists. They are worse! Passive aggressors, not moderates, might be a better description for most of the silent Muslim majority.

How many Russians were Communists and how many Germans were Nazis in the beginning? The numbers never have to be large. Militancy and terror are usually a minority and minorities still prevail. A kinetic vanguard can always depend on the silence and apathy of majorities. The Islamist menace is no different today.

Indeed, the propagandists and the swords are the lesser of two evils. We know what they believe, what they fight for, and we see what they do on a daily basis. Militants make no

secret of their religious motivation. Whatever the number of radicals, they will never be as numerous, or as guilty, as the larger *Ummah* which is routinely disingenuous, routinely apathetic, routinely absolved, routinely hypocritical, and routinely given a pass on accountability.

Most Americans and Europeans believe that most Muslims are innocents. How is this different than what most Muslims believe? Sadly, the great crimes of any century are more a function of apathy and appeasement, and less a product of militancy. Apathy and denial about the Islamism problem is as much a problem in the West as it is in the East.

A malignant force, once set in motion, tends to stay in motion unless confronted by an equal or superior force (hat tip to Isaac). The real strength of Islamists is the apathy of 59 Muslim nations worldwide, a sixth of the world's population. Islamofascism is an *Ummah* community problem. The progressive West cannot save the Islamic East from itself.

Calling Islamists criminals, militants, radicals, fundamentalists, or even terrorists might be necessary but not sufficient. These are half-truths, euphemisms at best. Proselytizers, apologists, and jihadists must be linked precisely, directly, and routinely to the ideology, communities, and culture of origin. That culture is Islam! Culture is the primary culprit midst James Clapper's "nefarious" characters.

So let's be clear when we speak of the enemy. With the Muslim wars, there are probably three relevant semantic distinctions to be made. **Islam** is the big tent, the culture, for the most part an apathetic, apologetic, passive, or mostly bovine majority. **Islamists** are the proselytizing militants or financiers, missionaries, domestic or immigrant activists who believe they act in the name of a "great" religion. **Islamofascists** are the kinetic Muslims, those who oppress or kill in the name of Mohammed, the Koran, or imperial Islam. The terms are related, though not necessarily interchangeable.*

The necessity to distinguish militants from moderates is not trivial. The so-called moderate is the more difficult problem, demographically and ideologically. Islamism is in the end a philosophical, political, religious, now kinetic, quest to reverse the vector of Emanuel Kant's optimism. There is more than a little history to support irredentist culture. And the passage of time is not progress. Dark ages are still possible. The vector of history moves forward – or backwards. Contemporary Islamism is a very large sanguinary bet on door number two, the recidivist option.

And yes, Islamists claim that their aggression is actually defense, a victim's posture. Let's allow that historical delusion. Muslim scholars and clerics have been looking to the past in

search of the future for centuries. Recidivism, yea political immaturity, is the fatal flaw of all utopians, especially fascists. Unfortunately, the predicate of all fascism, religious or secular, is coercion. ISIS and *Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi* are the logical products of Islamism unchallenged.



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

There is no question that imperial Islam will fail – implode or be defeated. The question is how much masochism, denial, and damage the *Ummah* and the civilized world will endure before that day arrives.

*Some of the best defenses for using terms like Islamism and Islamofascism often come, ironically, from serious writers on the American Left. See Christopher Hitchens seminal [essay](#) in *Slate* or almost anything written by Paul [Berman](#) on the subject.

G. Murphy Donovan writes about the politics of national security.

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