Where Did the Religion of Peace Slogan Come From?

Days after the ISIS-inspired terrorist attack in San Bernardino, President Obama's address to the nation concerning the threat of ISIS missed the mark. In fact, President Obama seemed at times to be more concerned with Americans ostracizing Muslim communities through "suspicion and hate," than he was with protecting innocent American civilians from murder in the name of radical Islam.

It is high time for western political leaders to stop responding to terrorism by naming Islam as 'the religion of peace'. It is time to have a hard conversation about Islam.

The West is in the throes of acute cognitive dissonance over Islam, whose brands are at war with each other. On the one hand we are told that Islam is the Religion of Peace. On the other hand we are confronted with an unending sequence of acts of terror committed in the name of the faith.

There is a depressing connection between the two brands: the louder one brand becomes, the more the volume is turned up on the other.

The slogan 'Religion of Peace' has been steadily promoted by western leaders in response to terrorism: George Bush Jr and Jacques Chirac after 9/11, Tony Blair after 7/7, David Cameron after drummer Lee Riby was beheaded and after British tourists were slaughtered in Tunisia, and François Hollande after the Charlie Hebdo killings. After the beheading of 21 Copts on a Libyan beach Barak Obama called upon the world to "continue to lift up the voices of Muslim clerics and scholars who teach the true peaceful nature of Islam."

One may well ask how 'the religion of peace' became a brand of Islam, for the phrase cannot be found in the Qur'an, nor in

the teachings of Muhammad.

Islam was first called 'the religion of peace' as late as 1930, in the title of a book published in India by Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi. The phrase was slow to take off, but by the 1970s it was appearing more and more frequently in the writings of Muslims for western audiences.

What does "religion of peace" actually mean?

Words for 'peace' in European languages imply the absence of war, and freedom from disturbance. It is no coincidence that the German words Friede 'peace' and frei 'free' sound similar, because they come from the same root.

While there is a link in Arabic between salam, a word often translated 'peace', and Islam, the real connection is found in the idea of safety.

The word Islam is based upon a military metaphor. Derived from aslama 'surrender' its primary meaning is to make oneself safe (salama) through surrender. In its original meaning, a muslim was someone who surrendered in warfare.

Thus Islam did not stand for the absence of war, but for one of its intended outcomes: surrender leading to the 'safety' of captivity. It was Muhammad himself who said to his non-Muslim neighbors aslim taslam 'surrender (i.e. convert to Islam) and you will be safe'.

The Religion of Peace slogan has not gone uncontested. It has been rejected by many, including [Melanie Phillips](#) writing for *The Times*, who called it 'pure myth'.

Even among Muslims the phrase has not only been challenged by radical clerics such as Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, but also by mainstream Muslim leaders.

Sheikh Ramadan Al-Buti of Syria was one of the most widely respected traditionalist Sunni scholars before he was killed

in 2013 by a suicide bomber. The year before he had been listed as number 27 in the '_Independent Journal_.