RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

No God But God

Reza Aslan

Contents

About the Book

Though it is the fastest growing religion in the world, Islam remains shrouded in ignorance and fear. What is the essence of this ancient faith? Is it a religion of peace or of war? How does Allah differ from the God of Jews and Christians? Can an Islamic state be founded on democratic values such as pluralism and human rights?

In *No god but God*, challenging the 'clash of civilisations' mentality that has distorted our view of Islam, Aslan explains this faith in all its complexity, beauty and compassion.

About the Author

Dr. Reza Aslan is an internationally acclaimed writer and scholar of religions. His first book, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*, was an international bestseller. Shortlisted for the *Guadian* First Book Award, it has been translated into thirteen languages and was named by Blackwells as one of the hundred most important books of the last decade. He is also the author of *How to Win a Cosmic War: Confronting Radical Religion*, as well as the editor of *Tablet* & *Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East*. Born in Iran, he now lives in Los Angeles, where he is associate professor of creative writing at the University of California, Riverside.

Also by Reza Aslan

How to Win a Cosmic War:
Confronting Radical Religion

No god but God

The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam

NEW EDITION, FULLY REVISED

AND UPDATED

REZA ASLAN

arrow books

For my mother, Soheyla,
and my father, Hassan

Acknowledgments

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for never doubting me; Catherine Bell, for getting me started; Frank Conroy, for giving me a shot; Elyse Cheney, for finding me; Daniel Menaker, for trusting me; Amanda Fortini, for fixing me; my teachers, for challenging me; and Ian Werrett, for absolutely everything else.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Preface to the Updated Edition

TEN YEARS AFTER the attacks of 9/11, anti-Muslim sentiment is at an all-time high throughout Europe and North America, far higher than it was in the immediate aftermath of that tragic day in 2001. Polls show that nearly half the populations in the United States and Canada hold unfavorable views toward Islam. In Europe, the passage of laws curtailing the rights and freedoms of Muslims and the success of avowedly anti-Muslim politicians and political parties have led to an even greater sense of marginalization and disenfranchisement among Muslim communities.

Many reasons have been given to explain this sudden surge in anti-Muslim hysteria. Certainly the global financial crisis has played a role. In times of economic distress, it is only natural for people to look for a scapegoat upon whom to thrust their fears and anxieties. In many parts of Europe and North America, fear of Islam goes hand in hand with larger concerns over immigration and the increasingly borderless, increasingly heterogeneous world in which we live.

It is also true that, a decade after the start of the so-called war on terror, a sense of war weariness has descended upon the United States and its Western allies. Now that the patriotic fervor with which the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq were launched has dissipated and the architect of the 9/11 attacks—Osama bin Laden—killed,

many are wondering what exactly has been achieved with the trillions of dollars spent and the thousands of lives lost fighting the so-called “war on terror.” At the same time, a spate of “homegrown” terror attacks in Europe and North America has created a heightened sense of concern, even in the United States, where the economically prosperous, socially integrated, and upwardly mobile Muslim community is no longer thought to be immune to the kind of militant ideology that has found a foothold among some young Muslims in Europe.

But while these are all important determinants in explaining the tide of anti-Muslim sentiment that has washed over Europe and North America in recent years, there is another, more fundamental factor that must be addressed. It involves a 2010 poll showing that nearly a quarter of Americans continue to believe that President Barack Obama is himself a Muslim, a 10 percent jump from a similar survey taken in 2008. Among registered Republicans, the number is nearly 40 percent; among self-described Tea Party members, it is upward of 60 percent. In fact, polls consistently show that the more one disagrees with President Obama’s policies on, say, healthcare or financial regulation, the more likely one is to consider him a Muslim.

Simply put, Islam in the United States has become *otherized*. It has become a receptacle into which can be tossed all the angst and apprehension people feel about the faltering economy, about the new and unfamiliar political order, about the shifting cultural, racial, and religious landscapes that have fundamentally altered the world. Across Europe and North America, whatever is fearful, whatever is foreign, whatever is alien and unsafe is being tagged with the label “Islam.”

This is not an unexpected development, certainly not in the United States. Indeed, everything that is currently being said about America’s diverse Muslim population—

that they are foreign and exotic and un-American—was said about Catholic and Jewish immigrants nearly a century ago. Neither is the otherizing of Islam a new phenomenon in the Western world. On the contrary, from the Crusades to the clash of civilizations, Islam has always played a significant role as the West's quintessential other. Still, it is dispiriting to note that even in a country founded on the principle of religious freedom, a large swath of the population firmly believes that such freedoms do not apply to Muslims, that Muslims are somehow *different*.

When I published *No god but God* in 2005, my aim was to challenge this assumption. I wanted to demonstrate that there is nothing exceptional or extraordinary about Islam, that the same historical, cultural, and geographic considerations that have influenced the development of every religion in every part of the world have similarly influenced the development of Islam, transforming it into one of the most eclectic, most diverse faiths in the history of religions. And while that message is as important today as it was back then—perhaps even more so—we must recognize that greater knowledge about Islam is not enough to alter people's perceptions of Muslims. Minds are not changed merely through acquiring data or information (if that were the case it would take no effort to convince Americans that Obama is, in fact, a Christian). Rather, it is solely through the slow and steady building of personal relationships that one discovers the fundamental truth that all people everywhere have the same dreams and aspirations, that all people struggle with the same fears and anxieties.

Of course, such a process takes time. It may take another generation or so for this era of anti-Muslim frenzy to be looked back upon with the same shame and derision with which the current generation views the anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish hysterics of the past. But that day will no doubt come. Perhaps then we will recognize the intimate

connections that bind us all together beyond any cultural, ethnic, or religious affiliations.

Inshallah. God willing.

Prologue

THE CLASH OF MONOTHEISMS

MIDNIGHT, AND FIVE hours to Marrakech. I have always had trouble sleeping on trains. There is something about the unrelenting rhythm and hum of the wheels as they roll over the tracks that always keeps me awake. It is like a distant melody that's too loud to ignore. Not even the darkness that inundates the compartments at night seems to help. It is worse at night, when the stars are the only lights visible in the vast, muted desert whizzing by my window.

This is an unfortunate quirk, because the best way to travel by train through Morocco is asleep. The trains are flooded with illegal *faux guides*, who shift from cabin to cabin searching for tourists with whom to share their recommendations for the best restaurants, the cheapest hotels, the cleanest women. The *faux guides* in Morocco speak half a dozen languages, which makes them difficult to ignore. Usually, my olive skin, thick brows, and black hair keep them at bay. But the only way to avoid them completely is to be asleep, so that they have no choice but to move on to the next beleaguered traveler.

That is precisely what I thought was taking place in the compartment next to mine when I heard raised voices. It was an argument between what I assumed was a *faux guide* and a reluctant tourist. I could hear an inexorable

cackle of Arabic spoken too quickly for me to understand, interrupted by the occasional piqued responses of an American.

I had witnessed this type of exchange before: in *grands-taxis*, at the bazaar, too often on the trains. In my few months in Morocco, I'd become accustomed to the abrupt fury of the locals, which can burst into a conversation like a clap of thunder, then—as you brace for the storm—dissolve just as quickly into a grumble and a friendly pat on the back.

The voices next door grew louder, and now I thought I grasped the matter. It wasn't a *faux guide* at all. Someone was being chastised. It was difficult to tell, but I recognized the garbled Berber dialect the authorities sometimes use when they want to intimidate foreigners. The American kept saying "Wait a minute," then, "*Parlez-vous anglais? Parlez-vous français?*" The Moroccan, I could tell, was demanding their passports.

Curious, I stood and stepped quietly over the knees of the snoring businessman slumped next to me. I slid open the door just enough to squeeze through and walked into the corridor. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I glimpsed the familiar red-and-black conductor's uniform flashing across the glass door of the adjoining compartment. I knocked lightly and entered without waiting for a response.

"*Salaam alay-kum*," I said. *Peace be with you*.

The conductor halted his diatribe and turned to me with the customary "*Walay-kum salaam*." *And to you, peace*. His face was flushed and his eyes red, though not, it seemed, from anger. His uncombed hair and the heavy creases in his uniform indicated he had only just awakened. There was an indolent quality to his speech that made him difficult to understand. He was emboldened by my presence.

"Dear sir," he said in clear and comprehensible Arabic, "this is not a nightclub. There are children here. This is not a nightclub."

I had no idea what he meant.

The American gripped my shoulders and turned me toward him. “Will you please tell this man we were sleeping?” He was young and remarkably tall, with large green eyes and a shock of blond hair that hung down over his face and that he kept combing back with his fingers. “We were only sleeping,” he repeated, mouthing the words as though I were reading his lips. “*Comprendez-vous?*”

I turned back to the conductor and translated: “He says he was sleeping.”

The conductor was livid and, in his excitement, dropped once more into an incomprehensible Berber dialect. He began gesticulating wildly, his movements meant to indicate his sincerity. I was to understand that he would not be in such a fit over a sleeping couple. He had children, he kept saying. He was a father; he was a *Muslim*. There was more, but I stopped listening. My attention had fallen completely on the other person in the cabin.

She was sitting directly behind the man, purposely obscured by him: legs crossed casually, hands folded on her lap. Her hair was disheveled and her cheeks radiated heat. She wasn’t looking directly at us, but rather observing the scene through the bowed reflection we cast on the window.

“Did you tell him we were sleeping?” the American asked me.

“I don’t think he believes you,” I replied.

Though taken aback by my English, he was too shocked by the accusation to pursue it. “He doesn’t believe me? Great. What’s he going to do, stone us to death?”

“Malcolm!” the woman cried out, louder than it seemed she’d meant to. She reached up and pulled him down next to her.

“Fine,” Malcolm said with a sigh. “Just ask him how much he wants to go away.” He fumbled in his shirt pockets and took out a wad of tattered multicolored bills. Before he

could fan them out, I stepped in front of him and put my arms out to the conductor.

“The American says he is sorry,” I said. “He is very, very sorry.”

Taking the conductor’s arm, I led him gently to the door, but he would not accept the apology. He again demanded their passports. I pretended not to understand. It all seemed a bit histrionic to me. Perhaps he had caught the couple acting inappropriately, but that would have warranted little more than a sharp rebuke. They were young; they were foreigners; they did not understand the complexities of social decorum in the Muslim world. Surely the conductor understood that. And yet he seemed genuinely disturbed and personally offended by this seemingly inoffensive couple. Again he insisted he was a father and a Muslim and a virtuous man. I agreed, and promised I would stay with the couple until we reached Marrakech.

“May God increase your kindness,” I said, and slid open the door.

The conductor touched his chest reluctantly and thanked me. Then, just as he was about to step into the corridor, he turned back into the compartment and pointed a trembling finger at the seated couple. “Christian!” he spat in English, his voice brimming with contempt. He slid the doors closed and we heard him make his way noisily down the corridor.

For a moment, no one spoke. I remained standing by the door, gripping the luggage rack as the train tilted through a wide turn. “That was an odd thing to say,” I said with a laugh.

“I’m Jennifer,” the girl said. “This is my husband, Malcolm. Thanks for helping us. Things could have gotten out of hand.”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “I’m sure he’s already forgotten all about it.”

“Well, there was nothing to forget,” Malcolm said.

“Of course.”

Suddenly, Malcolm was furious. “The truth is that man has been hovering over us ever since we boarded this train.”

“Malcolm,” Jennifer whispered, squeezing his hand. I tried to catch her eye but she would not look at me. Malcolm was shaking with anger.

“Why would he do that?” I asked.

“You heard him,” Malcolm said, his voice rising. “Because we’re Christians.”

I flinched. It was an involuntary reaction—a mere twitch of the eyebrows—but Jennifer caught it and said, almost in apology, “We’re missionaries. We’re on our way to the Western Sahara to preach the gospel.”

All at once, I understood why the conductor had been shadowing the couple; why he was so rancorous and unforgiving about having caught them in a compromising position. For the first time since entering the compartment I noticed a small, open cardboard box perched between two knapsacks on the luggage rack. The box was filled with green, pocket-sized New Testaments in Arabic translation. There were three or four missing.

“Would you like one?” Jennifer asked. “We’re passing them out.”

EVER SINCE THE ATTACKS of September 11, 2001, pundits, politicians, and preachers throughout the United States and Europe have argued that the world is embroiled in a “clash of civilizations,” to use Samuel Huntington’s now ubiquitous term, between the modern, enlightened, democratic societies of the West and the archaic, barbarous, autocratic societies of the Middle East. A few well-respected academics have carried this argument

further by suggesting that the failure of democracy to emerge in the Muslim world is due in large part to Muslim culture, which they claim is intrinsically incompatible with Enlightenment values such as liberalism, pluralism, individualism, and human rights. It was therefore simply a matter of time before these two great civilizations, which have such conflicting ideologies, clashed with each other in some catastrophic way. And what better example do we need of this inevitability than the so-called war on terror?

But just beneath the surface of this misguided and divisive rhetoric is a more subtle, though far more detrimental, sentiment: that this is not so much a cultural conflict as a religious one; that we are not in the midst of a "clash of civilizations," but rather a "clash of monotheisms."

The clash-of-monotheisms mentality could be heard in the religiously polarizing, "good versus evil" rhetoric with which the United States launched the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It could be seen in the rising anti-Muslim vehemence that has become so much a part of the mainstream media's discourse about the Middle East. It could be read in the opinion columns of right-wing ideologues who insist that Islam represents a backward and violent religion and culture totally at odds with "Western" values.

Of course, there is no shortage of anti-Christian and anti-Jewish propaganda in Islam. In fact, it sometimes seems that not even the most moderate preacher or politician in the Muslim world can resist advancing the occasional conspiracy theory regarding "the Crusaders and Jews," by which most simply mean *them:* that faceless, colonialist, Zionist, imperialist "other" who is not *us*. So the clash of monotheisms is by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, from the earliest days of the Islamic expansion to the bloody wars and inquisitions of the Crusades to the tragic consequences of colonialism and the cycle of

violence in Israel/Palestine, the hostility, mistrust, and often violent intolerance that has marked relations among Jews, Christians, and Muslims has been one of Western history's most enduring themes.

Over the last few years, however, as international conflicts have increasingly been framed in apocalyptic terms and political agendas on all sides couched in theological language, it has become impossible to ignore the startling similarities between the antagonistic and uninformed rhetoric that fueled the destructive religious wars of the past, and that which drives the current conflicts of the Middle East. When the Reverend Jerry Vines, past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, calls the Prophet Muhammad "a demon-possessed pedophile," he sounds eerily like the medieval papal propagandists for whom Muhammad was the Antichrist and the Islamic expansion a sign of the Apocalypse. When the Republican senator from Oklahoma, James Inhofe, stands before the U.S. Congress and insists that the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East are not political or territorial battles but "a contest over whether or not the word of God is true," he speaks, knowingly or not, the language of the Crusades.

One could argue that the clash of monotheisms is the inevitable result of monotheism itself. Whereas a religion of many gods posits many myths to describe the human condition, a religion of one god tends to be monomythic; it not only rejects all other gods, it rejects all other explanations for God. If there is only one God, then there may be only one truth, and that can easily lead to bloody conflicts of irreconcilable absolutisms. Missionary activity, while commendable for providing health and education to the impoverished throughout the world, is nonetheless predicated on the belief that there is but one path to God, and that all other paths lead toward sin and damnation.

Malcolm and Jennifer, as I discovered on our way to Marrakech, were part of a rapidly growing movement of

Christian missionaries who have increasingly begun to focus on the Muslim world. Because Christian evangelism is often bitterly reproached in Muslim countries—thanks in large part to the lingering memory of the colonial endeavor, when Europe's disastrous "civilizing mission" went hand in hand with a fervently anti-Islamic "Christianizing mission"—some evangelical institutions now teach their missionaries to "go undercover" in the Muslim world by taking on Muslim identities, wearing Muslim clothing (including the veil), even fasting and praying as Muslims. At the same time, the United States government has encouraged large numbers of Christian aid organizations to take an active role in rebuilding the infrastructures of Iraq and Afghanistan in the wake of the two wars, giving ammunition to those who seek to portray the occupation of those countries as another Crusade of Christians against Muslims. Add to this the perception, held by many in the Muslim world, that there is collusion between the United States and Israel against Muslim interests in general and Palestinian rights in particular, and one can understand how Muslims' resentment and suspicion of the West has only increased, and with disastrous consequences.

Considering how effortlessly religious dogma has become intertwined with political ideology, how can we overcome the clash-of-monotheisms mentality that has so deeply entrenched itself in the modern world? Clearly, education and tolerance are essential. But what is most desperately needed is not so much a better appreciation of our neighbor's religion as a broader, more complete understanding of religion itself.

Religion, it must be understood, is not faith. Religion is the *story* of faith. It is an institutionalized system of symbols and metaphors (read rituals and myths) that provides a common language with which a community of faith can share with each other their numinous encounter with the Divine Presence. Religion is concerned not with

genuine history, but with sacred history, which does not course through time like a river. Rather, sacred history is like a hallowed tree whose roots dig deep into primordial time and whose branches weave in and out of genuine history with little concern for the boundaries of space and time. Indeed, it is precisely at those moments when sacred and genuine history collide that religions are born. The clash of monotheisms occurs when faith, which is mysterious and ineffable and which eschews all categorizations, becomes entangled in the gnarled branches of religion.

THIS, THEN, IS the *story* of Islam. It is a story anchored in the memories of the first generation of Muslims and catalogued by the Prophet Muhammad's earliest biographers, Ibn Ishaq (d. 768), Ibn Hisham (d. 833), al-Baladhuri (d. 892), and al-Tabari (d. 922). At the heart of the story is the Glorious Quran—the divine revelations Muhammad received during a span of some twenty-three years in Mecca and Medina. While the Quran, for reasons that will become clear, tells us very little about Muhammad's life (indeed, Muhammad is rarely mentioned in it), it is invaluable in revealing the ideology of the Muslim faith in its infancy: that is, before the faith became a religion, before the religion became an institution.

Still, we must never forget that as indispensable and historically valuable as the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet may be, they are nevertheless grounded in *mythology*. It is a shame that this word, *myth*, which originally signified nothing more than stories of the supernatural, has come to be regarded as synonymous with falsehood, when in fact myths are always true. By their very nature, myths inhere both legitimacy and credibility. Whatever truths they convey have little to do with

historical fact. To ask whether Moses actually parted the Red Sea, or whether Jesus truly raised Lazarus from the dead, or whether the word of God indeed poured through the lips of Muhammad, is to ask irrelevant questions. The only question that matters with regard to a religion and its mythology is “What do these stories mean?”

The fact is that no evangelist in any of the world’s great religions would have been at all concerned with recording his or her objective observations of historical events. They would not have been recording observations at all! Rather, they were *interpreting* those events in order to give structure and meaning to the myths and rituals of their community, providing future generations with a common identity, a common aspiration, a common *story*. After all, religion is, by definition, interpretation; and by definition, all interpretations are valid. However, some interpretations are more reasonable than others. And as the Jewish philosopher and mystic Moses Maimonides noted so many years ago, it is reason, not imagination, which determines what is probable and what is not.

The way scholars form a reasonable interpretation of a particular religious tradition is by merging that religion’s myths with what can be known about the spiritual and political landscape in which those myths arose. By relying on the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet, along with our understanding of the cultural milieu in which Muhammad was born and in which his message was formed, we can more reasonably reconstruct the origins and evolution of Islam. This is no easy task, though it is made somewhat easier by the fact that Muhammad appears to have lived “in the full view of history,” to quote Ernest Renan, and died an enormously successful prophet (something for which his Christian and Jewish detractors have never forgiven him).

Once a reasonable interpretation of the rise of Islam in sixth- and seventh-century Arabia has been formed, it is

possible to trace how Muhammad's revolutionary message of moral accountability and social egalitarianism was gradually reinterpreted by his successors into competing ideologies of rigid legalism and uncompromising orthodoxy, which fractured the Muslim community and widened the gap between mainstream, or *Sunni*, Islam and its two major branches, *Shi'ism* and *Sufism*. Although sharing a common sacred history, each group strove to develop its own interpretation of scripture, its own ideas on theology and the law, and its own community of faith. And each had different responses to the experience of colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, that experience forced the entire Muslim community to reconsider the role of faith in modern society. While some Muslims pushed for the creation of an indigenous Islamic Enlightenment by eagerly developing Islamic alternatives to Western secular notions of democracy, others advocated separation from Western cultural ideals in favor of the complete "Islamization" of society. With the end of colonialism and the birth of the Islamic state in the twentieth century, these two groups have refined their arguments against the backdrop of the ongoing debate in the Muslim world over the prospect of forming a genuine Islamic democracy. But as we shall see, at the center of the debate over Islam and democracy is a far more significant internal struggle over who gets to define the Islamic Reformation that is already under way in most of the Muslim world.

The reformation of Christianity was a terrifying process, but it was not, as it has so often been presented, a collision between Protestant reform and Catholic intransigence. Rather, the Christian Reformation was an argument over the future of the faith—a violent, bloody argument that engulfed Europe in devastation and war for more than a century.

Thus far, the Islamic Reformation has proved no different. For most of the Western world, September 11, 2001, signaled the commencement of a worldwide struggle between Islam and the West—the ultimate manifestation of the clash of civilizations. From the Islamic perspective, however, the attacks on New York and Washington were part of an ongoing clash between those Muslims who strive to reconcile their religious values with the realities of the modern world, and those who react to modernism and reform by reverting—sometimes fanatically—to the "fundamentals" of their faith.

This book is not just a critical reexamination of the origins and evolution of Islam, nor is it merely an account of the current struggle among Muslims to define the future of this magnificent yet misunderstood faith. This book is, above all else, an argument for reform. There are those who will call it apostasy, but that is not troubling. No one speaks for God—not even the prophets (who speak *about* God). There are those who will call it apology, but that is hardly a bad thing. An apology is a defense, and there is no higher calling than to defend one's faith, especially from ignorance and hate, and thus to help shape the story of that faith, a story which, in this case, began fourteen centuries ago, at the end of the sixth century C.E., in the sacred city of Mecca, the land that gave birth to Muhammad ibn Abdallah ibn Abdal-Muttalib: the Prophet and Messenger of God. May peace and blessings be upon him.

Author’s Note

While there is a widely recognized system for the transliteration of Arabic into English, along with specific diacritical markings to indicate long and short vowels, I have endeavored, for the sake of clarity and ease, to present all Arabic words in their simplest and most recognizable English rendering. The Arabic letter *hamza*, which is rarely vocalized, will occasionally be marked with an apostrophe. The letter *ain*—best pronounced as a glottal stop—will be marked with a *reverse* apostrophe, as in the word *bay‘ah*, meaning “oath.” Further, rather than pluralizing Arabic nouns according to their proper grammatical rules, I will simply add an *s:* thus, *Kahins*, instead of *Kuhhan*.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of the Quran are my own.

Chronology of Key Events

570	Birth of the Prophet Muhammad
610	Muhammad receives first Revelation at Mt. Hira
622	Muslim emigration (*Hijra*) to Yathrib (later called Medina)
624	Battle of Badr against Mecca and the Quraysh
625	Battle of Uhud
627	Battle of the Trench
628	Treaty of Hudaybiyyah between Medina and Mecca
630	Muhammad's victory over the Quraysh and the Muslim occupation of Mecca
632	Muhammad dies
632–634	Caliphate of Abu Bakr
634–644	Caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab
644–656	Caliphate of Uthman ibn Affan
656–661	Caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib, considered the first Imam of Shi'ism
661–750	The Umayyad Dynasty
680	Husayn ibn Ali, grandson of the Prophet, killed at Karbala
750–850	The Abbasid Dynasty
756	Last Umayyad prince, Abd al-Rahman,

	establishes rival Caliphate in Spain
874	The occultation of the Twelfth Imam, or the *Mahdi*
934–1062	Buyid Dynasty rules western Iran, Iraq, and Mesopotamia
969–1171	Fatimid Dynasty rules North Africa, Egypt, and Syria
977–1186	Ghaznavid Dynasty rules Khurasan, Afghanistan, and northern India
1095	Christian Crusades launched by Pope Urban II
1250–1517	Mamluk Dynasty rules Egypt and Syria
1281–1924	The Ottoman Empire
1501–1725	Safavid Dynasty rules Iran
1526–1858	Mughal Dynasty rules India
1857	The Indian Revolt against the British
1924	Creation of secular Turkish republic and the end of the Ottoman Caliphate
1925	Beginning of Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran
1928	The Society of Muslim Brothers founded by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt
1932	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia established
1947	Pakistan founded as first Islamic state
1948	State of Israel established
1952	Free Officers revolt in Egypt, led by Gamal Abd al-Nasser
1979	Soviets invade Afghanistan
1980	Iran Hostage Crisis

1987	First Intifada, or Palestinian Uprising
1988	Hamas founded
1989	Soviet army pulls out of Afghanistan
1991	The Persian Gulf War; al-Qaeda formed
1992	Algerian Civil War
2000	Second Intifada in Israel/Palestine
2001	Al-Qaeda attack on New York and Washington
2003	U.S.-led invasion of Iraq
2006	Hamas wins elections in Palestine
2008	Israeli invasion of Gaza
2009	Green Movement protests in Iran
2010	U.S. combat mission in Iraq officially ends
2011	Democratic protests erupt across North Africa
2011	Osama bin Laden killed in Pakistan