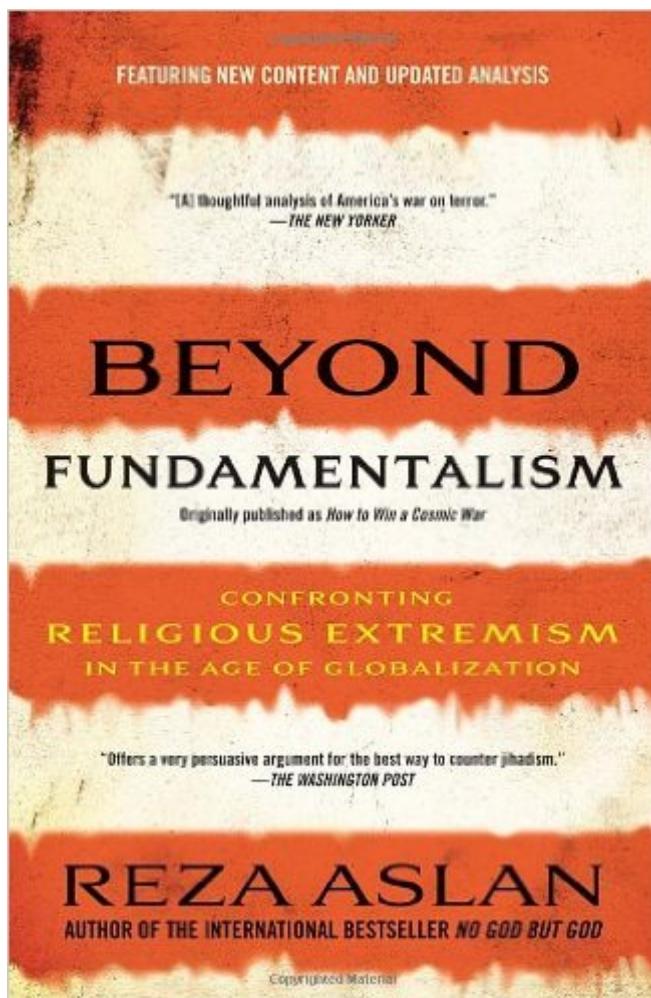


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Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism In The Age Of Globalization



Synopsis

The wars in the Middle East have become religious wars in which God is believed to be directly engaged on behalf of one side against the other. The hijackers who attacked America on September 11, 2001, thought they were fighting in the name of God. According to award-winning writer and scholar of religions Reza Aslan, the United States, by infusing the War on Terror with its own religiously polarizing rhetoric, is fighting a similar warâ "a war that canâ t be won.â Beyond Fundamentalism is both an in-depth study of the ideology fueling al-Qaâ ida, the Taliban, and like-minded militants throughout the Muslim world and an exploration of religious violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. At a time when religion and politics increasingly share the same vocabulary and function in the same sphere, Aslan writes that we must strip the conflicts of our world of their religious connotations and address the earthly grievances that always lie at its root. How do you win a religious war? By refusing to fight in one. Featuring new content and updated analysisOriginally published as How to Win a Cosmic War

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Customer Reviews

With his second book, How to Win a Cosmic War, Reza Aslan has solidified his place as the voice of moderation in the battles of Christian vs. Islam. As an American-born Muslim, he has insights for his fellow citizens about the history and perspective of those whose hearts and minds we are trying to win in the Middle East. Unlike his previous book, No god but God, which was more of a history lesson in Islam for those of us in the West, this book focuses more specifically on the issues of fundamentalism and terrorism with which we are dealing today. He describes the growth of radical

groups throughout the twentieth century. He shows how the idea of jihad was perverted by certain Muslims and what that means for us today. Ultimately, he is trying to convince us to take what is too often articulated as a "cosmic war" (often unthinkingly) and bring it back down to earth. The terrorists we battle are dangerous because they don't have attainable, negotiable goals. The overthrow of the West, worldwide Islamic rule--these are not likely to happen and are certainly not things we can negotiate. This rhetoric elevates their struggle to the cosmic plane. The image becomes one of Good vs. Evil, God vs. Satan. Yet, when we allow ourselves to echo this rhetoric and inflame tensions by using words like "crusade," we are fighting a cosmic battle, not a real one. Cosmic battles cannot be won. Mr. Aslan reminds us that only by focusing on real, attainable goals can we make progress and reduce terrorism. By changing the "real world" around the terrorists for the better, they cannot recruit. There will always be radicals, but they are criminals, not warriors, however they see themselves. Mr. Aslan has a rare point-of-view.

So unlike what most of the detractors here claim, this book is not an apology for terrorism. Its essential point, as the title suggests, is that if we accept the battle as defined by the Jihadists -- as a cosmic war-- then it is unwinnable, and pursuing it on those terms will inevitably distance us from the Muslim world. My sense is that Aslan's most fundamental allegiance is to the Muslim world, which he would like to see become democratic, but that he genuinely believes in the American dream as well and wants to be one with it. He is doing his best to make a positive contribution toward a better world by describing the world through his eyes, and he is not stupid. His description of the young jihadist mindset as acting out of misguided love rather than hate - was subtle, accurate and brave, and a real contribution to the discussion. He does a good job of explaining the difference between Jihadists vs. Islamists, and why we fail to understand the dynamic between them at our peril. I think he describes the wound so effectively, because he is wounded himself, and that in itself doesn't diminish the book. But in failing to overcome the wound, he fails to convince the unconvinced. In what follows, I overemphasize the negative. The book is mostly fair, and he has a point, but I'm trying to explain what will set people off. He is upset that Western countries don't have more toleration for Muslim cultures, despite the fact that the degree of toleration they do display would be unthinkable in many Muslim majority countries. Consider: "Even in Europe and the developed world, the idea of secular nationalism was problematic. That is because membership, or rather citizenship, in the nation-state requires submission to the state's sovereignty over all aspects of life."

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