

CONVERSATIONS WITH *AYAAN HIRSI ALI*

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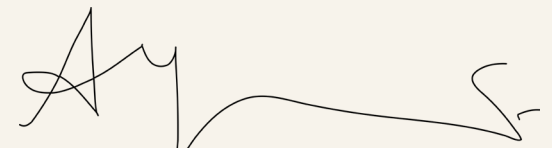


Freedom Women's Rights Restoring the West

Inspired by Ayaan's
Most Influential Essays
and Lectures



If you wonder why I—a woman of color, an African, a former Muslim, a former asylum seeker, and an immigrant—look at the antics of today’s anti-Israel, anti-American protesters with such fear and trembling, allow me to explain.


Ayaan Hirsi Ali

CONFRONTING RADICAL ISLAMISM

“In effect, I have been deemed to be a heretic, not just by Muslims—for whom I am already an apostate—but by some Western liberals as well, whose multicultural sensibilities are offended by such ‘insensitive’ pronouncements. My uncompromising statements on this topic have incited such vehement denunciations that one would think I had committed an act of violence myself. For today, it seems, speaking the truth about Islam is a crime. ‘Hate speech’ is the modern term for heresy. And in the present atmosphere, anything that makes Muslims feel uncomfortable is branded as ‘hate’.”

—Ayaan Hirsi Ali,
Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now, 2015

Long before most in the West were willing to confront it, Ayaan Hirsi Ali was a rare and unflinching voice warning about the growing danger of radical Islamism. Her clarity came not from theory, but from lived experience—as a young woman, she was drawn into the Islamist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood while attending school in Kenya and saw from within how it sought to control thought, silence dissent, subjugate women, and sow antisemitism.

Escaping a forced marriage, she found refuge in the Netherlands, only to discover that the same patterns of oppression persisted within immigrant communities there. Speaking out against these abuses, she co-created the short film *Submission* with Theo van Gogh, a searing portrayal of the treatment of women under Islam. Van Gogh’s murder by an Islamic extremist—and the death threat to Ayaan pinned to his body—made clear the personal risks she faced for telling the truth.

After 9/11, Ayaan left Islam and dedicated herself to confronting radical Islam head-on. Through her work in the media and on college campuses, she has often been shunned, silenced, or targeted for her candor—yet she has remained unwavering in her mission to defend Western liberalism and safeguard the freedoms that ideology seeks to erode.



Trey: What exactly is the threat of political Islam or “Islamism”?

Ayaan: I want to start by issuing the by now familiar disclaimer that not all Muslims are Islamists. I refer purely to the threat posed by those Muslims who subscribe to the political agenda of Islamism: A theocratic agenda that seeks to replace our existing liberal, secular order with an alternative one based on Islamic law.

Islamists are playing the long game. Through the process of conversion or missionary work and the gradual Islamization of institutions, the Islamist is committed to the transformation of Western society. How long does he hope it will take him to get Sharia law established in Europe and North America? The answer to this question differs from one Islamist to the next.

Trey: We often associate the Islamist threat with the post-9/11 era. Has this threat diminished in the U.S., or has it merely evolved in recent years?

Ayaan: In the past, Islamists sought to physically and psychologically harm the West through acts of terrorism. They beheaded civilians, attacked crowds of people, and in their most visible act, flew planes full of passengers into buildings, hoping to strike fear into the heart of Western democracy. These attacks continue to have a huge impact on the psyche of the West. Countries like the UK and the U.S. sacrificed significant personal liberties for a degree of security; liberties which they have yet to recuperate.

It is important to recognize that, by and large, this tradeoff (of liberty for security) has worked. The U.S. resolved to never let something like the attacks of 9/11, 2001, happen again, and so far, they haven’t. Western omnipresence in the Middle East, combined with pervasive surveillance networks at home, ensured that Islamic terrorists never came anywhere close. Though smaller attacks persisted for some time, the threat of Islamic terrorism has mostly faded into the background, along with some of the fear. In the 2016 Presidential election, terrorism was the second biggest concern for Americans, only four percent behind the economy. In 2024, Islamic terrorism didn’t even register in polling.

It would be a shortsighted mistake to say we defeated Muslim terrorists, however. Given the sustained and withering military operations the West inflicted upon them, I think it is more realistic to say that the Islamists who argued for gradualism and the methods of subversion defeated those who sought to fast-track the imposition of Islamic law on the West through Jihad or coercion. In other words, the prevailing Islamists have simply altered their methods in favor of domestic subversion.

What 9/11 made clear is that the terrorists successfully built up a massive network of operators within the U.S. who were hard at work, gradually radicalizing vulnerable targets. What is most interesting about this form of subversion is that it no longer requires direct contact between a source and a target. The perpetrators of the Boston Marathon bombing, for example, had no clear links to a terrorist cell but were radicalized by osmosis, including through their mosque and through Islamist social media. These agents of radicalization are now telling their audiences to work within and through the system. Convert one person at a time; bring Sharia law to one community at a time. Win one election at a time. Change and capture one institution at a time; and do so legally, without firing a single shot. Large, spectacular attacks weren’t the most efficient way. Perhaps this is.

“The rise and spread of Political Islam must be seen within the bigger picture of Western decline.”

Trey: You noted the shift to domestic subversion. What key assets or methods are Islamists using to carry out this gradual takeover?

Ayaan: Islamists have successfully implanted themselves within mosques, activist groups, educational institutions, and social media such that they can flood the ambient environment with pro-Islamist content. The effect has been to gradually subvert Americans and immigrants alike to support Islamist political objectives. The most obvious example of this is the seismic shift in public

opinion on Israel among the youngest generations. No other issue in our time has seen so big a shift so quickly.

The rise and spread of Political Islam must be seen within the bigger picture of Western decline. Islamist ideas can only flourish in a society that is too feeble to defend itself. As I mentioned previously, Islamists have been able to exploit several assets to their advantage. The first is time. Like the Soviets, Islamists have learned that the attention span of American democracy is very short. We suffer from the myth that our domestic problems can be resolved in the next election with a reshuffling of the White House. Subversives know that weakening a nation is a generational prospect.

The second asset is discontented demographics, by which I mean the swaths of disaffected people, mostly young men, who are ripe for radicalization. These can be either the domestic population who feel largely alienated from their communities, or immigrants from developing countries who struggle to assimilate. The friction these groups feel with the rest of the society makes them prime candidates. In rich societies with welfare states, immigrants are put in the position where they are dependent on welfare and are not incentivized to participate even in the economy. Simultaneously, it is becoming increasingly difficult to bring families, resulting in an immigrant population heavily skewed towards young men. In Canada, for example, the population ratio between men and women ages 25 to 44 is widening, fueled entirely by immigration. Among the 20-24 year old age bracket, there are now 110 men for every 100 women, a disparity approaching China’s own much-reported male surplus.

Whereas the alienated domestic population might find meaning in wokeness or other para-religious movements, young immigrant men—alienated, angry, idle, and bored—enter the mosques and become radicalized. Sometimes these disparate groups interact, such as when we saw “Queers for Palestine” banners march to the tune of “from the river to the sea,” up until an avowed Islamist would confront them and knock them down. This is a recipe for disaffection. Such a society has sown the seeds of its own destruction. As for wokism: it is a pointless pseudo-religion and the Islamist knows this very well. Many converts to Islam first went woke and, when predictably they come out spiritually and morally empty, the Islamist is there inviting them into the warm embrace of the Muslim Umma.

Trey: Focusing on the challenge of assimilation, what is being overlooked in the immigration debate that makes certain groups vulnerable to radicalization?

Ayaan: What has been mostly overlooked is that regions of the world, where most immigrants have come from in the 21st century, are often tribal and do not have the same institutions, culture, or morals as the West. It is irresponsible to assume that all immigrants to the West will fully adapt to our way of life because they come here voluntarily. True, that was the case when large numbers of people fled European wars and economic stagnation in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In a matter of one or two generations they were fully assimilated. Even though it took a little longer, the same can be said about immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and even parts of Africa.

It is obvious, however, that immigrants who are predominantly Muslim struggle to fit in. Even when they flourish economically, as they have done in America, they are confronted with the insurmountable cultural differences between Islam and the West. They come from the regions of the world that do not have the same institutions, culture, or morals as the West. Of course, many Muslims do manage to find a way of balancing their faith with their citizenship. But it is harder, and, unfortunately, a growing number of American, British, French, and other Western Muslims choose to turn to the Islamists instead.

Trey: Are there any other assets that Islamists are using to their advantage, besides time and discontented demographics?

Ayaan: Their third asset is technology. Here, the Islamists have deployed the techniques of subversion with much success. The earliest and most obvious example was the use of communications and social media to isolate and radicalize individuals, often for violent terrorist action. With the rise of mass social media consumption on sites like TikTok, Islamists have been able to inspire large swathes of young TikTokers to flirt with Islamism. As I mentioned previously, the most notable example of this is found in the rapid shift of opinion against the state of Israel among young people. In the past two years, we have witnessed the stunning

resurgence of antisemitism among the same population and the compulsory urge to attribute everything wrong in the world to Western action, and particularly the U.S.

“It is important to call out what is happening on social media for what it is: It is reinforcing indoctrination that has happened at school or in the mosque.”

Maybe, these young people do not understand what they are saying or that they are being used. Maybe, they go along with whatever they are told to believe because it is exciting, or maybe it gives them a sense of belonging to a movement that fights for justice. Few of them can properly describe how what is going on in Gaza constitutes a genocide, as my friend Douglas Murray teased out recently. Technology provides the most effective means for priming the masses yet devised, and we are rapidly losing the next generation to subversion.

The fourth and final asset, paradoxically, is Western constitutional and legal frameworks. This gets to what I said in the past about the West being too tolerant of intolerance. Islamists have been able to wield legal institutions against their enemies. All they have to do in many cases is claim Islamophobia and any obstacles

to their objectives clear themselves away. The fear of a discrimination lawsuit is enough to send nearly any person or organization running for the hills.

“What makes the concept of Islamophobia so dangerous is that the very effort to explore this question is deemed Islamophobic. There is no ability to probe the bounds of what counts as Islamophobia. Just the accusation is a death sentence in some circles.”

Absurdly high levels of open immigration have allowed Islamists to establish beachheads within Western societies with almost no filtering from immigration authorities. The conditions in the host country are such that assimilation can be avoided, while disaffected young men are gradually Islamized in their communities and through technology. The same process occurs for the young domestic population, which is indoctrinated through

similar channels. Islamists infiltrate every institution and organization, cloaking themselves in the language and legacy of historic civil rights movements. Whenever they are confronted with objections to their activities, they are able to effectively wield the law against the host country.

Trey: What can be done about the Islamist-led subversion of our societies?

Ayaan: I fear the window to address the Islamist threat is getting worryingly narrow. Many European countries are moving in a direction that would make vocal dissent either highly discouraged or formally outlawed. Most of Europe now has some system of censorship on the books. Scotland, a country known internationally for its free spirit, joined the ranks of such countries, enacting a new hate crime law that aims to tackle “hatred and prejudice,” two notoriously unclear and ambiguous concepts. In Canada, Justin Trudeau introduced what journalist Matt Taibbi has described as a “blueprint for dystopia in a horrific speech bill.” This so-called “On-line Harms Act” would allow administrative panels, not judges bound by rules of evidence, to fine or imprison citizens for internet posts they made in the past—in some cases, for life.

In Germany, Marie-Thérèse Kaiser, a politician in the Alternative for Germany Party, cited the government’s own statistics in an argument against resettling yet more Afghan nationals in Germany. Afghans in Germany commit rape at very high rates. Along with other migrants from places like Turkey and Syria, they commit half of gang rapes—despite being collectively only 14% of the population. She did not make up these numbers. They are, again, the government’s own. Yet, under German hate-speech laws, she has now been twice found guilty and fined thousands of Euros. It boggles the mind that you can get a criminal record in Germany for citing government-produced facts.

Forces in the U.S. hope to do so as well, though that remains a more distant threat for the moment. Still, the direction of travel is unmistakable: the Islamists are here, and they are winning.

Trey: Should Western governments seek to engage with political Islamists like al-Qaeda and Islamic State, or is this a mistake, in your view?

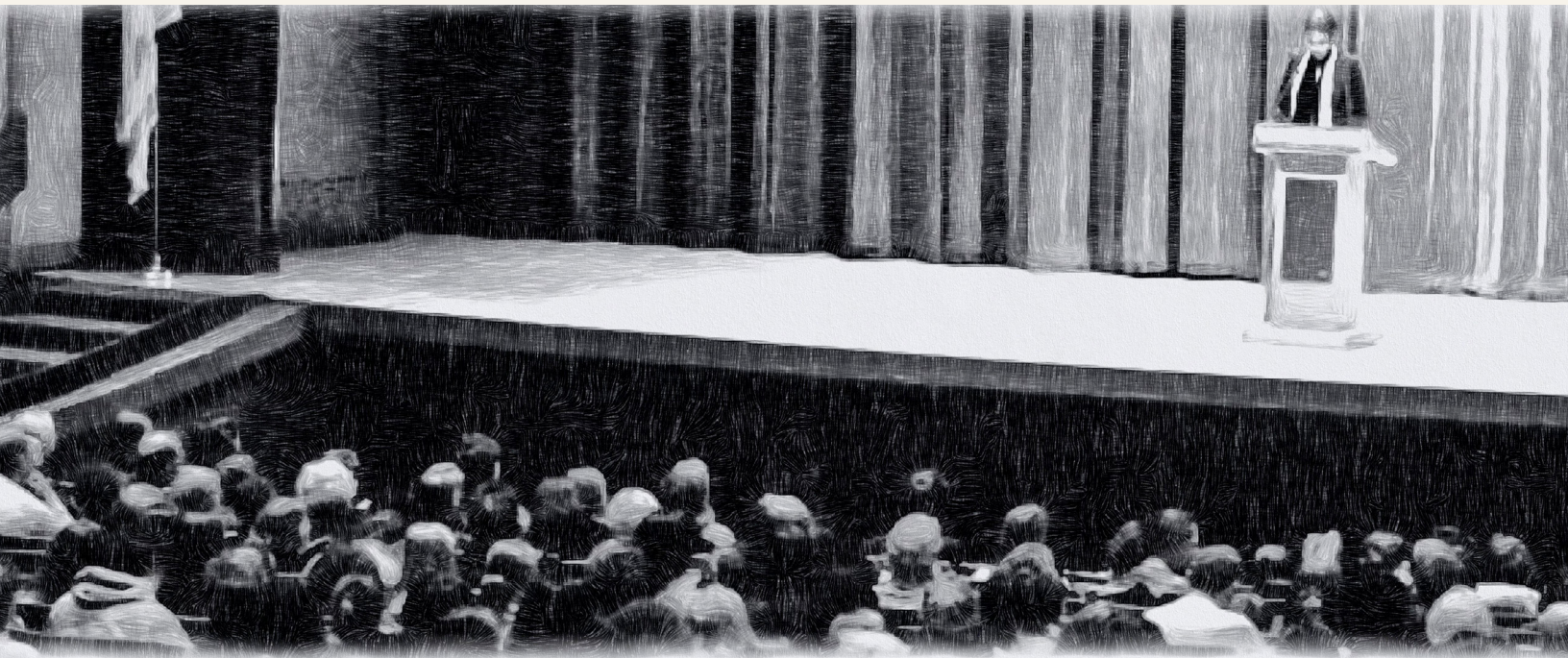
Ayaan: The main focus for this debate has been the controversy over how to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood, the world’s most influential modern Islamist organization. This diffuse global network, whose broad aim is to promote Sharia-based government and Islamic values, makes enthusiastic use of democratic institutions wherever they exist to promote its goals. But Muslim-majority countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, in particular, have put pressure on their Western allies to ban the Brotherhood as an extremist organization with links to terrorism, and hence to join their front against Qatar, the Brotherhood’s main sponsor in the Gulf.

Trey: You identify the Muslim Brotherhood as a central player in this ideological struggle. For those unaware, what are its origins, and why does it remain so influential?

Ayaan: The Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928 by schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna. It advocates the adoption of Islam as a means to both personal self-improvement and broader social reform. Initially a religious and welfare organization, the group quickly adopted a political agenda. Its self-professed aim is the establishment of a state ruled by Sharia (or Islamic) law, ultimately united with others under a caliphate, which became the basic ideological template for all subsequent Islamist movements. al-Banna himself offered a five-fold formulation of its ethos that has remained the motto of the Brotherhood ever since:

- Allah is our objective.
- The Prophet is our leader.
- The Qur’an is our constitution.
- Jihad is our way.
- Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.

Implicit in this formation is a rejection of the contemporary political arrangements of his native Egypt, then under British administration. As far as al-Banna was concerned, contemporary Islam had lost its prestige and dominance precisely because most Muslims had been corrupted by Western influences. The very idea of the nation state he regarded as an illegitimate form of government of alien origin that was at odds with the imperial and ultimately global ideals of Muslim governance.



He also rejected the secularizing tendencies of modernity, which, in his view, violated a proper Muslim way of life, which should be governed in all its facets by the Qur'an and the Sunnah: as the group's most famous slogan puts this totalizing ambition, "Islam is the solution." His ultimate goal was an Islamic, not a national state, and one which would eventually unite all the Muslims.

In accord with this global vision, al-Banna sought to establish branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in other countries. He succeeded. Soon after it was founded, the group spread beyond the confines of Egypt, establishing branches in nearly every country in the Arab world. In addition, it also provided the ideological basis for a number of other major Islamist movements outside the Arab world, especially the Pakistan-based group Jama'at-i Islami.

By the 1950s, the secular nationalist government of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt came to view the political Islam of the Brotherhood as a threat to the security of the Egyptian state, and members of the group were imprisoned and, in some cases, tortured. In the decades that followed, governments in other countries where the movement had established branches, including Iraq, Tunisia, and Syria, began their own crackdowns on them, prompting many Brothers (Ikhwan) to seek refuge in Europe, especially in the UK, France, Germany, and Switzerland.

By the 1980s, many of the émigrés who had taken the Muslim Brotherhood to Europe realized that they would not be returning to their countries of origin any time soon. They began to create permanent organizations inspired by Islamist ideology but with priorities adapted for new generations of Muslims born and raised in the West. This gave rise to national affiliates like the Muslim Association of Britain (est. 1997), the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (est. 1983), and the Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland (est. 1982). The Brotherhood also began operating in the U.S. in the 1960s after the arrival of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and South Asia. By the late 1970s it became clear that many of them were not returning to their often repressive homelands either. Following the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Saudis intensified their focus on American Muslims, and as more funds and Islamic immigrants flowed into the country, a variety of Brotherhood-affiliated organizations like the Muslim

Students Association (est. 1963), the North American Islamic Trust (est. 1973), and the Islamic Society of North America (est. 1981) sprang up. The best known of them is probably the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), which was set up following a 1993 Philadelphia meeting of Hamas leaders and activists to discuss propaganda efforts against the Oslo peace accords between Israel and the Palestinians. Its stated mission is to "enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding."

Those objectives sound innocuous enough, but advocates of repressing the Brotherhood argue that they hide sinister objectives and connections behind deceptively anodyne language in public. Contrast, for instance, the bland mission statement above with evidence that emerged as part of a 2007 federal trial against the Holy Land Foundation, which was charged with providing millions of dollars to Hamas. One of the key documents that came to light was a 1991 strategy paper of the Brotherhood authored by Mohamed Akram, who was a key Ikhwan leader in the U.S. at the time. In his 18-page "Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America," Akram states that it exists to "present Islam as a civilizational alternative" and "support the establishment of the global Islamic state wherever it is." He says that Muslim Brothers should look upon this mission as a "Civilization Jihadist responsibility."

The Ikhwan must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and sabotaging its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and God's religion is made victorious over all other religions.

Even though many Brotherhood apologists have dismissed this memo as outdated, it is consistent with numerous other statements on its long-war strategy. In a 1995 speech to an Islamic conference in Ohio, the Muslim Brotherhood's spiritual leader, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, declared that "victory" will come through dawa, i.e., the conversion of non-Muslims and radicalization of Muslims: "Conquest through dawa, that is what we hope for." The group's official supreme leader, Mohammed Akef, later affirmed the same objective, stating that he

has "complete faith that Islam will invade Europe and America, because Islam has logic and a mission."

Nor are the Brothers averse to using deception to camouflage their cause. FBI wiretaps of the 1993 Philadelphia meeting that led to the founding of CAIR caught several US-based Hamas activists agreeing that hiding their affiliation and intentions was the best tactic to avoid proscription: "I swear by Allah that war is deception," said one senior leader, "deceive, camouflage, pretend that you're leaving while you're walking that way. Deceive your enemy." More precisely:

Let's not hoist a large Islamic flag and let's not be barbaric-talking. We will remain a front so that if the thing [the U.S. government ban on Hamas] happens, we will benefit from the new happenings instead of having all of our organizations classified and exposed.

Trey: Does this mean the Muslim Brotherhood should be criminalized?

Ayaan: Their radical objectives, deceptive tactics, and links to terrorist outfits mean that the difference between non-violent extremists engaged "only" in political and missionary work (da'wa) and violent extremists is merely one of tactics and timing, not deep principle or long-term goals. This means that legal proscription on grounds of sedition is the appropriate policy towards Brotherhood-affiliated organizations.

It is key to understand that there is no "moderate" Muslim Brotherhood. Every branch of the organization works towards its primary mission as summarized in the works of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb: a theocratic Islamist caliphate under the rule of a literalist form of Sharia law. Although initially re-created in historically Muslim lands (including Spain), this would ultimately be

carried elsewhere by the sword or by mass migration. In this long-term objective they differ little from jihadists like al-Qaeda, varying only over how to get there and on what timescale; worse, their "long war" political Islam is often a gateway to violent jihad when conditions are ripe. Both are as incompatible with liberal democratic Western values as the Soviet aspiration for global communist hegemony during the Cold War.

Advocates of toleration argue that the Brotherhood no longer seriously embraces the radical vision al-Banna enunciated, nor the establishment of an Islamic State. They claim the Brotherhood is ready to participate in ordinary politics and, through that participation, would



further moderate. In contrast to the “Islamized Leninism” of Qutb, the alleged new model for the Ikhwan (Brothers) is more akin to the Christian Democratic parties of Europe. On this view, we should not ban them for three reasons: not all of their chapters are violent, they are not fundamentally anti-democratic, and the social and diplomatic backlash would be too severe.

Trey: Is political Islam fundamentally different from other religiously inspired political movements?

Ayaan: The skeptics—and I’m one of them—reply that political Islam is exceptional. Its theology, history, and the behavior of its adherents stand out in ways that mark it as irreconcilable with democracy and secularism in a way that Christianity is not. Unlike Christian Democrats, the Muslim Brotherhood takes an instrumental view of elections to seize power and then subvert the system for theocratic ends: “one man, one vote, one time,” as the saying goes. Any appearance to the contrary is just them playing al-Banna’s long game. As Recep Erdogan, the Islamist President of Turkey, notoriously said about democracy, “it is a train that we ride until we get where we need to get and then we get off.”

This theocratic ambition has deep roots in Islam. Whereas Jesus was a political dissident executed by the state and Moses famously a leader without one, the Prophet Muhammad was a political leader who founded a polity himself. Muslim scripture was powerfully shaped by that biographical difference. The Koran contains myriad direct legal injunctions, ranging from the implementation of the hudud punishments for offenses such as apostasy to specific rules on civil questions like inheritance—hence al-Banna’s [founder of the Muslim Brotherhood] boast that “the Koran is our constitution.”

Despite plentiful rules for individual conduct, the Koran is hazier about the form of government to administer them. Indeed, the most famous schism in Islam, between Sunnis and Shias, arose immediately upon Muhammad’s death. His followers were unable to decide if the Caliph—his successor as leader—should be elective or hereditary. Notwithstanding the lack of scriptural clarity on the point, Muslims came to regard the caliphate itself as an essential part of Islam. This fact further politicized the

faith, as hereditary caliphates—fusing secular with religious power—became the model for Islamic politics for the next millennium.

Trey: If we look back at the 20th century, what was the pivotal moment that sparked the modern-day Islamist movement?

Ayaan: It was the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the 1920s and the abolition of the last caliphate by Ataturk’s secular Turkish Republic. Muslims like al-Banna, humiliated by European imperialism, rejected secularism, democracy, and the nation state as Western imports at odds with Islamic tradition. But he also saw the achievement of a new theocratic caliphate as something that would unfold gradually, each step requiring different tactics. Islamists might downplay their theocratic goals early on, and even partake in elections, if it improved their position in the long term.

This sets the stage for the present dispute: have his followers come to accept democracy as part of all stages of their political theory, or are they still theocratic opportunists at heart?

Trey: You frame this as a dispute between genuine belief and opportunism. When Islamists have actually taken power, does the record support the skeptics?

Ayaan: Aside from Hamas, the Brotherhood group that controls Gaza and turned authoritarian almost as soon as it won elections in 2006, Exhibit A for the skeptics is the Brotherhood’s native Egypt. The short-lived Islamist president, Muhammad Morsi, seemed to govern for the Brotherhood alone. He flooded the bureaucracy with Islamists, declared his decisions beyond judicial review, and infuriated the army by attending a rally where clerics urged Egyptians to join a jihad in Syria. In the autumn of 2012, he oversaw an effort to draft a new constitution that would have increased the role of Sharia in Egyptian courts, alarming secularists. By the time a military coup removed him in 2013, his autocratic behavior in power had done much to discredit the view that the Egyptian Brothers had moderated.

Exhibit B is Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey’s president. Another avowed Islamist, he threw his full weight behind

the Brotherhood when it took power in Egypt and has backed other Islamist parties in Libya, Syria, and Tunisia since the Arab Spring. Domestically, he has grown more autocratic the longer he has been in power. After 11 years as prime minister he was elected president and set about turning that previously weak post into a hegemonic one. After an attempted coup in 2016, he had tens of thousands of people purged from their jobs or arrested, often for the merest suggestion of a connection to the religious group blamed for the plot. He has also steadily co-opted institutions and eroded checks and balances, turned much of the media into a tool of state propaganda, censored the internet, and jailed many of his critics.

Defenders of the Brotherhood claim that the authoritarianism displayed by Morsi and Erdogan reflects their national political environments rather than an anti-democratic essence in their ideology. More hopeful examples, they say, might be found in Tunisia and Morocco. Tunisia’s Brotherhood party, Ennahda, which styles itself “Muslim democratic,” was the biggest party in parliament—until President Kais Saied suspended the assembly in July 2021. Similarly, in Morocco, the Justice and Development Party (PJD), another supposed moderate Islamist outfit, was appointed by King Muhammad VI to lead the ruling coalition, until suffering a crushing defeat at the polls a month later.

Both Ennahda and the PJD seem to have learned from the Egyptian Brotherhood not to overreach and to share power with more secular groups. For example, when large protests pushed Tunisian democracy to the brink in 2013, Ennahda compromised over a new constitution and relinquished power. The PJD also tried to downplay its Islamist image; it failed to stop laws pushing French in education at the expense of Arabic, for instance, and despite pledging never to do so, its prime minister presided over the normalization of relations with Israel.

We cannot prove whether such parties are still playing al-Banna’s long game. But advocates of tolerating the Brotherhood tell us that, in environments that do not encourage authoritarianism, it is not a necessary development. If Morocco’s King or Tunisia’s lack of a strong politicized army can place effective checks on how much power they amass, surely mature Western democracies could do at least as well?

Trey: Could the Western tradition of liberal democracy facilitate the moderation that the advocates of tolerating the Brotherhood propose?

Ayaan: There’s no good reason to think that it could work. Instead, they can create opportunities for Islamist minorities to exert disproportionate impact. See how the Muslim Brotherhood Islamists have encouraged and exploited the two-tier system of justice in Western Europe or the implementation of DEI diktats in America. The seemingly sudden mobilization of mobs in the aftermath of the October 7th attack that fills the hearts of Western cities with genocidal cries of globalize the Intifada and from the River to the Sea, Israel Shall Be Free, is another illustration of Muslim Brotherhood duplicity in action.

Another cautionary tale in this regard is Indonesia, a secular democracy where no avowedly religious party has ever received more than 8% of the vote in national parliamentary elections, even though the country is majority Muslim. But locally elected Islamists have passed over 400 local ordinances based on Islamic law since the country’s regions were granted more autonomy in 1999. In Aceh province alcohol is prohibited, women’s dress is restricted, and adultery and homosexuality are punished with whippings.

Indonesia shows how the workings of democracy can magnify the power of an illiberal minority at the local level. The danger for the West here is obvious. As I pointed out in my writings on British local elections, for instance, mass immigration has already produced several hundred local council wards with an Islamic majority. This has been accompanied by the emergence of a grassroots campaign group called “The Muslim Vote,” pushing a sectarian agenda. Sharia-lite is a de facto reality in Britain and other European countries with a serious presence of the Muslim Brotherhood. There are “family courts” that officiate marriages (including polygamous ones), divorces, and child custody. If the borders stay open and the Brotherhood remains active, then local demand for Islamist legislation will inexorably increase, whether it’s more mosques and religious schools or greater restrictions on alcohol sales and on mixed-sex public facilities. The phenomena of honor violence and female genital mutilation have now been a reality



in various European countries for at least three decades. Even in the minority, Islamists will be able to ratchet up restrictions.

The final argument for tolerating the Brotherhood is that it would be too risky to ban them. Diplomatically, it would put a wrench in the works of America’s alliance with Turkey, a key regional ally of the Brotherhood. A decision to designate the Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization would also forbid the U.S. government from engaging with foreign officials from Brotherhood-affiliated parties, which have in recent years included the governments of counter-terrorist partners like Morocco and Tunisia.

Domestically, it would risk driving non-Islamist Muslims into the Brothers’ hands by creating a narrative of anti-Muslim persecution. Driving this sort of wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims in America, Europe, and elsewhere, it is argued, would be seriously counter-productive.

Trey: What about the diplomatic risks associated with banning the Muslim Brotherhood?

Ayaan: Those are real. However, the U.S. and her allies can deal with these countries without agreeing to

tolerate subversion of their societies by a hostile foreign entity. They must also be offset against the diplomatic benefits to our relationship with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE, all of whom have proscribed the Muslim Brotherhood domestically and are beginning to defund the petro-Islamic groups they birthed. They have asked Western countries to follow suit, and conditioned trade and security deals on such a crackdown.

As for Turkey, we shouldn’t forget that its motives are varied and the U.S. has leverage. Its President has weakened his drive to promote political Islam abroad and has spent the last couple of years mending fences with regional powers like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, whose help he needs to support the Turkish Lira. He has also ordered news outlets launched by Brotherhood exiles not to criticize Egypt’s military regime, and even reached out to the Assad government, who are mortal enemies of the Ikhwan. To be sure, Erdoğan hasn’t totally changed his spots; he has been fiercely critical of Israel’s conduct during its conflict with Hamas, accusing Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu of genocide, and halting all trade with the Jewish state. But overall, political Islam is a weaker force in Turkish foreign policy in the Arab world than it was, meaning a U.S./UK crackdown on our Brotherhood affiliates will be less of an irritant.

As for the risk of a domestic Muslim backlash, we shouldn’t be too moved by Middle Eastern precedents. From the Shah’s iron rule in Iran, through Saddam Hussein’s secular dictatorship, to the coup that ousted elected Islamists in Algeria in 1992 and the repression of the Brothers in Syria, it is said that attempts to ban them have produced at best a precarious stability and at worst civil wars. But this overlooks huge differences between autocrats in the Middle East and Western societies. To be sure, the record of crackdowns in the former is bad. Unlike these autocracies, however, Western societies offer durable prosperity, generous welfare states, and expansive political and personal freedoms, including the freedom to live one’s life in accordance with Islamic precepts. All of this, combined with much smaller Muslim populations, reduces the risk of a violent backlash.

To the extent that there is an Islamist population that might be radicalized by the move, this just highlights the fatal flaw in the argument: the poor track record of tolerating political Islam in the West to date. If the assumption was that by giving the Brotherhood free reign

we would starve such views of support, it hasn’t worked. Europe has seen thousands of radicalized Muslim youth joining terrorist groups, the rise of Islamic ghettos, polls indicating widespread support for Islamist views, and civil unrest along sectarian lines, most recently in Britain and in France. In America, where Muslims are only 1% of the total population, let’s not learn these lessons too late. The key threat here is not an Islamist takeover of the country, but an Islamist takeover of its Muslim citizens. As the most prominent Muslim organizations were either created by or are associated with the Brotherhood, the absence of a strong tradition of Islam means that immigrants are more susceptible to being won over by their purism. This makes it even more important for us to call for a crackdown.

Trey: With President Trump’s recent Executive Order to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization, we have finally taken decisive action at home. But this is a global network with powerful state backers. What further steps must be taken on the international stage to fully dismantle this threat?



Ayaan: Here is what I propose:

- 1) Designate the Muslim Brotherhood a foreign terrorist organization, starting in Egypt and then on a case-by-case basis in other countries as appropriate. This piecemeal approach is to be preferred to a blanket global designation, as it requires proof of “material support” (18 U.S.C. § 2339B) to Salafi-jihadist movements.
- 2) Explore the use of sedition charges (18 U.S.C. § 2384) against other domestic Brotherhood affiliates that do not fall under the material support statute.
- 3) Develop foreign policy mechanisms to deter Turkey and Qatar from facilitating the Muslim Brotherhood and its global affiliates, including those in the West. Particular attention should be paid to the Turkish-EU economic relationship and Turkey’s status as a NATO ally.

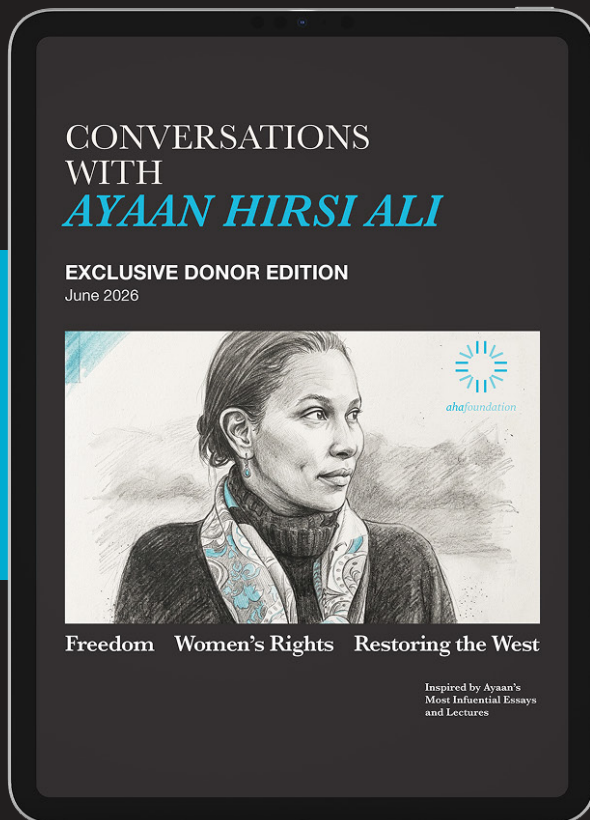
By taking an axe to the roots of this rotten tree, we’ll allow more light to shine upon those Muslims at home and abroad who believe in democracy and the separation of mosque and state.

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