

The Truth about Muhammad

Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion



ROBERT SPENCER

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**REGNERY
PUBLISHING, INC.**
An Eagle Publishing Company • Washington, DC



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CHAPTER ONE



Why a biography of Muhammad is relevant today

- ◆ How the “Islam is peace” mantra still controls American policy
- ◆ Muslim presentations of Muhammad: are they talking about the same man?
- ◆ Why it matters what Muhammad was like
- ◆ Why this book is dangerous

Is Islam a religion of peace? Why it matters

FIVE YEARS INTO THE WAR ON TERROR, IT IS STILL COMMONPLACE to hear Islam called a religion of peace. It is now also common to hear that term used derisively or ironically, in light of continued acts of violence committed in the name of Islam. A tiny minority of extremists has supposedly hijacked the religion, but jihadist Muslims won elections in the Palestinian Authority and elsewhere. The new, American-backed Iraqi and Afghan constitutions have enshrined sharia, Islamic law, (which includes the death penalty for Christian converts), as the highest law of

the land. And the vast majority of peaceful Muslims show no signs of resisting or condemning the global Islamic jihad that is being fought in their name.

Mounting evidence that jihadist violence is actually quite popular among Muslims worldwide has not made Western officials reconsider their views of Islam. On April 10, 2006, President George Bush took questions from graduate students at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C. One student prefaced a question with a series of assertions about Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam:

Morning, Mr. President. I have a more general question about the United States' work to democratize the rest of the world. Many have viewed the United States' effort to democratize the world—especially nations in the Middle East—as an imposition or invasion on their sovereign rights. Considering that it was, in fact, the Prophet Muhammed who established the first known constitution in the world—I'm referring to the constitution he wrote for the city of Medina—and that his life and the principles outlined in his constitution, such as the championing of the welfare of women, children and the poor, living as an equal among his people, dissolving disputes between the warring clans in Arabia, giving any man or woman in parliament the right to vote, and guaranteeing respect for all religions, ironically parallel those principles that we hold most precious in our own Constitution, I'm wondering how might your recently formed Iraq Study Group under the U.S. Institute for Peace explore these striking similarities to forge a new relationship with Iraqis and educate Americans about the democratic principles inherent in Islam?

The president responded generously, taking for granted the veracity of this portrait of Muhammad:

I'm not saying to countries, you've got to look like us or act like us, but I am saying, you know, give your people a chance to be free. And I think it's necessary for America to take the lead on this issue. I think it is—I think it is vital for our future that we encourage liberty, and in this case, the Middle East. And as you said, it doesn't necessarily run contrary to what the Prophet Muhammad said.¹

Dueling Muhammads

It is exceedingly curious that so few Muslim countries, in which Muhammad is generally revered, encourage liberty and democracy and grant women legal equity. Yet the idea of Muhammad as a champion of these values was not original to the president's questioner. The Muslim writer Farida Khanam portrays him as meek, mild, and full of love and compassion:

His heart was filled with intense love for all humankind irrespective of caste, creed, or color. Once he advised his Companions to regard all people as their brothers and sisters. He added: "You are all Adam's offspring and Adam was born of clay."

All this tells us what kind of awareness Muhammad wanted to instill in humans. His mission was to bring people abreast of the reality that all people—despite that they come from different countries and are seemingly different from one another in regards to their color, language, dress, and culture—are interconnected. Hence a proper relationship can only be established between all humans if they were to regard one another as sisters and brothers. Only then will proper feelings of love and respect prevail throughout the world.²

Islamic apologists and contemporary academics have echoed the same ideas. Muhammad "was, by all accounts," says Islamic scholar Carl Ernst,

“a charismatic person known for his integrity.”³ Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, whose biography of Muhammad, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar)*, won first prize in an international Muhammad biography competition held in Mecca in 1979, wrote that “the Prophet combined both perfection of creation and perfection of manners. . . . The Prophet is the most just, the most decent, the most truthful at speech, and the honestest [sic] of all.”⁴

In a similar vein, Ibrahim Hooper of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, an organization that says it wants “to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, and empower American Muslims,” urged Muslims during the Muhammad cartoon riots, which erupted internationally in early 2006, to imitate the Prophet’s example:⁵

You do not do evil to those who do evil to you, but you deal with them with forgiveness and kindness (Sahih Al-Bukhari). That description of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad is a summary of how he reacted to personal attacks and abuse. Islamic traditions include a number of instances of the Prophet having the opportunity to strike back at those who attacked him, but refraining from doing so. . . . As Muslims, we need to take a step back and ask ourselves, “What would the Prophet Muhammad do?”⁶

But the international riots and murders committed over these cartoons—universally explained by the perpetrators as revenge for the alleged insult to Muhammad—suggested that Hooper’s view was by no means universally accepted among Muslims.

Some Muslims even invoked Muhammad’s example in exactly the opposite direction of Hooper’s plea for restraint. Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed, an open supporter of Osama bin Laden who preached jihad in Britain for many years before finally leaving the country in the wake of the July 7, 2005, jihad bombings in London, declared that Muhammad himself would want the cartoonists dead: “The insult has been established now by everybody, Muslim and non-Muslim, and everybody condemns the

cartoonist and condemns the cartoon. However, in Islam, God said, *and the messenger Mohammed said*, whoever insults a prophet, he must be punished and executed. This man should be put on trial and if it is proven to be executed” (emphasis added).⁷ The English jihadist group Al-Ghurabaa, the successor to Bakri’s Al-Muhajiroun organization, published a similar statement, referring to incidents in Muhammad’s life to justify its position:

At the time of the Messenger Muhammad (saw)⁸ there were individuals like these who dishonoured and insulted him upon whom the Islamic judgement was executed. Such people were not tolerated in the past and throughout the history of Islam were dealt with according to the Shariah [Islamic law]. Shortly after these incidents the people began to realize that insulting the Messenger of Allah (saw) was not something to be taken lightly and doing so could get you killed, a concept that many seem to have forgotten today.⁹

In April 2006, the Mujahadeen Council, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, then leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, announced that it had murdered a Christian in Mosul because “this impure crusader offended our noble prophet Mohammed.”¹⁰ Mukhlas, a perpetrator of the 2002 Bali jihadist bombings, sounded a similar note:

You who still have a shred of faith in your hearts, have you forgotten that to kill infidels and the enemies of Islam is a deed that has a reward above no other. . . . Aren’t you aware that the model for us all, the Prophet Mohammed and the four rightful caliphs, undertook to murder infidels as one of their primary activities, and that the Prophet waged jihad operations 77 times in the first 10 years as head of the Muslim community in Medina?¹¹

Most Western scholars of Islam would assert that Mukhlas does not understand his religion and mischaracterizes its prophet. Karen Armstrong, in

her hagiographical *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, notes that the September 11 hijackers “had Muhammad in mind, when they boarded the doomed aircraft. ‘Be optimistic,’ they were told in the documents that were allegedly found in their luggage, ‘the Prophet was always optimistic.’” However, Armstrong continues, “the very idea that Muhammad would have found anything to be optimistic about in the carnage committed in his name on September 11 is an obscenity, because, as I try to show in these pages, Muhammad spent most of his life trying to stop that kind of indiscriminate slaughter. . . . Muhammad eventually abjured violence and pursued a daring, inspired policy of non-violence that was worthy of Gandhi.”¹²

Why Muhammad matters

So what was Muhammad really like? The question becomes more pressing every day—for if he was indeed a man of peace, one may reasonably hope that his example would become the linchpin of reform efforts in the Islamic world that would eventually roll back the influence of jihad terrorists. If he really championed democracy and equality of the sexes, one could profitably invoke his example among Muslims, who revere him as the highest example of human behavior, to work for these ideals in the Islamic world. But if the jihad terrorists are correct in invoking his example to justify their deeds, then Islamic reformers will need to initiate a respectful but searching re-evaluation of the place Muhammad occupies within Islam—a vastly more difficult undertaking.

Western non-Muslims need to know the answer so that we can plan public policy accordingly. The common distinction drawn between “Islam” and “Islamism,” which is accepted without question by the vast majority of public policy analysts, opinion-makers, lawmakers, and diplomats, rests on the idea that there is a core, a kernel, or perhaps an original form of Islam that did not teach warfare against non-Muslims; “Islamism” is widely reputed to be a Muslim imitation of fascism and communism that has little or nothing to do with the actual teachings of Islam. When seven-

teen Muslims were arrested in Canada in June 2006 on suspicion of plotting jihad terror attacks against the Canadian Parliament building and other landmarks, the *Ottawa Citizen* hastened to reassert liberal pieties:

In 2001, they brought their war against the West to two great American cities. Next were Spain and England. In Holland, they butchered a filmmaker on the street. Australians got theirs in Bali. It's surprising it took them so long to turn to Canada.

Let's be clear about who we mean by "they." We mean Islamists. Not Muslims, but Islamists. A Muslim is one who practices Islam, a great religion. An Islamist is one for whom Islam is not just a religion, but a political ideology.

Islamists seek to establish pure Islamic societies governed according to the harshest interpretation of Islam. Islamism has apocalyptic echoes of another millennial ideology, fascism (think of the Thousand Year Reich). Islamism is totalitarian, utopian, violent—and like fascism it is expansionist.¹³

Likewise, after the 2005 jihadist bombings in London, British prime minister Tony Blair declared: "We know that these people act in the name of Islam but we also know that the vast and overwhelming majority of Muslims both here and abroad are decent and law-abiding people who abhor this kind of terrorism every bit as much as we do."¹⁴

Britain, like the states of continental Europe, has staked a great deal on this assumption—most notably, its immigration policies. Of course, even if the jihadists are right about Muhammad that does not mean that all or even most Muslims will not be law-abiding and opposed to terrorism. In Islam, as in every religious tradition, there is a spectrum of belief, knowledge, and fervor. One cannot be sure from anyone's self-identification as a Muslim how much he knows about the Qur'an and the life of Muhammad. This is true particularly because Islam is an essentially Arabic religion; Muslims must learn the daily prayers and the Qur'an in Arabic, which is the language of Allah. To pray to him in another tongue is unacceptable. Since

most Muslims today are not native Arabic speakers, and the Qur'an is in difficult, classical, seventh-century Arabic (and most English translations are in equally difficult ersatz King James Bible-like language), many Muslims, even those who are quite serious about their faith, have only a dim awareness of what these texts actually say.

Difficulties aside, the texts can be read and understood. And if peaceful Muslims can mount no comeback when jihadists point to Muhammad's example to justify violence, their ranks will always remain vulnerable to recruitment from jihadists who present themselves as the exponents of "pure Islam," faithfully following Muhammad's example.

The Qur'an and Islamic tradition are clear that the Prophet is the supreme example of behavior for Muslims to follow. His importance to hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide is rooted in the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book. In brief, he is "an excellent model of conduct" (Qur'an 33:21). He demonstrates "an exalted standard of character" (68:4), and indeed, "he who obeys the Messenger [Muhammad], obeys Allah" (4:80). The Qur'an frequently tells Muslims to obey Allah and Muhammad: while the Muslim holy book takes for granted that Muhammad is fallible (cf. 48:2; 80:1-12), it also instructs Muslims repeatedly to obey Muhammad (3:32; 3:132; 4:13; 4:59; 4:69; 5:92; 8:1; 8:20; 8:46; 9:71; 24:47; 24:51; 24:52; 24:54; 24:56; 33:33; 47:33; 49:14; 58:13; 64:12).

Any devout Muslim will take this seriously. Muqtedar Khan of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy explains:

No religious leader has as much influence on his followers as does Muhammad (Peace be upon him) the last Prophet of Islam...And Muhammad as the final messenger of God enjoys preeminence when it comes to revelation—the Qur'an—and traditions. So much so that the words, deeds and silences (that which he saw and did not forbid) of Muhammad became an independent source of Islamic law. Muslims, as a part of religious observance, not only obey, but also seek to emulate and imitate their Prophet in every aspect

of life. Thus Muhammad is the medium as well as a source of the divine law.¹⁵

As both reform-minded Muslims and bloodthirsty jihadists invoke his example to justify their actions, the question of which group is likely to prevail in the future, and which will guide an Islamic world that is in the grip of a religious revival and increasingly hostile toward America and the West, will largely be determined by Muhammad—by what he was really like according to Islamic texts.

By examining the Islamic texts and what they say about the religion's founding prophet, we can learn something of Muhammad, even if there has not been a scholarly "quest for the historical Muhammad" the way there has been, and still is, a great quest for the historical Jesus. The true identity, words, and deeds of the Prophet of Islam are topics that have only been lightly explored by scholars, largely owing to the paucity of early, reliable sources, and the entrenched Islamic resistance to any questioning of accepted Islamic beliefs, even if that questioning is based on non-polemical, scholarly principles. While historical critics of the Bible have operated freely and wielded tremendous influence in the Christian and post-Christian West, in the Islamic world such studies are virtually nonexistent. The few scholars who work in this field, such as Christoph Luxenberg, receive death threats and publish under pseudonyms.

But ultimately the quest for the historical Muhammad, while fascinating and important, is not what will determine the course the Islamic world will take in the coming decades. For any such investigations are extremely unlikely to gain any significant audience in the Islamic world. What is certain to be influential, however, is the figure of Muhammad as he appears in the Qur'an and other accepted Islamic sources—especially the Hadith, the traditions of the Prophet that have largely determined the bases of Islamic practice and piety.

This battle is already raging. Members of jihad groups are already claiming the Qur'an and Hadith as their allies in their efforts to win over cultural Muslims. Muslim hardliners have made deep inroads into peaceful Muslim

communities by preaching violent Islam as the “pure Islam” and calling Muslims back to what they present as the full observance of their religion. And that full observance involves warfare against non-Muslims in order to establish the hegemony of the Islamic social order.¹⁶ This recruitment centers not only upon the Qur’an and other key Islamic texts, but also on the figure of Muhammad.

Polite fictions are useless

Many policymakers and pundits do not want to pursue such a line of investigation because its conclusions could be frightening. If the terrorists have not “hijacked” a peaceful religion, if they have not perverted Islam’s substance, then what? Do you want to see a global war? Do you want to see the United States having to take on the fifty-seven states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference simultaneously? One prominent conservative political analyst even asserted that although the idea that Islam is a religion of peace “seems a polite fiction, it is an important one. Influential Muslims believe it to be true, and it is crucial that they prevail in the Muslim struggle for self-definition. Rather than scorning them, we should be doing what we can to support the likes of King Abdullah of Jordan, who has launched an anti-terror initiative, and Iraq’s Ayatollah Sistani, who has been consistent in condemning terrorism. Whatever the theological niceties of Islam, religious cultures take on different colorations across time. Some people wondered whether Christianity was a religion of peace three hundred years ago when rival Christian princes were warring over questions of faith.”¹⁷

The difference is that no Christian could credibly argue that Jesus, the prince of peace, taught violence, or anything that contradicted his precepts that those who live by the sword shall die by the sword, that men should turn the other cheek, and that they should render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. But if Muhammad taught violence, if Muhammad taught a doctrine of required holy war against infidels, if Muhammad conflated religion and government it will change mujahedin around the world not

one bit to pretend otherwise; they will continue to invoke what they believe to be his authentic teachings in order to justify their actions. The fact that truths are difficult is no reason to choose unreality and “polite fictions.”

If Muhammad’s own life and teachings are the source of jihad violence, identifying that truth will not compel Islamic states to fight America. But it will allow for clear-minded policymaking, make possible honest reform within Islam, and have the advantage of being based on the facts.

The purpose of this book

This is not a comprehensive biography of the Prophet of Islam, although it does provide a general outline of the trajectory of his career. Above all, it is an examination of some aspects of his life that non-Muslims find problematic, and that are used by Muslims today to justify violent actions or other behavior not in accord with Western notions of human rights and the dignity of the human person. Western readers will learn why moderate Muslims—on whom Western governments and law enforcement officials are placing so much hope—appear so weak and marginalized compared to jihadist movements in the Islamic world. And they will learn why Muslims find Muhammad’s example so compelling, and why that example can be used to justify such widely divergent actions.

Along the way, I will show how popular views of Muhammad and Islam have been shaped in the English-speaking world and the West in general, and reveal some of the biases of those who did the shaping.

Why I did not want to write this book

In early 2006, Muslim rage erupted worldwide over the famous Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. The cartoons themselves were much less offensive than what is routinely printed in every American newspaper about presidents, presidential candidates, and other pols. There were twelve in all; nine were entirely innocuous, while three made a connection between Islam and violence. Although the idea of riots over cartoons

seemed ridiculous to most non-Muslims, the “crisis” provoked diplomatic responses, official United Nations discussions, international boycotts, and the threatening of utterly innocent businesspeople and embassy personnel. Just a few examples from the height of the cartoon crisis:

- ◆ Gaza: In late January, gunmen seized an EU office, demanding apologies from Denmark and Norway (where another publication later reprinted the cartoons).¹⁸ The following day, demonstrators chanted “War on Denmark, death to Denmark” as they burned Danish flags. Said Islamic Jihad leader Nafez Azzam: “We feel great rage at the continued attacks on Islam and the Prophet of Islam and we demand that the Danish government make a clear and public apology for the wrongful crime.”¹⁹
- ◆ Arab interior ministers, meeting in Tunis, declared: “We ask the Danish authorities to take the necessary measures to punish those responsible for this harm and to take action to avoid a repeat.”²⁰
- ◆ Libya and Saudi Arabia recalled their ambassadors from Copenhagen.
- ◆ In Saudi Arabia, an angry mob beat two employees of the Danish corporation Arla Foods.
- ◆ Throughout the Islamic world, Arla Foods was subjected to a crippling boycott—a boycott that was endorsed by Muslim officials worldwide.²¹
- ◆ Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari complained to the Danish ambassador to Baghdad, when Danish troops were put on alert there after a fatwa concerning the cartoons was issued.²²

These incidents followed diplomatic protests from the Muslim World League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and other organizations; protests in Kashmir; death threats emanating from Pakistan; and

more.²³ Even Bill Clinton got into the act, decrying “these totally outrageous cartoons against Islam” and huffing self-righteously: “So now what are we going to do? . . . Replace the anti-Semitic prejudice with anti-Islamic prejudice?”²⁴ Of course not, but his question was beside the point. The cartoons were not a manifestation of anti-Islamic prejudice: criticism of Muhammad or even of Islam is not and should not be considered equivalent to anti-Semitism. Islam is not a race; the problems with it are not the product of fear-mongering and fiction, but of ideology and facts—facts that have been stressed repeatedly by Muslims around the world, when they commit violence in the name of Islam and justify that violence by its teachings. Noting, as some of the cartoons do, that there is a connection between the teachings of Muhammad and Islamic violence is simply an awareness of what has been repeatedly asserted by Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Omar Bakri, Abu Hamza, Abu Bakar Bashir, and so many other jihadists. Do all these men and so many, many others misunderstand and misrepresent the teachings of Muhammad and Islam? This question, as crucial as it is, is irrelevant to an ethical evaluation of the cartoons. The fact is, these and other jihad terrorists claim Muhammad’s example and words as their inspiration. Some of the cartoons call attention to that fact.

Ultimately, then, the cartoon controversy is a question of freedom of speech. As it grew into an international cause célèbre, the cartoon controversy indicated the gulf between the Islamic world and the post-Christian West in matters of freedom of speech and expression. And it may yet turn out that as the West continues to pay homage to its idols of tolerance, multiculturalism, and pluralism, it will give up those hard-won freedoms voluntarily. Freedom of speech encompasses precisely the freedom to annoy, to ridicule, and to offend. If it doesn’t, it is hollow: inoffensive speech doesn’t need the protection of a constitutional amendment. The instant that any person or ideology is considered off-limits for critical examination and even ridicule, freedom of speech has been replaced by an ideological straitjacket. Westerners seem to grasp this easily when it comes to affronts to Christianity, even when they are as sharp-edged and offensive as Andres

Serrano's *Piss Christ* or Chris Ofili's dung- and pornography-encrusted Holy Virgin Mary. But the same clarity of thought doesn't seem to carry over to an Islamic context.

Yet that is where it is needed the most. The cartoon controversy, insignificant and even silly as it may have been in its origins, grew to be an increasingly serious challenge to Western notions of pluralism and freedom of speech. The newspaper that originally printed the cartoons, *Jyllands-Posten*, and Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen generally limited themselves to saying essentially that they were sorry if Muslims took offense, and that none was intended. But calls from Muslims to go farther and "punish those responsible," as the Arab interior ministers demanded, or to treat the cartoons as a human rights violation, as a Belgian imam demanded, continued. Even the European Union castigated the Danes for mishandling the controversy, apparently oblivious to the fact that to place Muhammad and Islam beyond criticism and even beyond lampooning would be just as dangerous for a free society as the idea that the "Beloved Leader" of North Korea or dialectical materialism is above criticism. Indeed, it would be death for a free society.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference had decided at a meeting in Mecca in December 2005 to use the cartoons as an abject lesson in the perils of Western secularism. Muslim cartoon rage was not spontaneous, but it spread quickly all across the Muslim world.²⁵ At least 139 people were killed and 823 were injured in the international cartoon riots, and the cartoonists now live under death threats.²⁶

Death to "blasphemers"

Nor was cartoon rage unique. In September 2004, Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh's film *Submission* aired on Dutch TV. The brainchild of an ex-Muslim member of the Dutch Parliament, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Submission* decried the mistreatment of Muslim women—and even featured images of battered women wearing see-through robes that exposed their breasts, with verses from the Qur'an written on their bodies. On November 2, 2004, van

Gogh was shot dead on an Amsterdam street by Muhammad Bouyeri, a Muslim who, after shooting van Gogh several times, stabbed him repeatedly, slit his throat with a butcher knife, and left a note on the body containing verses from the Qur'an and threats to other Dutch public figures who opposed the flood of Muslim immigrants into the Netherlands.²⁷

This kind of murder has ample precedent in the Islamic world. In 1947, Islamic radicals murdered Iranian lawyer Ahmad Kasravi in court, where he was defending himself against charges that he had attacked Islam. Four years later, members of the same radical Muslim group, Fadayan-e Islam, assassinated Iranian prime minister Haji-Ali Razmara after a group of Muslim clerics issued a fatwa calling for his death. In 1992, the Egyptian writer Faraj Foda was murdered by Muslims enraged at his "apostasy" from Islam—another offense for which traditional Islamic law prescribes the death penalty. Foda's countryman, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Naguib Mahfouz, was stabbed in 1994 after accusations of blasphemy. Under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, many non-Muslims have been arrested, tortured, and sentenced to die on the slimmest of evidence. And of course, there is the Ayatollah Khomeini's notorious death fatwa against the novelist Salman Rushdie.

Van Gogh no doubt intended *Submission* to be provocative and even insulting. The great-grandson of Vincent van Gogh's brother, he was a well-known and controversial gadfly on the Dutch scene; in the past, he had criticized Jews and Christians with enough vehemence to elicit formal complaints. Even Hirsi Ali acknowledged that "the criticism of van Gogh was legitimate. But when someone has to die for his world view, what he may have done wrong is no longer the issue. That's when we have to stand up for our basic rights. Otherwise we are just reinforcing the killer and conceding that there was a good reason to kill this person."²⁸

Defending freedom of speech

The free world should have stood resolutely with Denmark, ready to defend freedom of expression. But it did not. After the murder of van Gogh,

the free world should have defended free speech. But it did not. Against Islamic intolerance and violence, the West should have promoted its own Judeo-Christian heritage, with its emphasis on the dignity of the human person, from which Western freedoms of speech and conscience flow. But it did not.

Undefended, we will lose our rights to free speech and thought.

That is why I determined, after a great deal of hesitation and uncertainty, that I must write this book. I am fully aware of the risks involved. But the question of Muhammad—of who he was, what he did, and what he believed—is key to understanding today’s global conflict with the jihadists, and what we must do about it.

The subject matter is provocative—possibly lethally so.

But I will report on what Muslim sources—sources regarded as reliable by most Muslims—say about Muhammad. And I will discuss some of the implications. It is not necessary—and it is not my intention—to insult Muhammad, to deride him, to lampoon or mock him, or to write anything except a scrupulously accurate account of what he said and did about some key issues. But in these areas tempers run hot very quickly.

Still, that is why this book had to be written. Freedom of inquiry and speech, the quest for truth, should not be cowed into silence by violent intimidation or the acceptance of half-truths and propaganda meant to appease freedom’s enemies.

One thing is certain: if no one is willing to take such risks, freedom of speech will swiftly become a relic of history.

General notes

In writing this book I have relied exclusively upon Islamic sources for the life of Muhammad: the earliest biographical material in the Islamic tradition, which I will detail in chapter three, as well as the English translations of the Qur’an made by the Muslims Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall. (Qur’anic verse numeration is not standard; therefore, if you are using a translation other than Ali’s or Pickthall’s, please be

aware that a verse I am citing may be several verses away from the location I specify for it.) There is in this material some divergence in the way names are transliterated from the Arabic, so that occasionally someone's name will be spelled one way by me and by one source but in another way by another source; I apologize for the confusion this causes, and have tried to keep it to a minimum.

Similarly, I have in all cases referred to the deity of Islam as "Allah," while the English translation of the earliest Muslim biography of Muhammad refers to the same deity as "God"—as I'll illustrate in my quotations from that biography in this book. Of course, the word "Allah" does not belong exclusively to Islam; it predates Islam, and Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews use the word Allah for God. The Qur'an, of course, claims that the deity of Jews and Christians is the same as that of the Muslims (29:46). However, since traditional Islam rejects such Christian doctrines as the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and others, and classifies Judaism along with Christianity as a renegade perversion of Islam, it seems prudent to me, as well as to many English-speaking Muslims, to continue to use the Arabic word "Allah" to refer to the Islamic deity in English. I hope that this will not cause further confusion.