

# Opinion: The Fort Hood tragedy and radical Islam

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*(Editor's note: This is the first release of a biweekly column that Jim Denison will be writing for Associated Baptist Press. Called FaithLines, the column will address contemporary theological issues that will emerge from the intersection of Christian faith and American culture.)*

(ABP) — "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).



*Jim Denison*

On Nov. 5, 13 soldiers were killed at Fort Hood, Texas. One was a newlywed; another was three months pregnant. Nineteen children are now without parents. Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, the alleged attacker, was a devoted Muslim. Was he a terrorist? Why is this issue so crucial for our nation?

Eight years after 9/11, most Americans don't know why radical Muslims hate us. There are more than 1.4 billion Muslims in the world, and more Muslims in America than Presbyterians or Episcopalians. What do they believe? What distinguishes "radical Islam" from the rest of the Muslim

world? How can Christians turn this threat into an opportunity for the gospel?

All Muslims accept five faith commitments:

- *The central creed of Islam: There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his prophet.*
- *Prayers five times a day, facing Mecca.*
- *Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan.*
- *Pilgrimage to Mecca, Muhammad's birthplace.*
- *Giving to the poor.*

Radical Muslims add two additional, crucial tenets.

First: Radical Muslims claim that we — Americans and/or Westerners in general — started this fight. The Quran forbids a Muslim to initiate aggression, but requires Muslims to defend Islam: "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors" (2:190); "if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith" (2:191); "Nor take life — which God has made sacred — except for just cause" (17:33).

Radical Muslims are convinced that the Western world has been attacking Islam since the Crusades (1095-1291). They are especially outraged with our support for Israel, a nation they believe stole its land from its rightful Palestinian owners. They are certain that the Quran requires them to attack us in defense of their faith.

Second: radical Muslims assert that there are no innocent victims in the West. Our society is composed of democracies, where we elect our leaders and support our military. As a result, we are all complicit in this perceived assault on Islam. They view us in the same way we view Germans who supported Hitler.

Radical Muslims do not see 9/11 as an unprovoked attack on innocent citizens. They view it as a defense of Islam that struck at the heart of Western imperialistic, crusader-style aggression — the Twin Towers symbolizing financial aggression; the Pentagon, military aggression; and Washington, political aggression.

The vast majority of Muslims repudiate these assertions. They do not want conflict with the West. They seek to practice their religion within the context of their culture. But surveys report that five to seven percent of the Muslim world supports these claims. Out of a global population of 1.4 billion Muslims, as many as 100 million Muslims believe that attacking people in the West is a defense of Islam required by the Quran.

Does Maj. Hasan fit this profile? Investigators have uncovered connections between Hasan and radical Muslim websites and clerics. He developed a PowerPoint presentation titled, "Why the war on terror is a war on Islam." In it, he applauds a Muslim convert who killed an American soldier at an Arkansas recruitment center.

Whatever the motives behind the Fort Hood tragedy, it is clear that radical Islam is the challenge of our lifetime. How should Christians respond?

First, pray for Muslims to turn to Jesus as their Lord. More Muslims are becoming Christians today than at any time in Islamic history. The Quran teaches that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, ascended to heaven and will return at the end of history. Now thousands of Muslims are seeing visions and dreams of Jesus and trusting him as their Savior. Pray for millions more to follow him as their Lord.

Second, support Muslim-background believers (MBBs) in prayer and personal encouragement. Muslim converts to Christianity frequently face intense persecution for their new faith. At the same time, they are often our best missionaries to the Islamic world. Look for ways to help MBBs in your

community and around the globe.

God is our "ever-present help in trouble." He is revealing his love and grace to the Muslim world. Let's join him.

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