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George Weigel. Faith, Reason, and the War Against Jihadism: A Call to Action. Doubleday Religious Publishing. 208 pages. \$18.95

Among the many issues that divide the nation, perhaps none is more consequential than that presented by jihadist terrorism. Of course, to entertain such an opinion is to take sides in a bitterly contested partisan debate. For the left tends to regard jihadist terrorism as one threat among many, including globalization, the environment, and universal health care.

Conservatives, who needn't disregard the disruptions of globalization, the threats to the environment, and the public interest in affordable health care for all, are more likely to see in the rise of Islamic extremism, and in the mega-terror aimed at civilian populations that is its weapon of choice, the paramount challenge of the age.

Notwithstanding reasonable differences of opinion over policy priorities, it should be possible to reach agreement on the proposition that the menace of mega-terror is real and growing. Walter Russell Mead convincingly argues in *Power, Terror, Peace, and War*, a study of grand strategy in our post 9/11 world, that "as the international capitalist system Americans have worked so hard to build continues to reward innovation, we can expect the increasingly rapid development of new technologies, especially in biology, that can unleash unimaginable destruction, with relative ease." Indeed, with every passing moment, weapons of mass destruction — not only biological, but also chemical and nuclear, to say nothing of the techniques for potentially devastating cyber terror — are growing more powerful and plentiful, while the costs to produce, distribute, and maintain them are steadily falling. Paradoxically, the triumph of technology and the American international system produces an ever more abundant and diverse supply of weapons for the mega-terror that now threatens it.

Mega-terror, however, requires more than weapons of mass destruction. It also requires will, discipline, organization, strategy, and money. It is true that technology is increasingly offering to common criminals and even to alienated adolescents, armed with credit cards and internet access, opportunities to build bombs, produce toxins, and unleash viruses that can inflict harm on a mass scale. But the threat of mega-terror does not emanate equally from all corners of society and from all areas around the globe. The disgruntled and the misfits, the poor and the oppressed, exist everywhere. Thus far, however, it is only the jihadists who have declared war against the American-led West, only the Muslim extremists who have developed the ideas, recruited the fighters, established the institutions, obtained the funds, and demonstrated the determination to bring the United States to its knees, or die trying.

There can be little doubt that we have the resources to defeat this vicious adversary. But will we acquire the knowledge? And do we have the will?

These are the important questions that George Weigel, no stranger to partisan battles, and an eminent student of war and peace and theology and politics, addresses in his concise and trenchant book. Distinguished Senior Fellow at Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center (on whose advisory board I sit), Weigel contends that we were poorly prepared for the immense challenges presented by the al Qaeda jihadists when they launched their mass murder surprise attack on September 11, and that we have made too little progress in the seven years since that awful day. Believing that the threat we face is too dire to indulge in partisan posturing, Weigel aims to reach a reasoned understanding of the enemy and of ourselves to equip us to defend our nation and our civilization. But he doesn't seek in his short volume to provide a comprehensive account. Rather, he focuses on the religious dimensions of the war against jihadist terror: the distinctive Islamic beliefs that the jihadists radicalized; the reform of our politics based on a proper appreciation of the jihadists' religious warfare; and the resources within our own religious traditions for informing and fortifying our spirits for the long war ahead.

The first step is to overcome the powerful prejudice, grounded in Enlightenment arrogance and progressive hope, that religious belief is in the process of vanishing as a relevant factor in world politics:

Viewed through history's wide-angle lens, the events of September 11, 2001, were one lethal expression of the fact that, contrary to secularization theory and the widespread assumptions of the world's elites (including the governmental elites), the twenty-first century will be one in which rapidly advancing modernization coincides with an explosion of religious conviction and passion. Indeed, a case can be made that the acids and volatilities of modernization have themselves contributed mightily to this remarkable global religious revival, which includes such socially and politically benign phenomena as the dramatic expansion of Pentecostalism (the fastest growing religious phenomenon in human history) and Mormonism (the most important new religion in fourteen centuries). Yet 9/11 was clearly something else, and something more. For the expression of globalized religious passion Americans saw that day represented a specific and mortal threat to the civilization of the West, and to the United States as the lead society of the West. War had been declared upon us by an enemy the overwhelming majority of us did not recognize — an enemy whose motivations were utterly alien to twenty-first century western sensibilities.

Unless we grasp the religious roots of our enemies' passions and purposes, argues Weigel, we are bound to misunderstand their intentions, fail to anticipate their plans, and leave ourselves vulnerable to catastrophic blows.

Moreover, because Islamic extremism has acquired bases around the globe, the war against the jihadists is a global war,

being fought on many fronts, with more likely to come. Many are interconnected: there is an Afghan front, an Iraqi front, an Iranian front, a Lebanese/Syrian front, a Gaza front, a Somali front, a Pakistani front, a North Africa/Maghreb front, a Sudanese front, a Southwest Asian front, an intelligence front, a financial-flows front, an economic front, an energy front, and a homeland security front. These are all fields of fire — some kinetic, others of a different sort — in the same global war; and they must be understood as such. Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States and on American diplomatic and military assets were, for example, planned in the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia. Places unknown to the vast majority of Americans are now among the most evil places on earth, as one U.S. Special Forces officer puts it; what happens in locales previously unknown save in the most recondite geography bees — North Waziristan — has direct effects on our armed forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. What is being plotted in such places could have devastating effects on the homeland.

In this global war, religious questions have become a vital national security issue.

In fact, the political salience of religion is nothing new. It is we, maintains Weigel, thanks in no small measure to the “aggressive and inward looking secularism” of our academic and journalistic elites, who have lost sight of how convictions about God — and about God’s death — shape conceptions of family and friendship, freedom and responsibility, nobility and happiness, and justice and the legitimate methods for achieving a just society. Unless we recognize that jihadists’ ideas do not cease to have consequences because they are religious ideas, the United States will be unable to marshal, as it did during the Cold War in response to communist doctrine, “intellectual and cultural resources to blunt the threat.” Weigel notes in this regard the irony that our fashionable, bestselling atheists — Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens — have, by pouring scorn on religion in all its forms, weakened our ability to take religious ideas seriously at the very moment that grasping religion’s power in our adversaries’ lives and the religious supports of our own principles has become urgent.

Recognition of religion’s centrality should be accompanied by an appreciation of distinctions among religions. In particular, observes Weigel, the tendency to speak of the three great monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — as a family of faiths conceals more than it reveals, particularly in the case of Islam. Although all three trace their origins to God’s revelation to Abraham, the shared beliefs of Judaism and Christianity, on the one hand, and Islam on the other, have been, he contends, exaggerated.

Weigel asks us to consider, for example, that whereas Jesus proclaimed that he came not to abolish but to fulfill Jewish law, Islam teaches that God’s revelation to Muhammad unequivocally supersedes the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament. Whereas Jewish and Christian understandings of sacred scripture invite a human grappling with God’s revelation (in Hebrew, “Israel,” the name Jacob received after wrestling with an angel, means

“you have struggled with God”), the Muslim understanding of the Qur’an as dictated by God through the angel Gabriel or Jibril and perfectly and completely transcribed by Muhammad encourages submission (the meaning in Arabic of “Islam”) or surrender to the will of God and leaves less room for creative interpretation and religious self-criticism. Whereas Judaism and Christianity understand God as a loving Father, Islam understands Allah as radically distant and dwelling outside this world, which makes it difficult to understand how, on the Islamic view, man can be made in God’s image, or can, in his thought and actions, imitate God. Whereas Jews and Christians mourn when one of their number converts to the other faith, under Islamic law a Muslim convert to Judaism or Christianity is “liable at least in principle to death.” And whereas Judaism advances no claims to rule over non-Jews and whereas Christians now preach separation of church and state, Islam fuses religious and political authority. Indeed, to the extent that it teaches that the Muslim world is in exclusive possession of the revealed truth, that the Islamic state is the sole legitimate political form, and that the world is divided into a “House of Islam” and a “House of War,” Islam lends support to the conclusion that engaging in permanent imperialism until the whole world comes under its sway is a religious imperative.

In some cases, Weigel seems to compare the best readings of Jewish and Christian doctrine to the most literal and rigid readings of Islam. Still, he stresses “that Islam has, over the centuries, given meaning and purpose to hundreds of millions of lives that have been nobly and decently lived,” and that Islam has made magnificent contributions in architecture, poetry, philosophy, and more. And his overarching purpose in distinguishing key features of Islamic theology is to contribute to an understanding of the flash points in Islam’s wrenching centuries-long struggle with modernity. The outcome of that struggle, argues Weigel, depends in large measure on the extent to which Muslims can find resources within Islam — as resources were found during the Muslim Enlightenment of the ninth through the thirteenth centuries to justify the embrace of Greek philosophy — to provide religious grounds for the protection of individual rights, and moral, political, and intellectual pluralism.

Whereas Judaism and Christianity view God as a loving Father, Weigel observes, Islam understands Allah as radically distant and dwelling outside this world.

The enemy, in other words, is not Islam. The enemy is jihadism, or the extreme interpretation of Islam according to which all Muslims have a religious responsibility to wage permanent war — governed exclusively by Muslim interpretation of politics and justice — aimed at imposing Muslim rule world-wide.

Contemporary jihadism, as Weigel shows, has roots that extend deep into Muslim intellectual history. To be sure, the plain meaning of many Qur’anic verses and the high points of Muhammad’s life as a warrior-prophet provide rich material. But the doctrine of jihadism required development. It got it from ‘Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyya (1265–1328), who, in pondering the destruction of the Caliphate by the Mongols in 1265, elaborated the meaning of jihad as the spread of Islam through war and conquest. Five centuries later, the founder of

Wahhabism, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahab (1703/4–1792), emphasized that God is an absolute lawgiver who demands total submission. In the twentieth century, Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), the Egyptian-born founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, condemned modernizers and liberalizers for corrupting the Muslim spirit. Sayyid Qutb (1903–1966) took up where al-Banna left off by penning a withering critique of liberal modernity and by restating jihadist doctrine for his time. A teacher to the teachers of today’s jihadists, Qutb produced a synthesis that requires the cleansing of the House of Islam of infidels and unbelievers; the creation of an Islamic state governed by Islamic law; the state’s extension through conquest in the House of War; and the treatment of other religions and political orders as not simply mistaken but evils to be extinguished, and the treatment of all who disagree — Muslim as well as non-Muslims — as enemies to be wiped out.

Following a suggestion in Pope Benedict XVI’s controversial 2006 lecture at the University of Regensburg, Weigel argues that ultimately the doctrine that underlies jihadism flows from a theological error. The understanding of Allah as Absolute Will, according to Weigel, separates God from reason and justice, and thereby deprives Muslims of standards for criticizing authoritative interpreters of the Qur’an and Islamic law.

To what extent Weigel correctly diagnoses a fundamental theological error, as opposed to articulating a Catholic critique of Islam — and to what extent his focus on theology must be supplemented by examination of the role that family order and social structure play in the Muslim world in devaluing individual rights and channeling alienation into religious fanaticism — are matters of great interest. He is certainly persuasive that the jihadists interpret history and politics not on the basis of common assumptions in the West about the inevitability of progress and the triumph of liberal and democratic ideas, but rather informed by alien and very potent theological convictions. It therefore behooves us to study their theology.

Not the least of the benefits of studying Islamic theology is to prepare the grounds for dialogue with Muslims of good faith and understanding. Like all great world religions, Islam is constituted by a trove of teachings and traditions. Devotion to it is consistent with choosing which teachings and traditions to emphasize and elaborate and which to fence in or allow to fade into the background. Indeed, such choices are crucial to the conservation of all faiths. Accordingly, argues Weigel,

The interreligious dialogue of the future should focus on helping those Muslims willing to do so to explore the possibility of an Islamic case for religious tolerance, social pluralism, and civil society — even as Islam’s interlocutors (among Christians, Jews, and others, including non-believers) open themselves to the possibility that the Islamic critique of certain aspects of modern culture is not without merit.

The preconditions for such a dialogue are few. Foremost among them is the conviction that men and women of different faiths and cultures are endowed with a common humanity and share an ability to reason about justice.

To confront jihadism, Weigel champions a reformed realism, of which interfaith dialogue is one part. Invoking the spirit of Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), Weigel argues in favor of an orientation that recognizes both the human propensity toward wickedness and the ennobling capacity of men and women to make progress in living in accordance with principles of freedom and equality. Taking both power and justice seriously, it urges rigorous preparation for national defense, and no less rigorous preparation for peace.

Weigel's reformed realism issues in several unexceptionable conclusions. For example, rather than aiming at the creation of liberal democracies throughout the Middle East and the wider Muslim world, we should take the painful lessons of Iraqi reconstruction to heart, counsels Weigel, and more modestly seek to foster "responsible and responsive government, which will take different forms given different historical and cultural circumstances." At the same time, we should be under no illusions about the limits of dialogue and the constraints of strategies that worked under very different circumstances against very different enemies. Deterrence strategies are likely to be less effective against those determined to be martyrs and those, like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who, under the influence of the Shiite school of jihadism, see themselves as obliged to hasten the apocalypse.

A reformed realism at home, Weigel maintains, depends upon a restoration of cultural self-confidence. Unless we renew our appreciation of the principles and practices at the core of representative self-government in America, we will be unable to take adequate responsibility for fostering "the virtues of the citizenry" which, in a liberal democracy, "are the foundations of national security."

The doctrine that has come to be known as multiculturalism, observes Weigel, presents a major obstacle. It should not be confused with the reasonable liberal teaching that individuals are equal before the law and that diverse cultures should be appreciated for their distinctive achievements. Instead, multiculturalism advances the more dogmatic theory that all cultures are equal, but in practice it preaches that Western culture is peculiarly oppressive. This incoherent mix, which urges toleration for them and intolerance of us, goes further than the familiar forms of relativism to estrange us from the best in our civilization and to erode respect for reason.

Nothing less than reclaiming the history of the West, in Weigel's view, will renew our confidence in our own principles. That history teaches that liberty and equality and the political institutions that support them are not the exclusive work of the modern Enlightenment but also draw on classical and religious sources. It demonstrates that the first of individual rights, religious freedom, is not merely a pragmatic accommodation with the diversity of human experience and judgment, but also a statement about the fundamental nature of the person. It strongly suggests that the Christian belief in the intelligibility of the world provided a powerful impetus to modern science, and fostered a curiosity about

humanity that, coupled with the biblical belief in the dignity of the person, spurred Western civilization to study other civilizations to an extent unrivaled by other civilizations. And perhaps paradoxically, the history of freedom and reason in the West, precisely because it encourages an appreciation for religion by showing how our morals and politics have been nourished by biblical faith, can contribute to the construction of a common ground on which to pursue a mutually appreciative and tolerant conversation with Islam.

But that concerns the long term. In the short term, it will be necessary to resist what Weigel calls “salami tactics,” or the embrace of destructive multicultural policies that pervert the imperatives of toleration. These include the development of poor Muslim suburbs around European cities which have become a law unto themselves; the disregard by European authorities of female circumcision and forced marriage; and Europeans’ dramatic capitulations in the domain of liberty of thought and discussion to Muslim demands to silence opinions critical of Islam.

So far from obliging states to bar the expression of opinions some factions oppose, the doctrine of toleration imposes an obligation on the state to protect unpopular opinions and an obligation on citizens to learn to live with the pronouncement and publication of views they reject. “When democratic states with a record of genuine tolerance that puts most Islamic societies to shame turn themselves inside out legally in order to appease seditious extremists,” Weigel admonishes, “they betray their own constituting principles and lay the cultural groundwork for further trouble in the future.” Indeed, it is not intolerant for a state to maintain the moral foundations of toleration, which include securing the equal liberty of all under impartial laws. And the defense of toleration depends not only on criticism of those who condemn liberty and equality, but also on the punishment or exclusion of those who use violence to curtail the essential liberties of others.

There is plenty to be done in the intermediate term as well. Weigel wants us to reduce our role in financing the jihadists by developing alternatives to oil. And he urges that we take public diplomacy no less seriously in the war against the jihadists than we did in the Cold War, which means that we must substantially increase funding for our embassies around the world and for programs abroad designed to make America’s case, while creating initiatives at home to produce a new generation of experts and leaders well-versed in the languages and cultures of the wider Muslim world.

Whether from the perspective of the short, intermediate, or long term, there is, as Weigel concludes, no reasonable alternative in the long war ahead to U.S. leadership. For the U.S. to exercise that leadership reasonably, it will be necessary for some substantial portion of conservatives and some substantial portion of progressives to recognize and unite around their common interest in the preservation of democracy in America, which, given the fanaticism of our adversaries and the power of the weapons increasingly at their disposal, is what is at stake in the war against jihadism.

Peter Berkowitz is the Tad and Dianne Taube Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and teaches at George Mason University School of Law. His writings are posted at www.PeterBerkowitz.com.