



# How to Win a Cosmic War: God, Globalization, and the End of the War on Terror

By Reza Aslan

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## How to Win a Cosmic War: God, Globalization, and the End of the War on Terror By Reza Aslan

A cosmic war is a religious war. It is a battle not between armies or nations, but between the forces of good and evil, a war in which God is believed to be directly engaged on behalf of one side against the other.

The hijackers who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, thought they were fighting a cosmic war. According to award-winning writer and scholar of religions Reza Aslan, by infusing the United States War on Terror with the same kind of religiously polarizing rhetoric and Manichean worldview, is also fighting a cosmic war—a war that can't be won.

**How to Win a Cosmic War** is both an in-depth study of the ideology fueling al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, and like-minded militants throughout the Muslim world, and an exploration of religious violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Surveying the global scene from Israel to Iraq and from New York to the Netherlands, Aslan argues that religion is a stronger force today than it has been in a century. At a time when religion and politics are increasingly sharing the same vocabulary and functioning in the same sphere, Aslan writes that we must strip the conflicts of our world—in particular, the War on Terror—of their religious connotations and address the earthly grievances that always lie behind the cosmic impulse.

How do you win a cosmic war? By refusing to fight in one.

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### Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

This book offers an informed critique of good-and-evil dualisms on both sides in the war on terror. Terrorists and their opponents share an "us against them" conception of reality that vilifies the enemy as irredeemable and suited only for destruction. Political estrangement and isolation nurture the cosmic dualism inherent in violent jihadist ideologies, argues Aslan (creative writing, Univ. of California at Riverside; *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*). But a similar dualism lies behind ill-founded American responses to terrorism. In quick, informative surveys, Aslan takes readers through the origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, zealotry in ancient Jewish and contemporary (evangelical Christian and Zionist) forms, the history of Islamic jihadist distortions of Islamic teaching, and the repressive postcolonial governments that nurture such radical ideologs. But Aslan is hopeful: radical groups moderate their ideologies when they are drawn into the political process, and a new U.S. administration may adopt a more enlightened foreign policy. Aslan's suggestions are simple but not simplistic. Recommended for all readers interested in viewing the war on terror from this alternative perspective.—Steve Young, McHenry Cty. Coll., Crystal Lake, IL

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From [The New Yorker](#)

Aslan's thoughtful analysis of America's war on terror argues that the nation's jihadist enemies believe the conflict is taking place on a spiritual, "cosmic" plane and thus cannot be lost. Only by denying the terrorists their good-versus-evil religious narrative can the United States keep the war grounded and winnable. Certainly this is good advice, although, given President Obama's abandonment of his predecessor's Manichaeic foreign policy, it may have been overtaken by recent events. Far more interesting is Aslan's agreement with Bush on the question of democracy. He distinguishes Islamist nationalist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah from global jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda, and contends that recognizing the former as legitimate participants in the democratic process will undermine support for unyielding war. It's an appealing, if unproved, claim.

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Review

"In this provocative and engaging book, Reza Aslan shows why he is one of America's leading analysts of the confusing and frightening forces that confront us. It is Aslan's great gift to see things clearly, and to say them clearly, and in this important new work he offers us a way forward. He is prescriptive and passionate, and his book will make you think."—Jon Meacham, author of **American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House**

"'Terror' is never going to show up with a pen to sign a peace treaty ending the "War on Terror." The use of that phrase has created a black hole into which serious talk about serious topics—including, by all means, Islam but also Christianity and Judaism--has disappeared. Reza Aslan's elegant, incisive book breaks the spell cast by "the emperor's new talk" and signals that the conversation the world has been waiting for may at last be about to begin."—Jack Miles, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of **God: A Biography**

"Reza Aslan's is an indispensable voice with an urgently needed message. His book reaches across a world chasm that too many regard as unbridgeable - with balance, eloquence, and rare wisdom."—James Carroll, author of *Constantine's Sword* and *Practicing Catholic*

“Reza Aslan’s **How To Win A Cosmic War** hovers confidently over a vast historical terrain, landing where it must to explore how common and terrible apocalyptic thinking is—how it plagues every religious tradition, every inspired nationalism, and cannot be defeated with brute force, upon which it thrives. A unique primer for pragmatic leaders whose patient enlightenment is the real antidote to terror.”—Bernard Avishai, author of *The Hebrew Republic* and *The Tragedy of Zionism*

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#### **Kimberly Plummer:**

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