

The Two Faces of Islam

By [The Globalist](#) | Monday, January 04, 2010

Much of the debate in the West about Islam views the religion as a monolith. Former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid, who died on December 30, 2009, could not have disagreed more. In his view, there are two very different forms of Islam — one Wahhabi-inspired and the other humanitarian. In this Globalist Retrospective, we present his list of the key attributes of both sides of Islam.

The essence of Islam is encapsulated in the words of the Quran, "For you, your religion. For me, my religion." That is the essence of tolerance.

In sharp contrast, religious fanatics — either purposely or out of ignorance — pervert Islam into a dogma of intolerance, hatred and bloodshed. What [Abdurrahman Wahid](#) would like to offer below is two lists outlining the distinctions between the two approaches.

Here is the balance sheet he came up with:

Wahhabi Islam	"Non-Wahhabi," humanitarian Islam
1. An aggressive program with clear ideological and political goals	Human dignity, which demands freedom of conscience and rejects the forced imposition of religious views
2. Immense funding from oil-rich Wahhabi sponsors	Ability to mobilize immense resources to bring to bear on this problem, once it is identified and a global commitment is made to solve it
3. Ability to distribute funds in impoverished areas to buy loyalty and power	Ability to leverage resources by supporting individuals and organizations that truly embrace a peaceful and tolerant Islam
4. Claim to and aura of religious authenticity and Arab prestige	Nearly 1,400 years of Islamic traditions and spirituality, which are inimical to fundamentalist ideology

5. Appeal to Islamic identity, pride and history

6. Ability to blend into the much larger traditionalist masses and blur the distinction between moderate Islam and their brand of religious extremism

7. Full-time commitment by its agents/leadership

8. Networks of Islamic schools that propagate extremism

9. Absence of organized opposition in the Islamic world

10. Global network of fundamentalist imams who guide their flocks to extremism

11. Well-oiled "machine" established to translate, publish and distribute Wahhabi/Salafi propaganda and disseminate its ideology throughout the world

12. Scholarships for locals to study in Saudi Arabia and return with degrees and indoctrination, to serve as future leaders

13. Ability to cross national and cultural borders in the name of religion

Appeal to local and national — as well as Islamic — culture/traditions/ pride

Power of the feminine spirit, and the fact that half of humanity consists of women, who have an inherent stake in the outcome of this struggle

Traditional and Sufi leadership and masses, who are not yet radicalized (strong numeric advantage: 85% to 90% of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims)

Ability to harness networks of Islamic schools to propagate a peaceful and tolerant Islam

Natural tendency of like-minded people to work together when alerted to a common danger

Ability to form a global network of like-minded individuals, organizations and opinion leaders to promote moderate and progressive ideas throughout the Muslim world

Existence of a counterideology, in the form of traditional, Sufi and modern Islamic teachings, and the ability to translate such works into key languages

Benefits of modernity, for all its flaws, and the widespread appeal of popular culture

Ability to cross national and cultural borders in the name of religion

14. Internet communication

Internet communications, to disseminate progressive views — linking and inspiring like-minded individuals and organizations throughout the world

15. Reluctance of many national governments to supervise or control this entire process

The nation-state

16.

The universal human desire for freedom, justice and a better life for oneself and loved ones

Conclusion

While there are a few parallels between the two conceptions, the effects and the consequences resulting from the differences could not be more acute. All of us would do well to play our part in having the right side of the balance sheet he presents above maintain the upper hand.