Why do Muslims seem to be involved in more violence?

Other than Israel and a few clusters of Christians, the Middle East and parts of Africa are dominated by Islam, though with various internal divisions. Over recent decades, much terrorism and violence has become associated with the region. Is it reasonable to think the region is more violent than the rest of the world? And if so, what's driving it?

Samuel Huntington, author of *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996), puts it this way:

> "The question remains as to why, as the twentieth century ends, Muslims are involved in far more intergroup violence than people of other civilizations. Has this always been the case? In the past Christians killed fellow Christians and other people in massive numbers. To evaluate the violence propensities of civilizations throughout history would require extensive research, which is impossible here. What can be done, however, is to identify possible causes of current Muslim group violence, both intra-Islam and extra-Islam, and distinguish between those causes which explain a greater propensity toward group conflict throughout history, if that exists, from those which only explain a propensity at the end of the twentieth century. Six possible causes suggest themselves."

And what are those six possibilities?

1) Islam from the start has been a religion of the sword.

"The doctrines of Islam, it is argued, dictate war against unbelievers, and when the initial expansion of Islam tapered off, Muslim groups, quite contrary to doctrine, then fought among themselves. … The Koran and other statements of Muslim beliefs contain few prohibitions on violence, and a concept of

nonviolence is absent from Muslim doctrine and practice."

2) Islam's expansion and conversion of disparate people.

"From its origins in Arabia, the spread of Islam across northern Africa and much of the Middle East and later to central Asia, the Subcontinent, and the Balkans brought Muslims into direct contact with many different peoples, who conquered and converted, and the legacy of this process remains."

3) Muslims are "indigestible" in non-Muslim cultures.

"Even more than Christianity, Islam is an absolutist faith. It merges religion and politics and draws a sharp line between those in the Dar al-Islam and those in the Dar al-harb. As a result, Confucians, Buddhists, Hindus, Western Christians, and Orthodox Christians have less difficulty adapting to and living with each other than any one of them has in adapting to and living with Muslims."

4) Western imperialism is the cause of Muslim violence.

"…Western imperialism and the subjection of Muslim societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produced an image of Muslim military and economic weakness and hence encourages non-Islamic groups to view Muslims as an attractive target. … The Muslim as victim argument, however, does not explain conflicts between Muslim majorities and non-Muslim minorities in countries such as Sudan, Egypt, Iran, and Indonesia."

5) Islam lacks one or more core states.

"Islam is a source of instability in the world because it lacks a dominant center. States aspiring to be leaders of Islam, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and potentially Indonesia, compete for influence in the Muslim world; no one of them is in a strong position to mediate conflicts within Islam; and no one of them is able to act

authoritatively on behalf of Islam in dealing with conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim groups."

6) Demography: Muslim societies have had lots of young men.

"…the demographic explosion in Muslim societies and the availability of large numbers of often unemployed males between the ages of fifteen and thirty is a natural source of instability and violence within Islam and against non-Muslims. Whatever other causes may be at work, this factor alone would go a long way to explaining Muslim violence in the 1980s and 1990s. The aging of this pig-in-the-python generation by the third decade of the twenty-first century and economic development in Muslim societies, if and as that occurs, could consequently lead to a significant reduction in Muslim violence propensities and hence to a general decline in the frequency and intensity of fault line wars."

So, what do you think? Does any of the above seem plausible to you?