

Muslims must engage with Islamic ideas that give rise to terrorism

Tanveer Ahmed, [The Australian](#), October 08, 2014

THOSE Muslims who cry Islamophobia repeatedly when asked about terrorism and Islam do themselves a disservice by not engaging with the ideas inherent in Islam that might lend themselves to actions of violent confrontation.

Islamophobia is becoming its own industry with university departments and experts, an extension of the leftist view that an underbelly of racism is the root cause of everything from terrorism to our border protection policies. The almost universal action of religious Muslims is to assert that Islam has nothing to do with terrorism, as if the actions of Islamic State, the Taliban, al-Qa'ida, Boko Haram, just to name some of the best-known but tiny proportion of modern Islamists, arose out of thin air.

Far from being an aberration, the beheadings orchestrated by Islamic State are encouraging thousands of Muslims from Europe and elsewhere to join the organisation. How is it that Muslims can still pretend that this has nothing to do with Islam?

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Or perhaps the more likely argument is that these young, impressionable Muslims understand the beheadings to be commanded by sacred texts and are the way the unbelieving masses will indeed be conquered for Islam.

Millions of Muslims believe that Islam is perfect, above reproach, should rule the world, and that jihad is the path to this end. The group Hizb-ut-Tahrir openly argues this in Australia. They just don't espouse violence as the means. The fact millions of other Muslims do not believe this does not make it any less of a fundamental Islamic tenet.

A contributor to what outwardly appears like ongoing denial from large sections of the Muslim community is a view that it is better to talk about the more uncomfortable conflicts and beliefs in Islam behind closed doors, for fear that open discussion merely adds fuel for the bigots and the so-called hate media. This view neglects to recognise that not talking about it adds the fuel, for bigots and hate groups look like they are the ones representing the widely thought but not spoken views within the community.

Racist views should not be tolerated, but the continuous denial and pretence that Islam can only be interpreted as a religion of peace, much like a cuddly teddy bear, enables the hatemongers rather than stifling them.

After the second recorded beheading by Islamic State last month, a group of the most senior clerics in the world, from the Grand Mufti in Egypt to the Mufti in Palestine, released an open letter refuting theological points that were the basis of Islamic State.

The letter notes that it's not for liberal audiences, code that the most uncomfortable aspects of Islam are better suppressed from Western audiences.

It is a commendable attempt to actually engage in an intellectual way with the ideas of Islamists and terrorist organisations and an admission their actions have at least some basis in the set of ideas known as Islam. It is the kind of engagement that moderate Muslims who repeatedly suggest terrorism has nothing to do with Islam could learn from.

However, despite the good intentions of the open letter, it exposes some of the troubling aspects of Islam that confirm that while bombing Islamic State may diminish the organisation, the idea itself has strong roots and is here to stay.

For example, the letter says that unbelievers should not be killed unless they openly express their lack of belief and faith. That should make us all feel more comfortable. As long as we don't openly say we don't believe in Islam, we should be safe from attack.

The letter does go on to state that such killings have no basis in the modern context.

Another important point the letter states is that Muslims can have a national identity. Again, the clerics are careful not to suggest that a national identity can ever take precedence to the Muslim one, an important source of debate that I have heard within the community all my life. This notion of a transnational identity or belonging to the ummah is critical. It is also the reason Muslims are likelier to point to Western foreign policy being the key contributor to terrorism, a belief more likely if one is taught to believe in a very strong connection with other Muslims.

The undercurrent of this is centuries of subjugation and failure within the Arab world, something for which many Muslims blame only the West and its interventions, conveniently avoiding the sclerotic decay inherent in the countries and region.

Islam is primarily a religion of conquest. The fact the vast majority of Muslims are peace loving and committed to Australia is not because of Islam but despite it. They have too much to lose to interpret Islam too literally. But that does not mean there are not thousands of Muslims from around the world, including Australia, who may not take such a liberal view.

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