



## Europe, Islam and Jihadism: Establishing the Distinctions

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In my last European professional tour of June-July, I briefed and lectured Government officials, NGOs and European Union audiences in Rome, Berlin, Brussels, Paris and London. I will report on the main issues of discussions and areas of common interest in the near future. One of the hot issues of exchange has been the ability for Europeans (Government and public) to make a distinction between the theology of Islam and the ideology of Jihadism. Although links have been established by the Jihadists themselves, especially in their indoctrination process, EU and local Government officials need to isolate the doctrinal political component from the theological web, for the purpose of drawing national security strategies. But, the Jihadi lobby has been efficient in blurring the frontiers in the purpose of keeping authorities and

the public at bay. This trend is now developing in the United States as well, particularly since the dissemination of the so-called "lexicon." The battle of ideas seems to be now taking place within the West, between two camps: those who want to isolate the ideology of Jihadism as a root of Terrorism and those who wish to camouflage it for a variety of reasons. The European Public Must Learn to Distinguish Between Islam as a religion and Jihadism as an Ideology

Following are excerpts from an interview I had with Monika Polakova of the Slovak News Agency (TASR) on 30-Jun-2008.

*Are concerns about islamization of Europe substantiated? Is Islam dangerous for the Western society?*

It is true that many in Europe seems to express worry about Islam as a whole and others are projecting these conclusions into the demographic trends of Muslim communities. What I have noticed in Europe is that people fully mix problems of immigrant integration into Western societies with the fight against terrorism. That is not the correct way to address the problem. The problem are jihadists who have infiltrated the Muslim community. What is needed is to help this community to isolate and marginalize the Jihadists who operate there.

#### *Where does Jihad come from?*

It is an ancient state instrument used in a modern society by contemporary Jihadists. In old times, it was used as an instrument for the defense and expansion of the Islamic state, in order to preserve or gain more territory. With the collapse of the caliphate, its use has in principle ended. Today we speak of jihad as an ideology as modern jihadists are calling for the return to the caliphate. Although it's not exactly the same, it would be currently like National Socialists calling for the re-emergence of the Third Reich.

*Can one agree with the statement that Muslims in Europe feel discriminated against because of their religion? May this sentiment lead to the defensive posture that Europe perceives as aggressive? Where can one find the root causes of the mutual intolerance between Western and Muslim societies?*

Jihadist and their followers argue that Western societies are naturally

hostile to Islam. When we look at how European society views Islam, we find out that it does not know much about it. If Europeans do not know much about Islam, it means they are responding only to what they see. And what they see are mostly manifestations of fundamentalism. Europeans began being hostile particularly after the terrorist attacks in the US, Madrid, London and other manifestations of jihadism. Jihadi followers can be heard well, which is not true about the silent Muslim majority. Europeans are reacting to the microphone which has been held by the jihadists and whose proclamations are in conflict with European democratic values. European reaction is the following: either a small minority begins to attack the core of the Islamic religion or the social majority begins to distance itself from the Muslim community. Jihadists provoke a hostile European reaction and the Muslims majority then reacts to that. The problem is that governments and academics in Europe have not done their job well in the last 20-30 years when they did not explain to the European public that what they see is not a Muslim majority but a Jihadist minority.

*Is the main problem intolerance, weak knowledge and ignorance?*

The problem is ignorance. The educational system must emphasize that Islam is a religion like others and jihadists are an ideological movement. Let's not confuse the two. I don't think it's a question of tolerance - the problem is ignorance.

*Is it possible to find roots of terrorism in Islam?*

If you want to find them, you can find them in the texts speaking about war and jihad. But war is one thing and terrorism is another. Contemporary jihadists read the Quran and extract from it those verses that refer to violence and then tell Muslims that it's their duty to behave according to those words. One must be objective: there are references to war and violence but that is it. The problem is not whether it is there but whether it's being used as a blueprint for action.

*How to successfully integrate Muslims in Europe and break stereotypes?*

From the point of view of European governments, it is necessary to educate the public without magnifying or belittling the matter, without equating Islam either with only peace or with only war. It's imperative to tell the public that the problem of terrorism comes from an ideology, not from a religion. There is certainly a connection between the two (religion and ideology) but it must all be properly explained. What's most needed is an extensive reform of education in this field. If European governments can achieve this, then the public will be supportive of their policies. With regard to the politics of the Muslim communities in Europe, European governments must use all of their resources to educate them about democracy and pluralism outside of the influence of the Jihadists. It's necessary to support democratic forces within the Muslim communities and allow

for a debate between the Jihadists and counter-Jihadists. If that debate takes place, I think counter-Jihadists will win. Young Muslims are frustrated because they see that the dominant force in their community tells them: if you don't do this and this, you go against Islam. Nobody tells them that one may attend a Mosque without having to follow fundamentalism. What is necessary is to strengthen the weak side of democracy, secularism, women's and student organizations or artists who all stand on the side opposite to Jihad.

*Question: Do Western governments know what they must do?*

No. We are in a critical stage. The majority of European governments and politicians, and this goes also for the USA, has advisers and experts coming from the Middle East or from universities where their positions are paid by oil-producing regimes of the Middle East. These experts devise strategies for their governments, which all say one thing: if there is Muslim extremism, it is due to your foreign policy (Israel-Palestine etc.) or due to the way you treat Muslim immigrants at home. They don't say that extremism is a result of a movement. Governments have for decades marginalized and ignored the problem and now after 9/11 ask themselves where it comes from. What should be done now? We must cultivate a new generation of academics, people, who will understand this, to involve dissidents from the Arab world who would inform us about the reality of this struggle.

*When could this exchange take place?*

In the course of a decade. The new generation of experts sees matters differently, new literature is coming, but it needs more time. I think that a strategic change in Europe will take place over the course of 10 years. Had we been more active in the 1990s, we would not have been having this problem today. This criticism holds also for the US, since 9/11 seven years have gone by, millions of dollars have been spent and we still make slow steps in the direction of informing and educating the public. I am a realist. I see that the young generation has better instincts. So my conclusion is such that Europe will eventually correct itself, but it needs time and mean-

while a crisis of confrontation may take place.

*This year is the year of a European multicultural dialogue announced by the EU. Do you see its significance and some concrete results which this initiative may bring in terms of improving relations with the Muslim community?*

Inter-cultural dialogue would be effective only if all elements of the Islamic community were involved. This is the condition. This kind of dialogue is typically used by jihadists to gain time. It is imperative that various opinion groups from the Muslim community will be represented at the dialogue. It is up to the European side to ensure this representation if they want the dialogue to bring any fruit.

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