

## Hamid Bayazi

### On Polarization: Reasons and consequences

Ladies and Gentlemen, I think I'll follow Dr. Fahim. Thank you very much for waiting to listen to me. Let me just start, having heard the message of the Ayatolla, that there is a solution. Now the country is going through a crisis. The West is generally speaking is going through a crisis. And by and large, people feel that there isn't a solution. There is confusion amongst the public. There is strong confusion amongst policymakers but today we have heard from a very learned and perhaps the strongest voice of Shia Islam today. Now I say this because Gangeii was the best pupil of Khomeini, whom as you know was the grand Imam of Shi'ism. And once Khomeini wrote his doctrine of Velayat-e-faqih, the Shia version of the jurisprudence leadership or ownership of the social life of people, Gangeii parted from him.

We heard from him today and he said "There is a solution" and the solution today to this problem which today releases itself in the form of "Islamic" extremism is available, and that is the empowerment of genuine advocates of Islam. This is the purpose of this conference: to give a voice to those Muslims whose creed and whose speech contests that of extremism: The real and the genuine message of Islam.

Now my learned colleague here, Dr. Fahim started and spoke about this very important Islamic phrase- "La Ikraha fe Din". Putting it into the social context, of the time at which this verse was said, that is 1400 years ago in Saudi Arabia, Din doesn't really translate into religion. Din translates into a way of life. Islam emphasises not only for you not to impose your faith upon others. Do not interfere with the way that they live. Live and let live. That is the true message of Islam and that is the glory of Islam and that is why I am proud to be Muslim.

I am supposed to talk about polarisation in the community: reasons and consequences. I will start with the reasons. These are: there is a great international socio-political vacuum after the downfall of Russia. Some of us are old enough to remember - those of you who are here to remember that in 60's early 70s. Most revolutions or uprisings for change, in all countries, including Muslim countries; including Palestine; Iran - They all assumed a Marxist character.

People were seeking justice and getting sick of the dictators who ruled them. Usually an ideology takes the forefront and then people follow it. Now, in the vacuum of one ideology, as if you like, the strength of Islamic righteousness was taking ground, which I think symbolised itself in the very beginnings in the Iranian revolution, which was the first of his kind. It opened a new way where people who were oppressed felt that they could seek justice by Islam. But what has happened since is the most important point.

The twisted political ideology that these extremists have imposed upon these movements for justice which has disfigured them; and now for us the Muslims of the world, whether in the West or in the East, the most impressing threat is this, what I refer to 'disease'. Now why do I give it the name 'disease'? Because it's got a pattern, and certain communities; in this particular case, Islamic communities are by and large not immune to it. As a young man myself going through the Iranian revolution coming from a background of relative

wealth and comfort and not liking the Shah so much, I became a strong-minded Muslim; I became a supporter of Khomeini. I didn't understand what this guy was all about, but I supported him whole-heartedly, madly. I understand what the youth of our communities go through. They don't mean harm when they start. But what takes over is a 'disease'. And it characterises as a 'disease'. And unless we recognise that we cannot use the antidote to diffuse this 'disease'. Now this is what this conference is about.

Tolerance International-UK is not a religious organisation. We have a humanist chairman whom you've heard. We don't profess to be religious, but we do profess that by correct analysis and research we can recommend changes in policies and changes to people of religious leadership to be able to contest this.

To begin with our Tolerance Day Campaign seeks to empower and support the Muslim community which is the community unfortunately at this moment in time which is more vulnerable to this extremism. So what will the consequences be if this goes on? A disease has a pattern. Does anybody here know how you catch a cold? Go in a bus, somebody sneezes, you catch a cold. I'll tell you how a young Muslim catches the disease of extremism. It's as easy as that because I caught it.

Why does it turn into violence? Despair? Because they don't have a voice? Because nobody really represents them? Now these are the reasons. The consequences ..... It's a pattern; a pattern that unless you realise will take over. I have absolutely no doubt. It will take over in Britain as it has taken over in Palestine, as it has taken over in Iraq. It is an antagonistic polarisation within the community of Muslims and it is dangerous. And that is why I want to thank you because I know many of you represent organisations and many of you have come a long way and I know many of your organisations seek to engage in community activity, or activities for the Muslim community or other inter-religious communities, inter-faith communities. You have a responsibility. We have a responsibility. We cannot sit aside and allow this to happen. Extremism in Islam, in the name of Islam will create extremism in the name of other religions. It's a pattern.

Allow me to take you through an example of a pattern to which I am very familiar and that is in my country, Iran. We started loving Khomeini. 99.5 percent of us- completely united. Within 6 months, as soon as the voice of the moderate Muslims started coming out, the community was polarised to an extent that father was executing son; son was killing father. Look at Iraq today. Do you really think- ask any Muslim and they will laugh. Do you really think that Shias and Sunnis have so serious a problem that they would blow each other up. No, no, no. This is polarisation. This is the consequence. This is the pattern of the disease. So we have a responsibility because the same pattern has entered communities of Muslims in the West as well and it is no good denying it. There are those who have gone to the extreme. There are those like my colleagues here who are preaching the opposite. There are those in the middle, by and large 80-90 percent who are completely confused and a good half of them lending the other way.

Now I am a Muslim.

I love Islam.

I love Muslim communities and I would like to help them.

And this is what Tolerance International is about. We think that unless we address this question in this country and in other countries this will blow up out of proportion.

Uncontrollable.

The consequence is serious.

So therefore our responsibility is as people of faith; representatives of organisations; members of the media; leaders of communities and religions.

It is serious.

Thank you very much for attending. And, I hope you take these messages and I hope that our organisations and our communities can work hand in hand to address this very, very worrying situation.

But allow me to end like the Ayatollah did.

That the good news is that these countries that have gone through this have also found its solution.

The solution is: The Glory of Islam.

It is Islam and Muslims themselves.

If anybody wants to help, all they need to do is to empower the genuine voices of Islam to do what they need to do:

- on a national level,
- on an international level,
- exactly the same.

In whichever country in which you find extremism in the world, try and find the opposite voice and empower it.

That is the solution.

Because nobody, nobody can take away the recruiters of the fundamentalist terrorists other than Muslims. It is too strong a faith for others to try and stop it. It needs to be Muslims themselves.

Now that's why we have given priority in our Tolerance programme empowering the Muslim community; to helping; to assisting; to helping; to researching; to understanding.  
I wish you well.

Thank you