

# FOUR ISLAMIC VOICES

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*A time for the silent to amplify their influence*



A few days after the deadly attacks in Paris that rocked the nation of France, President Obama expressed solidarity with the French people and defended his administration's policy in fighting IS (the Islamic State). "IS is the face of evil," Mr Obama said at the conclusion of the G20 summit in Antalya, Turkey. "Our goal is to... destroy this barbaric organisation."

The president also stressed two points: that **the Muslim community has an obligation to work to counter anti-Western sentiment** and that **Christians and those from other faiths should avoid stereotyping Muslims**.

This, in itself, is not an unreasonable request to the Muslim community and is a valid warning for the Christian community. However, the deafening silence by Muslim leaders across the globe after the Paris attacks did little to lessen the stereotype that Islam is not 'a religion of peace'.

Adding fuel to the fire, Russian president Vladimir Putin said at the G20 summit that financing for the Islamic State is coming from 40 nations that include some G20 states. He provided examples based on data about the financing of IS affiliates by private individuals.

As key decision makers continue to debate the most effective means of opposing and defeating IS, many analysts are emphasising the need for the global Muslim community to be deeply involved. Military intervention may provide temporary solutions, but in the current political context, new radical groups will form as quickly as old ones disappear. And in today's escalating 'war on terror', different voices within global Islam are singing different tunes, with only a few being heard in international media.

In this article, we look at four primary 'Islamic voices' that need to be considered in today's questions about the way forward.

## 1. THE AGGRESSIVE EXTREMISTS

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The loudest voice, without question, is that of extremists such as those allied with IS. Despite the relatively small number of extremists (compared to the global population), they are making themselves heard and are dominating global media. Beyond the actual terror attacks, IS is also very skilled at using social media networks and multimedia to strategically increase their 'global presence'. They do this for two reasons.

Firstly, IS is clear about its wishes to attract followers from across the globe, and dissatisfied youth of the Middle East and Europe appear to be especially open to influence in this regard. The more IS is profiled on the global stage, the more disillusioned young people in the West are drawn to an 'alternative way of life' lived out by fundamentalists who appear to have vast amounts of power and influence.

Secondly, extremists' 'loud voice' on international media plays a key role in drawing Western nations deeper into the ongoing confrontations. This is something that fundamentalists in the Muslim world desire, as their strategists aim to fulfil Islamic prophecies that call for an apocalyptic battle before Islam's 'ultimate victory'.

Fouad Hussein, a Jordanian journalist who met Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's predecessor) – while in prison, wrote a book detailing the thinking and strategies of al-Qaeda's terrorists and describing their 'seven-phase' plan. The second to last phase was planned as total confrontation with the West, when the army of an Islamic caliphate pursued a vast war on a global scale against non-believers. This was also the ultimate goal of infamous terrorist Osama bin Laden. And while al-Qaeda is now seen as less of a threat than IS (at least within current conditions), IS would share this vision.

This radical Islamic voice is vastly amplified by Western media and is therefore the one which dominates.

## 2. THE ANTAGONISTIC MODERATES

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Perhaps more concerning than the radical minority, whose loud voice is to be expected, is the antagonistic voice of those speaking from a place of freedom and democracy.

One such voice is South African Muslim academic Professor Farid Esack. Three days after the Paris attack, Professor Esack of the University of Johannesburg's Centre for the Study of Democracy – who is known for his work in inter-religious dialogue – said in a Facebook post that he was "sickened" by the expectation that he has to condemn those involved in the Paris attacks:

*"I am not praying for Paris; I am not condemning anyone. Why the hell should I? I had nothing to do with it. I am sickened by the perpetual expectations to condemn. I walk away from your racist and Islamophobic expectations that whenever your chickens come home to roost then I must feign horror. Stop supporting and funding terror outfits, get out of other people's lands and continents, stop outlawing peaceful resistance such as Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement, to occupations, abandon your cultural imperialism, destroy your arms industry that provides the weapons that kill hundreds of thousands of others every year. The logic is quite simple: When you eat, it's stupid to expect that no [\*\*\*] will ever come out from your body. Yes, I feel sorry for the victims on whom the [\*\*\*] falls. But, [\*\*\*] own it; it's yours!"*

These words of a highly influential 'democratic' leader might not be giving a direct stamp of approval to terrorism, but Professor Esack is implying that acts of terror are a logical, expected result of past actions by the West. And he is definitely not alone in this belief, which angrily places the ultimate blame on the countries that are targeted.

## 3. THE APOLOGETIC MINORITY

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This 'apologetic' voice is rarely heard in mainstream media and from the general Muslim public. Yet they are there. One of the voices condemning the attacks by fellow Muslims is Farid Ghadry, president of the Reform Party of Syria. On August 2013, Mr Ghadry wrote the following after an attack on two British teens in Zanzibar:

*"I indict Islam. Yes, I indict it for ignoring the terror against two innocent British teens in Zanzibar who were doused with acid. I do not give a damn what the reasons were and what justification those Islamists had to change permanently the good lives of two innocent young teens who were there to help Muslims in the first place. What is holy about Ramadan when the Muslims in Zanzibar use it to commit the unholyest of acts?"*

*I am really, really angry.*

*Where are our Muslim leaders to speak out against such terror and to commit, once and for all, to its eradication? Where is the King of Saudi Arabia, or the President of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation? Cooperation on what? With the OIC's silence, how could not anyone interpret 'Cooperation' to mean to cooperate to disfigure the innocent?*

*Where is the Grand Imam of al-Azhar University, or the Arab League, or Ayatollah Khamenei, or the millions of other religious Muslim leaders? Where is Erdogan of Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood? Why are they silent in the face of such atrocities committed in the name of Islam?*

*Where are all our collective Muslim voices to indict these senseless acts not even animals in a jungle are capable of? Islam has become synonymous with terror and the target of justifiable and global contempt. The religion I was born into, and which shelters 1.3 billion people, has turned into a weapon of global destruction against the other 5.7 billion people who do not adhere to Muslim principles.*

*Islam no longer exists for Islam. Islam exists today to destroy non-Muslims.*

*I indict all of Islam because the religion that is supposed to support the needy and the helpless has become a cult of terror against the self-sufficient and the enterprising. I indict all the silent Muslim leaders for their weakness. With their silence, they are feeding these acts of barbarism to define Islam. I indict them for all the acts of terror committed in the past against thousands upon thousands of innocent people.*

*I am really, really angry at all the Imams, the Grand Muftis, the Sheikhs, the Mawlawis, the Ayatollahs, the Emirs, the Kings, the Princes, and whatever titles they embrace.*

*At the end, if they do not indict these acts publicly and courageously all of them share in the savagery of Zanzibar. That is their legacy.*

*Something must change. The West must change course to help us find our way, the hard way. This status quo cannot go on. If you want to help Islam, then it is time to tie your help with what our leaders do or say, and not by how much intelligence they deliver. Otherwise, stop buying our oil and gas. Let us perish in our own waste. Maybe, then, our leaders will speak out and cooperate with the West based on equality and not based on them forcing Islam upon the rest of the world.*

*Enough is enough. I am really, really angry.*

*May those British teens, and all who were injured by Islamic terror in the past, find peace and happiness. May they, and their families, forgive us for not speaking loudly enough."*

## 4. THE APATHETIC MAJORITY

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As 'loud' as the extremists in the headlines is the silence of the vast majority of Muslims. There is a response needed from those who claim to be 'true followers of Islam', and an explanation of why the majority of peace-loving Muslims allow a small minority of fanatics to 'kidnap' a religion so dear to them.

An often-forwarded opinion piece written in 2007 by Paul Marek (often incorrectly attributed to Dr. Emanuel Tanay) compared the Muslim 'silent majority' to other such groups in history:

*"A man, whose family was German aristocracy prior to World War II, owned a number of large industries and estates. When asked how many German people were true Nazis, the answer he gave can guide our attitude toward fanaticism.*

*'Very few people were true Nazis,' he said, 'but many enjoyed the return of German pride, and many more were too busy to care. I was one of those who just thought the Nazis were a bunch of fools. So, the majority just sat back and let it all happen. Then, before we knew it, they owned us, and we had lost control, and the end of the world had come. My family lost everything. I ended up in a concentration camp and the Allies destroyed my factories.'*

*We are told again and again by 'experts' and 'talking heads' that Islam is the religion of peace and that the vast majority of Muslims just want to live in peace. Although this unqualified assertion may be true, it is entirely irrelevant. It is meaningless fluff, meant to make us feel better, and meant to somehow diminish the spectre of fanatics rampaging across the globe in the name of Islam.*

*The fact is that the fanatics rule Islam at this moment in history. It is the fanatics who march. It is the fanatics who wage any one of 50 shooting wars worldwide. It is the fanatics who systematically slaughter Christian or tribal groups throughout Africa and are gradually taking over the entire continent in an Islamic wave. It is the fanatics who bomb, behead, murder, or honour-kill. It is the fanatics who take over mosque after mosque.*

*The hard, quantifiable fact is that the peaceful majority, the 'silent majority', is cowed and extraneous. Communist Russia was comprised of Russians who just wanted to live in peace, yet the Russian Communists were responsible for the murder of about 60 million people. The peaceful majority were irrelevant. China's huge population was peaceful as well, but Chinese Communists managed to kill a staggering 70 million people.*

*And who can forget Rwanda, which collapsed into butchery. Could it not be said that the majority of Rwandans were 'peace loving'?*

*History lessons are often incredibly simple and blunt, yet for all our powers of reason, we often miss the most basic and uncomplicated of points: Peace-loving Muslims have been made irrelevant by their silence. Peace-loving Muslims will become our enemy if they don't speak up, because like my friend from Germany, they will awaken one day and find that the fanatics own them, and the end of their world will have begun.*

*Peace-loving Germans, Japanese, Chinese, Russians, Rwandans, Serbs, Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians, Somalis, Nigerians, Algerians, and many others have died because the peaceful majority did not speak up until it was too late. As for us who watch it all unfold, we must pay attention to the only group that counts – the fanatics who threaten our way of life."*

While some of this opinion piece may be inflammatory (in terms of turning Christians against their genuinely peace-loving neighbours and creating fear and suspicion), there is still an element of truth that cannot be ignored: that things could look different if the Muslim majority around the world actively raised their voices against those of the extremists. In this regard, the age-old saying of Edmund Burke applies: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

## CONCLUSION

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Considering these 'different voices', it becomes clear that within Islam there is a wide range of practices, standpoints and beliefs. Therefore whenever Islam is given a voice in the media and on social platforms – be it the voice of an extremist or the voice of an average moderate – there should be an awareness among listeners that there are other voices existing within the Islamic faith.

Even if 'Islam' is an umbrella term covering multiple interpretations of the religion, the loudest voice will be the one that shapes the religion. Extremism and silence together will determine the future of Islam. The more vocal the anti-violence majority is, the more chance there is for a solution to extremism and aggression.

From a Christian perspective, the Body of Christ needs to be aware of this disparity as well. The loudest voices are generally those of aggression and antagonism, and if this is what Muslims (and refugees) around the world are hearing from Christians, how will they ever be drawn to Christ?

