

The Challenge of teaching Islam to US Counterterrorism Professionals

Why A Scientific Approach to understanding Radical Islam is badly needed

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Some elements of the FBI's counterterrorism training have been recently accused [of being 'Islamophobic'](#) [1]. These accusations were partially in response to reports that counterterrorism agents at the FBI's training center in Quantico, Virginia were being taught that "devout" Muslims are more likely to be "violent" and that American Muslims are likely to be terrorist sympathizers, according to training materials acquired by Wired's [Spencer Ackerman](#) [2]. The documents have been described as offering violent interpretations of Islam such as tenets that "Any war against non-believers is justified". In addition, [a congressional hearing](#) has been conducted to address the issue [3] and recently the Obama administration [pulled back all training materials](#) used for the law enforcement and national security communities and is in the process of reviewing them[4].

Discussions about Islam and Radical Islam has become polarized and politicized between different parties who accuse one another of being either an "apologist" or being an "Islamophobe" (or a basher). In this political war the analytical discussion and debate has gotten thrown out the window. This situation is not only un-scientific but is also dangerous as it is vital we understand the ideological basis of "threat doctrine" of the jihadists and their sympathizers.

Discussions and critiques regarding training materials on radical Islam and Islamic terrorism can not use vague terms and relative expressions such as the word "Islamophobia". Instead, they need to specifically address the factual validity and accuracy of the information provided in the courses, books, or other training materials.

For example, instead of accusing the above mentioned document of "offering a violent interpretation of Islam in which any war against non-believers is justified", the (cite authors) could have provided a counter point

by referring to at least *one single widely acceptable Islamic Sharia or Jurisprudence* book that challenges and criticizes this well established violent Islamic Sharia concept [5] - *or* in other words to provide the title of an approved Islamic book that clearly states that declaring wars against non-Muslims to spread Islam is "un-Islamic". This is particularly important since the concept of declaring wars against Non- Muslims to spread the religion is agreed upon by *ALL* schools of Islamic jurisprudence (until today). The existence of one single Islamic book (if exists) that challenges such a concept could have provided the necessary '**evidence**' that the training is inaccurate. Providing such a *Sharia Book* instead of blaming others of "*Islamophobia*" could have brought the whole discussion about the topic from a sensational emotional accusation level to the level of scientific objectiveness.

Similarly, some counterterrorism instructors have been accused of saying that [Islamic law was incompatible with the U.S. Constitution](#) [6]. The *ONLY* way to prove that the latter statement is wrong is to provide a single official or recognized Islamic Law Book that clearly and unambiguously supports constitutional values of freedom of religion and equality of women. Until today, Islamic Law supports and justifies the killing of apostates, beating wives, and killing homosexuals. Before accusing others for claiming that "Islamic Law is incompatible with the US constitution" (check to see if this was called "offensive"), it is imperative to ask ourselves if the formerly mentioned violent principles of Islamic Law are compatible with the US constitution or *not*.

The current 'unscientific environment' in discussing Radical Islam has actually been used by Al-Qaeda terrorists to their benefit to attempt to influence the decision making within the U.S. For example, in the latest issue of Al-Qaeda's Inspire Magazine, the late American al-Qaeda propagandist, Samir Khan [7], [criticized anti-Muslim counterterrorism trainers in the US](#). Mr. Khan wrote in Inspire: "Because the West was ardent to point out the mujahidin's attachment to Islam as extreme, portraying them as "fundamentalists," Muslims throughout the world asked: Wait, are they not then concluding that a good practicing Muslim is their fundamentalist enemy?"

For Khan, having Americans arguing that Al-Qaeda represents Islam is a great concept as not only is that message precisely what Al-Qaeda's been trying to promote for years, but the more the U.S. government behaves as if

there really is a rise of Islamic Sharia taking hold across U.S., the more alienated that Muslims in the US will feel and, therefore, find validity in al-Qaeda's message. From AQAP's perspective, Al-Qaeda has no better friend in the United States than those American counterterrorism trainers and activists who advance Al-Qaeda's arguments for them.

The question now is if the above views of Al-Qaeda should lead us to stopping any program that exposes radical teachings? Quite the opposite, we need to evaluate Al-Qaeda statements in a rational manner.

The Al-Qaeda statements about the counterterrorism training in the US should actually make us question if Al-Qaeda terrorists - who enjoy beheading innocents - would ever tell us what is truly beneficial to them. We have the full right to mistrust the information they release to us as it is unlikely that they will tell us the truth about what would truly harm them - so that we can do it *or* inform us about what benefit them - so that we avoid doing it.

In addition, the described Al-Qaeda approach must be seen via the lens of Arabic and Islamic culture rather than our Western glasses. For example, Al-Qaeda in this case might be using a tactic that is commonly used by children in the Middle East. This tactic is simply to show your opponent that what he is doing to 'annoy' you is actually '*beneficial*' for you. In this case the opponent is likely to stop what he is doing -**which is actually what you want to achieve**. The Al-Qaeda tactic in this case could be that. If they showed that criticism of Islam is hurting them it is likely that the US government will increase such forms of training (which is the opposite of what Al-Qaeda wants to achieve). On the contrary, an intelligent way to stop the training is simply to say that such training is 'beneficial' for their cause. In such a case it is possible that some US government officials may immediately jump to stop such training -**which is exactly what Al-Qaeda wants to achieve** (as stopping training about Radical Islam will make the government officials in the West ignorant about the topic and thus become passive in confronting its threat).

Unfortunately, some counterterrorism trainers who do not follow scientific methods when they address the problem of Radical Islam may actually help Al-Qaeda but via a **completely different mechanism**.

Using an unscientific or emotionally driven or biased approach in addressing Islamic Radicalism opens the gate for criticizing training about

the topic and thus gives an opportunity for the 'apologists' of radical Islam to demand **stopping** all forms of training - **Which is exactly what many Radical Islamic groups want to** happen (for the same reason explained earlier).

Examples of unscientific approaches in addressing Islam and Radical Islam include:

1- **Failure to define terminology** such as the words "Radical", "Moderate", "Devout", "jihadist" and others. These words may mean different things for different people. Clear definitions of these expressions are vital to make the discussion about the topic of Islam more scientific.

2- **Hiding information to prove the speakers view point.** For example, hiding the existence of peaceful verses [8] in the Quran that may contradict some mainstream violent interpretations [9] to convince the audience that there is no way that moderate forms of Islam can ever exist.

3- **Accusing all Muslims of being violent** and ignoring that there is a percentage of Muslims who fit in the category of Cultural or Ritual Muslims and are not necessarily violent or pro-violence [10].

4- **Failure to make a distinction between criticizing the theology and criticizing individual Muslims.** Islamic theology may contain violent teachings but many Muslims practice a superficial form of Islam without practicing or even believing various theological aspects of their faith. Some Muslims could be unaware of or even have opposing views to these violent teachings [11]. It is important that trainers who teach the topic of Radical Islam clarify to their audience that criticizing certain theological teachings *does not* mean criticizing all individual Muslims.

5- **Giving inaccurate information about Islam** such as that [Allah is the "Moon God"](#) [12]. The latter completely contradict the basics of Islamic teachings [13], [14]. The document [12] has used the fact that some Muslims used the crescent as a symbol for Islam -to confirm their wrong assumption. The reality is that the crescent was NEVER used by prophet Mohamed or the early Muslims as a symbol for the religion. Others claim that 'Allah' is an Idol. The word "Allah"

is basically an Arabic word that existed before the birth of Prophet Mohamed and was used -and is still used- by Arabic speaking Jews and [Christians](#) to describe the Lord [15]. It is fair to say that Islamic radicals are to be blamed for linking the word "Allah" to violence, for example, by saying statements like "Allah Akbar" while committing their barbaric crimes, however, this does not justify in any way deviating from the scientific and linguistic facts about using the word '*Allah*' itself.

The lack of a scientific approach is also one of the features of the 'Apologists' for Radical Islam. The attempts of the latter group to underestimate the threat posed by Radical Islam may give misleading information to our homeland security professionals and thus can put our country at more risk.

Examples of the misleading approach of some apologists for Radical Islam include:

- 1- Ignoring the role of **Ideology** in creating the problem of Islamic Radicalism -despite the existence factual and logical evidence that the *ideology* plays a significant role in creating the problem of terrorism. The apologetics, for example, have not explained yet why circumstances that they suggest as the true cause of terrorism such as poverty, lack of dedication, political suppression, and others have not affected Non-Muslims-who live under the same socioeconomic and political circumstances- to the same extent as they have affected Muslim communities (e.g., the Christian Copts in Egypt).
- 2- Hiding the mainstream Islamic definitions that define **Jihad** in a violent manner and using rare interpretations for the word to give an impression that the concept of 'Jihad' is a peaceful concept of "Holy Struggle " [16]and it is all about the Western misunderstanding of the word . Hiding the traditional Islamic definition of the word Jihad and failure to explain how the word is truly understood in Muslim societies [17] has very serious implications as according to the assumption that 'Jihad' is a peaceful concept the US should probably respond to the radical Islamic Imams in Pakistan who declared Jihad on the US [18] by

sending them a '*thank- you*' note for offering peace to the US - instead of increasing the alert levels of the country.

It was not that difficult for US government officials to read any chapter about Jihad in one of the mainstream Islamic jurisprudence or Sharia books to know the real meaning of the word.

3- **Selective use of information.** For example, teaching about the 'peaceful' principles in Sharia Law without addressing the existence of 'violent' principles as well. This 'sugar-coating' for Sharia Law can be easily exposed by evaluating any approved Sharia or Islamic jurisprudence book and by observing the applications of this law in countries that apply it [19].

4- **Using distorted logic.** For example, building an assumption that Islamic ideology has nothing to do with terrorism because *most Muslims are not terrorists*. This reasoning, while looks logical, is actually unscientific. *The following can illustrate this point:* The fact that not every cigarette smoker develops lung cancer *does not* negate the fact that lung cancer is caused by cigarette smoking. Similarly, the fact that not every follower of Islamic ideology develops violent attitudes *does not* negate the fact that the Ideology could be the cause of violence attitudes that develop in some Islamic societies.

5- **Lack of objective evaluation of Islamic core texts.** For example some counterterrorism trainers have been [criticized for mentioning that peaceful verses in the Quran are 'abrogated'](#) by the violent ones [21]. The fact is that the concept of abrogation in the Quran is a well-known Islamic concept and is taught in the most authentic mainstream Islamic books and is based on Verse {Quran 2:106} [22] in the Quran. We cannot blame the messenger for his statement if it has a clear reference to the approved Islamic teaching books. Blaming the messenger in such a case is a form of scientific dishonesty that aims at hiding facts and misleading the decision makers.

To conclude, trainers for courses that teach about Islam and radical Islam Must use a scientific and factual approach when they discuss issues related to this sensitive topic. Failure to do so either by being biased toward (Apologetic attitude) or against (Islamophobic attitude) - is wrong as this can either make us 'underestimate' the threat posed by the Islamism phenomenon *or* 'exaggerate' it. An honest [3], factual, unbiased, and fiercely independent approach is needed. **The decision** of the Obama administration to pull back all training materials used for the law enforcement and national security communities can be a correct decision if the aim was to do an honest objective evaluation for this material. On the contrary, the decision can be dangerous if the only aim was to be politically correct with Muslim communities.

References:

[1]<http://thinkprogress.org/security/2011/09/15/319772/fbi-islamophobic-training/>

[2]<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/07/fbi-islam-101-guide/>

[3]<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/10/fbi-chief-anti-islam-training/>

[4]<http://dailycaller.com/2011/10/21/obama-administration-pulls-references-to-islam-from-terror-training-materials-official-says/>

[5] The concept of declaring wars against Non-Muslims and offering them to convert to Islam, to pay a humiliating tax (Jizia), or to be killed is agreed upon by *all* Islamic schools of Jurisprudence until today. The concept is also approved and promoted in bestseller Islamic books such as Fiqh Al-Sunna, Minhaj Al-Muslim, Fiqh: According to the Quran & Sunna. The concept is still a mainstream form of teaching.

[6]<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/09/fbi-islam-domination/4/>

[7] Samir Khan has been recently killed during the drone attack of Al-Awlaki

See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/world/middleeast/samir-khan-killed-by-drone-spun-out-of-the-american-middle-class.html>

[8] Example- Quran 2:256 Let there be no compulsion in religion.

[9] *Redda Law* (killing Muslims who convert to other faith) is a fundamental principle in Islamic Sharia Law and is the mainstream teaching in Islamic jurisprudence books.

[10] See: Understanding Islamic Culture Vital in Dealing with Its Problems (Article) at

http://www.tawfikhamid.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Understanding_Radical_Islam.pdf

[11] <http://americanislamicleadership.org/>

[12] http://www.islam-watch.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=840

[13] Quran 41:37 Among His Signs are the Night and the Day, and the Sun and the Moon. **Adore not the sun and the moon**, but adore Allah (God), Who created them, if it is Him ye wish to serve.

[14] 22:18 Seest thou not that to Allah bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth,- the sun, **the moon**, the stars; the hills, the trees, the animals; and a great number among mankind? But a great number are (also) such as are fit for Punishment: and such as Allah shall disgrace,- None can raise to honour: for Allah carries out all that He wills.

[15] An Arabic Christian web site using the word "Allah" to represent God See:

http://www.arabicbible.com/arabic/a_salvation/a_salvation_gods_plan_f_or_salvation.htm

[16] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=972RW7PzYN4>

[17] A Comment on Mr. John Brennan's Speech To CSIS, "Protecting The American People From Terrorism And Violent Extremism" (Article)

http://www.tawfikhamid.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Understanding_Radical_Islam.pdf

[18] <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/09/27/pakistan-on-brink-as-imams-call-for-jihad/>

[19] <http://keepTonyBlairforPM.wordpress.com/does-sharia-law-really-call-for-barbaric-punishments/>

[20] The author in this example is not trying to make a similarity but only trying to make a scientific point of using logical analysis of the data.

[21] <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/09/fbi-islam-domination/4/>

[22] {Quran 2:106} None of Our revelations do *We abrogate* or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that Allah Hath power over all things?

[23] The author would like to give an example of scientific honesty in the ongoing discussions and debates about Radical Islam when the [Economist apologized recently to Rachid Ghannouchi](#) (co-founder of the Hizb al-Nahḍah Islamic Party of Tunisia) for incorrectly quoting him in statements that portrayed him as an Islamic extremist.