



ISLAMIC TERROR: WHAT MUSLIM AMERICANS CAN DO

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I am an American Muslim. And I, along with my mainstream Muslim brethren, in America and abroad, must come to terms with an ever more apparent truth: that we are the only ones who can lead a winning fight against the radicalism crippling our faith.

If there was ever any doubt of this, just look at the nature of the terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California in December of 2015. What's most troubling about the San Bernardino massacre is that Syed Farook, the husband half of the terrorist couple, seems to have been, by almost all accounts, an ordinary American. His was not a crime born of poverty or lack of opportunity, or an inability to integrate into American society. Just the opposite.

He was raised in a middle class environment by first generation Pakistani immigrant parents. He was educated and earned a good living. I too, like many American Muslims, come from a background that is very similar, as the son of Pakistani immigrants, which makes the attack all the more concerning. It seems unthinkable that someone in such a position could be susceptible to radicalization. Yet we have seen it happen time and again among younger Muslims in the Middle East, Europe and now America.

Attacks like San Bernardino underscore the importance of countering extremist propaganda. While sophisticated attacks by terrorist groups can be effectively prevented by law enforcement and national-security measures, the truth is there isn't much that can be done by any government—not even stricter gun-control laws—to eliminate the possibility of a radicalized lone wolf wreaking havoc. Only defeating the ideology that inspires these attacks can do that.

A propaganda war must be waged against this radicalism and American Muslims have to be on the front lines for it to be credible. Merely condemning Islamist terror is not enough. We must actively engage in counter-extremism messaging.

We must build an intellectual and theological case against radical Islam. Our religious leaders have to educate and warn our youth about the dangers of searching for spiritual guidance on the Internet. They must make it perfectly clear that anyone who engages in any act of terrorism is not doing God's work, they're doing the work of the devil.

And we in the Muslim community have to continue to be vigilant. If someone who regularly attends mosque stops coming and disappears abruptly after marrying a Pakistani woman in Saudi Arabia whom he met online, it shouldn't take two years and 36 Americans getting shot (including one from that very mosque) before we notice.

We have the benefit of living in a nation that protects freedom of speech and association, a

nation that values the marketplace of ideas, a nation that allows us all to practice our faith, no matter our religion. We have the opportunity to speak out and challenge radicalism in a way others abroad cannot.

There is a war going on that extends beyond Syria, and American Muslims are under siege – not by a fringe group of bigoted Americans, but by a fringe group of Muslims abroad who seek to tear our communities apart and take away the freedom that we all cherish. They are trying to target the disaffected among us, hijack the mosque pulpit, and convince us that we're unwelcome in our own country.

But if we're serious about leading this fight with unified support, certain things will have to change. We can't call out prejudice against our own faith without also calling out the gender inequality and homophobia that we find in some of our own Muslim communities. We can't be champions of our own religious freedom without also championing the freedom of people of all religious traditions, including other Muslim denominations that we may disagree with. We have to change the way we think about Islamic law and vilify the medieval judicial practices that persist in the Middle East. And we must have the uncomfortable but necessary conversations about where much of the funding for this cancerous supremacist ideology is coming from—Saudi Arabia.

We carry with us a responsibility to our country, our faith and our children. The majority of us are here because our parents or grandparents emigrated from oppressive and illiberal nations for the promise of a better life in America. But the way things are heading, our children may grow up with less opportunity and freedom than we did. I can think of no greater defeat and surrender to radicalism than that.

I'm Khurram Dara for Prager University.