'Moderate' Islam in Western Counterterrorism Praxes: Countering Extremism or Coercing Negligence?

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Abstract

Moderate Islam has been emphasised in Western counterterrorism praxes. In what ways are the Islamic perspective on moderation incorporated into these praxes? To explore this question, the paper adopts decoloniality as its analytical framework and uses an interdisciplinary approach combining Critical Security Studies and Islamic Studies. Relying on critical analyses of secondary counterterrorism discourses and practices as well as key primary Islamic sources, the paper explores the Islamic concept of wasaṭiyyah (moderation), which forms the foundation for promulgating 'moderate Islam.' In essence, moderation in Islam is positioned as the middle path between the two opposite margins of ghulūw (extremism) and ghaflah (negligence). Although moderation as understood through the Islamic perspective requires the maintenance of an impeccable balance between both margins, Western counterterrorism praxes place more weight on extremism (ghulūw). Such fragmental conceptualisation and application of moderation in Islam substantially diminishes its efficacy in mitigating terrorism and violent extremism.

Introduction

Terrorism (and violent extremism) has become a global phenomenon, particularly after 9/11.[1] Nevertheless, there is not a universally accepted definition of terrorism, with a myriad of definitions contingent upon distinct contexts and relevant actors. The framing of a generally embraced definition is obstructed by the difficulty in sifting through a complex web of acts of terror committed by state actors, and those of non-state actors motivated by either religious or political ideologies, racial supremacy, ethnicity, and nationalism. For instance, Noam Chomsky defines terrorism (albeit narrowly) as 'a calculated use of violence (or the threat of violence) against civilians to attain goals that are political, religious or ideological in nature; this is done through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear.'[2] The United Nations broadly defined terrorism

as 'any act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.'[3] This paper follows these understandings of terrorism whilst recognising that its precise definitions remain elusive and contested.

Amid contested definitions and framings of terrorism comes the discourses and practices of counterterrorism and counter-extremism with their attendant notions of (de)radicalisation and disengagement with the aim of eradicating terrorism or violent acts of extremism.[4] Although there is no universally accepted or objective definition of terrorism, counterterrorism discourses and practices are generally understood as intended to mitigate 'malicious' terrorism and violent extremism. Western counterterrorism praxes have evolved to feature prominently in governmental, inter-governmental as well as non-governmental organisations' policies dedicated to countering terrorism and various forms of violent extremism around the globe.[5] Counterterrorism has also been subject to much inquiry and a top the research agenda of many institutions and think tanks.[6] Nevertheless, because counterterrorism is presumed to be on the righteous side of the struggle against terrorism, its practices and discourses have not attracted the needed critical scrutiny.

This paper focuses on 'Moderate Islam' and critiques its application and instrumentalisation across a variety of contexts within Western counterterrorism praxes.[7] There is a disconnect between the Islamic view on moderation and the current discourses and practices around what is perceived as 'moderate Islam' within Western counterterrorism praxes. The paper contends that Western counterterrorism praxes' conceptual obliviousness in regards to the authentic Islamic perspective on moderation has adverse practical implications for the fight against violent extremism and terrorism. The fragmental understanding of 'moderate' or 'moderation' is highlighted alongside its utilisation within the Western counterterrorism complex.

An Islamic perspective on moderation must be brought to the centre of analysis to benefit holistically from the mitigating role of moderate Islam in curbing violent extremism and terrorism. In what ways are the Islamic perspective on moderation accounted for in Western counterterrorism praxes? Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines the broader literature on Critical Security Studies (CSS) and Islamic Studies, the paper adopts decoloniality as its analytical framework in exploring this question, and relies on critical analyses of counterterrorism discourses and practices as well as key primary Islamic sources (and discourses) especially the Qur'an and ahadith.[8]

The paper adopts CSS due to its emphasis on the need to transcend the traditional preoccupation with state security as the foundation of human security.[9] This is much needed within Western counterterrorism praxes, given the state's authority to prosecute its own citizens in the name of state security, to the detriment of the individual security of citizens, whom the state is obligated to protect. This is especially relevant when one critically scrutinises the counterterrorism praxes in most Western countries.[10] There is a need to focus on the fear of ordinary people to threats against their livelihood.[11]

First, the paper disinters the Islamic perspective on moderation through primary Islamic sources. Secondary sources in the field of Islamic Studies are also consulted in this respect to highlight the constructive potency of embracing an interdisciplinary approach, which crucially allows for the understanding of moderation through an Islamic perspective rather than through the assumptions underlying a Westernised or Eurocentric perspective. The paper advocates for the 'decolonisation' of moderation in order to understand moderate Islam, that is, to view Islam through an Islamic lens. Decoloniality as an analytical framework is useful in this respect as it emphasises 'pluriversality.' [12] Despite appreciating Western contributions to the human endeavour, decoloniality aims to set aside the uni-temporality designed by the West to allow, through pluriversality, local histories, subjectivities, knowledges, narratives and struggles against modernity to surface, to have a face and to be seen or recognised.[13] In this regard, rather than relying on a Western understanding of 'moderation,' a localised perspective of Islam on moderation will be explored.

Secondly, the paper underlines and illustrates the partial or incomplete understanding and utilisation of moderation in Western counterterrorism discourses and practices. Apart from its limited or skewed application, there are at least two issues with how 'moderation' is approached in Western counterterrorism praxes. First, the application of the concept moderation specifically targets Islam and Muslims. In this respect, there is a contested formula developed to distinguish between 'moderate' and 'extremist' Muslims in the form of a binary framing.[14] As will be shown, in some contexts, governments set parameters regarding who is a 'moderate' and who is not.

Building upon this duality, moderate or 'legitimate' Muslims are those considered to have accepted Western values and are well integrated into society whilst extremists are those rejected outright and deemed as outcasts (mostly without evidence of having committed any crime). Muslims in Western countries, such as the Netherlands and Norway, often feel pressured to demonstrate how moderate they are in order to fit in.[15] The framing of moderation in this way brings to the fore an important question regarding 'social rights and complex freedom'[16] and the need to rethink moderation not only within counterterrorism praxes but more broadly within Western societies.[17]

Islamic Perspective on Moderation (Wasaṭiyyah)

Wasaṭiyyah is etymologically rooted from the trilateral Arabic letters wa-sa-ṭa (wasaṭa), which is approximately translatable as moderate, fair, middle or just.[18] The word has been referenced in the Qur'an in different contexts; it appeared five times explicitly in the Qu'ran, in different forms.[19] The most oft referenced is the usage in Qur'an Chapter 2, Verse 143 (2:143), which used the phrase 'ummatan wasatan' to connote 'a median nation or middle community', 'a just community' or a 'community of the middle way' as translated by most scholars of Qur'anic exegesis.[20] The nation of Prophet Muhammad is referenced here with the traits of fairness and justice, due to these traits' role in a balanced community that neither transgresses limits set by God nor is too lax to be negligent of the directives of God. Besides, the verse relates to the nation of Prophet Muhammad's

role as a just witness to nations of other prophets, that those prophets delivered the message to their people on the day of judgement. This is supported by a hadith in which the Prophet indicated how nations of other prophets (like Noah) would be asked on the day of judgement if their prophets had warned them, but their answer would be in the negative. The nation of Prophet Muhammad, being a nation that believes in all the prophets and messengers, would act as a just or fair witness that indeed they (those prophets) had delivered their message.[21]

Most exegeses interpret 'wasatan' in the sense of issuing fair or just witness. To be fair or just requires that one maintains an impartial middle position between two conflicting extremes. However, it is in the exegeses of Albaghawi that we see reference to wasatan as '… the followers of the wasat religion, one that represents a middle path between exaggeration and negligence, because both are blameworthy in the matter of religion.'[22] It is from Albaghawi's exegesis that we find an interpretation that corresponds to the general understanding of moderation as the middle path between extremism and negligence. Going by these exegeses, it is abundantly clear that the concept of wasat does not stand or act alone but is positioned between two extremes. Any inclination towards one extreme would result in an inappropriate utilisation and implementation of wasaṭiyyah. By inference and as rightly noted by Mohammed Hashim Kamali,[23] the proper implementation of wasaṭiyyah requires an alignment to justice and fairness between these two extremes; in other words, for one to be moderate, one must be fair and just.

It is imperative that the corollary notions of ghulūw (extremism) and ghaflah (negligence) are explored. In linguistic terms, Ibn Manẓūr explained ghulūw to mean exceeding reasonable bounds, to overstate or to exaggerate.[24] Despite rephrasing the meaning they give to the term, most linguists largely agree with the definition given by Ibn Manẓūr to ghulūw.[25] There are several terminologies worth noting that are related to the ghulūw. These include tashaddud (extremely strict), tanaṭṭuʿ (overly committed to religious rituals), ifrāṭ (extreme and beyond actual limits), taṭarruf (radicalism) and ʿunf (harshness). [26] All these terminologies, according to Al-Luwayḥiq, can be subsumed under the term ghulūw.[27]

The Qur'an is unambiguous in its usage of the term ghulūw; as exemplified in Chapter 4, Verse 171 and in Chapter 5, Verse 77. In both of these instances 'the People of the Book' (Muslims, Jews and Christians) are warned not to transgress the boundaries set by their individual faith and practice – and transgressing those bounds constitutes ghulūw. Clearly, ghulūw is frowned upon by Islam as indicated in the Quranic exegeses of these verses.

There are various forms of ghulūw (extremism) in Islam, not all of which necessarily relate to violence; some do while others do not. A prominent form of ghulūw that is associated with violent extremism is the declaration of war against those Muslims who commit acts detested by Islam, such Muslims are referred to as infidels (kuffar) (). Such declarations can also be due to differences in opinion[28] and not necessarily belligerent.   Other forms of extremism that are not intrinsically violent but are nevertheless denounced in Islam are loving the Prophet more than one loves God or believing that the Prophet Muhammed is the only prophet of God, in disregard to other prophets.[29]

Ghaflah, the term representing the antithesis of ghulūw, has been defined in the Lane Lexicon as forgetfulness, heedlessness, or inadvertence;[30] most of the term's usage throughout the Qur'an is generally not far from this lexical understanding. Ghalflah is repeated in diverse contexts and forms over thirty times throughout the Qur'an with only five maintaining the term's exact structure.[31] All of these refer to heedlessness or inattentiveness. Together with other connotations in the Qur'an, ghaflah is denounced as it signifies forgetting to obey God and his messenger, the Prophet Muhammad. It is regarded as a sin to be neglectful, forgetful, or heedless of God's orders or those of the Prophet. In sum, the opposing extremes of ghulūw and ghaflah are equally condemned in Islam. To be moderate in Islam is to avoid these two extremes by adopting a middle path between both.

Moderate Islam (or a moderate Muslim) as understood and utilised within counter-extremism and counterterrorism praxes, is not only somewhat limited in comparison to the above holistic Islamic conceptualisation of wasaṭiyyah, it also has quite alarming implications. Moderation is posited in a curiously one-sided manner, only in its role as an ameliorant of violent extremism, although opposing violent extremism constitutes only one part of the Islamic concept of wasatiyyah. Muslims are called on to diligently apply wasatiyyah as a middle ground between ghulūw (extreme faith and practice) and ghaflah (negligence of duty) as indicated above; both ghulūw and ghaflah are impermissible in equal measure.

By way of contrast, in counterterrorism discourses the denouncement of ghulūw is insensitively amplified relative to that of ghaflah – regarding it as unacceptable to be extreme in faith and practice but acceptable to neglect one's faith. In the strict Islamic interpretation, ghaflah is denounced as much as ghulūw; both are acts of extremism. The only distinction is ghulūw's positioning on the 'scalding hot' side of the gauge, while ghaflah is positioned on the 'freezing cold.' The scalding hot corresponds to violent acts of extremism whereas the freezing cold may not necessarily entail violence, yet it corresponds to a censured act of extremism in Islam. This 'cold' extremism could be expressed by the Muslim individual or by state counterterrorism policy that targets violent extremism while supporting - explicitly or implicitly - the negligence of religious practice.

The Western counterterrorism complex, disregarding the need to maintain balance between the two extremes of ghulūw and ghaflah, utilises the concept of moderation in a remarkably myopic sense. For most counterterrorism actors, especially Western governments, moderation encapsulates only the fight against violent extremism without any consideration given to whether counterterrorism measures would coerce or compel one into abandoning or neglecting important aspects of their faith. That is, in formulating counter-extremism or counterterrorism policies, states and institutions implement policies that infringe - advertently or inadvertently -upon the right of their citizenry to freely practise their chosen religion. This is because the only aspect of moderation that captures their attention is violent extremism and not the opposite end of the pendulum, represented by negligence. The ensuing passages elaborate upon this in detail.

Moderate Islam in Counterterrorism Discourses and Praxes

There have been copious discourses, studies, policies, and practices on counterterrorism including de-radicalisation, disengagement and counter-extremism, especially since 9/11. A key recurring feature in most of these studies, policy implementations, and recommendations (both governmental and non-governmental) has been the accentuation of the mitigating role of what has come to be regarded in the West as moderate Islam. The moderate Islam discourse stems from the realisation that Islam is a religion with a strongly embedded tradition of wasaṭiyyah. While the assertion that wasaṭiyyah is a well-grounded concept within the framework of Islamic theology is accurate as shown above, its adaptation and utilisation within the Western counterterrorism/counter-extremism complex mostly does not reflect the true essence of wasaṭiyyah as understood within the Islamic tradition. Moderation is inaccurately viewed or interpreted to suit the interests of counterterrorism actors. It is mostly viewed and understood to mean making concessions on some fundamental Islamic practices to the extent of ghaflah (negligence of duty). A moderate Muslim is perceived as one who is lax in their belief or practice of core aspects of their religion.[32]

Thus, the less adherent a Muslim is in regards to core Islamic principles or duties, the more moderate the Muslim is regarded. Closely related to this, moderation is used to categorise Muslims as 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate'[33] with moderates considered legitimate and non-moderates or extremists illegitimate. Moderation can also entail customising or localising the religion to 'European Islam' or 'French Islam' or 'American Islam' and so on.[34] In some cases, such a view of moderation leads to classifying Muslims as 'secular,' 'progressive' or 'moderate' as opposed to 'other' Muslims.[35] Furthermore, some discourses depict moderate Islam as directly opposed to violent extremism[36] with moderates dedicated to secularism while ' "absolutists" are committed to sharia.'[37] Others similarly contend that 'The dividing line between moderate Muslims and radical Islamists in countries with legal systems based on those of the West (the majority of states in the Muslim world) is whether shari'a should apply.' [38]

The definition given to a concept has far-reaching implications on its utilisation. Thus, how the concept of 'moderate Islam' or a 'moderate Muslim' is defined and operationalised affects counterterrorism praxes. Although there is disagreement in regards to the precise meaning of moderate Islam, there are an array of hints regarding how to distinguish moderates from the 'non-moderates,' thus giving a useful parameter in understanding how the term has been understood and utilised. These allusions to what is entailed by the term moderation, such as those discussed above, are fundamentally problematic in the sense that if we accept such a duality between moderates and extremists, where do the 'other' Muslims fit within this duality? The duality itself becomes a form of extremism that not only appears to encourage the negligence of duty among some Muslims but also – by refusing to recognise them - denies Muslims who cannot be situated within such a binary categorisation their fundamental right to free belief and religious practice.

Labelling or categorisations constitute an initial step leading to human right abuses that are perpetrated under the Western counterterrorism complex. The skewed conceptualisation and

subsequent misuse of moderation, which leads to classifying Muslims and enacting expansive measures against them, could be viewed as pejorative and a form of 'cold' extremism. It could lead some Muslims to believe either believe that such counterterrorism discourses and policies represent a latent call to be negligent of core aspects of the Islamic faith or that such discourses and policies are aggressively transformative in nature and target the Islamic faith. Consequently, some Muslims may be pushed to the extreme 'hot' end of the spectrum of Islamic belief and practice. In other words, instead of pulling people away from violent extremism, the discourse and praxes of moderation couched in the form above regrettably pushes some Muslims towards violent extremism.

Common Western definitions of moderate Islam, which centre upon moderate Muslims' presumed rejection of sharia, are misleading and myopic in that they focus only on the penal aspects of sharia or on sharia as public law. A comprehensive understanding of sharia (not just the penal codes or as a public law) would lead to acknowledging that the rejection of sharia could amount to a rejection of most of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. That is, most Muslims already apply sharia in their daily lives and within their families (or communities) by following the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, even if sharia is not the public law in their country.

This tendency to erroneously equate the entire sharia with only its penal codes merits further discussion.[39] Using support for sharia as a yardstick for sifting moderates from extremists can be grossly misleading. Pew Research Centre conducted a survey assessing the level of support for sharia in thirty-nine countries around the world, which found that in twenty-five countries, fifty to ninety-nine per cent support the application of sharia.[40] If support for sharia were a strong indicator of who is moderate and who is not, then – according to Pew's data – then the majority of Muslims around the world are violent extremists as opposed to moderates. Obviously, this is grossly inaccurate; yet unfortunately, moderates are conceptualised in counterterrorism praxes as those who do not support sharia and other fundamental Islamic beliefs and practices whilst extremists are those who do. But as the data from Pew's research shows, most ordinary Muslims –those who do not support violent extremism - do support the application of sharia. Yet labelling them as 'extremist' due to their support of sharia heightens their vulnerability to human rights violations under counterterrorism praxes.

In developing a model with the aim of distinguishing moderates from extremists, Alex Schmid further compounded issues by developing additional labels. He categorised Muslims as 'jihadist', 'Islamist', 'conservative', or 'pluralist' within a circular model, in which the closer a Muslim is positioned in relation to the outermost circle, the more moderate that person is, whereas the closer a Muslim is positioned to the innermost circle, the more extremist and violent that person is. Jihadists comprise the innermost circle, followed by Islamists and then conservatives, and ending with pluralists in the outermost circle. Pluralist Muslims, according to Schmid, are those who can be categorised as 'modern Muslims, cultural Muslims, sociological Muslims, liberal Muslims, reformist Muslims, progressive Muslims, western Muslims, Muslim democrats and the Muslim left.'[41]

Although the categorisations are self-explanatory, they are not without complications. For instance, the assertion that the 'pluralist' Muslims in his outer circle are the best representation of moderate Islam is ahistorical and debatable. This categorisation inaccurately implies that Muslims as a whole are not pluralistic in terms of accepting and coexisting with people of diverse faiths and backgrounds. Historically, Prophet Muhammad coexisted with the Jews in Madina and included them in Madina's constitution or charter. Islamic empires were also known for tolerance and acceptance in regards to the coexistence of their Muslim populations with people of different faiths.

Labels and categorisations can be very appealing to Muslims interested in what such categorisations superficially represent. Yet at the same time, Muslims who are not interested in being categorised could become alienated and thus attempt to assert their identity in a general Islamic sense, in turn causing them to be regarded as extremists. Such 'extremism,' without any inclination towards violence, is liable to becoming misconstrued as potentially violent extremism in need of neutralising, leading to abuse of the rights of Muslims regarded as extremist. This is a clear form of 'cold extremism' stemming from a misunderstood and misapplied concept of moderation or wasaṭiyyah.

The labelling of Islam or Muslims as 'moderate' is highly contested and rejected by most Muslims, many of whom disapprove the label's insinuation that they are less devout – in belief and in practice - than are 'non-moderate' Muslims. In research conducted by Kristina Murphy, Adrian Cherney and Julie Barkworth on how to avoid community backlash in the fight against terrorism, they cited some of their Muslim participants' feelings and reactions when they are referred to as moderate Muslims.[42] One man said that he 'think[s] of lazy Muslims' when he hears about moderate Muslims. Another respondent indicated that he is much more comfortable with being identified simply as a Muslim, without any label.[43]

Additionally, such labelling may discourage well-meaning Muslims willing to help in the fight against terrorism or extremism from showing up and working with governmental and non-governmental counterterrorism entities. This is because working with such organisations could cause one to be regarded as a 'moderate' Muslim, in the sense of someone who has sold out their faith. In fact, in archetypal cases in the United Kingdom and Australia, Basia Spalek and Alia Imtoual observed how the binary framing of Muslims as legitimate and illegitimate hinders all-inclusive engagement with Muslim communities when countering terrorism. This is because 'moderate' Muslims are regarded as legitimate and worthy of engagement whilst 'non-moderate' Muslims (not necessarily extremists prone to violence or terrorism) are regarded as illegitimate and thus automatically excluded from community engagement programmes and/or targeted by government counterterrorism policies. [44]

The pitfall here is that whilst appearing to be countering extremism, Western counterterrorism praxes are in actuality exacerbating conditions that lead to terrorism. Muslim clerics and their followers who are close to the state or other counterterrorism entities are viewed as illegitimate Muslims by other Muslims, who had first been alienated by government policy that also regards them as illegitimate. In the same vein, those Muslims close to the state or supportive of

counterterrorism praxes likewise consider Muslims outside the state-allied sphere to be illegitimate. This circularity results in an 'illegitimate camp' of Muslims who do not comply with any law or policy that emanates from such engagements.[45] Here the so-called illegitimate Muslims are denied their civic right to be engaged in matters that concern their faith, country and security-thus they are victimised by a form of cold extremism.

Such definitions and utilisations of moderation or wasaṭiyyah have adverse impacts on issues related to international human rights and the rule of law within Western counterterrorism praxes.[46] The fourth pillar of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy emphasises the indispensability of 'respecting human rights for all and the rule of law'[47] to any meaningful counterterrorism strategy. In practice, however, counterterrorism actors often disregard this pillar and instead contravene others' rights in the fight against terrorism.[48]

Devout Muslims on the spectrum of ideological violence may consider the framing as moderate of those allied to the fight against terrorism as a call to ghaflah: a call to abandon or neglect their faith or some fundamental aspects of it. This in turn emboldens the rhetoric of potentially violent extremists and extremist groups, as counterterrorism becomes viewed as a deliberate project of religious persecution and rejection of the Islamic faith.

Thus, instead of tempering religious extremism, counterterrorism's framing of religious moderation may have intensified it. For instance, there is documented evidence from the Netherlands regarding how Muslims have been securitised to such an extent that non-Muslim Dutch persons view Islam and Muslims as a 'threat.' Moreover, the state intelligence service has been given sweeping authority to stop and interrogate any Muslim they deem suspicious without any hard evidence of a criminal offence.[49]

In the United Kingdom, through a government-community counterterrorism project, some parents have resorted to spying on their own kids for radical or extremist tendencies, apparently acting on the basis of the government's definition of moderation versus extremism in attempt to show their own moderateness. Madeline-Sophie Abbass documented parents in Leeds and Bradford becoming alarmed about their kids displaying what was regarded as indications of extremism such as growing a beard, wearing hijab, and regularly attending Friday prayers.[50]

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Tyler Golson documented controversial and sweeping policies of several Western European states, especially after 9/11, to institutionalise 'moderate' or 'euro-friendly Islam.'[51] These states regarded themselves as legitimate constructors of a more acceptable form of Islam in their bid to counter terrorism or 'the Muslim threat.' Three main governmental policies were enacted to foster this acceptable form of moderate Islam: 'recognition or incorporation of Islamic organizations,' 'mosque or Islamic school building,' and the 'treatment of Islamic clergy (imams).'[52] Here, moderate Islam is (mis)construed to reference any manifestation of Islam that is 'European' or 'domesticated' no matter how transformative it may be.

In implementing these policies, Western European governments were attempting to co-opt Muslim organisations and set up training centres for imams in their bid to institutionalise Islam or reform it into a 'moderate' religion. This is curious, especially considering the fundamental

Western principle of strict separation between religion and politics, or between church and state. Yet when it comes to Islam, there is a concerted attempt - under the guise of moderation - by Western states such as Germany and France, to construct an official or state Islam as the most acceptable form of the religion.[53] In Germany, an attempt to train Islamic teachers through the instruction of 'moderate' trainers appointed by the state backfired when Muhammad Sven Kalisch, an Islamic Studies professor appointed to coordinate the training, denied the existence of Prophet Muhammed, leading the Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany to reject him outright.[54] In France under then-interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy, the French Council for the Muslim Religion was established in 2002 in an attempt to 'domesticate' Islam[55] - a clear failure as evidenced by the rise of violent extremism in France since the council's establishment. In any case, such policies undercut the principle of the 'secular state' and the stated objectives of such policies in their entirety.

Furthermore, integration policies under state-sponsored reformation of Islam have become transformative in that Muslim migrants are expected to compromise their religious values no matter how accommodating or non-threatening those values may be. Thus, the enactment of such policies and laws coerces Muslim migrants into Europeanising themselves. Kristin Archick, Paul Belkin, and Christopher M. Blanchard et al [56] described the integration and counter-extremism efforts of five European countries with sizeable Muslim populations: France, Germany, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Spain.[57] In their counter-extremism efforts, these countries (and their neighbours) enacted controversial laws, such as the ban on the burqa (the veil or face covering for Muslim women) in France, parts of Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. Switzerland enacted a ban on the construction of minarets through a referendum.[58] The so-called logic behind these laws was that moderate Muslims do not need to wear a burqa or build minarets to practise their faith. From such logic emanates misguided policies and practices fostering rejection, intolerance, and denial of rights.

Furthermore, these Western countries were unsure about what type of Islamic organisation to partner or engage with for their reform projects; should they engage with 'conservative' or 'moderate' organisations? Interestingly, moderate organisations here refer to those 'willing to blend Islamic religion and culture with the political values of mainstream European society.' [59] Moderates are seen by European governments as those individuals or organisations that are willing to relinquish some aspects of their religion so as to be engaged with the state or society. This is biased in terms of the demand for Muslims to conform to European values - values that are apparently unable to accommodate and tolerate some of Muslims' religious practices, no matter how peaceful and non-threatening they may be. This lack of tolerance makes Muslim migrants feel unwelcomed, and thus they are prone to clinging to their faith as a sole source of identity, potentially leading to extremist practice and radicalisation.[60] This is indeed how 'cold' extremism can fuel 'hot' extremism, when demands are made upon Muslim immigrants to give up core aspects of their identity to integrate, but without giving these immigrants much in return.

To assess the effectiveness of deradicalisation, Angela Rabasa et al[61] examined several states' programmes, in which two key issues were identified. One is the choice between deradicalisation

and disengagement. Deradicalisation is far more challenging as it requires changing the worldview or belief system of an individual who may have engaged in violent extremism. Disengagement, in contrast, focuses on getting the individual to renounce violence but not necessarily changing their worldview or belief system, which –the researchers noted - could potentially lead to recidivism. While this cautionary observation cannot be discounted, the reality is that a counter-extremism programme that is most likely to succeed starts with disengagement.[62] For most governments, their counter-extremism policies are aimed at direct deradicalisation and not a step-by-step approach starting with disengagement. These deradicalisation programmes, which are mostly focused on 'culture' and 'rights,' are insensitively guided by the assumption that the Western state can transform a Muslim immigrant alongside the form of Islam they practised in their home country into something deemed as moderate. Yet for most Muslim immigrants, especially those from the Middle East and Muslim-majority countries, Islam is an integral part of their lives and culture, yet most deradicalisation programmes are not adequately sensitive to that. And even for those that do not use Islam as a primary means of identification and strive to integrate into Western European societies, they remain alienated; as exemplified by the case of Dutch Muslims, who are regarded as 'newcomers' no matter to what extent they strive to prove their 'Dutchness.'[63]

A holistic understanding of moderation inclusive of the Islamic perspective offers many potential benefits to Western counterterrorism praxes; the following are just a few highlights. First, when the concept of moderation or wasaṭiyyah is utilised by Western counterterrorism praxes, it deploys a strict binary between exclusivity and inclusivity. Who is included and who is excluded by Western counterterrorism praxes when the concept of moderation is applied? Applications of the concept of moderation ought to be pluralistic in that they do not only target Muslims but are deployed in a broader sense or within broader contexts to include 'others.' This is important because violent extremism or radicalism harms Muslims as much as non-Muslims.

Thus, it is imperative to broaden the general view held by Western counterterrorism praxes regarding moderation. It is no coincidence that most exegeses interpret 'umattan wasattan' (see Qur'an 2:143) as justly balanced communities, not justly balanced Muslims. This indicates that membership to a justly balanced community need not be confined to Muslims only. [64] When implementing policies which centre upon moderation or moderate Islam to counter violent extremism, Western counterterrorism praxes must be fair and just in who they include or exclude in terms of target groups. The community's role has been widely acknowledged as critical in fighting terrorism; policies therefore need to be community focused and not divisive.[65] Among Muslims, segregation between 'moderates' and 'extremists' must be avoided as much as possible to ensure communal cohesion towards the desired outcome of any policy adopted. Muslim communities should not be singled out and regarded as threats, which breeds hatred and prejudice among other communities against the entire Muslim community.

Furthermore, the appropriate application of moderation in counterterrorism policies and practices must strike a balance between 'modernity' and 'tradition or culture,' in terms of acknowledging peoples' traditions, habits, perspectives, and beliefs, and not discrediting those in favour of modernity. A careful balance is required when attempting to – for example - regulate

dress codes, food (the halal industry for instance), and the architecture and administration of places of worship. Among the many cases requiring reassessment due to the utter failure to achieve this balance are France's ongoing attempt to establish an official state Islam that is 'French' in nature, and Germany's attempt to teach Islam through its own state-appointed scholars rather than traditional scholars.

In the latter case of Germany, this reassessment does not discount the fact that there are extremist Muslim clerics. Nevertheless, it underscores the fact that there are mainstream traditional Muslim scholars who could be consulted to teach Islam holistically. It has been observed that youth who possess shallow knowledge of Islam can easily be radicalised as a result.[66] The intent of teaching authentic and comprehensive Islam - not necessarily 'moderate' Islam - is laudable. Any proper teaching of Islam would fall within the parameters of the concept of wasaṭiyyah, thus rendering it an 'Islam of simplicity not complexity, of preaching not alienation, of kindness not violence, of acquaintance not disregard, of tolerance not fanaticism, of content not form, of achievement not dispute, of offering not pretentiousness, of al-ijtihād (reasoning) not al-taqlīd (blind imitation), of al-tajdīd (renewal) not stagnation, of punctuality not neglect, of wasaṭiyyah (moderation), not extremism or negligence.'[67]

Another important issue to note is the need for balance in regards to coercion in laws and policies. Coercive laws are often adopted that are not well balanced but are instead extreme in nature and practice. Most counterterrorism laws are coercive in their bid to overhaul or domesticate Islam and compel Muslims within their jurisdiction to abide by this state-created moderate form of Islam. There is a need to adopt balanced legislation and policies in that security considerations are upheld but without resorting to coercion. Instead of overhauling or domesticating Islam, investing in mainstream Islamic teaching would be more beneficial. Legislation implemented for security reasons should not single out a particular community as its target.

Lastly, an important related issue is the need to achieve a balance between regulating religion and ensuring freedom to practise one. Even though the right to freedom of religion is guaranteed by international law, conventions, and standards, as well as the constitutions or national legislation of most countries, Western counterterrorism praxes overlook this fundamental right in order to tighten regulations. Thus, regulation and security restrictions outweigh the freedom or right to practise one's faith or religion of choice, especially in regards to Islam.

Conclusion

This paper sets out to highlight the inconsistency in the application of moderate Islam in Western counterterrorism praxes. Its application has been heavily one-sided thus far and requires the adoption or inclusion of the Islamic perspective of wasaṭiyyah (moderation) in order to maximise the benefits offered by genuine moderation in Islam. To this end, the paper evaluated ways in which moderate Islam is conceptualised and applied within Western counterterrorism praxes and explored ways in which this conceptualisation and application could be improved by incorporating the Islamic perspective of moderation. Terrorism and violent extremism will be with us for the

foreseeable future, thus measures to alleviate and ultimately eradicate violent extremism if possible are indispensable.

Although the utilisation of moderation to counter extremist Islamic ideology is not entirely without its merits or good intentions, more must be done by the Western counterterrorism complex to appropriately apply moderate Islam if terrorism is to be successfully neutralised. The appropriate application of moderation requires a holistic perspective incorporating Islamic theological nuances; not least of which is the understanding of wasaṭiyyah (moderation) as a middle road between the two opposing margins of ghulūw (extremism) and ghaflah (negligence). Through this approach, terrorism and violent extremism may be optimally opposed, on both the ideological and policy level.

The current utilisation of moderation within Western counterterrorism praxes mostly focuses on countering extremism without taking into consideration the implications of this one-sided focus; namely, coercing Muslim immigrants - directly and indirectly, subtly or palpably - to neglect their religious practices. Attempts to overhaul or reform Islam while categorising Muslims – which tend to alienate Muslims by regarding their beliefs and practices as illegitimate - may in fact exacerbate extremism rather than curb it. Furthermore, it leads to the unjustified targeting and prosecution of individuals innocent of perpetuating violent acts or harbouring violent tendencies. This targeting, in turn, is exploited by violent extremist groups to lend credibility to their propagandist narratives, thereby widening this propaganda's reach and its ability to encourage acts of terrorism. The application of moderate Islam to counter terrorism or violent extremism is – unfortunately – primarily aimed at extremism while coercing Muslims into negligence, rather than taking the middle path between both extremism and negligence.

With its focus on the usage of 'moderate Islam' in Western counterterrorism praxes, the research could not extend to investigate the consistency of non-Western countries' counterterrorism praxes with wasaṭiyyah from an Islamic perspective. It would be interesting to investigate the application of wasaṭiyyah by Muslim-majority countries themselves, and this paper can serve as a foundation or starting point for further research in this regard.

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