

Can the moderates hold their responsibilities?

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In the Egyptian mind Denmark has always been thought of as a Scandinavian peaceful, quiet and harmonious society. That is why I was surprised by what I had to know from the rapid close look at the socio-political scene of Denmark.

I visited Denmark in August this year as I participant in an Egyptian-Danish dialogue conference initiated and organized by Danmission in collaboration with an Egyptian partner; the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS).

What took us all; Egyptians, by surprise was the discourse of the major political parties in Denmark when it came to minorities and immigration issues and in the centre of it those concerning the Muslim community. We were astonished by the animosity to immigrants expressed by the wave of laws biased against their children who are supposedly complete equal citizens. For us it was interesting to know that one of the Scandinavian societies, which most Arabs think of as a model of modern social justice and equity, is still struggling with tolerance.

More unexpectedly, several Danish Muslim participants pinpointed the stereotyping they face, partially because of the popularity of some extremist Muslim groups as Hizb-ul-Tahrir. It was totally stunning to recognize the presence and the magnitude of activity of that Party that has been banned in Egypt since 1974. It is a party aiming at re-establishing the Khalifa state, the old regime that was prevalent in the Mideast before the introduction of the modern state in the years following First World War. From the point of view of the majority of Muslims it is a backward vision carried by an extremist group. From Denmark, we could know about the spread of Hizb-ul-Tahrir in Europe, from Britain to Russia. Moreover, it was not the only extremist group in the continent. Several other groups are active spreading their message and recruiting young people of the Muslim minorities. They used the religious illiteracy characteristic of those youth who are seeking to acquire knowledge regarding their religion and confused about their identity in societies that do not adequately accept them with their differences or properly integrate them and their cultures.

Apparently, European Muslims are stuck between two extremist visions. Radical Islam on one side is embodied by extremist parties, institutions and individual Imams, who definitely do not qualify to represent Islam or the majority of Muslims. On the other side Radical right wing parties, building on the discourse of the extremist Islamic Parties and pursuing their xenophobic ideology, spread their extremist anti-Islamic opinion and advance their anti-Muslim and anti- Immigrants policies. Again, extremist Muslim movements use the right wing rhetoric that is sometimes translated into legislation to recruit young Muslims and spread their extremist message.

Actually, extremists on both sides are in alliance. They are mutually feeding and supporting each other. Both camps are extremely happy with the activities of the opposite camp. Fighting each other, they could occupy the political platform and could expel the moderates to a corner. And since September 11, the alliance of radicals have gained much more power, that we must admit that the radicals have loud voices, clear messages, and first of all strong motives. After all they are at war. This means their weapons are loaded, their forces are mobilized and their maps are unfolded and their plans in action.

On the contrary, the moderates' voices, quiet by nature, are fading and their objective and sophisticated arguments look less appealing to the public.

Muslims in Europe and maybe Islam itself is passing through a complex uneasy era. It is misunderstood by some of its believers as well as by most xenophobes. It is seemingly stuck between extremist views on both sides. Modern Muslims are there. They are the majority in the Mideast and they must be the majority in Europe and the U.S. as well. But as usual, the good and moderate are inactive or at least not active enough. That is the problem. Most activists on both sides are radical. The problem not only concerns the Muslims'. It is as much a problem for the west, and especially for Europe.

There must be a way out of the trap. Muslims have to find it out, together with moderates in the west and specially Europe how to get out of the trap. Facing the Radicals Alliance we need a Moderates Alliance. And we need it badly.



To know how to face radicalism, we have to know how that wave of extremism rose in the first place.

Richard Clark the first American National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counterterrorism explained that process in

his book "Against All Enemies." In this book I found an answer to the question of how the campaign of Radical Islamism was established and launched.

In a chapter entitled "stumbling into the Islamic World" he wrote:

"Pakistani military intelligence funded by the U.S. and Saudi governments and "charitable" organizations, had turned groups of nineteenth-century Afghan tribesmen and several thousand Arab volunteers into a force that had crippled the mighty Red Army. The Stinger had been the final element they had needed.... Were we right to have armed the Afghans with Stingers and other weapons? Was it a misjudgment to have involved the Saudis? There are many who believe that these were mistaken Cold War policies that laid the seeds of al Qaeda."

To that question, Clark responded:

"Even with hindsight, I believe the Reagan administration was right to assist the Afghans and to drain the Soviet Union's resolve".

However, a few lines afterward, he confessed that

"The U.S. did, however, make four mistakes during the Reagan administration that affect us today."

The second mistake cited by Clark is that

"When the U.S. engaged the Saudis, Egyptians, and other Arab states in the fighting against the Soviets, America sought (or acquiesced in) the importation into Afghanistan and Pakistan of an army of "Arabs" without considering who they were or what would happen to them after the Soviets left. The Saudis took the lead in assembling the group of volunteers. The Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Turki, relied upon a man from a wealthy construction family that was close to the Saudi royal family. Turki empowered a son of that family, one Usama bin Laden, to recruit, move, train, and indoctrinate the Arab volunteers in Afghanistan. Many of those recruited were misfits in their own societies. Many have connections to the Muslim Brotherhood, a longtime fundamentalist group that had threatened Egypt and Syria. Many of these volunteers later became al Qaeda network of affiliated terrorist groups, staging campaigns in Algeria, Egypt, and elsewhere.... In Afghanistan a new power structure was emerging. The new players were the tribal chiefs who had led the fighting forces, the Pakistani military intelligence officers who had conveyed that American supplies to them, and the Arab volunteers who had brought money and Korans.

As they sat together in Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad, they mused on what was now happening to the Soviet Union. Among them were the Saudi Usama bin Laden, the Pakistani Khalid Sheikh Muhammed, the

Indonesian known as Hambali, and others we did not know then. In the wake of their Afghan defeat (and, the Arabs believed, because of that defeat), the Soviet Union was now unraveling. Some Afghans and some Arab fighters pondered what you could do with money, Korans, and a few good weapons. You could overthrow an infidel government. More important, you could destroy a superpower. They just did. It was now 1990.”

I believe Mr. Clark as the Americans know better what they organized in Afghanistan. Yet I disagree with Clark when he said the Koran(s) were introduced by Arabs into Afghanistan. The Koran is the holy book of Islam and Afghanistan was a Muslim country centuries before eruption of the war the Americans launched on the Soviet Union there.

What that war was in bad need for was a strong pressing motive that would make the young fighters leave their home countries and go to the tough terrains and mountains of Afghanistan to engage in a war against an enemy who is not attacking their own countries or threatening their own interests. The motive was the responsibility of radical Muslim leaders from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt. They manipulated the concept of “Jihad” so that it suits the political purpose at that war. Originally Jihad means the Muslims’ struggle to conform to the instructions of Islam and live up to them. But at that time and place it was re-explained to mean fighting the infidels. And at that time and place the infidels were the communists. This explanation is consistent with Reagan’s condemning the Soviet Union of being the Great Evil. It also coincided with another form of “Jihad” in which the Catholic Church in Poland sidelined with the “Solidarity” movement in challenging the communist regime and successfully operated to lead it to collapse.

Clark’s analysis goes on the same direction. He stated that:

“To the extent that religion was a political force during the Cold War, it was a weak one promoted by the United States as a counterpoint to the anti-religion ideology of the Soviet Union. When the Cold War ended, the United States could move massively into the Persian Gulf during a crisis there, ethnic and religious tensions could erupt in the Balkans and Central Asia, and religious fervor could no longer be directed at the Communists. Those feeling disadvantaged by the global system and wishing to blame their lot on foreign forces had only one world-dominant nation to blame for their troubles, one major target to motivate their followers: America.”

That is as respectable an analysis as it departs from the analysis attributing radical Islamist terrorism to the hatred of American and western successes, richness and freedom.

These are the real circumstances that resulted in the emergence of terrorism and the rise of radical Islamism. And that is the nature of the alliance that created it and stood behind its spread.



Now we badly need an Alliance of Moderates, which is as strong, effective and motivated as the Alliance of Radicals. Analyzing the international scene would lead us to recognize that such an alliance would only be based on a special active partnership between the European Union members and Egypt. The Alliance of Moderates can be built between the European Union with its anti-war stand and Egypt as a moderate Muslim power and a central state. Egypt has always been a centre of moderate tolerant Islam. It has the oldest and biggest Islamic University; Al-Azhar. Nowadays, Al-Azhar has the most moderate, enlighten, and tolerant leadership it can have: Sheikh Dr. Muhammed Sayed Tantawi. Moreover, the Egyptian minister of endowment is Dr. Muhammed Hamdy Zagzog, and the president of the Al-Azhar University Dr. Ahmed El-Tayeb, both of them studied in Europe, in Germany and France and both hold the most moderate and modern Islamic vision. The fourth figure is Dr. Ali Gomaa the Mufti of Egypt who actively participated in inter-religious dialogue in Egypt and Europe. In the presence of the four harmonious influential figures leading the Islamic institutions in Egypt there is a real opportunity to reverse the flux of radicalism in the whole region and revise, scrutinize and challenge the radical Muslim trends in Europe, in addition to clarifying the real meaning of Islam to non-Muslims all over the real world. Accomplishing such a mission requires a lot of effort and it needs to begin immediately. It is already late.