



How States Address Islamophobia Responses and Models

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Islamophobia is defined as “excessive fear of Muslims, or what is associated with Islam, such as mosques and the Holy Qur’an”. The effectiveness and feasibility of the measures taken in combating Islamophobia are important, where the image of Muslims in Western and European societies is determined, either by their recognition and acceptance as part of the social fabric, or by their rejection and marginalization as outsiders who embody the Other, which is different in terms of culture, civilization, and religion .

As a result of the rising wave of Islamophobia, particularly in the European countries, urgent questions have arisen about governments’ stances on this hateful phenomenon, which leads to conflicts and hate crimes that threaten the stability of those countries. Undoubtedly, Western countries follow a certain pattern in managing issues of importance, especially those that directly jeopardize internal social security and stability. This makes the European-Western approach to this issue worthy of analysis and understanding, to clarify the reality of the situation regarding accusations against Western governments of complacency in the fight against Islamophobia.

International Efforts

The international community has paid great attention to the mechanisms of combating Islamophobia, not least in the old European continent, and worked to develop it, not only to protect internal stability, but also because this phenomenon has spread and become global, especially since the 9/11 events in 2001. International efforts must therefore match the magnitude of such a challenge. Perhaps the emergence of issues of extremism and terrorism and how they have reached risky levels, prompted everyone to re-correct some concepts and convictions that ignited these views, including Islamophobia. This is manifested in the UN General Assembly proclamation of March 15 the World Day to Combat Islamophobia at its 46th session, as requested by Pakistan.

The UN, in cooperation with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), issued joint guidelines addressing intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. Extremism and terrorism should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization, or ethnic group. The Council of Europe (CoE) human rights organization has called in several resolutions for promoting a global dialogue to promote a culture of tolerance and peace, based on respect for the diversity of religions and beliefs .

In view of the growing threat of Islamophobia, Western countries have created new positions to monitor Islamophobia, including the European Commission (EC), which introduced the position of EU coordinator to combat hatred against Muslims in 2015, to ensure a strong and comprehensive response to this issue through EC's services, and to promote integration policies for all segments of European society. The US has established an office in its Department of State and appointed a special envoy to combat Islamophobia worldwide. Similarly, Canada recently announced the appointment of journalist and activist Amira al-Ghawabi as the first special representative to combat Islamophobia.

The creation of such positions in Western countries could have an effective impact on curbing the spread of Islamophobia, which has become a concern for everyone. After all, this international alignment was not on the spur of the moment. The 2022 annual report issued by the Collective for Countering Islamophobia in Europe (CCIE) recorded 467 racism incidents, 128 hatred and provocation incidents, 71 offense incidents, 59 moral harassment incidents, 44 defamation incidents, 27 physical attack incidents, and 33 incidents related to the anti-separatism law.

Broadly Worded Judgements

The criteria for judging experiences and evaluating policies vary from one researcher to another, and they depend on the evidence wielded by each side, especially on an issue such as fighting terrorism or countering Islamophobia. Such judgement has become vague and overboard. Thus, reviewing a Western or European model based on raising a generation of Muslims who run religious institutions, not by polarizing them from abroad, confirms that everyone is worried, and manages this threatening crisis according to a strategy that suits their national or ideological interests. Lest this proposition not be just a theoretical narrative, counter-Islamophobia efforts exerted by Western governments are based on three aspects:

First: Strong confrontation in the event of a direct terrorist attack on a country, where all institutions and world public opinion are mobilized, but such a confrontation falls whenever the threat is likely or latent. This was witnessed in France in 2015, which was shocked by a series of terrorist attacks that included mass shootings and suicide bombings that killed 150 citizens. All world governments stood in solidarity with France, and organized a million-strong march in which 40 prime ministers participated.

Second: The premise that makes them reluctant to prevent or stop provocations by some populists and right-wing extremists in Europe or by immigrants who ride the tide of hatred of religion, as happened in Sweden by repeatedly burning the Holy Qur'an on the grounds that this is personal freedom. Although this is a gap in the European approach to terrorism, international organizations have begun to address it, such as the UN Human Rights Council vote that the burning of the Holy Qur'an falls under the violations against Muslim minorities in Europe .

Third: Responding to external threats that necessitate international cooperation, such as those posed by terrorist groups Daesh and al-Qaeda, on the grounds that these threats can spread from one nation to another in a variety of ways, chief among them the so-called "lone wolves," people who were born in those nations but are unhappy with their social standing there or those who were able to enter Europe through migration, a phenomenon that has become more common in the last ten years as a result of the security chaos that has gripped the Middle East since the early 2000s.

The New Zealand Lesson

Central governments in Western and European countries adopting policies and measures to curb the growth of Islamophobia contribute effectively to addressing Islamophobia at its roots. In the same context, New Zealand is one of the best governments that has set a model in fighting extremism against Muslims. After the horrendous attack on the Christchurch mosques in 2019, which killed 51 worshippers, Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand Prime Minister at the time, took a series of decisions, most notably: changing the procedures of bearing arms, bringing the perpetrator to justice, mourning the souls of the martyrs, as well as putting on an Islamic dress in solidarity with the families of the victims. Ardern criticized nationalist white-supremacist ideology and rejected anything that associates immigration with violence or hatred. She called for a global campaign to root out terrorism and pressured the far right and Western populists politically and through media to change their extremist

political discourse against Muslims and other immigrants. In addition, New Zealand political forces, that hold various views, condemned the terrorist operation.

The point of the review of the New Zealand experience is that the New Zealand government presented a different perspective to what is being said about the role of Western governments in confronting terrorism and extremism. Never has a State taken such a stance with victims against a terrorist who holds different ideologies from the Other. The solidarity of Western society, especially France, confirms that the West has approached Islamophobia with a sense of responsibility .

Reasonable Grounds

Western governments may not be held fully accountable for what happens in their own countries or anywhere in the world, or accept the argument promoted by some (including Westerners) that the West is generally passive in the face of terrorism. The West has enough reasons to wage a real war against Islamophobia and extremism, including:

Reason 1: Any pullback or inaction at any level would in the West have a catastrophic outcome for everyone, even if not in the country itself, as happened in the Bali bombings against Australian tourists. “Pullback” may be interpreted by terrorists as a kind of Western weakness and success in intimidating Western governments. This is not true, and does not help improve the image of Western States.

Reason 2: The mere assumption that inaction or pullback in combating any act of terrorism targeting Muslims or others seems to be an invitation and encouragement by Western governments to continue these crimes, which have become innumerable. It would seem like allowing terrorist crimes, not least given the spread of many extremist ideologies .

Reason 3: The assumption that Western governments are thinking about not countering terrorism, extremism and targeted hate speech violates the stereotype formed by their humanitarian communities based on stability and security, which allows all ideologies and adherents of all religions to exist on the territory of those governments and to live together under their laws that protect everyone and reject extremist ideologies that call for discrimination and division. Thus, the radicalization of a certain segment, a minority or a majority in society, will automatically mean the extremism of the other. This is what we see in many countries in Africa, and Western and European governments are well aware of it.

Conclusion

Western political convictions regarding countering terrorism stem from the fact that security approaches alone are not suitable for eliminating this phenomenon, but rather develop tension and oppression, as terrorism is basically a multi-faceted social phenomenon, and therefore it needs multiple methods to address it. Drawing upon this conviction helps proper evaluation in accordance with the Western approach, which relies on legal legislation and political measures to maintain public security .

All in all, there is an urgent need to increase the measures to combat targeted hate crimes, prosecute them anywhere in the world, and launch public education campaigns about Muslims and Islam with the aim of dispelling offensive myths and misconceptions.