Moderate Muslims and Islamist Terrorism:

Between Denial and Resistance

Since President Trump attempted to ban Muslims from certain countries from entering the United States, the question which Muslims are 'moderate Muslims' and which are potential 'radical Islamist terrorists' has gained new relevance. While some Muslim leaders deny any connection between their religion and terrorism, it is undeniable that many terrorists claim to act in the name of Islam. This Research Paper first seeks to determine where the world's 1.6 billion Muslims stand in relation to terrorism, distinguishing between Jihadist Muslims, Islamist Muslims, Conservative Muslims and Pluralist Muslims. It then looks at which criteria would allow us to distinguish between 'moderates' and other Muslims. Subsequently, the focus is on the role of moderation in Islam itself, whereby attention is given to the Global Movement of Moderates which originated in Malaysia. While some leading Muslim scholars stress that moderation is a central value in Islam, many Muslims nevertheless do not like to be called 'moderates' for fear of being seen as pro-Western. A further section of this Research Paper looks at how Islamist extremists view moderate Muslims. This is followed by a section that focuses on moderate Muslims voicing their opposition to Islamist terrorism – something often overlooked by Western media. The concluding section raises the thorny question whether moderation is rooted in Islam itself or comes from outside and the author pleads for humanism to be the middle ground for moderates of all faiths and political persuasions.

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Introduction

> Every time a bunch of terrorists with Muslim names blows up something important anywhere in the world, everybody starts looking for moderate Muslims. The reason is that there is a general consensus that 'moderate' Muslims can somehow counter this phenomenon of 'Islamist' terrorism.

> Syed Mansoor Hussain[1]

> But the most glaring failure has been on the part of us mainstream Muslims in not evolving a redefinition of Islamic postulates that would have left no room for the radicals to misuse Islam and our holy book, the Quran, for their nefarious purposes. […] I feel that it is the total passivity of mainstream Islam, the nonchalance of the moderate Muslims that is largely to blame for this state of affairs.

> Sultan Shahin[2]

In his inaugural address of January 20, 2017, the newly sworn-in president of the United States, Donald J. Trump, announced that "We will […] unite the civilized world against Radical Islamic Terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth".[3] His predecessor, Barack H. Obama, had tried to rally the international community to 'Countering Violent Extremism' (CVE), thereby not linking terrorism to any specific religion. The CVE formula was meant to cover, in principle if not always in practice, secular terrorists like white, right-wing supremacists in the United States as well. The change in terminology from the 44th to the 45th American president begs the question what is the difference between 'radical' and 'extreme' – two terms that are often (but not quite correctly) used interchangeably.[4] Indirectly, however, it begs another, rarely addressed question: where does, when it comes to Muslims and Islam, 'moderate' end and 'radical' (or 'extremist') begin?

With his attempts to ban people from seven Muslim-majority countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen) from entering the United States, President Trump appears to target a much wider group of people: Muslims from these countries are implicitly considered potential 'radical' Muslims while Muslims from countries like Tunisia and Saudi Arabia (which produced larger numbers of foreign fighters heading

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[1] S. M. Hussain, "Moderate Muslims", *Muslim Presence*, 14 December 2016, http://muslimpresence.ca/?p=1944 , 14.
[2] S. Shahin, *The Missing Introspection. A Critique of Current Muslim Approaches. The Way Forward* (New Delhi: 2014) (A collection of his oral statements at the UN Human Rights Council and articles and speeches at different forums). Author statement at the UNHR Council, 14th session, 31 May-18 June 2010, pp. 46 & 48.
[3] White House, *The Inaugural Address. Remarks of President Donald J. Trump as Prepared for Delivery*, January 20, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address.
[4] In terms of the history of ideas, radicalism is linked to the 18th century enlightenment and 19th century political parties calling themselves 'radical' tended to be egalitarian and democratic. Extremists, on the other hand, build on a different intellectual heritage, often rooted in race or religion, and tend to be supremacist and authoritarian. For differentiating radicalism from extremism, see A. Bötticher, "Radicalism and Extremism – Conceptualisation and Differentiation of two Controversial Terms in the German Debate" (written in German, with English summary), Leiden: ISGA, 2017, https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/49257/FullText.pdf?sequence=1; for her short definitions of radicalism and extremism, see the Research Note by A. Bötticher, "Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 4 (August 2017), www.terrorismanalysts.com [forthcoming].

for the Caliphate in Syria and Iraq than the seven) are apparently not.[5] By implication, citizens from more than forty other Muslim countries are presumably considered more 'moderate' by the Trump administration.[6]

The identification of moderate Muslims is not just an academic question. In the first decade after 9/11, some Western policy-makers considered 'non-violent extremists' as de facto moderates, trying to use them to rally Muslim communities against violent extremism. The uncritical acceptance of often self-appointed spokesmen from Muslim diaspora communities was a costly error since some of these 'non-violent extremists' turned out to be ideologically closer to jihadi organisations than to the silent and peaceful Muslim mainstream majority.[7] There is, for instance, still ambiguity about some Islamist organisations like the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood (MB) which has a structured and organised presence in 81 countries. At different times of its history since 1928 and in different countries, some of its members and sections have engaged in political violence, including assassinations and acts of terrorism.[8] This ambiguity continues to this day: Hamas, which is part of the MB 'family', engages in acts of terrorism while, next door, members of the political wing of the Jordanian section of the MB are sitting peacefully in parliament.[9] Members of the MB also sit in parliament or government in Kuwait and Bahrain.[10]

The purpose of this Research Paper is to explore the notion of 'moderate Muslims' (and, secondarily, the more difficult one of 'moderate Islam'[11]) and the relationship between mainstream, non-violent Muslims and Islamist terrorism. It is, in this context, important for policy-makers and the public to keep an eye on proportions, neither under- nor over-estimating problems: while there are some 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, there are probably not more than 100,000 terrorists in the world who explicitly profess to be engaged in this form of political violence in the name of Islam.[12] Based on this, the ratio of Muslim terrorists – non-violent Muslims would be 1: 16,000. However, the public in

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[5] On numbers of 'foreign fighters' in Syria and Iraq, see A. P. Schmid and J. Tinnes, "Foreign (Terrorist) Fighters with IS: A European Perspective", The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 6, no. 8 (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2015.1.08.

[6] The inclusion or exclusion of Muslim countries in President Trump's ban was probably driven by expediency (e.g. the presence or absence of major US business interests) as much as perceived national security interests (presence of major al Qaeda and ISIS cells in certain countries). For an analysis, see: D. Milton, "Does the Cure Address the Problem? Examining the Trump Administration's Executive Order Using Publicly Available Data on Terrorism", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 4 (August 2017), www.terrorismanalysts.com [forthcoming].

[7] A. P. Schmid, "Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?" The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 5, no. 5 (2014), http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2014.1.05; see also S. Westrop, "Countering Islamist Extremism the Right Way", National Review, 22 February 2017, http://www.islamist-watch.org/25391/countering-islamist-extremism-the-right-way. Angel Rabasa et al also noted that "Distinguishing between authentic moderates and extremists masquerading as moderates presents a major difficulty in Western programs of engagement with Muslim communities". See A. Rabasa, C. Benard, L. H. Schwartz and P. Sickle, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (St. Monica: RAND, 2007), p. 3.

[8] Cf. C. Farahat, "The Muslim Brotherhood, Fountain of Islamist Violence", *Middle Eastern Quarterly* http://www.meforum.org/meq/pdfs/6562.pdf.

[9] Cf. G. Taylor, "How to deal with Muslim Brotherhood triggers Trump White House infighting", *Washington Times*, 27 March 2017, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/mar/27/muslim-brotherhood-listing-as-terror-group-delayed/.

[10] H.A. Hellyer, "The Many Faces of Political Islam - From Moderate to Extreme", *The Cipher Brief*, 19 April 2017, https://www.thecipherbrief.com/article/middle-east/many-faces-political-islam-moderate-extreme-1095?utm_source=Join+the+Community+Subscribers&utm_campaign=5c7acd28a4-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_04_19&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_02cbee778d-5c7acd28a4-122476801.

[11] Part of the problem stems from the internal contradictions of Islam. In the words of Shahab Ahmed: "The main difficulty in conceptualizing Islam/Islamic lies in the *prolific scale* of contradiction between the ideas, values and practices that claim normative affiliation with "Islam" – which poses the demanding problem of how to locate the *coherence of an internally-contradictory phenomenon'*. See S. Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p.109.

[12] R. Alexander and H. Moore, "Are most victims of Terrorism Muslim?" *BBC,* 20 January 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30883058.

the West hears more about the less than 1 percent of 1 percent of Muslims who use terrorism[13] as a tactic than about the vast majority who are, to varying degrees, more 'moderate' and not terrorists.

Strangely enough, some Muslims would even deny the existence of a fraction of a percentage of Muslim terrorists. One prominent Turkish Islamic cleric, the Sufi-inspired Fetullah Gülen who promotes a form of modern, science-oriented Islam[14] said, "No terrorist can be a Muslim, and no true Muslim can be a terrorist".[15] His former ally, and since 2013, his authoritarian political opponent, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who stands close to the Muslim Brotherhood and accuses the Gülen movement of having attempted to overthrow his government, appeared to agree with him at least on this point when he said: "There is no Islamic terror".[16] However, others disagree. For instance, the UAE Ambassador to Russia, Omar Saif Ghobash, admitted:

> Although I loathe what the terrorists do, I realize that according to the minimal entry requirements for Islam, they are Muslims. Islam demands only that a believer affirm that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger. Violent jihadists certainly believe this. That is why major religious institutions in the Islamic world have rightly refused to label them as non-Muslims, even while condemning their actions. It is too easy to say that jihadist extremists have nothing to do with us. Even if their readings of Islamic Scripture seem warped and out of date, they have gained traction. What worries me is that as the extremists' ideas have spread, the circle of Muslims clinging to other conceptions of Islam has begun to shrink. And as it has shrunk, it has become quieter and quieter, until only the extremists seem to speak and act in the name of Islam. We need to speak out, but it is not enough to declare in public that Islam is not violent or radical or angry, that Islam is a religion of peace. We need to take responsibility for the Islam of peace. We need to demonstrate how it is expressed in our lives and the lives of those in our community".[17]

The relationship between religion and violence is complex and contested.[18] However, some of the best works in the field have found historical connections. Jonathan Fine,

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[13] Terrorism has been defined in many ways. In the understanding of this author, terrorism refers to a political communication strategy for psychological mass manipulation whereby unarmed civilians (and non-combatants such as prisoners of war) are deliberately victimised in order to impress third parties (e.g. intimidate, coerce or otherwise influence a government or a section of society or international public opinion), with the help of portrayals of demonstrative violence in front of witnessing audiences and/or by means of coverage in mass and social media. Terrorism from non-state actors is often a strategy of provocation aiming at societal polarisation and conflict escalation while state - or regime - terrorism serves the purpose of repression and social control. Terrorism as psychological warfare is also an irregular and illegal tactic in armed conflicts where it can be used by one or both sides. For an Academic Consensus Definition, see: A. P. Schmid (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp.86-87.

[14] A. Rabasa et al, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (St. Monica: RAND, 2007), p. 74.

[15] F. Gülen's, "Condemnation Message of Terrorism", *Washington Post,* 12 September 2001 http://www.guleninstitute.org/news/97-gs-condemnation-message-of-terrorism/. - For an analysis of the Gülen movement (cemaat) with its 3-6 million followers worldwide, see: American Foreign Policy Council, *World Almanac of Islamism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), pp.958-967.

[16] Cit. B. Bekdil, "There is no Islamic terror", *Hurriyet Daily News,* 31 August 2016.

[17] O. Saif Ghobash, "Advice for Young Muslims", *Foreign Affairs*, December 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-11-29/advice-young-muslims.

[18] For a discussion of the different positions regarding the relationship between terrorism and religion, see A. P. Schmid (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 23-27; see also: J. Ian Ross (Ed.) *Religion and Violence. An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict from Antiquity to the Present. 3 volumes.* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2011).

for instance, found examples of religiously-inspired terrorism in all three Abrahamic religions.[19] Currently, Islamist terrorism is the most violent form in comparison with terrorism emanating from groups claiming Jewish or Christian identities. Most of the people killed by violent Islamists are also Muslims rather than Jews or Christians.[20] Given this fact alone, one would expect that 'moderate' Muslims would be the first to do all they can to do what President Trump promised to do, namely eradicate radical Islam completely from the face of the Earth. But this apparently silent Muslim mainstream majority appears to do little, or, at any rate, it does not do enough – at least in Western perceptions. As one American imam put it:

> Every time such incredible violence is perpetrated by people who claim the mantle of Islam, the same question echoes from the halls of academia to the talking heads in the media: Where are the 'moderate Muslims' and when will they stand up against all this murder and mayhem committed in the name of their faith? These questions tend to be followed up by a call for a 'moderate Islam' to counter religious extremism.[21]

What could be the reasons for this perception of 'moderate' Muslims' apathy in the face of terrorist violence carried out in name of their religion? Are moderate Muslim leaders afraid to raise their voices for fear of being targeted themselves by the jihadists? Or are there in fact many Muslims protesting, demonstrating and acting against jihadists in their midst – but we somehow do not hear much from and about them, perhaps because most Western media are not reporting it? These are some of the issues to be addressed in this exploratory Research Paper.

The Place of Moderate Muslims in the Bandwidth of Interpretations of Islam

In order to explore such questions, we first have to establish what 'moderate' Muslims are and, indirectly, what 'moderate Islam' is. How many 'moderates' are there in the Muslim community (*ummah*) and what are their characteristics? How should we label those who are neither moderates nor extremists?

One way to approach this issue is to imagine a series of concentric circles, starting from a very small, violence-prone extremist jihadist core to more peaceful Muslims in the other rings, and especially the outermost ring.[22] Based on such a classification, four circles can be distinguished:

1. *Jihadist Muslims:* in the innermost circle are the revolutionary and often terrorist, predominantly Sunni Salafist 'jihadists'.[23] Those belonging to this group want to impose

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[19] J. Fine, *Political Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. From Holy War to Modern Terror* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

[20] R. Alexander and H. Moore, "Are most victims of Terrorism Muslim?" *BBC,* 20 January 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30883058.

[21] S. Sultan, "The Problem with Moderate Islam and Why We Need to Redefine Radical", *Ideas Faith*, 24 December 2014, p.1.

[22] The basics of the concentric circles figures are derived from S. Harris & M. Nawaz, *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 21-26. However, the terminology used here slightly differs.

[23] Jihadists are defined here as those Muslims who see the armed propagation of Islam as the sixth pillar of their faith, often not only seeing it as a collective defensive obligation but also as an individual duty to attack 'infidels' as well as others whom they consider apostates and heretics in order to establish global Islamic rule, based on certain de-

their interpretation of Islam on all others by the threat or use of force in order to achieve their submission and conversion. These violent extremists are a small group (perhaps 100,000[24]) but these fanatics who have been joined by (local) opportunists are the most organised and most militant ones. They often also enjoy the sympathy if not the support of a significant number of Muslims in the second circle, if not beyond, depending on the particular conflict constellation and the perceived justness of their cause.[25] While some of them have global aspirations, others are mainly interested in fighting the 'near enemy'.

2. *Islamist Muslims*: the second, much larger circle, consist of 'Islamists'. These proponents of 'political Islam' may not practice violence themselves but often adhere to the same, or a similar, fundamentalist and exclusivist ideology as the jihadist terrorists. They make no distinction between the religious and political sphere in society and want to spread and impose Islamic law[26] by opposing non-believers and apostates to make Islam rule supreme. However, they seek to reach this goal in various ways, ranging from persuasion to coercion. Political Islamists – like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during the Arab Spring – are willing to achieve their objectives, if the occasion presents itself, through the ballot box rather than through revolutionary terrorism like the more militant jihadists, using democracy as a vehicle to go beyond it. In principle, they are opposed to pluralism, but for practical and pragmatic reasons, they opt for coexistence with other political parties as, for instance, in Tunisia (Ennahda) and Morocco (Justice and Development Party – PJD). There are Islamist parties in many Muslim-majority countries. According to various accounts, 10 to 15 percent of the world's Muslims are Islamists.[27] That would put their total number at between 160 and 240 million people. In Saudi Arabia and Iran, Sunni and Shia Islamist regimes are in power, vying for regional dominance.

3. *Conservative Muslims*: then there is a third circle, consisting of 'non-Islamist' Muslims. This circle includes 'religiously conservative' Muslims. These 'conservatives' form the majority of Muslims in countries like Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Gulf states. Conservative Muslims in these states are sometimes also called 'traditional Muslims'. Many of them, especially those influenced by Saudi Wahhabism,

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contextualised passages in the Qur'an (e.g. Surah 8:39). Cf. C. Van de Voorde, "Lemma 'Jihad'", in J. Ian Ross (Ed.) *Religion and Violence. An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict from Antiquity to the Present* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), Vol. 2, pp. 394-402. The goals of jihadists differ and many are more interested in solving local conflicts in their favour than conducting attacks outside a particular theatre of war. While there are Shi'ite terrorists, the majority of Islamist terrorists are Sunni Salafists.

[24] P. Bergen and E. Schneider, "Jihadist threat not as big as you think", *CNN*, 29 September 2014, http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/26/opinion/bergen-schneider-how-many-jihadists/. Bergen and Schneider calculated the numbers in various theatres of jihadist conflict and concluded in 2014: "If we tally up the low and high estimates for all these groups, we can begin to have a sense of the total number of jihadist militants that are part of formal organizations around the globe. We found that on the low end, an estimated 85,000 men are fighting in jihadist groups around the world; on the high end, 106,000". Since the proclamation of the Caliphate in mid-2014 their numbers might have increased, being closer to the higher end of the Bergen & Schneider estimate. On the other hand, anti-IS coalition forces have killed tens of thousands of IS fighters.

[25] Cf. A. P. Schmid, "Data to Measure Sympathy and Support for Islamist Terrorism: A Look at Muslim Opinions on Al Qaeda and IS", The Hague: *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, no. 2, February 2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2017.1.02.

[26] Following the *World Almanac of Islamism*, the term 'Islamist' is used to "[d]escribe movements, groups and individuals which harness religious values and ideals to serve a larger political agenda aimed at spreading or imposing Islamic law, either locally, regionally, or internationally". See American Foreign Policy Council, *World Almanac of Islamism 2014* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), p.5.

[27] S. Harris & M. Nawaz, *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* (2015), pp. 21-22. For an overview of many national surveys since 9/11, see D. Pipes, "How Many Islamists?" *Middle East Forum Blog*, Updated 23 September 2016, http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2003/10/how-many-islamists?utm_source=Middle+East+Forum&utm_campaign=836b25ec6e-smith_cliff_2017_04_10&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_086cfd423c-836b25ec6e-33588161&goal=0_086cfd423c-836b25ec6e-33588161.

are fundamentalists, that is, they take the words of the Qur'an literally, regarding it as the word of Allah that has to be followed to the letter at all times and in all places.[28] This is the largest circle, most probably accounting for the majority of all Muslims. Contrary to Islamists, they tend not to view Islam as a political ideology and are not revolutionary.

4. *Pluralist Muslims*: Beyond these three circles of jihadists, Islamists and conservative Muslims, there are non-traditional Muslims, most of whom live in countries where Muslims are not a majority, especially those living in Western diasporas. They adhere to a broader interpretation of what it means to be Islamic and are inclusivists rather than exclusivists regarding various expressions of their faith and its relationship to other faiths.[29] They include 'modern Muslims', 'cultural Muslims', 'sociological Muslims', 'liberal Muslims', 'reformist Muslims', 'progressive Muslims', 'Western Muslims', 'Muslim democrats' and the 'Muslim left'. How big these (often overlapping) sub-groups are, is hard to ascertain.[30]

As one moves from the innermost circle to more outer circles, one moves away from those advocating violence to those rejecting violence, from intolerant exclusivism to more pluralist practices of faith.

The Search for 'Moderate Muslims'

If we accept this simple – and simplistic – concentric classification, where should we situate 'moderate Muslims'? Are they, rather than being situated in the third circles and forming the mainstream, only situated in the outermost circle?[31] What makes them 'moderate'? [32] Are they moderate because they are 'peaceful' and 'opposed to

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[28] Wahhabism is a particular form of Salafism practised in, and propagated from, Saudi Arabia. The term "Salafism", according to Joas Wagemakers, refers to the trend within Islam whose adherents claim to emulate "the pious predecessors" (*al-salaf al-sālih*) as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible, is sometimes associated with labels such as "ultra-orthodox", "extreme", "radical" and even "terrorist" in media discourse, both in the West and in the Arab world. Given Salafis' own claims that they merely represent Islam in all its supposed purity and simply follow the sources, the Qur'an and the sunna, such labels may not necessarily be applicable to them, however. Yet the term "fundamentalist" certainly is, considering Salafis' strong tendency to reject the religious "innovations" (*bida'*) that Islamic tradition has allegedly accumulated throughout the centuries and their belief that one must go back to the very beginning of Islam in all aspects of life." See J. Wagemakers, "Salafi Source Readings between Al-Qaeda and ISIS", 29 July 2016, http://www.oasiscenter.eu/articles/peoples-of-islam/2016/07/29/salafi-source-readings-between-al-qaeda-and-the-isis#, p.56. As Quintan Wiktorowicz has pointed out, Salafists need not be jihadists, many of them are quietists while others hold a middle position, being political but not in favour of using violence to achieve political objectives. Cf. Q. Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising. Muslim Extremism in the West* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
[29] The concept 'inclusivist Muslims' is derived from Rüdiger Lohlker, Professor of Islamic Studies at the Institute of Orientalistik, University of Vienna. For his perspective, see R. Lohlker, *Dschihadismus. Materialien* (Wien:facultas wuv, 2009).
[30] Charles Kurzman, for instance, claimed: "Around the world […] most Muslims are far less interested in Islamist revolution than in liberal Islam. By liberal Islam, I mean movements that espouse key ideals of the Western liberal tradition, such as democracy, human rights, social equality, and tolerance – but they approach these ideals through a distinctly Islamic discourse, not just borrowing Western discourses. Kurzman greatly overestimates the size of this 4th circle when attributing such values to 'most Muslims'". See Charles Kurzman, *The Missing Martyrs. Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.95.
[31] Irshad Manji and Mohammed S. Dajani noted that: "The difference between 'reformist' Muslims and 'moderates' is not semantic. The latter term is misleading because many 'moderate' Muslims exhibit all the traits of orthodoxy, including dogma and a fear of challenging their communities' groupthink." See I. Manji and M. S. Dajani, "Is there a 'Moderate' Islam?" *Policy Watch*, No. 2534, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 16 December 2015, p.1/3; A. Kadir Yildirim, "Why Aren't There Any Progressive Muslim Parties and Why That's a Problem", *Huffington Post Blog*, 11 January 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akadir-yildirim/why-arent-there-any-progressive-muslim-parties_b_8940644.html.
[32] Amitai Etzioni has noted that not all moderates are modern. There are also 'illiberal Muslims' – those who are, neither pro-liberal democracy nor pro-violence. See A. Etzioni, *Security First. For a Muscular, Moral Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 86-87.

terrorism'? Is 'moderate Muslim' an externally applied label for Westernised and pro-Western Muslims? Do Muslims themselves use moderation as a concept?

Answers to such questions require an exploration of what 'moderate' means in Islam. There is no consensus on that. According to Akeel Bilgrmi, "'moderates' are committed to secularism while 'absolutists' are committed to 'sharia'".[33] Making the support for the introduction of sharia (Islamic law) in public affairs the test for distinguishing 'moderates' from 'radical Islamists' has also been suggested in 2007 by Angel Rabasa et al in a RAND study:

> The dividing line between moderate Muslims and radical Islamists in countries with legal systems based on the West (the majority of states in the Muslim world) is whether *sharia* should apply.[34]

Yet very large numbers of Muslims are, in principle, for the introduction and application of sharia law.[35] A look at the results of Muslim public opinion polls in different countries confirms that. A survey conducted in 2013 in 39 countries (out of a total of 48 countries with Muslim majorities) found support levels vary from a high of 99 percent in Afghanistan to a low of 8 percent in Azerbaijan, with majorities of Muslims in 25 countries (out of 39) desiring to make sharia the official law in their land (Table 1).

Table 1: *Countries with more than 50% of Muslims Favouring Making Sharia the Official Law in their Country (Pew, 2013)*[36]

Afghanistan:	99%	Jordan:	71%
Iraq:	91%	Nigeria:	71%
Palest. Territories:	89%	Uganda:	66%
Malaysia:	86%	Ethiopia:	65%
Niger:	86%	Mozambique:	65%
Pakistan:	84%	Kenya:	64%
Morocco:	83%	Mali:	63%
Djibouti:	82%	Ghana:	58%
Bangladesh:	82%	Tunisia:	56%
DR Congo:	74%	Senegal:	55%
Thailand:	77%	Cameroon:	53%
Egypt:	74%	Liberia:	52%.
Indonesia:	72%		

In other words, if sharia-based law is made the test to distinguish 'moderate' Muslims from other Muslims, the moderates would be in a minority in half of all Muslim-majority countries.

Other criteria mentioned by the RAND study for identifying 'moderate Muslims' are

[33] A. Bilgrami, "What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity", *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992), p. 827; cit. A. Sahhab, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 328, n. 66.
[34] A. Rabasa et al, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (St. Monica: RAND, 2007), p. 67.
[35] For background on Sharia law, see, for instance: http://www.islamicsupremecouncil.org/understanding-islam/legal-rulings/52-understanding-islamic-law.html.
[36] http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/; cit. M. Lipka, "Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world", *Pew Research Center*, 22 July 2016, p.3; http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/22/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s--and-around-the-world.

> "[…].those who share the key dimensions of democratic culture. These include support for democracy and internationally recognized human rights (including gender equality and freedom of worship), respect for diversity, acceptance of nonsectarian sources of law, and opposition to terrorism and other illegitimate forms of violence".[37]

Adding some of these criteria would further reduce the number of moderate Muslims. Gender equality is not supported by core Islamic texts nor by mainstream Muslim practices, nor is freedom of worship allowed in most Muslim-majority countries.[38] On the other hand, opposition to terrorism among Muslims is widespread.[39] That issue of support for terrorism seems to be the main issue that counts for some Western politicians.[40]

How then, should we define 'moderation' in (democratic) politics and 'moderate Muslims'?

In the view of this writer, moderation in politics refers to the prudent *behaviour* of moderate individuals, groups and parties as well as their rational *ideological* platform, with the two being connected since moderate actors tend to seek the middle ground in their attempt to obtain the support of voters from diverse segments of society. Moderates seek to manage (rather than solve) conflicts of interest by searching, through dialogue, a balance between the positions of opposite sides in the political contest, finding solutions through negotiation, compromise and reform, rather than through armed confrontations in the form of violent revolution or armed repression. Rather than seeing the political landscape in 'black-and-white'/good-vs.-evil terms, moderates acknowledge that no single party is in possession of absolute truth or definite solutions for society's problems; in other words, moderates accept – and not just tolerate – the legitimacy of 'grey' areas between opposing political worldviews.[41]

When it comes to 'moderate Muslims' in Western diasporas, some understanding along the lines of the above definition should also apply. For Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, the term 'moderate' has been used for "Islamist movements that attempt to achieve their goals through bottom-up, non-violent methods, and are able to both accept democratic values and tolerate perspectives other than their own. In the same sense, ideological moderation is defined as the gradual transformation of a movement's core values and beliefs from rigid and fixed, to flexible and tolerant".[42]

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[37] A. Rabasa et al, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (St. Monica: RAND, 2007), p. 67.

[38] S. Manzoor noted that "[…] if by being moderate we mean believing in freedom of expression and an acceptance of equality in gender and sexuality, it is by no means certain that the majority of Muslim are moderate […]". See S. Manzoor, "Can we drop the term 'moderate Muslim? It's meaningless", *The Guardian*,16 March 2015, [based on BBC Radio podcast "In Search of Moderate Muslims", presented by S. Manzoor, *BBC Radio 4*, 17 March 2017 at 4 pm; producer Natalie Steed].

[39] Cf. A. P. Schmid, "Data to Measure Sympathy and Support for Islamist Terrorism: A Look at Muslim Opinions on Al Qaeda and IS", The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 8, no.2 (2017), http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2017.1.02.

[40] For instance, in a presidential campaign speech held on 26 April 2016, Hillary Clinton distinguished between "hard-working, terror-hating Muslims and [Muslim] terrorists". See K. A. Beydoun, "The myth of the 'moderate Muslim'. Deconstructing the mythic 'good versus bad' Muslim paradigm", *Al Jazeera,* 20 May 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/05/myth-moderate-muslim-160511085819521.html.

[41] For a recent work on moderation, see A. Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes* (Philadelphia: Penn Press, 2015).

[42] J. Tallmeister, "The Ideological Moderation of Islamist Movements", Student Essay University of Edinburgh, 25 July 2013, http://www.e-ir.info/2013/07/25/the-ideological-moderation-of-islamist-movements/, basing herself on J. Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.3, and K. Dalacoura, *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press,2011), p. 123.

Let us, for further guidance, turn to Islam itself to see what 'moderation' means in that religion.

Moderation in Islam

Reading the Qur'an, one finds both bellicose and peaceful language. The more peaceful language is usually associated with statements made by the Prophet in the early period of his historical existence when he was receiving divine messages in Mecca (610 until 622) and not yet in a position of power. The more bellicose statements are generally associated with the period after he had gained political power in Medina and subsequently conquered Mecca (629 until 632) from where he had emigrated in 622.[43] Accordingly, one finds in the holy book (and in the hadith[44]) expressions of moderation as well as many more that point in the opposite direction (see Box 1).

Box 1: *Qur'an's Mecca and Medina Verses – Comments by Amitai Etzioni*

[T]he Qur'an and *hadith* – like Christian and Jewish texts – contain passages that justify violence and others that reject it. Both are part of Islam. The Qur'an does include an exhortation to 'Slay the idolaters wherever you find them' (Q 9:5), and says: 'I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them' (Q 8:12). In the *hadith*, we may read: 'I have been commanded to fight against people so long as they do not declare that there is no god but Allah' (Sahih Muslim 1.9.30) and 'Killing unbelievers is a small matter to us' (Tabari 9:69). Observers of such exhortations may be called warriors;[50] 'jihadists' seems closer to the common parlance.

One finds in the same texts: 'And do not take any human being's life – that God willed to be sacred – other than in [the pursuit of] justice' (Q 17:33); and again: 'The taking of one innocent life is like taking all of Mankind [...] and the saving of one life is like saving all of Mankind' (Q 5:33). There are also exhortations to peace and compassion in the *hadith*: 'Someone urged the Messenger of God, "Call down a curse upon the idol-worshippers!" whereupon he said: "I have not been sent to curse. I have been sent as compassion"' (Muslim 6284). And again: 'A strong person is not the person who throws his adversaries to the ground. A strong person is the one who contains himself when he is angry' (Al-Muwatta 47.12). These are the texts on which non-violent, moderate Islam draws'.

Source: A. Etzioni, "Talking to the Muslim World: How, and with whom?", *International Affairs* 92, no. 6 (4 November 2016), https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12746, pp. 1361-1379.

Islamic scholars and Muslim militants can find examples of both moderation and extremism in the Qur'an and use appropriate quotes to defend their points of view (or target specific audiences). Here are some examples:

Hassan al-Banna, the Egyptian founder of the Muslim Brotherhood had – following the Medina verses of the Prophet – declared that "It is in the nature of Islam to dominate,

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[43] The Mecca and Medina distinction is widely used. Like in the case of the Christian Bible with its marked distinction between the moral rigor of the Old Testament and the forgiving mildness of the New Testament, there is a distinction between the more peaceful Qur'anic verses from the early Mecca period of the Prophet (when he held no political power) and the verses from the Medina period where the Prophet (by then ruler of a religious community) called for the forcible imposition of Islam. Cf. R. Lohlker, *Dschihadismus. Materialien* (Wien: facultas wuv, 2009), p. 16; A. Hirsi Ali, *Preserving the Values of the West* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 16 October 2016), pp. 3-4.
[44] *Hadith* refers to the saying and actions of the Prophet as transmitted by oral tradition and recorded later.

not to be dominated, to impose its law on all nations and to extend its power to the entire planet."[45]

On the other hand, Hassan al-Banna's grandson, Tariq Ramadan, who teaches Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University, holds that:

> The theme of moderation in religious practice has been a constant in Islamic literature from the very beginning, during the Prophet Muhammad's life in the early 7th century. In the Quran and the Prophetic traditions that accompany it, Muslim women and men are called upon to exercise moderation in all aspects of their religious life. "God desires ease for you, and desires not hardship", the Quran reminds us, and Muhammad confirms: "Make things easy, do not make them difficult". [...] Over the past 13 centuries, most Islamic scholars and Muslims around the world (whether Sunni or Shia, irrespective of legal school), have promoted and followed the path of moderation and flexibility in the practice of their religion.[46]

The principal contemporary spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, also claims moderation to be central to Islam:

> Moderation, or balance, is not only a general characteristic of Islam, it is a fundamental landmark. The Qur'an says: "Thus we have made you an umma [community] justly balanced, that you might be witness over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves" (Qur'an 2:143). As such, the Muslim umma is a nation of justice and moderation [...] Islamic texts call upon Muslims to exercise moderation and to reject and oppose all kinds of extremism.[47]

However, al-Qaradawi has, on other occasions, for other audiences, also made less moderate statements like this one:

> After having been expelled twice, Islam will be victorious and reconquer Europe [...] I am certain that this time, victory will be won not by the sword but by preaching and [Islamic] ideology.[48]

In the original Islamic sources, the Arab term for moderation is *'wasatiyyah'*.

However, the number of passages in the Qur'an addressing moderation is overshadowed by the so-called 'sword verses' (e.g. Qur'an 9:5). As prime example of

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[45] "The Muslim Brotherhood", The Investigative Project on Terrorism, *http://www.investigativeproject.org/profile/173;* See "Muslim Brotherhood Factsheet", Stand With Us, http://www.standwithus.com/news/article.asp?id=1757.
[46] T. Ramadan, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim", *The New Statesman*, 12 February 2010, http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2010/02/muslim-religious-moderation.

[47] Al-Qaradawi in Toledo (Ohio) at a conference of the Muslim Arab Youth Association (MAYA); "Yusuf al-Qaradawi", *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yusuf_al-Qaradawi; Y. al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening Between Rejection and Extremism* (Herndon, VA: American Trust Publications and the International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991), p. 21; see A. Etzioni, *Security First. For a Muscular, Moral Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 139.
[48] Y. al-Qaradawi, "Fatwa", 2003; see "Muslim Brotherhood Factsheet", Stand With Us, http://www.standwithus.com/news/article.asp?id=1757.

'moderation' in the Qur'an, reference is – apparently due to the absence of other relevant passages[49] - made to the already-quoted Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 143.[50]

This verse is interpreted in a very broad way. Kamal Hassan, a commentator on this verse, claims that it:

> [...] is used in the context of the Quranic expression '*ummatan wasatan*', which refers to the Universal Islamic Community or Nation having the attributes of Justice, Excellence and Balance in order to serve as Allah's trustworthy 'witnesses over mankind' ('*shuhada'ala al-nas*) in this world and in the Hereafter (Qur'an 2.:143). It can be translated as 'Middle Position of Justice, Excellence and Balance' or 'Justly Balanced Quality' or 'Justly Balanced Nature' of Islam and the Islamic community. The more popular translation of the term, however, is 'moderation'.[51]

A similar interpretation has been provided by Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. After deploring the fact "that the image of Islam as the religion of peace and moderation was hijacked by violent aggressions of militant Muslims and their network of terror", he stated that:

> [...] the virtue of moderation was expounded in Islam by a key verse in the Quran (Surah Al-Baqarah; Verse 143) which describes Muslims as an ummah or community justly balanced and classical Muslim scholars agreed that being ummah justly balanced means essentially possessing a combination of interconnected attributes of justice, goodness, avoidance of extreme laxity or extravagance and being in the middle position. Apart from this, the Qur'an also emphasizes (Surah Al-Anbiya; Verse 107) the role of Islam as the harbinger of mercy and compassion to all mankind.

Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin was speaking on the occasion of a meeting of the Global Movement of Moderates, a creation of Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak. According to the secretariat of the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM), 'moderation' refers, on the operational and pragmatic level, to "a set of values and behaviour that is morally, socially and culturally acceptable".[52] This statement would imply that moderation is determined by context rather than religious dogma alone.

Let us, for further clarification, look at some of the statements coming from the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM). In 2012, the government of Malaysia organised in Kuala Lumpur an inaugural 'International Conference on Global Movement of Moderates' (ICGMM), attended by 850 delegates from over 70 countries. The country's Prime Minister, Najib Razak, stressed that "It is time for the moderates of all countries,

of all religions to take back the center, to reclaim the agenda for peace and pragmatism and to marginalize the extremists".[53] He had first made such a call on 27 September 2010 at the 65th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. In his view, "The real divide is not between Muslims and non-Muslims, or between the developed and developing worlds, it is between moderates and extremists [...]. Moderation is the 'fitrah', or essence, of humanity's greatest heights, the solid bedrock on which all the world's civilizations have been built [...] moderation stands for acceptance, freedom, tolerance, compassion, justice and peace."[54]

In his keynote address for ICGMM in 2012, the Malaysian prime minister said that "[...] no-one has a monopoly of truth". He also quoted, without precise source identification (possibly a hadith), the Prophet Muhammed who counseled that "moderation is the best of actions". Contrasting 'moderation' with 'extremism', the Malaysian leader continued:

> Extremists, we know, are driven by orthodoxies – a set of messianic ideals characterized by crass simplifications, misrepresentations and outright lies. Rather than celebrating the sanctity of life, as is required by all religions, extremists emphasize the glory of afterlife.[55]

In April 2015, the Global Movement of Moderates issued the Langkawi Declaration on the occasion of the 26th ASEAN Summit in Malaysia where government leaders agreed to "promote moderation as an ASEAN value that promotes peace, security and development". (See Appendix for key passages).

Furthermore, the leaders of states and governments present at Langkawi agreed to "promote education as an effective means of instilling respect for life, for diversity and the values of moderation, tolerance, non-violence and mutual understanding towards preventing the spread of violent extremism and addressing its root causes". They also agreed to "encourage academic discourse and exchanges to amplify the voices of moderates", having recognized earlier in the same declaration "that moderation guides action which emphasizes tolerance, understanding, dialogue, mutual respect and inclusiveness and is a tool to bridge differences and resolve disputes".[56]

These are admirable goals, showing that non-Arab Muslim leaders are trying to find a way out of the literalist interpretation of Islam. However, so far, the Global Movement of Moderates has not received as much attention and traction among Muslims and non-Muslims as one would hope for. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, the head of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies in Malaysia, and author of a monograph on 'The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam' therefore opened his study of the Qur'anic principle of *wasatiyyah* with the observation that it is '[...] an important aspect of Islam that has fallen into neglect".[57]

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[53] Global Movement of Moderates Foundation (GMMF), "International Conference in Global Movement of Moderates", Report, Kuala Lumpur, 17-19 Gl, January 2012. Foreword from the Prime Minister, p. 4.
[54] Quoted in brochure of the Global Movement of Moderates, p. 2; See also Global Movement of Moderates, "Founder-Patron", http://www.gmomf.org/about-us/founder-patron/.
[55] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[56] "Langkawi Declaration of the Global Movement of Moderates", Langkawi, Malaysia, 27 April 2015.
[57] M. Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam. The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 235. The author defined 'moderation, or wasatiyyah as "… closely aligned with justice, and it means opting for a middle position between extremities. Moderation is often used interchangeably with 'average', 'core', 'standard', 'heart', and 'non-aligned'. The opposite of *wasatiyyah* is *tatarruf*, which denotes 'inclination toward the peripheries' and is known as 'extremism', 'radicalism', and 'excess'". Ibid., p. 9.

Muslims' Apprehension to Being Labelled 'Moderates'

If moderation is, as some of the claims cited above imply, such a central value in Islam, one might expect most Muslims would not object to being called 'moderate Muslims'. However, that is not so; it is a controversial term and many Muslims outside the 'Global Movement of Moderates' are decidedly unhappy when being labelled 'moderate Muslims'. Since the concept of 'moderate Muslims' has been invoked frequently by Western politicians, a self-identification of Muslims as 'moderates' often implies that they are seen as 'Uncle Toms', as London's first Muslim Mayor, Sadiq Khan, said.[58]

However, this distancing of moderate and other Muslims from a Western host society (of which many Muslims have in the meantime become citizens) is not confined to British Muslims. Adrian Cherney and Kristina Murphy, interviewing Muslims in Australia, found that many of those interviewed:

> [...] may not understand themselves as moderates and also do not want to be labelled or seen as one (as many in our sample expressed), yet they are placed in an unenviable position of possibly being rejected by their community if they choose to work in partnership with governments and police.[59]

Again, this is a remarkable and puzzling statement, implying that their religious identification is antagonistic to their Australian citizenship and the obligations that come with it. Anne Aly, an Egyptian scholar who became Australia's first Muslim Member of Parliament, (and in her previous career was an academic expert in the field of terrorism studies), expressed her dilemma in more nuanced terms:

> The responsibility placed on Australian Muslims to actively reject terrorism comes from both official channels through government funded programs under the banner of counter terrorism and countering violent extremism and the public through the popular media. Yet, Muslims in Australia who do speak out against religiously motivated non-state terrorism find themselves in an impossible bind. They are expected to speak out as representatives of a fragmented, heterogeneous and diverse mix of communities and ideologies. Often, when they do speak out, they are viewed with suspicion and presumed to be 'apologists for Islam' whose claim to tolerance and the peaceful nature of Islamic doctrine purposefully ignores its true nature. Such responses render these spokespersons illegitimate - both as representatives of Muslim communities and as Australian citizens.[60] (For other views, see Box 2).

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[58] See R. Ibrahim, "'Radical' vs. 'Moderate' Islam: A Muslim View", Gatestone Institute, 25 May 2016, p.1; https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/8101/radical-moderate-islam.

[59] A. Cherney and K. Murphy, "What does it mean to be a moderate Muslim in the war on terror? Muslim interpretations and reactions", *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 9, no. 2 (January 2016), pp. 159-181.

[60] A. Aly, "Illegitimate: When Moderate Muslims Speak Out", *M/C Journal* 17, no. 5 (2014), p.1, http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/rt/printerFriendly/890/0.

Box 2: *Muslim Views on 'Moderate Muslims'*

According to H.R. Yarger, Muslim experts vary considerably in their characterisation of 'moderate Muslims':

- Abid Ullah Jan, a member of the Canadian think tank Independent Center for Strategic Studies and Analyses, insists that the entire debate on moderate Muslims is political, not academic or religious. [...] According to Jan, followers of this extremism regard as moderates only those who "publicly reject the Qur'an as the final manifesto of God," who renounce "key parts of the Qur'an," and who acquiesce to "unquestioning support for Israel."

- M.A. Muqtedar Khan, Assistant Professor at the University of Delaware, claims that Muslims generally do not like "the terms moderate, progressive, or liberal" because they are associated with individuals who sold out politically to the other side. Khan insists the moderate label should refer to a person's intellectual positions, not politics. He surmises that moderate Muslims are "reflective, self-critical, pro-democracy and pro-human rights, and closet secularists." They differ from radical Muslims in their methods and basic openness to a modern interpretation of Islam.

- Others insist that there is no "moderate or radical Islam; there is only one Islam: All other expressions are falsehoods espoused by...hypocrites or...apostates."

Quotes from: Harry R. Yarger, *Moderate Muslims: Myth or Reality?* Master Thesis (Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: U.S. Army War College, 2007), pp. 6-7.

Such a dilemma is also evident in the United States where most Muslims are generally better off and better integrated (except recently arrived refugees, e.g. those from Somalia) than those in European diasporas. Sohaib Sultan, Imam and Muslim Life Coordinator in the Office of Religious Life at Princeton University, discussing the problematic label 'moderate Islam', noted that:

> [...] it is invoked in a very imperialist way by the rich and powerful who just want Muslims to join their bandwagon and make no trouble. [...] Second, it is arguably this 'moderate Islam' attitude that has led to a quietism in the face of intolerable crimes as political Islam is left to the 'radicals' and 'extremists'. [...] In summary, 'moderate Islam' has led to an Islam that is just too darn convenient for those who insist on maintaining the status quo. And, thus, 'moderate Islam' has lost any capacity among the masses to lead a serious movement for change.[61]

Whether 'moderate Islam' has lost already – or not yet gained – a mobilising capacity against jihadist terrorism, is still an open question. However, it is undeniable that Islamist extremists (or radicals as they are often called) are on the offensive. Let us see how they view 'moderate Muslims'.

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[61] S. Sultan, "The Problem with Moderate Islam and Why We Need to Redefine Radical", *Time Magazine Ideas*, 24 December 2014, http://time.com/3642707/the-problem-with-moderate-islam-and-why-we-need-to-redefine-radical/.

Islamist Extremists and Moderate Muslims

If moderate Muslims already feel uneasy with being called 'moderate Muslims', such resistance is, as can be expected, even greater among Muslims with extremist convictions. For them, Islam itself is not 'moderate'. As illustration, two quotes from the former leader of al Qaeda and from the leader of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They share the same extremist jihadist interpretation of Islam.

In an essay entitled 'Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West', Osama bin Laden clearly stated that Islam could not be moderate when it comes to non-Muslims:

> [O]ur talks with the infidel West and our conflict with them ultimately revolve around one issue, and it is: Does Islam, or does it not, force people by the power of the sword to submit to its authority corporeally if not spiritually? Yes. There are only three choices in Islam: either willing submission [i.e. conversion]; or payment of the *jizya* [poll-tax paid by non-Muslims], thereby bodily, though not spiritual, submission to the authority of Islam; or the sword – for it is not right to let him [an infidel] live. The matter is summed up for every person alive: either submit, or live under the suzerainty of Islam, or die [...] Such, then, is the basis of the relationship between the infidel and the Muslim. Battle, animosity, and hatred – directed from the Muslim to the infidel – is the foundation of our religion.[62]

While some have considered bin Laden 'moderate' in comparison to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (a.k.a. Caliph Ibrahim), both share a similar interpretation of the role of Islam. Abu Bakr:

> Islam was never a religion of peace. Islam is the religion of fighting. No-one should believe that the war that we are waging is the war of the Islamic State. It is the war of all Muslims, but the Islamic State is spearheading it. It is the war of Muslims against infidels.[63]

We find such an aggressive line of thought not only with jihadists like Bin Laden and Abu Bakr but also with some Islamists who are not themselves engaging in violence. In an article titled 'The Truth about the Moderate Muslim as Seen by the West and its Muslim Followers', authored in 2011 by an apparently 'radical' writer, Ahmed Ibrahim Khadr, he labelled the term 'moderate Muslims' "[...] simply a slur against Islam and Muslims, a distortion of Islam, a rift among Muslims, a spark to ignite war among them". For Khadr 'moderates' are 'false Muslims' and he outlined the many ways in which they differ from what he considers 'true Muslims' and what others consider as being 'extremists'. (See Box 3). This list is one of the clearest statements this writer has found to distinguish mainstream moderate Muslims from extremists (labelled 'radicals' by A.I. Khadr) and is therefore cited at some length.

Box 3: *Major Differences between Extremist (Radicals) and Moderate Muslims, according to Ahmed Ibrahim Khadr*

- Radicals want the caliphate to return; moderates reject the caliphate.
- Radicals want to apply Sharia (Islamic law); moderates reject the application of Sharia.
- Radicals reject the idea of renewal and reform, seeing it as a way to conform Islam to Western culture; moderates accept it.
- Radicals accept the duty of waging jihad in the path of Allah; moderates reject it.
- Radicals accept those laws that punish whoever insults or leaves the religion [apostates]; moderates recoil from these laws.
- Radicals respect and revere every deed and every word of the Prophet – peace be upon him – in the hadith; moderates do not.
- Radicals oppose democracy; moderates accept it.
- Radicals see the people of the book [Jews and Christians] as dhimmis [...]; moderates oppose this [view].
- Radicals reject the idea that men and women are equal; moderates accept it, according to Western views.
- Radicals oppose the idea of religious freedom and apostasy from Islam; moderates agree to it.
- Radicals desire to see Islam reign supreme; moderates oppose this.
- Radicals place the Koran over the constitution; moderates reject this [assumption].
- Radicals reject the idea of religious equality because Allah's true religion is Islam; moderates accept it.
- Radicals embrace the wearing of hijabs and niqabs; moderates reject it.
- Radicals reject universal human rights, including the right to be homosexual; moderates accept them.
- Radicals support jihadi groups; moderates reject them.

Source: These distinctions [here in translation from Arabic and rearranged in their sequence] are derived from A. I. Khadr's article, "The Truth about the Moderate Muslim Seen by the West and its Muslim Followers", as adapted by R. Ibrahim, "'Radical' vs. 'Moderate' Islam: A Muslim View", Gatestone Institute, 25 May 2016, pp.2-3, https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/8101/radical-moderate-islam.

Which of these divergent interpretations of Islam is correct? This question cannot be solved due to the many positions and sometimes contradictions to be found in Quranic and Islamic sources. As one observer noted:

> For each account of acceptance of the non-Muslim or of equality for women highlighted by progressive Islamic theology, the radical faction would provide a host of counter-accounts, often better sourced from the corpus. [...] Yet the expectation of proponents of 'moderate Islam' is that some compendium of traditions will be pulled out from the scholastic corpus to refute and rebuke the radicals. It is a futile quest.[64]

Islamic religious exegesis has – as in the case of other religions – varied greatly through the ages and scholars and laymen have generally found solutions that served them and fitted their circumstances.

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[64] H. Mneimneh, "The Futile Quest or 'Moderate Islam'", Fikra Forum, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2016, pp. 2-3; http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-futile-quest-for-moderate-islam.

Moderate Muslims Resisting Islamist Terrorism

Moderate Muslims have repeatedly complained that their protests against terrorists who claim to act in defence of Islam are not heard in the West. For instance, in December 2015 some 70,000 Indian clerics issued a *fatwa* (legal pronouncement) against ISIS, al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, saying that terrorist groups were "not Islamic organisations" and that they were a threat to humanity. The occasion was a Sufi religious festival in Rajasthan (India), attended by 1.5 million Muslims who also recorded their protest against terrorism by signing a form to show their opposition to terrorism.[65]

Such statements rarely reach the headlines of newspapers in the West. However, research shows that there are many Muslims raising their voices in opposition to terrorism. One 19 year old American Muslim student at the University of Colorado, Heraa Hashimi, annoyed by accusations that Muslims do not condemn terrorism enough, began – using the Internet as her resource – to compile on a spreadsheet references to instances where Muslims had condemned terrorist attacks. In less than one month she managed to put together a 712 page-long document, listing instances of Muslims condemning terrorism. Since then her spreadsheet has received more entries.[66]

Condemnations of attacks on innocent civilians by Muslims can indeed be found after many incidents. Following a terrorist attack by a lone actor on London's Westminster Bridge in March 2017 (in an incident that killed five people and wounded forty more), the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, himself a Muslim, condemned the London attack as did the general secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, Harud Khan, and the chair of the Finsbury Park mosque, Mohammed Kozbar. The latter said that "The killing of innocent victims should be condemned by everyone".[67]

There have been fatwas by groups of Muslim clerics against ISIS and there have been campaigns on the Internet under labels such as 'Not in my Name'. By and large, however, there has often been denial (e.g. in the form of claims that "ISIS is not Islamic") or minimalisation of the problem (e.g. by saying "more attacks in Europe have been plotted by non-Muslims, according to Europol").

Unfortunately, many Muslims do not express their disagreement with the jihadist terrorists in public for fear of being targeted by Muslim extremists. In Europe, 'liberal' and 'secular' Muslims have received death threats for speaking out against jihadists. One study from 2005 found that "By and large, radicals have been successful in intimidating, marginalizing, or silencing moderate Muslims – those who share the key

[65] C. Mortimer, "70,000 Indian Muslim clerics issue fatwa against ISIS, the Taliban, al-Qaeda and other terror groups", *The Independent* (UK), 10 December 2015, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/70000-indian-muslim-clerics-issue-fatwa-against-isis-the-taliban-al-qaida-and-other-terror-groups-a6768191.html.
[66] A. Mahdawi, "The 712-page Google doc that proves Muslims do condemn terrorism", *The Guardian,* 26 March 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2017/mar/26/muslims-condemn-terrorism-stats; for H. Hashimi's list, see: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1e8BjMW36CMNc4-qc9UNQku0blstZSzp5FMtkdlavqzc/edit#gid=0.
[67] See H. Sherwood and H. Pidd, "UK leaders condemn 'cowardly' London attack", *The Guardian,* 23 March 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/23/uk-muslim-leaders-condemn-cowardly-london-attack.

dimensions of democratic culture.[...]".[68] Since 2005 such threats appear to have become more frequent, also affecting broader groups of people.[69]

While there can be no doubt that very large majorities of Muslims are firmly opposed to the terrorism of violent extremists who profess to act in the name of Islam, such opposition has not yet reached a magnitude or public visibility that could have made it clear to jihadist terrorists that their struggle is an isolated and ultimately futile one.

Conclusion

While there is controversy about the existence, size and role of 'moderate Muslims', it is indisputable that the majority of Muslims in most countries reject extremism in the form of indiscriminate, unprovoked armed attacks on civilians and non-combatants. The moderate Muslim position on terrorism is unequivocal. In the words of Mohammad Hashim Kamali, author of The *Middle Path of Moderation in Islam*:

> Terrorism is absolutely prohibited in Islam, whether committed by individuals or states regardless of the religious affiliation of the perpetrator. It is a crime in Islam and can never be justified in its name. Terrorists must be brought to justice and it is an obligation of all Muslims and concerned to make it possible.[70]

This moderation regarding *means* of challenging opponents is, however, not necessarily accompanied with moderation in terms of *ends* to be achieved – like the introduction of sharia law for all, Muslims and non-Muslims. As we have seen in Table 1, sizeable segments of Muslim populations, especially in Muslim-majority countries, favour this objective.

Whether moderation is rooted in Islam itself or comes from outside is a matter of dispute. Islam itself, with its long history of theory and practice among people of different cultures, is a much broader belief system than Islamist fundamentalists would want us to believe. In a paradigm-shifting book, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic,* Shahab Ahmet[71] concluded, as Noah Feldman summarised it in the obituary of the author, who was a professor of Islamic Studies at Harvard University (he died age 48):

> [...] Islam is not a religion in the usual Western sense, or primarily a system of religious law or a set of orthodox beliefs, as many contemporary Muslims have come to believe. Islam is rather a welter of contradictions – including at the same time the tradition of orthodoxy and law and the contrasting, sometimes heterodox traditions of philosophy, poetry and mystical thought. Today's Salafists miss the contradiction and complexity because they see Islam as only rule and creed. In fact, it's that and much, much more.

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[68] A. Rabasa, C. Benard, L.Schwartz and P.Sickle, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (St. Monica: RAND, 2007), p. 2.

[69] For instance, in the summer of 2017 death threats were made by Muslim extremists against a small but brave group of more than 60 Islamic leaders and imams from France, Belgium, Great Britain and Tunisia, who "…in a move that may be unprecedented, are touring Europe to denounce Islamic terrorism and to pay homage to the victims of terror in Europe by visiting many of the sites of terror attacks". K. Khan, "Hero Imams", Gatestone Institute, 24 July 2017, https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/10728/hero-imams.

[70] M. Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam. The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 243-244.

[71] S. Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

It's capacious enough to include both the prohibition on wine and the elevated practice of drinking it to achieve higher truth. Islam is thus in some ways a kind of culture or a civilization – but more than that, this contradictory Islam is a way for those who call themselves Muslims to make meaning in the world. Islam is made, Ahmed argued, through three things: the text of the Quran; the context of lived ideas and culture produced by actual Muslims; and the nature of the universe itself against which the Quran is revealed, which Ahmed called the "pre-Text".[72]

Shahab Ahmed himself, in his ground-breaking study of Islam, had this to say about 'moderate Muslims':

Muslims are regularly classified by the expert exponents of contemporary Western public analytical discourse as 'extremist' or 'moderate' in terms of those Muslims' understanding of and commitment to *al-jihad fi sabil Allah* – literally 'struggle in the cause of God', sometimes called the 'Sixth Pillar of Islam'. The defining question for modern Western taxonomy is whether Muslims understand *jihad*/struggle as, in the first instance, 'warfare against non-Muslims' (which is 'extremist') or as a 'spiritual struggle' (which is 'moderate') [...] the orthodox and majoritarian understanding is that *jihad* means, above all, fighting the infidel. That, we are told, is the meaning of *jihad* in Islam.[73]

What then is a 'moderate Muslim' in the end: one who does *not seek to impose sharia* on non-Muslims – what one could call 'moderation of belief' or those who *do not want to use force* to do so – what one could call 'moderation of means'?

Maybe the answer to the question 'What is a moderate believer?' lies largely outside religions who claim unique possession of 'truth'. That is the view of Sam Harris, himself an atheist**:**

The problem is that moderates of all faiths are committed to reinterpreting, or ignoring outright, the most dangerous and absurd parts of their scripture – and this commitment is precisely what makes them moderates. But it also requires some degree of intellectual dishonesty, because moderates can't acknowledge that their moderation comes from *outside* the faith. The doors leading out of the prison of scriptural literalism simply do not open from the inside. In the twenty-first century, the moderate's commitment to scientific rationality, human rights, gender equality, and every other modern value – values that [...] are potentially universal for human beings – comes from the past thousand years of human progress, much of which was accomplished in spite of religion, not because of it. So when moderates claim to find their modern, ethical commitments within scripture, it looks like an exercise in self-deception. The truth is that most of our modern values are

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[72] N. Feldman, "An Extraordinary Scholar Redefined Islam", *Bloomberg*, 20 September 2015, https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2015-09-20/an-extraordinary-scholar-redefined-islam.
[73] S. Ahmed, *The Middle Path* (2015), pp. 318-319.

> *antithetical* to the specific teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And where we do find these values expressed in our holy books, they are almost never *best expressed there*.[74]

What are these modern core values? Essentially, they are the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations – values to which in 1948 Muslim and non-Muslim states subscribed – values like freedom of religion, freedom of thought and freedom of speech, religious tolerance, gender equality, rule of law, democracy, and more.[75]

Today, when the United Nations' human rights regime is under great strain, squeezed by authoritarian governments and populist leaders on the one hand and extremist non-state actors and terrorists on the other hand, humanism is the middle ground moderates of all faiths and political persuasions – Muslims and non-Muslims, believers and non-believers – ought to defend against fanatics of all faiths who are engaging in violence to advance their absolutist agendas.

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[74] S. Ahmed, *The Middle Path* (2015), p. 65.
[75] For the full text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf. When the UDHR was codified in conventions, some Muslim governments modified the clause relating to freedom of religion. See for the current situation "International Religious Freedom Report for 2015", U.S. Department of State, 2016, https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper.

Appendix:
Langkawi Declaration on The Global Movement of Moderates (2015) [Excerpt]

WE, the Heads of State/Government of Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, on the occasion of the 26th ASEAN Summit in Langkawi, Malaysia on 27 April 2015 [...],

NOTING that the Global Movement of Moderates is an initiative which promotes a culture of peace and complements other initiatives, including the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations,

APPRECIATING efforts at the community, national, regional and international levels in promoting cohesion of the multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural ASEAN community whose diversity is a source of strength to promote moderation,

ACKNOWLEDGING that moderation, as a means to promote tolerance and mutual understanding, includes the importance of engaging in dialogues on political, economic and socio-cultural issues,

RECOGNISING that moderation guides action which emphasizes tolerance, understanding, dialogue, mutual respect and inclusiveness and is a tool to bridge differences and resolve disputes,

FURTHER RECOGNISING that moderation is an all-encompassing approach not only in resolving differences and conflicts peacefully but also for ensuring sustainable and inclusive development and equitable growth as well as promoting social harmony and mutual understanding within the country and region,

FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING that a commitment to democratic values, good governance, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, equitable and inclusive economic growth, tolerance and mutual respect and adherence to social justice are vital to countering terrorism, violent extremism and radicalism, which pose a challenge to ASEAN, and address their root causes,

RECOGNISING that moderation is a core value in the pursuit of long-lasting peace and a tool to diffuse tensions, negate radicalism and counter extremism in all its forms and manifestations,

MINDFUL that violent extremism should not be associated with any culture, civilisation or religion,

EMPHASISING that terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations should not be tolerated or condoned,

COMMENDING efforts and initiatives towards the sharing of best practices on counter-radicalisation and tackling the root causes of extremism,

ENCOURAGED that the Global Movement of Moderates has received widespread support from the international community, academic institutions and civil society organisations,

DO HEREBY AGREE TO: Strengthen ASEAN unity and solidarity and its central role in maintaining and promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region; Enhance ASEAN's common agenda for peace and prosperity, which promotes political and social stability, inclusive political processes; sustainable growth which provides opportunities for all and upholds dignity; and social justice with emphasis on mutual respect, balance and moderation; Promote moderation as an ASEAN value that promotes peace, security and development. [...]

For full text, see: http://www.gmomf.org/wp-content/uploads/media/Langkawi-Declaration/LANGKAWI-DECLARATION-ON-THE-GLOBAL-MOVEMENT-OF-MODERATES.pdf.

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