

The Other Way to Fight Terrorism

The work of the LibForAll Foundation

Silicon Valley resident Ravi Krishnamurthy is the Vice President of the LibForAll Foundation, an organization whose mission is complex but can be stated simply: to fight Islamist extremism globally.

Based in both Winston-Salem, North Carolina and Jakarta, Indonesia, LibForAll was founded in 2003 by the late former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid and American businessman C. Holland Taylor.

Before Wahid became the President of Indonesia, he was the long-time president of the Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Muslim organization in the world, with tens of millions of members.

LibForAll is the largest player in the fight against Islamist extremism in Indonesia, and is now expanding its reach globally.

Indonesia has the highest Muslim population (about 200 million, accounting for over 88% of the country's population) of any country on the planet; and Indonesia is considered by many observers to be the world's biggest success story with respect to preventing Muslim radicalization and terrorism. Indonesia has prevented widespread radicalization and has successfully marginalized Jemmah Islamiyyah, the most prominent Indonesian terrorist movement.

And a huge part of that success—and perhaps the key to fighting Islamist extremist terrorism in other parts of the world—lies in the work of LibForAll, an organization *The Weekly Standard* calls “the world's most potent and innovative anti-extremist network.”

And that work has nothing to do with hunting down and capturing terrorists.

Krishnamurthy was formerly an electrical engineer and entrepreneur. As a youth, the Chennai native scored 32nd out of 80,000 applicants in the nationwide entrance exam to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology. He studied at IIT Madras, and later did his Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, before embarking on a career in business, technology, and entrepreneurship. He went on to garner 18 patents and co-found the Silicon Valley company Enlite Networks.

From a young age, Krishnamurthy was fascinated by society's big questions. He observes: “All of the problems we see—whether religious, economic or political—ultimately



[10% of the world's Muslims wield so much power over the 90%] because the 10% are both well-organized and well-funded, while the 90% are neither.

stem from a sense of alienation, whereby we divide people into ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Base human emotions such as fear, greed, and craving for power come from this feeling of alienation, and taken to the extreme, result in the most appalling atrocities.”

“The solutions we seek must therefore have a spiritual foundation that can overcome these base emotions. By spiritual, I mean being rooted in the higher human experiences that underlie all major religions, such as love, devotion, surrender, wisdom, and gnosis.”

Krishnamurthy also has an intensely practical focus. At Enlite Networks, he helped globally distributed design and software

teams work together seamlessly, as if they were in a single virtual location. Krishnamurthy began as a product architect, but quickly moved into business development and field services—whereby he could first-hand affect the culture change required to derive full value from a new technology. He says that his personal journey into spirituality was vital to his effectiveness in these roles.

After leaving CollabNet—the company that acquired Enlite Networks—Krishnamurthy was teaching spiritual workshops in partnership with the Oneness University, a spiritual school headquartered in southern India. In one of these workshops, he met the wife of LibForAll co-founder Taylor, who subsequently introduced Krishnamurthy to her husband. Later, Taylor introduced Krishnamurthy to co-founder President Wahid.

Krishnamurthy was inspired by the two men's profound vision and unwavering commitment. He says: “President Wahid is one of the most remarkable human beings I have ever met. Even when extremists attacked and vilified him, he never had a trace of hatred or anger towards them. He fought them from a space of love and caring for humanity. And Holland [Taylor] brought business acumen and public relations expertise, combined with a deep background in Islam and mysticism, which enabled LibForAll to achieve results in a complex and challenging field.

“When I saw this spirituality in action, I knew that LibForAll gave me a unique opportunity to bring together all of my expertise—in business, technology and spirituality—and apply it to solving one of the most critical issues of our time.”

Krishnamurthy points out that there are two ways that a Muslim can view Islam: either as a personal, essentially non-political source of spiritual meaning that unfolds naturally in a believer's life; or as a political ideology used to advance specific worldly, and all too human, agendas. He and other observers estimate that 85 to 90 percent of the world's 1.5 billion Muslims subscribe to the first view (or, close to it on the spectrum), while 10 to 15 percent (the extremists) subscribe to the second view. It is worth noting that, of the group with the extremist view, a small subgroup comprises those Muslims actually committing acts of terrorism.

So then, the basic dichotomy consists

of Islam as personal religion versus Islam as political ideology.

I ask Krishnamurthy why the 10% wield so much power over the 90%.

“Primarily because the 10% are both well-organized and well-funded, while the 90% are neither. In 2003, *U.S. News and World Report* estimated that over the previous 40 years, Saudi Arabia—specifically, quasi-official charities with ties to the ruling elite and to top Saudi clerics—had spent about \$70 billion to propagate Wahhabism around the world. Today the amount of money could well be twice that. And that does not even consider all of the other nations that are also funding Islamist extremism and terrorism.”

Wahhabism is an extremist branch of Sunni Islam that not only condemns non-Muslims as infidels, but also condemns many other Muslims (including Shiites and even other Sunnis who do not subscribe to extreme Wahhabi views) as non-Muslims—and as a consequence, justifies violence against all of these groups. Wahhabism is the most popular form of Islam in Saudi Arabia.

Krishnamurthy divides the active extremists further into two groups based on what type of tactics they employ: the revolutionaries and the “evolutionaries.”

“The revolutionaries are exemplified in a group such as Al Qaeda. The revolutionaries are not willing to compromise. To them, the formal religion of Islam is the solution to everything, and they believe that they must impose Islam on everybody; any non-believer must either convert to Islam or, at least, submit to living under Islamic law. From that worldview comes the notion that violence and terrorism are acceptable tactics to achieve these aims. Ironically, the revolutionaries are, in a sense, easier to deal with. They are easier to marginalize, since their agendas are so overt and their actions so clearly reprehensible.

“The evolutionaries are exemplified in the Muslim Brotherhood and the political movements that it has inspired around the world. The evolutionaries’ approach is more insidious. They advance their agenda through lawful means. What makes them so dangerous is that their agenda is often hidden. They work by taking political office, using the court systems, and infiltrating Muslim organizations including mosques.

“Evolutionaries and revolutionaries share an ideology of supremacy and hatred that underlies and animates terrorism. The ultimate goal of the revolutionaries and the evolutionaries is the same: the creation of an Islamic state.”

The book *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, which LibForAll produced and published (see bibliography for full citation), gives a description of a typical extremist infiltration of a moderate mosque in Indonesia:

At first, a group of youths comes and voluntarily cleans the mosque, not just once but many times. Attracted by their apparent reli-



Ravi Krishnamurthy (left) with the late President Wahid (seated) and Indonesian rock star Dhani (center)

gious sincerity, the mosque board gives them an opportunity to issue the call to prayer, and eventually involves them as members of the board itself. These new members cleverly and conscientiously discharge their responsibilities, because in reality they’re extremist agents tasked with the goal of seizing control of the mosque. As their position becomes increasingly powerful, they begin to invite other friends to join the board, and eventually control who may or may not serve as imam, deliver the Friday sermon, or provide religious education to attendees at the mosque. Slowly but surely, the mosque falls into the hands of radicals, until local religious leaders who once gave sermons and lectures at the mosque are denied the opportunity to teach Islam to their own congregations, and in fact lose control of the mosque and the local people, unless they prove willing to accept and promote the extremists’ ideology.

Krishnamurthy says, “Such non-violent means tend to be far more effective than violent means. In fact, the evolutionaries will sometimes criticize revolutionary groups such as Al-Qaeda, not necessarily on moral grounds but because they believe that Al-Qaeda’s tactics are counterproductive and prematurely reveal the hidden agenda(s) of the evolutionaries.”

According to the late President Wahid and other moderate leaders, what extremists do is to take small sections of the Koran that support their views, ignore other sections that negate their views, and thus give their views an apparent (but not real) Islamic basis.

In an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2005, the late President Wahid wrote:

All too many Muslims fail to grasp Islam, which teaches one to be lenient towards others

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and to understand their value systems, knowing that these are tolerated by Islam as a religion. The essence of Islam is encapsulated in the words of the Quran, “For you, your religion; for me, my religion.” That is the essence of tolerance. Religious fanatics—either purposely or out of ignorance—pervert Islam into a dogma of intolerance, hatred and bloodshed.... The most effective way to overcome Islamist extremism is to explain what Islam truly is to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

In its fight against terrorism, LibForAll aims to mobilize the vast silent majority (the 90%) and provide them with the information, organization, and resources needed to marginalize the extremists (the 10%).

The group works by creating networks of powerful people including religious leaders, leaders of mass organizations, leading educators, popular entertainers, government officials, businesspeople, and the mass media.

For example, LibForAll worked closely with Indonesian rock star Ahmad Dhani and his band Dewa (meaning “god” in Javanese and Sanskrit) to create a “Musical Jihad” against religious hatred and terrorism. Dewa’s album *Laskar Cinta* (“Warriors of Love”) offered young Indonesians a stark choice—to embrace

a message of love, peace, and tolerance, or to support the hatred and bloodlust propagated by terrorist group Laskar Jihad (“Warriors of Jihad”). The album and a subsequent song by the same name, with lyrics inspired by verses from the Koran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, sold millions of copies and won multiple AMI awards—Indonesia’s equivalent to the Grammy. Tens of millions of Indonesian youth watched *Laskar Cinta* on TV and listened to it on mainstream radio, and the single rose to #1 on MTV Asia. LibForAll continues to work with Dhani and other celebrities in order to devise innovative ways to reach mass audiences, and undercut the radicals’ power to influence young minds.

LibForAll is producing a 26-episode television series entitled *Ocean of Revelations* aimed at helping Muslims cultivate a deeper and more spiritual, pluralistic and tolerant understanding of their religion. Seven episodes have already been produced, and some of these (with English subtitles) can be found at vimeo.com. Each episode focuses on a key topic from Islam, and the speakers are renowned Muslim leaders from across the globe with authority and credibility in the Islamic world. Krishnamurthy says, “They each speak in their own language on the show, and we add subtitles. So far we have subtitled all of the existing episodes into Arabic, English, German, Indonesian, and Turkish... and more languages may be coming.” LibForAll plans

to distribute the video series to thousands of *madrassas* around the world and make it available on-line.

LibForAll’s International Institute of Koranic Studies systematizes the lessons learned from the organization’s successes, and is designed to stimulate a renaissance in Islamic pluralism, tolerance, and critical thinking. It aims to propagate freedom of thought and debate within the Muslim world; to research, develop, and articulate the theological grounds for constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion as well as the separation of state and religion; to build a bridge between Muslim traditions and the modern world by deepening—rather than denying—Muslims’ understanding of their religion; and to empower female Muslim scholars, teachers and activists. The Institute’s leadership team includes renowned Koranic scholars from the Middle East, North Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. The Institute’s initial base of operations is in Indonesia; however, most of its activities are based online, with the ability to impact even Muslim societies where freedom of expression is severely constrained.

And LibForAll is currently translating the book *The Illusion of an Islamic State: The Expansion of Transnational Islamist Movements to Indonesia* from its original Indonesian into English. This book, edited by the

late President Wahid, presents compelling theological arguments for the separation of religion and state and is largely credited with preventing a member of Indonesia’s extremist Prosperous Justice Party from being elected Vice President two years ago. *The Illusion of an Islamic State* is hugely relevant to the worldwide debate on the merits of a religious versus a secular state—especially in light of the current revolutions in the Arab world. An English version of a 40-page excerpt of the book is already available for free on-line, but Krishnamurthy says that the entire translation should be complete by the summer of 2011.

LibForAll has built a powerful network of top Muslim and non-Muslim leaders, an impressive track record of success, and a reputation as the leading NGO developing and implementing counter-extremism strategies worldwide. Krishnamurthy speaks with optimism about LibForAll’s ability to accomplish its mission: “God willing, LibForAll will grow into a multi-generational worldwide movement that inspires an intellectual, cultural, social, political, legal, and spiritual renaissance in the Muslim world.” ■

The LibForAll Foundation is a 501(c)(3), tax-exempt, non-profit corporation. You can donate to it or find other ways to get involved at www.LibForAll.org

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