



Promoting Moderate Islam: An Interview with Holland Taylor

LibForAll founder C. Holland Taylor urges the West to join forces with the non-radical Muslims to defeat the ideology that is threatening all humanity.

By Ruthie Blum Leibowitz

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"Our goal is to marginalize, discredit and defeat the ideology of radical Islamism," says C. Holland Taylor, the chairman and CEO of the LibForAll Foundation, "and to transform the understanding that Muslims have of their religious obligations."

Taylor is a Christian-turned-Universalist — a South Carolinian expert in Islam residing in Indonesia — who left the cushy corporate world for more spiritual pastures. These involve "helping ensure the global triumph of a pluralistic and tolerant understanding of Islam, at peace with itself in the modern world."

This, he argues, is the only way that the West and Muslims themselves will be able to eradicate the evil of those who have been politicizing and exploiting Islam for pernicious aims at global hegemony.

A close friend of Abdurrahman Wahid, the late president of Indonesia and leader of the world's largest Muslim organization, Taylor believes that the West has been dropping the ball where confronting the Wahabbi-Muslim Brotherhood lobby is concerned. Rather than making a distinction between its false agenda and the true nature of Islam as a religion, Taylor claims, both the West and Muslims are being seduced into its orbit and lulled into submission.

Indeed, argues Taylor, radical Islam is a "danger to all of humanity." And the only way to counter and conquer it is for Muslims and non-Muslims to join forces.

To this end, the LibForAll Foundation, established in 2003, is working to educate these forces in what Taylor asserts is the true pluralistic and spiritual nature of Islam versus the totalitarian ideology of the extremists. One project the foundation undertook was the publication — and translation into English — of *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, a book exposing the infiltration of Islamist extremists into Indonesia. The book was a sensation there and derailed the candidacy of the Muslim Brotherhood vice presidential contender in the 2009 elections. Another is the establishment of the International Institute of Qur'anic Studies — a global network of top Muslim scholars and leaders working to initiate a

systematic reform of Qur'anic studies that "promotes freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in the Muslim world."

BLUM: Is it not the task of Muslims to behave in such a way that others will have a "tolerant understanding" of Islam? Is it not the duty of their own religious leaders to "transform their understanding of their religious obligations," to extricate themselves and the rest of us from the Wahabbi-Muslim Brotherhood ideology?

Taylor: During WWII, the United States and the United Kingdom were fighting against a national socialist ideology; during the Cold War, we were opposed to a totalitarian, Marxist-Leninist international ideology. Each was relatively easy to confront, because the Nazi ideology was tied to German racial supremacy, and the Communist ideology was tied to atheism and materialism.

Islamist ideology poses a greater challenge. Here, totalitarianism has leapt the species barrier from previous, more readily-identifiable-as-pernicious ideologies by embedding itself in a religion. This has created a difficulty, both for Muslims and non-Muslims, because of the particular strategy that's being employed by the extremists, who are masters of manipulation, intimidation, and violence. We can see this, for example, in the Gaza Strip, where it is simply not possible for Muslims to oppose Hamas. Those who do so are killed. Another example is Pakistan, where moderates are liable to find themselves with a suicide bomber showing up at their madrassa during Friday prayers to kill the sheikh who's been condemning the Taliban. This is a threat to all of humanity. It is therefore incumbent upon all human beings — everyone of good will of every faith and nation — to join together to fight it.

Clearly, to theologially discredit it requires Muslims. But, using the WWII analogy: in seeking to defeat the Japanese or the Germans, we didn't say that it was up to all the good Japanese or Germans to defeat Hitler. We didn't say that it was up to the Russians or the Chinese to defeat the Germans or the Japanese. And it may well have been that even the United States could not have defeated Germany without the presence of Russian forces on the Eastern Front.

Dealing with a totalitarian ideology which has infiltrated and seized power within a society, and which has harnessed the resources of that society to propagate itself, requires a variety of parties. And it is just as much in our interest to defeat it as it is in Muslims' interest to do so.

BLUM: After 9/11, the United States did go to war to defeat the radical Islamists in Afghanistan. And Israel did go to war against Hamas in Gaza and against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Does this not constitute assistance to moderate Muslims, as well as to the West?

TAYLOR: Since 9/11, the West, particularly America, has been engaged in what can be called kinetic actions against terrorists. What we have not done is develop and execute any internally coherent strategy to marginalize, discredit, and defeat the ideology of radical Islam, which underlies and animates terrorism. It is very important to distinguish between the efforts to take down terrorists and the efforts to discredit the ideology. Ideology is more dangerous than bombs. There are organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, that very deliberately eschew violence as they seek to influence Muslim populations, acquire control over the repressive apparatus of the state in Muslim-majority countries, influence foreign policy in the West, and neutralize any possibility of Western governments opposing them and their brand of radical Islam.

They also have a global, expansionary perspective. Both the Shiite extremists in Iran and the Wahabbis in Saudi Arabia act globally. They have agents everywhere in the world propagating their ideology, seeking to influence and control what Muslims think and what they perceive to be their religious obligation.

BLUM: In fairness to the Western governments you accuse of not developing and executing strategies to discredit and defeat the ideology of radical Islam, whenever anyone even dares call it by name, he is labeled as "Islamophobic."

TAYLOR: This is both a manifestation and proof of the strategy and success of the Islamists. I mean, who is accusing the West of being Islamophobic? It is the Wahabbi-Muslim Brotherhood lobby in the West, backed up by Westerners who ally themselves with that lobby. The Wahabbis and the Muslim Brotherhood have grafted themselves onto certain segments of Western society, saying, "We have a common interest, and our common interest is to prevent Islamophobia," or, "Our common interest is to ensure the civil rights of minorities."

This is not to say that there is no such thing as Islamophobia in the West, a phenomenon that has existed among people whose religious views convince them that Islam is a satanic religion. This is not related to 9/11, but has been around for hundreds of years. Then there are those who might be Islamophobic for one reason or another, but if there were not Muslim extremists committing the acts that we read about in the newspaper, it would be a moot issue. Even people who think that Islam is a satanic religion wouldn't be very concerned about it, because they'd be busy thinking about something else. It is the actions of Muslim extremists that have brought this to the fore.

Furthermore, most people in the West are not Islamophobic at all; they're simply concerned about security. The term "Islamophobia" today is used and spread by Muslim extremists against anyone seeking to expose their nefarious activities. And it is a tool to gain sympathy among humanitarian people.

BLUM: You are saying that the Muslim extremists have learned and adapted the language of the West for their purposes...

TAYLOR: Yes, the victimology language. And in order to counter it, there needs to be a profound understanding on the part of Western society as to the nature of Islam and the spectrum of views that exist within it — to distinguish between those Muslims who are politicizing Islam to achieve worldly objectives, and the vast majority of other Muslims who either have no axe to grind, or who have a pluralistic, tolerant, or spiritual understanding of Islam.

When any religion is politicized, it becomes an institution for power; and an institution for power is inherently corrupted by human beings. This phenomenon existed in Europe within Christianity; it existed within Islam since its very early stages; and we still see it coursing through the body of Islam today. But there are Muslim leaders who oppose this. Western governments, institutions, the media, and society at large need to ally ourselves with them and with all Muslims who share our humane universal values.

BLUM: You're saying that the Muslims most visible to the West are those who have politicized Islam to achieve power. How, then, can you expect politicians, bureaucrats, reporters, and the general public to make a distinction between Islam and the actions of

radical Islamists? After all, it is the Muslim Brotherhood that has people writing op-eds in the press, heading NGOs, and funding mosques all over the place.

TAYLOR: It's not difficult to become educated in Islam as a religion and in the history of Islamic movements, past and present. But it requires seriousness. And part of the problem is that people who occupy positions of influence or responsibility in the West often do not take their responsibilities seriously. In addition, the people in the U.S. and most European countries who are tasked with addressing the ideology that underlies and animates terrorism come from non-specialist backgrounds, then occupy positions of responsibility for two or three years. They know nothing when they enter their positions. And even if they learn something while on the job, they're out of it in a short period of time. This means that they have no opportunity to develop any real expertise. Even more problematic is the fact that, even when such people do gain expertise during their tenure, there's no methodology for institutionalizing that expertise.

This is not the case among counter-terrorism experts in the West, who tend to stay in their positions. As such, they study what motivates terrorists, and it doesn't take long for them to ascertain that Islamic terrorism has a strong ideological component. But counter-terrorism professionals are not tasked with delving into the ideology; they're only tasked with preventing acts of terrorism and capturing terrorists. And so we have in the West is an institutional disconnect, where the people tasked with the ideology don't understand it, and the people who understand it are tasked only with its violent manifestation.

BLUM: What can be done about that?

TAYLOR: In order to effectively overcome the coherent, systematic, long-term efforts of the Islamists, we have to adopt certain principles. The first of these — like in medicine — is to do no harm. This is better than acting in ignorance. Because if you have a counter-radicalization effort and don't know what you're doing, the effort itself is going to be the target of infiltration and control by the very people you're seeking to discredit. This is what has happened in the West. Run by people who don't know what they're doing, counter-radicalization efforts have become the target of the Wahabbi-Muslim Brotherhood lobby, which is pursuing a long-term, multi-generational strategy and has the financing and the operatives to embed itself in Western society.

The second principle is, understand. It is absolutely critical that we develop an understanding of the spectrum of views that exist within Islam, and that we understand who our enemies — and allies — are. Once we understand the dynamics of the Muslim world, Islam, and Muslim theology, we have to institutionalize that understanding. When we have the systems in place to institutionalize that understanding, we have to develop systematic strategies to counter and defeat the extremists, our enemies. As we develop these strategies, we have to implement, adjust, fine-tune, expand, and further refine them, based on our experience in the field. It is a simple program, but it requires coherence.

And herein lies another problem. No prescription can be implemented without a societal consensus on the need for such a prescription. So it's necessary to begin an educational process in all sectors of Western society. Because, in the absence of a societal consensus, it will never be possible for us to counter the influence of the Wahabbis and the Muslim Brotherhood in the West who are seeking to prevent it from occurring.

BLUM: How can such a consensus be developed, when there are sectors in the West (i.e., academics, artists, writers and politicians) which hold a dimmer view of the United States

than of Islamism? Some groups even blame U.S. behavior for the 9/11 attacks in particular and for the radicalization of Muslims in general.

TAYLOR: This is a hard-Left narrative, and I don't believe that the hard-Left is part of the solution any more than the hard-Right is. The solution lies in the center of both sides of the political spectrum. There are people on the Left with humanitarian concerns, who can be enticed to whitewash Islam, and say that the actions of the terrorists have nothing to do with Islam, because Islam is a religion of peace. Likewise, there are people on the Right with national-security concerns, who can be drawn into the orbit of Islamophobes. There is a battle going on, both on the Left and on the Right. The hard Left is seeking to influence people on the Left who are simply humanitarians; the hard-Right is seeking to influence people on the Right who are simply security-minded. To disable the efforts of the far-Left and the far-Right, it is necessary to build a broad-based coalition, from the center-Left to the center-Right, bringing together humanitarians and security-oriented people. Such a coalition would recognize that both the far-Left and the far-Right thrive on politicizing the issue of Islam and religion. The dangerous situation in the West today is that there are non-Muslims who are politicizing Islam as much as the Islamists are doing so. And while this is going on, the Wahabbi-Muslim Brotherhood lobby is laughing all the way to the bank, because they are turning their enemies against one another.

BLUM: Which brings us back to the question of whether there isn't too much silence on the part of the non-radical Muslims.

TAYLOR: It is common in the West to hear this claim that Muslims are not speaking up. But Westerners have very little idea about what is being said in the Muslim world. All sorts of Muslims are speaking up — in Indonesia, for example — but they're not being heard in New York, where no one can hear or understand them.

BLUM: But this is the age of the Internet. How is it possible that the Arab world is conducting what it claims are Facebook revolutions, while Indonesian Muslims are supposedly speaking up, yet no one in the West can hear them?

TAYLOR: Most of what emerges from Indonesia is in Indonesian. This is why the LibForAll Foundation decided to translate a book we published in Indonesia in 2009 into English. The book, *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, became a national phenomenon, setting Indonesia ablaze against the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahabbism. Written by the most prominent Muslim spiritual leaders in the country, it exposed the theology of radical Islam, its systematic infiltration into all segments of Indonesian society, and its intention to convert that society — which has been historically pluralistic, tolerant, and a non-religious state — to an Islamic state, it had a decisive influence on the outcome of the 2009 elections.

BLUM: Speaking of elections in the Muslim world, Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi was recently lynched by a mob of Islamists and killed. This, like the ouster of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, was celebrated by U.S. President Barack Obama and many others in the West. But aren't these signs that the moderate Muslims are being abandoned, rather than encouraged?

TAYLOR: A real cause for celebration is when you have a transition to a pluralistic and tolerant state, whose citizens enjoy civil, economic, and religious liberty. Right now, what you have in the Arab world is merely a transition. It's certainly premature to celebrate.

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