

The Case of an Extremist Imam in Italy

Giovanni Giacalone



Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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Summary:

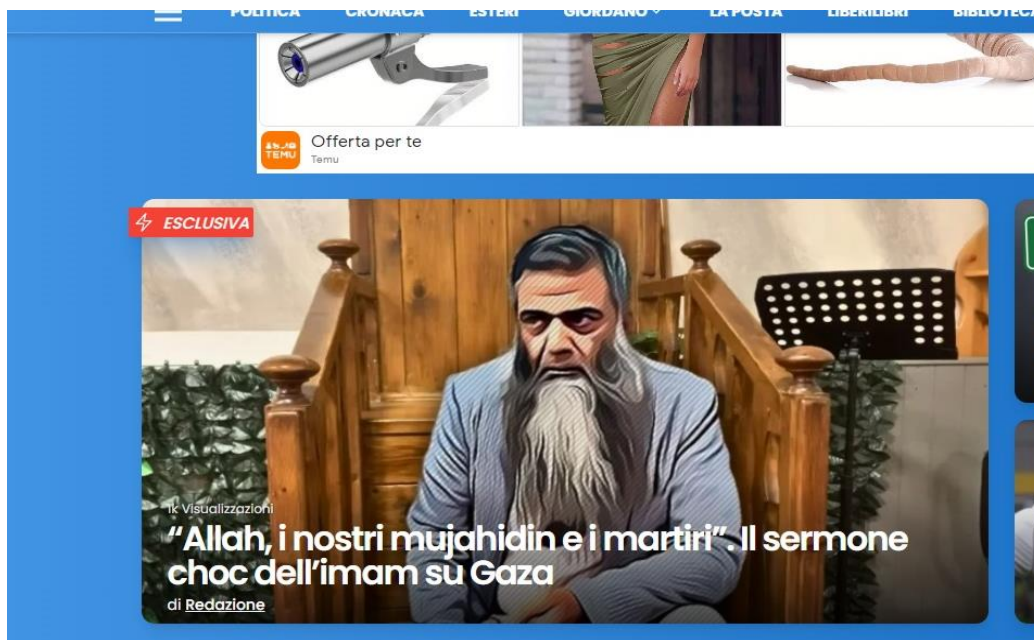
Since the October 7th massacre perpetrated by Hamas against Israelis in the south of the Jewish State, the anti-Israel propaganda at street demonstrations and on the internet boosted throughout Europe and Italy is no exception.

The Mediterranean country, which is a “bridge” between North Africa and Europe, has seen a peak in such activity in multiple sectors such as universities, some media, part of the political arena and, indeed, among the Islamists active in the country.

As any counter-terrorism expert knows, extremist propaganda is the prelude to possible violent actions, it is the gasoline that fuels terror acts, and authorities should therefore intervene as soon as the problem manifests itself. However, this does not always occur, unfortunately.

One case that caught media attention in Italy is the case of Pakistani Tablighi preacher Zulfiqar Khan, originally from Rawalpindi, who holds the role of imam at the Iqraa mosque in Bologna. Such attention is due to the preacher’s violent statements and sermons against Israel, Europe, the UK, the US; against the “Israelites” and constantly against Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu.

On March 27th, 2024, the website of Nicola Porro, a notorious Italian journalist and anchorman, published an article on Khan’s case and raised an important question: if this is Khan’s verbal content that is publicly available, what will he therefore say in private?



Iqraa’s Facebook page is full of videos of sermons by Khan with eloquent titles such as “American military industrial complex, a threat to world peace”; “The destructive role of the United States in destabilizing world peace”; “Continuous hypocrite oppression”, “The definitive end of Israel”, “NATO’s destruction”. Titles that have nothing to do with religion and should find no place in a mosque.

Quranic and Biblical Doctrine to Back Ideological Statements

In order to better understand this issue, it is useful to go deeper into detail, for instance, on November 12th, 2023, in a 13-minutes-long video entitled [“Who are the inhumane and real oppressors”](#) Khan attacked *Libero* daily newspaper co-director Pietro Senaldi and TV anchorman and journalist Paolo Del Debbio for criticizing his statements during Tv show *Dritto e Rovescio* on channel *Rete 4* during which the Pakistani preacher made statements such as: “The Israelites are terrorists and deceivers according to the Bible”, “It’s within the Jewish faith that they have to deceive in order to obtain interest”.



Khan also cited the story of the beheading of John Baptist by King Herod to back his theory on how mean the Jews are. Andrea Delmastro Delle Vedove, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Justice in Giorgia Meloni’s government, strongly criticized Khan’s statements, claiming that they have nothing to do with religion and called them “ideological trash”.

Indeed, Delmastro is correct and it is worth asking why Khan is free to use the pulpit of his mosque for such an activity that has nothing to do with religion.

In the video, Khan quotes the Quranic verse 9:119:

“Oh you who believe! Be afraid of Allah, and be with those who are true.”

He then comments on the verse by saying: “Allah is ordering the Muslims to fear Allah and stay with the truthful, not with the false, liars, deceivers”. (The same adjectives that he uses in his sermons to describe Israel, the US, Europe, the UK, and the governments of some Muslim countries).

At minute 1:14 he relates the topic to the Israel-Hamas war and defines journalists as “slaves of the system” and “slaves of Israel”, indicating them as “fools speaking the language of parrots who should be learning the religion”.

The preacher then makes a hardly comprehensible statement about Israelis killing the prophets: “Israeli misters, not in general, precisely the leaders, to terrorize people, they wouldn’t even see if they had a prophet in front of them who is speaking the truth, to hide the truth they killed prophets, they tortured prophets to terrorize people, and when I said that in Marc 6:17-29 the desire of Herodes’ wife brought to the beheading of John Baptist”.

Khan cites the Quranic verse 5:32:

*“If someone kills a person **who did not kill anyone**, it’s like if he killed the whole humanity”.*

*Shortly after, he states that Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu is “**an assassin** who opened the doors of **genocide**...**Who killed thousands of women and Children...Journalists, doctors, UN representatives**”.*

Now, Quranic verse 5:32 says:

*“Therefore, We ordained for the Children of Israel that he who slays a soul **unless it be (in punishment) for murder or for spreading mischief on earth** shall be as if he had slain all mankind; and he who saves a life shall be as if he had given life to all mankind”.*

Because Khan, in his sermons, constantly refers to the Israelis, the Israelites, Europe, the United States, the UK, to journalists and politicians siding with Israel, as “assassins”, “slaves of the Zionists”, “deceivers”, “terrorists”, “liars”, “oppressors”, “corruptors” (these are some of the terms taken from the videos of Khan’s sermons), citing that verse might instigate fanatics to take action against whoever they perceive as a possible target.

It is also interesting to notice how, in minute 12:35, Khan states:

*“**In Italy, thank to Allah, we are safe, we have the right of the word**”.*

The meaning of this statement is unclear, but it does raise curiosity.

Street Demonstrations and Mosque Preaching

On Friday, February 23rd 2024, Zulfiqar Khan used the pulpit of his IQRAA mosque in Bologna to attack once again the US, the UK, Israel and Europe using a doctrinal rhetoric based on the Quran and the Hadith. The sermon was posted on IQRAA’s Facebook page entitled:

[“Delusions of invincibility of the United States and its allies”](#).

Khan once again used verses from the Quran to describe the situation in Gaza, stating that “Allah said that the Quran, in every age, speaks for the present moment” and citing Quran 43:78 describing “those who hate the Truth”, and 54: 43-46, about the unbelievers and the hour of judgment.

He then immediately moved to the topic of Israel “threatening to bomb children and elderly people in Rafah”. He claimed that “America, Israel and Europe think that they can win because they are a multitude” and he praised Russia, Brazil, China, Iran, and Yemen for contrasting Israel.

And again: “And these terrorists (referring to Western countries fighting the Houthis) say that Yemen is a threat to Europe. Yemen is only asking for a ceasefire in Gaza and everything will go back to normality. And when they saw that their destiny is defeat and they have no way of escape, Germany wanted to confiscate Russian assets. This is the dirty face of these assassins and terrorists”.

As if it wasn’t enough, he stated: “Because Allah sees who is with Israel and the US. If he is unfair, he will have his end...Those who side with Israel and America will come to a bad end”.

The following day, on February 24th, during a pro-Palestinian street demonstration in Milan, Khan stated during a speech that Gaza's war is "a genocide that was planned, designed, by these assassins, supported by America, by the UK".

Additionally, Europe is "enslaved by its boss Netanyahu", because "everyone is enslaved by Israel" and once again accuses Netanyahu of being "a liar, an assassin and the Israelis of aiming to occupy the whole world and killing pregnant women".

Khan then moves to an unlikely anthropological and Biblical theory, and says that: "nobody can prove that Israelis are Semites, because Semites are the children of Sem, son of Noah, and they were Palestinians. Those who come from Poland are not Semites. The antisemite is Netanyahu who is committing genocide in Palestine...Netanyahu's mother tongue is not Hebrew. He came from abroad to kick out the Palestinians. They are not Jews, they are not real Jews. Why did Netanyahu say that he is a descendant of Joseph? He didn't say Yaacov? Because they hate Yaacov".

Some of the videos were very recently removed from IQRAA's Facebook page, but ITCT previously downloaded them.



Figure 1 Zulfiqar Khan during the February 24th demonstration in Milan

Scrolling through IQRAA Italia's [Facebook page](#), it is possible to find plenty of sermons delivered from the pulpit of Khan's Islamic center in Bologna, with different and eloquent titles such as: "American military industrial complex, a threat to world peace"; "Destructive role of the United States in destabilizing world peace"; "Continuous hypocrite oppression".



Figure 2 Khan during a sermon named "Nato's destruction"

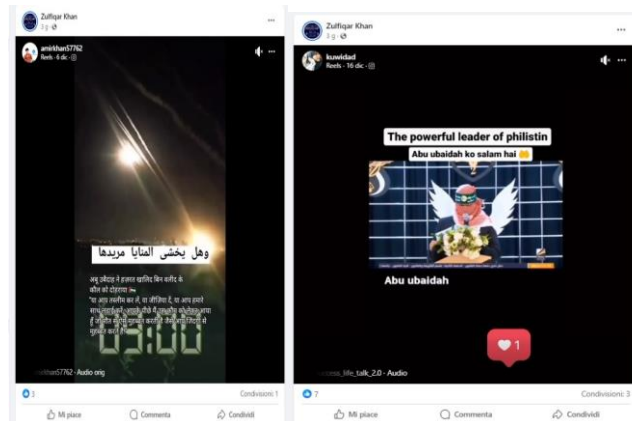


Figure 3 Khan during the sermon entitled "The final end of Israel: what you need to know"



Figure 4 Khan during the sermon entitled: "American industrial military complex, a threat to world peace"

Khan also re-posted several images with clear ideological content:





In a video posted on March 25th 2024 on Iqraa’s Facebook page and entitled “Free Palestine”, he welcomed the US decision not to veto the ceasefire resolution at the UN and later states: “Let’s wait for Allah’s rahma and all the brothers who gave their courage, who supported the mujahidin and we must do a Dua for our martyrs who lost their lives during these months”.



In another sermon entitled “[The pedophiles in the American government and the Zionist role](#)”, published on April 5th, Khan accuses Joe Biden of “forcing his underage daughter to take a shower with him at midnight”.

At the end of the sermon, the preacher also takes it out on the presidents of Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia because “they know nothing” and he invokes “Allah destroy these ”zaalimin, oppressors, as they should be”.

On Friday, April 12th, Khan delivered a particularly aggressive sermon, initially stating that “the Israelites are anti-Semites”, that “Zionists are not Jews” and adding that anti-Semitism did not exist before 1881 when “Germanism succeeded against Judaism” and then “The league of anti-Semitism was born... And the real anti-Semites are the Americans and the Israelites...”.

Shortly after, Khan stated:

“Don’t follow those who hide the truth...Perpetrate jihad against these liars, these assassins”.

The preacher also explained meaning of the term “kafir” as “those who cover/hide the truth”.

Considering that on several occasions Khan accused journalists of “hiding the truth” by siding with Israel and of being “slaves of Netanyahu”, the previous statements are especially concerning as some could interpretate it as a call to launch jihad against journalists.

Khan also said: *“Fight against those who start fighting against you...Islam responds, it does not attack. No war has even been initiated by the Muslims”*.

A few minutes later he defines Joe Biden and Benjamin Netanyahu as *“the horns of Satan”*, *“Very soon we will see how these horns of Satan will end up”* and *“For them there will be an immense punishment”*. At the end of the sermon, the preacher uses the term *“Thaghout”* to indicate the satanic powers to be fought, indeed once again the United States and Israel.

He also attacks those Muslim countries not siding with Iran and Hamas, specifically Morocco, and he further adds that:

“Allah orders to fight against those who are allies of Satan”.

A few Conclusive Considerations

Zulfiqar Khan is not involved in terrorist activity. Moreover, freedom of expression in a democratic society should be safeguarded; however, when this freedom is used to spread hateful propaganda, then it requires measures to clamp it down.

Extremist ideology, which present extreme, all-encompassing, non-questionable positions and which include a complex of beliefs, opinions, representations and values that orient a particular group or individual, is the first of a two-step mechanism that leads to possible violent actions. It is a vital "feeding process" for the transition to violence.

Therefore, permitting the diffusion of such a rhetoric, such verbal content, is not only unacceptable, it is also a serious risk because it is impossible to know if, and how many potentially dangerous individuals receptive to such messages and willing to take action are listening.

Radicalization process

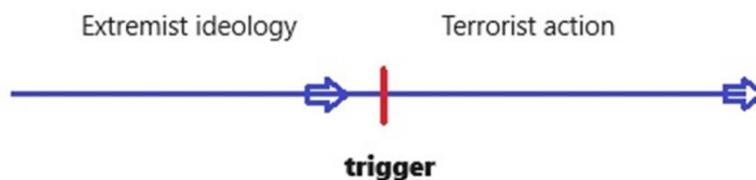


Figure 5 The radicalization line ©GG

One additional matter of concern is the use that Khan makes of Quranic content, taking single verses out of context and relating it to current events that have nothing to do with religion, and therefore using such content for ideological propaganda.

In some cases, his statements reach an interestingly contorted level, for instance, when he states that PM Netanyahu and the Israelis, unlike the Palestinians, are not Semites because they come from Poland. This theory, backed by a very personal view on Biblical genealogy, could not only be interpreted as a way to delegitimize Israeli existence, but it could also be an attempt to avoid accusations of anti-Semitism.

The use that Khan makes of the story of King Herod beheading John Baptist, as cited in the Gospel, could be interpreted as a way to put the Christians against the Jews. Such claims were made during a mainstream TV show in Italy, a Catholic country. Khan seems to forget that John Baptist was himself a Jew who followed Christ, who was also a Jew. Therefore, it does not make much sense unless it is perceived as ideological propaganda.

The use that Khan makes of the term “*kafir*” (those who cover the truth) referring to journalists who do not share his ideological and political views is also a very problematic issue, especially since he also invokes jihad against the “*kafir*”.

Other religious references to the current war between Hamas and Israel, with the depiction of Israel and the United States as “satanic forces”, Joe Biden and Benjamin Netanyahu as “the horns of Satan” recall the use made by the Khomeinism to describe the United States (The Great Satan) and Israel (the Little Satan).

In some cases, Khan also used the Bible to verbally attack Israelis, for instance, on April 8th, he stated that in Ezekiel 22:18 God says, “The house of Israel became dross to me...”, universalizing its meaning and connecting it to the Quranic term “*Maghdhub*” in the first Sura of the Quran as “those who do not follow the orders of Allah”.

The material discussed in this report is just part of a larger content available on Iqraa’s Facebook; a content that is constantly increasing given that the Italian authorities have not yet intervened.

Khan's use of religious sources is of serious concern as he extrapolates and decontextualizes verses and then attributes universal meanings to be linked to current events that have nothing to do with fideistic-religious aspects and therefore uses them for hateful ideological propaganda.

Mosques and Islamic cultural centers are places intended for religious activity and they should not become hubs for extremist and hateful propaganda. It is not a problem just for the audience targeted by such a propaganda, but also for those Muslims who do not wish to see their religious centers transformed into an Islamist propaganda platform.

ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.