ANDREW MARR SHOW
26TH MARCH 2017
BARONESS SAYEEDA WARSI

AN: Welcome, Baroness Warsi. Now, in this book, it’s very interesting, you lay out the pattern, the kind of people who commit terror. And actually in this latest case Masood seems to fit your pattern very neatly.

BW: I do, and one of the questions that I’ve asked for a number of years now is: what actually makes a violent Jihadi, what makes a terrorist? And there is so much expert evidence out today – indeed, from our own intelligence services’ internal documentation, Home Affairs Select Committee, academics, researchers, people who’ve studied deeply the lives of these terrorists, who say that there can be anything between 15 to about 28 different reasons, different telltale signs. And my argument has consistently been that the government has obsessively focused on one, which we refer to as ‘Islamist ideology.’ Ideology is important, but it is but one factor.

AM: And this is another example of somebody who’s not born a Muslim and converts – in this case relatively late in life – and is radicalised in prison. If we had a different way of searching for these people what would it look like?

BW: Well, I think first of all it’s important to know that it’s difficult to search for these people. I think there has in the past unfortunately been a narrative which says that somehow people – for example Muslim communities, know who these people are amongst themselves. That somehow not only do they know them but they’re condoning them or maybe even sheltering them. And I think what we’ve seen in the terrorist attack from last week is that it’s incredibly difficult. This is a young man who was born in a Christian home, born in a fairly comfortable home, seemed to be living a fairly good lifestyle, was popular, then got involved in criminality and didn’t convert to Islam until later on in life. So he
was a violent Christian long before he was a violent Muslim, and
I’m not sure that any of the people who were growing up with
him, indeed his own family, would have known that he would
have gone on to commit such an extreme act. And I think
therefore it’s important for us to go back to what I keep saying is
important: evidence-based policy making.

AM: So why is it, Sayeeda, that you get these damaged, violent,
often drug-taking young men and they convert again and again to
Islam before they commit acts? They don’t convert to evangelical
Christianity or Hinduism. They choose Islam. Why do you think
that is?
BW: Although there are people around the world who are
evangelical Christians and commit violent acts, and extremist
Hindus. Indeed Buddhists who commit extremist acts. People
always want to find a cause. Nobody is going to say, ‘I am an
extremist or a terrorist, I just want to commit violent acts because
that’s the kind of violent man I am,’ which clearly Khalid Masood
was. They want to try and find an air of respectability, a
justification for it. Indeed, if you go back to the GBH that he was
convicted of in early life, there’s some suggestion that the
argument that he presented to court at that time was the he had
been racially abused. So his violent act was based upon his racial
identity. So people will always find a grievance.

AM: In your book you’re very eloquent about the pressure now,
and the sense of black despair felt by a lot of Muslims in this
country about what you call Islamophobia. But isn’t it also the
case that although Islam is a peaceful religion for the vast
majority of people, there is a strain of modern Islamic thought
deobandi, and particularly salafi Islam, which is extremely
aggressive, it sees life on this planet as an eternal fight between
the righteous and the kafir, the unbelievers, and that’s a real fight
– and that is a real problem for your religion?
BARONESS SAYEEDA WARSI

BW: Well, I think Madeleine Albright put it much better than I could ever put it. She said every religious text has the potential to create eternal peace and every religious text has the potential to create war. And therefore I think if you take any religious text of any religion and try and interpret it in a way which justifies violence we can do that. My own view has been – I come from a very mixed theological background. I have come from a strong sunni family, a big shiah influence, I grew up with Sufi influence, grew up actually in a deobandi mosque in the heart of Savile Town in Dewsbury, and I therefore feel that isn’t a theological view, it is actually people who are violent and extreme and who will use any text to try and justify their position.

AM: In your book, *The Enemy Within*, you have a lot of recommendations for different groups, including for Muslims in Britain. Can you just sum up what you think has to change in our Muslim communities in Britain, because a lot of them are quite closed off from the rest of society and, as it were, they’ve turned their backs on mainstream British society?

BW: So one of the arguments that I make in the book is that Britain and Islam have known each other since 7th century Britain. We’ve had interactions for hundreds and hundreds of years. And it’s important, especially for a post-9/11 generation who’ve known nothing but this war on terror and the counter-terrorism policies, that there is a world before all of this and it’s important for us to contextualise that relationship much broader than the last 10 or 15 years. And one of the arguments I have an open conversation with my dear co-religionists in this book, what I say to them is I’m having this conversation with you not because you’re terrorists, because you’re not, there are three million of them – us – and everybody in the country would have perished if they were. But actually are we as a community fit for purpose? It is a very personal conversation. It is something that I’ve thought about for a long time. So what I talk to the British Muslim communities about is not about counter-terrorism, but what I talk about is
whether they are the best community they could possibly be for Britain 2017.

AM: When the state is dealing with Islamic ideology they have this strategy which is called –

BW: Islamist ideology.

AM: Islamist ideology. They don’t like the word...

BW: Well, it’s not actually correct. I mean, for me Islamism in itself –

AM: We’re getting into a very difficult verbal discussion...

BW: It’s an academic discussion.

AM: Nevertheless, when you are against this thing, whatever it is, they have this strategy called Prevent, which you’re very, very critical of. Just explain to us why you think the government strategy isn’t working.

BW: Well, Prevent is part of the counter-terrorism strategy, it’s one of the four strands. And there is lobby out there which absolutely trashes Prevent and says we don’t need it. There’s another lobby out there which says it’s absolutely perfect, and I think my colleagues in government, and indeed where I would stand, is I think the reality is somewhere in between. I think Prevent in its current form has huge problems. I think it’s broken. I think the brand is toxic. I think there are question marks about the training, about the trainers, about the level of quality of training within schools, about how it’s being implemented on the front line, and therefore what I’ve asked for is a pause, an independent review, a look at what has worked and what hasn’t worked, and then put in place a Prevent-like strategy which is upstream, but one which is deeply trusted by the communities that it’s trying to engage.

AM: A moment of calm and clever reflection. Sayeeda Warsi, thank you very much indeed for talking to us.