

# **“It is you who has gotten the wrong end of the stick”.**

## **An Islamic State Warrior speaks out to Danes**

*Mehmet Ümit Necef*

### **News**

Enes Ciftci, the first person in Denmark sentenced for having gone to Syria to fight for Islamic State, addressed the Danish people directly through a letter published on the homepage of the Danish TV-channel TV2. The letter was accompanied by an interview with Ciftci conducted by a journalist from the channel.

### **Summary**

Enes Ciftci, both in his open letter and in the interview, criticizes the Western and Danish military interventions in Muslim countries, declares his allegiance to IS and explains why IS violence against Western civilians is necessary and legitimate. His main argument is that since the Western powers bomb and kill Muslim civilians, especially in Iraq, Afghanistan and in Syria, the Muslims have the right to do the same against Western civilians. The Western violence and brutality against Muslims justifies Muslim retaliation in the same manner. Moreover, Ciftci thinks in terms of “collective guilt”. That is, according to him all Westerners are guilty as long as their governments inflict pain and death on Muslims through their military interventions. Finally, Ciftci also directs critique against Muslim men who do not join IS.

### **Key Words**

Islamic State, Enes Ciftci, justification of violence

### **About the Author**

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### **Analysis:**

Enes Ciftci, the first person in Denmark to be sentenced for having joined Islamic State (IS), addressed the Danish people directly by writing an open letter to TV2, the biggest private channel in the country. He apparently wanted to present his reasons for supporting IS to the broad public by utilizing the occasion of the appeal case against him starting the following day, 20 February.

On 24 June 2016 Ciftci was sentenced to seven years in jail for having been recruited by IS, having gone to Syria to join their ranks and finally for having donated money to the organization. During the trial Ciftci denied the accusation that he went to Syria to fight and claimed that he went there to work as a baker.

In addition to imprisonment, the prosecution had also demanded he be stripped of his Danish citizenship as well as expatriation to Turkey. Since the court did not go along with these two demands, pointing to the fact that he is born in Denmark and has no family in Turkey except a grandmother and an uncle, the prosecution had appealed the court ruling.

Accompanying excerpts from the letter was an interview with him conducted in the prison where he is confined.<sup>1</sup> Both in his open letter and the interview, Ciftci criticizes the West and Denmark in an outspoken manner, declares his allegiance to IS and presents his views without mincing words.

### **Ciftci's justifications for violence against civilians**

Ciftci's open letter and the interview are unique in the Danish context, since it is the first time a person sentenced as a terrorist associated with IS has spoken openly in an interview and written an open letter to the Danish public. In both the letter and the interview Ciftci invests a lot of effort to justify the use of violence against Western civilians. To present the reasons Ciftci puts forward to substantiate that IS terrorist attacks on civilians are legitimate, I will quote extensively from both texts, the contents of which supplement each other.

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<sup>1</sup> I contacted journalist Anders Lomholt, who conducted the interview and asked for the whole text. Lomholt promised to return to me after he gets Ciftci's permission to give me the whole text. I have not gotten a positive response as yet.

1. Eye for an eye: The West kills innocent civilians in Muslim countries, and IS takes revenge by doing the same in Westerns countries.

After stating his support for Islamic State's violence, Ciftci elaborates his reasons: "After all, it is not us who does something wrong. It is you who has gotten the wrong end of the stick. It is you, who is the reason behind why there are people like me and all the others who support Islamic State. .... It is USA and Denmark and a number of Western countries who have bombed and killed thousands of innocent civilians in the Middle East. First in Iraq, then in Afghanistan, and now in Syria. Your interventions have made these conflicts much worse than they ever would be, if they were left alone. Why should you get involved in things which have nothing to do with you?" (Ciftci, quoted after Lomholt 2017).

The journalist objects to his justification of violence against Western civilians by saying, "But because you and others think the West's intervention in the conflicts in the Middle East is wrong, it doesn't justify terror attacks on innocent people, for example in Nice where a lorry crashed into a big crowd". Ciftci answers back: "You kill the innocent each day. We don't hear about that in the Danish media. But when revenge strikes at some civilians in France or in Germany, then it suddenly becomes a huge story. The fact is that we just hit back the same way as you hit my brothers and sisters in Syria" (Ciftci, quoted after Lomholt 2017).

In the letter he reiterates the same line of argumentation: "We live in a time, in which politicians together with their friends stand in line to fight against Islam and Muslims. For many years one has killed thousands without giving a thought to the consequences. Now it is so that one cannot just throw bombs at the heads of Muslims without any consequences: If one can afford to participate in a war, then one should also pay the price" (Ciftci 2017).

2. "Collective guilt"

Ciftci thinks in terms of the concept of "collective guilt" without using the term itself. This concept means that individuals are held responsible for the actions of other members of their family, ethnic or religious group, nation or any other human congregation, without actively collaborating in those actions. The individual in question does not even have to have lived at the time of the action. Let's see how Ciftci reasons in the framework of "collective guilt". To the journalist's remark, "I have difficulty to accept that if I meet you somewhere in the world, you would cut my throat, because I am not a Muslim. Can you understand that?", he answers frankly: "I have nothing personal against you, Anders. But you must understand that you are a part of the Danish

society. And you have gone into war against the Muslims. I hear neither you nor others shout about it. I neither see that you overthrow your government. Therefore, you are a part of this fight, and you must accept that" (Ciftci, quoted after Lomholt 2017).

So any Dane, even a Danish child, is guilty and can justifiably be murdered simply by being a member of a society which is involved in conflicts in Muslim countries, for example by sending war planes to bomb areas under IS control in Syria.

3. We have no other alternative than resorting to violence.

Ciftci uses an argument, which has traditionally been used in many other contexts by groups with very different ideologies and political aims such as RAF in Germany, PKK in Turkey, ETA in Spain and IRA in Northern Ireland: The regime, the state, the capitalist/imperialist system, the West, the bourgeoisie, the *kuffar*, etc., does not leave us any other alternative than resorting to violence and brutality. In this universe which endorses violence as a legitimate means of achieving the "right" aims, use of violence is constructed not as a conscious political choice, but as an absolute necessity of circumstances. It is as if the powerful enemy condemns the victim of suppression to commit violence and brutality.

Let's see how he uses this argument. The journalist asks him: "How come you ever can defend an attack on the innocent as for example in Nice? It can after all be anyone who is affected. For that matter also people who agree with you". And the IS-warrior answers in accordance with the "party line": "When my leaders order that kind of an attack, it is because it is the only possible way we can strike back. On the battlefield in Syria we are hit by bombs and drones from the air, against which we have no chance to defend ourselves. If you had sent soldiers instead, we could have fought man-to-man on the ground. That would be a fair fight. But when you hit us in such a way that we cannot defend ourselves, then it is fair that we strike back in a way where you yourself are defenseless. Therefore attacks as in Nice take place, and it would not surprise me, if more of such attacks are on the line" (Ciftci, quoted after Lomholt 2017).

In his letter Ciftci resorts also to sentimental rhetoric: "When the enemies choose to bomb from the air, we have no possibility to protect our women and children. So it is also fair that brothers strike back in situations, in which it is you who are defenseless. Therefore attacks as we have seen in Paris and Belgium take place" (Ciftci 2017). In Ciftci's argumentation, the targets of Western bombs are glibly transformed from "we" to "our women and children".

### **The honourable and the disloyal**

Besides arguing for the necessity and the moral legitimacy of terrorist attacks on civilians, Ciftci does two more things in the letter. The first is that he refers to a well-known redefinition of the concept of terrorism: "The word terrorist is a word created by the West, and which is used against Muslims. When terror comes from the oppressed, it is not terrorism any more, but a freedom fight. Anybody who calls to Islam and fights for it will be persecuted and will be called a terrorist. Democracy is a living proof of the fact that as soon as there is something one doesn't like, it is criminalized. It is hypocrisy on high level" (Ciftci 2017).

Secondly, he appeals indirectly to Muslim men in Denmark and criticizes their lack of support for IS's fight: "It is an honour to be together with loyal people. Brothers, who do not come with excuses, and who gets up from their warm beds, when help is needed" (Ciftci 2017). With these remarks Ciftci is apparently trying to shame Muslim men and appeal to their bad conscience. The message between the lines seem to be that those Muslim men who don't join IS are not real men, but just a bunch of disloyal, lazy, selfish and conformist cowards.

An important detail should be noted to make his mindset more intelligible: Enes Ciftci has in connection with the trial changed his rural and peaceful name to the more martial and sanguine sounding Hamza Cakan. The original family name Ciftci means simply farmer, and the name Enes stems from a minor figure in Islamic history. However, Hamza was a major figure, being the youngest uncle of Mohammad and one of his first followers. He was well known as a fierce warrior and was martyred during a battle with the pagans. The newly chosen family name, Cakan, means "striker" in Turkish, and the root verb "cak" is normally used in relation to lightning. Apparently he wanted to sound more valiant than his quiet family name suggested. Since he, according to TV2, still calls himself Enes Ciftci and has given his approval that TV2 can use his original name, I refer to him by his original name in the article.

It is clear from his rhetoric that Ciftci has problems with democracy, calling it "hypocrisy on high level". However, he cannot but be conscious at least on one level of the fact that his statements in his letter and the interview can only be uttered in a liberal democratic country. It would not be unjust to say that even in Turkey, probably still one of the most democratic Muslim-majority countries, a media outlet would have difficulties if it ever dared to publish such statements directly from the mouth and pen of a person convicted of terrorism.

Moreover, in spite of his hostility to democracy, Ciftci still does not refrain from referring to a basic principle in liberal democracies: Freedom of speech and the necessity to differentiate between speech and an act, for example between fiery speech

and a violent act. To the journalist's question of whether or not he is worried that his statements in the interview will harm his appeal case, he says: "I ought to be punished for my actions, not my views. It is not fair to expel me just because I have another opinion". Of course, he is right. We will soon see if the appeal court decides that his acts are sufficiently grave to strip him of his Danish citizenship and expel him from Denmark.

### **Literature:**

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