

TRACING THE TERROR REGIME: UNDERSTANDING ISLAMIC FAULT LINES

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'I think that the best way to solve problems and to fight against war is through dialogue. For me the best way to fight against terrorism and extremism... just a simple thing: educate the next generation.'

- Malala Yousafzai

The above quote by Malala Yousafzai might seem idealistic and preachy yet the avenue of education could possibly be our only sustaining resort in combating the relentless global crusade against terrorism. Terrorism the very term signifies a systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion. It is a term that is politically and emotionally loaded and this greatly compounds the difficulty of providing a precise definition. The concept of terrorism may itself be controversial as it is often used by State authorities to delegitimize political or other opponents and potentially legitimize the state's use of armed force against opponents. The term terror¹ comes from the Latin word 'terrere' which means to frighten. The final goal maybe to achieve religious, ideological or political objectives. However, education in the above quote does not solely mean awakening a misled terrorist to a righteous path, it also would include in its ambit 'us' the wronged populace from emerging as 'victims' of terrorism to 'the populace' who have previously played the role of perpetrators actively practicing 'islamophobia'. This paper would trace the concept, causes and the situations that perpetuate Terrorism, the current challenges and suggestions to curb the same within the present international paradigm.

(i) International Islamic Isolation: Islamophobia:

Recent research², published by Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins of the US Department of National Security Affairs, set out to identify why Muslims in Western societies embrace violent extremism.

¹ . George E., Rush, The Dictionary of Criminal Justice (5th ed.), (Guildford, CT: McGraw-Hill, 2002) 204-205.

Ahmad Kurshid, Sayyid Abul A La Mawdudi's Towards Understanding Islam, (Leicestershire, The Islamic Foundation, 1981) 100-101.

²Adrian Cherney, "Could Islamophobia lead to more Terrorism?", The Chronicle 4 December 2015, 2 February 2016 <<http://www.thechronicle.com.au/news/could-islamophobia-lead-more-terrorism/2862839/>>.

This research identified four causes:

- personal and collective grievances;
- networks and interpersonal ties;
- political and religious ideologies; and
- enabling environments and support structures.

It becomes increasingly imperative to analyze the driving factors that seem to radicalise seemingly innocent people into ruthless terrorists. Comprehensively, the factors pertaining to personal and collective grievances would include issues of economic marginalisation and cultural alienation. This results into a sense of victimisation and misgivings regarding foreign policies and attitudes adopted by particularly Western governments and societies. Networks and personnel ties refer to existing kinship and friendship ties that help reinforce extremist beliefs. Political and religious ideologies help to demonise enemies and justify violence against them. They also help create incentives to use violence. Enabling environments and support structures include physical and virtual settings - such as the internet, social media and prisons - that provide ideological and material aid for radicalising individuals. Tackling these causes in a holistic way is what is required to counter violent extremism effectively.

Is terrorism really the consequence of an ill-informed young supposed ‘jihadi’ who after a lifetime of exploitation meted out to him has been ingrained a life-doctrine that vengeance upon a western culture is the only remedy for the countless wrongs committed against the Islamic culture, faith and its people. Organizations like Jaish-e-Muhammed, the Indian Mujahhedan, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State are nothing but mercenary organizations misleading a confused segment of population where there is an abyss of capable and assertive political leadership. The concept of ‘Jihad’ has been fractured and moulded to take the shape of a cast where its original and true meaning has lost its essence. We are all living in this world where the term ‘Jihadi’ can very well go to signify a ‘terrorist’. However, Terrorism is in fact completely the opposite of Jihad. Ironically, the self styled custodians of Islam have chosen to forget that ‘Islam’ means peace and that the Holy Quran teaches tolerance towards other faiths and religions.

“There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break. Allah is Hearer, Knower.” (2:256). No doubt, Islam does provide guidelines for war. But in those guidelines, the killing of women, children, the old and the weak

is expressly forbidden. Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the first Caliph, fundamentally told Islamic armies: *“I instruct you in ten matters: Do not kill women, children, the old, or the infirm; do not destroy any town.”*³ Sadly the late Abu-Bakr-Al Baghdadi of the Islamic State selectively solely adopted the name and not the principles of the first caliphate.

(ii) Misinterpreted Ideologies: Conflict zones & Fault lines within the Religion

Using religion to justify an illogical terror regime which may manifest in the form of the rubble of the twin towers in New York, the Mumbai mayhem, the cowardly Peshawar school attack, or the very recent Paris carnage is even more cruel and heinous than the act itself. That’s because two carnal sins are committed—the murders themselves, and then defamation of Islam by using religion to justify them. Needless to say, the distortion of the term ‘Jihad’ has been distorted and manipulated to fulfil the ambitions of capricious self acclaimed leaders of numerous mercenary ‘terrorist’ outfits rendering out diktats in the name of religion. Abul Ala Maududi,⁴ the political philosopher and scholar, explaining the term ‘Jihad’ in his book ‘Towards understanding Islam states, ‘Jihad should be under guidance of the Quran and Prophet’s Hadith, otherwise it is not Jihad but violence. (The Hadith, is a written record of the Prophet’s teachings). Maududi explains: ‘Jihad in Islam is not merely a ‘struggle’. It is instead a ‘struggle’ for the ‘Cause of Allah’. The ‘Cause of Allah’ is essential for the term of ‘Jihad’ in Islam. Unfortunately, the cause of Allah in the post 9/11 era has come to mean not the protection of the innocents but the procurement of money, power and politics by the rogue terrorist organizations. These outfits are capitalizing on the grievances of the already weak and fragile and conjuring up a warped global notion of jihad.

In more ways than one, Syria’s siege by the Islamic State is a manifestation of the growing extremism affirmatively waving the lethal terrorism flag under the guise of enforcing the Muslim ‘Sharia’ law. It seeks to convert or eliminate the ‘kafirs’ or the infidels i.e. anyone who rejects the truth of Islam. Interesting to note here is that the kafirs are markedly the Western countries and the Shia Muslims. The draconian divide between the Shia Muslims and the Sunni Muslims is as historic and relevant even today to completely comprehend the current status of the Islamic State’s vendetta against the Shia Muslims in the Middle East.

³ Abu Zafar, “Jihad is Not Terrorism. Terrorism is not Jihad,” 22 December 2014, Quartz India, 9 February 2016. < <http://qz.com/316516/jihad-is-not-terrorism-terrorism-is-not-jihad/>>.

⁴ Ahmad Kurshid, Sayyid Abul A La Mawdudi’s Towards Understanding Islam, (Leicestershire, The Islamic Foundation, 1981) 100-101.

(iii) Shia – Sunni division:

The Sunni-Shia conflict⁵ is 1,400 years in the making, dating back to the years immediately after the Prophet Mohammed's death in 632. The Prophet died without having appointed a successor leading to a massive split over the future of the rapidly growing religion – chiefly whether the religion's next leader should be chosen by a kind of democratic consensus, or whether only Mohammed's blood relations should reign. The arguments are complicated but essentially boil down to the fact that Sunnis believe the Prophet's trusted friend and advisor Abu Bakr was the first rightful leader of Muslims or "caliph", while Shias believe that Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law Ali was chosen by Allah to hold the title. Both men did eventually hold the title – Abu Bakr first until his death, and Ali fourth after two previous caliphs were assassinated – but the schism really hit over who should come next. While Sunni Muslims argue that their interpretation of Islam follows the Sunnah (ways of Mohammed), Shias argue that Ali was the rightful first caliph and only his descendants could claim to be the true leaders of Muslims. The tension is not eased by a Hadith in which the Prophet was quoted as saying: "My Ummah (community) will be fragmented into seventy-three sects and all of them will be in the Hell fire except one." Inevitably both Sunnis and Shias claim to be the one "pure" Islamic sect. The Sunni-Shia split led to each denomination developing its own unique cultures, doctrines and schools of thought. The vast majority of the Muslims in the world are Sunni, amounting to as much as 85% of the religion's adherents. They are spread all over the globe – from Morocco to Indonesia - and make up the dominant religion in North Africa and the Middle East. Only Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain have a Shia majority, although there are also significant Shia populations in Yemen, Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria and Qatar. India too boasts of a dominant Shia population which is however in minority in comparison with other religions⁶.

⁵ John Hall, "Sunni and Shia muslims: Islam's 1,400-year-old divide explained", *The Independent* 4 January 2016, 2 February 2016 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/sunni-and-shia-islams-1400-year-old-divide-explained-a6796131.html>>

⁶ Adam Withnall, "The Middle East divide between Sunni and Shia explained in one map", *The Independent* 5 January 2016, 2 February 2016 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/the-middle-east-divide-between-sunni-and-shia-explained-in-one-map-a6797796.html>>.

Iraq⁷ was ruled by the Sunni Saddam Hussein for more than 20 years, during which time he brutally oppressed Shia Muslims. The current conflict in Iraq is fuelled by sectarian rivalries too, which embattled President Bashar al-Assad and his family members of the Shia Alawite-sect, while many of the insurgent groups in his country – including the Islamic State terror group – are Sunni adherents. Paradoxically the so called ‘terrorist’ organizations are also equally polarized in their sectarian belief schemes. The infamous Al-Qaeda is a sunni based terror outfit and the Hezbollah is a Shia based terror organization. They share few similarities beyond the use of violence. Hezbollah has developed a political wing that competes in elections and is part of the Lebanese government, a path not chosen by al-Qaeda, which operates a diffuse network largely in the shadows. Both groups have deployed suicide bombers, and their attacks shifted from a focus on the West and Israel to other Muslims, such as al-Qaeda’s killing of Shia civilians in Iraq and Hezbollah’s participation in the Syrian civil war.

Al-Qaeda⁸ in Iraq had been decimated by Sunni Iraqis who joined the fight against extremists, the U.S.-led military surge, and the death of Zarqawi, its leader, in a 2006 U.S. airstrike, but found new purpose exploiting the vacuum left by the receding Syrian state. It established its own transnational movement known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The group expanded its grip on Sunni provinces in Iraq and eastern regions in Syria, seizing Iraq’s second-largest city, Mosul, in June 2014. It defied orders from al-Qaeda’s top commanders to curtail its transnational ambitions and wanton violence against civilians, which led to the militant group’s expulsion from al-Qaeda in February 2014. ISIS rebranded as the Islamic State in July 2014 and declared its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, as caliph. The group’s highly publicized killing of Western hostages triggered a campaign of air strikes by the United States and its regional allies Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Syria’s civil war, in which a quarter million people have been killed and eleven million—more than half the country’s prewar population—displaced, has amplified sectarian tensions to unprecedented levels. The war began with peaceful protests in 2011 calling for an end to the Assad regime. Decades of the Assad family’s repression of Syria’s majority Sunni population and elevation of minority Alawis in government and the private sector has sown sectarian strife. Assad’s

⁷Council on Foreign Affairs, “The Sunni-Shia Divide”, February 2014, Council on Foreign Affairs, 9 February 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#!/?cid=otr-marketing_url-sunni_shia_infoguide>

⁸ Adrian Humphreys, “The Sunni-Shia split at the heart of regional conflict in the middle east explained”, The National Post 18 November 2015, 2 February 2016 <<http://news.nationalpost.com/news/world/israel-middle-east/the-sunni-shia-split-at-the-heart-of-regional-conflict-in-the-middle-east-explained>>

suppression of the Sunnis in Syria is of course a major reason for the full throttle attack of the Islamic State eliminating the Shias and Shia supporters from Syria.

As of now in a major turn of events, in the G20 Summit, post the Paris attack, participant countries came to a consensus that the Hezbollah group which was previously categorized as having ties with rogue organizations now was incumbent to arrive at a solution for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition, which would be preceded by UN-mediated negotiations between the Syrian opposition and regime as well a ceasefire between Assad's forces and curbing the Islamic State.

(iv) Challenges & Solutions in the Social Sciences Paradigm

As social science theorists we are inevitably going to struggle to achieve a solution to this vicious international dilemma that threatens to dismember not just life of an infinite number of innocents but also a culture and faith that is fast being boycotted and ambushed into a corner. The context of violent passages in Islam⁹ is more ambiguous than might be expected of a perfect book from a loving God. Most contemporary Muslims exercise a personal choice to interpret their holy book's call to arms according to their own moral preconceptions about justifiable violence.

As Pentti Linkola writes 'The difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter is a matter of perspective: it all depends on the observer and the verdict of history.' Holistically whatever be the verdict of this historical strife, it is imperative that innocents not be the casualty amidst the chaos and confusion of acquiring political and financial power. The façade maybe structured differently whether the terrorist act occurs in Paris or Pathankot. Refugees flocking to escape the tyranny of a rogue organization practicing ethnic cleansing can never be backed by logic. The Western countries despite being the primal soft target of IS are opening up their gateways to allocate the consequences of a war they never participated in. Terrorists posing as migrants might, of course, conduct terrorist attacks, but that risk exists even without refugees.

The fundamental question to be probed is finally that 'Is Terrorism the new normal?' As an intellectual from social sciences and as a global citizen I would abhor resigning to that rhetoric. As John L. Esposito aptly writes "Critical to the fight against global terrorism is an ability to move beyond presuppositions and stereotypes in our attitudes and policies and to form partnerships that transcend an "us" and "them" view of the world." I think the above

⁹ TROP, The Religion Of Peace, "What does Islam teach about", 2002-2016, What makes Islam so different, 4 February 2016. <<http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/pages/quran/violence.aspx>>

statement captures the essence of the solution that I propose to give through this paper. Partnerships that would go to create an effective dialogue between not just powerful yet victim countries, not just between Hollande Francois & Narendra Modi or Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama but also between the perpetrators and the victims. This is imperative because the solution is not just imposing one power bloc over throttling the prevalent rogue dictator. It is imperative that the global exclusion that Muslims are confronting be faced. The 26/11 Ajmal Kasab was not the product of Pakistan. He was the creation of ignorance, exploitation and a self styled dictator like Lakhvi and Hafiz Saeed. Thanks to these factors today, a Kasab is born in some part of the world daily. He can raid our home anytime, kill or be killed at any cost. You can never fight and win against someone who can shoot you once and then run off and hide while you have to remain eternally on guard. You have to attack the source of your enemy's strength. In this case, that enemy is not that one man terrorist army that creeps into Pathankot or sails into Mumbai. The only way to defeat them is to build relationships with them, to draw them into the modern world with education and business, so that an illogical and capricious leader harbouring a rogue thought does not handover ammunitions to an unassuming and vulnerable youth. Otherwise the fight will go on forever.