

Islam and Terrorism: An Overview

BY

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It is quite obvious terrorism affects all nations around the globe and it has many forms, with different meanings depending on the angle one views it. Many countries define terrorism, draw up terrorist profiles, and publish lists of terrorists' organizations in the light of their own national interests. A terrorist organization to some countries is limited to freedom fighters to others. What one country sees as terrorist nations, another welcomes as loyal allies, but in general term, terrorism is the use of threat of violence to create fear and harm. The word Islam means submission and peace. True religions thus reflect submission to the will of Allah, which begets peace and harmony with fellow human beings and with all creation. It is no wonder, therefore, that Islam as part of its attempts to ensure there is harmony and peace has directed all Muslims to avoid anything likely to bring about dissention, division, disunity and strife. Therefore, Islam like any other religion in the world cannot be held accountable for global terrorism. This paper recommends that it is desirous for the Muslim world to educate their followers on the principles of Islam and also have dialogue with the leaders of other religions on the activities of terrorists. It is also important for United Nations to issue guidelines on the fight against terrorism which must focused on the activities of terrorists around the world without shifting blame to any religion. These guidelines shall state the importance of world peace without undermining human rights and freedom of religion.

INTRODUCTION

The word terrorism and its derivatives are some of the oft-repeated words you hear in the Western media today. It is so often and so now uses the words terrorism, terrorist, terrorize, and terror almost exclusively to refer to Muslim personalities, organizations and nations. This strategy of theirs, this brainwashing, has indeed paid off because to many people the word terrorist is almost synonymous with Muslims, and terrorism with the teaching of Islam, which are not in line with Western ideas about human behavior. The word terrorism and its cousin extremism are used to depict anyone who sticks to

observing prayers in their appointed time and those who defend themselves against oppression are often described as extremist and terrorists respectively.

These accusations and their aftermath have also portrayed the West as the true champions of human right, fighting for the enthronement of peace against a religion that disregards peace. The onslaught as championed by U.S., a country regarded as “the world police” and viewed as the liberator of the human race had led to the death of silencing of millions of Muslims accused of being terrorist has been instilled into the heart of most nations of the world while the United States and her allies are positioned s the only group that can put check to this unwholesome threat.¹

The question therefore remains; how sincere is the quest to rid the world of terrorism today. Indeed, it could be deduced from history that, those who today claim to fight for the world have themselves inflicted the worst of atrocities on the poor inhabitants of the world. Right from the onset, the values they stood for brought about the enslavement of fellow humans then termed colonialism, now coated globalization. In essence, their conduct over the years has reflected the dictate”.... only permanent interest” will they now fifth for the world².

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to address the issue of terrorism, whether global or local, while reflecting on the Islamic perspective on it and the role Muslims – particularly Islamic scholars should play in highlighting the true teachings of Islam and its relationship with the people of other faith.

To do this, the paper will first address the issue of what is meant by terrorism. Next it will address the features and attributes of terrorism. After this, the paper will look at the meaning of Islam and its teachings. The paper will finally come out with observations and recommendations.

¹ Abdulkareem Harun, *September 11 before and Beyond* (Newith: Ismalic Heritage Foundation), 2002 vii.

² Ibid.

MEANING OF TERRORISM

There is no single universally acceptable definition of the word terrorism. With terrorism dominating the world's agenda, the definition of terror, terrorist and terrorism assume a whole new importance. Many countries define terrorism, draw up terrorist profiles, and publish lists of terrorists' organizations in the light of their own national interests. A terrorist organization to some countries is limited to freedom fighters to others. What one country sees as terrorist nations, another welcomes as loyal allies, but in general term, terrorism is the use of threat of violence to create fear and harm.³

Thus, terrorists commit all sorts of atrocities like murder, kidnapping, hijacking of aero planes, setting of bombs etc in order to achieve their goals and objectives.

According to Harun Yahya, there are two distinct characteristics of terrorism:

1. Targeting civilian: Any occupied country has the right to resist an army occupying its territory. But if that resistance includes attacks on civilian as targets, any justification ceases to apply, and terrorism begins. This definition is entirely in accord with Islamic rules on war. The Prophet (S.A.W.) commanded his followers to do battle against those who declare war on them. But he also ordered them to never regard civilians as targets. On the country every Muslim was ordered – and still obliged – to take great care to ensure the safety of non-combatants.
2. Destroying Peace: If no state of war exists, then terrorism can include attacks on military or official targets. Attacks intended to break down

³ A. A. Gwandu “Global Terrorism and Islamic Scholarship” (UDUS: Paper Presented at the NARAIS National Conference, 2004) at 2.

peaceful relations between countries or communities are acts of terrorism, even when aimed at military target.⁴

FEATURES OF TERRORISM

Terrorist acts are committed for various reasons. Some terrorists group support a particular political philosophy or world view, others represent ethnic groups which feel marginalized and seek to liberate themselves from the government of the day but cannot hope to engage government in a face – to face military encounter. Some terrorists may also engage in terrorism in order to force their religious views on others. In fact there are so many causes for which terrorist groups may be formed.

It can clearly be seen from the above that terrorism may be sponsored but any group of people or government, and that is knows no state, religious or ethnic boundary.

HISTORY OF TERRORISM

It may not be possible to state with any degree of certainty when organized terrorism first took place in human history. However, if we extend the meaning of terrorism to cover any violent acts of aggression against someone then we can say that *Qabil* (Cain) was the first terrorist on earth for he killed his brother *Habil* (Abel) out of jealousy. Nearer our time, however, an American group, the Ku Klux Klan, an extremist organization, used violence to terrorize the Blacks and anyone who had any sympathy for them after the end of the American Civil War in 1865 and during the early part of the last century of the Christian Era. In Germany, in the 1930's Adolf Hitler used terrorism to eliminate his opponents

⁴ Harun Yahya, Only love can Defeat Terrorism (Lagos: AL-Hikmat Islamic Publisher, 2003) 8.

or keep them quiet, so did Benito Mussolini of Italy and Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union.⁵

Another wave of terrorism began during the 1960's like the Red Brigade in Italy and the Red Army faction in West Germany. These two groups sought the destruction of the then political and economic systems in their respective home countries, and the development of new systems. Among the terrorists groups and organizations formed around this period was the Jewish group, which came into existence before the independence of Israel in 1948. This group was reckless in the use of terror as a weapon against the British in order to spend the end of the British rule in Palestine and create a Jewish homeland. An example was the blowing up of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. Since the 1960's various Palestinian groups had also been formed and have carried out campaigns against Israel, seeking to destroy it and establish an independent Palestinian state just as the Israeli terrorist group had earlier done. Similarly, the provisional Irish Republican Army which was established in 1970 uses violence in its fight to rid Northern Ireland of British rule which they perceived as a form of colonialism against the people of Ireland. Many other terrorist organizations are found now spread all over the world.⁶

The most amazing thing, however, is that despite all the above mentioned terrorist groups and organizations, the majority of which sprang up in Europe and America, the West and its allies do not associate them with terror as they do with the Al-Qaeda and other groups with links to some Muslims. Indeed, terrorism is a condemnable act, but no one group that commits the act should be singled out for mention from among many others. Just as we hear, Muslim terrorists we should also hear Christian terrorist, Jewish terrorists, American terrorism e.t.c. How do we justify calling Palestinian Resistance Movement

⁵ Gwandu (n3).

⁶ Ibid.

terrorism organizations without referring to the Jewish state as a racist and terrorism state.

Al-Sudeis said, addressing visitors to the Islamic Holy city for traditional Hajj Pilgrimage, ‘When the oppressor Zionist enemy uses its war Holy sites, that’s not terrorism to their mind – but defending land, religion and honour is’.⁷

ISLAM AS RELIGION OF PEACE

Islam is the name of the religion which Allah has approved for mankind, from the beginning of creation to the end of human life on this planet. Thus all true religions revealed by Allah to earlier Prophets (A.S) as well as that religion revealed to the final Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) are properly speaking, Islam. We thus find the Holy Quran referring to Prophets as Muslims as in the following verses:

Prophet Yusuf said “Take Thou my Soul (as death) as one submitting to Thy will (as a Muslim), and unite me with the righteous.”⁸

And Allah (S.W.T) said of Prophet Ibrahim: “Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was true in faith, and bowed his will to God’s (which is Islam), and he joined not gods with Allah”⁹

The word Islam means submission and peace. True religions thus reflect submission to the will of Allah, which begets peace and harmony with fellow human beings and with all creation. It is no wonder, therefore, that Islam as part of its attempts to ensure this harmony and peace, has directed all Muslims to avoid anything likely to bring about dissention, division, disunity and strife as the following verses of the Holy Quran clearly indicate:

⁷ Available at www.albawaba.com Accessed 20 March, 2016.

⁸ Qu’ran 12 verse 101.

⁹ Qu’ran 3 verse 67.

O Mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you know one another. Verily the most honourable of you with Allah is that (Believer) who is most pious.¹⁰

O Mankind! Be doubtful do you Lord, who created you from a single person (Adam) and from him (Adam) He created his wife (Hawwa / Eve), and from them both He created men and women.¹¹

These and other similar verses point to the fact that mankind are all related to one another, having common origin and common ancestors. As such all mankind should live in peace and harmony and should view the issue of race, colour and geographical location as accidents which should not be used to sever their pristine unity. All mankind are one, the best of them distinguished himself only by piety.

In order to ensure that the unity of mankind is sustained and peace and security spread everywhere Allah decreed that all must deal with others fairly and justly. In connection with this Allah (S.W.T) said: 'Lo! Allah enjoineeth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness, and abomination and wickness. He exhorted you in order that ye may take heed'.¹²

Allah also said: 'Lo! Allah commandeth you that ye restore deposits to their owners, if ye judge between mankind, that ye judge justly.'¹³ Again He said: 'And if ye give your word, do justice thereto even though it be (Against) a kinsman'.¹⁴

Islam also condemns transgression and injustice in whatever form as the following verses clearly show:

¹⁰ Quran 49 verse 13.

¹¹ Quran 4 verse 58.

¹² Quran 4 verse 1.

¹³ Quran 16 verse 90.

¹⁴ Quran 5 verse 152.

And let not you hatred of a fold who (once) stopped your going to the inviolable place of worship seduce you to transgress; but help ye one another unto righteousness and pious duty. Help not one another unto sin and transgression, but keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is severe in punishment.¹⁵

Also ‘Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors.’¹⁶

Even when attacked, Muslims are enjoined to retaliate in the like manner as the verse below shows: ‘And one who attacketh you, attack him in like manner as he attack you.’¹⁷

Similarly, even in the event when Muslims fight justly against persecutions and injustice, they are enjoined to cease fighting if the persecutors stop the persecution, as they verse below indicates: ‘And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrongdoers.’¹⁸

Regarding desire to maintain peaceful co-existence, and the desire to forge peace whenever possible, the Holy Quran said, ‘And if (the enemy) inclines to peace, incline thou also to it, and trust in Allah’.¹⁹ ‘So, if they hold aloof from you and wage not war against you and offer you peace, Allah allows you no way against them.’²⁰

After all, the above quotations from the Holy Quran, one is tempted to ask, is there any religion or system in the world which has done as much as Islam has done to encourage peaceful co-existence, maintain peace and create conditions which ensure the prevalence of peace on earth? Would there have been first and second world wars or a Vietnam if Islam rules the World? Would there have

¹⁵ Qu’ran 5 verse 2.

¹⁶ Qu’ran 2 verse 190.

¹⁷ Qu’ran 2 verse 194.

¹⁸ Qu’ran 2 verse 193

¹⁹ Qu’ran 8 verse 61

²⁰ Qu’ran 4 verse 90

been the sort of carnage that takes place in Palestinian territories daily, before the eyes of the whole world?

We can see the practical application of the Islamic principles pertaining to peaceful co-existence when we look at the constitution Madinah during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and how it was faithfully implemented. The two Arab tribes of *Aws* and *Khazraj* who were idol – worshippers and the three Jewish tribes of *Banu Qaynuqa*, *Banu Qurayzah* and *Banu Nadir* all lived a life of peace and harmony as one people under the leadership of the prophet (S.A.W) and no incident of terrorism occurred under the arrangement of which lasted until the Jews breached the terms of the constitution.

We can also cite the example of the Treaty of *Al-hudabiyyah* to show how peace – loving the Muslims were and will continue to be so long as they follow the teaching of Islam. Here was the Prophet (S.A.W) leading thousands of his followers from Al-Madinah on their way to Makkah to perform purely religious rites. They carried no weapons apart from what was traditionally allowed to be carried by a traveler. But they were prevented from entering by the Makkan aristocracy. A treaty was subsequently signed, the terms of which speak volumes for the peaceful nature of Islam. Under the treaty it was agreed that if any Makkan left Makka to join the Prophet (S.A.W) without the approval of his guardian, he should be rejected by the Prophet (S.A.W) but the reverse was not the case. Some of the terms of the treaty looked so humiliating that many of the followers of the Prophet (S.A.W) initially refused to accept them until the Prophet (S.A.W) stamped his foot and resisted the pressure to reject them. All this goes to show the commitment of Islam, as a religion, to peace, peaceful co-existence and peaceful resolution of conflict. Add to this, the fact that even in pre civilization, Islam does not allow the use of force or compulsion. For

example, the Quran is very specific that ‘there should be no compulsion in religion’.²¹

But despite all these clear evidence that Islam stands for peace, its enemies, who compel the whole world to do their bidding, still find it convenient to link it, as a religion, to terrorism. No Muslim who allows himself to be guided in his belief and action by the teaching of Islam will be spared. Every true Muslim is seen as a potential terrorist. Anybody who does not support the American attack on Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya is a terrorist, as former president George Bush put it, ‘You are either with us or against us’.

The United States has through various covert activities subverted attempt by any Muslim nation to the Military capable and independent of foreign control. Those who do not submit are then subjected to psychological and physical attacks. Examples abound, Libya and Iran were bad countries of the past until Sudan adopted Islamic toga, which implied less United States interference, and then it joined the clique of countries in the black book of the United State. The moment Afghanistan became Islamic state, the previously known freedom fighters and liberators of their fathers land became terrorists²².

This is not peculiar to Muslim countries alone; all communities of people that have refused to recognize the supremacy of the United States are similarly branded terrorist nations and subjected to similar attacks. What makes that of Islamic unique is that it is constantly on the scene, it cannot be killed like communism. Besides refusing to submit to the United States hegemony, it insists on justice for the Palestinians which in the understanding of America is not acceptable, indeed a crime.²³

²¹ Quran 2 verse 256.

²² Abu Umar Al-Faruq, *will anyone dare ask why America why?* (Lagos: Salsabil Associates, 2004) IX.

²³ Ibid.

Today we are happy that many Americans and people from other parts of the world who are mainly non-Muslims have come to see the injustice embedded in the United States policies and activities all over the world.

Though the American led West has continuously emphasized that the battle is not against Islam. Rather, it is a battle waged against some devilish individuals. However, by attempting to make a distinction between Islam and these persons, the West is shaping the thoughts of the inhabitants of the world as to who a moderate Muslim is, as opposed to an extremist. Those bent on disregarding the values of the Western world which is today the accepted norms of the society are declared extremists, with those that are a word or strive against the forceful enthronement of such values in their homeland declared as terrorist, while those who have altered their ways of life to suit the dictates of the modern world declared as modern and moderate. In essence, those who evidently manifest their beliefs in all they do are despised and fought against while those who confine their lord to a corner of their hearts or their places of worship, with every other aspect of their life clearly reflecting their secular conviction are the good and friendly ones. This distinction also renders an attempt at rallying a unified front against the Western world highly impossible since the emphasis is on individuals and not the religion.²⁴

September 11, 2001, would go down in history as a day to reckon with. The world suddenly woke up to the reality that United States was under attack. Four hijacked passenger planes crashed directly into the New York World Trade Centre and the pentagon in Washington. Thousands of Americans were maimed and killed. The cost might even go over the one trillion dollar mark, and the event may even trigger worldwide economic depression.

²⁴ Abdulhakeem.op.cit., at viii

The whole world rose in condemnation of this dastard act at the same time called for justice. Events however took a new turn immediately. The press, American security network and notable politicians came out hard on the Muslims and the United States President, George W. Bush, declared a crusade.

It was not the first time the world was led in the nose in the wrong direction. The Oklahoma bombing was the instance and the previous attempt on the WTO was another. In both occasions the Muslims bore the agony of the accused but the happenstance, truth surface as it was realized that the enemy was right inside United States, an American or a group of Americans.²⁵

Why is it that anytime United States witnesses an attack, the Muslims, the Middle East and other Muslims states are always at the receiving end? Who attacked United States and for what reason? These questions remained unanswered for many reasons including the conclusion reached by United States that Muslims' world always attacks them. However, the prime suspect of 9/11, Osama Ladan issued two statements both of which are denials of any involvement.

But in a normal terrorist event, the terrorist cannot wait to take credit, in order to link the violence to the socio-political intent of the terrorist organization.²⁶

Huge problems are emerging in the official view of evident. It is known that the United States was planning an invasion of Afghanistan long before the attacks on the world Trade Towers. Indeed the attacks on the world Trade Tower perfectly fit the time table of the invasion by October, 2001 as stated by United State officials.

It is important to note that 19 names of suspected hijackers released by the United States don't point to Afghanistan. They came from Saudi Arabia, Egypt,

²⁵ Umar (n22)vi

²⁶ Cathy Garger, "9/11 – Are Americas the Victims of A Hoax?" Weekly Trust (Abuja) July 16 – 22, 2005.

United Arab Emirates; all across the Middle East without the focus in any one region. Indeed, even as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was admitting that its list of 19 names was based solely on identifications thought to have been forged, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Saudi Al-Faisal insisted that an investigation in Saudi Arabia showed that the 5 Saudi men were not aboard the four jet liners that crashed in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania on September 11th 2001. It was proved that five of the names included in the FBI list had nothing to do with what happened. Al-Faisal told the Arabic press in Washington after the meeting with former United State President – George W. Bush at the white house. A sixth identified hijacker is also reported to still be alive in Tunisia, while a 7th named man died two years ago!²⁷ The conclusion was 19 names of suspected hijackers released by FBI don't even appear on the passenger list of the hijacked planes.²⁸

CNN reported that men who hijacked those aircrafts were using phony Identifications, using the names of real people still leaving in Arab nations in the Middle East.²⁹

FBI chief Robert Mueller admitted on September 20 and on September 27 that at this time the FBI has no legal proof to prove that true identities of the suicidal hijackers. Yet in the haste to move forward on the already planned war in Afghanistan they relied on the identification issued to press.³⁰

Yet another problem lies with the described actions of the hijackers themselves. It was stated on the one hand that these men were such fanatical devotees of their faith that they willingly crashed the jets they were flying into buildings. Yet on the other hand, it was stated that these same men spent the night before

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

their planned visit to Allah drinking in strip bars, committing not just one, but two mortal sins which would keep them out of paradise no matter what else they did. Truly devout Muslims would spend the day before a suicide attack fasting and praying. Not only does the drinking in strip bars not fit the profile of a fanatically religious Muslim to die for his cause, but the witness report of men in the bars are of men going out of their way to be noticed and remembered, while waving around phony identifications.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is quite obvious terrorism affects all nations around the globe and it has many forms, with different meanings depending on the angle one views it. Many countries define terrorism, draw up terrorist profiles, and publish lists of terrorists' organizations in the light of their own national interests. A terrorist organization to some countries is limited to freedom fighters to others. What one country sees as terrorist nations, another welcomes as loyal allies, but in general term, terrorism is the use of threat of violence to create fear and harm.

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In view of the foregoing, it is desirous for the Muslim world to educate their followers on the principles of Islam and also have dialogue with the leaders of other religions on the activities of terrorists.

It is also important for United Nations to issue guidelines on the fight against terrorism which must focused on the activities of terrorists around the world without shifting blame to any religion. These guidelines shall state the importance of world peace without undermining human rights and freedom of religion.