

TERRORISM AND ISLAM : A MISCONCEPTION

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Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight the problem of terrorism which is challenging the very existence of mankind today. Especially after 9/11 attacks there has been increasing propaganda in the west that it is the teachings of Islam which is the main source of terrorist activities. This is a great misconception which needs to be challenged. Another ideology which has been greatly misinterpreted and misused is the concept of “Jihad”. Jihad does not mean ‘to Kill’ or ‘holy war’ as it is misunderstood. The Holy Quran says, Jihad means to strike or to struggle in the way of the Almighty. It means to purify one’s self that is to restrain one’s self from evil inclinations which are inner Jihad. It also means to defend one’s homeland, property from oppression and aggression. The Holy Quran does speak of war but only at the last resort. The Quran which explicitly lays down the rules to be followed in the battle field, which prohibits from touching women, children and aged during war and shows sympathy even towards the prisoners of war can never be the cause of barbaric and brutal deaths meted out by the terrorists. Terrorism in all its famous have been strongly criticized and condemned by scholars all over the world. It is highly unjustified to equate terrorism with a religion like Islam which stands for universal peace, tolerance and perseverance. The solution lies not in spreading any misconceptions about any religion but finding out the root causes and striking out those causes at its very initial stage. It gives a call to the followers of all the religions of the world to unitedly fight against the menace. At the same time, the politicians and the media are being asked to play a neutral and responsible role in combating the disease which is spreading like cancer.

Key Words: Terrorism, Jihad, Islam, Peace, Misconception

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Today, the most threatening and burning issue which is posing a great challenge to the safety, security and the very existence of mankind is the issue of terrorism. However, the problem becomes more grave when the issue gets related to any particular religion, especially Islam. Since the September 11 attacks at WTC there has been an increasing propaganda especially in the west that it is the teachings of Islam which is the root cause of terrorist activities. Before we discuss the two terms i.e. Islam and Terrorism it is very important to know first what terrorism means. Unfortunately, the word 'terrorism' is an ambiguous concept which boasts of so many meanings that no precise meaning could be assigned to it. Even International Organizations like the League of Nations and United Nations had considerable difficulty in developing a consensus on the definition of terrorism. Some say it is a state of terror, panic and a fear psychosis created by the terrorist in order to force and coerce and blackmail the authority using violent methods. According to Jenkins, terrorism is the threat of violence, individual acts of violence, a campaign of violence designed primarily to instill a fear of the terrorist. Prof. Shwarzenberger states, a terrorist is probably best defined by reference to his immediate objective. It is to use force for the purpose of creating fear and in this way to attain whatever further aim he may have in mind. There are many reasons as to why there is no universal consensus regarding the definition of terrorism. Angus Martyn in a briefing paper for the Australian Parliament has stated that "The international community has never succeeded in developing as accepted comprehensive definition of terrorism. During the 1970s and 1980s, the United Nations attempts to define the term foundered mainly due to differences of opinion between various members about the use of violence in the context of conflicts over national liberation and self-determination. This divergences have made it impossible to conclude a comprehensive convention on international terrorism that incorporate a single, all-encompassing, legally binding, criminal law definition of terrorism. The international community has adopted a serious of sectoral conventions that define and criminalize various types of terrorist activities. Since 1994 the United Nations General Assembly has condemned terrorist act using the following description of terrorism, "Criminal Acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons a particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them."

Terrorism in fact is regarded as a phenomenon which find its root in ideological movement and not in religion. According to some scholars nihilism in modern times the source of the problem. They view nihilism as a decline in values, or in other words, a tendency of devaluing all values. Terrorism is not restricted to any location – be it the location of identity, territory or religion.

To quote Dr. Parvez Amir Ali Hoodbhoy, “leaders of the Muslim community in the United States, and President Bush, have routinely asserted that Islam is religion of peace that was hijacked by fanatics of Septemebr’11. These two assertions are simply untrue. First, Islam-like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or any other religion – is not about peace. Nor is it about war. Every religion is about absolute believe its own superiority and the divine right to impose its version of truth upon others.”

In the January 8,2002, New York Times, Nicholas Kristof wrote, “There’s just one thing that most Americans and Osama Bin Laden seems able to agree on: that the attacks on World Trade Center arose somehow from Islam.” A 2003 study of Jeffrey Record for the United States Army quoted a source (Schmid and Jongman 1988) that counted 109 definitions of terrorism that covered of total of 22 different definitional elements. Record continued “Terrorism expert Walter Laquetr also has counted over 100 definitions and conclude that only general characteristic generally agreed upon is that terrorism involves violence and the threat of violence.” Yet terrorism is hardly the only enterprise involving violence under threat of violence. So does war, coercive diplomacy and bar room brawls.” So, the question arises that the term which itself suffers from a concrete definition, in what sense can it be related to the high and lofty ideals presented by Islam.

Islam, on the other hand is derived from the word ‘salaam’ which means peace. To understand better, one must refer to its original sources, the Holy Quran and the teachings of Muhammad. The Arabic word Islam literally means ‘surrender’ or ‘submission’. Islam, as a faith means total and sincere surrender to God so that one can live in peace and tranquility. Peace (Salam in Arabic, Shalom in Hebrew) is achieved through active obedience to the revealed commandments of God, for God is the just, the peace. The name Islam is universal in meaning. Islam is not named after a tribe of people or an individual, as Judaism is named after the tribe of Judah, Christianity after Christ and Buddhism after Buddha. Islam is not a name chosen by Human beings, it was divinely communicated from God. Islam a global faith, not of the east or the west. Islam is complete way of life, implying total submission to

God. Islam is a religion which was given to Adam, the first man and the first prophet of Allah, and it was the religion of all the prophets send by Allah to mankind. Further it name was chosen by Allah himself and clearly mentioned in the final scripture, Al-Quran, in which he revealed to man. Allah state the following:

“This day have I perfected your religion to you, completed only favour upon you and I have chosen for you Islam as your religion” (Quran 5:3)

“If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God) never will it be accepted of him”. (Quran 3.85)

Many preach that Islam is some distant ancient religion. Yet it is a fact that it is the fastest growing religions in the country. There are five basic believes of Islam –

- (1) Belief in the God. (Allah is the Arabic word for God)
- (2) Belief in prophet hood (Muhammed and the ones before him)
- (3) Belief in the justice of God.
- (4) Belief in the Imams of God.
- (5) Belief in the Day of Judgement.

There are five duties of muslims.

- (1) Pray five times a day – morning, noon, afternoon, sunset and evening.
- (2) Make a pilgrimage to Macca once in their lifetime if physically or financially abled.
- (3) Fast during the month of Ramadan.
- (4) Give to the poor (Zakat)
- (5) Strive in the way of God (Jihad)

Thus a religion which preaches tolerance, peace, stability, control over life, sacrifice can never be equated to terrorism.

Terrorism and the violent tactics applied by them like kidnapping, hostage-taking, bombings, assassination, hijacking etc. are all foreign to the concept of Islam. Such activities have no place in Islamic Shariah. The Holy Quran makes it explicit that killing an innocent person is equivalent to killing the whole of human kind while saving a person is equivalent to the saving of all mankind. Ch. 5 V : 32 of the Holy Quran states, **“on that account : we ordained for the children of Israel that if any one slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew the whole people and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then although there came to them our apostles with clear signs, yet, even after that, many of**

them continued to commit excesses in the land.” In Islam, no one can be forced to convert their religion. As Sural Al Kafiroon of the Holy Quran makes it clear, **‘to you be your way, and to be mine’, let there be no compulsion in religion.** Thus the religion which represent patience, tolerance and peace in its highest form can never the source of violent tactics resorted to by the terrorists.

One ideology which has been greatly misinterpreted and misused not only by the non Muslims but the Muslims also, is the concept of Jihad. Many say Jihad means to kill. Some others interpret as holy war. Again some feel that when Muslims go to war is known as Jihad. The Princeton University Middle Eastern scholar Bernard Lewis states that Islamic jurisprudence does not allow terrorism. But at the same time he says that Jihad is an unlimited offensive to bring the whole world under Islamic law. Unfortunately, these are misunderstood concepts which needs to be contested.

The word ‘Jihad’ does find expression in several places in the Holy Quran.

Ch-4 V-76, Ch-29 V-8, Ch-22 V : 78, Ch-9 V : 20, Ch-29 V : 6, Ch-9 V : 24.

In the Holy Quran, it means to strive or to struggle in the way of the Almighty. Jihad means to purify one’s self i.e. to free one’s own self from evil inclinations. The Holy Quran speaks of war but only at the last resort that is only if you are provoked one is allowed to go to war for self defence, to protest against aggression and oppression. At the same time, the Quran asks to show restraints. Ch-2 V : 190 says. **Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed Allah does not like transgressors.** Though the Quran speaks of war, it also gives a big list of dos and don’ts which one should keep in mind when going to war. One has been strictly prohibited from attacking children, women and aged in the battlefield. Even the coconut trees and crops are to be spared. Not only that strict terms have been laid down regarding the behaviour or treatment to be meted out to the ‘Prisoners of War’. It has been said that the prisoners are to be fed and clothed in the same way as themselves and to be released after the war is over only in lieu of ransom. Those who fail to pay the ransom amount are to be educated if found illiterate. If they seek peace, they are to be escorted to a place of security Ch-9 V : 6.

It becomes clear to us that the Holy Quran which prohibits from touching women and children during war, which lays down strict rules to be followed in the battlefield, which shows sympathy even towards the prisoners of war can never be the source or the cause of brutal deaths of hundreds of people where an infant is also not spared by the terrorists. Thus,

terrorism cannot be justified under any valid interpretation of the Islamic faith. Muslim scholars speak out against terrorism in all its forms and offer explanations of misinterpreted teachings. Fethullah Gulen, a prominent Turkish scholar has claimed that “a real Muslim”, who understood Islam in every aspect, could not be a ‘terrorist’. There are many other people with similar points of view, who says that Extremists have hijacked Islam. Ali Gomaa, former Grand Mufti of Egypt, stated not only for the Islam but in general, “Terrorism cannot be born of religion. Terrorism is the product of corrupt minds and hardened hearts. Even, Harun Yahya is his book, ‘Terrorism. The Ritual of the Devil says, “The morality of religion forbids all kinds of terrorist acts, and yet, a number of terrorist groups still claim that they are acting in its name. Those who carry out acts of terrorism and violence in the name of Islam cannot possibly be called religions groups.

Observations

Terrorism and Islam are like two poles standing opposed to each other. Any attempt to relate the two concepts together would lead to their distortions. Spreading of misconceptions about any religion will not only fail to solve the problem but also aggravate the problem. The problem is terrorism while its solution lies in the teachings of Islam. Islam as the propagator of peace and harmony stands in great contradiction to the path of violence, force and bloodshed resorted to by the terrorists. We are all aware of the fact about the humiliation and the insult the Muslims all over the world had to undergo in the wake of 9/11 attacks. So, a positive change of attitude and behaviour towards the Muslim will greatly help in minimizing the problem. It is also the responsibility of the Muslims all over the world to come together and put a united front against the barbaric acts meted out by the terrorists by ceasing all types of associations with them and helping the Intelligence Agency with informations. Violence breeds violence. In this contest, the rough and tough role of the states needs to be analysed. The role of the politicians should also be taken into consideration who for their own selfish interests tend to neglect the basic amenities to be provided to the citizens which itself breeds terrorism, we also know that terrorism thrives on media and so it is very important that media play a neutral and responsible role in order to combat the problem. And last, but not the least, the pristine and lofty ideals of not only Islam, but all other religious scriptures of the world should be glorified and highlighted in today’s world of conflict and tension so that peace and harmony can prevail on earth – **the earth free from fear and terror.**

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