

ISLAM, TERRORISM, RADICALISATION OF MUSLIM YOUTH AND THE CONCEPT OF JIHAD

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Jihad

This word has been in frequent use in the Western press over the past several years, explained directly or subtly, to mean holy war. As a matter of fact the term "holy war" was coined in Europe during the Crusades, meaning the war against Muslims. It does not have a counterpart in Islamic glossary, and Jihad is certainly not its translation.

The Arabic word "jihad" means struggling or striving and applies to any effort exerted by anyone. In this sense, a student struggles and strives to get an education and pass course work; an employee strives to fulfil his/her job and maintain good relations with his/her employer; a surgeon strives to assist his/her patient as best as he can and so on.

Jihad can be done with speech, the pen, lobbying or picketing, or the Quran by inviting people to the message of Islam.

Since Islam is not confined to the boundaries of the individual but extends to the welfare of society and humanity in general, an individual cannot keep himself/herself in isolation from what happens in their community or in the world at large, hence the Quranic injunction to the Islamic nation to take as a duty "to enjoin good and forbid evil." (3:104).

Islam does not forbid the use of force as a last resort to bring about the greater good or peace. Every country believes in having an Army to keep the peace and offer protection and security to its people. The same is true in Islam. There are strict parameters laid down, however, in Divine Law should force be used.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) gave various guidelines: Do not dishonour a treaty. Do not mutilate the dead. Do not kill women. Do not kill children. Do not kill the old. Do not kill those without weapons. Do not kill those engaged in worship (priests, rabbis etc.) Do not cut down trees. Do not burn crops. Do not poison wells of your enemies. Fight only those who come at you.

Military action is a subgroup of Jihad and not its totality. That was what prophet Mohammad (pbuh) emphasized to his companions when returning from a military campaign, he told them: "*This day we have returned from the minor jihad (war) to the major jihad (self-control and betterment).*"

Jihad is not a declaration of war against other religions and certainly not against Christians and Jews as some media and political circles want it to be perceived. Islam does not fight other religions. Christians and Jews are considered as fellow

inheritors of The Abrahamic traditions by Muslims, worshipping the same God and following the tradition of Abraham (pbuh).

The Prophet (pbuh) said: “The best Jihad is saying a word of truth in the court of a tyrant ruler”.

We have to acknowledge again, for the sake of honesty, that historically all traditions, Muslim, Christian, Jew as well as others, had their lapses in honestly following the valued ideals of their religions or philosophies. We all made mistakes, and we still do. Muslims are no exception, and time and again religion was exploited by ambitious tyrants or violated by ignorant mobs. This is no reflection on religion, but it shows how desperately humanity is in need of better education, more enduring concern for human dignity, rights and freedom, and vigilant pursuit of justice, even at the price of curbing political and economic greed.

Islam and Terrorism

What does Islam say about Terrorism?

Islam is a religion of mercy and does not permit terrorism. God says in the Quran:

“God does not forbid you from showing kindness and dealing justly with those who have not fought you about religion and have not driven you out of your homes. God loves just dealers.” Quran 60:8

“If anyone killed a person not in retaliation for murder or to spread mischief in the land, it would be as if he killed the whole of humanity. And likewise if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the whole of humanity.” Quran 5:32

These Islamic teachings make it clear that acts of inciting terror, the wholesale destruction of buildings and properties, the bombing and maiming of innocent men, women, and children are all forbidden and detestable acts according to Islam. When individual Muslims commit an act of terrorism, they would be guilty of violating the laws of Islam. With regard to suicide bombings; there is no concept of this in the teachings of Islam and it is considered to be a major sin.

The Media

Islamophobia is at its peak due to the negative portrayal of Islam in the media and what some bad Muslims have done in the name of Islam but which has no basis in Islam. Fear and mistrust is rife and has come about due to misunderstandings and not having enough knowledge about Islam and Muslims. The only source of information many people have is what they get from the media.

‘Islamic Terrorism’, ‘Muslim fundamentalists’, women being oppressed and forced to wear the veil, ‘forced marriages’ and ‘terror plot’, are some of the terms associated with Islam and Muslims. This brings fear in the general population and creates a greater divide between Muslims and non-Muslims.

When the caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) were published in the Danish newspapers, it touched a nerve with every Muslim. The two main sources of knowledge Muslims follow in religious matters are the Quran and the Sunnah, ie the Prophet’s teachings and sayings, and following his example. When Non-Muslims

remark negatively of someone who is so highly regarded by Muslims, Muslims all over the world become outraged.

Having said this, there is no excuse whatsoever for Muslims to counter this with equal negativity, threat of violence or terrorism. The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) was very often persecuted and ill treated himself during his life time and at no point did he react in a negative way. This peaceful existence was one of the main reasons Islam spread so quickly.

The media need to draw a line between what is termed freedom of expression and inciting racial and religious hatred by the way they write, using insensitive language and misrepresenting Islam and Muslims.

Some politicians have also begun to use terms which are not only insensitive but abusive. This shows a lack of knowledge of Islam on their part. These unchallenged comments create further division in society and help towards the young introducing political Islam to counter this.

Some words such as 'Islamic Terrorism', 'Muslim extremism', 'Islamic fundamentalism and 'Jihadists', need to be challenged. This sort of language is bringing greater division, mistrust and misunderstanding. Perhaps when the dust settles and more academic and scientific research is done, there needs to be effort made to find solutions to the real causes of extremism and terrorism. Only then can people responsible take effective measures to prevent future occurrence.

Britain has always held the highest position in striving towards equality, peace and justice and is seen to be respectful of other peoples' faith. This is the reason why we have Mosques, Gurdwaras, Temples and Synagogues and people are freely able to practice their faith. The author has always held this view.

However, a summary report on Islamophobia in the EU after September 11, produced by the European Monitoring Centre, Vienna May 2002, shows that while the level and frequency of anti-Muslim acts or sentiments have differed, anti-Muslim sentiments have risen in nearly all EU member countries.

Involvement and active participation in Inter-faith work has led the author to believe that all faiths and people of no faith have so much in common. There is a need to dwell more on these commonalities rather than the small differences that exists among communities.

The Radicalisation of Muslim Youth in Europe

It is difficult to draw a general view of extremism in Europe and there is no obvious single explanation for the appearance of radicalisation among the Muslim Youth in Britain. There is lack of scientific data on this.

However, below is a list of possible explanations:

- The lack of integration and racism lead to some Muslims feeling excluded from the society in which they live.
- Some lifestyle choices for instance dress code, reinforce the rejection of the Muslim community by European society

- The economic and social crisis hit the Muslim communities the hardest. Unemployment among Muslims is higher than average and this reinforces the feeling of exclusion;
- Globalisation and improved and rapid means of communication, including the internet, give people in Europe direct access to information. The young are now more aware than ever before of the events in Bosnia, Somalia, Chechnya, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where the Muslims, mainly, appear to have been the victims.
- Feeling excluded in the country they are living in, they develop a kind of empathy with all the Muslim victims in the world and convince themselves that their own exclusion and the persecution of their brothers and sisters have the same roots: the rejection of Islam by the Western world
- Undermining the dignity of Muslims by persistent negative portrayal, stereotypes and misconceptions which demonise the community as a whole and perpetuate the “Them and Us” dichotomy.
- Not engaging and involving young Muslims in decision making that affects their lives and giving them ownership of resources.
- Responding slowly or not at all to legitimate Muslim grievances and anti-Muslim discrimination incidents and hate crimes.

There is an assumption that the non-English speaking Imams and Scholars have been educated abroad, are the cause for concern and bring about radicalism and extremism. This is far from the truth. The fact is that these elderly scholars and Imams are more of a stabilising and harmonising influence in Muslim communities. These misconceptions need to be challenged and the real hate preachers need to be identified.

It may be argued that more often than not, the so-called hate preachers, often labelled by the media as “clerics” and “scholars”, are in fact lay people without any credible theological qualification or education.

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