

On “Islamic Extremism”¹

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The theme of this international conference is “How to Understand and Co-exist with Radical Islam.” But when I read the concept paper, or the brochure, it became clear from the very first paragraph that the issue at hand is “Islamic terrorism” and that, in the view of the writer of the concept paper, the only terror that exists in the world or should be fought is the Islamic or Muslim terror. The concept paper also tells us in the very first paragraph that “The terrorists are immersed in Islamic history and doctrine.” The concept paper then goes on to say that “The world had yet to devise a strategy to understand, manage or counter the menace,” and that “We either have to score a victory in this war, which at the moment appears not possible... or have to design a framework to learn to co-exist with this growing global militant threat.”

If I am not wrong, the presumption is that the so-called “Islamic terrorism” is immersed in Islamic history and culture, that the current war against Islamic terrorism is not succeeding, so we should find a framework to co-exist with it.

I will try to briefly examine these assumptions and show how far they are correct.

“Islamic extremism” is a fairly modern term. It is true that early Islam saw the rise of the *Khawarij*, or the Kharijites, during the caliphates of the third and fourth Caliphs of Islam, that is during the first Hijri century itself. They believed in fanatic ideas and excommunicated a Muslim on very flimsy grounds, and considered his murder lawful. These fanatics were rejected by the Muslim community and the movement died within a century. But their ideas remained buried in books and inspired fanatics in later centuries though they never gained currency or larger acceptance in the Muslim *Ummah*. The only other group believing in similar ideas was the Ismaili fraternity of the “Hashashin,” or the Assassins, during the 5th-7th Hijri centuries (10-13th CE). Their targets were the Abbasid and Fatimid rulers of the day as well as the Mongols and the Crusaders. The former were attacking the Arab-Islamic World from the east while the latter were attacking it from the west. The Crusaders were attacking and devastating a vast area from Turkey to Morocco. The Crusades continued over nine campaigns, from 1099 to 1369 CE. Soon thereafter European colonialists started their conquests of the East, mostly Muslim lands, in search of *lebensraum*. The Portuguese and Spaniards started this new violent and expansionist

push. Most other European powers soon followed suit and by the 17th-18th centuries, the whole World of Islam, from Morocco to Indonesia, was enslaved. Resistance, or legitimate *Jihad*, movements started in all occupied areas but they were mostly unsuccessful.

The libel of Islamic “Extremism” was coined by the colonial powers ever since. An army of orientalist and historians was pressed into service in many countries, especially in Britain, France and Netherlands, to defame Islam, invent a false history with a view to selectively defame Muslim history and religion. Suddenly a religion, which had safeguarded world peace for close to nine centuries, was branded extremist and violent. All kinds of myths were created to defame Islam and Muslims. This was necessary in order to justify the conquest and rule by a supposedly superior civilisation and race. Lies were spread in our own country, India, against most civilized and enlightened Muslim rulers like Tipu Sultan and Wajid Ali Shah whose territories had to be occupied. A new concocted and selective history was authored and publicised by the British to divide-and-rule Indians. Now that fake history is considered Gospel truth by many in our own country. They fail to realise that the lies invented by the British are not found anywhere in the books written by non-Muslim historians and writers of the Muslim period in India.

Under this planned defamation of the freedom fighters, Muslims fighting the British became “Indian fanatics” and the great Mulla Hasan of Somalia became “Mad Mulla”.

Europeans themselves never refrained from violence and terrorism if it served their purpose in all colonized lands. Within this context, we see the so-called “Arab Revolt” during the First World War which was instigated, armed, financed and led by the British to weaken and finally annihilate the Ottoman Empire. This was not possible without painting the Ottomans in the worst possible colour. To achieve this, the western press was used mercilessly. As today, even in those days media was under the total control of those forces which wanted to subjugate and control the Muslim World and beyond in order to exploit its human and material resources.

During the First World War, Britain and France laid the foundations of the current Arab World or Middle East, which is the heart of the Muslim World, by imposing an artificial order on it. Under this scheme, while Britain promised the Sharif of Makkah, Husain ibn Ali, to install him as the “King of the Arabs” after the First World War, in reward for his revolt against the Ottoman State, it also promised a part of the promised Arab State to the Jews. At the same time it conspired with France under what is known as “Sykes-Picot Agreement” of May 1916 to divide most of the Middle East, from Palestine to Kuwait, between them. Other areas of the region had already been occupied by France and Britain. This artificial order is the source of most political and social problems of the region and it still survives though the US, particularly since 2001, is

trying to reshape this region to suit its long-term strategic plans to control the resources and markets of the area. Maps have been readied by American think tanks for the kind of balkanized Middle East the US prefers.

This artificial regime was forced on the Middle East since the end of the First World War when local satraps were created, imposed and protected. They were and continue to be more loyal to their foreign masters than to their own people.

In 1948, Israel was allowed to be born, through deceit, conspiracy and terror, occupying 78 percent of the mandated Palestine and turning a majority of the Palestinian Arabs into refugees by use of plain terror. Terror was introduced to the Middle East by the Zionists.⁽¹⁾² The Middle East stood up in revolt against these policies, especially the creation of Israel. Regimes of satraps were overthrown in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and later in Yemen, Sudan and Libya. Algeria gained freedom from France in 1962 after a most bloody freedom struggle in which two million Algerians were killed..

A new world power, the US, was slowly taking over this region dislodging Britain and France which were weakened by the Second World War. After the emergence of Israel, western countries imposed an arms embargo on the Arab countries in order to keep Israel ever invincible. This led the Egyptian government under Gamal Abdel Nasser to request the Russians for arms. The result was the “Czech Arms” delivery to Egypt which opened the gates of the Middle East to Russia while providing the western media with more targets to defame Muslims although the lot of the terrorized masses did not change as a result of the Russian entry. Some satraps changed loyalties and became loyal to Moscow while still persecuting their countrymen.

Until then no “Islamic Terrorism” had appeared in any of the Arab or Muslim countries. Fateh appeared in January 1965 but it pursued a purely national freedom struggle to liberate occupied Palestine after the Palestinians came to realize that the Arab regimes will never do so. Muslims in Mindanao are in revolt since 1969 against the creeping colonization of their homeland by the Manila regime. An earlier rebellion during 1899–1913 against the American occupation was also for the same reason. Malay people of Patani started their revolt in 1959 against forced Thaification and overbearing Thai control since 1934.⁽²⁾³

The first Islamic terrorist movement to appear in the Muslim hinterland was Jama’at Al-Takfir wa’l-Hijrah in Egypt in 1973 by some disgruntled Muslim Brotherhood youth. Arrested in mid-1960s, they were subjected to severe torture while in detention. They developed their ideology inside the prisons and concluded that the rulers of Egypt and all those who paid allegiance to them were *kafirs* who should be socially shunned. As a result, they started moving

to uninhabited mountainous and desert areas. The most famous terrorist act of this group was kidnapping and later killing of Shaikh Husain Al-Dahabi, the then Egyptian minister of Auqaf and Islamic Affairs, in July 1977. Soon a fiercer terror outfit, Jihad Organisation, took shape. It assassinated President Anwar Sadat on 6 October 1981 and was mercilessly crushed soon thereafter.

These terrorist organisations were a result of a long debate among the Egyptian Ikhwan al-Muslmoon (Muslim Brotherhood) members who were imprisoned since mid-1950s. A group among these prisoners concluded that the people running the Egyptian regime were not Muslims because of the persecution and torture of a section⁽³⁾⁴ of the Muslim Brotherhood who were hounded, jailed and subjected to worst kind of torture, taught to the Egyptian intelligence and police by East Germany's dreaded Stassi. There were two factions among the imprisoned Muslim Brotherhood members. The larger and mainstream group, led by the then head (*Murshid*) of the Muslim Brotherhood, Justice Hasan Al-Hudhaibi (*d.* 11 Nov., 1973), was opposed to any violent reaction to the regime's injustices. Al-Hudhaibi, while in jail, authored a book, *Du'at, la Qudat* (Preachers, Not Judges) to teach his people that they should patiently bear the trials and tribulations faced in the discharge of their mission and wait for Allah's help. The smaller group found support in the thoughts of another Muslim Brotherhood ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, who too was jailed. He wrote *Ma'alim fil-Tariq* (*Milestones*) to articulate his ideas. He was executed by the Nasser regime in August 1966 after a sham trial. His thoughts influenced the less-matured youth and led to the emergence of a group of followers called "Qutbiyyun" (Qutbites) and later of outfits like Jama'at al-Takfir Wa'I-Hijrah and Jihad Organisation. Such violent tiny groups later appeared in many other Arab countries. Even the Shia in Iraq saw the emergence of similar outfits like Jama'at Al-Da'wah.

The basic reason behind the appearance of such violent groups was the utterly dictatorial and undemocratic nature of the West-supported Arab regimes which mercilessly crushed any popular movement for change and democracy. These violent groups did not limit their antagonism to local regimes. They also loathed the foreign backers of these regimes, *viz.*, US, Soviet Union, France and Britain. All such Arab regimes received political, intelligence and military support from western countries and media. Western support to the Israeli occupation and expansionism further inflamed these sentiments which were already anti-West due to a long history of complaints, especially the destruction of the Ottoman State and forcing secularism and western liberalism on unwilling Muslim societies, and blind support to Israel.

All this was further complicated by the fact that though West propagated the slogans of democracy, liberty and free speech, it never supported these values in Muslim countries. Instead, in all cases it unreservedly supported dictators, both monarchs and generals. This was the spectacle from Morocco and Turkey to Pakistan and Indonesia. Democratically-elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq was toppled in a CIA-engineered *coup* in 1953. President Sukarno of Indonesia was unseated in another CIA-inspired *coup* in September 1965. West supported the Turkish army generals who staged *coup* after *coup* against Islam-inclined democratically-elected governments. Election results were nullified in Algeria in December 1991 at the behest of France, only because Islamists had won. Likewise, Hamas won the elections in Palestine in 2006 but the results were quickly nullified and the defeated and discredited Fateh organisation was allowed to rule ever since without fresh parliamentary or presidential elections to this day. The “Arab Spring,” which sprouted in January 2011 from Tunisia, was not allowed to bloom although it stood for all the good slogans that are raised by the West. Western, especially American support, allowed anti-democracy forces to defeat the forces of democratic change in the Arab World. The worst scenario took place in Egypt where western and regional satraps’ support allowed the army to topple the country’s first democratically-elected government. Many of the overthrown democratic government’s members including the elected President, languish in jails, facing execution, with western support and connivance. Twenty-one thousand supporters of Egypt’s toppled democratic regime have been killed since the *coup* in July 2013 and forty one thousand are being tortured in overflowing prisons. Yet, this does not stir the western conscience. Likewise, Israel’s continued occupation of Palestinian and Syrian lands, flouting of hundreds of UN resolutions, building hundreds of illegal settlements on stolen land, the illegal blockade of Gaza Strip since June 2007, waging three cruel, one-sided wars against the defenceless people of Gaza during the same period -- all this does not stir western conscience.

This is a clear case of double standards. West preaches certain values to Muslim countries and demands Muslims to embrace democracy and liberalism. But, on the ground, it prefers local dictators in whatever form they may come in all these countries. For the West, especially the US, it is most important to exploit the resources and control the markets of the Muslim and Third World.

For this reason, the US and its allies used the 9/11 terror attacks as a pretext to attack and devastate Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. The list of countries requiring regime-change after 9/11 was very long but the resistance US troops faced in Afghanistan and Iraq frustrated those plans. Yet the West, through its dominant media, uses terms and phrases like “Islamic

extremism” and “Islamic terrorism” to browbeat the resistance and rejection of its plans. Western media plays its role to the hilt by overplaying the “Islamic terrorism” which is in fact a small part of the terror attacks taking place all over the world. Evidence shows that less than two percent of terrorist attacks from 2009 to 2013 in the EU countries were religiously motivated. In 2013, just one percent of the 152 terror attacks were religious in nature; in 2012, less than three percent of the 219 terrorist attacks were inspired by religion. The vast majority of terror attacks in these years were motivated by ethno-nationalism or separatism. In 2013, 55 percent of terrorist attacks were ethno-nationalist or separatist in nature; in 2012, more than three-quarters (76 percent) of terrorist attacks were inspired by ethno-nationalism or separatism. These facts, nonetheless, have never stopped the prejudiced pundits from insisting otherwise.(4)⁵

The tiny “Islamic” terror-organisations of the seventies are dead since long. Later, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 led the American administration, especially CIA, to prop up resistance outfits consisting of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. They were trained in CIA-funded and managed madrasahs on Afghanistan-Pakistan borders. They were even provided with specially-designed textbooks, at the cost of US\$ 800 million, which taught Jihad(5)⁶ using symbols like bombs, guns, hand-grenades and swords. Arab youth joined this Western crusade under the assumption that they were fighting a real Jihad. Al-Qaeda was one of these organizations. It was propped up, funded and trained by CIA.(6)⁷ At that time they were “freedom-fighters” and “Mujahideen” to the Western media. The war against Russian forces badly ruined Afghanistan. The US promised at that time that it will rebuild Afghanistan after the war. But it reneged on that promise soon after securing the destruction of the “Evil Empire” by proxy, which paved the way for the US to emerge as the sole world superpower with all the destructive Neocon plans and invasions that followed and still continue. America’s going back on its promise to rebuild Afghanistan created the first rift between these groups, especially Al-Qaeda, and the US. This rift widened when the US built a military base in Saudi Arabia’s Hafr Al-Batin cantonment area in 1990. Al-Qaeda demanded the US to withdraw its forces from the holy land of Islam. The US refused. Now Al-Qaeda started attacking its erstwhile ally.(7)⁸ After fighting Al-Qaeda for years, the US had no qualms to use this very “terrorist” organisation again in Syria and later in Libya. “Islamic State,” or ISIS, or Da’ish, is also a product of US policies. It is a splinter group of Al-Qaeda. It first appeared in northern Iraq in October 2006 as “Islamic State in Iraq” (ISI). It was supposed to fight the Iraqi Shia and Iran as part of America’s hellish divide-and-rule sectarian plan of pitting Sunnis against Shia which had started in that year (2006) with a view to frustrate the Iraqi resistance which until then embraced both the Shia and

Sunnis of Iraq.(8)⁹ ISIS jumped into Syria in August 2011 with clear US and Israeli help. We have a classified US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) document of 2012 (obtained in the US by a court order) which clearly says that the US has to create a “Salafist principality” in Syria in order to win the war against the Assad regime(9)¹⁰.

The US started its sham aerial strikes against ISIS in Syria since late 2014 but the terror organisation was not scathed in the least and continued its march ahead, occupying more areas, until the Russians started attacking ISIS bases in Syria since early October 2015, benefiting from a UN Security Council resolution calling for action against this terror outfit. A majority of the people joining ISIS and similar outfits are actually European nationals even though they might be of Middle Eastern, African, South Asian and Central Asian origins. Therefore, it is mostly a local problem for Western countries to tackle, control and take the blame for, as these people are often second or third generation immigrants. Thus the problem should also be seen as a British or French problem which in turn has local roots.

The Paris terror attack is most recent. We condemn it unconditionally but we also caution that blame should be apportioned to any group only after a careful probe by neutral experts. At the same time, let us not forget that just before the Paris attack, there were similar murderous attacks killing hundreds by ISIS -- the same day in Baghdad, the previous day in Beirut and a few days earlier in Kabul.

It should also be borne in mind that around 95 per cent of the victims of terrorist outfits like Al Qaeda and ISIS are Muslims. A 2011 report by the US government's National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC) said, “In cases where the religious affiliation of terrorism casualties could be determined, Muslims suffered between 82 and 97 percent of terrorism-related fatalities over the past five years.”(10)¹¹ Therefore, the challenge is not just for non-Muslims. Muslims are the main targets and victims of these outfits.

While West has no qualms about dealing with Al-Qaeda, ISIS and the like, it is terrified that forces of real Islam, like the Muslim Brotherhood, may succeed in the Muslim World.

It has been a consistent western policy, since early nineteenth century at least, not to allow political Islam a foothold anywhere in the world. For this, the whole West conspired to destroy the Ottoman State and has, directly and indirectly, fought and defamed Islamic movements which believe in democracy and peaceful political struggle but will not allow the West to continue to rob and control their natural resources and markets. As early as February 1949, the founder of Muslim Brotherhood, Shaikh Hasan Al-Banna, was assassinated in Cairo at the behest of the British embassy in Egypt. West made no noises over the active persecution of Muslim

Brotherhood in Egypt since early 1950s and in Syria since early 1970s. More recently, it has actively participated in the defamation and overthrow of the first democratically-elected President of Egypt, his government and party through the July 2013 *coup*. Now this peaceful and democratic organisation has been outlawed by Egypt, certain Arab countries toeing the American line as well as by the US although there is no proof of it ever indulging in terror activities or raising or supporting a terror group.

ISIS has been lionized and given vast coverage in order to defame political Islam which believes in the rule of law, international legitimacy, democracy and co-existence. West clearly prefers in the Muslim and Third World only those who believe in bullets than those who believe in ballots.

To sum it up, the abusive terms of “Islamic terrorism” and “Islamic extremism” have been coined to defame legitimate, peaceful and democratic Islamic organisations, movements and political parties, so that these popular organisations may not legitimately challenge the dictatorial regimes installed and supported by the West in Muslim countries. Terrorist organisations like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, LeT etc. enjoy no support of mainstream Islam. Many *fatwas* have been issued against them all over the world. In India, we have been very clear about condemning these terror organisations. I myself, as head of the All India Muslim Majlis-e Mushawarat, the umbrella body of Indian Muslim organizations, was the first in India to condemn Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Boko Haram. Yet these organisations grow and get the support of Western countries whenever it suits them.

In the end I would like to say that we, Muslims and non-Muslims, east and west, cannot coexist with any terror outfit whatsoever its colour or creed, while peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding and tolerance of peaceful and democratic organisations, movements and political parties is a prerequisite for a better and peaceful world.

I beg to differ with the theme of the conference that we may somehow “coexist” with “Islamic Extremism”. We cannot coexist with any extremism of any colour or creed. At the same time, for a better and peaceful world, we have to coexist with peaceful and democratic organisations like Muslim Brotherhood, as well as with organizations fighting against occupation anywhere in the world, including Palestine. We cannot have peace without justice.

¹ This lecture was delivered at the 3-day International Conference on “How to Understand and Co-exist with Radical Islam” at RCA Girls PG College, Virindavan, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, on 18 November, 2015.

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- ² (1) Some of the famous Jewish terror organizations were Haganah, Irgun and Stern gangs. Their exploits against the Arabs and the British are sufficient to fill volumes. Two Jewish terror leaders, Manachem Begin and Yitshak Shamir, became prime ministers of Israel.
- ³ (2) Patani formally became a part of Thailand as a result of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909.
- ⁴ (3) Another group of Muslim Brotherhood, which cooperated with the Egyptian regime was not touched. It included persons like Shaikh Hasan Al-Baqouri, Dr Muhammad Al-Bahi, Shaikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, Shaikh Sayyid Sabiq and Dr Abdul Aziz Kamil etc., who all held high positions in Nasser's government.
- ⁵ (4) Ben Norton, "Our Terrorism Double Standard: After Paris, Let's Stop Blaming Muslims and Take a Hard Look at Ourselves..." Salon, November 14, 2015 -- <http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/our-terrorism-double-standard-after-paris-lets-stop-blaming-muslims-and-take-hard?akid=13657.8667.usGobR&rd=1&src=newsletter1045809&t=4>. See also: Beenish Ahmed, "Less Than 2 Percent Of Terrorist Attacks In The E.U. Are Religiously Motivated," thinkprogress.org, Jan 8, 2015 -- <http://thinkprogress.org/world/2015/01/08/3609796/islamist-terrorism-europe/>
- ⁶ (5) Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway, "From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad - Violent Soviet-Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts," *Washington Post*, 23 March 2002 - <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/USjihadABCs.html>
- ⁷ (6) Garikai Chengu, "America Created Al-Qaeda and the ISIS Terror Group," Global Research, November 14, 2015 - <http://www.globalresearch.ca/america-created-al-qaeda-and-the-isis-terror-group/5402881>
- ⁸ (7) This is a normal behaviour of all terrorists. In our own country, monsters like Shiv Sena, VHP, Khalistanis and LTTE stung their Congress chankya creators.
- ⁹ (8) Entirely based on secret American documents, Wikileaks materials show "the United States had a deliberate policy of exacerbating sectarian divisions in Iraq following its invasion and occupation, in the belief that the country would be easier to dominate in such circumstances": Julian Assange in his introduction to *The Wikileaks Files*, Verso, London-New York, 2015, p. 15.
- ¹⁰ (9) "Secret Document shows ISIS is US baby," *The Milli Gazette*, 1-15 June, 2015, p. 16.
- ¹¹ (10) Ruth Alexander and Hannah Moore, "Are most victims of terrorism Muslim?," BBC News, 20 January 2015 - <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30883058>; Danios, "Most Victims of Islamic Terrorism are Muslims... And Why America is to Blame For It," Loonwatch.com, 18 June, 2012 - <http://www.loonwatch.com/2012/06/most-victims-of-islamic-terrorism-are-muslims-and-why-america-is-to-blame-for-it/>