

Islamic Ideology, Rise of Terror and State: A Perspective on Crisis in Middle East

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Abstract

The security concern of nation state is put to severest of tests in the present century by the rise of extremist and terrorist force across the world especially in Middle East region. Today Islamic ideology is labeled and castigated for its active support to extremist elements across the region. There is an urgent need to analyze the role of Islam in aiding and nurturing terrorism in the region. With this objective in view, Islamic ideology is juxtaposed with actual realities at the geo-political level. The present is an attempt to put crisis in middle-east in a dissection tray for its thread bare analysis and finding reasons responsible for large scale violence and destruction. It is an attempt to put the west-Asian turmoil in proper perspective.

KEYWORDS: Islam, peace, west Asian, extremist etc

Introduction

Islam is the religion of one true God (ch. 2; verses 136) (Abdullah, 1991:p.55)). It is not a sect or an ethic religion. In its view all religion is one, for the truth is One. It is the religion preached by all the earlier prophets. It is the truth taught by all the inspired books. In essence it amounts to a consciousness of the will and plan of God and a joyous submission to that will and plan (ch. 3; verses 85) (Abdullah, 1991a:p.145). It is universal and claim to date from Adam. Father Ibrahim is mentioned as the great Ancestor of those among whom Islam was first preached- Jews, Christians and Arab Quraish.(ch. 2.verse 128) (Abdullah, 1991b:p.53). Islam is the religion of every creature- living or non living on the face of the earth and the universe.

Today the status of Islam is in crises as never before in its more than fourteen Hundred years of existence amongst Muslim Ummah. Moderate Muslims across the globe who constitute ninety percent of Muslims are called upon to account for every act of terror committed by Muslim extremists who constitute only one percent of Muslims. The world seems to have exploded in a frenzy of allegedly Islamic ideology- fuelled killings in the acts of – Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Syria) [ISIS/ISIL and now IS], Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Boko Haram and Al Qaeda. The reactions to Islamic radicals conducting acts of terror have been varied: from outright killing of Muslims to asking them to get out of country and account for the killing of innocents⁶. Even Muslims pushed by anti-Muslim rallies in the western world are starting to debate the role that Islamist ideology plays in extremism. Most importantly, the traditional conservative Muslim political and clerical establishment had broken its silence with Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar mosque, proposing a radical overhaul of Islamic teachings; even Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el- Sisi, calling for a “religious revolution” to purge Islam of extremist tendencies. Today the call is to re-interpret Islam

to defeat extremist who are considered to be guided by Islamic ideology. Differentiate between True Islam and Islam propagated by extremist elements. Separating Moderate Islam and Jihadist Islam and determining as to “who speaks for Islam?”

Ideology versus Reality

Even as the global civil war casts a shadow of doubt over Muslim world and threatens to tear it apart, there is a deep pessimism over the future of Islam. Some call it, the harbinger of new awakening. American Muslim scholar Asma Afsaruddin says it is “intra- Muslim dialectics” played out between ‘absolutists’ and liberals. Some claim it to be birth pangs of new Islam. However, the real question is to understand the present imbroglio in its true nature, before labeling it as a fight within Islam or attempt to re-interpret Islam. We need to analyze whether the present civil war in Islamic world is Islamic ideology driven or its roots are somewhere else.

Ideology is loosely defined as “belief system”. In this view political/ religious ideology is looked at as a set of belief that characterizes any group, government or the entire nation. A more rigorous definition of political/ religious ideology would be “that it is a programmatic and rhetorical application of some grandiose philosophical system, which arouse men to political action and may provide strategic guidance for that action” (Hagopian, 1978: p.390). Seen from the prism of above definition, none of the countries across the globe qualify as ideology inspired Islamic state. All the countries that saw their leadership change – Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen- are republics, whereas Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the Emirates, Jordan and Morocco- are monarchies (Haider, 2015: p.8). For those who say that the present war is a Muslim civil war born out of clash between extremist and liberalist ideologies need to stop, think and rewind to 2012-2013, when the Syrian President, Bashar al Assad, faced the most difficult pressure from armed Free Syrian Army fighters and Jabhat Al- Nasrah rebels, or further rewind to historicise the rise of some militant “Islamic” movements to bring balance in public debate. This is important because the present debate needs to be shifted to more logical terrain; analyze and understand whether Islam is the driving force behind all recent acts of terror.

Starting with Taliban, it was raised by Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to fight the soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1979 and after the end of cold war when its western masters left; it fought brutal war with several Taliban leaders and under the leadership of Mulla Umar consolidated a new Afghan state. Al- Qaeda was floated by ex Taliban recruit and U.S agent trained to fight Russians in Afghanistan. After 9/11 both resisted American invasion in Afghanistan and led different splinters of the same groups in west Asia and South Asia, after U.S destroyed them in Afghanistan. Similarly, IS was once known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) led by the Jordanian terrorist Al Zaraqawi, who was killed in 2006 in a targeted attack by the U.S Air Force. In 2003, AQI began fighting the American Occupation of Iraq. Later it merged with other small resistance groups and turned into the Mujahideen Shura Council, before emerging as the ISIS under the leadership of Abu Bakr al- Baghdadi. IS also emerged as a reaction to western intervention in west Asia and gradually broadened its scope to Syria during the protests against President Bashar al- Assad. Boko Haram arose following the brutal suppression of the people of Biafra by the Nigerian Government supported by prominent western

countries and oil companies. Boko Haram started as a movement that criticized the corrupt, oil-wealthy government Nigeria and became a provider for the poor undertaking state-like welfare functions in northeast Nigeria. (Sirnate, 2015: p.8)

The emergence of terror groups in west Asia is more owing to interventionist policy of U.S and its allies. The west misread “Arab Spring” when people poured out onto the streets from Tunis to Damascus and Sana, it demanded democracy and positive change which could have been better effected through the ballot box than funding, aiding and assisting extremist and fringe elements. It followed the strategy of regime change and funded extremist groups in pursuance of its aim without realizing that in the bargain it also eroded what were once “secular” regimes wherein minorities and women enjoyed a higher position than they do in other countries of the Arab world. (Suroor, 2015: p.7)

The U.S and its allies made a more fundamental mistake by infusing the spirit of Jihad in their campaign against Mr. Assad, so as to help trigger a popular uprising in Syria. It was repeating the mistake of 1980’s in Afghanistan when Reagan administration openly used Islam as an ideological tool to spur armed resistance to soviet forces in Afghanistan. It created a deadly cocktail, which led to rise of Al- Qaeda and threat and far reaching consequence to international security. As in 1980’s so in Syria as well the American strategy backfired, in just two years Syria descended into a Somalian style failed state under the weight of the international jihad against Mr. Assad.

Neo- Liberalism and terror

The seeds of current rise in extremism around the world can be seen in the neo-liberalism induced world order that has pushed the masses of people at the margins. The scale of crisis has been laid out by the charity Oxfam which states that just 80 individuals now have the same net wealth as 3.5 billion people- half the entire global population (Milne, 2015: p.7). Last year, the best- off one percent owned 48 percent of the world wealth, up from 44 percent five years ago. On the current trend, the richest one percent will have pocketed more than the other 99 percent put together next year. The 0.1 percent has done even better, quadrupling their share of U.S income since the 1980s. This is wealth grab at the cost of people at large. For 30 years, under the rule of “market fundamentalism”- privatization, deregulation and low taxes on the rich- inequality in income and wealth has ballooned, both within and between the large majority of countries (Milne, 2015: p.7). It has not only sucked wealth from the public realm into the hands of small minority, but shrunk the political discourse that the current movements and rebellions challenge or even attempt to change. The left is popularly discredited and doesn’t find purchase in societies with strong ethnic and religious sentiments, so the religious based ideology of rebellion is natural outcome.

In implementing ideology of democracy and neo-liberal economic order the western countries have been over zealous. They have enforced the current economic system that breeds and perpetuates global inequality and encourages a neo- mercantilism of sorts where western nations have encouraged and backed despots to preserve economic interests and have undertaken military invasion to cement control over economic and natural resources.

Islam and terror

Islam is religion of peace and it's Prophet (pbuh) and his adherents down the ages have amply exhibited its serenity and piousness. It has stood the test of time and pulls and pressures of different challenges posed to it during different eras and various forms of governments from autocrat monarchies to people's democracies. We need to understand that present challenge has not risen from Islamic ideology but the extremist elements have a common religion that is Islam. These terror outfits are born out of particular configuration of geopolitics and superpower interventions and invasions. They started as resistance movements aspiring for creation of more ideal state, oppose foreign invasion, bad governance and despotic regimes. Creation of ideal state is, as history of Europe in Medieval period till early part of nineteenth century showed, a bloody business. It needs an ideological mooring, offered here by appeal to Islam, and extremely violent tactics as was a case during French Revolution and establishment of Lenin's Russia in 1917. So, equating Islam with violence in the present context would be completely off the mark.

One should also keep in mind the geo-political realities of the region currently in the centre of turmoil. Islam is the only commonly known ideology and script in these regions in which an articulation of resistance can be woven which people can identify with. Islamic ideology is merely the fabric in which an articulation of inequality, marginalization, and alienation is stitched. Islamic ideology is the tool of mobilization for various terror groups. Islam gives them legitimacy. It gives them a narrative and it attracts money. Islam was not the driving force in these movements. Initially it was motivated by corrupt and bad governments, unequal power relations between countries, invasion by foreign powers and global income inequalities made persistent by the current global economic regime where the one percent has captured half of the world's wealth.

The majority of Muslims living in democratic countries like India, Malaysia and Indonesia practise their religions peacefully and within the bounds of law speak through their law abiding and good cosmopolitan behavior about the peace loving and all embracing nature of Islam. We only need to look at the 99 percent of the population exhibiting certain kind of discourse, than highlight the 01 percent and calling to account the ninety nine percent for the evil deeds of minuscule. The stray killing in the name of Islam is, on deeper examination, found to be having its reason elsewhere. The Algerians who killed 12 people in France lived on the margins of French society and were immigrants from a country which had been virtually socially, economically and politically destroyed by France which, historians agree, was always the worst country to get colonized by. (Sirnate, 2015: p.7). Even in Pakistan where around 150 innocent children were massacred in a school in broad day light have their own personal grudge against military operations that had destroyed their home and family. This is not to condone any of the acts of terror or terrorist groups but to bring the whole issue in proper perspective.

Duality: Rethinking solutions

The contemporary challenges to global security and reforming Islam or re-interpreting Islam as a method or technique of resolving global crisis is like beating about the bushes and playing directly into the hand of extremists elements in general and

promoting inequality, marginalization and deprivation in particular thereby, helping terror groups in finding easy recruits. The whole point about terrorism is to divide communities, fracture pluralistic culture, destroy social fabric and scare people into changing how they relate to each other. Cause of terrorism is to be found elsewhere so to eliminate it the solution is to be found elsewhere, certainly not in re-interpreting or reforming Islam; and thereby creating further fissure and promoting fissiparous tendencies.

If there is any thing that requires reform and reinterpretation it is state sponsored violence sanctioned under the guise of democracy as terror. There is a greater need and urgency then ever before to classify state sponsored violence as an act of terrorism not as a collateral damage- as something that is necessary in protecting the interest of haves. From 2003 to2011, during the U.S led invasion of Iraq, nearly half a million Iraqis died because American state decided that Iraq was hiding weapon of mass destruction and chemical weapons which it could never find even after a decade of occupation and left a country of poor, deprived and terrorized. By the end of 2014, America had conducted 500 targeted killings through drones of suspected terrorists, which have led to death of 3674 people. It is estimated that repeated attempts to kill 41 high profile suspects have killed around 1147 people, including women and children . (Mannathukkaren, 2015: p.7) Unless a solution is found to bring perpetrators of this bloody mayhem to account, no permanent redress to terrorism can be found.

There should be a concerted attempt to acknowledge invisible violence and its material basis. The beheading of innocent individuals that are televised is as much gory, barbaric and abhorrent as the aerial bombing of women and children away from television cameras. The western consensus that all threat to freedom of speech is from fanatic fringe of Islamist is erroneous, as it blinds them to their own atrocities and crushes under the boots of democratic state any Bradley Manning, who dares to break the silence to expose the phonies of freedom of speech.

Conclusion

It should also be put into proper perspective that the western world makes sincere attempts to prevent clash between Islam and Christianity by ceasing to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign countries in the name of democracy and its demonic economic world order. The U.S and its allies should refrain from fostering a clash within Islam in the name of eliminating terrorism. Its insincere propaganda machinery under the control of neo- capitalist will do more harm to its interest in the long run. In the same week as the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Boko Haram killed 2000 people. But this was hardly news in the western media. Peshawar did not occasion solidarity marches either. Only when there will be equal pain and disgust to any killing and atrocities happening in any part of the world, that there is any chance of finding new and path breaking solution of present crisis. So long the duality of standard remain in our judgments and actions all attempt to find lasting solution will end up in mirage.

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