Editorial

Muslim Scholars' Take on the Negative Consequences of "Terrorism"

I pen this editorial feeling weary of having to address this particular topic yet again. But please bear with me, for the senseless murder of fourteen innocents in San Bernardino on December 2, 2015, occurred only twenty-two miles from my home. Although I do not regularly attend the mosque that the killers frequented, I personally know that its director is one of America's best Muslim leaders in terms of knowledge, wisdom, and kindness. Lastly, one victim recently graduated from the university at which I teach.

Over the years, I have addressed Muslim extremism and radicalism from various vantage points: the identity of the Muslim extremists, whether their actions can be intellectually and religiously described as Islamic (AJISS 32:2), and whether they could be decisively defeated (not wiped out) so that peace will prevail (AJISS 32:4). I have deliberated how their violent acts against innocents evoke apprehension and fear, thereby stigmatizing and staining all Muslims and even Islam itself (AJISS 29:1). I even addressed the erroneous perception that America's imams cause radicalism and suggested how they should tailor their messages to combat extremism (AJISS 27:2). In this editorial, I explicate what a group of Muslim academics in the Middle East considers to be the negative consequences of "terrorism" (*maḍār al-irhāb*).[1]

The first negative consequence of terrorism[2] is that it "attracts God's wrath and subjects the perpetrator to God's severe punishment, both in this world and the hereafter."[3] These Muslim scholars had the following verse in mind while extrapolating: "If anyone kills a believer deliberately, the punishment for him is Hell, and there he will remain: God is angry with him, and rejects him, and had prepared a tremendous torment for him" (Q. 4:93). In a hadith narrated by Ibn Abbas, the young Companion who has been dubbed the "father of Qur'anic exegesis," he said that when this verse was revealed the Companions asked the Prophet, "Even if the perpetrator repents, becomes a true believer, and does good deeds?" The Prophet responded, "How else can he repent?" (*annā lahū al-tawbah*).[4]

Several versions of this hadith, as recorded in the main Hadith compilations, all of which go back to Ibn Abbas, emphasize two points: (1) as the last verse revealed on the subject, Q. 4:93 was never abrogated (and if anything, it may have abrogated others), and (2) any Muslim who kills another Muslim deliberately cannot repent for it. In spite of the Prophet's categorical explanation above, one version in al-Bukhari includes a comment by Mujahid, a Follower scholar who might have been unaware of the version that contains the Prophet's explanation, suggesting that there may be an exception for a perpetrator who "regretted" (*illā man nadim*) his actions.

Although Q. 4:93 pertains to intra-Muslim killing, which is the majority of terrorist cases in today's world, scholars cite Q. 5:32, which proclaims the severity of killing and the reward for safeguarding any person's life:

> On the account of that [killing his brother], We decreed to the Children of Israel that whoever kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land – it is as if he kills all humanity. And whoever saves a life, it is as if he saves the lives of all humanity.

This verse was revealed in the context of Cain killing his brother Abel. Due to its severity, God forbade it to the people of Moses and of Muhammad. It should be pointed out that it does not matter, in terms of proscription or warning, which community is being addressed, so long as it is stated in the Qur'an. Hence, all Muslims consider this verse applicable to themselves, just as it was on the Children of Israel.

This first consequence, which is purely religious and theological in nature, must be considered by those who claim to be believers. It is significant because almost all violent extremists claim to be religious and more pious than "regular" believers, either at heart or in deed.[5] Although motivated mainly by sociopolitical ideologies, religious motivations are always part of their agendas.

It would therefore be out of character for these "pious" violent extremists to ignore what God and Prophet say about killing innocent people. However, it is inconceivable that they, especially the leaders, simply bypass all the Qur'an and Sunnah's clear pronouncements on terrorizing innocent citizens. This is why, despite the objections of some critics, such words as *hypocrisy*, *ignorance*, and *selectivity* are sometimes used to describe the extremists.

Extremists are hypocrites precisely because they claim to be acting on behalf of Muslims and Islam, despite violating the latter's principles regarding the value and sanctity of humanity and human life. They are ignorant because they claim to be knowledgeable and eager to defend Muslims and Islam, and yet miss or seem to be unaware of some basic Islamic knowledge and the Muslim majority's consensus against the use of violence. They are definitely

selective, because they choose only those texts or interpretations that support their worldview and actions.

The second consequence is purely socio-political: to send "shivers into people's hearts, and spreads panic (*al-dhu'r*) and horror (*al-faza'*) among the population."[6] Not only is this an absolute truth, it also debilitates entire populations: The innocent dead no longer have any life to lead, the injured and traumatized victims are forever changed, and their loved ones are left to deal with the consequences, none of which can be even remotely positive.

The resulting pain and panic is felt regardless of one's faith, age, and socio-economic status. The recent exodus of Muslim refugees to Europe is a glaring example of the horror of terrorism. Thousands of people have died at the hands of extremists, while millions have been displaced without any foreseeable hope of ever going home. It is disheartening to learn that one of the San Bernardino victims, a young Muslimah who attended the same mosque as the killer, was considered lucky despite having about four bullets in her body. One can hardly imagine the terror that gripped the victims and their families. To be the cause of so many people's everlasting anguish is unforgivable before God and unpardonable by the population.

Here in the United States, every terrorist activity sends absolute shivers into our spine, even in the comfort of our homes. On the day of the attack, the director of my daughters' Islamic school at the mosque abruptly dismissed school in total chaos. Panic set in as some parents rushed to pick up their children on such short notice. The school was closed for a week, for the staff thought that they or perhaps even the children might be attacked. One might think this was an overreaction, but they would be wrong. Here in California, several mosques were vandalized; one was firebombed. Before the attackers' identities were revealed, my wife and I were glued to our television, praying that the perpetrators were not Muslim. Unfortunately, our prayer was not accepted. We were not unconcerned about the victims, but we were justifiably worried about the backlash if it turned out that Muslims were involved.

My hijab-wearing wife and daughter remain petrified. They get scary looks from people while out shopping, unsure what people are thinking about them. And so they constantly pray that no crazy person will harm them. When my wife saw police cars parked at our neighbor's home and the police talking with them about matters unrelated to us, she panicked. "Is she telling them something about us?" she queried. Her reaction, understandably, was based on the authorities' "If you see something, say something" mantra. It took some reassurance on my part of God's protection to calm her nerves. In addition, we had nothing to fear since we have not done "something." All of these unsettling experiences, manifested in different ways and multiplied among America's

several million Muslims and the global Muslim community, are the consequences of the actions of a few Muslims extremists.

The third consequence is more social, political, and economic in nature, for it "results in a lack of security and tranquility, and leads to widespread killings, looting, theft and other crimes."[7] With the occurrence and threat of terrorism on the rise, peace and security are things of the past. The world's security apparatus always reassures the public, but it cannot guarantee anything absolutely. Once again Muslim societies, with mediocre to non-existent security agencies, are more susceptible and vulnerable than others. People in the West see an increased deployment of security personnel after every terrorist attack, because peace and tranquility have been demonstrably destabilized. There is always a heightened sense of vulnerability, and so authorities act to quickly restore the sense of (if not actual) order and calm.

For many Muslim societies, the hope and expectation of security is just as compelling. But where terrorism has become a "norm" and the authorities are far more indifferent, the lack of security seems to be deeply felt. Terrorism also results in widespread looting and plundering, for law and order become scarce. In this case, the consequences of terrorism are compounded, which engenders a chaotic atmosphere in which other crimes flourish.

Other social ills result from terrorism, particularly, among Muslim societies. The cost of living increases, for in terrorist prone areas businesspeople cannot carry out their usual activities and on-hand supplies cannot meet the demand. One result of the ensuing scarcity is inflated prices. In the ensuing struggle to survive, social trust and the compassion of the haves for the have-nots eventually vanish.

Terrorism also leads to wondering who the potential recruits might be, even though the majority is not inclined to extremism. Skepticism prevails, suspicion is commonplace, and severe restrictive measures are easily instituted and applied. And with that, even the most compassionate haves may find themselves unable to help the have-nots. Since 9/11, the sincere charity works of certain wealthy people in the Middle East have been seriously hampered because they are suspected of helping terrorists. Some of us with distinctly Muslim names have experienced difficulties sending money to our poor relatives in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia for this very reason.

And the net effect of all of this is a vicious cycle of more killing and terrorism, suspicion, a lack of compassion, severe restrictions, and, of course, more suffering for Muslims worldwide. Given all of this, why would Muslims sympathize with the terrorists? Reading that most Muslims sympathize with terrorists, as "revealed" by recent Islamophobia pollsters,[8] is not only shockingly insulting but also completely untrue and unreasonable, nothing more

than a pathetic figment of the pollsters' imagination and wishful thinking. For more reputable polls and statistics, read "Muslim Americans Are More Likely to Reject Violence, Intolerance than Many Other Americans."[9]

This Issue

We begin this issue with Jibreel Delgado's "Religions, Lifeways, Same Difference: Defining *Dīn* in the US, the Middle East, and South Asia." Using definitions from western sociologists of religion and conservative political lobbyists and think tanks that match those offered by some Muslim scholars, Delgado shows how most experts on religion in these three regions understand it as a system that governs public behavior. He concludes that earlier mid-twentieth century Muslim critiques of equating *dīn* and religion had little to do with Islam's intrinsic nature.

Next is Ali Paya's "The *Faqīh* as Engineer: A Critical Assessment of *Fiqh*'s Epistemological Status." In his exploration of this topic, Paya argues that many *fuqahā'* and other scholars have not fully appreciated why Muslim scholars like al-Farabi and al-Ghazzali classified *fiqh* within the category of "applied sciences." One result of this attitude, he concludes, is the emergence of epistemic confusion. He observes that equating a *faqīh* with an *'ālim* is an unfortunate consequence that helped the *fuqahā'* further consolidate their dominant position in the ecosystem of Islamic culture.

Nesya Shemer's "Islamic Law and Political Ideology: Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Renewed Interpretation of Islamic Prayer Laws" looks at the methodological principles informing al-Qaradawi's rulings as regards Muslim minorities. Comparing classical-era discussions on prayer times with al-Qaradawi's new interpretations, Shemer notes the ongoing historical process of change undergone by the Shari'ah concerning these times in the context of extraordinary circumstances. She also highlights how the shaykh's political positions have influenced both his rulings and intra-Muslim discussions in the West.

We close with "The Politics of the Two *Qiblah*s and the Emergence of an Alternative Islamic Monotheism" penned by Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid. He examines and clarifies the "*qiblah* literature" to reveal the Ka'bah's role as both a geographical locale and a spiritual magnet. Hamid seeks to answer several questions: Was the prayer direction changed from Makkah to Jerusalem and then back to Makkah (Q. 2:142-44) a divine command or Muhammad's independent judgment? Was it a move to dilute the Arabs' emotional attachment to the Ka'bah or to win over Madinah's Jewish community? Might it have been a throwback to the Abrahamic heritage, envisaged by the Prophet as a base for a wider, monolithic Islamic nationalism?

I hope that our readers will find these papers not only thought-provoking and stimulating, but also sources of inspiration and motivation for their own research.

Endnotes

1. "Al-Irhāb," *Mawsūʿat Naḍrat al-Naʿīm fī Makārim Ahklāq al-Rasūl*, ed. Salih ibn Abdullah ibn Humayd et al. (Jeddah: Dar al-Wasilah, 2012), 9:3828-36. In some of the editorials listed above, I mentioned how various non-Muslim critics like to observe that Muslims around the world do not speak out against extremism and terrorism, a situation that they use to "prove" Muslims as sympathetic to extremists. Although what they say is not true, as shown in those editorials, this explanation here will therefore serve as additional proof that classical and modern Muslim scholars have always spoken against terrorism, a fact that both critics and media outlets have always failed to acknowledge.

2. A *terrorist* is "an individual who uses violence, terror, and intimidation to achieve a result," and *terrorism* is "the calculated use of violence (or the threat of violence) against civilians in order to attain goals that are political or religious or ideological in nature; this is done through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear." Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms. S.v. "terrorist." Retrieved Dec. 20, 2015, from http://www.thefreedictionary.com/terrorist.

3. *Mawsūʿat*, 9:3836.

4. Ali ibn Muhammad al-Mawardi, *Al-Nukat wa al-ʿUyūn Tafsīr al-Māwardī* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2007), 1:520. This source also refers to al-Tabari and al-Suyuti.

5. The San Bernardino killer was said to frequent mosque several times daily, including the dawn (*fajr*) prayer. This particular prayer, out of all the daily prayers due to its time, is considered to be an outward sign of serious commitment to religiosity, notwithstanding the fact that many terrorists used to be hardened criminals and party animals. Oddly, being pious does not prevent them from committing heinous crimes and such other social ills as rape, doing drugs, and killing innocent people.

6. *Mawsūʿat*, 9:3836.

7. Ibid.

8. http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/behind-trump-bogus-statistics-article-1.2459360.

9. Retrieved Dec. 22, 2015 from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-bier/muslim-americans-violence_b_8812234.html?ncid=txtlnkusaolp 00000592.

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