

TERRORISM AND ISLAM: A POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

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Abstract

It has been globally acknowledged that the burning issue of the day is nothing but terrorism. The fear of which has changed the entire political scenario of the world. This paper seeks to analyze the rationale provided by groups of terrorists like the Mujaheddin and the Taliban in Afghanistan that everything they do is in following the injunctions of Allah. Intermittently quoting from the Qur'an, they profess that they are strictly adhering to an Islamic lifestyle and implementing the same. This paper has taken the onus of studying the authenticity of the Qur'an and analyzing whether it actually bolsters up terrorism and violence. The difference between Mullah-Islam and Allah-Islam needs to be demarcated. Various reports have stated that the madrassas have become the fountainhead of terrorism as most terrorists are coached by the Mullahs. The Qur'an is interpreted in such a manner that it serves in the fulfilment of their political propaganda thus, calling for a mass disapproval of Muslims and Islam. The myth needs to be broken. The political motive behind this needs to be analyzed. Force implemented by this aberrant reading does not in any way undermine the true message of the sacred text. A strict adherence to the Qur'an would have actually led to an ambience of peaceful tolerance.

Keywords – Terrorism, Mujaheddin, Taliban, Islam, Afghanistan, the Qur'an, Madrassa, Politics.

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Every individual claims to have supreme knowledge of Islam. Their stance on religious and societal function seems to be deeply formed by their interpretation of the Qur'an. But in actuality it is simply a religious mask to hide the evil political intentions that they harbour. This has been the feeling of many and this paper will strictly highlight that Islam has nothing to do with terrorism. To prove this point I have taken Afghanistan as a reference. A person's lack of knowledge pertaining to the Qur'an, wide media coverage of the edicts formulated by the terrorists in the name of Islam has actually led to the defamation of Islam. Terrorism, the major threat on mankind, has invariably been linked with Islam as the terrorists themselves proclaim that the driving force behind them is Islam. Any act involving the use of violence on innocents for the fulfilment of one's political agenda can be termed as terrorism. The question that now arises is whether the terrorists are actually using the veil of Islam to hide their cruel intentions or does the Qur'an literally promote such acts of violence. Let's first make one thing very clear that there remains a clear distinction between Muslims and Islamists. For an Islamist unlike a Muslim, Islam is not a religion but a political ideology. They want the strictest interpretation of Islam in guiding the society. (Spencer 7) God is now represented not as the benevolent and loving father but a strict disciplinarian who, as is always seen, is threatening the people with hell fire and constant suffering even for their slight deviation from the injunctions highlighted in the Qur'an. Maajid Nawaz opines that Islamism 'isn't a religious movement with political consequences, it is a political movement with religious consequences.' (Nawaz and Bromley 86) It is politics and not piety that distinguishes between mainstream and radicalised Muslims.

Islam means submission and the Qur'an is the basis of Islamic law and theology. The Qur'an is the basis of the religious life of the Muslim world that governs every aspect of their existence. The major reason behind such debates and aberrant reading of the Qur'an is primarily because of the language in which the original text has been written. It is written in classical seventh-century Arabic, a language that is extremely difficult for interpretation as most Muslims today are not native Arabic speakers. Therefore, the onus of the clarification lies on the Mullahs who themselves are not highly literate.

Samuel Huntington has stated that people “need new sources of identity, new forms of stable community, and new sets of moral precepts to provide them with a sense of meaning and purpose.” (Huntington 97) Religion is able to meet these needs. He states that the resurgence of Islam embodies the acceptance of modernity, rejection of Western culture, and the recommitment to Islam as the guide to life in the modern world.

Afghanistan had been subjected to various wars and was ruled by different powers from time to time. The Soviet-backed Afghanistan had led to mass exodus of citizens. Over one million Afghans got killed during the decade-long Soviet rule that lasted from 1979-89. Malalai Joya mentions:

‘During this time, the United States was also involved in Afghanistan. In the name of the legitimate struggle of the mujahideen to liberate our country, the US funded, trained and armed some of the worst extremists in the world – people like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Abdul Rab al- Rasul Sayyaf and Osama bin Laden. The latter, of course, was not an Afghan. He was one of the thousands of foreigners that the United States and Pakistan recruited, trained and funded with the collusion of wealthy Saudi Arabian extremists. This intervention helped lead to the eventual downfall of the Soviet Union and contributed to the end of the Cold War, but it left us plagued with well-armed fundamentalists. Even before the Russians were driven out, many of the extremist groups had begun fighting each other and making life terrible for the Afghan people. Ultimately both the superpowers used Afghanistan for their own interests.’ (Joya 17)

Respite from the Soviet came in the form of the Mujaheddin. In an Islamic context, the Mujahideen are holy knights of Allah who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Allah. Their goals are to defend the weak, uphold justice, vanquish the oppressors and establish peace, order and justice, as well as facilitate the worship of Allah. But they were already involved in a civil war for the sake of power and money. Anarchy became rampant. Mass abductions, rape and murder continued. This constant strife between the warring lords and the ruling power brought distraught with women suffering the most irrespective of which political faction was in power. The financial aid received by the Afghan government came to an end with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A period of massive financial crisis began with factories closing overnight and people starving. President Najeebullah’s government came to an end and the rule of the Mujaheddin began. Ahmed Rashid in his book *Taliban* has highlighted the rampant mayhem caused by these warring groups.

‘Their leaders sold off everything to Pakistani traders to make money, stripping down telephone wires and poles, cutting trees, selling off factories, machinery and even road rollers to scrap merchants. The warlords seized homes and farms, threw out their occupants and handed them over to their supporters. The commanders abused the population at will, kidnapping young girls and boys for their sexual pleasure, robbing merchants in the bazaars and fighting and brawling in the streets.’(Rashid 21)

The initial insurgence of the Taliban was considered as a blessing as they had crushed the warring tribal groups and brought peace and security to the surrounding areas of Kandahar. Their coming to power was looked upon as a saviour by the commoners who were already leading a torturous life under the Mujaheddins. Their name itself portrayed that they were far detached from the party politics and the fight for gaining power. Their only motive was to cleanse society of its evils. They wanted to hand over power to a government which was made up of 'good Muslims'. The people who joined this group were already world-weary of the criminal activities of the Mujaheddin leadership. They wanted to purify the society which had gone completely wrong as corruption had jeopardized the Islamic way of living. Probing into the background of the Taliban, we find that many of them had been born in Pakistani refugee camps, educated in the *madrassas* of Pakistan and learnt their fighting skills from the Mujaheddin parties. Hence, they were totally ignorant of their own country and its history. The only thing that they had learnt was about the ideal Islamic society during Prophet Mohammad's time and that is what they wanted to in still in the lives of the people as well. In the month of March, 1996, Ahmed Rashid had interviewed Mullah Wakil, the aide to Omar who stated:

'The Sharia does not allow politics or political parties. That is why we give no salaries to officials or soldiers, just food, clothes, shoes and weapons. We want to live a life like the Prophet lived 1400 years ago and jihad is our right. We want to recreate the time of the Prophet and we are only carrying out what the Afghan people have wanted for the past 14 years.' (Rashid 43)

Malalai Joya has explicitly stated that initially the Taliban were referred to as 'angels of peace' by the then so-called president Burhanuddin Rabbani. Ahmad Shah Massoud complimented the Taliban for having the same way of thinking. Even Benazir Bhutto, referred to as 'the mother of the Taliban' had funded and promoted the Taliban to exploit trade routes through Afghanistan.

'Pakistan provided a new telephone and wireless network for the Taliban, refurbished Kandahar airport and helped out with spare parts and armaments for the Taliban's airforce, while continuing to provide food, fuel and ammunition, including rockets. The Saudis provided fuel, money and hundreds of new pick-ups to the Taliban. Much of this aid was flown into Kandahar airport from the Gulf port city of Dubai.' (Rashid 45)

The leader of the Taliban was Mullah Mohammed Omar, also known as [*Amir al-Mu'minin*](#) ('Commander of the Faithful'), after he had donned the cloak, said to belong to Muhammad. He was chosen as the leader primarily because of his veneration to Islam. Pakistani journalist Rahimullah Yousufzai was given an explanation by Omar himself when he stated:

'We took up arms to achieve the aims of the Afghan jihad and save our people from further suffering at the hands of the so-called Mujaheddin. We had complete faith in God Almighty. We never forgot that. He can bless us with victory or plunge us into defeat.' (Rashid 23).

Mullah Omar emerged as the savior of the people when in the spring of 1994 Singesar neighbours came to him for help as two teenage girls who had been abducted by a commander. The head of the girls were shaved and then they were deported to a military camp where they were persistently raped. Omar, along with some thirty Talibs rescued the girl and hanged the commander from the barrel of a tank. Then they captured their entire arms and ammunitions. Omar, later said, 'We were fighting against Muslims who had gone wrong. How could we remain quiet when we could see crimes being committed against women and the poor?' (Burns and Levine). Omar's group also freed a young boy whom two commanders wanted to sodomise and thus had a confrontation between them leading to a fight that killed many civilians. Henceforth, Omar's group was approached for all kinds of local disputes as well. Omar gained quite a reputation as he asked for no reward or credit. The only thing he wanted from the people was to set up a just Islamic system.

Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, was always assisted by young male students from Pakistani *madrassas*. Whenever the need arised the Pakistani *ulema* would close the *madrassas* thus leaving the students with no other option but join the war. A peek into their background did reveal the fact that these *talibs* were between 14 and 24 years old. Their life seemed meaningful only because of the existence of a war, the only profession that they could adapt to. Many had spent their lives in refugee camps and taught by Afghan mullahs or Pakistan's Islamic fundamentalist parties. It was in the *madrassas* that they studied the Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet and the Islamic law but they solely remained unaware of maths, science, history or geography. They remained unaware of the love of a woman, being mostly orphans and being brought up in a culture of an all-male brotherhood. They were taught that the militant Islam is the only indisputable way of pleasing Allah and becoming God's own soldiers. Ahmed Rashid has opined that the *talibs* felt that oppression of women is a norm as they are evil incarnation who distracted mankind from serving Allah. Controlling women would reaffirm their manhood. Sexual opportunity would diminish their zeal for jihad. Therefore, the only way to keep the morale high of the talibs was by oppressing women that would be the yardstick for Islamic radicalism, promoted by the Taliban.

The C.I.A. with Saudi Arabia, in order to promote Wahabism, provided the funds to indoctrinate thousands of *madrassas* students with the ideology of fighting a just war in Afghanistan. Hundreds of *madrassas* propped up in Pakistan without any form of regulation, drawing in students and millions of Afghan refugees who had fled across the border. Danial Khan in a report from Pakistan stated that the *madrassas* are the only place where the poor people in Pakistan can opt for an education. There are approximately 40,000 *madrassas* in Pakistan. 'Laal Masjid' or 'The Red Mosque' preached an extreme interpretation of Islam. Its leaders advocated a strict Sharia law. This *madrassa* was run by two brothers Maulana Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rasheed Gazi. Danial Khan reported that these *madrassas* instilled in the students anti governmental feelings. The students vandalized and burned down buildings and targeted anyone they viewed as unislamic. Later, inside the ruins of the Red Mosque, Intelligence sources found letters from Laden's second-in-

command instructing the mosque's leaders to revolt against the government. Pakistan investigators believe that as many as eighteen foreign fighters had entered the complex in the weeks before the siege to train its students how to use weapons. Solid evidence says that terrorists were indeed using *madrassas* as training grounds. These students are trained better than a commando of the Pakistan army. They have the ability to spread terror and are capable of handling sophisticated weapons. These religious schools are churning out fanatics on a regular basis. These hate factories teach their students for four years followed by two years of jihad training in a terrorist camp.

The Taliban had set forth to formulate a totally new concept of Islamic reform by promoting an extremely strict interpretation of the Sharia and by popularizing the concept of jihad. They opine that they are in a perpetual state of jihad with the non-Muslims. Similarly the term mujaheddin comes from the word 'mujahid' which means one engaged in jihad. Jihad undoubtedly means war. But that war is with the self, in order to purge oneself of the evil that resides within to emerge as a better individual. 'Jihad is the inner struggle of moral discipline and commitment to Islam and political action.' (Metcalf 4). Both the Mujaheddin and the Taliban have always justified their action by bringing in the precedence of Prophet Mohammad as the Prophet himself had rebelled against the corrupt Arab society. This exemplification of the Prophet has become the quintessential of jihadi Muslim behavior. The terrorists profess that they are waging a jihad against corruption and evil. But the reality seems to be totally different. The strict followers of Islam, the terrorists, seem to have forgotten verse 5:32 of the Qur'an which states:

'We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land – it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind.' (Haleem71)

Maajid Usman Nawaz, the founding chairman of [Quilliam](#), a counter-extremism think tank that seeks to challenge the narratives of [Islamist](#) extremists, was formerly a member of the Islamist group [Hizb ut-Tahrir](#). He highlights the way Islam is wrongly promoted to mould the minds of the distressed youth and how he was also a victim of the same:

'I was sixteen at the time I started hearing all this. When you're that age, already angry and disenfranchised, you're very susceptible to absolutes. This globalization of our grievance was what many would later come to know as the powerful Islamist narrative. It would go on to stir the hearts of thousands of young Muslims around the world, leading to the creation of groups who would commit many atrocities in its name.' (Nawaz and Bromley 89)

We do find that the terrorist groups were actually on the fringes of the society and by the manipulation of Islam they began establishing their foothold in the social milieu. Faith becomes identified as a form of resistance that brought forth an identity of defiance and self-affirmation. It thus became a game of power politics of the marginal powers. Omid Safi has surmised that these impulsive reactions are basically a result of colonialism and

modernity. It is far-fetched from the idea of true Islam and it does nothing but reduces Islam to a single dynamic of power. These social malignancies are primarily a result of violently repulsive acts. These acts deaden and deconstruct the societal concept of virtue and ethics. This results in an acclimatization and indoctrination of justifying immorality. We do forget that any abusive work carried out in the name of Islam becomes a precedent which leads to misleading notions of the religion. Karl Marx has therefore aptly referred to religion as 'the opium of the people.'

The best way to conclude the entire discussion is by performing *Jihad Akbar* which calls for a greater struggle for rumination leading to unification of the differences that has been the center of Islamic teaching and pondering over certain questions raised by Omid Safi:

'Can we find a way to celebrate our common humanity not in spite of our differences but *because* of them, through them, and beyond them? Can we learn to grow to the point where ultimately "we" refers not to an exclusivist grouping, but to what the Qur'an calls the *Bani Adam*, the totality of humanity?' (Safi 12)

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