

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > Shades of Terrorism: War against Terrorists is not a War on Islam

Shades of Terrorism: War against Terrorists is not a War on Islam

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Wed, 08/02/2017 - 06:31

Paper No. 6284

Dated 01-Aug-2017

By Kazi Anwarul Masud

Though British political philosopher Edmund Burke used the term “terrorism” in the 18th century to demonize the French Revolution, Maximillian Robes Pierre spoke of “first maxim to conduct the people by reason and the enemies of the people(is) by terror”, and his reiteration that “terror is nothing else but justice, prompt, secure and inflexible”. Modern terrorism in one form or another has been a part of human history since 1st century.

Of the early religious terrorists (religious terrorism is motivated primarily by religion as opposed to ethnic or a politically ideological terrorist group) the notables were Hindu Thugees, the Muslim Assassins, and the Jewish Zealot-Sciari. The Thugees pursued religious ends by offering their victims to the Hindu Goddess of destruction -- Kali (the Thugees were active from the 7th till mid-19th century India). The assassins killed politicians and clerics who refused to submit to their brand of Islam. Zealot-Sciari, on the other hand, used political violence for religious solution. Though short lived this group waged what they believed to be God ordained war against Cannanites for possession of the Promised Land.

Marxism created its own brand of terrorism subscribing to Italian revolutionary Carlo Piscane’s theory of the “propaganda of the deed” recognizing the usefulness of terrorism to deliver a message to an audience other than the target and draw attention to and support for the terrorist’ cause. Piscane’s theory was put into practice through the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 and of Arch Duke Ferdinand of Austria triggering the outbreak of the First World War.

Throughout history, particularly during the colonial period the colonizers resorted to what may be described as “state terrorism” and a segment of the colonized in their yearning to be free embarked upon their own brand of terrorism. One could readily recall the barbarism of

the Fascist and the Nazi regimes and the on-going Israeli genocidal acts in the occupied territories as examples of state terrorism. In the second category of response to state terrorism one could cite China, Indo-China, Kenya, Malaysia, Cyprus, India, Bangladesh and countless others. In the category of the state sponsored terrorism one could cite the example of Kashmiris trained and armed by Pakistan (denied by the Pakistani authorities) and sent across the Line of Control in Kashmir to conduct terrorist acts in Indian Kashmir. While it is immoral to keep free people in bondage it has to be enquired how expansive the definition of terrorism should be to support armed rebellion.

Thus we are faced with the problem of defining terrorism which would have universal acceptance. To cut through the Gordian definitional knot terrorism expert Arnold Schmidt suggested to the UN that if the core of war crimes—deliberate attacks on civilians, hostage taking, and killing of prisoners—is extended to peace times then one could simply define acts of terrorism as “peace time equivalent of war crimes”. The US authorities have been able to agree on some of the fundamental elements of terrorism as follows: - (a) terrorism is the unlawful use of violence against non-combatants, governments and societies, (b) it is used to inculcate fear and/or intended to coerce/intimidate, (c) by sub-national groups or clandestine agents,; (d) in furtherance of political, religious or ideological goals. To Harvard University’s Jessica Stern the “deliberate evocation of dread is what sets terrorism apart from simple murder or assault”.

Had it not been for the events of 9/11 perhaps terrorism either of al-Qaida variety, Islamic State brutalities or state terrorism would not have brought about the fundamental change in international order. State terrorism by the Fascists and the Nazis got their fitting reply with their total defeat and replacement of these regimes by western style democracies. The disappearances of the colonies, aberrations (like apartheid in South Africa), and defeat of military dictatorship in various parts of the world drew the curtain down on state terrorism. Finally the disappearance of communism persuaded Francis Fukuyama to conclude that liberal democracy constituting the “endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution” and “the final form of human government” and as such constituting ‘the end of history’ has arrived.

Though free from defects and irrationalities of earlier forms of governments Fukuyama unhesitatingly conceded that today’s stable democracies of the West were not without injustice or serious social problems. Though there can never be any justification for terrorism because the children at Beslan went to school like any other children do every day every where in the world, nor for the genocidal attacks on unarmed civilians by the Pakistani army on 25th March 1971 in the then East Pakistan, massacre of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica by Milosevic forces, or the civilians in Rwanda; yet the bombings of USS Cole, and US embassies at Kenya and Tanzania leaving scores dead and wounded did introduce the world to non-state actors who were capable of inflicting great damage to the most powerful nation on earth without incurring much loss to the perpetrators themselves. Such acts fit the terrorists’ agenda because their concerns are generally macro-concerns and essentially political in nature.

The violence wrought upon the American people on 9/11 appear to have been partly motivated by revenge (for what the perpetrators viewed as unjust American actions against the Muslims) and the political aspirations of late Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida and Islamic State – all rejected by the Muslim world. There was therefore no perceptible adverse international reaction when NATO bombed Afghanistan (already a pre-industrial society) to a pulp for refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden for trial (Osama later was found and killed by the American

marines in a garrison town in Pakistan).

War on terror, however, lost its innocence when Iraq was invaded first on the assumption that Saddam Hussein was capable of launching weapons of mass destruction against the West under an hour and later on the ground of his alleged links with the al-Qaida. When both the arguments proved to be false then the ultimate argument of freeing the Iraqis from the clutches of tyrant was advanced. But the legality of Iraq invasion has remained questionable till today since the invasion took place neither in self-defense nor with the approval of the UNSC. Besides, argued Princeton Professor Michael Walzer that as with domestic crimes, use of force would require actual or imminent boundary crossing and invasion or physical assault. Otherwise any use of force by one state against the political sovereignty or territorial integrity of another state would constitute aggression and would be a criminal act. But given the fact that the group of “new sovereigntists” dedicated to defending American institutions against alleged encroachment by international laws and institutions who consider US sovereignty as absolute, illimitable and non-dissipatory and given the fact that so much water has flown down the bridge since Iraq invasion the question of its legality remains an academic issue.

Effectively what happened in the UNSC on Iraq despite Madeline Albright’s assertion that US arguments for Iraq war were not persuasive enough for the Europeans to accept or James Rubin’s putting responsibility for American debacle in UNSC on shifts in the US justification for waging the war as demanded by changing situation on the ground; was perhaps most cogently explained by Michael Glennon of the Fletcher School of Diplomacy that UNSC’s failure to prevent the Iraq war was not a failure at all but was due to the incompatibility of the new global configuration resultant of the towering preeminence of the US with the way UNSC was framed to work. The war of attrition waged by the Sunni Arabs in Iraq against the US occupation coupled with the slow progress on Palestine issue do not appear to have produced the desired result either in Iraq or elsewhere. On the contrary wrote Dr. Peter Warren Singer (of Brookings Institution) that at broader level the US and the Islamic world stand at a point of historic and dangerous crises as American description of the “war on terror” is broadly interpreted as the “war on Islam” by much of the world’s Muslim community. Singer is uncomfortable with Bernard Lewis’ deterministic view point that Islam as a doctrine rejects modernity and is thus placed in a “millennial rivalry” with the Judeo-Christian West.

In Lewis’ monolithic analysis of Islam (the terms Arab and Muslim have been frequently interchanged in the analysis) runs the risk of committing the mistake made by McCarthyism of misdiagnosis of the “red menace” rolled into Soviet Union, China and Third World into one monolithic and inseparable structure. Some western leaders mindful of furious reaction by many Muslims are more cautious in identifying the terrorists. Immediately after the 7th July London bombings then Prime Minister Tony Blair told that the British people that “the vast and overwhelming majority of the Muslims, here and abroad, are decent and law abiding people who abhor the act of terrorism every bit as much as we do”. Shockingly, however, London suicide bombers have been found to be mostly born and bred in the UK albeit of Pakistani and Jamaican origin. Whereas in the past terrorists were foreigners imbued with Jihadist mentality, London bombers were mostly young and the objects of their attack were of little symbolic value (like the Twin Towers representing American capitalist might).

Despite the fact that the London carnage was less damaging than the Madrid bombing or the Twin Towers the counter-terrorist experts fear that Jihadist net work span Europe from Poland to Portugal. Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh was killed by a Dutch of Moroccan descent

born and bred in Europe. Today the Muslims constitute the majority of immigrants in most European countries estimated at between 15 and 20 million and projected to double by 2025. These second or third generation children of immigrants “are the latest, most dangerous incarnation of that staple of immigration literature, the revolt of the second generation. They are also dramatic instances of what could be called adversarial assimilation—integration into host country’s adversarial culture”.

Immediately after the serial blasts in Bangladesh by Islamic extremists President Bush, Prime Minister Blair, European Commission, and other world leaders condemned the bombings. Being victims of Islamic terrorism themselves the western leaders warned Bangladesh anew of the serious situation prevailing in the country which had called into question the claim of Bangladesh as a moderate Muslim country. However it was not the first time that the foreigners had warned Bangladesh authorities of the incipient and stealthy progress of Islamic extremism in the country. In April 2002 Bertil Linter wrote in the Far Eastern Economic Review that after the fall of Kandahar hundreds of Taliban and al-Qaida fighters had arrived by boat from Karachi to Chittagong. A few months later Time magazine’s Alex Perry provided details of southern Bangladesh becoming “a heaven for Jihadists”. Later Eliza Griswold in a piece in The New York Times raised the possibility of Bangladesh giving birth to the next Islamic Revolution. Indian government had been incessant in their allegations of Bangladesh providing safe heaven and materials to the Indian insurgents fighting in the North Eastern India. Besides, Indians allege of increased presence of Pakistani Intelligence Services (ISI) trying to destabilize North Eastern India from Bangladesh. A former Indian Foreign Secretary Shayam Saran in a speech at Delhi warned that India would not ignore her neighbors’ conduct “to allowing the use of their territories for cross border terrorism and hostile activities against India”.

Predictably then Bangladesh authorities continued to dismiss these allegations. People, however, found it difficult to be totally dismissive of a study conducted by an eminent Bangladeshi economist that corporations run by religious fundamentalists make an annual profit of twelve billion taka every year ten percent of which is spent by the fundamentalists for organizational purposes like carrying out regular party activities, providing remuneration and allowances to about half a million party cadres, and running armed training camps. The number of madrashas in Bangladesh is estimated to be 64000 (sixty four thousand) divided into two broad categories—Aliya madrashas run with governmental support and control, and Dars-e-Nizami or Deoband style madrashas who are totally independent. Jamat-e-Islami, founded by Maulana Abu ala Maududi, had grown out of Deoband madrasa system. Jamat from the very beginning was inspired by Ikhwan ul Muslemin or Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt with the aim of bringing about an Islamic revolution and creating an Islamic state. Initially in undivided India Jamat was opposed to the concept of Pakistan. Later, however, when Jamat came to support Pakistan as the Islamic state for the Indian Muslims, Bengali nationalism was totally unacceptable to them. Unsurprisingly therefore Jamat sided with the Pakistani occupation forces in East Pakistan and fought against the war of liberation. Unfortunately successive military governments needing an ideological platform to justify their opposition to Awami League supported and patronized Jamat-e-Islami making it possible for Jamat and another Islamist party to become members of a coalition government in Bangladesh.

History has changed since then though not Pakistan sponsored terrorism into India which has become almost a daily occurrence goading Indian Vice Presidential nominee to remind Pakistan that she should not forget 1971 defeat at the hands of India. His remarks came days

after the US called Pakistan a safe haven of terrorists. In Bangladesh the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina set up International Crimes Tribunal under the INTERNATIONAL CRIMES (TRIBUNALS) ACT, 1973 (ACT NO. XIX OF 1973), enacted by the parliament of Bangladesh to provide for the detention, prosecution and punishment of persons responsible for committing genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other crimes under international law. After lengthy process and providing all legal opportunities to the accused the Tribunals condemned several leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami for collaborating with the Occupying Pakistan Army in commission of genocide, crimes against humanity and other crimes. The process is still going on. Bringing to account of these collaborators was not only an unfulfilled demand of the people. It was also an election pledge of Awami League in 2008 elections.

Some foreign critics of the establishment and punishment of Pakistani collaborators forget about the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials where the German and Japanese accused of war crimes were hanged. The spirit of Nuremberg trial was explained by Geoffrey Lawrence the main British Judge at the Trial. He said” There were, I suppose, three possible courses: to let the atrocities which had been committed go unpunished; to put the perpetrators to death or punish them by executive action; or to try them. Which was it to be? Was it possible to let such atrocities go unpunished? Could France; could Russia, could Holland, Belgium, Norway, Czechoslovakia, Poland or Yugoslavia be expected to consent to such a course? ... It will be remembered that after the First World War alleged criminals were handed over to be tried by Germany, and what a farce that was! The majority got off and such sentences as were inflicted were derisory and were soon remitted”.

While any debate on terrorism erupts into fierce debate it has to be recognized that the international community till today has not been able to reach a consensus on a definition of “terrorism”. One of the points of heated contention in this debate has been whether the term “terrorism” should apply to the actions of States in the same way that it applies to the actions of non-State groups writes Philip Cryan(NOVEMBER 29, 2001. Defining Terrorism Counterpunch). The confusion is mainly placed at the door of the Western powers who want to place both the Israeli state terrorism at the same level with the Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. Then there are numerous instances of CIA arming and training the Contras against the Nicaraguan government; US bombing of a Beirut in March 1985; overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende; And then of course US support of Saddam Regime during the during Iraq-Iran war.

In this sad and disruptive world the military defeat of the Islamic State and the weakening of Al-Qaeda may show us a light at the end of the tunnel if the Trump Presidency along with the thoughtful global leaders can convince their populace that the war against the terrorists is not a war on Islam and Islam phobia is a disease and there is no need to embark on another crusade in the 21st century.

Tags:

[Terrorism](#) ^[1]

[War against Terrorism](#) ^[2]

[Al Qaeda](#) ^[3]

State and non State terrorism [4]

Category:

Papers [5]

Countries:

others [6]

Topics:

Terrorism [7]

Islamic Affairs [8]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2190>

Links

[1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/70>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1726>

[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/101>

[4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1727>

[5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>

[6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/others>

[7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/terrorism>

[8] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/islamic-affairs>