Terrorism, Islam, Muslims and the Media Discourse:

By

[1]Muhammad Younas, [2]Mirwais Kasi

Abstract:

Does Islam promote terrorism? Is terrorism a Muslims' monopoly? Do only Ummah (Muslim Community) constitute terrorist organizations? Historical facts and figures confirm that terrorism could not be single handedly linked to a particular religion, nationality, ethnicity, or any other group. Historically, it is being used by numerous entities such as nationalist groups, religious organizations or governmental regimes, professing different religions, to accomplish their religious or socio-political goals. The fairness of international media's role in presenting the issue of global terrorism is questionable. Therefore, this article will make an attempt to deconstruct the media discourse: the stereotyping of Muslims and Islam vis-à-vis terrorism, particularly, in the wake of Nine-Elven incidents in USA. Besides, care will be taken to point out the negative role of so-called Islamic militant organizations like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, etc., who claim to profess the religion of Islam and selfishly style themselves as the custodians of Islam in general *and Jihad in particular.*

Keywords: Terrorism, Media, Religion, Non-Combatants (Civilians), Terrorist Organizations, Monopoly

Introduction:

In the 74th annual session (2019) of the UN's General Assembly, the Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, spoke out against the 'media lies' surrounding the fire outbreaks in the Amazonian forests; he characterized the media role as manipulative for indigenous people and reflective of the

[1]M.Phil. Scholar, Department of International Relations, University of Balochistan, Quetta Pakistan

[2]Prof., Dr. Mirwais Kasi, Research Supervisor and Chairman, Department of International Relations, University of Balochistan, Quetta Pakistan

colonial spirit. Meanwhile, on September 26, 2019, Pakistan's PM, Imran Khan, pronounced on his official Twitter account, "President Erdogan, PM Mahathir and myself had a meeting today in which we decided our three countries would jointly start an English language channel dedicated to confronting the challenges posed by Islamophobia and setting the record straight on our great religion—Islam".

According to a BBC report, the very word 'terrorism' was coined for the first time to reflect the high voltage of violence that took place during the course of French Revolution, and went straight into the dictionary, Académie François, in 1798. The initial meaning of terrorism, as recorded in this dictionary, is *the system or rule of terror.* During the years 1793-1794, Maximillian Robespierre, the head of the French government arrested half a million people out of which forty thousand were executed, over two hundred thousand were deported and more than 200,000 were tortured and starved to death in prison (Cobb, 1988). Historians call that period of violence as *reign of terror*. The main purpose of that severe violence was to terrorize the opponent groups to materialize socio-political goals. In the course of time, Robespierre's precedent was adopted by other leaders in different parts of the world in order to deal with rival parties with an iron hand (Evans, 2018). For example: Adolf Hitler is said to have incinerated six million Jews; Joseph Stalin is estimated to have killed twenty million people; Mao Tso Tsung of China had killed fourteen to twenty million human beings; Benito Mussolini of Italy had killed four hundred thousand people in his home country alone; Ashoka, in one battle of Kalinga alone, murdered one hundred thousand people. These all actions are to be considered as a great human catastrophe and irreparable shocks of terror. None of these perpetrators of terror was a follower of Islam.

Defining Terrorism:

Before looking into further historical records, it is worthy to touch upon the controversial nature of defining terrorism in order to strengthen our insight regarding a very basic dilemma: who is really a terrorist and who is not.

Given the contradictory nature of terrorism, it has a plethora of definitions (Laqueur, 2004). There is no single universally-accepted legal definition of the of terrorism (Schmid, 2012) and, therefore, always open to the subjective interpretation. The UN Security Council's Res. 1566 in 2004 is considered to be one of the comprehensive definitions of terrorism (Soofi, 2017). Yet, it is non-binding in terms of International Law (Schmid, 2012). While lacking a legal definition, academicians had been making attempts

since 1980s to reach an academic consensual definition of terrorism. This endeavor is compiled by Alex P. Schmid and Joseph J. Easson in a volume, namely, *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research, London and New York, 2011*, that contains hundreds of definitions of terrorism. Therefore, the definition of terrorism differs from person to person on the basis of distinct geo-political or cultural or ideological contexts (Naik, 2002). But, according to James D. Kiras, most of the definitions of terrorism begin from a common point of departure. First and foremost, he argues, terrorism is characterized by *violence* (the main focus of this article); the determination for which violence is used, and its root causes, is where most of the deviations about defining terrorism start (Kiras, 2007). We daily observe that *one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter*. Osama Bin Laden (OBL), for instance, was the emblem of Islamic radicalism and militancy in the West; conversely, he was regarded as a hero in the conservative Muslim world. Many examples of similar nature can be explored through historical records and even in the present times—IRA versus UK, Hamas versus Israel, Kashmiris versus India so on and so forth. There is a beautiful saying, "beauty lies in the eyes of beholder". Each side labels the other of being terrorist. Even, sovereign states are involved in this blame game accusing each other of being the supporters of terrorism (Williams, 1976) directly or indirectly. Realistically speaking, there is no moral authority in the dynamics of international life that could help us to perform a litmus paper taste in order to find out who is really a terrorist and who is not (Crenshaw, 1981). We are left with the questions: what exactly constitute terrorism? How can it be defined in a universal language? Hence, terrorism is a contested concept.

Terrorism and Non-Combatants:

It is beyond the scope of this article to cope up with controversies related to the nature of terrorism. Henceforth, we will stick to the substance of *violence* (the primary constituent in defining terrorism), and try to precisely prove our point in a historical perspective that terrorism is not a peculiar characteristic of any ideology, ethnic group or religion (Ahmed, 2001), particularly, Islam.

Coming back to the point, those tools or trends or strategies of violence used during the reign of French revolution—from where the concept of terrorism originated—to suppress, speaking philosophically, the very 'others' or 'non-us' or 'them' (Kamal, 2008) were followed and adapted, in the course of time, especially in 19th and 20th centuries, by certain parties like dictators (Roberts, 2005), governmental regimes nationalist groups, anarchists, and religious militant organizations (Evans,

2018). Collectively, millions of people had been murdered in WWI, WWII, Cold War, Civil Wars in Third World, Anti-Colonial Nationalist Wars. Additionally, colossal miseries were caused to non-combatant with rise of Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, Nazism in Germany, and Fascism in Italy, let alone the bloodshed and human rights violations precipitated by American military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in the present day—the occupation of Iraq was not ratified by the UN Security Council. These all aforementioned situations involved very minor percentage of Islamic or Muslim character but they all are featured by high undercurrents of violence against non-combatants culminating into terrorism.

Historical Facts and Figures:

Moreover, given the volume of terrorist activities carried out in the 19th and 20th centuries, we can hardly find that Muslims were involved in those terrorist actions—except the decade of 1990s when Al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden (OBL, rose to prominence and made headlines for the first time by targeting US embassies in the African continent. Space does not permit to mention all of them, yet we will mention couple of them to make our point. One, Tsar Alexander II of Russia was assassinated in 1881 by Ignace Hryniewiecki who was an anarchist. Two, in 1886, eight non-Muslim anarchists blasted a bomb in the famous Haymarket of Chicago during a labor rally in which 12 innocent human beings were murdered. Three, on 6th September, 1901, US president, William McKinley, was assassinated by Leon Czolgosz who was also an anarchist. Four, two culprits by the name of James and Joseph (Christians) took the responsibility of a bomb blast on October 28, 1910 in the Los Angeles' Times Newspaper building in which 21 innocent people were murdered. Five, on 28th June, 1914, young Serbs assassinated the Archduke of Austria which precipitated the horrors of WWI. Six, in 1925, the Bulgarian communist party conducted the biggest terrorist attack on the soil of Bulgaria in which 150 non-combatants were executed and over 500 were injured. Seven, in 1934, king Alexander I of Yugoslavia was assassinated by Vlada Georgief. Eight, US ambassadors to Guatemala and Japan were assassinated by non-Muslims in 1968 and 1969 respectively. Nine, in 1995, a truck loaded with explosive was detonated in the Federal Building of Oklahoma (FBO) where 166 innocent human beings were executed and hundreds other were injured—in early reporting, the press declared Oklahoma bombing as a 'Middle-East conspiracy', but, later on, it was known that two right-wing Christian activists, Timothy and Terry, were actually behind it.

Furthermore, historical records show us that during the period of 1941 to 1948, 259 terrorist attacks were conducted by Jewish terrorist organizations, namely, Irgun and Stern Gang, against the United Kingdom of Great Britain (Hoffman, 2006). The famous King David Hotel (KDH) bombing was conducted by Irgun under Menachem Begin's leadership in which 91 innocent human beings were murdered. It was the biggest terrorist attack against the history of British mandate. These Jewish terrorist groups were fighting for the creation of Israeli state which did not exist before 1945 on the map of globe. At that time, Menachem Begin was designed as terrorist by the British government; later on, he, ironically, became the Prime Minister of Israel and also awarded with Nobel Peace prize. For the sake of argument, the Palestine-Israel crisis can be explained by sketching a simple story: one day a guest Mr. J came to Mr. A's home to find shelter away from the hatred-cum-terror of Mr. H. After sometime, Mr. J occupied Mr. A's home and threw him out of his home. While Mr. A is bound to naturally claim back his home, but Mr. J calls him a terrorist and tries to keep him away from his home by the use of violent force. The bottom line is: injustice is injustice either done to Mr. J by Mr. H or done to Mr. A by Mr. J. Morally speaking, the state of Israel enjoys no prerogatives to call the Palestinians as terrorists.

The scenarios of similar nature are available in the stomach of history where today's terrorists become tomorrow's government (Waheed, Ahmed, 2012). For example, Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA) in Cyprus and, The National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria were initially designated as terrorist groups by the forces whom they were fighting to liberate certain territories. Later on, their leadership occupied high ranks in the governmental machinery after they were able to defeat the ruling forces. Yasir Arafat and Nelson Mandela may also fit in this category. This is how we are facing conundrum in terms of understanding the concept of terrorism. We often see that there will be two labels for a single activity. For instance, Bhagat Singh was a terrorist no. 1 for Britishers while he was a freedom fighter hero for common Indians.

To continue with, Irish Republican Army (IRA) conducted terrorist activities against UK for almost a hundred years (BBC, 2006). A part of their motivation is the catholic religion. But they are never called as catholic terrorists. The number of Muslim terrorist attacks against UK are in no way comparable to IRA's terrorist attacks. In the year 1972 alone, IRA carried out three bomb blasts. Additionally, they bombed Guildford Pub, Birmingham Pub, Manchester Shopping Centre, Band Bridge, and BBC in 1974, 1974, 1996, 1998 and 2001 respectively. It is estimated that 82

innocent human beings were slayed and more than 850 people were injured collectively. Yet, Tony Blair was more anxious about Muslim terrorists as compared to IRA which had been conducting terrorist acts against UK for nearly a century. Why? The answer may be rooted in the mechanics and dynamics of Global War on Terrorism (GWT) that paved the way for the stereotyping of Muslin through a media narrative.

Furthermore, randomly speaking, Red Brigade in Italy was responsible for the murdering of Aldo Moro, the former PM of Italy. Japanese sect with a Buddhist cult called as 'Aum Shinrikyo' used nerve gas in the Tokyo subway (Stimson Centre, 1995). They tried to kill in thousands but they failed; even then, 12 innocent human beings were killed and more than 1000 were wounded. Between 1968 to 2010, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) killed 828 people and wounded thousand more (Watson, Cameron, 2007) in Spain and France. In African Continent, the list of terrorist groups is exhausted. The most notorious one is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) which motivate themselves by the teachings of Christianity. They recruit children to launch terrorist attacks. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), commonly remembered as Tamil Tigers, was a Hindu terrorist organization operated in Sri Lanka to get their minority-oriented grievances heard. This is considered to be one of the most notorious and most violent of all the terrorist organizations of the world. They trained children to commit suicide bombings. Therefore, it should be stressed that suicide bombing also happens among the non-Muslim groups. After 9/11 people normally only know about Muslim Palestinian, Iraqi or Afghani suicide bombers.

South Asian Terrorism Portal is the largest website on terrorism in Asia. In its list of terrorist attacks Muslims are in minority. But this is never highlighted in the mainstream media. In India there are several terrorist groups professing different religions. Bhndranwale group was a Sikh terrorist organization. On 5th June 1984, Indian Security Forces (ISF) assaulted the Golden Temple (their Headquarter) in which 100 people were killed. In retaliation, the then PM of India, Indira Gandhi, was gunned down by the Sikh security guard. In the North East of India, there are Christian terrorist organizations: All Tripura Tiger Forces (ATTF); National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). On 2nd October, 2004, Forty-Four Hindus were killed by Christian terrorists. Likewise, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is a Hindu terrorist organization particularly trained to target the Muslims. From 1990 to 2005, they carried out 749 terrorist attacks. The Maoists are even a greater danger to the Indian state. In the span of seven years, they have conducted 99 attacks encompassing

one third of Indian territory. They are present in almost hundred out of six hundred districts of India. On 9th September 2006, Times of India reported that thirty launchers and 875 rockets that were supposed to be supplied to Maoists were intercepted and confiscated by the police. It seems, they could wage a minor war against the Indian army. Given the statistics of terrorist activities, Kashmiri militants are calculated by in very minor percentage. Yet, the Indian media leaves no stone unturned to convince the Indian masses that Kashmiri Muslim terrorists are a grave threat for Indian security. Additionally, the forensic reports and circumstantial evidence showed that the Gujrat massacre was an inside job driven by political motives. The scale of human miseries in Gujrat massacre is higher than the 9/11. Yet, the people who were involved in that brutality were never called as terrorist in the mainstream media.

Rise of Islamic Terrorism:

It has been argued that with the departure of Marxist-Leninist transnational terrorism, militant Islamic terrorism, represented by the group of Al-Qaeda, empowered by globalization, was growing into a global phenomenon (Kiras, 2011). No doubt, the selective and out-of-the-context interpretation of Quran and Hadith by Al-Qaeda and like-minded organization is portraying Islam as a hostile and expansionist religion. The OBL's fatwa(s) of 1993 and 1996 declared Jihad against America in particular and on the West in general. However, Islam does not allow the declaration of Jihad without formal state authority. Rather, Islam encourages peaceful co-existence. Quran says, "there is no compulsion in the religion {of Islam}". Additionally, all other Muslim terrorist organization which rose to prominence due to media warfare under the umbrella of GWT have no room in Islam. In Islam two wrongs does not make a right. One cannot punish a person for the crimes of another person. For example, in March 1993, a serial of 13 bomb blasts in Bombay, allegedly done by Lashkar e Taiba (LeT), in which 250 innocent human beings were killed, cannot be justified as a legitimate retaliation to the incident of Babri mosque followed by Hindu-Muslim riots of December 1992 and January 1993—that are said to be the longest riots after the partition.

Conclusion:

Concludingly, in the aftermath of Nine-Eleven incidents, there was a common statement bombarded in the Western media and essentially imported by other parts of the world. The statement reads: *all Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorist are Muslims*. This implies that being a terrorist is the liability of only those persons who profess the religion of Islam; the rest are all crystal clear. The global public opinion is being shaped through the weapon of media in such a way that ordinary people, after 9/11, began to think and feel that terrorism and Islam have an organic relationship and both are, therefore, inseparable. On the contrary, historical testimony proves that terrorism is not a peculiar and exclusive character of Muslims and Islam. Islam condemns terrorism in all its manifestations. Quran says in Surah Al Maidah Chapter 5, verse 32, "If any person kills any other innocent human being (Whether Muslim or non-Muslim), it is as though he has killed the whole of humanity". Quran also says, "If anybody saves the life of other human being (whether Muslim or non-Muslim), it is as though he saves the whole of humanity". Thus, we have seen (in the above paragraphs) that there had been Christian terrorists, Hindu terrorists, Buddhist terrorists, Communist terrorist, Sikh terrorists and Muslim terrorists. In fact, terrorism had not been monopolized by any religion. Again, terrorism is not the monopoly of Islam. Beside religious terrorism, the pages of history also contains the stories of secular terrorism.

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