

Terrorism & religion, a Pakistani voice: The left in the West needs to accept that there is an extremism problem among Muslims

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Saying 'terrorism has nothing to do with Islam' is as problematic as saying 'all Muslims are terrorists'. Both these statements provide sweeping generalization for a complex issue.

In a recent exam, I was asked a mind-boggling question: How to save Pakistan from secularism? It could have been phrased differently but the author of this question had already taken a position that secularism was bad for Pakistan.

During his lectures, the author of this question had insisted upon the deficiencies found in modern political and economic systems due to their status of 'being formulated by men'. Equating these political ideologies with Islam, he argued how catastrophic the effect of these ideologies have been on human beings. Caliphate, he asserted, was the only solution for the issues people in 21st century face.

One of the many groups claiming to be proponents of Islamic Caliphate, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar claimed responsibility for the Lahore blast which killed 73 people, while injuring more than 300 – most of whom were children [1].

A day before Lahore blast, an Ahmadi man was stabbed to death in Glasgow [2]. One of the most hated sects of Islam, Ahmadis face severe persecution in Muslim countries – especially Pakistan where they have been apostatized by the Constitution [3].

On April 7, another Bangladeshi secularist blogger was hacked to death by the Islamist terrorists [4]. A couple of days after the incident, 3 Shias were shot dead in Karachi in a sectarian attack [5], apparently carried out by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

All these attacks were carried out by Islamists who, one way or another, refuted the right to live for those who differed from their worldview. All these attacks were planned and executed in an attempt to impose a specific ideology on others.

Earlier this year, Mumtaz Qadri – the murderer of Governor Punjab Salmaan Taseer – was hanged to death [6]. Thousands came out to pay him tribute for 'his services to Islam' and 'being a true lover of Prophet Muhammad'.

They came out to protest against the punishment for killing someone in the name of Islam.

Meanwhile, my instructor – the author of the above question, explained the benefits of Islamic Caliphate.

Many in Pakistan have been apologetic towards the actions and ideas of Islamist terrorists. Imran Khan – a populist leader said in 2012 that Pakistan didn't face any threat from Taliban's ideology [7]. Former chief of a popular religious party in Pakistan, while paying tribute to him, said Osama bin Laden was still alive in the hearts of people [8].

On the other hand, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina responded to the issue of atheist bloggers being killed in the following words [9]:

"Everyone has to hold their tongue, has to maintain a level of decency in what they write. If they write something provocative and something bad happens, the government will not take responsibility."

She went on to ask:

"If someone writes filthy things about my religion, why should we tolerate it?" Basically, Prime Minister of a country was acquitting herself of being responsible for some citizens having difference of opinion with her.

While all this has been happening in Islamic countries, many in the West, who claim to be standing left of the center, fail to realize the gravity of the Islamism problem.

Living in open societies, where there is absolute freedom of expression, this section of the left fail to realize that closed Muslim societies like ours don't tolerate such 'luxuries'. For example, in a country like Pakistan, you cannot declare yourself an atheist and expect to live on. You cannot criticize religious dogma publicly, unless you really have had enough with your life.

Even those Muslims who claim to be moderate in societies like ours don't go too well with the idea of freethinking or LGBT right for example.

Chanting slogans like 'terrorism has no religion' to 'this is not true Islam' – unapologetically and nonsensically, this regressive part of the Western left has unintentionally provided a space for Islamism to bloom. Being far away from offering a viable solution, these chants comprise more of guilt-ridden, sympathetic attitudes towards Muslim minorities and barely touch upon the realities of Muslim world.

Either ISIS terrorists throwing homosexuals off the roofs or Bangladeshi mob beating secularists to death –both have a religion and it is Islam. They are motivated by verses of Quran and hadith. They are driven by the motive of enforcing the rule of god on the planet Earth. No matter how flawed their interpretation of Islam is, they do have an Islamic connection and to deny it is to live in ignorance.

Saying ISIS or Taliban don't follow true Islam is as ridiculous as it sounds. Anybody having a fair knowledge of Islam would know that it consists of several sects, having different and at times, opposite interpretations. In Sunni Islam, for instance, Muslims have 4 major school of thoughts –Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. Even in Hanafi school of thought, there are sub-sects like Deobandi and Bareilvi. Deobandis, for instance, are further divided into various groups.

Not all of these sects and their sub-sects are essentially violent and not all of them can be acquitted of links with Islamist terrorism. These groups range from being totally non-violent and apolitical to being extremely violent and having political ambitions.

Saying 'terrorism has nothing to do with Islam' is as problematic as saying 'all Muslims are terrorists'. Both these statements provide sweeping generalization for a complex issue.

While thousands are actually taking part in jihad, hundreds of thousands are one step behind the action. There consist a large section of Muslim population which is apologetic towards jihadists and their ideology.

That said, there are millions of Muslims who want to live peacefully, according to the modern norms so labelling the followers of a whole religion as terrorists is not going to get us anywhere.

The real task that the Western left must be spending its energy on is to come out of the denial, identify the Islamism problem and then try to solve it. Turning a blind eye towards this grave issue is an insult to those who have suffered from this menace and keep on living to resist the oppression of Islamists in Muslim countries.

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P.S.

* "The left in the West needs to accept that there is an extremism problem among Muslims". The Nation [Pakistan]. April 21, 2016, 1:47 am:
<http://nation.com.pk/blogs/21-Apr-2016/the-left-in-the-west-needs-to-accept-that-there-is-an-extremism-problem-among-muslims>

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Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 37587), [Press Review: Easter Bloodbath in Lahore \(Pakistan\) and A Siege in the Capital ; an unending cycle of extremism.](#)

[2] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/26/muslim-shopkeeper-murdered-in-suspected-religiously-prejudiced-a/>

[3] <http://nation.com.pk/blogs/01-Oct-2015/persecution-of-ahmadis-who-are-the-true-muslims-in-pakistan-anyway>

[4] <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bangladesh-blogger-idUSKCN0X40FZ>

[5] <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/111269-Father-son-among-three-killed-in-sectarian-attack>

[6] <http://www.dawn.com/news/1242637>

[7] <http://archive.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-12940-No-threat-to-Pakistan-from-Taliban-ideology-Imran>

[8] <http://tribune.com.pk/story/664425/osama-bin-laden-still-alive-in-peoples-hearts-ji-chief/>

[9] <http://www.butterfliesandwheels.org/2016/sheikh-hasina-to-the-killers-have-fun/>