



# The Politics of Terrorism and ‘War On Terror’

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Global terrorism has become a frightening reality. Ordinary citizens throughout the world live with increasing fear of a deadly attack from unknown individuals at any moment, for reasons many of us cannot fathom. National and international security forces are on constant alert, desperate to prevent the next catastrophe. The visual and print media today is overwhelmed with images of blood stains in streets and weeping family members unable to even comprehend their loss.

Terrorism today has become a deterministic entity shaping the destiny of individual and society. Terrorism and war on terror have become the part of the every day vocabulary of the contemporary folk. Between terrorism and war on terror the civilian population passes through a nightmarish life. The present study is an attempt to contribute to the growing literature on the post 9/11 world scenario, treating terrorism as a social reality, a global problem and a complex phenomenon. The study focuses on the plight of individuals in the contemporary world scenario.

This paper attempts to analyze the political and social background which brought about such a terror shrieking world. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines terrorism as "the systematic use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective". *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (vol 7) Terrorism has been practiced by political organizations with both rightist and leftist objectives, by nationalistic and religious groups, by revolutionaries, and even by state institutions such as armies, intelligence services, and police.

Terrorist acts are committed for various reasons. Some terrorist groups support a particular political philosophy. Other terrorist organizations represent ethnic groups seeking liberation from governments in power. Dictators use violence to frighten or eliminate their opponents. Most terrorist groups have a small number of members. They believe the threat or use of violence to create fear is the best way to gain publicity and support for their causes. Generally, terrorists attack people who oppose their cause or objects that symbolize such opposition. Common victims of terrorist kidnappings and assassinations include diplomats, business executives, political leaders, judges, and police. Terrorists also attack churches, synagogues and other places of worship, oil refineries, and government offices. At other times, terrorist simply choose any target certain to attract newspapers or TV coverage. Some terrorists hijack aeroplanes or seize public buildings. Then they hold the passengers or occupants hostage and make demands to further their cause. They often threaten to kill the hostages if their demands are not met. Bombing make up about half of all terrorist acts. Terrorism may cross national boundaries. A quarrel in one nation may cause terrorist attacks in several other countries. Most terrorist groups fail to achieve their long-range political goal. Governments fight terrorism by refusing to accept terrorist demands and by increasing security at airports and other likely targets.

A historical glance may be made into the background and circumstances that brought about such a terror struck world here. Colonialism and imperialism play a vital role in any discussion regarding terrorism. Several western thinkers and writers argue in support of the 'war on terror' to create a new world order- a kind of recolonization.

Paul Johnson, the American historian argues that "the answer to terrorism is colonialism" (*Wall Street Journal* Nov 2003). He writes that Americans can't resist fighting against the countries that promote terrorism. "Nothing can replace war. When Bush remarks that, the war is in the long run, he might not have looked into the political responsibility on these countries. We can't deny the historical fact that the war against pirates in nineteenth century was an important factor in the expansion of colonialism. In the near future, let's expect new colonies which were terrorist countries hitherto." (*Wall Street Journal* Nov 2003). From these words it is clear that capitalism and imperialism are closely related to colonialism. The liberal marketing in the globalization is to be kept in mind at this instance.

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Martin Wolf, the economic columnist in *The Need for a New Imperialism* (July 2004) suggested to the British government that Prime Minister Tony Blair should take the contemporary situations as an opportunity to modify the world order. Quoting the British diplomat Robert Cooper, Wolf says, "Countries like Afghanistan are dangerously intolerable to the civilized nations, and hence a defensive imperialism is the need of the hour." *Australian* (July 10 2003)

Max Boot is another thinker who asked for the colonization of the "failed states". In the journal *Australian* (Oct 15 2002,) he argues that countries like Afghanistan are "failed states" and they need improvement through American colonization. These three political philosophers argue that, the answer to terrorism is colonialism.

The idea that imperialism had served civilizations by clearing inferior races of the earth found widespread expression in nineteenth century European thought, from natural science to anthropology and politics.

Herbert Spencer wrote in *Social Statistics* (1850), "The forces which are working out the great scheme of perfect happiness, taking no account of incidental suffering, exterminate such sections of mankind as stand in their way." This is a train of thought Charles Lyell had pursued twenty years earlier in *Principles of Geology*: "if the most significant and diminutive of species...have each slaughtered their thousands, why should not we, the lords of creations do the same?" His student Charles Darwin confirmed in *The Descent of Man* that "at some future period not very distant as measured in centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races ". Sven Ludquist comments in his *Survey of European Thought on Genocide*: "After Darwin, it became accepted to shrug your shoulders at genocide. If you were upset, you are just showing your lack of education." In another of his books titled *A History of Bombing*, Sven Ludquist writes that bombing originated as a method of war considered fit for use only against uncivilized adversaries. From all the above mentioned arguments it can be seen that colonialism and imperialism have been carried out to "civilize" the "failed states". This civilizing process in its tougher aspects becomes colonialism.

Frantz Fanon in his *Wretched of the Earth* writes "The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence." Similarly Biju V Nair in his book *Terrorism, Adhipathya Rashtriyavum*

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*Mathabheekarathayum* argues that terrorism is “a cross current against colonialism”(4). So we see that terrorism and colonialism go on as action and reaction.

In his book *When Victims Becomes Killers*, the political activist Mahmood Mamdani writes that the debate on terrorism revolves around two poles, the cultural and political. Culture talk seeks the explanation for a deed in the culture of the doer. In contrast the political talk tends to explain the deed as a response to issues of a political context of unaddressed grievances. Imperialism wins only when the colonized location is conquered culturally and politically. Cultural imperialism is not merely colonialism but a longer project. It aims to create a strong bond between the native culture of the colonized and the aims of colonialism. Such an ever lasting project brings about an abiding result for the colonial masters.

Such a project got destroyed with the Cold War which lasted for around four decades. It posed a threat to the bond mentioned above .Both the parties argued that their culture is the supreme one and it is to be globally accepted. With the fall of the Soviet Union the western colonialism ventured further into the construction of a globally unified culture. This aim is served by the agenda of globalization in the liberal market. The various community and cultures on the earth are taken out of its variety and declared as part of one unique global culture. Variety has been ignored and even blanket terms like “Islamism” have been constructed to present a counter culture against this global culture.

“Islamism” has become a political term with wide currency in the western countries. “Islamism” has been presented as a unique and unified movement lacking variety. An average western citizen can’t see its multi faces in accordance with the different cultures and nations. Imperialism identified Islam with only Arab Muslims and neglected the population of the biggest Muslim country, Indonesia and Muslims in India from the umbrella of Islam. They don’t try to recognize that the Muslims in these two countries do not come under Arab Muslim sects. The west often neglects the fact that each Muslim group in each country has its own culture and even religious observances. The diversity of Islam has been neglected by the western imperialism.

Though the term focused on Arab Muslim later it connoted fundamentalism and fanaticism for the west. The fact that Arab Muslims are only one among the various sects has been neglected. Thus the political myth of the hundred crores of Muslim population being a totality and posing

a threat against the modern civilization was constructed. The Arabian oil being an inevitable factor in the world economics such a myth was a political weapon for the interests of the colonialism. It got sharpened over one and a half centuries. In 1996, Samuel Huntington presented the aim of western colonialism in his *Clash of Civilizations* he states that “Islam is the only civilization which has put the survival of the West in doubt, and it has done that at least twice.” (Huntington: 209)

Huntington argues that the trends of global conflict after the end of the Cold War are increasingly appearing at these civilizational divisions. Wars such as those following the break up of Yugoslavia, in Chechnya, and between India and Pakistan were cited as evidence of inter-civilizational conflict. He argues that the Islamic civilization has experienced a massive population explosion which is fueling instability both on the borders of Islam and in its interior, where fundamentalist movements are becoming increasingly popular. Manifestations of what he terms the “Islamic Resurgence” include the 1979 Iranian revolution and the first Gulf war. Perhaps the most controversial statement Huntington made in the Foreign Affairs article was that “Islam has bloody borders”. Huntington sees Islamic civilization as a potential ally to china, both having more revisionist goals and sharing common conflicts with other civilizations, especially the west. Specifically he identifies common Chinese and Islamic interests in the areas of weapon proliferation, human rights and democracy that conflict with those of the west, and feels that these are areas in which the two civilizations will cooperate. Russia, Japan and India are what Huntington calls “awing civilizations” and may favour either side. Russia for example, clashes with many Muslim ethnic groups on its southern boarder such as Chechnya but cooperates with Iran in order to avoid further Muslim orthodox violence in southern Russia and in an attempt to continue the flow oil. Huntington argues that a “Sino-Islamic connection” is emerging in which China will cooperate more closely with Iran, Pakistan, and other states to argue its international position.

He states that civilizational conflicts are “particularly prevalent between Muslims and non Muslims”, identifying the bloody borders” between Islamic and no Islamic civilizations. This conflict dates back as far as the initial thrust of Islam into Europe, its eventual expulsion in the Spanish recon quest, the attacks of the ottoman Turks on Eastern Europe and Vienna, and the European imperial division of the Islamic nations in the 1800 and 1900s. He writes:

The initial Arab-Islamic sweep outward from the early seventh to the mid eighth century established Muslim rule in North Africa, Ilberia, the

Middle East, Persia, and Northern India. For two centuries or so the lines of division between Islam and Christianity stabilized. Then in the late eleventh century, Christians reasserted control of the western Mediterranean, conquered Sicily, and captured Toledo. In 1095 Christendom launched the Crusades and for a century or a half Christian potentates attempted, with decreasing success, to establish Christian rule in the Holy Land and adjoining areas in the Near East, losing Acre, their last foothold there, in 1291. Meanwhile the Ottoman Turks had appeared on the scene. They first weakened Byzantium and then conquered much of the Balkans as well as North Africa, captured Constantinople in 1453, and besieged Vienna in 1529. "For almost a thousand years," Bernard Lewis observes, "from the first Moorish landing in Spain to the second Turkish siege of Vienna, Europe was under constant threat from Islam." Islam is the only civilization which has put the survival of the West in doubt, and it has done that at least twice. (Huntington: 209)

Huntington's book was translated to many world languages, and turned to be a standard reference book for political thinkers as well as diplomats. The book underlines a new world order. This new order is defined as being based on culture and not on political and organizational grounds. Huntington implies that the westerns cultural centered Washington comes in conflict with the Islamic culture. The book does not define or describes civilizations. He neglected the fact that it was among Muslim countries that war broke out in the recent years and the difficulty in unify Islamic cultures has been totally ignored. But the book got universal acclaimed as a book on world civilizations.

The question why Islam only becomes the target of the west is answered in the book *Covering Islam* by Edward Said:

...modern Occidental reactions to Islam have been dominated by a radically simplified type of thinking that may still be called Orientalist. Insofar as Islam has always been seen as belonging to the Orient, it's particular fate within the general structure of Orientalism has been to be looked at first of all as if it were one monolithic thing and then with a very special hostility and fear. .. so far as the West is concerned, Islam represents not only a formidable competitor but also a late coming

challenge to Christianity. From most of the Middle Ages and during the early part of Renaissance in Europe, Islam was believed a demonic religion of apostasy blasphemy and obscurity. It did seem to matter that Muslims considered Muhammed a prophet and not a god; what mattered to Christians was that Muhammed was false prophet a sower of discord, sensualist, a hypocrite, an agent of the devil. Nor was this view of Muhammed strictly a doctrinal one. Real events in the real world made of Islam a considerable political force. For hundreds of years Islamic armies and navies threatened Europe, destroyed its out posts, colonized its domains. It was as if a younger, more virile and energetic version of Christianity had arisen in the East, equipped itself with the learning of ancient Greeks, invigorated with a simple, fearless, and warlike deed, and set about destroying Christianity. Even when the world of Islam entered a period of decline and Europe a period of ascendancy, fear of Mohammedanism' persisted. Closer to Europe than any of the other non Christian religion, the Islamic world by its very adjacency evoked memories of its encroachments on Europe, and always, of its latent power again and again to disturb the West. Other great civilizations of the East-India and China among them could be thought of as defeated and distanced and hence not a constant worry. Only Islam seemed never to have submitted completely to the West; and when, after the dramatic oil-price rises of the early 1970s the Muslim world seemed once more on the verge of repeating its early conquests, the whole West seemed to shudder. The on set of 'Islamic terrorism' in the 1980s and 1990s has deepened and intensified the shock (Fanon: 67)

It is in such a backdrop that 9/11 took place and it is widely agreed that the world has entered into a new age, an age that saw a series of blasts and attacks all over the world. This stifling atmosphere brought about the notion of the 'war on terror' which upset human rights and freedom.

Any state has its own measure to oppress violence and any anti state endeavour from the part of the citizens. The State has been broadly defined as "the organized political community forming the part of a country and controlled by one government", by the Oxford Advanced

Learner's Dictionary (509) (seventh edition). In the Indian context the State comprises of Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. These three organs of state form the basic structure of the political system under which the people are to be governed. This structure works directed by the guidelines of the constitution. The constitution of a country may be described as the foundational law which ordains the fundamentals of its polity and on the alter of which all other laws and executive acts of the state are to be tested for their validity and legitimacy. Every constitution is based on the social political ethos and faith aspirations of the people.

We can show our concern over the global phenomenon of some people getting blanketly condemned and labelled as terrorists in a generalized manner merely because of their Muslim identities. Harsh Mander writes in "Terrorism and State":

Millions of men and women, merely because they happen to be born to Muslim homes-believers and non-believers, students working people, home-makers and the aged, the wealthy and the impoverished- are all, with each blast, dragged into the dock of the hearts and minds of people of other religious persuasions. Here they are charged with the guilt of solidarity if not active complicity for the horrible crimes that the overwhelming majority of them intensely abhor. They find their eyes lowered, their spirit crushed, for heinous offences which they oppose no less than their neighbours. (*The Hindu*, 21 September 2008).

He mentioned the danger involved in the response of the State to terror attacks holding the entire Muslim community guilty unless they can prove their innocence. He cites the report of one Peoples Tribunal organized by the Anhad and Human Rights' Law Network from August 22 to 24, 2008 in Hyderabad.

Similarly, the tribunal, comprising respected retired judges, human rights activists, lawyers, academics and journalists, confirmed that "a large number of innocent young Muslims have been and are being victimized by the police on the charge of being involved in various terrorist acts across the country. This is particularly so in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan, though not limited to these States". It concluded that "this victimization and demonization of Muslims in the guise of investigation of terror offences, is having a very serious psychological impact on the minds of not only the families of the victims but also other members of the community. It is leading to a very strong sense of insecurity and alienation..."

(21 September, 2008). Nowadays we see how Muslim community has been looked upon by the global public.

All citizens have a duty to respect and protect the sanity and unity of our society. No one shall gain from degrading a society into a theatre of anarchy where every man's hand is on his neighbour's throat. Religious and political activities undertaken in the public domain need to pay heed to promoting harmony and mutual trust. At the same time, preserving the health of a society should not be understood as the mere avoidance of offensive acts or words. Justice and equality are basic to the sanity and stability of a society.

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