

## Islam and Terrorism: Supporting or Opposing Each Other?

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### **Abstract**

*Terrorism is a problem that affects countries across the globe and attracts more attention from researchers, media, policy makers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and general citizenry. For centuries, various acts of terrorism have been carried out in different parts of the world by different groups. Meanwhile, there is no single factor that could be used to justify terrorist activities. This is because there are countless reasons behind terrorism, most of which are political and economic in nature. Nonetheless, some terrorist groups often claim that they are fighting for Islam and Muslims. But, this is just an attempt to cover their destructive rational acts aimed at achieving personal interests. It uses secondary data from academic books, journal articles and other publications. The study advocate that all stake holders must put hands on deck to ensure that terrorism pose no more threat to the national security and it must to be tackle with all determinations.*

**Keywords:** *Terrorism, Islam, Jihad, Hadith*

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### **Introduction**

Terrorism is a problem that affects countries across the globe and attracts more attention from researchers, media, policy makers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and general citizenry. For centuries, various acts of terrorism have been carried out in different parts of the world by different groups. Meanwhile, there is no single factor that could be used to justify terrorist activities. This is because there are countless reasons behind terrorism, most of which are political and economic in nature. Nonetheless, some terrorist groups often claim that they are fighting for Islam and Muslims. But, this is just an attempt to cover their destructive rational acts aimed at achieving personal interests.

In contemporary times, despite all the conscious efforts to truly understand Islam and Muslims, the world has been made to paint terrorism and Islam with the same brush. For many years, the act of terrorism has been openly linked to Islam by the large portion of the world's population. Today, even movies that have terrorism as their central theme always display Muslims as the terrorists. By implication, these simplified and undifferentiated descriptions of Islam /help create a situation in which Islam is seen as a religion of oppression besides being an antagonistic to other religions. However, there is need for the world and its population to know and understand that Islam itself has been against the terrorist activities and has, indeed, considered and treated the perpetrators as the worst type of criminals.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Concept of Terrorism**

Terrorism is one of the concepts that have no single universally accepted definition (Mustapha, 2009; Lemieux & Boyle, 2012; Madaki, 2019). However, the concept has been defined differently by many students, scholars, researchers, policy makers, security administrators and intelligence officers. One of such definitions is that of Schelling (1966) who sees terrorism as a form of violent coercion, a bargaining process based on the power to hurt and intimidate as a substitute for the use of overt military force. According to Federal Bureau of Investigation (2001), terrorism connotes the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property in order to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social goals. Terrorism refers to the politically motivated acts of violence perpetrated against civilian targets with the aim of inflicting mass casualties, instilling fear and a sense of insecurity in order to affect a change in the policies and actions of the victims (Josephine, 2015).

The above definitions view terrorism as a violent attempt to produce radical changes in the government's political positions, rather than the destruction of military potential. This sentiment is also shared by Crenshaw (1985), Betts (1982) and Mickolus (1976) who, in their Instrumental Theory of Terrorism, viewed terrorism as a means to political end. Other scholars such as Wilkinson (2001), Laqueur (2001), Goldstone (2004) and Robison, Crenshaw and Jenkins (2006) noted that political conditions and opportunities are more likely to cause terrorism.

Therefore, despite the variations in their conceptual definitions of the concept, almost all the scholars viewed terrorism as a channel through which the terrorists attempt to pursue their political interests. This simply means that the fundamental reasons behind terrorist activities are mostly political in nature, not religious or ideological. As such, the authors define terrorism as a crime against the humanity in which violence is used to cause mass casualties, create general sense of insecurity and infuse fear in citizens with the aim of compelling a government or achieving a particular political goal.

### **Concept of *Jihad* (Holy War)**

The concept of *Jihad* is stated in various chapters of the holy Qur'an and it does not mean waging a holy war against infidels (Yahya, 2002). In other words, *Jihad* does not mean forcing people to accept Islam (Islamic Affairs Department, n.d.). In Islam, *Jihad* simply means calling people to willingly embrace the true religion and fighting with one's soul and wealth against those who reject it. *Jihad* also involves a situation in which Muslims wage a war against non-Muslims with whom they have no peace agreement or when they attack Muslim territory. Unlike other forms of battle, the aim of *Jihad* is to make the word of Allah to prevail (Ibn-Nuhaas, 1426). This is because the prophet Muhammad (SAW) was reported to have said that "the one who fights to make the word of Allah far above is the one fighting for the sake of Allah" ((Bukhari & Muslim).

Muslims are allowed to engage in a holy war only to defend their religion when it is attacked as Allah (SWT) says:

If they violate their oaths after their covenant and attack your religion with disapproval and criticisms, then fight the leaders of disbelief for their oaths are nothing to them, so that they may stop (Qur'an, 9:12).

Meanwhile, war is an "unwanted obligation" in Islam which has to be carried out with strict adherence to particular humane and moral guidelines. Also, it must not be resorted to except when it is absolutely inevitable. According to Yahya (2002), there are two dimensions of *Jihad* in Islam, namely: the **inner** and the **external** *jihad*. Inner *jihad* seeks to curb negative and self-destructive forces within individuals. External *jihad*, on the other hand, refers a struggle against violence and tyranny by means of words and actions. In some Islamic literature, the above categories of *Jihad* are called *Jihad Al-akbar* and *Jihad Al-asghar* (Ibn-Nuhaas, 1426). The first dimension is said to be more important than the second one. This is because prophet Muhammad (SAW) was reported to have told his companions that "we are now returning from the minor *jihad* (i.e. fighting for the cause of Allah) to the major *jihad* (i.e. struggle with the inner self)".

#### **Difference between *Jihad* and Terrorism**

No doubt, *Jihad* is an Islamic teaching, but it is quite different from terrorism in many aspects. From the above brief explanations of terrorism and *Jihad*, one can be able to clearly differentiate between the two even without further clarifications. However, most Western people see terrorism and *Jihad* as the same thing due to some revolutionary meanings given to it by people. Meanwhile, one important difference between terrorism and *Jihad* is that the later is guided by some strict rules of engagement which prohibit the *Al-Mujahiduun* from destroying civilian lives, harming animals and even cutting down trees. In most cases, terrorists launch their atrocious attacks on ordinary civilians, while *Al-Mujahiduun* fight only those people whom they encounter on the battlefield. This is to say that unlike terrorists, real *Al-Mujahiduun* do not kill people including Christians and Jews or destroy their properties while they are at home, schools, worshipping places or markets.

*Jihad* also differs from terrorism in the sense that *Al-Mujahiduun* fight only when the other party attacks them and no other alternative remains except such war. This is evident in the first 13 years of Islam, when many Muslims were harassed, oppressed, abused, tortured and even murdered with their houses and possessions plundered in Macca. Instead of fighting the oppressors, the Muslims were ordered to migrate to the town of Yathrib, which is presently known as Madinah. In his holy Book, Allah (SWT) says that:

Permission to fight is given to those who are fought against because they have been wronged. And, surely Allah has the power to come to the support of the believers (Qur'an, 22:39).

Fight in the Way of God against those who fight you, but do not go beyond the limits. Allah does not love those who go beyond the limits (Qur'an, 2:190).

...Fight against the disbelievers collectively as they fight against you collectively. But know that Allah is with those who are pious (Qur'an, 9:36).

Will you not fight the people who have violated their oaths and intended to expel the Messenger (i.e. prophet Muhammad) while they did attack you first? Do you fear them? Allah has more right that you should fear Him if you are believers (Qur'an, 9:13).

The above verses reveal that true Muslims do not engage in battle until it becomes compulsory. They also suggest that the permission of war is granted to the oppressed, not those who are striving for political power or economic benefits. This simply means that *Jihad* is mostly undertaken for defensive purposes, not offensive like that of terrorism. In fact, the history reveals that for all the holy wars fought by prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companions, none was initiated by the Muslims (Yahya, 2002). In real Islamic *Jihad*, it is not allowed to kill women,

children, insane and old persons if they do not engage in the battle or aid the fighting with their intellect. The same is applied to the weak, blind and handicapped (Ibn Nuhaas, 1426). Indeed, the prophet Muhammad (SAW) has severally said these rules to his companions who were about to go to war (Yahya, 2002). This is also mentioned in chapter 60, verse 8 of the holy Qur'an where Allah (SWT) commands Muslim soldiers to treat the non-Muslims kindly and justly. Additionally, the opinions of the majority of Islamic scholars suggest that the merchants, skilled workers and employees should not be killed if they are not involved in the battle. As such, the haphazard, massive killings of animals and civilian human population including children, insane, handicapped and women by the terrorists is enough to differentiate between contemporary act of terrorism and *Jihad* ordained by Allah (SWT). In short, *Jihad* differs from terrorism in the sense that it is guided by certain rules and it does not involve indiscriminate killing of human beings and destruction of their properties. The two also differ in terms of their goals and purpose of engagement. Therefore, it is not out of place to say that terrorism and *Jihad* are going in opposite directions.

### **Islam and Terrorism**

At the outset, we would like to start by saying that whereas some terrorist attacks might have been the work of some misled Muslims, such acts were certainly not the products of real Islamic teachings. This is because Islam does not support terrorism as most of the Muslims have been strongly condemning the terrorist attacks that often result in death and injury of thousands of innocent people. Even the verses quoted by some hypocrite Muslims and terrorists are misinterpreted and sometimes used incorrectly to rationalize their acts or motivate and mislead the new recruits. In many cases, people killed in terrorist attacks involve both Muslims and non-Muslims. For instance, Yahya (2002) noted that there were Muslims, Christians and Jews among those who were killed in New York and Washington.

A number of scholars such as Mustapha (2009) and Lemieux and Boyle (2012) maintained that terrorism involves suicide bombings and attacks. As a matter of fact, suicide is contrary to the teachings of Islam. For whatever reasons, a Muslim is not allowed to kill him/herself as stated in chapter 2, verse 29 of the holy Qur'an. With reference to Sahih Al-Bikhari, Vol.2, Hadiths No. 445 and 446, we can say that whoever commits suicide, Allah (SWT) forbids Paradise for him and he/she will be admitted to Hell fire on the Day of Judgment. Perhaps, this may be why Yahya (2002) opined that carrying out suicide attacks and causing the death of innocent people while doing so are a total violation of Islamic morality committed by individuals who have a very mistaken perception of religion and are brainwashed with feelings of hatred and revenge.

Terrorists often claim that they wage an attack and kill people because they reject the true religion and embrace worldly established orders such as democracy. However, Islam does not allow any Muslim including the holy prophet Muhammad (SAW) to use force or violence to coerce people to accept it. This is evident in the following verses:

O Muhammad (SAW), invites mankind to the path of your Lord (i.e. Islam) with wisdom and fair preaching, and urges them in a way that is better. Truly, your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His path, and He is the best knower of those who are guided (Qur'an, 16:125).

Verily, you, O Muhammad (SAW) guide not whom you like, but Allah (SWT) guides whom He wills. And, He knows best those who are guided (Qur'an, 28:56).

The second verse was revealed to prophet Muhammad (SAW) when he was trying to give *Kalimatush Shahada* to his uncle, Abu Talib who was dying (see Sahih Al-Bikhari, Vol.5, Hadith No. 223). As notorious as Fir'aun (i.e. Pharaoh), Allah (SWT) sent prophets Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) to him and told them that:

Speak to him (i.e. Pharaoh) gently, perhaps he may accept admonition or fear Allah (Qur'an, 20:44).

Presenting the above verses as our evidences, we argue that terrorism is not by any means a mode of communicating Islam to other people, whether Christians or Jews. Therefore, the roots of contemporary act of terrorism should be traced and understood from the rational and subjective sense of the terrorists and those who benefit from their immoral activities. In fact, whereas terrorism attempts to create a society where violence, fear, murder and chaos reign, Islam teaches peace, justice and respect for human life.

According to Emmanuel (2015), terrorism encourages indiscriminate killings through assassinations, bombing, hijacking and hostage taking. Terrorism also encourages cruelty and violence, causing pain, bloodshed and committing murder (Yahya, 2002). For many terrorists, shedding people's blood is a way of life and hence they mercilessly kill men and women, old and young and civilians and combatants without pity. Even among themselves, murder is the most common solution to many internal issues. This simply signifies that terrorists apparently never think of relating their acts to the elementary principle that Islam places great value on the sanctity of human life as Allah (SWT) says that:

Whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein; and wrath and Curse of Allah are upon him and a great torment is prepared for him (Qur'an, 3:93).

If someone kills another person unless it is in retaliation for someone else or for causing corruption in the earth, it is as if he had murdered the whole mankind (Qur'an, 5:32).

These verses clearly forbid any Muslim from willful killing of any human being without any justification to do so. Even killing a disbeliever by a Muslim is not allowed in Islam except by a mistake. Even if it mistakenly happened, the person who committed the act is ordained to free a believing slave and give blood-money (*Diyya*) to the deceased's family (see Qur'an, 3:92).

Reinforcing the above verses, the prophet Muhammad (SAW) said that:

A faithful believer remains at liberty regarding his religion until he kills somebody unlawfully (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol.9 Hadith No.2).

After me, do not become disbelievers by striking or cutting the necks of one another (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol.9 Hadith No.7).

The blood of a Muslim who pronounced *Kalimatulsh Shahada* cannot be shed except in three cases as stated in Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol.9 Hadith No.17. Similar details are also obtainable in Fath Al-Bari, Vol.15, p. 220.

The biggest sins in Islam are to join others as partners in worship with Allah, to murder a human being, to be undutiful to one's parents and to give a false witness (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol.9 Hadith No.10).

By virtue of the above verses and Hadiths, the authors argue that terrorists are nothing more than 'bad eggs' in Islam who can be equally found in other religions. Even in times of adversity, the Muslims are ordered to act with justice, perseverance and patience. In fact, the fundamental characteristic of the Islamic concept of life is that it does not admit conflict. Therefore, it is erroneous and completely wrong to say that Islam teaches, supports and encourages terrorism. The reality is that even if some terrorists have Muslim identities, their activities should not be the basis upon which the entire religion will be labeled hostile and destructive. The truth is that there is no room for terrorists and their atrocious acts in Islam. Meanwhile, we admit that some Muslims engage in terrorism due to their illiteracy combined with the manner in which Islamic scriptures are misinterpreted and misconstrued by some individuals to give incorrect meanings and suit distorted agendas. And, this situation is equally obtainable in other religions.

## **Conclusion**

Based on our little research on terrorism and some Islamic injunctions, we conclude that contrary to the belief of some people, Islam does not support or encourage the act of terrorism in any way. And, none of the terrorist attacks is perpetrated for the sake of Islam. Therefore, any Muslim who engages in terrorism does so out of his personal interest and he will surely reap the outcomes of his evil deeds on the Day of Judgment as Allah (SWT) says that:

On the Day when every person will be confronted with all his good and evil deeds, he will wish that there were a great distance between him and his evil (Qur'an, 2:30).

Whosoever brings good, he shall have the better thereof; and whosoever brings evil, then those who deed evil deeds will only be rewarded for what they used to do (Qur'an, 28:84).

And for those who believe and do righteous deeds, Allah (SWT) will pay them their rewards in full. And, Allah does not like the polytheists and wrong-doers (Qur'an, 2:57).

Everyone is going to taste death, and We shall make a trial of you with evil and with good. And to Us you will be returned (Qur'an, 21:35).

And the evil of what they did will appear to them, and that which they used to mocked at will completely encircle them (Qur'an, 45:33).

How (will it be) when We gather them on the Day about which there is no doubt and each person will be paid in full what he has earned. And they will not be dealt with unjustly (Qur'an, 2: 25).

The above verses and many of their kind show that people's personal deeds will be judged individually in the Hereafter and whosoever did good, will surely see good and vice versa. Therefore, it is good and fair to judge each and every Muslim with his personal deeds, instead of judging the Islam based on the wrong deeds of some of its adherents.

### **Recommendations**

In line with the above brief discussion of how Islam opposes terrorism, the authors offered the following recommendations:

- 1.** There seems to be a noticeable inconsistency between knowledge of Islam and the certainty of judgments. As such, it is recommended that people should seek good knowledge on and interpretation of Islamic teachings in order to avoid judging the religion based on the terrorist acts of some of its misled adherents.
- 2.** The Muslim Ummah should work tirelessly to recapture the true spirit of Islam, and rescue it from the 'fake Muslims' who have harmed its integrity and honor. However, this could be achieved through writing of this kind, media campaigns and public lectures that aimed at enlighten people that targeting and killing of civilians is against the teachings of true Islam.
- 3.** The government, media and security experts or analysts should always reveal the truth when it comes to the issue of terrorism, and that efforts should be made to clearly identify and understand the real sources of terrorism in order to avoid labeling Islam or any other religion as hostile or destructive.
- 4.** Finally, people should fear Allah (SWT) and refrain from misusing or misinterpreting the verses of the holy Qur'an to lure others into the act of terrorism and violence.

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