

Chapter 12 – IDEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR ISLAMIC RADICALISM AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DERADICALIZATION

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The flavor *du jour* in discussions of Islamic terrorism features a de-emphasis on the ideological component, drawing instead upon epidemiological and criminological concepts; approaching Mexican drug gangs and Islamic extremists as being more similar than they are different. This aids a network scrutiny and suggests buy-out rather than ideological deradicalization. Such new abandonments of the idea “turf” as in the anthropological/revived development theory approach which treats recruits as “accidental” ones and which emphasizes state-building as if it can be devoid of ideology are profoundly troubling. Perhaps despair over the ideological strength of Islamic extremism has set in, or policymakers seek more modest successes, which through media amplification could trump the failure to catch Osama, discourage the emergence of his ilk or Al-Qai’dism generally. Clearly the debate about how to best dampen enthusiasm for violent radicalism in immigrant communities and countries of origin continues.

While for some years, the approaches to global jihadism languished in a pervasive indictment of Islamic ideas and recent history, the ‘new’ answer – refocusing away from ideology – will do little to deradicalize those committed to these movements, and we must always remember that large numbers of violent radicals are not necessary to wreak havoc, a relatively small number can do so.

Not all extremist groups are identical; nor do they emerge from the same intellectual or political sources, even though some common themes exist in the histories of older, and newer [1] groups. Movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Front Islamique du Salvation fought over the implementation or actions of secular Western-style Muslim governments; Islamist student movements confronted Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and early Islamist militants like Qassam’s Brigades or Tahrir al-islam confronted the Israelis. Then new radical Islamist groups confronted Muslim leaders they believed to be misdirecting their societies like Takfir wa al-Higrah, the Military Academy Group and Jihad Islami in Egypt. In Saudi Arabia an ultra- or neo-Wahhabi movement arose in 1979, while in Tunisia, Turkey, and Syria other radical Islamist groups emerged as well. All discussions generated by these earlier roots of radicalism circulate around:

- a) Resistance to Western political domination;
- b) Resistance to Western ideological and cultural domination;
- c) Reactions to the end of clerical influence in education and law under modern states;
- d) The failures of modern, Western-style, non-Islamist, and even religious Islamic (as in Saudi Arabia) governments to create deep national loyalties;
- e) The social shock of modernization, rural-urban migration, the continuity of poverty and failure of national governments to meet popular needs;
- f) The failure of revolutionary, leftist, Arab-nationalist, and other political movements to achieve social and political change and right grievances such as the dispossession of the Palestinians; and
- g) The failure of local governments to democratize or significantly increase political pluralism.

These circumstances (listed above) that promote recruitment and push radicals into activism (or militance) existed prior to, and exert pressure simultaneously with Islamist extremist messages. They may limit or enhance the Islamic aspects of ideological attraction to movements, helping to explain variations in recruitment from individual to individual, and one geographic area or political setting to another. The ideology would not be as attractive (or alternatives so unappealing) without the compelling nature of

these circumstances. Thus any discussion of ideology should see it as a multi-directional process in which extremist ideology attracts adherents and other available “ideologies” or social and political memberships repel or fail to attract. It is also multi-directional in its interaction with local political, social, or movement situations or events. That is why deradicalization may not be effective if all it does is to address “improper aspects of belief” or create a new orthodoxy.

With this context in mind, let us address the aspects of ideology contained in the New Militant Jihad as expressed in several waves of thought since 1979, the late 1980s, early 1990s or later depending on which group we consider. The determination to fight and attack Westerners or their representatives or alleged pawns, was the “new” aspect of an extant Islamic extremism. This discussion will emphasize the elements common to the ideological position of many groups, necessarily blurring some distinctions.

12.1 HAKMIYYA

Extremists have (along with conservative Muslims) defended the true sovereignty of Allah (God) (*hakmiyya*) as compared to the secularized nation-state and its civil laws. The main problem here is the distinction between true Islamic practice and the lifestyle, laws, or license permitted by the local government. Extremists call for a restoration of God’s sovereignty, and thus their movement is one of purist reform. This principle was emphasized by Abu al-A`la Mawdudi in his arguments for Pakistan to become an Islamic state and also appeared early on in the discourse of Hassan al-Banna of the Muslim Brotherhood. The 1970s-era of Islamic radicals determined that only overthrowing local governments (fighting the near enemy via *jihad*) which had so secularized as to be apostates would bring about the sovereignty of God. The other steps concern the restoration or purification of Islamic law (*shari`ah*) and establishment of the form as well as intent of an Islamic state.

Confronting this ideological emphasis is not easy. The secularization and recreation of assimilated Muslims as urged by some US think tanks simply will not fly in the today’s Islamic world, so impacted by Islamic revival and devoid of counter ideologies. The best that can be hoped for is to emphasize the history of temporal power through Islamic history and the need for moderation.

12.2 ISLAMIC SOCIETY

All actions above are to be undertaken to re-Islamize or Islamize society. A truly Islamic society will uphold the *hisba* (commanding the good and forbidding the evil) by following *shari`ah*, and will cleanse itself of the unbridled materialism that has led Muslims to stress wealth and status rather than piety. This is why extremist groups engaged in *jihad*, or battling to consolidate power whether in a neighborhood, village or larger area insist on social and legal changes on the turf they rule ensuring more pious behavior rules, laws, according to the group’s interpretation. The only difference between the norms instituted in the Swat Valley, by the Taliban, by Somali groups and that in an officially Islamic setting such as Saudi Arabia is in the degree of moderation tolerated. Because there always were, and are Islamic principles that support such moderation [1], it is incorrect to paint the extremists (along with the so-called ‘Wahhabis’) as totalitarians as some authors do [3],[4]. These arguments confuse the beliefs of ordinary Muslims with the preoccupations of radicals [5].

The longing for a truly Islamic society, means that deradicalization of ideas which come to be accepted by the local population as “Muslim” is problematic and state interventionism, or other means of directly addressing the ideological issue to be reformed are necessary.

12.3 NECESSITY FOR JIHAD

Jihad’s purpose to purify and restore Islamic society is described above. The most important advent for contemporary Islamic extremism was its insistence that *jihad* is inevitable and necessary, as is martyrdom,

because of the heightening of global conflict – the West’s intolerance for Islam. Even so, the New Mujahidin have focused rather exclusively on militarism or focoism [6], almost for its own sake, and as a way of distinguishing themselves from the *qa'iduna* (those Muslims who sit on the sidelines and refuse to fight) [7] such as the more moderate Muslim Brotherhood. The insistence on jihad, and discourse of a perennial and generational jihad distinguishes actors willing to moderate violence in return for pursuing political participation in the existing system, from others who continue to emphasize jihad. They describe a jihad that is revolutionary, Trotskyist in its “eternal” quality.

Again, this is a recurring theme in Muslim history. So what is ‘new’ about it? Abd al-Salam al-Farag of the Gama’at Islamiyya explained the necessity for jihad in a crucially influential pamphlet. His argument was not unlike Muhammad abd al-Wahhab’s (currently scholars often argue that either the radical Egyptians influenced bin Laden, or it was his underlying neo-Wahhabi beliefs that simply combined with the influence of other activists). Jihad had become a forgotten duty (*al-farida al-gha'iba*) [7],[9] indeed, Muslim reformers had earlier argued that the overall struggle to be a good Muslim could supplant jihad as war-fighting, and only activists with inspired strategic messages, attainable local military goals (like Ibn Sa`ud), or the bitter radicalization acquired through state torture and imprisonment (as in Egypt) awakened the call to ‘war-fighting’ jihad.

The literature, and the Egyptian recanting and Saudi deradicalization campaigns all note that there are doctrinal differences between ‘classical jihad’ and its interpretation in the new *fiqh al-jihad* (jurisprudence of jihad) by contemporary extremists [7],[10]. However, the militants are right and those seeking to defuse violence are also correct – jihad has been authorized for Muslims and was an important part of Islam’s response to attack, as well as for its expansion. Bin Laden and Zawahiri successfully counter Saudi governmental arguments about the exclusivity of Islamic knowledge, [7] or that jihad can only be led by a proper Muslim leader, by challenging the Saudi leadership and claiming that it has compromised its stewardship of the Holy Places by allying with the West, and pointing to the official `ulama as being tamed servants of the state. The texts explaining jihad and *siyar* (Islam’s ‘law of nations’) show that there were rules and limitations, [11] but also that boundaries of jihad (or just causes for war) were under dispute even in medieval times.

A very important distinction is the need for jihad as an individual or a collective duty. When it is an individual duty, then every Muslim, man, woman and child can participate in jihad and the discouragement of participants who had debts or dependents is nullified. Because Muslims are interpreting today’s crisis as just such a situation, we have seen women’s participation in jihad and a general fever of volunteerism. Where one could argue that only collective jihad is doctrinally valid [10] it would be better to engage in popular discussions and peacemaking aimed at determining practical solutions to the crises.

12.4 OCCUPATION OF MUSLIM LANDS AND ONSLAUGHT ON MUSLIM PRACTICES

The occupation of historically Muslim dominated lands, the dar al-Islam and direct attacks on life and livelihood of particular groups, as well as restrictions on religious rights provide the rationale for jihad as an individual duty. One could argue that Muslim governments have been complicit in the heightening of these views. For instance, the oil companies have maintained large blocs of Western expatriate employees (and other nationalities) in Saudi Arabia for many years. But the idea that Westerners should not be present on the Arabian Peninsula was primarily preached in response to the first Gulf war when Westerners were stationed in Saudi Arabia. By adopting the idea that it is better for Western military presence to retreat from Saudi Arabia, the government may have inadvertently strengthened the public impression that Western presence constitutes ‘occupation’.

Since the nineteenth century, Western colonialism and imperialism did indeed confront Muslims with direct and indirect forms of oppression, occupation, expropriation and exploitation. The extremists deny

the Western supremacy of civilization that is asserted by Samuel Huntington, or Bernard Lewis. They are not trying to conquer the world or defeat Western civilization, but to prevent Muslims from falling prey more thoroughly to its “sicknesses”, particularly its social aspects in their own society.

In Iraq, the fact is that there was a military seizure of power, and a military occupation. No-one convinced Iraqi or Saudi extremists otherwise. Rather, they came to see their militant resistance as counterproductive in the short term, not that jihad is wrong. This is similar to the Gama`at Islamiyya’s views as expressed in books of recantation: that jihad is not sinful, but cannot be undertaken at the expense of the broader population [12].

The presence of Western military operations and troops in Afghanistan and the air campaigns in Pakistan likewise provide a focus for jihad.

12.5 MARTYRDOM

In the new jihad, the linkage of jihad to martyrdom is key. In the classical treatises on jihad, Muslims are exhorted to not set out to deliberately become martyrs, but rather to fight jihad as avidly as possible. However, in the movements of new jihad, the reverence for martyrdom has been emphasized through recruiting videos, speech, poetry, songs, and Internet-posted histories of ‘martyrs’ so that fighting and martyrdom are equated at a new level. This has helped to rationalize suicide operations, even though suicide is anathema, and forbidden to Muslims.

Many have blamed Sayyid Qutb for his ideological motivations of extremism. But in his case, he shifted from a focus on gradual Islamization to an acceptance of martyrdom which – like his own – was experienced at the hands of the state, not by choice, not in suicide bombings. He only came to see martyrdom as inevitable because of the Egyptian government’s brutality at the time, and determination to execute, those like him, whose voices and writings were influential.

When recruits believe they will be martyrs, a powerful psychological component is operating, for even in today’s non-extremist *salafi* thought, one is constantly reminded that this world (*dunya*) is not the abode of Muslims, their true life begins only at the grave. The doubts and fears of the recruit drop away when he is assured of martyrdom by the organization.

12.6 TAKFIR

Because Muslims are embroiled in a global conflict, the ‘New Jihad’ has correctly identified local Muslim governments as being influenced, and subservient to Western powers [13] They also believe these rulers to have acted against Islam, in their national programs, actions such as the peace treaties with Israel (for Egypt and Jordan), by promoting legal reforms not in accord with *shari`ah*, or because of their corruption. *Takfir* is the action of calling a Muslim an infidel, or non-believer and as such he may be the object of jihad; i.e., he may be killed for offenses to Islam. Most of the ‘new jihads’ identify the local Muslim governments as made up of apostates through the process of takfir, thus legitimizing violence on these authorities and their police, judges, or other agents. The Sunni extremists in Iraq also use *takfirideologies* to claim the Shi`a Muslims in Iraq as infidels as well drawing on historical arguments against them, which are rooted in contemporary fears of their dominance in the new Iraqi government. The Shi`a were called apostates, or renegade-apostates (because apostates are subject to death) and their specific religious characteristics were mocked and identified as un-Islamic.

Paradoxically, attacks in the West are not the primary aim of extremists; these are engaged in as terrorism usually is, to demonstrate a capability that could not be sustained. However, the extremists primarily focus on their “near enemies” and targeting and enraging the “far enemy” was a secondary aim.

12.7 NON-MUSLIMS

Although Jews and Christians are Peoples of the Book as defined in the Qur'ān, meaning they have special rights, are fellow monotheists, and can reside in an Islamic state so long as they pay the jizya, a variant of a poll tax, extremist groups have emphasized the ideas that Jews and Christians seek to trick Muslims into not following their faith; that they themselves rejected their Message after believing (Qur'ān 3: 105, 106) or will betray them (as the Jews of Madina did to the Prophet Muhammad). These scriptural and historical suspicions and enmities are complicated by modern-day arguments put forward by Western figures who vilify Islam utilizing arguments derived from their Christian beliefs, and claim that the West is a Judeo-Christian culture inimically opposed to (and by) Islam.

One can argue that Muslim governments or schools must teach more tolerance toward Christians, Jews, or other Muslim sects; indeed such a program was already underway in Saudi Arabia prior to 9/11 [14] however the prejudices stirred up by ignorant or intolerant figures are difficult to dispel where people have little or no contact with the other groups, and when it is reasonable for them to believe that Israel oppresses Palestinians, or that Western Christians hate Muslims.

12.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR IDEOLOGICAL RESPONSES

Policymakers could grant too much importance to religious figures in the hopes that they will influence those who might be attracted to extremist ideology. The most effective speakers in this process are those who have been part of movements and recanted as opposed to governmental *'ulama* (clerics). The downside is that religious figures, parties and powers will retain dominance wherever they can (as in Iraq) if they are primary intermediaries, and perhaps this is a permanent fixture of the region since non-religious non-sectarian opposition parties are tiny and weak.

Clerics or other religiously legitimate speakers can play an important role in backing the state to urge truces, or an end to violence or in deradicalizing movements, but their appeal varies. Where the opposition to a local Muslim government is strong, the state needs to involve the voices of clerics and/or former movement leaders to deradicalize [15] and the opposite is true where the opposition has less popular support. Governments may be tempted to instead use force through the military or security services resulting in either an upswing in violence [16],[17] or a broader underground or exile movement.

One can extend Taylor's paradigm to a more general one about religious discourse, which can still serve as an important source of legitimacy. However, a government-backed message cannot remain legitimate if it simply argues the opposite of all of the above aspects of ideological radicalism, because in many cases, these overlap with mainstream principles and the devil is in the detail of these arguments.

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