

ISLAM AND THE WEST: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS FOR PEACEBUILDING BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND THE WEST

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Abstract:

Violent extremism and radicalization through hatred, frustration and injustice has been increasing in the contemporary world. Those behaviours and the attitudes further lead to various forms of terrorism in the world society. Violent radicalization, though, is a different phenomenon, as not every radicalized individual can be a terrorist; however, it may circumvent to terrorism as well as lead the way to be a violent extremist for achieving their political, and religious ideological goals. In the West, Islam as a religion has been propagated behind the contemporary terrorism in the world due to the misunderstanding, and misinterpretation of the religion. A few academic researches especially Bernard Lewis's *The Roots of the Muslim Rage* played a crucial role defining that misunderstanding. This article, hence, critically analyses to remove such misunderstanding for building peace in the world.

Keywords: Islam, the West, Civilizations, Radicalization

Introduction:

Since beginning of history, *good and evil forces* have been continuing to wage war against each other like Adam vs. Satan, Ram vs. Rawan, Landlordism vs. Serfdom, Bourgeoisie vs. Proletariat, and Capitalism vs. Socialism; but it has always been difficult to characterise who is *good* and who is *evil*, particularly during wars. In response, history, however, stands at powerful and victory side without any discrimination of the *good* or the *evil* and winner always be called a *good force*. Though, good and bad forces want to wipe out each other but it is also a fact that they need each other for their existence because the death of the one symbolically brings the death of the other.

The fight between the *evil* and the *good* has always brought violent extremism and radicalization in the world through hatred, frustration and injustice. So it has been to the current world mainly in the shape of terrorism. According to the European Commission's expert group on Violent Radicalization established in 2006 stated in 2008 that "radicalization is a context bound phenomenon par excellence global sociological and political drivers matter as much as ideological and

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Psychological ones”¹. The report also suggests that violent radicalization although is a different phenomenon nor every radicalized individual can be a terrorist. However, it may circumvent to terrorism as well as lead the way to be a violent extremist for achieving their political” religious” ideological goals. On the following pages the report suggests that the terrorists’ attacks and threats have been increasing for the last two decades” and the youth due to the internet and the propaganda through social media are the major victims. Moreover, it also warns about the threats coming out of European border. The single government in Europe is unable to tackle the outgrowing radicalization and violent extremism in the continent in particular and beyond in general.

The Roots of Muslim Rage:

Seeking the background of the current phase of violent extremism, and radicalization which has been leading to various forms of terrorism in the world is due to the mistrust, and misunderstanding between the West and Islam. And, two articles paved a very crucial role having that level of misinterpretation. The one article was written by Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage” in “The Atlantic Monthly” in September 1990 and the second was written by Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” in “Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993. Both of these articles, later, came up in a book shape by 1993 and 1996 with the titles of *Islam and the West* and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* respectively. After the clash between Socialism and Capitalism in the same manner during the cold war period, Capitalism which had its roots in the West came up at victory stand and being eulogized as a positive force for the world. But, having the fear of symbolic death, the West needed some opposite force (*evil force*) i.e. any ideology, any nation, any civilization; so that they could carry the flag of victory at their own side.

These two, especially the second, masterpieces gave direction to the forces of the West towards their new counterpart for the contemporary power play. This is called the West vs. Islamic civilization. Though, Huntington defines “civilization as a cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity”² but highlights the religion Islam which has its different roots in different culture of 57 Muslim countries. Every Islamic country has its own culture, history and traditions. Taking a critical approach towards Huntington’s definition of civilization, Edward W. Said³ says that civilizations and identities have their own connotation.

Islamic (the name of religion) civilization has been placed as a big dangerous civilization for the West. Islam has been pointed out among the seven or eight civilizations as a threat to the West while Africa as a *possibility*.⁴ The world order has completely been changing after defining the new force.

After seeing some personal experience of our society, it is seen that religion can be a significant part of any culture but it cannot alter the whole culture according to its teachings. Contrary to the religious affections, the cultural values have more influence on human being but it is a crucial point to say that we should build the essence of co-existence and to accept the rainbow of culture prevailing in this world. “This globalization has been described in terms of the “shrinking of the globe” to the extent of becoming a “global village”. Yet, *there is no parallel global culture* in sight”.⁵

The selection of Bernard Lewis’s article “The Roots of Muslim Rage” which was written in September 1990 in “The Atlantic Monthly” magazine is amazing when the title of the topic does not co-relate with each other, as “Islam” is a religion while “the West” defines some geographical location. The author in his book “Islam and the West” explains the reason for relating the religion’s name with the geographical location.

This Ideal of a single Islamic polity, transcending both country and nation, till has considerable appeal for Muslims, as recent events have demonstrated. Both terms, therefore, “Europe” and “Islam”, represent a primary civilizational self-definition of the entities, which they designate...].⁶

He describes the topic with historical perspective and relates things with their ancestral linkages. It is a very critical topic in the present world when any misconception, distrust, mal-definition and mal-practice related to Islam and the West can be a disastrous for the whole humanity.

Giving the historical background of schism between State and Church in the European Christendom in the beginning of the article, he justifies it by quoting: “Render... unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God the things which are God’s.”⁷ That schism brought separate and independent roles of these two institutions, which later collided with the philosophy of Islam. Islam, as he describes, “there is only one, however, that in its worldview distribution, its continuing vitality, its universalist aspirations, can be compared to Christianity, and that is Islam”.⁸

Apart from the whole article's description about limitations of Islam and the strengths of the West, he eulogized Islam for its Universalist approach and its message of peace, harmony and equality to the world. This article deals with the relationship between Islam and the West, Europe and later USA, in an historical perception as well as at the present world. He writes about the Islamic religious, social, political and military teachings and compares with the West. Giving the historical background, he mentions that Islam ruled from West to East and North to South at its heyday. Giving the reasons of the conflict between Islam and the West, he said that it had stronger threat from the North and the West as Christendom was existed on these directions which had the more or less same concept of God as Muslims had while on the direction of the East and the South, idolaters and polytheists had their population which had the absolute opposite belief from Islam.

Islam, according to his understanding, divides the world into two major groups one is called House of Allah where those had their places who embraces Islam and the other is House of War where infidels have their rules. The second group is the enemy of Allah and they have to be sent to Him for chastising in the hereafter life. That division motivated Muslims in their glory days and they started to establish their feet in its surrounding and far borders till China, Russia, Europe and Africa. Muslim's conquests in Spain, Portugal, parts of France, and hostage of Vienna began the hostility between Islam and the West and the West remained mostly under the dominance of their rule till 1492 in Spain and failure of Vienna siege in 1683.

Later, Muslim fell down as a power and their territories were recaptured by the European powers. These colonizers attacked on their soils and they lost their domination not only in rest of the world but also in their own countries and their own houses. They brought their ideas, culture, laws and customs to their land and promulgated with strong hands. The article also talks about the good and bad impact of Western philosophy and the Islamic teachings such as, the author supported treatment of women in the West is better than the polygamy and concubine system in Islamic world. He further states if slavery is a bad mark on the forehead of the colonizer powers, they also the first which outlawed it not only from their own countries but also from their colonized and influenced world. Racism is better than fascism as it at least does not kick the colored people out of their land. He articulates about the Western imperialism as the continuation of historical process. He illustrates at the end that that

power relationship based on the antagonism gives the reason for the present world's crises between these two powers though United States of America (USA), being the daughter of the Europe, has been replaced from Europe.

By exploring the aggressive connection between Islam and USA, he wonders why Islam has an antagonistic approach towards USA as well because USA started its relationship with the Arab and other Muslim world after the WWII. The world sees a great change in the framework of Islamic nations, which started to call USA as an enemy of Allah. Afterwards in the article, he explores the following causes in that regard.⁹

a. German's anti-US influence:

German's scholars propagated anti-US campaign and they had influence on the Muslim world because of their famous work in the field of science and literature.

b. Marxism (Soviet's version):

Marxists also played an important role to demean the notion of Capitalism around the world and US, being the supporter of the idea, came under attack of the opponent world.

c. Third Worldism:

The term was originated in France but later flourished in USA, which addressed to those countries who got their independence from their colonizers and had no ideological association either with Capitalists or Socialist world. Though US had no colony in Arab land and Muslim World except in Philippine for a short time, yet that view as mentioned by the author " This view took as axiomatic the goodness and purity of the East and the Wickedness of the West, expanding in an exponential curve of evil from Western Europe to the United States"¹⁰.

d. Support to Israel:

The major cause of rage is its support to Israel. Since the creation of the Israel on the Arab land, Muslims have been protesting against that cruel action from the West But the author presents the fact that British and Soviet Russia played the important role to save the infant state of Israel but US came late in 1956 for their rescue.

He surprised not to see the Muslim anger against Soviet Russia and Western Europe in that regard but the rage against USA has strongly been built on these grounds but if we look at the present events in the world politics, USA is the key player for taking actions against the Muslim world. Giving the other causes of a fear of Islamic world from the West, he

expressed two main enemies in the form of ideologies, i.e. secularism and modernism, in the present time. Muslims have a fear of spreading of the Judeo-Christian heritage in the shape of secularism to their society and their culture while modernism would become the cause of the vulgarity and rebellious attitude of their women and children at their homes.¹¹ But it is also been shared that some ideas like warfare technology, written constitution and they have cordially accepted political system.

To sum up, this article supported the actions of the West by any means though it was written to bridge the differences of these civilizations and stressed for finding the common and better words for the appreciation of each other's cultures.

Critical Analysis:

The following critical analysis has been drawn after reading the piece of writing.

Having an optimistic view, the findings of these articles especially the Roots of Muslim Rage would have taken as a warning by the world leaders a decade ago; so that the world could have been saved from such a giant clash. Unfortunately, it occurred in the shape of September 11, 2001 when the world was divided into two blocs Islamic extremists/terrorists "them" and the Western democratic forces "us" and the rest of the world had to join any of these two. President of United States, George W. Bush, had been seen to go further by stating that this is a new crusade which gave the rebirth of political driven, though motivated masses on the name of religion from both sides, wars of 11th and 12th centuries between Turkey's Sultans and Roman's Kings of that time. That heinous crime against the people of America and the irresponsible statement by the President of US turned the warning of these articles into reality. It was a very critical theme at that time when that misconception, mistrust, mal definition and mal practice related to Islam and the West had become the disaster for the whole humanity. That Al-Qaeda's action (as it has been popularized) gave strength to the thought of Bernard Lewis when he says:

In the classical Islamic view, to which many Muslims are beginning to return, the world and all mankind are divided into two: the House of Islam, where the Muslim law and faith prevails, and the rest, known as the House of Unbelief or the house of War, which it is duty of Muslims ultimately to bring to Islam [...]. The obligation of holy war therefore begins at home and continues abroad, against the same infidel enemy.¹²

Being a commentator on a culture/civilization other than oneself, the deep understanding of those cultural discourses is very essential for better skills to deal with the related issue. It is found that either the author did not have full information about the teachings of Islam or they, by traveling the whole history of its existence along with the western border, could not articulate his points.

Certainly neither Huntington nor Lewis has much time to spare for the internal dynamics and plurality of every civilization, [...] that a great deal of demagoguery and downright ignorance is involved in presuming to speak for a whole religion or civilization. No. the West is the west and Islam is Islam.¹³

He tells that Muslim was never against of any other power or country except the West and he gives the example of Soviet Russia's antagonistic policies towards Islamic world in the case of Israel's help as well as end of Tatar's rule within its border. I think that Muslims protested on the policies of Russian aggression against Islam whenever it was attacked by it especially in the cases of Chechnya and Grozny. Muslims sent their persons to fight against their brutal act.

In 1979-88, Afghan war where Soviet Russia was defeated and the cold war had been ended by the debacle of Soviet Russia into Russia. That war was fought by USA with the help in the shape of finances, logistics, and human resources of Pakistan, Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia in particular, and the Muslim world in general. Pakistan provided its land and gave access to the difficult terrain of Afghanistan by its intelligentsia. That part of history shows the cordial relation between these different civilizations.

Counting the new development thoughts by the West to the Muslim world, political system and written constitution are some of them. But, if we look at the life of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in Medina, he gave one of the first written constitutions and laws for the establishment of first Islamic State in this world. That is famously called as "Medina Pact (Medina Peace Treaty)",

the first written pact between the Jews and the Muslims of Medina, the document from early Islamic history based upon two agreements concluded between the clans of Medina and the Prophet Muhammad soon after the Hijrah (Latin: Hegira), or emigration, to Medina in ad 622. The agreements established the *muhājirūn*, i.e., the early Muslims who followed Muhammad, on a par with the eight clans of Medina (called the *anṣār*, or "helpers");

collectively, the nine tribes formed the first Muslim community (*ummah*). The agreements also regulated the relations of the Muslims with the Jews of Medina¹⁴.

Muslims ruled on Europe but they did not make it colony as the West powers did with their subjects. Muslims established their rule on those foreign lands but they did not transfer the resources of the subjective land back to their homeland. They rather used them for the betterment of their citizens. They married in new cultures and adopted those characteristics, which did not negate the Islamic teachings.

Understanding of different cultures is very necessary for peacebuilding because differences among them become the cause of violent conflict in the world. In a globalized world, the importance of Peace and Intercultural Dialogue between/among cultures has been increased. "There are now more interactions and exchanges not only within the same cultures but also among different cultures due to the increase of migratory movements, demographic changes and transformations in social structures and institutions."¹⁵ Now, it is quite difficult that a society, either living in a very far desert of Gobi or on the top of the Mount Everest, can live without the interaction of people from other cultures. Being students of Peace Studies, the deep understanding of these discourses is very essential for better skills to deal with the related issues. On the basis of that, the course content was very well developed. Defining the language, discourses and ideology, the main elements of construction of any culture has been discussed at length in every cross-cultural interaction; which basically provides a good base for starting an intercultural dialogue among citizens.

Conclusion:

The cultural values have more influence than the religious affections on human being but it is a crucial point to say that we should build the essence of co-existence and to accept the rainbow of cultures prevailing in this world. "This globalization has been described in terms of the "shrinking of the globe" to the extent of becoming a "global village"". Yet, *there is no parallel global culture* in sight."¹⁶

The major cause of Muslim's rage towards US in particular, and the West in general is its unconditional support to Israel. Since the creation of the Israel on the Arab land, Muslims have been protesting against that cruel action from the West. It would really be appreciative action by Obama if he tells the characteristics of Islamic teachings to the West and particularly Israelis because the Muslims know very well what he referred to the Quran in his speech like "The Holy Koran teaches that whoever kills an

innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind."¹⁷ Had the President quoted the above-mentioned verse from the Old Testament (which is an original source of Quran) in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University during his visits to Israel or any world platform, it would have been one of the conflict resolution actions from USA.

At present, the world is standing at stake and any adventurous policy or mistake can destroy the whole world in a very short time. Such article, which would divide the world history between “us” and “them”, has played a disastrous role. As it has been seen after September 11, 2001. This is the time to learn from history in a constructive way. It, therefore, is very important first to differentiate Islam, as a religion, and the Muslims, its followers. Muslims doing any action does not reflect the teaching of Islam; nor it can be associated under the influence of the religion; like any terrorism held by Hindus in Sri Lanka, or Christians in Northern Ireland cannot be associated with Hinduism and Christianity. We should have bear in mind that we are all human beings and residents of this world, any wrong or aggressive policy from any one either from Muslim or the West, or any other party would have its equal effects on all of us. We should leave the civilization’s vendetta among us in contrary; we should work towards a positive evolution of history of humankind. The voyage of a society which starts from the understanding of cultural discourse, passing through the horny bushes of clash and alliances of civilizations which has firmly been developed after the colonial and post-colonial episodes of history, ended up on the shore of identity and globalization discourses; provoked the thoughts to see the present world conflicts from different lenses.

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