

Actions of terrorists a violation of the Qur'an

By Aijaz Husain

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On July 7 there were four bomb explosions in the city of London that took the lives of 55 innocent people and injured hundreds of others. On July 13, in one of the deadliest bomb attacks in Baghdad, a daily occurrence in that city, 18 children perished, some as young as eight. Those responsible for this carnage happen to be Muslim extremists. What these men did is just another form of abuse of the Holy Qur'an, perhaps much worse than the alleged desecration of it that occurred at Guantanamo Bay Prison.

The Qur'an prohibits the followers of Islam from killing innocent people and forbids them from taking their own lives for reasons however compelling, whether personal, religious or political. Flouting those injunctions, and doing so in the name of Islam, amounts to a sacrilege the seriousness of which, from an Islamic perspective, cannot be exaggerated.

The indiscriminate daily killings of people in Iraq, the kidnappings and beheadings of persons perversely perceived as enemies of Islam, and carrying those atrocities under the label of Jihad -- meaning as if they have a direct mandate to do so from the Almighty -- is an inexcusable violation of the Qur'an.

Basically Jihad is a populist concept that enjoins Muslims to exercise strict discipline both in their social and personal lives, pursue excellence of character and uphold Islamic values as enshrined in the Qur'an and the Shariah (the Islamic law).

Of course Jihad conceptually does place an expectation on Muslims to take up arms and go to war in self-defence or fight enemies that specifically pose a threat to the exercise of their religious freedom.

Thankfully, there is hardly any place in the world today where Muslims are not able to practice their religion freely without fear of persecution. Thus the question of waging Jihad to seek religious freedom in today's world is purely academic.

As well, contrary to popular belief, Jihad is not to be used as a means of settling territorial disputes or resolving political conflicts even if the issues involved on the Muslim side are legitimate. As such the Palestinian issue, the Kashmir dispute or the Chechnyan peoples' quest for independence do not fall within the meaning of Jihad. Such disputes, as far as Islam is concerned, need to be resolved through peaceful means. But if the dispute does lead to an armed encounter, it does not become Jihad.

It will thus be seen that the Islamists or "Jihadists", as the Western media likes to call them, are in contempt of the Holy Qur'an by distorting and twisting the meaning of Jihad, a very important postulate of Islamic philosophy.

Totally reprehensible as the terrorist activities are, there is the undeniable reality that the West's own contribution to the spread of terrorism in the world is by no

means small. The very invasion of Iraq, absolutely uncalled for as it was, is a glaring example of the West's insensitivity to issues of concern to the Muslim world.

Before, the U.S. invasion, Iraq was the only Arab country where Saddam Hussein's secular dictatorship -- ruthless as it was -- had treated Muslim extremists with brutal harshness. The regime had seen to it that many of the country's religious leaders would either be in exile, in jail or worse still, resting in their graves.

The invasion changed all that, turning the country into a hub of terrorist activity and a haven for the recruitment and training of volunteers willing to wage their brand of holy war.

Even before the invasion of Iraq, America's stock in the Muslim world was never high. The war has reduced it to a level that cannot go any lower.

Yes, it is indeed tragic that the U.S. has lost more than 1,700 of its soldiers in the war effort. But the world has never heard a word of sympathy from the authors of the war for the loss of more than 50,000 Iraqi civilian lives (Amnesty International figures), all victims of the relentless Allied bombing, not to speak of the almost total destruction of the countries infrastructure worth billions of dollars.

Euphemistically speaking, as far as the West is concerned, the civilian lives lost in Iraq, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of family homes, the unspeakable brutalities suffered by the Iraqi people, the tragedies we hear so much about are nothing more than "collateral damage."

Iraqis are asking: What had they done to be called "the Axis of Evil"? Why were they made to pay the huge price for the crimes committed by Saddam Hussein or by those responsible for the 9/11 atrocity? And who gave Americans the authority to go to war in Iraq in the first place?

Of course there are many more issues of grave concern to the Muslim world. Decades of the West's support of autocratic regimes in the Middle East, the constant U.S. meddling and intrusion into the affairs of countries in the Middle East, the American partisan approach to the Palestinian dispute, the torture and humiliation to which Muslim prisoners are subjected without being given the right to due process, are all matters that are enough to cause the blood to boil of even the most moderate in the Muslim world.

The moderates, however, are a silent, yet an overwhelming majority, resentful but tolerant, forward looking and realistically optimistic about their future. Crouching beneath that majority is a small band of radicals, Muslims only in name, who have the capacity to shoot innocent people and gun down worshippers right inside their mosques and churches without even so much as a little prick to their conscience.

It remains to be seen whether these radicals will ever learn that there is another dimension to Jihad, a non-violent one that could give their struggle the dignity, respect and the goodwill of the very people whom they see as their adversaries.

Husain is a social work educator and a member of the Saskatchewan-based Muslims for Peace & Justice (MPJ).