

Theoretical and Operative Framework of the Vicious Cycle of Muslim Radicalisation

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I am a scientist, not a Muslim scholar per se, but a truly concerned Muslim practitioner . An Islamic value of importance for social equality can be seen in the institution of zakat (an alms tax). Another central theme is respect for creation. Both cases can be widely read up in the Holy Qur'an. The underlying theological principle of creation is the unity of Allah (Arabic: tauheed).

According to the Glorious Qur'an, everything has been created by and strives to return to Allah (the God), thereby giving meaning to human existence. In addition to the emphasis on the unity of Allah in a monotheistic sense, the unity Allah is also embodied in creation. The theoretical principle of creation is closely connected to the principle of responsibility. The creation principle assumes that there is a harmonious state of nature (Arabic: fitra) for both people and creation. Human beings are thought of as fundamentally different from other life forms because of their capacity for reason. People are aware of the linearity of time and are therefore responsible for carrying out the role of earthly vicegerents for Allah (Arabic: khaleefa). They are also responsible for promoting civilization. The question is: How much has the Muslim majority done to uphold this principle of harmony and civilization? Wars, bloodshed, suffering, wanton killing of innocent lives in the name of Islam? However, Islam came as an instrument to enjoin peace and extend mercy for Mankind.

The Muslim brotherhood in Egypt and ideologically related groups in other parts of North Africa initially emerged as winners from the Arab spring. By then, politically-motivated Islamic practices had lost power almost everywhere, and their radical and violent practical manifestations prevailed. One major reason was the failure to tackle the people's problems (compare to the civil war in Sierra Leone). The other one was a vicious cycle of repression by the authoritarian regimes, that were back in power, on the other hand and sectarian-based radicalization on the other hand.

The Arab spring was followed by extremism. At that time, more than two years after the start of the Arab spring, politically-motivated Islamic practice was at its zenith. It was the big winner of the upheavals in the Arab world: Egypt had a Muslim Brotherhood president, and Tunisia's constituent Assembly was dominated by a similar ideologically related Party. Islam is not a religion of ideologies.

Opposition to that development was signally led by Saudi Arabia, where a different form of Islamic practice was dominant: Wahhabism, a branch of Sunni Islam which is linked with the House of Saudi since the 18th century. Wahhabism gave rise to modern Salafism. Salafists advocate a return to the values and social structures that existed in the earliest days of Islam. Islam is a way of life, and not a religion per popular definition. While Salafism places doctrine first, the Muslim Brotherhood was formed in Egypt in 1920s as a political and social movement. The return to Islamic values was a

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means to an end, and the end was liberation from colonial hegemony. The harnessing of Islam to a social agenda and anti-Western politics is still inherent to the movement up to date.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists share similar beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, the Muslim Brotherhood opposes the form of government that exists in Saudi Arabia and most of the Arab States, with their conspicuous wealth and alliance with the west. So the rulers of those countries saw the development of the Arab spring as an existential threat. The attempt by Saudi Arabia and some of its neighbours to turn back the tide, should not be seen as a fight against politically-motivated Islamic belief and practice but as a school of thought-based clash within the "Mazhab" (school of thought): Wahhabists/Salafists versus Muslim Brotherhood.

Only one country in the Gulf stepped out of the line. Interestingly, the country is also a Wahhabi society, Qatar. Qatar lent backing to the Muslim Brotherhood across the Arab world, granted its leaders asylum and provided media support through TV broadcast Al-Jazeera. She is only a small country of only 300,000 (three hundred thousand) people, overshadowed by neighbours Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Emir of Qatar adopted that policy in order to make clients of the most likely winners and thus secure Qatar prosperity and independence.

Sunni Islam, particularly in its Wahhabi and Salafi forms, regard Shiites as heretics. To Jihad-Salafis, they are as much an enemy as no-Muslims. The religious hostility towards Shiites is connected with the rival claims of Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran to hegemony in the region- and given the fact that the two countries see themselves as leaders of their respective religious denominations. Conflicts that erupt in neighbouring countries (Syria, Yemen, etc.) are sometimes effectively proxy wars.

Conflicts in the ethnically and religiously heterogeneous countries of the Middle East were kept under wraps for decades, if not for centuries, by authoritarian forces. With the end of the authoritarian regimes, there was nothing to stop them "boiling" over. They were provoked by instrumentalisation of minors and denominational allegiance in Islam by actors with various interests.

Against this backdrop, the Islamic State (ISIS) became alarmingly "attractive" in the eyes of many Sunni Muslims. Its media-savvy use of violence even bewitched people in the west. In the eyes of many, ISIS is now the prevalent manifestation of politically-motivated Islamic practice. All this has made ISIS strong and now makes it so hard to defeat. The vicious and protracted cycle of radicalization is turning faster and faster, and the perpetration is taking new versions, dimensions, and forms. Let us beware of digital Jihad. The Internet has become an arena of international warfare. The ISIS uses social media to target individuals and communities in the virtual world, with the aim of spreading their ideology and recruiting people. We need to focus on identifying ways to combat cyber-jihadism and disrupt digital jihad. More private sector cooperation and corporate social responsibility is needed: Google, Facebook, and Twitter have to police their platforms better so that they cannot be used for criminal activities. Moreover, a counter-narrative needs to be developed. Especially web-savvy Muslims (precise knowledge and interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah) have to counteract ISIS propaganda by information, and must challenge the ISIS narrative rather than leave the interpretation of our Holy Qur'an to the amateur.

If we don't stop them online, we will have more problems offline. A piece of advice for America and her allies: It is far more effective to kill the "idea" than the "perpetrator", for more of the latter will be born again and again. Therefore, the best prevention is an effective counter-narrative alongside tackling socio-economic and political grievances, like youth unemployment. Unless young people find perspectives, radicalism will appeal to them.