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MARTYRS OR TERRORISTS: SUICIDE BOMBING IN ISLAMIC HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract

Most sociologists, anthropologists and scholars with backgrounds different from the Islamic tradition had written off martyrdom as parallel to suicide. However, the concept of martyrdom in Islam is associated with an all-inclusive effort to make the word of Allah supreme on the surface of the earth. The adoption of suicide terrorism by some Muslim groups as a strategic objective of modern warfare is the thrust of this paper. The work explicates suicide terrorism as war tactic in contemporary time. It examines the evidence and claims that have been advanced for the permissibility of self-sacrifices operation (al-amaliyyat al-Istishhadiyyah) or martyrdom, and suicide bombing, which many of the contemporary groups consider as legitimate tactic of war and hence subsequently qualifying the one that is involved a martyr. To achieve this, the authors use the Qur'an, Hadith, different school of thoughts and contemporary scholar's view to examine the position and claims that have been advanced. However, the various sources from classical times to our present day provide evidence that martyrdom or self-sacrifice operation is not alien to Islam but, the upsurge of suicide terrorism and suicide bombing among some militant Muslim groups today is not an influence of Islamic fundamentalism or conservatism as mostly explained in intellectual discourse rather it is adopted as a war tactic which exists in other traditions outside Islam and that its permissibility depends on the context of its deployment.

Keywords: *Jihad, Martyrs, Terrorists, Suicide, bombing*

Defining Jihad, Martyrdom and Terrorism

The twin institutions of Jihad and *Shahid* (martyrdom) had existed in Islam from the nascent period of Islamic history and civilization. The word Jihad is derived from the verbal root *Jahada* which means struggle or striving. It denotes any form of activity, either personal or for the community of Muslims, having the aim of striving for the cause of God and Islam. It may have military connotations but it would be incorrect to translate it as holy war, crusade or terrorist act because these words do not convey the meaning of Jihad.¹ The concept of martyrdom in Islam is associated with an all-round effort to make the word of Allah supreme on the surface of the earth. Martyrdom is regarded as the highest form of *shahādah*, i.e. witness which a Muslim can make to the religion of Islam.² The popular narratives before now from most sociologists, anthropologists and scholars with backgrounds different from the Islamic tradition had written off martyrdom as akin to suicide. While suicide may be defined as all cases of death resulting directly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce the result of death, martyrdom is associated with positive struggle for the Islamic cause and it is associated with *ʾImān* (faith). In martyrdom operation or suicide terrorism, Robert Pape posited that the willingness of an attacker to die has strategic value as it serves as a weapon of weak groups incapable of "denial" as a "coercive strategy"³ and that suicide terrorism relies on punishment and, especially, the expectation of future damage," which provides coercive leverage. The term terrorism has remained difficult to define because it is often interpreted as a pejorative concept. While there is no doubt that terrorism is associated with death, violence and war but the terrorists often view their actions as necessary to liberate themselves or make a political statement.⁵ Fotion (et al.) therefore, consider terrorism as a tactic of war or in a war-like struggle by nations, non-nations and individuals.⁶ Terrorism is viewed as sub-specie of revolutionary violence or to define it as a distinct and possibly new phenomenon, owing nothing to historical antecedents of violence by non-governmental people in pursuit of political ends of the revolutionary mould.⁷ The term terrorism has more frequently been associated with violence committed by disenfranchised groups desperately attempting to gain a shred of power or influence.⁸

There is no unitary or commonly used definition of terrorism. What is often cited is the popular understanding of terrorism that is constructed by media and politics. Terrorism has no precise meaning, yet

it is safe to say that terrorism is in the eyes of the beholder. At times, terrorist groups are described as revolutionaries, freedom fighters, guerillas and to others as terrorists. The term is often used to assert that political violence of an enemy is immoral, wanton and unjustified. Terrorism according to some people is ‘mindless and senseless killing, a theatre, pathological politics, ideological assertion’.⁹ The analysis of who is a terrorist largely depends on who is calling the name at the time. Terrorism is defined as “the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain goals, which are often political or ideological in nature, by intimidation or coercion”¹⁰ The US States Intelligence Committee defines terrorism as “the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain political goal through instilling of fear, intimidation or coercion”.¹¹ It also means the threat of or actual use of violence for political or other purposes, to foster fear, insecurity, distrust and unrest among specific group or general population.¹² Although terrorist groups cannot kill on the scale that governments with all their military power can, their sheer numbers, their intense dedication, and their dangerous unpredictability have given them influence vastly out of proportion with their meager military resources.¹³

The classification of terrorism by Robert Pape is noteworthy. In his celebrated work, he classified terrorism into; *demonstrative terrorism*, which seeks publicity, *destructive terrorism*, which seeks to exert coercion through the threat of injury and death as well as to mobilize support, and *suicide terrorism*, which involves an attacker's actually killing himself or herself along with others, generally as part of a campaign.¹⁴

What are the Aims of Terrorist Groups?

It is to influence, discredit, destroy the present system of government, to foster a breakdown in existing social structure, to erode the trust of population on the government, to foster growing insecurity and fear among the citizenry and to use agitation and propaganda (AGIPOP). One can safely say that there is no uniform demand among the various groups that are already tagged as terrorist groups in the world today. In understanding religious terrorism, Mark Juergensmeyer posited that, the puzzle among scholars has been why destruction is accepted with such dedication and certainty by some believers and why bad things are done by people who otherwise appear to be good?¹⁵

The recruitment videos and online posting of Muslim terrorist groups often linked their sporadic bombing activities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Saudi Arabia as a form of retaliation for specific acts like the demand for the withdrawal of foreign troops in Iraq, the death of half a million Iraqi children due to sanction, the overthrow of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the US one sided support for Israel and the presence of US forces in Saudi Arabia among others. This seems to support Pape's thesis that terrorism involved the weaker nation or organization targeting the stronger one.¹⁶

Suicide and Martyrdom in Islam

Suicide is the deliberate destruction of one's own life. It is always an intentional act which can cause death either through the individual's own deliberate acts or from his or her choice not to avoid a threat to life. In his classic study of suicide, Durkheim¹⁷ which seems to have influenced modern thinkers has even included acts of public altruism performed by religious martyrs, defining suicide as "all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce suicide". A martyr is the name given to those who, in fearless profession of their religion or in an effort of establishing or propagating it, prefer to die rather than abandon it or its teachings or practices.¹⁸ Martyrdom identified the exemplary ethical model of moral action in a show of struggle (*jihad*) for the sacred, manifested in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. The (male) martyr or *shāhid* encountered the sacred by fighting against the enemies of the true religion; and in the process giving up his life in exchange for a higher, celestial existence. In this regard, it was not merely the event of death that identified martyrdom, but the very fulfillment of the duty of obedience to the will of God that brought one to the level of sacred. Martyrdom can also signify the honorable defense of the faith. The code of honor, which reflects a defensive derive to protect the pietistic themes of virtue.¹⁹

Why do people decide to die for a cause to fulfill perceived social obligations rather than as voluntary choice? Martyrdom has a longer history²⁰ and it goes to the Old Testament where Jews would martyr themselves because they refused to worship the gods of others in the Roman empire, the zealots were reported to have fortified themselves in the Masada fortress, fought the Romans and in the end, died by their own hand just as they were about to be overpowered. In the same vein, under the Roman rule, the Christians also martyred themselves by refusing to

take oaths of allegiance to Rome but declaring their allegiance to Christianity. The celebrated act of Samson deliberately (and fatally) pulling down the house on himself and his enemies with the intention of killing his enemies shows that suicide attacks are as ancient as human conflict. The passage says:

And Samson said; Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.²¹

In the early history of Islam, a pseudo-Muslim group known as the Assassins that flourished between eleventh and thirteenth centuries were reputed to have practiced suicide terrorism. The name Assassins was given to the group from the drug hashish that the group used ritually in carrying out their murderous expeditions on state officials. The group members were noted not to fear death but welcomed it.²² The Hezbollah of Lebanon has been noted to have re-invented martyr/suicide terrorism in 1983 in its attack on US embassy, US marine barracks and French paratroop barracks in Lebanon killing more than 300 civilians and military personnels.²³ Other groups that have adopted it include: Tamil Tiger in Sri Lanka, the Japanese kamikazes²⁴ and in more recent times are Israel/Palestine groups, Chechnya rebel, the Taliban of Pakistan and Afghanistan, Al-Shabaab of Somalia, Boko Haram of Nigeria, Al-Qaeda in Arabia Peninsula and al-Qaeda in the Maghrib.

The adoption of martyr/suicide terrorism is due to a number of reasons. According to Pape: “Suicide terrorism is the most aggressive form of terrorism... it places the priority of coercing a target above the retaining of the organization’s members, and the recruitment of future member... Other forms of terrorism have a main objective of publicity to gain support in their actions while the main purpose in suicide terrorism is coercion... Suicide terrorism involved the weaker nation or organization targeting the stronger one.... organizations that employ suicide terrorism are always the weaker, they must rely on a tactic of punishment to cause mounting civilian costs to overwhelm the target state’s interest in the issue in dispute and so to cause it to concede the terrorists’ political demands,”²⁵

Pape concludes that the individuals’ “willingness to die magnifies the coercive effects of punishment in three ways”. The first of these reasons is that suicide terrorist attacks cause more damage than other

forms of terrorism. Because the attacker has no escape plan and no fear of their own life they are more likely to complete their mission. The person can “conceal weapons on their own bodies and make last-minute adjustments more easily”, making the attack more successful.²⁶ Awofeso views suicide terrorism as primarily a weapon of psychological warfare and that terrorists choose targets that horrify and traumatize the wider community. He further posited that a major goal of all forms of suicidal terrorism is to cause fear and it is a paradox of a self-aiming to abolish itself while simultaneously seeking self-esteem, i.e. aiming to accumulate ‘suicidal capital’.²⁷

Islam strongly condemns suicide because of the Islamic teachings on the sanctity of life. The Glorious Qur’ān says:

Because of that We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.²⁸

The Prophet of Islam said, “Whoever kills himself with something in the world, he will be punished with it on the Day of Judgment.”²⁹ In another tradition, he says:

“Whoever jumped off a mountain and as a result killed himself, then he is in the fire of Hell, falling in it forever. Whoever drank poison and as a result killed himself, then his poison will be in his hand, drinking it in the fire of Hell forever. And whoever killed himself with an iron, then his iron will be in his hand, bringing it in his stomach in the fire of Hell forever.”³⁰

However, Islam sanctions death related to martyrdom just like Christianity that earlier supported taking one’s life for martyrdom or to protect virginity. It was only in the middle ages that Christian authorities strengthened their denunciation of suicide and Augustine for example maintained that no argument can justify suicide, because the act precludes any possibility of repentance and labeled the act as murder and the position was maintained by Aquinas who described it as a crime against the community and a usurpation of the rights of God to grant life and death.³¹ Durkheim classical study has classified suicide into three namely: altruistic, egoistic and anomie suicide. Modern complex society offers

examples of individuals giving their lives in time of war like what happened in Sri Lanka among the Black Tigers and the Japanese kamikazes society of the 1940s in order to accomplish some goals involving group values. Such behaviour is judged as suicidal by outside observers. Suicide bombing or martyr terrorism is someone giving his life in attempt to destroy or kill their targets or opponents. It is apparently clear from Islamic sources that no act could be done for egoistic purpose and still be considered Islamic or acceptable. What Durkheim has classified as egoistic suicide is not acceptable under any guise in Islam so also the anomie suicide. No one is allowed to take his life because of downward social mobility as test and trials are part of the teachings which Muslims are expected to imbibe for their faith to be considered genuine.³²

Suicide process involves an unsuccessful search for possible alternatives to deal with problems, culminating in a final decision that death represents the only possible solution. Suicide/martyr terrorism seldom represents irrational behaviour, the popular narratives among the militant Muslim groups who have adopted it as a tactic of war is that such action expresses meaning usually about some fundamental flaw in a situation as the case of the Muslims; the flaw is injustice of the powerful nations over the weak nations. Hence lacing oneself with bombs to kill a citizen of the unjust nation is seen as the rational reaction to the sophisticated guided precision missiles, cluster bombs and pilot less missile planes of developed nations who have closed their eyes against the injustice and oppression they daily experienced in their lives rather than to see it as a consequence of poverty or youthful frustration.³³ Suicide terrorism enjoyed transcendent moralism among groups that sanctioned it like Hamas, Boko Haram, Taliban, Hezbollah and Tamil Tigers etc. The position of finding an answer to deal with problems of life as the motivation of suicide terrorism is rejected by Pape when he posited that, "In general, suicide attackers are rarely socially isolated, clinically insane, or economically destitute individuals, but are most often educated, socially integrated, and highly capable people who could be expected to have a good future"³⁴

There are two distinct camps in the Muslim world on the subject whether suicide bombers are martyrs or terrorists; those who consider it as terrorism and deliberate act of killing oneself and those who argue that it is permissible jihad effort in Islam. The other dimension to the argument is the bombing of Muslims by Muslims as there is no justifiable reason

apart from what Islam considers as a just cause (adultery, apostasy and murder) that can make a Muslim government terminates the life of another Muslim. There is no doubt that suicide/martyr terrorism as the most effective of all forms of terrorism in modern time has done incalculable damage to lives and properties across the world. It is therefore apposite to examine the evidences and claims that have been advanced for the permissibility of self-sacrifices operation (*al-amaliyyat al- Istishhadiyyah*) or martyrdom operation (martyrdom terrorism), which many of such groups consider as legitimate tactic of war and hence subsequently qualifying the one that is involved a martyr.

Martyrdom Terrorism or Self-Sacrifice Operations in Islamic Hermeneutics

It is discernible in the life of the Muslims that the institution of Jihad is viewed from various perspectives ranging from those who see it as an integral part of Islam to those who consider that the modern world does not have any place for Jihad in whatever form. Let us first consider some verses of the Qur'an which provide immediate references for Islamists on the subject under consideration. The Qur'an says: - "Say: "Can you expect for us (any fate) other than one of two glorious things- (martyrdom or victory)? But we can expect for you either that Allah will send his punishment from Himself, or by our hands. So wait (expectant); we too will wait with you."³⁵Maududi interpreted the above verse thus:

Even if they killed in the way of Allah, it would be success....A believer considers it his success if he sacrifices his life and wealth in the Way of Allah...The criterion of success or failure is whether he has extended or not all the powers of his body and soul, his head and his heart to elevate the world of Allah.³⁶

The implication of this verse is that it is victory when the enemy is defeated and victory also when a person dies in the cause of fighting for the sake of Allah as such a person is granted the rank of a martyr.

During the historic treaty of Hudaibiyyah (6A.H), the Muslims had an uphill task of entering Makkah to perform a religious obligation of pilgrimage. The delay in the return of 'Uthman bn 'Affan who was the Prophet's emissary to the Quraysh to the Muslim camp made the Muslims to make a pledge with the Prophet which has been described as "pledge of death". Allah declares in the Qur'an:

Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur'an: and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.³⁷

Maududi wrote on this verse:

(The) aspect of the Islamic faith which determines the nature of the relationship between Allah and His servants has been called a transaction. This means that faith is not a merely metaphysical conception but is in fact, a contract by which the servant sells his life and possessions to Allah and in return for this accepts His promise that he would give him the Garden in the Life after death.³⁸

The understanding of Islamists (as political movement and Qur'anic interpreters) is that Allah traded with the believers, with their life first, and then their wealth, whether they die by sword, the gun or the bomb as there is no difference between the one who wants to sell himself to his Lord with a plane or by receiving a bullet or receiving a sword, or by becoming a bullet for the sake of Allah.

The martyrdom operation is a specific action performed by the Mujahid (fighter) with certainty or least doubt of mind that it either inflicts harm on the enemy or by killing from their fighters or inflicting suffering on them, and that he has certainty or the least amount of doubt that he will reach martyrdom by being killed for the sake of Allah. The support for the position of Islamists for martyrdom operation has been derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah and understanding of early scholars of Islam. One of the famous references from the Qur'an often cited to support martyrdom operation is the story of the Companion of the Ditch mentioned in the Qur'an in Surat al-Buruj (85) and explained by Prophet Muhammad:

It has been narrated by Suhaibal-Rumi about the story of the Boy and the people of the Ditch. The story about the young boy who would go and be set by the king to be taught magic, he would go to see a priest also though he was warned by the priest not to come - because they will find out. Eventually they did notice that the boy was coming late and

eventually found out that he was being taught by the priest. They ordered to kill the boy but could not, every time they attempted to do so, Allah (SAW) protected and saved him? He said to the king: "You will not be able to kill me until you do what I order you to," the king asked: "What should I do?" he said: "gather all the people, and tie me to a tree, and then get a bow and put the arrow on the bow, and say "in the name of Allah, the Lord of this boy," and throw the arrow and you will kill me." The king gathered the people, and he took the arrow, and said "in the name of Allah, the Lord of this boy." He threw the arrow and the arrow went directly into his head (the boy's head), the boy put his hand on his head and he died, all the people began to say, "we believe in the Lord of the boy, we believe in the Lord of the boy, we believe in the Lord of the boy," the king said: "do you believe in him without asking my permission?" and he ordered to dig a ditch, and to throw them in, and the people did not hesitate"³⁹

Ibn Taymiyyah commented on this story thus:-"The boy said to the king, "Kill me". He ordered him to kill him for the sake of the religion to prevail, for this reasons, early scholars of Islam loved for the Muslims to go into the middle of the unbelievers, and even if he has the least amount of doubt that he is going to be killed, if that has benefit for the Muslims"⁴⁰ Allah says: - "Among the people, there is someone who will sell himself to please Allah, and Allah is kind to His servants."⁴¹ According to Ibn Kathir when Hisham bin 'Amr penetrated the lines of the enemy, some people criticized him for putting himself into harm. Umar and Abu Hurayrah refuted them and recited this verse.⁴²

The early generation of the Muslim, most especially the companions applied this verse to the one who fought the enemy by himself in the battlefield. Notable companions like 'Umari bn Khattab and Abu Hurayrah opined that any person who goes into the enemy by himself to cause destruction even by himself alone, that this verse is applicable to him.⁴³ Many other Companions of the Prophet, according to Qurtubi, submitted that this verse is about the one who goes into the enemy by himself to fight.⁴⁴ It is narrated that a man asked Bara' ibn Azib, "if a man who throws himself into the gathering of the polytheist by himself, did he throw himself into harm?" he said: "No, the real one who harms himself is the one who does a sin and gives up and does not ask forgiveness."⁴⁵ The early Muslim scholars have provided an intellectual support for self sacrifice operation. "There is agreement that you can sacrifice your life for the sake of Jihad."⁴⁶ Imam Sarkhasi said:

Our Imam (Abu Hanifah) said: "if one man raids alone, on a big number of the polytheists and he has the least amount of doubt or he knows that he will attack some of them, or inflict some harm upon them, it is allowed, but if he thinks that he cannot inflict any harm on them it is not allowed to do so." Muhammad ibn Hasan Al Shaybani reported that Imam al-Jassas said: "If one man advances alone on a thousand men, there is no harm at all if he thinks that he could be saved or that he could inflict harm on them, if he is not seeking to be saved nor to inflict harm on them, I would dislike it because he is disposing himself without to benefit the Muslims, but if he was not seeking to be saved or to inflict harm but he was seeking to motivate the Muslims, in order for them to do the same and so that they would kill the enemy and inflict maximum damage, it is allowed to do so." He also said that it is allowed to do so to terrify the enemy because that has benefit for the Muslims.⁴⁷

Imam Shafi'i said: "I do not see harm or restrictions for a man to go in the middle of a big gathering barehanded and fight them, or for a man to go into a gathering knowing that he will be killed or most likely that he will be killed, because it occurred in the time of the Prophet (SAW), a man went into the battlefield and fought without any weapons, and the Prophet (SAW) praised him when he was killed".⁴⁸ Imam an-Nawawi said: "That is a proof that it is allowed for a man to go into the battlefield and fight, himself against a big gathering of the *mushrikūn* (polytheists), confront them face to face and become martyr, without any dislike for it, and that is the opinion of the generality of scholars of Islam".⁴⁹ Imam Qurtubi in his understanding wrote "The correct *hukm* (judgment) for me is that it is allowed to go through the enemy for the one who has no strength, from four angles. If he seeks martyrdom, second if he seeks with the martyrdom *shahādah* to inflict harm on the enemy or to tease them, or to motivate the Muslims or to make them brave, or to put fear into the enemy to make them wonder 'if one Muslim can do that what will the rest do'.⁵⁰

In our contemporary times there are scholars who have also made statement on martyrdom operation. Nasiru'd-Din Al Albani (d.1999) was asked about a group of people from the enemy of commandos who keep

inflicting harm on the Muslims, a group of Muslims started to use explosives on their body, and attacking tanks with it, they asked, "is it Jihad or suicide?" Albani replied: "That is not considered suicide, suicide is when a Muslim kills himself to be saved from his miserable life or something similar, as far as what you are asking about, that is *Jihad fisabilillah*, but we must consider that this action cannot be done individually without to designate somebody as an Amir who can assess if it will be beneficial for Islam and Muslims, and if the Amir decides that to lose that Mujahid is more beneficial than to keep him, especially if he is going to inflict damage on the enemy, then the opinion of that Amir is binding and even if the man is unhappy with that, he must obey him. Suicide is one of the biggest prohibitions. It is when someone dies because he wants to end his life, as for in the Jihad it is not suicide, the way the companions used to fight big numbers of the enemy by themselves,"⁵¹

A leading contemporary Islamic scholar, Yusuf al-Qaradawi recently explained the distinction this way: attacks on enemies are not suicide operations, but "heroic martyrdom operations" in which the Muslims act not "out of hopelessness and despair, but are driven by an overwhelming desire to cast terror and fear into the hearts of the oppressors."⁵² Shaykh al-Qaradawi holds categorically that these are not only permitted but also required, since they are the only and most effective military means for the Palestinian struggle: These operations [suicide bombings] must be the greatest Jihad in Allah's way, so they are among the legitimate 'deterrence' mentioned in the Qur'an "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into [the hearts of] the enemies of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly"⁵³ Shaykh al-Qaradawi adds that it is wrong to call these missions suicide operations, since the *shāhid* has sacrificed himself for the sake of the superior goal of defending his religion and community, while common suicide is a hopeless deed performed by a person who kills himself for his own selfish reasons. He considers the youths who defend their land as real martyrs, who sacrifice their souls in the way of God, as long as they have the intention and no other choice to 'deter' their enemies.

The militant Muslim groups consider martyrdom operation in contemporary narratives as not just legitimate, but highly commendable when undertaken for reasons of Jihad. In case of Hamas for example,

suicide terrorism is considered as an operation and violence is used strategically as necessary acts. This explains why Hamas approves it as 'letters' to the enemy.⁵⁴ Going into war knowing with the certainty that one will die, they argue, is not suicide (*intihar*) but self-chosen martyrdom (*istishhad*), a much-praised form of self-sacrifice in the path of God, a way to win the eternal affection of Allah for paradise. The various sources from classical times to our present day provide evidences that martyrdom or self-sacrifice operation is not alien to Islam. What is however alien is the application of the operation against Muslims as currently being experienced in Iraq, Afghanistan, Algeria and Pakistan lately where martyrdom operation for sectarian fighting between the Shi'ah and Sunni Muslims or lately in Jordan and Nigeria where it has been used against Muslims, Christians and innocent civilians. The Prophet of Islam explained this, as a day of Kharaj when there will be wild killing between Muslims. Abdullah Bin 'Umar said: "I heard Messenger of Allah (Peace and Blessings be upon him) say: "The *fitnah* will come from here and he pointed towards the east (of Madinah), the place where the horn of Satan will appear and you will be striking each other's necks."⁵⁵

Suicide Terrorism as War Tactic in Contemporary Time

In spiritualizing violence, Juergensmeyer⁵⁶ posited that religion gave terrorism a remarkable power. The upsurge of suicide terrorism among some militant Muslim groups today is not an influence of Islamic fundamentalism or conservatism as mostly explained in intellectual discourse. Most terrorist groups irrespective of religious or ideological differences borrow tactics from one another. It is in this respect one cannot agree less with Pape when he posited that:

The leading agent of suicide terrorism is the Tamil Tigers, which is not an Islamic group—these are Marxists, a particularly secular group. In suicide terms, the Tamil Tigers lead the way—they have committed more suicide terrorist attacks than either Hamas or Islamic Jihad.⁵⁷

Also, the female suicide bombing of January 6, 2015 in Istanbul Turkey was carried out by a Marxist group- DHKP-C. The group claimed that its "sacrificial fighter... carried out the sacrificial action on the tourist police department in Sultanahmet" in its fight against corruption.⁵⁸

As earlier mentioned, suicide terrorism or martyr terrorism is the most deadly of all forms of terrorism with an average of eight casualties per attack. Its effectiveness in installing the reign of terror in the world is largely responsible for terrorist groups using it as a major tactic of war against the state. Again, Suicide bombing prospers because it has been seen to succeed (in forcing the U.S. and Israeli departures from Lebanon). Every suicide terrorist campaign since 1980 has been waged by terrorist groups whose principal goal has been to establish self-determination. Religion is rarely the root cause, although religion may be used as a recruiting tool because of its appeal to people's emotion in the service of the broader strategic objective (Pape). The logic employed by terrorist groups in legitimizing suicide terrorism is to say among other things to their sympathizers (and would be sympathizers) that their communities are under attack or being violated and that their acts are simply responses to the violence being experienced. In other groups like the Boko Haram of Nigeria, freedom of the people vis-a-vis their faith is considered imperiled by government policies and that the secular culture of permissiveness naturally made them to be at war with secular democratic government. It is clear that in terrorist narratives, political grievances are magnified into grand spiritual condemnation and bringing into fore what he describes as vigilante theology or righteous rebellion.⁵⁹

Suicide terrorism is directed at gaining control of territory that the terrorists prized. In the case of Boko Haram the Borno axis of Nigeria and Adamawa region is considered important region of their Islamization drive with occasional attack on Kano city. The time the Nigeria government allowed Boko Haram to control parts of Nigeria territory marked a watershed in Boko Haram audaciousness against the Nigeria state. The implication of that is that they transformed from mere fighters (*Mujahidūn*) to pseudo-state (*dawlah*) thereby viewing an attack against them as an attack against an Islamic state which indicates in Islamic metaphor a declaration of war by an enemy state. Pape captures this succinctly that "The taproot of suicide terrorism is nationalism" not religion and that it is "an extreme strategy for national liberation".⁶⁰ It is this perspective that the local communities are persuaded to re-define acts of suicide and murder as acts of martyrdom or self-sacrifice on behalf of the community.⁶¹ In choosing target of attack, suicide terrorism is calculated to target states viewed as especially vulnerable to coercive punishment. They attack consistently the capital city of state or important towns to send message to the people that the government cannot protect

them. If the government cannot protect the capital cities, it is clearly incapable of protecting other cities and towns.⁶² This explains why most of the attacks were against military and political targets such as government buildings, police convoys, police stations, recruiting stations and Western combat troops. The attacks against mosques and churches are meant to undermine the people's confidence in the states and Federal government especially on their ability to maintain order. The attacks also assist the insurgents to exacerbate inter-religious strife and tension which conforms to the strategic logic of suicide terrorism of undermining the government in order to establish their rule over the people. Suicide operation was considered by many people in Africa for example as alien to them. However, the strength of Boko Haram in its adoption of martyr terrorism as a campaign strategy indicates that terrorists learn from each other; the spread of the method is therefore neither irrational nor surprising.⁶³

Islam has made it forbidden for a Muslim to kill another Muslim or to kill another person unlawfully. The Prophet of Islam warned, "Stay away from seven grave sins." They asked O' Messenger of Allah, what are they?" He said associating partners with Allah, magic, unjustly killing a person whom Allah has made impermissible (to kill), dealing in interest, taking/stealing the money of an orphan, running away from the battle field and falsely accusing the believing woman with fornication (or adultery).⁶⁴ In another tradition, the Messenger of Allah said, "Verily one of the worse situations in which there is no escape for the one who is involved in it is to kill someone unlawfully."⁶⁵ The usage of weapon against another Muslim takes the person away from the brotherhood of Islam, "Whoever carries a weapon against us is not from us"⁶⁶

The extra-judicial murder of Boko Haram leaders in 2009 (in Nigeria) and the government interpretation of the event as a political agenda of a region against the state greatly underestimate the damage religious rhetoric is capable of unleashing in a plural state like Nigeria. The unfolding event since 2009 confirms that religion, Larry Iannaccone⁶⁷ argues is uniquely able to act as a vehicle for politically oppressed, culturally despised and socially marginalized groups. The militant Islamic groups' popular narrative that keeps them going is that Islam is not merely a vehicle; it has an engine that never runs out of fuel. It is in this perspective; we can understand the endless supply of individuals who are willing to give up their lives for martyrdom operation. The source of the fuel is the power of martyrdom or self-sacrifice and the only way to curtail the source of the fuel is to ensure a just society for all. The need for justice

and fair play among all nations provides the immediate solution to the indiscriminate use of self-sacrifice operation. Mahmud Mamdani understanding of the situation is very apt when he submitted that the popularity of such extreme methods necessitates that we examine terrorists' grievances and that terrorists are not simply born; they are created. Terrorists do not act out of religious conviction; they act as a response to an unjust society. "Terrorism," Mamdani concludes, "is not a necessary effect of religious tendencies, whether fundamentalist or secular. Rather, terrorism is born of a political encounter."⁶⁸

Conclusion

The question of why people are prepared to transform themselves into living missiles has been difficult to understand by scholars and the end result has been to conjecture that the emergence of suicide bombing is a result of religious syncretism by Sunni Muslim who borrowed it from their Shi'ah rival Muslim group or socio-economic frustrations of the youths. The profiles of people who have participated in self-sacrifice operations in most Muslim countries have not shown that of frustration but that of optimism of sacrificing their lives in order to inflict harm on the enemies. There is no doubt that it has received attention of world leaders because it is an unconventional way of fighting war. The existence of martyrdom terrorism or self-sacrifice operation in the history of major religions and cultures cannot be denied. In Islam, it is meant to legitimately seek martyrdom, to inflict harm on the enemy, to tease them, to motivate other Muslims to be brave in war and make the enemy wonder that if a Muslim can do that what will the rest do'. This confirms the statement of the Prophet of Islam that, "war is a deceit"⁶⁹ There is no doubt that this ancient war tactics has been taken over to accentuate all forms of grievances by youths and people whose mission are greatly diametrically opposed to Islamic teachings and dictates.

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