

Islam & Terrorism

A Gagged Theology and 'Narcissistic Indoctrination'

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A Diversity of Islamic Identity

Islam has been a dynamic force both historically and in the contemporary world. A critical question in this context is, how should Islam be reconsidered and deliberated if Muslims are to come to terms with themselves and the world at large. There have been influential Muslim liberationist and revivalist movements through the ages and any examination of Islam in the modern world must take the past into account, in order to understand the present better, instead of considering Islam to be a closed doctrinaire persuasion. Indeed, Islam allows life's plurality to expand its horizons and, since society is always in flux, constant transformations influence different persuasions or introduce different trends in the same persuasion. Context transforms text.

It is this adaptability that makes Islam align with Ba'ath Socialism, or Leftist movements like Polisario in Sub-Saharan Africa, or, on the other end of the ideological spectrum,

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movements like Taliban in Afghanistan. It is, again, the same malleability that makes revivalist movements side with the kind of resurgent atavism that rejects modernisation and preaches submission to the injunctions of religious decrees in societies that have already undergone significant modernisation. Indeed, it is conflicting visions of text and context that bring religious orthodox bigotry and progressive and modern societies on a collision course.

It is through the latter stream of atavistic movements that many Muslims in India and elsewhere have realised and asserted their identity. Though it is well understood that revivalist movements do not occur in isolation from the rest of the world, it is important to consider the changing nature of political legitimacy created by modernisation and the challenge posed by modernisation to theological authority. There has been a constant interaction between Islamic traditions and modern societies with varying repercussions, including militant activism. The development of the Islamic community and the emergence of a revivalist Muslim identity makes the study of the history of Islam a necessity, in order to understand and present the different forms of the Muslim experience in the context of modern world history.

In tracing the Muslim identity, one discovers the fundamentalist trend that seeks to grasp the Islamic world in its holistic vision of a world *umma* (community). But this vision is disturbed as contemporary Muslims are faced with the problem of diversity within the community. This diversity embraces the entire range, from fundamentalist to liberal, within each sect. [The reason for creating “liberal” and “fundamentalist” binaries is for the purpose of using them in broad comparative terms that may not necessarily be understood as closed rigid categories]

The two prominent trends in Islam, Sunni and Shi’i Islam, moreover, represent their divergent versions of Islamic polity

and society, and this has been a major driver of world politics and influence in the construction of legitimate political authority in the Muslim world. It is, consequently, imperative that the distinction between these two broad streams be understood. Further, it needs to be noted that recognised differences exist between the four schools of the Sunni tradition – Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki and Hanbali – which determine the formation of their account of Islamic jurisprudence. The distinct methodologies of the four Sunni and one Shi'i School of thought stress their differences, "which have to do with the means of interpretation they grant their jurists that in turn allows for a greater or lesser independence from the Qur'an and the Tradition."²

The first schism in Islam arose immediately after the death of Prophet Muhammad. There were divisions and internal strife over the question of Sunni selection and Shi'i nomination. Ameer Ali rightly observes, "Differences of opinion on abstract subjects, about which there cannot be any certitude in a finite existence, have always given rise to greater bitterness and fiercer hostility than ordinary differences on matters within the range of human cognition."³ The bitter division between Sunni and Shi'i owe their origin to political and dynastic causes, old tribal rivalries and jealousy.

The sparse similarities between the Shia and the Sunni, point at the existence of a sharp division between the two, both in India and within the wider Muslim World. Each sect claims to represent the authentic Islamic tradition and argues that the other group is un-Islamic or heretical. However,

The responsibility for fanning intra-Muslim sectarian strife rests with the traditional ulema. Islam has no place for official

2 Tamara Albertini, "The Seductiveness of Certainty: The Destruction of Islam's Intellectual Legacy by the Fundamentalists", *Philosophy East and West*, Volume 53, Number 4, 2003, p. 459.

3 Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: A History of the Evolution and ideals of Islam*, 1964, Chatto & Windus Ltd, London, p.292.

priesthood that can lay down the official doctrine. In principle, in Islam there are no intermediaries between man and God, the relation being direct and unmediated. While this makes religious leadership more democratic in theory, it also means that the ulema of different Muslim groups are free to stake their own competing claims to represent ‘true’ Islam, in turn branding other groups as deviant.⁴

Crucially, there is tremendous diversity within Islam, both in the Sunni and the Shia streams, clearly demonstrating that this is not a monolithic construct, but a widely varied system of beliefs and practices reflecting numerous schools of thought and interpretation.

Shias: The Way of the Imams

The Shi’i belief revolves around the figure of Ali. The Shia believed that the Prophet chose Ali as his successor and he should therefore have been the first Caliph of Islam after the Prophet. In particular, the Shia, reject the first three caliphates of Abu Bakr, Umar and Usman, revered by the Sunnis. This became the crucial point in parting of the ways of the Shia and the Sunnis. “For the Shia, religious authority is far more important. The Shi’i heartlands would remain in the region where the deaths of Ali and Hussein took place – present Iraq and Iran. The need to stand up against all odds on a matter of principle, the readiness for martyrdom, total passion, disregard for death and acceptance of tragedy are familiar aspects of the Shia.”⁵ This has been termed by scholars as the “Karbala Paradigm.”⁶

4 Yoginder Siknad, *Muslims in India: Contemporary Social and Political Discourses*, 2007, Hope India Publications, Gurgaon, p. 150.

5 Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam Today: A Short Introduction to the Muslim World*, 1999, I.B. Tauris Publishers, London, p. 44.

6 Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi’i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*, 2004, University of Washington Press, Seattle, pp. 8-9.

One of the most consistent and significant trends throughout this period was that Shi'i imams, who were descendents of the Prophet and who had varying degrees of popular support among the masses, were rivals of the Sunni caliphs, who actually ruled the empire. This rivalry was particularly intense during the Umayyad period and came to a head with the battle of Karbala in 680 during the reign of the second Umayyad caliph, Yazid. This battle of Karbala results in 'Karbala Paradigm'. The most commonly accepted narrative of the battle of Karbala begins with an account of the discontent of Muslims [especially in southern Iraq] under the rule of Yazid, who is portrayed as having been politically oppressive and morally corrupt. Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussein (in Medina) received several letters from the caliph's subjects in Southern Iraq to lead them in an uprising against Yazid. After sending scouts to assess the situation in Southern Iraq, Hussein and a number of his close relatives left the Hijaz, in Western Arabia, and began the trip to Iraq. In Southern Iraq in a desert named Karbala, located near the Euphrates River, the caravan was surrounded by an overwhelmingly large army sent by Yazid. A standoff ensued because Hussein refused to give his oath of allegiance to Yazid. At the end of ten days of waiting, negotiating, and occasionally fighting, a final battle took place, in which Hussein and all of his adult male relatives and supporters were killed in a brutal fashion. The survivors, consisting of women and children, together with Hussein's son Zeyn al-Abidin, who was too ill to take part in the fighting, were then taken captive and transported, along with the heads of the martyrs, which had been placed on spears, to Yazid's court in Damascus. In this narrative, Yazid represents the ultimate impious, tyrannical villain. His supporters, like Shemr, represented as being the one who actually killed Hussein, are also portrayed mostly as being immoral, cruel and worldly. Hussein and his supporters,

such as Abbas, his sons Ali Asghar and Ali Akbar, the young bridegroom Qasim, to name a few, are represented by Shi'is as symbols of courage, piety and truth. The women and girls, in particular Zeynab, serve as symbols of the ideal of women supporting their male relative, suffering the indignation of captivity with dignity, educating and preparing their sons to follow the path of Hussein, willingly sacrificing their male loved ones to martyrdom, and serving as spokespersons for the cause after the men were martyred. Thus, for Shi'is this event has become the root metaphor upon which many of their religious beliefs and practices are based. It has served as a vindication of the Shi'i cause in the face of Sunni criticism, as well as constituting the central event in their understanding of human history. At the same time, the rituals associated with the battle have historically served as a vehicle for expressing and strengthening a variety of political and social relationships, associations and identities. The "Karbala Paradigm" has also provided an opportunity for spiritual redemption for Shi'is. By mourning the fate of the family of the Prophet Muhammad (the ahl al-beyt) generally, and his grandson Hussein specifically, Shi'is hope to gain salvation and admission to paradise.⁷

The Shi'i are, further, divided into five sub-sects based on their faith (aqidah) in the Imams. They are the Zaidia, the Ismailia, the Isna- Asharia or Imamia, the Kaisania, and the Ghallia or Ghullat. These sects and the branches they bifurcated into had more or less attachment to Ali. Out of these sects the Isna-Asharia is a larger and the most prominent group, and is referred to as 'Shia Proper'.⁸ The major concentration of the Isna Asharia has been in Iran, Southern Iraq and South Asia. The Isna-Asharias are also divided into two sub-sects, the

7 Ibid.

8 Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: A History of Evolution and Ideals of Islam*, 1964, Chatto & Windus Ltd, London, pp. 290-291.

Usulis and the Akhbaris, that is, the followers of principles and the followers of traditions. There is no difference between them on the question of the Imamate or on descent to the last Imam.⁹ But they differ on the amount of authority to be attached to the exposition of the Mujtahid (Islamic scholar), who call themselves the representatives of the Imam. The Twelver Imami Shias agrees with the Sunni Muslims on the centrality of the Qur'an and Sunna as the primary source of Islamic law. The Twelvers, however, define Sunna as the life example of the Prophet and his rightful successors, the Imams. Their legal system is based on the hadith tradition transmitted through the Imams and lays stress on the principle of ijtiḥād or personal reasoning in comprehending and interpreting the Imam's ruling applicable to new situations. However, since taqlid (emulation) is essential to ijtiḥād, it, too, needs to be problematised.

The Ahl-us-Sunnah: The Way of the Caliphs

Initially, the Sunni tradition had its various branches which gradually disappeared, but it is still divided into four principal denominations, differing on many questions of dogma and ritual. From the two fundamental sources of scripture and the Prophet's deeds and sayings, the ulema derive the law. There are four important persuasions within the Sunni School of law, namely, Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali, designated after their respective founders. "Earlier it was permissible to consult the opinions of all the four schools, but later it became a rule to follow one particular school. This rule came to be regarded as binding, and was called taqlid. In other words, orthodoxy came to be regarded as strict adherence to one of the four schools

9 The 'descent to the last Imam' can be understood as a principle of aqeedah or faith in the existence of Imam Mehdi, the last among the twelve Imams, who is believed to be living in occultation and it is believed that he will reappear on the day of Judgement.

of fiqh. The particular fiqh followed was naturally regarded as comprehending the manifold aspects of the shari'ah."¹⁰

Among the Sunni schools, Hanafi is mostly represented in Asia, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. The second most popular school, the Maliki, emerged as a reaction against an excessive use of personal reasoning in the Hanafi School. The Maliki is conservative and best suited for pastoral communities. It is popular, in whole or in part, in the Gulf countries, Spain, East and West African countries, and also in the United States, France and the United Kingdom.¹¹ The third, Shafi School, which prevails in Southern Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Indonesia and Malaysia, draws a middle course between Hanafis and Malikis. Though the Shafi School cautioned against change, it cannot be viewed as inflexible. Its founder encouraged jurists to revise their own previous verdicts if they came to a better judgment.

The fourth and the most rigid among the four schools is the Hanbali, established by Ibn Hanbal. The founder of the School argued that the Qur'an and the Sunna were the law itself and not merely the source of it. He argued that the Qur'an must be understood in its literal sense, without resort to allegorical interpretation, and that all Traditions from the Prophet regarded as sound in his time comprised the unquestioned second source of law.¹² The Hanbali ideology proclaimed an uncompromising and rigorous monotheism, rejecting pluralism, whether that pluralism is within the domain of Islam or without. This rejection of diversity by the Hanbali ideology stresses on the nature of their narcissistic philosophy, declaring themselves to be the representatives of the only "authentic" Islam.

10 M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, 1967, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, p. 58.

11 David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, 2005, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 66-68.

12 *Ibid*, p. 71

The circle of Islam is understood within the Wahhabi worldview as uniform and anything deviating from this uniformity must be rejected in totality. The Hanbali oppose the term “Wahhabi” and claim simply to be part of a larger Salafi Movement that began in Egypt and was later imported to Saudi Empire. There was a cross-pollination of religious practice and belief between the two movements, giving birth to a puritanical-radical combine, calling for the return to a purportedly pristine Islam unadulterated by ‘accretions’.

Wahhabism is a brand of Islam founded on the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century. “They consider themselves *ghayr muqallidun*, non-adherents – that is, they do not follow any school of law. Thus, in Wahhabism, unlike the conservative Hanbalism out of which Wahhabi Islam first emerged, not one of the legal means developed by classical jurisprudence is accepted.¹³ The figure who remains central in formulating this fundamentalist doctrine within Islam is Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who was inspired by Hanbali teachings. Post 9/11, Wahhabism has been identified by governments, political analysts, and the media as the major “Islamic threat” facing western civilization and the inspiration for Osama Bin Laden and his al Qaeda network. It has become infamous for its negative influence on Islam, mosques, and madrasas globally. It is described as extremist, radical, puritanical, contemptuous of modernity, misogynist and militant in nature. It has been characterized as Islamo-fascism following in the traditions of Communism and Nazism. There are many who have asserted that the militant extremism of Osama has its roots in the religious teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who is believed to have legitimated jihad against non-wahhabis and encouraged the forcible spread of the Wahhabi creed.

13 Tamara Albertini, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

The contemporary Salafi Movement is the most recent resurgence of puritanical reformism. The term salafi derives from the Arabic salaf, which means, “to precede”. Based upon salaf (predecessors) understandings of Islam, the Salafis have constructed a manhaj, or approach to religion. The Salafi manhaj is a methodology for determining proper religious interpretations based upon the Qur’an, the Sunna, and the salaf model. It is predicated upon certain accepted “truths” about Islam, which were espoused by the Prophet and recorded in authentic hadith. Important issues include tawhid (belief in the oneness of God), the evils of shirk (ascribing partners to God in prayer), and the problem of bid’a (innovation in religion). Salafis also emphasise the role of hadith science and the weakness of blindly following one mathhab (school of Islamic jurisprudence) rather than religious “truth.” The objective of the salafi movement is to this understanding of Islam.¹⁴

Narcissistic Consolidation

Apart from these fundamentalist trends, there is of course, another side to the canvas of the study of Islam. Liberal critics of the fundamentalist interpretations articulate discontent over the increasing influence of fundamentalism and speak of the ‘hijacking of Islam’. They insist on the Quranic injunction that “there is no compulsion in religion,”¹⁵ and argue that Islam supports an ethic of tolerance and that Muslims can fully embrace pluralism.

It has been observed that there is a complex heterogeneity within Islam. This plurality comprehends not only the diversity of two different sects, but also points to the diversity within

14 See, Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood and State Power in Jordan*, State University of New York Press, pp. 111-112.

15 Al-Baqara, Ayah 256.

particular sects. Edward Mortimer argues that there appears to be “not one Islam, but many Islams, because one finds such an enormous variety of Islamic thought and action.”¹⁶ The behaviour of Islamic radicals is premised on the Shari’ah and its implementation in a place where it is not in place. In fact, it must be noted that the imposition of Shari’ah varies in different countries with Muslim majority populations. Generally, this enforcement is seen more in rural areas than in urban settings of those countries. Also, the application of laws by Shari’ah courts differs depending on time and place, in addition to the school of law being applied. Given this background of diversity in the formulation and legislation of Shari’ah, contemporary scholars such as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im, have argued that Shari’ah is “not necessarily perfect and infallible like Islam.”¹⁷

However, in the context of Shari’ah, differences emerge among the radical forces, each considering its own interpretation as the rightly acceptable one, resulting in ‘narcissistic indoctrination’.

Nevertheless, the intense plurality within the Faith has worked against the entire notion of a monolithic construct of Islam, with each trend separately contesting in the varied attempts at ‘revivalism’.

Religious revivalism in the Islamic world had earlier sought to purify Islam itself from social practices that had gradually been incorporated into Islam through cultural borrowing. Now it seemed time to cast its gaze outside the faith, to purify its world by eliminating not merely the internal enemy but the enemy outside. This

16 Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*, 1982, Thetford Press, Britain, pp. 80-82.

17 Abdullahi An Na’im, “Mahmud Mohammad Taha and the Crisis in Islam in Reform: Implications for Interreligious Relations”, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Volume 25, Number 1, Winter, 1988, pp. 1-21

radical notion of purification now turned to violence, using the call to jihad as a call to arms.¹⁸

This call to arms, well displayed in the cataclysmic event of 9/11 and in the proliferation of terrorist movements across the world, has much to reveal about extremist Islam and its increasing momentum in contemporary world politics. Within South Asia, there has been a tendency to associate fundamentalist form of Islam with the Deoband School because of the fact that the Afghan Taliban are purportedly the product of the Deoband School of thought, though this is a claim that the Ulema at the Dar ul Uloom Deoband firmly reject.¹⁹ What is increasingly noticed, however, is the role of mischievous states and the global ‘great game’ in the dynamics of terrorism. Indeed, it was Cold War politics, hostility towards the Soviet backed regime in Afghanistan, and American corporate greed for gas pipelines, that helped create and sustain the Taliban in the 1980s, and was responsible for importing Pakistani Taliban mujahidin to the Afghan-Pakistan border,²⁰ leading to establishment of Deobandi mercenary madaris. America’s geopolitical strategy provoked stark alterations and a dramatic

18 Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 2004, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 19

19 “Deoband Ulema terms all Taliban actions un-Islamic”, *Dawn*, June 20, 2009, <https://www.dawn.com/news/472493>

20 Looking at the international system that stimulated the growth of radical Islam, one thinks of the great power rivalries in Afghanistan that culminated in the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979. The United States (US) reacted to this invasion in diverse ways. It is widely believed in the Arab world that Afghanistan was the melting pot which produced, under Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) leadership, member of terror groups from different Arab countries. Thousands of Arabs went to fight in Afghanistan, many of them financed by Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian construction tycoon who had strong CIA connections (See. Hilal Khashan: 1997, p. 8). After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, many Arab mujahideen returned to their home countries and gave weight to militant Islamic groups there. (See, *Newsweek*: 1993, p.33)

change in the character of revivalist movements, creating a context that made political power focus on the fulfilment of a project of 'Islamic purification'.

Ulema: The Initial Dilemma

Islamist terrorists claim to serve the Faith, deriving legitimacy from certain Qura'nic verses to justify their actions and gain motivation from religion itself. It is broadly expected that a majority of ulema would condemn and disassociate themselves from such an understanding and interpretation of Islam. In the early post 9/11 world, however, Islamic clerics were not quick to come to terms with the reality of Islamist terrorism. What has been observed over a period of time, however, is an evolution in the narrative of condemnation, starting with a verbal condemnation, and culminating in written dictates or fatwas. The first collective initiative in issuing a fatwa came on May 31, 2008, when over 100,000 clerics, under the banner of Darul Uloom Deoband, issued a fatwa against terrorism and declared violence to be unislamic. The fatwa signed by Darul Uloom Deoband grand mufti Maulana Habibur Rahman declared that Islam and Muslims had no link with terrorism.²¹

During fieldwork in Lucknow in 2008-2009 this writer met several ulema from the two sects, who were both concerned about such an association with terrorism and also determined to dispel all allegations. Reacting to the Deoband fatwa, one

21 In this context of delinking terrorism and Islam, "It is proven from clear guidelines provided in the Holy Qur'an, that the allegation of terrorism against a religion which preaches and guarantees world peace are nothing but lie. The religion of Islam has come to wipe out all kinds of terrorism and to spread the message of global peace." (See, "Deoband first: A fatwa against terror", The Times of India, June 1, 2008, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Deoband-first-A-fatwa-against-terror/articleshow/3089161.cms>).

of the clerics Fazlur Rehman, argued, “If Islam has nothing to do with terrorism then why do we need to pronounce a fatwa in our defence? Any such measure can be counter-productive, legitimising the allegations that are levelled at the community and the religion.” Rehman evidently ignored the problem of interpretation that lies within Islam.

However, others also referred to the May 30 fatwa linked the issue to grievances about the state’s approach towards the minorities. Khalid Rashid, Firangi Mahali supported the fatwa but also talked about the treatment meted out to Muslim youth at the hands of the Police on mere suspicion.

A common thread running across all the ulema interviewed was the allegation of an American-Jewish conspiracy against the Muslims world. Such conspiracy theories have become an integral part of the rationalisation of extremism and terrorism throughout the Muslim world. In particular, conspiracy theories surrounding the 9/11 attacks began circulating among the ulema as well as the Muslims community soon after the attacks. Among the most common (and astonishing) was the belief that 9/11 was the result of a Jewish and American conspiracy. This repeated claim by Muslim clerics aggravated the problem of radicalisation, furthering the agenda of extremist Islamism, which emphasises the role of violent jihad as a purifying act with the ultimate goal of establishing a messianic caliphate to embraces all ‘true’ Muslims who subscribe to the radical interpretation of the Faith.

Despite the relative moderation of Indian Islam, radical undertones and conspiracy theories that characterize the perspectives of Indian clerics indicate a high measure of ambivalence on the issue of the threat of terrorism and responses to this global challenge.

9/11: A Zionist-American Conspiracy?

Regarding the September 11 attacks, the al Qaeda proclaimed:

The only motive for the youth [the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks] is to defend the religion of God, their honour and their sanctity – not in service to humanity nor in service to any ideology whether eastern or western – but in service to Islam, and in defence of its people by their pure intentions, willingly not coerced. This [mission] was also given as a message to all the enemies of the [Muslim] community in that we will strike with an iron fist the heads of our enemies despite their strength or our weakness. It was also given especially at this time because it verifies to the community that is living in distress in every place in these days that the only way to salvation from this humiliation is the sword. The enemy doesn't understand any language other than this.²²

Despite this unambiguous claim by al Qaeda, conspiracy theories proliferated among Muslim clerics, claiming that 9/11 was an international Zionist conspiracy (and/or an 'inside job' by the Americans). The existence of a vibrant global network of conspiracy theorists that work continuously and energetically in the Muslim world, foments sentiments against the states of Israel and America. The geopolitics of the West Asian region and America's military engagements across the Muslim world add to the hardening of this sentiment. However, these theories fit into the Western mould of anti-Semitism, as they are generally

22 "A statement from qaidat al-jihad regarding the mandates of the heroes and the legality of the operations in New York and Washington," April 24, 2002, <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/4796/QAE20020424.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>.

thought to. Another field-based study²³ in 2016 in Lucknow and Delhi to study the responses of Indian Muslims to the Holocaust and Jews found a plurality of thought on the issue of Holocaust denial among Indian Muslims. Unlike Christian anti-Semitism, the denial of the Holocaust in the Muslim world is seen more as a result of political frustration than of theological dogma. The study also revealed the existence of class factors in the divergence of Muslim responses on this issue. While the clerical class across sects either justified the oppression of Jews or questioned its historical credibility, the responses from Muslims belonging to different sections of the society varied.

This variation in response had to do with the class factor, where the urban educated elite, primarily English educated, were straightforward in acknowledging the genocide of six million Jews... There was another group of Muslims that has received minimal or negligible mainstream education. Here the interviewees had no knowledge about the Holocaust or for that matter about the existence of a community like the Jews... Apart from these two categories there was another set of people, the petite bourgeoisie and the middle class. Their responses were more of a political reaction to the increasing violence of Israeli oppression in Palestine. It is this class which is closer to the clergy, updated with the politics around Israel and Palestine (however, this knowledge is limited to media coverage and news), and hence, easily influenced by the ‘sacred’ dictates. It was among this category that I could see a sense of “collective anger” at the Israeli policies and American backing.²⁴

23 Ambreen Agha, “Indian Muslim Denial of the Holocaust: Who are these Muslims?”, *Café Dissensus*, January 20, 2017, <https://cafedissensus.com/2017/01/20/indian-muslim-denial-of-the-holocaust-who-are-these-muslims/>

24 Ibid

Despite the plurality of responses among Muslims, this is one point over which ulema of different sects dispel their sectarian differences and arrive at a common platform. However, in the sphere of global world politics there is no melting down of sectarian differences, as visible in the warming of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel/US on the one side, and growing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, on the other. Such political calculations demonstrate that the complexities of such issues transcend ideology and cannot be boxed into simplistic binaries.

While initial evasion in responses from sections of the community that was either living in a state of denial or caught in conspiracy theories, there were, of course, at least some direct condemnations of terrorism after the 9/11 attacks. Thus, on September 15, 2001, Ayatollah Ali Khameni of Iran declared,

Killing of people, in any place and with any kind of weapons, including atomic bombs, long range missiles, biological or chemical weapons, passenger or war planes, carried out by any organisation, country or individual is condemned... it makes no difference whether such massacres happen in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Qana, Sabra, Shatila, Deir Yassin, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, or in New York and Washington.²⁵

On the same day as Iranian clerical leadership's statement, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and Chairman of the Senior Ulema Shaikh Abdulaziz Al-Ashaikh issued a statement condemning terrorism in general a 'gross crime and sinful act inviting the anger of God Almighty' and specifically the attack

25 "Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatullah Sayed Khamenei Condemn Attacks on US", Bangladesh.com, September 15, 2001, <http://www.bangladesh.com/forums/religion/7619-supreme-leader-iran-ayatullah-sayed-khamenei-condemn-attacks-us.html>

on the US.²⁶ Similarly, on December 3, 2001, the Grand Sheikh of al Azhar in Egypt responded against the suicide bombings on Israeli civilians. Representing nearly a billion Sunni Muslims, Sheikh Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi at a press conference in Cairo condemned terrorism in all its forms, saying that he rejected and condemned the aggression against the innocent civilian people, regardless of whatever side, sect or country the aggression came from.²⁷

While such definitive condemnation of terrorism in general and 9/11 in particular, could be found in sections of opinions among the international religious clerics, the condemnation among the Indian clerics tended to be conditional, revolving around conspiracy theories and subject to a sectarian understanding of the issue.

Significant among the conspiracy theories that were doing the rounds after the 9/11 attacks was the claim that a large number of Jewish employees (variously, 3,000 or 4,000) in the World Trade Centre were on leave on the day of the attack, suggesting that the strikes were a pre-planned Jewish-American conspiracy against Muslims. An Indian alim, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Teelay Waali Masjid in Lucknow, belonging to the Deoband School, reiterated the absence of Jews on the day of the attack, and eventually blamed the ‘evil American-Israel nexus’, arguing, “Muslims are progressing. Defaming them is the only means to pull them down. Muslims fear going to America and this would result in lack of growth and development.” Rehman was no different from a number of other ulema who blamed

26 “Saudi Grand Mufti Condemns Terrorist Acts in US”, Saudi Embassy, September 15, 2001, http://web.archive.org/web/20011009024647/http://www.saudiembassy.net/press_release/01-spa/09-15-Islam.htm

27 Frank Gardener, “Grand Sheikh Condemns Suicide Bombings”, BBC News, December 4, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1690624.stm

America and Israel for the 9/11 attacks. This conspiratorial mindset has fed into the broader ambivalence over issues of terrorism and fed into incitement against the West and its allies.

Thus, the 'Shahi Imam' of Delhi's Jama Masjid, Maulana Syed Ahmed Bukhari, during an international conference against terrorism organised by the Jama Masjid United Forum in Delhi on June 1, 2008, argued, "What is terrorism, who is the terrorist, who patronises terrorists, and why terrorism is spreading, are the questions that are answered differently by different people." Condemning the Israel-Palestine war, Bukhari, argued that, without the restoration of the al Aqsa mosque to the Palestinians and the freedom of Palestine, peace was not possible in the Middle East. Further, he asserted that the American occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan was the reason for the preceding waves of terrorism. Bukhari's position rests largely on the 'grievance thesis',²⁸ but failed to acknowledge the larger threat emanating from Islamic extremism, or to define measures to combat militant mobilisation within Islam. He did, however, note that disunity among Muslim countries and leaders was the major cause of the problems faced by Muslims.

Apart from the interview with Fazlur Rehman, the author also interviewed two Shi'i ulema and one Sunni alim in 2008-2009. The Shi'a ulema included Sayed Hamid ul-Hasan, principal of Jamia Nazimiya, Lucknow; 29 and Syed Kalbe

28 Grievance theory rests on the point that the offender has caused a grievance to the victim, and the punishment of the offender will satisfy the victim, and make up for that grievance.

29 Historical research provides us with the facts about shi' madrasas, dating back to the time of nawab Amjad Ali Shah of Awadh (1842-1847). The nawab is said to have been a devout shi'ite and an ardent follower of the religious leaders. Therefore he set up an institution of shi'ite theology called Jami'i sultaniyya or Shahi madrasa, 1843. The institution was originally accommodated in the mausoleum of nawab Saadat Ali Khan in Khas Bazaar (later known as Qaiser Bagh). In 1857 the Shahi madrasa was abolished by the British after the annexation of Awadh. As a result the shi'ite studies in

Jawad Naqvi. The other Sunni alim was Maulana Khalid Rasheed, Farangi Mahali³⁰, Naib Imam Eidgah, Lucknow. Some of their opinions and perspectives help illustrate the radical underpinnings of conservative Muslim thought in India today, and the influence of the wider radical Islamist discourse, across the sectarian divide.

All four ulema relied on Quranic authority to emphasise the distinction between ‘qitaal’ and ‘jihad’, where ‘qitaal’ means to kill and jihad has varied meanings, and also underlined the diversity of actions that came under the notion of jihad: ‘jihad

Awadh declined. The abolition marked a very important point in the history of shi’ites, because it had put an end to the study of shi’ite students at the Firangi Mahal, thus opening up opportunity for the increase of tension between Sunnites and Shi’ites in Lucknow, which culminated in the riots of 1911. after the shutdown of madrasa sultaniyya, the shi’ite ‘ulama first continued religious teaching through private tutorage. In 1890 Mawlana Sayyid Abul Hasan Abbu Sahib founded Madrasa Nazimiyya and made Mawlana Najm al-Hasan the director of the madrasa. He had a new building erected for the madrasa on Victoria Street, Lucknow. At present the madrasa is run by Sayyid Farid al-Hasan, son of Sayyid Hamid al-Hasan, who was also the director of the madrasa a few years back and continues play an important role in the successful running of the madrasa. The madrasa is financially aided by the Uttar Pradesh government. But the higher section which is run by Mawlana Hamid al-Hasan, is unaided. The sources of income for the maintenance of the instruction are traditional shi’ite means. Admission is restricted to the Twelver branch of the shi’ite sect. (See Sayyid Najmul Raza Rizvi in Hartung & Reifield: 2006, 109-112).

- 30 From their arrival in Lucknow in the later seventeenth century down to the early twentieth century, the Farangi Mahallis had been able to ignore the Hindu world about them. Part of the sharif world of Muslim governing traditions, they taught in madrasas and served at the courts of Muslim princes. Only two Hindus appear in their record in positions of honour, both in the early twentieth century. One was Raja Kishen Pershad and the second was Gandhi. (See Robinson: 2007, 157). Robinson introduces the Farangi Mahal family of learned and holy men as one which has lived separately from other religious communities but, equally, has been happy to coexist with them. When in twentieth century some shareable public spaces opened up, Farangi Mahallis were able to join other communities, though in small numbers and generally for a restricted time.

bil kalab' (struggle with the pen); 'jihad bil nisan' (struggle with the tongue or language) and lastly 'jihad bil saif' (struggle with the sword). Syed Kalbe Jawad Naqvi asserted that the concept covers working towards the welfare of society, seeking education, a labourer's tedious work, as well as serving Islam and humanity. There is a need to keep all of these in mind while using the term. Moreover tolerance and forgiveness strengthen relations (in the personal, domestic and international spheres) and secondly, prevents violent international differences. The authority of the Quran, he emphasized, demands that, "You should fight with people who are fighting with you. Fight in the way of God and not for protecting your material belongings. In this fight one should remember to not transgress the bounds of humanity. You should agree to come to terms if your enemy is willing to do it, and forgive him."

Denying any linkages between Islam and Terrorism, Sayed Shah Fazlur Rahman observed, "Islam and terrorism have no relation; and this should be engrained in everyone's mind for progressive and peaceful living." He argued that jihad is vast and it is necessary to have a conceptual understanding of the term. Generosity is also a form of jihad, as is self-denial, (Nafs-e-jihad). He further explained the situations where the use of sword becomes legitimate. Fighting against evil and fighting in defence of one's nation or country is the legitimate use of the sword. Rahman, along with the others, underlined the Quranic dictum that the killing of one innocent was tantamount to an attack on all of humanity. Nobody, he insisted, has the right over another individual's life.

Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman underlined media biases and said that most of the people working with the English media, including Muslims, do not know about the Muslim society at large. There has existed a bias against the common Muslims.

In his attempt to explain the term jihad, insisted that it was a completely baseless argument that the Prophet spread Islam at

the point of the sword. There is, he asserted, no instance where the Prophet raised or compelled his followers to raise the sword to spread Islam. Such arguments reflect a distortion of history. This misrepresentation of Islamic history not only divests the religion of its authentic historical past but also makes ‘history’ a mere tool in a biased political narrative.³¹ It should be well understood, Rasheed argued, that neither Islam nor any other religion perpetuates violence of any kind. The Qur’anic verses, he argues, testify that “Allah dislikes those who sow the seeds of dissension.”

Among the Shia ulema, Syed Kalbe Jawad candidly spoke about the geopolitics and the American grand strategy to secure itself by occupying other nations. On this line of thought, he said,

Terrorism has a dense nexus with politics. One should know the intricacies before maligning a religion. Clearly the Taliban and al Qaeda are responsible for the attacks but all this is only possible with American and Israeli support. And this is not new to world politics, it has been happening ever since America needed Afghanistan’s support in its fight against the Soviet Union. Now when the situation is out of control they are blaming the Muslim community. Here it is understood that their main agenda is to spoil the image of Islam.

31 History being a narrative in its very form is susceptible to elements of subjectivity. This questions the basic understanding of Islamic history. As E.H Carr argued, facts do not speak for themselves. It is the historian who makes them speak. (See Carr: ‘What is History?’) It is the task of the historian to balance the element of subjectivity and reality. Only careful and critical enquiry of the sources can answer the question of whether Islam was spread by the sword. That there is no such evidence anywhere in the history of Islam is argued by many distinguished Western historians. [See, Thomas W. Arnold ‘the Preaching of Islam’, M. G. Hodgson, ‘the Venture of Islam’, and Ira Lapidus, ‘History of Islamic Societies’,] These historians give substantial evidence to the contrary of what is widely believed in the western world.

He further urged for a closer scrutiny of the ideology of Wahhabism, which, he asserted, was venomous not only for non-Muslims, but also for Muslims who are not its followers. Wahhabis consider both Shia and Sunni as infidels and hypocrites, who have distorted the essence of Islam. For the Wahhabis anyone who refuses to conform to their ideology should be killed. Drawing an impenetrable link between America-Israel and America's role in Afghanistan, Jawad stated, "Muslims are divided and this is working against them. 9/11 is the brainchild of America and Israel. They want to wipe out Islam from the face of the globe." "The Taliban Maulvis have links with Israel," Jawad asserted, insisting that "any objective assessment must pass through this impassable network to unmask the truth, which has been simplified."

Maulana Fazlur Rahman reflected on widespread Muslim concerns, and argued that "post-9/11 Islam and Muslims have gone through painful tribulations. Something that they didn't deserve," and insisted, "The Israeli lobby is responsible for this. The unprecedented Islamic terror is the result of an America-Israel conspiracy." He cites the Qur'an to argue that Muslims cannot be blamed since, "Force and religion are two opposite entities. Force cannot be used in matters of religion." He consequently urged educated individuals to look into the gaps and questions still unanswered. 9/11 is America's brainchild, he claimed. It was made possible with Israeli support. Why were 3,000 Israelis not present in the twin towers on that day? The reason behind 9/11, he claimed, was that,

Muslims are progressing. Defaming them is the only means to pull them down. Muslims fear going to America and this would result in lack of growth and development." American's fear is that if all Muslims unite, the American power would crumble. A united Islam is a threat to American power. Why is America

forgetting the fodder of Afghan Mujahidin in her war against the Soviet Union? The Afghan Mujahidin or the Islamic fundamentalists were trained by the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and now the wrongs done should be met with fairness.

Among all the ulema interviewed, Rahman was the most assertive in proclaiming US responsibility for 9/11 and global terrorism.

Maulana Khalid Rasheed also argued that “the responsibility doesn’t rest on Muslims. It’s only the game of politics and power. One has to understand this intricate web designed to trap Muslims to hinder their growth, both in India and the world.” Reflecting on the past position of Indian Muslims he argued that “when India was a British colony, then Indian Muslims had better government employment opportunities. During colonisation 37 per cent Indian Muslims were in government jobs, but now in Independent India only 2 per cent Muslims work in the government sector... Why is an Indian Muslim seen only as a Muslim, why not an Indian? Why are identities restricted to religion?” Rasheed’s concerns revolve around the “multiple identity debate”, where Amartya Sen argues that “internal diversities should not be overlooked and religious identity should not be given singular attention in assessing an individual.”³²

32 Amartya Sen argues that giving an automatic priority to the Islamic identity of a Muslim person in order to understand his role in the civil society, or in the literary and professional world, can result in profound misunderstanding. Further, that the increasing tendency to overlook the many identities that any human being has and to try to classify individuals according to a single allegedly pre-eminent religious identity is an intellectual confusion that can animate dangerous divisiveness. An Islamist instigator of violence against infidels may want Muslims to forget that they have any identity other than being Islamic. To Sen, what is surprising is that, those who would like to quell that violence promote, in effect, the same intellectual disorientation by seeing Muslims primarily as members of an Islamic world. The world is made much more incendiary by the advocacy and popularity of single-

Astonishingly, Rasheed insisted that there was ‘no trace of Muslim involvement’ in the 9/11 acts of terror: “There is no such entity called Osama (bin Laden). I fail to understand where do these arguments come from? How an identity is created and then runs into oblivion? How something like Afghanistan, a state bereft of education, technology and progress, blasts America’s twin towers?” Like the other ulema Rasheed also blamed the American-Israeli nexus, and their vested interest in the oil rich countries for this ‘conspiracy’. However, Rasheed, much like Rehman and other ulema, was oblivious of the fact that Saudi Arabia had been the main US ally in the region since its creation and the relationship between the two had since been growing. Evidently continuing with this US policy, President Donald Trump visited Riyadh on May 20-21, 2017, making it his first overseas visit, demonstrating a clear reinforcement of Washington’s policy priorities.³³

Another theme agitating the ulema was the state of Indian madrasas. The madrasa has, for some time now,

dimensional categorization of human beings, which combines haziness of vision with increased scope for the exploitation of that haze by the champions of violence. Sen iterates that the people of the world can be classified according to many other partitions, each of which has some—often far-reaching—relevance in our lives: nationalities, locations, classes, occupations, social status, languages, politics, and many others. While religious categories have received much airing in recent years, they cannot be presumed to obliterate other distinctions, and even less can they be seen as the only relevant system of classifying people across the globe. In partitioning the population of the world into those belonging to “the Islamic world,” “the Western world,” “the Hindu world,” “the Buddhist world,” the divisive power of classificatory priority is implicitly used to place people firmly inside a unique set of rigid boxes. Despite our diverse diversities, the world is suddenly seen not as a collection of people, but as a federation of religions and civilizations. (See, Sen: 2006)

33 Ambreen Agha, “US President Donald Trump’s visit to Riyadh and Jerusalem: Reasserting Realpolitik?”, *Indian Council of World Affairs*, June 27, 2017, p.4, <http://www.icwa.in/pdfs/IB/2014/TrumpRiyadh27062017IB.pdf>

been embroiled in controversy, widely seen as a regressive institution that is holding the Muslim community back. Thus, one commentator asks, “Scholars and journalists alike may be able to garner evidence for Muslim efforts at recovering or maintaining medieval Islam, or an effort at Islamizing Muslim masses perceived to be erring from orthodoxy, or even some evidence for the ‘proliferation of separatist attitude’ among the impressionable youth of the Madrasas, but is this view of Madrasas entirely right?”³⁴ Are Indian madaris harbouring terrorism or are they victims of a campaign of slander?

In response to these questions, Maulana Hamid ul-Hasan argued that the madrasas that are suspected to be preaching extremist militant ideologies should be brought out in open; and should not be categorised within the dini madaris. “The madrasa that indoctrinates its students with radical extremist teachings should be called a duniyai (worldly) institution and not a dini madrasa”

However, another Shia Maulana, Kalbe Jawad, urged that madrasas aided by Wahhabi sources should be exposed; and that the madaris that need to be put to question are the ones in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Balochistan, which are very conservative and rigid. He described the Taliban as a ‘flawed concept within Islam’. On the other hand, Maulana Fazlur Rehman was more empathetic towards the Taliban, calling them fighters against occupation and righteous in Islamic practice. This difference of opinion on Taliban between the two strains of Islam does not show the sectarian binaries because Maulana Khalid Rasheed, another Sunni cleric, denounced the Taliban. He stated that there are no Islamic States; there are

34 David Emmanuel Singh, “The Independent Madrasas of India: Dar al ‘Ulum, Deoband Nadwat al-‘Ulama, Lucknow”, *Journal of Dharma*, Volume 32, Number 2, p.133, http://www.ocms.ac.uk/docs/madrasas_deoband.pdf

only countries with Muslims majorities. "The only country that can be called a true Islamic country is Saudi Arabia," he clarified.

An overview of these conversations with clerics belonging to different sects establishes the point that the Muslim clerics in India were initially in a denial, but gradually acknowledged the problem and eventually publically denounced terrorism in 2008, after pressure from various quarters. However, this recognition and condemnation has been conditional and rife with narratives of American-Israeli conspiracies against the Muslim world, and were often sectarian in nature. A similar problem is observed among the Muslim nations, particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia, backed by their western allies, who accuse one another of fomenting radicalism. It is this politicisation of the discourse on terrorism, intertwined with sectarianism, that has been counter-productive, and that fails to address the problem, thus far. While at one level, leading Muslim nations abandon radical Islam in order to strengthen relations with the west, on another level, they appropriate extremist clerical beliefs to establish domestic political legitimacy.

The Challenge Within

While the Indian ulema have come together to condemn terrorism after pressure from various quarters and publicly denounced terror in May 2008 in a massive Anti-Terrorism Convention organised by Darul Uloom Deoband, it, this has not resolved the problems and challenges posed by radical ideologies within.

Such radical overtones were noticeable in the responses of Indian Muslim leaders to the killing of Osama bin Laden, on May 1-2, 2011 in Pakistan. One such voice was that of Syed Ahmad Bukhari, the Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid, who demanded, "When did any court of law in the world convict Bin

Laden of terrorist activities? It is only America's assertion and that of NATO that he was one. Why we should believe them?"³⁵ In a similar vein, Maulana Arshad Madani, the President of a faction of the Jama'at-i-Ulema Hind, asserted, with implicit contradiction, "I do not believe Osama indulged in terrorism. The question to be asked is why did US come into Afghanistan in the first place? Who created Osama?"³⁶

Bin Laden's killing brought the radical Muslim perspective to the fore once again, particularly across South Asia. A study in Pakistan, released by the Gilani Foundation and based on a poll carried out by the Gallup Institute that covered 2,530 men and women in the rural and urban areas, representing the adult population of Pakistan over a cross-section of educational, income, age and linguistic backgrounds. A majority of Pakistanis surveyed in the poll appeared to be aggrieved by bin Laden's death, with 51 per cent describing their emotions as "grief", though a third said they were unconcerned about the incident.³⁷ When asked about the logic behind the attacks, a majority of them believed that Pakistan authorities carried out the attack in collusion with the United States. Around 57 per cent of Pakistanis believed that the then Gilani-Zardari Government was in total or in partial connivance with the American troops.

These views echoed a broad stream of opinion across the Muslim world, strongly reflected over the Internet. The Egyptian admirers of bin Laden took to the streets in Cairo following his

35 Abantika Ghosh, "Who says Osama is a terrorist, ask Muslim Religious Leaders", *The Times of India*, May 3, 2011, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Who-says-Osama-is-a-terrorist-ask-Muslim-religious-leaders/articleshow/8147921.cms>

36 Ibid

37 "Most Pakistanis grieve for Osama", Rediff, May 17, 2011, <http://www.rediff.com/news/slide-show/slide-show-1-osama-killed-most-pakistanis-grieve-for-osama-says-survey/20110517.htm>.

death; supporters of Jama'at-e-Islami in Pakistan attended an anti-US rally in Lahore; Muslims in the UK protested against bin Laden's killing outside the US Embassy in London.³⁸

The Islamic State and the Orthodoxy

As the landscape of jihad changed with the emergence of the Islamic State (IS/ also know as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS, or Daesh) and its manifestations in widely advertised and extreme brutality, the response from the Muslim world has been quick and sharp in condemning the outfit, its ideological distortions and its actions. The utter savagery of Daesh actions and various aspects of their teachings, war-fighting and administration horrified most Muslim leaders. As a result, condemnations of terrorism in the post-2014 world have been less equivocal. However, conspiracy theories blaming the US-Israeli combine for all or most of the ills of the Muslim world have not lost their currency.

Moving out of their zone of silence, which was often viewed as complicity, in context of the increasing Daesh role across the globe and its penetration into South Asia, an annual gathering of almost 70,000 South Asian Sunni Muslim clerics came together on December 9, 2015, and passed a fatwa against global terrorist organizations, explicitly naming the Taliban, al Qaeda and Daesh. The motivation for the fatwa, which was signed by 1.5 million attendees, was the Paris attack of November 13, 2015, according to Hazrat Subhan Raza Khan, chairperson of the Dargah Aala Hazrat.³⁹

38 "In Pictures: Reactions to Bin Laden's Death", Al Jazeera, May 8, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/photo_galleries/general/20115814127705538.html

39 Priyangi Agarwal, "70,000 clerics issue fatwa against terrorism, 15 lakh Muslims support it", *The Times of India*, December 9, 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/70000-clerics-issue-fatwa-against-terrorism-15-lakh-Muslims-support-it/articleshow/50100656.cms>

It is important to recognize that the radical voice doesn't end at Muslim clerics; rather it proliferates through the dissemination of radical ideas among the vulnerable masses, increasingly through the use of technology. Given the reach of social media, the fundamentalists have succeeded in radicalising and recruiting youth surreptitiously, signalling a change in the spaces of radicalisation – from mosques to social media platforms. The recruitment of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria saw many examples of online radicalisation and mobilisation of youth, who were brought to regard jihad as a state of permanent warfare with 'unbelievers' and 'infidels', seeing violence against them as love for Islam as propagated by Allah through the Prophet in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Significantly, many traditional and conservative ulema support and share this radical, messianic vision of an Islamic Caliphate.

However, it is important to note here, that the Qur'an and the Hadith do not talk of an Islamic State. Even the term Dar-ul-Islam was coined by later jurists. It was only with time that the seizure of territorial power and its prolongation in particular territories led to the consolidation and hegemonisation of dominance through a religious-political ideology, through which the then wielders of power conceptualized the Islamic State.⁴⁰ Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, a Sudanese-born Islamic

40 The Islamic State: After the death of Prophet Muhammad, a series of Caliphs governed. It started with Abu Bakr Siddique, Umar, Uthman and Ali, popularly known as the Rashidun or rightly guided caliphs in Sunni Islam. After the Rashidun period, a series of Caliphates were established that developed their own laws based on the Shari'ah. After the Rashidun Islamic Empire came the Umayyad and the Abbasid Empires, both raising competing claims to the Sunni Caliphate; and the Fatimid Empire, drawing descent from Ali and Muhammad through his daughter Fatima. The political history of Islam, from the death of Prophet Muhammad has been defined by the institution of the caliphate and measured by successive caliphal dynasties. Illustratively, the Rashidun presided over the polity Muhammad had created in Medina and directed the conquests that brought Arabia, most

scholar, argued for the separation of Islam and State. Consciously separating the 'Islamic' from the 'Islamic State', he asserted, "The notion of an Islamic State is a post-colonial innovation based on European model of the state and totalitarian view of law and public policy as instruments of social engineering by the ruling elites,"⁴¹ thus arguing for the need of a secular state for Muslims.

While arguing that the claim of a so-called Islamic State to coercively enforce Shari'ah repudiates the foundational teachings of Islam, An-Nai'm cites other scholars, such as Djohan Effendy, Manshur Hamid, Ahmad Wahib and Dawam Rahajaro, who reasserted several important propositions on the relationship between Islam and State. Firstly, in their view, there is no clear cut evidence that the Qur'an and Sunna oblige Muslims to establish an Islamic State. Secondly, since Islam is conceived as timeless and universal, Muslims' understanding of it should not be confined to a formal and legal sense of it, drawn from a specific time or place.⁴²

of the eastern domains of the Byzantine Empire, and the lands of the former Sassanian Empire under Muslim rule. Later, the Umayyads established their dynastic rule over the Islamic empire and extended it, governing from Syria for nearly a century (661-750) until they were overthrown by the Abbasids in a revolution carefully planned in ideological terms. The Abbasid period (750-1258) is often characterised as an apogee of Islamic civilisation, and in many ways Abbasids defined the institution of the caliphate. The way they elaborated their authority, asserted their claims to legitimacy and styled their rule, inspired the contemporary and future provincial rulers and rivals. Later in the tenth century the Fatimids and the second Umayyad caliphate challenged the Abbasid legitimacy (See, Safran: 2001, 1-2). This chronology of Islamic history represents these dynasties' exclusive rightful claim to the Command of the Faithful and the promotion of their distinctive interpretations to support their claims and subsequently indoctrinate their followers. Thus the concept of the caliphate proved historically malleable within parameters determined by the early community.

41 Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'ah*, 2009, Harvard University Press, US, p. 7.

42 *Ibid*, p. 252

Strategic Options

In recent years, particularly, in the post-2014 world, there has been an overwhelming response from the Muslim community in general and the clerics, in particular, condemning religiously inspired violence, and particularly terrorism. Despite this condemnation, the problem of violent extremism persists. A vibrant counter-narrative to violent extremism, with the Muslim as principal stakeholder, remains elusive. This can be done through community-based programmes where community leaders, civil society groups and local leaderships come together to build and sustain preventive efforts, as well as to offer a counter-narrative to violent extremism.

Since a community-based approach is unlikely to survive on its own, active state participation in terms of allocation of resources and, most importantly, building social capital – trust—with the target community, are necessary. A convergence of interests in this partnership between the state and the community is an inescapable imperative.