قُـــل لَّا يَسْــتَوِى ٱلْخَــــبِيثُ وَٱلطَّيِّـــبُ وَلَـــوْ أَعْجَـــبَكَ كَـــثْرَةُ

ٱلْخَــبِيثِ فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّـهَ يَـٰٓأُوْلِى ٱلْأَلْبَـٰبِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

Understanding And Countering Muslim Extremism

Preface

This article - commissioned after the events in Paris on the evening of Friday the 13th, 2015 - will explain what Muslim extremism is, and what might be done to counter such extremism.

Based as my analysis and conclusions are on forty years of practical experience of extremism and extremists - which experience includes ten years as a radical Muslim - it presents 'an insider view' of the problem and thus provides a somewhat different perspective to that presented by many contemporary writings on the subject.

I have provided a glossary of some of the Islamic terms used, and have preferred the term Muslim extremism - the extremism manifested by those Muslims and groups, belonging to the Sunni tradition, who adhere to a particular interpretation of Quran and Sunnah - to the more common term Islamic extremism, since technically Islam is neither an -ism nor an ideology but rather submission by individuals to the will of Allah as manifest in the Quran and Sunnah.

Defining Extremism

A useful definition of extremism - based on practical experience - is that it is the principles, the causes, the characteristics, that promote, incite, or describe the harsh action of extremists, and/or what results from such harsh actions by such extremists. For an extremist is a person who tends toward harshness, or who is harsh, or who supports/incites harshness, in pursuit of some supra-personal objective, usually of a political or a religious nature; where by *harsh* is meant rough, severe, a tendency to be unfeeling, unempathic, uncompassionate, dishonourable.

An extremist, therefore, lacks an understanding of, or a feeling for, innocency: of treating individuals as individuals and of judging them only on the basis of a personal knowing of them extending over a period of time. Instead, the extremist uses some abstract criteria deriving from whatever ideology, or cause, or interpretation of some religion, or authoritative figure or leader, that they believe in or follow, for whatever reason or from whatever personal motive.

Which abstract criteria almost always involves a division of people into an 'us' and a 'them': we, the true believers, the defenders of our cause/movement /leader/ideology/faith, and our enemies who are either intent on destroying/undermining 'us' and/or who are wrong/bad/evil and whom 'we' come to hate and despise, en masse.

Thus the extremist dehumanizes their perceived enemy or enemies, viewing them not as individual human beings but rather as a commodity, as a means to a supra-personal end. Hence why, for example, the statement attributed to ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fil 'Iraq wa ash-Sham (Isil, 'Islamic State', Daesh) after the Friday 13 attacks mentioned 'crusaders' and called those massacred in the Bataclan theatre profane 'idolaters', with the statement beginning and ending with Quranic ayat (Al-Hashr 2 and Al-Munafiqun 8). For they were following a strategy outlined, among others, by the pseudonymous Abu Bakr Naji in the 2004 text إدارة التوحش: أخطر مرحلة ستمر بها الأمة [Administering The Chaos: The Critical Transition The Ummah Will Experience] [1] and which strategy is of using violence and killing (including massacres) to provoke a response, to reveal the practical (rather than the theoretical) nature of Jihad (part of which Jihad is to deter the enemy), to wear down enemies, and to polarize and inspire both Muslim youth and 'the Crusader enemy', all of which tactics are explained in the context of the Quran and Sunnah, and thus by reference to Shariah.

This harsh perception of individual human beings as (i) 'a means to an end', and (ii) in terms of abstract categories to which they are assigned, en masse, by extremists on the basis of whatever ideology/cause/faith the extremist believes in or professes, is the raison d'etre of all extremism. Only the categories, and the aim(s), differ.

Muslim Extremism

The abstract categories of Muslim extremism are those of the kuffar (the unbelievers, infidels, idolaters), the believers (Muslims, the Ummah), apostates (murtads), heretics, and those fighting 'fi sabilillah' (Jihadists).

The aims for which certain categories are used are essentially two-fold: the supra-personal one of the establishment of a khilafah through Jihad, and the personal one of a place in Jannah through either martyrdom or by strictly adhering to what is believed to be the correct interpretation of Quran and Sunnah and thus living according to Shariah.

These two aims - the supra-personal, idealistic, one, and the personal one - are inextricably entwined, and explain why for instance seven of the attackers in Paris immolated themselves by detonating explosives attached to their bodies. For not only could they massacre infidels - and thus support the strategy of 'creating and managing the chaos' - but they would, being Shuhadaah, attain the goal of Jannah.

These aims and categories are defined by particular interpretations of Quranic Ayat and Ahadith, and it is these particular interpretations which distinguish the harsh interpretation of Islam - the extremism of certain Muslims - from that of the majority of Muslims who reside in the countries of the West.

Countering Muslim Extremism

Some examples may suffice for such a harsh interpretation to be perceived in context and thus understood for what it is, an extremist deviation. For there seems to be a distinct lack of knowledge about Islam both among Muslim extremists and those who (mostly associated with far-right political groups) react with hatred against Muslims in general as a result of the atrocities committed by some Muslim extremists. Both of which sides - with their 'us' and 'them' attitudes and divisions - just inflame and increase the conflict that groups such as Daesh and al-Qaida need and encourage.

Thus, neither side seems to know nor appreciate such clearly expressed sentiments, in the Quran, as the following:

> "Remember that Allah is The Most Merciful, He Who Often Forgives." 5:34 Interpretation of Meaning

> "You who believe, be firm in being fair - as a witness for Allah - even though it is not to your own advantage, nor to the advantage of your kin, and whether the matter concerns the rich or the poor. For Allah is the best protector (of all). Do not just follow your own desires, for you may deviate, and turn away, and Allah is always knowing of all that you do." 4:135 Interpretation of Meaning

> "Be loyal and do your duty to Allah; fear Him and always speak with honour. He will direct you to do honourable deeds and will forgive your mis-deeds. And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger will achieve the greatest achievement of all." 33:70-71 Interpretation of Meaning

> "Observe the limits which Allah has set." 9:112

> "Be forgiving and generous, for would you not seek Allah's forgiveness for yourself? For Allah is indeed The Most Merciful: He Who Often Forgives." 24:22 Interpretation of Meaning

Truths evident in the hadith regarding Mu'adh ibn Jaba as narrated by Abu Musa:

> When Allah's Messenger (salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam) sent him and Mu'adh bin Jabal to Yemen, he said to them: "Make things easy for the people rather than difficult; provide them with reports of good, and do

not let them turn away [from what is honourable]. You should both work together, with mutual respect, understanding and loyalty." Bukhari, Vol 8, Book 73, Number 145

and in the hadith narrated by Abdullah bin 'Amr:

"The Prophet (salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam) never used insulting words and neither did he ever speak maliciously. He used to say that "the closest to me from among you is the person who has good manners and a noble character." Bukhari: Volume 5, Book 57, Number 104

and in ahadith such as:

"Those who believes in Allah and the Last Day should either speak honourably or be silent." Muslim Book 1, 75

For what these examples illustrate - and many more could be adduced - is that one effective way to counter Muslim extremism is for Muslims themselves to, using Quran and Sunnah, counter the harsh interpretation of Islam by the extremists. To thus express the humanity that is at the heart of Islam; a humanity so evident in the millions of Muslims, world-wide, who know or who intuitively feel that

"The 'Ibaad of Ar-Rahman are those who walk on earth in humility." 25:63 Interpretation of Meaning

and that

"We have made you [Muslims] a Wasat [just and noble] people, that you be examples for all other peoples as the Messenger [Muhammad] is an example for you." 2: 143 Interpretation of Meaning

There is therefore no need - as individuals such as Cheryl Benard suggested in her 2003 text *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies* - for the West to support and "encourage a moderate, democratic interpretation and presentation of Islam", since Islam as understood and practised by the majority of Muslims world-wide enshrines the same values that make, and have made, the societies of the West what they are, as those who are familiar with Studia Humanitatis - ancient and modern - will assuredly appreciate, [2] with such a strident promotion and sponsorship of a Western-made "moderate, democratic interpretation" of Islam only confirming what Muslim extremists already believe - that the modern West is their enemy, and at war with Islam - and thus not only aiding resentment, disaffection, among many young Muslims but also contributing to the spread of Muslim extremism.

Beyond Missiles, Drones, And Invasions

Have Western programmes of 'de-radicalization' and of 'tackling extremism' - of engaging with and encouraging 'moderate' Muslims and a 'moderate' Islam, of promoting a 'modernist Islam' - worked? Apparently not, given the attacks in Mumbai, Tunisia, France, and the numerous planned attacks that have been prevented in Britain and elsewhere, thanks to the security services.

Fourteen years after 9/11 - and almost five years after the death of bin Laden - and despite the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and military interventions in places such as Syria and Yemen, there are more Muslim extremists in more countries than ever. As recent police raids in France have revealed, such extremists have no difficulty in acquiring arms, from hand-guns to semi-automatic rifles, to rocket launchers.

The issue of Muslim extremism is not complex; it is simple. For the the issue is one of interpretation of texts such as the Quran and Sunnah, and of a particular interpretation, or interpretations, being used by various groups and individuals to inflame passions and provide individuals - such as the disadvantaged, the disaffected, and those inclined toward idealism - with a sense of identity and a purpose which is vivifying. [3]

To counter such extremism there has to be, and of necessity from within Muslim communities and by individual Muslims, a promotion of classical Islamic jurisprudence and thus of the independence, the authority, the learning, of the Qadi. For a problem that was classically understood in Islam - and which is important and relevant today - was the distinction made by Muslim scholars between fiqh (classical Islamic jurisprudence) and Shariah, with fiqh understood as our fallible understanding and attempts at interpretation, and with Shariah being the divine and perfect guidance given by Allah. For fiqh was based on the principles of acceptance of diversity of scholarly opinion, on custom [4], and on logical deductions by individuals that are stated to be fallible and thus not immutable. [5] Such a distinction allows for reasoned change, accepts the necessity of diverse opinions, the necessity of individual independent scholarly judgement in trials, in arbitrations, and in determining penalties.

However, in modern times, this classical distinction between fiqh and Shariah - with its allowance for reasoned change based on diverse scholarly opinion, its acceptance of local custom, and the necessity of individual independent scholarly judgement in trials, arbitrations, and determining penalties - is not made by extremist groups such as Daesh when they implement their interpretation of 'Shariah law' and which interpretation invariably has an inflexible penal code and immutable penalties with those judging individuals using such an interpretation invariably lacking the learning and the independence of a classically trained Qadi. For it is the practical implementation of 'Shariah' law that is the raison d'etre of groups such as

Daesh and al-Qaida, and it is that implementation, and their interpretations of texts, that needs to be exposed, from within Muslim communities, thus destroying the credibility and the allure that such groups have for a minority of Muslims.

Hence, and in addition to current strategies and tactics, it is (i) the scholarly, years-long, learning required for a correct interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah, and (ii) the roles and importance of classically trained Muslim scholars and of the Qadi, and (iii) the opinions of such learned Muslims, that should be encouraged, supported, and promoted, by Western governments.

David Myatt
2015

[1] The title is generally translated as *Management of Savagery*, although *Administering The Chaos* is more appropriate since what is referred to are not savage deeds per se but rather the violent chaos of the period of transition which, caused by Jihad, will precede the establishment of the Khilafah, with 'administering' capturing both of the implied meanings: that of 'managing' the chaos and that of administering 'the cure', of provoking the chaos as a means to an end.

[2] For thousands of years – from the classical world to the Renaissance to fairly recent times – Studia Humanitatis (an appreciation and understanding of our being, our nature, as humans) was considered to be the basis of a good education. Thus, for Cicero, Studia Humanitatis implied forming and shaping the manners, the character, and the knowledge, of young people through them acquiring an understanding of subjects such as philosophy, geometry, rhetoric, music, and *litterarum cognitio* (literary culture) with Cicero noting the importance of the Greek virtue of εὐταξία (self-restraint) manifest as that virtue is in manners: in what Muslims term Adab.

[3] What often seems to be forgotten is that extremist groups (Muslim and otherwise) have within their ranks many idealists who - initially at least - have good intentions and believe they are doing what is right and necessary.

[4] لعادة محكمة

[5] One has only to read the chapter on evidence in al-Majalla al Ahkam al Adaliyyah (an Ottoman book of Hanafi jurisprudence published in the late 19th century) to appreciate how a Qadi was guided by logic.

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Glossary

Ayah: a quranic verse. Plural: Ayat.

Ahadith: plural of Hadith (qv).

Fi sabilillah: 'in the cause of Allah'.

Hadith: a recorded saying, or deed, of the Prophet Muhammad.

Islam: literally means submission to the Will of Allah, as manifest in the Quran and Sunnah.

Jannah: Paradise. As recounted, for example, in the following Ayah:

> " [Allah] will forgive your transgressions [ذُنُوبَكُمْ] and guide you to Jannah wherein are rivers, cascading down, and those beautiful dwellings set within perpetually-flowering gardens. And this is the success that matters." 61:12
> [Interpretation of Meaning]

Khilafah: Caliphate. A Muslim community (or nation/Empire) founded upon Shariah, led by a Khalifah ('Caliph').

Kuffar: those who do not believe in the Way of Islam. Often translated as infidels. Singular: Kaffir.

Qadi: A learned Muslim judge.

Shariah: the Muslim way of living, as manifest in the Muslim legal system, and which system includes the laws governing interactions between Muslims.

Shuhadaah: Martyrs. Muslims who die Fi Sabilillah. Singular: Shaheed. A Shaheed is often called a "witness to the truth (of Islam)".

Sunnah: The example of the life and deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammed as recorded in Ahadith.

Image: Quran Surah 5, Ayah 100

"The dirty and the clean are not alike even though, being ubiquitous, what is dirty may entice you."
[Interpretation of Meaning]