

Christian Terrorists, Islamic Terrorists or Just Plain Terrorists?

Since September 11, many of us have taken a close interest in various debates and discussions on terrorism taking place in the media. One of the issues that have repeatedly come up is the unfairness involved in calling terrorist organisations such as “Al Qaeda” as “Islamic terrorists.” There is an un-stated implication that those who use this appellation are anti-Islam and are using this unfortunate episode to tar all Muslims and Islam with the same brush. Such an emotional response is understandable given that some crazy people in the West (terrorists?) have responded by killing people wearing turbans just because the currently most prominent terrorist wears one and by attacking anyone who has the same general features (“brown” as against “white,” “yellow” & “black,” who have different facial characteristics) as the terrorists involved in the September 11 attacks. Responsible people of whatever religious affiliation who have used the term “Islamic terrorists” have, however, been at pains to state and reiterate that the war against terrorism is not a war against Islam. Sufficient time has now passed for us to examine this issue dispassionately so that future debate is based on logic and not on emotions.

The question is whether the IRA are “Christian terrorists,” the “LTTE” “Hindu terrorists” and AQ, JEM, HUM, LET et al “Islamic terrorists” as described by some. The answer to this question lies in their objectives and ideology. The professed objective of the IRA is to get rid of British rule in Northern Ireland and to expel the British from Ireland. To my knowledge they have neither claimed that their objective is to establish a Christian or Catholic rule in Northern Ireland nor have they used Christian or Catholic theology to justify or support their terrorist actions. If this information is correct the IRA are better termed “Irish terrorists” and not “Christian terrorists”. The objective of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam is merely to establish a homeland for the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Again their ideology may have elements of Tamil superiority, but to my knowledge they have neither professed that their objective is a Hindu state in Sri Lanka, nor have they used Hinduism in any form to justify their actions to the outside world. They are therefore referred to either as “Sri Lankan Tamil Terrorists” or just “Tamil terrorists,” even though the Tamil citizens of India, who do not agree with their ideology or approach, may not like the second appellation. It also does not imply that Sri Lankan Tamils or all Irish are terrorists.

The professed ideology of all the terrorist groups that have been referred to as “Islamic terrorists” or “Jehadis” is Islam. This by no stretch of imagination means that all Muslims are terrorists. Though “Jihad” in Islam means “struggle” these terrorist groups have defined “Jihad” as an armed “struggle” between their version of Islam and non-Muslim people and countries, sometimes by name (Americans) at other times in a generic sense. Their rhetoric and justification is all based on Islamic religious texts, even though the meaning and intent of these texts may be quite different from what they profess it to be and which many Muslims have clarified is a gross distortion of Islam.

In recent history the only other groups that can arguably be classed as religion based were the “Sikh terrorists” trained in or based in Pakistan. Sikhism and its greater glory was the professed ideology of many groups, which terrorised the population of Punjab even though they indiscriminately killed both Sikh and Hindu civilians. Their primary objective was the establishment of a Khalistan within India. Thus they are referred to as either “Sikh terrorists” or “Khalistani terrorists.” By

analogy the use of the term “Islamic terrorists,” or in the case of Pakistan based anti-India terrorist groups “Pakistani Jihadis” does not appear to be inappropriate.

Islam has some unique features for which it is rightly appreciated. All Muslims are equal before Islam. The religion does not sanction or condone any distinction or discrimination based on wealth, caste, creed or nationality. This positive feature also means that terrorism based on a fundamentalist & blinkered interpretation of Islam is by its very nature one of the most international forms of terrorism since the demise of communism. Though individual terrorist groups may consist of one nationality (e.g. Philippines’ Abu Sayef, Indonesian ALF) their belief unites them as brothers in a common cause with Saudi Arabians, Egyptians, Iraqis and Pakistanis with the same beliefs. Thus individuals indoctrinated with an ideology that glorifies (their version of) “Islam” and promotes hatred against the rest (Americans & their Arab “stooges”, Jews/Israelis, Hindus/Indians, godless communists/Central Asians/ Chinese) are as international as Al Qaeda even if their primary objectives is the “liberation” of a specific geographical area or country from its rulers.

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Note: Any views expressed in this article are personal.

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