Would Terrorism Become a Thing of the Past?: When and How?

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Terrorism is not new. Long before 9/11 New York had become a major victim of terrorism on another September morning in 1920. A car bomb loaded with 100 pounds of dynamite and 500 pounds of cast-iron slugs was driven by an Italian anarchist and it exploded in front of J. P. Morgan building killing 39 persons. It was plotted and executed by the anarchists, who were horrified by the brutality of industrial capitalism and outraged at the U.S. support to it.

Anarchists are now a thing of the past. Would Jihadi terrorists of 9/11 who attacked the World Trade Centre in New York, 11 September also become a thing of the past later? The short answer to this question is that this will not happen automatically. Unlike the anarchists of the last century, the terrorists of today are driven by religious faith and strong sense of economic deprivation and cultural alienation. To overcome current day terrorist challenge requires a commonality of undertaking and a combined approach that has a mix of military and diplomatic efforts.

Recent origins of Terrorism

The seeds of modern day terrorism were sown during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the response of western powers thereto. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 commenced a fresh 'great game' between the two super-powers, i.e., the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The US intelligence agency, CIA, seeking counter measures, recognized that use of religion could be a potent force against communism. In this game of using religion to challenge communism, France, Greece and Italy gave massive financial aid to Rightist Christian Organizations to enable them to defeat the communists. Britain fully supported this move.

Islam too came in handy for the covert operations by US intelligence. The idea of Jihad or 'holy war' against the Soviet invaders of 1979 was carefully planned by the CIA with support from Afghan mujahideen, Pakistani military and intelligence services under Zia-ul-Haq and financial support from Saudi Arabia. In 1989, the Soviet invaders of Afghanistan were defeated and sent home. The CIA celebrated the victory of its policy in Afghanistan in 1989 with

champagne mentions John K. Cooley in the introduction to the third edition of his book *Unholy Wars*.[1]

The alliance among US and the Islamists forces against Russians in Afghanistan had led to strengthening of a variety of mujahideen groups who fought amongst themselves after Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and subsequent departure of US from the scene. The people of Afghanistan were ravaged by drugs, poverty, and horrific war injuries from fighting and landmines.

With Afghan civil war worsening in the early 1990s, the world witnessed the rise of a conservative group called Taliban which tried to impose a rigid version of Islam in Afghanistan. The Taliban were actively financed by private fortunes of men like Osama bin Laden, Islamic Banks and charities, and the huge proceeds of the drug trade which flourished during and after the war. This drew strong reaction from the West. The Taliban disregarded Western pressures to moderate their stance and even well-targeted US missile attacks on alleged terrorist camps in Afghanistan and Sudan. Within few years, Taliban established their control over almost entire Afghanistan.

Fed with their success, the Islamist groups led by Osama Bin Laden came together to raise an international Islamic front against the West and declared jihad or 'holy war' against Western powers. A new programme of training of Islamist militants started not only in Afghanistan but also in Algeria, Egypt and other Arab states. All these culminated in 9/11.

The use of religion in statecraft in different states has also shown how dangerous it can be for those states in particular and humankind in general. India has suffered for no fault of its own. As a global society, India has failed to envisage the long-term bad effects of using religious fundamentalism as an instrument of statecraft. There is a need for a new approach. How to effect change?

It was during my tenure as Executive Director of the World Bank in Washington DC, that the catastrophe of 9/11 took place. In the wake of the tragedy, it became fashionable for every think tank to discuss two questions: 'What went wrong?' and 'Why people hate us [Americans]'? I attended one such meeting. The guest speaker concluded on a sombre note that there was a need for building a coalition of nations against terrorism. After the presentation, the Chairperson said that India may have the answer because of its heritage of pluralism and its originality of mind, and gave me the floor. I was not prepared; I recall saying then that 'while India may have the answer. I do not'. I went on to narrate my experiences in handling terrorism in India. This was one of my responsibilities when I was Home Secretary in the Government.

I have been reflecting on this theme since then trying to construct a framework for a global public policy – a policy for harmony among different people and societies in the post-9/11 world as seen through the lens of the Indian experience.

Origins and Relevance of Bahudha approach

It is said that when the student is ready the teacher will appear. I was drawn to an approach that has greatly contributed to the enrichment of Indian life: 'respect for another person's view of truth with hope and belief that he or she may be right'. This is best expressed in the ancient Rigvedic hymn that enjoins Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vadanti. The Real is one, the learned speak of it variously.

I wrote a book later with the title Bahudha. This is derived from the word bahu, and dha is suffixed to it to make it an adverb. 'Bahu' denotes many ways or parts or forms or directions. It is used to express a sense of manifoldness, to express frequency, as in 'time and again'. Bahudha is also used as an expression of intermittent continuity in various time frames. In the present work, I have used the term Bahudha to suggest an eternal reality or continuum, a dialogue of harmony, and peaceful living in society.

The Bahudha approach recognizes that there is a distinction between pluralism and plural societies. Pluralism is an inevitable ingredient of democratic societies. In such societies, there are various boundaries: racial, linguistic, religious, and at times even ideological. The Bahudha approach does not believe in annexation of boundaries or assimilation of identities and propagation of a single simplistic world view. It merely facilities dialogue and thereby promotes understanding of the collective good. The realization of one's own identity may sustain boundaries and yet, at the same time, the understanding of other identities may help formulate a public policy of harmony. The Bahudha approach is conscious of the fact that societies without boundaries are not possible but also recognizes that there are common threats that transcend boundaries.

Pluralism would be the closest equivalent to Bahudha in the English language. In my world view, bahudha is more than pluralism – of course, it denotes many diversities but it is also an attitude of mind. The moot question is how this approach relevant in today's terrorism afflicted world?

In today's world, the power of the military to create unrest and destruction has emerged as a global phenomenon. Economic power and use of military force have proved inadequate agents for preservation of peace. The dilemma is: How to cope with an enemy that may be physically weak, but endowed with a 'do or die' mentality?

Terrorism is now truly a global phenomenon. It is lethal and cheap. Terrorist attacks could invariably come by stealth, masterminded by some computer whizz-kid or some science or technology major. There are many players in the field: fanatics, criminals, drug-traffickers, mafia and warlords. It is a highly unconventional war that cannot be successfully fought with only conventional weapons or tactics. The state must learn to be flexible and agile. It calls for and has full scope of cooperation at the global level.

The danger of ineffective handling of terrorism also comes from 'failed' states. The world is threatened less by strong nation-states than by tottering and failing ones. The danger lies in that fact that these 'failing' or 'failed states' have a tendency to establish a nexus with criminals, drug mafia, and fundamentalists.

To overcome terrorism we need to closely look at four aspects of state and society and integration among various approaches. These are (i) military intervention; (ii) religious harmony; (iii) educational programming; and (iv) strengthening of international political architecture: United Nations.

Role of Military

In our fight against terrorism the military has a significant role to play. A question is often posed about the role and relevance of the military in the construction of an environment for creative dialogue among civilizations. In the post 9/11 world, it is quite obvious that the ugly face of terrorism has given full justification for a strong military posture. In fact, the rise of terrorist activities in different parts of the world demands it. It, however, does not mean that military intervention can be taken in an arbitrary fashion either within the country or among nation-states.

In the aftermath of 26/11 Mumbai tragedy we have rightly reacted with restraint. We have appropriately moved towards strengthening of our legal framework, our security infrastructure, and our criminal justice system. However, we need to remain vigilant about Hindu-Muslim unity and accord the Muslims greater opportunities in education and economic welfare programmes. India has both the ability and a rich tradition to pursue this goal. At the same time, we should resist any attempt to arouse religious fundamentalism as this will not counter terrorism but it will only lead to further weakening of our society and the nation-state.

People are running out of ideas on how to deal with terrorism. Recently, the United Kingdom decided to spend 4,00,00 pounds at an advertisement campaign in Pakistan radio and television in which well-known Muslims were made to tell Pakistanis that they were happy and successful in the UK and therefore, UK should not be subjected to terrorist attacks. This is policy of appeasement and at best a soft approach.

Position of Religion

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the famous German thinker Friedrich Neitzsche (1844-1900) made an astounding statement declaring the 'death of God'. Advances in science and technology gave human beings new powers of control over the forces of nature and that, in turn, let several writers and thinkers to declare their independence from God. The so called 'Age of Reason' had dawned and started asserting itself.

But by the end of the twentieth century, however, religion began to reassert itself and began to influence world events. Politicians, journalists, and scholars started realizing the extremely powerful value of the religious motives of citizens and need to use their beliefs in the promotion of development, peace and happiness in society.

Simultaneously, religions also witnessed the rise of fundamentalist groups in their midst. Jewish fundamentalists, Hindu radicals, angry Buddhist monks, Christian rightists, and

Muslims fundamentalists started catching news headlines. The rise of Islamist elements among believers of Islam, in particular, received extraordinary notice in the West and people began expressing their world view in terms of a clash between Islam and Christianity.

The re-assertion of religion in public affairs also came to mean a revival of the traditional belief that 'my religion is the best'. The fact that identifying religion with dogmas and beliefs had led to several wars in the past and inflicted suffering on fellow citizens began receding from human consciousness. Several questions were asked: what is the political role of religion? How does it affect state policy? What is our religious experience?

In the enunciation of the Islamic faith, the well-known Sufi poet Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi puts it beautifully when he writes, "The lamps are different but the light is the same: it comes from beyond". There are similar expressions in other religions as well. All these strengthen the logic that there can be salvation outside the church or the synagogue, outside the temple or the sangh, and outside the mosque or the gurudwara. Even under the guidance of the same scripture, different communities have developed different ways of worship and communion with the creator. This, in turn, has created manifold forms of religious dialogues and forms of worship.

The re-emergence of religion as a vital force in the twenty-first century, both at the individual and community levels, needs to be taken into account in the formulation of a public policy of harmony. Different religions should be regarded as comrades in a joint enterprise aimed at ensuring peaceful coexistence, international welfare and justice, racial equality and political independence of all peoples.

Religion is a potent force. As an agent for the generation of peace and happiness, it generates goodwill among people, and helps them to lead a life of spirituality and fulfillment. In recent years, we have seen how people like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King have used it for achieving justice and freedom. Swami Vivekananda and Mother Teresa were also inspired by their religious faiths to serve the poor, the derelict, and the marginalised. It is religious faith which has driven the Dalai Lama to propagate the message of love and peace not only among his Tibetan people (including those living in exile in India) but also in distant lands.

Education for a Better Citizen

The task of utilizing education as an instrument of harmony is not an easy affair. The educational curriculum, in particular, has become in several countries an ideological battleground. The interpretation of historical events often excites religious and ethnic groups who start taking positions that are not always rational. Yet, education is the most dependable resource for preparing the youth for initiating dialogue.

It is true that in societies marked by intolerant ethos, in which religious or ethnic groups blindly espouse their narrowest possible perceptions, education can only play a limited role. Patience and time are needed for education to play its expected meaningful role in brining

peace and harmony in the world. The biggest positive factor is that despite all odd youth all over the world are full of hope.

We have to look beyond the events that have characterized the global scene since 9/11. Two aspects of education would, however, remain paramount. First, education must strive to create in young minds a willingness to tolerate differences of opinion and the desire to understand different points of view. Second, massive progress in science and technology has tended to stress intellectual rather than moral and spiritual values.

What we need is a synthesis of these values? spiritual and moral as well as intellectual? with the aim of producing a fully integrated human being. Such a person would be both inwards looking as well as outward looking, who would search his own mind in order that his nobler self may prevail at all times, and at the same time recognize his obligations to his fellow men and the world around him.

International Political Architecture: The United Nations

The role of law within a nation-state as well as in the wider world is an essential pre-requisite to peace and happiness. Towards this, there is need to strengthen our international political institution: the United Nations.

The theory of preventive war enunciated by the United States in its National Security Document of September 2002 making inter alia its unilateralist approach in tackling terrorism explicit needs to be reviewed. The UN Charter calls upon member states to attempt to settle dispute peacefully and failing that, to make a reference to the Security Council for appropriate action including use of military force in terms of Article 51. The categorical position emerging out of Article 51 is that states refrain from the use of its military till an armed attack takes place. This has been repeatedly violated but it needs to be respected for building a harmonious world.

The UN needs to be re-organized in several ways: by expanding the Security Council to reflect present day political and economic realities and by funding a permanent peacekeeping force. An empowered Economic and Social Security Council would also enable the UN to play a more effective role in reforming the global economic and financial system, represented by the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, to give all nations including the advanced industrial countries a role in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Outlook

Transnational terrorist networks are now using religion and funds raised out of illegal trade in drugs, in pursuit of their objectives. The increasing relevance of warlords in polity management, the growing number of insurgent outfits, and new mercenary agencies have emboldened terrorist networks and added a new feature to warfare. The new terrorism has prospered particularly in those countries where law and order has broken down to a

considerable extent, for example, in Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia and Pakistan and where religious fundamentalists have an impact on the education system and considerable say in the state policy formulation mechanism.

The alienation of Muslims living in Europe and USA also needs special attention, as they feel alienated from their traditions. The problem gets accentuated because they are not fully accepted in the society and the government needs to be sensitive. Intellectuals, women, and youth must be encouraged to play a greater role in the social and political affairs of their land. The more democratic the world becomes, the less would be the threat of terrorism and suicide killings.

Recently we have come across writers who argue that we must not 'respect' those religions which have 'obnoxious' ideas. This could be misguiding and may cause further conflict. The right attitude is to respect all religions but with a clear recognition that all religions are human creations and therefore intrinsically imperfect. We should therefore be in a position to change our beliefs in light of new discoveries based on science and rationality.

While fundamentalist religious forces are likely to continue to dominate political discourse for some time to come, it is not likely to be a permanent feature of the world social and political order. As fundamentalism cannot satisfy growing human aspirations or meet the challenges of modernization, the present hold of extremist organizations over its followers in the Islamic world would gradually loosen and eventually recede. We have strong mystical traditions in Islam that have found eloquent expression in Sufi ideas and religions disciplines (to which Wahhabis an other fundamentalist groups are strongly opposed) that could be supported.

My sense of optimism and confidence that the nation-states would cooperate in elimination of terrorist violence from our midst makes me believe that the menace of terrorism in its present form would become a thing of the past in coming few decades. As I have said before that this is not inevitable. The state-system, civil society organizations and concerned citizens have to take stronger action against terrorism. As I look into the future of the challenge of removal of poverty, disease, illiteracy and inequality would, however, persist in the 21st century.

The movements for democracy, religious harmony, and good education need not be viewed as separate ideals or goals; these are interrelated. Creative minds, civil society institutions, and global political architecture need to have a unity of purpose. The future of harmonious living demands sharing of a perspective that accommodates different points of view and respect for the ideas of Bahudha.

At the same time, we have to discard the ideas like 'My God is superior to yours' and 'teaching hatred can secure national integrity' and dismantle infrastructure that 'breeds hatred and imparts training for terrorists acts'. Amidst all this, our task is to move collectively as human beings towards peaceful and harmonious living that demands both rationality and love. On our generation rests the responsibility to provide these elements.

It is our duty to work together to inculcate the Bahudha approach in our society, religion, and politics. It is only through dialogue and working together, without sacrificing whatever is viable in our traditions, that the hope for a harmonious society can emerge. It is important to emphasise here that civilizations do not clash. Viciousness, duplicity and lack of trust could be tackled through a dialogic approach and by cultivating a mindset that embraces perspectives other than one's own. It is earnestly hoped that Bahudha can make a contribution to a better world.

Endnote

1 See John K. Cooley, Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism, Edition 3, Pluto Press, New York, 1999, pp 11-28.