

Combating Terrorism and the Barbaric Egypt Rawda Mosque Attack

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*The barbaric attack that killed 305 worshippers including 27 children during Friday prayers (24 November 2017) at the **Rawda mosque in North Sinai, Egypt** is a tragic reminder to the entire human family that the threat of terrorism is as deadly as ever.*

Though no one has formally claimed responsibility, it is reported that some of the terrorists carried Daesh flags. It is estimated that some 25 to 30 persons were involved in the heinous act.

Terrorist attacks have a long history in Egypt. They have become worse since the overthrow of Egypt's first democratically elected president, **Dr. Mohammed Morsi**, in 2013. Daesh or groups affiliated to it have been targeting local tribes and Christian churches.

Egyptian president **Abdel Fattah el-Sissi** has chosen to respond to the Rawda carnage, the worst in modern Egyptian history, by ordering air strikes on militant strongholds. While they serve a purpose, they are not the solution. More attention to, and emphasis upon, constant and comprehensive intelligence gathering may help to prevent acts of terror from occurring. In a number of terrorist episodes in different parts of the world, the absence or lack of prior intelligence appears to have been the real problem. In this regard, Malaysia has evolved an effective intelligence gathering system that has played a significant role in thwarting potential terrorist attacks.

Equally important in this battle against terrorism is education, especially in relation to certain key motivating concepts that seem to spur potential terrorists to act in an utterly irrational manner. Their notion of the justification for violence for instance is totally misconceived. They operate under the erroneous belief that it is perfectly legitimate to use violence to advance the Islamic cause as they and their religious teachers interpret it. It is forgotten that it is only if one is a victim of direct, overt aggression that one is permitted to defend oneself by whatever means possible including the use of force. The pursuit of justice which is paramount in Islam has to be through peaceful means. This is why the avenues for articulating issues pertaining to justice — even if they are anathema to the powers-that-be — should be available in any society. The ruling elite in Egypt should address this obvious flaw in its political system as a matter of urgency.

Education or awareness building should also aim to nurture a willingness to accept diversity within the Muslim family. Differences within the ummah should be seen as legitimate and integral to the faith as long as it does not subvert the fundamental principle of the Oneness of God (Tawhid). Since the Rawda mosque is viewed as a Sufi mosque and Sufis in Egypt and other countries are regarded as heretics by Daesh and other Wahabi oriented extremist

groups, it is crucial to re-assert that the Sufis have made a monumental contribution to Islamic civilisation. Their emphasis upon the quintessence of Islam and their gentle character and conduct played a major role in the spread of the religion in Southeast Asia, South India, Central Asia and East and West Africa. Sufi movements were also critical in the resistance to Western colonial rule in North Africa. Some questionable practices among some Sufi orders should not diminish their overall worth and value.

Their acceptance by mainstream Muslims just as the acceptance of the Shia minority — another significant sect that Daesh types and Wahabis reject — underscores the inclusive spirit of Islam which today is threatened by the bigotry and fanaticism of fringe elements. It is that inclusive spirit that the Amman Message of 2005 seeks to capture, a Message endorsed by Muslim leaders and religious scholars from all over the world that should be brought to the fore at a crucial time like this. And indeed, the Amman Message embodies that precious Quranic truth, “Unto every one of you have We appointed a (different) law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but (He willed it otherwise) in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.” (Chapter 5, Verse 48)

However, education and awareness, on the one hand, and effective intelligence, on the other, will not be able to root out terrorism if we do not take into account the vital role of global geopolitical forces. Since I have discussed these forces in other articles in the last 10 years, I will merely pose a number of questions on this occasion. Is it a coincidence that the US elite and its allies began to focus upon ‘Islamic terrorism’ after the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991? Was it motivated by the need for a new enemy that would justify the pursuit of global hegemony and the sale of weapons in tandem with the tightening of the state security apparatus? Was conflating Islam with terrorism which incidentally has historical antecedents in the interface between Islam and the West an attempt to denigrate the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination? Is this an indication of how Israeli interests have shaped the US agenda on ‘Islamic terrorism’? Was the 9-11 tragedy part of that hegemonic agenda? Has the manipulation of terrorism as part of that agenda become even more obvious now with the recent revelations of who actually finances certain terrorist outfits, trains the militants and provides them with intelligence?

These are questions that need to be asked because even in the case of Rawda, analysts are wondering why the attack took place when it did. Is it because the Egyptian government has played a pivotal role in trying to bring the two adversarial factions in Palestine — Fatah and Hamas — together in order to solidify the Palestinian struggle? Perhaps some people are not comfortable with this development?

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