# Addressing Extremism and Terrorism

This section explores possible ways in which extremism can be addressed in order to reduce the number of violent terrorist attacks. It considers how individuals, communities and governments can help the situation and whether a resolution is achievable, and shows that a multi-dimensional approach is essential involving all stakeholders. The twin evils of extremism and terrorism have always existed throughout history. For instance, in previous centuries, mankind has witnessed the genocide of native americans and australian aborigines, terrorist atrocities committed by the British Empire, the crusades, the Lord’s resistance army in Uganda, white supremacists in USA, etc. The focus here however is what is generally perceived as religious extremism and terrorism, particularly associated with Muslims in the present era.

In spite of the fact that terrorism has no association with any religion, let alone Islam, and that Muslims particularly are the greatest victims of global terrorism, the current widespread perception, stemming especially from the media, is to the contrary. It has therefore become necessary for individuals and religious groups to vocally disassociate themselves from the actions of extremists and terrorists. One dimension of this is to intellectually refute extremism. The Minhaj-ul-Quran movement for instance, published a comprehensive 600-page document titled ‘Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings’ in 2010 directly refuting extremist ideologies while also condemning terrorism to establish that it has no basis in Islam (Tahir-ul-Qadri, 2010). The same organisation also launched a peace curriculum more recently, which it claims is designed “to counter [the] terrorist narrative and ISIS ideology” through educating people (Minhaj, 2015).

There have also been several other similar initiatives by Muslims around the world to defeat extremism and terrorism on intellectual grounds. For example, 70,000 clerics from around the world recently approved a fatwa in India to confirm their stand against terrorism and for acknowledging the “non Islamic” nature of the activity of terrorist groups (Agarwall, 2015). A key evidence establishing the Islamic positing on killing is the Quranic verse (5:32) stating that “Whoever kills a human being unless it be (as punishment) for murder or spreading mischief (terrorism) in the land, it is as if he killed all of mankind, and whoever saves the life of a single person, it is as if he saved the life of all mankind.”

In line with addressing extremism intellectually to destroy its ideological basis, a longer term solution to the problem is to educate the masses on not only the reality of extremism and terrorism, but also through promoting values that are totally counterproductive to what extremists and terrorists stand for. This is already taking place by many individuals and groups, but their efforts do not normally get as much publicity as the activities of extremists and terrorists. One form of this is the rise of interfaith groups, which generally aim to develop mutual awareness, understanding and respect of each others’ faiths. Notably, extremism and inter-faith practices both often exploit the presence of diversity in society, but whereas extremists are intolerant of diversity and strive to strengthen boundaries and divisions between people of different faiths, interfaith groups view this diversity as opportunities for emphasising unity and sharing ideas to enrich society. There are numerous interfaith organisations operating in Britain, and they have been working for over a century (Ahmed, 2015).

Ultimately, extremism and terrorism would have to be addressed by adopting a more considerate, just, progressive, and spiritually mature strategy. Extremism often thrives when there are unaddressed grievances and injustices (Borum, 2014), poverty (Shinn, 2016), unemployment (Siedler, 2007), illiteracy and ignorance (Moore, 2008), etc. All these social and legal problems would therefore need to be addressed if the possible justifications for violence are to be drastically reduced. The problem is also closely associated with the pace of technological and economic progress because rapid advancement in these areas can ensure reduced dependency on depletable or non-renewable material resources. Many of the terrorist activities can be linked to vested economic interests, and securing and protecting supplies of oil, gas and other precious commodities. As pointed out by Heinberg (2009), many instances of terrorism are associated with those countries that “happen to be important producers and exporters of oil” (p. 58). Although the relationship between some governments and religious extremists has existed since before the discovery of oil in the early 20th century, such as of the British government and Wahhabism, promoting solar, tidal and other renewable energy sources could still have a major impact in preventing the need for terrorism and reducing warfare generally.

The role of policing in a community is also central for directly preventing and combating terrorism. Counterterrorism activities have become prominent since the time of the IRA bombings in the UK. These activities include gathering intelligence, both openly and covertly, albeit in a cautious manner (Bayley & Weisburd, 2009). Caution is necessary because counterterrorism measures in the UK are increasingly alienating Muslims (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011). In particular, in terms of the relationship between the police and the community, a very important element is trust. This is because in a multi-cultural society where one or more communities are associated with extremism and terrorism, as is the Muslim community nowadays, those who are neither extremists nor terrorists and have no association with them fear from being accused by others and searched by police (Spalek, 2010), and from prejudice. Moreover, establishing trust ensures cooperation in addressing extremism and tackling terrorism.

The problem of terrorism specifically can be addressed further in a huge way by dealing with those corporations and government agencies that fund, sponsor, arm and train terrorists. As highlighted by Byman (2005: 1), “States and terrorist groups have long had a deadly relationship,” and many terrorist groups rely on state support for their violent activities. Many countries sponsor terrorism, but the largest terrorist state in the world, which also plays the biggest role in supporting terrorism worldwide is the United States (Nakashima, 2010). In this regard, WikiLeaks is doing a commendable job of addressing terrorism, such as when it exposed Hillary Clinton’s ties to ISIS in the fake US war on terror (Walia, 2016), and Saudi Arabia as funding terrorist groups (Walsh, 2010). These exposures show the need to rethink who we allow to govern over us. Exposing and overthrowing these governments, working to change foreign policies, blocking the arms supplies of terrorists, and putting a stop to their funding has now become a need of paramount importance for the sake of the whole world.

At an individual level, people can play an important role to address extremism and terrorism by raising awareness of the problem, helping to keep the neighbourhood safe, building bridges between members of different faiths, and reporting suspicious activities they may encounter. Social media provides a useful platform for interacting with other people for this purpose in this age of information warfare, and there are many sites and groups on social media dedicated to tackling these specific issues. As an example, the site ‘Standing Firmly for Justice’ exists on Facebook (SFJ, 2017) to address extremism and terrorism by correcting media propaganda, exposing terrorists, and tackling extremism by encouraging harmonious relations between different religious groups. The same platform can be used to identify potential extremists or for monitoring the activities of known extremists.

A range of ways have been explored above on what individuals, communities and governments can do for addressing extremism and terrorism. Based on the examples given of what is being done already, members of communities associated with extremism and terrorism, can work to refute its underlying theoretical basis, and interfaith groups can hold meetings and conferences for bringing people together. However, various conditions that make extremism and terrorism thrive must also be addressed, which include grievances, injustices, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and general ignorance. The policing and technological sides were also highlighted, the latter to show how reduced dependency on renewable resources can make a difference as well. On a more global scale, there is a need to stop the funding, sponsoring, arming and training of terrorist groups, and for people to work, both individually and collectively, to expose this reality to help build a peaceful future.

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