

# Islam, extremism and moderation

**UNENDING CYCLE:** Violence in the Muslim world must be stopped before it spreads and endangers peace for all of humanity



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**E**XTRREMISM and violence are universal phenomena that have existed throughout human history, and are not particular to any religious, social or ethnic group. It threatens all regions, societies and religions.

Yet, radicalism is expanding, both in the West and East; people are becoming more radical and much brutal in the contemporary period. Extremist's acts are, today, committed as much by transnational and supranational groups, as by official state parties and organisations, both in the West and in the Muslim world.

The extremism of Islamophobia is escalating sharply in Europe. Even the most crucial principle of liberalism, freedom of speech, has been turned into a tool for extremism, as we have witnessed in the recent developments following the Paris tragedy.

Violence and radicalism are spreading like cancer in the failed states of the Middle East, North African regions and South Asian countries. The Arab Spring, where people fought for genuine democracy and good governance, has morphed into a hotbed of extremism across swathes of the Middle East and North Africa.

The safety and well-being of the entire Muslim world has been jeopardised by the creation of the so-called Islamic State, or IS. This extremist militant group has committed brutalities and transgressions that violate the core principles of Islam and humanity.

The horrifying results of extremism are seen in the faces of the innocent girls who were kidnapped and are still being sold today by Boko Haram in Nigeria. Extremism is rampant, and the world has also witnessed its definite appearance in Iraqi and Syrian minorities, fleeing for their lives because of an ideology that treats them as sub-human and inferior, on account of their religious affiliation.

Extremism is manifested in the laws of certain Muslim countries, which fanatically violate their cit-

izen's human rights with impunity, and uphold religious beliefs by force and brutality. The radicalisation of Muslim youth in Western societies has also become a reality, turning the former against the common values and ideals of their new homelands.

The clash-of-civilisations narrative, along with the spread of extremism and violence in the Muslim world, often draws the focus of experts and pundits on the religion of Islam itself as being the sole explanation of extremism in the Muslim world. In the current political climate, especially after the tragedy of Sept 11, 2001, Islam has increasingly been seen as subversive, and synonymous with extremism, violence and terrorism. Too often, Islam is portrayed negatively and as a monolithic entity, which poses a growing threat to world peace.

The war on terror has become a "war on everything" that is related to Islam. As history reveals, balance and moderation have been imprinted on the character of classical Islamic civilisation. For many centuries, Islam exposed itself as a religion of moderation, committed to establishing a system of truth and justice that shuns laxity on one side and extremism on the other.

The recent radicalisation of the Muslim youth, indeed, is bred by political and societal grievances. It is the manifestation of the absence of good governance in Muslim societies. Extremists are provoked by countless injustices and cruelty committed by the West, and by their own dysfunctional governments. For decades, the region has been exploited by those eager to control the resources and wealth of certain nations, with no concern for the people's will and welfare that live therein. The citizens' rights for proper education, well-being, protection and human security were largely ignored by their hopeless ruling elite. No opportunity was made available to amend the unfair systems through peaceful means endorsed by Islamic teachings, such as consultation and the participatory system of rule through fair elections, gov-

ernment accountability and the advocacy of people's rights.

The Muslim masses, particularly in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, became disillusioned with the consequences of the United States-led war on terror, as well. They have been exhausted from the unending cycle of despotism, economic and political exploitations, foreign invasions, poverty and public cruelty.

Hate breeds hate, and violence breeds violence. This cycle of violence in the Muslim world should be stopped without any delay, lest it spreads further and endangers peace for all of humanity.

Neither US drone strikes against militant groups, nor the intervention of foreign troops in conflict-ridden zones can contribute to long-lasting peace and stability in the region. Rather, it shall continue to stimulate rage and despair in the hearts of victimised civilians and children, sowing the seeds of more radical generations to come.

It is fairly obvious that the imposition of the Western model of democracy alone is no

cure for the evil of violence in the Muslim world. It remains to be said that considerations of public welfare and public interests, as well as the protection of the rights of the citizens and human dignity, are the main solutions to nullifying the strongest magnet of extremism in the Muslim world.

Peace and stability in the region depend on the aptitude of governments to inspire a climate of public trust, appreciation and sincerity between the political elite and the people; governments should learn to respond to the needs and benefits of their people. Militarism and violence, whether by individuals or states, must be brought under control through understanding the authentic Islamic principles of balance and moderation. All types of violence, corruption, discrimination and rivalry must be strongly condemned by Muslim religious leaders, intellectuals and politicians as being violations of the core principles of Islam and humanity. The media and educational systems should be utilised to train Muslim youth to adopt more peaceful and harmonious ways of life.

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