

Religious fundamentalism in Muslim countries

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Countries with Muslim majority are in grip of religious fundamentalism in various forms and shapes. Some countries are more hit than others but this menace is spreading slowly but steadily in all countries. It has emerged as a great danger to the democratic gains that has been achieved by the great uprising of the masses of these countries.

Religious fundamentalism is not just a phenomena spread by individuals, groups, mosques, madrassas or cluster of these groups: they were able to use the state powers like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, sometimes for a short period and in other cases, they have consolidated their grip on state structures. The aim is not to spread it to one continent or over the entire world, but they will continue the struggle for implementation of their political Islamic agenda till the “judgment day”.

Understanding roots of the growth of religious fundamentalism in the countries of Middle East, it is absolute a clear fact that American and British imperialism presented political Islam in a conscious manner as a counter offense to the rise of nationalist and socialist movements that spread throughout the fifties and sixties.

On 5th January 1957, the US president Eisenhower asked Congress for a resolution authorizing him to pledge increased military and economic aid, even direct US protection, to any Gulf nation willing to acknowledge the communist threat. Two months later “Eisenhower doctrine” was passed by the Congress. To save Middle East from communism, Washington turned to political Islam, or known commonly as religious fundamentalism. The “religious approach was adopted side by side the “police and military approach”.

Eisenhower’s doctrine was put in test in Jordan first where nationalists were brutally crushed, with Muslim Brotherhood on monarchy’s side by Shah Hussein. Ever since, civil liberties are curtailed in Jordan.

Earlier in 1951, Mohammed Mosadeq, the Iranian prime minister who dared to nationalize Anglo Iranian Oil Company was overthrown in a coup staged by CIA and Ayotollah Kashani was siding with coup plotters.

These historical references are among several more that will help, at least partly; explain how imperialism fathered Hamas, Hezbollah, Mehdi Militi, Alqaida, Taliban and Iranian Ayatollahs.

Latest in the list is DAASH that was helped initially by imperialist forces to counter the uprising in the Middle East and for the overthrow the ones not in their darling lists anymore. DAASH has emerged now as most barbarian terrorist group that the world has ever known, all on the name of "Islamic State".

You breed a beast and hope for the best is not what would happen. Breeding of religious fundamentalism in Muslim countries by the imperialist forces was their greatest political and organization blunder in forming strategies to save capitalism from opposite ideologies.

Side by side, the Saudis have played an important role in strengthening and helping religious groups across Muslim countries in promoting their Wahabi ideology. Saudi financing goes much beyond Middle East. Saudis also gives huge cash subsidies to right wing groups in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Maldives. Iran supports the Shia groups like Hezbollah. Kuwait and Qatar supports various groups including Hamas and Taliban in several manners.

Religious fundamentalist groups in various Muslim countries are using all sort of medieval terrorist act to frighten the opponents. The barbarian acts of burning the prisoners alive by pouring oil; killing prisoners by shooting and releasing their videos have shaken the world tremendously.

The first religious fundamentalist government in a Muslim country was in Iran. Since 1979, it has stabilized its basis initially by physically killing all opposition groups and later by forced enforcement of so called "Islamic laws" mainly against women, democracy and working class. The Iranian regime has helped fanatic Shia groups around the globe against Sunni and Wahabi Muslims.

In Afghanistan, the nine years power period of religious fanatics from 1992 to 2001 played a decisive role in promoting religious fundamentalism not only in Muslim countries but also across the globe. It introduced "Jihad" as the main weapon of spreading fanaticism. It turned Islam into "political Islam". Osama Bin Laden used Afghanistan as his base camp to plan and carry out all terrorist activities. Pakistan became a refuge for him in his later years of life.

In Pakistan, the 16 December 2014 was the most deadly attack on any school by religious fanatics. 146 were killed in a Peshawar Army Public School, including 136 children, ages ranging from 10 to 17 years. They asked the children to recite Kalma and then fired at them. It was an attack on Muslim children by Muslim fanatics. Almost 11 percent of the total children enrolled in the school were killed within 15 minutes of their occupation of the school.

Such was the devastating effect on children across Pakistan that my son aged 14 asked his mum what should he do in case they come to his school, "line up or run". The day shocked Pakistan and the world. The news of the killing of the innocent children was flashed all over the world as the main story of the day. There was a great anger and shock.

The Pakistani state failed miserably to curb the rise of religious fundamentalism. There is always a soft spot for them. For a long time, they were encouraged by the state as a second line of security. The security paradigm meant an anti-India enmity was the core purpose of state patronage.

Pakistan is situated in a region where fundamentalism has been posed, of late, as one of the most threatening questions. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan really began in the 1980s. On the one hand, the military dictator, General Zia ul-Haq, was using religion to justify his rule and was „Islamizing“ laws and society. On the other hand, Pakistan had become a base camp for the forces opposing the Afghan revolution. After the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the Zia allies with US, uses Islam to consolidate his power passes pro-Islamic legislation, and create many madrasahs and his policies created a "culture of jihad" within Pakistan that continues until present day.

Recently Islamic fundamentalism has risen as an alternative political phenomenon not only in Pakistan but also in the entire Muslim world. Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan is partly a link of this international phenomenon and partly caused by specific local reasons. When analyzing Islamic fundamentalism, one must understand that the religion of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism are not one and the same thing.

Islamic fundamentalism is now a reactionary, nonscientific movement aimed at returning society to a centuries-old social set-up, defying all material and historical factors. It is an attempt to roll back the wheel of history. Fundamentalism finds its roots in the backwardness of society, social deprivation, a low level of consciousness, poverty, and ignorance.

Let us go back to the example of Pakistan. Apart from creating and supporting Jihadist groups, for decades, the state and military with the financial and political assistance of imperial powers, has indoctrinated millions with conservative Islamic ideology for the purpose of safeguarding its strategic interests.

The three decades since 1980 are seen as the years of madrassas, over 20,000 at present providing home ground for recruitment for suicidal attackers. Supported mainly by Saudi Arabia and many million Muslim immigrants, they have become the alternative to the regular school system. Most of the terrorist activities carried out in Pakistan and elsewhere are linked to the organizational and political support of these madrassas.

After 9/11, the state's close relationship with the fundamentalists has changed to some extent but not broken in real terms. The banned terrorist groups change their name and carry out activities on a regular basis. They hold meetings and public rallies, collect funds and publish their literature without any state intervention.

Pakistan has become more conservative, more Islamic and more right wing resulting in the growth of the extreme Islamist's ideas. Blasphemy laws are frequently used for settling personal and ideological scores. Religious minorities, women and children are the easy targets. These soft targets are paying the greatest price for this decisive right wing turn.

The rise of religious fundamentalism has emerged as the most serious challenge not only to progressive forces but also to the very foundation of a modern society. Education and health are the real targets of the fanatics.

Polio workers, mainly women, are killed by fanatics, on the assumption that a team working for the elimination of polio led to the discovery of Osama Bin Ladin, leading to his assassination. The net result is that the World Health Organization has recommended a ban on all Pakistanis traveling abroad without a polio vaccination certificate.

Religious fanatics groups are the new version of fascism. They are fascists in the making. They have all the historic characteristics of fascism. They kill opponents en mass. They have found considerable space among the middle class, particularly educated ones. They are against trade unions and social movements. They are promoting women as inferior to men, and aim to keep them in the home. Attacking the religious minorities has become a norm.

The religious fanatic groups are internationalists. They want an Islamic world. They are against democracy and promote *Khilafat* (kingdom) as a way of governance. They are the most barbaric force recent history has seen in the shape of "Islamic State" and Taliban. There is nothing progressive in their ideology. They are not anti-imperialism but anti-America and anti-West. They have created and carried out the most barbaric terrorist activities in the shape of suicide attacks,

bomb blasts, mass killings and indiscriminate shootings.

They must be countered. The American way of fighting back in shape of “war on terror” has failed miserably. Despite all the American initiatives of occupations, wars and creating democratic alternatives, the religious fundamentalists have grown with more force.

Fundamentalists are stronger than they were at 9/11, despite the occupation of Afghanistan.

A whole package is needed. The state must break all links with fanatic’s groups. The mindset that religious fundamentalists are “our own brothers, our own people, our security line and guarantee against “Hindus”, some are bad and some are good” and so on must be changed. The conspiracy theories are most favorable arguments among the religious right wingers. They do not want to face the reality.

There is no short cut to end religious fundamentalism. There is no military solution. It has to be a political fight with dramatic reforms in education, health and working realities in most Muslim countries. Starting from nationalization of madrassas, it must go on to provide free education, health and transport as one of most effective means to counter fundamentalism.

Right wing ideas are promoting extreme right wing ideology. A mass working class alternative in the shape of trade unions and political parties linked with social movements is the most effective manner to counter religious fundamentalism.

Avoiding a ‘clash of barbarisms’ between imperialist barbarism and that of organizations like the DAASH and Al-Qaeda, is a must. Imperialist barbarism and its dictatorial supporters oppress millions of people daily around the world. This is the fertile ground in which fundamentalist and terrorist organizations prosper. They feed off international interventions such as the ones led by the US and other western powers in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Iraq, and those regional powers.

We must never forget one basic truth: the terrorist violence is directed first and foremost against people in Muslim countries. They attack all freedoms and all fundamental rights. They play a major counter-revolutionary role – against the progressive aspirations of the ‘Arab spring’, for example.

These forces must be fought, at a time when they are carrying out an increasing number of barbaric acts. We must fight them not only in our countries, but also through international solidarity – by fighting against imperialist wars; supporting progressive movements, resisting fundamentalism and defending victims of intolerance wherever they may be.

Fundamentalism (of all religions) and the new Far Right (xenophobic and racist) are laying claim to the ideological ground of radicalism. We need a broad international anti-fascist and anti-fundamentalist resistance front, and also an activist Left capable of providing a radical alternative.

The rise of religious fundamentalist groups in countries with Muslim majority, owes to numbers of factors, few beyond the scope of this essay, but we can analyze this phenomenon only if looked at with historical context. Equally important is to understand the political economy of Political Islam. It is evident that Islamists were marginalized when viable left/nationalist alternative were available. The Islamists filled the vacuum left by Left/nationalists in Middle East. In their rise, overt and covert imperialist’s patronage or intervention has helped Islamists gain the present mass status.

Also, important to note, that imperialism is not in clash with fundamentalism. It is only a section of fundamentalism, gone out of control that Washington and its allies are fighting against.

Unfortunately, the rise of religious fundamentalism was not taken seriously by the progressive forces

around the globe. They are a new reality that poses a direct threat to their existence. The religious fundamentalist groups and right wing have adopted many political terminologies of the Left in promotion of their ideas. They do so to find a base among masses. We should not be fooled by the use of these terminologies.

The religious fundamentalist groups are not revolutionaries, anti imperialist or radical. They are a force just in opposite direction. There should not be any political alliance or united front with these reactionaries. They must be opposed independently. The “war on terror” should not confuse us.

While opposing religious fundamentalism we should not be part of the imperialist alliance of “war on terror”. Both must be opposed and an independent strategy to counter the both must be our main priority of building a viable alternative based on socialist ideas. World must be free from reaction and oppression of any kind.

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