

Understanding and Responding to Islamic Terrorism

Lesson 7: Islamic Terrorism and “True Islam” (Pt. 2)

Lesson Outline

Terrorism in the Life of Muhammad
Muhammad’s Example and “True Islam”
Problems for Moderate Muslims

Terrorism in the Life of Muhammad

References in the Qur'an

- Surah 2:190-191 states, "Fight in Allah's cause those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits. Allah does not love those who exceed their rightful limits. Kill them (in a combat situation) wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out because persecution and injustice are worse than killing.""
- Muhammad tells his followers, "But when the forbidden (four) months are over then fight and kill the (distrusted) pagans wherever you find them, and catch them, attack them, and stay waiting for them in every stage (of war) (9:5).

Terrorism in the Life of Muhammad

References in the Qur'an

- In one of the last Surahs written, Muhammad receives the revelation, "Fight (O Prophet) those (in the vicinity of Makkah) who do not believe in Allah or the Last Day..." (9:29a).
- Surah 48:29 reads, "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. And those who are with him are strong against the unbelievers, (but) compassionate within themselves."

Terrorism in the Life of Muhammad

References in the Qur'an

- Finally, Muhammad is told, "O Prophet! Strive hard against the Unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell- An evil refuge (indeed)" (66:9, Ali).

Terrorism in the Life of Muhammad

References in the Biographies

- Given the records found in Ibn Ishaq's *Life of Muhammad* and al-Waqidi's *Kitab al-Maghazi* (Book of Wars), Muhammad took these Qur'anic injunctions quite seriously and quite literally.
- The following slide contains a selection of events from Muhammad's life that show his disregard for anyone thought to be an enemy of Islam or of Muhammad's prophethood. It should be noted that Muhammad's actions are by no means limited only to military engagements. He also personally committed genocide, enslaved women, and sanctioned the assassinations of multiple people.
- Check the printed handout for details

Terrorism in the Life of Muhammad

- Muhammad's actions in the biographies
 - Murder
 - Assassination
 - Exile
 - Seizure of property
 - Genocide
 - Enslavement
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Terrorism in the Life of Muhammad

What is important to notice about the events in this chart is that the targets are people who “opposed” Muhammad’s authority and growing political movement. Some of the targets physically opposed the prophet by fighting against him. Other targets criticized Muhammad for his brutality. Sadly, many of the victims were women and children who had their husbands and fathers killed and were then sold into slavery. Anyone that Muhammad deemed an “enemy” to Islam became a target, and targets were eliminated by force.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Muhammad's Actions Compared to Modern Terrorist Groups

- When one compares the actions of Muhammad and his contemporary followers to those of Muslim terrorist groups today, it is possible to see a striking similarity.
- While the weapons have changed, the types of attacks, human toll, and level of violence have remained consistent.

Modern Terrorist Groups' Actions

- Enslavement
- Seizure of Property
- Beheading
- Massacre/Mass Murder
- Genocide
- Execution

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Quite similar to Muhammad's approach, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, ISIS, and Boko Haram display little regard for anyone that is deemed an "enemy" of Islam. Each of the groups is responsible for both military and civilian deaths, of both Muslims and non-Muslims. In fact one study from the Combating Terrorism Center in the United States shows that Al Qaeda kills roughly eight times as many Muslims as it does non-Muslims. Thus, even co-religionists are not safe from the devastating impact of these four contemporary Islamic terrorist groups.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Muhammad's Actions and "Distorted" Islam

- There are many Muslims in general and scholars in particular who argue that the violence perpetrated by Al Qaeda, ISIS, the Taliban, and Boko Haram does not reflect "true Islam."
- The violence, they say, is a "distortion" of Islam. Rather than look at these "false Muslims," the public is encouraged to look to the life of Muhammad for what a true Muslim should look like.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Muhammad's Actions and "Distorted" Islam

- Gülen notes that it is "a great shame that Islam, which is based on [tenets of peace], is seen by others to be equaled with terrorism." He sees this false conclusion as a problem of sources. People today look to a few followers of Islam and make conclusions based on that minority. Gülen continues, "One should seek Islam through its own sources and in its own true representatives throughout history, not through the actions of a tiny minority that misrepresent it."

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Muhammad's Actions and "Distorted" Islam

- The idea is that, if one looks not at a violent minority but rather the sources of Islam and its "own true representatives," one will arrive at the conclusion that Islam is a religion of peace. However, it is the life of Muhammad that has been the focus of this project, and examination of that life has not led to the conclusion that Islam is a peaceful religion. His life is far from a model of temperance and peace.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Muhammad's Actions and "True Islam"

- The problem with a discussion of "true Islam" and the example of Muhammad is that Muhammad's example—particularly violence toward non-Muslims—is supposed to demonstrate true Islam, yet many scholars today reject violent acts of ISIS and others as "un-Islamic," despite the fact that those actions are consistent with what the prophet himself committed.
- It is a logical fallacy that hinders any fruitful discussion of how Islamic terrorist groups really are.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Muhammad's Actions and "True Islam"

- Terrorist actions, such as beheadings and forced enslavement, are rejected as "un-Islamic," yet they are the same actions that the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, committed.
- So, if the prophet and example of Islam committed those very actions, how can they be dismissed as "un-Islamic"? It simply does not make sense to reject actions committed by Muhammad, whom Jazuli describes as "the best of the creatures of Allah... choice of Allah among the creatures of Allah, selection of Allah in the creation of Allah, elite of Allah among the prophets of Allah... the best of the prophets of Allah..."

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Terrorism and Devotion to Muhammad

- Digging beneath centuries of interpretations and opinions to examine only the actions of Muhammad himself would appear to simplify the discussion. However, examining Muhammad's life only complicates the issue.
- He is adored as the model of Islam, and his violent actions are either ignored or explained away. Yet, these same actions are rejected in their contemporary expressions as "un-Islamic."
- Gülen writes, "No terrorist can be a Muslim, and no real Muslim can be a terrorist," yet such a statement is too general.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Terrorism and Devotion to Muhammad

- Certainly, Muhammad was the greatest Muslim, yet he committed the same actions as groups today who are labeled "terrorists."
- The rejection of contemporary terrorist activities, committed in the name of "true Islam" and in contrast to the example of Muhammad, make it particularly difficult to examine violence in Islam.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Problems for Moderate Muslims

- Clearly, Muslim terrorists reflect the sources and life of Muhammad.
- So, to say they are not Islamic, moderate Muslims must posit one or more of the following three arguments:
 - There is a problem with the sources
 - There is a problem with the life of Muhammad
 - Terrorism was limited to the life of Muhammad (no longer valid)

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

There is a problem with the sources

- Within Sunni Islam there is almost no discussion of textual criticism regarding the Qur'an. It is accepted as the perfect revelation of Allah in its current form and Muslims believe that it has not been changed.
- The collections of traditions cited in this study are generally accepted by all Sunni Muslims and even some Shi'a Muslims.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

There is a problem with the sources

- The two biographies referenced are also widely accepted as the earliest and most reliable testimonies of Muhammad's life.
- The sources are reliable, which means that the references to violent actions are to be considered factual and historical. Muslims must now interact with these problematic texts and determine how to interpret and apply them to today's culture.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

There is a problem with the life of Muhammad

- There is no room in the Muslim world for a critique of Muhammad's life. In many Muslim countries, speaking ill of Muhammad will earn one jail time, beatings, or even death.
- The prophet is believed to be the perfect Muslim and the best example of a man submitted to Allah.
- So, if the perfect Muslim (Muhammad) committed terrorist acts, Muslims cannot look at the acts themselves and determine that they are "un-Islamic." These terrorist acts, at least in the life of Muhammad, are quintessentially "Muslim."

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Terrorism was limited to the life of Muhammad

- Some Muslims claim that Muhammad's acts of terrorism were limited to his time. He was allowed to do them because he was the prophet of Allah, but his followers could not do them.
- The problem is that Muhammad's followers committed terrible acts while Muhammad was alive. So, does Muhammad's role as prophet somehow extend the permission to commit terrorism to his followers?

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

Terrorism was limited to the life of Muhammad

- Also, there is no indication from the texts that Muhammad believed his actions were limited to his own ministry.
- Finally, even if Muhammad did tell his followers not to continue with terrorist activities, they did not listen. Following Muhammad's death the Muslim community swept across the Middle East and North Africa conquering everything in their path through violent battles. It seems unlikely that these early Muslims, many of whom knew Muhammad, were acting contrary to how Muhammad instructed them.

Muhammad's Example and "True Islam"

What can we conclude about Moderate Muslims?

Moderate Muslims are in a difficult position to explain away the actions of modern terrorist groups. What they need to do is admit that Muhammad committed actions they now disagree with and reject, but that will be difficult.

Conclusion

- It is difficult to see the logic behind statements that groups such as ISIS do not reflect “true Islam” or that they are “un-Islamic.”
- While there is no “true Islam,” these groups certainly reflect the life of Muhammad and the earliest sources recognized by most Muslims around the world.
- How can Muslims then say that they are un-Islamic?

Questions and Comments