

## TERRORISM IDEOLOGICAL AND MEDIA RISKS



Mohammed Zahid Goul

Editor-in-chief of the Turkish Independent website

**T**he dialectical relationship between ideology and media is a double-edged sword that has greatly affected Muslim communities over the past years. At worst, it has brought about global crises when extremists in the West and East used malicious media, spearheaded by the most notorious extremists and racists, instrumentalizing such tools as platforms to spread terrorism, sparking global wars and occupying countries whose crimes were not worse than the crimes of their attackers.

The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order by Samuel Huntington (2007) introduced a theory to the effect that hate speech against Muslims was built in Europe and the West in general, followed by calls for Islamophobia and attacks on Islamic manifestations fueled by bitter enmities that embodied the ideologies of far-right parties, whether in Europe or America. Such a trend was met by voluntary or suspected involuntary action across the Arab countries and by Muslims and was exploited by extremist movements, claiming espousal of Islam, such as Al-Qaeda, Daesh (ISIS) and Boko Haram, among others. Through their extremist ideology and media, such movements brought about religious turmoil to the whole world. Simply put, such movements never represent specific countries or governments; they only represent themselves.

There is no doubt that the media plays a vital and significant role in forming convictions and perspectives in contemporary life, and the effect is no longer limited to the official media of countries, nor to international political, regional or local media decision-making centers. Rather, every party, grouping or organization, no matter how small, becomes a media platform that addresses its followers, enemies and the whole world. People, whatever their ideological, national, ethnic, religious or political identities are, have become owners of websites open to all people, whether intended by the speech or others, and this contemporary media image carries great promises and warnings. These websites use something of benefit to people and guide them for good.

At the same time, they may be used to harm people and not benefit them and bring them back to evil and destruction. Therefore, the media arenas today should be seen as fields of media and ideological confrontation. Some fight their ideological, religious, civilizational or political battles on electronic communication websites more than they are on the ground, and its danger is that it may cause bloodshed, bringing in enemies and terrorism more than if they were on the battlefield. It commits the most dangerous stages and images of terrorism. Addressing these ideological and media risks, and preventing them from continuing their blind and futile wars are the right steps of confrontation.

Media responsibility becomes even more important when confrontation with terrorist groups and organizations adopting and legitimizing terrorist acts becomes sectarian - not religious - through its mission and media apparatus. Confrontation does not depend on military warfare or security prosecutions. Rather, it is necessary to establish specialized media agencies, train technical media experts and develop scientific plans with which media battles are also fought. Terrorist organizations today have electronic media devices and websites on the internet that they can use to win supporters and followers over the past few years, more than what the security services expected. This requires the apparatuses of the IMCTC member countries facing terrorist groups and organizations to identify the reasons for the success notched up by the media of terrorism, sedition and division in communicating its message first; the reasons for winning supporters and followers second; laying out plans that face these terrorist media campaigns in a way that is outperforming third; refuting their terrorist ideas and providing another convincing alternative. The mere claim to refute terrorist ideologies without offering an alternative does not make the treatment feasible or adequate.

One of the gravest mistakes committed by the Western media is describing Islam as terrorism, for no other reason than attempting to intimidate and scare people off Islam as the most prevalent religion in the West. These Western media are deficient or malicious and should not be described as democracy in any case. Terrorism has no religious identity; terrorism is not exercised by true followers and believers of religions; rather, terrorism is exercised by those who have deviated from the right path of true religion. True religion is the religion that calls for peace, security and tolerance, and whoever insists on stigmatizing Islam with terrorism is a direct or indirect advocate of terrorism or simply benefits from taking advantage of terrorism or is suspected of being linked to intelligence bodies of ill intentions.

Ever since inception, social media has turned into fields of ideological, media, political, sectarian, and other battles, some of which have turned into fields of ideological battles, clash of civilizations, sects and religions, which are more dangerous

than political, ideological, and sectarian satellite channels, because they reach every home and every youth and teenager. Social media platforms have faster and greater capabilities to deliver their messages to readers, students or their followers, while infiltrating into their smart phones before entering their home, school, university, and other rooms. Social media can motivate them to take to the streets and orchestrate demonstrations within minutes. It is not possible to prevent such demonstrations except with high technical capabilities and taking formal judicial approvals.

As such, the problems and crises of the political, social, civilizational, ideological, and religious areas and others entered the websites and social media, through which everyone spread his or her positive and negative ideas. Therefore, the websites and social media snowballed into crises, including those who invoked the past crises and revived their positives and negatives, transferring and publishing them in the present. What is going on in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen is a picture identical to that bad controversy between traditional thought and contemporary media. Political conflicts have increased; therefore, websites and social networking have become full of historical hatred and ideological extremism. These websites are encouraged by politicians who live on historical conflicts among Muslims; they increased these websites significantly from 12 websites in 1997 to 150 thousand websites in recent years. These websites represent a conducive environment for ideological extremism and a broad bedrock and springboard for terrorism.

In the context of these sociopolitical circumstances that people suffer from, theories that attempt to analyze the manifestations of extremism and terrorism do not help, and they remain unable to provide appropriate solutions. The bottom-line is to evince a basic understanding of the real root causes of extremism, and not the reasons presented by the attacker or any of the local affiliations. Therefore, Islam per se does not cherish any aggressive doctrine nor any aggressive scripts; however, there are extremist ideological errors committed by some Muslims, and even this must be questioned whether it is the result of an aggressive mentality among such people, or that it is enshrouded in the case of being subjected to partisan or narrow sectarian education.

Out of the overall world population, approximately seven billion, 42% use the internet, and about 29% use social media, and 51% use smart phones, and 23% use social media via smart phones. There is no doubt that a large proportion of the people of the Muslim world is an important part of these large proportions. This means that there is a vital role for these means in spreading messages and building convictions. States will not be able to control it unless they are able to provide expressive visions of the convictions of their peoples and youth, otherwise they will lose their youth and

communities. Equally important, it may trap them to perish, as was the case of some Arab and Muslim communities in recent years.

The attempt to reform the conditions of Muslim states that suffer from extremism and terrorism should not take place through the application of foreign theories of reform, because these theories do not accommodate and understand the conditions of Muslim ideology and thought at all. These foreign committees that undertake this are not honest and it is doubtful that they want to realize reform; even if these foreign committees or countries were sincere, they would shut down all the websites, which incite extremism and violence in their countries; they have such websites according to their laws. On the contrary, they put them under surveillance and accountability whenever they want, and provide theories that push the security services in the countries to be at odds with their youth, instead of attracting and reforming them.

The turbulent political, social, economic and media conditions of Muslims need convincing and compelling reform initiatives for Muslim youth before others, without being convincing to ministers, officials and security officials only. This is what should be assumed by intelligentsia, literati, religious scholars, polymaths and imams, provided that they are independent in their jurisprudence, ideas and visions, as representatives of the identity of community and all of its intellectual, religious and political powers, so that they have scientific capacity and ethical trust in front of youth to address the problems of their community.

Such thinkers and reformists are concerned with holding direct dialogue discussions first with the biggest segment of youth to better understand their needs and the root causes contributory to making them instrumentalized by extremist movements. Through these overt or covert dialogues, websites can be created and managed by youth themselves, putting intellectual materials and political convictions, opening the door to providing answers to all the questions that may reach these websites. Equally important, one of the most important goals of the youth initiative should also be building the self-convictions of youth, without the need for unknown convictions. Such a youth initiative should communicate through social media with other associated initiatives, including a moderation initiative, a counseling initiative, a tolerance initiative and other intellectual forums in spreading the ideas of moderation and tolerance.

The profound vision of the existing problems confirms that the solution should not be to counter violence with violence, nor through exercising restrictions and surveillance on the means of communication; rather, by preparing a young generation aware of national issues of the time and aware of the problems that can be impactful

through social media. As such, the cultural and scientific training will be best manifested through preventing wrongful use of these methods and websites.

Islamic states should address the major western countries to necessarily change their policy towards the Muslim world, and not to offend Islam in the statements of the leaders of such countries. Islam is neither extremist nor violent. The accusation of Islam in such a fashion can be factored in making Muslim youth hate the West. Websites and social media should not be used in provoking hostility towards civilizations, turning such Western websites into hate platforms.

The significance of creating the bedrock of moderate and tolerant Islamic ideology, including scientific institutions and well-educated youth themselves, and not by external dictates. This also includes encouraging cultural gatherings between the Muslim youth of different nationalities, languages and contemporary and heritage intellectual schools. As such, considering historical Islamic thought schools as schools of thought found in history is further encouraged. Given this undeniable fact, it is not the task of contemporary generations to judge their cultural production. The convergence and similarity of traditional, contemporary and Islamic identities open the horizons for closer cooperation and stronger love between contemporary and traditional Islamic schools.