Global Terrorism and Islamic Radicalization: Analyses from Fethullah Gulen's Perspective

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Abstract

Terrorism and Islamic radicalization has become a major concern for every citizen of the world in this day and age. The acts of terror has perpetrated across the borders of nations and caused global unrest, fear and uncertainty. The recent terrorist attacks at Paris brought our attention once again to radical Islam and terrorism. People from different parts of life have become more curious as to whether Islam is the source of these violent attacks or is it the marginal groups who misinterpret it, in spite of the majority of Muslims who oppose them. Terrorism is a crime against humanity and it does not belong to any religion although Islam and terrorism have been used as synonymies by some scholars and media groups. The phrase 'Islamic terror' is an insult to Muslims all over the world for they denounce all forms of terrorism and condemn it with a strong language. Indeed, some radical groups utilize this approach to encourage some ignorant youths to join them. It is imperative that we make a stand against all forms of terror by promoting the views of moderate Islamic scholars. In this essay, we examine terror, its definition and Islamic perspective on terror on the basis of primary sources; interpretation of Islam by radical groups and their contradictions; the status of terrorists in Islam; the notion of jihad in Islam and it's misinterpretation by extreme groups, Islamic radicalization and its analyses. We discuss these issues from the perspective of Fethullah Gulen, prominent contemporary scholar. The essay concludes with a need for moderate Muslim scholars who advocate universal human values, democracy and dialogue amongst different cultures, faiths and ethnic groups to promote world peace. Fethullah Gulen is an Islamic thinker, community leader and social advocate who dedicated his life to dialogue and mutual respect amongst different cultures and religions to promote world peace and universal human values. Due to his great effect on people, he was named as one of Time Magazine's 100 most influential people in the world in 2013 and was also recognized as a scholar who preaches a message of tolerance in global scale. The Economist described him as 'a farm boy on the world stage'.

Keywords: Islamic Radicalization, Terror, ISIS, Jihad, Global Terrorism.

1. Islamic radicalization and Global Terrorism

In recent years, terror groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS have started to threaten world peace by conducting the most evil attracts and murdering. There are many forms of Islamic radicalism in terrorist groups and they use various methods to achieve their goals. Religion is one of the bases that radical groups attract new members and use them in their evil acts.

Although there is neither an academic nor an international legal consensus regarding the definition of the term 'terrorism' it can be defined as acts of violence committed by a person or a group who view themselves as victims of a historical wrong doing and hence stage unexpected attacks on civilian targets, including embassies and airliners, with the aim of causing major destruction. Radicalization is a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or reject and/or undermine contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice. In Islamic history, many radical groups appeared and killed innocent people in the name of religion.

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For example, the sect Khawarij which literally meaning those who strayed from the righteous path was an extremist Muslim group who employed Islamic arguments in an attempt to maximize their appeal to segments of the greater Muslim population.[2]The extreme sect that is rooted in Islamic tradition and known for its religious fanaticism divided the world into believers and non-believers according to its false doctrines. If a person does not accept their radical approach, he/she was labelled as unbeliever (takfir) and was subject to death unless he/she repented.[3]

Initially, people of Khawarij supported the fourth Caliph Ali but later rejected him when he agreed to arbitrate rather than continue to fight against Mu'awiya –the first Caliph of the Umayyad dynasty and his followers. After separating from Ali, they eventually assassinated him, established a separate community, and engaged in many brutal terror activities. With their radical approach, they declared other Muslims to be unbelievers and therefore deemed worthy of death. In this way, they did not hesitate to kill Muslims including the Companions of the Prophet. They argued that people who committed major sins were subject to death unless they repented.[4]Similarly, ISIS and many other terrorist groups have adopted their radical approach and labelled other people unbeliever -including Muslims who do not share their thoughts and declared *jihad* against all.

Salafism, definition of Islamic belief in an absolutist and literalist manner, emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and advocated a return to the traditions of the devout ancestors.[5]The main theme in Salafism is an effort to return to the pristine fundamentals of faith. By advocating the study of texts in a more literal and traditional sense they adhere to the doctrines of Taymiyyah who called for a definition of Islamic belief in an absolutist and literalist manner after realizing the total decadence of the Abbasid caliphate in the thirteenth century. Salafism reacted to the Westernization of the Muslim world and emphasized the restoration of Islamic doctrines to the pure form on the basis of the Quran and Sunnah.

In its early stages, Salafism was a modernist and intellectual movement for it only aimed to assert the validity of Islam in modern times, prove its compatibility with reason and science, and legitimizes the acquisition of Western scientific and technological achievements.[6]However, it turned into political structure under the title of Wahhabism that emerged in the eighteenth century and was founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a Hanbali scholar, in Arabia. Wahhabism belongs to the category of movements that seek a return to a strict application of the Sharia (Islamic Legal System) while opposing both Western encroachment and the intellectual, artistic and mystical tradition of Islam itself, and all this in the name of an early puritan Islam considered to have been lost by later generations.[7]Nowadays, it is the most important source of inspiration in Saudi Arabia and there has been a close relation between the Saudi ruling family and the Wahhabi religious establishment.[8]

Like Salafism, Wahhabism proclaims monotheism as its primary doctrine but militancy and radicalization, both in the Wahhabi and Salafi doctrines begin to emerge in contemporary times. By the claim to return to the pristine fundamentals of faith, radical Islamic understanding has become attractive for many younger Muslims who live in the Western countries. Another reason that makes radicalism attractive them is a crisis of identity. Although they are born in the Western countries, they cannot identify themselves with their cultures and values. Probably, this is why many young Muslims from the Western countries have joined ISIS terrorist group in spite their brutal violence and evil crimes against all humanity.

2. Jihad in the Context of Radical Islam

Unfortunately, the Muslim world has been suffering from Western colonialism that started in the twentieth century.

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[2]Ansary, F. A., (2008), "*Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia's Approach.*" Middle East Policy, 15 (2): 111–142.

[3] Esposito,John L., (2002), *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam,*(pp. 41-42) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[4] Esposito, John L., (2003) *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[5]Kepel, Gilles, (2006)*Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

[6] Esposito,JohnL., (2003), *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam,*(p. 275) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[7]Antúneza, Juan Carlos and IoannisTellidisb, (2013) "*The power of words: the deficient terminology surrounding Islam-related terrorism*" Critical Studies on Terrorism, 6(1), 118–139.

[8] Blanchard, Christopher M, (2007) "*The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya*" (Washington, D.C. : Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

In order to protect their countries and natural resources against colonialism and its worst effects, Muslims have developed the notion of *jihad*. Muslim scholars have emphasized on this notion to encourage people to defend their countries. The word *jihad* has gained the meaning of 'war' while excluding others. Additionally, radical groups have misinterpreted the wars during the period of the Prophet, the Four Righteous Caliphs and their successors by removing them from their historical contexts and approaching them from their extremist perspective. This understanding and the idea of resistance against western forces in Islamic lands have caused some ignorant minds to be radicalized and terrorized.

Today, while committing acts of terrorism against civilians and innocent people, radical terrorist groups have started to use the notion of *jihad* to veil their evil crimes. Although such acts are completely at odds with Islam's basic principles, the claims of their perpetrators have led many ill-informed Westerners to understand *jihad* as encompassing indiscriminate acts of violence in the name of Islam.[9]Muslims and none-Muslims agree in condemning the terrorists in the strongest terms but western scholars and media failed to question their interpretation of Islamic concepts. Using Islamic terminology ignorantly serve the purposes of terrorism because it decreases the gap between the marginal terrorist groups and majority of Muslims. It also reinforces the symbiotic relationship between Islam phobia and radicalization.[10]

The impression made in the West by ISIS and al-Qaeda-style terrorism has led western people to new extremes of misunderstanding about Islam and *jihad*. For example, the American Wesleyan pastor James L. Garlow holds that *jihad* can be something as violent as killing those who do not believe in Islam and attacking in the name of Allah – including such things as kidnappings and bombings.[11]

In order to protect one's faith, person, family, property and land against aggressors, Muslims can resort to physical force but it is one of the many meanings of *jihad*. However, declaring a war against enemy can only be doneby a government and if individuals or groups resort such method, it is considered as terror and Islam applies the severest punishment to prevent it. Prominent Islamic scholar and community leader Fethullah Gulen argues that no Muslim can approve of any terrorist activity and terror has no place in a quest to achieve independence or salvation for it takes the lives of innocent people.[12]He brings some evidences from the Qur'an to support his view;

He who kills a soul unless it be (in legal punishment) for murder or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth will be as if he had killed all humankind; and he who saves a life will be as if he had saved the lives of all humankind.[13] Even when Muslims have to resort war to defend their country, Prophet Muhammad brought many limitations to war even if it is for a just cause;

Do not betray, inflict injustice, plunder, or defile the bodies; do not kill children, the elderly, or women, do not cut down the date orchards or burn them. Do not cut down trees that bear fruit. Do not kill sheep, cattle, or camels unless it is for food. You may come across people who have retreated into monasteries on your way; do not touch them or interfere with their worship….[14]

Gulen maintains that such commandments are the historical records that warn the heads of states against any kind of injustice and reminds them that they will be taken to account in the Judgment Day for their acts.[15]However, extreme groups find young minds and radicalize them to employ their terrorist agenda. While imposing their extreme ideas, they misinterpret the Qur'an and Sunnah by their partial approach and disconnecting religious texts from their context. Moreover, they use Islamic concepts such as *jihad* to mask their terrorist actions and increase the support of the general Muslim population.

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[9]Kurucan, Ahmet &Erol, Mustafa Kasim, (2012) *Dialogue in Islam*, London: Great Britain.

[10] Abbas, T., (2012), "*The Symbiotic Relationship between Islamophobia and Radicalisation*" in Critical Studies on Terrorism, 5 (3): 345–358.

[11]Garlow, James, (2002),*A Christian's Response to Islam*, (Oklahoma: River Oak Publishing.

[12] Gulen, Fethullah, (2006), *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, New Jersey: The Light.

[13] Qur'an 5: 32.

[14] Ibn Athīr, (1968),*Usd al-Ghaba*(Lions of Frost), (2/335), Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabi.

[15]Sevindi, Nevval, (2002),*Fethullah Gülen'le Global Hosgoruve New York Sohbetleri* (Interview with Fethullah Gulen on Global Peace), (pp. 28-29), Istanbul: Timas.

This is one of Al-Qaeda and ISIS's main goals and, in order to achieve it, terrorist propaganda resortsto terminology that appears in different periods of Islamic history and with which a vast part of the Muslim population is familiar, such as Umma (the global Muslim community), Sharia (Islamic legal system) or *jihad*.[16] Social media is their instrument of exchanging and transmitting their radical ideas at the global level and thereby aiding in creating new radical identities and imaginaries.[17]Therefore, the internet is a means of diffusion and globalization of salafist-jihadist ideology.[18]

Another factor that radical terrorist groups utilize to attract new people is the language that media and politicians use. Western depictions of Islam are a monolithic; they describe Islam as a religion of violence and terror. Such description affects the security practices in western countries[19] and this opens a new opportunity for radical groups to attract oppressed Muslims to their sides. Due to their misunderstandings and ignorance, they fear from Islam and its followers for they see them as a threat to their most basic values. Radical terrorist groups utilize the misconceptions that Muslims have -reacting to the perceived hate and fear of non-Muslims-and build up terrorist acts within the frame of defensive posture. Nevertheless, rather than targeting the few individuals that flirt and engage with radicalism, counter-radicalization policies have had the effect of targeting and victimizing entire communities, becoming counter-productive.[20]

When examining primary Islamic sources, Muslims are forbidden to declare the excommunication of others, as such an act would turn against themselves. Gulen emphasizes on this point and brings evidences from primary Islamic sources to support his arguments. For example, Prophet Muhammad said; "any person who calls his brother as 'O unbeliever' (has in fact done an act by which this unbelief) would return to one of them. If it were so, as he asserted (then the unbelief of man was confirmed but if it was not true), then it returned to him (to the man who labeled it on his brother Muslim)."[21]Although Prophet Muhammad warned Muslims stating, 'insulting a Muslim is an evil action and fighting him/her is disbelief'[22] radical groups ignored this type of clear religious text and used others that support their aims when used disconnected from their actual context.

The aggression of radical groups towards Muslim countries that co-operated with Western governments attracts ignorant minds who suffered much from western colonialization. Using their hatred against the West, they spread out the radical ideas among the non-extremist segments of the Muslim population. The approach in the Western countries to all Muslims as terrorist is not only offensive and insulting to the majority of Muslim believers but also is a great opportunity for the radical Islamic groups to use it to justify their terrorist activities. Additionally, because of such approach, many Muslims who live in western countries have become the targets of attacks by non-Muslim. Therefore, "Islamic terrorism" is false and provocative term. Muslims reject this term for it is against the spirit and meaning of Islam. Indeed, employing this term is very dangerous and against the West for it reinforces the idea that the West is an implacable enemy of Islam. Contrary to stereotypes, Islam advocates numerous non-violent and peace building values and expects Muslims to abide and live by them much like Christian doctrine.[23]There have been terror groups almost in every religion but this does not justify accepting that the followers of such religion are all together terrorists.

When examining the history of Islam, one will see that Islam does not teach Muslims to kill innocent people in the name of Allah (God). In the Qur'an and prophetic traditions there are many rules that put limits and invite Muslims to be just if they are forced by their circumstances and conditions to fight their enemies.

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[16]Antúneza, Juan Carlos and IoannisTellidisb, (2013) "*The power of words: the deficient terminology surrounding Islam-related terrorism*" Critical Studies on Terrorism, 6(1), 118–139.

[17]Orhan, Mehmet, (2010), "*Al-Qaeda: Analysis of the Emergence, Radicalism, and Violence of a Jihadist Action Group in Turkey*", Turkish Studies, 11 (2), 143-161.

[18] Dominique Thomas, '*The Role of Internet in Diffusion of The Salafist Doctrine*' in Bernard Rougier (ed.), *What is Salafism?* (pp. 87-102) Paris: PUF.

[19] Please see Leeuwen, Van, T., (2008)*Discourse and Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[20]Antúneza, Juan Carlos and IoannisTellidisb, (2013) "*The power of words: the deficient terminology surrounding Islam-related terrorism*" Critical Studies on Terrorism, 6 (1), 118–139.

[21] Muslim,ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, (1996), *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, Delhi India: Adam Publishers, (chapter iman: 26).

[22] Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, (chapter Iman: 28).

[23]Antúneza, Juan Carlos and IoannisTellidisb, (2013) "*The power of words: the deficient terminology surrounding Islam-related terrorism*" Critical Studies on Terrorism, 6(1), 118–139.

Islam has always favored defense over offence and the importance of mercy towards enemies, therefore Fethullah Gülen has repeatedly stated that "a real Muslim" who understood Islam in every aspect could not be a terrorist.[24]He stressed on the fact that terrorism must be condemned without any excuses. He even labelled the suicide bombers as the companions of hellfire. However, religious extremists are ignorant of their faith, therefore they have hijacked Islam just as it has periodically occurred with Christianity and other religions throughout history.[25]

According to the US National Counterterrorism Center, in cases where the religious affiliation of terrorism casualties could be determined, Muslims suffered between 82 and 97 percent of terrorism-related fatalities over the past five years.[26]The analysis of this data manifests that mostly Muslims are the victims of radical groups and Islamic countries suffer from them most.

Radicalism or fundamentalism is not only the problem of Islam; rather it has emerged and consolidated in many of the world's major religions.[27]Although Fundamentalism and Islamism have become synonyms in contemporary usage fundamentalism is a more conservative subset of Islamism.[28]Simply, While Muslims follow the tenants of Islam that are established by primary sources -the Qur'an and Sunnah (Prophetic Traditions)- without resorting any violence, fundamentalists interpret these sources in the direction of their political agendas and often resort terror to actualize these objectives.

Nowadays, Radical groups use some Islamic concepts to attract the vast majority of Muslim populations. For example, ISIS terror group has been using the concept of '*jihad*' in their campaign and promote their radical approach as "strive in the way of Allah."With this deceptive usage, they not only intent to justify their evil actions, but also to obtain the support of pious Muslims all over the world. Parallel to this, many Western authors have used this concept in the meaning of 'holy war."[29]With this approach, knowingly or unknowingly they have supported the campaign of radical groups. For example, Bernard Lewis argues that, "the overwhelming majority of classical theologians, jurists, and traditionalists understood the obligation of *jihad* in a military sense".[30]

However, Gulen opposes his opinion and explains its various meanings in different contexts. On the basis of primary Islamic sources, he defines *jihad* as one's struggling against all destructive emotions such as rancor, hatred, jealousy, arrogance, pride, self-love, egotism and the evil-commanding self.[31] In Prophetic traditions, *jihad* is conceptualized in social context; a person who works for the good of widows and the helpless is like those who fight in the name of God.[32]Another form of *jihad* in prophetic tradition is speaking truth to a despotic and tyrannical ruler's face.[33]*Jihad* also has a social and intellectual dimension in the context of exerting conscience and reason to derive a legal ruling from the sources which is called *ijtihād*.[34]Although the word *jihad* and its conjugations are repeated some 34 times in the Qur'an, only four of these usages refer directly to war.[35] Within a context of fight, *jihad* is used in the meaning of just war against oppression and persecution in Islamic literature.

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[24]Saritoprak,Zeki, (2005), "*Fethullah Gulen´s Thoughts on State, Democracy, Politics, Terrorism.*" The Muslim World, 95 (3): 325–471.

[25]Ramsbotham, O., T. Woodhouse, and H. Miall, (2011),*Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts,* (pp. 339-345) Malden, MA: Polity Press.

[26] NCTC (National Counterterrorism Center)(2012), Country Reports on Terrorism: Annex of Statistical Information, July 31.Washington, DC: Office of the Coordinator for Coutnerterrorism. (July 31 2012).

[27] Armstrong, Karen, (2001), *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Glasgow: Harper Collins.

[28]Fuller, Graham, (2003)*The Future of Political Islam,*(p. 48) London: Palgrave MacMillan.

[29]Wagemakers, Joas, (2011), "*Protecting Jihad: The Sharia Council of the Minbar Al-TawhidWa-L-Jihad.*" Middle East Policy, 18 (2): 148–162.

[30]Lewis,Bernard, (1998)*The Political Language of Islam*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[31]Gülen, Fethullah, (1998) *AsrınGetirdiğiTereddütler* (Questions and Answers about Islam), (3/26) İzmir: Nil Yayınları.

[32]Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma'il,(1997), *Saḥıḥ al-Bukhari*, Riyadh: Darussalam Pub. & Distr.,(chapter Nafaqat: 1)

[33]Abu Dawud, Sulayman ibn al-Ash'ath, (1984), *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf,(chapter Melāhim: 17).

[34]Kurucan, (2012).

[35]Karlığa, Bekir (2004), 'Religion, Terror, War, and the Need for Global Ethics', in *An Islamic Perspective: Terror and Suicide Attacks*, (p. 39) New Jersey: Light.

However, Western uses of the term usually undermine counter-terrorist, counter-extremist and anti-radicalization efforts by accepting and reinvigorating the legitimacy that the extremists want to ascribe to the term.[36]Islam is not in any sense, a violent religion. However, the mixture of religion and politics has too often resulted in violence against innocent victims.[37]Radical groups have managed to deceive some Muslim minds with the idea of West-East confrontation. In order to convince them, they employed a conspiracy theory against the Islamic religion and way of life. Indeed, in certain degree they succeeded in their manipulative war propaganda against the West for people in Muslim countries are mostly poor peasants who have little religious knowledge.

In modern time, neo Khārijite terrorist groups have been using the notion of *takfir* (accusing someone with disbelief) and with this manipulative approach, they justify the murder of innocent people. A great number of Islamic scholars and majority of Muslim believers consider ISIS as terrorist group and their activities as evil crime against all humanity. Similarly, majority of Muslims deem ISIS and other similar terror groups against Muslims at first place for a vast majority of victims of terror are Muslims. Therefore, In order to win the battle against all radical and terrorist groups, the Western countries should incorporate Islamic understandings and traditions surrounding the explanation of the phenomenon instead of adopting overly simplistic and, in some cases, purposefully misguiding approach towards Islam and terror. Now, the article will provide Gulen's views on terror and Islamic radicalization so readers can see how they are opposite to each other.

3. Gulen's Statements on Recent Terror Attacks

Gulen deems terrorism as the greatest blow to peace, democracy, and humanity[38] and he always condemns any terrorist activity no matter by whom it is carried out or for what purpose it is done. He issues his statements in this regard on various media platforms. Upon the recent terrorist attack that took place in Paris, he stated;

I strongly condemn the terrorist attacks on French magazine Charlie Hebdo and in Paris suburbs. These revolting acts of terrorism are deplorable – they serve no purpose but to bring about destruction, sorrow and grief. I reiterate my condemnation of all forms of terror regardless of its perpetrators or their stated purposes. I share my deep condolences with the victims' families, loved ones and the people of France.[39]

Gulen sees radical groups a real threat for the entire world and therefore openly rejects their claims on the basis of primary Islamic sources. His statement on ISIS terror group was published in New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Wall Street Journal and Los Angeles Times on 22 August 2014. In his statement, he used very strong language to condemn their evil acts;

I deplore the brutal atrocities being committed by the ISIS terrorist group hiding behind a false religious rhetoric and join the people of conscience from around the world in calling for these perpetrators to immediately cease their cruel and inhuman acts. Any form of attack, suppression or persecution of minorities or innocent civilians is an act that contradicts the principles of the Qur'an and the tradition of our Prophet upon whom be peace and blessings. ISIS members are either completely ignorant of the spirit of Islam and its blessed messenger, or their actions are designed to serve their individual interests or those of their political masters. Regardless, their actions represent those of a terrorist group and they should be labelled as such and be brought to justice.[40] Gulen published very strong condemnation message when September 11 terror attack happened in USA. He deemed the terror attack as the most bloody, condemnable one, and an assault against world peace as well as against universal democratic and humanistic values.[41] He stated that those who perpetrated this atrocity can only be considered as being the most brutal people in the world.[42]

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[36]Antúneza, Juan Carlos and IoannisTellidisb, (2013) "*The power of words: the deficient terminology surrounding Islam-related terrorism*" Critical Studies on Terrorism, 6(1), 118–139.

[37]Combs, Cindy C, (1997),*Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, New Jersey: Person Prentice Hall.

[38] Gulen, Fethullah, (2006), *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, (New Jersey: The Light.

[39]Gulen, Fethullah, (2014) Statement on Paris attacks,http://fgulen.com/en/press/messages/47207-fethullah-gulen-statement-on-paris-attacks. (February 24 2015).

[40]Gulen, Fethullah, (2014), ISIS Cruelty Deserves Our Strongest Condemnation,http://www.fethullah-gulen.org/news/gulen-isis.html. (February 24 2015).

[41] Gulen, (2006).

[42] Gulen, (2006).

He argues that killing a human is an act that is equal in gravity to not believing in God, therefore no one can give a fatwa (a legal pronouncement in Islam, issued by a religious law specialist, concerning a specific issue) in this matter. In his view, Islam has always respected different ideas but some religious leaders misinterpreted Islam and misled ignorant people. He stresses upon the true methods to attain faith and states that just as a goal must be legitimate, so must all the means employed to reach that goal. He holds that one cannot achieve Heaven by murdering another person. For him, individuals or groups cannot declare war, if they do, it is considered as an act of terror. War is only declared by an official government to defend their country against all kind of attacks.

4. Violence is a Disease

Gülen deems violence as a disease that can be observed in every corner of the world.[43] Every kind of murder is accursed no matter who commits it. Terror cannot be rationalized on any basis. Insulting Islamic values does not legitimize the murder, therefore Muslims cannot support any terror activity in their heart. Gulen argues that it is antithetical to the creed and conduct of a believer to say, "so-and-so was an enemy of religion, of faith, of Islam, of the Qur'an; it is good that he was killed, for he deserved it anyway".[44]Gulen believes that life is scared trust and it is necessary to protect all living creatures. His view on life and its value can be understood better from his following statements;

In my lifetime, I have never deliberately and knowingly stepped on even an ant. I did not see or speak to a friend of mine for months, for breaking the backbone of a snake. I have believed in the rights of every living being, that all of them have a place in the ecosystem. I have stated that we have no right or authority to harm a living being. It is a fact that the most honorable and most sacred of all creatures is the human being. I have repeatedly stated that those who murder under these pretexts or intentions cannot enter Paradise, and cannot be considered Muslims. This is not my personal opinion. It is the voice, expression, and breath of the ethos of Islam; this belief is part of our nature.[45]

It is antithetical to the core of Islam to use various pretexts and distortion of religious texts to justify acts of terrorism. He argues that Muslims must strongly oppose terrorism for the Qur'an equates the murder of one person to disbelief; Whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense (in the Hereafter) is Hell, therein to abide; and God has utterly condemned him, excluded him from His mercy, and prepared for him a tremendous punishment.[46]

In order to support his view, Gulen brings the statement of the famous Qur'anic exegete 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas on this verse;for him, the repentance of those who kill a believer purposefully will be denied, and they will be doomed to eternal Hell.[47]Gulen concludes that considering the life of human kind is the most honorable, Islam regulated many rulings to protect it against any kind of violence and harm.

5. Jihad from Gulen's Perspective

According to Gülen, numerous Islamic concepts, including *jihad*, have been misunderstood, due to a disconnect with their traditional, historical meanings, and due to their willful misrepresentation by some misguided Muslims and others who have a vested interest in Islam being misunderstood.[48]For example, one of the most influential Orientalists of the twentieth century, Joseph Schacht, misunderstood *jihad*. He argues that the basis of the Islamic attitude towards unbelievers is the law of war; they must be either converted or subjugated or killed (excepting women, children and slaves).[49] Derived from the root j-h-d, jihad means using all one's strength, as well as moving toward an objective with all one's power and strength and resisting every difficulty.[50]

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[43]Gülen, Fethullah,(2005), *KirikTesti 4: UmitBurcu* (Broken Pitcher, vol. 4: The Constellation of Hope),(p. 207) Istanbul: GazetecilerveYazarlarVakfi.

[44]Gülen, (2005).

[45]Ergil, Doğu,(2012), *Fethullah Gülen&TheGülen Movement in 100 Questions*,(pp. 93-95), New York: Blue Dome Press.

[46] Qur'an 4: 93.

[47]Al-Tabarī, Ibn Jarir, (1954),*Jami al-Bayan an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an* (Comprehensive Explanation on Interpretation of the Qur'anic Verses), (4/295) Egypt: Dār al-Maʿārif.

[48]Ergil, (2012).

[49]Schacht, Joseph, (1964),*An Introduction to Islamic Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[50]Ibn Manzur, Muhammad Ibn Mukarram, (2000)*Lisan al-Arab*, (3/133) Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.

In Islamic literature, it has been defined as 'learning, teaching and implementing religious commands, commanding good and forbidding evil, struggling against the ego's desires.[51] Struggling (jihad) can be done in the form of internal and external according to Gulen; the effort to attain one's essence can be evaluated in the external form while the process of enabling someone else to attain his or her essence in the category of external *jihad*.[52] Gulen holds that the internal *jihad* is the greatest one for it is based on overcoming obstacles between oneself and his/her essence, and the soul's reaching knowledge and eventually divine knowledge, divine love, and spiritual bliss.[53]He argues that the second is based on removing obstacles between people and faith so that people can have a free choice to adopt a way.[54]

Since *jihad* is defined by Gulen as struggling in the path of God, all efforts made to reform family, society and people can be included in his definition. In true sense, *jihad* is conducted against one's ego and carnal desires. Believers find inner peace and vitality in struggling against their negative sides of ego. For Gulen, there are as many roads to God as there are creatures and God leads those who strive for His sake to salvation on one or more of these roads.[55]Through inner struggling, people follow middle and balanced way regarding their anger, intelligence and lust. Therefore Gulen holds that the greater *jihad* is proclaiming war on ego's destructive and negative emotions and thoughts (e.g.,malice, hatred, envy, selfishness, pride, arrogance, and pomp), which prevent people from attaining perfection.

Islam aims to stop war, terror, injustice and anarchy therefore allows war as the last resort to stop disorder, oppression, and mischief. Islam allows Muslims to fight in particular situations; however, it is temporary and the last solution. Peace is essential in Islam. The Qur'an places great emphasis on the virtue of peace[56] and does not permit anyone to respond to an evil deed with one which is worse.[57]Even in an atmosphere in which two armies have fought against each other and blood has been spilled, if the enemy forgoes fighting and wants to make a treaty, then the Muslims are commanded not to react emotionally, but to make a treaty, putting their trust in God.[58]War is justified only to prevent chaos, anarchy, and mischief; "disorder (rooted in rebellion against God and recognizing no laws) is worse than killing."[59]

Islam aims to protect the right of religion, life, property, progeny, and intellect. God states in the Qur'an;

O you who believe! Be upholders and standard-bearers of right for God's sake, being witnesses for (the establishment of) absolute justice. And by no means let your detestation for a people (or their detestation for you) move you to (commit the sin of) deviating from justice. Be just: this is nearer and more suited to righteousness and piety.[60]

6. Holy War

There is no notion of 'holy war' in Islam and if a Muslim country is secure, war is not permissible. Therefore, it is not legitimate to declare war against any people only on the basis of their disbelief[61]for there is no compulsion in Islam. Consequently, to talk about fighting or conflict is completely contrary to the basic spirit of a religion that enjoins treaties and reconciliation, not only in time of peace, but even during wartime.[62] Gulen believes that some evil people, groups or terrorist organizations instigate ignorant people who do not know the true criteria of their religion and who act on emotions and chauvinism and manipulate them for their wicked purposes. It is a reality that some people living in Islamic countries are not moderate Muslims with a balanced way of thinking and sufficient knowledge of their own sources. For this reason, he argues that it is not wise to blame other side (the West) before recognizing the problems within Islamic societies.

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[51]Al-Jassās,Abu Bakr al-Rāzī, (1978), *Kitāb al-Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, (3/208) Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī.
[52] Gulen, Fethullah, (2006)*Essays, Perspectives, Opinions*, New Jersey: The Light.
[53] Gulen, (2006).
[54] Gulen, (2006) p. 62.
[55] Gulen, (2006) p. 63.
[56] Qur'an 4:128.
[57] Qur'an 41: 34.
[58] Gulen, (2006), p. 176.
[59] Qur'an 2: 191.
[60] Qur'an 5: 8.
[61]Bulaç, Ali, (2004),*'Jihad',* in *An Islamic Perspective: Terror and Suicide Attacks*, (p. 56), New Jersey: Light.
[62] Gulen, (2006).

In this regard, he argues that if one lacks sound knowledge along with bravery, the bravery can lead these ignorant people to such insanity and terrorist acts that it will not be possible to rectify the mistakes they make. He states that no period of Islam witnessed the like of today's atrocities, committed so-called in the name of religion by committing suicide attacks, resulting in mass murders of women, elderly, children, and all.[63]

He severely condemns terrorist people who use vehicles loaded with bombs and kill innocent people in the name of Islam. For him, this is completely against the message of the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet andsuch events truly embarrasses and grieves Muslims.[64]He maintains that Muslims must always act in compliance with the principles of Islam, no matter what the circumstances are and never forget that lawful ends must only be sought through lawful means.[65]Killing innocent people is a grave sin in Islam, therefore Imam Abu Ḥanīfa (669-767 CE), the founder of Ḥanafī school of thought ruled that it is not lawful to march upon a group of people if their intention is not known.[66]

Gulen argues that Prophet Muhammad was the man of love and peace and his mission was to communicate the faith as he had been enjoined by God, therefore, he visited the most hard-hearted unbelievers many times without displaying any resentment.[67] He wanted all people should be able to feel Paradise in their hearts by inviting them to the faith; 'pronounce there is no deity but God and be saved.'[68]In order to support his argument Gulen mentions the conquest of Makka by the Prophet and his attitude towards his enemies. People of Makka persecuted Muslims for long time and killed some but now they were defeated and in fear. However, the Prophet gathered them and addressed them as follows;

I say to you as Joseph (Prophet) once said to his brothers. There is no blame for the actions that you have performed before. God will forgive you, too. He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful. Go, you are all free.[69] He forgave them all even his bitterest enemies and did not force them to accept Islam. He left them free to choose whatever they could believe. Another time, he raised his hands to pray for those who stoned him, broke his teeth, wounded his cheek, and caused his head to be covered in blood: "My God, grant guidance to my people, for they do not know!"[70]When we examine the evil acts of ISIS, it is clear that there is no connection or similarity between their horrible crimes and the noble act of the Prophet. Therefore, the terrorist groups who use Islamic concepts such as *jihad* to attract young minds delude people and blacken the bright face of Islam.

In order to stop their delusions, there is an unquestionable need for a true leader who is able to fulfill the hope and aspirations of individuals, groups of followers and communities, whilst respecting the followers of other faiths, people of diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds.[71] In this regard, Gulen and his followers showed remarkable creativity and activism with regard to interfaith dialogue in world politics, establishing over 50 interfaith centers in the United States alone.[72] For Gulen, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and even Hinduism and other world religions, accept the same divine source for themselves, and they, with the nontheistic religions such as Buddhism, 'pursue the same goal'.[73]

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[63]Gulen, Fethullah, (2014)Weekly Lectures, http://www.herkul.org/weekly-sermons/the-grave-consequence-of-murders-committed-under-the-guise-of-religion-2/(February 24, 2015).

[64] Gulen, Fethullah, (2014) Weekly Lectures, http://www.herkul.org/weekly-sermons/the-grave-consequence-of-murders-committed-under-the-guise-of-religion-1/(February 24, 2015).

Gulen, (2014).

[66]Al-Marghinani, Abū Bakr, (2007), *Al-Hidaya*, (2/170–171) Karachi: DarulIshaat.

[67] Gulen, (2006) p. 176.

[68]Ibn Kathīr, (2003) *al-Bidāyawa'l-Nihāya* (Beginning and End),(3/62-63) Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya.

[69]'Irāqī, 'Abdal-Raḥīm b.al-Ḥusayn, (2011),*al-MughnianHaml a-Asfar* (Abundant Source from Loads of Books), (3/179), Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī.

[70]QadiIyad, (1972), *Al-Shifa*, (1/105), Damascus: Dar al-Wafalil-Ṭibaʿahwa-'al-Nashr.

[71]Dogan, Recep, (2014), "*Conflict Resolution Forms in the Life of Prophet Muhammad*", The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society, 4 (2), 9-19.

[72]TuranKayaoglu, (2012), "*Constructing the dialogue of civilizations in world politics: a case of global Islamic activism*", Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, 23 (2), 129-147.

[73] Gulen, Fethullah, (2000) *Advocate of dialogue*, (ed. Ali Unal and Alphonse Williams), (Fairfax, VA: Fountain Press.

He argues that no divine religion has ever been based on conflict, whether it be the religions represented by Moses and Jesus, or the religion represented by Muhammad.[74]Gulen disagrees with Huntington who predicted the clashes among civilizations. He believes that the breeze of tolerance and dialogue will continue to blow and it is powerful enough to overwhelm lethal weapons, to subdue mechanized military units and much of any other negativity that may arise.[75]He predicts that if tolerance and dialogue is represented in the best possible way it will encourage people to come together, to gather round the same basic human values and humankind will live one more spring before seeing the end of the world.[76]

7. Conclusion

Terror and Islamic radicalization are once again threaten the world peace. In order to win the war against terrorist groups, the West should utilize the opportunity of promoting moderate Islamic understanding. In this regard, Fethullah Gulen is prominent Islamic thinker and very effective community leader. He inspires moderate Islam to millions all over the globe. His views on terror can be summarized as follows;

In true Islam, terror does not exist. A Muslim cannot kill another human being, nor could he touch an innocent person, even in time of war. Since Islam never permits any terrorist activity, Muslim scholars must be very careful on this matter and no one give a fatwa (a legal verdict) nor are they are lenient to terrorists. In this regard, a suicide bombing is forbidden in Islam, even in the event of war Islam does not permit it. Anyone who kills him/herself and other innocent people in suicide bombing goes to hell.

Islam has always respected different ideas and this must be understood for it to be appreciated properly. Gulen argues that in the countries Muslims live, some religious leaders and immature Muslims have no other weapon on hand than their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam; they use this to engage people in struggles that serve their own purposes.[77]He holds that Islam is a true faith and on the way to attaining faith one can never use untrue methods therefore one cannot achieve Heaven by murdering another person. He stressed on the fact that the most important goal for a Muslim is to win the pleasure of God and it cannot be won by killing people.

Gulen points out how terror groups find supporters for themselves; dissatisfied youth has lost their spirituality and some people take advantage of them by using them as murderers on the pretext of some crazy goals. Indeed, killing a human is a truly awful thing and the Qur'an says that killing one person is the same as killing all people therefore a murderer will stay in Hell for eternity. He suggests that if this is a fundamental principle of religion, then it should be taught in education.

He maintains that true Muslims will never involve themselves in terrorist activities because the real factors behind terrorism are worldly advantages and self-interests. However, problems such as anti-democratic practices and human rights violations have resulted in the foundation of various disaffected and disenfranchised groups and these ignorant people have been manipulated and used by terrorist groups to achieve their goals. Moreover, they have based all of their efforts on destruction and the creation of fear in society and agitated the unhappy segments of society by stirring up trouble and fomenting violence.

Gulen holds that terrorism is ugly in its nature and it must be addressed with a great deal of consideration. Governors and responsible officers should try very hard to find the motivating factors for radicals and stop them; otherwise, some civilizations, nations and civic organizations will be always under threat. He believes that in order to eliminate terror once and for all, the real reasons behind terror must be discovered and the whole world sincerely take action against them.

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[74] Gulen, (2006) p. 256.
[75] Gulen, (2006) p. 257.
[76] Gulen,(2006).
[77]Gulen, Fethullah, (2005), *An Interview with Fethullah Gülen*, (Translated by ZekiSaritoprak and Ali Ünal), The Muslim World, 95 (3), 466.

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