

IS TERROR INTRINSIC TO ISLAM?

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The Islamic State and the broader jihadist movements throughout the world that agree with it are, I think, correct in their basic understanding of Islam.

Islam has no central or definitive body or figure authorized to define what exactly it is. Opinions about its essence and scope vary widely according to the political or philosophic background of its own interpreters. The current effort to establish an Islamic State, with a designated Caliph, again to take up the mission assigned to Islam, brings to our attention the question: "What is Islam?"

The issue of "terror" is a further aspect of this same understanding. Many outside Islam seek to separate "terror" and "Islam" as if they were, in their usage, independent or even opposed ideas. This latter view is almost impossible seriously to maintain in the light of Islamic history and the text of the Qur'an itself.

John Kerry, however, insists that what we see is "terrorism" with nothing to do with Islam. The Obama administration seems to have a rule never to identify Islam with "terrorism," no matter what the evidence or what representatives of the Islamic State themselves say. The vice-president speaks of "Hell" in connection with actions of the Islamic State. Diane Feinstein speaks of "evil" behind the current slaughters in Iraq and Syria. The pope mentions "stopping aggression." The English hate-laws prevent frank and honest discussion of what actually goes on in Islamic countries or communities in the West. Not even Winston Churchill's critical view of Islam is permitted to be read in public.

Ecumenism and liberalism both, in their differing ways, because of their commitment to tolerance and free speech, make it difficult to deal with what is happening in Islamic states. Islam is not friendly to relativism or to subtle distinctions.

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What I want to propose here is an opinion. An opinion is a position that sees the plausibility but not certainty of a given proposition. But I think this opinion is well-grounded and makes more sense both of historic and of present Islam than most of the other views that are prevalent. I do not conceive this reflection as definitive. Nor do I document it in any formal sense, though it can be. It is a view that, paradoxically, has, I think, more respect for Islam than most of its current critics or advocates.

This comment is an apologia, as it were, for the Islamic State at least in the sense that it accepts its sincerity and religious purpose. It understands how, in its own terms, the philosophic background that enhances its view does, in its own terms, justify its actions, including the violent ones.

The Islamic State and the broader jihadist movements throughout the world that agree with it are, I think, correct in their basic understanding of Islam. Plenty of evidence is found, both in the long history of early Muslim military expansion and in its theoretical interpretation of the Qur'an itself, to conclude that the Islamic State and its sympathizers have it basically right. The purpose of Islam, with the often violent means it can and does use to accomplish it, is to

extend its rule, in the name of Allah, to all the world. The world cannot be at "peace" until it is all Muslim. The "terror" we see does not primarily arise from modern totalitarian theories, nationalism, or from anywhere else but what is considered, on objective evidence, to be a faithful reading of a mission assigned by Allah to the Islamic world, which has been itself largely procrastinating about fulfilling its assigned mission.

To look elsewhere for an explanation is simply not to see what the Islamic State and its friends are telling us about why they act as they do. The tendency among pragmatic Western thinkers, locked into their own narrow views, is to exclude any such motivation as an excuse of raw power. This view shows the intellectual shortcomings of Western leaders and the narrowness of much Western thought.

Jihadism, as it were, is a religious movement before it is anything else. Allah does grant violence a significant place. It is over the truth of this position, or better the inability to disprove it, that the real controversy lies. A recent essay in the American Thinker calculated that over the years of its expansion, from its beginning in the seventh and eighth centuries, some 250 million people have been killed in wars and persecutions caused by Islam. Nothing else in the history of the world, including the totalitarianisms of the last century, has been so lethal.

If Islam is a religion of peace, what sort of peace does it bring?

Other understandings of Islam's record, though not its mission, within Islam may be also plausible, but no more so than this jihadist interpretation. It may be possible for some to read Islam as a religion of "peace." But its "peace," in its own terms, means the peace of Allah within its boundaries. With the rest of the outside world, it is at war in order to accomplish a religious purpose, namely, to have all submitted to Allah in the passive way that the Qur'an specifies.

Islam can at times be defeated or stopped, as at Tours or Vienna, but it will always rise again as it is now bent on so doing.; To picture the jihadists and leaders of the Islamic State as mere "terrorists" or thugs is to use Western political terms to blind ourselves to the religious dynamism of this movement. No wonder our leaders cannot or will not understand it. This purpose, when successful, is a terrible thing. But we are not seeing a group of gangsters, as many are wont to maintain. The roots of Islam are theological, rather bad theology, but still coherent within its own orbit and presuppositions.

Briefly put, Islam, in its founding, is intended to be, literally, the world religion. Nothing else has any standing in comparison. It is to bring the whole world to worship Allah according to the canons of the Qur'an. It is a belief, based on a supposed revelation to Mohammed, of which there is little evidence. Sufficient justification to expand this religion, once founded, to all the world by use of arms is found in the Qur'an and in its interpreters to explain the violent means used, often successfully, to establish, pacify, and rule tribes, states, territories, and empires.

In Muslim doctrine, everyone born into the world is a Muslim. No one has any right or reason not to be. Hence, everyone who is not a Muslim is to be converted or eliminated. This is also true of the literary, monumental, and other signs of civilizations or states that are not Muslim. They are destroyed as not authorized by the Qur'an.

It is the religious responsibility of Islam to carry out its assigned mission of subduing the world to Allah. When we try to explain this religion in economic, political, psychological, or other terms, we simply fail to see what is going on. From the outside, it is almost impossible to see how this system coheres within itself. But, granted its premises and the philosophy of voluntarism used to explain and defend it, it becomes much clearer that we are in fact dealing with a religion that claims to be true in insisting that it is carrying out the will of Allah, not its own.

If we are going to deal with it, we have to do so on those terms, on the validity of such a claim. The trouble with this approach, of course, is that truth, logos, is not recognized in a voluntarist setting. If Allah transcends the distinction of good and evil, if he can will today its opposite tomorrow, as the omnipotence of Allah is understood to mean in Islam, then there can be no real discussion that is not simply a temporary pragmatic stand-off, a balance of interest and power.

Whenever incidents of violence are witnessed in the Islamic world, or in other parts of the world caused by Islamic agents, we hear complaints that almost no Muslim voices rise to condemn this violence. When the original 9/11 happened, there was not condemnation coming from within Islam, but widespread celebration. Islam was seen as winning. But all Muslim scholars know that they cannot, on the basis of the Qur'an, condemn the use of violence to expand their religion.; There is simply too much evidence that this usage is permitted. To deny it would be to undermine the integrity of the Qur'an.

Obviously, the enemies of the Islamic State and its jihadist allies are not only the "Crusaders" or the West. Some of Islam's bloodiest wars were its invasion of Hindu India, where the tension remains marked. There are also Muslim efforts into China. The Philippines has a major problem as does Russia. But Islam wars with itself. The Sunni/Shiite struggles are legendary. It is important to note that one of the first things on the Islamic State's agenda, if it is successful in surviving, is to unite all of Islam in its creedal unity.

The unfinished business from Tours and Vienna

All existing Islamic states are some sort of compromise between the true Islamic mission and forces, usually military forces that limit this world-wide unification. Almost all standing Muslim governments recognize the danger to themselves of a successful Caliphate. They all have some form of jihadist presence within their boundaries that seek to control it in the name of their very survival. There are or were Christian and other minorities within these states that are, to a greater or lesser extent, tolerated. But they are all, as non-Muslims, treated as second-class citizens. The Islamic movement renews that purist side of Islam that insists in eradicating or expelling non-Muslim presences in Muslim lands.

The Archbishop of Mosul, on seeing his people exiled and killed, forced to choose between conversion and death, empathized that his buildings were destroyed, the archives and all record of the long Christian presence in that area destroyed. He warned that this form of treatment is what the nations of the West could expect sooner or later. There are now significant Muslim enclaves in every part of America and Europe to be of great concern as centers of future uprisings within each city. There are now thousands of mosques in Europe and America, financed largely by oil money, that are parts of a closed enclave that excludes local law and enforces Muslim law.

Yet, we can ask: is this Islamic State anything more than a pipe-dream? No Islamic state has any serious possibility of defeating modern armies. But, ironically, they no longer think that modern armies will be necessary. They are convinced that widespread use of terrorism and other means of civil disorder can be successful. No one really has the will or the means to control the destructive forces that the Islamic State already has in place.

The Islamic State strategists think it is quite possible to take another step in the expansion of Islam, to take up again the assault on Europe left off at Tours and Vienna. Muslim armies have always been known for cruelty and craftiness. Men often shrank in fear before its threat, as they are intended to do. A Muslim theoretician once remarked that their aim was to make the streets of Western cities look like those battlefields we see in the cities of the Middle East. Again with the suicide bomber and believers in their use, for which they are said to be "martyrs," this may be possible.

Finally, the case of the Islamic State and of the jihadists is not just a threat arising out of Islam's mission to conquer the world for Allah. It is also a moral case, that the life of the West is atheist and decadent. It does not deserve its prosperity and position. The mission of mankind is the submission to Allah in all things. Once this submission is in place, the sphere of war will be over. No more beheading or car-bombings will be necessary or tolerated. No dissent within Islam will be possible or permitted. All will be at peace under the law of Islam. This is the religious purpose of the Islamic State. It is folly to think of it in any other terms.

But with great opposition both from the West and from within Islamic states to this vision, is there any possibility of its success? Pat Buchanan thought that a group of Seals one of these days would eliminate the new Caliph. Existing Muslim government officials know that their days are numbered if the Islamic State succeeds. But, at the same time, this vision does seem to be the real impetus of the Islamic peoples.

It is easy to write this movement off as fanatical and ruthless, which it is. To the outside world, it sounds horrific, but I suspect not to those who believe its truth and see the current revival of Islam with relief. The second or third class ranking of Islam in the modern world is over. But to the degree that we misjudge what is motivating the renewal of Islam, we will never understand why it exists as it does.