In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

The Crotch Bomber

One of the most crucial issues that should engage our immediate attention and thoughtful consideration is to ascertain what goes on in the minds of those Muslim youth who not only profess and practice the ideology of extremism and terrorism, but also consider it to be a sacred religious duty. Hardly two weeks have passed when we learnt about the killing of Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Khan by the US forces in a drone attack in Yemen, allegedly for propagating and practicing terrorism.

Now we learn that a Nigerian youth by the name of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab who was indicted on eight charges for trying to blow up a Detroit-bound airplane on Christmas Day of 2009 has pleaded guilty to all eight charges including attempted murder. Admitting to his guilt, he said that he wanted to avenge the killing of Muslims worldwide by the United States. He said that the bomb was a “blessed weapon to save the lives of innocent Muslims” and that he wanted to retaliate against the United States for its support of Israel. He also said that “participation in jihad against the United States is considered among the most virtuous of deeds in Islam, and is highly encouraged in the Qur’an.”

Obviously Umar has a perverse understanding of the Qur’an. His failed attack meant to kill innocent people as well as himself is in clear violation of the Qur’an. The Qur’an clearly states that whoever kills an innocent soul has committed an act like murdering all of humanity. “…If anyone kills a person; unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land, it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind…” (al-Ma’idah,5:32). Some may argue that there are ayat in the Qur’an such as “Kill them wherever you encounter them, and drive them out from where they drove you out, for persecution is more serious than killing…”(al-Baqarah, 2:191), and “And We prescribed for them therein: The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and for wounds retaliation…”(al-Ma’idah, 5:45). But such divine commands have to be understood in the context of the times and circumstances in which they were revealed. If understood out of context, they will definitely lead to erroneous assumptions and conclusions.

While Umar’s angry outburst against the United States in the court is shared by many Muslim youth around the world, and rightly so, because of the unjustified and unwarranted brutal killing of innocent Muslims, and destruction of their lands and properties around the world, the sinister tactic adopted by him and other youth to give vent to their rage by trying to kill other innocent people on the pretext of fulfilling a religious obligation is not only an egregious act of extremism but also something that is highly deplorable and unacceptable, and way apart from the teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

Disenchanted and frustrated by injustice and oppression around them, whether it is in their own homelands or elsewhere, such youth become easy prey for pseudo-scholars. With their eloquent oratory and persuasive deviationist teachings, these so-called scholars ensnare these youth into thinking and believing that resorting to violence, in order to punish the unjust and the oppressor, even if it means killing innocent people in the process, is a religious duty. We learn from statements made by Umar that he was inspired by the lectures of Anwar al-Awlaki to do what he did. Some of the youth, because of their naiveté, start imbibing the thoughts instilled into them by fanatic individuals. These thoughts then crystallize into an ideology, which goes to convince the youth that their stand is correct, however, insane it may be. At this point, it is very difficult if not impossible to rehabilitate the youth toward the correct thinking. Parents, teachers, imams, and scholars have an onerous task of imparting correct Islamic teachings to the youth and seeing that they are not distracted by the malicious ideology of people of extremist mentality.

Almost certainly, one day Umar while serving his long sentence, and after mellowing down will realize that what he did was incorrect, and that his paying heed to the extremist discourse was wrong.

As of now, the Muslim world does not have a Caliph or a Collective Caliphate vested with powers to declare a collective action to be taken up by the ummah. As such it is nothing short of insanity to take recourse to violence individually or collectively at the behest of unauthentic preachers and self styled scholars. Such needless action is not only against the Islamic teachings and ethos, but also detrimental to the cause of Islam and Muslims.
We agree that our youth cannot take it any longer, especially after what the Muslims have gone through in the post 9/11 decade, and what they are undergoing now. The Qur’an says, “The believers are brothers…” (al-Hujurat, 49:10). The Prophet (SAW) described the ummah as one body, and said, “The likeness of believers in regard to mutual love, affection, and fellow-feeling is that of one body; when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches…” So if a Muslim anywhere in the world is hurt as a result of oppression and injustice, another Muslim is bound to feel the pain of that hurt and suffering.

However genuine the grievances of the youth may be, the reaction to those grievances by way of adopting extremism and terrorism has no legitimacy in our faith. This leaves us to reflect upon the question: What is the way to reconcile between what the Qur’an and the Sunnah advocate, and the reality on ground? Muslims look for solution to all problems in the model and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). This is because the Qur’an says, “Indeed in the Messenger of Allah, you have a good example to follow…” (Al-Ahzab, 33:21). We have to follow the prophetic methodology in all our pursuits.

How did the Prophet (SAW) and his noble companions respond when they were persecuted by the Quraish of Mecca just for saying, “Allah is our Lord.” They bore all the persecution including hunger, social boycott, harassment, beatings, and torture with admirable calm. Until the time they had migrated to Medina, and were given divine permission to fight in self-defense, and resist oppression, they displayed exemplary patience. They were not cowards, and could have defended themselves against their opponents, even during the Meccan period, but they submitted to the Prophet’s command to bear all adversities at that time with patience and fortitude. Why do we not pay attention to this phase of the Prophet’s sirah? People generally do not know that even during the ten years of his prophetic era after his emigration to Medina, the battles in which the Prophet (SAW) was personally engaged in did not total to more than six days. Even during the Medinan period, he always preferred peace and opted for it unless commanded through divine revelation to fight the unjust, the oppressors, and the aggressors. We know about the truce of Hudaibiyah signed between the Prophet (SAW) and the polytheists of Mecca. Even though the clauses of the treaty were clearly in favor of the disbelievers, yet Allah (SAW) calls this pact a clear victory for the Prophet (SAW). “Truly We have granted you a clear victory” (al-Fath, 48:1).

The way of militancy and violence never served our cause in the past, nor will it do so in the present or the future. The non-violent peaceful way of giving vent to one’s fury and frustration in the face of rampant oppression and injustice is to participate in peaceful protests and rallies and arouse the conscience of the masses. It is invariably the large but weak majority that gets crushed at the hands of a ruthless minority that has an insatiable appetite for power, prestige, and wealth. This is why the youth have now realized that their countries are not ruled by the collective will of the people but either by tyrants and despotic rulers or by an oligarchy, or a few corporations who exploit and impoverish the chunk of the population.

Allah (SWT) is well aware about the plots of the wicked, while they themselves may not be aware of the consequences of their evil schemes. “And likewise in every city We set up its greatest wrongdoers to plot in it. They plot against themselves alone, but they are not aware of it” (al-An’am, 6:123). Moreover, the Qur’an also says, “…They were plotting and Allah was plotting, but Allah is the best of Plotters” (al-Anfal, 8:30). We see the plots of the plotters turning against them. The peaceful protests by the youth in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries to show their displeasure of corrupt regimes and their success in overthrowing them have been exported to other countries. We have now begun to see a glimpse of it in America too. What is ‘Occupy Wall Street?’ It is an outburst against recession, unemployment, outsourcing, senseless spending in unwarranted wars, plunging of the US Dollar with no gold reserve to support it, the humungous gap between the 1 % filthy rich and the remaining 99% of the population including those below the poverty line, and above all a protest against the rapacious banking industry that has made hundreds of thousands of people homeless. And this appears to be just the tip of the iceberg.

We have to keep on doing our part and have implicit faith in Allah (SWT) who has made the Muslim ummah a just nation. “Thus We have made you a just nation that you may be a witness over mankind…” (al-Baqarah, 2:143). We have to enjoin good and forbid evil. “You are the best of the nations raised up for (the benefit of) men; you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and believe in Allah.” (Aal ‘Imran, 3: 110). We have to cooperate in all that is good and refuse to cooperate in all that is evil. “…Help you one another in virtue, but do not help one another in sin and transgression” (al-Ma’idah, 5:2).

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