

Bloodshed in the Month of Ramadan, or the Transnational Dimension of Jihadism

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The disquieting schism among Muslims, who are divided into those who interpret Islam as a religion of peace and those who view it as an ideology of war, is evident at any time including the month of Ramadan. At the beginning of the holy month, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, the spokesman of the Islamic State, declared via the IS-run broadcasting station *Al-Bayan* that jihad is the best way to get closer to God, and he announced that there would be attacks on “crusaders, Shiites, and apostates”. A couple of days later his words were put into practice by jihadists in several countries. In the Tunisian holiday resort of Sousse the student Seifeddine Rezgui shot and killed 38 people with an automatic rifle, and an attack on the Shiite Al-Imam al-Sadek mosque claimed 26 lives in Kuwait. In northern Syria IS troops launched attacks on Kobanê and other Kurdish towns, killing many women and children. And in France, in the vicinity of Lyon, the 35-year old Salafist Yessin Salhi (who was already known to the police) decapitated his boss but failed in his attempt to blow up the factory – with 43 workers in it – where he was employed. Four militant attacks in four countries, all driven by the same ideology. In all cases, the victims were people denounced as being “infidels”, on whom ‘open season’ in the literal sense was declared: Kurds, Shiites, and citizens of western nations.

Here in these parts, there is a tendency to attribute the radicalization of young Muslims to experiences of discrimination, Islamophobia, and socioeconomic marginalization. That is, the blame is not put on the perpetrators but on society. Viewed from a global perspective, the bloody Friday of the 2015 Ramadan shows that such patterns of explanation are at odds with reality. Kuwait is an Islamic nation with Sunnites making up 65% of the population. Marginalization is absolutely out of the question. The same is true for Tunisia. 99% of its population is Sunnite Arabs or Berbers, and even political Islamism, whose proponents used to be persecuted, could organize itself without hindrance after the fall of Ben Ali in the course of the “Arabellion” (see Dossier: Tunisia). No discrimination of Muslims exists in either of these states. Syria, in turn, is divided into regions suffering from the authoritarian dictatorship of the Assad regime and regions that are being

terrorized by the Islamic State. The attacks on the small Kurdish enclaves are part of an expansion that ignores basic human rights; they, too, cannot be accounted for by the simple explanations offered by German experts. What, however, about the French example? The French governments of the past are doubtlessly guilty of grave neglect not only with regard to human rights violations during colonial times but also to the country’s immigration and integration policies. Still, the question is whether the deed of Yassin S. was motivated by poverty or despair. He was married, had three children, and was employed by the company he wanted to destroy. He was definitely not ‘de-racinated’. It is obvious, however, that he had come under the influence of radical preachers a couple of years before, and made himself at home in an Islamist scene.

While people turn to Salafism and Jihadism for very diverse reasons, it is undeniable that a radical ideology is essential in that process. All Salafists and jihadists share notions such as the division of the world into the “House of War” and the “House of Islam”, the dichotomy of believers and nonbelievers, the idea of an indisputable divine order that must be implemented by all means, and the reference to the Qur’an and Sunnah to justify even the most terrible human rights violations.

Radical Islamism is an ideology that attracts followers all over the world, and unites them into a new *ummah* of religious totalitarianism whose members are active not only in the Muslim core countries but also in places where Muslims constitute small minorities. While the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts differ widely, ideology unites them all: the Tunisian student and the German petty criminal, the Malaysian nurse and the Iraqi clan chief. It is the fascistoid ideology of a group of people who feel called upon in the name of their God to bring terror and death on all those who do not share their opinion. Their ultimate dream is to force their rule upon the whole world. They believe that the caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is only the beginning of a wave of conquest which – modeled on the expansion of early Islam – will ensure “that the word of God is the highest” everywhere. This phrase means nothing less than a regime like that of

the Islamic State, ruled by the laws of a pre-modern *shari'a*, where underage girls are married off and non-Muslim women are enslaved, raped, and sold because this was the usual practice in Muhammad's time. A straightjacket of norms divides all conceivable actions, ranging from brushing one's teeth to the relations between the genders, into the categories of permitted (*halal*) and not permitted (*haram*). Progressive Muslim circles have repeatedly pointed out that many ideas of the Salafist zealots are accepted even by the Muslim mainstream, and that critical reflection is urgently needed. This is met with fierce opposition by many who want to create the impression that Islamist terrorism has nothing to do with Islam – an attitude that plays into the hands of the jihadists. The same is true for the assertion that Muslims, both in Germany and globally, are marginalized and denied equal opportunities; this supports the jihadist reasoning that acts of terror are legitimate acts of resistance.

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