

A SUNNI MUSLIM SCHOLAR'S HUMANITARIAN AND RELIGIOUS REJECTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

Y Alp Aslandogan and Bekir Cinar

Abstract

This paper analyses the multi-faceted response of a Sunni-Hanafi scholar, Fethullah Gülen, to the phenomenon of violence against civilians under a religious rhetoric. Gülen's response involves four components: (a) humanitarian, (b) religious, (c) political or realist, and (d) practical/educational. (a) Gülen categorically condemns acts of violence against innocent non-combatants including women and children as inhuman. (b) Gülen sets out the principles of Islamic jurisprudence that invalidate any declaration of war by individuals or groups: hence, such self-declared wars under the banner of Islam cannot be regarded as legitimate. He refutes 'the end justifies the means' argument, calling it a Marxist-Communist rhetoric, with no Islamic justification whatever. (c) While discussing misunderstanding, misrepresentation and abuse of religious texts, Gülen hints at the presence of individuals, interest groups, and other entities that benefit from friction and violent conflict. He suggests that the possibility should be considered that some individuals have been manipulated, perhaps even 'hypnotised' through special drugs, to carry out actions they would otherwise not carry out. (d) Gülen offers practical approaches to rooting out the problem of hate-mongering and violent conflict. The underlying dynamic of this approach is to provide, through education, mutual understanding, respect, opportunity and hope. Only educational institutions that foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and respect, and offer hope of upward mobility, can provide lasting solutions. Concepts such as 'love of creation due to the Creator' can be located in every culture and spiritual tradition. Gülen's own emphasis on Islamic spirituality provides an example that is particularly significant for Muslims: his argument against terrorism and for peaceful interfaith relations is based upon the authoritative view of the Sunni tradition, to which 90% of the world's Muslims adhere.

Introduction

This article discusses the unconditional rejection of violence against civilians by an influential Sunni-Muslim scholar, Fethullah Gülen, on humanitarian and religious grounds, as well as the educational response of civil society organizations inspired by his ideas. We first consider forms and contexts of violence. We point out that terrorism that is perpetrated under a religious, ideological or nationalistic rhetoric is part of a larger picture that includes various forms of violence that usually stem from frustration under adverse political conditions and have political goals. We then introduce Gülen as an influential Sunni-Muslim scholar, opinion leader, activist and poet who has consistently voiced his condemnation of terrorism. After reviewing general views of Gülen on violence, we examine Gülen's rejection of violence against civilians that is perpetrated under a religious rhetoric, both on humanitarian as well as religious grounds. We provide both summaries of Gülen's views as well as direct translations of quotations from his works. We briefly touch upon some of Gülen's comments on the political conditions that provide the breeding ground for terrorism. We then highlight educational measures inspired by Gülen's ideas and implemented by civil society initiatives in fragile regions of the world, that inculcate an outlook that embraces and respects diversity. We conclude with a discussion of possible topics for future studies.

Forms and Contexts of Violence

Violence is unwanted physical interference with the bodies of others, such that they experience pain and mental anguish and, in the extreme case, death. In general terms violence is a product of an individual or group who acts unilaterally in order to impose its opinion, where there is no space for negotiation due to power imbalance. Violence can be viewed as the anathema to the spirit and substance of democracy. This follows, almost by definition, because democracy, considered as a set of institutions and as a way of life, is a non-violent means of equally apportioning and publicly monitoring power within and among overlapping communities of people who live according to a wide variety of morals.¹

Davis comments that 'violence is shown to be negatively related to the availability of alternative means of acquiring political goods and to the availability of alternative economic opportunities.'² In other words, one of the aims of the use of political violence³ is to alter the political and economic status quo, because the latter is seen as maintaining injustice and unfairness. The injustice and unfairness are subjective and not objective. In other words, these are a reflection of the perceptions of people who claim to be suffering from them. They are also relative and not absolute. The 'the deprivation theory of civil violence'⁴ suggests

1 John Keane, *Violence and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press: 2004, p.1

2 Gareth G. Davis, 'Repression, Rationality and Relative Deprivation; A theoretical and empirical examination of Cross-National Variations in Political Violence', http://economics.gmu.edu/working/WPE_99/99_04.pdf, accessed on 15 Mar 07

3 Gareth G. Davis, 'Repression, Rationality and Relative Deprivation; A theoretical and empirical examination of Cross-National Variations in Political Violence', http://economics.gmu.edu/working/WPE_99/99_04.pdf, accessed on 15 Mar. 07 and Wilkinson states that 'political violence is either the deliberate infliction or threat of infliction of physical injury or damage for political ends, or it is violence which occurs unintentionally in the course of severe political conflicts'. In Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, Macmillan: London 1977, p.30

4 Paul Wilkinson, *Political Terrorism*, Macmillan: London, 1974, p. 126. He states that 'there are at least four models of relative deprivation: rising expectations may overtake rising capability; capabilities may remain static while expectation rise; general socio-economic malaise may actually bring about a drop in capabilities while expectations remain constant; and finally there is the classic J-curve phenomenon in which, for a period, capabilities keep pace

that ‘political violence results from the social frustration that occurs in the wake of relative deprivation’.⁵ Individuals or groups may feel that the deprivation causes the problem, and the use of violence ‘becomes more attractive to those that are excluded from the state apparatus—the prize of victory raises with inequality’.⁶

Porta draws a table (Table 2.1) in order to provide some explanations about the origins of violence. These are: the structural conditions, such as ‘the level of societal development, the strength of ethnic or class cleavages, the repressiveness of a regime, and cultural traditions’; and what Porta calls the ‘conjunctural’ explanation, which relates to ‘the intermediate stages of economic development, the crises of modernization, period of ineffective state coercion, and rapid cultural changes’.⁷

Whether the structural or the conjunctural explanation has more to say about political violence and terrorism, the essential characteristic of politics itself requires ‘conflict between the desires of different individuals’,⁸ that helps to find a right balance in the society. This explanation leads us to look at ‘socio-economic factors that can potentially contribute to the manifestation of violence, such as social dislocation, urbanisation, modernisation, immigration, unemployment and poverty’.⁹

When such a dispute involves disagreement about appropriate source of legitimation the conflict may be more than usually intractable, for the standard democratic procedure of majority vote by legitimating ‘people’ (*vox populi, vox Dei*) is fatally flawed when the question at issue is who ‘the people’ are. The more intractable the dispute the more likely, other things being equal, that dissent will take illegal or terroristic forms.¹⁰

Identifying and analysing forms of violence and responses to forms of violence requires one to focus on the role of representation, sovereignty, and identity in conflict, as well as the role of the state system in reconstructing some of the essential conditions of asymmetric warfare. Without analysing the implications of the conditions and nature of the peace and order, as well as important elements of the violence, one cannot reach a proper result on identifying the violence.

In Table 2.2 forms of violence and responses are shown. There is a very thin line between peace and war. This line consists of political systems and politicians. If the politicians do not react properly in response to political problems, they will make it more difficult to keep

with rising expectations and then suddenly drop behind’.

5 Gareth G Davis, ‘Repression, Rationality and Relative Deprivation: A theoretical and empirical examination of Cross-National Variations in Political Violence’, http://economics.gmu.edu/working/WPE_99/99_04.pdf, and he states that ‘Relative Deprivation is said to occur when the outcomes experienced by individuals are inferior to those that: a) they expected to receive or b) felt that they were entitled to receive. It is the inconsistency between outcomes and expectations and/or the prevalence of outcomes that are regarded as unjust that constitutes Relative Deprivation’

6 Carles Boix, ‘Political Violence’, Paper prepared for the Yale Conference on: Order, Conflict and Violence, April 30th-May 1st, 2004.

7 Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*, Cambridge University Press: 1995, p.5.

8 Martin Warner and Roger Crisp, ‘Introduction’, in Martin Warner and Roger Crisp (Ed.), *Terrorism, Protest and Power*, Edward Elgar: 1990, pp. 1-14.

9 Jason Franks, ‘Rethinking the Roots of Terrorism: Orthodox Terrorism Theory and Beyond’, <http://www.bisa.ac.uk/2006/pps/franks.pdf>, accessed on 16 March 2007

10 Martin Warner and Roger Crisp, ‘Introduction’, in Martin Warner and Roger Crisp (Ed.), *Terrorism, Protest and Power*, Edward Elgar: 1990, pp. 1-14

the peace. This is also the case in the international system, in which states and international politicians become the main actors who represent that thin line. If they have tended to draw on similar simple definitional categories to define and legitimate their responses, they will inflame the political activities of the others, thereby creating more problems. These others may often gain a degree of support and legitimacy when people see their grievances in the media and in public debate.¹¹

Frustration, Civil Disobedience and Violence

Civil disobedience is often an effective means of changing laws and protecting liberties. It also embodies an important moral concept that there are times when law and justice do not coincide and that to obey the law at such times can be an abdication of ethical responsibility.¹²

According to the theory of frustration-aggression, ‘humans only become violent if they are frustrated in their efforts to attain a particular goal: severe frustration leads to anger and anger to acts of aggressive violence’.¹³ This theory ‘maintains that aggression is always a consequence of frustration’.¹⁴ Frustration ‘results from unfulfilled needs or unresolved problems’.¹⁵ These are ‘since ancient times, worsening deprivation, injustice or oppression’ which can be seen ‘major precondition of political violence’.¹⁶

Political Violence

Political violence can involve violations of human rights in the society. It occurs whenever the expected net gains from employing it exceed the net gains derived from accepting the status quo among some political actors (such as unions, peasant organizations, a clique of army officers and so on). The status quo is here defined as a situation in which either a section of society holds the (public) monopoly of violence and policymaking uncontested by those that are excluded from the decision-making process or political differences are settled peacefully (through either voting procedures or bargaining) among all parties in contention.¹⁷ In the following table, different levels of political conflict are shown and tried to be distinguished.

In the national scale, political violence becomes unavoidable in an unequal society in which assets are not distributed fairly among people. Then, the potential rebels can apply violence to overturn the existing political and economic system.¹⁸ In the international scale, political violence is perpetrated against real or perceived entities responsible for injustices or suffering. While definitions of terrorism include some common elements such as the use of violence and the aim of inflicting terror on a government or its people, the lack of consensus over the definition “points to its inescapably political nature, perhaps best encapsulated in

11 Oliver P. Richmond, ‘Realizing Hegemony? Symbolic Terrorism and the Roots of Conflict’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 26 No. 4 (2003): pp. 289–309.

12 Kayla Starr, adapted by Bonnie Blackberry, ‘The Role of Civil Disobedience in Democracy’ CLMP News Summer ‘98 Issue at <http://www.civilliberties.org/sum98role.html>, accessed on 24 May 2007

13 Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, Macmillan: London 1977, p.35

14 S O Brien, R Tay and B Watson, ‘Situational factors contributing to the expression of aggression on the roads’, *IATSS Research*, 28:1, 2004; http://eprints.qut.edu.au/archive/00002167/01/watson_IATSS.pdf, accessed on 15 Mar 07

15 Random House Webster’s Dictionary

16 Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, Macmillan: London 1977, p.36

17 Carles Boix, ‘Political Violence’, Paper prepared for the Yale Conference on: Order, Conflict and Violence, April 30th-May 1st, 2004.

18 Carles Boix, ‘Political Violence’, Paper prepared for the Yale Conference on: Order, Conflict and Violence, April 30th-May 1st, 2004.

the aphorism (or cliché) that ‘one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter.’¹⁹ The following table illustrates various forms of political violence perpetrated by individuals, groups or states.

Especially during the last few decades, acts of violence carried out by individuals with Muslim names or groups claiming a Muslim identity have occupied the news numerous times. While each such action or information about their possible perpetrators have made headline news, Muslim reactions to such actions and their tragic consequences were given a disproportionately smaller space by the news media²⁰. In the following we will examine the views of an influential Muslim scholar on violence as a case in point. But first a review of indicators of his impact and his significance is in order.

Roots of Terrorism

In the following, we will discuss the political roots of terrorism, and the role ideology or religion might play in the promotion of a terrorist agenda among masses.

Political Roots of Terrorism

Terrorism can be likened to a cancerous cell in an existing political system. If the political system works perfectly, this cancer cell will not be visible within the political system; if the system does not work perfectly, it will be visible and grow and spread into the whole political system.²¹ In his parallel views, Wilkinson states that ‘revolutionary violence stems directly from conflicts within and between a country’s political institutions.

Revolutionary violence is seen as basically the product of conflict about legitimacy, political rights, and access to power. It often results from the refusal or incapacity of a government to meet certain claims made upon it by a powerful group or a coalition of group’.²²

Roots of conflict and terrorism may feed each other indirectly, and consequently, ‘what needs to happen now is a rethinking of terrorism in order to provide alternative approaches that can deal with the root causes.’²³

No human is born a terrorist and the decision to get involved in terrorism does not happen overnight. Therefore, an important realisation here is that terrorism is a process²⁴ and ‘terrorism is a choice; it is a political strategy selected from among a range of options’.²⁵ The process of terrorism has an historical background, which involves people who rightly or wrongly perceive that the political system is treating them harshly. This harsh treatment may even stretch back to their ancestors. The action of terrorism is an end product of the process. This process moves through several stages until the overt terrorist action takes place. Only, at the action stage of terrorism does it become noticeable and be named by people. From the initial

19 Ben Golder and George Williams, ‘What is Terrorism? Problems of Legal Definition’, *UNSW Law Journal*, 27, 270.

20 As one example of collections of such responses, see the American Academy of Religion’s special web site available at <http://groups.colgate.edu/aarislam/response.htm>.

21 Bekir Cinar, *Devlet Guvenligi, Istihbarat ve Terorizm (State Security, Intelligence and Terrorism)*, Sam Yayinlari: Ankara 1997, p. 247

22 Paul Wilkinson, *Political Terrorism*, Macmillan: London, 1974, p. 129

23 Jason Franks, *Rethinking the Roots of Terrorism: Beyond Orthodox Terrorism Theory - a new research agenda*, <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/intrel/cpcs/papers/Rethinking.pdf>, accessed on 12 March 2007

24 Andrew Silke, ‘Terrorism’, *The Psychologist*, Vol. 14 No. 11, pp. 580-81.

25 Michael Walzer, ‘Five Questions About Terrorism’, *Dissent*, Winter 2002, pp. 5-9.

genesis of terrorism to the action itself, each individual stage requires careful determination and planning. Accordingly, terrorism has many dimensions and each dimension needs to be dealt with carefully in order to understand and prevent it.

Examination of an existing political system and its governance may provide the required information about the root causes of terrorism. Such an investigation, however, should start at least from 40 years before the present day. For example, ethnic terrorism may be a product of a 'nation-state'²⁶ because nationalism means that the dominant ethnic groups in the country have been prized above others, who have been subordinated in the country's political, economic and social life for a prolonged period. 'Without question, in the most successful revolutionary wars of the last 25 years, the strongest appeal has been to nationalism and patriotism based either on resistance to a conqueror or the gaining of independence from a colonial power'.²⁷ Today, it is difficult to see any colonial power in any country, but many ethnic groups within the nation-state see the dominant ethnic group or government as a colonial power or occupying power.

In addition to seeing terrorism as the product of the nation-state, one may see it as a product of the political systems of repressive regimes²⁸, economic systems which are corrupted and produce poverty and no job opportunities, educational systems which are lacking in decent education and training, and the never-ending conflicts within a society.

Another type of political system which is relevant is the international system, in particular the current balance of power. One Middle Eastern academic points out to the imbalance of power in places such as the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya and Kashmir as a factor in the escalation of violence.²⁹

Ideological Roots

According to Kullberg and Jokinen, 'terrorism is not an ideology as such. It has no united political agenda. In principle, almost any ideology could be claimed by a terrorist'.³⁰ Terrorism

26 'Nation-states exist to deliver political goods-security, education, health services, economic opportunity, environmental surveillance, a legal frame-work of order and a judicial system to administer it, and fundamental infra-structural requirements such as roads and communications facilities-to their citizens'. In Rober I Rotberg, 'The New Nature of Nation-State Failure', *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2002, Vol.25 (3), pp.85-96, and <http://www.twq.com/02summer/rotberg.pdf>, accessed 15 Mar. 07 and 'A form of state in which those who exercise power claim legitimacy for their rule partly or solely on the grounds that their power is exercised for the promotion of the distinctive interests, values and cultural heritage of a particular nation whose members ideally would constitute all, or most of, its subject population and all of whom would dwell within the borders.' In the online edition of *A Glossary of Political Economy Terms* by Dr. Paul M. Johnson and http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/nation_state, accessed on 15 Mar. 07

27 Paul Wilkinson, *Political Terrorism*, Macmillan: London, 1974, p. 74

28 'The region has been dominated by a range of authoritarian political systems, including military regimes, monarchies, theocracies, and one-party states regimes. ... Civil society is weak as a result of the severe legal restrictions and coercive methods that the region's regimes use to stifle political expression. Independent media are largely nonexistent; most newspapers and articles are censored, and those that exist are seen as serving the interests of the regime or particular political parties. In such societies, severe repression drives all politics underground, placing the moderate opposition at a disadvantage and encouraging political extremism'. In Jennifer L. Windsor, *Promoting Democratization Can Combat Terrorism*, *The Washington Quarterly*, summer 2003, 26:3, pp. 43-58

29 Ben Mollov, who is lecturer in conflict studies, social studies at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, 'Religion and Religious Extremism', *International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security*, 8-11 March 2005, Madrid, at <http://english.safe-democracy.org/keynotes/religion-and-religious-extremism.html>, accessed on 3 March 2007

30 Anssi Kullberg and Christian Jokinen, 'From Terror to Terrorism: the Logic on the Roots of Selective Political

uses ideology as a tool for participating in relations with an audience who believes in that ideology and for influencing the wider public. In other words, ‘terrorism needs an all-encompassing philosophy, a religion or secular ideology, to legitimize violence, to win recruits to the cause and to mobilize them for action’.³¹ Human beings seek to justify whatever they do. The justification can be done with an ideology or a religion cast into an ideological form³². People who belong to different groups in a friction-stricken society feel forced to position themselves in relation to two opposing poles. The opposing concepts of the others have such powerful meanings that they tend to supersede other conflicts and determine how these conflicts are interpreted, mobilised around, and fought over.³³

The Role of Religion

Popular arguments that overlook the complex historic, political and social factors and link terrorism with religion do not stand scrutiny. But even if religion per se is not a direct cause of terrorism, there is no question that people can find justification for terrorism in religion, just as they do in nationalism, various ideologies and racism. Mark Juergensmeyer says that while religion has been a major factor in recent acts of terrorism, it is seldom the only one³⁴.

Religiosity itself is not a cause of political radicalism. Appeals to religion are likely to be a way of framing or representing a struggle in terms that a potential constituency will understand rather than the determinants of a strategic choice.

Religious ideologies, goals, and motivations are often interwoven with those that are economic, social, and political. A group’s decision to turn to violence is usually situational and is seldom endemic to the religious tradition to which the group is related. Islam does not cause terrorism, nor does any other religion with which terrorist acts have been associated. As John Esposito explained, usually ‘political and economic grievances are primary causes or catalysts, and religion becomes a means to legitimate and mobilize’. Ian Reader stated that even in the case of Aum Shinrikyo, the Buddhist movement implicated in the Tokyo nerve gas incident in 1995, the religious factor ‘would not have been enough to take the group in the direction that it did’.³⁵

Because there are terrorists who claim that they belong to a certain religion, or use religious symbols, they may be easily branded ‘religious terrorists’ (e.g. ‘Islamic terrorists’). But such an attitude overlooks several significant factors that play a role in an individual’s getting involved in terrorism, as well as the reactions and condemnations of those who legitimately represent the faith. Terrorism can be the means used in the name of some ideology by terrorist groups, but that ideology is not terrorism.³⁶ ‘Interviews with terrorist often reveal that

Violence’, *Research Unit for Conflicts and Terrorism*, University of Turku, Finland, The Eurasian Politician, 19th July 2004.

31 Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorists Threat*, John Murray: Great Britain 2006, p.92-93

32 Anthony Shadid, ‘Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats, and the New Politics of Islam’, Westview Press, 2002, 228.

33 Tore BJØRGO, Yngve Carlsson, Thomas Haaland, ‘Hate Crime or Gang Conflict? Violence between Youth Group in a Norwegian City’, at <http://www.fpvv.uni-mb.si/conf2004/papers/bjorgo.pdf>, accessed on 24 May 2007

34 Mark Juergensmeyer, ‘Terror in the Mind of God’, University of California Press, 2003.

35 Mark Juergensmeyer, ‘Religion’, *Addressing the Causes of Terrorism*, The Club de Madrid Series on Democracy and Terrorism, Vol. 1, pp.27-34.

36 Anssi Kullberg and Christian Jokinen, ‘From Terror to Terrorism: the Logic on the Roots of Selective Political Violence’, *Research Unit for Conflicts and Terrorism*, University of Turku, Finland, The Eurasian Politician, 19th July 2004.

their sense of frustration bred of failure. Religion provides them with a means of dealing with these personal issues in a way that address their particular inadequacies by making them part of a more powerful movement and promising ultimate victory.³⁷ In short, religion may enable people to deal with their frustrations, but it is not the root cause of those frustrations, or their decision to engage in terrorist action. A striking study supporting this point is the one by Pape³⁸.

Drawing conclusions from the 23 years of data collected by the Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism, Prof. Robert Pape of University of Chicago demonstrated that occupation of territories claimed by a group is the best predictor of suicide terrorism, far better than religious orientation. Pape found surprisingly weak correlation between religion and suicide terrorism, even including the case of al-Qaeda related groups. Out of the 315 separate attacks within the 23 years between 1980 to 2003, 301 of them were perpetrated as part of a “large, coherent political or military campaign” against an entity perceived as a “foreign occupier”³⁹. Pape lists nine such cases including Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza, Sri Lanka, southeast Turkey, Chechnya, Kashmir, Punjab, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula that account for 95 percent of the suicide terrorist attacks in the aforementioned period. Pape shows that in the past 20 years groups with an Islamist rhetoric were responsible for less than 35 percent of suicide attacks. The leading perpetrator of suicide attacks, the Tamil Tigers, as well as the Kurdish PKK group are Marxist-Leninist groups that are strictly opposed to religion⁴⁰. Another surprising finding of Pape was that even among the individuals identified with al-Qaeda, religious fundamentalism was a considerably weaker predictor than the presence of foreign troops in the individual’s homeland territory. The presence of foreign troops was a ten times stronger predictor of involvement in terrorism than religious orientation⁴¹. If we consider that “ends justify means” is an essentially Leninist argument⁴² and some of the Arab states have been under Soviet influence during the 1950-1980 period, then the impact of Marxist-Leninist ideology can be seen as even greater than these figures suggest.

Gülen: An Influential Sunni-Muslim Scholar

Fethullah Gülen is an authoritative mainstream Turkish Muslim scholar, thinker, author, poet, opinion leader and educational activist, whose ideas carry great significance for Turkish Muslims as well as increasingly Muslims in other countries. A recent study sponsored by the Brookings Institution found Gülen as the top contemporary role model for Turkish youth⁴³. Internet opinion polls have consistently confirmed his name recognition and approval as a mainstream scholar by the vast majority of Turkish people⁴⁴. Gülen’s readership in Turkey is estimated around several millions. His impact outside Turkey is growing daily as his works are translated into many languages including English, Arabic, Russian, German, Spanish,

37 Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorists Threat*, John Murray: Great Britain 2006, p.91

38 Robert A. Pape, 2005. *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York: Random House, 23.

39 Pape, *Ibid.* p. 4.

40 Pape, *Ibid.* p. 4

41 Pape, *Ibid.* p.103.

42 Ladis K. D. Kristof, ‘Reflections on Angelina Balabanoff’s Lenin’, *Russian Review*, 22:4, 1963, 369-376.

43 Akbar Ahmed, 2007, *Journey Into Islam*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 157.

44 Muhammed Çetin, 2005. *Mobilization and Countermobilization: The Gülen movement in Turkey*. Proceedings of the Conference on Islam in the contemporary world: Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice, Rice University, Houston, TX.

Urdu, Bosnian, Albanian, Malay and Indonesian. In addition to printed publications, his ideas are accessible to an ever increasing world population through private Radio/TV networks sympathetic to his views.

Gülen has been recognized for his consistent stance against the use of violence with a religious rhetoric. More specifically,

- i. He was the first Muslim scholar who publicly condemned the attacks of 9/11 with an advertisement in the Washington Post.
- ii. He helped publish a scholarly book on Islamic perspective on terror and suicide attacks, condemning such acts on humanitarian and religious grounds.
- iii. He did not express these views only to western readers but voiced them in mosque sermons among thousands of Muslim audience members. He unequivocally rejects suicide attacks, regardless of location or conditions.
- iv. He gave interviews to Turkish, Japanese, Kenyan and American newspapers categorically condemning acts of terror for political, ideological and religious reasons. He appeared on numerous national television shows publicly condemning such acts.

Gülen has been actively promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue for over a decade, starting long before the tragedy of 9/11. In Turkey, he has been credited for bringing about a positive atmosphere of relationships between the majority Muslim population and the various religious minorities such as Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities. Outside of Turkey, his ideas on interfaith dialog have inspired many to establish organizations engaging in dialogue with the same objectives of mutual understanding, empathic acceptance, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation. His efforts for dialog and tolerance have been recognized by a personal audience with the late Pope John Paul II, an invitation by the chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, as well as meetings with the leaders of various Christian denominations.

Gülen's Opinions on Political Violence

Throughout his career as a preacher and teacher, Gülen has maintained a consistent stance against the use of violence for political means, especially against civilians. In Gülen's view, economic conditions, corruption in the state, or ideological reasons can not justify violence. He is on the record numerous times for encouraging his listeners or readers to respect the rule of law and to find a peaceful solution to any conflict between individuals or between the individual and the state. Besides being illegitimate, Gülen views violence as producing the very opposite of what its perpetrators aim to achieve, especially in the case of inter-group conflicts arising from difference as experienced in Turkey during the 1970s. According to Gülen, 'the problems of difference among people can be solved by means of tolerance. If these differences are respected, there will be a chance of benefiting from everybody's ideas without discriminating against anyone'.⁴⁵

His very first article on 1 February 1979 in the popular magazine 'Sızıntı'⁴⁶ states that his

45 Filiz Baskan, 'The Fethullah Gülen Community: Contribution or Barrier to the Consolidation of Democracy in Turkey?', Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 41, No. 6 (November 2005), pp. 849 – 861. In addition to his encouragement on dialogue, he also offer another way too. 'In order to work on various social problems and bring harmony to society, Gülen promoted cooperation with various segments of society, particularly with adherents of religions other than Islam as well as with secularists in Turkey.' In Zeki Saritoprak, 'An Islamic Approach to Peace and Nonviolence: A Turkish Experience', The Muslim World, Vol. 95 (July 2005), pp. 413-427

46 Sızıntı is a monthly magazine on literature, science and story which began its publishing life on 1 February

methods and mission is stopping ‘the crying of children by sharing their unhappiness and agony, and helping them to be happy and helping them reach their highest level of human soul’⁴⁷. With this mission, he states one of his principles as ‘avoidance of political and ideological conflict.’⁴⁸ Institutions which have been established by participants of a civil society movement inspired by his works have made non-violence a key principle in their activities.⁴⁹ Altunoğlu states that according to Gülen, whatever is achieved by violent means will inevitably collapse’.⁵⁰ Violence cannot be seen as a means of achievement. Moreover, Gülen expresses that ‘it is obvious that you could not and cannot achieve anything by violence and bad temper. It is needless to emphasize that when you knock with love, respect and affection, doors to the paths of dialogue are opened and that you can have the opportunity to explain the values that you represent’.⁵¹

Gülen’s Rejection of Violence on Humanistic Grounds

The first component of Gülen’s response to violence against civilians is a rejection on humanitarian grounds. As will be illustrated below, Gülen declares acts of violence against innocent civilians including women and children as inhumane. He uses clear statements in categorically condemning killing of innocent civilians, elderly, women and children. The following is an excerpt from his condemnation message which was submitted to Washington Post on September 12th, 2001⁵²:

Any terrorist activity, no matter who it is committed by and for whatever purpose, is the greatest blow against peace, democracy and humanity. For this reason, terrorist activities can by no means be approved of. Terror cannot be a means for independence, nor a legitimate route to salvation. The recent terrorist activity, which is by far the most bloody and catastrophic to date, is a sabotage against not only the United States of America but also against world peace and the universal democratic and humanistic values. The perpetrators of this act cannot be but the most brutal of all.

I strongly condemn the recent terrorist attack on the United States. It is worthy of nothing but condemnation and hatred, and all in the world must condemn it.

I assure the American people that I pray to God Almighty for the victims and share their pain and sorrow from the bottom of my heart. May God give them with patience.

During late 1990s Turkey suffered from the terrorist activities of a group who called themselves “the party of God.” This group went to such extremes as to torture and kill Muslims who they declared as being hypocrites or conspirers of enemies of faith. The Turkish daily newspaper Zaman, which is known for its sympathetic editorial position toward Gülen used

1979.

47 M. F. Gülen, ‘Bu Ağlamayı Dindirmek İçin Yavru (For Stopping This Crying of Baby)’ Sızıntı, Vol.1 No.1, pp.1-2

48 M. Hermansen, ‘Understandings of “Community” within the Gülen Movement’, <http://fethullahGülenconference.org/houston/index.php>, accessed on 12 August 2007

49 Ebru Altunoğlu, Fethullah Gülen’s Perception Of State And Society, Thesis Submitted To The Institute Of Social Sciences In Partial Fulfilment Of The Requirements For The Degree Of Master Of Arts in Political Science and International Relations, Boğaziçi University, 1999, p.60

50 Ebru Altunoğlu, *Fethullah Gülen’s Perception Of State And Society*, Thesis Submitted To The Institute Of Social Sciences In Partial Fulfilment Of The Requirements For The Degree Of Master Of Arts in Political Science and International Relations, Boğaziçi University, 1999, p.94

51 Selçuk Camcı, Dr. Kudret Ünal (ed.). Fethullah Gülen’in Konuşma ve Yazılarında Hoşgörü ve Diyalog İklimi, Merkur Yayınları. İzmir, 1998, p.140

52 <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/968/3/>.

a headline that gave a new name to this group: “The party of savagery⁵³”.

In multiple interviews given to Zaman daily, Milliyet daily, Kenyan and Canadian newspapers, Gülen also clearly stated his condemnation of Bin Laden, his accomplices and their actions⁵⁴:

Bin Laden is among the persons in this world that I hate most. Because he has defaced the beautiful face of Islam. He has produced a dirty image. Even if we work on repairing the terrible damage he has caused with all our power, it will take years. We shall speak on every platform everywhere. We shall write books. We shall declare “this is not Islam”. Bin Laden replaced Islamic logic with his own desires and wishes and lives as a monster. The men around him are like that as well. If there are people who think like that, they are also locked into monstrosity. We equivocally condemn their perspective.

In the above two quotes it is important to note that Gülen both declares perpetrators of terrorist acts as evil as well as questioning their humanity. In other words, in Gülen’s views these individuals have lost their inner capacity to function as human beings through their conscious and persistent involvement in acts of terror against humanity. On the one hand, by condemning terrorist acts as cruel as a human and by depicting Bin Laden as a monster, Gülen shows his solidarity with the humanity and his common stance against terror as a fellow human. At the same time he also appeals to the human side of his audience, who are primarily Muslims. But Gülen completes this appeal with a religious component, and for an important reason. After all, the appeal and justifications of the terrorist groups such as Bin Laden’s is based on both suffering of individuals and nations, as well as their religious conscience.

Gülen’s Rejection of Violence on Religious Grounds

Gülen’s opinion towards violence and political violence is based on mainstream traditional interpretations of basic sources of Islam, such as the Qur’an, the prophetic tradition, as well as particular interpretations of certain aspects of those same sources shaped by the Central-Asian and Anatolian experience. His opinion has provided a powerful approach to spiritual change not only in Turkey but also many parts of the world through educational institutions and dialogue activities.

In Gülen’s view, any Muslim who correctly understands Islam cannot be or become a terrorist, or a person engaged in terrorist activities can not remain a Muslim.⁵⁵ Misunderstandings and misinterpretations of Islam and Islamic resources need to be corrected. For this reason, Gülen strongly encourages Muslims to engage in education to internalize and convey open and inclusive interpretations of their faith, as demonstrated by the spiritually-oriented Anatolian Muslim experience.⁵⁶

53 Zaman daily, 17 January 2001.

54 Akman, N. Zaman daily, March 22-April 1, 2004.

55 M. Fethullah Gülen, ‘Real Muslims Cannot Be Terrorists’, Turkish Daily News, September 19, 2001

56 Basic Principles of Anatolian Sufism are: We are the avant-garde of love; we don’t have time for hostility; Love all the creation because of the Creator; Tongueless to those who curse, handless to those who hit; Self-renewal is the only condition of continues existence; The greatest book to be read is human being; Be an advocate of others, but a judge to yourself; If there is no one left on Earth to build dialogue and love, go to other parts of the universe; Universe is within human, human is within the Universe; Science is the light illuminating roads towards the reality; Our way has been established on science, knowledge and love of human; Do not preach; instead act as a living model; Let us unite together, let us be huge, alive; Do not hurt even if you were offended; Whatever becomes heavy for your own personality, do not make it applied to anybody; Always bear in mind that even your enemy is a human; Everything created by God is placed orderly. In Fahri Karakas, ‘Global Peaceful Social Innovation: The Case of

There are three components of Gülen's religious response to violence against civilians. The first is the rejection of self-declared wars. The second is the reiteration of an important principle of Islamic jurisprudence: Individuality of crime and the rejection of harming women, children and otherwise non-combatant civilians under any circumstances. The third is the rejection of "they have no other means" rhetoric and "ends justify means" philosophy. Gülen supports this position by pointing to the Leninist roots of this philosophy and the lack of precedents in the lives of the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) and his companions.

Gülen states that 'all kinds of unjust murders are great sins'⁵⁷ referring to some of the central concepts justice and peace in the Qur'an, both of which are the current essence of the modern legal system developed to protect life, capital, and reproduction. Other verses Gülen alludes to in this context include 'Deal fairly, and do not let the hatred of others for you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just, for that is next to piety, and fear God'⁵⁸; and '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.'⁵⁹ According to Gülen, no political reason could justify killing innocent civilians and causing disorder and corruption on the earth. In contrast, he highlights that 'loving and respecting humanity merely because they are human is an expression of respect for the Almighty Creator. ... If we can raise a community upon this perspective, people will eventually recover and they will manage to compensate for whatever they have lost'.⁶⁰

Gülen's first categorical response to violence against civilians is the rejection of self-declared wars. The following quote summarizes this point⁶¹:

The rules of Islam are obvious. Individuals cannot declare war. Neither a group nor an organization cannot declare a war. War is declared by the state. You cannot declare a war without a president or an army saying that it is war. Otherwise, it becomes a relative or personal war.

Another quote reiterates this principle and alludes to the rules of conduct during war which we will elaborate below⁶²:

An Islamic authority can do war only within the framework of such definite principles, and only a state, not certain individuals or organizations, can decide a war.

Elsewhere, Gülen states that if a person or group believe that their government does not represent their views, then it is their duty to influence the government or otherwise induce social change through non-violent means⁶³. The issue of Iraqi insurgency during the first months of U.S.-led invasion is not addressed in the sources available to the authors of this essay. While

Gülen Network', <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/2242/4/>, accessed on 14 August 2007

57 M. Fethullah Gülen (under pen-name Hikmet Isik), 'What does Islam say about killing an innocent person?' The Fountain, October - December 2006, Issue 56, August 2007, available online at <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/articles.php?SIN=7808256c10&k=792&840098454&show=part1>, accessed on 13

58 The Quran, 5:8,

59 The Quran 5:32

60 M. Fethullah Gülen, 'Respect For Humankind', The Fountain, January - March, 2006 / Issue 53 <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/articles.php?SIN=6e31958cbc&k=738&593384988&show=part1>, accessed on 13 August 2007

61 Fethullah Gülen. 2004. 'No Islamic World Exists Today.' Interview with N. Akman. Zaman, 22 March.

62 Fethullah Gülen. 2004. Interview with Fethullah Gülen. Daily Nation. 30 July.

63 Fethullah Gülen, 2003, 'Suicide Attacks Can not be Reconciled with the Universal Call of Islam', Zaman daily, 16 November 2003, available online in Turkish at <http://tr.fGülen.com/content/view/3885/77/>.

some logical inferences can be made based on Gülen's stated views on related topics, we will leave this exercise to another research project.

Gülen also highlights a point of confusion among both Muslims as well as non-Muslims, with respect to those principles that regulate a soldier's conduct during the time of war and encourage active defence toward the protection of five important entities: Life, freedom, family/progeny, property, and sanity/health. Gülen distinguishes between regulation of war and promotion of war⁶⁴:

Islam has never looked favourably upon war, although it is a reality and one of the most prominent elements in the history of humankind; Islam has bound war first and foremost to the condition of defence, and then, within the framework of the principle "inciting division/rivalry is worse than murder," found in the Qur'an, it has deemed war lawful only to prevent war and disputes which lead to war, to prevent disorder, oppression and subjection. These are the conditions that Islam deems necessary for engaging in war;

Here is the middle part of Gülen's condemnation message after 9/11/01 we omitted above which touches upon the principle of individuality of crime, and the rejection of "ends justify means" approach⁶⁵:

In relation to Islam's stance regarding terrorism, I can assure that Islam, never approves of any kind of terrorism. Terrorism cannot be a means for any Islamic goal, and a terrorist cannot be a Muslim, nor can a true Muslim be a terrorist. Islam orders peace and a true Muslim can only be a symbol of peace and the maintenance of basic human rights. Islam preaches that if there are ten people on board a vessel of whom one is innocent and nine guilty of a criminal act, then the ship may not be sunk in view of punishing the guilty for there is amongst them one innocent. Any right, whatever it's nature, is respected in Islam and it cannot be violated. The right of an individual cannot be violated in the interest of the community. The Qur'an, Islam's sacred Book, declares that one who takes a life unjustly is as if he/she took the lives of all humankind, and that one who saves a life is as if he/she saved the lives of all. In the words of our Prophet, a Muslim is one from who comes no harm, neither from his/her tongue nor hand.

Earliest recorded stance of Gülen against violence occurred in the midst of ideologically driven armed conflicts in Turkey during the 1970s. Various ideological groups such as communists (Marxist, Leninist, Maoist, as well as sympathizers of Albanian Enver Hodja) and ultra-nationalists used both propaganda as well as violence to pursue their agendas. Clashes among the youth groups claimed the lives of thousands of youth as well as members of security forces, intellectuals, teachers and politicians. Armed groups would demand the students to boycott classes, and the shopkeepers to close down shops to disturb normal life in the country. During this troubled period, Gülen consistently promoted non-violent resistance to the demands of these groups. The Marxist-Leninist-Maoist groups were especially keen on provoking resistance from the faithful and hence drawing them to the armed conflicts. While communist factions marched across the street from the mosque where Gülen was preaching, he is reported to have said the following⁶⁶:

Those people who chant agitating slogans today may one day come into the mosque and shoot me. If any of you in this audience react violently, let it be known that I do not approve or condone it.

64 Nevval Sevindi, "Fethullah Gülen ile New York Sohbetleri" (New York Conversations with Fethullah Gülen and Global Tolerance), Timas Yayınları, İstanbul, April, 2002.

65 <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/968/3/>

66 An account of Gülen's years in İzmir can be found in the biography of his early years, entitled "Kucuk Dunyam" (My Little World), Ufuk Yayınları, İstanbul, 2006.

If I am assassinated, despite all your angers, I ask you to bury my body and seek for order, peace and love in our society. Regardless to what happens; you should say that ‘we, believers should be representatives of love and security⁶⁷.

His second noteworthy stance was during the first Gulf war. While Saddam was sending missiles to Israeli cities, Gülen declared publicly in a mosque sermon attended by thousands of Muslims⁶⁸:

Today, I am equally sad for the Israeli children who are under the threat of deadly missiles, as I am sad for the dying Iraqi children. Killing innocent children has no place in our faith.

The Qur’anic references for the principle of individuality of crime are well known and even memorized in its original Arabic by many Muslims⁶⁹:

No bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another [The Qur’an, Chapters An’am, 6:164; Nahl, 16:15; Fatir, 35:18].

The following quote from Gülen combines this principles of the individuality of crime, rejection of suicidal attacks, and harming innocent civilians⁷⁰:

You can not touch innocent civilians even at the time of war. No one can issue a religious verdict condoning such an act either. No one can become a suicide bomber. No one can wrap explosives around his/her body and enter a crowd of innocent civilians. This is religiously unacceptable regardless of the faith of those in the crowd. Such an act can not be condoned even at the time of war.

Islamic rules of conduct during the war tells us not to touch children, those who pray in their places of worship. This is not something that was declared during a certain time period and then forgotten. Instead, this rule has been stated by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and reiterated by (the first caliph) Abu Bakr, (the second caliph) Omar, and in later times Salahaddeen Ayyoobi, (Seljuk Sultan) Alparslan, Kilicarslan and (Ottoman Sultan) Fatih (Mehmed II).

One example of the prophetic tradition regarding protection of women and children that Gülen alludes to was issued shortly after the conquest of Mecca. Certain polytheist Arab tribes, especially the tribe of Hawazin got worried after the conquest of Mecca and the submission of the tribe of Quraish, the Prophet’s tribe. These tribes thought that if they did not strike first, they would be politically isolated among the tribes who accepted Islam or made an alliance with the Muslims. Hence they began assembling a force under the leadership of the Hawazin elite. This culminated in a battle known as the battle of Hunayn. At the end of the battle Prophet Muhammad saw the body of a dead woman among the dead of the pagans. “What is this that I see?” he asked. People around him answered: “This is a woman, killed by the forces of Khaled ibn Walled.” The Prophet said to one of them “Run to Khaled! Remind him that the Messenger of God forbids him to kill children, women, and servants.” One of

67 One of his Sermons, Izmir, 1979, and Sefa KAPLAN, ‘Ateist terörist değildir’, Hurriyet, 21/04/2004

68 One of the series of sermons entitled “Peygamberimizin Yüce Ahlakı” (The Exemplary Morals and Conduct of Our Prophet) given in 1990, some of which are available online at <http://tr.fGülen.com> (Multimedia->Vaaz). As an example of criticism Gülen received, see <http://fl.parsimony.net/forum789/messages/8354.htm>.

69 Ali, A.Y., “The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an,” Amana Publications, MD, 2004, Unal, A., “The Qur’an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English”, The Light Inc., NJ 2007.

70 Capan 2004, p.10, Isik Yayinlari, Istanbul, 2004. Translation by the authors. For reference, the Turkish original begins as follows: “... Savaşırken bile suçsuz! insanlara ilişemezsiniz. Hiç kimse bu mevzuda bir fetva da veremez. Kimse intihar komandosu olamaz. Kimse vücuduna bombalar bağlayıp, masum insanların içine giremez. İçine girdiği bu toplum hangi dinden olursa olsun caiz değildir. Savaş halinde bile buna cevaz verilmemiştir.”

those present said “Dear Messenger of God! But are they not the children of the pagans?” The Prophet answered: “Were not the best of you, too, once the children of pagans? All children are born with their true nature and are innocent.”⁷¹

The same principle and instruction can be seen consistently reiterated toward the end of Prophet’s life. During a time of illness, the news of an imminent attack by an alliance of Northern Arabs and the forces of the Eastern Roman Empire arrived at Medina. The Prophet ordered the preparation of an army under the command of Uthama b. Zayd, and gave the following instructions to Uthama: “Fight in God’s way. Do not be cruel to people. Do not go against your covenant. Do not cut down trees bearing fruits. Do not slaughter livestock. Do not kill the pious who are secluded in monasteries, engaged in worship, or children and women...”⁷² Another record of Prophet’s protest of killing a non-combatant woman can be found in the respected source of prophetic tradition Abu Dawud. The instructions of the Prophet were enshrined in Islamic legal literature, to the effect that the killing of non-combatants such as women, children, the elderly, the disabled is expressly forbidden.⁷³ Albayrak points out that there is no Islamic text which allows the killing of non-combatant civilians in war, as opposed to a combatant (muharib). Albayrak (Albayrak 2006:137) gives a linguistic analysis of a Qur’anic verse in this context⁷⁴:

The Qur’an states clearly ‘Fight in the cause of God those who fight you (who are liable and able to fight, and who participate actively in the fight) but do not transgress the limits; for God loves not transgressors’ (Baqara, 2:190). The Arabic verb *yuqatilûna* in the verse is of extreme importance. To explain this in grammatical terms, the mood (reciprocal form) in Arabic denotes ‘participation’ which, in this sense, means ‘those who fall under the status of combatant’. Thus non-combatants are not to be fought against. This must be obeyed rule in war and applies equally stringently when war has not been declared.

Gülen’s Historical References

Among Gülen’s references in this context are historical incidents that illustrate the consistent interpretation of the same religious sources. The expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain by Catholic Christians provides a historic example that shows the continuity of the understanding of the principles of individuality of crime (2006:137).

It is known that when Muslims in Andalusia (Spain) were expelled from the peninsula, some Muslims asked the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II to expel his Christian subjects from Istanbul as a retaliation for the Christians’ attacks on the Andalusia Muslims. However, the Ottoman Shayk al-Islam Zambilli Jamali Efendi objected, arguing that this practice was against Islamic law concerning the rights of non-Muslim subjects.⁷⁵ In brief, Islam forbids reprisal and the frame of every action in war is defined by Islamic law, which nobody may transgress.

The third component of Gülen’s religious response to violence is perhaps the most significant. This is the rejection of ends justify means philosophy. In a recorded address after London subway bombings and amidst suicide bombing events in Israel, Gülen criticized an authority

71 Abu Dawud, Jihad, 111.

72 Muhammed b. Umar b. Waqid, *Kitab al-Maghazi*, Oxford 1966, III.117-118; Hamza Aktan, ‘Acts of Terror and Suicide Attacks in the Light of the Qur’an and the Sunna’, *An Islamic Perspective: Terror and Suicide Attacks*, New Jersey: Light Pb 2004., 26

73 Tahawi, *Sharh al-Maan al-Athar*, Beirut: Dar Kutub al-Ilmiyya 1996, III.224; Çapan, *Ibid.*, 83

74 Albayrak, I., “Juxtaposition of Islam with Violence”, in Hunt et al., “Muslim Citizens of the Globalized World: Contributions of the Gülen Movement”, *The Light Inc.*, NJ 2006.

75 Bekir Karlığa, *Kültürlerarası Diyalog Sempozyumu*, *Erkâm Mat. İst.* 1998, 16

who condoned acts of suicide bombings for Palestinians⁷⁶:

Unfortunately some condone acts of suicide bombing with the rhetoric of “they have no other means”. If this (referring to suicide bombings) is the only means Muslims have, let that means be buried deep into ground together with the one who uses it.

Gülen continues that the combination of certain non-religious motives and the lack of a holistic perspective allows people to pick and choose what part of the religious tradition they would use in justifying violent acts⁷⁷:

The problem today is that Islam is not understood properly, in a holistic manner. Islam has always been respectful of plurality of worldviews and this point needs to be understood well today. Islam is an authentic religion and it should be lived true to its spirit. While striving toward an Islamic life, it is self-contradictory to use illegitimate means. Just as the ends should be righteous, the means should also be righteous. A Muslim can not hope to please God by killing humans. Killing humans can not be a means of pleasing God.

Gülen also offers explanations for misinterpreted verses and prophetic sayings which are abused by those who justify acts of violence. He states that ‘the reasons why certain Muslim people or institutions that misunderstand Islam are becoming involved in terrorist attacks throughout the world should be sought not in Islam, but within the people themselves, in their misinterpretations⁷⁸ and in other factors.⁷⁹

The verses in the Qur’an that specify conditions for jihad have been misinterpreted by others and taken as the fundamental aim of Islam. In essence, these people, who have failed to grasp the true spirit of Islam, have been unable to strike a balance between the broad and finer points and this, when coupled with the fact that they have been consumed with hatred, has led them to misinterpret Islam. The heart of a genuine Muslim community is full of love and affection for all of creation.

Albayrak points out Gülen’s criticism of context-free reading of the religious sources driven by motives other than religious piety⁸⁰:

(Gülen) ‘argues that some narrow-minded individuals who lack the power of discernment narrow the broad scope of Islam. For this reason Gülen suggests that such people must first change the image of Islam in their mind. Because they have no comprehensive understanding of the sources, they take as reference only some sections of the Islamic sources without exploring the Qur’an and the Prophetic tradition, or the understandings of prominent Muslim scholars. They read these texts literally and mostly out of context without examining what precede or follows them. The results are disastrous: they misinterpret their religion and then put this misunderstood religion into practice; consequently they are misguided and they misguide others’.

Gülen’s Opinions on Political Roots of Terrorism

On the political perspective while discussing misunderstandings, misrepresentations and abuses of religious texts, Gülen hints at the presence of individuals, ideology or interest groups, and other entities that benefit from friction and armed conflict. He points out that the possibility of some individuals having been manipulated and deceived or plainly hypnotized,

76 “Hosgoru, bombalar ve azinliklar” (Tolerance, bombs and religious minorities), available online in Turkish at <http://www.herkul.org>.

77 Akman, *Ibid*.

78 Ismail Albayrak, ‘Islam and Terror: From the Perspective of Fethullah Gülen’, <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/2243/4/>, accessed on 14 August 2007

79 M. Fethullah Gülen, ‘Real Muslims Cannot Be Terrorists’, Turkish Daily News, September 19, 2001

80 Albayrak *Ibid*.

sometimes through special drugs, to carry out actions they would not carry out otherwise should be given consideration.

Gülen does not deny that political conditions are sources of political violence and terrorism, but he insists that people should not use those conditions in order to justify their unlawful action. He advises that ‘Muslims must be legitimate in their intentions when it comes to their goals, thoughts, and actions, for only a straight and allowed way can lead them to their exalted object’.⁸¹ This clearly indicate that Muslim should be legitimate not only their action but also their intentions. Without legitimacy, neither their action nor intention is acceptable even if they gain what they aimed.

We have discussed the secondary role of ideology or religion in communication and recruitment for terrorism. Gülen echoes the findings of researchers who point out diverse conditions that provide a feeding ground for terrorist groups. The recent history of colonialism, tyranny of non-democratic, authoritarian leaders, the presence of various forms of suffering and injustice, and the lack of authoritative scholars provide opportunities for misleading individuals toward violent reactions that serve other interests. He asserts that

We must realize that no Muslim country, when considered from the viewpoint of administrative, legal, and economic matters, exists. What we mean by that phrase is countries with majority Muslim populations. Many of them have movements for independence and also have to cope with the pressures of artificial and oligarchic governments, poverty, ignorance, lack of accurate religious knowledge, geographical difficulties, and unjust distribution of wealth; continued intervention from outside forces who want to block democracy from taking root; easy imports and the consequent non-improvement in domestic production, export, and economics; and, more than anything else, the role of the media in undermining moral values. All of these problems are confronting the Muslims and make them appear in an unfavourable light.⁸²

We have highlighted frustration as a leading cause of terrorism tendencies above. The frustration serves as the turning point toward political violence. According to Gülen, in order to eliminate the tendency toward violence, main focus should be on the individual who lives under those conditions that produce frustration. In some cases, only moral support is enough for many people who are suffering under those conditions. Often, however, a systematic approach centred around education is the only lasting solution. Gülen believes that the humanity is looking forward to the days where individuals endowed with high human values overcome those who favour hostility:

I have been looking forward to a better world resembling Paradise, where humanity can live in peace and tranquillity. Our world is tired of war and clashes. It direly needs mercy, affection, spiritual well-being, and peace more than air and water. I believe that people in every country are ready for such a world.⁸³

The states have been responding to the problem of terrorism through measures such as anti-terrorist legislation, strengthening judicial power, increased state accountability, special

81 In M. Fethullah Gülen, ‘Respect For Humankind’, The Fountain, January – March, 2006 / Issue 53 <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/articles.php?SIN=6e31958cbc&k=738&593384988&show=part1>, accessed on 13 August 2007

82 M. Fethullah Gülen, ‘Respect For Humankind’, The Fountain, January – March, 2006 / Issue 53 <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/articles.php?SIN=6e31958cbc&k=738&593384988&show=part1>, accessed on 13 August 2007.

83 Fethullah Gülen, ‘Excerpts from F. Gülen’s Answers to Questions on Education and Turkish Educational Activities Abroad’, <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/779/2/>, accessed on 14 August 2007.

forces, better command and coordination among security forces, direction of media, better intelligence, deterrence, and collaboration among government agencies, as well as reduction of systematic causes. Below, we will examine the civilian response inspired by Gülen's educational philosophy and activism that centres on the individual human.

The Educational Approach to the Problem of Terrorism

Gülen sees the individual human being at the centre of every major problem of humanity as well as its solution. Lasting solutions to social problems such as lack of education, poverty and division can not be achieved without paying enough attention to the individual human. For this reason, the underlying dynamics of Gülen's approach are education, mutual understanding, respect, opportunity and hope. Saritoprak comments that 'for the peaceful world of the future, Gülen encourages his admirers to establish educational institutions in and outside of Turkey. He gives special importance to the areas where ethnic and religious conflicts are escalating, such as Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, the Philippines, Banda Aceh, Northern Iraq, and South-eastern Turkey'.⁸⁴

Many educational institutions (from nursery to university) have been established in Turkey and some 103 countries of the world by civil society organizations that have been inspired by Gülen. In addition to following the national curricula of their localities, these educational institutions actively foster interfaith and intercultural dialog, mutual understanding and respect, which offer hope of upward mobility, and provide lasting solutions to the problem of violent social conflict.⁸⁵ A striking example of generation of hope of upward mobility is the set of educational institutions in south-eastern Turkey. In his soon to be published book, in part presented at this conference, Kalyoncu describes how the people of the region, predominantly Kurdish citizens of Turkey, embrace and support the educational initiatives of organizations inspired by Gülen that give their children an opportunity to become engineers, doctors, lawyers and architects instead of being recruited by terrorist organizations⁸⁶. Other examples of such bridges can be seen in Philippines, where Muslim minority students study with their fellow Christian students in an atmosphere of trust⁸⁷; Bosnia-Herzegovina where children of Bosnian Muslims who have been massacred by Serbians study shoulder-to-shoulder with their children⁸⁸, and Macedonia where the fighting Albanian, Macedonia and Serbian factions carry their children to such schools for safety.

Students are not the only beneficiaries of these educational institutions. Increasingly transnational in their outlook, civil society organizations focusing on education 'serve as a bridge between the peoples of the countries where they are and thereby can contribute to the world peace'.⁸⁹ In many cases, the educational institutions have started a larger synergy and led to

84 Zeki Saritoprak, 'An Islamic Approach to Peace and Nonviolence: A Turkish Experience', *The Muslim World*, Vol. 95 (July 2005), pp. 413-427

85 Zeki Saritoprak, 'An Islamic Approach to Peace and Nonviolence: A Turkish Experience', *The Muslim World*, Vol. 95 (July 2005), pp. 413-427

86 Mehmet Kalyoncu, 'The Counter Terrorism Issue In Terms Of Systems Theory; Diyarbakir as a Case Study', presentation at the Second Istanbul Conference on Democracy and Global Security, June 14-16, 2007.

87 Michel, Thomas. 2003. Fethullah Gülen as an Educator. In *Turkish Islam and the secular state: The Gülen movement*. M. H. Yavuz and J. L. Esposito, eds. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

88 Serif Ali Tekalan, 'Monuments of Love and Alturism', in *Baris Kopruleri (Bridges of Peace)*, Istanbul: Ufuk Kitaplari, 2005, 254.

89 Fahri Karakas, 'Global Peaceful Social Innovation: The Case of Gülen Network', <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/2242/4/>, accessed on 14 August 2007

the formation of new trade and civic links among communities and nations.

Conclusion

We began by examining origins and root causes of violence, especially political violence. Economic, political, social and cultural factors each play a role in the slipping of individuals into the perilous slope of terrorism. Both governments as well as civic organizations have an obligation in responding to this modern phenomenon which has far reaching consequences for humanity. Recently, religion, and in particular the name of Islam have been juxtaposed with terrorist actions and individuals. Among opinion leaders who respond to terrorism, Gülen is distinguished by three factors. First, Gülen has clearly voiced his unconditional condemnation of acts of violence against civilians and stated that involvement in terrorism can not coincide with commitment to faith. Secondly, Gülen argued both as a human and as a Muslim scholar in systematic and convincing ways to distance his audience from having sympathy with the perpetrators of such actions. Third, lasting solutions to the problem of terrorism in the form of educational institutions inculcating a culture of tolerance and respect, and opportunities for upward mobility have been generated by civil society organizations inspired and encouraged by Gülen. In other words, Gülen's ideas and vision have not remained in audio tapes and books, but instead they have been realized in concrete projects in volatile regions of the world. From the beginning of his career, Gülen has been involved in the establishment of educational institutions and personally tutored some of their first teachers. He has personally experienced whether his proposals to humanity were workable or not. The results have so far been positive and there are tangible indicators of decreased tensions in communities with Gülen-inspired educational institutions in many regions of the world.⁹⁰ A review of Gülen's rhetoric and action reveals that he has understood the root causes of violence and political violence (terrorism), paving the way for him to pioneer sustainable ways to combat and prevent them.

We have pointed out to the political and economic roots of terrorism and the role ideology, or religion cast into an ideological form, plays in communicating with the community in order to recruit more support, rather than being itself the root cause of terrorism. Richardson comments that 'broad social, economic and cultural factors may be the underlying causes or rather the risk factors that make a society more or less susceptible to the appeal of terrorist groups'.⁹¹ Economic and other grievances only lead to terrorism if people feel that those grievances are a product of the political system, and they are excluded from that system. Consequently, the response to the complex phenomenon of terrorism involves participation by political institutions, such as governmental agencies, as well as civil society organizations. Gülen's humanitarian, religious as well as educational response to violence against civilians, as implemented by the civil society organizations inspired by his ideas, demonstrates the potential of the civil society organizations in this challenging task.

90 Zeki Saritoprak, 'An Islamic Approach to Peace and Nonviolence: A Turkish Experience', *The Muslim World*, Vol. 95 (July 2005), pp. 413-427

91 Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorists Threat*, John Murray: GB 2006, p. 93