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Reclaim the true jihad

AS pointed out by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the attacks against the United States were acts of terror and do not reflect true jihad. Unfortunately, the prevailing view among non-Muslims is that terrorism is synonymous with jihad. It is condemned as "a scriptural utopia that breeds fanatical madness" and "the most obnoxious supremacist doctrine since Hitler's Final Solution".

True jihad is none of these. Jihad means striving in the way of God. Jihad al-akhbar (Greater Struggle) is the inner struggle against ignorance and for self-purification as well as knowledge. Jihad as-asghir (Lesser Struggle) is a just armed struggle for the ummah's defence and non-Muslim's protection from oppression and evil but it prohibits attacking enemies from the back and killing innocents.

We have seen many things under the guise of jihad or pursuing martyrdom. The explanations for these acts demonise Islam and threaten to make the ummah as pariahs in the post-Sept 11 World Order. Already, there is renewed interest in Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilisations which declared that "the absolute nature of Islam that merges religion and politics, the absence of non-violence in the faith and the lack of one or more core states that would effectively mediate conflicts have combined to make Islam a source of global instability". We know this is tosh but does the world?

Even cogent analyses such as Professor Mark Juergensmeyer's Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence do not distinguish true jihad. The point is violent ideas, images and acts are not the monopoly of any religion. History proves that all the major religious traditions have served as a resource, albeit via misinterpretations, of violent actors. Should Timothy McVeigh's quasi-Christian beliefs and Osama bin Laden's faith be blamed or their psychotic abuse of religious mores and symbols?

No religion or its followers should be targeted for the condemnable act of a few. It is an anomaly to call terrorism jihad. Call it Kalashnikov culture, fundamental psychosis or symbolic-violence culture, whatever. The lesson is clear: When religion is politicised, people are subjugated to scripturally manipulated societal order that will send the country hurtling back to the Dark Ages.

The ummah must join Dr Mahathir and Malaysia in rectifying misperceptions and reclaiming true jihad.

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