

Muslims Real Victims of Terror

Interview

The author of "Al Qaeda, the Myth" Prof. Rik Colsaet spoke to Zaman recently. Colsaet strongly opposes the term "Islamic terror." Asking the question, "Islam has existed for 1,400 years, but why are we facing this type of terror just now?" he urges the West to focus on the roots of terror.

After London's attacks terror once again tops the world agenda. After the March 11 Madrid attacks another European Union (EU) member lost many to a terror attack. The EU organized urgent meetings, took decisions and declared war against terror. However discussions on the causes of such incidents diminished. Those who discuss the causes are accused of "finding excuses" for terror. Colsaet insists on the necessity to go to the roots of terror without heeding for the criticisms. Colsaet a Belgian who is the Director of Security and Global Environment at the Royal Institute for International Relations and also Professor of International Relations at Ghent University, had his books "Al Qaeda, the Myth" and "Between al-Andalus and a failing integration: Europe's pursuit of a long-term counterterrorism strategy in the post-al-Qaeda era" published last year. Colsaet begins with an emphatic rejection of the terms "Islamic terror" and "Muslim terror." He thinks terror's greatest victims are Muslims. According to Colsaet al Qaeda has been disabled as a result of the operations that have been undertaken for two years, but ben Ladin managed to form a virtual community. What is to be done now, Colsaet thinks, is to dry the sources that feeds this virtual community. He put forward the following recommendations:

Why has there been no terror for 1400 years?

I reject the use of the term "Islamic terror." "Muslims' terror" is again an inappropriate expression. These expressions are very ugly. Islam has nothing to do with these incidents. I use the "Islamist pro- Jihaad terror" turn of phrase. To me "Islamic" means the correct reciting of Qoran, while, "Islamist" means those who use Islam for political motives. The EU should immediately begin a dialogue with political groups inspired by religion. I think AKP and some parties in Morocco are such groups, I mean they accept the rules of democracy and the concept of a nation-state but they do not have an pro-ummah approach like Bin-Laden.

I think we should look at the roots of the motives of Islamist terror. When I say, "the root of the motives", I know that the US and Israel react to this expression as they think it justifies terror. I do not have any intention "to justify terror" but it is necessary to know the motives of terror if a fight against terror has to be started. How can you fight terror in any other way? For example, the US President George W. Bush uses the expression, 'evil'. That is good but, with this expression, which motives of terror do you understand and develop struggle methods accordingly? What I am trying to say is, why has the pro-Jihaad terror appeared in this era? Islam has exists for 1 400 years but, we are facing

terror now. Why now? This question has many answers. I do not think only poverty is the cause of this. Africa should sprout most of the terrorist activities, then. The motives of terror in Turkey, in the Middle East, in North Africa and Western Europe are all different from each other. However, they have a common aspect, and that is the common understanding of the West's attitude. Among these, there are deprivation, marginalization and suppression. Bin Laden knows very well how to use all of these.

Bush Reacted Irresponsibly

US President reacted most irresponsibly after the attacks in London when he said: "We will bring war to them." In contrast the British reacted professionally and maturely. The western world has not been successful in the struggle against terrorism. Almost all of the western media and western politicians, and Bush in particular, has helped Laden a lot. Their reactions are exactly what Bin Laden wants. Perhaps they are playing into Bin Laden's hands without being aware of that. I observed that the number of people in the middle level of the Bush administration who think that the present counter terror methods do not work has increased.

171,000 of 175,000 Terror Victims are Muslims

The Western world has been selective in human tragedies but I believe that this selection is mere perception. For instance, I will tell you about a study we conducted. The Western world is talking about "Islamic Terror" so we decided to investigate the truth, i.e. how many Muslims and Westerners this terror has killed. the number of people killed in terrorist attacks since 1990 is 175,000. The civil war in Algeria is included in this evaluation, the war in Iraq is not. Only 4,000 of these people are westerners and the September 11 attack is also included in this number. There is a very clear picture in front of us. Muslims are the biggest victims of this terror. In fact Muslims kill Muslims."

I Plead with Western Governments

When these numbers appear, you and some Westerners assert "Is a Westerner's life more precious?" I don't think Muslims have such a perception. Yet, I don't think the West is waging a war against the Islamic world. For example, Belgium both as a people and as a country objected to the Iraq war. We thought this war would create an image of a crusade against Muslims and unfortunately we were right. This is a perception. The West has no intention of a crusade against the Islamic world. I am aware of the fact that sometimes perception is stronger than the reality itself. The Western governments have to diffuse this perception urgently. I think the most important problem that we should eliminate is this perception issue. The Islamic world says the West remained silent against Srebrenica. They are right. However, a total of 800,000 people were killed in Rwanda within three months and the West did not even turn a hair. Rwandans were not Muslims.

No Organized Al-Qaeda Structure Anymore

I think, al-Qaeda has not had an organized and disciplined structure for the last two years. Precautionary measures taken in the entire world, and primarily in the US, have weakened the organization. Even if you arrested Osama bin Laden and all the other leaders of the organization, terror would not stop. Bin Laden's success is his creating an imaginary community therefore not the leaders of this organization but the sources feeding this imaginary community should be eliminated.

Answer to Huntington: EU with Turkey

I am against Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis. I support Turkey's EU membership only to show the entire world that there is no clash of civilizations and no differences between the West and the Islamic world due to political reasons. The West should diffuse the Muslims perception of the Crusades. Turkey's future membership will play a crucial role in efforts to eliminate this perception.

(Zaman.com, 17 juli 2005)

[Copyright Feza Newspaper Publishing Co]