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ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON TERRORISM AND THE MISUSE OF FATWA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECURITY, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the Islamic perspective on terrorism and the deliberate misuse of Fatwa in Nigeria, demonstrating the incompatibility of such acts with Islamic teachings. Terrorist activities including kidnapping, killings, and the creation of fear are unequivocally condemned in the Qur'an and Hadith, which emphasize the sanctity of human life, property, and societal order. The study highlights the role of Islamic jurists (Muftis) in issuing Fatwas and underscores the dangers of false rulings that legitimize violence or criminality. Using classical scholarship, Qur'anic injunctions, Hadith, and contemporary Nigerian incidents, the paper illustrates how terrorist acts and misrepresented Jihad compromise security, disrupt education, and undermine the moral integrity of society. The closure of schools in parts of Kwara State following terrorist threats exemplifies the adverse effects on education and community development. The paper recommends the establishment of regulatory mechanisms to oversee Fatwa issuance, the public condemnation of criminal acts, and the promotion of authentic Islamic guidance to safeguard life, property, and societal well-being. In conclusion, Islam fundamentally opposes terrorism and the distortion of religious rulings, placing responsibility on scholars, government, and society to maintain justice, security, and education.

Keywords: Terrorism, Fatwa, Security, Mufti and Religious Abuse

Introduction

Based on the title of this paper, terrorism, kidnapping, and killing are actions that Islam explicitly forbids in society. Ibn Taymiyyah defined a terrorist as "whoever spreads fear among people and unlawfully sheds blood is a corrupter on the earth" (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995). Al-Qurtubi similarly observes that terrorism, termed *Hirabah*, includes "every act that terrifies people and makes roads unsafe" (Al-Qurtubi, 2006). Islam categorizes any attempt to cause fear or insecurity in life and property as *ifsad fi al-Ard*, corruption and disorder in the land—denying societal progress and development. Islamic jurists agree that terrorism, kidnapping, and unlawful killing fall under *Hirabah* or acts that destroy security, spread fear, violate life or property, and disrupt societal order, whether committed individually or collectively. These acts are often driven by motives to seize property or resources illegally. In a contemporary understanding, King and Nwake (2019) define insecurity as "a state of being subject to fear, terror, war, threat, danger, extortion, and harassment, often exacerbated by the activities of bandits, terrorists, kidnappers, and herdsmen." Allah has explicitly prohibited such acts as *haram* in the Qur'an:

> Whoever kills a soul unless for soul or corruption (*fasad*) in the land… (Qur'an 5:32).

Al-Kafi notes that "killing a soul unlawfully is among the greatest of major sins, greater even than theft, adultery, or consuming alcohol. The murder of an innocent person is unparalleled because the soul (*Ruhu*) belongs solely to Allah" (Al-Kafi, 1996). Ibn Kathir and Al-Tabari explain that the soul (*Ruhu*) exists by divine decree and is not subject to human comprehension (Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 2003). Since the beginning of human existence, terrorism, unlawful killing, and destruction of property have been condemned in all forms, with no conditions permitting them. The Qur'an underscores the moral objective (*Maqasid*) of Islam:

> You are the best community brought forth for humanity: you enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah (Qur'an 3:110).

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Conceptual Clarifications

Bad Character

Bad character refers to immoral behaviour that is forbidden and must not be tolerated in society. Islam discourages aiding or condoning terrorists, kidnappers, or murderers. Allah advises:

> And verily, whosoever shows patience and forgives, that would truly be among the things recommended by Allah (Qur'an 42:43).

The Prophet (pbuh) also said:

> Do not destroy villages or towns; do not spoil cultivated fields and gardens; do not slaughter cattle unnecessarily. Do not wish for an encounter with the enemy; pray to Allah to grant you security; but when forced to encounter them, exercise patience (Sahih Muslim, Muslim, 2007)

Thus, Muslims are required to engage morally in all matters, promoting good character, patience, and non-violence. Supporting terrorists or kidnappers is considered outside the fold of Islam (Bernard, 2003). Jihad, properly understood, refers to internal and external efforts to uphold justice and convey Islam peacefully, not to oppress or harm others.

Differences Between Jihad and Terrorist Acts

Jihad primarily refers to striving in the path of Allah, which includes both internal spiritual purification and external efforts to promote justice and guidance (Ibn ʿArabī, 1980; Rūmī, 2004). Al-Jurjānī explains that jihad also involves inviting others to the true religion through wisdom and persuasion (Al-Jurjānī, 1983). The Qur'an commands believers to "strive in the cause of Allah with the striving due to Him" (Qur'an 22:78), while also emphasizing that there should be no compulsion in religion and that invitation must be carried out with wisdom and good counsel (Qur'an 2:256; 16:125). The Prophet ﷺ likewise highlighted the virtues of gentleness and patience in dealing with people (Muslim, 2007). Furthermore, Islam strictly prohibits the killing of innocent persons and permits fighting only in cases of aggression or oppression (Qur'an 2:190; 22:39; Ibn Kathīr, 2003). These verses clarify that Islamic combat is strictly defensive, in response to provocation, and never a justification for terrorism.

Islam strictly condemns terrorism and any form of violence directed against innocent people. International law defines terrorism as the deliberate use of violence to create fear among civilians for political or ideological purposes (United Nations, 2019). Islamic scholarship likewise rejects such acts because the objectives of Islam emphasize peace, justice, and harmony between humanity and the Creator (Khan, 2018). The Qur'an condemns persecution and coercion in matters of faith, emphasizing that "there is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256) and describing persecution as worse than killing (Qur'an 2:191). Classical commentators such as Al-Qurṭubī and Al-Ṭabarī explain that forcing people away from their faith destabilizes society and undermines justice (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ emphasized love, compassion, and the sanctity of life as essential elements of faith (Muslim, 2007).

Fatwah and Terrorism

Issuing a *fatwa* that attempts to justify terrorism, unlawful killing, or any form of insecurity is strictly forbidden in Islam. Islamic teachings place great responsibility on scholars who provide legal opinions, because a *fatwa* is expected to reflect the guidance of Allah as derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. For this reason, the Qur'an strongly warns believers against attributing false rulings to Allah or speaking about religion without sound knowledge. Allah states that Satan encourages people toward evil and immorality and leads them to say about Allah what they do not know (Qur'an 2:169). Similarly, the Qur'an warns that those who fabricate falsehood in the name of Allah will never attain success (Qur'an 16:116). These verses highlight the seriousness of misrepresenting divine guidance, particularly in matters that affect human life and societal peace. Classical Muslim scholars emphasised that issuing a *fatwa* is a grave and delicate responsibility. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya explained that a mufti essentially functions as a representative who conveys the rulings of Allah to the people. Because of this position, a mufti must exercise the highest level of scholarly competence, sincerity, and caution when issuing legal opinions (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1996). Any verdict that promotes injustice, violence, or harm contradicts the ethical objectives of Islamic law, which aim to preserve life, religion, intellect, property, and human dignity.

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Prophetic traditions further demonstrate the importance of accuracy in religious rulings. Reports found in the collections of Abu Dawud indicate that even some companions were corrected when they issued an incorrect legal opinion, showing that no individual is above correction when the truth becomes clear (Abū Dāwūd, 2008). This tradition of scholarly accountability underscores the principle that religious verdicts must always be grounded in authentic evidence and sound understanding. In contemporary times, attempts by certain individuals or groups to justify terrorism or violent extremism under the guise of *jihad* represent a serious distortion of Islamic teachings. Such claims contradict the Qur'anic emphasis on justice, mercy, and the sanctity of human life. Reports in Nigerian media have also highlighted how some clerics have misused religious rhetoric to legitimise violent acts, even when the victims are innocent civilians or fellow Muslims (Vanguard, 2021). These interpretations not only violate Islamic principles but also damage the image of Islam and the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), whose message consistently promoted compassion, justice, and peaceful coexistence.

Impact of Terrorism on Education

The rise of terrorism and insecurity in parts of Nigeria has had serious consequences for the educational sector. In Kwara State, the temporary closure of schools in local government areas such as Isin, Irepodun, Oke-Ero, and Ekiti was implemented as a precautionary measure to protect students and teachers from potential terrorist attacks and kidnappings. While such measures are necessary to safeguard lives, they inevitably disrupt the educational process. Students preparing for critical examinations, particularly those organized by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO), face significant setbacks during prolonged school closures. These interruptions can result in learning gaps, increased anxiety among students, and delays in academic progression (Okunade, 2020). From an Islamic perspective, the pursuit of knowledge is a fundamental obligation and a cornerstone of societal development. The Qur'an begins with a command that emphasizes the importance of learning: *"Read in the name of your Lord who created"* (Qur'an 96:1). Similarly, Allah promises to elevate those who possess faith and knowledge:

> *Allah will raise those who believe among you and those who have been given knowledge in degrees* (Qur'an 58:11).

These verses highlight the central role of education in Islam, which is not only intellectual but also moral and societal in nature.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reinforced this emphasis on learning through both instruction and practice. In Madinah, a group known as the *Ahl al-Suffah* lived in the Prophet's Mosque, dedicating themselves to memorizing and understanding the Qur'an and prophetic teachings. Many later became renowned scholars who significantly contributed to Islamic knowledge (Ibn Majah, 2007). Consequently, interruptions to education due to insecurity not only impede academic development but also conflict with Islam's emphasis on cultivating morally and intellectually capable individuals.

Islam and the Invasion of Innocent People

Islam strongly condemns aggression against innocent individuals and prohibits the unlawful occupation of property or territories. While self-defense is permitted, the Qur'an strictly forbids transgression and injustice:

> *Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not love transgressors* (Qur'an 2:190).

This guidance establishes a moral and ethical framework for conflict, underscoring restraint and accountability. Moreover, Islam promotes peaceful coexistence with others, including non-Muslims who live in society peacefully. The Qur'an states:

> *Allah forbids you to show hostility to unbelievers who do not fight you or expel you from your homes* (Qur'an 60:8–9).

Another verse warns believers against spreading disorder once peace has been established:

> *Do not promote disorder on the earth after peace has been established* (Qur'an 7:56).

These teachings emphasize the protection of life, property, and social harmony.

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Prophetic traditions reinforce these principles. The Prophet ﷺ instructed believers not to desire confrontation with enemies but to seek safety and exercise patience if conflict becomes unavoidable (Al-Bukhari, 2007). He also warned that anyone who unjustly kills a protected non-Muslim will not even smell the fragrance of Paradise (Muslim, 2007). These narrations illustrate the seriousness with which Islam protects life and the rights of peaceful communities. Classical scholars have addressed the issue of defensive warfare. Ibn Taymiyyah (2003) permitted resistance against invading forces, such as during the Mongol invasions, but he strictly differentiated legitimate defence from unjust aggression. He emphasised that religion cannot be misused as a pretext to seize others' property or land. Therefore, no individual, group, or self-appointed mufti has the authority to declare aggression against peaceful communities under the guise of *jihad*. Doing so constitutes a distortion of Islamic teachings and violates the principles of justice, mercy, and sanctity of life.

Conclusion

Islam strictly forbids terrorism, kidnapping, unlawful killing, and the invasion of innocent people. Any *fatwa* or religious ruling that seeks to justify such acts is false and haram, directly contradicting the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Education is a vital pillar in Islam, and disruptions caused by terrorism and insecurity not only threaten students' academic progress but also hinder the moral and intellectual development of society. As the Qur'an reminds us, truth and falsehood are never equal: *"The blind and the seeing are not equal, nor are darkness and light"* (Qur'an 35:19). Misrepresenting divine guidance or issuing false religious rulings undermines societal trust and damages the reputation of Islam.

Suggestions

To address these challenges, several measures should be taken:

1. Communities and individuals should actively resist false *fatwas*, ensuring that religious rulings are never misused to justify violence or criminal acts.
2. Muftis and Islamic clerics should issue *fatwas* strictly according to Shariah principles and should be held accountable for any public pronouncement that deviates from Islamic law.
3. Governments and Islamic authorities should establish disciplinary committees to monitor the issuance of *fatwas* and prevent misleading or harmful rulings.
4. Religious rulings should promote understanding, peace, and social cohesion; misuse of *fatwas* to justify violence should be firmly opposed to protect Islam's image.
5. Communities should be educated on the Islamic prohibition of terrorism, the sanctity of life, and the value of knowledge, promoting a culture of peace and moral responsibility.

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