Fading "War on Terror" And Leaving Islamophobia Behind: The Future of Islamophobia

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Abstract

A powerful discourse after September 11, 2001 attacks i.e., the "War on Terror" was constructed by the Western propaganda machines that dominated the social and political arena of the world now for more than two decades. War on Terror was not just a conflict between the Western Powers and the Terrorists, but it was a powerful discourse of hatred and discrimination against Muslims which disturbed the core of society through immense Islamophobia. America's tendency toward conflict resolution directly linked with War on Terror is increasing rapidly and was very desperate to get rid of the Afghan war in one way or another. Does any settlement like Doha Accord mean an end to the Afghan War and subsequently an end to War on Terror? If so, then what will be the future of Islamophobia when there is no War on Terror discourse in society? There is a gap that needs to be filled between "conflict resolutions" i.e. the tendency to end the War on Terror and "discourse maintenance" i.e. dealing with Islamophobia which was part of the global War on Terror. The pricking idea is regarding the future of islamophobia. Through qualitative data analysis, the present article attempts to ascertain the future of Islamophobia and its deep-rooted relationship with the "war against terrorism" discourse. The present study suggests that leadership and mainstream scholarship in the Islamic world need to take unprecedented measures against Islamophobia.

Keywords   Islamophobia, Discourse, Anti-Semitism, Orientalism, Jihad, Blasphemy

Introduction

Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon as historically there has been surfing hate and discrimination against the followers of Islam in many societies. Historical evidence of this hate can easily be witnessed in the events when the Crusades took back the city of Jerusalem. The etymology of the term "Islamophobia'' is mainly attributed to the first usage of the term by Alphonse Etienne Dinet, a French Muslim convert and orientalist painter. He used the term "Islamophobia" for the first time in the book published in 1918 "The Life of Mohammad, the Prophet of Allah" (Dinet et al, 1918). In recent years, the usage of the term Islamophobia is credited to Edward Said's article "Orientalism Reconsidered" (Said, 1985). Evidence of Islamophobia or "fear of Islam and Muslims" can be traced back to the dawn of Islam (Housley, 2007) and throughout orientalist literature (Said, 1985). This article aims to study the relationship of Islamophobia with the War on Terror and to analyze the consequences of leaving Islamophobia behind which was part of the War on Terror discourse post 9/11. In the scenario after 9/11, the war which was started against terrorists was not just a tussle between terrorists and the US; rather, it was everyone's Islamophobia in Western society. Soon after the attacks, the US was quick to respond in statements that sparked anger against Islam in public. For example, George W Bush, the former president of the United States at the time when towers came

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down soon after said that those behind the inhumane attacks on US soil shall be made to pay, and the United States of America will soon lead to a new global 'Crusade' against terrorism" (Noor, 2006).

After the construction of two identities using historic terms of hatred like "Crusades" in such statements, the images of a terrorist started appearing in the media. Those were the images of none but of a common tribal Muslim with long beards on their faces and turbans on their heads. The images were then repeated and broadcasted so many times in media that meanings took new turns. The words like "Taliban", which in linguistics means "those who study in an Islamic seminary", were now believed to be barbaric terrorists. Considering Gillian Whitlock's theory of 'soft weapons' to images, the stigmatizing construction of tribal Muslims in general as terrorists and shaping public opinions through these images were not accidental acts but were part of an ambition to take Islamophobia to an apex level in Western societies which was previously unimagined. Noraini Muhammad Yusof argues about the importance of images on human life and suggests that images play a significant role in how we communicate, and thus shape our lives. They influence our imagination and the overall construction of social and cultural identities. Because images may quickly influence viewers both cognitively and emotionally, visual communication is more prevalent than ever before. Many of the images that we see daily are ideological images such as the anti-Muslim or anti-American pictures triggered by 9/11" (Zeiny & Yusaf, 2015). As the War on Terror matured, hate was ignited against Islam and Muslims not only in America but almost in the entire non-Muslim world.

The global wrath of Islamophobia is now haunting Muslims everywhere. The strongest force behind rising Islamophobia during the War on Terror was the misinterpretation and misquotation of Jihad. Jihad was primarily glorified as a "holy war" by the Americans during Ronald Reagan's "Communist Containment" where he brought these rogue elements into the White House and praised them as "courageous" as the "founding fathers of the USA" (Gwertzman, 1986). Later, this same pragmatism as their root of self-identity made President Bush call the very same rogue elements as "worst enemies of America" and launched a global war on terror against them. Barbara Slater Stem argues about the misinterpretation of Jihad. Jihad, according to this description, is a "broad Islamic concept that includes struggle against evil tendencies, within oneself, and struggle against others".

Advocates of this view insist that radicals and *terrorists* have unjustly *misinterpreted jihad* to justify their immoral acts of murders and should not be associated with Islamic values and practices" (Stern, 2009). The politicization and misinterpretation of Jihad were the need of both major belligerents during the war on terror where terrorists were chased everywhere and wanted to be used for regaining political power, and the United States, on the other hand, had a very favorable environment to intervene everywhere in the Muslim world. Dr. Farish A. Noor argues that the events following the terrorist attacks on the United States of America provided the pretext for the American government to resume its military outreach to key Muslim states throughout Asia, using the ambiguous 'war on terror' trope to justify direct and indirect intervention in the domestic and international political affairs of the involved states (Noor, 2006). The war on terror spread its tentacles rapidly out into the Islamic world, and soon it emerged as not just a conflict but a powerful discourse of hatred, prejudice, and discrimination against Muslims which has still dominated Western societies.

Islamophobia during War on Terror: New Heights

During the war on terror, Islamophobia took new heights and the climate was perfectly established for a new climax that was previously unimaginable. The misrepresentation of "terrorists and Jihad" in media leads to enormous racism against Muslims, especially those living in America and Europe. The media played a key role in highlighting this racism and prejudice against Muslims. They (the media) can symbolize the world in specific ways. And, because there are so many different and conflicting methods to construct the meaning of the world, it matters a tremendous deal who and what is represented, who and what is constantly and routinely kept out, and how purposes, individuals, events, and connections are portrayed. What we know about society is determined by how things are presented to us, and this information impacts what we do and what rules we are willing to accept (Miller & Cobley, 2002).

Gallop took a survey on Islamophobia from 2008 to 2011 with a large cluster of data and the analyzed data found a horrifying conclusion. The survey shows that 52% of Americans and 48% of Canadians say the West does not respect Muslim societies. Similarly, there were mixed opinions about Muslim Americans' loyalty to the United States Army. The percentage was increasing year by year in terms of those who believed they are non-loyal or less loyal (Gallop, 2011). This portrait of

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Muslim identity being different is almost identical to the Orientalist's representation or ''misrepresentation'' of the Orient which is well explained by Edward Said in his book "Orientalism (1978)". Here too, western media propagated two identities and two opinions to the general public through misquotation and misrepresentation. This division during the war on terror demarcated (Native Westerners)" as being civil, rational, superior and progressive while (Muslim Immigrants in Europe and America and everywhere as race)" being backward, wild, inferior and irrational had a stigmatizing impact on the rise of Islamophobia. Gilroy (1987) argues "because they are portrayed as 'different' in the media, ethnic minorities are thought to be unable to completely engage in British culture. These discourses of the 'other' have contextually framed media representations of ethnic minorities. Additionally, these discourses indicate that Muslims are foreign to indigenous culture" (Gilory, 2013).

After the media's forged narratives against Muslims, a distinct political and social climate bestow permission to hate and created an enabling environment that signals the legitimacy of public hostility towards the Muslim communities. There has been a monumental increase in Islamophobic and anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents of violence in the US, Europe, Canada, India, Australia, New Zeeland, and almost every non-Muslim country. Poynting and others (2007) argue that following these attacks, reactionary violence against people believed to be Muslim increased significantly. Resulting in assaults, arson, and even racially motivated killings around the world, particularly in nations affiliated with the US. Even in Canada, one of the Western countries that were against the US's 2003 invasion of Iraq, anti-Muslim violence and governmental anti-Muslim actions proliferated (Poynting, 2007). In the United States, the increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes dramatically jumped. It is on record that from just 28 incidents in the year 2000, the number jumped to 481 during 2001, 155 in 2002, 149 in 2003, 156 in 2004, 128 in 2005, 156 in 2006, 115 in 2007, and 105 in 2008. And even such an increase in numbers too is not the complete view and just a merry assertion of anti-Muslim hate. Peek, (2011) argues in his book "Behind the Backlash; Muslims American after 9/11" about the nature of reported incidents in the US. Hate crime underreporting is a problem. But how serious is the problem? Since it began reporting the figures in 1992, the FBI has counted between 6,000 and 10,000 hate-crime events per year. Similarly, the outlook of Europe also changed after 9/11 and anti-Muslim hate dominated both society and politics.

According to a Gallop study, "about four in ten citizens see an irreconcilable contradiction between the values of liberal democracy and Islam in Europe". Ogan argues about hate against Muslims in Europe, "Today, Europe is seeing a battle between the local and the transnational. Over seventeen million Muslims live in 17 countries across Western Europe, with the highest concentrations in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain (Ogan & Bashir, 2014). There has been an upsurge in Islamophobic discourse in all of these countries, probably most notably in the Netherlands, where Geert Wilders, Dutch MP and head of the Nationalistic Freedom Party, has called for a full cessation of immigration from all across the Muslim world.

Anti-Muslim hate in New Zeeland and Australia too took new heights after 9/11, not only in terms of several incidents but the severity of violence as well. On 15th March 2019 at Christchurch, the worst terrorist attack devastated New Zeeland in what appeared to be an anti-Muslim hate crime when a gunman opened fire consecutively on two mosques where Muslims were busy in Friday prayers resulting in the killing of 51 innocent worshipers and injuring other 49. The shooter not only killed those people but live broadcasted the shooting over Facebook to spread more fear. The stigmatizing increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes posts 9/11 is clear evidence of the fact that most attacks reporting and reshaping of public narratives and the construction of War on Terror discourse have a major role in the new heights of Islamophobia which previously was unimaginable.

Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism

Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism have too much in common but the inclusion of this section in the article is not a comparison of both as there is enough debate on that in literature. Like Islamophobia took new heights after 9/11 and during the war on terror, Anti-Semitism too had a history with war i.e. world war 2nd. After the Second World War, Anti-Semitism was never dealt with afterward and was left behind. Even today, after almost seven decades, Anti-Semitism is dominating societies, and hate crimes against Jews never stopped. If we compare "Anti-Semitism after world war 2nd" with "Islamophobia after 9/11 and war on terror", it is very much understandable that immense Islamophobia too has a future in society even if the war on terror concludes someday, the way Anti-

Semitism survived for decades after its new heights which resulted in Holocaust. Those in power will construct a new discourse after the war on terror and Islamophobia will be justified and ignited under the new one.

The primary argument in the present study is about America's tendency to end its conflicts, specifically the twenty years old Afghan War. For this purpose, Americans negotiated and signed a peace deal with all stakeholders including the then terrorists i.e. Taliban under which the United States has gradually withdrawn all of its remaining ground troops from Afghanistan. Is Afghan War the last battlefield in the global war on terror and does an end to the Afghan War mean an end to the global war on terror?

An end to the war on terror is a vague debate and lacks clarity. If we assume the end to "an end to armed conflicts" then the US is surely pulling out not only from Afghanistan but from those conflicts in the Middle East as well, the two strategic fronts at war on terror. President Obama told US troops coming home from their last deployments in Iraq in December 2011 that the American mission in the nation had been completed. The US is so eager to get rid of the war on terror that President Obama announced back in 2013, The United States is so keen to end the war on terror that President Barack Obama said in 2013 that the "Global War on Terror" is over now, and the military and intelligence agencies will no longer wage war against a tactic, but instead concentrate on a specific group of organizations aimed at destroying the United States. Not only Obama Administration, but President Trump has a very clear policy regarding the war in Afghanistan as he campaigned against the nineteen years old war in Afghanistan and stressed bringing back home American soldiers that are fighting in Afghanistan. In his State of the Union Address in 2018, President Trump pledged to end wars in the Middle East and quoted about Afghanistan, "the hour has come to at least try for peace" and "Do not fight endless wars". On Feb 29[th,] 2020, the US and Afghan Taliban signed a peace deal in Afghanistan under which the nineteen years old Afghan War will pessimistically come to an end. After approving the agreement, President Trump stated that Afghanistan has been a "long and difficult journey." After so many years, it's now time to bring our folks home.

These developments suggest that there is a growing tendency in American Society and Political Outlook for ending conflicts and as the Afghan War is their last on-going military conflict, which is in the process of peace building and American Withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is evident that War on Terror is ending and Afghan War was the last battlefield in the war on terror. In the last few years, Americans pulled out of the Iraq War, left ISIS behind in Syria for YPJ/PKK and Turkey to deal with, and stopped military assistance to Pakistan for its war against terrorism. There is a growing tendency toward "Isolation" as well in American politics as Isolationism is the root of the American Self Image (Papp, 1919). It is therefore clearly evident that an end to the war in Afghanistan is in fact, an end to the war on terror.

This brings us to the second and far more important question of the taken problem statement in the present study. Who will deal with Islamophobia and how can the tarnished image of Islam and Muslims be repaired?

Dealing with post-9/11 and post-war terror Islamophobia is yet another challenge for not only the two belligerents of the war on terror but the whole international community. One thing is for sure common in both US and Terrorists, they both do not care if Islamophobia is left behind at the end of the war on terror. Another dominant perception is that Islamophobia was present for centuries and it will always remain in society, the only significant success in countering Islamophobia is to redo or reduces it from the heights it took during the war on terror. Edward Said in his book Orientalism (1978) argues about the Orientalist writer's misinterpretation through discourses about the East or Orient. He believes that Oriental writers would never succeed if the East or Orient had their representation (Said, 1985). Anna Halafoff suggests that dealing with Islamophobia requires Muslim's active participation in social and political arenas. She stresses on self-representation of Muslims instead of letting others represent them (Halafoff, 2011).

Dealing with Islamophobia and changing public opinions about Islam and Muslims is possible only through self-representation by Muslims. These narratives develop through time through repetitive misrepresentative images of Islam in Western media and reshaping these Islamophobic narratives is possible yet again only through mass media coverage of the soft image of Islam and Muslims. Muslim leadership today knows that the only way to deal with Islamophobia is self-

representation. On the side-line of the 74th UNGA session, the leadership of Pakistan, Malaysia, and Turkey met with "Countering Islamophobia" as an agenda on the table. Ex-PM of Pakistan Imran Khan later tweeted that day "Misconceptions that unite communities against Muslims will be rectified; the subject of blasphemy would be appropriately contextualized; series and documentaries on Muslim history would be created to educate/inform our people and the globe; and Muslims would be given an exclusive media representation." Today's Muslim leadership quickly responds to blasphemy and ridicule of Islam or the Prophet Muhammad (May Peace Be Upon Him) because blasphemy is a major contributor to developing Islamophobia". This hypothesis brings us to the conclusion that though Muslims are the victims of hate crimes sparked by Islamophobia, they too had a rational roadmap to counter Islamophobia which is to represent themselves as peaceful and responsible citizens of society and represent their religion as a religion of love and peace.

Analysis of the Data and Findings

After analysis of the taken variables and perspectives and interpretation of the text using thematic analysis of the development of Islamophobia in society and its relationship with the war on terror discourse, the present study found that an end to the war in Afghanistan is an end to the war on terror discourse. There is a growing tendency in the current American political outlook to end their conflicts and they are busy developing the discourses in favour of going into Isolation. There has been very little or almost no mention of the War on Terror in the statements of the leadership in America or its NATO alliance. They have much bigger problems to deal with i.e. the potential rise of China as a global hegemon, and Russia's misadventures inside Eastern Europe and specifically in Ukraine in February 2022. The present study found that the stigmatizing increase in Islamophobia right after 9/11 and at the start of the war on terror was not accidental and Western powers engineered anti-Islamic sentiments in society to justify their global political war on terror imposed upon many Islamic countries, and to cover up the atrocities that took place during the war on terror including mass human rights violations and suffering of millions.

The present study found that the development of two identities i.e. "us vs them" in media campaigns through repetitive image broadcasting was the major shift in the rise of Islamophobia after 9/11 and during the war on terror. The rise in Islamophobia during the entire war on terror not only dominated the social and political outlook in America but as well in Europe, India, Australia, Canada, and many other parts of the world. The present study found that the said rise in Islamophobia was for political purposes and that many far-rights political parties are Islamophobic and use anti-Muslim hate as political agenda. The present study found that one of the root causes of the increase in Islamophobia is Blasphemy in Western countries under the flag of freedom of expression. Such acts are followed by violent reactions from Muslims around the world and Islamophobes use Blasphemy to spark anger in Muslims.

The present study found that the politicization of Islam and misinterpretation of Jihad through misquotation of the verses of the Quran was not only in the greater interest of terrorists but both the belligerents in the war on terror. Jihad primarily was glorified by the Americans and the war on terror was nothing but their dogmatic approach to turning things around. The present study found that Christchurch Mosque shooting in 2019 is not only evidence of the increase in the number of Islamophobic incidents but the growing and previously unimaginable intensity as well.

The present study suggests that in the view of Anti-Semitism surviving in society after seven decades since its hype during the Second World War, Islamophobia too has a future even if the war in Afghanistan and the war on terror ends someday. Thus, Islamophobia requires the attention of leadership and mainstream scholarship in the Islamic world. Muslims around the world need to present their true image through active participation. The present study suggests that countering Islamophobia is only possible to reshape public opinion about Islam and Muslims through self-representation. Muslim communities in the non-Muslim world need to actively participate in the cause to repair their image.

Conclusion

9/11 followed by the war on terror took Islamophobia to a new stigmatizing height. American and Western European intellectuals have a history of influencing human life through their contribution to literature. From the land of Oxford and Cambridge where armies of academics worked day and night for the betterment of human society and the human race, it is so unfortunate that some ignorant minds from the very same society painted an ugly image of Islam and Muslims and developed the discourses

which disturbed the very roots of human society through the division into "us vs them". There are plurality, diversity, and dynamicity among humans. When these many things vary in this world, freedom of expression and liberal values are essential to follow, to sustain an environment of coexistence. Such a diverse society needs one who believes in mutual coexistence, mutual respect, mutual interest, and mutual prosperity. The haters, the dividers, the liars, and those who hurt the sentiment of the masses need to be rejected. Any liberal society represents one good way to the coexistence of all humans, that is strong enough moral bases to stand up for it and to counter the immoral who preach hate. Islam is a fourteen hundred years old global religion followed by 1.6 billion fellow human beings from all cultures and ethnicities based on the teachings of love, respect, and peaceful coexistence, and yet those who developed the discourse of the war on terror wanted to generalize and stereotype desperately destroy the soft image of Muslims and justify their politically motivated aggression and wars against Islamic countries. To counter Islamophobia, two steps are very essential. First, it is now the core responsibility of governments, intellectuals, artists, writers, and alumni in the Islamic world to present the true and soft image of Islam and reshape public opinions. And the second step forward is making a distinction between mainstream Islam and those violent groups who used Islam as their political ideology. There are certainly few things in common between the terrorists and those who developed the discourse of the war on terror and took Islamophobia to new heights. They both believe that Islam is not a religion of peace and they both believe so not for the sake of Islam but for political gains. To conclude, Muslim communities in the entire non-Muslim world are suffering right now from a growing degree of perceived or real discrimination, violence, and Islamophobia since 9/11. Sooner than later war on terror will come to its conclusion and those in power will no more in need of the misrepresentation and misquotation of Islam, it is the cry of the time that let us deal with Islamophobia and don't leave it behind.

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