**Islamic Extremist Terrorism**

Islamic extremist terrorism refers to acts of terrorism claimed by its supporters and practitioners to be in furtherance of the goals of Islam. Mainstream believers consider these acts to be egregious violations of the religion's ethics. They regularly condemn acts of terrorism perpetrated by self-professed Muslims.

Where such violent and terrorist activity aims to establish a pan-Islamic theocracy and impose religious law (Sharia), it is sometimes termed Islamist terrorism. The term Islamic terrorism is more widely used, while governments often refer to it as Islamic extremism. There is much debate about whether commentary on the subject unfairly caricatures Muslims, and Arab Muslims in particular (see the Muhammad cartoons controversy for example).

According to statistics of the National Counterterrorism Center, a national government organization of the United States, Islamic extremism was responsible for approximately 57% of terrorist fatalities and 61% of wounding in 2004 and early 2005, where a terrorist perpetrator type could be specified. Extremist acts have included airline hijacking, beheading, kidnapping, assassination, and suicide bombing. Terrorist threats have included fatwas and death threats. Both Muslims and non-Muslims have been among the targets and victims.

Some terrorist activities committed by Muslims do not fall into the category of Islamic extremist terrorism: Nationalist and separatist organizations in the Muslim world often derive inspiration from secular ideologies. These are not well described as either Islamic extremist or Islamist.

**Organizations**

Al-Qaeda is defined by most Western nations as an Islamic extremist group. Formed in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it is accused of committing terrorism in a number of countries in Africa, the Middle East, Europe. and Indonesia. It orchestrated the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States. The group, under its leader Osama bin Laden, is opposed to the monarchy in Saudi Arabia, which it sees as insufficiently Islamic and too closely tied to America. Al-Qaeda claims it is engaged in a struggle against Zionism, Christianity, and the secular West.

The charter of Hamas calls for the destruction of Israel, and its "military wing" has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks in Israel. Hamas justifies these attacks as necessary in fighting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Although the wider movement also serves as a charity organization and provides services to Palestinians, Hamas has been designated as a terrorist group by the European Union, Canada, the United States, Israel, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and Human Rights Watch.

Lashkar-e-Toiba is a militant group active in the Kashmiri independence movement. The Lashkar leadership describes Hindus and Jews as the main enemies of Islam, claiming India and Israel to be the main enemies of Pakistan.. Lashkar-e-Toiba, along with Jaish-e-Mohammed, another militant group active in Kashmir are on the United States' foreign terrorist organizations list. They are also designated as terrorist groups by the UK, India, Australia and Pakistan.

Hezbollah is a Shia Islamist political party in Lebanon, comprising a militia and extensive programs for social development. There is a wide disagreement about how Hezbollah violent acts, and thus the organization as a whole, should be characterized. Throughout most of the Arab and Muslim worlds Hezbollah is regarded as a legitimate resistance movement; resisting all of Palestine. Lebanon government also recognized it as a legitimate resistance against occupation of Lebanese land by Israel. Some countries regard Hezbollah's violent acts to be terrorist attacks, and thus they consider Hezbollah a "terrorist" organization. The United States, Canada, Israel and the Netherlands consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization, while the United Kingdom and Australia consider only Hezbollah's external security organization to be a terrorist organization; for political reasons making a distinction between the organizations terrorist activities and its social activities. Russia, the European Union, and several other countries including the China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, among others, do not consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization. The European Union does not list Hezbollah or its constituent groups in its list of terrorist organizations, but does list Hezbollah's senior intelligence officer Imad Mugniyah..

Some Islamist groups, notably Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad in Palestine and Al-Qaeda have used suicide bombers against civilians, soldiers, and government officials of the regimes that they oppose. Their use of suicide bombers is seen by many Muslims as contradictory to Islam's teachings. Groups who support suicide bombings often refer to such attacks as "martyrdom operations" and the suicide-bombers who commit them as "martyrs" (Arabic: shahada, plural of "shahid"). The bombers, and their sympathizers often believe that suicide bombers, as martyrs to the cause of jihad against the enemy, will receive the rewards of paradise for their actions.

**Ideology and theology**

Islamist extremists sometimes claim they are defending Islam and the Muslim community, or that they are acting in retaliation for what they see as aggression against Muslims by Israel and by various western countries such as the United States.

The members of some groups are more likely to not see themselves as terrorists, as the political origins of such groups in the Palestinian Territories, Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, Chechnya and most recently post-Saddam Iraq are often connected to demands for statehood and nationalist self-determination.

In an interview with The American Conservative magazine, Robert Pape, author of the book *Dying to Win*, said "The central fact is that overwhelmingly suicide-terrorist attacks are not driven by religion as much as they are by a clear strategic objective: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland. From Lebanon to Sri Lanka to Chechnya to Kashmir to the West Bank, every major suicide-terrorist campaign — over 95 percent of all the incidents — has had as its central objective to compel a democratic state to withdraw."

Some supporters of Palestinian political violence have claimed that citizens of Israel are legitimate military targets because Jewish adolescents are required by law to serve in the country's military.

**Islamist ideology**

Islamist ideology, specifically of the militant breed, often positions itself in opposition to Western society. The United States, specifically, is greatly opposed by most Islamist Jihadis, scholars, and leaders. In addition to criticizing the United States for what they see as immoral secularism, many Islamists claim that Western society is actively anti-Islamic. The cultural products of western societies, and specifically of the United States, are often criticized by Islamists for the same reasons.

The lack of authoritarian restrictions on free speech is a common Islamist criticism of western democracies. Islamists have claimed that such unrestricted free speech has led to the proliferation of pornography, immorality, secularism, homosexuality, feminism, and many other ideas that Islamists often oppose.

Islamists are often opposed to (the practitioners of) Christianity and Judaism. Some Islamists identify what they see as a historical struggle between Christianity and Islam, dating back as far as the Crusades, among other historical conflicts between practitioners of the two respective religions. Many of the existent violent Islamist groups have as their central cause a Jihad (holy war) against Christians and Jews. An example is Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda, which is also known as 'International Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders'. Most militant Islamists oppose Israel's policies, and often its existence.

For a discussion as to whether or not there are elements of neo-fascist ideology in certain militant Islamic groups, see the discussion at Neofascism and religion.

**Interpretations of the Qur'an**

It has been suggested that the Qur'an, Islam's sacred text, denounces the killing of any Muslim person who is not guilty of at least one of two crimes:

"On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life; it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then although there came to them Our messengers with clear signs, yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in the land."

"And there are those who put up a mosque by way of mischief and infidelity - to disunite the Believers - and in preparation for one who warred against Allah and His Messenger aforetime. They will indeed swear that their intention is nothing but good; But Allah doth declare that they are certainly liars."

Militant Islamists sometimes justify terrorism against fellow Muslims, in particular against regimes they consider non-Islamic, on the basis that their enemies are apostates. Islamic law traditionally designates death as the penalty for apostasy from Islam. Opinions within the Muslim community vary as to the grounds on which an individual may be declared to have apostasies. The most common view among Muslim scholars is that a declaration of takfir (designation of a Muslim as an apostate) can only be made by an established religious authority. Mainstream Muslim scholars usually oppose recourse to *takfir*, except in rare instances. *Takfir* was used as justification for the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

Another relevant Qur'anic verse reads:

"Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith."

This verse is interpreted by Islamic scholar Ibn Kathir as forbidding attacks on non-combatants.

According to Jihad Watch, Mohammed Reza Taheriazar wrote that the following Quranic verses and others are used by Islamic terrorists to justify their cause. The great majority of Islamic scholars and Muslim groups dismiss the claims attributed to Taheriazar, and say these verses are used out of context: Letters from a Mujahid: a detailed Qur'anic justification for killing in Allah's name

"Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers, for that they joined companions with Allah, for which He had sent no authority: their abode will be the Fire: And evil is the home of the wrong-doers!"

"How many a township have We destroyed! As a raid by night, or while they slept at noon, Our terror came unto them. No plea had they, when Our terror came unto them, save that they said: Lo! We were wrong-doers."

"Remember thy Lord inspired the angels (with the message): 'I am with you: give firmness to the Believers: I will instill terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them.'"

"Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly."

"Lo! those who disbelieve spend their wealth in order that they may debar (men) from the way of Allah. They will spend it, then it will become an anguish for them, then they will be conquered. And those who disbelieve will be gathered unto hell,"

"But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, an seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful."

"Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."

"And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they!"

"And the True Promise draweth nigh; then behold them, staring wide (in terror), the eyes of those who disbelieve! (They say): Alas for us! We (lived) in forgetfulness of this. Ah, but we were wrong-doers!"

"He it is Who hath sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion however much idolaters may be averse."

"On the Day when (some) faces will be whitened and (some) faces will be blackened; and as for those whose faces have been blackened, it will be said unto them: Disbelieved ye after your (profession of) belief ? Then taste the punishment for that ye disbelieved."

"Lo! Those who disbelieve Our revelations, We shall expose them to the Fire. As often as their skins are consumed We shall exchange them for fresh skins that they may taste the torment. Lo! Allah is ever Mighty, Wise."

"And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is all for Allah. But if they cease, then lo! Allah is Seer of what they do."

"O Prophet! Exhort the believers to fight. If there be of you twenty steadfast they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a hundred (steadfast) they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they (the disbelievers) are a folk without intelligence."

"Lo! those who disbelieve, among the People of the Scripture and the idolaters, will abide in fire of hell. They are the worst of created beings."

"Say: (It is) the truth from the Lord of you (all). Then whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve. Lo! We have prepared for disbelievers Fire. Its tent encloseth them. If they ask for showers, they will be showered with water like to molten lead which burneth the faces. Calamitous the drink and ill the resting-place!"

"These twain (the believers and the disbelievers) are two opponents who contend concerning their Lord. But as for those who disbelieve, garments of fire will be cut out for them; boiling fluid will be poured down on their heads, Whereby that which is in their bellies, and their skins too, will be melted; And for them are hooked rods of iron. Whenever, in their anguish, they would go forth from thence they are driven back therein and (it is said unto them): Taste the doom of burning."

The words "fear" and "punishment" are used instead (of the word "terror") in some translations in order to prevent people from confusing terror ("a pronounced state of fear") with terrorism. ("violence, especially against civilians, that is insignificant in terms of military tactics but aimed at undermining morale.")

**Muslim attitudes towards terrorism**

In parliamentary election of January 2006, 57% of Palestinians voted for Hamas, which is designated as a terrorist organization by Israel, United States, Canada, and the European Union and responsible for a number of attacks against Israeli civilians. Observers are divided over whether the election results represent support for the organization's tactics, support for the organization's social programs, or dissatisfaction with the previous government which was widely seen as corrupt and incompetent. A public opinion survey released following the election, indicated that nearly three quarters of Palestinians believe that Hamas should change its policy regarding the destruction of Israel and 84% of Palestinians support a peace agreement with Israel. Among Hamas voters, 73% of respondents supported a peace agreement with Israel. However Hamas has ruled out removing the clause in its constitution which demands the destruction of Israel.

A 2005 Pew Research study that involved 17,000 people in 17 countries showed support for terrorism was declining in the Muslim world along with a growing belief that Islamic extremism represents a threat to those countries. A Daily Telegraph survey showed that 6% of British Muslims fully supported the July 2005 bombings in the London Underground.

The Free Muslims Coalition rallied against terror, stating that they wanted to send "a message to radical Muslims and supporters of terrorism that we reject them and that we will defeat them."

Abdel Rahman al-Rashed, a Muslim and the general manager of Arab news channel, Al-Arabiya has said: "It is a certain fact that not all Muslims are terrorists, but it is equally certain, and exceptionally painful, that almost all terrorists are Muslims." Statistics compiled by the United States government's Counterterrorism Center present a more complicated picture: of known and specified terrorist incidents from the beginning of 2004 through the first quarter of 2005, slightly more than half of the fatalities were attributed to Islamic extremists but a majority of over-all incidents were considered of either "unknown/unspecified" or a secular political nature. The vast majority of the "unknown/unspecified" terrorism fatalities did however happen in Islamic regions such as Iraq and Afghanistan, or in regions where Islam is otherwise involved in conflicts such as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, southern Thailand and Kashmir. The methodology employed by the Center is sometimes disputed.

Iranian Ayatollah Ozma Seyyed Yousef Sanei issued a fatwa (ruling) that suicide attacks against civilians are legitimate only in the context of war. The ruling did not say whether other types of attacks against civilians are justified outside of the context of war, nor whether Jihad is included in Sanei's definition of war.

On the other hand, Fethullah Gulen, a prominent Turkish Islamic scholar, has claimed that "a real Muslim," who understood Islam in every aspect, could not be a terrorist. There are several, if not many, other people with similar points of view such as Karen Armstrong, Prof. Ahmet Akgunduz, and Harun Yahya.

**Examples of attacks**

* 7 March 2006 - 2006 Varanasi bombings. An attack attributed to Lashkar-e-Toiba by Uttar Pradesh government officials, over 28 killed and over 100 injured, in a series of attacks in the Sankath Mochan Hanuman temple and Cantonment Railway Station in the Hindu holy city of Varanasi. Uttar Pradesh government officials.
* 9 November 2005 - 2005 Amman bombings. Over 60 killed and 115 injured, in a series of coordinated suicide attacks on hotels in Amman, Jordan. Four attackers including a husband and wife team were involved.
* 29 October [2005](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005) - 29 October 2005 Delhi bombings. Over 60 killed and over 180 injured in a series of three attacks in crowded markets and a bus, just 2 days before the Diwali festival.
* 23 July 2005 - Bomb attacks at Sharm el-Sheikh, an Egyptian resort city, at least 64 people killed.
* 7 July 2005 - Multiple bombings in London Underground. 53 killed by four suicide bombers. Nearly 700 injured.
* 4 February 2005 - Muslim militants attacked the Christian community in Demsa, Nigeria, killing 36 people, destroying property and displacing an additional 3000 people.
* 3 September 2004 Approximately 344 civilians including 186 children, are massacred during the Beslan school hostage crisis by Chechen Islamic Terrorists or "Chechen Separatists".
* 11 March 2004 - Multiple bombings on trains near Madrid, Spain. 191 killed, 1460 injured. (alleged link to Al-Qaeda)
* 16 May 2004- Casablanca Attacks - 4 simultaneous attacks in Casablanca killing 33 civilians (mostly Moroccans) carried by Salafaia Jihadia.
* 12 October 2002 - [Bombing in Bali nightclub](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2002_Bali_bombing). 202 killed, 300 injured.
* 24 September 2002 - Machine Gun attack on Hindu temple in Ahmedabad, India. 31 dead, 86 injured.
* 7 May 2002 - Bombing in al-Arbaa, Algeria. 49 dead, 117 injured
* 9 March 2002 - Café suicide bombing in Jerusalem; 11 killed, 54 injured
* 3 March 2002 - Suicide bomb attack on a Passover Seder in a Hotel in Netanya, Israel. 29 dead, 133 injured
* 13 December 2001-Suicide attack on India's parliament in New Delhi. Aimed at eliminating the top leadership of India and causing anarchy in the country. Allegedly done by Pakistan-based Islamic terrorists organizations, Jaish-E-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Toiba.
* 11 September 2001 - September 11, 2001 attacks 4 planes hijacked and crashed into World Trade Center and The Pentagon by 19 hijackers. Nearly 3000 dead.
* 7 August 1998 - 1998 United States embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya. 225 dead. 4000+ injured
* 25 June 1996 - Khobar Towers bombing, 20 killed, 372 wounded.
* 26 February 1993 - World Trade Center bombing. 6 killed.
* 18 April [1983](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1983) - April 1983 U.S. Embassy bombing in Beirut, Lebanon. 63 killed.