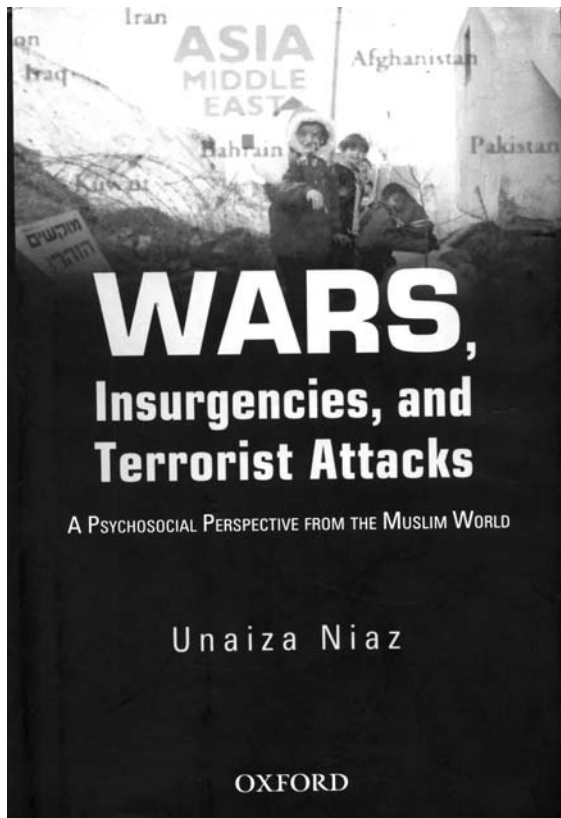


BOOK REVIEW

Wars, Insurgencies, and Terrorist Attacks: A Psychosocial Perspective from the Muslim World

By Unaiza Niaz Published by: University Oxford Press



Dr Unaiza Niaz's book titled 'Wars, Insurgencies, and Terrorist Activities' is a maiden and a pioneering first attempt to provide a 'Psychosocial Perspective from the Muslim World' on major challenges to the existence of human race. Published by one of the most prestigious publisher, the Oxford University Press, this 364 page, aesthetically printed, heavily referenced, book is a landmark and a virgin academic effort to provide an empirical, evidence based, and a scientific understanding of a complex issue. With the help of over a dozen other contributors of high academic and scholarly credentials, she has compiled a comprehensive reference book. The book through its title and contents appears as an intellectual sequel to the work of Konrad Lorenz, once a Nazi, later a Nobel laureate and eventually a Greens revolutionary.

In his book published in 1973, *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*, Lorenz wrote "The competition between human beings destroys with cold and diabolic brutality... Under the pressure of this competitive fury we have not only forgotten what is useful to humanity as a whole, but even that which is good and advantageous to the individual." Lorenz believed that human being is the only species on Earth which under the pressure of overpopulation starts to compete with its fellow beings and plans in cold blood, a systematic destruction of its own kind.

Over centuries of our so called civilized existence we have continued to confirm the theory of Konrad Lorenz, that humans are the most vicious animal that has ever walked this planet. It has expressed its brutality and ferociousness towards almost all components of its milieu, but he has been particularly vile, and atrocious towards its own kind. He has used premises of 'righteousness', progress, ideology, and most frequently religion to unleash his malice, and wickedness, unto others of its kind. The three most common ploys that humans have traditionally employed to do so have been wars, insurgencies and terrorism.

Dr Unaiza Niaz in her erudite style traces the history of all the three ploys and argues in her book that the latest, juiciest, and the easiest of preys in the new Millennium is the Muslim world.

Supported by equally lucid first hand accounts from mental health, and public health experts of high international standing such as Ahmed Okasha, Nasir Loza, Idris Teranti, Ghassan Shahroum and Saeed Farooq she systematically builds the argument that the hunting grounds and the game fields for the savage display of beastly instincts at the start of the 21st Century is the Muslim world that extends from Northern Africa, across Middle East, South Asia, Far East. The single characteristic that links the easy prey that inhabits these lands is his belief in Islam. The contributors towards the book have been carefully chosen to cover the hotspots in this huge 'playfield' such as Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Pakistan. All the authors from these diverse geographic settings agree that when it comes to wars against Muslims, the 'hunters' have been an interesting assortment of all religions, colours, castes and creeds from around the World. When the weapon changes to insurgencies and terrorist acts, a Muslim infant, girl, woman or man, does not have to look far for its hunter. The perpetrators of terrorism are available locally, are

nearly always homegrown, Muslims, and sometimes the adolescent who wears the suicide vest is the next-door neighbour of the victims who he blasts. The authors argue that the perpetrator of War Against Terror is clearly the West but the insurgencies and terrorist acts are seen by an average Muslim as the other two prongs of a three pronged attack waged by the same enemy.

The main contents of the book start with the chapter on history of terrorism by Dr Niaz. She traces the roots of terrorism to the Roman Era. She draws an interesting hypothesis of how serial monotheistic religious movements have turned against each other, in the last five thousand years. She converges first to the era when the Muslims clashed with West as a civilization, in the first millennium, the Crusades. Muslim's responded through Salahuddin Ayubi. The cause cited for the crusades was to protect Christianity, from the then a 'new civilization, a new way of life, called Islam'. The latest edition of monotheism was seen as a threat to the age old, well established traditions of Christianity. Interestingly, Judaism had seen Christianity, with the same eyes, a millennium earlier and had hunted the Roman converts through terrorism unleashed by Zealots. Today, the scene seems to have reversed. Ironically the Islamic world of today, sees itself under threat at the hands of the Western way of life, thinking, and ideology. A thousand years since the Crusades, the Muslim civilization faces another wave of wars, compounded this time with insurgencies, and terrorist attacks. The cause for the clash of these two civilizations cited today is the wealth of natural resources. The entire Muslim world is either at war, is facing local mutinies, rebellions or is bleeding at the hands of terrorist acts.

Dr Unaiza Niaz has also compiled subsequent chapters on 'Etiology' and 'Aftermath' of terrorism, with the same incisiveness and flare. An in-depth analysis of evolution of terrorism, the psychological approaches to understand violence, is provided through the psychoanalytic, behavioural, and cognitive theories on human behaviour. The neurobiological, psychophysiological, hormonal and neuropsychological factors that can help understand the etiology of terrorism are also ably discussed. The author supports her viewpoint of separating terrorist's mind-set from the psychopathology of a mentally ill patient through the use of updated references and empirical data. The most startling hypothesis quoted is the 'transgenerational impact of violence' and the ability of terror and its clinical consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder to pass on to the subsequent generations as a genetic experience. At another point she cites Alexander & Kline to highlight the psychological and social dimensions of terrorism. The terrorism is not merely a state of pervasive fear, panic or anxiety, that generates hopelessness, helplessness, and

vulnerability, in an individual but it undermines the trust of the society in its own institutions, and instigates them to almost compulsively commit errors, over reactions, and undertake oppressive legislations that furthers the agenda of the terrorist.

The book also provides an invaluable quarry of data on terrorist acts committed around the world, particularly the ones in Pakistan since 9/11, provides useful statistics on the most vulnerable groups, and the profiles of areas and people who are likely to become potential suicide bombers and terrorists.

The chapter on 'Trauma related conditions and treatments by Saeed Farooq and Javed Akhtar is an invaluable contribution to the book. It not only provides a well referenced evidence based understanding of the clinical and therapeutic aspects of psychotrauma. The chapter provides hope to the silent sufferers of effects of wars and terrorism and links them with the professionals that they ought to visit to seek cure.

The two forewords by two academic giants from the world of psychotrauma and public mental health, namely Professor David Alexander, and Professor Nasser Loza a defence for Islam written by Prof Ahmed Okasha enhances the already high stature of the book.

The author aimed to "write a well researched academic reference book to sensitise and create awareness about the sufferings of innocent civilians", and saw physicians, and mental health professionals as its potential readers. It sets out to help a physician/mental health professional in any part of the world who is faced with a Muslim survivor of war, terror, or trauma and is suffering from their psychological and social consequences. Amazingly, by the time you finish reading it you feel as if you have read a book of literature, science, medicine, psychology, and politics. Illustrated with poems, short stories, and eye witness accounts, it has an equal number of figures, graphs, and tables. The narrative and sequencing of chapters speaks of the intense sensitivity of the author one hand and her brilliance as a seasoned author at the other. It is this diversity and simplicity of the book that enhances its relevance far beyond its intended readership to include scholars from diverse fields as well as the lay public.

Any library, personal or public, that has a section on trauma, psychiatry, psychology, sociology or politics will appear incomplete if it does not have this brilliant publication on its rack.

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