

THE REVIVAL OF AN OLD NARRATIVE TO COUNTER TERRORISM: THE “BALKH SCHOOL APPROACH” TO NEUTRALIZING THE NEO-KHARIJITE NARRATIVE IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to explain why, despite numerous collective and individual efforts, states have failed to eradicate terrorism produced by Islamic extremism. What alternatives to present paradigms possibly exist in the battle against terrorism and extremism? Through its neo-Kharijite and takfiri character, the irreconcilable extremism that developed at the end of the Cold War due to a leadership vacuum in the Islamic world, has caused widespread unease among Muslims and others. As a result, the current study approaches the topic of countering extremism from an entirely new perspective, which is nearly unprecedented in the literature. Because the current ways of combating extremism are either war or spreading alternate narratives. However, this piece resurrects a historic practice of weakening extremism. The revival of the Balkh school as an existent and viable alternative narrative in the Islamic world might diminish extremist and takfiri discourses. The Balkh school is a good opportunity to revive a peaceful tradition among Muslims in order to end extremism. A good and better way is to update and expand successful and effective narratives of the past that have shown significant achievements in the field of moderation and reciprocity with the use of modern tools.

Keywords: Kharijite Movement; Murji'a; Erfan-e-Islami; Māturīdiya; Cultural Fiqh; Rumi; Islamic State of Khurasan.

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Introduction

Religious extremism, terrorism, and militant jihadism are the most frightening and terrifying phenomena of our time. They have seriously affected the world, particularly the Islamic world, through their violence, hatred, murder, and the destruction of civilizational manifestations. These phenomena take the lives of thousands of innocent people every year, displace millions of people, and force hundreds of thousands of people to migrate out of their lands. Widows, the disabled, and orphans are among their consequences. In addition to the great damage to human life, they have dealt a severe blow to civilization, culture, tradition, and customs. Cities, monuments, farmland, and irrigation canals, among other items, have been destroyed. In one sentence, terrorism has overthrown the whole foundation of human life.

The victims of the phenomenon of religious extremism are not only human beings, civilizations and certain cities. The whole of the East and the West are burning in the fire of this ominous phenomenon. Powerful and developed western countries are seemingly safe, while psychologically, those who follow the news of the world are constantly anxious. In the meantime, the Islamic world is more under attack than others and has paid a heavy price. Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Libya have become so vulnerable to the phenomenon of extremism that getting rid of this situation is the first goal for the people in these countries; the next step is rebuilding the community and the people, which requires a lot of time and money.

The situation does not end with these few countries. The phenomenon of extremism and terrorism is growing among Muslims. Potentially, many young people in the Arab world, Central Asia, South Asia, Africa, and East Asia are victims of religious extremism. A kind of frustration directs them in this direction. This causes the terrorist networks to recruit them. The prevailing narratives of religion as well as the economic and social frustration of young people are primarily responsible for the current situation. The Cold War, and the rivalries of the two great powers against each other, have caused the religious spirit to become an instrument of ideology as also to be used as a tool of proxy wars in hegemonic countries in different regions to further stimulate and strengthen religious forces to defeat their regional rivals. These unpredictable policies and strategies have become a threat to the security, tranquillity,

development, and power of all these governments, and they are ultimately forced to spend huge sums to destroy them.

Some Muslims who had experienced bitter defeats against colonialism, the West, and Eastern modernity, and aspired to establish an Islamic caliphate or consolidate Islamic law in their societies as a result of these instrumental policies of the great and small powers, found an opportunity to form cohesive organizations, and introduce violence as the dominant narrative of Islam. Today, hearing the name of Islam and Muslims in societies, especially non-Islamic ones, a picture of terror, violence, assassination, murder, suicide, and corruption are immediately formed in the minds of the followers of other religions. For this reason, a kind of Islamophobia has set in, and is spreading in the media, communities, and governments.¹ Of course, this mentality about Islam and Muslims also exists among Islamic communities and governments. Modern and secular Islamic Muslim governments are viewed with skepticism by the Muslims condemned to extremism and terrorism.

The prevailing narrative of Islam and its propaganda by opponents have encouraged extremist Muslim groups to continue extremist practices. The media coverage of the influence of terrorist networks has led Muslim extremists to conclude that their method has worked. Therefore, they have come to believe that they should become more unconventional in pursuing school curricula, recruit more young people, set up more training camps, and carry out terrorist missions. Today, these groups consider themselves the true Muslims, and the main defenders of Islam. In their literature, other Muslims are hypocrites, misguided, or apostates. In any case, they are considered anti-Islamic, and their killing is permissible. For this reason, extremist Muslim ideologies religiously justify the massacre of Muslims in public, and even in mosques.

Efforts to eradicate and defeat Islamic extremism and terrorism have been underway for years. Western governments and Islamic countries, each jointly or individually, have used various methods to combat it. But, so far, these efforts have backfired. The Taliban have regained power; the ISIL has re-emerged with the Khorasan branch;

¹ Kazeem Oluwaseun Dauda, “Islamophobia and Religious Intolerance: Threats to Global Peace and Harmonious Co-Existence”, *QIJIS: Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2020), 257-292. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v8i2.6811>.

Shiite extremism operates in the Levant as a government organization; and dozens of other networks and groups are active in some way or the other across Islamic lands. Any and all models of repression have been used to eradicate terrorism. From political pressure to economic pressure, military missions, and unconventional attacks have all been short-term treatments. Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider the current methods of fighting terrorism.

The notion that “poison is destroyed by an antidote” may seem to be a traditional method, an old model. However, it is deeply rooted in human wisdom and experience. Religious extremism and Islamic terrorism—which were potentially ignited within themselves as also ignited by global and regional powers—are not being eradicated from the outside today. The prevailing extremist version of Islam can be replaced by its antidote, which is a moderate and peaceful version. The narratives in the margins today which, in the past, were the dominant narrations, were able to show a mutually acceptable and developed Islam and succeed in the war against extremism.

One of these narratives in the margins today is of the Balkh school. It exists as an antidote already and does not need to be made. Rather, reviving and strengthening it as a dominant narrative can have a positive response in weakening and eradicating terrorism. With the revival of the narratives of the Balkh school, the harsh and extremist readings by the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Ansarul Sharia, Al Nusra Front, Harakati Jihadi Islami, ISIS, ISK, the Taliban, and other Islamic extremists, will become obsolete. Schools, curricula, and the public will live with a historically moderate Islam. The Balkh school has a historical-religious legitimacy among Muslims. This article is an attempt to understand the nature of extremist currents in Islam, how and why the methods of fighting terrorism have not yet resulted in satisfactory answers, and finally, how the Balkh school can become an alternative narrative and how it can be used.

The Salient Narrative of the Neo-Kharijite Muslims

Today, Islamist groups have a *neo-Kharijite* nature (the term will be elaborated later). The proxy games of the great powers in the Cold War, followed by the instrumental use of the regional powers’ potential extremist capacity of Islam, were wrong policies used by the governments. These pushed Islam towards extremism and terrorism.

Earlier, during the anti-colonial struggle, Muslims were active by being part of liberation and independence movements. Great Muslim leaders, such as Jamaluddin Afghani, Seyyed Ahmad Khan, Mohammad Abdu, Rashid Reza, Medhat Pasha, and others, all strived to make the East as free as the West—a free, secure, and developed land. Civilization, development, culture, education and, especially, new human laws were at the center of their writings. Limited and exceptional extremist individuals and organizations were not supported by the masses or by Muslim leaders and thinkers which existed in some areas. Because of this, they did not achieve much.

The Cold War severely damaged the dominant Islamic tradition of Orientalism. In the blockade of the world by the great powers, Islam became either ‘Eastern’ or ‘Western’. In simpler terms, two major narratives were formed in Islam; one was the narrative of Sufi and mystical Islam which did not mix with many political powers, and considered religious matters as internal matters, and sought to practice and propagate it; another was the anti-other and politicized narrative which became an armed struggle after the liberation of Islamic lands, and the defeat of non-Islamic ideologies. The former reconciled with Communism and the Soviet bloc, but the latter moved along the American-Western line. Among the masses, Moscow supported Sufi and mystical Islam² in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and other Eastern Bloc Islamic lands because they agreed with the socialist ideology and were not sensitive to the ideology of Communism.

However, Washington increasingly sought the support of non-Sufi and mystical Muslims to contain and defeat Communism. At the end of the Cold War and the fall of Communism, politicized Islam prevailed. The Islamic countries used politicized Islam with ready and effortless soldiers in the form of paramilitary units fighting against each other in three directions: the struggle for domination, the Shi’ite-Sunni war, and the struggle against Israel. Meanwhile, a number of countries left the Eastern bloc and continued to strive to show their nationalist and liberating image, and strengthen the narrative of

² Although the early Soviet leaders opposed any form of religious practices and also politicized Sufism in the Caucasus region, overall Sufi Islam was accepted as accommodative Islam. See, Gordon M. Hahn, “The Jihadi Insurgency and the Russian Counterinsurgency in the North Caucasus,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 24, no. 1 (2008), 1-39.

politicized Islam. Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi are prominent examples.³

As a result, Muslim politicized organizations were grouped into three categories: 1) political Islamist; 2) asset Islamists backed by regional powers; and 3) militant Islamists. Each group was active in different fields, and represent the extremist narrative of Islam. To begin with, the political Islamist groups largely used the rivalry of the great powers during the Cold War to strengthen and expand, and sought power in the politics of their countries. Through the extremist approach against national and international enemies, they reached the conclusion that they should reinvent themselves from being militant groups to become a political opposition. These groups participated in elections and political contests in their countries. A clear example of these Islamist parties is the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan, the Justice and Development Party in Turkey, and Hamas in Palestine.

In addition, other Islamists turned as the strategic assets to those regional powers who desired their hegemony to prevail within the region, or in the Islamic world. The regional powers adopted the proxy war tactics of the Cold war. Therefore, they sponsored and stimulated certain Islamist groups to fight the rival country in the region. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan were among the most powerful countries in the region who sought to fill the power vacuum created by the end of the Cold War and, therefore, created many asset groups to help extend their sphere of influence or weaken their ideological rivals in the region.⁴ The Islamic Party of Afghanistan, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the Taliban, were two prominent examples created and supported by Pakistan for influence in Afghanistan. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, as well as Shiite extremist groups were also strengthened in the Saudi-Iranian regional game.

Finally, the failed political Islamists, the outdated asset Islamists, and some of the irreconcilable Islamists, who would survive the Cold War and regional power politics, turned into becoming a dominant threat to Muslim and non-Muslim countries. They all

³ Robert Landa, "Political Islam and East-West Relations," *Russia and the Moslem World* 2 (2016), 284.

⁴ Muharrem Ekşi, "Regional Hegemony Quests in the Middle East from the Balance of Power System to the Balance of Proxy Wars: Turkey as Balancing Power for the Iran-Saudi Rivalry", *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 11, no. 21 (2017), 133-156.

believed that the main causes behind Islam’s degeneration were twofold: first, the Western world was seeking to weaken Islam with all its might; second, westernized Islamic countries, with their corrupt and imitative governments, had paved the way for the fall of Islam. Therefore, in their eyes, both factors were equally to blame. The difference is that the destruction and defeat of Islamic governments was through the military wars by this group; creating insecurity and weakening the West through terror and panic was their priority.

Regardless of their jurisprudential school, political organization, or geographical locations they belonged to, all the Islamists have a neo-Kharijite nature, with a *Takfirī* ideology.⁵ There are many divisions and categories of Islamist currents and groups, which complicates our knowledge about them. It also does not show the nature of these groups as a single threat. For a correct and accurate understanding, the Neo-Kharijite term is explained here: The conception of the Neo-Khawarij is, literally, a Persian word (*Naw Khawarij*) which means Neo-Seceders. Those who believe in all-strategy mean to oppose those Muslim governments who have failed to apply Sharia rule in Islamic societies and oppose the non-Muslim Western world which supports and encourages secularism and democracy in the Islamic world.⁶

Four Features of Neo-Kharijite Narrative

Despite the diversity in their goals and origins, the Neo-Kharijite narrative shares four common characteristics. These are; over-emphasizing Takfir; not giving others an opportunity, massacres, defaming Islam’s face, and causing divisions among Muslims.⁷ The following is a comprehensive and extensive account of each of these

⁵ Takfirism has been called a “minority ideology” which “advocates the killing of other Muslims declared to be unbelievers”. The accusation itself is called *takfir*, derived from the word *kāfir* (unbeliever), and is described as when “one who is a Muslim is declared impure.” Eli Alshech, “The Doctrinal Crisis within the Salafi-Jihadi Ranks and the Emergence of Neo-Takfirism”, *Islamic Law and Society* 21, no. 4 (2014): 419-452. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-00214p04>.

⁶ Ihsan Yilmaz, “Beyond Post-Islamism: The Transformation of Turkish Islamism to Non-Islamism”, *The Muslim World and Politics in Transition: Creative Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 67-81.

⁷ Ahmad Muballighi, “The Characteristics of Takfir Phenomena and the Issue of Nabawi Sunnat against that [*Wizḥagibai Padida Takfir wa Mowḥo Sunnat Nabawi Alai Islam Nisbat ba An*]”, *Andishai Taqreeb Journal* 12 (2007), 41.

Neo-Kharijite characteristics and their influence on international security.

Over-emphasizing Takfir

Takfir, or excommunication, is the first characteristic of all the Takfiri organizations across the globe. They have a self-purity mentality, defining others as spoilt and perverse, and a clear black and white understanding of self and others. Using this ideological basis, takfiri groups have excommunicated their opponents, both Muslims (Shiites and Sunnis who do not agree with them) and non-Muslims as a pretext for achieving political goals and objectives. The truth is that the “takfir” axis is not founded on any concept or logic, and if we presume that it is based on an idea or thought, it is only one type of thought. It results in religious texts that are dry, lack perspective, and have no religious objective in mind. The term was first used by the Kharijites in the eighth century AD against Muslims who were not in their camps. Today, emerging organizations operate in the same takfiri manner. This has turned out to be the biggest problem in the Islamic world today, and have caused irreparable material and spiritual damage to the Islamic world.⁸

No Chance for Others

The denial of other ways of thinking and their expression is the second characteristic of Takfiri groups. The Takfiris as a whole are impatient people, and believe that giving opportunities to others supports and encourages corruption and irreligion among Muslims and non-Muslims.⁹ Therefore, by no means should one remain silent in the face of the views of others, and cause doubt in one’s own faith. A Takfiri even considers creating opportunities for the opinions of

⁸ Mohammad Reza Ageshta, “Explaining and Recognizing the Basis of Takfir Thoughts in Takfiri Groups” [*Tab’een wa Shinakht Tafakuri Takfir dar Aqa’eed Goro bai Takfir*], *Elm wa Foton Nizami Journal* 41, (2017), 159–181; Mohamed Badar, Masaki Nagata, and Tiphane Tueni, “The Radical Application of the Islamist Concept of *Takfir*”, *Arab Law Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2017): 134-162. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15730255-31020044>.

⁹ Jamileh Kadivar, “Exploring Takfir, Its Origins and Contemporary Use: The Case of Takfiri Approach in Daesh’s Media”, *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 7, no. 3 (2020): 259-285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347798920921706>. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, “The Danger of Takfir (Excommunication): Exposing IS’ Takfiri Ideology,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9, no. 4 (2017): 3-12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26351508>.

others to create doubts in his beliefs, and provides the ground for leaving the circle of Islam. This has led to the failure of many programs of dialogue and interaction within the faith, and the way to influence the Takfiris has been closed. Eventually, one will become less aware of their beliefs.

Non-Conventional Massacre

Mass killing is the third characteristic of all Takfiri groups. The frequent and escalating massacres by Takfiri organizations include elements that are both plainly and obliquely related to Islam.¹⁰ According to these groups, since Islam is under threat and attacked by the powers and cultures of non-Muslims, it is permissible to kill all non-Muslims as well as Muslims who live in the shadow of non-Muslim governments, or the allied governments of non-Muslims. On the basis of this mentality, they carry out suicide attacks in mosques, markets, hospitals, and other gatherings. These attacks and massacres are not limited to a specific community. Islamic and Western countries are all in the same line for these thinkers.

Disfiguring Islam

The fourth characteristic of the Takfiri groups are defaming Islam’s image. This is one of the most disastrous outcomes of the propagation of the evil phenomena of Takfiri: the tarnishing of Islam’s image.¹¹ The fact is that the Takfiris’ violent activities have tarnished the image of the smiling face of the faith. With acts of violence, the Takfiris have offered the greatest propaganda feed for the global media at a time when Islam’s foes are attempting to broaden the scope of the propaganda war against Islam. Many secular Muslims and non-Muslims believe that Islam is far from peaceful and a menace to humanity.

The four characteristics mentioned above include all Islamist groups which are referred to in this essay as “newcomers.” All groups affiliated with the newcomers, directly or indirectly, in Asia, Africa,

¹⁰ Mohamed Elewa Badar & Polona Florijančič, “Killing in the Name of Islam? Assessing the Tunisian Approach to Criminalising Takfir and Incitement to Religious Hatred against International and Regional Human Rights Instruments”, *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 39, no. 4 (2021): 481-507. DOI: 10.1080/18918131.2021.2021665.

¹¹ Badar, Nagata, and Tueni, “The Radical Application of the Islamist Concept of *Takfir*,” 132-160.

and other Islamic and non-Islamic countries, have shown this mentality and behavior. The dominant narration of Islam by the Neo-Kharijites consists of these four features. The insecurity and terror that are being felt by Muslims and non-Muslims today derive from this group. With the exception of areas in which the Muslim minority is at odds with the extremist minorities of other religions, it is considered a matter of action and reaction.

The Failure to Respond to the Neo-Kharijite Narrative

The Neo-Kharijite narrative, and terrorism as its outcome, has now become one of the most serious security threats for nations and governments all around the world; it affects everyone—from small, developing countries to the world's most powerful nations. Terrorist actions have grown in number, and international efforts to oppose them have grown as well. However, the international community has not yet been able to confront the situation thoroughly and effectively, despite all laws and agreements being in place. No modality is seen to have been effective in removing the filth of terrorists who squander the blood of thousands of innocent people on the planet.

Counterterrorism is one of the few problems on which the vast majority of governments and nations agree. Even though more than 60 years have passed since the issue of terrorism was raised at the international level, and many international and regional conventions to recognize and combat terrorism have been created, there is still no definite opinion on the concept of terrorism, its exact definition and application, in public opinion.

Since the fall of the former Soviet Union and the recognition of the necessity to combat terrorism, governments and the international community have implemented three counterterrorism policies: the preventive approach, the legal punishment strategy, and the offensive/suppression strategy. All of these have been mostly unsuccessful. None of them has been able to remove the terrorism phenomena, and none of them has been able to prevent terrorist activities in the long term.¹² In the short term, some of these methods have been effective in some places. In particular, the military policy of suppressing extremist groups has been able to keep them on the

¹² Iftikhari, Asghar, Shabistani, Ali, "Islamic Republic of Iran's Strategy to Fight Terrorism [*Rahkar Jamburi Islami Iran dar Muqabila ba Terrorism*]", *Afaqi Amniat Journal* 12 (2011), 4-35.

sidelines for a while. But this has been temporary. None of these groups have been permanently destroyed. They have either reappeared on the stage, or reappeared with a different nature and name.

The military strategy in the battle against terrorism is centered on the use of armed force and, instead of “arresting or murdering” terrorists, the policy of “targeting and killing” terrorists is recommended, which is opposed to the human rights framework. In other words, this technique permits a government that wants to control terrorists to use light or heavy weaponry to target terrorists. This employment of lethal force is not seen as violating human rights legislation. As a result, since 9/11, the USA has pursued this counter-terrorism policy, and continues to do so to this day. The US efforts to counter-terrorism can be defined under the “Circuits of Terrorism,”¹³ in which Asghar Iftikhari has investigated relationship in-depth and determined that it has developed as a result of the US activities after the terrorist attack on 9/11.

None of the counter-terrorism models and methods have yielded satisfactory answers. All approaches fall outside the Islamic narrative. Instead of destroying the deadly poison of Islamic extremism with an antidote within Islam itself, these methods have resorted to the means and methods which the Islamists and the Muslim masses—who are influenced by the Islamist narrative—see as merely suppressing Islam and Muslims. This puts the illiterate youth in the recruitment program of terrorist groups. Instead of a top-down and completely out-of-religious approach, a bottom-up approach within the religion (within Islam) is needed to treat the poison with an antidote. Religious affairs are unsolvable by non-religious means. When a stream takes on a religious color, it cannot be modified or changed by laws, rules, principles, or force. The mentioned means have no legitimacy in a religious ideological reading and must be resisted. The terrorist groups believe in conducting Jihad against the prevailing sets and mechanism of suppressing Muslim extremists.

Religion is one cultural and historical phenomena that has a wide impact on various areas of individual and social life in the world,

¹³ According to “Circuits of Terrorism”, [Asghar Iftikhari, 2011] there are five orbits (indicators), the first and second of which are more akin to the classic definition of “terrorism” (the use of physical violence to accomplish restricted political aims); government terrorism; and network terrorism.

especially among Muslims. The field of religious studies shows that this is a very complex and multi-layered phenomenon that can be defined from different perspectives. From a psychological point of view, religion is “people’s feelings, actions and experiences when they are alone, when they find themselves in front of whatever they call divine”.¹⁴ From a sociological point of view religion is, “a set of religious beliefs, practices, rituals and institutions that human beings follow in different societies. From the naturalists’ perspective, religion is a set of commandments and prohibitions that hinder the free operation of our talents. Or, religion is ‘morality’ to which feeling and emotion have given excellence, warmth, and light.”¹⁵

From the perspective of religion itself, it is a “confession of the fact that all beings are manifestations of a force that is beyond our knowledge,” or it is “a human response to the divine call.”¹⁶ Religion is also considered as a historical phenomenon, which has a political and social role. From this perspective, religion is studied as a specific historical process and in a specific historical context. In the historical dimension, Will Durant considers factors such as spiritualism, witchcraft, totems and taboos, ancestor worship, and idolatry as the primary and main factors as the characteristics of an emerging religion. It is after these that other religions, such as Buddhism and Abrahamic religions as well as other religions, grow and develop in specific historical and cultural contexts.¹⁷ The multifaceted nature of religion is responsible for the profound influence of this phenomenon in different areas of human life—from psychological to individual to political and social. Thus, religion, with its influence, affects all areas of human life, including politics.¹⁸

When religion has such an influence on the spirit, thought, and behavior of individuals, the struggle against its aberrations (terrorism and extremism) with the use of non-religious methods, non-religious narratives, and even other religions cannot eliminate the problem.

¹⁴ Majeed Mohahhed, “The Roots of Political Extremism in Afghanistan [Rishabai Ifratiat Siiasi dar Afghanistan]”, *Faslanama Elmi Pazhobishi Rana* (2021), 22-45.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ John Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 23.

¹⁷ Will Durant, *The Greatest Minds and Ideas of All Time* (South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 381-402.

¹⁸ Majeed Hick, “The Roots of Political Extremism in Afghanistan [Rishabai Ifratiat Siiasi dar Afghanistan]”, *Faslanama Elmi Pazhobishi Rana* (2021), 22-45.

The right and logical approach is either creating a counternarrative or reviving an effective narrative to fight terrorism and extremism by re-reading Islamic texts.

The Best Alternative: The Revival of an Old Narrative

The most effective way to fight terrorism is to adopt an ‘introverted’ approach that is rooted in Islamic texts, and has legitimacy and acceptance. This approach can be of two types. One is to create a new narrative that keeps in mind the needs of the age; the second is to revive narratives of the past with the use of modern tools. The first method has been used in various political, economic, and social fields. The creation of counter-narratives has become worldwide literature, and models known today. By creating new narratives, governments, as well as national and international organizations, have sought new plans and changes in their desired goal. Stories, movies, science books, technology, and social media have been widely used to propagate anti-narratives.

However, this method does not seem effective in eradicating extremism in Islam. Throughout history, the dominant narration in Islam has been based on texts and narration. What has been formed over the centuries as Islamic law and Islamic civilization has validity and legitimacy among Muslims. The creation of a counter-narrative falls within the framework of heresy, which is considered one of the important rules for distinguishing religious from non-religious matters. Due to this, the grand narratives of liberalism and Communism in the last half-century have not been able to become a good ‘dress’ for Islam. Muslims who have tried to gain prestige and status among the Muslim ummah by reconciling Islam with the prevailing paradigms of the time have finally lost their reputation. Conservative and traditionalist scholars still hold a prominent place in Islamic societies. In particular, their works and ideas are taught in the curriculum in the schools from where the most extremist minds are emitted.

Ultimately, religious intellectualism and Islamic modernity remain among a limited group of urban intellectuals. In recent years, the notion of generating counter-narratives in order to combat extremist recruitment and propaganda has gained traction. However, it has been challenging to curate this material in a systematic manner, target it to at-risk audiences and, most crucially, quantify the content’s

positive influence on their behavior. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) has been doing research and pilot projects with the Against Violent Extremism (AVE) network of former extremists and survivors of extremism that it has been overseeing for the past several years. These studies were carried out in order to evaluate and develop approaches that could assist counternarrative efforts having a greater impact.¹⁹ This solution proposes that in-depth religious studies give originality to the values of fundamental human rights (such as the right to life, the right to liberty, the right to property, and other fundamental rights) and establish the foundations of an Islamic intellectual and legal system in the light of religious values, regardless of any tendencies and interpretive interventions of Islamic religions.

No doubt it takes time and numerous facilities to create a new narrative against the narration of the extremist slave by Muslims or non-Muslims, but ultimately there is no guarantee that it will succeed. Thus, the best way is to revive existing moderate Islamic narrations, which have been marginalized due to the clash of narrations. The term “the revival of narratives” refers to stories told from the perspective of individuals who have been historically marginalized. The word “revival” connotes a zone of defiance against established dominance. A revival of a narrative goes beyond the idea that individuals in positions of relative power may simply recount the experiences of those on the fringes. These must, instead, originate from the edges, from marginalized viewpoints and voices. According to this definition of the revival of narratives, an effective and good narrative of Islam is one that dominated Islamic societies in the eighth and ninth centuries AD on the Balkh axis, but was marginalized over time. In particular, the Mongol invasion of Khorasan, the era of colonialism, and the expansion of the Deoband School drove it out of the field, and today it is a victim of extremist policies.

It is important to revive this narration in such a way that it is perceived as having created a glorious and fruitful period in the collective historical memory of Muslims. The Islamic world today, despite scientific and intellectual decentralization, still pays attention to the mainland and the cradle. The great Muslim scholars and muftis

¹⁹ Tanya Silverman and et al., “The Impact of Counter-Narrative: Insights from a Year-long Cross-platform Pilot Study Of Counter-Narrative Curation, Targeting, Evaluation and Impact”, 03 March 2022, at, https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/fileadmin/PDFs/anderes/schwerpunkt_Radikalisierung/Impact-of-Counter-Narratives_ONLINE_1.pdf, p.11

in the Islamic world, and in the West, receive their main source of belief from works and books that have been published mostly by Islamic historical centers. Among these, the school of Mecca/Medina, the school of Baghdad/Syria (*Greater Sham*), the school of Egypt, the school of Balkh (*Khorasan*) are among the most important centers producing religious literature today. Of course, in the meantime, apart from the Balkh school, other schools merged over time with the politics and rule of the Caliphs and empires, justifying the permanence of totalitarian governments.

Unfortunately, today the historical main-lands of Islamic Sharia and civilization have emerged completely politicized after a period of stagnation. Emerging schools, such as the Deoband School, the Saudi Salafists, and the Turkish Neo-Ottomans, have appeared in the national interest of their nation-states and do not really meet the cosmopolitan ideals of the Muslims. Efforts are being made to create or revive past narratives *outside* of traditional Islamic centers, such as Turkey, Indonesia, and Pakistan. However, due to the lack of support for historical legitimacy and skeptical views regarding the political intentions of these countries, the possibility of its spread is weak. For instance, Pakistan has developed Harakat ut-Taleem as a front organization for the counter-narrative, with its content, campaigns, and missions remaining anonymous until date. For the last seven years, the organization has collaborated with the development sector, launching a number of public awareness projects. They are now concentrating their efforts on Islamist extremism, notably the Taliban in Pakistan.²⁰ They have not established any focused counter-narrative initiatives.²¹ Moreover, this movement has not been taken seriously, since Muslims in different countries have a very political view of Pakistan.

However, reviving a narrative from Afghanistan which derives from a large part of ancient Khorasan, which was the origin of greatness and glory for Muslims in the past as well as the lack of any claim to be the Umm al-Qurā (Leader of Muslims) of the Islamic world today can be seen as a source of trust and legitimacy to counter terrorism. No regional hegemon has any survival or security concerns from Afghanistan as a potential or active threat. Even the Taliban—who have adopted an imported ideology of politicized

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Ibid.

Islam from *Afghan-Arabs*²²—are not enjoying popular support in Afghanistan. What the people in Afghanistan long for, and believe in, is an interactive, mutually acceptable, mystical, and reconciling Islam despite the presence of the Taliban. Investing and supporting this model of religious narration can cause the growth and flourishing of a desirable narration of Islam.

The Balkh School Approach

The question that arises is, why has the Balkh school been chosen as a desirable alternative to revive the anti-neo-Kharijite narrative, since there are dozens of experiences and historical models of narrations in the history of Islam? Why not Egypt? Why not Mecca/Medina? Why not Iraq and Syria? The short answer to these questions is that all the teachings of the above-mentioned Islamic centers—which have historically validity and legitimacy—have eventually led to extremism and terrorism in the Islamic world. The appearance of Salafism, Wahhabism, politicized Islam, jihadist Islam, and finally Islamic terrorism in thought and action have been the product of the teachings of these schools in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Medina/Mecca. The complete package of Islamic ideology and its founders belong to these lands.

In the Balkh school, Islam had a separate narrative from those of Iraq, Syria, Mecca/Medina, and Egypt from the beginning. The Balkh school has been a fusion of Khorasan mysticism, indigenous customs, and cultural jurisprudence on the one hand, and its fusion with the *Murji'a*, *Karāmiya*, and *Māturidiyya* theological schools on the other. These melted together in Balkh's pre-Islam civilization and culture, and created a unique method, unlike in Baghdad, Medina, Egypt, and other Islamic centers. The difference between the Balkh school of thinking and other Islamic schools of thought is the distinction between *cultural Fiqh* (cultural Jurisprudence) and *Sharia Fiqh* (Sharia Jurisprudence).²³ Balkh has been a representation of the

²² Afghan Arabs are Muslim Islamists from the Arab region who came to Afghanistan during and after the Soviet-Afghan War to assist fellow Muslims in fighting the Soviets and pro-Soviet Afghans. Volunteers are estimated to number between 8,000 and 35,000. See, Mohammed M. Hafez, "Jihad after Iraq: Lessons from the Arab Afghans", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, No. 2 (2009), 73-94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100802639600>.

²³ Ali Amiri, *The Adrift Wisdom: The Rise and Decline of Rationality in Islam [Khirad-e-Awara: Zohor wa Zawal Aqlaniat dar Islam]* (Kabul: Amiri Publications, 2013), 121.

merger of Islamic jurisprudence with culture and custom from its inception; it has sought the conduct, deeds, ideas, and regulations from this address. Throughout history, these points of view have been able to defeat narrow-minded and radical religious interpretations, and push them out of the field.

“Cultural fiqh” as a dominant practice under the Balkh school is not limited to the present geography of the city of Balkh in northern Afghanistan today. The school is backed by a medieval Islamic geography that extends to the major cities of Merv, Bukhara, Samarkand, Nasaf, Takhāristān (in present-day northern Afghanistan), and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Therefore, when the Balkh school is mentioned, its intellectual and doctrinal features have been perfected by the children of Mervi, Bukhari, Samarkandi, Takhāristān, Badakhshāni (major cities of Khurasan), and Balkhi. It is an Islam that is still alive, and still runs in the veins of the social life of the people of Central Asia, despite the onslaught of jihadist and takfiri ideas.

Historically, the Balkh school in the early Islamic centuries did not compare with Islamic extremism and harsh readings. On the one hand, the defenders of the school resisted those Balkhi scholars who were being influenced from the schools of Iraq, Syria and Mecca/Medina. They expelled people such as Jahm b. Ṣafwān Balkhī (696–745 AD), and ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Ajrad Balkhī (d. 621 AD) who were great Kharijite and Jabriya (determinism) theologians, and neutralized the views of Khālid Ibn Maymūn Balkhī (died around 670 AD), one of the famous Kharijite ideologues. Also, while facing the emerging power of the armed Kharijites in Sistān, the Balkh school produced a counter-narrative, and subjugated the great Kharijite leaders of Khorasan and Sistān in the ninth century AD. Yaquub Laith Saffar (840–879 AD) and Hamzah Sistanī (d. 834 AD) (two of the well-known Kharijite political and military commanders and leaders), were tamed. Yet, their image in the nationalist literature of Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia (Greater Khorasan region) is of liberation heroes, even though they were the Kharijites of this region.

In the *Cultural Fiqh* narrative of the Balkh school, there are intellectual and practical indicators that reconcile Islam and Muslims with each other, and with the followers of other religions. Just as in Balkh, Sunni and Shiite Muslims have lived in peace for centuries; in the same way, Muslims have also lived in peace with Hindus, Jews

(the Jews of Balkh have migrated to Israel between 1954-1967).²⁴ History has rarely seen evidence of religious conflict in Balkh. In addition to its historical validity, religious legitimacy, and lack of nationalist hegemony, this school also has other important indicators, such as pragmatic mysticism, a-politicized beliefs, co-existent externalism, moderation, and the capacity to blend different methods into one grand narrative. This is what is necessary today, and could become a response to the prevailing narrative of Islamic extremism. These indicators are based on the great theological schools and the rich historical experiences in and around Balkh—all of which combined to form the Balkh school in history.

The following are the five characteristics of the Balkh school.

Pragmatic Mysticism

Mysticism (*irfān*) is an important element in the Balkh school. Balkh mysticism is an important branch attributed to this school due to the formation of its first nuclei in Balkh. Apart from this, geographically, the big cities of ancient Khorasan—such as Merv, Bukhara, Samarkand, Herat and Ghazni—have played a prominent role in its development. Love, self-sacrifice, philanthropy, and the hatred of selfishness are considered the most important concepts in Balkh mysticism, which are always propagated through poetry, writings, and in Sufi circles. Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī (Rumi) is one of the hundreds of examples. What made Balkh mysticism resistant against offensive narratives during early times is its pragmatic nature. Pragmatism in Balkh mysticism is an important point that can be considered against the pragmatism of the takfiri groups. Among Muslims, most groups and organizations are theoretically concerned with following Ibn ‘Arabī’s mysticism in the abstract, and have not been very successful in practice.²⁵ However, the great mystics of Khorasan were men of action, and took to the field with a practical approach as compared to other groups, and even the Kharijites of Sistan and Khurasan.

Ibrāhīm Adham Balkhī (718-77 AD), Shaqīq Balkhī (d. 810 AD), Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī (804–874 AD) Rabi‘a Balkhī (d. Around 950

²⁴ Liura Saeed, “The History of Jews in Afghanistan”, 12 June 2009, at <http://www.iranjewish.com/worldyhood/Afghanistan.htm>

²⁵ Shafii Kadkani, “An Assessment of the Paradigms of Khurasani Mysticism with Ibn Arabi Mysticism [*Barrasi Paradigm hai Erfani Khurasani ba Erfani Ibn Arabi*]”, 11 February 2022, at <https://shahraranews.ir/fa/news/27059>.

AD), Ibn Sīnā Balkhī (980–1037 AD), Ḥākīm Nasser Khosrow Balkhī (1004–1088 AD), Attar Neyshapouri (1146–1221 AD), Sanai Ghaznavi (1080–1131 AD), and Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273 AD) were all among those who led schools and had large circles of followers, and were considered the mainstays of traditional civil society. They promoted their thoughts and works among the people; and Muslims, especially the common people, were greatly influenced by their thoughts and ideas. This situation continues to this day, and in areas that are still influenced by Balkhi mysticism, people are fascinated by the great mystics of Khorasan.

Unlike takfiri and other superficial currents, Mysticism, is today a dynamic culture of philanthropy in which man is not seen as black or white, Eastern or Western, Muslim or non-Muslim; all are loved. Many great mystics in the Balkh school had Christian, Jewish, and Hindu followers, and they lived a happy and peaceful life together. The Buddhist temples of Balkh, and the role of the Buddha’s head on the victorious Sassanid coins indicate the influence of Buddhism in Khorasan, one of the places identified with the origins of Sufism. Frequent travels between Islamic lands and Buddhist areas in the post-Islamic era also led to the transfer and introduction of Buddhist customs and rituals to Sufi thought and customs in these areas.²⁶

Apolitical Beliefs

Murji‘ah, or non-political theological thinking, is another important feature of the Balkh school. The Murji‘as were a theological sect of Muslims who believed that one should not comment on the infidelities or beliefs of anyone in this world. Rather, its determination should be delayed until the Day of Judgment. Therefore, in the doctrinal and behavioral model of Balkhi Islam, the gate of leaving Islam (apostasy) is very narrow. ‘Takfir’ was the most criticized term of Balkh political literature throughout history. In the first centuries AH, at the height of political strife and the war over the succession of the Prophet among the Muslims, this school appeared in Balkh, was nurtured in Balkh, and the scholars of Balkh tried to multiply it. Sometimes, due to Balkh’s inclination towards theological beliefs,

²⁶ Paiman Abul Bashari et al., “A Comparison of the Story of the Life of Ibrahim Adham and its Relation to Buddhist Beliefs”, *Journal of Justarhai Adabi* 4 (2012), 36-49.

Murji'ah has been called "Murjiabad", meaning the city of the Murji'ans.

The word Murji'ah derives from *Ijā'*, which literally means 'to postpone'. It was an ideology that stood in stark contrast to that of the Kharijites. That is, the Murji'ans believed that since one could not know the esoteric beliefs of individuals, anyone who claimed to be a Muslim should be considered a true Muslim, and that any judgment about him should be left to God. This belief is considered an inevitable necessity during the growth and expansion of takfiri groups that seek to kill others by proving their own purity.

Co-Existent Externalism

The doctrinal and behavioral foundations of the Balkh school also enjoy a culture of co-existence based on the Karamite (*Karamiya*) theological school. The beliefs of the Karamite sect were founded in Khorasan, and institutionalized in Balkh. The great mystics of Balkh, such as Rumi, the famous mystic and poet of our time, has been the greatest scientist and theologian of Karamiya. The Balkh school has a clear approach to the concepts of God and other existences within the framework of Karamite beliefs, just like other externalist theologians of Iraq, Syria, and Medina. But the difference between Balkh's externalism is that it is mixed with tolerance, mutual acceptance, and mysticism, while non-Balkhi externalists are violence-prone, which has laid the foundations for conferring legitimacy on contemporary Jihadism and intolerance among Muslims.

Therefore, this unique feature of the Balkh school has made it a counter-narrative against Salafism and Islamic Jihadism throughout history. With this idea, the Balkh school's followers were able to dismantle the Kharijites during the ninth and tenth centuries. It is this idea that has the potential of reducing and eliminating the Takfiri ideology of eliminating others as hypocrites and non-believers. According to this feature of the Balkh school, all human beings are blessed by God; even non-Muslims will eventually be forgiven. This belief is not reflected in any other Islamic sect and theology but is being practiced by the followers of the Balkh school. The concept of God in the Balkh school is based on the views of the Karamite, an extremely gracious and kind being. These beliefs made Muslims follow the Balkh school in Khurasan, and become interactive and

mutually acceptable, and not show prejudice and insensitivity towards others.

The Theology of the Middle Way

The Balkh school also manifested itself in a middle way between the beliefs of Ash‘arism, the Mu‘tazilites, and the Kharijites when the Islamic world was embroiled in a war over thoughts and beliefs. Over time, the war spread from universities and schools to the public sphere, leading to bloody clashes among Muslims. In the meantime, in the areas around the Balkh school, a middle and moderate path, called *Maturidiyyai*, appeared in Samarkand, which reconciled Mu‘tazilite rationalism and the Ash‘arite narrative. The Balkh school soon absorbed the views of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī. One of his most important masters, Naṣr b. Yaḥyā Balkhī, a religious scholar, played an important role in the improvement of Māturīdī thoughts.

By accepting the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad as a principle, that “the best of everything lies in the middle,”²⁷ the Māturīdī feature of Balkh school actually stood against extremist readings of Islam. It rejected the extremism in rationalism that today has led to secularism and materialism among Muslims, as well as the extremism in narcissism that has led to violent Salafism. Both these extreme ways of thinking have resulted in violence during the course of history. However, in the Balkh region, those who belonged to the Balkh school have never confronted each other militarily to exterminate the other. This is what the Islamic world needs—a middle-way theology, with an accommodative approach to embarrass all believers, and bring about reconciliation among the different contested and extreme narratives of the Qur‘ān and Hadiths.

A Melting Pot of Sects

In the Balkh school, the reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis accounts for more than the differences between them. The people of Balkh are Sunni, with both a majority and a minority. However, they love the family of the Prophet of Islam. Since the history of the presence of the *Alawites*²⁸ of Khorasan under the

²⁷ Ḥadīth *khayr al-umūr awsaṭubā*.

²⁸ The Alawites are an ethno-religious group found primarily in the Levant which originated from Shia Islam. The Alawites revere ‘Alī (‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib), considered

leadership of Yaḥyā b. Zayd in the eighth century (which was supported by the followers of both the Sunnis and the Ḥanafis), and the later discovery of the tomb of Ali ibn Abi Talib during the Seljuk period in Balkh (which has been guarded by the Sunnis since then), the Shiites and Sunnis are unique in Balkh. Theologically, the Shiites of Balkh are Alawites, and the Sunnis are Marji'is, and this has left both groups largely immune to later political-ideological tendencies. In contrast to other Islamic lands where Shiites face serious animosity and opposition from other Shiites, Sunnis from other Sunnis, as well as from Shiites for Sunnis, tolerance has been shown among them in the Balkh school.

From the first centuries of Islam, scholars, jurists, commentators, narrators, ascetics, and the sheikhs of Balkh have preserved their unique narrative of the family of the Prophet. Moreover, they were not confused in the anti-Shiite and anti-Sunni games of other Muslims. In the works of the great scholars of the Sunni world as well as the great scholars of the Shiite world who are attributed to Balkh, their narratives are so similar to each other that, today, it can be difficult to attribute them specifically to either the Sunnis or to the Shiites.

Thus, today, when another aspect of Islamic extremism is the Sunni-Shiite armed war, each of which seeks to massacre the other (like ISIS and the Quds Force), a unifying narrative between these two Islamic sects is still a matter of time. Because even if Sunnis do not fight with Sunnis, or Shiites with Shiites, the Shiite-Sunni sectarian wars are one of the factors that intensify insecurity in the Islamic world, and the entire international system.

In today's context, these characteristics of the Balkh school can be the answer to the Neo-Kharijite and Takfiri extremism in the Islamic world, which has emerged in the form of Islamic radicalism, and threatens the security of Muslims and humanity in general. The Balkh school of thought and practices believe in an accommodative

the first Imam of the Twelver school. The Alawi Muslims practice an esoteric form of Shi'a Islam. This complex yet syncretic faith includes an emphasis on a trinity (Muhammad, his nephew and eventual successor 'Alī, and Salmān al-Fārisī, an early Persian convert to Islam), a belief in reincarnation, and the celebration of a "mass" involving wine and bread. Alawis have their own unique religious texts, and recognize numerous Muslim, Christian, and Persian holidays—Harvard Divinity School.

approach, with no one wanting to exterminate anyone from the circle of Islam. It also seeks conciliation between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is a school which has no place for the takfir of those who have a different interpretation of Islamic texts, or have differences in the practice of Islamic sharia and customs. It follows an interactive approach by respecting different views and giving a chance for others to speak up and argue the bases of their thoughts and beliefs. The massacre of innocent Muslims and non-Muslims is also strongly prohibited in the Balkh interpretation of Islam. It’s foundational Quranic belief is that “killing an innocent human being is [similar to] killing the whole humanity.”²⁹

Above all, the school has been a pride of the Islamic civilization and thinking throughout history. It gave birth to many well-known people: scholars like Avicenna (Abū ‘Alī Sīnā Balkhī, the physician, astronomer, philosopher, and writer of the Islamic Golden Age, and the father of early modern medicine); Rumi (Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī (Rumi), the great mystic and poet); Albumasar (Abū Ma’shar Balkhī, the founder of an astrology school); Abū Zayd Balkhī (the polymath and founder Balkhī school), any many other prominent persons who have played an extensive role in human civilization.

The prominent face of the Balkh school is the Murji’a, one of the theological schools of Islamic civilization and culture, and its influence may be seen across the Islamic world. This school arose, developed, and flourished at different points in Islam’s history, and its teachings affected a significant portion of the Islamic world. The Islamic East was where this school had the most impact, and lasted the longest. Balkh was one of the most essential places for the school’s inception, dynamism, and longevity. Murji’a had two renowned children, Karamiya and Māturīdiyya, the first of whom died early outside Balkh. The latter, on the other hand, is still going strong.³⁰

However, today, the Balkh school is being attacked by takfiri and extremist Muslim groups from all sides. Debilitating Balkh narrative of Islam was an outcome of the colonial rivalries; from the period of British rivalry with the Tsar in the nineteenth and early

²⁹ Q.S. al-Māidah [5]: 32.

³⁰ Mohammad Nabi Rahimzada, “Balkh Theological School [Maktabi Kalami Balkh]”, 2 April 2022, at: http://www.journals.miu.ac.ir/article_12.html

twentieth centuries, the integrated version of traditional Islam merged with the Salafism of Shah Waliullah Muhaddith Dehlawi (1703–1762 AD)—the Salafi leader of the Sub-continent in the form of Deoband—and supported all its influence on the Balkh school. Under the Tsar regime, the suburbs of Balkh school were invaded by the Tsar on the other side of the Amu Darya. The Tsar administration also weakened Balkh theology. Later, in the Afghanistan Jihad, Pakistan-based Deoband, another offshoot of Deoband School, was merged with Arab Salafism by Afghan Arabs, presenting an extreme fragmentation of Hanafi. The Soviets also invaded any religious narrative. Both strongly opposed Balkh narrative and a Western-Eastern projected Islamic narratives were replacing.

The situation of the followers of the Balkh school is chaotic; they are gradually disappearing every day. At least in the past two years, about 1,300 scholars affiliated with the Balkh school have been assassinated and physically removed from the scene.³¹ Each of the indicators of the Balkh School has the capacity to accept contemporary values, without resisting or rejecting them. If one plans properly, reviving the narrative of the Balkh School can become a great strategy. The school of Balkh, and the Balkhis have been accused of heresy by Salafi and Hanbali scholars in the past. However, the scholars of Balkh, with vigilance and faith in the principles of Islam, have updated the rules and tools according to the needs of the time and thus enjoy a special place among the Muslim ummah. Today, all over the Islamic and non-Islamic world, scholars, commentators, narrators, theologians and philosophers affiliated with the Balkh school have a good reputation. Reviving the narrative of this school, and expanding it, can be a response to the existing extremist narrations.

Concluding Remarks

This article is an attempt to make countries and great powers better, instead of fighting Islamic extremism in the form of emerging and takfiri movements rising every day among the hundreds of thousands of unemployed and poor teenagers, who are also rural Muslims. This will be a long-term strategy and will involve changing the narrative in the context of Islamic societies and, through this,

³¹ Personal Interview with Malikyar, Mohammad Arif, The Deputy Minister of Islamic Education of the Republic of Afghanistan, interview on 4 April 2022.

finding a permanent solution. Combating terrorism is currently one of the most pressing dangers to global peace. Terrorism does not dictate the system of action and reaction in and of itself. Counterterrorism must follow a logical sequence, one that is defined by natural, divine, and human values, to work against all anti-peace occurrences.

It is at this point that the international system’s flaws become obvious. The international system lacks a clear and comprehensive strategy to counter threats and violations of peace. As a result, existing international counterterrorism mechanisms and measures are incompatible with other measures taken in this direction,

To transform extremism into tolerance and moderation by investing in reviving the narratives of Islamic reciprocity is a good and right way. There is no doubt that the creation of a new narrative will be considered religious heresy by extremists and rejected by them; however, the revival of past narratives has a deep historical legitimacy among Muslims. Therefore, this is the way to proceed. The Balkh school is a good opportunity to revive a peaceful tradition among Muslims in order to end extremism. This school has historically been attacked by extremist forces backed by the great colonial powers since the nineteenth century, including by the communist Cold War paradigm. Today, it needs to be strengthened again, and injected as a healing prescription among Muslims.

Reviving a narrative that has been part of a historical paradigm in a large part of Islamic geography in the past, and updating it under today’s conditions is the best way. In the case of Islam, which is a principled and conservative religion, and its mainstream is against *ijtihad* and innovation, creating a new narrative will not be remarkably successful. A good and better way is to update and expand successful and effective narratives of the past that have shown significant achievements in the field of moderation and reciprocity with the use of modern tools.

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