

# DECOLONISING THE DEBATE ON REMOTE WARFARE

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# INTRODUCTION

- I will engage with the non-western experience of remote warfare;
- Most conflicts in the world today are taking place in Muslim countries or involve so-called Muslim armed non-state actors;
- What is the Muslim mainstream view on remote warfare? What is the extremist perspective on remote warfare?
- I will not engage with operation forces, private contractors, intelligence, military training teams, cyber security...

# ARGUMENT

- Innovation is a must in Islam;
- But the use of technology must be monitored and must comply with principles of war as established in the scriptures and their interpretations;
- Yet, extremist groups engage in remote warfare, adapting Islamic scriptures through interpretations;
- Technology as an aggravating factor that helps with the shift the Muslim code of ethics and the rules of engagement on Islamic extremist side.

# REGULATION OF WARFARE IN ISLAMIC LAW

- Defensive jihad al-qital:

- ❑ A fair war is a defensive war relying on the principle of self defense (Quran 2:190, 22:39), to protect Islam (Quran 22:40) and the oppressed (Quran 4:75).
- ❑ War should be waged in the way of Allah (*fi sabil-Allah*)
- ❑ States (Iran-Iraq war)

- Aggressive Jihad al-qital:

- ❑ Armed Non-State Actors: building on al Qaeda's understanding of *jihad al-qital* but no proper doctrine.
- ❑ Example: ISIL followed the rule of the *jizya* but tried to force-convert individuals. *There is no compulsion in religion* (Quran 2:256)

# PERMISSIBLE USE OF FORCE

- The focus is on restraint: SABR (patience) = the way it is done, the conduct, the use.

*« And the retribution for an evil act is an avil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation, his reward is from Allah. Ineed he does line wrongdoers »(Quran 42:40)*

*Hadith “Do not be eager to meet the enemy but ask God for safety; yet, if you meet them, persevere and have patience; and know that Paradise is under the Shadow of Swords.”*

# ISLAMIC LAW AND TECHNOLOGY

- These principles apply in remote warfare (there is no difference between physical presence and light-footprint operations);
- *“Once Prophet Muhammad came across some people doing artificial pollination of palm trees. Due to some reason he disliked the idea and commented that it would be better not to do any pollination at all. However for the following year the harvest was poor. When he came to know about this Prophet Muhammad admitted his limitation of knowledge regarding secular affairs and said: “If a question relates to your worldly matters you would know better about it, but if it relates to your religion then to me it belongs.” Hadith*
- No rejection of innovation;

# MAINSTREAM APPROACH TO REMOTE WARFARE

- No obstacle to arms sales, war gaming, UAVs and others...;
- But the use needs to be monitored: APPLY SABR and restraint:
  - ☐ For example: It is haram to sell a weapon to someone who will use it illegitimately. See hadith *“Help you one another in Al-Birr and At-Taqwa (virtue, righteousness and piety); but do not help one another in sin and transgression”* (Quran 5:2)
- Principles, such as distinction between civilians and combatants, must be respected, so the debate about surgical strikes is the same as in other cultures;

# ISLAMIC EXTREMIST DOCTRINE ABOUT REMOTE WARFARE

- "This last year's most daunting problem was an adaptive enemy who, for a time, enjoyed tactical superiority in the airspace under our conventional air superiority in the form of commercially available drones and fuel-expedient weapons systems, and our only available response was small arms fire," (Gen. Raymond Thomas, 2016, referring to ISIS in Iraq);
- These extremist groups have no code of conduct other than distorted interpretations of the scriptures that suit their goals (Ex of sexual slavery);
- Their adoption of remote warfare, merged with Islamic views on technology, impact on asymmetric conflict.



# AGILITY AND INEQUALITY

- Islamist Extremist doctrine has evolved to become a toolbox serving an agenda and interests;
- Impact on the rules of engagement and violations of Islamic principles;
- Narratives about civilians who become part of the booty or are legitimate targets (they are *kafirs*);
- De-humanisation attached to remote warfare then frees the hands of extremist groups even further.

# DECOLONISING REMOTE WARFARE

- Issue 1: The result of our approach to remote warfare doctrine, strategy and tactics has an impact on the Islamic extremist doctrine:
  - It feeds their narrative on aggressive jihad.
  - Ethics of warfare
- Issue 2: Are we turning civilians into targets because extremists' groups have taken them hostages?

# DECOLONISING REMOTE WARFARE

- Are we decolonising war via remote warfare? Less impact on culture, traditions and religion;
- Remote warfare leads to another experience of war for the locals: it isn't remote for them;
- It is dehumanising: [#notabugsplat](#) in Pakistan

# DECOLONISING REMOTE WARFARE

- Besides, imposition of Western superiority through technology;
- Technological colonisation– is it a priority? Vs utilitarian approach;
- Reinforcing the Otherness: lack of knowledge of the local culture will impact intelligence;

# THE FUTURE

- It is Islam's problem? Muslims' problems? Muslim leaders' problems? Are others who engage in remote warfare indirectly responsible for this shift in ethics but also for pushing extremists to... the extremes?
- Lessons learned? Could we mitigate impact on civilians? Not from a « us » perspectives via surgical strikes but looking at the impact remote warfare has on extremists' tactics and strategies;
- Future? Terrorist drone attacks? Suicide drones? Chemical drone attacks? While this is in violation of mainstream interpretations of Islamic scriptures, extremist groups have legitimised such uses.