

The War on Terror Has Contributed to the Growing Abuse of Human Rights



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The phrase “war on terror” refers to a military campaign launched by a coalition of many states including NATO countries under the auspices of the US to deal with the so-called threat of terrorism on global level. This term was first coined by the former president of the US, George W. Bush in 2001 when he asserted his stance of fighting against such elements as had initiated terrorism on global level by targeting the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on September 9, 2001, killing around three thousand people. America accused Osama Bin Laden, the head of Al-Qaida to be the man responsible for those terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and demanded his custody from the Taliban who had provided asylum to OBL prior to these attacks. As the Taliban refused to hand over “the most wanted” man to the USA, America and its coalition partners launched a war on Afghanistan and termed it “Global War on Terror”. Initially the target of this war was Osama Bin Laden and his organisation, Al-Qaida but with the passage of time all like-minded Muslim organisations and their sympathisers were determined as the targets of that war. The apparent goals of the war—elimination of networks of terrorism on global level—were very alluring but as the things unfolded it was observed that the so-called war on terror caused more violence and bloodshed, and violated more human rights than what the terrorists could have done. Now, it is a well recognised reality that in actual the war on terror has contributed to the growing abuse of human rights by killing tens of thousands of civilians, arresting and torturing the innocent, shattering economies, putting trade sanction, and what not! The succeeding paragraphs will bring forth the instances of how this war on terror has snatched the peace of the world and pushed humanity to hell by causing violations of human rights. However, the focus of discussion will remain on Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq as these were the main battlefields and hence most affected regions of the war on terrorism.

The first very important point to be understood is that Osama bin Laden had taken asylum in Afghanistan. He was originally a Saudi citizen whose citizenship was abrogated by his country forcing him to get refuge in Sudan in 1991. However, in 1996 America forced Sudan to expel Osama bin Laden. He then got asylum in Afghanistan in 1996. He was still in Afghanistan when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre came under attack. America demanded that Afghanistan hand over OBL to America without providing any proof of his involvement. As Julian Assange had taken asylum in Iceland and Edward Snowden got asylum in Russia, and America never attacked these countries to arrest them, an all out attack on Afghanistan for merely this reason that Taliban had given asylum to OBL is not convincing in any respect. Carpet bombing an entire country of above 30 million people for one suspect’s stay there is never justifiable at all. I believe that the very start of the war on terror was the greatest violation of human rights. How could the entire Afghan nation be targeted just for the sake of one man?

Written in 2010, the official House of Commons Library briefing paper on the legitimacy of US invasion of Afghanistan states: “The military campaign in Afghanistan was not specifically mandated by UN, but was widely (although not universally) perceived to be a legitimate form of self-defence under the UN charter.” As a matter of fact, the article 2(4) of the UN charter prohibits the threat of use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. The accepted exceptions to this are when the Security Council authorises military action or when it is in self-defence under article 51 of the charter. However, the carpet bombing of Afghanistan was not an act of self-defence under article 51. Marjorie Cohn, a professor of law at California’s Thomas Jefferson School of Law and a former president of the US National Lawyers Guild considers the attack by US and UK forces categorically illegitimate for two reasons: first, “the attacks in New York and Washington DC were criminal attacks, not ‘armed attacks’ by another state” and second,

“there was not an imminent threat of an armed attack on the US after September 11, or the US would not have waited three weeks before initiating its bombing campaign”^[1].

Just for the sake of argument, if we believe that launching the war on terror was a step in the right direction to eliminate terrorism from the face of the earth; we will shudder to calculate the atrocities caused in the name of these ‘crusades’ as mentioned by G. W. Bush in a speech. The Taliban, who were not involved in any terrorist attack on America, were brutally killed in gas chambers, captured and imprisoned in jails like Guantanamo bay, Bagram and other “dark sites”. In these notorious jails and torture cells, very inhuman mental and physical torture was inflicted on the prisoners of the war which again was the utter violation of Geneva Accords on the rights of prisoners. The inhuman methods of torture were also violation of America’s own laws. However, all atrocities on the prisoners were inflicted on them in the name of war on terror and the world also criminally condoned every criminal act of the US forces. What an irony that war on terror created more terrorism than the alleged terrorists!

The US and the United Kingdom’s invasion into Iraq in 2003, under the pretext of eliminating weapons of mass destruction from Iraq and dismantling the alleged nexus of Saddam Hussain and Al-Qaida is another very prominent case in point that categorically substantiates the argument that war on terror has caused grave violations of human rights. The havoc this invasion brought to a country of 38 million people is beyond imagination. The coalition forces killed tens of thousands of innocent Iraqi people, utterly destabilised the country unleashing all the forces of hell to ignite sectarian and ethnic clashes there to go on for decades and paving way for Daesh to establish their so-called Islamic State on the ruins of the Iraqi State. On 6 July 2016, Sir John Chilcot, who headed the British public inquiry into the nation’s role in the Iraq War, announced that at the time of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Saddam Hussein did not pose an urgent threat to British interests, that intelligence regarding weapons of mass destruction was presented with unwarranted certainty, that peaceful alternatives to war had not been exhausted, that the United Kingdom and the United States had undermined the authority of the United Nations Security Council, and that the process of identifying the legal basis was “far from satisfactory”^[2].

The crimes against humanity committed by the American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq present a mind-numbing picture of the violation of human rights in the war on terrorism. Robert Bales, a former United States soldier, murdered 16 Afghan civilians in Panjwayi, Kandahar, Afghanistan on March 11, 2012—an event known as the Kandahar massacre. He killed 16 innocent Afghan civilians including nine children, some as young as two years old, four women and three men in two separate attacks on the night of March 11, 2012. Investigators said Bales returned to his camp after the first attack and left the camp an hour later to commit the second attack. He was immediately evacuated to US to protect him from any repercussions inside Afghanistan. This incident is a sharp reminder that war on terror has contributed to the growing abuse of human rights.

In January 2012, a video went viral on YouTube, TMZ and other sites, and caused anger and outrage in Afghanistan and many other parts of the world. The video shows four US Marines in their combat gear laughing and joking as they urinate on dead bodies of Afghan Taliban. One of the bodies is covered in blood and the Marine can be heard joking “Have a great day, buddy”, “Golden like a shower” and “Yeahhhh!”^[3] What humanity, what civilisation on earth what morality allows such a beastly, inhuman and immoral treatment of the dead bodies of human beings? Staff Sgt. Joseph W. Chamblin was reduced in rank to sergeant and ordered to pay \$500 after he pleaded guilty to charges stemming from this

shameful incident. The other culprits also got scot free. This orgy of killing human beings, albeit enemies, and defiling their corpses proves it beyond any doubt that war on terror has abused human rights rather than respecting them.

In her book, "The Wrong Enemy" Carlotta Gall has described numerous such incidents as provide conclusive evidence that war on terror has contributed to the growing abuse of human rights. In one such incident when a NATO convoy moving on Jalalabad-Kandhar Road is targeted by a suicide bomber, who is hardly able to kill anybody in the convoy, the troops retaliate with indiscriminate firing on whatever vehicle they meet on the way afterwards. In many identical incidents, American and NATO fighter jets bombed social gatherings and marriage ceremonies in Afghanistan to kill hundreds of innocent civilians. These incidents gave the Taliban ample excuse to justify their cause of fighting against their enemy and let the people come over to them to avenge the atrocities committed on them by the invading forces. In one recent incident the Afghan forces' helicopters attacked a religious gathering for which about 1,000 people had assembled in a mosque and surrounding fields to witness the ceremony of granting recognition to the students who had learnt the Qur'an by heart or completed their course of reciting it. The attack of gunship helicopters killed around a hundred students, their teachers and their parents, and injured dozens of other men and boys. This was indeed a cold-blooded murder of innocent children and other people. Hence, it is an undeniable fact that war on terror has snatched the right to life in Afghanistan and neighbouring areas.

Another heart-wrenching incident that tells us upsetting stories of breach of human rights owing to misguided and blind attacks on civilians under the cover of war on terror occurred on 3 October, 2015 when a US-led airstrike struck and badly damaged Kunduz Trauma Centre operated by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), killing dozens of doctors, staff members and patients. The Trauma Center was struck by 'a series of aerial bombing raids'. The humanitarian organisation said the hospital was 'hit several times' in the course of the attack, and that the hospital had been 'repeatedly and precisely hit'. The attack had continued for 30 minutes after MSF staff had contacted US and Afghan officials during the strike. After initial denials from the US government, finally the then US President Barack Obama apologised to MSF president for the incident, saying it was a mistake^[4]. It is rightly said by Martin Luther King, Jr:

Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.

Sovereignty of a country is the most respectable right of the people living in that country. Pakistan played a very important role in this so-called war on terrorism by providing its airbases, allowing transportation of NATO arms and ammunition through its territory and sharing intelligence with US and coalition forces engaged in Afghanistan. Pakistan has suffered a loss of \$123 billion along with lives of 80000 people. However, what Pakistan received in return is breach of its sovereignty due to drone attacks on their enemies inside the territory of Pakistan, its image assassination as a supporter of the so-called terrorists and provider of safe havens to the Afghan insurgents. The Trump administration in its Pakistan policy, announced in August 2017, suspended all security-related assistance to Pakistan on the usual charge that Pakistan had failed to sever ties with the militant groups, leading to the US and NATO's failure to defeat the Taliban. In addition, breaching the sovereignty of the country, the drone strikes inside Pakistan have killed thousands of innocent people creating resentment among the victim families against Pakistan. Since 2004, the United States government has attacked thousands of targets in

Northwest Pakistan using drones operated by the United States Air Force. Amnesty International found that a number of victims were unarmed and that some strikes could amount to war crimes.^[5]

Though the estimates of casualties of the war on terror are hard to verify, in their joint report called “Body Count: Casualty Figures after 10 Years of the War on Terror”, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Physicians for Global Survival, and the Nobel Prize-winning International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War concluded that this number is staggering, with at least 1.3 million lives lost in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan alone since the onset of war on 7 October 2001. However, the report also notes that the total number of people killed in the three countries “could also be in excess of 2 million, whereas a figure below 1 million is extremely unlikely.”^[6] This death toll of only ten years after the outbreak of the war gives a very clear idea of the grave violations of human rights in the name of war on terror.

Conclusion

The war on terror has killed hundreds of thousands of people including innocent men, women and children. It has destabilised countries, shattered economies, and devastated societies. However, the major casualty of the war on terror is the image of Islam, the religion of peace; and the Muslims, who have been portrayed as terrorists and their religion as a dogma of extremism and terrorism. Islamic fundamentalism has not been the main cause of terrorism in the West during the past decade or so. Eighty percent of deaths by lone-wolf terrorists in the West were driven by right-wing extremism, nationalism, antigovernment sentiment, political extremism and other forms of supremacy. The deaths from jihadist terrorism on American soil since the September 11 attacks are fewer than the people killed in terrorist attacks motivated by white supremacist and other right-wing extremist ideologies, according to New America, a research organisation in Washington, DC^[7]. It is, therefore, conclusively proved that war on terror has contributed to the growing abuse of human rights.

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