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## A WORD FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

Over the past few decades, nothing impacted the world affairs so profoundly as did terrorism, and yet our understanding of this phenomenon remains elusive and often biased by political interests. Although modern terrorism spans deep into the history, it is this current fourth wave, characterized as a “religious wave”, which grips the Islamic World.

This wave of terrorism has been more violent, more widespread, and longer lasting than its predecessor waves. In fourteen centuries since the birth of Islam, the history of Muslims never been invulnerable to terrorism, but being so openly labeled as “Islamic” terrorism certainly calls for a profound study and scholarly analysis. In this regard, a hasty mentioning to a few most recent and, somehow, related events will help to set the stage for what is reported in this issue.

Ten years after the death of bin Laden, four years after the fall of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and twenty years after the invasion of Afghanistan by the West led by the US, the very Taliban, whose presence at power and harboring terrorists then in 2001 triggered the invasion, in 2021 returned back to power in Afghanistan. Not only the group was supported to return to power, but that very West seems having relations with the Taliban, although of humanitarian nature. This rather paradoxical development and, most significantly, the United States’ engagement with the group, have opened a new page in the story that necessitates a fresh scholarly debate and discourse.

Although many analysts have approached this fourth wave of terrorism in the same manner as those preceding it, it is argued that the groups featured in this wave are fundamentally different. The different terrorist groups associated with Islam, like the Taliban, ISIS, al-Qaeda, and others, are active across a wide expanse, ranging from North Waziristan of Pakistan to Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. This fourth wave, religious terrorism, encompasses dozens of countries and an equal number of ethnicities like Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Uyghurs, Arabs, Somalis, Tuaregs, Nigerians, and others. Furthermore, these groups include adherents of different religious currents like Salafis, Hanafis, Sufis, etc. By merely looking at the geographic dispersion, economic situations, cultural roots, ethnicity backgrounds of these groups, a myriad of questions emerge.

Maybe a main question confronting policy makers and scholars alike is the degree to which these groups differ from one another, i.e., what are the differences and commonalities? What are the ideological foundations and guiding religious principles of each group? What are the origins of each group? How do these groups’ religious beliefs differ from those commonly held in the communities from which they emerged? How do these groups carry out their war in the virtual arena? In order to mobilize the youth, how has their interaction with the Palestinian issue been and how did these groups differ in their adherence to the enduring Israeli–Palestin-

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ian conflict? What is the connection between the militant groups of the 21st century and some theorists of the 20th century in the Muslim World? What was each group's posture toward Islamic sects different from their own? What are the points of political contention between these groups, in both the local and global contexts? How do these groups or some of them relate to some Islamic schools of thought? How do the racial and ethnic compositions of these groups differ? Does the international community treat these groups in the same way, if not, why? How can these groups be assessed in terms of the definitions of terrorism? What was the role of "religious grievance" in the mobilization and insurgency of these groups and how did they resort to uprising in response to their perceptions of discrimination, political exclusion, and perceptions of threats against religious sovereignty?

This issue of *Politics and Religion Journal* has been allocated for in-depth understanding of these groups by discussing and trying to answer the mentioned questions through comparative approaches. It is imperative to mention that the above questions are rather outside the capacity of one journal issue, but it is rather setting a stage for a wider scholarly works and discussion.

In the first article, Shayeq challenges the Western researchers who have not been able to fully unveil and divulge the Taliban. Most of the time, Taliban are described as a synonymous to "traditional", "extremist", "terrorist", "radical", "Deobandi", "Salafi", "Pashtun", "Hanafi", and "criminal". According to the author, none of these labels alone is enough, to grasp sufficiently the hybrid nature of this group. The Taliban, as the author argues, is the self-contradictory outcome of radicalized religion, dichotomized education, organized crime, anachronism, ethno-nationalist hegemonism, and longstanding tensions in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. To understand the immediate and long-term political and security implications of the Taliban's return to power on the re-emergence of ISIS, one should understand the theoretical (consider ideological/religious) and structural similarities and differences between the Taliban and ISIS. In their article, Moheq, Amiraoui, and Ansari examined the social origins, organizational characteristics, dominating political worldviews, theological genealogy, and jurisprudential theories of the Taliban and ISIS. Mohammed Khaled, in his paper "Jahiliyyah Rhetoric as a Divine Legitimacy for Violence" presents a richly detailed look at the influence of Sayyid Qutb and the contemporary Islamist orthodoxy on Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Islamic State, and the main differences among the three organizations in this regard. Furthermore, Abboushi, Hayati, and Abdulwahab in their article "How Al-Qa'eda and ISIS Employed Media" explore how the two organizations recruit youth and convince them with their media arguments. Salama, Hayati, Rasip and Abdulwahab examine the extent to which the Palestinian issue is exploited to promote cross-border terrorist movements and how it has been utilized the value, sanctity, and nobility of the Palestinian issue to influence Arab and Islamic societies in an attempt to give legitimacy and credibility to their presence, media discourse, and political acts. The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 has raised the question: Are the Taliban different from

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other terrorist organizations (e.g., al Qaeda, IS-K)? In his paper, Poya, argues if the lack of a universally agreed definition of terrorism affects the investigation and prosecution of the Taliban's terrorist acts and offenses. The author examines whether the Taliban are a terrorist organization and whether there is any difference between the Taliban and the other terrorist organizations (e.g., al Qaeda, IS-K) in committing an act of terrorism.

Finally, the *Analyses* section includes an article on religious grievance. Since grievances have been one of the important causes of conflicts throughout the human history, Joya and Rahimi apply the "Theory of Religious Grievance" to understand what happened in Afghanistan. They attempt to explain the conflict in Afghanistan and to some extent in Iraq beyond the economic reasons that dominated the development discourse that had limited impact in terms of reducing violence and countering insurgency in the post-2001 period. The theory explains how and when religious grievance turns into political grievance to engender conflict in societies where a political interpretation of religion is dominant. The paper discusses how radicalism can be contained by investing in and promoting alternative moderate discourses to delegitimize radical narratives that have been used as a conflict mobilization strategy.

By presenting this issue to the academic community, it must be noted that many aspects of "religious terrorism" are still uncovered and need to be explained and explored. This journal issue is just a step into this crucial study.

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