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The terrorism nightmare: Sinai and London's 7/7

Recent attacks in Egypt, Tunisia, Kuwait and France, set against the backdrop of the 10th anniversary of 7/7 London bombings, indicate that terrorism will long remain a nightmare in need of coordinated international action

Said Shehata

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The so-called "Sinai Province" (aka Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis), which is linked to the "Islamic State" group, launched several raids in North Sinai that ended in battles killing 17 soldiers and more than 100 militants, according to the spokesperson of the Egyptian army. It should be said that other reports stated higher numbers of soldiers killed. This horrible incident came after the assassination of Hesham Barakat, Egypt's prosecutor-general, in Cairo. It also happened before the killing of nine members of the Muslim Brotherhood. It looks like a cycle of violence has started and it may have severe consequences on Egypt.

Meanwhile, the cabinet approved draft anti-terrorism legislation after President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi promised a tougher legal system against terrorism. President El-Sisi said, "The arm of justice is chained by the law. We are not going to wait for this. We are going to amend the law to allow us to implement justice as soon as possible." The subsequent cabinet statement said it approved a "package of draft laws that achieve swift justice and retribution for our martyrs."

These developments represent challenges and have implications on Egypt and other countries. First, it is clear that the affiliates and supporters of the Islamic State group spread very quickly. Their members do not fear death. They also have the resources to attract locals to join and help

them in their operations. So it is very hard for any military to eradicate them without huge sacrifices and without a well-planned strategy.

The Egyptian army built a buffer zone along the border with Gaza, increased the number of checkpoints, and has imposed a state of emergency in North Sinai since last October. However, all those measures did not stop what happened.

Second, the economic situation will get worse since such incidents scare away potential investors and foreign direct investment.

Third, if reports about militants holding part of North Sinai are verified, this is a new threat to Egypt. It would be a change of tactics by the Islamic State group and could be an invitation for more extremists to join them. This will complicate the situation further.

Fourth, the attacks came after incidents in Kuwait, France, Tunisia and other locations. That terrorism reaches several places in our world requires an international action plan.

What is needed in Egypt, like in other places, is to face militant extremists with a clear plan. Security is necessary but not enough. Other elements should be included, such as counter-narrative discourses, using schools, universities, mosques to fight extremism. A clear political vision to overcome the current difficult situation is a pressing issue. My fear is that Egypt might be dragged into a vicious cycle of violence if there are hasty decisions through security means alone.

The London bombings

If Egypt has witnessed atrocities in the last few days, the UK went through a similar experience on 7/7 2005. In both cases, Islamist radicals committed the crimes.

The recent brutal incidents in Tunisia, Kuwait, France and Egypt shed the light on the threat posed by Islamist extremists and radical groups such as the Islamic State (or Daesh) in the UK and the world 10 years after the horrific scenes in London that resulted in the killing of 52 persons. The number of Britons killed in Tunisia reached 30. In addition, 27 worshippers were killed in a Shia mosque in Kuwait and more than 200 were wounded in the attack.

The main message of these atrocities is what the British prime minister said: that Islamist radicals represent an "existential threat to British people at home and abroad." This applies to all countries that have gone through similar ferocious operations by those desperate people.

Innocent people were killed. Attempts to destabilise some countries were made. The illusion of the Islamic Caliphate through violence and terrorism should be stopped through measures in the UK in particular and the world generally.

Britain has mainly adopted the legal and security approach to fight radical Islamists since 7/7, such as the Terrorism Act of 2006 and keeping suspects in custody for up to 90 days, and recently the bill to counter terrorism presented by David Cameron. It includes monitoring

broadcasters to stop radical views before being broadcast. It also points at the role of schools and universities to fight terrorism. However, there is unease amongst teachers and university lecturers on informing the police about potential radicals.

It could be argued that there were no similar attacks since 2005 until now. However, there were several plots that were intercepted by security forces and some people were charged and convicted under new laws. In one estimate, security forces disrupted 40 terror plots in the 10 years since 7/7. Other measures are so far not taken by either the government or the Muslim community, such as stopping the spread of radical views in some mosques and universities by some preachers.

I argue that the UK pays the price of being too tolerant towards radical Islamists. London was called "Londonistan" for giving refuge to extremists, such as Abu Qatada, the mentor of Seifallah Ben Hassine, who is now the leader of Ansar Al-Sharia in Tunisia, the extremist group being linked to radicalising the student who killed 39 people in Sousse, Tunisia. Britain is a target for extremists, especially from the Islamic State group, and also a breeding ground.

The British government should put more resources into countering the radical discourse of extremists on social media, since it has been the main tool of the Islamic State group's success in killing and destabilising countries. So far, the government is failing on this front and it should do more.

Other measures, such as deploying hundreds of armed officers in a counter terrorism exercise in central London and stopping radical preachers from spreading their views in universities and TV channels, are necessary but are not enough. In addition, putting new laws, when passed through parliament, into practice may face obstacles from freedom of speech groups. Schools will receive guidance on identifying pupils in danger of radicalisation. However, the National Union of Teachers expressed concern that such steps might spur nervousness and confusion amongst teachers.

The British approach to tackling extremism is not comprehensive and the security component is prevalent in all steps taken by the government. Security measures are needed but on their own they cannot face the new threat posed by the Islamic State group and other extremists. Muslim families and mosques have an important role to play and they should take responsibility to monitor their children and community members. The government should actively engage with community leaders and imams to do their part. Some mosques and families contributed in some cases to radicalisation of their people through hosting radical preachers as Abu Hamza Al-Masry in Finsbury Park Mosque. Some families do not monitor their children's use of the Internet and leave them easy prey for extremists. Moreover, engaging social media is a must on the side of the government to eradicate the danger of extremists.

What is called the "Islamic Caliphate" in Syria and Iraq should be dismantled because it is the first time since the fall of the Islamic Caliphate at the hands of Kamal Ataturk that a mini model of this caliphate exists. In addition, verses from the Quran that are used by extremists should be revised and challenged by Al-Azhar and leading Islamic scholars and imams through campaigns

on social media and other media outlets. This counter-narrative is crucial to diminish the loud voice of radicals.

Finally, the political will of the British government should be seen in practice and not just laws and slogans. If a mosque is found spreading extremist views, it should be closed, as Cameron suggested. Political correctness should be deleted from the dictionary when dealing with extremists who threaten stability and peace.

Unfortunately, this nightmare will cause trouble to Britain and other countries in the near future since a comprehensive strategy to face the terrorist threat has not yet been clearly shaped. Security, families, mosques and Imams, schools and universities, a counter religious discourse and destroying the "Islamic Caliphate" in Syria and Iraq are the main elements of this strategy.

The presence of Daesh in several countries, such as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, and Europe, and local affiliates — such as Jund Al-Khilafa in Algeria and Sinai Province in Egypt — ensures that this nightmare will occupy the world's attention in the foreseeable future.