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Fundamentalism

Escalation of terror in Lahore – We live in the same world

- Features -

Publication date: Tuesday 7 June 2016

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A bombing in Lahore on Easter Sunday (the end of March) targeted Christians, but also children and Muslims sharing together a popular place of conviviality. The similarity in targets and modality reminds us of earlier events in Brussels and Paris. [1].

The suicidal attack committed in Lahore, one of the main cities of Pakistan, on Sunday 27 March, killed at least 74 persons and wounded more than 350 others. One group of the local Taliban movement, the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), claimed responsibility for the attack. Like the Islamic State in Brussels five days earlier, it aimed at having the maximum number of victims; the belt of explosives contained metallic balls which cause multiple wounds that are difficult to heal. Just like in Paris on 13 November 2015, it was a place of friendly relations amongst diverse communities, which was transformed into a place of death.

The rich have their private and secured spaces. The others mix with each other in the public parks, places where families go for picnics, and where women can enjoy greater freedom. Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park, the public park where the bomb attack occurred, is much visited by residents of the nearby districts, mixing people from the lower class with the middle class of modest living standards. According to the statements of the Taliban group, the attack targeted Christian families celebrating Easter Sunday; however, it knew that the majority of victims would be Muslims. The message was clear – for as long as Christians will live here, you and your children will never be safe.

Thus, the kamikaze blew up his belt close to a play area for children, wherein at least 29 lost their lives, others were injured, all traumatized. The shock was profound amongst the Pakistani people who helplessly continue to undergo an endless escalation of terror. They desperately feel that there is no longer any limit to this deadly violence from the terrorists.

It was the second time that young people were directly targeted. The first time was in Peshawar, in the Northwest [2] the Talibans of the TTP [3] attacked a public school for children of the military in December 2014. More than 150 died, wherein at least 136 were from 10 to 17 years old. This tragedy provoked a deep sentiment of repulsion from the people, resulting in a spontaneous general strike of protest.

Today, a representative of the JuA announced, after the Easter Sunday bombing, that other operations will be conducted in the future, including against “schools and universities”. Girls’ schools have been destroyed by the Taliban in the zones where they have been traditionally established for a long time; girls have no right to education. Young women are attacked on campus with acid thrown in their faces for not wearing the “proper” veil. Now, school children, as well as university students, are directly threatened by blind attacks with the particular aim to sow terror in the country. The message of JuA is to show it is capable of operating in Lahore, capital of the province of Punjab, bordering India, a long way from the Pashtun territory borders of Afghanistan.

The majority of the intercommunal violence pits the Sunni movements against the Shiite minority; but the Ahmadiyya (Muslims not recognized as such by the others), Christians (often from popular origins) [4], Hindus... are constantly harassed – villages burnt, accusations of blasphemy, churches attacked. The non-Muslim minorities represent only a small percent of the population. It is feared that the exodus of the small minorities will increase, as the government has been incapable of protecting them. We are witnessing here a long and relentless process of religious purification.

Facing this terror from the Taliban, some democrats are tempted to stand together with the government of Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League. Even if Punjab, with Lahore as its capital, is his stronghold as well as his brother’s, this has not prevented anything. The current government, just like the previous ones, have left the madrasas

(Quranic schools) to be the hotbed of jihadists. It has answered to the threat by strengthening military tribunals and discretionary powers given to the army and security agencies. It is well known, however, that many factions of the State apparatus maintain relations with the fundamentalists, sponsoring them in Afghanistan, using them against India.

The Awami Workers Party (AWP) for its part refuses to leave it to the military. If the blind attacks have generally been done by Taliban-type movements, the armed forces and antiterrorist tribunals have been responsible for the Â« targeted Â» social repression – trade unionists abducted and tortured by the rangers, peasant leaders assassinated, left activists condemned to prison for life, Â« disappearance Â» of nationalistic Balochis... In Pakistan there is state terror applied against the social movements, while serving the big wealthy families. The unfounded accusations of Â« terrorism Â» and national security offenses nourish the arbitrary just as much as the Â« crime Â» of blasphemy. Thus, numerous mass cadres, members or supported by the AWP, are presently detained under false charges.

The AWP demands the government to fight religious terrorism more effectively – but through the reinforcement of civil and non-military institutions, by resorting to the police and not to the army, by the nationalization of Quranic schools, the modification of educational programmes to fight against religious suprematism and hate speeches, the abrogation of discriminatory laws against minority populations, the respect of press freedom, the abandon of neoliberal policies that aggravate inequalities and social insecurity.

Nursat Hussain, General Secretary of the AWP –Islamabad/Rawalpindi branch explained during a press conference, that “In this alarming situation, the Awami Workers Party believes that only a firm commitment to secularism, in which the laws and functions of the state are separated from religion, is essential for the protection and freedom of all citizens, especially of religious minorities.” [5]

The AWP concluded its communiqué dated 28 March by calling for unity of all those who stand in shock and condemnation in the face of the attack. “It is time to carve out a new narrative of radical peace and equality from the ruins of our violent past. All the progressive, secular and democratic forces must stand together, under the banner of radical peace, justice and equality for all.” [6]

This call should be heard on the international level. In the West, Pakistan has only been seen as “elsewhere”, a foreign country in the sense that the torments it is subjected to have nothing common with ours. The evolution of jihadist terrorism there and here, the security responses there and here, show that we surely live in the same world. It will no longer be enough to affirm our solidarity, we must also carry out common struggles for the right to live there and here.

Monday 4 April 2016

[1] This article was written in French shortly after the bombing but only translated to English much more recently

[2] See [“Pakistan: â€œIt was an attack on Muslim children by Muslim fanatics’ – Religious fanatics groups or the fascists in the making?”](#).

[3] Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP, Taliban Movement of Pakistan).

[4] See [“Pakistani Christians demand protection after the suicide attack on Easter Sunday – The attackers’ main target was Pakistan’s poor Christian community”](#).

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[5] See [“After Sunday’s deadly bomb attack in Lahore \(Pakistan\): Strengthen Civilian Institutions and Reform Curriculum to Combat Terrorism”](#).

[6] See [“Pakistan: Another Attack by Islamist Far Right on Christians and Democracy”](#).