

Islam & Terrorism



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TERRORISM & ISLAM



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The UK Islamic Mission was established in August 1962, on the initiative of a small group of Muslims who felt the need for a British-based organisation which would convey the true spirit of Islam to the Western world.

The setting up of the UK Islamic Mission underlines the determination to meet this urgent need of the Muslims in the West. It was an effort both of moral development and social reorientation in the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah, the only way to real progress and salvation. The Mission's aims can be summed up as follows:

- The propagation and projection of the true Islamic teachings implicitly identifying and exposing concepts and innovatory practices that are alien to the message of Islam.
- To demonstrate to the nation's opinion-formers, academics, industrialists, financiers, etc., that Islam is a timeless and relevant problem-solving way of life.
- Providing a valued Islamic education to Muslim children living in the UK.

In its efforts to provide leadership and guidance, the UK Islamic Mission wishes to present an Article, written by the late *Khurram Murad* (1932-1996) which illustrates quite clearly the huge gulf between terrorism and Islam. The Article definitively puts to rest the fallacious and malicious propaganda, so commonly distributed by various institutions and media organisations. For any information relating to our organisation or to discuss any issues presented in this article, please contact our central office or any of our local branches.

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At a very crucial moment in the history of mankind, we are witnessing a drama which has dangerous and fateful consequences for the future of mankind. Violence on many planes and in many places and in many forms is rampant. Indeed, this era is the most violent and bloody in the history of mankind. One particular form of violence, called terrorism, which is not a very definable word as we shall see a little later on, is also on the increase. It is a matter of great concern for every human being, who has respect for human life, human rights and human dignity, to see the rise of this ugly phenomena. If we flip through the printed pages of the media, look at the images on the screen over the last three decades, we see a continuing stream of that which is called terrorism.

In September 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked four aeroplanes; three of them were taken to Jordan and one to Cairo. On 13 September, the three in Jordan were blown up in front of the assembled world media. This was the starting point of international terrorism appearing before a worldwide audience. As recently as April 1995, there was a huge bomb explosion in Oklahoma, killing hundreds of people, including women and children, and resulting in much havoc. Before this outrage, what the Americans would like to call one of the most spectacular acts of terrorism, though it would not rank as such amongst other similar acts, was the bomb explosion at the World Trade Center on 26 February 1993, killing about ten people and injuring a great many more. The drama of TWA Flight 847 in 1984, the hostage-taking of American Embassy staff in Tehran coupled with so many other regularly occurring acts continue the violence worldwide. These events are such that every ordinary human being cannot but be concerned for the victims of such terrorism. Their misery, suffering, afflictions and for many their deaths deserve full human sympathy, irrespective of the cause for which I or anybody else may stand.

The Game of Image-Building

In all this, the image of Islam in the West has once again been painted with highly skilful craftsmanship. It is an image which displays this ugly face of terrorism, as also of violence, fanaticism coupled with a dark hue of hatred. Islam and this image have become fused. Following the recent burning of copies of *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford, there has been a continuous stream of books with titles like *The Dagger of Islam*, *The Militant Islam*, *The Rage of Islam*, etc. Such fundamental fear in newspaper and periodical articles is evident by titles such as 'The Warriors of God', 'The Holy Warriors in the Path of God' and 'Islam Backs the Dark Ages'. These are all contributed by respectable newspapers, respectable publishers and respectable writers. Since 1979, following the Iranian Revolution, the *Daily Telegraph* set the tone with its column leader: 'Islam on the March Again after Seven Centuries.' Then, television is not far behind. German TV has been showing a multi-part series entitled 'Terror in the name of Allah' which sets the image and tone before the audience. So this image of Islam as a form of terrorism has become transfixed in the minds of those who are listening and watching these films or reading these books and articles.

This image is not a new image; hence why I have said it has been painted again. 'This image', R.W. Southern, a noted historian, said, 'of astonishing tenacity has changed very little from generation to generation.'¹ Norman Daniel, who has chronicled the same with painstaking research says in *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*: 'The creation of a legend of Muhammad's life, violent and voluptuous, was an important part of Christian polemic'². The noted French philosopher, Voltaire, wrote: 'that he (Muhammad) should put his own country to fire and the sword to make this book (the Qur'an) respected.'³ He then went on to say that this medieval concept proved extremely durable, surviving the break-up of Europe, European ideology and Europe's ideological unity - the division into Catholics and Protestants and the advent of atheism. It could be added that even enlightenment, liberty, secularism and humanism

through all these changes failed to obliterate this medieval concept. This image is still a part of the cultural inheritance of the West today. So it is not a new image; it is inherited from the past. However, there are circumstances today which have made this image perform yet new tasks.

Terrorism: A Global Phenomenon

One should note that recent Muslim activities which are categorised as terrorism are but a part of the overall terrorist activities which take place around the globe. The terrorist activities of the IRA and the Loyalists on a much larger scale, have been going on for more than three decades. In December 1984, a disco club was destroyed by a bomb. In December 1983, Harrods was bombed to cause maximum casualties to Christmas shoppers. On 4 October 1984, a Brighton hotel where Mrs. Thatcher and other Government ministers were staying, was bombed. These events are common knowledge.

We should also recall the Kurdish Workers Party which undertook in just two days in November 1973, 75 terrorist attacks against Turkish establishments and embassies worldwide. Of course, the Armenians have been carrying out such terrorist actions against the Turkish establishment for years.

After Oklahoma, when suspicion for the same fell on the Muslims, Newsweek magazine counted the terrorist actions during the preceding seven days and came to a count of 13 events which could be classified as terrorist, and out of these only three were carried out by Muslims. During 1980-85, according to Robert Oakley, the former US Ambassador to Pakistan and a State Department official, out of all the events catalogued as terrorist, about 58 per cent took place in Europe and of these a quarter were of 'Middle East origin'.

Of course the words 'Middle East origin' are suspect in themselves because the person who placed the bomb in Oklahoma was also supposed to be of 'Middle East origin'. Thus, 'Middle East origin' is a very vast label under which much can go. When Muslims are not at

the forefront or in the lead of terrorist activities why does the whole focus fall on Muslims and Islam? As soon as one hears the word 'terrorism', immediately the picture of a Muslim's screaming voice, bearded face, hands raised high, comes to mind because newspapers and journals always display such photographs. The first source to project this image then is the media. However, the media is not to be blamed; it only puts headings on that which it thinks the public expects.

During 1985-88, over a 40-month period, ABC Nightline, an American news and current affairs slot, showed 52 programmes on terrorism, 48 of which were focused on the Middle East. This was not an appropriate proportion of terrorist events taking place the world over. Then there is the concept of a civilizational conflict which will arise in the future. The reason advanced for many American actions is that this is a sure defence against the anticipated actions that could be taken against it. All terrorist acts are carried out by or on behalf of the evil empire as President Reagan used to say. Today, the Soviet evil empire has been replaced by expectations of another evil empire rising in its place, one which was at the doorstep of Europe for a thousand years and which is again expected to arrive in the same place. So this image is neatly demarcated.

If the Middle East were to be a place where there was no Islam, where there was no oil, where there was no Israel, then these events would not have received the same projection by the media. The many terrorist events in Sri Lanka by Tamils as in many other places do not receive that much publicity. Because the Middle East is inhabited not only by people but by oil as well, and not only people but by Arabs, then as soon as you say Arab, you must also say Muslim. However, George Habbash, the Palestinian group leader who in September 1970 hijacked four planes was not a Muslim, he was rather a Christian! Yet again though it goes to the debit ledger of the Muslims because he was an Arab and he was of 'Middle East origin'.

Demonising Islam

The academics say, so consequently do the politicians, that this violence and terrorism actually goes back deep into the roots of Islam, into its religious roots. The call of jihad - holy war - with which the Qur'an is full, the division of the world into two tribes, the Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb, and the dream of world domination, are deemed to be the roots of Islam. This is why the terminology is carefully tailored to fit this pattern.

If Pakistan makes a bomb, a nuclear bomb, it is christened as an Islamic bomb. The bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima was not a Christian bomb, and the bomb which was made by Israel is not a Jewish bomb, the bomb made by India is not a Hindu bomb but if Pakistan succeeds in making a bomb, it is an Islamic bomb.

There is little doubt that the IRA has very deep Catholic roots and the Protestant groups allied against it also have deep religious roots. But no one deduces their terrorist activities to Christianity, to Catholicism or to Protestantism. Muslim activities, however, are attributed immediately to Islam. So this demonisation of Islam is a long, bng saga, one which appears regularly on the political screen of the world. As mentioned earlier, this is a drama which has dangerous consequences for mankind.

As far as Islam is concerned, it is not fruitful to compare theory with practice and practice with theory because the sanctity of life is common to all religions. Islam neither claims to be a new and specifically superior religion, nor is it, but in Islam the sanctity of human life, is supreme. The Holy Qur'an says: '. . . that to kill one person is like killing the entire mankind . . . And to give life to one person is giving life to the entire mankind' (5: 32).

Even during war, in those backward days when there was no Red Cross and no international law of war, Abu Bakr Siddiq, the first Caliph of Islam, instructed the Muslim army as follows before it was despatched: 'Don't touch a woman, don't touch a child, don't touch an

old man, don't touch a sick man, and don't burn a garden, don't burn harvests, don't go on a scorcher policy.⁴ Although conquests took place, most cities fell to the Muslims without bloodshed and without razing them to the ground, without reducing them to rubble as has happened in many other cases.

The question is what is the truth? Behind all this image-making, what is the truth? Pontius Pilate asked the same question of the Jews who brought Jesus before him. Out of ignorance or deliberately, and this is a matter of debate for historians, he ultimately sent Jesus to be nailed to the cross to die. Behind this image-making, I believe an effort is being made in our own time to send the whole faith and an entire people to the same sad fate. Therefore, the question of what the truth is, is very important.

Einstein is considered to be the architect of modern scientific thought. Before he rose to eminence he was a postmaster, and used to travel on the bus from the city centre where there was a clock tower. There he used to see the clock. One day he thought that if his bus travelled at the speed of the light, then the clock would always show the hour as 5 p.m., i.e. time would never change for him. This was the day the theory of relativity was born, a day when the Newtonian theory of the universe was overturned. However, without subscribing fully to Einstein's theory, one could say that reality depends on the position of the observer; not only the position of the observer, but also his political interests, political bias and prejudices. That is where reality lies.

Defining Terrorism

So let us define terrorism. Unfortunately, searching the literature for a definition of terrorism does not help. Every scholar says that it is impossible to define terrorism. It depends on the perspective of the person who is defining it. One author said that we should not use the word terrorism because it conjures up so many disparate meanings in people's minds. Others say any definition is worse than useless because it is the political rubric under which the definition is contained which counts, i.e. it is randomly, arbitrarily and selectively applied by those who have political motives. Terrorism is not a term of scientific classification. It is imprecise and emotive. It is not applied to all acts nor to all people. It is reserved for politically motivated violence of which we disapprove. So this is what the definition is.

However, efforts have been made to define it. For our purpose, let us adopt the definition employed by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency. It defines it as, ' . . . Use of violence for political purposes by individuals or groups whether acting for, or in opposition to established governmental authority.'⁵ It includes, therefore, acts of a government, against other governments and by groups appointed by a government.

With this definition in hand, we shall go forward and look at the history of Islam and compare it with the rest of world history because all people say that you must go to the roots of Islam. The roots of Islam are in its Holy Book, in the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and in its history. Let us take just one or two examples. Take the case of Jerusalem. Salahuddin captured it in 1187; this according to a Christian chronicler, Ernoul, who was present there. This is also narrated by Stanley Lane-Poole in his biography of Salahuddin.

Salahuddin's guards were commanded by responsible Amirs. They kept order in every street, prevented violence, even insult, insomuch that no abuse against the Christians was ever heard of.⁶ This he

compares with the events of approximately 100 years earlier, in 1099, when Duke Godfrey of Bouillon and Tancred of Hauteville rode through the streets of Jerusalem choked with the dead and dying, when hundreds of Muslims were tortured, burned and killed in cold blood, all in all a wanton massacre defiling the Christian teaching: 'Blessed are the merciful.' Will and Ariel Durant, authors of *The Story of Civilisation*, say: 'Women were stabbed to death, suckling babes were snatched by the leg from the mothers' breasts and flung over the walls or had their necks broken by being dashed against posts and 70,000 Moslems remaining in the city were slaughtered. The surviving Jews were herded into a synagogue and burned alive.'⁷

Even earlier, in 638, when [Umar, the Second Caliph took Jerusalem, he virtually walked from Madina to Jerusalem. I say walked because for half the way he rode a camel, but for the other half his servant rode the camel. He had 14 patches on his dress. He signed a peace agreement with the Christians of the town and took it absolutely peacefully. By comparison, when the Romans in 70 CE took Jerusalem by force the streets of the city were clogged with corpses; they slew all the Jews they could lay their hands on. Josephus numbered at 1,197,000 the Jews killed in this siege and its aftermath; Tacitus calculated them at 600,000.'⁸

Then there was the violence of the Inquisitions. Inquisitions, according to the Durants, are among the darkest blots on the record of mankind, revealing a ferocity unknown in any beast. Hundreds and thousands of people were burned at the stake because of their divergence in faith.⁹ These are just a few examples from world history. This does not mean that Islamic history is free from such incidents. Muslim kings also committed acts of violence. We as Muslims would not condone them in any case. Nor should non-Muslims. But the comparison is there to see.

When we look at the present time we find that those who are in the forefront of accusing Islam and Muslims of terrorism are in fact greater terrorists themselves. We do not condone or excuse acts of

terrorism by Muslims. Even if our opponent does something wrong, morally it is not right for us to respond with something else which is wrong. Muslims must stand for the teachings of Islam under all circumstances. But the hypocrisy through which the accusations are laid at the doors of Muslims and Islam is something which must be kept in view.

To judge all that is happening, we should accept the dictum of Justice Jackson who, observing in the Nuremberg war trials, said: 'If certain acts and violations of treaties are crimes, they are crimes whether the United States judge them or Germany judge them. We are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us.'¹⁰ This is the criteria on which we have to judge both parties. And Muslims should be prepared that these rules should be invoked against them as well if they violate them.

When during the 1950s the United States was haunted by the fear of an evil empire, i.e. Communism, the Hoover Commission was set up to report on how the United States should face this enemy.

The Hoover Commission's report says: 'There are no rules in this game, hitherto acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply. If the United States is to survive the long-standing American concept of fair play must be reconsidered. We must subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies. American people must be made acquainted with, understand and support this fundamentally repugnant philosophy.'¹¹

So starting in Greece, and moving from there to Iran, Chile, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and Libya, we find that America, using the same definition of terrorism that the CIA accepted, was engaged in subverting, taking covert action and bombing for political purposes. In Iran, where Dr. Mussadeq came to power in 1952, and the supply of oil to the West was threatened, it is a well-known story that the CIA gave money to organise mass demonstrations which sought to throw him out and bring back the King. Of course, the Shah had to

be thrown out again in 1979 only this time America could not save him.

Chile is a very interesting story. Dr Salvador Allende was elected President in 1970. Thereafter, the American Administration first tried by bribery to create economic and political chaos. The Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Army, Gen. Rene Schneider, a firm constitutionalist, was empowered to stop the President from taking the oath. When the Commander-in-Chief refused, a plot was hatched to kidnap the Commander-in-Chief himself. \$50,000 American dollars was the price tag for his kidnapping and subsequent murder. \$7 million was allocated by the CIA for destabilising Chile, financing opposition parties as also terrorist and paramilitary forces. So in September 1973, by a brutal, violent military coup, Allende was thrown out and killed.¹² President Ford said: 'I think this was in the best interests of the people of Chile. And certainly in our best interests.'¹³ So that is how we judge our actions. If this was done by a Palestinian group or an Arab or Muslim group, this would represent the highest act of terrorism.

Without wanting to go into the details about the Vietnam war, one very interesting incident should at least be highlighted. When the peace negotiations were going on, Saigon tried to introduce some conditions which Hanoi refused to accept. To bring Hanoi to the negotiating table with a feasible political objective, not war, Nixon ordered the bombardment of Hanoi. For 12 days, 100 B52s and 500 fighter bombers, carried out sortie after sortie over Hanoi. In intensity and sustainment, never before in the history of warfare had such a bombardment taken place. Each plane carried 24 500lb. bombs and round the clock this bombardment went on for 12 days, reducing Hanoi to rubble. The sole purpose, to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table - a political objective!

This does not mean that other countries have not performed similar acts. The United States is chosen as an example because it is at the forefront of the fight against terrorism. Currently, it labels five Muslim states as terrorist without any tenable evidence whatsoever.

It has been wielding the sword over the head of Pakistan for 12 years. Unless Pakistan agrees to the political demands of the United States, it will not be cleared from the list.

Israel is in the thick of the battle in the Middle East, and Israel is one of the few states which have been born out of terrorism. All Israeli political leaders have been terrorist leaders. The first plane ever to be hijacked was by Israel in December 1954. It carried two Syrians who were detained as hostages in order to effect the release of Israeli prisoners held in custody in Damascus. Even if one ignores all the acts of terrorism by Zionist groups in Palestine, who can deny that even after emergence as a state the first political murder was carried out by Israel in 1948 when Count Bernadotte, the United Nations negotiator, was killed and the commander who ordered his death was Shamir, later to be Foreign Minister of Israel. There is a long history of killings in Israel of Palestinians. These events are recorded by Israeli historians themselves. Benny Morris is one of those who has chronicled the whole saga. He argues that it is a myth that the Palestinians fled. Rather, they were made to flee, and this in the face of threats and killings. Fear was put into their hearts. They were terrorised and made to leave. Many other Israeli historians have also recorded this. In October 1985, Israel sent its bombers to Tunis, a far away place. These bombs killed about two dozen Palestinians and about a dozen Tunisians. In direct contravention of international law, this was once again done for a political reason.

These are just some of the incidents. They cannot become an excuse for Muslims, to shed even one drop of innocent human blood. However, we have to bear in mind when evaluating this drama that images of Islam and terrorism are being woven together. One view which is raised by many leader writers is that, if Islam does not approve of terrorism and if Muslims do not approve of it, then they should openly condemn all acts of terrorism. Of course, we should accept this because Muslims via the Qur'an have been asked to be witnesses unto justice for the sake of Allah alone and for no other political purpose. The Holy Qur'an says: 'Let not the enmity of any

people make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice' (5: 8). Hence, it is the Muslim's religious duty to condemn such violence. But if Muslims do not condemn, can we understand why not? Perhaps we can, for those who are at the forefront of demanding that Muslims condemn acts of terrorism, do not themselves openly condemn all terrorist acts.

When Israel bombed Tunis, the first reaction of the United States government was that this is an action of some terrorists. After a day, it was said that it was a legitimate defensive action taken by Israel. Finally, when the furore all over the world grew louder and louder, the United States abstained from voting on the Resolution in the Security Council which condemned Israel's act against Tunis. Abstaining is not condemning, it is condoning! Resolution after Resolution in the Security Council has been vetoed by the United States, and it stood alone in vetoing those resolutions. So, what respect for the opinion of the world community? With such a bad record, perhaps it is difficult for Muslims to condemn terrorist actions immediately. The United States is powerful, it is a mighty power, the only superpower. Perhaps it can afford to say yes, it was wrong, but Muslims feel powerless and, therefore, with the mentality of a powerless people, they find it hard to say yes, they have been wrong.

What is the Truth?

We again revert to the most important question raised earlier: What is the truth? It was the same question Pontius Pilate asked of the Jews who brought Jesus Christ before him. And searching for truth, he ultimately sent Jesus to the cross. If an American group bombs Oklahoma, their psychology has to be understood, their history has to be investigated, their action has to be looked at with compassion and mercy, but if a person of 'Middle East origin' is rumoured to have thrown that bomb, then the whole Muslim community in the United States for three days lives in a state of terror and fear; even their neighbours make threatening phone calls to the effect that we are going to kill you, we are going to get you. So the whole people, the

whole faith, is being nailed to the cross. This is a very dangerous game to play, because there is so much commonality between Islam and the West. There is so much in common between Islam and Christianity. As Southern says, perhaps this is the very reason for conflict between Islam and Christianity; i.e. they have so much in common between them. Of course, there are differences as well. The future of mankind cannot be peaceful unless the West and Islam can peacefully co-exist and they can only co-exist if both let the other live according to their beliefs, culture, traditions, laws and social norms. If both can do that, only then can there be peace and co-existence between the two.

It is important for the future of humanity. There are over 1.3 billion Muslims in the world. Every fifth person walking on the globe is a Muslim and they inhabit areas which are strategically important. Muslims are not out to deprive the West of the resources that are in their lands. They have to trade with the West. They have to have economic ties with the West. They have to sell their oil as well. Of course, they will guard against the extravagances of their rulers who have been doing the bidding of foreign powers, who have been squandering the resources of Muslim countries, but they are not basically hostile. Hostility is only a reaction against what has been done to them and what is being done unashamedly. The two major civilisations of the world, the Western civilisation and the Islamic civilisation, are neighbours. They are so much akin to each other and if they can co-operate, then the world can become a happy and peaceful place to live in. If not, then not only one but more Bosnias may take place and this would be a catastrophe.

A quotation from H.G. Wells in this respect is very appropriate: "The Roman could lie, the Roman could lie about his enemies with the freedom and vigour that must arouse the envy of even the modern propagandist."¹⁴

An accusation against any people is usually the prelude, an excuse for some massacre, enslavement or robbery on the part of the accuser. Accusations though lead us nowhere.

Finally, to conclude, it is appropriate to refer to an incident which is taken from St. Augustine. Chomsky also quoted this in *Pirates and Emperors*. A pirate was captured and brought before Alexander the Great. Alexander asked the pirate: 'How dare you molest the people?' The pirate replied: 'And how dare you molest the entire world? I am called a thief because I do it with a little ship only. You do it with a great navy and you are called an Emperor.' Under this scenario, powerless people doing trivial acts are the major terrorists of the world whilst major powers perpetrating terrorism in many parts of the world are the civilised barbarians.

Notes

- 1 R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1962).
- 2 Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh University Press, 1960 [revised edition, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1993]).
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 290.
- 4 These instructions are quoted in many of his biographies, e.g. A. Aziz: *Abu Bakr: The Caliph* (Karachi: Din Mohammadi Press, 1978).
- 5 Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1988), p. 32.
- 6 Stanley Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (originally published in 1898, repr. by Sind Sager Academy), pp. 232-3.

- 7 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization. Vol. 4: The Age of Faith* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950), p. 592.
- 8 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization. Vol. 3: Caesar and Christ*, p. 545.
- 9 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization. Vol. 6: The Reformation*, pp. 208-16.
- 10 *The Trial of German War Criminals, Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal sitting in Nuremberg, Germany* (London: HMSO, 1946). Part I: Summary of the indictment and their legal foundations by Justice Robert H. Jackson, pp. 49-86.
- 11 Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only* (London: Harper-Collins, 1995).
- 12 Nathaniel Davis, *The Last Years of Salvador Allende* (London: Tauris, 1985), pp. 8-10.
- 13 Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, op. cit., pp. 319-20, 345 as reported in the *New York Times*, 17 September 1974, pp. 11, 22.
- 14 H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (London: Cassell, 1920).

This is an edited version of the transcript of the Seminar given by Khurram Murad (1932-96) at the Islamic Foundation, Leicester, on 23 August 1995. The Editors are grateful to Abdur Rashid Siddiqui for preparing this edited version for the journal.

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