Review

Extremist violence, secular and religious: Is there a more basic counter path?

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This paper argues that the present counter-measures to deal with the plague of extremist violence in the world are inadequate, in that they are largely reactive rather than addressing the root causes, which are prejudices of various kinds. It postulates the need for a united global approach in this matter based on spiritual principles.

Key words: Extremism, extremist violence, terrorism, prejudice, counter measures, unified global approach, spiritual.

INTRODUCTION

We are bombarded almost every day in the media with news of some new atrocities committed somewhere in the world – some bombings, shootings, killings or other forms of violence. And the incidences of it happening seem to be increasing. It is argued by one commentator that whilst it is not a new phenomenon, the growing concentration of power in the hands of the state, which is a constitutive feature of modern societies, sows the seeds of this terrorism (Di Cesare, 2019). Presumably, there are other factors causing the increase. Sometimes it seems that the perpetrators are secular extremists, sometimes it seems that they are religious extremists. Often the victims are what might be described as being innocent people. They are not existing adversaries except in the sense that they may be perceived as being different in some critical respect from the perpetrator.

Thus, the victims may hold certain religious views which mark them out for attack either by secular extremists or by extremists of a different religious persuasion. Or the victims may have certain characteristics, such as skin colour, which is different to that of the perpetrator. One common denominator is that the perpetrators hold prejudiced views of one kind or another which any reasonable person would regard as being extreme, including the fact that the perpetrators are willing to express them in physical violence against anyone that is of a different view or characteristic. The perpetrators act upon their views of what they perceive to be an unacceptable difference, whether of religion, race, ethnicity, etc. This paper argues that there is a more basic path that can more effectively counter either of these forms of extremism by providing a persuasive rationale, incentive and conviction for the elimination of prejudice. That is, there is a path that can lead ultimately to the avoidance of violent extremism in the longer term.

I argue that in the first instance, it should be tackled in human society by a comprehensive and well-designed program of global education, and supported widely not only by the law but also by all practical means as part of a general global program which has a very high priority. Beyond that, I argue that it is a task that requires a driving, universal spiritual perspective and force that can
provide the momentum, guidance, perseverance and deep commitment which only such a spiritual belief can engender. Given our varied inheritances, humans just don’t have the capacity by themselves to voluntarily establish a new, unified, just and peaceful global system totally free of prejudice for this purpose.

**EXTREMISM**

For present purposes of this study, it is not really necessary to enter into a detailed discussion of what constitutes extremism and extremist violence. It is much the same as the meaning of the term terrorism (Nacos, 2012).

It is clearly a very complex phenomenon, not new, and any definition must be based on subjective opinion. What may be extreme to one person may not be extreme to another. For example, conduct that involves violence may be seen by some as being necessary in order to remedy some other perceived wrong, whilst to others, the same conduct may be seen as abhorrent. One suggested definition that highlights the difficulties is: Although the term violent extremism has no agreed definition, it is generally applied to the phenomenon of groups engaged in violent activities in pursuit of a political ideology that is outside of the mainstream, often because it excludes certain groups, cultures or identities (Frazer and Jambers, 2018).

The Secretary-General of the United Nations gave another definition of terrorism as being:

*Intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act* (Annan, 2005).

It is submitted that most of the definitions that have been offered are deficient, in that they do not generally identify the fundamental source of the extremism; rather, they concentrate on actions and effects. All extremism is rooted in some form of ideology or belief, a mental element, be it an ideology or belief that comprises religious bigotry or gross intolerance, extreme racism, ethnic, political or national prejudice, etc. They are all forms of prejudice when measured against universal principles that embrace all humanity. It is these prejudices that have caused the world’s sickness leading to extremism. Martin Luther King Jr stated:

*There is little hope for us until we become tough-minded enough to break loose from the shackles of prejudice, half-truths, and down-right ignorance* (King, 1963a).

For the purposes of the paper, extremism is identified in terms of some deeply rooted prejudice that leads to or causes the threat of unacceptable physical violence against others, based on a particular ideology or belief, being violence that would normally be criminal in nature. This is the meaning that is adopted by the author in this article. This may include examples of what normally might be considered extremism in this sense, but which may not be criminal or may not be treated as criminal in the country where it is committed. It can include state-sponsored extremism, as well as extremism directed against the state (Nacos, 2012). It is not a term that should be directed at people expressing themselves in fervent terms but without having any part in advocating violence, even if the views of the protagonist would be considered generally as being extreme in terms of the current mores of a community, or a major section of the community. Thus, Martin Luther King Jr reflected on his acquired label as being extreme in his anti-racist views, although many people would disagree with that description. He advocated peaceful protest, not violence (King, 1963b).

But even here, there may be a subjective element as to what forms of violence are acceptable and what are not, that is, unless perhaps the person assessing the matter is a pacifist. Thus we can say that the use of a necessary and appropriate measure of force by the police in the performance of their duties would not normally be categorised as extremism. In normal circumstances, it would not be motivated by prejudice and would not be criminal. On the other hand, the actions of the person alleged to be a white racist in randomly shooting and killing or injuring Muslims in or about a mosque in Christchurch recently would in the opinion of most people be an act of extremism. There are all sorts of permutations and uncertainties in between these two examples. And there is an intermediate question as to whether the impermissible violence is comprised in forms of intimidation, coercive pressure, sponsorship and encouragement, etc., including through electronic means (Nacos, 2012), rather than just brute physical violence. Leaving aside the criminal element, it is not possible to totally avoid considerations that the word extremism has connotations of something that must be reasonably seen to be morally wrong if it involves or may well involve the use of violence against others. And as morality means different things to different people, there will be room for argument in some situations. This notwithstanding, there may well be a broad agreement in at least liberal societies that extreme prejudices based on religion, race, ethnicity and the like are not a sufficient justification for such violent action and are immoral. Such a view has been incorporated into international law in the International Bill of Rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, provide some guidance in this respect, although not all countries respect and uphold these international instruments. In this regard,
discrimination based on religion, race, ethnicity and the like are prohibited under international human rights law (The International Bill of Human Rights, 1988).

That there will be some uncertainty as to when it is appropriate to label something leading to violence as extremism must be accepted, but in many cases, there will be broad agreement on such a label.

Given this uncertainty and the difficulties of definition, it will in many cases still be possible, judged from the perspective of a reasonable person, to conclude that many prejudiced views leading to unacceptable violence are extremist in all the circumstances. It is submitted that the uncertainties already referred to should not be used as a cover to avoid that description in the more obvious cases. Most people would feel comfortable in labelling as extremism violent actions against others taken merely on the grounds of the religion, race, ethnicity or similar criteria of the other person.

SUGGESTED METHODS TO COUNTER EXTREMISM

On the assumption that extremism is an evil that should be countered and if possible prevented altogether, what are the suggested methods and approaches to do this? Here, there will be vast number of suggestions and approaches. The leading method is of course various types of counter-terrorism, involving collection of information, surveillance, exchange of information, a high level of preparedness with counter measures and policing, legislative restrictions, counter-violence, etc. Some take the view that societies need to increase their resilience to such extremism (Stephens et al., 2019), suggesting that extremism is now here to stay, or at least that it is going to last for a long time. Re-education, sometimes called de-radicalisation, is advocated by many, and there is apparently some evidences that it can be effective in some cases. But in an increasingly secular society with much divided and often intolerant, diverse religious communities, this can be problematic. The methods used are largely reactive rather than putting the emphasis on seeking solutions at the source.

The literature on dealing with this subject is now vast and the suggestions many. The efforts being made by countries to counter terrorist activities are far reaching and arguably can be said to impinge on civil liberties in many cases. In some cases, they might be seen as being repressive and in themselves extreme. But the prevalence of extremism continues and may even be increasing in its strength, spread and in its serious effects (Coats, 2018). Religion itself is under attack in many places as being a primary source of extremism, including in provoking extremist opposition.

The overall result is increasing divisions in society. Governments themselves are encountering increasing problems in dealing with the threats posed in the face of demands for peace and security within their borders. The much divided international community seems powerless to effectively respond. One has to ask, whilst accepting that some counter-measures are inevitably necessary, whether the global community is approaching the issue from the best point of view; that is, whether it is getting to the root of the issue, to its source rather than just to its actions and effects.

THE SOURCE OF EXTREMISM

Given that extremism is usually based on a form of fanatic or very intolerant beliefs, usually by persons who are part of a group, although it is possible for a loner to be an extremist; but usually under some prior external influence, the suggestion of getting to the source and dealing with it at that level runs into problems. Extremism is based on belief. It can be asked whether it is even possible to get to the source and change such strongly held extremist beliefs except by some extremely repressive measure in opposition. Clearly, it is no easy task, and arguably, the secular society because of its very nature is not well equipped to do this. Appeals to secular human rights or to democratic freedoms are not likely to carry a lot of weight with persons of strongly held views in an opposite direction. This will be particularly so where the extremist view is based on some keenly held sense of injustice or, alternatively, on the belief that the extremist is carrying out of some divinely ordained task, arguably a form of prejudice in itself.

RELIGION AS A SOURCE

There can be no doubt that the strong beliefs of some religionists can be classed as a form of fanaticism, potentially leading to the expression and acts of extremism in the world. This can be directed at followers of other religions or sects, or against the society generally including non-religious people and governments. Thus it is stated:

_There has been a revival of religious fanaticism in all parts of the globe, and among people of varied faiths. It is a truly worldwide phenomenon and, in our view, a deeply disturbing one, for religious fanaticism breeds hatred and violence. We need not look far to find numerous examples in the world today of the civil strife, terror and human suffering that religious fanaticism has wreaked upon religious communities and entire nations. Its pernicious influence can be found at the root of all too many of the wars, conflicts and other ills undermining peace in the world, including the problem of terrorism_ (Baha’i International Community, 1987).

Many religions, or particular sects of religions, claim exclusive access to religious truth, and arguably such
forms of exclusivism, when taken to excess, become intolerant of other beliefs, and hence are a form of prejudice and should be classed as fanatical. Abdu’l-Baha states:

One of the forms of prejudice which afflict the world of mankind is religious bigotry and fanaticism. When this hatred burns in human hearts, it becomes the cause of revolution, destruction, abasement of humankind and deprivation of the mercy of God (Abdu’l-Baha, 1982).

It is very difficult, due to the frequent intensity of the religious beliefs in question, to deal with this form of extremism at its source. Religious fanaticism and hatred appear to be a world-devouring fire, whose violence cannot easily be quenched. Appeals to the peaceful origins of the particular religion and its founder are often unlikely to find a ready hearing. The problem stems from the much divided nature of the global society, with many contending religions and sects and with increasingly secular segments of that society that are not really capable and ready to deal with religious issues. To some, it seems that stern counter-measures may be the only effective avenue to take, even to the point of over-riding the human right of freedom of religion and belief.

On one view, it is possible to argue that in fact, religious extremism does not exist, because extremism is not a form of genuine religion. Those that take that view believe that true religion is meant to create peace, tolerance and harmony and not violence. Thus, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is reported to have stated:

Terrorism has no religion… (Singh, 2010).

But this view depends upon a person’s view as to what constitutes true religion. Some may argue, as I do, that genuine religion does not advocate violence, but this is by no means a universal view. And in any event, extremists often act in the name of religion even if they have a distorted view of that religion, so it still has to be dealt with as a form of religious extremism.

ANTI-RELIGION AS A SOURCE

Just as fanatical religion can be a source of extremism, so the fanatical belief opposed to religion generally, or to a particular religion or sect, can be a source of extremism. Increasingly, there are strident attacks on the value and even existence of religion in society, or of a particular religion. The growing secularisation of society has itself spurned criticism of religion generally, and when taken to excess, it can become a form of fanaticism leading to extremism. Such beliefs may have been responsible for it provoking a number of violent acts of extremism. An example may be the case of the recent attack on the mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand. It is also very difficult, due to the not uncommon intensity of anti-religious beliefs, to deal with this form of extremism at its source. Some may see religion as a leading cause of the problems of society and not a contributor to their solution.

OTHER SOURCES OF EXTREMISM

The other sources of extremism are as many as it is possible to conceive of different forms of prejudice. That is, there are views held of one kind or another which any reasonable person would regard as being extreme, including the fact that the perpetrators are willing to express them in physical violence against anyone that is of a different view or characteristic. Some have been identified already, namely, extreme prejudices based on race and ethnicity. But of course there are many other forms. Wikipedia states:

The word is often used to refer to preconceived, usually unfavourable, feelings towards people or a person because of their political affiliation, sex, gender, beliefs, values, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, language, nationality, beauty, occupation, education, criminality, sport team affiliation or other personal characteristics (Wikipedia online).

It is a matter of serious concern. Prejudice is by and large caused by a lack of tolerance and compassion for others. It is a product of a divided society where the idea of them and us prevails. This in turn is to a large extent a matter of the inheritance of ideas from the divisions of the past. It can be deeply ingrained in the human psyche. There are psychological aspects to the study of prejudice that are beyond the scope of this essay, but any attempt to deal with extremism in society must, I would argue, address this subject at its root. In this sense, it is argued that the existing and various methods and attempts to deal with extremism and identified in the beginning of this essay are really superficial and unlikely to achieve ongoing, effective global results in all cases. Without more basic solutions that go to the heart of the matter on a global basis, I would argue that extremism is likely to continue for the foreseeable future and perhaps even indefinitely.

THE GLOBAL DILEMMA

I argue that if extreme prejudice is to be effectively tackled, it has to be done on a global basis involving humanity as a whole. The world society is now so interdependent and interlinked, that no such undertaking, colossal as it undoubtedly is, is going to work if not undertaken on such a global basis. If one country was to
take up the cause of working towards the abolition of all
forms of extreme prejudice among all of its own citizens,
a first step could be by some sort of fully comprehensive,
well-funded, high priority national educational campaign,
with the nation’s leaders setting the example, but that
would do little to deal with the issue elsewhere.
Extremism spills over state borders very easily in these
days of global communication and transport; and in any
event, the chances of such an effective and
comprehensive national campaign happening, in the
pluralist, politically divided society that most countries
now have, may be limited at present. Even less chance in
tyrammical countries.

And I have already indicated that there is little scope at
present for the nations in the international arena together
mounting such an effective and comprehensive campaign
on a global basis. The international community is far too
divided and the nations too self-interested to contemplate
such a co-operative venture even being adopted, let
alone succeeding. Many nations have a perceived
entrenched interest in the continuance of the disparities
that give rise to many forms of extreme prejudice. One
only has to look at the weaknesses of the international
human rights regime to see this. What is expressed in
universal human rights terms is as yet a long, long way
from universal application and fair implementation
(Nicholson, 2018); thus, the global dilemma. If my
argument is correct that extremism has to be dealt with
on a common global basis, it is very hard to see the
nations of the world working cooperatively together to do
that at the present time. So does this mean the
extremism and it’s undesirable, destructive effects are
inevitably here for the long term? The many violent
precedents have been set, no doubt encouraging many
others who are greatly discontented and prejudiced to
follow suit. Do the nations of the world just continue with
their present counter measures, thus to some extent
mitigating but not totally preventing extremism in all its
forms in all places, and otherwise telling their citizens to
get used to it, to be resilient and cautious? Many would
not accept this. And I don’t think we should. It is a global
blight that should not be accepted in this modern age.

A NEW GLOBAL PARADIGM

Some people may think that prejudice is innate, due to
the differences between human beings, and that there is
nothing much we can do about eradicating it. For my part,
I do not accept this, just as I do not accept that humans
are innately aggressive. Rather I see this as a
misconception of human nature.

Psychological studies I believe are generally supportive
of the view that humans have both the potential for good
and bad, and that with education and good example, it is
possible to emphasise and bring out the former and not
the latter. But of course, this requires a prevailing and
appropriate philosophy and guide. Absent some serious
physical or mental illness, in my view, people are not
naturally prejudiced. Bandura wrote:

….behaviour is learned from the environment through
the process of observational learning (Bandura, 1977).

There is a different view such as that of H. Fishbein
who argues that prejudice and discrimination are firmly
rooted in our genetic/evolutionary heritage and are
influenced by individual and cultural/historical factors and
experiences. They must be still susceptible to change by
appropriate education.

If my view is correct in this regard, then extreme
prejudices are learned through life experiences and
associations. To address this, it is obviously necessary to
effect change for as many people as possible, away from
such negative experiences and associations towards
much more positive ones. This is necessary for the
inculcation of the view that prejudices are destructive and
should be put to one side, to be replaced by a positive
approach to difference. But this is an extremely tall order
in a diverse, pluralistic and divided world society. Some
would say impossibility, particularly, since much of the
prejudice originates in the leaders and followers of certain
religions and sects advocating forms of exclusivism. At
the very least, it would have to be based on a widespread
philosophy or belief that taught that all prejudices should
be replaced by a philosophy or belief in the oneness of
the one human race, and that all differences, religious or
otherwise (other than those disruptive of unity) between
people are to be treasured and respected in the interests
of the unity and wellbeing of all humanity above all else.
Not all religions or sects provide this. It would have to be
backed up by a just global order that was conducive to
the ultimate removal of the basis of many prejudices and
which sought to deal with the many inequities between
peoples. The driving force behind such a philosophy or
belief must be that the prevailing circumstances of the
interdependent global human society on this one small,
fragile planet in this age now demand such an approach
for meaningful long-term human survival and wellbeing.
The need for a general consciousness and acceptance of
the unity in diversity of all should, in my view, be the
founding principle of the global human society.

Of course humans generally are a long way from
accepting such a philosophy or belief; they are denied
this very opportunity by the existing divisions and
prejudices within human society, the primary source of
extremism. One particular factor is the prevalence of the
concept of absolute national sovereignty, causing leaders
and their followers to put the perceived interests of their
own countries or nations first, supported by entrenched
self-interest groups within countries that support the
status quo. This relic of the past is still asserted by many,
even under the threat of a universal conflagration or
a global collapse of various kinds. This creates barriers to
the evolution of a new global society which puts the planet and all its inhabitants first and which values diversity across boundaries. Likewise, the divisions caused by exclusivism in matters of religion or belief on the part of some religious clerics and their followers, resistant to any attempt to establish and build commonalities, tolerance and universalism, constitute a major barrier to unity in the global society. Despite many advances in the last century or so, and the fact of the growing interdependence of all peoples and nations, the prevailing mind-set is often still nationalistic, exclusivist, intolerant, self-centred and inward looking rather than global. This notwithstanding, there is an emerging consciousness that this approach cannot be continued indefinitely, that we are one human race, and that a more global approach is required for worthwhile human survival.

The call for a new global unity in diversity, free of prejudice, extremism and mass violence, is now being echoed by many leading people. Fromm wrote:

I believe that the One World which is emerging can come into existence only if a New Man comes into being – a man who has emerged from the archaic ties of blood and soil, and who feels himself to be a citizen of the world whose loyalty is to the human race and to life, rather than to any exclusive part of it, a man who loves his country because he loves mankind, and whose views are not warped by tribal loyalties (Fromm, 1962).

Dubos wrote:

Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival (Dubos, 1981).

And Baha’u’llah wrote:

If the learned and wise men of goodwill were to impart guidance unto the people, the whole earth would be regarded as one country (Baha’u’llah, 1978).

And:

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established (Baha’u’llah, 1976).

**A SPIRITUAL SOLUTION**

One has to be realistic in advancing any new paradigm that offers an ultimate solution to extremism. It seems most unlikely, given the barriers already spoken of, that the nations of the world and their leaders would voluntarily adopt and implement the paradigm change suggested above in the foreseeable future. Such an act of global statesmanship in creating a new global order that can deal effectively with extremism in the longer term seems to be beyond them. The view has been expressed that:

...we have learned that being global does not make something necessarily positive. Organized crime, terrorism, arms trafficking, and slavery are global. This global reach of the dark side of human endeavour cries out for world governance and the lesser peace. Without planetwide structures to regulate human affairs, the world is helpless to defend against destructive actions beyond the reach of national law and becomes a playground for disintegrative forces. Terrorism is forcing an examination of the constitution of the nation-state, the application of national power, the connections between religion and violence, the international legal framework, and the UN’s structural focus on the nation-state (Collins, 2004).

So again, does this mean that humanity, incapable of voluntarily choosing such a task, will have to put up with violent extremism for the indefinite future? I do not accept this. I argue that if prejudices of various kinds, in their most extreme forms, are tackled comprehensively in human society by an appropriate and well-designed program of global education, and supported widely not only by the law but also by all practical means as part of a general global program which has a high priority, that the plague of violent extremism can be addressed and to some extent at least ameliorated. But in saying this, I think the total overcoming of violent extremism will require a lot more than just human effort. That is to say, in my view, it is a task that requires a driving, universal spiritual perspective and force that can provide the momentum, guidance, perseverance and deep commitment which only such a spiritual belief can engender. Given our varied inheritances, humans just don’t have the capacity by themselves to voluntarily establish a new, unified, just and peaceful global system totally free of prejudice for this purpose. Thus, Abdu’l-Baha wrote:

...it is impossible for a human being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith. For self-love is kneaded into the very clay of man; and it is not possible that, without any hope of a substantial reward, he should neglect his own present material good (Abdu’l-Baha, 1975).

And Schaefer wrote:

A reconstruction of morals comes only from a living faith. Values can only be absolutely valid if they are not in need of rational justification, if they are not in contradiction to reason, but at the same time are immune to criticism. That means that they are based on God as the law-giver. Nothing but such a morality can ever hope to overcome
the prevailing pluralism and relativism of all moral concepts, and to motivate people to accept and obey it. Mankind's global society is in need of a global code of ethics. Hans Küng, a renowned Catholic theologian, has acknowledged that this world only has a chance of survival if it is endowed with a common, universal standard of values, ideals and goals (Schaefer, 1994).

And central to such a supernatural code of ethics as part of a new global order, must in my view be the goal of the abolition of prejudices, the root cause of extremism. This requires, in my view, a new global spiritual perspective of universal brotherhood and sisterhood as prophesised of old in the sacred scriptures of the great religions, a universal consciousness of the oneness of all humanity under the one supreme Deity of all. On this subject, Abdu'l-Baha stated:

The morals of humanity must undergo change. New remedy and solution for human problems must be adopted. Human intellects themselves must change and be subject to the universal reformation. Just as the thoughts and hypotheses of past ages are fruitless today, likewise, dogmas and codes of human invention are obsolete and barren of product in religion. Nay, it is true that they are the cause of enmity and conducive to strife in the world of humanity; war and bloodshed proceed from them and the oneness of mankind finds no recognition in their observance. Therefore it is our duty in this radiant century to investigate the essentials of divine religion, seek the realities underlying the oneness of the world of humanity and discover the source of fellowship and agreement which will unite mankind in the heavenly bond of love. This unity is the radiance of eternity, the divine spirituality, the effulgence of God and the bounty of the Kingdom. We must investigate the divine source of these heavenly bestowals and adhere unto them steadfastly. For if we remain fettered and restricted by human inventions and dogmas, day by day the world of mankind will be degraded, day by day warfare and strife will increase and satanic forces converge toward the destruction of the human race (Abdu'l-Baha, 1943,1976).

What seems to some as being quite idealistic suddenly becomes an imperative to long term human survival. When we consider this matter deeply, conscious of the gross modern means now available for human violence and destruction, and the great risks of allowing the roots of extremism to continue and flourish, we can see the need for dramatic global change. I argue that there is no alternative but to adopt such a new, universal spiritual approach in the manner already described. In fact, some would argue that it is essential for this to occur and in the view of at least one religion, it is inevitable that it will eventually happen.

Many would still argue, however, particularly in the case of those of a materialist/atheistic bent, that spiritual solutions are not and cannot be the answer. But where are the effective alternate solutions to which they can refer with confidence? Are we simply going to let humanity to slide into further division and chaos and try to make the best of it? This is a matter to which the Universal House of Justice has directed its attention:

A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.

The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise. Where is the new world promised by these ideologies? Where is the international peace to whose ideals they proclaim their devotion? Where are the breakthroughs into new realms of cultural achievement produced by the aggrandizement of this race, of that nation or of a particular class? (Universal House of Justice, 1985).

Yet there will still be those that again cry impossibility. To this, Abdu'l-Baha responds:

A few, unaware of the power latent in human endeavour, consider this matter as highly impracticable, say even beyond the scope of man's utmost efforts. Such is not the case, however on the contrary, thanks to the unfailing grace of God, the loving-kindness of His favoured ones, the unrivalled endeavours of wise and capable souls, and the thoughts and ideas of the peerless leaders of this age, nothing whatsoever can be regarded as unattainable. Endeavour, ceaseless endeavour, is required. Nothing short of an indomitable determination can possibly achieve it. Many a cause which past ages have regarded as purely visionary, yet in this day has become most easy and practicable. Why should this most great and lofty achievement? Surely the day will come when its beauteous light shall shed illumination upon the assemblage of man (Abdu'l-Baha, 1975).

We may be approaching a turning point in human history, as that history increasingly takes on a common global dimension, where we as one human race have to make some vital choices in this matter. I suggest that extremism in the manner defined above should be seen as one symptom of an old-world order break-down, an
order that no longer meets the needs of an increasingly interdependent world. We must as a human race decide whether the existing and divided world order has passed its use-by date, and needs to be replaced by a new, united and just world order, if for no other reason than to unitedly tackle and solve the great issues plaguing humanity at present. It may well turn out that the rise of violent extremism, along with many other serious contemporary global issues of concern, provide the driving force for us to take this matter very seriously and make the necessary global changes, voluntarily or otherwise (Collins, 2004).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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