

Selective Legitimisation of Extremism

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Selective Legitimisation of Extremism: Lessons from Afghanistan, Syria, and Bangladesh

Context

In recent years, global responses to Islamic radicalism have revealed a recurring pattern: **legitimacy and engagement often follow power consolidation by radical groups**. Historical and contemporary cases like **Afghanistan (2021)**, **Syria (2024)**, and **Bangladesh's recent developments** illustrate how the international community's approach shifts once these groups gain control.

This phenomenon has far-reaching consequences for **regional stability** and **international norms**, necessitating a detailed examination of these events and their broader implications.

Key Examples and Developments

1. Case Study: Afghanistan and the Taliban

- **U.S. Withdrawal:**

- The 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan ended with **chaos**, marked by the **Kabul airport suicide bombing**, killing 13 U.S. troops and numerous civilians.
- The **abandonment of \$7.1 billion worth of U.S. military equipment** further strengthened the Taliban's control, raising global concerns.

- **International Engagement:**

- Despite initial opposition to the Taliban, powers like the **U.S., China, and Russia** swiftly recognised and engaged with the new regime.
- **Troika Plus (U.S., China, Russia, Pakistan)** actively sought to shape Afghanistan's future, sidelining **India's role** in discussions.

- **India's Role at the UNSC:**

- As president of the **UN Security Council (UNSC)** in August 2021, India influenced **Resolution 2593**, ensuring references to Pakistan-linked terrorist groups like **Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)** and **Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)**.
- However, the resolution lacked enforcement, allowing the Taliban to operate **without accountability**.

2. Syria: The Ascent of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS)

- **Change in Leadership:**

- In 2024, **Bashar al-Assad** was overthrown by **Abu Muhammad al-Jolani**, a former al Qaeda affiliate and leader of HTS.
- Despite his extremist past, al-Jolani's rise to political power led to a **recalibrated stance by Western powers**, including the **removal of a \$10 million bounty** on him.

- **Global Implications:**

- The acceptance of al-Jolani's leadership highlights a troubling precedent: **violence and power acquisition shield extremist leaders from accountability.**
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3. Bangladesh: A New Flashpoint

- **Political Instability:**

- The collapse of **Sheikh Hasina's secular government** paved the way for an interim military-led administration under **Muhammad Yunus**.
- Radical groups like **Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT)** and **Jamaat-e-Islami** have exploited the instability, promoting **extremist agendas**.

- **Impact on India-Bangladesh Relations:**

- Over the past 16 years, **India-Bangladesh relations flourished** under Sheikh Hasina's secular governance.
 - The interim government's **anti-India rhetoric** and increasing religious tensions risk undoing this progress, creating a **volatile environment**.
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Implications for Global Governance

1. Erosion of International Norms

- The recognition of regimes like the Taliban and HTS undermines core **UN mandates** on human rights and terrorism.
- This **selective application** of norms signals that **power through violence** can lead to **international acceptance**.

2. Empowerment of Extremist Groups

- Radical groups worldwide are emboldened by the message that **violence and authoritarianism yield legitimacy**.
- This trend particularly threatens **unstable regions** in **Africa** and **South Asia**.

3. Human Rights Undermined

- Vulnerable populations—**women, minorities, and dissenters**—face dire consequences as **human rights take a backseat** to diplomatic expediency.
 - In Afghanistan, the **Taliban's rollback of gender equality and education** illustrates this disregard.
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The Way Forward

1. Prioritising Principled Diplomacy

- The international community must **reject regimes** that rise through **violence** unless they demonstrate **accountability**.
- Diplomatic engagement should be a **tool for enforcement** of norms, not **legitimation**.

2. Strengthening Multilateral Efforts

- Institutions like the **UN** should enhance the enforcement of resolutions like **UNSC 2593**.
- Economic aid should be **conditional on progress** in governance, human rights, and counter-terrorism.

3. Addressing Global Religiophobia

- Religious extremism thrives on **polarisation**.
 - Efforts to combat all forms of **religious hatred**, as India has advocated, can foster **global solidarity** against extremism.
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Conclusion

The cases of **Afghanistan, Syria, and Bangladesh** highlight a troubling trend: the **selective legitimisation of radical groups** based on their control of power. This approach undermines efforts to combat extremism, erodes international norms, and destabilises fragile regions.

For nations like **India**, navigating these challenges requires a **balanced strategy**—engaging with current regimes while **opposing radicalism** and **prioritising regional stability**. Global cooperation and principled diplomacy remain the need of the hour to prevent further escalation and ensure long-term peace.