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Generally, when we want to be pessimistic and to draw people's attention to the fact that it will be a long struggle, we say it is a 30-year war, and you are telling us it is more than a 30-year war, so it upped the ante and it is quite frightening.

Jamal Khashoggi

I am sure it will not be a 30-year war. It has already been one, and that is due to the fact that we have been using the wrong approach. There are two approaches to fighting terrorism. The current one has been going on for the last 20 or 25 years, depending on when you start counting, from 9/11 or from the mid-1990s, with the first strike by the Clinton administration on General Abad or the bombing of Al-Qaeda targets in Sudan. Had the current approach been giving results and been successful, we would have no more terrorism today, so that indicates that it is not going well. This approach is failing, and the proof of that is that we have more terrorists. Not only that, but for the first time, terrorism has transformed from organisations into states holding lands and territories, so this approach is not working and we have to admit that.

What is the other approach? It is more complicated, it is very comprehensive, and I could call it the 'fixed Arab wall' approach. We have to go for the root cause of the problem. The root cause of the problem is chaos and anarchy. It is true that terrorism predicated that anarchy in Syria, Iraq and Libya, in the form of Al-Qaeda and 9/11, but we must remember that there was a form of anarchy in Afghanistan. After the Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan, the West almost totally ignored it and left it in chaos. Chaos and anarchy existed in Afghanistan from 1992 to 2001, and this provided a haven for Al-Qaeda and terrorism, so anarchy was there in Afghanistan. The world could have done something, it could have fixed Afghanistan, but at that time nobody was interested in doing so. I remember the late Ahmed Shahbaz, a mainstream Muslim jihadist, in the good sense of the word, going around the world a few months before 9/11 seeking help, and nobody listened to him. He was ignored, then 9/11 happened, and two days before it happened he was assassinated, and the rest we know.

Therefore, fixing anarchy, fixing the Arab world, is a solution, but I will go back to the current approach. The current approach we have right now is just to bomb Al-Qaeda, to bomb ISIS, to assassinate them, to use drones. Taking, for example, what the Russians have been doing in Syria for the last year, they did not liberate much land from ISIS. More land was liberated from ISIS in the hands of the Syrians who were supported by Turkey, or the Kurds who were supported by the Americans, than was liberated by the Russians. The Russians were busy bombing people in Aleppo. Therefore, there has to be something wrong. It is the people who have the motive to free themselves from ISIS, not the Russians or the Americans, but the Syrian people, not even the Gulf countries. The Syrian people, the Libyan people, the Iraqi people are the ones who are demanding to be freed from ISIS. ISIS is not the future of the Arab world – the future of the Arab world is what we witnessed in Tahrir Square in 2011. There was no sign of ISIS or Al-Qaeda and no pictures of Osama Bin-Laden. People wanted democracy in the Western sense, that is what the people are looking for, but because we did not support the people at that juncture in history, chaos and anarchy prevailed in some areas of the Arab world, so Al-Qaeda and later ISIS became the alternative.

This approach makes world leaders and strategists lose strategic vision. When they take this approach they lose ethical values and begin to say they will choose to fight ISIS first before countering Bashar. That is wrong, because the tyrant is part of the problem. It is what begot ISIS – his actions, his bad administration, his failures and his injustice are what led to chaos in Syria, Iraq or Libya, and the result is ISIS. This approach distorts our vision and makes many world leaders make the wrong statement – ISIS first and then Bashar. Now they have become even more accepting of Bashar and more insistent on targeting ISIS, and in fact nobody is targeting ISIS right now in Syria except the Syrian people. This approach leads to more chaos, and that is exactly what is happening in Syria. That is exactly what could happen in Iraq.

Losing strategic vision in Iraq makes us blind to what Iran is doing in the region. Iran's expansionism and hegemony in the region is not being seen. Because of this current approach we do not see the radical Shia groups who are as bad as ISIS is. The only difference between them and ISIS is that the radical Shia groups, who are as hateful and violent, do not target the West, while the Sunni radicals target the West, so they become a threat. The Shia radicals who are fighting in Syria and Iraq, exercising their hegemony and leading to more chaos and more disturbances in the regions, are not to be seen; that is indicative of how this current vision makes us lose our strategic planning.

What we should do is go for the approach of fixing the Arab world, targeting the anarchy first. This approach includes an element of the first – of course you will continue targeting the radicals, fighting and eliminating them, but at the same time you must have a plan to fix the Arab world completely, to bring it back from tyranny, injustice and failing economies, and unless we do that, the cycle will continue. Just remember that the first terrorist attack that brought Al-Qaeda to our awareness occurred in the mid-1990s, 30 years ago. It is already 30 years old, so we must change course and adapt to a more comprehensive course that concentrates on fixing the problem from scratch.

Why am I putting so much emphasis on chaos and anarchy? Yes, we have a very mean, ugly and brutal form of extremism, but in every society there are groups who are willing to use violence against the system. They are small in number in Europe, or in Montana or in France, but if, God forbid, if, in your peace-loving countries that enjoy peace, stability and law and order, anarchy for some reason prevailed, for example in France, those radicals would emerge. That is why the radicals emerged in our region. It is not because we, the Arabs, are radicals in hiding, but it is just because the system has collapsed, so we need to bring back the system. That does not mean standing by tyrants such as Bashar or Gaddafi from Libya, or other small tyrants in Libya – they are not the solution but the problem.