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### In Memoriam

*This article is republished in memory of Lt Col Dr Muhammad Salim Muhammad Tufail (retired) who passed away on 30 April 2020. Lt Col Dr Salim and two other co-authors had written this article which was originally published in CDiSS Commentary on 1 August 2018. The Editors would like to wish Lt Col Dr Salim's family our most heartfelt condolences.*

*Al-Fatihah.*

*الفاطحة*

### NO PLACE FOR RACIAL HATRED IN THE MILITARY

By

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One might remember the horrendous images of Prisoners of War (POW) who were treated badly in Abu Ghraib which became viral in the early years of the American invasion of Iraq. Although it might appear as a case of soldiers against prisoners, it was also perceived by some quarters as an ethnic attack. Such images were a display of the Americans' unjust treatment against the Iraqis in that the Arabs were the sole victims whereas the American soldiers were the perpetrators. This incident contributed to the opinion that soldiers may demean people of different ethnicities and cultures thus leaving open the possibility of ethnic subordination and mistreatment, whether in the event of war or in routine daily situations.

Time has passed since the murky tragedy, but there remains a number of attacks against other ethnicities in which military involvement is regarded palpable. The attacks against the Rohingya by Myanmar's armed forces is a more recent event that has caught the attention of many, which has also been claimed as genocide or ethnic cleansing. Even though the call to wipe out the Rohingya came from the infamous monk Ashin Wirathu, but the series of brutal killings and torture are nonetheless carried out by the soldiers, where some of them were even filmed in the process and took no regret for it. Critics have come forward to stop the mass murder but to no avail, as in the minds of the soldiers, what they are doing is a form of patriotism: protecting the motherland from "illegal immigrants" who could cause impending repercussions if no actions are taken. Without mercy, the soldiers arbitrarily raid the minority by inciting chaos, most of which have led to casualties or deaths.

These examples have shown that the generic perception in which an ethnic attack could only occur in a hostile situation between two parties, such as between soldiers and commoners, is not always true. There are some records showing that signs of ethnic or racial aggression within the military compound itself, such as the incidents of racism in some American military units as early as the colonial period. In this research, it was documented that throughout the history, both free and enslaved minorities received unfair treatments from the whites, the majority. This matter had sparked instability such as riots and protests in the country. In fact, it has continued to the millennium era although the number of cases has lessened.

Regardless of the players involved in the situation of an ethnic clash - be it between military personnel and locals, or among the military personnel themselves - it usually depicts one major feature: prejudice against an ethnic group. This type of disrespect allows people, usually ones with greater power, to do as they please against the seemingly problematic group, especially one that has lesser power or no power at all. Whereas most intercultural issues are due to the lack of understanding, the issue at hand here is triggered by negative perceptions against others, a high level of ego and sentiments of superiority.

The armed forces and their link to this kind of ethnic-based hatred is not new. This is evident in wars especially during the periods of the First and Second World Wars when the subject of ethnicity was used as a medium of propaganda to build the numbers needed in waging a battle against the enemy. At that point of time, a large presence of foreign faces in the frontlines was evident, whether they were serving to defend colonial masters in their land or they were the masters defending their own colonies. It was during this time that the ethnic and cultural prejudice together with unfair treatment started to build up.

That said, the Second World War ended in 1945. So why do news and stories exposing ethnic discrimination by armed forces personnel still linger at that time when this phenomenon should have been long gone, together with the end of the devastating war?

Dissecting the cause of ethnic attacks, it is indispensable to not link ethnic attacks with prejudice. Normally, when a person of a particular ethnicity is present, people who are of a different ethnicity will likely pattern or stereotype that particular person by his or her appearance. If the person is white-skinned, he must be a European or an American. If he is brown-skinned, then the ethnicity must be Latin American. From the physical characteristics, the patterning then moves to the inner self, and most of the time this modelling activity is sourced from the perceiver's previous social experiences and information. For example, Latin Americas could be perceived as a community with drug abuse or crime problems. The reason can be traced from the information formed in the perceiver: news about large drug cartels in Latin American countries, which are often portrayed in the media. Therefore, the existing prejudice grows bigger and generalised, from simply associating Latin Americans with drug abuse problem to Latin Americans with just, problems. It leads people to having a newly-formed belief that the ethnic group is infested with problems in comparison to the non-Latin Americans who believe that they are "better". It is now a "responsibility" for those with power and number, such as the soldiers to clean these impurities whenever they have the chance. And this is the case in Middle Eastern countries where the citizens experience an ethnic attacks by mostly Caucasian soldiers who came with a form of prejudice that "all Arabs are terrorists."

In the new era laden with a plethora of new technologies, information, whether it is correct or not, is being disseminated at a very fast pace, including information received by members of military. As normal human beings, soldiers too get influenced by this kind of information which forms their own set of prejudgment. Worse, soldiers who carry out ethnic, racial or cultural attacks, are doing so in the name of nationalism, patriotism and peace to justify the act although those incursions could essentially be categorised as xenophobia, chauvinism and acts of terror. Here, another problem arises: The misinterpretation of patriotism and nationalism in carrying the "honourable" duty of a soldier, even if it involves the unfair treatment or abuse of people based on their ethnicity.

As a conclusion, whatever the synonyms are, racism, prejudice, bias or many other derivations, ethnic attacks are something that must be prevented at all costs as it brings about instability, prejudice and never-ending conflicts. Military policymakers must work together with their civilian counterparts and NGOs to actively promote intercultural understanding among soldiers so that differences in human beings can be learnt, understood and appreciated. Besides, intercultural understanding would also help soldiers to not generalise people and to act with more professional and impartial conduct, not by using favouritism and unfair method that comes from personal and influenced points of view which is counterproductive for the future. In that sense, the world can really achieve the state of global peace if we could leave ethnic based attacks behind and grasp the idea of cultural variation that could be used to enhance peace, protect our homes, societies and nations, together. Interculturality is simple, but it needs the full commitment and understanding to bring out all the benefits it can offer.

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