Anger and inequality breeding 'terrorists'

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Article

New Sunday Times - 05/21/2006

TWO official reports on the 2005 July bombing on the London transport system which killed more than 50 people were released last week.

One of the youths left a video claiming responsibility, backed up by other videotapes implicating their involvement. The event was the worst attack of its kind in British history.

Three of them were known in some form by the British authorities but the security service failed to follow up, said one of the reports published by the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament which reports directly to the Prime Minister.

The other is a more "narrative" 41-page report from the Home Office. Many questions were left unanswered, including the failure to fully understand the threat from home-grown suicide bombers.

One British intelligence agency dismissed speculation that suicide attacks would become the norm in Europe. The reports provide a chance to gain insight into how Muslims live in Britain and perhaps elsewhere in the West.

A video grab shows one of the suspects in the London bombing. What drove him to attack his adopted country?

Thus far, the tendency is to quickly point a finger at the community and its religious beliefs, complicating the issue even further.

There is little attempt to understand the dynamics of the situation, especially those increasingly left at the fringes of Western societies.

With it comes a myriad of problems of discrimination, marginalisation and radicalisation, particularly among the younger generation of migrant families who are now citizens.

A case in point perhaps was what took place during street riots in many French suburbs and cities that began on Oct 27 last year.

The rioting was sparked by a rumour among French youths of African origin that two of their kind had been electrocuted, one badly injured while attempting to hide from the law.

Spontaneously, there were suggestions that Islam could be the solution to the crisis — a red-herring to implicate religion as the cause of the event.

Such pernicious misportrayals can only worsen the situation, particularly when the migrant communities had been constantly subjugated in various ways.

Three weeks into the rioting, the French President broke his silence and spoke of inequalities and discrimination that fuelled the rioters' anger and that the country has "undeniable problems faced by many residents of underprivileged neighbourhoods".

Interestingly, in this respect, Francis Fukumaya, in his latest book, After the Neocons — America at the Crossroads (2006), quoted a phenomenon called "deterritorialised" Islam.

By this, he highlighted individual Muslims who are cut off from local traditions in non-Muslim lands.

This seems to explain why so many of the "terrorists" are bred in their adopted country, one that is modern and democratic, such as Western Europe.

Ironically, it is precisely such society they lived in that they found alienating, he observed.

Fukuyama cited Oliver Roy's persuasive argument that the so-called Islamic jihadism cannot be understood primarily on cultural and religious terms.

He asserted that this type of religiosity is not the root cause of present-day terrorism. Rather, it is an attempt to use religion for political purposes, more a product of modernity (like communism and fascism) than a reassertion of traditional religion or culture.

More importantly, he argued that radical Islamist ideas are not Islamic but Western in origin. Similar arguments were made by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit in Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies (2004).

They believe the roots of occidentalism lie in the Western, rather than non-Western, world.

In other words, mishmash general and simplistic views linking terrorism to religion or culture are not helpful.

The oft-misquoted views expressed about hating the West have more to do with the hypocritical policy dimensions, namely in foreign affairs in relation to the Middle East. It is not in reference to the values of openness and freedom, nor is it about a "clash of civilisation" with the West.

For too long, the West has been in denial, suspiciously singling out and stereotyping Islam and the Muslims. This only serves as barriers to promoting better understanding and dialogue.

Maybe it is time to take the cue from a young European Muslim rapper, Medine, whose latest record aptly titled Jihad: The Greatest Struggle is Within Yourself. Part of his song goes: "We live here, and we're not going anywhere. So let's start getting used to it."

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