

‘Black Holes and Revelations’: The Connection Between Failed Expectations & Modern Terrorism



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Since 9/11, the cycle of terrorism has gone from bad to worse.¹

The tempo, scale and targeting of terrorist operations against the West has increased. There is no easy answer to this. People want simple solutions and politicians are eager to find them, however, their policy positions have in many instances been found wanting.

Which leads us to the central dilemma.

In an interconnected world, how does the West protect its borders from cells of former jihadist fighters? How does it protect its Non-Muslim majorities from opportunistic attacks staged by ‘home-grown Muslim radicals’, inspired by events overseas? How does a democratic society remain a bastion of tolerance, welcoming Muslim immigrants and being fair and just to established Muslim populations in an ever-increasing climate of fear and intolerance? What is the right balance between the heavy hand of the ever-changing counter-terrorism laws in the West, struggling to stay ahead of the rapid adaptability of ‘the threat’ posed by terrorism and rising social intolerance toward all manifestations of Islam?

There are no silver bullets to any of these questions, yet a hard conversation needs to be had regarding the ‘war’ we are fighting.

As a species, humans strive to see things in patterns for simplicity's sake. We like to connect the dots and form associations to explain the world around us. We are driven by the need to know, especially when presented with the challenge of complexity.

Take the Syrian civil war for instance. It is a conflict that defies a simple explanation. Even the most skilled commentator often struggles to explain this conflict between the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russia, the Shia theocracy of Iran, and Iran's ally the Shia Southern Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah, versus a cacophony of groups opposed to Assad's regime – some backed by the United States, some backed by Turkey, some independently rogue and self sustaining, others accepting money from private Gulf Arab players. On this battleground the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Loyalties are not fixed.

While this civil war plays itself out in a specific area of the Middle East, its impact has been international in scope. In 2015, a refugee crisis swamped Europe, and while the Syrian civil war is seen as a primary driver, it is not the only one.

Poverty and war in Africa also plays into this strategic crisis.

European national governments, all dependent on the EU organization in Brussels for continent-wide policy settings, failed to convince EU citizens that their interests would come first, as 'open borders' saw hundreds of thousands of Africans and Arabs, many of them Muslim, move into the EU's Schengen zone.² National governments, panicked by the rise of the political Right, acted. Barriers went up. Makeshift refugee camps were erected. And local bureaucracies, finding their 'national voice', did their best to create a deterrent against further refugee incursions. This deterrent, being neither fish nor fowl, in many instances failed to effectively deal with uncontrolled people movement. The knock-on effect of this complex set of problems for the EU is Brexit.

From a security perspective, the arrival of so many people, many of whom undocumented, (without a determined place of origin and motivation for seeking asylum), raised the very real prospect that some of these migrants may well be radicalized, or sleeper agents that sought to bury themselves within established Muslim communities in the West, biding their time to wreak havoc.

And indeed, since 2015 there have been a spate of terrorist attacks, many using simple, everyday items such as knives, trucks and vans to create mass casualty events. Luck and good intelligence has so far prevented a repeat of highly organized assaults such as the Charlie Hebdo³ and Bataclan⁴ armed terrorist attacks of 2015 in France. However, the recent London Bridge assault (June 3, 2017) has shown that coordination by local radicals, without the use of firearms or explosives, can have a 'strategic effect' if linked to an overseas group like Islamic State, irrespective whether there is a true connection.

This then brings us to the extraordinary complexity of what policy setting national governments should roll out to further mitigate against the proliferation of attacks in Western capitals.

So far we have seen multiple combinations of:

- Up-arming police to paramilitary status, with the idea that heavily armed police officers stand a better chance of deterring a terrorist operation, or, if one was in progress, the officer on station would have a better means of eliminating some, if not all of the threat before it manifests into a mass casualty event.
- More CCTV surveillance of public spaces, especially in shopping precincts and around national monuments and other symbols of national power.
- Passive defences such as the installation of bollards to prevent unauthorized vehicular access to places where people gather.
- Deradicalisation programs designed to prevent the young in Muslim communities of falling prey to extremist recruiters.
- Monitoring mosques for preachers and other senior religious figures in Muslim communities preaching hatred in the West.
- Intrusive intelligence collection measures, again, largely and bluntly aimed at Muslim citizens.

Where none of these policy options work separately, or in combination, governments routinely give their version of a ‘good account’ of their preventative measures and then promise to do more of the same.

Terrorism continues to blight our societies because thinking outside the box is frowned upon by the ‘empire builders’ who stake their entire career on bringing into being and promoting the current Counter Terrorism (CT) tool kit.

In the West CT, just like Defence, is a multibillion-dollar enterprise.

Companies keep rolling out new, subtle and ever more intrusive surveillance equipment. Outsourcing the job of security to private firms is a cutthroat but highly profitable business because government treasury officials are always striving for financial ‘efficiencies’, but sadly without necessarily achieving public safety or public good ‘effectiveness’.

Police can get more arms, but police manpower levels do not match the government’s fixation on firepower.

We can pay for weapons, but not for well-trained, highly motivated professional people to use them. So when looking at national CT efforts, it is often a grab bag of unachievable and unrealized goals trotted out by politicians for their own short-term survival. It is therefore easy for them to dominate the airwaves to impress their

electorates with how much of public money is being spent on new technologies and new advanced tactics, which essentially amounts to the same old wine in new bottles.

So let's drill down a little further.

Outlands

For the moment it is important to separate what is going on in the Middle East, Africa and Asia from what is happening in Western capitals.

In places that are active war zones, where states have failed and external parties (usually, but not exclusively, neighbouring countries seeking to influence events to their advantage), support local proxy forces to fight central authorities, or vice versa, these conflicts are visceral local contests. Blood and treasure is shed in significant amounts in the hope that either one side or the other, acquiesces to 'peace' and a cessation of hostilities. But it is not peace the parties to the conflict are striving for – it is victory and dominance.

We see this happening in Syria where Assad and his foreign allies are not playing for a negotiated settlement and a democratic Syria, neither are the opposition forces. Any 'peace' will come from the evisceration of the 'other side' and its full-scale collapse. This is how 'stability' will re-emerge from warring chaos.

Similarly in Yemen. Neither the Saudi-backed government, nor the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels are striving to manoeuvre the other side to the negotiating table; they are caught-up in a sectarian struggle between the Saudi and Iranian theocracies. It is a zero-sum game fuelled by ancient, hard to fathom local prejudices, that the Western mind, no matter how well schooled, finds difficult to understand and rationalize.

Which then leads us to Western foreign policy.

Should we be in Syria? Should we still be in Iraq? Afghanistan? The southern Philippines? Libya? Chad? Somalia? Is a Western military presence so fundamentally important to a good outcome? What is the good outcome we seek? Stopping local wars? What are the strategic calculations at play here?

Arguably, the cynic might point out that the West only gets involved in a military intervention to save or enhance its commercial interests. There is definitely some truth to this.

Western governments are good at portraying themselves as doing the 'right thing' without the commitment and wherewithal necessary to have a decisive impact on foreign battlegrounds.

Sending penny-packet forces of drones, combat planes and ‘military trainers’ to assist one side of the struggle may well keep a Western country’s interests alive, but it will not stop the conflict which is often driven by deeply held and hard to gauge inter-communal and sectarian biases. Occasional military ‘surges’ may well alter the internal balance of power within a troubled country. But owing to the fact that the West aims to avoid protracted military engagements of this type, and, due to the very real force structure limitations of its military forces, e.g., caps on manpower, operational and deployable assets and most importantly – public will, these gains are often temporary and easily reversed.

For example, the surges in Afghanistan and Iraq aided Western backed governments, but only while the surge was in progress. Once Western military commitments were rolled back, local insurgent and terrorist groups resumed the offensive. Local forces often know that Western commitment to intervene is limited in time. They need only to withstand defeat for a short while before they can come out of the shadows to pursue their objectives again.

The impression of Western forces, either singularly (unilaterally as in the US) or as a collective, gives the view to long suffering people that the forces of liberation from tyranny and oppression have arrived. A positive view – greatly aided by a compliant, uncritical, consolidated Western mainstream media.

In fact, these forces only add weight to anti-democratic and corrupt potentates.

The language used by the West to justify their military intervention is to ‘fight terrorism’, to ‘liberate’ the people, to create ‘safe havens’. The actual outcome is the reverse. Local conflicts become more complex with the arrival of external forces, robbing the locals of determining their own winners and losers, of their own sovereignty and fate. Furthermore, the nature of the local war often escalates as local forces meet the challenge of the presence of foreign militaries. While never able to match the technological firepower ranged against them, local forces will adapt to ensure they can continue to fight ‘the enemy’. Civilians in most cases bear the brunt of this and attacking soft targets, weakens and delegitimizes central authorities because they are seen as unable, or in some cases, unwilling to protect the people. It also demonstrates impotence in the foreign presence because under strict rules of engagement, Western militaries are limited in the way they can fight local insurgents, militias and terrorist groups. Firepower is nullified in built-up urban areas, or where there are significant population centres. This gives the advantage to local forces willing to kill indiscriminately.

When people are banished from their country and/or forced into refugee camps in neighbouring countries, it is not unreasonable to see them as damaged both emotionally and psychologically. The rough conditions of displacement, memories of loss of home and family, life in limbo in the hellish conditions of subsistence living

on limited UN handouts, all the while waiting for a chance to live in the West, can certainly warp and twist one's views of reality.

Abandonment and betrayal by the West is a common feeling of victims of local wars and Western military intervention.

The West did not 'fix' their countries. In many cases, it is handed from one oppressive group to another. Iraq is a classic case of intervention gone wrong. The American-led intervention undermined and destroyed the Hussein regime that then led to a ruinous civil war and to sectarian dictatorship. Now a heavily Iranian influenced political leadership rules in Baghdad. For Iraqi émigrés, this national tragedy of 'good intentions gone horribly wrong' fuels a quiet rage which has consumed that country's sons and daughters. Some of them have taken up arms with extremist groups like Al Qaeda or Islamic State; some of them escaped to the West but are unhappy with the state of their former homeland, which they can watch daily on TV news, constantly reminded of what helped ruin their lives.

Homeland

In many ways, this pathology of victimization is all too common because it is all too true.

As people who were lucky enough to make it out of the brutal refugee camps into the West, they carry the burden of their memories, of their traumas, and of their disappointments. They come to the West and are celebrated for their 'differences' in culture, language and cuisine, but they are also treated as different, and not part of the mainstream.

This reality is not helped by the fact that often, new arrivals in the West are not wealthy, and quickly find their way to the lower socio-economic order. If they were people of stature and education back home, there is no easy way for them to resume this status in their adopted country. Some people can deal with this and work through it. Others simply cannot deal with this and may consider it the 'final insult'. From doctor to taxi driver. These resentments become family lore and can consciously or subconsciously be passed down to the younger generation, even if the children are born in the new country. Under these circumstances it cannot be surprising that 'home grown jihadists' spring up from the largely disconnected Muslim communities that live throughout the West.

They may receive social welfare handouts and at some level they may indeed be grateful for finding a home in the West, but they don't feel part of the Western experience.

Western countries long ago abandoned the expectation of socially integrating new arrivals in favour of multiculturalism – a veneer for institutionalized social isolation. In Europe, multiculturalism, combined with the traditional ghettoisation of minorities, has led to explosive inter-communal tensions between the Non-Muslim and Muslim communities. Today, terrorism, uncontrolled migration from Muslim majority countries and the rise of the political Right, is the ‘holy trinity’ of social ills that feed off each other.

Public anxiety fuelled by sensationalist media reporting, both mainstream and social, contributes to the perception that all Western countries are now under siege from an ‘enemy within’, namely Muslim communities.

As these communities’ public profile come more and more under suspicion and scrutiny, they withdraw within. Coming from political cultures that submit to authority, and where speaking against the prevailing authority can land them in jail or worse, lead to torture and death, it is not customary for first or even second generation Western Muslims to speak out. They may be law abiding, but generally they are invisible, preferring to stay out of the spotlight, rather than engaging with a Non-Muslim majority seething with anger and bias.

Strangely there is an echo of the past which we often ‘forget’ to acknowledge.

The Muslim migrant experience in the West today, while not the same, is historically similar to the experience of other waves of migrants.

If we look at the Australian case for instance, those European migrants who came to Australia in the 1950s were survivors of the most horrific war in modern history. Christian-on-Christian, White-on-White – carnage on an industrial scale. People were uprooted from their homes, displaced by conflict, and suffered the most despicable atrocities. Where once they may have been prosperous, they were largely destitute by the time they came to Australia. Where once they had social class and education, in their new adopted homeland their personal past meant nothing. The local Anglo-Celtic mainstream population was hostile and racist to the new arrivals. But there were two significant differences between then and now.

The migrants of the 1950s were expected to relinquish their past and start anew. This was not an easy thing to do, and in some instances people failed to adapt to these new conditions and returned to their country of origin.

But there was opportunity for those who stayed and tried.

Employment was one of the preconditions that allowed people who came with nothing to ‘make a go’ of their new life.

Discrimination could be fought by proving to the Anglo-Celtic mainstream that the new comers were hard working and wanted to belong. It was through their hard work that everyone prospered.

The price the 'bloody new Australians' (as new arrivals were called in those days) had to pay was that old hatreds and conflicts that tore Europe apart, would not be accepted, let alone become part of the Australian way of life. The aim was to become an Australian, in spite of Italian, Greek, German or Jewish surnames or private cultural or spiritual practices and beliefs. This social construct was extended to include Asian migrants by the 1970s with the end of the White Australia Policy. By the 1980s, 'bloody new Australian' was replaced with 'ethnic', which showed that there was no longer acceptance per se. The term ethnic had clear 'outsider' implications and many people found the term offensive.

In order to find a less confronting approach to social inclusion, Australia moved away from 'assimilation' and adopted 'multiculturalism', a Canadian idea designed specifically to heal the breach between Anglophone and Francophone Canadians. Bureaucratic mandarins in Australia quickly adopted this seemingly post-modern concept of celebrating cultural differences. No longer would Australia and Australian folklore mythologize Anglo-Celtic society as the 'cultural norm' of what it means to be an Australian. Instead, the very notion of a single, homogeneous Australian identity was resigned to the dustbin of history. People are now officially welcomed into Australia without prejudice, are free to settle and adopt whatever the Australian government deems appropriate pledges of allegiance in whatever timeframe made them 'comfortable'. Citizenship regulations are watered down. Showing multitudinous aspects of the diverse national character is normal. Even going as far as to denigrate and subsume the history of 'white Australian' settlement to the 'sophisticated' political and social construct of multiculturalism. In the contemporary Australian context, multiculturalism stands for the display of colourful costumes, exotic cuisine, music and dancing but also the passive 'non-acceptance' by the acculturated Anglo-Celtic population of social morays that are far removed from accepted behaviour in a modern state - child marriage, female genital mutilation and familial misogyny. It is a tribal concept where each institutionalized and compartmentalized demographic demands their own laws and rules of social engagement.

What is missing in this? Inclusive national pride? Who still stands up for the flag and what it represents? 'No longer applicable' is the rallying cry from 'post-modern' chattering elites and self-interested groups, playing the politics of identity card. Many of them would not be so privileged were it not for the personal sacrifices of previous generations of settlers, whatever their colour or creed.

But of course, this whitewashed version of Australia hides the very real passive-aggressive tendencies of modern society.

As the commodity booms ebbed and flowed from the 1950s to the 1990s, public attitudes hardened against migration and migrant communities. Outsourcing and automation of established industries took care of the rest.

Employment was no longer a right, it became a privilege.

Those who had paid jobs defended their positions and employers became choosier about who and how many people could find full time work – the very bread and butter that kept people busy and productive, and the nation economically vibrant. The very bread and butter that made Australia the envy of the OECD.⁵ The dominant Anglo-Celtic cultural group felt alienated from the country it founded and developed. European migrants who successfully adapted and integrated, resented the social handouts their taxes were being used for. They themselves, after all, had no such advantage when they came to Australia, however, work was plentiful. As the fabric of Australia began to fray, bonds of trust and friendship among groups withered and the fewer economic opportunities people had, the less generous they became. Then came the War on Terrorism and the great Muslim scare.

Changing Foreign Landscapes

By the time the planes slammed into the World Trade Centre, the world was already looking precarious.

Many Muslim countries were under illiberal or other forms of autocracy. In some of the wealthier states, stability and beneficent rule brought about economic prosperity, international trade and good relations.

But the vast majority of Muslim states in the Middle East and North Africa were bereft of vision and ruled with a sclerotic and iron hand. Countries like Egypt were stable, but the country seethed as the elite became so divorced from the people that it fomented political violence as the only form of anti-government opposition as non-violent political opposition was crushed and delegitimized by the state. Countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran were locking horns, not just from a sectarian perspective, but from a geopolitical one as well, buying influence and conducting proxy skirmishes in the hope of tripping up the other. The United States condoned and supported the relationships it had with regional autocracies, knowing full well the scale and nature of the oppression of the people. But eager for stability, the US did not turn away from this policy. By providing weapons to countries like Egypt, those Egyptians who stood against the government could not stand by the United States – the US was the enabler of ‘their enemy’, their oppressor.

Those in the Middle East who wanted non-violent political change to something akin to a democracy, could not rely on the United States, or any European country to intercede on their behalf. In Western capitals, commercial and strategic imperatives trump issues like democracy for Arabs. When things go bad, when states fail or when the strategic situation turns worse, the only option Washington has is the military option. Political solutions are always considered soft and indeterminate. Dealing with a strongman in Cairo, Baghdad or Tripoli gets results. Dealing with Arabs who know their mind politically and have a strong sense of their sovereignty would be confusing and possibly disrupt Western interests. The dashed hopes of millions of people, after the 2014 Arab Spring showed where the West stood with regard to championing the rights and freedoms of Arab people.

As the War on Terror evolved, it became obvious to some that not all attacks claimed by 'Al Qaeda' were sanctioned or ever connected to the global terrorist 'franchise'. In fact, many Al Qaeda claimed attacks were perpetrated by groups that had been around as local armed opposition for decades, but were losing traction and members because they were not 'attractive enough' to sustain themselves and their struggle.

Al Qaeda was the new, more intimidating brand of terror enforcers and creating a 'branch office' raised older conflicts with no prior international standing to a new and more powerful level by being seen as a tentacle of the Al Qaeda jihadist octopus.

Nexus: Where the Outlands Meet the Homeland

The Internet provided extremist recruiters a ready-made tool to reach deep into the minds of young, disenfranchised Western Muslims to join or actively sympathize with their cause – something that only accelerated as this technology proliferated. If the Vietnam War was the 'lounge-room war' – the first time that ordinary folk could see the carnage of modern war through the technological lens of television, the 'War on Terror' is the 'pocket war' – where people can reach into their pockets and instantly see in near real-time Western warplanes drop their ordinance on militia positions, or see the aftermath of terrorist operations from their smart phones. The compression of time and space that modern communications technology provides, gives people no time to process what they see. It also allows them to vent their anger and disapproval instantly, linking up through social media and forming unhealthy virtual cabals that simply play into and enhance pre-existing personal biases.

Robbed of any powerful counter-narrative by Western governments, themselves incapable of understanding how technology and psychology are combining in new and important ways to undermine older social and political norms, they continue to plod along with a simplistic 'good guy', 'bad guy' methodology, even when this is hard to maintain. Showing a muscular response to 'the threat' of terrorism ensures that they can trade in on Non-Muslim anxiety for electoral advantage. What this does

is paint all local Muslim citizens and permanent residents in the West with the broad brush of extremism. This is called ‘co-radicalization’.

This is made worse through the permissiveness of multiculturalism which allows people of all faiths, persuasions and ethnic variations to celebrate and revel in their ‘politics of identity’, which also plays its role in undermining the foundations of a non-sectarian national community.

The centre is not holding.

It is seen as effete and ripe for challenge by those who seek to turn their politics of identity into a weapon against the state in which they live.

The idea of ghettoized communities pulling away from the nation-state they reside in to form permanently antagonistic enclaves to the mainstream, is now considered not only possible, but is arguably happening. For a national police force to up-arm and move into these areas, in some cases is becoming problematic if not impossible. These areas become safe havens for extremists.

This should be considered the great failure of multiculturalism.

There should always be an expectation that migrants who come to the West, become part of the Western experience. That they do so voluntarily and without equivocation. It cannot be beyond the task of psychologists to work alongside bureaucrats to come up with a way to vet people more closely, to seriously and diligently consider whether individuals and/or families are of good character; in other words, who would be good migrants and happily give up a part of themselves for the privilege of living conflict-free in the West.

An Alternative Narrative

But for this to work, inclusiveness needs to move from bureaucratic lip service to reality.

For this to happen, the West needs to adopt and embrace a non-sectarian form of nationalism, that celebrates a nation’s past, however imperfect the contemporary cognoscenti believes it to be. A nationalism that encourages a mixing of people in work and life, wherever they come from. Celebrating and participating in this sort of inter-communal unity ought to build trust and bonds of friendship over time.

Employment is not just an economic activity, it is a critical component that unites people in peace. When people are busy, earning money, single male migrants from more conservative societies can afford to marry and have families. People can afford

to buy homes and pay household bills. Mundane as this sounds, in the neo-liberal economic order in which we live, where ‘market-forces’ dictate economic opportunities, we have lost the ability to see employment as a critical social balm. This is a great mistake. People’s taxes pay for governments to manage the economy that in a very utilitarian way, looks after the greatest good for the greatest number of people; not defend the unsustainable privileges of the corporate and governing elite.

The media too has a role to play. Perhaps the most important role of all. It has to stop giving extremists a free kick. People who take delight in killing innocents are ‘murders’, not terrorists. The full weight of criminal law and the shame that comes from being associated with the lowest of human behaviour must be accorded to these individuals – *and their families*.

Most home-grown radicals think that once they die for their ‘cause’, they are assured a path to paradise and will be considered worthy of martyrdom by whatever international group they aspire to hitch their wagon to. This mythology can be rolled back by some simple, but tough methods. Suicide terrorists must be made to realize that their ‘martyrdom’ will never be acknowledged as such by the media. Individual or mass casualty events should be reported as murder, criminalizing this behaviour, not politicizing it. Calling them terrorists and publicly linking their atrocities to overseas jihadist groups gives them, and the very groups the West is fighting overseas, the very thing they want. To be seen as a meaningful part of a global non-state actor, besieging Western capitals from whatever multicultural safe haven was afforded them.

Words have power.

Using the right words will diminish the ‘glory of the act’.

Furthermore, national laws must be tough, but fair – laser-like in their precision.

The families of any extremist, home-grown or not, who reside in a Western country and whose family member has perpetrated ‘murder’, should be deported and their citizenship/residency and all assets stripped from them. Often a radicalized person contemplating a suicide attack is known for harbouring such views among family and friends, and for those who know and do nothing to alert authorities to a potential problem – this is ‘enablement’ and should not go unpunished.

Why?

Because prior to a perpetrator conducting a ‘martyrdom operation’, he/she has to know that there will be far-reaching consequences for their actions.

It is not about creating a mass casualty event and seeking solace in ‘going to heaven’, knowing that the law will protect their families and friends.

Perpetrators need to know that their actions will have consequences affecting the ones they leave behind. There has to be a set of very clear, publicly known and understood sanctions put forward to make people think before they act.

While civil libertarians and opportunistic members of the legal fraternity will balk, members of the media will need to tone down and change the nature of their language in reporting terrorist incidents for the public good and for public safety. Lawyers will have to accept that in order to get on top of Non-Muslim racism and vigilantism, openly pandering to minorities with extremist views is not in the public interest. There are some things that ought not be acceptable – even in a democracy. That will make democracy strong and a worthy concept to defend.

Policing is becoming harder to do in the inner cities harbouring disenfranchised and hostile populations. Police need to be respected by the law-abiding and feared by the wrongdoer. They need to be prepared to take tough action on the spot and then, to deescalate and become the peacemaker after a confrontation.

One of the most effective ways of handling martyrdom operations would be to ensure there are enough female sharpshooters⁶ among the ranks of CT police officers. And, that sharpshooters are trained to critically wound rather than kill the perpetrator, unless absolutely necessary.

Critically wounding would:

- a. Deny them death, absolution for their sins and heavenly rewards in the afterlife.
- b. Deny them martyrdom and the ‘reward’ of being seen as a ‘hero’ for a cause.
- c. If the perpetrator is conscious and incarcerated, they will have to live with the consequences of their actions – including personal guilt, family and community shame.
- d. While they may want to kill themselves to end the pain of living with the consequences of their actions, as ‘a believer’, they cannot self-harm because that would close off the idea of forgiveness and the afterlife forever.

Psychological studies conducted on would-be suicide bombers who were caught prior to setting up an attack have shown that many were depressive and had a record of criminal or antisocial behaviour.⁷ This is especially the case for those lapsed Muslims who rediscover religion later in life, or for new converts seeking to prove their fidelity to their new faith. Islam forbids entry into heaven to those who commit suicide, but, for those who give their life for a cause greater than themselves, entry to heaven and rewards in the afterlife are guaranteed. Unfortunately, suicide terrorism, as pioneered by Hezbollah, (Lebanon in 1983) has become a legitimate symbol of political

resistance.⁸ Once this meme passes on to other terrorist organizations and then embeds itself in the dark web, the idea of dying to usher in an earthly paradise of Islamist rule, gives people who would otherwise kill themselves in conventional self-harm scenarios a much better out. By attaching themselves to a cause, and by killing themselves and others in the name of that cause, gives them a sense of absolution for their sins and a way around the Muslim prohibition and family shame associated with conventional suicide.⁹

Ultimately, the aim has to be to set up temporal and spiritual sanctions against suicide attacks to create a deterrent to this sort of action. We need to remember that these people are murderers and as such we need to attack their twisted idea of Islam, making martyrdom unappealing if indeed they are true believers.

On top of all of these possible solutions to the current state of affairs is the West's strange fixation with the Muslim world – long the cockpit of international relations.

While the West will always seek to influence the way Arab and Muslim states behave, a dose of reality should be put on the table. Let's be honest about why Western forces are being deployed to the Middle East. If it is about defending specific strategic and commercial interests, do not dress it up as high morality. If we want to help liberalize Arab countries, then deal with the hand that is given. No modern post-colonial Arab state was a functional democracy. Our blood and treasure spent in places like Afghanistan and Iraq show that local forces and polities are resistant to Western norms and conditions. This is not necessarily something that is 'bad'. Some Gulf States have managed public expectations very well in spite of not being 'democracies'. And while Western critics can say that contemporary Gulf States are politically repressive, we have to realize that from a historic perspective – many of them have achieved a level of political and social development in a very short space of time (from the late 1960s). Furthermore, their political evolution is not set in stone and may, in time, generate for themselves more internal liberalism, while maintaining a stable national government. For us in the West to say this is not good enough is madness, since the resultant chaos from foreign regime change will almost guarantee more of the very destructive tendencies in the region we condemn today.

Conclusion

None of this will be easily achieved, and much of the argument put forward will be criticized and rejected outright. But national debates must be had.

We need to ask ourselves what sort of societies we wish to live in. We need to ask ourselves what world do we want to live in. If indeed we truly want to end racism, political violence and inter-communal hostility, the current course is not working. The centre is not holding and the West, as a whole, is declining in its weak and

mismanaged responses to what can otherwise be controlled by governments taking some simple and direct actions. And if none of the proscriptions described are desirable – what then are the alternatives? Are we indeed a society on the wane? Is the West’s fall, like that of Rome’s, an inevitable consequence of our arrogance, our fallibility? Whatever the outcome, let us hope that we can put the demos back into democracy and have the civilized debate that needs to happen before the devils of our current nature strip us of every civic virtue.

**Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of
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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Refugee_camps_in_Iraq#/media/File:Humanitarian_aid_distribution_in_Khazar_camp_scape.Khazer_frontline_camp_Northern_Iraq_Western_Asia_21_November_2016.jpg

ENDNOTES

¹ Kirk A., Mapped: *Which country suffers the most from terrorism?* The Telegraph, March 24 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/mapped-which-countries-suffer-the-most-from-terrorism/>

² For information about the Schengen Zone see: http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen_en

³ For more information see: *Charlie Hebdo attack: Three days of terror*, BBC News, January 14 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30708237>

⁴ For more information see: Kamouni S., *A year on Bataclan massacre – what happened in the Paris attacks, where is the theatre and how many people died?* The Sun, May 24 2017, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2163925/bataclan-massacre-paris-attacks-2015/>

⁵ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) <http://www.oecd.org/about/>

⁶ It is believed by some Islamist groups that being killed by a woman robs them of their manhood, pride and their automatic entry to heaven as ‘martyrs’. It is one of the reasons that the YPG (Syrian Kurdish Militia) uses female fighters in its war with Islamic State.

⁷ For more information regarding suicide in the Islamic context see: <http://www.islamicsupremecouncil.org/understanding-islam/legal-rulings/21-jihad-classical-islamic-perspective.html?start=15>

⁸ Malka H., *Must Innocents Die? The Islamic Debate Over Suicide Attacks*, Brookings, March 1 2013, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/must-innocents-die-the-islamic-debate-over-suicide-attacks/>

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