

Denial is still a river in Londonistan

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On one thing the British liberal class is certain – the hacking to death of a soldier in a Woolwich street yesterday had absolutely nothing to do with religion. The murderers screamed ‘Allahu akhbar’ as they tried to decapitate the soldier (a barbaric hallmark of Islamic terror), announced proudly that ‘We swear by almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you’ and quoted the Koran as religious justification.

But the atrocity, we have been repeatedly told, had nothing to do with religion. Ever since 9/11, the UK and US political and media establishment,

along with much if not most of the British security service and increasingly the US security establishment, has repeated this mantra. Killing in the name of Islam is a warped hijacking of the religion, a perversion of the religion, the very antithesis of the religion. But based on the precepts of the religion itself? Good heavens, no.

For more than two decades, the British political and security establishment has gone to extreme lengths to deny the true religious nature of the Islamic jihad, or holy war, against the free world and 'backsliding' Muslims (who are the jihad's most numerous victims). There are several reasons for this state of denial, of which in my view the key is that to the official mind a holy war is such a fearsome prospect – it's uncontrollable, can last for decades, is driven by wholly irrational motives

immune to negotiation and is characterised by unmitigated savagery -- they cannot admit that this is what it actually is.

So instead they come up with absurd statements like the one made to me some years ago by a very senior security official, who said this couldn't be an Islamic religious war because to say it was would demonise all Muslims.

This was clearly a risible non sequitur. The fact that many Muslims not only do not support the jihad but are being themselves persecuted by it does not make it any less of a holy war against their perceived backsliding or heresy.

Nor can anyone plausibly claim that the jihad is based on a 'warped' or 'perverted' form of Islam and is therefore not actually Islam at all. It is clearly an interpretation of Islam which, whatever you may think of it, is

grounded in the religion. The fact that many Muslims reject this interpretation – and that there are indeed other rival interpretations -- is irrelevant to this point. It is arguably as authentic as more pacific interpretations – and more to the point, dominates the Islamic world today. To deny that is to deny its endorsement by the world's leading Islamic jurists and scholars – or to pretend that they, too, are somehow not 'real' Muslims.

One of most difficult things to get across in this increasingly desperate argument is that there is within the Islamic world a continuum of aggressive or unacceptable views which emanate from the religion – a continuum which extends from prejudice and bigotry at one end to terrorism at the other -- that makes atrocities such as the one in Woolwich yesterday all but inevitable. While most

at the merely bigoted end will neither support nor take part in terrorism, the noxious views they accept and promulgate create the lethal sea in which terrorism swims.

The result of the refusal to acknowledge this religious continuum is to undermine those Muslims who do most earnestly want to reform their religion. While the British and American victims of the jihad obdurately refuse to identify it as a religious issue, reformist Muslims haven't got a leg to stand on in trying to make the case to their own community.

Today, I was contacted by someone from a Muslim family whose name is known to me but whose identity I will protect. His message in response to the Woolwich atrocity is so important, and so heartfelt and anguished, that I

reproduce it here.

‘Confronting the Causes of Religion-Motivated Terrorism.

‘I'm from a Muslim family background, and I needed to write down my thoughts on this terrible and traumatic event. I feel that it raises points that would be appropriate for the excellent articles that you publish.

‘The overwhelming majority of Muslims here and throughout the world will be as horrified as anyone by the terrible events in Woolwich. Furthermore, I am certain that the overwhelming majority of Muslim organisations, imams and community leaders would describe the actions of the men concerned to be evil and un-Islamic. The accepted consensus among most scholars is that when you live in a non-Islamic country (where you are allowed live and practice your

religion in peace), you are forbidden to make war on the people of that country.

‘That being said, surely it’s time for Muslims everywhere to confront some of the extreme views held within their communities and face up to the fact that such views may act as stepping-stones for some ignorant and impressionable people who go on to carry out atrocious acts of violence.

‘It is a fact that far too many Muslim scholars promote and far too many Muslims believe, interpretations of Islam that are anything but moderate. For example, that non-Muslims are morally and spiritually ‘inferior’ beings to Muslims or that in an ideal ‘Islamic’ society, the death penalty should apply for a Muslim who leaves Islam, for anyone who insults the Prophet, has sex outside of marriage or takes part in

an homosexual act.

‘Whilst I’m not suggesting that any significant number of the Muslims holding such views would ever commit or even condone the events we saw in Woolwich, I am suggesting that if someone already believes such interpretations of Islam then it would be easier for them to believe that it’s morally acceptable to behead an off-duty soldier in the street.

‘As we have seen in the various media exposés, extreme views such as those outlined above are being promoted, often with impunity, in mosques, madrassas, faith schools and Islamic student societies throughout Britain. The result of this, as numerous polls have demonstrated, is that an unacceptably high minority of British Muslims support extreme and illiberal interpretations of Islam. For example,

a poll carried out by Policy Exchange suggested that over a third of young British Muslims believe that the death penalty should apply for apostasy.

‘In every other aspect of our society, an ‘extremist’ is defined by both their actions and their personally held views. It is perfectly reasonable to label a racist a ‘racist’, whether or not they carry out illegal acts or promote law-breaking. For some reason, however, such rational logic isn’t generally applied when it comes to describing members of religious groups.

‘It seems that any Muslim who states that they support obeying the laws of the land is defined by default as ‘moderate’ without regard to whether he or she might hold some views that are very extreme and unpleasant indeed. However, a large section of our media and institutions appear to only

label a Muslim as an 'extremist' if he or she breaks the law or incites others to do so.

'This is illogical and irrational. The time has come for Muslim organisations, scholars, imams and lay-people to stand up and state unequivocally that interpretations such as those outlined above are unacceptable and should never be promoted, here or abroad. They should go further and distance themselves from anyone who promotes those views.

'What's more, politicians, the media and all of us should ask questions of any person who refuses to condemn such bigotry and ostracise them, just as we do with someone who refuses to condemn racism. Universities must ban Islamic societies that promote hateful views, and any mosque,

madrassa or Islamic faith school that promotes extreme, illiberal interpretations of Islam should be closed down and the management prosecuted.

‘Stating that non-Muslims are inferior to Muslims or that people should be killed for leaving a religion or having gay sex is simple hate speech, whether or not the speaker believes that it is ordained by Allah. The fact that hate speech is illegal under English law recognises the fact that hateful speech can sometimes promote hateful action. Surely it’s time for the people who promote the views outlined above are treated as the criminals they are.

‘Most importantly, the time has come for our media, politicians and anti-fascist organisations to expose, name and shame any Muslim organisation, mosque, imam, scholar

or spokesperson who refuses to condemn and distance themselves from the unacceptable interpretations of Islam that are far-too-often promoted without challenge in Britain today.'

The Prime Minister has spoken of the Woolwich killers 'betraying' Islam. But in refusing to acknowledge the true religious nature of such terrorism, it is surely he who is betraying reformist Muslims everywhere.