

Terrorism FORK

Link between terrorism



By Tariq Ramadan

Rather than insisting on Muslims' own duty to integrate, British society must reconcile itself with its self-professed values

LET us look closely at recent developments in government policy toward Muslims. The British Muslim reaction to the July 7 attacks was exemplary, as Ken Livingstone pointed out, and this was a proof that they were well integrated into society. A policy of constructive engagement would have spared no effort to make the best of these tragic events.

Instead, the British government has adopted an attitude of double denial, at home and abroad. Obsession with the "terrorist threat" rapidly colonised debate and drove the government headlong into an approach restricted to the "fight against radicalisation and extremism". Though it appeared normal to deal with the issue, the "Muslim question" could in no way be reduced to one of security. Further, this policy was accompanied by a demeaning - and frequently paternalistic - argument on the necessity of "integration". Muslims, so it went, must accept those British values (liberty, tolerance, democracy, etc) that make up the essence of "Britishness".

This reductive argument is dangerous on two counts. First, it tendentiously associates terrorism with integration. It is common knowledge that the authors of the terrorist acts were thoroughly integrated: they were educated, held jobs and were culturally westernised. Second, in today's social and political debate it normalises a formula that only parties of the extreme right once

dared to articulate: that Muslims, on the whole, have a problem with western values and must offer more convincing "proof" that they accept them. On December 8 last year, Tony Blair called on minorities to conform to "our essential values", stating that they have "a duty to integrate". The Muslim community, because it is perceived as "badly integrated", has

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Terrorism requires analysis of the religious rhetoric and the political strategies of its authors; they must be confronted firmly. It is equally clear that an accurately targeted security policy is a necessity. But this cannot justify sweeping measures applied to an entire segment of the population on the basis of a misdiagnosis. The vast

Islam and British

A majority of British Muslims have absolutely no problem with the British values cited above. Their cultural and religious integration is already a fact, as proven by the millions of citizens who live peaceably in this country.

The problem today is not one of "essential values", but of the gap between these values and everyday

to reconcile itself with its own self-professed values; it is up to politicians to practise what they preach.

Tony Blair and his government have obliged civil servants to deny that a link exists between terrorism and British foreign policy. While the invasion of Iraq can never be claimed as ethical justification for terrorist attacks against innocent citizens in

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social and political practice. Justice is applied variably depending on whether one is black, Asian or Muslim. Equal opportunity is often a myth. Young citizens from cultural and religious "minorities" run up against the wall of institutionalised racism. Rather than insisting that Muslims yield to a "duty to integrate", society must shoulder its "duty of consistency". It is up to British society

London, it would be absurd to deny the reality of the political connection between the two. The illegal invasion of Iraq, blind support for the insane policies of George Bush, British silence on the oppression of the Palestinians - how could these issues not have a direct bearing on the deep discontent shared by many Muslims toward the west in general, and toward Britain in particular. Even

foreign policy

though this is not the sole explanation for terrorism, it is certainly part of the explanation (without arguing that it can be justified).

We must be bold enough to take the measure of this foreign policy, and listen to the voices of millions of citizens who have democratically and peacefully opposed the war, citizens whose voices were not heard. The negative effects of this policy - in terms of confidence - are deep, not to mention what we now know about the horrors of Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, and the secret flights that carried prisoners without rights through Britain to the black sites of the torture gulag.

Tony Blair will make his last gesture toward the Muslims of Britain *today* at an international conference on Islam and Muslims in the World. The spirit of the initiative seems at first glance praiseworthy but, on closer inspection, it stands revealed as little more than an exercise in fence mending or public relations. While I have been invited to participate in the conference, not a single representative of the leading British

Muslim associations has been invited to speak, not a single sensitive subject has been touched upon. It is as though these associations and their leaders were part of the problem, and could not become an active part of the solution. It is as though we could hope to solve deep-seated problems by refusing to see them for what they are. So many fine intentions and words about openness, while the facts speak instead of petty politics.

If Muslims, in Britain and throughout the world, are to refuse to cast themselves as victims and instead assume their responsibilities and develop a critical political awareness, the process must begin by resisting political manoeuvres designed to lull them, to select their representatives for them, and even to make cynical use of them. The imperative is theirs, but it can only be a positive development for democracy in Britain. COURTESY THE GUARDIAN

The writer is the president of the think tank European Muslim Network and author of "The Messenger, The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad"