

When healers become killers: the doctor as terrorist

Doctors, as any nurse will tell you, are inclined to arrogance. Most times this is to the good: it takes a certain self-assertive pride to claim powers of life and death.

On the other hand, spiritual pride, combined with arrogance, can lead even doctors into evil. Seven of the 8 suspects in the attempted car bombings in London and Glasgow this summer were doctors. We have grown used to terrorists justifying murder in the name of Islam, but the idea of doctors turning to terrorism is still shocking. So we need to ask: What kind of arrogance allows a doctor to pervert his faith and become both healer and killer?

Many erroneously think poverty and oppression are the root cause of terrorism. But in fact many terrorists are well educated and come from well-to-do families. Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, the son of a Saudi billionaire, studied economics at university. Moreover, as scholar Walter Laquer writes in *No End to War*, a disproportionate number of doctors are terrorist leaders. Bin Laden's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri; George Habash, who founded the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; Fathi Shikaki, a founder of Palestinian Islamic Jihad — all were doctors.

To be sure, doctors-as-killers are not unique to Islam. Nazi Germany readily found doctors to carry out genocidal programs. Nor did the Soviet Union lack for physicians in its "re-education" facilities. More recently, a Tokyo doctor was convicted of planting sarin gas on subway cars as part of a terrorist plot.

What needs to be understood is the intersection of ideology and theology. The intellectual class is often the source of radicalism. Socialism, philosopher Friedrich Hayek noted, did not begin as a working-class movement. It was a "construction" of "second-hand dealers in ideas," including "professional

men and technicians, such as scientists and doctors."

Islamism shares this connection of education, class and radicalism. Al Qaeda was formed in the 1980s with the merger of bin Laden's "Afghan" Arabs and 2 Egyptian terrorist groups that trace their roots to the Muslim Brotherhood, headed in the 1950s by the Egyptian scholar Sayyid Qutb.

Sayyid Qutb is the godfather of Islamism terrorism. His writings are to Islamism what Marx's *Das Kapital* was to communism.

Qutb, who studied in the United States in the 1940s, hated the West. American men were interested only in "money-grubbing and exploitation." The women were worse. "The American girl," Qutb wrote in *The America I Have Seen*, "knows seductiveness lies in the round breasts, the full buttocks, and in the shapely thighs, sleek legs — and she shows all this and does not hide it."

Qutb blamed Judaism, Christianity and secularism for mankind's degeneration and thought only jihad would cleanse Islam of the Western contagion. In his writings he called for "a revolutionary program" to impose the Muslim legal code of Shariah on the world and to restore the proper relationship between man and God.

This should sound familiar. Qutb's theocratic paradise echoes Marx's socialist utopia. Qutb effectively inserted a political creed — a world-transforming revolution — into Islam, a religion that traditionally eschewed political extremism.

And therein is the clue to doctors becoming terrorists. Like communism and fascism, Islamism is a totalitarian ideology. But it is also spiritually motivated. Any material dimension to Islamism — grievances about Islamophobia, American support for Israel, etc. — is secondary to its spiritual dreams.

Political philosopher Eric Voegelin



Fred Sebastian

coined the term pneumopathological to describe those who indulge in psychological fantasies rather than understand the world in its reality. Such people dwell in a "second-order reality." This "reality" doesn't refer to particular goals, but rather to a state of mind that allows them to regard mass murder as a magical tool for reordering the world.

Islamist terrorism is pneumopathological because it's a form of spiritual arrogance, a symptom of a disease in which, as political philosopher Barry Cooper states, "evil assumes the form of spirituality."

You might recall the TV image of the burning man shouting "Allah, Allah" as he charged a policeman at Glasgow airport. You don't invoke God when your flesh is on fire unless your mind is so consumed by spiritual arrogance that it overrides your oath to do no harm.

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