

We must avoid fatal folly that helped to create Europe's 'leaderless jihad'

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CONSIDER this moment. The young jihadist Mohamed Merah, 23, a Frenchman of Algerian background, has recently killed three French soldiers, two of African heritage and one West Indian. He did this to avenge the actions of French soldiers in Afghanistan. He said to one of the soldiers he killed: "You killed my brothers; I kill you."

Now he has gone to a modest Jewish school in a peaceful, middle-class suburb of Toulouse and shot a rabbi and his two young sons. At this moment, he chases after an eight-year-old girl. When he catches her, he holds her by the hair while he reloads the gun, then shoots her in the head. All this he has filmed. Later, during the 32-hour police siege that finally ended, as Merah had wanted it to, in his death, Merah tells police he acted in revenge for Palestinian children killed by Israelis.

What else do we know about Merah? We know that he visited Afghanistan in 2010 and went to several other Middle Eastern nations. Then, last year, he spent two months in Pakistan. He told police he was trained by al-Qa'ida in Waziristan, a tribal redoubt for global jihadi terrorists. He also claimed that al-Qa'ida gave him money.

What else? Merah's stepfather had been detained in Syria for running an al-Qa'ida safe house. He was convicted in Toulouse for recruiting people to join al-Qa'ida in Iraq. Merah's brother, charged with complicity in the latest killings, has said how proud he is of Merah.

The Left, liberal interpretation of Merah is that while his actions were despicable he is really a victim, marginalised in France by his background.

The most famous and important such interpretation comes from Tariq Ramadan, professor of Islamic Studies at Oxford University, and often hailed as a kind of moderate Islamist.

He did not justify or support Merah's murders. But he wrote: "The story of Mohamed Merah holds up a mirror to the face of France; he ends up a jihadi without real conviction, after having been a citizen deprived of true dignity ... rather like an overgrown adolescent, unemployed, at a loose end, soft-hearted but also disturbed and incoherent."

Tariq Ramadan also wrote: "His political thought is that of a young man adrift, imbued neither with the values of Islam or driven by racism and anti-Semitism."

The polar opposite of that interpretation is offered by the French newspaper Le Figaro, which wrote: "The terrorist wanted to show his hatred for France by targeting the military and the school ... He was supported by his family and probably also by a network. This monster is the creation of a suburban counter-culture that is alienated

from our country's legal basis. It's too easy just to swallow yet again the eternal sermon of sociologists or demographers who - if they recognise this isolation at all - are happy to make the state solely responsible for it. The social difficulties do not justify the bitterness felt by this counter-culture in its struggle for dominance ... Terrorised France is sitting on top of a volcano."

The key difference between these interpretations is that Le Figaro's is consistent with the facts; Tariq Ramadan's pertains entirely to fantasy.

How do Merah's murders differ from those of Anders Breivik in Norway or the American staff sergeant in Afghanistan?

Insofar as Breivik was a coherent far-Rightist, he is similar to Merah. But very few such far-Right outfits produce competent terrorists and their support base is tiny. The American sergeant will be tried in due course, but every sinew of the American military institution is against the things he did. Breivik's family disowned him. The American's family will surely disown his actions.

Merah's actions are entirely different. Although far more murderous than most, they are part of a huge wave of anti-Semitic violence, virtually all of it originating in France's Muslim community, which has swept over France in the past 15 years. Insane demonising of Israel is part of this.

Of course, the vast majority of France's six million or so Muslims do not engage in anti-Semitic violence. The vast majority of Muslims in all Western societies are law-abiding. But the minority who are attracted to a jihadist interpretation is disturbingly large.

This is in part because many, if not most, mainstream interpretations of Islam contain within their cosmology a view of the West that is essentially negative, if not hostile.

European security figures believe that "leaderless jihad" is a new and growing threat. Because Western security forces have been so successful in hunting down, arresting or stopping al-Qa'ida plotters, the global jihadi movement is adapting. It is emphasising rapid training for recruits from Western societies and sending them back to act on their own, rather than in cells.

This handicaps Western police forces. What would civil libertarians say if the police had tried to take any preventive action before Merah committed his murders, on the basis of his associations or internet usage? It is impossible.

There is no evidence that Merah was deranged or particularly isolated. He travelled easily in the Middle East, he had a close relationship with his family. It is more than likely, as is the case with the vast majority of jihadist murderers, he made a rational commitment to the Islamist jihadist ideology.

France has Europe's largest Muslim population. Many of them went to France as asylum-seekers. All over Europe, Muslim Brotherhood members found asylum from persecution in North Africa, then set up Muslim Brotherhood organisations in Europe. The failure of North Africans to integrate in Europe, similar to the situation of many

Pakistanis in Britain, cannot be blamed predominantly on the host society. Chinese, Indian and other immigrants have been very successful.

Rather, what is clear is that there was a vast, unregulated Muslim immigration into Europe, much of it under the guise of asylum-seeking, which has been catastrophically unsuccessful.

France's President, Nicolas Sarkozy, merely acknowledged the obvious by drawing the connection between this immigration and crime. Immigration into Australia has been, in contrast, very successful, mainly because it has been legal and orderly. Since Labor dismantled John Howard's Pacific Solution, some 16,000 people have arrived in Australia in unlawful boats, the majority of them Muslim and from countries with strong traditions of Islamic extremism.

Some of the people charged with terrorism offences in Australia have come here under the refugee and humanitarian program.

The desire of the Australian public for this inflow to stop is entirely rational and sensible, and not remotely racist. If each of those 16,000 people results in three more coming eventually through family reunion, then that's upwards of 65,000 people who have not been chosen by our immigration program. And, despite a marginal fall in numbers for part of last year, the better established the route becomes the more people it will attract.

The asylum-seeker phenomenon in Europe has been a dismal failure and has introduced a savage new strain of anti-Semitism, anti-social behaviour, alienation and terrorism into that continent. The problem is much smaller in Australia, but it is folly for us to repeat Europe's historic mistake.