

# A New War on Terror?

By Dr. Azeem Ibrahim\*

**J**ust when the threat of Islamist terrorism seemed to be successfully suppressed, the actions of Breivik bring awareness of the evil engendered by other extremist ideologies.

When a Muslim terrorist commits an act of violence, Muslims all over the world tend to be blamed. As soon as an outrage is reported, the media jump to the conclusion that it must be Muslim terrorism. But when it turns out that a white Christian has committed an unspeakably violent act, then he is always a lone wolf. The recent horrific shootings in Norway prompted a rush to judgment by certain irresponsible commentators and bloggers that was soon contradicted by the facts. Like Timothy McVeigh in Oklahoma, we have a new name to add to the list of lone, white extremist murderers of children -- the Norwegian, Anders Behring Breivik.

His bombing of government buildings in Oslo that Friday, followed by the slaughter of around 86 young victims on an island adds a chilling new dimension to Western-Muslim relations. Breivik was not Muslim and his victims were not Muslims and he did not bomb a mosque or a Muslim neighborhood. Fueled by his twisted Islamophobia, he chose instead as his target the "multicultural elites" who he believed were responsible for supporting Muslim immigration into Europe, accusing left-wing politicians in Europe of allowing Muslims to overrun the continent.

Calling himself a Christian conservative, patriot and nationalist, he said in his online manifesto that the "indigenous Europeans" responsible would be punished for their "treasonous acts." So with convoluted logic, Breivik bombed government buildings in Oslo where the leading Labor party was headquartered and he targeted young people gathered at an annual Labor Party summer retreat.



Countries in the European Union are feeling particularly vulnerable to the latent and sometimes overt Islamophobia manifesting itself recently. Germany's leader, Angela Merkel acknowledged publicly that "multiculturalism has failed" and the rise of nationalist, racist movements in Britain are causing deep concern. The European Union with its borderless inclusion of immigrants is currently under severe economic stress as the eurozone is on the brink of collapse. Any economic turmoil allows resentments to surface against the "other" -- usually hardworking immigrants whose relative success is due to working long hours under difficult conditions, unlike the local unemployed white youth with their welfare entitlement mentality. It can be an explosive situation, especially if the immigrants are of another race, language, religion and culture, and Norway has been welcoming in recent years to thousands of refugees from Pakistan, Iraq and Somalia. The Muslim population of Norway is only 1.8 percent, small compared with Germany and France's immigrant populations, but obviously outstanding in a homogenous population such as Norway's.

Once again, we are forced to try to understand the mentality of a violent extremist such as Breivik. As the prescient Molly Ivins said in 2001 about the Oklahoma bombing, "Exactly how a supposed code of honor could drive someone to murder 168 people is beyond me, but it is obviously not unique to McVeigh."

Breivik's 1,500 word online manifesto lacks any inner logic. He identifies with the Knights Templar, predicts a major European war to drive out Islamic influence by 2083, and quotes American Islamophobic bloggers and writers, such as Daniel Pipes and Robert Spencer who runs the Jihad Watch website. Some of the U.S. writers are quick to deny any responsibility for Breivik's actions, in spite of his numerous citations of their anti-Islamist views. Of course they must bear responsibility for motivating Breivik and giving a spurious legitimacy and language for his inchoate views. Parts of the manifesto were taken almost word for word from the writings of "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski, substituting the word "multiculturalism" for "leftism." Breivik's manifesto is a ragtag collection of other people's beliefs emerging as a garbage can of fringe and racist writings from the internet.

What makes a sick thinker move from internet rambolling to cold-blooded murder is going to be a subject for long debate and endless speculation to come. Breivik's situation can be described as something similar to "the banality of evil" or "normalizing the unthinkable", where doing things in an organized and systematic way, such as documenting it in detail in a diary, results in normalizing routine actions that normally would be degrading, murderous, unspeakable. "People do great wrong, not because they are unaware of what they are doing but because they consider it to be right." It will be interesting to see if the Norwegian justice system allows him to testify in court so he can expound in public his extreme nationalist philosophy.

Breivik's violent extremism based on his Islamophobia is particularly shocking when one considers the dramatic reduction in Islamic extremism in recent years. Radical Islamist plots have almost disappeared, thanks to better policing and intelligence work. In 2009, only one out of 294 attacks in six European countries was attributed to Islamists. Common perceptions about terrorism in Europe are misplaced and young Muslim activists are more likely to be concerned about poverty, unemployment and exclusion, just like their Western counterparts. According to a recent Pew Center Global Attitudes study, Muslim countries are just as concerned about Islamic extremism and violence in their own countries, and overall there is a noticeable thaw in Europe and the US in Muslim-Western relations since 2006.

Just when the threat of Islamist terrorism seemed to be successfully contained and suppressed, the actions last Friday of the Norwegian white supremacist, Breivik, has brought about a horrified new awareness of the evil engendered by the continuation of the war on terror. **PR**

#### Note:

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