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CRITIQUING THE CRITICS: debating without venom

by Philip Baum

It certainly ruffled a few feathers. In my last lead editorial, entitled "Christian Fundamentalism & Justiciar Knights", I used the atrocity perpetrated in Norway on 22nd July 2011 as an example of the fact that our security system must be able to counter the threat posed by all those who wish to target it, regardless as to their gender, colour, ethnicity or religion.

Albeit the article focussed on the actions of Anders Behring Breivik, I was careful to cite a Europol Report that stated that "...only 3 out of the 249 terrorist attacks that were perpetrated within the EU in 2010 were carried out by Islamists". Judging by the response, however, it would seem many readers took offence at either the use of the phrase "Christian Fundamentalism" or the analysis of an attack that had been perpetrated against a non-aviation target. In analysing the responses, however, it was interesting to note that, without exception, every negative comment was expressed by an American.

I decided not to respond to people individually, especially as many missive senders had felt the need to express their sentiments with venom and in terms unbecoming of industry professionals. The lead editorial is supposed to be provocative in nature and to encourage debate, but I have little time for expletive-laden correspondence and am concerned when it is drafted by industry insiders. Despite that, I think there is a need to address the issue.

Many of those who wrote in were somehow of the impression that I was against profiling and felt the need to remind me that, "Israel effectively uses racial profiling in her airports to the benefit of its travellers". Obviously the reader is unfamiliar with the fact that I never miss an opportunity (even now) to remind people of the value of profiling! He also stated that, "It works so well that the American TSA is finally being trained to use it as well". Clearly the TSA has to better market its behavioural analysis programme if industry employees are of the belief that it is utilising racial profiling as part of its armoury.

The question though is whether we should profile on the basis of ethnicity and this is where I disagree. The same reader is of the view that due to the higher number of Islamist extremists than Christian extremists, ethnic profiling is justified. "Please tell me how many times you have heard Christian leaders, of any form, in any country, publicly embrace or preach the wilful murder of innocents and the overthrow of governments?...The active proponents of Islam, however, are legion in their preaching of hatred, murder, forced conversion or death, destruction and overthrow of western society in favour of Islamic rule." He adds that, "In a religion of hundreds of millions of adherents there need be only a small percentage that embrace such views, but that small percentage still equates to millions."

Another reader felt that I was trying to be politically correct – something I have always rallied against – and that, "If the point of the story is to say that not ALL terrorists are Islamic, then that was lost in the rush to cuddle up to the Islamic terrorist and label this psycho a 'fundamentalist Christian'. The Christian Bible, fundamentally, states that all men are created in the image of God, therefore, any 'fundamentalist Christian' would not act in such a manner." Still more extreme was the comment that, "Aviation security does not need

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politically correct excrement like this article. That heinous lunatic was about as Christian as Joseph Stalin". I think it fair to point out that the vast majority of Muslims consider Mohammed Atta to be about as good a Muslim as Jesus...

In fact, it is that blinkered view of the world that could be our biggest enemy. I clearly recall the days before 11th September 2001 when the American establishment justified the more intense security measures on flights operating to the United States than for those departing from, or operating within, the country on the basis of a misguided belief that all those who might wish to target aviation somehow lived overseas.

Another reader also took offence at my linking the phrase Christian Fundamentalism with a terrorist attack. "Christian Fundamentalism is a good thing: believe in Christ (God incarnate) to be saved from hell, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, love your neighbour as yourself, and finding peace." Anders Behring Breivik seemingly didn't follow this line of thought....and one reader certainly feels that "It was unconscionable what this person did, but even worse is that this person will not be put to death for what he has done." This brings us to the question as to whether I should have used a non-aviation story to illustrate a point?

I firmly believe that if we operate in a silo and fail to heed the bigger picture, all our frontline efforts are in vain. The type of attack that occurred in Norway could just as easily have been levelled at an airport. Let's not forget that the first attempt to destroy the World Trade Centre in New York was with an improvised explosive device and the best example of liquid explosives being used to kill large numbers of people is Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995.

One reader pointed out that my editorial referred to the existence of "at least seven other 'Justiciar Knights' of his ilk" and commented "that may seem like a lot and, if they perform similar horrific acts as Breivik did, then it's beyond regrettable. Yet it took only about that many Islamic terrorists to kill thousands in coordinated attacks on 9/11".

That's exactly my point, as I do not question the fact that the greatest threat that we face is in the form of Islamic Fundamentalism. It clearly is. However, our security system must be one that addresses all threats and we need to go out of our way to ensure that our screeners do not become so fixated on one threat that they remain blind to the others which are also out there....as it only takes one Breivik...or, if you prefer 21st Century aviation examples, one Zhang Pilin or one David Mark Robinson. And if you don't know who they are, that further illustrates the problem we face! ■

