

We must be clear on who the victims are



WHAT makes an 18-year-old living in a big house with a successful career in prospect turn on two police officers and stab them outside a suburban police station?

How did Numan Haider, a young man from a well-educated Afghan family, get radicalised by Islamic extremists, begin wrapping himself in the Islamic flag, and get to the stage where he would kill — and die — for that cause in a Melbourne carpark?

The Australian security agencies are asking exactly that question. We need to come up with the right answer. Because if all it takes is exposure to extremist Islamist sermons and literature, then we have a real problem. The internet is swimming with the stuff.

Self-styled Jihadis are already coming up with their answers. It is all the fault of Australia, they say. Muslim people are treated so badly they are turning against this country towards its opponents such as Islamic State in northern Iraq and Syria.

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The trouble with explanations like this is that the facts get in the way. The family of Numan Haider left Afghanistan to migrate to Australia. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan was a hardline Islamic state. Coming to Australia meant getting away from that.

And Australia was good to the family. They have a very nice house in a good suburb. The children received a good education. The taxpayers of Australia were pretty good to Numan Haider with schooling and services. The family lived in security and freedom — a lot more than Islamic State would ever give to a minority ethnic or religious group.

The standard analysis is that people turn to extremist groups out of hardship, that some kind of

discrimination or deprivation forces them into anti-social activity. It is not the recent experience. Nearly all the conspirators in the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre had received tertiary education in the West. They did not grow up in refugee camps. They were able to travel and easily assimilate into Western society. It is well known that Osama bin Laden came from an extremely wealthy family and enjoyed a privileged upbringing, including lengthy periods of living in the West. It seems in these cases that affluence contributes more to extremism than poverty. It is possible these privileged young men feel guilty about their money and the ease of their life compared with others in war zones, a guilt that gives extremists plenty to work with.

The next step is to promote a sense of victimhood. Islam was a great civilisation that ruled much of the world, excelling in science and art. But it fell behind the West. It lost its foothold in Europe. Its homelands were divided after

World War I. The radicals represent its people as downtrodden and suffering. Only by re-establishing a caliphate, they say, can its honour and prestige be restored. In fact, the fight in Iraq and Syria is between Muslim and Muslim. But the preachers of hate want to blame a whole host of others for the problems: the West for dividing Islam or the Jews for establishing a homeland of their own.

THEY reach out to disaffected youth with stories of horror and shame that must be avenged, if not in Iraq, then in Brisbane or Endeavour Hills. Any interest this evokes from police or the security services is just further justification for radicalisation.

The interest of law enforcement agencies is not the cause of radicalisation. It is the result. But it too can be turned to propaganda purposes. Blaming authorities is a standard political technique. Left-wing activists always blame the police for causing violence at their demonstrations.

Deakin University student Tahmid Mirza, a jihadi propagandist and supporter of Islamic State, was quoted in the weekend press explaining why he has rejected this country, a country that gave him a home and an education: "... many Muslims have been harassed, betrayed and in fact lied to by the government and the so-called 'security' intelligence."

In other words, he is a victim. The real victims here are not the aid workers or journalists who have been beheaded by Islamic State. The victims here are not the Yazidis of Northern Iraq facing genocide and extermination. The real victims are those who were taken in by Australia, given a home, healthcare, a free education and subsidised university places.

Such a terrible country. Why would any Muslim want to live here?

The fact that so many do tells you that things are not really as Mr Mirza claims. A lot more Muslims are trying to get into Australia than are trying to leave it.

This idea that Australia's

treatment of Muslims is to blame for terrorism is so fanciful you would wonder how anyone could believe it. But it is standard-issue opinion among university academics, ABC journalists and Greens senators. They act on the principle that "My enemy's enemy is my friend". Since they don't like open liberal Western capitalist society, they feel natural support for those who regard themselves as at war with Western civilisation. The brutality of Islamic State does not seem to worry them nearly so much as the imagined "brutality" of the Australian Government.

Thank heavens, real people don't fall for such rubbish. They know our society, for all its faults, is worth protecting. They are not taken in by the claims of the extremists or their odd bedfellows on the Australian political Left.

The people on the front line in the effort against terrorism are not the problem, they are a crucial part of the solution.

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