

How to counter Islamophobia

ISLAMOPHOBIA is the fear, prejudice and hatred against Islam and Muslims, especially in the West. It is based on stereotyping all Muslims as extremists, lunatics and/or terrorists and is probably the greatest threat confronting the Muslim world today.

Beyond the Wall: A new mindset
BY K.K. TAN

On a global level, there may be some localised incidents based on fears or prejudices against other religions, but nothing comparable to the scale of Islamophobia. Why? Islamophobia became more widespread after the co-ordinated attacks in the US 16 years ago, on Sept 11, 2001 by the terror group called Al-Qaeda, which had its origins in Afghanistan when it was under military occupation by the then Soviet Union (1978-1989). The CIA was responsible for creating Al-Qaeda at that time to serve US interests against the Soviets.

"Sept 11" can be considered a game changer in world history when the most powerful country in the world was seemingly brought to its knees by 19 self-professed "Muslim jihadists", using four hijacked passenger planes. Nearly 3,000 people were killed and 6,000 people injured. The iconic World Trade Centre was destroyed and the Pentagon (Department of Defence) partly damaged.

Because the 19 terrorists openly proclaimed themselves to be "Muslim jihadists", the public backlash against Muslims in general in the US and Europe was severe.

The US government retaliated aggressively, not necessarily correctly in all cases, against selective Muslim countries such as Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The rest of what happened and how Al-Qaeda was crippled militarily and the killing of its leader Osama bin Laden on May 2, 2011 (about 10 years later) in Pakistan, is now history.

The actions via military attacks, drones or otherwise until today, by the Western powers against

selective Muslim groups and countries, have been given a major boost by the new US president, Donald Trump, who is widely perceived to be the most anti-Muslim US president ever. These actions have subtly reinforced the psychology of Islamophobia in the subconscious minds of many non-Muslims.

The rise in Islamophobia is giving credence to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the late US political scientist Samuel Huntington's theory of the "Clash of Civilisations". It is as though the entire Muslim world is at war with the Christian world or it is Islam versus Christianity.

This may be precisely what the extremists from both sides (Muslims and Christians) want but why should the peace and justice loving people of all religions allow it? Both these global monotheist religions have far more similarities in content and origin than their perceived minor differences, which the extremists are playing up and exploiting to the hilt to cause strife.

Extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda, IS (in Syria and Iraq) and the Abu Sayyaf (in southern Philippines) may seem to be losing militarily, but their influence like the Taliban and other terror groups around the world have not waned and should never be underestimated.

I have written and alerted readers in this column as far back as 2014, even before IS became a global monster (not just in Syria and Iraq), on the need, not only to defeat this insidious terror movement militarily but also to educate the alienated and disenchanted Muslim youths who are attracted to IS ideology and to explain to them why it is so wrong to blame, vent their anger and inflict harm on innocent people for the suffering of the Muslims, especially the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian conflict appears to be the cause celebre used by Muslim extremists and terrorists to

recruit disenchanted Muslim youths to join their movements.

For nearly 30 years since my student days in Britain, I have written about, campaigned and demonstrated in the campuses and streets for the rights of the oppressed Palestinian people against the Zionist aggressor, Israel. Even though I am a non-Muslim, I have supported and fought for the Palestinian cause on a matter of principle based on truth and justice, so yes, I do have the locus standi to defend the oppressed Muslim people and to write about the subject of Islamophobia.

Like most smear campaigns, the proponents of Islamophobia created and promoted negative perceptions of a targeted group that they do not like or have a hidden agenda against. And like other smear campaigns, there are some basis used by the opponents of Islam to justify the negative stereotyping of Muslims as extremists and/or terrorists.

The Muslim extremists and terrorists are largely responsible for Islamophobia. They are falling straight into the "trap" of the enemies of Islam who are whipping up anti-Muslim sentiments. Since most terror attacks are caused by people professing to be "Muslim jihadists", it is easy for the right-wing white supremacists to use these incidents to promote the negative perceptions of Muslims and Islam.

The irony is that extremist Muslim supremacists in Muslim majority countries, including Malaysia, are using similar arguments or rationale against non-Muslim minorities as the ones used by the extremist white supremacists against Muslim minorities in the West, who, like the non-Muslim Asians and black people, also suffer from racism.

It is as though these extremist Muslims are working in cohorts with the pro-Zionist white extremists who are oppressing the Muslim minorities in the West and the Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories. The real



enemies of Islam, besides the Zionists and the right-wing white supremacists, are the self-professed "Muslim jihadists" who resort to acts of terror to harm people, thereby undermining the image of Islam.

Every time there is an act of terror committed by Muslim extremists, we hear strong condemnations by the non-Muslim leaders but somehow, the reactions from the moderate and civil-minded Muslim community leaders in general seem to be rather mute or even silent. This gives the false impression that they sympathise with the terrorists or are condoning their acts.

Herein lies the biggest challenge needed to counter Islamophobia.

It is not enough to rely mostly on non-Muslim leaders to openly condemn acts of terrorism by self-professed "Muslim jihadists" such as the IS. In fact, such a scenario would only reinforce the negative perception of Muslims.

Moderate Muslim leaders, either

in the Muslim minority or Muslim majority countries, must do much more to speak out loudly and clearly and in unison against acts of terror anywhere in the world.

They must also play a more proactive and pre-emptive role in educating Muslim youths about the evils of extremism and terrorism.

They must constantly remind Muslims that it is wrong, unjust and anti-Islamic (saying "un-Islamic" is not strong enough) to harm, kill or massacre innocent people who play no role in oppressing the Palestinians or other Muslims.

Islam is a religion of peace, justice and compassion and no Muslim extremists should be allowed to hijack and/or defame the good name of Islam.

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