

Europeans are right to worry about homegrown terrorism, but the Net, not Islam, is the real problem, writes Muhammad Abdul Bari

Virtual reality

There is a powerful narrative today about how many young European Muslims are susceptible to terrorism, how Islam leads to radicalisation and how Muslims, because of their creed, choose to live in ghettos and therefore create swamps that breed terrorists. This narrative's most extreme form is the idea of "Eurabia", an incendiary term that purportedly describes a phenomenon by which Muslim hordes are now contaminating Europe's very DNA.

From this narrative, fear of homegrown terrorism resonates the most, as does the impetus to deal with Muslims as a foreign foe. So, too, does the idea that accommodating religious differences is dangerous. A false dichotomy is created in which Muslims must choose between a western and European identity or a supposedly separate Islamic identity.

But the relationship between European Muslims' faith, and identification with European nations, seldom conforms to the "Eurabia" stereotype. A wide-ranging

Addressing the sense of injustice, siege and alienation faced by young Muslims is a victory for European liberal values

global Gallup study that culminated in the book *Who Speaks for Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think*, by John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, includes detailed and sophisticated analysis of European Muslims' attitudes. The results suggest that religious and national identities are complementary, not competing, concepts.

Muslims living in Paris, London and Berlin are more religious than the general public. But they are just as likely as anyone else to identify with their nation and its democratic institutions, and just as likely to reject violence.

The prevailing narrative often regards mosques and Islamic associations as spaces for radicalisation, but I contend that some young people are turning away from these peaceful institutions. This may be because mosques and Islamic associations find it difficult to compete with the promises of solace available through the internet, where voices can address political issues, feed off injustices around the world

and launch calls to arms that can ultimately be murderous.

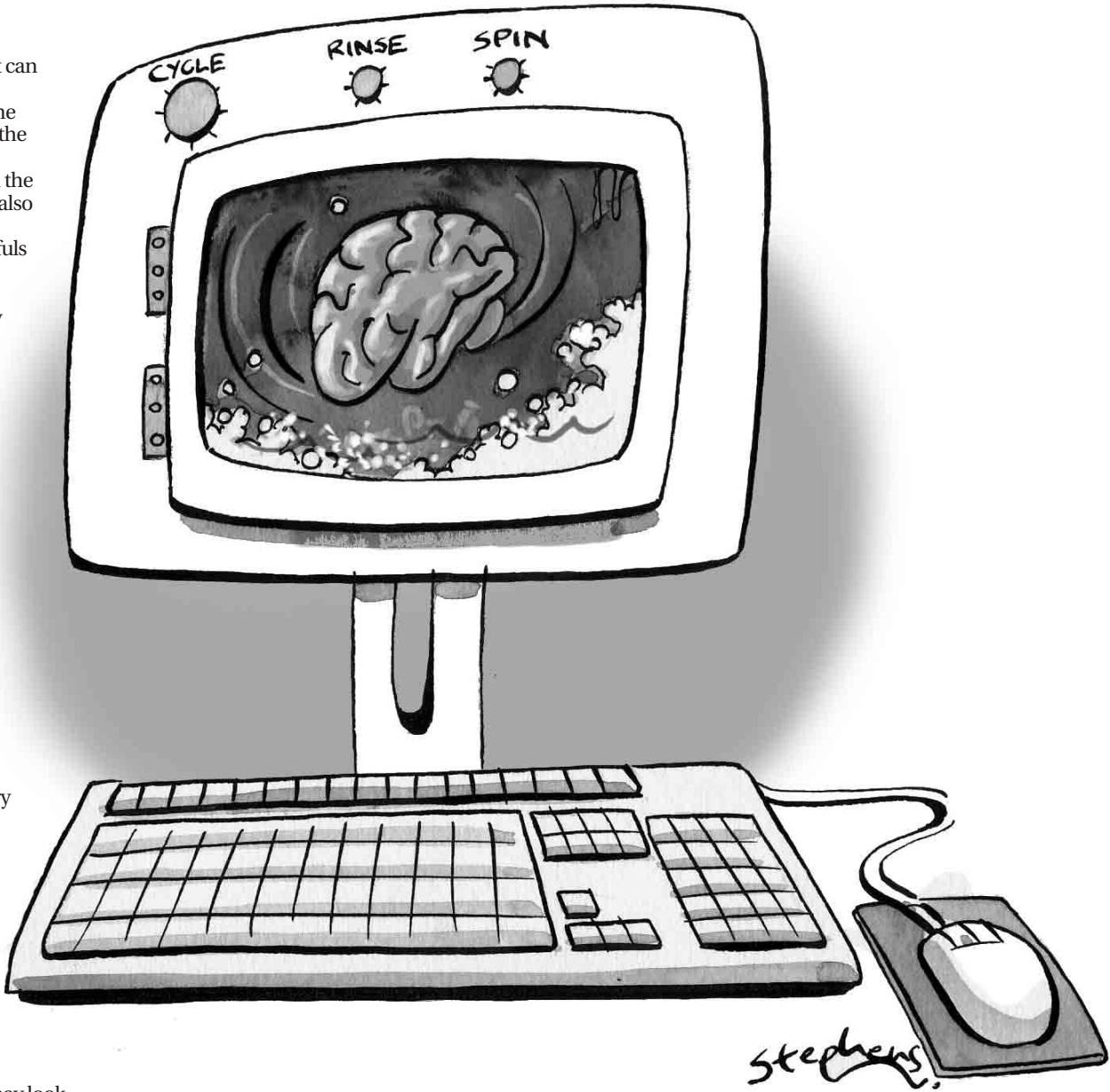
The internet is where some young Muslims succumb to the alluring narrative of Islam constructed by those behind the terror attacks of our age. We also know that the internet's devastating impact on handfuls of young people is not confined to the Muslim community, as evidenced by the tragic events in Bridgend, in Britain, where more than 20 young people, seemingly connected through the internet, have committed suicide in under two years.

For some young Muslims, the paramount subculture is virtual, and it operates on the fringes of Muslim communities, whether in Europe or in the Islamic world. The story it presents is of a world beset by real injustices, for which the only solution is violent action that will supposedly lead to the victory of a monolithic Muslim world. Never mind the inconvenient truth that the acts may be theologically impermissible; the ends justify the means, and there really is no alternative.

Such a narrative is appealing because it feeds into the alienation that many young Muslims feel. Some may look to unpopular and unjust foreign adventures in Iraq as examples of the futility of lawful political action. Others feel suffocated by the prevailing toxic discourse that casts European Muslims as foreign, alien and suspect. Laws enacted to single out and "persecute" Muslims, and statements that affirm the Islamophobia of the media, buttress the absurd notion that what we are really witnessing is a "war on Islam".

In Muslim communities everywhere, there is a need to challenge this narrative by making known Islam's theological repudiation of violence. We must redouble our efforts to reach out in local communities and demonstrate the realities of our faith.

Addressing the sense of injustice, siege



and alienation faced by young Muslims is not a victory for the extremists. Rather, it is a victory for European liberal values because it demonstrates that every individual and every minority is of equal worth.

Indeed, we should view neither homegrown terrorism nor the presence of Muslims as new to Europe. Islam's interaction with European society sparked a flowering of knowledge, and large numbers of Muslims have inhabited the Balkans and eastern and central Europe for hundreds of years. They helped rebuild the economies of war-torn Europe in the 1950s, arriving as immigrants and then making Europe their home. In almost every field of life, Muslims have been an integral part of the European tapestry.

All Europeans, including those who are Muslim, are right to worry about the issue of homegrown terrorism. Our right to security and life is paramount, as is the need to inhabit a space free of prejudice and suspicion. The July 7 bombings in 2005 in my home city of London brought this into sharp relief. The victims were of all faiths and races, including Muslims, as were the heroes who helped London get back on its feet so quickly.

Londoners' collective message after 7/7 was decisive, and it must be Europe's message as well: we will not allow such atrocities to divide us.

Muhammad Abdul Bari is secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain. Copyright: Project Syndicate/Europe's World

James Dorn

What price stability?

The US Treasury's takeover of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the nation's largest mortgage financiers, was predictable. The drive for profits while housing prices were rising, and the expectation that the federal government would not let these market-socialists fail, allowed Fannie and Freddie to accumulate a huge portfolio of mortgages and mortgage-backed securities. Now that the asset price bubble in housing is being deflated and Fannie and Freddie's capital is shrinking, the Fed is compelled to come to the rescue in order to "stabilise" US and global financial markets.

The real issue is: "what next?" The two government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs) are going to be allowed to continue to expand their portfolios until the end of next year, but will then have to begin trimming back by about 10 per cent per year. In the past, Fannie and Freddie showered large sums on members of Congress to win votes and retain their privileged position. Although those payments are now illegal, Fannie and Freddie have many friends on Capitol Hill who believe the GSEs are essential to affordable housing; they will fight hard to maintain the status quo.

Fundamentally, the Fannie and Freddie debacle is about the role of government in a free society. If government is limited to protecting people and property, and individuals are allowed to keep the fruits of their labour and to bear the risks of loss, then capital will be efficiently allocated.

The secret to a harmonious financial system is to get institutions and incentives right. Experience has shown that market liberalism best directs resources to where they have the most value to society. The so-called voluntary principle, based on private property and the rule of law, allows information to be effectively processed by those individuals who have a stake in the results. Effective private property rights mean that rewards and

losses are concentrated on decision-makers, not taxpayers. The hybrid nature of GSEs – whereby profits flow to shareholders and managers while losses are socialised – distorts institutions and incentives, and misdirects capital. Congress then calls for more regulation and delegates power to some regulatory agency to oversee the GSEs. However, when regulators have little to gain from efficiency, and losses due to lax regulation accrue to taxpayers, what incentive is there to be prudent?

Preserving the status quo by maintaining Fannie and Freddie's crony capitalism would expand the size and scope of government, rather than make individuals responsible for their mistakes.

The problem is that once markets are polluted with privileged firms, private entrepreneurs will be crowded out. Instead of moving to a self-regulating market, the GSEs will be made to obey new regulations, which often have unintended consequences. The takeover of Fannie and Freddie could cost taxpayers US\$200 billion to US\$300 billion – and far more if housing prices fail to stabilise.

Once the door to government intervention is opened, more people and firms want favours. Keeping interest rates lower than market rates to benefit GSEs distorts capital markets. Contagion is often blamed on "market failure". In fact, if true private markets exist and the locus of responsibility is on individuals rather than being socialised, errors of judgment would not accumulate as they do under market socialism or crony capitalism.

The next administration and Congress will have to decide whether to shut down Fannie and Freddie or continue on the path of market socialism. Choosing the latter would mean more regulation and state control, and less freedom. It would change the distribution of risk but not reduce risk.

When the US Treasury is raided to defend the government's credibility to guarantee GSE debt, it may calm markets for a time. Yet, in the long run, the drifts towards socialism and increased government borrowing requirements discourage foreign investment, decrease private saving, increase interest rates and slow US growth. That is a high price to pay for "stability".

The Fannie and Freddie debacle is about the role of government in a free society

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Other Voices

McCain is taking a big risk with Palin

David Ignatius

In the military culture that shaped John McCain, there is no more important responsibility than the promotion boards that select the right officers for top positions of command. It's a sacred trust in Senator McCain's world, because people's lives are at stake.

Senator McCain wrote in his memoir of the officer's responsibility for those who serve under him: "He does not risk their lives and welfare for his sake, but only to answer the shared duty they are called to answer."

Senator McCain made the most important command decision of his life when he chose Sarah Palin as his vice-presidential nominee. Two weeks later, it is still puzzling that he selected a person who, for all her admirable qualities, is not prepared by experience or interest to be commander-in-chief. No promotion board in history would have made such a decision.

Because of Mrs Palin's dynamism and political appeal, she's being hailed as an "inspired choice", to use President George W. Bush's words. She has energised the Republican ticket: the polls show it, as do the enthusiastic crowds. And if a politician's primary responsibility is to get elected, this may indeed have been a sublime choice. But was it the right one? And what does it tell us about Senator McCain?

Senator McCain is 72, and he has had a serious bout with a virulent form of cancer. Thus, he had a special responsibility to pick a running mate who could be, in effect, a deputy commander – someone who could take over if his health should fail. America is at war,

as Senator McCain so often reminds us, and he was picking someone who might be responsible for its security.

Senator McCain's appeal is that he presents himself as a man of principle, who will do the right thing even if it is politically costly. He did that in championing the troop surge in Iraq, and he has taken courageous stands in the Senate for years. He defied his party on issues he believed in, from ethics reform to climate change and torture.

But Senator McCain also likes to win. And he has an impulsive streak, sometimes bordering on recklessness, which is described by many of his friends and by Senator McCain himself in his memoir, *Faith of My Fathers*. The desire to win, and the impulsiveness, converged in his decision to pick Mrs Palin – a bold move that has allowed the senator to regain his maverick identity.

Mrs Palin is an immensely engaging political personality. But that doesn't make her a suitable commander-in-chief for a nation at war. She has almost no knowledge or experience of foreign affairs; no military leader would entrust command to someone so inexperienced or unprepared.

Barack Obama faces a similar question, but he has been in the national spotlight for four years and has travelled, studied and prepared – and he chose, in Joe Biden, a running mate who is one of the Senate's genuine experts on foreign policy. The country will watch Mrs Palin's performance in interviews and debates, but right now she seems a genuinely risky bet.

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Ignorant warmongers retrace the steps of history

Jonathan Power

Does America know what a dangerous game its leaders are playing? Does it know its history? And do the leaders of Europe, who should be a brake on American determination, go along with Washington because they are almost equally ignorant? After all, none of the present crop of European leaders has had time to study much history, and all of them made their way up because of their skill and knowledge of domestic affairs. They have had little or no preparation for the affairs of the world.

On the Russian, Georgian and Ukrainian side, one can make the same argument: ignorance reigns, so history can be repeated.

The first world war was the most important, geopolitically, of the last century. After 43 years of unbroken peace, Europe slipped into war with barely a diplomatic thought.

The issues were there: whether or not Austrian power could prevail in Italy; the degree of influence Russia was allowed to enjoy in the Ottoman empire; the balance of power between Prussia and Austria in Germany; and that between Prussia and France across Europe. But Europe had managed these tensions for four decades – until an assassin's bullet murdered Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, and leaders across Europe lost their perspective.

Without this tragic mistake of statecraft, owing more to insouciance than malevolence, there would not have been the massive carnage of 1914-1918. There would have been no Great Depression, no rise of Hitler, no consolidation of the autocracy of Stalin, no second world war, no unilater

al development of the nuclear bomb and no cold war.

Yet the people of all sides enthusiastically supported a war their leaders had led them, blindfolded, into. War was terrible, yes, but it was also necessary and sometimes splendid.

Leo Tolstoy, in *War and Peace*, made a similar point about the French war led by Napoleon against Russia: "[War] is here!", cried Prince Andrey. "This is it! God, I'm scared, but it's marvellous!" Later in the day, wiser after tens of thousands on both sides had been killed, he exclaimed:

The end of the cold war was the time to stop this discredited, macho diplomacy [towards Russia]

"How can God look down from heaven and listen to it all?"

"But for us, the descendants of these people," Tolstoy wrote in his novel, "as we contemplate this vast accomplishment in all its enormity and seek to penetrate its dreadful simplicity, the explanations seem inadequate."

"It is beyond our comprehension that millions of Christian men should have killed and tortured each other just because Napoleon was a megalomaniac, [Tsar] Alexander was obstinate, the English were devious and the Duke of Oldenburg was badly done by ... the more we try to explain away such phenomena in rational terms, the more irrational and in-

comprehensible they become." Interestingly, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, in a speech three years ago, condemned "balance of power" politics as outmoded and dangerous. "We tried this before; it led to the Great War," she said.

Yet she and her president, George W. Bush, are trying it again. Having moved Nato up to Russia's borders, attempted to encircle Russia in the south and tried to enlist India and China in the east, they are playing this old game. With what intent? The end of the cold war was the time to stop this discredited, macho diplomacy. It was a time to build a more stable and harmonious relationship with Russia. Bill Clinton was not a student of history and he did not take the opportunity. Mr Bush built on his mistakes.

Americans preparing to vote in November have the chance to repudiate this legacy, incarnate now in the candidacy of Republican John McCain. If they vote for Democrat Barack Obama, it will not be a cure-all, but he will be a moderating force.

Before they vote, the electorate needs to study some history. So do the candidates. And so, too, do the European leaders, both of the west and east. Only then can we avert a new cold war with all the "dreadful simplicity" it would bring in its wake.

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A Myanmar famine spreads unchecked

Ian Holliday

The spectre of famine is looming over Myanmar's Chin state. Early this year, a rare species of bamboo that flowers roughly every half-century produced a bumper harvest of fruit and seed, which was eaten mainly by rats. For several months now, a superbreed of huge rodents has descended on towns and villages to devour crops and provisions intended for human consumption. Already, the plague has taken many people to the brink of starvation and left the entire state in desperate need of food aid.

Maotam, as the cyclical bamboo flowering is called by local people, is not unique to western Myanmar, where Chin state is located.

Indeed, the current devastation started across the border in northeastern India, in 2006, spread to Bangladesh in January this year and only moved inside Myanmar in March. Since then, however, its impact on the Chin people has been catastrophic.

Chin state is a small and inaccessible part of a closed country. Its mainly Christian population of half a million lives off the land in hill rice farms surrounded by bamboo forest. Transport links even with towns and cities in Myanmar are poor, and contact with the outside world is slight. Throughout Myanmar's long years of entrenched military government, the Chin National Front has kept up a low-grade insurgency.

News of a developing famine first reached the outside world in June. Lengthy analyses were then issued by the Chin Human Rights Organisation in July, and by the Project Maje information group last

month. In response, some emergency food aid was delivered by the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme.

Nevertheless, messages sent through church networks indicate that hunger remains pervasive. Many people pawn or sell possessions to buy food. Some borrow from moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates. Others dig for wild root crops in the forest. Gradually, Chin society is falling apart as residents abandon villages, schools close and crime rises.

Myanmar already has one major humanitarian crisis on its hands. Cyclone Nargis swept the south of the country at the start of May, and around 140,000 people either perished in the storm or are missing, presumed dead. However, while rescue and rehabilitation services are stretched, assistance is being delivered to affected areas by ordinary people, government officials and aid agencies.

By contrast, the famine spreading across Chin state is largely unaddressed. People are not driving cars laden with food into the Chin hills. To do so would require a return journey of many days from Yangon or Mandalay.

The government is not redirecting services to the disaster zone. It has already diverted as much as it can to Nargis relief. Aid agencies are not present on the ground. They find it almost impossible to access the area. Direct assistance to the Chin people is therefore urgently needed.

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