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SUBWAYS OF TERROR

Bombs are bad for one's health. Whether one considers the full WHO definition or even the most basic criterion of remaining alive and sentient, bombs tend to militate towards diseases — social, physical, psychological and spiritual. This applies equally whether one is a resident of London, Belfast or Baghdad. The question, in the public health context, is to ask, where the bombs come from?

The arms industry. Like tobacco and drug barons, they're not fussy. Child soldiers in central Africa, both sides in the Iran–Iraq war, rapturous Millenarian's in Midwestern US, police-state Saudi Arabia, über-fortress Israel, the Mujaheddin in Afghanistan ... theirs is a toxic egalitarianism, an amorality that makes Satan look like a Tupperware matron. The UK is the second biggest arms dealer in the world. Our taxes, our labour.

Oil and other demons. Full-spectrum dominance, the goal of the current US administration (to which our British government seems tethered), is incompatible with democratic self-determination. Over a period of 80 years, from Morocco to Indonesia, funding, arms and coup d'états have allowed despotisms to strangle progressive movements. War fuels political and economic dominance. Our leaders seem to be following the apocalyptic texts of Huntington¹ and Fukuyama,² if not to the letter, then certainly in spirit. Perhaps, some day, real freedom will out, but it will require a process. Witness Venezuela, Bolivia, the Mexican Zapatistas and events in other Latin American countries today, where redistributive mass movements are attempting to transform the economic order — but think how many revolutionary processes, from that of Simon Bolivar onwards, it has taken to get to this stage.

Broken mirrors. In the absence of a coherent left-wing alternative, frustration and anger over the very real injustices in the world and the impotence of Muslim nations in the face of the dominant West tend to drive conflicted youth into the toxic arms of the Jihadists. The pre-requisite of peace is economic and political justice. However, there are major structural features in the Islamic religion and society that need a good dose of EBM. Concepts extant since Islam's 1st century have always vied with the rationalist and mystical visions of the faith, but revelling in a kind of pornographic situationism, the Islamist

supremacist movement shifts through a Borgesian diorama of chat rooms and message boards instantly accessible to millions. Just as, during the 1980s in the West, the discourse shifted to the right, and we got heroin and MRSA, so in Muslim lands and diasporas, it switched from the economic to the tribal, and we got the Jihadists, this process being concretised through an obsession with ritual. A florid shell with an empty core into which can be pumped all manner of ills. A real retrovirus. These pathologies are related and are all about sociopolitical control.

A potted prescription for good health. These are complex diseases linked to the human condition, but as with STDs this does not mean they cannot be tackled. In the UK, we must engage with especially urban youth on all levels: theological, economic, political and artistic. Challenge, subvert, debunk and expose the pornographies of the preachers; get down on the Muslim street; seed emotive, rational and mystical ideas of liberation; and combat nihilistic exclusion and psychotic exclusivism! We need community psychiatry, Franz Fanon-style.³ But these things do not occur in a vacuum and there also needs to be geopolitical action. The madrassah 'stormtrooper' mentality can be rooted out with real education, debt cancellation and fair trade, in which military funding is switched to health and land redistributed, and where a locally-drawn, mixed economy and genuine (not tribal/feudal) grassroots democracy are engendered. Stop trying to monopolise control of resources. Get the arms and the armies out! They are part of the problem, not part of the solution and the policies of our elites generate problems which then 'compel' them to send in the troops. As with AIDS, it will require a 50-year, grass-roots cultural and political revolution. Will this happen? Read the last paragraph of Middlemarch. We must not be like the suicide bombers, we must not lose hope, we must not abrogate the centres of our beings. Yes, bombs are bad for one's health, but the first bombs to explode are those of the mind and the spirit.

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