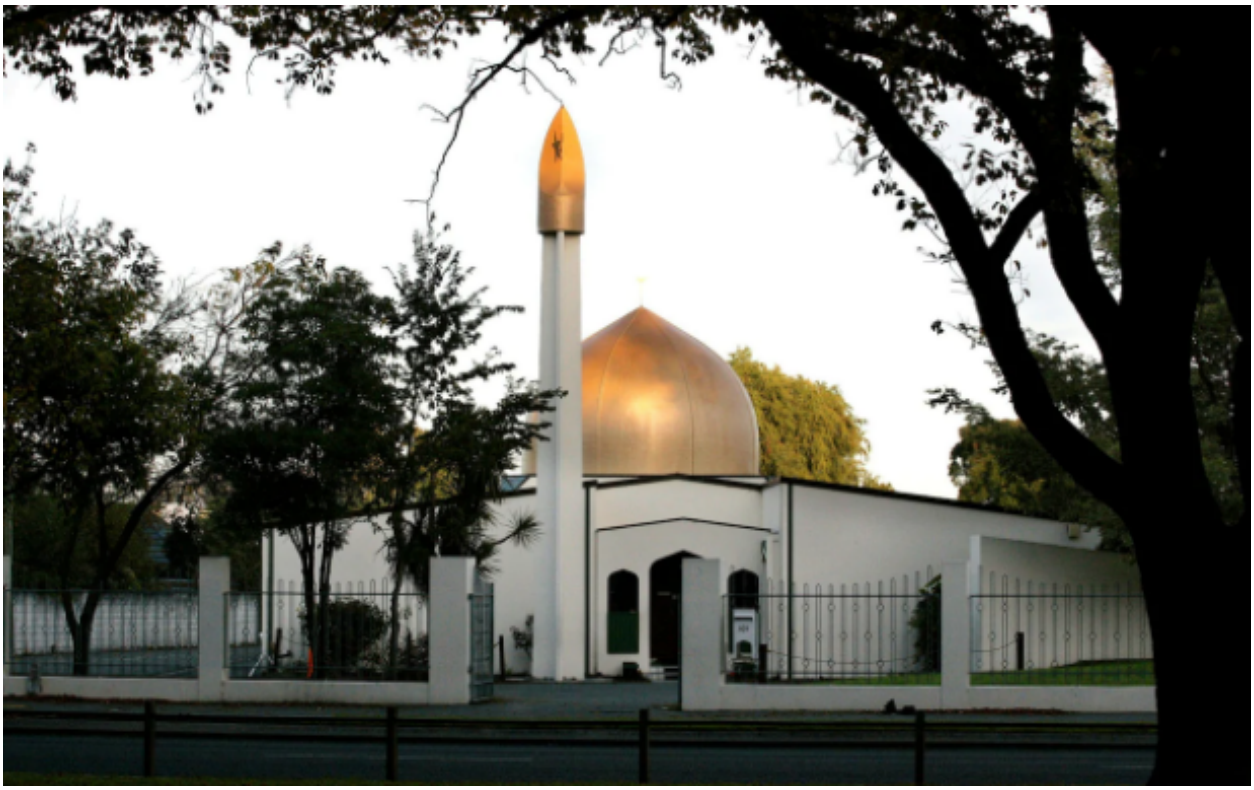
The Telegraph

To prevent another Christchurch, Islam must confront the attacks in its name that have radicalised the West

YAHYA CHOLIL STAQUF | 25 MARCH 2019



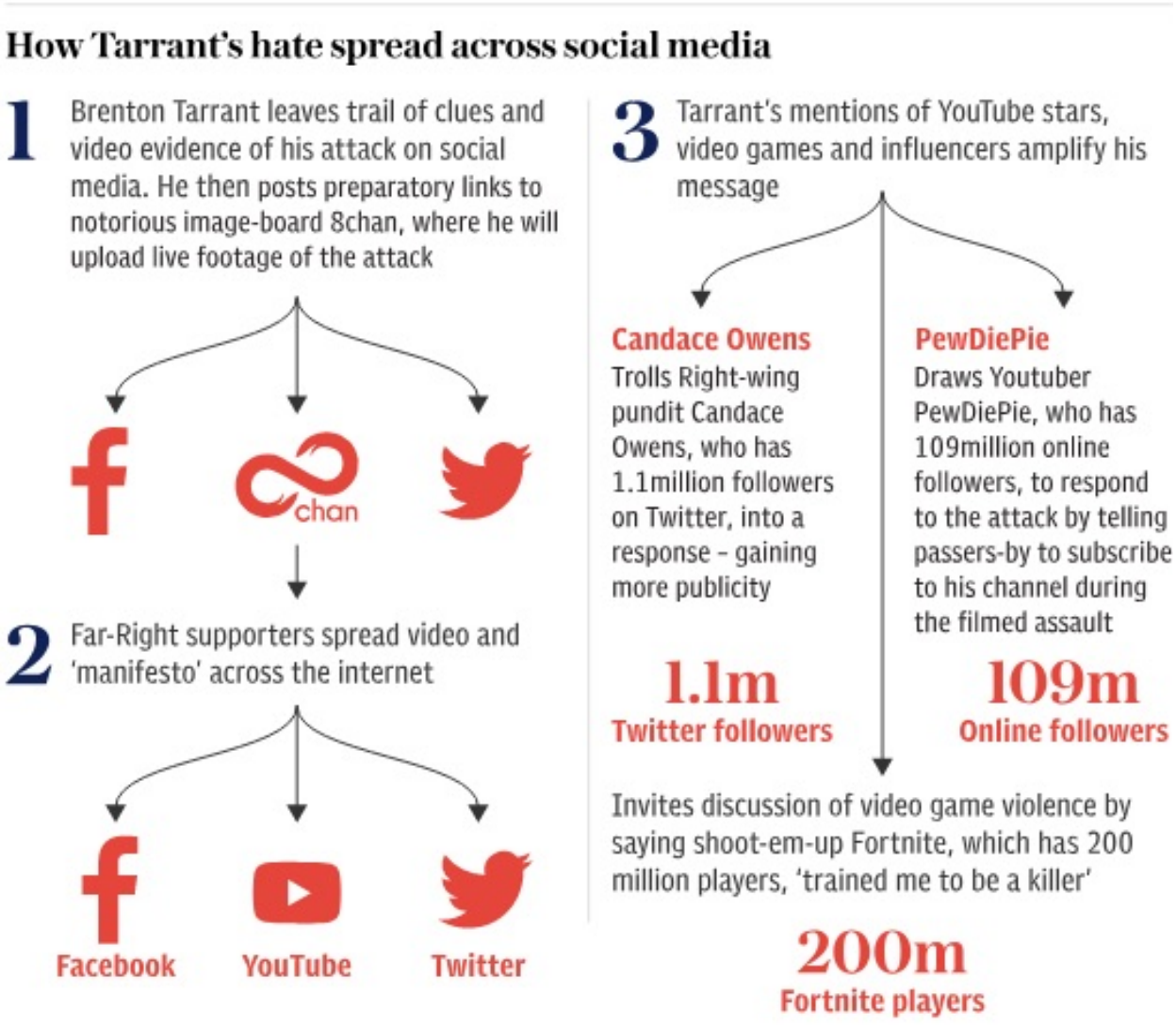
How can we prevent another atrocity like the one in Christchurch? CREDIT: REUTERS

How can we – Muslims and non-Muslims together – prevent another atrocity like the one in Christchurch? As I have watched New Zealanders of all faiths mourn, this has been the question on my mind. So far, few of the answers offered have come close to the truth.

What the massacre revealed was the need for a clear understanding of the weaponisation of ethnic, religious and political identities that is going on throughout the world. This was Brenton Tarrant's evil aim: to contribute to a polarisation of the West –

and to a parallel phenomenon in the Muslim world. His actions, which eerily resemble those of Isil and other Islamist terror groups, were calculated to intensify the hostility and suspicion that already exist towards Muslims in the West. They were also designed to elicit a response from Islamists and so encourage a cycle of retaliatory violence.

We must not let him, or anyone else, succeed. Solidarity across racial, religious, cultural and political lines to address this global crisis is the only answer. But this means resolutely acknowledging the causal factors of the violence that we are seeing in so many parts of the world. As a Muslim, this leads me to questions that require difficult but honest answers.



Why, for example, did the attacker emblazon a weapon with the name of Charles Martel, who defeated a Muslim army in Poitiers, France, in 732AD? It is obvious from his manifesto that he is an unabashed white supremacist. Yet the many historical references

it contains are also evidence of a fixation upon nearly 1400 years of armed conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, and an acute awareness of moments when the tide of Muslim conquest, which repeatedly threatened to inundate Europe, was turned back. From there, the attacker's fixation turned to more recent events: repeated Islamist terror attacks in Europe. For instance, he specifically referenced the death of Ebba Akerlund, an 11-year-old Swedish girl who was killed in an Islamist terror attack in 2017.

As much as it may be uncomfortable for many, this deserves more focus. The targeting of Muslims at prayer in Christchurch comes after nearly two decades during which Islamist atrocities have been a pervasive feature of news bulletins around the world. The massacre in New Zealand would likely be inconceivable if divorced from this wider context in which Islam has become synonymous with terror in the minds of many non-Muslims.

Sadly, from an Islamist perspective, the Christchurch atrocity is simply part of an ancient cycle of violence. Of course, most Europeans do not view themselves as being "at war" with Islam. But to a significant percentage of Muslims, this is simply because Westerners have been enjoying the peace of the victor, which Islamists seek to challenge. This is why Christchurch is such a dangerous moment.

Ending the cycle of violence requires addressing not only the ideology and motivations of someone like Tarrant, but also the historical framework he shares with many Muslims. That is, that Muslims and non-Muslims are and shall remain in a state of permanent conflict, until the end of time (according to Islamists) or the disappearance of Islam (according to advocates of a "counter-jihad").

Among Muslims and non-Muslims, there is an urgent need to address those obsolete and problematic elements of Islamic orthodoxy that underlie the Islamist worldview, fuelling violence on both sides. The world's largest Muslim organisation, Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama, of which I am General Secretary, has begun to do exactly that.

The truth, we recognise, is that jihadist doctrine, goals and strategy can be traced to specific tenets of orthodox, authoritative Islam and its historic practice. This includes those portions of Shariah that promote Islamic supremacy, encourage enmity towards non-Muslims and require the establishment of a caliphate. It is these elements – still taught by most Sunni and Shiite institutions – that constitute a summons to perpetual conflict.

It is our firm view that, if Muslims do not address the key tenets of Islamic tradition that encourage this violence, anyone – at any time – can harness them to defy what they claim to be illegitimate laws and butcher their fellow citizens, whether they live in the Islamic world or the West. This is what links so many current events, from Syria to the streets of London.

There is a desperate need for honest discussion of these matters. This is why it worries me to see Western political and intellectual elites weaponise the term "Islamophobia," to short-circuit analysis of a complex phenomenon that threatens all humanity. For example, it is factually incorrect and counter-productive to define Islamophobia as

"rooted in racism," as proposed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims. In reality, it is the spread of Islamist extremism and terror that primarily contributes to the rise of Islamophobia throughout the non-Muslim world.

That is why it is vital to challenge the prevailing "Muslim mindset," which is predicated upon enmity and suspicion towards non-Muslims, and often rationalises perpetrating violence in the name of Islam. Otherwise, non-Muslims will continue to be radicalised by Islamist attacks and by large-scale Muslim migration to the West.

We appeal to people on both sides of the political divide in the West, of all faiths and none, to renounce the practice of weaponising Islam for partisan advantage, and join us in the desperate struggle to reform obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy, rather than bequeath a tragic legacy of hatred and violence to future generations.

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Timeline UK terror attacks 2005 – present

7 July 2005
7/7 bombings

Four Islamist extremist suicide bombers detonated devices on public transport during the morning rush hour. One of the UK's worst terror attacks, 56 people were killed and over 700 injured

30 June 2007
Glasgow International Airport

Two Islamist terrorists drove a Jeep loaded with kerosene canisters through the airport's glass doors. Five people were injured, but the only fatality was one of the attackers. The incident was linked with two attempted car bombings in London the previous day

April 2013
Midlands mosque attacks

A right-wing extremist stabbed a Birmingham man to death and detonated nail bombs at three mosques in Walsall, Wolverhampton and Tipton. His stated motivation was to start a "race war"

16 June 2016
Jo Cox murder

Member of Parliament Jo Cox was fatally shot and stabbed by a right-wing extremist as she prepared to hold a constituency surgery in Birstall, West Yorkshire. Another man was also injured in the attack

January 2007
Letter bomb campaign

A series of letter bombs were sent to DNA testing and traffic management companies, injuring several people. The perpetrator, Miles Cooper, claimed he was drawing attention to a surveillance society

22 May 2008
Exeter bombing

A mentally-ill man, obsessed with thoughts of martyrdom and the 9/11 attacks, attempted to detonate a suicide bomb in a restaurant toilet. The device misfired, injuring only the attacker

22 May 2013
Lee Rigby murder

Off-duty soldier Lee Rigby was hacked to death by two Islamist extremists on his way back to barracks in Woolwich

5 December 2015
Leytonstone stabbings

A knife-wielding man attacked travellers at Leytonstone Tube station in London shouting, "This is for Syria!" Three people were injured, one seriously.

22 March 2017
Westminster Bridge attack

surgery in Birstall, West Yorkshire. Another man was also injured in the attack

22 March 2017
Westminster Bridge attack

An Islamist extremist ploughed his car through pedestrians on Westminster Bridge before stabbing a police officer, in an attempt to enter the Houses of Parliament. Six people were killed, including the policeman and his attacker, 49 people were injured

22 May 2017
Manchester Arena bombing

Suicide bomber Salman Abedi detonated a device, killing 22 people and injuring 250. He set the bomb off just after the conclusion of an Ariana Grande concert

3 June 2017
London Bridge attack

Three terrorists drove a van at high speed across London Bridge, before running into Borough Market and stabbing people. They killed at least eight people and injured 48, before being shot by police

19 June 2017
Finsbury Park mosque

An attacker drove a van into a crowd outside the mosque. The victims were Muslims returning from night prayers who had paused to offer first aid to a man who had been taken ill. Ten people were injured and one killed. The attacker was heard to say "I want to kill all Muslims"

15 September 2017
Parsons Green Tube station

Witnesses report a 'flash and bang' from a bucket on a London Underground train at Parsons Green. Metropolitan Police confirm the explosion is being treated as 'terrorist incident'