



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Al di là

I think what we have been witnessing in these last couple of years is to say the least frightening, terrifying and scary. The term, 'ma tista' tmur imkien' (you cannot go anywhere safe) is being uttered ever so frequently and becoming one customary phrase we use every time we consider travelling.

Travelling in Europe, whether going for a holiday or work, riding a train, taking a plane or walking down a boulevard seem to raise our pulse with trepidation of the unexpected.

All of this seems to have spiked with the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. This was a wake-up call that terrorists will be hitting hard. True, terrorist groups have been around for longer than we would like to admit. The worst bit about all of this is that an aura of uneasiness has crept around us, one that we had not been used to. There is a sense of anxiety and an atmosphere of uneasiness not knowing when, where or how it might hit you. In all probability the impact of all that is happening finds its resonance in the immediacy that our social media platform creates.

If the *Huffington Post*, a liberal/left commentary news aggregator, is anything to go with, it claims that Western Europe has seen worse times than these (http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/28/islamic-state-terrorism-threat_n_8670458.html). The list of tragedies along the years is endless. It leaves us breathless when we start mentioning even a few of these terrorist attacks; the Munich massacre during the 1972 Summer Olympics, the Bologna terrorist bombing of the Central Station which killed some 85 people and wounded more than 200, the infamous Lockerbie plane downing of 1988 which resulted in almost 300 victims, the Omagh bombing in Northern Ireland that killed 31 people, the London terror campaign of July 2005 that killed almost 60 and injured 700 people, the Oslo slaughter that asserted almost 70 lives and 110 injured, mostly young people, the Paris massacre that claimed 130 lives and almost 400 injured and last week the Nice carnage of almost 90 people and scores injured, to mention just a few.

Nevertheless, Dr Adrian Gallagher, Associate Professor in International Security at Leeds University, said: 'The reality is... Western Europe is safer now than it has been for decades and is far safer than most other parts of the world.' In fact, between 2001 and 2014 qualifies an endless list of victims; 42,759 deaths in Iraq, 16,888 in Afghanistan, 13,524 in Pakistan, 2,606 in Russia and 3,592 in Syria, once again just to mention a few! These numbers are astronomical. The worse thing is that we seem to be getting used to these terrible episodes.

I discussed this theme with Dr Trevor Calafato, a lecturer with the Department of Criminology within the Faculty for Social Wellbeing and an expert and specialist in terrorism and counter-terrorism studies on



Trevor Calafato

how this phenomenon impacts the local scene. When I asked him whether Maltese citizens can put their mind at rest that none of the above will ever happen to us he was quick to recommend vigilance. He said that these last months or so with our involvement in the international political scene and in the organising of high profile summits it did create a sense of anticipation. Dr Calafato insisted that even though Malta at face value might not prove to be a striking target, we always need to take the de rigueur precautions and create an environment where people are able to read into dangerous or potentially dodgy situations. He said that 'even though terrorism might emanate from a cause, distorted, twisted and bent as it might be, has no face' and this makes it more and more complex to identify where the problems are coming from. As we have seen in Nice, the most improbable of methods are being applied and foreseeing the likely dangerous scenarios is close to impossible.

I explored with Trevor whether Malta is out of the woods when it comes to this issue, as the Prime Minister seemed to imply some weeks ago in Parliament. He claims that danger is always there even for Malta, a position which is slightly different from that taken by Prime Minister Muscat who was reported by the media as stating that there is no information to suggest that Malta is in danger of a terrorist attack. (<http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2015-07-02/local-news/Maltese-roads-more-of>

industry, the Machiavellian thrust for power and the satiating of people's horrendous evil and malevolence numbness. This instinct to hurt, to maim, to injure, to oppress, to over-power are seasoned explanations. What we saw in Nice, in Istanbul, in Paris, in London, in Bagdad and in all the other countries and cities around the World, is simply a claim and a confirmation that we live in a perverse society.

Dr Trevor Calafato shared a number of intriguing reflections whilst discussing terrorism, namely that the first thing we need to do is to never let our guard down. He says that the way terrorism has developed is as unpredictable as it comes. Whilst radicalised people are the most prone to fall into this aggressor mode, however there exist no set profile of individuals that can be put away to guarantee our safety.

To illustrate the way terrorism has morphed Trevor gives the example of Britain when it had to deal with an armed conflict with the IRA. Trevor said that 'it was very clear that all targets were objectives close to the British, so a semblance of grounding and preparation could be made. The type of terrorism we are faced with today is different as it is encouraging 'lone wolves' and set off by religious convictions wrapped up in odium'. As Trevor claimed, our current terrorist patterns are founded on religious extremism and this tends to leave more victims because religion and the *al di là* seem to motivate people into thinking and believing that what they are doing is blessed by their 'god' and the so-called 'religion' they subscribe to.

Finally, Trevor maintains that in countries where there is a history of terrorism it is more likely that citizens become vigilant as they go about in their day-to-day business. In countries like ours, where there isn't a history of terrorism we tend to be lacking in terms of awareness training and this can make us an easier target.

Dr Calafato said that, 'whilst it is important to create a safe environment and improved security the fundamental solution is that we create the environment to dialogue'.

a-threat-than-terrorists-British-Foreign-Office-6736138253 - accessed on 18 July, 2016). Trevor continued saying that 'the issue of whether we are in danger or not depends very much on what the objective the terrorist group is, what media coverage it would manage to capture, the importance of the event in question and the ease of access to that country.'

The truth is that this situation of people killing indiscriminately has been rationalised for too long with the excuse of religion; the bombing of buildings, vans with explosives detonated at check points, lorries driven into children and families who in their turn are thrown around like skittles and gunmen shooting indiscriminately on people as they listen to their favourite band!

Religion it seems, instead of being a unifying factor, has been used as a justification to hurt and instil terror in communities. Religion is essentially turning into an apology for this twisted thinking that has motivated the arms

More can be found on the subject at:

Trevor Calafato (2016): The similarities between Lombroso's theories on political crime and contemporary terrorism issues, Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression
To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2016.1170715>

The Department of Youth and Community Studies (Faculty for Social Wellbeing) will be offering two courses; a BA (Hons.) in Youth and Community Studies (day course) and a Master of Arts in Youth Justice (part-time). For more information contact andrew.azzopardi@um.edu.mt



Dr Andrew Azzopardi
Head of Department
Department of Youth and
Community Studies
Faculty for Social Wellbeing,
University of Malta &
Broadcaster - Ghandi x1 Nghid
www.andrewazzopardi.org