

## Twisted beliefs driving Islamist butchers



Illustration: Eric Lobbecke

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Terrorists operating against Western targets claim their acts are inspired, and in many cases required, by Islam.

Federal Social Services and Multicultural Affairs Assistant Minister Zed Seselja should be commended for his plain speaking when he argues we have tolerated extremism too often and that the Muslim community should now do more to call out Islamic extremism (“Minister tells Muslims to call out terrorism”, *The Australian*, June 8). “Those who believe in this Islamist ideology are a small minority of Muslims, but there are still far too many of them. So it’s on the majority — including the moderate, peaceful Muslims of our world — to rise up against this,” he said.

Seselja suggested his colleagues should stop dancing around the issue and “call it for what it is”, saying it was an insult to suggest terrorism wasn’t religiously motivated. “Pretending that Islamist terrorists are simply mentally ill and not driven by an extreme ideology is not only dangerous, it is insulting to all Australians ... “We are surely mature enough as a nation to have an open discussion about the inspiration for Islamist terrorism in Salafist jihadist teaching, while acknowledging that most Muslims in Australia are good citizens who reject this extremism.”

Seselja is absolutely right that too many public figures have been walking on eggshells and becoming hostage to political correctness in failing to state publicly the underlying cause and motivation of terrorism.

Australians are reaching a boiling point of frustration when they hear some of our senior political leaders refuse to speak the most obvious truths about terrorism. It seems they're afraid of being called a bigot or Islamophobic, rather than being concerned about protecting innocents from being butchered by Islamist jihadists.

It's true that our political elites aren't experts on Islam. They may not have much credibility disputing Muslim scholars who point to Islamic sources that reject terrorist behaviour. Publicly saying there's a link may be self-defeating if it stirs up trouble with moderate Muslims who oppose terrorism. After all we need our Muslim communities to put trust in and co-operate with our counter-terrorism agencies. Most political leaders will want to avoid being open to the charge they are somehow at war with Islam.

But Seselja is right that this doesn't require them to keep silent on the issue of the links between Islam and terrorism. That's because when you don't call things by their real name, you insult the public by pretending the jihadist violence we're seeing isn't coming out of Muslim communities.

It's delusional to silence debate on how we tackle Islamist ideology to protect the image of Islam. So Malcolm Turnbull was right to point out on Wednesday in an interview on Melbourne radio that "we are facing a global threat, this Islamist terrorism. It is a disease and it is corrupting, seeking to destroy from within the Islamic religion and of course, lashing out to destroy and undermine our way of life."

When our political leaders and public intellectuals abandon the debate about how to tackle terrorism, the field is left open for extremists and fringe opinions such as those in the virulently anti-Western Hizb ut-Tahrir, which encourages the separation of its members from the mainstream, including the Muslim mainstream. Without directly organising terrorist attacks, its indoctrination can motivate members to turn fiery words into explosive deeds.

Killing innocents isn't condoned by any religion and our leaders shouldn't be cowed when they call a spade a spade and talk about the extremist ideology linked to Islam.

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