Olivier Roy, "One of France's Top Experts On Islamic Terrorism" (Part I)

by Hugh Fitzgerald

Olivier Roy, who refuses to believe that the acts of Muslim terrorists might actually be explained by reference to Islam, its texts and teachings, was [quick off the mark in explaining](#) the Manchester bombing:

> *Salman Abedi, the suicide bomber who killed 22 people at a Manchester pop concert this week, started life advantageously enough: to parents who had fled Gadhafi's Libya for a new life in Britain. But actually it was that kind of dislocation that would send him off kilter two decades later, says Olivier Roy, one of France's top experts on Islamic terrorism.*

> *"An estimated 60 percent of those who espouse violent jihadism in Europe are second-generation Muslims who have lost their connection with their country of origin and have*

They are subject to a "process of deculturation" that leaves them ignorant of and detached from both the European society and the one of their origins. The result, Roy argues, is a dangerous "identity vacuum" in which "violent extremism thrives."

As it happens, Salman Abedi did not "lose his connection" to Libya; in Manchester he lived in what was in effect a Little Libya, one of the largest communities of Libyans outside of Libya itself, surrounded by fellow Libyans, as well as other Muslims. Nor did his family sever their own connection to Libya. His parents moved back to Libya in 2011, but they, and at least two of his siblings, returned to Manchester often; his father, known as Abu Ismail, had been a member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, an anti-Khaddafy force that had close links to Al-Qaeda. When he was in Manchester, he and Salman Abedi regularly attended the Didsbury Mosque.

Abedi himself made frequent trips to Libya and was there, in fact, just before he returned to carry out the Manchester attack. He remained a devout Muslim, and gave no sign of falling away from Islam. His only sign of "Western decadence" was his occasionally smoking marijuana. He was not affected by "deculturation." He did not suffer from a "dangerous 'identity vacuum," as Olivier Roy would have us believe. He memorized the entire Qur'an, earning the title of *hafiz*. He was perfectly secure in his Muslim identity. Yet Olivier Roy insists on a psychological explanation — an "identity vacuum" — for Abedi's decision to become a *shahid*, despite all the evidence to the contrary. But that is because he continues to refuse to take the ideology of Islam seriously, refuses even to discuss the possibility that the clear meaning of the Islamic texts and teachings might be sufficient to explain Muslim terrorism.

If Salman Abedi did not appear to suffer from that "identity vacuum" that Roy insists explains much of Muslim terrorism, how would he explain what has prompted other terrorists, those who did not live in the West and could hardly be described as enduring that "identity vacuum" which he wrongly ascribes to Abedi? Let's see. What was the "identity vacuum," Olivier Roy should explain, experienced by Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the leaders of Al-Qaeda who spent their lives entirely within Muslim lands? What "identity vacuum" prompted Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, who was born and raised in Jordan, and spent his later life fighting Infidels in Iraq, including the Shi'a, whom he regarded as the worst kind of Infidels? Or Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the "caliph" of the Islamic State, who had studied Islam for years, and had three advanced degrees in Islamic studies from the Islamic University in Baghdad? None of these, nor hundreds of other Muslim terrorists, whose identities are known, and who have taken part in attacks on Infidels, appear to have had an "identity vacuum."

Anwar Al-Awlaki was born in New Mexico, spent the first seven years of his life in America before returning with his parents to Yemen, and then spent another twelve years in the United States, serving as an imam for a year at a notorious mosque in Falls Church, Virginia before he returned to Yemen. But did he suffer from an "identity vacuum," or was he, rather, always a committed Muslim while living in the West? How many of those who left Europe to join the Islamic State had previously suffered from an "identity vacuum," or had wavered in their commitment to Islam? Is there an "identity vacuum" among the Muslims of Boko Haram in Nigeria, or Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines?

This psychological explanation for Islamic terrorism simply draws attention away from what is to be found in the Qur'an, hadith, and sira, that is, the duty of Jihad and of Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong. Olivier Roy, like O.J. Simpson, is "looking for the real killer" and finds it in the "identity

vacuum" he claims so many Muslims suffer from.

Born in Britain in 1994, Abedi would later be drawn to violent fundamentalism after a life in limbo. On the one hand, he tried to reconnect with Libya, where he traveled shortly before this week's attack, while on the other, he strove to emulate the same British young people he killed.

In Roy's narrative, Abedi "tried to reconnect with Libya" — but through his frequent trips back, his family in Libya, his living within a largely Libyan milieu in Manchester — there was no need to "try to reconnect" because he never lost his Libyan connection. And Roy insists he "strove to emulate the same….people he killed." Roy offers no evidence for this. How did Abedi strive to emulate them? Does occasionally smoking marijuana constitute an attempt to "emulate the same British people [mostly, young girls] he killed"? He had intermittent connections to a gang of Libyan Muslims in Manchester, whose property crimes against Infidels they may have regarded as helping themselves to the Jizyah that they surely believed was theirs by right. In that activity, was he emulating these young girls he targeted?

Unlike second generations like Abedi's, third generations are normally better integrated in the West and don't account for more than 15 percent of homegrown jihadis," Roy says. "Converts, who also have an approach to Islam decontextualized from any culture, account for about 25 percent of those who fall prey to violent fundamentalism."

This is an example of "how to confuse with statistics." Is Roy speaking about Muslims in the U.K., or France, or throughout the European Union? He doesn't say. And his assertion that the third generation of Muslims account for "don't account for more than 15 percent of homegrown jihadis" tells us little unless we know what percentage of Muslims in the West are "third-generation." If that third generation constitutes 15

percent of the Muslim population of the West, then their accounting for no more "than 15 percent of homegrown jihadis" is scarcely cause for celebration. If, however, they accounted for, say, 5 percent of the Muslim population in the West, but 15 percent of the homegrown jihadis, that would be cause for even more alarm than sensible Infidels already feel. Roy doesn't tell us what percentage of the total Muslim population in the West are third generation. Nor does he tell us how he would define being "better integrated" into European societies. Nor does he tell us how Islam is "decontextualized from any culture" when Islam itself carries with it its own culture, the culture of Islam, a Total Belief-System, including a Complete Regulation of a Believer's Life and Explanation of the Universe, based on texts that do not change in time and space.

As for "converts," who constitute about 25 percent of those who become violent Jihadists, what percentage of the Muslims in France or the West (it still not having been made clear by Olivier Roy what country or countries, and what Muslim population, he is talking about) are converts? If they are 50 percent of the Muslim population, but only 25 percent of the Jihadis, that tells us that converts are less likely to be violent. If, on the other hand, converts are, say, 10 percent of the total Muslim population, but 25 percent of the violent Jihadists, this tells a different story. Olivier Roy again fails to provide the information needed for any judgement to be made.

> It's a pattern that can be traced from second-generation Khaled Kelkal, France's first homegrown jihadi in 1995, to the Kouachi brothers who attacked satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris in 2015. The rule also applies to foreign fighters such as Sabri Refla, the Belgian-born son of a Moroccan father and a Tunisian mother who left for Syria at 18 "after espousing an Islam completely unrelated to our background," says his grieving mother Saliha Ben Ali.

What exactly is the "pattern'" that Olivier Roy claims to have traced? That some second-generation Muslims in the West become jihadists? Yes, we all know this. We all know that first, second, and even third generation Muslims in the West have become Jihadists, and so have converts to Islam, and so have Muslims who have never set foot in the West. And he reports the self-serving remark by a mother (described, with unmerited empathy, as "grieving") that her Muslim terrorist son "was espousing an Islam completely unrelated to our background."

So what, then, was the Islam that the son's family espoused? A bowdlerized Qur'an from which all 109 Jihad verses were excised? Or from which all the negative comments on Infidels — such as that they are "the vilest of creatures," and that Muslims should not take Christians and Jews as friends — have been removed?

> *With little if any understanding of religion or Islamic culture, young people like Abedi turn to terrorism out of a "suicidal instinct" and "a fascination for death," Roy says. This key element is exemplified by the jihadi slogan first coined by Osama bin Laden: "We love death like you love life."*

> *The large majority of Al-Qaida and Islamic State jihadis, including the Manchester attacker Abedi, commit suicide attacks not because it makes sense strategically from a military perspective or because it's consistent with the Salafi creed," Roy says. "These attacks don't weaken the enemy significantly, and Islam condemns self-immolation as interference with God's will. These kids seek death as an end-goal in itself."*

Olivier Roy claims that Abedi had "little if any understanding of religion or Islamic culture" — even though he was the devout Muslim son of a devout father, attended mosque regularly, associated with Muslims, lived in a Libyan Muslim

environment within Manchester, traveled back and forth to Libya, and had committed to memory the entire Qur'an. On what basis, therefore, did Olivier Roy conclude that Salman Abedi "had little if any understanding of religion or Islamic culture"? What part of Islam does Roy think Abedi didn't understand? And more tellingly, what part of Islam do we now know that Olivier Roy does not understand?

Olivier Roy makes much of a "suicidal instinct" that he thinks leads young people to "turn to terrorism." He fails to recognize the clear distinction Muslims make between committing suicide and being a martyr, or *shahid*, willing to lose his life in an attack on Infidels. He claims that "We love death like you love life" is a "slogan first coined by Osama bin Laden." He's off by about 1350 years. The phrase originated at the Battle of Qadisiyya, in the year 636, when the commander of the Muslim forces, Khalid ibn Al-Walid, sent an emissary with a message from Caliph Abu Bakr to the Persian commander, Khosru. The message stated: "You [Khosru and his people] should convert to Islam, and then you will be safe, for if you don't, you should know that I have come to you with an army of men that love death, as you love life." This account has been recited in Muslim sermons, newspapers, and textbooks for years, long before Osama bin Laden mentioned it. It is remarkable that Olivier Roy appears unaware of all this, and attributes it to bin Laden.

Then there is Roy's claim that "self-immolation" is condemned by Islam, so that the suicide Jihadis are merely fulfilling their own death-wish and not following the tenets of Islam. Suicide, by itself, is certainly condemned in Islam. But in Islam, the Jihadis who die while attacking and killing Infidels, fulfilling the commandment to wage Jihad, are not regarded as committing suicide, which is forbidden, but as being willing to risk almost certain death in the commission of a deed of derring-do against Infidels, for which they deserve to be regarded as *shahids*, martyrs who have earned a

place in Paradise. Islam is against "suicide" — that is, taking one's life out of despair — but not against losing one's life while conducting an act of violent Jihad. There are many passages in the Qur'an and hadith that praise a Jihadi who knows he may well lose his life in an attack on Infidels. Roy simply refuses to credit the distinction in Islam between the suicides and the *shahids*, and to recognize that the latter are not, pace Roy "merely fulfilling their own death-wish," but are carrying out one of Islam's highest deeds.

Olivier Roy claims that the Manchester and similar terror attacks do not make sense strategically. We are asked to believe that these attacks "don't weaken the enemy significantly." Is that true? Haven't the more than 30,000 terrorist attacks by Muslims since 9/11/2001 had an enormous effect on the peoples of the West? Doesn't the palpable sense of insecurity that is now felt by non-Muslims all over Western Europe constitute a "weakening" of the enemy? Doesn't the fact that governments in the West now must constantly reassure their populations about the "level of threat" show that Islamic terrorism is having an effect? Are crowds in Paris and London, in Stockholm and Nice and Brussels and Munich, really as carefree as they were, say, twenty years ago? Is there not, in many places, a palpable sense of anxiety, even dread? Isn't terrorism on the tip of every tongue, each new atrocity ratcheting up the level of fear, with "terrorism" (the adjective "Islamic" ordinarily left out, but clearly understood) the subject of constant government study and pronouncements by lone academics, or solemn committees, charged with understanding the phenomenon and too often eager to claim or suggest that "Islamic terrorism" has nothing to do with Islam? Isn't Olivier Roy himself the member of a vast tribe of "Islamic terrorism experts" that only came into being just a few decades ago?

Along with the psychic cost, there is the economic cost of Islamic terrorism. The United States has spent some $791

billion for homeland security between 9/11/2001 and 3/01/2013. From 3/01/2013 to 2017, given that costs have kept increasing by at least one-third of that $791 billion, that means to a certainty that at least one trillion dollars has been spent from 9/11/2001 to 6/1/2017 on homeland security, just in one country. Nor does that figure include the $5 trillion spent by the United States abroad, in campaigns to both defeat terrorism — the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria — and to attempt to establish regimes that would meet some minimum level of decency, and thus, it was felt, dampen down the terrorist temptation. The skyrocketing sums spent in Iraq to bring good government after Saddam Hussein was toppled, and in Afghanistan to keep the Taliban off-balance and on the run, and even in Syria, with costly American support for the *soi-disant* "good rebels" who, it is hoped, will fight both Bashar al-Assad and the Islamic State, are expenses that can reasonably be linked, albeit indirectly, to the need to improve homeland security.

Think of the cost, too, all over Europe, for security measures made necessary by the threat of Islamic terrorism. There is now a huge security apparatus in place, increasing with each new attack. Think of the guards now deemed necessary, at airports and on airplanes, at train stations and on trains, at bus stations and on buses, at churches and synagogues and Hindu temples, at Christian and Jewish schools, at concert halls, at museums, at libraries, at sports events, at celebrations of national holidays, at Christmas markets, almost anywhere that a large and vulnerable crowd might assemble, and then might be blown up, or mowed down, by an Islamic terrorist or terrorists eager to "strike terror" in the hearts of Infidels. Think of the additional cost of the army patrols that now march through many European (and especially French) cities and towns, conducting their sweeps of sensitive or vulnerable areas, both to look for suspicious behavior as well as to reassure the populace.

Before the World Trade Center bombing, France used to deploy 20,000 soldiers at Christmas time. In 2015, it deployed 120,000. What have those extra 100,000 men cost French taxpayers? Think of the cost to the European governments of paying for those who must now monitor mosques and Muslim neighborhoods, and who also now pay large numbers of Muslim informers (whose trustworthiness is subject to debate, but whose ability to extract large sums from the government is beyond debate). Add to these the cost for extra police and detectives needed to conduct round-the-clock surveillance of some high-risk Muslims, lesser levels of surveillance for others, and the need to follow up every lead in order to prevent attacks (and the public may not realize just how many attacks have been, and will be, prevented by such tedious and expensive work). Then, after attacks, people connected to the perpetrator are picked up, with more detective work, more prosecutors, more court-appointed lawyers, more judges, and ultimately, more prison cells — all made necessary by the permanent threat of Islamic terrorism.

It's not a small problem. In late May, MI5 admitted that there were at least "23,000 Jihadis" in the United Kingdom.

How much, do you think, constant surveillance of 23,000 wily and dangerous Jihadis costs the British government? How many police resources have had to be diverted and devoted to this task?

Think also of the economic loss when events are cancelled out of fear of possible terrorism. Among events that have been cancelled in Europe are concerts, bicycle races, Christmas festivals, concerts, and the largest open-air flea market in all of Europe, La Braderie in Lille. Most recently, the government of the U.K. even cancelled The Changing of the Guard. The direct cost is to those who had to cancel their concerts, sports events, Christmas markets, open-air markets, flea markets. But the larger loss comes from cancellations by tourists who change their plans and decide not to visit a city

or country that has been the object of repeated terrorist attacks. Again, this has become a huge problem. In 2016, there were 5 million fewer tourists in Paris than in 2015. This cost Paris — its restaurants, hotels, shops, theatres, museums — 1.3 billion Euros, or 1.5 billion dollars — just in that one year. For France as a whole, how many billions of tourist dollars have been lost because of terrorism? In Nice, in Lyon, in Toulouse, cities where there have been widely publicized murderous attacks, tourism has suffered. And what has been the cost in lost tourism for France as a whole? And what further drop in tourism since 2016?

If we take all of Western Europe, how many tens of billions of tourist dollars have been lost in the U.K. (especially in London), Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia (especially Sweden, and in islamified Malmo)?Just the other day, the Russian government issued a warning to Russian tourists to avoid London, based on the attacks in Manchester and the abortive attempt to attack the Houses of Parliament which got as far as Westminster Bridge. How much of a drop in Russians going to London will there be? And what happens after the next major attack? And the next?

Travel agents and others involved in the tourism industry have made clear that the main reason tourists — especially Chinese and Japanese tourists, who happen to be the biggest spenders — chose not to visit Paris in 2016 was fear over terrorism and security in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo massacre in January 2015 and the attacks in November (at the Bataclan nightclub, and the restaurant Au Petit Cambodge) of the same year. Each new attack does damage to tourism in the city, and country, where the attack took place.

If the United States has had to spend more than $1 trillion on homeland security, and the countries of Western Europe collectively spent a similar sum, and if we were to tote up both those expenditures and the tens of billions of dollars in lost revenues because of declines in tourism due to Islamic

terror attacks, surely that is a major success for those waging economic jihad. Yet Olivier Roy blandly informs us that the attacks by Muslims in the West have been of "little strategic value" and "don't weaken the enemy." Is he right? The new expenses, for security, of a trillion here in the U.S. and a trillion there in Europe, and the tens of billions in lost tourism dollars, all of it the consequence of Muslim terrorism, is undeniably damaging — except to Olivier Roy, who denies that Islamic terrorism does indeed "weaken the enemy" and says not a word about economic jihad.

First published in