

What causes Islamist terrorism? If you are really smart, the answer is “capitalism”



Mohamed Abrini

by Lev Tsitrin

Lawyers are notoriously smart – so smart in fact that they don't hesitate to play it dumb when needed. A striking instance of the use of this tactic is in the *New York Times*' report titled [“Corporate Lawyer's Unlikely Mission: Defend and ‘Humanize’ a Hated Terrorist”](#) – the title that piqued my curiosity since, after all, I claim some expertise in both subjects, terrorism and lawyering.

How do you defend in court one Mohamed Abrini, an organizer of “assaults in Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016 [that] were the deadliest operations ever carried out by

the Islamic State on European soil [in the form of] coordinated shootings and bombings [and] killed 162 people and injured several hundred”? Mr. Abrini, after all, was “Belgium’s most wanted man” when he was “seen in surveillance video accompanying two suicide bombers who detonated their explosives at Brussels Airport on March 22.”

The answer, it turns out, is – you defend him by playing dumb.

Claim incomprehension. What caused Mohamed Abrini to engage in terrorism? His lawyer, Mr. Eskenazi, “said he has no good answers. After six years of conversations with Mr. Abrini – “I have never spent that much time with anyone else, including my wife,” Mr. Eskenazi said – the lawyer said he still struggles with what drove Mr. Abrini and the six other attackers who called the predominantly Muslim, working-class neighborhood of Molenbeek home.”

After six years of pondering the question, the thought that the motivation could have come from their conviction that this is what God wanted them to do – a conviction at which they must have arrived by starting with a factually wrong assumption that it is possible for anyone to unequivocally know whether God talked to Mohammed (this assumption is factually wrong because any two-part communication between three parties is by its very nature unreliable – and the putative transfer of information from God to Mohammed and then from Mohammed to Mohamed Abrini is exactly of such unreliable, two-part pattern), and deciding on the basis of their broken logic that God wanted them to kill infidels, never-ever crossed the smart corporate lawyer’s mind.

What is the best answer Mr. Eskenazi has for the motive of terrorist attacks? “Partly, Mr. Eskenazi blames what he describes as the hyper-individualistic capitalist system, which he said destroyed the importance of communities. But he also accuses the Belgian state of abandoning people like Mr. Abrini, who were struggling with issues of identity and

belonging. “We forgot that people want to be a part of a society,” he said. “And the Islamic State gave its members the sense of brotherhood. For people that feel lost, that is invaluable.”

This is where six years of hard mental effort have gotten Mr. Eskenazi: “It’s all capitalism, stupid!” When someone guns down people, it is because of “capitalist system.” Terrorism has nothing whatsoever to do with religion. Move on folks, nothing to see there.

The trial of Mohamed Abrini was supposed to shed light on Islamist terrorism. Instead, it seems to me, it sheds light on the professional trickery of very smart lawyers – who, when they need to, find it smart to play it very dumb.

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