

# Europe's radical young Muslims turn to violence

By Roula Khalaf in London and Jonathan Guthrie in Birmingham

At an Algerian-owned grocery store near London's modern-style Finsbury Park mosque, before Friday prayers, the mood yesterday was sombre and frustrated. "Why do they always assume only Muslim people are terrorists?" said Aziz Benach, a day after the terror attacks in London were blamed on religious extremists. "You know, there are also Muslim children and women, and they'll now be too scared to move around London."

As the hunt for the perpetrators of the atrocities in the city intensified, the Muslim community was braced for a possible backlash. The government was at great pains to stress the peaceful attitude of the vast majority of British Muslims.

Meanwhile, investigators are still looking at whether

the London attacks were the work of extremists who moved recently to Europe or a home-grown group. Yet it is inevitable that the attacks will intensify the debate over the radicalisation of young Muslims in Europe.

According to security experts, the focus of intelligence in the aftermath of September 11 was first on terrorist cells made up of jihadis with fighting experience in Afghanistan. At the end of the US-supported holy war against the Soviet invasion in the 1980s, many fighters from Arab countries were prevented from returning to their own countries and sought refuge in Europe.

More recently, however, the concern has shifted to younger jihadis, who came to Europe at a very young age or were born and bred there as children of immigrant families.

Identifying them is a much harder challenge as they

become part of a shadowy network who keep in close contact with one another through Muslim bookshops, informal mosques in ordinary houses and university prayer rooms.

"What we are now awaiting is the emergence of a new generation of terrorists: kids who were 12-15 years old on September 11 2001 and

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who have taken a year or two to make the same ideological progress that leads to violence, and which took their elders around 10 years or more," Claude Monique, director general of the European Strategic Intelligence

and Security Centre, told a US congressional committee in April.

The home-grown group accused of involvement in the murder of Theo van Gogh, the Dutch filmmaker, included members who were as young as 18. In Paris earlier this year, a gang of mostly North African extremists was arrested for

a bunch of local friends who became radicalised in France," says Olivier Roy, French expert on Islamist groups and author of *Globalised Islam*.

Analysts cite many factors behind the radicalisation of Muslim youth including such as the hostility towards Islam expressed in the wake of September 11, the outrage at the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and, in some cases, the lack of attention of governments to economic and social marginalisation of Muslim communities.

Shereen Hunter, director of the Islam programme at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, says Muslims of Turkish origin are far less prone to violent radicalisation than are those who come from North Africa and other parts of the Arab world.

The latter are more affected by the Arab-Israeli

conflict and other regional conflicts and may be more in tune with the considerable radicalisation of Islam in the countries of origin, she explains in a recent paper.

But Mr Roy argues that today's radical Muslims are above all culturally alienated, unable to cope with a globalising world. Though on the surface they appear integrated into European societies, they feel uprooted and are drawn to the idea of a Muslim "ummah" (nation) to which they could belong. And they lash out against the same target as ultra-leftists: imperialism and capitalism.

"They don't care about the Iraqi people, they make use of such conflicts," he says.

"They are not trying to build a political organisation. They want to do something spectacular that could be immediately understood by the masses."

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