Europe's radical young Muslims turn to violence

By Reuven Aharoni in London and Jonathan Galassi in Birmingham

At an Algerian-owned grocery store near London's Camden town, apartment buildings and mosques, before Friday prayers, the mood yesterday was somber and frustrated.

"Why do they always assume only Muslim people are terrorists?" said Ali Bensch, 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 intensifies, the Muslim community was bracing for a possible backlash. The government was at great pains to stress the peaceful majority of British Muslims.

Meanwhile, investigators are still looking at whether the London attacks were carried out by extremists who moved recently to Europe or from a home-grown group. Yet it is inevitable that the attacks will intensify the debate over the radicalization 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 Israeli Jewit, a French expert on Islamist groups and author of Global Jihad. Analyses of many factors behind the radicalization of Muslim youth, including such as the hostility towards Islam expressed in the wake of September 11, the outrage at the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and, in some cases, the lack of attention of governments to economic and social marginalization of Muslim communities.

Shirin Hosner, 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 radicalization 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 national conflicts and may be more in tune with the considerable radicalization of Islam in the countries of origin, she explains in a recent paper.

But Mr. Hosner argues that today's radical Muslims are above all culturally alienated, unable to cope with a disintegrating world. Though in the surfaces they appear integrated into European societies, they feel isolated and are closer to the idea of a Muslim "utopia" which they could believe. And they lack support for the same target as ultraorthodox imperialism and capitalism.

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