

Manchester. The wrong response?

Several things about the Manchester Arena incident seem to have been ignored, deliberately one suspects, by the politicians and the news.

By any measure what happened was a tragedy. If one of my grandchildren had been at the Arena – and they have frequently gone to such performances in London – I should have been devastated, so I empathise with those families so appallingly cut short or that will welcome home members permanently scarred, either mentally or physically, or both. Attending a vigil, placing flowers at the site, is a natural and healthy reaction.

But it is the official lamentation, widely featured by the news, which is both out of proportion, and in my opinion potentially dangerous.

In this country we observe official silence to remember those who knowingly, whether volunteer or conscript, put their lives at risk for the sake of the society in which they lived – in two major wars and a host of minor ones. To do this for those who did not and could not expect they ran any risk, is to demean the observance we make for those who certainly did.

I also ask whether the public and publicised expressions of grief and determination ‘to stand together’ don’t actually encourage those with a desire to hurt a society they despise to take the next opportunity to do so. As martyrs, they can guarantee themselves, and those who will follow them, a massive and orchestrated reaction to their crime. They know they have hurt us.

Finally, while it’s true the perpetrators are sick, deluded, losers, in this country at least nearly all of them have one thing in common – they believe their religion obliges them to destroy as many unbelievers as they can; that is their passport to paradise. I have not seen or heard one interview where a Mancunian expresses anger and puts the blame for what happened fairly where it belongs – on those who at home or abroad use the dogma of their religion to incite this kind of massacre. I suspect this is not because there haven’t been any but that the news media decided, either on their own or under pressure, not to show us.

We need to wake up. The number of such activities and the size of the networks of those involved in planning and carrying them out is growing steadily and inexorably. It’s sheer denial to say ‘we won’t let it defeat us’. In a very few years, if that is our only response, it will do so.