

Culture of Fear

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Culture of fear is a term used by certain scholars, writers, journalists and politicians who believe that some in society incite fear in the general public to achieve political goals, for example...

"The people don't want war, but they can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and for exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country." - Hermann Goering.

The term is used to describe fears about Islamic terrorism which, it is argued, are fears that are usually exaggerated or irrational in nature. The term has also been used to describe irrational fear in other contexts, such as citizens fearing persons of different ethnic backgrounds, or neighborhood residents fearing retribution if they assist police in identifying criminals.

Analysis

Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski argues that the use of the term War on Terror was intended to generate a culture of fear deliberately because it "obscures reason, intensifies emotions and makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue".

Frank Furedi, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent and writer for Spiked magazine, points out that today's culture of fear did not begin with the collapse of the World Trade Centre. Long before 11 September, he argues, public panics were widespread - on everything from GM crops to mobile phones, from global warming to foot-and-mouth. Like Durodié, Furedi argues that perceptions of risk, ideas about safety and controversies over health, the environment and technology have little to do with science or empirical evidence. Rather, they are shaped by cultural assumptions about human vulnerability. Furedi says that "we need a grown-up discussion about our post-11 September world, based on a reasoned evaluation of all the available evidence rather than on irrational fears for the future."

Jennie Bristow, a writer for Spiked Magazine, argues that the culture of fear that emerged following the September 11 attacks and the subsequent anthrax attacks were not so much emergent fears but rather top-down manufactured ones by politicians and reflected by the media. She also believes that the fears engendered, although irrational, allowed patriotism to emerge which eventually led to military adventurism in places not connected to either 9/11 or the anthrax attacks.

British academics Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate, argue that following terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, Madrid and London, government agencies developed a discourse of "new terrorism" in a cultural climate of fear and uncertainty. UK researchers argued that this process reduced notion of public safety and created the simplistic image of a non-white "terroristic other" that has negative consequences for ethnic minority groups in the UK.

In his 2004 BBC documentary film series, *The Power of Nightmares*, subtitled *The Rise of the Politics of Fear*, the journalist Adam Curtis argues that politicians have used our fears to increase their power and control over society. Though he does not use the term "culture of fear", what Curtis describes in his film is a reflection of this concept. He looks at the American neo-conservative movement and its depiction of the threat first from the Soviet Union and then from radical Islamists. Curtis insists there has been a largely illusory fear of terrorism in the west since the September 11 attacks and that politicians such as George W Bush and Tony Blair had stumbled on a new force to restore their power and authority; using the fear of an organised "web of evil" from which they could protect their people. Curtis's film castigated the media, security forces and the Bush administration for expanding their power in this way. The film features Bill Durodié, then Director of the International Centre for Security Analysis, and Senior Research Fellow in the International Policy Institute, King's College London, saying that to call this network an "invention" would be too strong a term. But he asserts that it probably does not exist and is largely a "(projection) of our own worst fears, and that what we see is a fantasy that's been created."