Islam now, China then: Any parallels?

M. Shahid Alam unearths similarities between how Islam is portrayed in the West today and how China was viewed in the middle of the 19th century

"History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history that we make today."--Henry Ford

ON some days, a glance at the leading stories in the Western media strongly suggests that Muslims everywhere, of all stripes, have gone berserk. It appears that Muslims have lost their minds.

In any week, we are confronted with reports of Islamic suicide attacks against Western targets in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Western countries themselves; terrorists foiled before they could act; terrorist attacks gone awry; terrorists indicted; terrorists convicted; terrorists tortured; terrorist suspects kidnapped by CIA; or warnings of new terrorist attacks against Western targets.

Unprovoked, without cause -- we are repeatedly told -- Muslims everywhere, even those living in the West, are lashing out against the civilised West. Many in the Western world -- especially in the US -- are beginning to believe that the entire Islamic world is on the warpath against civilisation itself.

Expert commentators in the Western media want us to believe that the Muslims have lost their minds. They tell us that Muslims are inherently, innately, perverse; that never before has violence been used in this way, against innocent civilians. It is always "innocent" civilians.

Other peoples, too, have endured colonisation, slavery, expulsions, extermination at the hands of Western powers, but none have responded with violence on this scale against the West. Certainly not with violence against civilians. Never have Aborigines, Africans, indigenous Americans, Hindus, Jews, or the Chinese targeted civilians. They never attacked Westerners indiscriminately. They never targeted "innocent Western civilians."

Is this "insanity" slowly raising its head across the Islamic world really unique? Is this "insanity" a uniquely Islamic phenomenon? Is this a uniquely contemporary phenomenon? Is this "insanity" unprovoked?



