

Confronting the Real Enemy to Civilization

Only minutes after the horrible massacres in Paris on November 13, 2015 French President Francois Hollande made it plain. The attacks in Paris by ISIS and its supporters were an act of war waged by a terrorist army, a jihadist army, the Islamic State ISIS or Daesh, against France. In contrast, President Barack Obama in characteristic fashion said he did not want “to speculate at this point in terms of who was responsible” for the massacres.

Now that ISIS in a video has threatened the U.S. and the rest of the democratic world it is time to accept the responsibility of ISIS and to realize that the terrorism in Paris manifested one aspect of Islamist warfare against Western civilization and its symbolic places. The response must be both a physical confrontation with the terrorist group and a forceful campaign against Islamist ideology.

In this the U.S. must join hands with Western European countries and above all with Russia, a key player. The presence of Russian forces and weapons and the support of pro-Russian forces in Ukraine may be troublesome but it is of much less urgency than the fight against the real enemy of civilization.

A useful parallel can be drawn between past and present. The death in Paris on November 10, 2015 of the colorful literary figure and cosmopolitan public intellectual Andre Glucksman evoked the memory of an individual who had strong opinions but always sought the truth as he saw it. In a sense he was lucky to die when he did and so could not witness the devastation of the city he loved that became the scene three days later of brutal Islamic terrorism.

Glucksman formed his opinions early. At the age of 13 he joined the French Communist party, and quit it six years later when horrified by the 1956 Budapest events. As a kind of young Maoist he took part in the May 1968 student uprising in Paris.

Belatedly, he became aware of the horrors of the Stalinist Soviet Union when in 1973 the French translation of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* was published. More than twenty years earlier, European leftists who were sympathetic to communism and believed it to be the way to a better society has expressed their bitter disillusion with their book *The God that Failed*.

Call it an epiphany or acceptance of reality, but these formerly committed leftists saw the light. This is in startling contrast to those political and religious leaders who today have not yet wakened from intellectual slumber, or self-deception about the monstrous evil confronting the west. They include Muslims as well as those in the U.S. and Western Europe.

Prominent among the religious leaders are those from the world's Muslim community. We know there are more than 1.4 billion Muslims in the world. We also know that most of those practicing Islam are not violent terrorists. But a minority, even if a small minority, are ruthless jihadist terrorists, many now beholden to ISIS, and some adhere to the extremist Wahhabism stemming from Saudi Arabia.

Perhaps the sharia law on which Islamic doctrine rests may not be a fixed and monolithic entity, and that it differs in different societies. Yet, most of the Muslim community is silent or has expressed little criticism of the murderous attacks in Paris. Nor, in general, have many Muslims voiced their concern about the hostility of some in their religion to those critical of the intolerance of aspects of the religion. All those critics, including courageous individuals such as Ibn Warraq, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Parvin Darabi, the Iranian-born

female activist, and Salman Rushdie have been threatened physically.

Justifiable criticism of Islam cannot be dismissed as "Islamophobia" The Muslim world has an obligation to speak up and denounce the murderers in their religion.

For the West, a new departure for attitudes, especially that of the U.S. administration, towards Islamist terrorism is essential. In hindsight, the lowest point in the presidency of Obama may be his unfortunate statement that the Islamist terrorism had been "contained," a few hours before its effectiveness was shown in Paris. Obama was heralding a policy that was in effect a failure.

Regretfully, instead of acknowledging the "mistatement," the administration's deputy national security adviser, Benjamin J. Rhodes, explained that the President was referring "very specifically to the question of ISIL's geographical expansion in Iraq and Syria." This adviser went further in his inexact statement and distortion of the facts by saying that "we have been able to stop that geographic advance and take back significant amounts of territory in both northern Iraq and Northern Syria. Even President Jimmy Carter in 1979 understood that he had been mistaken about the Soviet Union when that country invaded Afghanistan, and changed policy.

Why has Obama been so shortsighted? He can justly claim that Osama bin Laden was killed and that Muammar Gaddafi was deposed in Libya, and that some air strikes have taken place against ISIS, but he and his supporters still seem unaware of the dimensions of the problem.

The problem is urgent. The Obama administration must acknowledge that their view of the Middle East and of ISIS has been mistaken. ISIS is not simply a criminal gang, it is an Islamic state waging war. Like the Europeans such as Glucksman who sixty years ago realized they had been mistaken about the

monstrosities of Stalin, they must change their hesitant policy and act against the appeal of the present menace that will grow if it is not confronted. We now know that the Muslims in the *banlieues* in Paris contain terrorists as well those unhappy about poverty, prejudice, and discrimination.

The American administration persists in the policy of no U.S. "boots on the ground," or at best providing a limited number of advisers. But President Hollande is right. ISIS must be attacked and beaten. Degrading and destruction of ISIS was once mentioned rhetorically by the Obama administration. It must now be implemented by a coalition of those who recognize this is the main priority.

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