

Delusion and Reality in the Obama Administration

by Michael Curtis

It would be too unkind to say that the Obama Administration resembles the Gang that Couldn't Shoot Straight, the appellation given by the novelist Jimmy Breslin to a story about a Brooklyn Mafia mob. Yet, even loyal supporters of the Administration are perplexed and embarrassed by the decision on June 19, 2016 of Attorney-General Loretta Lynch to redact the most important parts of the transcript of the self-described soldier of Allah, the Islamist murderer of 49 people in Orlando, Florida.

Two recent actions have illustrated the insularity of mind, the remoteness of the U.S. Administration from reality, and given the impression of a fanatical obsession with a fabricated version of affairs. One is the repeated refusal by President Barack Obama and, on June 20, 2016, Attorney-General Loretta Lynch, to acknowledge that terrorist incidents are linked to if not the result of Radical Islam. The other is an unwillingness to abide by the Freedom of Information Act of 1966 that allows anyone to request information from executive branch government agencies.

It is inexplicable why Barack Obama and Loretta Lynch still persist in refusing to utter the words *Radical Islam* as if they were a kind of witchcraft in referring to the terrorists in the U.S. The murderers told us who they were and explained their actions. Major Nidal Hassan who killed 13 at Fort Hood on November 5, 2009 said he was linked to the notorious terrorist leader Anwar al-Awlaki. Muhammad Abdulazeed who killed 5 at Chattanooga, Tenn., on July 16, 2015 was motivated by Islamist propaganda. The couple that killed 14 in San Bernardino on June 12, 2016 were home grown terrorists

inspired by Islamist groups.

Why cannot the President and the Attorney General accept the references to Islamic terrorism by the perpetrators including those made by the murderer Omar Mateen in Orlando, Florida in his calls to the police during his intervals of murdering 49 people? Mateen had clearly said he had pledged allegiance to the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and the ISIS organization. It is unrewarding that the Administration's excuse for not speaking frankly is desire to avoid alienating supposed allies in the Muslim world.

What an extraordinary difference between the Obama Administration's inability to speak truth to the American public and the forthrightness and clarity of French political leaders in responding to terror in their country and elsewhere in Europe. After the ghastly series of massacres starting on January 7, 2015 at the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris and the nearby kosher supermarket that killed 17 people, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls stated the obvious.

The Obama administration should heed Valls' words, "We are at war, but not against a religion, not against a civilization, but at war to defend our values. It is a war against terrorism, against jihadism, against Radical Islam." After the terrorism on March 22, 2016 at the airport and metro station in Brussels, Valls repeated the reality, the existence of war against the three mentioned enemies.

President Obama correctly said that all of us have a responsibility to refute the view that groups like ISIL (ISIS) somehow represent Islam. The problem is that no serious critic of his foreign policy has suggested this is the case. All accept that the vast numbers of Muslims in the U.S. and around the world are peaceful people. But it is the height of irresponsibility to deny or overlook the fact that a part of the Muslim community can be characterized as adherents of Radical Islam, one expression, if a perverted one, of Islam.

Similarly, it is not true that addressing the terrorists correctly as Radical Islamist will in some way discourage efforts to combat them, or suggest the West is fighting a war against a religion, or even worse encouraging would be jihadists to join the terrorist groups. The statement and decision of Loretta Lynch in redacting the specific enemy, Islamic jihadists, from the transcript of the 911 calls made by the terrorist becomes incomprehensible, except as one that is politically motivated and thus politicizing the Department of Justice.

Both Lynch and Obama have spoken of the Orlando massacre as an act of terror, an act of hate. But neither mentioned it was inspired by terrorist ideology or that Mateen stated his allegiance to the world's major terrorist group. It is a truism that Mateen was not directed by ISIS or was part of a larger operation. ISIS has fully explained its strategy of calling for lone wolf operations, rather than relying on large scale, disciplined and organized ones.

Lynch's actions and non-actions have revealed a wider problem in the Obama Administration, the lack of transparency if not the continuing politicizing of the Department of Justice, already familiar from members of previous and present administrations, such as John Mitchell in the Nixon administration, and Eric Holder, the previous Attorney-General. On April 1, 2016 the White House was inexcusably undiplomatic by censoring a video of French President Francois Hollande and redacting his remarks that Islamist terrorism is at the root of terrorism.

On a number of occasions Obama has assured the country that his administration is the most transparent administration in history. His memorandum to the heads of executive departments and agencies declared that the Administration would, consistent with law and policy, disclose information rapidly in forms that the public can readily find and use.

Accordingly there has been some commitment to transparency. But, even admitting the growing problem because of the increase in the number of requests for information, there have been frequent departures from this noble principle. Rather, there has been secrecy, and imperfect closure of information off the record and concealed meetings. We know the State Department edited the transcript of the journalist James Rosen. The White House spin-doctor Ben Rhodes has arrogantly revealed his deception of the media and the general public over the nuclear deal with Iran. Censorship has been rife. It may be true as the administration argues that some information needs to be private, but the clear and frequent pronouncements, made clear in the media, by Mateen do not fall in this category.

The record of the Administration regarding secrecy and openness and transparency has been imperfect. Pertinent to the ongoing presidential campaign, a federal judge in May 2015 rebuked the State Department for not releasing the emails of Hillary Clinton, and ordered them to be released in batches every 30 days. More broadly in 2014, the Obama administration censored or refused to release more government records than in any previous year. About 39 % of total requests for information were censored or access was denied. In about 30 % of other instances, no records could be found or the request was found unreasonable. Federal officials could not find any records for one sixth or 13,000 requests for information.

Happily, it was a severe backlash and strong public concern from American citizens about the proposed redaction by Lynch that caused the Department of Justice to change its mind and make public the seemingly whole transcript of Mateen's remarks. The Administration's behavior, by denying or minimizing reference to the perpetrators as Islamic or linked to ISIS in some way, is largely political in character. It's explanation that by redacting the information it is preventing spreading of Islamic propaganda is a specious one. The

families of the 49 killed in Orlando deserve better from their rulers.