

France Gets Its Priorities Right in the War against Islamist Terrorism

The terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015 have called for strong, decisive action in response to the real threat facing Western Europe, the U.S., and Russia. The correct choice should be made. The priority in the Middle East should be determined action against the perpetrators of an act of war by a terrorist army of ISIS and countering the Islamist terrorism of al-Qaeda, the chief threats to civilization.

Differences exist about policy regarding Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and about the degree to which his ruthlessness has produced a vacuum that has allowed terrorism to thrive in Syria and Iraq. Assad is a brutal murderer, responsible for thousands of deaths and millions of displaced persons as a result of the civil war in his country. But he is not a killer of Americans or Western Europeans, nor is he a danger to the outside world. His removal from power is highly desirable, but it is not a solution to the real threat facing the Western democratic countries or Western civilization.

Assad's brutality deserves condemnation but it is the murder of westerners, which ISIS has made a specialty, that motivates young would-be jihadists, causes anxiety and fear in democratic countries, and attracts more attention by the media and TV. Differences among Europeans, the US, and Russia, over Assad's removal from power should not prevent decisive action by all countries to oppose Islamist terrorism, whether by the Islamic State (ISIS or Daesh) or by the various al-Qaeda organizations. Islamist terrorism is a global phenomenon.

French President François Hollande immediately recognized the

problem and unexpectedly became the leader in what he correctly called the war on terror. Regrettably, President Barack Obama and his administration have a problem with language when terrorist attacks occur. French prime minister Manuel Valls has no such problem: he tells his people, "We are at war, abroad and at home." In contrast, Obama uses euphemistic or oblique language like "international terrorism" and "extremism," without naming the perpetrators. For him, ISIS is not a state, but a "network of killers," and therefore it must be countered by counter-terrorism operations.

The Islamic State, the new caliphate, the most vicious of all the Arab dictatorships, is not so shy about revealing its responsibility for the recent murders in Paris. Nor is its objective a secret. It is seeking not only influence, but also world domination. The self-appointed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has told us that Islam is not a religion of peace. The terrorist Islamic State does give fair notice of its intentions. In February 2015, it announced in Dabiq, its highly sophisticated internet magazine, its plans for the democratic West: "We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women." Every Muslim was instructed to kill a "Crusader."

What is baffling about Obama is the misaligned nature of his memory. He is unable to remember that it is ISIS that was responsible for the Paris attacks or that the democratic world is engaged in war against a modern evil, but he has an acute memory for the faults of the U.S., not to mention those of the government of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Accordingly, Obama remind us, since we have faulty memories, that we must not forget about the 60 million people who have been displaced around the globe, and that he will veto any bill that halts or delays the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the U.S. despite concern that terrorists might be among them. His memory was acute on November 19, 2015, when he informed young Asian leaders in Malaysia that the U.S. suffers

from “pitfalls” such as income inequality, a political system controlled by the wealthy, and political parties divided along racial lines. The truth is out: Obama is giving political correctness a bad name.

The Obama policy of “leading from behind” is nonsensical. Britain is now using the RAF Tornados to help the Kurds, who are being attacked by ISIS in Syria. France is using its jets in considerable force to bomb Raqqa, the ISIS capital, and has been aggressive against terrorists in West Africa, especially in Mali and Libya. Russia, long concerned about terrorists in Chechnya and the subject of a number of attacks by Chechens as well as of the downing of its jet plane in Sinai, is now playing an active role against ISIS.

Strong measures and emergency legislation are essential to stem the tide of Islamist terrorism. Civil libertarians are understandably concerned that restrictions might go too far in curtailing freedom of speech or movement, or discriminating against Muslim populations. Nevertheless, President Hollande, now essentially the Western commander in chief, is reimposing controls of people at France’s borders and calling for EU checks on people within the Schengen border-free travel zone.

France is proposing to widen its emergency powers, to detain suspects, to outlaw associations that incite terrorism, and to control websites. French police have carried out hundreds of raids and made arrests without prior legal approval. The police are also being allowed when off duty to carry arms and to use them. Belgium is preparing to take similar action.

These restrictions, of course, curtail civil liberties and can be abused, but exceptional measures are needed. What is frightening is the degree to which the modern-day Islamist barbarians are making use of all digital channels. Young Islamists greeted the Paris attacks with joy, as was shown on Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat by their repeated images of the slaughter. Estimates suggest that nearly 50,000 Twitter accounts can be attributed to ISIS members and supporters, and

that more than 1,000 videos, about half praising the violence carried out by ISIS and the other half portraying the Islamic State as a paradise, are circulating on the internet. The German psychologist Ahmad Mansour has written that though mosques are still important, many young Muslims get most of their information about Islam from the web.

The West must mobilize pop culture to overcome ISIS. The question is whether young Muslims can overcome their possible cultural alienation in Western countries, particularly France, with the largest Muslim population in Europe. That alienation must be ended, or the fight against Islamist terrorism will not succeed, and we will witness the real possibility of Islamist triumph and conquest.

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