

No More Orlandos

by Michael Curtis

The next President of the United States must consider acting on the basis of what activists in Northern Ireland used to call “the politics of the last atrocity.” The CIA Director John Brennan on June 16, 2016 provided official confirmation that despite the military and financial activity directed against terrorists in recent years, the efforts of the United States have not reduced the capability and global reach of ISIS. Brennan warned the country of the dangerous terror threat posed by ISIS and the large cadre of Western fighters on whom it can draw.

Brennan did not use the words “Radical Islamic Terrorism,” words permanently absent from the White House vocabulary. He did not need to do so. As a result of the massacres in Orlando, Florida and in Paris, the U.S. and European countries realize from bitter experience of the existence of that global reach and that ISIS and those influenced by it, and al-Qaeda and others are preparing more attacks on the West.

These attacks may result from homegrown jihadists or from those infiltrating as supposed refugees and migrants into western societies. The massacre in Orlando is the latest example that the terrorist organizations, ISIS and others, have scored a sensational success in training and deploying operatives to carry out attacks. Though not all evidence is in, Omar Mateen, the callous murderer of 49 people, apparently had no direct links to ISIS but claimed allegiance to it and to its leader.

It is troubling that ISIS is skilled at social media propaganda, using twitter, telegram, and tumbler. This means there must be greater collaboration in the U.S. between the next President and technological and communications companies

to counter the ISIS success on this issue.

The next President must start from the reality of the threat to the country. The evidence has been clear for a number of years. In a video released on September 22, 2014, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, official spokesman and a senior leader of ISIS, issued instructions to defend the Islamic world and to “kill the disbelievers” in Western countries. They should be killed in any manner or way, with a rock, knife, run over with a car, thrown down from a high place, choked, or poisoned.

For a number of years, ISIS announced it was shifting its long term military campaign in favor of encouraging action by home grown jihadist terrorists. It even named the victims, police, security, intelligence members and their agents.

This in fact was not new policy. Osama bin Laden, Saudi founder of al- Qaeda, declared war on the U.S. with a series of bombings and attacks including those on two US embassies in east Africa in 1998, and was ultimately responsible for the 9/11 attacks. But he also wanted to strike across the world, eliminate the State of Israel, and above all restore Sharia law in the world. His objective was the spread of Islamic fundamentalist beliefs, and the consequent rising of Muslims throughout the world and their individual activity.

Osama did not make an explicit call for “lone wolf” activity but this was made clearer by the writings of Abu Musab al-Suri, an al-Qaeda operative, in his 1600 page book *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*. Suri recognized that the Muslim masses did not rise after 9/11. He called for individual jihad, or small groups, the act of individuals organizing and carrying out attacks without official connection or even support from a jihadist group, and the continuation throughout the world of sustained guerilla warfare under the banner of Islam.

Suri, a mechanical engineer, advocated not only the use of

local weaponry but also the use of modern technology: the Internet ; mainstream news organizations would broadcast their information and images of attacks; and the use of digital equipment, cameras, smartphones, and laptops. The acts of Omar Mateen in Orlando, and Larossi Aballa outside Paris exemplify this shift to decentralized and successful violence.

The use of the Internet and web sites became important in the hands of Anwar al-Awlaki, the cleric born in New Mexico who was based in Yemen and killed in a drone strike in September 2011. For a few years he was probably the most influential cleric in the English speaking world, partly through his links with Jihadists such as the Fort Hood killer, Nidal Malik Hasan, but mainly through his recruiting of terrorist and his skillful use of social medias.

What to do? The next US President must understand and respond to the Islamist enemy. Peter Bergen in his book *United States of Jihad* addresses the impact of Islamic thought and culture. The combination of fatalism and righteousness has empowered ISIS members to kill anyone they perceive to be standing in their way in order to wage a righteous war. They are instructed to strike terror into the enemies of Allah. The concept of "jihad" has been disputed. Some commentators see it in a mild way as an internal struggle for Muslims. But as a result of terrorists acts the undeniable truth that its main thrust is "holy war."

The holy war is based on Sharia law. Western political leaders should not be "politically correct" about this and ignore the role of Saudi Arabia in the problem. Two things are important. One is recognition of the crucial place of Wahhabism, the austere and fundamentalist branch of Sunni Islam, in Saudi Arabian affairs and of the anti-Western Salafi ideology sponsored by Saudi funded mosques and private donors.

With reference to the massacre in the Orlando gay club, it is worth remembering that according to Sharia law, married men

and women can be stoned to death for sex outside marriage while unmarried people can be lashed. Indeed, in May 2016, ISIS stoned 4 married men accused of adultery to death. The event near the Tigris river in Iraq, was witnessed by a large crowd including children who were present until the skulls of the victims were crushed.

Saudi Arabia punishes homosexuality and transgender individuals with death, whipping, or imprisonment. In 2014 a Saudi man got a 3 years prison term and 450 lashes for using Twitter to date other men. It is not coincidental that Mateen visited Saudi Arabia twice, in March 2011, and in March 2012, ten days on each occasion, and as well as the UAE.

The second issue is the denial by John Brennan that Saudi officials were involved in 9/11, and that the 28 redacted pages of the 9/11 Joint Inquiry Commission report in 2002 did not implicate them. It may be technically true that there is no evidence to indicate that the Saudi government as an institution or as senior Saudi officials individually had supported the 9/11 attack, but even the mediocre detective knows that perpetrators leave no fingerprints. Moreover, an attitude of this kind ignores the calls of the proponents of Islamic terrorism for individual or small group action with no official link. The next President must seek wiser counsel.