

Radical Islam in the United States and France

by Michael Curtis

Though the 22nd Amendment of the US Constitution forbids it, Barack Obama seems to be running for a third term as President of the United States. In his address on June 14, 2016 the President concentrated more on a fiery attack on Donald Trump than on the external enemy to the United States and the civilized world, the forces of "Radical Islam." a phrase he still refuses to name. By criticizing Trump rather than directly condemning and correctly naming an enemy whose claim to legitimacy is based on that religious extremism associated with Radical Islam, President Obama has made Trump a more plausible presidential candidate than he is to many U.S. citizens, who otherwise find him unacceptable.

What's in a name? That which we call Radical Islam (RI) would stink as sourly as if the phrase was not used. This is not a war over words, or a semantic problem, but a question of ideological religious belief. The use of words RI will not really alienate any government, group, or individual prepared and willing to fight Islamist terrorism.

Josh Earnest, White House spokesperson has explained that the President has become frustrated by "talking points" critical of him. But critics are right on this issue of Islamist jihadist terrorism.

No sensible person paints the 1.3 billion Muslims in the world with a broad brush or implies that the democratic countries of the world are at war with their religion. There should not be a call for discrimination against Muslims because of their faith. But the crucial point in the issue is the religious component of current terrorist activities and threats.

There is no magic in the phrase "Radical Islam" as President Obama suggested and the label in itself achieves nothing, and does not deter terrorism. Nevertheless, it is the correct description of the enemy, those who justify their terrorism through proclamation of adhering to or claiming to be implementing their extremist form of Islam. It is open to discussion as to whether there is a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West, but it is essential to grasp two essential points. As Bernard Lewis argued "One is the universality of religion as a factor in the lives of the Muslim peoples, and the other is its centrality."

There has been considerable discussion among scholars and commentators on the rationale of the terrorists. Are they radical extremists who have little religious affiliation but who use the religion of Islam to justify their murders, or are they individuals acting in the name of and on behalf of their version of Islam?

Perhaps the most perceptive statement on this perplexing issue comes from Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi in the UK, in his book *Not in God's Name*. Sacks argues "When terrorist or military groups invoke holy war, define their battle as a struggle against Satan, condemn unbelievers to death and commit murder while declaring God is great, to deny that they are acting on religious motives is absurd."

The recent incidents in the US and France illustrate the sagacity of Sack's comment. Action on the basis of religious motives has two facets. One is the well-planned organized attack by religiously ideological terrorists of which ISIS and the Caliphate State and al Qaeda stand out amid the multitude of other Islamist groups. They are acting out of a conscious struggle against western nations and societies that their religion has decreed are immoral.

The other is an operation by a lone wolf or members of a small group with little serious knowledge of Islam even if they are

observant. They claim to act in the name of or on behalf of their religion, even if they are really propelled by a search for a cause to give them a personal identity or to justify their innate hatred. Communism, socialism, nationalism no longer inspire the true believer, but Islam is at hand to fight against Western imperialism, gays, Jews, and Israel.

All the Muslim terrorists, like those who acted on 9/11 in the US, claim they are acting on behalf of the true faith and against enemies of Islam.

This was true of Mohammed Merah who attacked the Jewish school in Toulouse, France on March 2012, and was linked with al-Qaeda. The murderers on January 7, 2015 of 17 at Charlie Hebdo in Paris, and at the Jewish supermarket, were "avenging the Prophet Muhammad." The killers of 130 killed and hundreds injured in Paris and Saint-Denis on November 13, 2015 acted in conjunction with ISIS.

Now again in June 13, 2016, at Magnanville, about 35 miles from Paris, a 25 year old French born Muslim Larossi Abball killed two political officers, one the deputy head of a police station was stabbed to death and the other his 36 year old partner, had her throat slit in front of their 3 year old son. The killer declared in a video that Allah was the greatest, and pledged allegiance to the ISIS Caliph Abu Bakr al Bagdadi. Abball was answering the call to kill infidels, at home with their families.

The nightmare in France is not over. On June 14, 2016 a Muslim man with psychiatric problems stabbed a 19 year-old woman in Rennes, France, telling police he had heard voices ordering him to make a sacrifice for Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month that began on June 6.

The US has suffered by the incidents in San Bernardino on December 1, 2015 and the attack on June 12, 2016 on the gay night-club in Orlando, Florida. The two killers in San

Bernardino were home grown terrorists who posted a pledge to ISIS. The attack on Orlando with 49 dead and 53 injured is the deadliest mass shooting in the U.S. The act of hatred in Orlando by the 29 year-old Omar Mateen, a New York born Afghan-American, was inspired by Islamist radicalism.

The term radical extremism is important because it stresses the motivation behind the deed and planning of murderous acts, and a version of religious beliefs and culture that seeks to destroy Western civilization. Understandably, the term may disturb political leftists who remain unaware of the existential challenge to their values and culture. But it is a reminder that the struggle against Islamist jihadism has to be fought. The real task should be finding the most effective ways to wage that struggle.