

The French Fight

The aftermath of the French terrorist attacks has, so far, confirmed the helpful resolve that was the general French response to the *Charlie Hebdo* and kosher-market murders in Paris. The realistic objective after these outrages and the great march was that the national and religious-Muslim leaders would be forced to abandon their infuriating collective ambivalence and denounce Islamist violence, or, by declining to do so, to effectively condone it. This was the point President George W. Bush tried to make on the evening of September 11, 2001, when he said that the United States would make no distinction between terrorists and regimes that supported terrorism, and that all countries would have to decide whether they supported or opposed the impending American counterattack on terrorism. President Bush did not succeed in producing this Manichaean divide, and most of the Muslim world sank contentedly into pious demurrals from the antics of their belligerent coreligionists, while, within the community of Muslim states, avoiding a breach with Islamist militants and often tacitly commending them on their feisty assault on Islam's ancient sectarian foes.

Most of the senior Muslim officials who attended the Paris march – the king and queen of Jordan, the presidents of Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority, the prime minister of Turkey, and the foreign ministers of Algeria, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates – have been criticized at home for truckling to the West. This is the root of the problem: the incompetence of the Muslim world west of Malaysia at self-government and the tendency to blame the West for its own failures as mature political societies. This has created a division in technique between the Muslim states that have openly sympathized with the cutting edge of militant Islam, and those who have done the necessary to remain officially cordial with the West, although most of the latter were

effectively emulating the sleazy ambivalence of the Chinese toward the demented regime in the hermit-despotism of North Korea: Beijing purported to join with Japan and the Western powers in disapproval of the un-housetrained Kimist regime, which could not, in fact, discharge a sidearm without the complicity of the Chinese; and many Muslim regimes mouthed civilities at the West but furtively played footsie with the jihadists.

Any process of inciting better, or at least more consistent, behavior from the Arab powers would have to allow for the special status of Saudi Arabia, the feudal, misogynistic paymaster of the Wahhabi Islamist extremists, which is also the temporary light of the West for using the reduction in the world oil price it has generated by increasing production to discourage Iran from its nuclear ambitions, to deter Iranian and Russian meddling in Syria, and, by a fortunate accident, to evict Putin from Ukraine. The West had no right to expect its own irresolution to be redeemed by deliverance from so improbable a benefactor, but in our present state of threadbare Western leadership, we must take success where and how we get it. The cross-currents of Middle Eastern ambitions and loyalties are so treacherous and complicated they are almost impossible to plan for durably. But presumably the Saudis will eventually, if they haven't already, circumscribe Wahhabi subversion.

The second post-Paris objective, after forcing the Muslim governments to stop trying to suck and blow at the same time, is to evoke this problem from the mists of the evasive pretension in the West that all is well with the Muslim world apart from a few unrepresentative psychotics, the inevitable rogues and strays that pop up in such a robust religious culture as Islam. (It was pitiful and distressing to listen to a five-minute official explanation last week of the U.S. administration's reluctance to use the phrase "Islamic extremism." Who do they think knocked down the World Trade

Center – a group of angry shareholder activists? The flipside of this see-no-evil approach was the bunk about hot buttons and sensitive people, implying that insulting Islam or the Prophet invited and made explicable, if it did not justify, the murder of the authors of the disrespectful comments.)

In company with this version of events, Pope Francis's offhand comment, after unequivocally condemning the Paris outrages and sectarian violence generally, that insulting any religion was uncivilized and hazardous, was seized upon by Rome's habitual critics as an attempted papal whitewash of the Paris murders. The Vatican reiterated Francis's condemnation of those acts and his support for the anti-ISIS military alliance. No Muslim organization claimed the pope had endorsed violence; it was entirely the figment of the imagination of jumpy or anti-Catholic Westerners.

The French, who were pushed to the forefront of the Western response to Islamist terror by the Paris incidents, have manfully raised the bar for the rest of us. The associate publisher of *Le Figaro*, with *Le Monde* one of France's two most influential newspapers, issued a forceful "Declaration" last week in the splendid tradition of Emile Zola's "J'Accuse" in the Dreyfus case, leaving no doubt of the scope of the contest now well underway. He wrote: "It is high time that we realized finally that a new religious war has been declared and this time on a planetary scale. Islamists massacre Christians in Egypt, Iraq, Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria; all over in fact. We have the strong impression that this century is going to see the pitiless unleashing of a renascent Islam, seeking to dominate the world and make Christian civilization pay for the centuries in which it ruled the world. This hatred of Christianity vastly exceeds all problems of faith. Attacking churches, priests, other religious personnel, and the faithful, Islamists wish to destroy Western civilization, democracy, capitalism, what they call 'neo-colonialism,' equality of the sexes, the Rights of Man, all progress as we

conceive it. Marx, Lenin, and Stalin have been replaced (as threats to the West), by Allah and the Prophet. Bellicose imams have taken the places of the political commissars. The 21st century will be a war without mercy and the immense Islamized masses of the Third World and our great metropolises could be more dangerous than the tanks of the Warsaw Pact were. We weep with our usual crocodile tears for the Copts massacred at Alexandria and the Christians assassinated in Baghdad, but we passively sit with folded arms."

The author wrote of the "Belle Époque" of Saddam Hussein, surely the ultimate debunking of the ill-considered war against him (though, like the Warsaw Pact comparison, this is an exaggeration), and he was particularly exercised by a spectacle familiar to all of us: "a useful imbecile who lengthily explained on television that Egyptian Islamists massacred Copts because these Nile Valley Christians were representatives of the West, ambassadors of European culture, living symbols of capitalism, neo-colonialism, the dollar, and Coca-Cola, and thus they had a perfect right to wish to eliminate these surviving relics of a detested past," though the Copts antedated their Muslim oppressors in Egypt. The *Figaro* associate publisher demanded an end to nauseating platitudes about "Islamo-Christian amity . . . and the harmonious cohabitation of our three monotheisms," avoidance of "absurd and sometimes odious references to the most sober hours of our history," and the cessation of "our repentances and cowardices."

It was a magnificent polemical screed in the French manner, and showed again that France alone, of the great European powers, apart from the intermittent attendance of the British, has the instinct of a unitary national state united by principles of liberty and prepared to act like a warrior-people in defense of them. The rest of Western Europe is retarded by Germany's unending guilt and shame and anesthetized by the gelatinous Orwellian monster of the

European Commission, where all is homogenized relativism. The current Islamists are not a more serious threat than Soviet and international Communism was, not to mention the preceding mortal peril of Nazi Germany, whose hobnailed jackboot was on the throat of Paris itself from 1940 to 1944. Islam is not a totalitarian force (though it aspires to it) and does not govern a great power. While the Muslim world is better disposed to and more complicit in these attacks on Christian minorities and the West generally than their spokesmen and most Western governments and commentators admit, it remains a legitimate objective to separate the sane from the murderous Muslims. But the determination to get to the bottom of this problem, in France and the world, and to use whatever degree of force is necessary for the defense of our civilization and interests, is correct and vastly exceeds anything heard or seen in comparably influential media outlets in the English-speaking countries (except, for special reasons, India).

The United States and Canada are made of sterner stuff, despite the moral paralysis of the Obama administration, reduced last week to recruiting the almost equally diffident British prime minister, David Cameron, to help President Obama plead to the Congress not to threaten Iran with re-escalated sanctions; and France, if it remains firm, is strong enough politically to propel the whole European Union forward. In addition to a protocol to prevent failed states from becoming terrorist sanctuaries and training grounds, and the will to enforce the protocol, obviously new counterterrorist techniques will have to be developed. Just killing the leaders with drones, while useful, will not slay this hydra-headed monster. Massive infiltration will have to be implemented. The collaboration of Algeria, which has a battle-hardened army and has successfully fought a long civil war with Islamist extremists, could be helpful in this.

One dividend of this expanding problem is that the ability of the Israelophobes to keep the Arab powers focused on the

Palestinian question is faltering. In the same measure, as the entire West slowly rises to the challenge, the isolation of Israel – as the premier target and doughtiest enemy of the jihadists – declines. While the venom of the Islamist fanatics is heightened against the Jewish state because of the fraudulent claim of geographic usurpation, we of the Judeo-Christian tradition, including the irreligious and the atheists, are increasingly all in this together. It will become less of a free shot for the petty despotisms of Africa voting at the United Nations in lock-step with the Arabs. The spirit of France, added to that of Israel, if contagious, as it should be, can conquer all.

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