

Islamic Violence Must Be Ended

On Sunday, January 11, 2015 , Paris became the capital of the world as the setting of a unique historical demonstration: more than 40 international political leaders marched in the city ahead of two to three million people who had rallied against the terrorist attacks four days earlier. In symbolic fashion, they were manifesting their opposition to two attacks. The first was the massacre at the Paris office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* by gunmen, who, using Kalashnikov military weapons, killed 12 people, including the editor in chief and his staff and two police officers and injured another 11. The second was the murder of four innocent people, all Jews, in the kosher supermarket in the Rue des Rosiers in eastern Paris.

As has happened so often before, some of the mainstream media and the Obama administration were hesitant in determining the nature of the attacks and the identity of the gunmen. French political leaders, destined by history to carry the banner of humanity, informed them of the brutal truth of which they seemed unaware, or else which they deliberately avoided.

These gunmen were not petty criminals involved in a drug war in the streets of Paris, or disturbed individuals who were temporarily insane.

President François Hollande immediately spoke of the massacre at *Charlie Hebdo* as a terrorist act of extreme brutality. His political rival, Nicolas Sarkozy, regarded it as an attack on French democracy. The essential truth came from French prime minister Manuel Valls, on Saturday, January 10, 2014 in a speech at Evry, south of Paris. He made clear that France is at war with radical Islam. The war, he said, is not a war against a religion, not against a civilization, but a war to defend French values, which are universal: "It is a war

against terrorism, against jihadism, against everything that is aimed at breaking fraternity, freedom, solidarity.”

Some of the mainstream media in Western countries have been unwilling to accept this perspective. Instead, they have tended to romanticize Islam or to provide excuses for murderous action. Muslims are said to suffer from grievances, real or perceived. They are seen to have a serious identity crisis and cannot feel at home in French or other European societies. Some of the media even explain away in an uncritical way the Islamic hatred of Jews and of the State of Israel.

These excuses have no validity in connection with the terrorists in Paris. Collected information reveals that the two main killers, two brothers, were influenced by Anwar al-Awlaki, the extremist preacher who recruited people for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). He was killed by a U.S. drone strike in September 2011. One brother had lived two years in Yemen, and the other had spent time at and attended a military training camp there in 2011. These two acted on behalf of the al-Qaeda group. However, the third terrorist, the killer of Jews in the kosher shop, declared his allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) and to the self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Whatever the rivalry and their warfare against each other in Syria, or the organizational cooperation in France between the two terrorist groups, al-Qaeda and IS, both share Islamist jihadist extremism and hatred of Western civilization.

Islamist spokesmen, using social media, did not hesitate to applaud the attacks in Paris and to praise the killings by the “heroic jihadists.” They were joyous that “two lions” had terrified all of Paris. The spokesman for AQAP threatened that France would not live in safety as long as there is aggression against Muslims.

Though the French political figures have made clear that the

terrorist acts were committed by Islamist jihadists, the most important commentary on Islamist behavior has come from Egyptian president Abdel al-Fattah el-Sisi in a speech before religious scholars and clerics at Al-Azhar University, Cairo on December 28, 2014. He put the issue starkly and clearly.

There was a need for reform. The problem for the Muslim world was not their faith, but their ideology, which was hostile to the whole world and was a source of concern. That ideology was a body of ideas and texts that had become sanctified in the course of centuries to the point that challenging them had become very difficult. Was it conceivable, Sisi asked, that 1.6 billion Muslims would kill the world's population of seven billion? The Islamic nation was being torn apart and destroyed. Sisi implored the clerics to revolutionize the religion and get closer to a truly enlightened ideology.

There are two outstanding issues: the support that has been given to Muslim clerics who preach the same hatred – hatred against Jews, the State of Israel, and the democratic world in general – and the politicization of Islam. The latter problem, the combination of religious and political power, goes back to the origin of Islam, since in 624 the first raid by the Prophet Mohammed against a caravan in Mecca, and the continuing subjugation of other peoples. From the 7th century on, the Islamic empire stretched from Spain to Constantinople (the center of Christendom at the time), Persia, India, and the borders of China.

Holy Islamic wars continued until the 18th century, when the Ottoman Empire suffered some defeats. Such conflicts have been reignited in the late 20th century. Muslims' goal was to spread the "true" faith, led by a spiritual leader who would implement sharia law in the areas conquered. The world was divided into two parts: Dar al-Islam (Home of Peace) and Dar al-Harb (Home of War).

The fundamental problem facing the world is whether the

extreme Islamist ideology can be ended or controlled. The Western world must act in this regard. Passivity is complicity. Nevertheless, the argument of President Sisi suggests that Muslims must fix the problem. In this regard, it is worth asking where American Muslims stand on this issue.

Will the imams and Muslim clerics in the U.S. make categorical statements on Islamic terrorism and condemn all attacks made in the name of the "true" faith? Their voices ought to be heard in mosques condemning Islamic violence.

The haunting question is whether the Muslim world can reform itself and embrace freedom of expression, religious freedom, tolerance, and an end to violence based on religious hatred.

World peace depends on the outcome.

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