

Religious Illiteracy Hampers West's Response to Radical Islam

It seems that some lessons are difficult to learn. As ISIS was busy slaughtering Yazidis, Coptic Christians and western hostages, burning fellow Muslim alive, and destroying ancient pre-Islamic artifacts, President Obama was denying its spiritual pedigree and planning a White House summit on violent extremism that would deny any connection between radical Islam and terrorism.

The very use of the term "violent extremism" minimized the terrorist threat by obscuring its ideological motivations. And by using neutral terminology to mask its doctrinal character and goals, the president didn't simply ignore the religious connection – he affirmatively denied it and thus facilitated Islamist dissimulation.

He also attempted to shift blame for terrorism by legitimizing Muslim grievances against the West and attributing the actions of religious extremists to economic privation. With other world leaders and moderate Muslims finally acknowledging the threat, President Obama's steadfast refusal to do likewise seems pathological. His denial of the religious foundation for much of today's terrorism – and for Iran's nuclear ambitions – is a slap in the face of reality and an insult to Israel and all other U.S. allies that are targets of Islamist aggression. Moreover, it demonstrates either ignorance of history or an affinity for those committed to religious totalitarianism.

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