

Vive la France!

I long ago [predicted](#) that France will show the way to the appropriate response to Arab extremism. It is not the least irony that this should happen under the most improbable person to lead the French state in its history, not excluding the ill-favored trio of Charles (II) the Bald, Charles the Fat, and Charles the Simple (the latter two both known as Charles III). President François Hollande has never held a serious job, only an executive position in the French Socialist party and an aldermanic post in a town of about 3,000. When his unmarried companion and mother of their four children, Ségolène Royal, ran ahead of him in a presidential-nomination race in 2007, their relationship ended, and he succeeded her as Socialist presidential candidate and was elected in 2012.

M. le Président's succeeding companion departed the Elysée Palace in high dudgeon when it came to light that His Excellency had his official driver convey him, helmeted, on a motor scooter to the abode of his current companion-in-chief. Mlle. Royal currently serves in the cabinet of the prime minister. These matters may not be strictly relevant to the incumbent president's aptitudes as a statesman, but they indicate the farcical nature of this regime, which has conducted *la douce France*, a naturally very rich country, to negative economic growth, with absurd socialistic measures incentivizing idleness and punishing initiative and success. The French are among the world's most intellectually accomplished peoples, and among its most avaricious, and this phenomenon of a petit bourgeois redistributionist at the head of such a country must be seen as further evidence of the perversity of the French and of their tendency for *le choc*, the absurd, or whatever will startle convention. (Hollande would not have been nominated to the presidency if the New York prosecutor, Cyrus Vance Jr., had not bought into a confected charge of sexual assault by an African hotel maid in

Manhattan against World Bank president Dominique Strauss-Kahn, and had him removed to very rough prison for the fortnight required for the false charge to collapse, wiping out his presidential candidacy also. The consequences of the rogue American prosecutocracy ramify far beyond the United States.)

Few politicians could have been less likely than François Hollande to demonstrate the exactness of de Gaulle's closing comment in his astonishingly eloquent war memoirs: "Aged France, wracked by wars and revolutions and weighed down by history but revived, century after century, by the genius of renewal?." And yet it is this very M. Hollande, cloaked in implausibility, unencumbered with any obvious qualification for any position more exalted than that of a rural railway stationmaster, who has, these past months and culminating in the March of Unity in Paris on Sunday, written a new chapter in the greatness of his people.

Where other countries had quailed and waffled, France intervened in Mali and the Ivory Coast, former French colonies, to end terrible bloodletting and deny victory to Muslim extremists. After France had built two aircraft carriers for Russia, Hollande – as a punishment for Russian aggression in Ukraine – withdrew them from sale and is offering them elsewhere. (Canada is the country that should buy at least one of them, given Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper's tough talk about the Middle East and Russian behavior – the carriers have ice-breaking capability – but Harper seems to be, as the British say, all talk and no trousers.) And when twelve people were murdered in the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine attack, and four more in the hostage-taking at the Paris kosher market, Hollande called the incidents what they were: an assault on freedom of expression and an outright and disgusting act of anti-Semitism. *Charlie Hebdo* is a crass, vulgar, offensive magazine, which sets out to offend everyone and has little wit or style, but has been threatened only, though repeatedly so, by displeased Muslims. Hollande and

virtually all of his countrymen avoided the usual Anglo-Saxon pusillanimities about hot buttons and need for concern about the ruffled sensibilities of Muslims. He declared that, above all other characteristics, France was a democracy, that there was no democracy without freedom, that there was no freedom without freedom of speech and expression and a free press, and that anti-Semitism was racial and sectarian hatred that, when violently enacted, was the most vile and intolerable of crimes, whomever the victims. He called for a march of unity on Sunday and invited widespread public participation. There were none of the overworked patriotic pieties of other countries (often including the United States, where few politicians can avoid the well-trodden platitudes of superlative national self-praise). France does not claim to be perfect or superior to other countries (though it believes that in some respects it is), just to have principles embraced by almost everyone in the country, whose violation the republic will not tolerate. It was to be a silent march of unity, refusal to be intimidated, and determination to protect the nation and its highest ideals.

The people came: nearly two million in Paris, and almost as many in other French cities. From the Place de la République to the Place de la Nation, a somewhat ethnically varied route between squares redolent of mass political activity in French history, they walked, led by Hollande and the presidents or prime ministers of the European Union, Gabon, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Jordan (king and queen), the Palestinian Authority, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, and Ukraine, and the foreign ministers of Algeria, Egypt, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates. Not all of these countries are overly observant of human liberty, but that is not the issue. The point is opposition to terror, and this was a beginning in forcing many Arab governments to stop trying to suck and blow at the same time: to give lip service to

disapproval of terrorism while doing nothing to combat it. The presence of Mahmoud Abbas, Arafat's successor as head of the Palestinian Authority, only five people away from Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the front row of the immense throng, while it is unlikely to indicate a change of heart in the PLO, may presage greater care before trying to incite the murder of Israelis. The chief imam of Paris prominently participated in the march, as did Jewish leaders and many thousands of members of both communities. The board of French imams signed a joint condemnation of violence with the Holy See. France will not tolerate a challenge to the right of the French to enjoyment of their country. It is likely that the government, with broad multi-partisan support, will sharply increase security within all cities and infiltration of questionable organizations, while accelerating efforts to integrate Muslims into French life and reduce unemployment and poverty throughout the Muslim community of about 4.7 million people (out of 64 million people in France).

The violent deaths of 17 people in three days in a great city like Paris, at the hands of Islamist extremists, would not in itself generate such an immense reaction. But the fact that most of them were on the staff of a scurrilous magazine shows that the whole country will rise on the issue of freedom of expression and the unacceptability of suppression of press freedom. The fact that even many questionable elements of the Muslim world have lined up behind the West shows the power of the West to compel more-respectful treatment from many of these bedraggled countries that have routinely imagined that the principal Western powers can be cuffed about with impunity and that the niceties of civilized conduct can be observed while giving aid to the most odious terrorists, as Pakistan's hosting of Osama bin Laden while that country received heavy assistance from the United States indicated. The terrorist movements are a terrible nuisance but they do not threaten our entire civilization as Nazi Germany and Soviet Communism – fanatical ideologies installed in Great Powers and directed by

formidable totalitarian dictators – did.

What the Paris march and the spirit that prompted it may have achieved is to put pressure on the Islamic world to divide between pro- and anti-terrorist states, and on the rest of the world to organize a consensus, which would require the adherence of the Chinese and Russians, to deal with failed states. Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and other countries that could disintegrate must be prevented from becoming breeding grounds and sanctuaries for terrorist organizations. Where it will be very complicated is the case of Saudi Arabia, which, in exchange for untroubled incumbency by the House of Saud, has parceled out a sizable proportion of its oil revenues for decades to the Wahhabi sect, which is the chief propagator of the ecclesiastical rationale for Islamist violence. We owe the Saudis, as has been [discussed](#) in this space in recent weeks, the exposure of Russian leader Vladimir Putin as a penniless mountebank, and they have pushed him out of Ukraine. And we owe the Saudis the bonanza of the reduced oil price and of the rod on the back of Iran, which is the last stop before the arrival of the Israeli air force in preventing a nuclear-armed theocracy in that country. It is only the self-enfeeblement of Western political leadership that has thrust such power into the improbable but willing hands of the Saudis. Perhaps the Paris march may even start the West's political recovery from the narcoleptic torpor that has made the whole palsied alliance that won the Cold War, in Richard Nixon's chilling but prophetic phrase, "a pitiful helpless giant."

Given what was at stake and how clear the issues and strong the historic relationship with France, the land of Lafayette and the Statue of Liberty, are, the Obama administration will have to explain more credibly than it has why the United States was represented in the march only by its ambassador. The attorney general, Eric Holder, was in Paris; he would have been wholly inadequate, because his office is insufficiently

exalted and his exercise of it has been incompetent, but he outranks the ambassador, and he did not attend, though all eleven of the other delegates at the security-ministers conference he was attending managed to join the march. In addition to the long catalogue of its other failings, this administration has a cloth diplomatic ear. The same mentality that packed up the bust of Winston Churchill and gave Queen Elizabeth II an iPod as a state-visit present was represented by the lowest rank of official of any of the 50 countries present at the Paris march. This was much commented on by the French media, on the day of the greatest public statement of solidarity since General de Gaulle walked down the Champs-Élysées in the liberation of Paris on August 26, 1944. The least the French had a right to expect was elemental courtesy from the United States, which has as much to benefit from the goals of the Paris March as any country in the world.

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