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A silent march of solidarity for the victims of the Paris terrorists takes place in Montréal, January 11, 2015.

The West cannot indefinitely accommodate Islamist extremism

Writing in response to the tragic massacre in Paris, Western University professor Salim Mansur writes that nations such as France and Canada have failed to devise a credible policy to counter the Islamist's war against the West.

Salim Mansur

After the public outrage over the massacre at *Charlie Hebdo*, after the denunciations and piles of editorials condemning the chillingly bloody assault on free speech by Muslim extremist terrorists, after holding hands and marching in Paris with political leaders from around the world, the question remains “then what?”

More than a dozen years after 9/11 – and a list of Islamist terrorist atrocities that keeps growing in length – the question “then what” persists not as an impertinent afterthought, but as a damning critique of the West’s failure to be truthful to itself in formulating the policy needed to effectively contain and defeat radical Islam or Islamism in its midst.

The two masked men who stormed the office of *Charlie*

Hebdo were brothers Saïd Kouachi and Chérif Kouachi. They were in their early-thirties born of Algerian immigrant parents in Paris, and more or less abandoned to the vagaries of life in poverty. From the shadowy under-class world of low crimes to the certainties of *jihad* as a soldier of Allah is the allure of Islamism for those, such as the Kouachi brothers, searching for some purpose in life. Their numbers will grow as Islamism grows, as was once with the phenomena of Nazism and Communism.

Once the brothers were done with the massacre they raised the cry of “*Allahu Akbar*” (“God is great”), as reported by those who heard them, and “the Prophet is avenged.” A couple of days later and surrounded by police forces inside a printing plant in the vicinity of Paris, Chérif Kouachi recorded a telephone interview with a French



reporter from BMF TV before he and his brother were fatally shot. “We are defenders of the Prophet,” Chérif Kouachi told the French reporter. “We defend the Prophet from people who insult him. Then there is no problem. We can kill them.”

The Kouachi brothers faced death believing until the end they acted righteously in accordance with their belief. They chose to be martyrs just as their al Qaeda sponsors in Yemen, according to Chérif Kouachi in his final interview, had instructed them.

To engage with the question whether the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre was religiously or politically motivated is intellectually seductive. It is the sort of question, academic in nature, however, that ultimately is irresolvable – a paradox which spirals down into a mind-numbing vortex.

Historically the line separating religion and politics in any culture has been mostly non-existent. Religion and politics are both human activities driven by human needs, and when in relatively recent history the line demarcating the two becomes somewhat

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discernible it is as a result of lessons drawn from experience on how to meet the requirements of both without being crushed by either.

The distinguishing feature of the West is the extent to which the line demarcating religion and politics is clearly discernible. This sets the West apart from other cultures, and especially that of the world of Islam. Upon this fragile line rests the unique political system the West built over time, and through trials and errors, with its culture of freedom and democracy.

The massacre at *Charlie Hebdo* – irrespective of whether the irreverent cartoons were insulting to some or all Muslims, or how Muslim sensitivities relating to their religion should be accommodated within a secular culture – was not an isolated event. Since Khomeini, the Iranian religious leader, pronounced in 1989 the death sentence on Salman Rushdie for his novel, *The Satanic Verses*, a significant segment of the Muslim world has been ideologically mobilized to a state of war against the West. The religio-cultural dimension of this war is imposition of Islamist categories of permissible (*halal*) and impermissible (*haram*) based on Shariah on Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

This war came to France before 9/11, and Arab-Muslim terrorists from France's former colonies in North Africa have waged *jihad* in French towns for some time now. French citizens, especially French Jews, have been terrorized and some killed. One of the most outrageous *jihadist* crimes were the killings in May 1996 of seven French monks belonging to the Trappist Order. They were taken from the monastery in Tibhirine, Algeria, by terrorists of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and murdered to drive deep the wedge between France and her former colony.

France, as with other western democracies including Canada, has failed to devise a credible policy to counter the Islamist's war against the West. This failure arises in part from denial of any connection of terrorist acts by Muslims with Islam. President François Hollande speaking to his nation on television, on January 9, observed the killers at *Charlie Hebdo* had nothing to do with Islam.

Unlike President Hollande, Jeannette Bougrab had no reason to dissemble why her partner Stéphane Charbonnier was murdered. Ms. Bougrab is of Algerian and Muslim origin like the Kouachi brothers and, as she told French reporters, had lived for a long while with the fear that the man in her life – the editor of *Charlie Hebdo*, who signed his cartoons as ‘Charb’ – would be killed for his work as a satirist. She described his killers as “barbarians.”

The sad irony here is that Bougrab understood well not only the culture of her lover's murderers but, in sharp contrast to President Hollande, had a deeper appreciation of what France once represented. Ms. Bougrab, in speaking about the terrible

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loss of her man, said, “He defended secularism. He defended the spirit of Voltaire. He, in fact, was really the fruit of this ideal of the Republic that we’ve almost forgotten.”

The politically correct speech of President Hollande instead was symptomatic of multiculturalism, a deeply flawed idea based on the false premise that all cultures are equal. But as a policy, multiculturalism with its origin in Canadian politics maintains the illusion for western democracies that by appeasing Islamists the West will win them over, and undo homegrown terrorism. The facts are depressingly otherwise, as increasing numbers of immigrant Muslims born in the West and Muslim converts have embraced *jihadi* politics. The killings last October of two Canadian soldiers in Montreal and Ottawa, and the storming of the Canadian Parliament by a lone *jihadist*, fit the pattern of a rising curve of Islamist atrocities in the West.

Multiculturalism, as the flip side of appeasement, is the West’s display of guilt for its past history of colonial relationship with non-western societies. In seeking to make amends for past sins, the West ironically assumes responsibility for the sins of the non-West also. Hence, the murderous rampage of Kouachi brothers, as President Hollande solemnly declared, had nothing to do with Islam; left unstated, in terms of multiculturalism, was that the “root cause” of their savage Islamist acts was buried in the French colonial rule of Algeria in the not so distant past.

Multiculturalism deflects away from Muslims in the West their responsibility to publicly repudiate Islamism, and renounce any effort to import Shariah that would degrade the nature of the political system whose benefits attracted them at the outset to emigrate and settle within western democracies.



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In the aftermath of *Charlie Hebdo*, it would be fitting for a Canadian politician to show rare courage by calling for repeal of multiculturalism. The proper and unflinching response to Islamism requires the West to set aside political correctness and plainly assess the prevalent reality of the Islamist war.

It is not for the West, however, to resolve the immense political and cultural upheaval inside the world of Islam; nor is it for the West to dictate the modalities of Islamic reform for Muslims. But the West, including Canada, cannot indefinitely accommodate Islamists in its midst without doing irreparable harm to its culture.

It should instead urgently take a page from its own history within living memory, of the struggle to contain and defeat Soviet Communism. The struggle of the West against Islamism is similarly historical in nature; and it is long over-due that Islamists in the West heard from our political leaders in no uncertain terms that they have a choice to make: either they learn to assimilate into their host culture, or return to the house of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) whose values they cherish. ■

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