

The attacks against Charlie Hebdo represent a new brand of 'unpredictable terrorism'



"I stand with Charlie Hebdo, as we all must, to defend the art of satire, which has always been a force for liberty and against tyranny," said author Salman Rushdie, who better than most, understand what it is like to be the target of religious fanaticism. Mr. Rushdie was the recipient of a 'fatwa', declaring him a 'blasphemer' in

1989 issued by Ayatollah Khomeini over his treatment of the Prophet Muhammad in the novel 'The Satanic Verses'. Twenty-five years later, Mr. Rushdie is still occupying the 'most wanted' files of Islamic radicals. Yesterday, Islamic terrorists attacked the headquarters of the newspaper Charlie Hebdo, in the center of Paris; the provisional toll is 12 dead and a dozen wounded, including five in serious condition. Among the victims, the editor of the weekly, Stephan Charbonnier, aka Charb, and three famous cartoonists: Cabu, Tignous and Georges Wolinski. Two police officers on guard outside the building were also killed, one of them a Muslim. Charbonnier's name was highlighted alongside Mr. Rushdie's name in al-Qaeda's hit lists. The three men who launched commando style attack on Charlie Hebdo's headquarters in Paris, used Kalashnikov automatic guns against people, writers and cartoonists, armed only with their wits, pens and laptops. The terrorists deliberately focused their rage against the harmless civilians; they did not target a CIA station, a military installation or even the office of a

racist/supremacist political party (despicable as any of those actions would have been).

No, they shot cartoonists. It's like attacking the Red Cross, it is cowardly. ISIS's advance in Syria and Iraq, last spring, prompted Western intelligence to warn about the possibility of attacks spreading to the West. Few could have imagined that the best organized and deadliest of these would target the media, striking fear into those who use words and drawings to tell stories and explain the world, even poking fun at it. Of course, the gunmen have failed miserably in their intent. Nothing will change in the world of satire. Cartoonists will not, suddenly, start to censor themselves; it will never happen, because they long to search for truth, mocking fundamentalism and dogmatism, regardless of who is guilty of practicing it. If anything, the Charlie attacks will increase their desire to fight obscurantism. One of the unusual aspects of the attack is that, for the first time, it was directed against the press, against journalists. It also has the risk of inciting Islamophobia, presented as the latest act of war by jihadists in heart of Europe. Far more than satire, the real target of the attack was freedom itself. Perhaps it will wake up the vast majority of Muslims to denounce the very notion of such an attack, clearly and in the strongest terms as did various Communist mainstream parties against their more radical offshoots in the Europe of the 1970's – such as the Italian Communist Party did with the Red Brigades.

Islam must take a clear stance against those comrades who make mistakes, big mistakes. Otherwise, Islamophobia will rise and prosper in Europe, fueling the political vultures who will exploit people's fears of migrants and their children, justifying reactionaries' rants against millions of innocent and Muslim people in France and Europe. There are millions of Muslims, who are just as sick as anyone of seeing the name of Islam being soiled by terrorists shouting its name against people's right to laugh, to dress as they wish and think as

they like so long as they do not infringe on anyone's ability to enjoy the values of coexistence and peace on which Europe and western democracies are founded. Ironically, the perpetrators of the raid at Charlie Hebdo represent caricatures themselves; they wear long beards, funny hats and ridiculous outfits deliberately chosen to instill fear...rather than respect. The well-trained and professional killers who struck Charlie Hebdo want chaos in Europe, one fueled by fear such that citizens start to look for enemies among their neighbors, resulting in their being isolated rather than integrated and co-existing peacefully. In order to avoid drifting into a world defined by the black and white propaganda of 'us against them', France and Europe will find that the very French ideals of the 1789 Revolution, 'liberté', 'égalité' and 'fraternité' are still the best weapons to use against terrorism. Yet, it is essential that Muslims denounce violence done in their name vociferously.

All the outrage over the waste of innocent blood cannot mask the fact that the attacks should have been expected and that they have occurred in a political, religious and cultural context, which in recent months has seen a continuous increase in tension. The success of a book by Eric Zemmour describing the decline of the State and the advance of immigration and another book (to be published today) by Michel Houellebecq, entitled "Submission" (the title – Islam in Arabic means 'submission') of France to the Islamic Brotherhood Islamic are clear signs of a deterioration of Muslims' status in Europe. The killers are two brothers; French citizens of Algerian descent, Said and Kouachi Said. It seems they spent the summer in Syria, but not on the beaches of Latakia or the suq in Aleppo; rather they were fighting alongside ISIS or al-Nusra, against the Syrian – and very secular – government troops in that country's intractable civil war that started in 2011. It was not the first time that Charlie Hebdo attracted Islamic terrorism. In 2006 the newspaper had in fact been threatened by unknown assailants, and denounced by Islamic associations,

after the paper chose to publish a caricature of Muhammad wearing a turban shaped like a bomb on his head, first featured in the Danish paper 'Jyllands-Posten'.

Shortly before Christmas France had suffered three attacks within days: On December 20, Bertrand Nzohabonayo, an Islamic extremist native of Burundi, had attacked a police station in Joué-les-Tours, shouting "Allahu Akbar" and had managed to injuring three police officers before being shot down. On December 21, in Dijon, another assailant in a car had injured 13 people lunging into the crowd shouting "Allahu Akbar". The next day another terrorist had crashed with a van at a Christmas market in Nantes, targeting a table full of spirits shouting "Allahu Akbar", injuring 11 people. The dynamics of the three attacks were the same that characterized other attacks that occurred a few weeks before in Canada and, also in those cases, the assailants used motor vehicles, driven at high speed against passersby. Then there is the propaganda from ISIS's self-proclaimed "Caliph", Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who has incited Muslims to hit the "unbelievers" in the West in any way, whether by running them over with cars, attacking them with a knife, or shooting them with a sub-machine gun. Accordingly, last October, a French speaking jihadist incited Muslims in France to attack and kill non-Muslim civilians, threatening that no unbeliever, in any country (one might include recent attacks on buses in Kenya or even the bombings at the Boston Marathon in 2013), must feel safe. French authorities will now have to demonstrate that they have the ability to bring the terrorists to justice and to prevent further attacks.

Many wonder whether all the monitoring and prevention measures implemented by the authorities in Europe are really effective and able to confront the danger of jihadism – rather than merely fueling xenophobia – in a time when the ISIS is ready to take any action necessary, given that it has come under attack by a NATO coalition, including the United States,

France, UK and Canada. Yet, aerial attacks, no matter how useful, seem rather weak in addressing radical Islamists' new strategies in an ever more globalized and increasingly uncontrollable world. "If you cannot make it to the battlefield, then bring the battlefield to yourself," advises Aqsa Mahmood, a young British student who had decided to join ISIS in a clear prelude of the kind of less organized and more unpredictable terrorism seen in the latter half of 2014. 'Terrorism 2.0', as some have termed it, is more spontaneous and less predictable; it does away with the action planned by terrorist cells, whose schemes have a chance of being intercepted. It seems far more spontaneous and able to be practiced by 'lone wolves', catching freedom loving Western societies unprepared – if the principles of freedom, democracy and equality on which they function are to be upheld. The West will have to study again and learn how to deal with a new brand of terrorism, one more convenient and less expensive for organizations such as Al-Qaeda or the ISIS, to run.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, operating in Yemen, was a precursor, using makeshift bombs, and offering tips in its publications on how to build a homemade bomb, inviting the faithful to hit the aircraft in flight. Moreover, no longer are targets chosen on the basis of historic importance or symbolism such as landmarks, stations or airports. Today, the local Starbucks, or better yet, an anonymous coffee shop in an alley, is a legitimate target. And then there is the matter of weapons availability. Thanks to Internet, the would be terrorist can find all kinds of materiel from weapons to body armor and ammunition, as well as the how-to manuals 'designing a bomb for dummies'. Essentially, terrorists no longer need to be backed up by organizations; they merely need to be aroused by them and ISIS seems to be a major source of inspiration. There is a sad realization that Europe's security can now be compromised by a handful of men, armed with anything from a knife to a gun and without need for major technology. This unorganized and more unpredictable brand of terrorism might be

more destabilizing than in the past. It achieves sufficient violence to threaten the moral fabric, triggering socio-religious frictions in the Europe and any country sharing its values by fueling intolerance and mutual fear between cultures and religions.