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The Origin of Modern Terror and Crumbling Western Values

The Elephant in the Room

by JOHN CHUCKMAN

January 27, 2015

Do you ever solve problems by ignoring them? Most of us would say that is not possible, yet that is precisely what western governments do in their efforts to counteract what is called “Islamic terror.” Yes, there are vast and costly efforts to suppress the symptoms of what western governments regard as a modern plague, including killing many people presumed to be infected with it, fomenting rebellion and destruction in places presumed to be prone to it, secretly returning to barbaric practices such as torture, things we thought had been left behind centuries ago, to fight it, and violating rights of their own citizens we thought were as firmly established as the need for food and shelter. Governments ignore, in all these destructive efforts, what in private they know very well is the origin of the problem.

Have Islamic radicals always existed? Yes, we have records through the history of British and French empire-building of strange and fearsome groups. It appears every large religion has a spectrum of believers, always including at one end of the spectrum extreme fundamentalists. They are not a new phenomenon anywhere, so why has one group of them, in the sands of the Middle East, become part of our everyday awareness?

It is also nothing new that young men become hot-blooded and disturbed over what they regard as attacks upon their kind. Western society's record of crusades, religious wars, colonial wars, and revolts, a total likely having no equal in the histories of the world's peoples, offers countless examples of young men being angered by this or that circumstance and joining up or running off to fight.

George Bush told us today's terrorists hate our freedom and democratic values, but like virtually every utterance of George Bush, that one was fatuous, explaining nothing. Nevertheless, his is the explanation pounded into public consciousness because governments and the corporate press never stop repeating versions of it, the Charlie Hebdo affair and its theatrical posturing over free speech being only the latest. Theatrical? Yes, when we know perfectly well that most of those who marched at the front of the parade in Paris are anything but friends of free speech.

All backward peoples are uncomfortable with certain western values, that being the nature of backwardness, and backwardness is a defining characteristic of all fundamentalist religious groups – Hasidic or ultra-Orthodox Jews, Mennonites, Roman Catholic Cardinals, cloistered nuns, Sikhs, and many others – who typically choose modes of dress, rules to obey, and even foods to eat having little or no relationship with the contemporary world and science. Of course, that is their right so long as they are peaceful and law-abiding.

Any fundamentalist group, pushed by more powerful people from outside their community, is entirely capable of, and even prone to, violence, and all human beings are capable of violence when faced with abuse and injustice. Centuries of religious wars and terrors in Europe about such matters as how the Mass is celebrated prove the proposition and should be held as a warning, but they are forgotten by most, if they were ever known. The tendency towards violence continues today amongst many fundamentalist faiths. In so relatively small and seemingly homogeneous a society as Israel, there are regular attacks from ultra-Orthodox Jews against the country's worldly citizens or against fair-minded rules about such pedestrian matters as women riding buses or walking on a street. The attacks become quite violent – punching, spitting, burning down homes, and killing sometimes – and all go against what we call western values, but because the scale is fairly small, and our press also has a constant protective bias concerning all things Israeli, these events rarely make our mainline news. They must be found on the Internet.

It took Western Europe literally centuries to leave behind such recurrent and violent themes as witches and the need to burn them alive, the Evil Eye, casting out demons, execution for differences of belief, and countless other stupidities which characterized whole societies and destroyed lives. And if you want to go still further back, go to the Old Testament, a collection of ancient writing packed with violence, superstition, prejudice, and just plain ignorance, which Christians and others even today regard as containing important truths for contemporary life. Human progress, at least in some matters, takes a very long time indeed.

Our world has more backward people than most of us can imagine. The news does not feature their extremes and savageries because it serves no political purpose. In Africa, for example, we find practices and beliefs utterly repellent to modern minds: the practice of senior village men raping young girls as an accepted right, the genital mutilation of 3 million girls annually (an

African, not an Islamic, practice), the hunting down and butchering such “strange” people as albinos, their parts to be eaten as medicine, and many others. In India, a country well on its way to becoming modern yet one with a huge backward population, we have practices such as marrying off mere girls to old men rich enough to pay dowries to poor parents. At one stroke this enriches the parents and relieves them of the burden of a child, a female child too, always viewed less favorably. The practice generates a large population of widows when the old husbands of girls married at, say, twelve die. These women are then condemned to entire lives as widows, never allowed to remarry, required to dress and eat in certain ways, and basically shunned to live in squalid equivalents of old folks homes., living entirely meaningless lives. India also has the practice of “bride burning” where new brides who are deemed unacceptable for various reasons become the prey of the groom’s family, literally being burned alive. There are many other barbarities in that society too, including “honor killing” and young women who are made inmates in certain temples to serve as glorified prostitutes.

Our press assiduously avoids much of the world’s horrors as it focuses on “Islamic extremism,” and politics are the only explanation for the bias. The press theme of Islamic terror and indeed real incidents of terror grow from a reality always taken for granted, never debated, and certainly never criticised: the elephant in the room, as it were, is Israel’s illegal and agonizingly long occupation of the Palestinians.

It may be not be important to our press and governments that Israel holds millions as prisoners, crippling the lives of generation after generation, or that Israel periodically strikes out in every direction – Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank – causing the deaths of many thousands, or that Israel is seen to bulldoze people’s homes and sacred monuments with complete impunity, but it very much matters to many millions of Muslims in the world, and some of them, fundamentalist men, strike out against it just as young men everywhere have sometimes struck out against keenly-felt hurts and injustice.

In western countries, under the hard influence of America, a country in turn under the hard influence of the world’s best organized and financed lobby, the Israel Lobby, we have come to regard Israel’s behavior as normal, but it is, of course, not normal, not in any detail. What is normal about holding several million people prisoner for half a century? What is normal about bulldozing homes and literally stealing the land upon which they stood? What is normal about declaring an honestly elected government as criminal and treating its people as though they were criminals? What is normal about limiting people’s opportunity to earn a living or to import some of the needs of life? What is normal about killing nearly a thousand children, as Israel has done just in Gaza, since 2008?

Pretending that Israel’s behavior is not the major cause of that screams from our headlines and news broadcasts has reached absurd levels. America has only vastly compounded the problem of Israel’s organized abuse of a people: it and its silent partners have destroyed Iraq, destroyed Libya, are working hard to destroy Syria, have seen to it that Egypt’s tens of millions again live under absolute government, ignore countless inequities and barbarities in secretly-helpful countries like Saudi Arabia, and carry out extra-judicial killings through much of the region. All of it is carried out on Israel’s behalf and with Israel’s cooperation. Can any reasonable person not see that this vast factory of death also manufactures countless grievances and vendettas? The

stupidity is on a colossal scale, rooted in the notion that you can kill your way out of the terrible consequences of terrible policies.

In America, paid political shills (Newt Gingrich was one) have campaigned about there being no such thing as a Palestinian. Others (Dick Armey was one) have said that millions of Palestinians should be removed, all their land left conveniently to Israel. That last is an odd thing to say, isn't it, considering there are supposed to be no such thing as Palestinians? And just what country would take millions of "non-existent" Palestinians? Obviously no politician with even pretence of integrity would say such things, and how can intelligent and successful people like America's Jews take satisfaction in hearing politicians reciting such embarrassing scripts? But this is a good measure of the way intelligence and sound thinking are scorned in American politics. How can you achieve anything worth achieving without intelligence and sound thinking? You cannot, but that doesn't stop American Presidents and Secretaries of State from carrying on the world's longest-running dumb show, something called the "peace process." The sombre, moose-like figure of John Kerry is photographed playacting at statesmanship while American-supplied arms just keep killing thousands of innocent people.