

THE AUSTRALIAN

Paris attacks: Our politicians must confront Islamic extremism

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Illustration: Eric Lobbecke Source: TheAustralian

Barack Obama is right to call Friday's terrorist attacks in Paris an attack on humanity. But they are first and foremost an Islamist attack on the West

(<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/paris-terror-attacks/paris-attacks-war-declared-on-islamists-by-west/story-fnyenpo3-1227610182755>) . And it is only by destroying radical Islam that we can end the ever-escalating savagery that threatens our cities, our culture and our way of life.

That further onslaughts would follow last January's horrors was hardly unexpected.

“This is barely an aperitif,” a senior French police officer told *Le Figaro* immediately after Saïd and Chérif Kouachi forced their way into the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 12 people and injuring 11 others, before their accomplice, Amedy Coulibaly, killed four hostages at a kosher supermarket.

And in late September, as attempts multiplied, one of France’s most respected judges in terrorism cases, Marc Trevidic, warned *Le Monde* that with “Daech moving from poorly trained lone wolves to large-scale, carefully planned actions, the darkest days still lie ahead”.

It is therefore inevitable that Friday’s attacks will intensify the search for causes and solutions.

No doubt, **the situation in Syria has played a role** (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/paris-terror-attacks/paris-attacks-police-hunting-terror-cell-with-links-to-syria/story-fnyenpo3-1227610178188>), giving Islamist terrorism, which until the civil war seemed to be receding, a fresh lease of life.

And also fuelling that renewed vigour was the release, during the ill-fated “Arab Spring”, of scores of hardened jihadis from jails in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt.

With its cadres strengthened and replenished, Islamic State was able to expand its international networks, making it only a matter of time before the closely co-ordinated, multiple site suicide attacks that are the daily fare of Syria and Iraq crossed into Europe.

But it would be a mistake to view Syria’s bloodbath as the cause of Friday’s horrors. On the contrary, both the Syrian tragedy and the murders in Paris are mere symptoms of a far broader conflict within Islam itself and between Islam and the Judeo-Christian world.

After all, in shouting “Allahu akbar” as they opened fire, the terrorists in Paris were not simply seeking victory over Bashar al-Assad; rather, their goal was to accelerate the restoration of that uniquely Muslim conception, the global caliphate. Nor are their Shia adversaries — on whom they inflict, and from whom they receive, the most barbaric punishments — any less apocalyptic in fulfilling the Koran’s injunction to “terrify the enemy of God and your enemy”.

And with militant theocracies in Saudi Arabia and Iran backing Sunni and Shia extremists, respectively, each of those millenarian versions of Islam has the support of powerful states as it fights for world domination.

As a result, even were Syria’s civil war resolved, the conflict would just shift on to new battlegrounds; Europe’s proximity to the Middle East ensures its citizens would remain in the firing line.

Yet it is obviously not geography alone that places Europe at such grave risk.

No less significant is the sheer size of its Muslim communities, which now account for about 8 per cent of France’s population, nearly 7 per cent of Germany’s and only slightly less than that in Britain.

Moreover, every study shows that instead of integrating into their host countries significant elements in those communities have increasingly rejected them.

For example, Oxford professor Paul Collier, who is anything but a rightwing bigot, has pointed to myriad signs of rising separateness, going from political preferences to decisions about whether to wear the full veil (which growing numbers of young Bangladeshi girls in Britain adopt, despite its not being worn in Bangladesh).

Equally, contrary to their expectations, the recently released TIES studies of Sweden and Germany, which like their European Union sponsor bend over backwards to be politically correct, find the proportion of descendants of Turkish migrants who have close friends of native origin has tended to fall over time.

Those trends have been made all the more damaging by the hesitations of European political elites. Writing six years ago, Christopher Caldwell identified a process of “colonisation”, in which the terms on which recent arrivals adapt “are set by the immigrants and not by the natives, who started off not caring, but wound up not daring, to impose too many rules on their new neighbours”.

And the reluctance of French elites to confront Islamic fundamentalism, along with their search for an accommodation with community leaders who themselves tolerate extremists, are at the heart of the official report Malek Boutih, a French Socialist parliamentarian of Algerian descent, prepared on last January’s attacks.

The legacy is a pool of readily radicalised Muslims which is far too large to be effectively monitored. Germany’s prosecutor general recently said its surveillance services were “completely overwhelmed”; meanwhile, after three suspects on its watchlists committed terrorist acts, a senior official of the French counter-terrorism service told *Le Monde* that it had neither the capacity to properly follow even the most serious leads nor (despite increasingly sweeping powers) the right to simply place them in indefinite detention.

That the Frenchman who was among Friday’s terrorists was on the watchlist but had escaped detection only underscores that assessment.

Now will come the blowback. And the mounting reaction against German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s recklessness in dismantling what little protected Europe from a tidal wave of asylum-seekers will make it all the worse, especially if reports that one of the terrorists was a Syrian refugee are confirmed.

For sure, world leaders, echoing Francois Hollande, will mouth the usual platitudes; but at France’s regional elections, which will be held in three weeks’ time, the Front National seems set to sweep the vote.

“*Salus populi suprema lex esto,*” said the Romans: the safety of the people must be the highest law; and if the mainstream parties won’t deliver it, others will.

With the streets of Paris drenched in innocent blood, Australia’s politicians should heed the lesson.