

They want to turn Paris into a second Tehran

After the 11/13 attack – what next?

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This conference will address the most urgent threats of our time: the threat of global Islamism and the frightening prospect of the jihadists becoming able to use nuclear weapons.

Just a week ago, we witnessed in Paris the shocking attack, perpetrated by Islamists and motivated by their slogan “you love life, we love death”.

A week later the state of shock remains. The land of *liberté* is under a state of emergency, demonstrations are banned; fear, wherever we look. Have the attackers won?

Shortly before the 13 November attack, another assault on French *savoir vivre* took place – just a probe admittedly, but of symbolic importance. President Rouhani of Iran had been planning to visit France on November 14. Rouhani of all people! France of all places! The trip was cancelled after last weekend’s bloodbath. However, in the course of the preparations for the state visit, a

struggle over protocol erupted: to the shock of his hosts, Rouhani stated that he would not attend any official dinner at which even a single glass of wine was drunk.

Rouhani's outrageous demand reminds us of the aim of the Paris suicide murderers: they wanted to turn Paris into a second Tehran, a city where all the facets of the good life that people were savouring in that bloody Friday night are banned. In today's Tehran, women cannot visit a sports event if a male team is playing, lively music is strictly forbidden, unmarried couples are hauled off the street and taken to prison and there are no public night-clubs or bars. In Tehran, a glass of wine in public is punishable by 80 lashes and imprisonment; a third offense may carry the death penalty, of whose details we know little simply because Tehran, unlike ISIS, does not film its executions and put them up on YouTube.

Rouhani informed the media that he wished to reschedule his visit to France for the near future. But what does it mean to host the President of the world's most powerful Islamist state shortly after the mass murder in Paris?

So that brings me onto my theme: Why do the West's efforts to combat Islamism repeatedly fail? How is that we are unable to slay this many-headed monster?

I have already suggested one reason: the emergence of ISIS led some Western countries to recommend a partnership with Iran. The logic is as simple as it is wrong: ISIS is declared the main enemy, Tehran is identified as part of the solution and Israel is thereby excluded from the anti-Islamist coalition.

I have no doubt that Europeans find the ever-smiling Rouhani nicer than the fanatics of ISIS. However, partnering with Iran still amounts to setting the fox

to guard the geese. The rise of ISIS was spurred by the sectarian policies of the Shiites in Syria and Iraq, egged on by Tehran. With Iraqi Shiite militia, acting independently from Baghdad but in close collaboration with Tehran, murdering Iraqi Sunnis, the latter had little choice than to seek protection by joining ISIS.

Moreover, because sectarian war and chaos serve the ambitions of the Shiite militia, Tehran has repeatedly discreetly supported the Sunni jihadists. It behaves like the arsonist who later presents himself as a firefighter.

For decades, Tehran has been one of the behind-the-scenes sponsors of Al-Qaida and the Taliban and for many years Assad and the Iranians tactically supported the rise of ISIS in Syria, as the US Secretary of State confirmed on 14 November: “Assad cut his own deal with Daesh [= Islamic State] . They sell oil. He buys oil. They are symbiotic, not real enemies in this. And he has not, when he had a chance over four years, mounted his attacks against Daesh.”¹ (U.S. Department of State, Press Availability with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, November 14, 2015.)

Both basic errors in the struggle against Islamism – the courting of Iran and the related exclusion of Israel – were factors in the nuclear deal with Iran reached this summer by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany.

The origins of this deal lie with the charm offensive launched by Rouhani and the Iranian foreign minister Zarif. Just as in his later years Yasser Arafat incited his people in Arabic while leading the international community by the nose in English, so Rouhani and Zarif put on a display of moderation acceptable to the international public while the real ruler, the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei,

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continued to advocate the destruction of Israel and the United States.

Admittedly, it was easy enough to see through the deception since Khamenei's edicts continued to be published in English translation on his official website. However, President Obama and the other powers were all too eager to be deceived.

This desire to be deceived, especially in relation to Iran, is nothing new. Since the birth of the Islamic Republic in 1979 the West has consistently refused to recognize the existence of the Islamic revolution's programmatic statements, let alone take them seriously. Instead, hope has sprung eternal: whenever an Iranian leader has demonstrated a little more pragmatism, he has at once been hailed as the Great White Hope who will lead Iran away from its revolutionary path.

This time too the declarations of these two masters of PR have been taken as good coin and the edicts of the Supreme Leader ignored. The White House wanted to do business with Rouhani, even at the price of a partial sacrifice of Israel. It saw the advent of Rouhani as a strategic opportunity: now the Iranian regime could be finally deradicalized and reinforced as a regional hegemon that could stabilize the region. In line with this approach, one concession after another was made in the nuclear negotiations.

Today, however, all the evidence points to the conclusion that this policy of concessions is not having the desired effect. On the contrary. Anyone who was hoping for a new Iranian dawn "has been jolted with a series of increasingly rude awakenings in the past few weeks", wrote the pro-Obama *New York Times* in September. "A backlash appears to be underway." So, even more Americans were arrested and are still being held hostage in Tehran, Security Council decisions have been challenged by new Iranian missile tests,

Washington has been accused of being behind the Paris massacres and every effort to open up Iranian society has been brutally suppressed. The friendship that Obama tried to establish with Tehran was rejected and is practiced instead with Putin.

However, neither the White House nor any other government involved in the nuclear deal have issued statements about these disappointing developments so far. “It’s too embarrassing to an administration that has invested all of its diplomatic capital in the deal”, suggests Bret Stephens in the “Wall Street Journal.” (Bret Stephens, Iran’s Indecent Proposal, in: Wall Street Journal, October 27, 2015.)

This is where we really are. The hopes for reform in Iran have been dashed, but none of the governments involved has had the courage to admit it. Instead, both policies – trusting Iran and rejecting an active role for Israel – are being dragged as deadweight onto the battlefield with ISIS. Wishful thinking and self-deception must, it seems, continue.

With such a flawed starting point, it is no wonder that the prevailing mood is not one of confident defiance, but of fear. Fear is infectious. “Nothing in the world is more crippling” wrote Vasily Grossman in his novel *Life and Fate*, “than accumulated fear”.

Courage, however, is infectious, too. But in order to get out of the current fear-mode we need honesty and we need clarity. No one yet knows how to destroy the many-headed monster and its slogan “you love life, we love death”. We only know this much: strengthening one devil at the expense of another is not an option. The humanity that loves life must oppose the whole coalition of the crazy that extends from Hamas to Hezbollah, from the Muslim Brothers to Al-Qaida and from ISIS to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Moreover, we must mount this resistance in alliance with Israel, a country that is way ahead of all the rest when it comes to expertise in the struggle against Islamism and experience in preventing suicide murders.

Only then will it become possible to initiate an international campaign in order to outlaw suicide bombing and to legally ban suicide bombing as a war crime. Suicide murder, as the Paris attacks have once again shown, is one of the most serious threats against the free world, since it forces us either to restrict freedom in the interests of security or to live in insecurity and fear.

The future state of our societies therefore depends on whether the aberrant “we love death” fanaticism can be pushed back and destroyed. To this end, suicide murder should be outlawed and legally banned as an international crime against humanity and this criminalization given effect by the isolation and punishment of those who propagate it.

I wish this conference every success and I hope and I am sure that it will give impetus to the fight against the Islamist threat.

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