

Opinion

On (Not) Responding to Terror with Terror

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In the wake of the recent attacks in Paris, we find ourselves in the midst of terror. The threats are real and they are increasing.

The threats I am referring to are, of course, reactionary politicians.

While French President Francois Hollande announced immediately following the attacks that France's response would be "without mercy," he has since added that France will at the same time [maintain its commitment to Syrian refugees](#).

As Hollande explained, we must find the right balance between security and principle.

In the United States, however, the focus has been quite the opposite. Governors and members of Congress are not seeking to preserve the values that define the country while at the same time trying to protect the country's citizens, but rather are denigrating American values by fear-mongering and refugee scapegoating - actions which will not protect America from ISIS but only make ISIS stronger.

As a terror organization, ISIS requires terrified populaces and politicians willing to attack ISIS by any means necessary, particularly if those means can be exploited by ISIS to show potential recruits that America is an Islamophobic nation bent on the destruction, not only of ISIS, but of Islam.

Each time one of the 2016 Presidential candidates goes to the media with a new strategy for fighting ISIS - ranging from closing mosques to refusing to help Syrian refugees and worse - they are doing ISIS's work for them.

This suggests that either American politicians are incredibly stupid (which is certainly a possibility) or, worse yet, that they are exploiting the Paris tragedy to enact ideological policies under the cover of trying to prevent "another Paris." What must be realized is that exploiting the suffering of the innocent for ideological and political gain is the very essence of terrorism. Hence in much the same way that Bush's use of torture and Obama's use of drones are ways of fighting terror with terror, so too is the increasing use of Islamophobia.

The danger of fighting terror with terror is, as Nietzsche made clear, that we are revealing to the world that we find nothing wrong with terror *per se*, but only with *who is employing it*. The NRA's argument against restricting gun ownership is that the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. We can now see that American policies and politicians are putting forth the similar argument, that the only way to stop a bad guy with terror tactics is a good guy with terror tactics.

According to the Catholic doctrine that has since come to be known as the "Just War" tradition, we need not fear stooping to the level of our enemies as long as we are fighting with the "right

intention." As Saint Augustine and his followers argued, Catholic warriors could "turn the other cheek," not through pacifically refusing to take up arms, but rather through pacifically *not wanting* to take up arms. The true determination of *right intention*, however, was God's judgment, as only God could see into the soul of the warrior.

Yet for American politicians of today to make such claims, to argue that we can be assured that they have the right intention because God will judge them so, is to again resemble ISIS by asserting theological justification for the use of terror tactics. It is perhaps ironic that John F. Kennedy, America's first Catholic President, best argues against the recent attempts of American politicians to try, in essence, to out-ISIS ISIS. In his "[City Upon a Hill](#)" speech from 1961, Kennedy, quoting Pericles, said, "We do not imitate - for we are a model to others." He continued:

"Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us - and our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill - constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities."

We must be better than our enemies, not imitate them. Terrorists are supporters of a particular ideology who use particular tactics, but they are not particular individuals. Even if we killed every member of ISIS, if we did so through the tactics we are currently employing, we would not have thereby won the war on terror - we would only have perpetuated it.

But if we must imitate anyone, let us imitate Francois Hollande. Let us live up to the idea of *Nous sommes Paris* by focusing on the values that define us rather than by becoming the security state ISIS wants and needs us to be. We should be less afraid of what ISIS or Syrian refugees might do if we let our guard down, and more afraid of what we are becoming by trying to raise our guard ever higher through tactics that plunge us even lower.

Nolen Gertz is an Assistant Professor of Applied Philosophy at the University of Twente.



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