

A Global War on Radical Islam

By Joseph Lieberman

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A few important questions, following the terrorist atrocities in Paris last week: We are all Charlie now, but are we ready to fight to protect freedom of expression before another cartoonist is killed by Islamist extremists? Are we ready to do what is necessary to stop the killing of another police officer just because she is a police officer, and more Jews just because they are Jews?

In other words, can the inspiring unity that filled the streets of Paris on Sunday in defense of freedom be transformed into the mighty unity that is necessary now to defeat radical Islam before it kills more people and takes away more freedom?

In rapid order, the three attacks in France last week showed more clearly than ever that the international movement of violent Islamist extremism has declared war on Western civilization's foundational values, which are embraced by so many people throughout the world. The murders of police officers, cartoonists and Jews were attacks against the West's most central values and aspirations—the rule of law, freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Radical Islam will continue to threaten what we hold dear unless it is fought and eventually defeated.

Since 9/11, the U.S. has inflicted severe damage on [Osama bin Laden](#)'s al Qaeda. But al Qaeda has divided and reconstituted itself throughout the world under groups with new names like Islamic State, but with the same evil purposes.

Protesters during the march of the republic on the Place de la Nation in Paris on Sunday. Zuma Press

The truth is that the enemy is stronger today in more places than it was on 9/11 and is gaining more ground than ever. It is also true that homeland defenses are significantly better in the U.S. and elsewhere, which has helped thwart many planned terrorist attacks. But wars aren't won on defense.

After the three attacks in France, which so touched the hearts and fears of people everywhere, the world must go on the offensive. The radical Islamists long ago declared war on the West, but most of the nations targeted or threatened have not yet declared war against them.



The spirit that brought millions together in France on Sunday in support of the values of freedom and law should now bring those millions and tens of millions like them in other countries together to support a program like the following:

First, the civilized nations of the world must acknowledge that we are at war with violent Islamist extremism and that as long as these extremists continue to recruit, attack and expand territorially, the civilized world will continue to lose and the number and frequency of attacks like those in France will increase.

Second, every nation whose government or people have been attacked or threatened by Islamist terrorists should formally declare war against them. Congress should update the Authorization for Use of Military Force passed in the wake of 9/11 to grant the president broad authority to take action.

Third, the U.S., along with the world's other great powers, should form and lead a global alliance against radical Islam. That alliance must include leading Islamic nations—Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, to name a few—because Muslims who do not share the extremist views of the terrorists constitute the largest number of its victims.

Combining military, intelligence, economic and diplomatic assets, the goal of this Alliance Against Islamist Extremism should be nothing less than total destruction of the enemy—beginning with Islamic State, AQAP in Yemen, al-Shabaab in Somalia and Boko Haram in Nigeria. These groups are not interested in accommodation; they will not be diplomatically contained. They must be eliminated. As long as they exist, they will continue to radicalize followers, in person and online. They will provide training for terrorists who will attack us where we live, work and worship. That will stop only when they are destroyed.

Fourth, we must use our values as a weapon instead of allowing the enemy to exploit and target those values. The world war against Islamist terrorism is as much an ideological conflict as were the world wars against fascism and communism. The rule of law and the freedom of expression and religion that were attacked in France last week should be championed and spread by the alliance because where there is law and freedom, radical Islamists cannot flourish.

In the aftermath of the Paris attacks, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls on Saturday declared that France was “at war” with radical Islam. If that conclusion takes root, there is every reason for confidence that the civilized world can defeat the latest threat to its existence.

The White House has now admitted that it made a mistake on Sunday by not sending a high-ranking representative to the remarkable march in Paris. But a much greater, history-changing opportunity still awaits President Obama : to lead a global alliance to destroy violent Islamist extremism.

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