

Will Europe Man Up?

If the purpose of terrorism is to terrify, the Islamic State had an extraordinary week. Brussels, capital of the EU and command post of mighty NATO, is still in panic and lockdown.

“In Brussels, fear of attack lingers” was Monday’s headline over The Washington Post’s top story, which read:

“Not since Boston came to a near-standstill after the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 has the life of a major Western city been brought to a halt this way by the fear of terrorism.”

Below that is this headline: “After Paris, a campaign changed by fear.”

That story is about what’s happened in our presidential race: “Across the country ... have come pronouncements of anger and fear not seen after the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid – or even in some ways after Sept. 11 2001.”

Voters speak of “feeling more afraid of the Islamic State, more horrified by the imagery of the beheadings and other atrocities.”

The New York Times’ Roger Cohen describes the Paris he loves.

“[T]hey are shaken. There is a void in the streets too empty, a new suspicion in appraising glances, a wary numbness. Paris is afflicted with absences – the dead, of course; visitors frightened away; minds frozen by fear; and tranquility lost. The city feels vulnerable.”

“I think France is attacked above all for what it is,” writes Cohen, “That in turn is terrifying. ... I don’t think Paris has ever felt so precious or precarious to me as it did over the past week.”

Terrible as the massacres were, some perspective is in order.

What happened on Friday the 13th is that nine fanatics of the Islamic State, using suicide vests and AK-47s, slaughtered people at restaurants, a soccer stadium and in a concert hall.

The death toll of 130 is being called the "worst attack on French soil since World War II."

Yet, from August 1914 to November of 1918, World War I, 850 French died every day for 51 months, a total of 1.3 million in four years in a country not nearly so populous as France is today.

On Aug. 22, 1914, some 27,000 French soldiers died resisting the German invasion. Yet France survived to dictate terms to Berlin.

But that France was another country than today's.

In our own Civil War, in a country one-tenth as populous as today, 400 Americans, North and South, died every day for four years.

The point of this recital is not to minimize the horror in Paris.

But it is to suggest that when Jeb Bush calls the attack on Paris "an organized effort to destroy western civilization," he is ascribing to our enemies in ISIS powers they do not remotely possess.

Indeed, the terror, fear, panic and paralysis exhibited today is in ways more alarming than the massacre itself. Russia lost twice as many people on that airliner blown up over Sinai as died in France. But Russia and Vladimir Putin do not appear to be terrorized.

Every week in Iraq, terrorists claim as many lives as were lost in France. In Syria's civil war, 250,000 have died. This translates into more dead every day for four years than died in Paris on Nov. 13.

What has happened to a West that once ruled the world?

By any measure – military, economic, scientific – the Islamic State, compared to the West, is a joke.

What the Islamists do have, however, is this: If they can reach the West and are willing to give up their lives, and can learn how to fire an AK-47 or construct a suicide vest, they can terrify the peoples of the West by slaughtering dozens or scores of them.

For 10 days, ISIS killers have dominated world news, television, print and social media. So doing, they have engendered a real fear in the heart of Western man.

The strength of ISIS, of the Islamist militants, of those willing to die driving the “Crusaders” out of their lands, beheading infidels, imposing sharia, attacking the West, lies in an emptiness in the soul of Western Man.

Many Europeans are the “hollow men” of T. S. Eliot’s depiction.

They have repudiated their cradle faith Christianity, apologized for the sins of their fathers and sought to make reparations, embraced La Dolce Vita, materialism and hedonism, freeloaded off U.S. defense for 70 years, ceased to have children, thrown open their borders to former colonial peoples to come and repopulate the continent, and turned their back on patriotism to celebrate diversity and globalism.

They invited the world in. And the world is coming to enjoy the lavish fruits of their welfare states and, one day, will be using the West’s concept of one-man, one-vote to rule the countries that ruled their ancestors.

The colonized are slowly becoming the conquerors.

The challenge of ISIS is not entirely unhealthy. It will tell us whether Europe has the will to survive.

As for Paris, time to move on. For, given the triumph this has been for ISIS, more such massacres are inevitable.

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Last Updated: Monday, Nov 23, 2015 12:41:39 -0800