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Understanding the Paris Violence

by Sheldon Richman

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Contrary to American officialdom and its stalwart “manufacturers of consent” — the intelligentsia and mainstream media — we will never comprehend the reasons for the slaughter of 17 innocent people in Paris as long as we ignore the history of Western violence against the Muslim world.

Perpetrators and cheerleaders of Western violence stifle discussion of what motivates young Muslims to murder Americans and Europeans by conflating comprehension with exoneration. Trying to sort things out allegedly constitutes absolution.

That is wrong. If we understand, we may avoid such horrors as took place in Paris last week. If we misunderstand, we are likely to make matters worse.

The official explanation of why fanatical young Muslims murder Westerners is that they “hate our values.” That’s comforting, but is it true? Don’t “our values” include testing such claims through rational argument? If the media were truly interested in public enlightenment, they would regularly arrange for the official narrative to be challenged by knowledgeable opponents.

That the media refuse to do this shows that their purpose is something other than public enlightenment. If high-ranking government officials would decline to participate — they never appear with adversarial guests — the public should know it.

Even when a challenge to the official narrative falls in the media's lap, they pretend not to see it. We had an excellent example last weekend, when CNN reported that Amedy Coulibaly, the man who killed a policewoman and terrorized a kosher grocery in Paris, killing four hostages before being killed, was recorded justifying his actions. After playing the recording, CNN's Jake Tapper and guest "experts" dismissed Coulibaly's words as a mere "rant."

The first remarkable thing about the recording is what Coulibaly apparently did not say. He never condemned his hostages as Jews or infidels. Rather he focused on how they as taxpayers supported France's violence in Muslim countries. Of course, it was probably no accident that Coulibaly was in a grocery in a Jewish neighborhood. He was likely there because he drew a connection between Israel, (specifically, its anti-Palestinian policies) and Jews in general. (Israel's rulers and supporters encourage this invidious connection by declaring that Israel is the state of the Jewish people, no matter where individual Jews live and hold citizenship.)

Nevertheless, judging by the recording, what was on Coulibaly's mind was not his hostages' religion but their support for the French government's violence against Arabs and Muslims.

"You pay taxes, so that means you agree" with France's policy in the Middle East and Muslim Africa, Coulibaly apparently said.

"But we have to pay," someone responded.

"What? We don't have to. I don't pay my taxes!" he said.

"When I pay my taxes, it's for the highways, schools," a hostage said. "We pay our taxes but we don't harm anybody."

Coulibaly responded that 30 percent of tax revenues go to France's military. He also said that if a march could be held for *Charlie Hebdo*, why not one to oppose France's foreign intervention.

The validity of Coulibaly's theory of political responsibility is not the issue, although democratic governments are indeed said to be *of, by, and for the people*. What the negligent media

overlooked is that he stated a grievance and offered a coherent — which is not to say valid — defense of his actions. This was not the rant of a raving lunatic.

After demanding an end to NATO bombing in Iraq and Syria and condemning the French ban of the Muslim burqa and veil, Coulibaly said, “I was born in France. If they didn’t attack other countries, I wouldn’t be here”— by which he presumably meant *in the store holding hostages*. He also said, “If you harm our children, our women, our fighters, our old men, we will attack the men who fight against us.”

Again, Coulibaly must not be excused for his crimes. But we harm ourselves if we ignore what he and others in his position have said. (The Charlie Hebdo killers were similarly “radicalized.”) Muslims and Arabs have legitimate grievances against the U.S. government and its allies — even if some of their responses are illegitimate.

The way to end Muslim violence in the West, therefore, is for the West to end its violence against Muslims.