

A World Against Violence, Extremism

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In his speech before the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 24, 2013, newly elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani had some crucial things to say on how to improve relations among the nations of the world. He called for moderation in the demands made by states, and suggested doing away with the notion that “the military option is on the table,” and to adopt instead the attitude “peace is always possible.” He proposed the formula: “The world against violence and extremism.”

The world, he said, is not the result of a balance between two blocs, nor is it dominated by one single power; it is multipolar and all states whose power base depends on the ballot box are entitled to the same respect for their specific characteristics and their legitimate interests. No culture is superior to the others and none should seek to impose itself.

Such a plain common-sense program is obviously not being applied today, since ongoing conflicts have broken out everywhere, especially in the Mideast, leading to horrendous dramas committed by fanatics, fueled by the major powers which are striving to reach their strategic objectives by maintaining regional crises, since nuclear weapons prevent direct confrontations.

Defeating the Islamic State

That is the case of the combat waged by the Islamic State (IS). The United States has now built an interna-

tional coalition against IS, whereas we know that the U.S., together with its Arab and Turkish allies, is responsible for creating that breed of Islamic terrorists.

While airstrikes may be useful in defeating IS, all military experts know that only troops on the ground will be able to eradicate the extremists, who are well armed and trained, thanks to the complicity they were afforded, in particular, from Western intelligence ser-

vices. Those troops cannot come only from the countries where the extremists are operating and which urgently need to be supported in this fight. Given that the creature has escaped from its creator, the coalition now says that it intends to [support those troops], and let's hope it does. But as President Bashar al-Assad said during a meeting with a high-ranking Iranian official: The states that created terrorism are not the best ones to fight it. As we have seen, Turkey is reticent to join the coalition, because it benefits from the IS conquests against the Kurds.

The ad hoc alliances which IS has struck with the Baathists and Saddam's former military men, and with Sunni tribes dissatisfied

with their fate in [former Prime Minister Nouri] al-Maliki's Iraq, will be undone as soon as the interests of all the elements of Iraqi society are recognized by the government. It seems that the new Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, is attempting to forge a national consensus around that objective, and is considering giving important positions to certain Baathists and to other minorities that are part of the Iraqi mosaic.

As President Putin said at a 2007 international conference in Munich, in a democracy, the legitimate claims of minorities are not negated; they are taken into account by an enlightened majority.

But once Iraq and Syria are hopefully rid of this scourge, what will happen to all those fighters who were enlisted thanks to massive propaganda and many dollars? They will spread out to different countries where they will attempt to pursue their deadly deeds: Some will go to Central Asian countries such as Afghanistan, and others will go back to their native coun-



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Col. Alain Corvez (ret.) drew out “today’s paradoxes which border on the absurd,” with respect to military and strategic policies.

tries to carry out terrorist attacks—like the thousands who come from European countries.

Syria, which has been under assault from these barbarian hordes for more than three and a half years, must be assisted in its fight. Rather than advocating absurd support for “moderate Islamists,” who are nonexistent on the ground, and whom we are trying to train in camps in Jordan and elsewhere, we should recognize that Syria’s knowledge of Islamist movements is indispensable for us. We must at long last establish genuine cooperation to fight them. We have to stop referring to a dictatorship and untruthfully equating the current Syrian regime with the previous regime (which did have the immense advantage of stopping the Islamists). By the way, all other countries talked to the previous regime.

The Constitution voted up in the middle of the crisis in 2012 by the Syrians is totally democratic; it preserves fundamental freedoms, and the government, while fighting the jihadist fanatics, is trying to reconcile all moderate tendencies in the nation, and successfully so, since many opposition forces now support the legal government, knowing that it is the last bastion against the terrorists.

Moreover, striking alliances with countries that have terribly backward political and religious traditions, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, where the ballot box is unknown, in order to promote democracy in the world, is another one of today’s paradoxes which border on the absurd.

Directions for the Future

We should follow the wise precepts of President Rouhani at the United Nations, to build a more reasonable world, in which the powers will settle their conflicts of interest through dialogue and moderate demands, rather than by war.

The future of humanity is at stake, because men now wield a power which allows them to blow up our planet in a fit of madness. Deterrence has worked until now, and has saved us from a cataclysm. The balance of terror has so far stopped those who might have wanted to destroy their enemy by launching a nuclear salvo, because they knew they would be annihilated in automatic retaliatory strikes. Certain warhawks, however, would clearly like to persuade us that the United States has an anti-missile shield to protect it from nuclear second strikes, which gives it total military supremacy and does away with the concept of deterrence. That is

obviously not true, since no shield or “iron dome” is entirely impermeable, and none will be in the medium term.

The peoples of the world, whatever their economic and cultural wealth may be, must be equal before the law. No culture can claim to be preeminent and believe it is the beacon of the world. Liberty, whose statue lights up the world at the entrance to the Hudson River, belongs to all nations, and none may claim to be superior, even if it does momentarily enjoy economic and military superiority over the others.

France would do well to remember her intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment, and the level of worldwide prestige that General de Gaulle brought her to, by refusing to align France with any bloc—at a time when it was much more difficult to leave NATO than now—and by defending the right of all peoples to decide their own destiny, and advocating understanding among all the nations, which welcomed him during his many trips around the world, because he knew the various cultures, and proposed everywhere he went—in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America—to respect all men and women with their differences. That is also what guided his wish to build a Europe of nations that would preserve their specific characteristics and their sovereignty. That Europe, in his view, was supposed to open up to wide-ranging cooperation with Russia and beyond.

For us Frenchmen, who have the second Exclusive Economic Zone, thanks to our overseas territories on five continents, everything should incite us to follow a policy of world citizens, by maintaining relations based on respect, confidence, and cooperation with all nations.

I will leave the conclusion of my presentation to General de Gaulle, who, in a speech to Mexican academicians during his visit to Mexico in 1964, delivered a philosophical and political message that is strikingly topical, 50 years later, showing once again how visionary he was:

“Indeed, beyond the distances that are shrinking, beyond the ideologies that are weakening, and the political systems that are losing their breath, and unless humanity destroys itself some day in a monstrous self-destruction, the fact that will dominate the future is the unity of our universe: one cause, that of man; one necessity, that of world progress, and consequently of assistance to all those countries that desire it in order to develop; one duty, that of peace; these constitute for our species, the very basis of existence.”