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Don't say Islam is violent

By DEBRA J. SAUNDERS

Here's what I love about the French: They've long understood the dangers presented by radical Islam. French President Francois Hollande swiftly called the deadly shooting at Paris' *Charlie Hebdo* magazine "an act of exceptional barbarity," without doubt a terrorist attack. There was no hedging. The Socialist leader didn't engage in the sort of blather White House spokesman Josh Earnest offered on MSNBC shortly after the shootings. Earnest called the attack a "terrible act of violence," but not necessarily terrorism.

He repeated the mantra that Islam is a "religion of peace." Given that the shooters proclaimed "Allahu akbar" (God is great) and "We have avenged the Prophet Muhammad," Earnest came across like an addict in denial.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations knew better than to throw out the "religion of peace" line. In its statement, CAIR condemned the shootings as an assault on free speech. CAIR supports free speech, "even speech that mocks faiths and religious figures."

Back to Hollande, who understood how to react to the carnage. No hand-wringing about welcoming people of all faiths. No need to state the obvious—that most Muslims don't go around killing cartoonists. No hesitation to call this rampage what it was.

The shootings of journalists in their office were meant to make critics hesitate before stating what they think and believe. When these masked murderers shot cartoonists and police officers, they were warning the world that you cannot criticize radical Islam without risking your very skin.

You could call one work of former Jyllands-Posten culture editor Flemming Rose's Denmark's version of

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column

Charlie Hebdo. In 2005, Rose ran 12 largely unflattering cartoons that lampooned the Prophet Muhammad.

A year later, after two imams circulated the cartoons -- along with others not published in the Danish paper -- violence erupted in the Middle East. In 2008, Danish police arrested three men for plotting to behead a cartoonist who depicted Muhammad wearing a bomb as a turban. To show their support for free speech, 17 Danish newspapers reprinted the 2005 cartoons.

For his trouble, Rose won a reputation for being an unreasonable man of questionable judgment. As he told me in 2008, some Europeans believe "you shouldn't offend Muslims because they are so weak, they are so immature (and) they are such a different kind of minority that if you treat them like everybody else, they will go wild." Rose was astonished that Islamists had no problem with the message, "If you say we are violent, we are going to kill you."

Whatever you do, do not say that Islam is not a religion of peace.

In solidarity, media across the globe should be reproducing the work of slain cartoonists Stephane Charbonnier, Georges Wolinski, Bernard Verlhac and Jean Cabut. Rose wrote in *Politico* on Wednesday, "In the immediate aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* killings, news publications in the United States and around the world were publishing blurred images of the Muhammad cartoons so as not to offend." Now you know why these terrorists shot French journalists and their police protection.

(Creators Syndicate)



Washington's psychological polarization

By MICHAEL GERSON

As the 114th Congress begins in earnest, there are a number of things—such as tax and immigration reform and trade agreements—that political adults would like to get done for the good of the country. A commitment to incrementalism and compromise can be found, with sufficient diligence, among individual lawmakers in both parties.

But these scattered good intentions are as unlikely to cohere as dry sand. This is not just a function of policy disagreement. President Obama and congressional Republicans hold fundamentally different views of recent political history, particularly the outcome of the November midterm election.

The GOP is feeling the momentum of its best congressional performance since the New Deal, and Senate Republicans are enjoying the pleasing weight of committee gavels in their hands. Elected Republicans generally believe that Obama was humbled by voters and should act like it—that he should make concessions commensurate to his losses, as President Clinton did following his 1994 midterm defeat.

Obama, in contrast, seems to view the November outcome as his final liberation from a dirty political game characterized by complete Republican bad faith. He finds no repudiation in the verdict of an unrepresentative, midterm electorate. And he is no longer required to pretend that he cares about the political fate of the 4th District of Podunk. His reaction to the election has been to seek new avenues of executive action as an alternative to congressional dysfunction. So far, he has been politically rewarded.

This type of polarization seems more psychological than ideological. Obama and congressional Re-

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publicans are inhabiting alternative political realities, with no overlap in which compromise might take root. The two sides are

not simply disagreeing about the proper path up the mountain; they see a different mountain in a different place.

According to Frances Lee, an insightful political scientist at the University of Maryland, diverging interpretations of an election are not unusual. "The meaning of elections," she told me, "is almost always contested." One much-studied example is the 1984 presidential election, in which Ronald Reagan had a number of structural advantages, including an easy path to renomination and a strong economy. Over time, however, interpretations of the election outcome "were winnowed down to a focus on (Walter) Mondale's mistake in saying he would raise taxes and his closeness to special interests," according to Lee. The narrative of Mondale squandering the election won out.

Political scientists call this a "constructed explanation." Election outcomes are not self-interpreting. "In reality," said Sir Henry Sumner Maine, "the devotee of Democracy is much in the same position as the Greeks with their oracles. All agreed that the voice of an oracle was the voice of a god; but everybody allowed that when he spoke he was not as intelligible as might be desired."

As to the 2014 election: "It may well be," Lee told me, "that no single conventional wisdom will ever emerge. ... Faced with ambiguity, people tend to believe what they

want to believe. When people are surrounded by social networks that also want to believe the same thing, their views will harden further."

Lee locates this disagreement within a broader electoral trend—a three-decade period of very close two-party competition. "I'd say that 2014 has done nothing to shake the two parties' confidence that they can win control of U.S. national institutions. No party sees itself as a permanent minority. No party seems to believe it needs to fundamentally reform itself in order to compete. Post-2014, Republicans believe they have been given a vote of confidence from the voters and that Obama has been repudiated. Democrats are demoralized, but they don't see themselves as having 'lost' the American people. Certainly, Democrats have no less confidence than before that they can win the 2016 presidential election."

This is an underestimated source of dysfunction in American politics: The parties do not view themselves as losers, even when they lose. The 2012 election should have demonstrated to Republicans (among other lessons) that they need a seriously revised outreach to minorities, women and working-class voters. The 2014 election should have demonstrated to Democrats (among other lessons) that a reputation for unreconstructed liberalism seriously limits their geographic appeal.

Both parties could gain electoral advantages by realistically addressing their weaknesses, which would also open up the possibility of legislative progress. But everyone, unfortunately, seems to like what they see in the mirror.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

Climate change hurts the valley

By CAMILA THORNDIKE and DAN GOLDEN

The region's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, viticulture and forestry—all of which are climate-sensitive. Summers are hotter and dryer with rains occurring as storms, rather than replenishing drizzles. Snowpack is decreasing. Less water for irrigation, increasing incidence of pests and disease, and growing competition from weeds threaten local agriculture. It is becoming less attractive to grow some of the region's most popular wine varietals. In the forest, the range and growth rates of trees such as Douglas fir are increasingly restricted, diminishing the profitability of forestry. Hot summers and more particulate matter from forest fires severely impact the health of the elderly and those with respiratory problems.

But these hardships are tiny compared to the challenges our children and grandchildren face if we fail to act on climate change. Every reputable authority—from the Pentagon to the United Nations—warns that our current trajectory will lead to unprecedented social, economic and military crises. If we cannot secure a transition from fossil fuels before the end of the decade, it will not be possible for future generations to adapt.

Fortunately, the solution is in sight. Oregon has the rare opportunity to lead our country and the world with the policy economists and climatologists say we need. We can hold out-of-state polluters accountable for climate change with a price on carbon, either by charging them a fee or by requiring them to buy permits before they burn fossil fuels.

On Dec. 8, the Northwest Economic Research Center at Portland State University presented to the legislature their long-awaited study on the impacts of a state carbon pollution

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fee in Oregon. It showed a significant reduction in carbon pollution and a negligible effect on our economy. Another study, conducted by

Regional Economic Models Inc., predicts that a national carbon tax would create 450,000 new jobs in our region by 2025—if all the revenue were returned to citizens as a dividend.

Buckminster Fuller once said that a problem adequately stated is very nearly a problem solved. Our problem is not a shortage of solar panels or ethanol or hybrid cars, nor is it an abundance of gas and oil pipelines. Our problem is underpriced fossil fuels. We do not pay their hidden costs when we fill our tanks—that comes later, in the form of emergency drought relief, hurricane cleanup and forest fires. If polluters were accountable for these costs, a price signal would reverberate throughout our economy. It would reward smart decisions and punish wasteful ones. Both proven and novel energy alternatives would attract new capital. Nothing but a price on carbon can spark the systemic transformation we need, and that's because it targets the problem at its source.

The 2015 Oregon Legislature should hold the polluters accountable for the damage they do to the Willamette Valley economy by making them pay to pollute. And 100 percent of the revenue should be distributed evenly among all Oregonians, because the natural beneficiaries are the victims of climate change—all of us.

(Camila Thorndike is executive director of Oregon Climate. Dan Golden is policy director of Oregon Climate.)

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Wheatland Publishing Corp. • 142 Chemawa Road N. • Keizer, Oregon 97303
phone: 503.390.1051 • web: www.keizertimes.com • email: kt@keizertimes.com



EDITOR & PUBLISHER
Lyndon A. Zaitz
publisher@keizertimes.com

NEWS EDITOR
Craig Murphy
editor@keizertimes.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Eric A. Howald
news@keizertimes.com

ADVERTISING
Paula Moseley
advertising@keizertimes.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Andrew Jackson
graphics@keizertimes.com

BUSINESS MANAGER
Laurie Painter
billing@keizertimes.com

LEGAL NOTICES
legals@keizertimes.com

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Putin's follies have harsh consequences

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The *Financial Times* of London reported the other day that Russia's former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin has said of Russia: "There will be a fall in living standards. It will be painful. Protest activity will increase." What prompted Kudrin to make such a statement?

Not having heard a lot of talk about Russia of late, what's going on now? The Western sanctions on Russian President Vladimir Putin's banks, combined with the drastic drop in oil prices and the flight of capital, also caused by the sanctions, means that Russia is realizing a rather dramatic difference between money flowing into the nation's economy and what it must have in its reserves to pay debts and finance its imports.

Putin can do little if anything about his country's plight as long as the Western sanctions are in place, while ending them would require him to pull out of Crimea and leave the independent Ukraine alone. But, Putin would have to admit that his adventure into Ukraine was wrong and that means the long knives in the Kremlin, reputed to be sharp as razors for centuries, and never hesitated for use when "needed," could be used to cut him from office.

So, while at present he's been immensely popular, and has pulled many a shenanigan to keep the "wolves" from his door, if Putin does not back down, Russia will continue to pay a steep price. It's well known that a lot of Russians have

become world travelers, can now afford to own a car, like to purchase Western goods and prefer the status of living like Americans

(if there's not a whole lot of pretend and exaggeration in that claim).

In the meantime, to keep his head-of-government-position, Putin has undertaken some reckless adventures, including the takeover of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine. Recently, too, he's been sending ships and planes into foreign waters and air space and being cheered at home by the Russian hawks that are always looking for the chance to reclaim U.S.S.R. power and glory now found only in the history books.

Yet, even though Putin appears to be in that proverbial position between a rock and a hard place, he has another Russian bear up his sleeve. More important to the average Russian than travel overseas and Western goods is...vodka! The price of vodka has increasingly gone up and up of late and Putin has ordered his government to rein in its rising cost. He knows that its cost now exceeds the ability of the average Russian to buy it and this condition could seriously threaten his popularity.

Russia's economy is expected to slide deeper into recession this year. It's predicted that in 2015 inflation

will reach at least 10 percent and probably higher given the present standoff over Putin's incursions and the sanctions that have followed.

So, what's a guy with Putin's ambitions to do? Perhaps, all things considered, and factoring into decision-making over the evermore aggressive and threatening Islamic State, al Qaeda, and other less well-known jihadists, the smartest action Putin could take under present circumstances is to move to ally Russia more closely with the West.

The West, meaning Western Europe, Canada and the U.S., should be viewed more seriously by Russia as its friends as Russia's greatest threat presents itself not from the West but from Russia's southern borders. His first step to improved relations, although a tightrope act for him at home now, is to get out of Crimea and Ukraine to reassure the West that he is a responsible player on the world stage and deserves saving from the terrorists who see each Russian through the same jaundiced eyes every other infidel is seen by them.

(Gene H. McIntyre's column appears weekly in the *Keizertimes*.)

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