ISIS and the climate of fear -- a political-psychology perspective

ISIS AND THE CLIMATE OF FEAR: A POLITICAL-PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

イスラーム国（ISIS）と恐怖心の政治──政治心理学的な考察

Ali Ferdowsi *

　2014 年 6 月のイスラーム国（以下 ISIS）のメディアへの華々しい登場以降、米国政治を規定する主要な要因の 1 つとして「恐怖心」がかつてない程の重要性を帯びてきている。本稿では政治心理学的な分析手法を援用しつつ、ISIS が何よりも「テロ攻撃集団」としていかに「恐怖心」を醸成するための洗練された戦略を実践しているか、またそれが統計的には圧倒的に中東現地のムスリム一般住民を標的にしており、本来的にS.ハンティントン的な「西欧文明に敵対するイスラーム」という問題を内包していないにもかかわらず、米国エスタブリッシュメントによる他者への「恐怖心」によって如何に本質が曲解されて「ムスリム排斥」のような情緒的な政治主張に向かわせているかの契機を分析する。

　筆者は論稿中でマキャベリから以降最近に至るまでの政治学関係の議論を渉猟しつつ、「恐怖心」をめぐる問題が「テロル」との関係においていかに扱われてきたかを再検討し、西欧のメディアにおける「テロ集団」としての ISIS の登場が政治学的な観点から提起している問題の新しさと古さを跡付けようとする。同時に現在の米国社会を覆っているイスラモフォビアの情緒的反応についてもその淵源が古くかつ政治的に根深い問題から発していることを指摘している。

　本論稿の分析は直接的には ISIS によって政治的な雰囲気が大きく変容するなかで大統領選挙の年を迎えている米国の国内政治を扱うものであるが、ここでの議論は「アラブの春」以降のシリア危機に発する難民問題に直面している欧州（EU）や、2015 年11 月のパリのテロ多発事件以降緊迫した雰囲気に覆われているフランスの政治状況にも通底しており、その意味では偶々2014 年に ISIS によって惹起されたとはいえそれ自体が自律的な展開の契機を内包する現代社会の政治的な抑圧的システムのグローバルな拡大と拡散に警鐘を鳴らそうとするものである。

（文責・鈴木均）

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* Professor, Department of History and Political Science, Notre Dame de Namur University, Cal., United States of America.

What is the fundamental contradiction of our time by which we must understand the terrorist attacks occurring in recent years, and the backlash they evoke in the West against Muslims, though not them alone? There was a time when class struggle was considered the fundamental contradiction; then came the clash of ideologies or, if you will, economic systems, during the Cold War years that spanned much of the second half of the past century. But that contradiction too came to an end with the fall of one wall, the one in Berlin, that symbolized the fall of all the walls that sustained it. What now would be the fundamental contradiction of our time then, the one that divides humanity into two camps, and on which depends the prospects for war and peace, and around which we must organize?

This essay regarding the threat of ISIS (aka, IS, ISIL) and its meaning for our time is written with the view that our present fundamental contradiction is neither one of a clash of ideologies – an intolerant and "fanatical" Islam against an ecumenical and "democratic" West – nor a "clash of civilizations," as Samuel Huntington[1] would have it. But rather it is a clash between two visions of the future, two attitudes towards where our world is heading. On the one hand, there is a vision that sees the growing universalization of life and its meaning with hope and anticipation. And on the other, there is a reactive vision that looks with fright at the increasing erasure of the borders and barriers that divided humanity, the growing "de-localization" of all identities, and the intensification of the processes by which, in the continually prophetic words of Karl Marx, "all that is solid melts into air."[2] As such this is a clash inside our world. It is an immanent contradiction in a globalized and increasingly globalizing world that cuts across civilizations, rather than pitting one against another. It divides one humanity into two camps: one of hope on the side of universalism and a global commonwealth, and one of fear on the side of particularism and a siege mentality.

As I am writing in the United States, and as we see this "di-vision" clearly in the splitting of the US politics into the camps of those who proffer hope and those who hawk fear, particularly in the run up to the presidential election later this year, I will restrict my analysis to this one country. Moreover, to make the case, I will limit the bulk of my evidence to major politicians, who see the world from a different perch. The picture of the

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[1] Samuel P. Huntington, as is well-known, argued, first in an influential essay, then in a book that expanded on it, that with the end of the Cold War, humanity has entered an era in which a "clash of civilizations" takes the place of a clash of state-based ideologies and interests as the fundamental contradiction of our time. See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, summer 1993, 72:3, 22-49; and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996). Note that Huntington dropped the question mark in the book version of his thesis. The term and the thesis of a "clash of civilizations," however, plus its focus on Islam, was put forward by Bernard Lewis a few years earlier. See Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, 266:3, 47-60; the term "clash of civilization" is a section heading on page 56.

[2] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), marxist.org (Retrieved January 31, 2016), 16. See also Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, New York: Verso, 1983).

world that thereby emerges, consequently, cannot be attributed to academics and intellectuals. However, one need not follow US politics or the ups and downs of the primaries here to follow the rest of this essay. I will restrict my remarks to major figures, and provide the requisite information about the sources when needed.

Let us begin with President Obama who we can safely assume needs no introduction. "ISIL," he said in his December 6, 2015 Address to the Nation in the aftermath of the San Bernardino mass shootings, "does not speak for Islam." Rather, they are "part of a cult of death," a bunch of "thugs and killers," who "account for a tiny fraction of more than a billion Muslims around the world--including millions of patriotic Muslim Americans who reject their hateful ideology."[3] Clearly, this is an attempt in the wake of the recent terrorist attacks to resist the dragging of a frightened public opinion into an inter-civilizational war.[4] ISIS is a blot on Islam; it may have even infected parts of the faith, but one must resist equating a scourge with the religion itself. "We cannot turn against one another by letting this fight be defined as a war between America and Islam. That, too, is what groups like ISIL want."

The threat of being dragged into such a framing of the situation, i.e. a clash of civilizations, is obvious enough. Groups "like ISIL," those who are apprehensive about the implications of such an interpretation argue, are helped by those who are wittingly or unwittingly doing its bidding by framing it as such; and this might very well be the subtext of such warnings as the president's.[5] However, at least for the moment, a good number of the president's opponents on the Republican side seem more or less willing to ride the public's fear right into a civilizational clash, as witnessed as much by the content as by the tone of the campaign rhetoric of that party's aspirants to Obama's office. All the four frontrunners on the Republican side according to a long stretch of polls,[6] (respectively, real estate tycoon Donald Trump from German descent; junior senator from Texas and son of a Cuban asylum-seeker Ted Cruz; junior senator from Florida also of Cuban parentage Marco Rubio; and African-American brain surgeon Ben Carlson) certainly belong to the side of hawking fear to rally the base. Good form dictates that we refrain here from repeating some of their most outrageous statements, for instance, as expressed by Donald Trump, the perennial number 1 in the polls on the Republican side. Instead, let us turn to Marco Rubio, junior senator from Florida, who has a reputation among some of his GOP peers as "a foreign policy wonk." Speaking with an alarmist urgency two days after the Paris attacks (the "attacks" he said, "are a wake-up call"), he framed the situation as a clash of civilizations, thereby equating ISIS with the civilization of Islam, which he

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[3] "Address to the Nation by the President," (December 6, 2015), The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (Retrieved December 23, 2015).

[4] On this see: Peter Beinart (December 7, 2015), "How Obama Thinks about Terrorism," theatlantic.com (Retrieved December 12, 2015).

[5] Amanda Marcotte (November 17, 2015), "Ted Cruz, ISIS propagandist: It's almost like the GOP wants another massive Middle East war. The Republican rhetoric about Islam and Syrian refugees will fuel ISIS propaganda about the inevitability of war," sloan.com (Retrieved December 27, 2015).

[6] "2016 Republican Presidential Nomination," realclearpolitics.com (Retrieved January 31, 2016).

presumes, as do many others, to be a single and unified entity across time and space. "They literally want to overthrow our society," he said, "and replace it with their radical, Sunni Islamic view of the future." "This," he went on to conclude, "is a clash of civilizations."[7] This would indeed be an existential confrontation, if ISIS could carry out its ambition, especially if it were a civilization, in any form whatsoever, let alone as vast and variegated as civilizations encompassing more than a billion people. Nothing less than our future is at stake. "But ISIS is not a civilization," noted Peter Beinart in *The Atlantic*. It is a self-declared, though unrecognized state in parts of Iraq and Syria, and elsewhere, a "network of terrorist groups linked by a common ideology."[8]

Thus when it comes to what ISIS is about, what it is capable of, and perhaps what to do with it, we certainly have a "clash of views" in the West. The significance of this clash of views, with its attendant clash of politics, or vice versa, can hardly be exaggerated. In fact this essay is written with this conviction in mind that our future, the future of a globalized humanity, is defined first and foremost by this clash of views, or really a "clash of visions," one based on fear, and one based on hope, rather than by a so called "clash of civilizations." In a sense, the central thesis of this essay is that if in the clash of visions it is allowed that the proponents of fear frame the situation in which humanity finds itself in this rather advanced phase of globalization, then the West, and indeed the whole of humanity, would have to confront clashes that may be more legitimately called a "clash of barbarities." For the moment, in other words, the world is in thrall to a "clash of visions" that cuts across civilizations, rather than pitching one against another. We shall come back to this towards the end of the essay.

Climate of Fear and Zones of Violence

The attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, in the president's view, do not signify a clash of civilizations, as they do in the view of many of his opponents on the other side of the political spectrum. But it should not blind us to the fact that both sides agree on one thing which in my view is of no less significance than their disagreement. They both conceive of ISIS, and indeed of all jihadi militancy, as being anything but political. In an apparent attempt at refusing any political legitimacy to ISIS, they deny its unavoidable political dimension. President Obama, as we saw, considers them "thugs and killers" who belong to "a cult of death." Marco Rubio is absolutely unequivocal regarding the non-political being of ISIS. "This is not a geopolitical issue where they want to conquer territory," he asserts against military facts on the ground, and "this is not a grievance-based conflict."[9] It really borders on willful ignorance to suggest, as does Senator Rubio, that "they don't hate us because we have military assets in the Middle East." This

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[7] Marco Rubio (November 15, 2015), "Paris Attacks a Reminder of Threat of Radical Islam," marcorubio.com (Retrieved December 27, 2015).

[8] Peter Beinart (November 17, 2015), "ISIS Is Not waging a War Against Western Civilization: a Primer for Marco Rubio," theatlantic.com (Retrieved December 27, 2015).

[9] Marco Rubio (November 15, 2015), "Paris Attacks a Reminder of Threat of Radical Islam".

withholding of a political dimension to jihadism is all too common. "Their grievance," said the influential *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, "is rooted in psychology, not politics."[10]

This denial inevitably introduces a dimension of confusion in the discourse on ISIS, and the root causes of its emergence and functioning, and consequently in articulating and devising sorely needed political solutions for a problem that regardless of its various flags cries as well for a political solution. Worse yet, in the case of proponents of "a clash of civilizations" view, this denial perforce and in advance commits one to a view of the situation that is defined as war, and hence only of a military resolution. How this denial hamstrings US foreign policy in the Middle East, in particular, would take too many pages to be attempted here. But, no less importantly, this politically motivated denial is precisely that line of subduction where an inherently political issue slides into the dark realm of the irrational, to subsequently return as political fear and terror. For, to use a Freudian language, political fear is the return of the politically repressed.

Here we approach the crux of this essay's foundational argument; the point where the real threat of ISIS resides, where politics and psychology, and their doubles, fear mongering and terrorism, meet. For, indeed, this kind of psycho-political repression is required for the cycle of terrorism to complete itself. It binds the terrorist and the terrorized inside a liminal realm of indiscernibility that makes terrorism such a potent force. Without this repression of the political, the climate of fear, the totalizing of the struggle, and the disorienting intimidations of terrorism would lack the ground upon which they can stand. What are understood as the processes of "reification, normalization, and sublimation" that produce "cultures of fear" cannot take hold.[11] Let me explain.

Fear, write the editors of a collection of essays on political fear by a number of the world's most distinguished thinkers, "has become a central feature of global social life."[12] Vice President Al Gore, reflecting on the contemporary political climate in the US, bemoans that "the single most surprising new element in American national conversation is the prominence and intensity of fear."[13] What is more, Gore continues, is that "there is an uncharacteristic and persistent confusion about the sources of that fear; we seem to be having unusual difficulty in distinguishing between illusory threats and legitimate ones." This indiscernibility between the real and the imaginary threats is indeed what has prompted scholars and commentators to look for an environmental language in trying to understand the operations of political fear in the contemporary world. Such terms as "culture of fear" or "climate of fear"[14] point to this attempt. It is also another way of saying

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[10] Thomas Friedman (September 4, 2002), "9/11 Lesson Plan," nytimes.com (Retrieved December 28, 2015).

[11] Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith (eds), *Cultures of Fear: a Critical Reader* (New York: Pluto Press, 2009, Kindle e-version).

[12] Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith (eds), *Cultures of Fear*.

[13] Al Gore, "The Politics of Fear," *The Assault on Reason* (New York: Penguin, 2007), excerpted by CBSNews.com (Retrieved December 25, 2015).

[14] Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith, *Cultures of Fear;* see also Stefan Skrimshire, *Politics of Fear, Practice of Hop*e (London: Continuum, 2008), 2 and 5.

that the indiscernible admixture of the real and the imaginary contributes to a "phobic regime"[15] that is imbued with the irrational.

Al Gore, who obviously considers climate change a real threat, finds it incredulous in the same book that "almost three quarters of all Americans were so easily led to believe that Saddam Hussein was personally responsible for the attacks of September 11, 2001," and that several years later, "so many Americans still believe that most of the hijackers on September 11 were Iraqis."[16] We know we are in the dimly lit realm of the irrational when the mayor of Capriate in Bergamo, Italy, banned kebab (yes, kebab!) in 2009, with quite a few other towns in Genoa and Bergamo joining the ban later in the year; when minarets were banned in Switzerland (there were only four mosques with minarets in the whole country!);[17] when a majority of more than 70% of Oklahoma voters in 2010 approved of a constitutional amendment to ban "Shria law;"[18] and we most definitely know we are breathing the toxic air of the climate of fear when in the aftermath of Paris attacks at least 27 US governors announced, in a legally dubious act, that "they would close their states to asylum seekers fleeing [Syria's] civil war"[19] and some 54% of total respondents in a Washington Post/ ABC News poll said they oppose taking in refugees from Syria,[20] when not a single one of the attackers came from the suffering people of that country.[21]

In so far as the world appears to be swimming in a sea of fear, to understand the threat of ISIS, and contemporary terrorism in general, we must understand them as creatures of this environment, that is, an environment of fear. All environments evolve their own game of survival, their own creatures, and their own fittest; and the environment of fear is no exception. Let us pause one more time and remind ourselves that this essay on ISIS is ultimately founded on the idea that ISIS-like terrorism and its counterpart in the "securatic state"[22] belong to an environment of fear; as well as this

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[15] Benjamin Lazier and Jan Palmer, "Introduction," *Fear Across the Disciplines*, edited by Benjamin Lazier and Jan Palmer (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2012), 2.

[16] Al Gore, "The Politics of Fear," *The Assault on Reason.*

[17] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge and London, 2012), 5.

[18] Jacob Gershman (August 16, 2013), "Oklahoma Ban on Sharia Law Unconstitutional, US Judge Rules," WSJ.com (Retrieved December 28, 2015); another national poll conducted almost a month later, December 16-20, 2015, shows that voters oppose 51- 43 percent accepting Syrian refugees, see: Quinnipiac University (December 23, 2015), "US Voters Oppose Syrian Refugees, but Not All Muslim" quinnipiac.edu (Retrieved December 25, 2015).

[19] John Knefel (November 17, 2015), "Republican Governors Are Posturing on Refugees, but Their Xenophobia Has Real Consequences: AntiMuslim Hate Crimes Are Up, but That's Not All," thenation.come (Retrieved December 22, 2015).

[20] Gary Langer (November 20, 2015), "Terrorism Fears Rise Post-Paris; Most Back Force, Oppose Refugees (POLL)," abcnews.go.com (Retrieved December 28, 2015).

[21] The New York Times (Updated December 9, 2015), "The Expanding Web of Connections Among the Paris Attackers" (Retrieved December 28, 2015).

[22] A term used repeatedly in Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith (ed), *Cultures of Fear* where it means a political system in which security authorities have the final say on political policy. It is a more evocative, that is richer in meaning, term than the more commonly used "security state," in part because it points to the "-cratic" connotations (who and what principle is really in charge) something that the blander term "security state" does not seem to do.

observation that they together, and in a vicious cycle of terror and counter-terror, sustain and extend this environment. ISIS belongs to this environment of fear as do fish to water, as does its counterpart in the "security state."[23] Only in a world where fear is the dominant political substance, the primary or at least credible currency of politics, or in so far as it is so, does terrorism flourish. Consequently, ISIS is as much a player in this "logic of fear" as it is its sign and symptom. It is by the use of this logic, write the editors of the same collection mentioned above, "that governments, humanitarian agencies, and extremist organizations … monitor, control, and contain human beings in various zones of violence."[24]

How did we come to this, how does fear work as a primary political affect, and most importantly how do we free ourselves from this terrifying situation? To answer these questions we need to step back and look at the essential role of fear in the operations of power, without, given the limitations of this essay, being able to fully and contiguously answer them, for, as I just indicated, when it comes to these operations at their base level, ISIS is not essentially different from the seeming backlash that it evokes in the likes of Donald Trump and those who peddle fear for political gains.

The elemental power of fear in politics, in inducing people to view things and behave in a certain way, is possibly of prehistoric origins.[25] But it was not really until much later, that is at the dawn of modern era, and in a sense with the great Machiavelli that fear as an emotion proper to politics was discovered. Ever since, whether appraised positively or negatively, a conception of "fear" and its forceful operations, is central to political thought. This is certainly the case with Hobbes, but also with Locke.[26] More than half a millennium ago, Machiavelli famously placed fear above love, loyalty and friendship, and presumably other politically pertinent feelings, as the most potent of the political affections in chapter XVII of his *Prince*, and advised the prince in the virtues of artfully practicing it. The superiority of fear over love and friendship, and in a sense over all politically relevant emotions, he argued, is in the main due to its remaining effective "in time of need," during the times in which the prince is no longer triumphant; when princes cannot rely "entirely on their promises."[27] Fear remains the only effective political emotion in hard times when States cannot keep their promises, and hope has gone cold.

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[23] Tom Engelhart (June 17, 2013), "The 5 Uncontrollable Urges of the US Security State: What will we learn from Edward Snowden in the long run?" motherjones.com (Retrieved December 28, 2015).

[24] Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith (ed), *Cultures of Fear*, p.5.

[25] Arne Ohman, "The Biology of Fear: Evolutionary, Neural, and Psychological Perspectives," Chapter 2 in *Fear Across the Disciplines*, edited by Benjamin Lazier and Jan Palmer (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012): 35-50; Perhaps, relevantly, Corey Robin reminds us that the first affect to be named in the Bible is fear; see Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): p.1.

[26] For a history of the concept, its evaluation and evolution, see Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea,* particularly Part 1, pp. 31-160.

[27] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, constitution.org (Retrieved December 29, 2015).

Or in the "moments of moral doubt and political sluggishness" as our time is being seen by some.[28] Hobbes, about a century and a half after Machiavelli, identified three politically pertinent passions in chapter 13 of his *Leviathan*: "Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them."[29] Of the three, hope and fear have the potential of focusing men's attention on peace and long-term good, but Hobbes, being the patron saint of the absolutist state, ultimately settles on fear as the strongest of passions to persuade men to obey the state: "Of all Passions, that which enclineth men least to break the Lawes," he declares in chapter 27, "is Fear. Nay, (excepting some generous natures,) it is the only thing, (when there is apparence of profit, or pleasure by breaking the Lawes,) that makes them keep them."[30]

We need go no further in so far as the main argument of this essay is concerned. Ultimately in politics there are two supremely effective passions: hope and fear. Governments offer one or the other as their primary fare, as do revolutionaries and extremist groups. And the new political environment in which, as I shall explain, the nihilistic terrorism of ISIS-like jihadism becomes viable, even inviting, is the one dominated by fear. It is hard to imagine how in an environment of hope this type of terrorism can get any traction, reproduce itself as it has in recent years, and prosper. In an environment of hope this kind of terrorism would hardly resonate, it would fall on deaf ears, as it were, because it would lack the frame that would allow it to do its insidious work. I know it sounds tautological, because it is so true, but people who are saturated with hope cannot be easily frightened by terror. This is as true in the hothouses where terror grows as it is in the cold fearful climes of the West.

There is very little new in what I just said, except that things have become a lot more pronounced since Michael Ignatieff, prominent academic, author, and former leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, wrote the following towards the end of last century: "In the twentieth century, the idea of human universality rests less on hope than on fear, less on optimism about human capacity for good than on the dread of human capacity for evil, less on a vision of man as maker of his history than of man the wolf toward his own kind."[31] Others have noted an empirically demonstrable increase in reference to fear in various newspapers in the US, but also elsewhere, beginning in the 1980s. It appears that fear

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[28] Corey Robin, Fear: The History of a *Political Idea*, p. 9.

[29] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Reprinted from the Edition of 1651 (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1929 Impression), 98 (Retrieved from archive.org, December 28, 2015).

[30] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Reprinted from the Edition of 1651, p. 229.

[31] Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), pp. 18–19; quoted in Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, p. 10.

has become a pervasive frame of interpretation to define social situations in the so-called "postmodern condition."[32]

The problem is that political fear, and here we have to become more specific, has a peculiar relationship with reason, with distinguishing the real from the imaginary. For Machiavelli and the 17th century political thinkers fear was still of the order of the real; it was an honest passion, so to speak. But some two and half centuries later, Edmund Burke introduced a dimension of the imaginary into the operations of this emotion.[33] Writing in 1757, he started a section titled "Terror" (Part II, Section 2) in his *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* with "No passion so effectively robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear." This is, he argues, due to the metonymic relationship between fear on one the hand, and "pain or death" on the other. Fear "being an apprehension of pain or death," he writes, "operates in a manner that resembles actual pain."[34] Later, in section 3 of Part IV of the same treatise, Burke notes the difference between fear and terror. The only difference between the two is that "things which cause pain operate on the mind, by the intervention of the body; whereas things that cause terror generally affect the bodily organs by the operation of the mind..."[35]

It is this potential for the subduction of the real under the imaginary that makes terror available for political use. Terror has the power to push political action in the direction of the irrational, and consequently make it such a potent and seductive, if not irresistible, weapon in the field of politics. Terror can deliver the masses to those who master the insight that in reaching the submerged source of the operations of power in the dark depths of the irrational, the line of demarcation between the terrorized and the terrorist becomes obscure. Hermann Göring, the infamous Nazi leader, as reported by Gustave Gilbert, the psychologist assigned to the Nuremberg trials, shared this insight into the operations of politics. "The people don't want war, ... but they can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders," Göring explained. "That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and for exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country."[36] Denouncing the pacifists obviously is required if fear is going to become environmental. The insight is not his alone. "People react to fear, not to love," famously said Richard M. Nixon to an aide,

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[32] Relevant here is the acclaimed book by Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society, Toward a New Modernity*, Translated by Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992); closer to our topic see David L. Altheide, *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis* (Howthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002), and Stefan Skrimshire, *Politics of Fear, Practice of Hope*, p. 2.

[33] Although the idea itself was known to the ancients. Al Gore quotes the Roman philosopher Lacantius as having said: "Where fear is present, wisdom cannot be," in "The Politics of Fear," *The Assault on Reason* (New York: Penguin, 2007), excerpted by CBSNews.com (Retrieved December 25, 2015).

[34] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), 42.

[35] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 123.

[36] Gustave Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (Da Capo Press, 1995, originally published 1947), 278-279.

"They don't teach that in the Sunday school, but it is true."[37] It is hard to disagree with the 37th President of the United States on this score. An excellent book by Maria Helena Moreriar Alva documents in well-substantiated details how the Brazilian State implemented a "culture of fear" that affected politics in that country for years after 1964.[38]

Something like that appears to have been at work in producing the climate of fear (in the sense closer to terror) in which postmodern politics operates. Restricting ourselves to Islam, a well-researched monograph convincingly demonstrates how a conglomerate of think tanks, TV networks, media pundits and influential billionaires and politicians spend tens of millions of dollar every year to instill a fear of Islam and Muslims in the public's mind, by peddling "hate and fear... --in the form of books, reports, websites, blogs, and carefully crafted talking points that anti-Islam grassroots organizations and some right-wing religious groups use as propaganda for their constituency."[39] With the result that by the "relentless efforts of this small group of individuals and organizations, Islam is now the most negatively viewed religion in America."[40]

But it is not only newsmen, cartoonists, Hollywood,[41] and "Fear, Inc.," to borrow the title of the just quoted monograph "who set the tone of debate in times of crisis," remarked Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland Shibley Telhami in his review of *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy*, "but government officials."[42] Indeed highly informed commentators like Vice President Al Gore,[43] as well as the former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinsky claim that Bush's term "War on Terror" did not simply create "a culture of fear in America" but that it "was deliberately (or instinctively) calculated by its sponsors" to foster such a culture,[44] a point persuasively made by the prominent UC Berkeley cognitive scientist George Lakoff, starting with an essay which he wrote only a few days after the 9/11 attacks.[45] This is how Lakoff puts it a few years later:

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[37] Quoted in Al Gore, "The Politics of Fear," *The Assault on Reason.*

[38] Maria Helena Moreira Alves, *State and Opposition in Military Brazil* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985).

[39] Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir (2011), *Fear, Inc. The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America*, Center for American Progress, americanprogress.org (Retrieved January 5, 2014): 2.

[40] Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir (2011), *Fear, Inc. The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America*, p. 6.

[41] See, respectively, David L. Altheide, *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis;* Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); and Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (NY: Olive Branch Press, 3rd edition, 2014).

[42] Shibley Telhami (January 6, 2008), "Cartoon Villains," *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, nytimes.com (Retrieved December 28, 2015).

[43] Quoted in Al Gore, "The Politics of Fear," *The Assault on Reason.*

[44] Zbigniew Brzezinski (March 25, 2007, "Terrorized by 'War on Terror': How a Three-Word Mantra Has Undermined America," washingtonpost.com (Retrieved December 29, 2015).

[45] George Lakoff (September 16, 2001), "Metaphors of Terror," http://www.press.uchicago.edu/sites/daysafter/911lakoff.html (Retrieved December 29, 2015).

The war frame is all-consuming. It takes away focus from other problems, from everyday troubles, from jobs, education, health care, a failing economy. It justifies the spending of huge sums, and sending raw recruits into battle with inadequate equipment. It justifies the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent civilians. It justifies torture, military tribunals, and no due process. It justifies scaring people, with yellow, orange, and red alerts.[46]

This deliberate or instinctive framing was not restricted to the US.[47]

From this angle, it is of little significance "who started it" in fomenting a climate of fear; colonial or imperial occupation or aggression, or Muslims' reaction to them or to encroaching Western or modern values. Demonstrably, the climate of fear regarding Islam in the West is not something new. It was alive and strong before 9/11, and remained steadily strong after that attack. This is obvious and well-known enough not to need a demonstration here.[48] The world "islamophobia," currently a common word in the English language, is itself about a century old.[49] So a claim such as that made by Larry Miller in a January 14, 2002, essay in *The Weekly Standard*, that "After all, no matter what your daughter's political science professor says, we didn't start this" is utterly self-serving.[50] But that is the least of its problems. More importantly such finger-waggings or self-excusals do not get anybody out of the climate of fear, rather they are meant to perpetuate it. For, as we saw, a defining fact in producing a climate of fear is the refusal to admit any political legitimacy to the grievance of the other while not ceasing to play politics.

We can now become somewhat more specific about the seemingly apolitical politics of the climate of fear. "For political fear to arouse us," writes the political science professor Corey Robin in his insightful study of the subject, "the object of fear must belong to the realm of politics and yet somehow, in the minds of the fearful, stand apart from it."[51] And this is exactly the paradox at the heart of the politics of fear; its being simultaneously political and non-political. As such it resembles the realm of the undead, where "politically empty"[52] objects of fear spook everybody. "Were we to understand the objects of our fear as truly political," instead of being spooked, remarks Robin, "we might argue about them, as we do about other political things. We might find ourselves less united than we thought.

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[46] George Lakoff (February 28, 2006), "War on Terror," Rest In Peace, http://georgelakoff.com/writings/rockridge-institute/(Retrieved December 29, 2015).

[47] Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate, "Communicating the terrorist risk: Harnessing a culture of fear?" *Crime Media Culture* 2:2 (2006): 123-142; and Stefan Skrimshire, *Politics of Fear, Practice of Hope*, Part I, particularly Chapter 1: "Post-Democracy and the War on Terror", pp. 15-30.

[48] Nevertheless, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge and London, 2012).

[49] For a brief history of the term see: Miriam Urbrock, Marco Claas, "Islamophobia–conceptual historical analysis," theewc.org (Retrieved December 28, 2015).

[50] Quoted in Thomas Friedman (September 4, 2002), "9/11 Lesson Plan".

[51] Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, p. 4.

[52] The phrase "politically empty" is Robin's, see Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, p. 6.

Some of us might sympathize with the grievances of our foes; others might not see them as so implacable or dangerous."[53]

The political use of fear not only misrepresents the other as politically empty, but equally and in the same breath misrecognizes the true stance of the self, and as we just saw, in a glaring contrast that nevertheless remains unseen, makes one experience one's own grievance as real and originary. It would take us too long to argue, but there is a close and essential relationship between the politics of fear and the politics of victimhood.

Be that as it may, as Robin, among others,[54] argues, the fear of the other functions to repress another fear, the fear that pervades the in-group experiences. "For all our talk today of the fear of terrorism, or before that communism," Robin observes, "the most important form of fear is that which ordinary Americans have of their superiors, who sponsor and benefit from the inequities of everyday life. This kind of fear is repressive, constraining the actions of the less powerful, enabling the actions of the more powerful."[55]

Framing a political conflict as an existential, or civilizational, clash serves to produce a climate of fear and terror in which all sides are complicit. It is a way of doing politics when politics as such threatens the group's coherence, or seriously undermines its hierarchical structures of inequality, exploitation, and oppression. It is immaterial whether these are called our "traditions" (*sunnah*) or our "way of life."

ISIS as a Creature of a Climate of Fear

The above analysis should have foregrounded a fact about terrorism, that these days is seen almost exclusively as a natural correlate of "Radical Islam," that many seem to have lost sight of in the darkness of the climate of fear. Terrorism is not an ideology, simply because it can attach itself to any number of ideologies; as it has done so in the past, and is doing so now. "Terrorism," notes Zbigniew Brzezinsky, "is not an enemy but a technique of warfare--political intimidation through the killing of unarmed non-combatants."[56] It is a means of power whereby the one who exercises it seeks to achieve its objectives by inducing extraordinary fear in the heart of the other. Likewise, "The abstract noun, 'terror'," writes George Lakoff, "names not a nation or even people," and we might add religion or ideology, "but an emotion and the acts that create it."[57] As such, terrorism is based on an insight or presumption regarding the reaction of the terrorized. It is on the basis of this understanding that terrorists act to induce certain action in the terrorized.

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[53] Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea, p. 6.*
[54] *This is the central theme of collection of essays ref*erred to earlier, see Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith (ed), *Cultures of Fear.*
[55] Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea,* p. 20.
[56] Zbigniew Brzezinski (March 25, 2007, "Terrorized by 'War on Terror': How a Three-Word Mantra Has Undermined America".
[57] George Lakoff (February 28, 2006), "War on Terror," Rest In Peace.

That being said, let us continue with yet another fact which, even though of the most fundamental significance in understanding ISIS, is equally regularly neglected: The most important fact about ISIS is not that it is Islamic, radicalized or not, or is or is not adhering to a plausible or perverted interpretation of Islam, but that it is a terrorist threat in the sense that terror plays a disproportional role (or a totalizing role) in its arsenal of political weapons. ISIS is founded on an insight into politics, indeed into the operations of power, particularly in the climate of political fear, and the massive vulnerability of such a climate to the dark powers of terror. Whatever else ISIS might be delusional about, it is totally calculating in its assessment of the power of terror and its potential in the conditions where politics has been pushed down towards its zero degree of existence, to its barely political "state of nature," to borrow from Hobbes. It is this assessment of the quality, the "terrorizable" potentiality, of politics in our time that underlies ISIS's sense of its viability. And it is in finding this impoverishment of politics to its advantage that it acts to further push it in the direction of the pre-political condition of "war of all against all." ISIS is a creature of the contemporary poverty of politics in a globalized world. It is begotten by it, and it begets it.

ISIS understands that its enemy is mighty and not defeatable on any battlefield. Rather as a creature of a climate of fear it counts on its terrorizing actions to force its foe to bare its teeth, as it were, and thereby to expose the bare foundation of its foe's power; for, in its intuition of politics, it perceives it to be terror disguised as political order. It counts on its foe to lose its well-constructed composure, reveal its violent core, and thereby delegitimize its hegemonic aura. Its barbarity is meant to hold up a magical mirror to its foe and to the world in which the truth of power under the conditions of fear, its own and what it perceives to be its foe's as well, is fully displayed for what it is. It taunts its foe with its own barbarity such that its foe may be provoked to reveal its own. In short, it terrorizes in order to demoralize. This is how ISIS put it in its July 1, 2014 call to arms for its supporters: "They [ISIS supporters] have a statement that will cause the world to hear and understand *the meaning of terrorism*, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy and uncover its deviant nature." (emphasis added)[58] Terrorism is, for ISIS, a performative hermeneutical act. It bares the foundation of its own politics, and through that, the very foundation of all politics. ISIS does not represent Islam. It represents the danger of a politics based on generalized fear; terror felt and terror induced, a politics without hope.

It is precisely for this quintessential reason that ISIS is not a manifestation of a presumed "clash of civilizations." If it is an existential threat, which I do not think it is, not at least yet and directly, it is not to the West, but to the very possibility of politics. It is not a threat to our democracy and to our liberal values or our "radical western roots," contrary to what many, including Slavoj Zizek think.[59] It is a threat to our democracy in so far as our democracy is impoverished; and to our moral and political values, in so far as

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[58] NBCNews.com (Retrieved December 26, 2015).
[59] Slavoj Žižek (November 16, 2015), "In the Wake of Paris Attacks the Left Must Embrace its radical Western Roots," inthesetimes.com (Retrieved November 16, 2015).

they are emptied. It is a threat because the world of politics has lost its shield and oxygen of hope. It is, finally, not a threat to any particular civilization, but to civilization as such when civilization's civic core is withered in the autumnal winds of contemporary capitalism, a capitalism that is increasingly less bound with democracy. It is, in spite of its loud appearance, nothing but a radical and violent nihilism, for it offers its adherents nothing but death and bare power, and its victims nothing but death and servitude. It is the politics of fear in its most naked and extreme form.

That is why when it comes to its brutality, its exercise of terror, it is absolutely color-blind. Neither location nor creed matters in the globalized imagination of ISIS. It kills Muslims and non-Muslims indiscriminately. Contrary to the victims' wish in the West, it has not specifically targeted the West. An overwhelming majority of ISIS victims are Muslims. An article updated in the *New York Times* after the San Bernardino mass shooting listed a total of 62 major cases of attacks carried out or inspired by ISIS outside of Iraq and Syria in 2015. Obviously and for good reasons these two benighted countries were excluded. Be that as it may, I did some calculations on the basis of the information provided by this excellent article, and by checking other sources when more exact numbers were available.[60] Here are the results.

Of the 62 ISIS-related attacks in 2015, fifty-two, that is nearly 85 percent, had taken place in Muslim countries. The total number of deaths caused by these attacks was a staggering number of at least 1094 individuals. This clearly shows the magnitude of the threat ISIS poses to human life outside of its immediate zone of violence. Nine hundred and forty-nine of these victims were killed in Muslim countries, and 149 of them in parts of the West. In other words, less than fifteen percent of the ISIS victims are killed in the West. The vast majority of the victims, in so far as it could be ascertained, were also Muslims, including a total of 237 confirmed Shi'as, that is, 22 percent of the total. Apparently, ISIS is more anti-Shi'a than anti-West; which makes the claim of a cultural clash, or a clash of civilizations, appear somewhat exaggerated, if not altogether phobic.

ISIS and Its Threat to Democracy and Our Way of Life

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which ISIS and its ilk are a threat to democracy and our "radical western roots." Its terrorism adds fuel to the fire of a politics of fear, thereby making politics, and here I mean a politics of hope, even harder to carry out. We saw how quickly the attacks in Paris pushed the plight of refugees and immigrants from the trampled regions of the world to Europe not only off the news but also effected a transversal of associated emotions in much of the West, particularly in the US, from sympathy to fear. Support for sending a significant number of troops to fight against

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[60] Yourish, Karen, Derek Watkins and Tom Giratikanon (Updated December 7, 2015), "Recent Attacks Demonstrate Islamic State's Ability to Both Inspire and Coordinate Terror," *The New York Times* (Retrieved December 24, 2015).

militants in Syria and Iraq which was 53% opposed to 43% in favor in November 2014[61] has almost reversed to 53% support and 45% opposed a year later, right after the Paris attacks.[62] The cognitive frame "war on Terror," which Lakoff had declared deceased for good in 2006,[63] has returned to President Obama's Address to the Nation in the wake of the San Bernardino massacre.[64] The traction that Donald Trump is receiving among certain sectors of the Republican Party continues to be fueled, no doubt, by such news. Clearly, political discourse in the US has become more polarized, and such domestic issues as "Black Lives Matter" are somewhat overshadowed by the ISIS-inspired mass shooting in San Bernardino. Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor under Clinton, and now a UC Berkeley professor recently warned, "Donald Trump could really win this election." Professor Reich went on to explain, "in poll after poll, the candidates who take the most extreme, racist, right-wing positions go up." What is more, he adds, "Just by commanding the national stage, Republicans are already pushing dangerous ideas into public discourse and fueling a climate of violence and vitriol." Imagine what would happen, he taunts his readers, "If any of these candidates end up in the White House in 2016 [elections]."[65]

True, this is said in an email distributed to the already converted, but such imaginings are not totally useless. They give us a vision of what can happen if politics of fear is allowed to fester and grow. Here one is reminded of Philip Roth's novel *The Plot against America.* In the novel the Republican Convention is underway in June 1940 in Philadelphia to choose the party's candidate to run against Franklin D. Roosevelt, who, in a move disapproved by many, is preparing to run for a third term. On the twentieth ballot the Convention continues to be deadlocked. Then, in the darkness of the night, the famed pro-Nazi American hero Charles Lindbergh flies into Philadelphia, strides into the convention hall with his flight goggles still on, and is nominated by acclamation. In the novel, Lindbergh ends up defeating FDR in a landslide. Jews end up in domestic exile here in the US. The strong force that drives the plot is paranoia, or rather the interplay of nightmarish fear and the exuberance of a politics that feeds off hysteria. This interplay, writes Blake Morrison for *The Guardian*, ends in the horror of "a fascistic US government suspending civil liberties and persecuting minorities deemed a threat to security. Paranoid and yet (even without any allusion to America post-9/11) utterly plausible."[66]

Plausible, indeed. One need not go so far as to compare Trump and Lindbergh, and the way each one's adoring fans seem to be energized by their poisonous scapegoating, to

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[61] Justin McCarthy (November 12, 2015), "In U.S., 53% Oppose Sending Ground Troops to Fight Militants," gallup.com (Retrieved December 29, 2015).

[62] CNN/ORC International Poll, "Obama, ISIS, Terrorism," http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn (Retrieved December 29, 2015). Support slightly slipped and percentage arrived at parity (49% to 49%) by mid-December.

[63] George Lakoff (February 28, 2006), "War on Terror," Rest In Peace.

[64] "Address to the Nation by the President," (December 6, 2015).

[65] Robert Reich, in a message to MoveOn members, moveon.org, dated December 27, 2015. However, see David Brooks (December 4, 2015), "No, Donald Trump Won't Win," nytimes.com (Retrieved December 29, 2015).

[66] Blake Morrison (October 1, 2004), "Review: The Plot against America by Phillip Roth," theguardian.com (Retrieved December 29, 2015).

be frightful of what the future may portend. Although it is highly unlikely, it is not at all out of the realm of possibility that Islamophobia (and other xenophobias) may reach such feverish pitch for just one more heinous act of terrorism by someone claiming faith in Islam, particularly in a season of political demagoguery, to make the reintroduction of internment camps, like the ones US citizens of Japanese descent endured during the Second World War, a legitimate topic of political campaigns. The threat is remote, but the pain that even the thought of it causes is real.

But that imagining is perhaps itself too much influenced by fear. What is important in speaking of a politics of fear in Western democracies is to resolutely avoid totalizing its purview. Obviously there is a climate of fear but that does not mean that all there is left in politics is fear. It merely means that the politically emptied object of fear ends up dominating the political agenda, not only "crowding out other possible objects of fear and concern,"[67] but also fomenting in the West a "White Citadel" mentality. So there is something worth defending, for the political space in Western democracies is not fully occupied by a politics of fear, as poll after poll show, and hence the threat to existing democracy, in so far as it is not all a play of fear, is real. One has to fight for every square inch of democracy that remains unoccupied by fear, and hence is open for the free exercise of politics. ISIS is certainly a threat to our democracy in so far as our democracy has not fully succumbed to a politics of fear. ISIS belongs to forces of fear everywhere, and all those who wish to save or reconstruct politics under the sign of hope have to fight it as if it were an existential threat, but not the only one. The point is that one should fight ISIS under the banner of hope and not as a fight in the climate of fear. For as we saw earlier, the only other passion in politics capable of founding a civil order that is less hospitable to terror is hope.

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[67] Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, p. 16.