



GMPA

Global Migration Policy Associates

*An International research, policy development,
advisory services and advocacy group*

A reasoned commentary on causes and consequences of recent attacks and escalating war

Geneva, 9 December 2015

The atrocious attacks in Beirut and in Paris and the bombing of a Russian airliner in recent weeks –in tandem with horrific human carnage continuing unabated in Syria, Iraq and Yemen—compel us to join our voices in solidarity with the victims, their families and their communities—our communities. Like so many others, we reacted with moral, political and personal outrage against the wanton slaughter of civilians in the heart of their and our communities and societies. We heed what should be a universal call to unity in solidarity and sympathy for the victims, for all those affected, for all human beings – in France, Lebanon, the USA, as well as in Syria, Yemen and elsewhere.

As the days have passed, we feel like strangers in strange lands as voices – of political and military leaders, on the world’s news and social media, and among our own friends—respond with racial and religious profiling and calls for revenge, at times expressed in the most inhuman terms. We read of increased air raids on Syrian cities, explicit calls by elected officials for bombing women and children, and more fire-bombings of mosques and refugee shelters across Europe and North America. Some of the discourse—and acts—are so irrational, so surreal, that many people seem to be taking shelter in personal and moral outrage rather than coming to terms with the complexity of war «over there» coming home.

As academics, civil society organisers, and officials of local, national and international organizations working among and in support of refugees, migrants, racial-ethnic minorities and other marginalized communities, we believe that defence of the human rights of all is critical in these dangerous times. Yet we see that many responses to these horrific attacks pose rising challenges to the values we cherish as the moral and social compass for our societies: human rights, justice, peace and democracy.

We fear that these responses also threaten fundamental human rights and social cohesion manifestly targeted by those attacks:

- Hate speech, use of racist language and other paranoid reactions against Muslims unchecked by government or political authorities;
- Harsh but baseless rhetoric painting refugees and migrants as potential terrorists;
- Increased attacks on migrants and refugees and fire-bombings of refugee and migrant homes;
- Military raids by army troops and state of siege lockdowns in poor, multi-ethnic neighbourhoods;
- Calls for militarization of borders, closure of external EU borders to refugees, and rolling back of free movement rights within Europe;
- Prohibition of public demonstrations and house arrests of civil society activists around the COP21 Climate Change Conference in Paris.

As well, we witness:

- More foreign powers joining in bombardments on cities and villages in Syria;
- Announcement of new sales of weapons and armaments to countries in the Middle East;
- Calls for a united international war endorsed by the UN against belligerents in Syria and Iraq.

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The latter acknowledge that the attacks derive from warfare with aggressive international intervention in the Middle East. Entire countries, Syria, also Yemen, Iraq and Libya have been and continue to be destroyed. While religion was invoked, the Paris attackers proclaimed their motivation was retaliation, indeed vengeance, against parties directly engaged in this warfare against ‘their people.’ We read now of new threats of attacks targeting other countries intervening militarily in Syria.

The public narrative is as one-sided as the reality is complex. Relevant but rarely mentioned in media coverage and political statements about these attacks is the fact that the death toll in Syria alone has surpassed 250,000 in four years of externally fomented and supported warfare. That is an average of more than 5,000 monthly, on top of an estimated 25,000 persons injured and maimed per month, making for a daily average death toll of nearly 170 Syrians, mostly civilians, as innocent as the French and Lebanese victims last month. That is more than the 130 fatalities in the Paris attack, occurring in Syria every day over the last four years.

Many people in Syria have been killed by government armed forces or by irregular military forces, armed, supported and trained whether by Arab States, European countries, Iran, Russia, Turkey or the USA. EU member state arms exports to the Middle East increased by 40% over the last four years, while new deliveries of arms to the region are being announced by Russia, the United States and other countries. Since the Paris attacks, stock values of major defence and arms industry companies in the West and elsewhere have soared.

The brutal attacks and threats will not diminish as long as the externally fuelled warfare continues. No State involved is ‘innocent’ of brutal lack of respect for humanity and human rights. The Paris and Beirut attacks represent asymmetrical warfare in which the attackers justify retaliating for real and perceived grievances with an assertion of moral certainty that is, however, not unique. Numerous states are directly engaging in aggressive military intervention in the complex conflicts engulfing several Middle Eastern countries. Each has multiple, often opposing stakes, and each asserts moral righteousness for its warfare in which the values, lives and interests of only one side—one’s own side—are acknowledged.

The attacks and bombings in Paris and elsewhere derive from and serve to justify the unjustifiable in the Middle East. Responses to the attacks reinforce the dehumanization and demonization of an entire region and its people. The attacks and responses serve well to bolster flagging popular support for direct military interventions by a range of countries. We see the reactive rallying around the flags under-girded by discourse of “international solidarity” and reference to “western” values joined with explicit racial-ethnic and religious connotations polarizing “West” and “Arab Middle East”.

Peace, justice and democracy are universal values. Neither the slaughter of civilians in Paris nor the bombing of populations in Syria can be justified by any religion, national interest, racial-ethnic or moral code. The continuing horror and its global spread will only be mitigated by engaging all non-military means possible to stop the warfare in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. That requires an immediate end to foreign military interventions, and collaboration on other means to contain illegitimate insurgent forces that will not be contained or defeated by military aggression.

Our solidarity and sympathy for the victims will only be fruitful if it evolves into concrete actions to end the warfare, external aggression and, ultimately, the injustice that gave rise to the conflicts. And immediately, to shore up the defence of and respect for the full range of human rights—civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural—for everyone, including migrants and refugees. The upsurge in solidarity manifested all over the world in support of refugees, particularly after these attacks, is an encouraging sign of hope.

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