

It Must Not End in War... and It Doesn't Have to

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What happened in Paris was horrific. The reality of war again in Europe. A reality that is the daily experience for ordinary people in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen...that list is long, too long and of course is inherently linked to what happened in Paris. But there can never be a hierarchy of suffering when atrocities occur, they must all be condemned. We seem to have decided differently, France is at war. The crisis has metastasized.

Here we need to pause. We have to recall that those who propagated the wars on our list, in particular the war on Iraq, did so against the wishes of their electorates and contrary to international law; those who propagate the wars against the ordinary people of Paris, are also a minority and do it against the will of the majority they claim to represent. We must not lose that thought because we are shocked, angry, disgusted, frightened and want security. Paris today, Beirut yesterday, Douma the day before... all part of the same conflict in which you and I, regardless of our faith or skin color, are much closer to each other than we are to our governments and opportunist ideologues driving the conflict.

We have a choice. A militarized response bringing us deeper into George Orwell's state of permanent war; or we learn the lessons of medieval approaches - but with advanced technology - and end it.

The major powers are meeting to discuss the situation in Syria. There is little doubt that the nature of that discussion will now be different. In all likelihood, an 'act of war' having been committed, we will now witness a military response - possibly even the combined forces of NATO and Russia. They will commit to the continued attack on ISIS. Ironic as all of the belligerent leaders have said at one point or another that air strikes only strengthens their appeal. Will it stop bombings in Europe, make Washington (next stated target) safe? Of course not.

This is time for our leaders to do just that. Lead. If we want generations to endure living with armed police on every corner, the military on hand 'in case' too many gather together, the constant fear of terrorism; human rights and freedoms that we have taken for granted, curtailed, then we back them if they choose the folly of war. If not, then pause for thought and choose differently.

There is an alternative and it is for this that Vienna should provide us with a changed narrative. We have to learn the lessons of failed policies. It is vital that our leaders do not to

eschew international law, and follow a peaceful path out of the crisis in Europe born of the crisis of others.

Many states are now cutting aid budgets and channeling it to fund refugees. Norway has stopped all funding for work on Women Peace and Security -- work which has been empirically proven to make a difference to attaining sustainable peace. Who and how can this vital work be done without funding? And not to forget that this money is miniscule in comparison to what is spent on our military machines. The defense budgets for last year alone was 1.677 trillion dollars, enough to have fulfilled ALL of the millennium development goals several times over. Would we be in this situation if we had chosen that route instead of militarization?

At the Security Council in October, Yanar Mohammed from Iraq recalled how Iraqi women had addressed the SC 10 years ago and told them what needed to happen. They were ignored. She explained how ISIS had come into being as a result - simple: an invasion, the creation of an illegitimate regime, disenfranchisement, denial of rights.

"With support for ISIS and other violent extremist groups being voiced by individuals from the Philippines to Yemen and from Europe to West Africa, extremism is not an Iraqi or Syrian problem: lessons from our region must be applied globally."

She is right. The men (and it will be all men save one if the last round is indicative) gathered in Vienna need to stop pretending that they have the solutions and talk to those who can bring them. "Together we have the tools, evidence and resources to implement strategies for inclusive and lasting peace. The full and holistic implementation of Resolution 1325 and international human rights standards provide a comprehensive approach. What is primarily lacking is the political will."

And we know that right now this is NOT the lesson that the "leaders" want to hear. It's too gendered, too "soft" when a show of "strength" is needed. But this is the point. Leadership is about vision. The strong look to the long term and in the long term we want and need peace. We need an end to surrogate wars, resource wars justified by counter terrorism; all wars! Strength is in upholding law, not breaking it, as happens time and time again with the extra judicial killings, torture and illegal wars. We have to believe in what we have built over the decades of law and institution building, the knowledge that we have, the lessons of colonialism, and the process of 'othering'.

Yes we can bring war criminals to justice, on all sides, we can have accountability, we can rebuild broken communities. But we can never do that with militarism and violence. To our leaders we say: show wisdom and the courage to be visionaries, to eschew the militarized responses, which lead to more deaths - everywhere. Be imaginative, bring in the voices of the non-violent, make sure women are included (representative not tokenists).

We want a peace conference, not a war council.

We, and we are sure, the rational decent people of the world stand ready to play our part.