

Partners in Terror: U.S. Airstrikes Kill Civilians Jailed by ISIS

By [Robert C. Koehler](#)

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Students of Kabul University, one holding a photo showing graves of Afghan victims, decry the deaths of civilians, including scores of children, during a demonstration against a coalition airstrike in Farah Province that took place in 2009. (Photo: Sadeq/AP)

“Je suis Charlie. Tout est pardonné.”

Muhammad in tears adorns the [new cover](#) of Charlie Hebdo: “I am Charlie. All is forgiven.” This is bigger than satire.

I take a deep breath, uncertain how to write about last week’s insane shooting spree in Paris. My daughter and her husband live there. “Things are normal,” she told me a few days afterward, “but there’s a presence — this thing that has happened. It’s in the air.”

A few days later I came upon this headline at the [McClatchy](#) Washington bureau website: “U.S. airstrike in Syria may have killed 50 civilians.”

The story reports: “The civilians were being held in a makeshift jail in the town of Al Bab, close to the Turkish border, when the aircraft struck on the evening of Dec. 28, the witnesses said. The building, called the Al Saraya, a government center, was leveled in the airstrike. It was days before civil defense workers could dig out the victims’ bodies.”

The building, in fact, had been turned into a jail by Islamic State police. It contained guards and between 35 and more than 50 prisoners, according to different witnesses’ accounts. The prisoners “had been jailed shortly before the airstrike for minor infractions of the Islamic State’s harsh interpretation of Islamic law, such as smoking, wearing jeans or appearing too late for the afternoon prayer.”

IS arrested them. We killed them. Partners in terror.

This is my thought, in any case, as I absorb a week of marches, solidarity and media commentary. A “thing” is in the air. Something horrible has happened: Seventeen people were murdered in Paris and several million residents rallied at the Place de la Republique, crying for peace and freedom. I feel the shock and emotional pull of these murders as much as anyone else, but I’m unable to understand why they seem to matter more than the bombing deaths of Syrians or Afghans or Iraqis, which are also acts of terror.

They don’t, of course. And Muhammad weeps for them, too. So does the inexpressible

largeness in everyone's heart. Je suis Charlie. I am every victim of war and terror.

But no, it's not that simple. The interests of war commandeer some of the murders for their own ends and ignore the others. Thus a simple-minded and righteous rage is stirred into the grief, particularly by that segment of the media accustomed to serving the powerful. The [Christian Science Monitor](#), for instance, informs us: "US will host summit to counter international terrorism."

Brad Knickerbocker's article begins: "The United States has been at war with the likes of the Paris terrorists who shook up the world last week since September 11, 2001 — back when the Bush administration dubbed it the 'Global War on Terror' or GWOT."

Gosh, we've been plugging away for over 13 years now, battling evil, and we still haven't gotten rid of it. However, the article continues: "For the most part, terrorist attacks on the US homeland have been thwarted — the major exception being the Ft. Hood shooting in 2009 when radicalized US Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan, who'd been in touch with US-born Islamic militant Anwar al-Awlaki, killed 13 people and wounded 32 others."

Apparently it's only terrorism if the killer has an Arabic name. The ongoing string of mass murders by non-Arab lone wolves (Sandy Hook, Aurora, etc., etc.) are isolated incidents that have nothing to do with GWOT. And the feel-good war we've been waging in the Middle East and Central Asia, shattering countries, displacing millions, killing unknown numbers of civilians, isn't terror. Indeed, it's suddenly justified all over again by the lunatics who stormed Charlie Hebdo last week.

There's a certain type of solidarity that requires an enemy, and I'm certain the national leaders who marched in Paris on Sunday were there to promote only this kind of solidarity, not the more troubled and complicated kind . . . the kind that sees no enemies, only victims.

"It takes strength not to be saddened by the fact that the hierarchical structure of the human world results in millions of people expressing their horror at the effects of a divided world, whilst the so-called 'leaders' who promote and sustain such divisions march as if they are wholly innocent of the crimes they protest," [John Hopkins](#) wrote recently at Common Dreams.

Terrorism, he added, "will never be defeated by the military muscle of their states any more than it will be by their pretensions that its causes lie entirely outside their actions."

A "thing" is in the air, my daughter said. It's in the air in Paris, but also in Afghanistan and Iraq and a town in Syria called Al Bab, and countless other places. My guess is that most of those who rallied in collective grief because of it did so in solidarity with all the victims, not just a select few. But the interests of war — the partners in terror — are also rallying, capitalizing on isolated acts of evil to expand their power, relying on a simplistic media to keep "us" carefully separated from "them."

Muhammad weeps.

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Articles by: **[Robert C. Koehler](#)**

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