



THE MODERN THEOCRATIC CHALLENGE TO HUMANISM

On the occasion of the sixty ninth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

We are now celebrating the sixty ninth anniversary of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Approved in Paris by the General Assembly of the then recently established United Nations, on December the tenth, it is a marvellous text which lost none of its significance and charm today.

Legally, it was put in practice by [ulterior acts](#) and, historically, it materialized in a succession of texts such as the [US Declaration of Independence](#), the [French Declaration of the Rights of the Man and the Citizen](#) as well as in several partial declarations – namely on the [rights of children](#) – issued by the League of the Nations, and further as a new geopolitical vision set by the [Atlantic Charter](#).

Humanism was certainly not born with the American Revolution. If we look at Greek Sophists such as Protagoras – of whom we know so little, most of what we know being moreover written by his detractors – we are reminded of a maxim that could fully encompass the contemporary humanist vision: ‘[man is the measure of all things.](#)’ Humanism cannot be seen either as an exclusively Western, European invention. Humanism certainly existed in other shapes and within different civilizations before our era, for it was certainly not confined to the Greek world.

I believe the present celebration to be the convenient time to give some thoughts on humanism and the most important challenge it is facing: rising theocracy. In so doing the first point I would like to clarify is that this is not an attempt to engage in the common philosophical or theological argument between humanism and religion which has dominated the debate in recent decades.

Three years ago I was in Lalish, the location of the holiest temple of the Yazidi people, at the time surrounded by survivors of the then recent Jihadi genocide of Sinjar, barely 15 kms away from the Caliphate war frontline. From within a large religious participant spectrum, one of the presents concluded we were all there united, as religion could be seen as but a spiritual gathering through ritual, so being that the spirit itself was the essential element.

Any and every notion, when taken in a totalitarian way or transformed into an ideological imperative framework, can indeed create incompatibilities with existing philosophical positions in or out of the religious sphere. This can also be the case with some dogmatic and one-sided readings of what humanity is all about.

However, I do not consider that there is an inherent incompatibility between religion and humanism. More to the point, we should bear in mind that the American precursors of present-day humanism were (as their descendants still often are) staunchly religious people. What I think to be specific in the humanism translated in the 1948 Declaration is its universal and geopolitical character—that is as an informing principle of the international order. It is in this context that I would like to pursue our present discussion.

The First World War was a conflict fought in the name of the rights of nations regardless of the rights of the humans composing them. By contrast the Second World War, after the US involvement, and as we can see in the Atlantic Charter, had these



rights as its main guideline. The 1948 Declaration enshrined said rights as the official Worldview.

Marx, and most in particular, the mainstream Marxist doctrine, fundamentally challenged humanism, which it classified as a ‘disguised bourgeois social class ideology’. Marxism is, as we know, an interpretation of history from a specific ‘class-based point of view’. There was also, within or close to the Marxist doctrine, a vision where ‘class struggle’ was taken into account but not as an absolute alternative to humane values. The clash between both points of views within the French socialist family exploded with the ‘Dreyfus affair’ as pictured some years ago by the [French socialist theoretical review](#).

More important than the discussions within proponents of the Marxist doctrine, and very significantly from the political point of view, was its transformation into Marxism-Leninism and its transposition to a state policy through the Soviet revolution. After some controversy between the national or global character of the revolution, this doctrine turned, under Stalin, into a doctrine for the expansion of the national state which did not recognize either Kissinger’s so-called ‘[Westphalian principles](#)’ or any sort of humane or moral order.

The incipient world order emerging out of the First World War could not survive its first major challenge and collapsed together with its economic and monetary system in the thirties. The nationalism whose romantic version had deeply marked the European 19th century reappeared as the main driving force, yet now on a quite unromantic mood. The right to identity and self-expression is transformed into the ‘lebensraum’ necessity; humans are divided into superior and inferior races, the latter caricaturised as rats or other pests; hate and fanaticism are glorified, humanism portrayed as the ‘evil race’ doctrine aimed at annihilating the will of the pure races to resist.

Stalin and Hitler’s ‘national socialisms’, regardless of their formal ideological differences, shared, other than the names, also a ruthless contempt for any humane consideration. Both aimed to control the world.

Several varieties of nationalism, under communist or other ideological frameworks, survived to our day, some of them representing a clear threat, others being potentially challenging to our ‘rights-based world order’. This World order has in fact eroded considerably from the inside, and its reform and reinvigoration is certainly a strategic topic, albeit one that we will not discuss today.

The 20th century witnessed the birth of yet another global challenge, this time of religious contours. In 1927, the British subject and Indian cleric Maududi publishes ‘[Jihad in Islam](#)’, the starting point of a new totalitarian ideology challenging the international world order.

In a policy brief published by the SADF, ‘[Facing Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh: A global threat in need of a global response](#)’ I analyse his biography, his learning of Marx and Marxist literature and his capacity to transpose the revolutionary, global Marxist credo into a reactionary fundamentalist reading of holy scriptures—all this while unreservedly condemning Marxist socialist ideology.

One year later, in 1928, in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was formed, having since gradually developed into a major network organisation. The movement was at the time mostly influenced and in connection with German Nazi ideology; today it presents a sort of plastic geographic, ideological and organizational contour.



The Middle-East and South Asian chapters of this global fanatic religious ideology, springing out of the Sunni sect of Islam, strongly influenced their Shia counterparts in Iraq or Lebanon and most in particular those – such as the late ayatollah Khomeini or the present supreme leader ayatollah Khamenei – that shaped the constitution of the Islamic State in Iran.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran will unite Maududi's 'revolutionary and global' Jihadi doctrine with the dictatorial principle of the 'rule of the jurisprudent', that is, the rule of the one who is supposed to be able to represent God in Earth - in other words, a revolutionary and global theocracy. This is a similar exercise to the Soviet revolution which united the global, revolutionary Marxist doctrine with the notion of 'proletarian dictatorship'.

Whereas the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has given rise to some copy-cat versions such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, it remains by far the only significant, organic Jihadi power that couples unbounded ambition with deeds on the ground. Its practical action includes a considerable territorial expansion in its neighbourhood and an ideological, criminal or subversive presence in most of the rest of the world.

The IRI Jihadi policy makes full use of the traditional 'Taqiyya' (the art of deceiving when you are in a weaker position) whenever it is felt necessary to confuse others of its true intentions – using fictions such as the 'regime's moderate faction'. It constitutes, however and fundamentally, a committed and consistent challenge to humanism.

The main domain where the late 'League of Nations', during its short existence, managed to be successful – in the elaboration of the [rights of children](#) – was exactly the domain where the IRI boasted of its new values, publicising and honouring as an early example a child that made himself explode in the war with Iraq. This revealing example was soon to be transformed into a massive policy of turning children into dispensable mine-sweepers for offensive operations.

The IRI also excels in another domain in which the works of [Raphael Lemkin in the 'League of Nations'](#), back in 1933, left us a legacy: the definition of genocide, a [definition](#) that was only legally taken care of in 1948 in the context of the United Nations.

The accepted definition was forced to make an exception of crimes of annihilation on political grounds, as the Soviet Union, for obvious reasons, strongly opposed it. Some authors therefore created the neologism of 'politicide'; others considered that political genocides should be considered as such, that is genocides. This is also my opinion.

In this regard, in the celebration of the sixty ninth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, we cannot forget that we are also marking another anniversary, the twenty ninth anniversary of the great genocide of 30.000 political dissidents in Iran, a genocide which is, as regards existing regimes, the only one which has not known any sort of punishment or proper investigation.

The celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must therefore necessarily be a reminder of all those crimes and the impunity which remains unchallenged all over the world. Reminding most in particular the most horrendous, such as the ones committed against children, or plain genocide.

It must as well be a time to remember we are facing global, revolutionary challenges to a humane world order. These challenges aim at institutionalised tyranny over all humanity.



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