

# Charlie Hebdo...

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The French news last night was exclusively devoted to the aftermath of the attack on [Charlie Hebdo](#) and the hostage-taking in Vincennes, the killing of the perpetrators, the outrage in France and abroad, the mobilization of people around the country to express disgust and solidarity. After an hour we switched to al-Jazeera, which led with events in France, but then continued with reports on other attacks, just as deadly, in Nigeria, Iraq and Yemen. Of course, the closer you are to a terrorist attack or other disaster, the more you feel it. We were in Paris on Tuesday morning, less than a kilometre away from Charlie Hebdo's offices. And this was an attack not only on individuals, but also on the right to free expression, the denial of basic values which we believe to be universal. But on the human level, these attacks have to be all condemned equally. And an opposition of beliefs underlies so many terrorist attacks and military operations, in which violence is seen as a legitimate means to advance the values and interests of one group or another.

[Yesterday 700,000 people marched](#) in the streets, in an impressive and spontaneous mobilization. Today it is the state, the government, the establishment that is [organizing the demonstrations](#). That is really quite ironic. Charlie Hebdo was, is, not anti-Muslim. It is anti-establishment, mocking all those who use their position and their authority to mould the views and behaviours of others. Mockery is a very powerful weapon against the self-important and the intolerant. Those who are convinced that they are the possessors of absolute truth, whether they come from religions or political movements, are more effectively undermined by satire than by argument. Hence the killing of those who were wielding that weapon. But of course, like most violent attacks on things some faction does not like, it succeeds only in mobilizing a wider opposition.

The irony is that we have already entered a phase of political exploitation. There is a nationalist response in France, with much singing of the La Marseillaise, which recalls the response of the US after 9/11. Political parties and world leaders are jockeying for position. That is not what Charlie Hebdo was defending, and the spontaneous mobilization yesterday was much closer to Charlie Hebdo's own values than is the official mobilization today. State responses to terrorism are already making incursions into peoples' lives. If that is intensified as a result of the attack on Charlie Hebdo, then the terrorists will have at least in part succeeded.

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