

Terrorism and Liberal Democracy: Views from Historical and Civilizational Perspectives

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Hello, my name is Seiichi Kondo. I worked in government for some 42 years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The last three years there I served as Commissioner of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, where I was in charge of cultural policy and exchanges. I served as ambassador to the Paris-based UNESCO from 2006 to 2008, and then went to Copenhagen where I served as the Ambassador to Denmark for two years. Having served in these two countries where terrorist attacks have recently occurred, I would like to share with you my experiences in the hopes that it will provide you with some food for thought a fresh perspective concerning these attacks.

The series of incidents that we are looking at today cannot simply be categorized as terrorism carried out by religious fanatics or extremists; I can't help but feel that there are more complex and deep-seated problems involved. The first thing I'd like to mention is that the issues here have been around a long time, and need to be understood within the context of several hundred years' worth of history. The turning point in this long history would be the first wave of the modernization of Europe that occurred almost 400 years ago. With science and technology, and scholarship and ideology leading the way, modern civilization spread from Europe to the whole world. This produced the current set of values with their focus on democracy, free markets, respect for human rights and the rule of law. These would eventually come to be thought of as ubiquitous for all of mankind and worthy of protection. We have been taught – and this applies to myself as well – that these principles are beyond question.

Following the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama wrote a book titled *The End of History*, which caused quite a buzz. According to Fukuyama, over the course of history, mankind, using trial and error, considered various methods of rule, but in the end, determined that liberal democracy – in other words, democracy with a market economy – was optimal. He went on to argue that, with the attainment of this form of rule, mankind had reached its final stage of development. Fukuyama went on to say that, since the aim of history is to create the most desirable society – a kind of final paradise – then history

ended as we reached this final stage. The two universal principles of liberal democracy and communism had been at loggerheads during the Cold War, but communism collapsed, leaving liberal democracy as the clear winner. As a result, everyone accepted liberal democracy as the prevailing orthodoxy. However, looking at the 20-25 years that have passed since, we see increasing doubts as to whether the liberal democracy that we believe in is really flawless. The reason for these doubts stems from the fact that several countries with liberal-democratic forms of government have experienced problems. An issue that one often hears about concerns widening income disparity. One of the tenets of liberal democracy is that people should be allowed to act freely, competing and otherwise operating to the best of their abilities, which will result in the most efficient use of limited resources, and will supposedly make everyone better off. The idea is that this structure, while it may involve income disparity, gives the poor a fair chance to improve their lot. This is the prototypical “American Dream” which holds that one will be successful if he or she simply works hard enough. This is the stuff of Disney and Hollywood movies, where the just always win and those who work hard are rewarded.

In connection to my current teaching position at Doshisha University, I had the opportunity to participate in a symposium held in Paris in October of last year (2014) on the topic “What is Happiness?” Unlike other discussions on this subject, this event consisted of a gathering of economists who attempted to analyze happiness. Happiness is usually considered as a subjective phenomenon and thus something that cannot be analyzed in a scientific manner, so, until recently, the world’s scientific community had not taken up this issue in any meaningful way. However, with the spread of democracy, much attention has been given to whether individual citizens are happy or not. As a result, the political and business worlds have also decided they need to pay attention to happiness, and economists too have begun to look into this phenomenon. Happiness is difficult to deal with directly in terms of economics and sociology, and thus a variety of approaches was applied to this subject. One of these is the question of the relationship between people’s feelings of happiness and the size population of the area where they live. In other words, are people happier in large heavily populated or small sparsely populated areas? Another question was: “What is the relationship between level of income and happiness?” What are the effects of increasing or decreasing income on levels of happiness? Analyzing these questions in detail and from a variety of angles, the researchers carried out international comparisons by looking mainly at four countries: Japan, the U.S., France, and the UK. One of the questions considered was “What is the relationship between degree of happiness and economic disparity?” Conclusions showed

that the Japanese and French were highly attentive to such disparities, but Americans were almost completely oblivious to such disparities. According to these results, Americans found almost no relationship between happiness and [economic] disparity.

However, one of the issues that the Obama administration is currently concerned about is widening income disparity. Young people have even led demonstrations on Wall Street against this growing gap. Until recently, disparity was tolerated as a product of the free market system – the idea being that, as long as it is possible for the poor to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, this system must be allowed. In other words, with competition, there are winners and losers, so naturally there will be some disparity; being free to move up or down the economic ladder was considered the key virtue. This highlighted Americans' trust in the "American Dream." However, there has been a change in recent years as many find that no matter how hard they work, their fortunes do not improve. Increasing number of Americans have seemingly come to believe that the American Dream is nothing more than a false idea. There is growing concern that the hereto-trusted liberal democracy model – which produces income disparity as a byproduct – is deeply flawed.

So then, just how did liberal democracy come about? Modernization began around the 17th century. Following world wars and the Great Depression, modernism and modern rationalism, which included such concepts as democracy, a free market economy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, were recognized as the most attractive – or at least the less bad – systems in the U.S. and Europe, and subsequently these systems gradually expanded. So, creating this as a principle, Europe moved to action, achieving in economic development by way of the Industrial Revolution. With this, Europe gained confidence. A kind of doctrine of European supremacy – where Europe came to believe that it was leading mankind and had created the best possible system – began to take hold. That is to say, this led to a kind of racial discrimination wherein Europeans spread their way of thinking to other regions. This condescending attitude on the part of Europe seems to have been thinly veiled. I worked in Europe for all together 13 years. Never during this time did I faced anything like this directly; but, gleaned from their behavior, I couldn't help but feel that my counterparts felt a sense of European supremacy. It took a concrete form of colonialism. Europeans created colonies in Africa, the Middle East and Asia and exploited these areas to create a higher standard of living for themselves. They even participated in the slave trade. Before long they began to realize that this was wrong and gradually began to change their ways. However, it is undeniable that racial discrimination remains. Of course, Europeans do not show this discrimination overtly, as

this would undoubtedly be seen as uncivilized. However, while they may reason with each other by saying that “civilized persons do not discriminate,” occasionally their real feelings do come out unexpectedly. Colonialism has truly left a giant scar.

The Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru probably said it best: “History is written by conquerors.” Japan too has its own “Official History,” written from the point of view of those in power of the political authorities. However, there are also the defeated to consider. History may be written by the winners, but the losers have memories that are not recorded in the history books. These memories have nonetheless been passed down. Textbooks contain the history of the victors, told in a manner that shows them in the best light. While the downtrodden nature of the defeated is not recorded in these histories, it is conveyed from one generation to the next by word of mouth. These are the recollections of history that serve to stoke up resentment and that no doubt remain to some extent amongst those from the parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia that experienced European colonial rule. And then there is also China. China’s recent development has come with a certain arrogance that is accompanied by the slogan the “Chinese Dream.” China at one time boasted the largest GDP in the world, but, after the Opium Wars, it was thoroughly humiliated at the hands of Europe. The country has just recently attained the status of the world’s second largest economy; and it seems that the Chinese have regained their influence in the world and are now challenging the domination of the U.S.. This can certainly be thought of as one way to vindicate the humiliation suffered some 150 years ago.

Japan was also torn from national isolation some 150 years ago with the onslaught of the Meiji Restoration; and, following the War, the country emphasized economic growth as it sought to become a member of the West as exemplified by the U.S.. Ethnically and geographically, the Japanese are not Westerners but they were formally accepted into the international order as Western allies. However, countries that attempted to join later met with resistance. The OECD – which I have worked for – is an international economic organization located in Paris. Made up initially of sixteen developed countries, OECD membership soon increased to twenty nations. Initially, however, the composition of the organization was centered on the U.S. and Europe. Then, in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics, Japan was granted membership. In the 1990s, South Korea and Mexico joined. At the time, there emerged worldwide acknowledgement that, it is a good thing if countries besides the U.S. and Europe develop their economies enough, and are granted membership to the OECD to become a member of the West. There by gaining world recognition. Japan, South Korea and

Mexico were delighted to be able to join. It seemed as though their efforts had been rewarded: they had become a member of the world's leading economic group, and felt like honor students who made the grade.

However, recently the BRICs, made up of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, have gained much attention. None of these countries have made any effort to join the OECD. For them, the OECD will always be a bastion of colonialism; so no matter how much their world status rises they could not join in good conscience. Instead, they put their efforts into forging another way forward, separate from that of Europe and the U.S.. Over the last 400 years, Europe has been the focal point for the advances and modernization that would eventually spread to the rest of the world. The world is by no means a monolith, however. There are both countries that lead these efforts as well as those that consider themselves to be stepping-stones in these endeavors. This distinction has a tendency to be overlooked. It was believed that all the countries aimed to improve their affluence by achieving economic growth, making a beeline for the U.S. and Europe; but, it does not seem to be the case.

There is an international organization called UNESCO in Paris. A UN agency, UNESCO is in charge of education, science, culture, and communications. It does not, however, concern itself with politics or economics. As these arenas tend to give rise to confrontation, the agency was formed right after the end of the Second World War, to concern itself with fostering culture and education in support of humanity in an effort to encourage peace. UNESCO was the first organization that Japan was invited to join following the war. Because its goal is to promote peace, even former enemies and non-UN countries were welcome. Participation is granted solely for the purposes of pursuing peace. UNESCO therefore enjoys a very good reputation in Japan. I served as ambassador at the Japanese government's UNESCO mission for two years. UNESCO takes a position that culture transcends political, economic, and ethnic conflict; values cultural diversity; and advocates striving to reach a mutual understanding in discussions. Should some incident occur, however, developing countries' resentment of the colonial past soon becomes apparent. It is the same relationship as that between the Arab countries and Israel. I've heard that, at the UN headquarters in New York, the relationship between developing and developed countries is chilly, but I was surprised to find that this is also the case at UNESCO.

An example of this can be seen in the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which was established in 1972. Pursuing the UNESCO ideal of peace, this convention seeks to protect the treasures of cultural and

natural heritage in a wide variety of countries. The Convention was created with the conviction that we could transcend national borders, different political systems, and economic status in an effort to protect cultural treasures deemed irreplaceable for mankind. The Convention lists those things deemed treasures, which absolutely cannot be lost. If the country in question is poor, economic aid is provided to protect the heritage site there. Developing countries also have many archaeological sites. Numerous such sites exist in the Middle East and Iraq, as well as in Egypt. That this treaty protects these sites is a truly remarkable accomplishment. The Convention makes provision for the World Heritage Committee to implement this idea, but recently the resentment of developing countries towards the developed has come to the fore. For UNESCO sites are overwhelmingly located in advanced nations. Japan has 17 such sites, while European countries such as Italy and France have more than 40. On the other hand, the number of these sites in developing countries is just low and does not seem to increase. Developing countries increasingly complain “that developed countries arbitrarily create standards and make interpretations based on their own sense of values without paying due attention to our position.” Recently the Committee has become highly politicized.

Publicly, both developing and developed countries work together equally on these problem-solving issues, but internally resentment over Western European dominance remains. Even after developing countries gained independence from Western European colonialism, this dynamic has continued in various forms and the sense of victimization remains strong. The ranks of the developing countries include the Islamic countries and China. Japan was never a colony. It was occupied by the U.S. military for several years, but that was a result of defeat in the war and thus inevitable. Japan has never been subjugated. My experiences in Europe lead me to believe that the Japanese are blessed never to have known such historical and emotional resentment. The developing countries yearn for economic development and the material abundance of modern civilizations, but once a certain degree of economic development is achieved, historical resentment rises to the surface.

As anyone who has lived in Europe knows, racism is alive and well, leading to barriers in the workplace and at school. The inability to find employment and the sense of estrangement and victimization that young people feel get easily mixed up with “history.” This leads to anti-UK and France sentiments. When incidents occur in this environment things can rapidly get out of control. The current series of terrorist events is in no way similar to the Aum Shinrikyo religious fanaticism of several years ago, which was an isolated event; one can’t help but sense it is part of a very long historical trend.

This is not the history as recorded by the winners; it is a different, oppositional history that losers feel and this is what feeds these occasional outbursts.

One other thing I'd like to address is the extreme materialism of liberal democracy that has developed in Western Europe over the last 400 years. Advances in science and technology produced the Industrial Revolution, which in turn gave birth to a materialistic civilization. A unique corollary to this was that religion and spirituality seem to have been dismissed as unnecessary. When I say that Japanese culture and European culture are different, I mean that the Japanese put a great deal of emphasis on spirituality – with spirituality being the sense of whether one has substantial inner strength and is fulfilled, whether one is kind to others, and so on – as opposed to emphasizing material wealth and economic value. I often remark that Westerners tend to be materialistic and scientific; but when I use the word “spirituality” they seem puzzled. Westerners seem to think this connotes something religious and immediately become suspicious. Buddhism highly values the mental aspects and therefore they find it menacing. The concept of *mu* in Buddhism translates roughly into English as “nothing,” or “void,” and this word seems to produce a vague sense of fear in the Westerner. Accordingly, as they continue on the path of materialism, Westerners don't like Buddhism. As a result, secularism and anti-spirituality spread and a prejudice against religion beyond what is reasonable is produced. These are the circumstances under which recent terrorist incident occurred. For Europeans, there is a strong attraction to the “freedom”, as exemplified in part of “freedom of expression” so they use “freedom of expression” as a kind of weapon to express a sense of secularism, as can be seen their ignoring the feelings of Muslims and producing comics that make a mockery of Muhammad. It seems to have become commonplace to mock God indiscriminately.

One final note on Eurocentric liberal democracy: It is now apparent that the structure that Francis Fukuyama presented as “the terminus” is not very functional. In a word, it presents a moral dilemma. With a free market economy and democracy, we are taught that individual freedom and the fulfillment of individual desires is just. This ideology holds that with open competition, resources are utilized most efficiently, and everyone becomes better and happy. Under this doctrine, Japanese and world economies prospered. However, freedom comes with obligations, and the moral support needed was missing, leaving us with too much privilege and [unanswered] freedom, which I feel has resulted in the fragmentation of society. In international finance, institutional investors leverage huge sums of money in an effort to exercise their clout. This has resulted in business failures and has had gigantic effects on the real economy. This is a result of

freedom going too far. Going to whatever lengths one wishes to fulfill one's desires is going too far and constitutes a neglect of morals and ethics. This has resulted in the rich getting richer while the poor get poorer as qualitative issues worsen. The system of liberal democracy that characterized this final destination as a paradise has not really been effectively realized. There is too much emphasis placed on freedom with morality largely ignored. Such freedom has largely proven to be a negative for society as a whole. Think of the liberal democratic structure as a car: A Toyota Lexus will always just be a mechanism; how it operates is totally up to the driver. If the driver is licensed, follows the rules of the road and displays the proper etiquette, the Lexus will perform grandly. However, if the driver is drunk or on drugs, the Lexus will more than likely be involved in an accident. The same can be said of the liberal democratic structure. The structure may be splendid, but it is not being properly utilized. As a result, there is mistrust of the liberal democratic structure itself, leading, I believe, to a cynical state that produces feelings of despair.

Why do some young people in the developed countries end up going to the IS (Islamic State)? Simply out of curiosity? Until recently, they thought of the liberal democracy that we have inherited as a truly marvelous thing, but what with widening income disparity increasing crime, they fear they were wrong. They cannot find work; faced with the reality of their situation, they sink into despair. Thinking that, in a place with a totally different value system, they might find some purpose in life, they are increasingly flocking to the IS. I think they may also want to challenge convention, although, as I have never actually interviewed any of these young people, I can't be sure.

The violence and terror of Islamist extremists, of course, cannot be tolerated. However, simply condemning these acts will not make them go away. Behind these acts, there is a whole slew of problems, some of our making, with the structure of liberal democratic principles that we have created. And Europe, which has a bit of a checkered past itself, is at the root of the problem. I feel strongly that, without talking about these issues, there is no way we can have a dialogue on this incident.

So the question now is how best to proceed. I believe that Japan has an important role to fulfill when it comes to this issue. When you think about it, monotheism can be thought of as universalism. Similar to the unwavering belief that some might have in a single God, there is confidence in Europe that their system of democracy should be applied universally. The Japanese are believers in relativism; their thinking is that "I have my own way of doing things, but I will not impose this on others." Without this relativistic way of thinking, I believe it is not possible for people of different cultures

and with different interpretations of the past to coexist. This being the case, I feel strongly that Japan has a vital role to play regarding this issue. Thank you very much for allowing me to express my opinions on this matter of critical importance.