

There was no Rationale behind the Charlie Hebdo Attack, Mr Kerry

By [Elliott Banks](#), News Editor (2016/17)
Wednesday 2 December 2015



Image: Tobias Kleinschmidt

U.S Secretary of State John Kerry recently said something very concerning. After last Friday's appalling attacks on Paris, in which 130 people were murdered, John Kerry compared this attack to the attack in January on the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. The attack on the office of *Charlie Hebdo*, in which the editor-in-chief Stéphane Charbonnier and 11 other people died, was because the magazine had printed satirical cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. The world reacted the same as it did last Friday, the attack was condemned strongly, the phrase "Je suis Charlie" trended with many people decrying the shooting as an attack on freedom of speech and expression.

However, John Kerry has decided that unlike last Friday's attack there was some rationale behind the shooting up of the *Charlie Hebdo* offices. Kerry said:

"There's something different about what happened from *Charlie Hebdo*, and I think everybody would feel that. There was a sort of particularised focus and perhaps even a legitimacy in terms of - not a legitimacy, but a rationale that you could attach yourself to somehow and say, okay, they're really angry because of this and that."

Mr Kerry is unsubtly referring to the controversial cartoons, as in Islam you cannot depict an image of the Prophet Muhammad. This was the justification of the Islamists responsible for the attack who believed that the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo* should pay for their insult with their lives. What is worrying is that the Chief Diplomat of the U.S, a nation which proudly proclaims itself to be the defenders of freedom of speech, the press and expression has come out on record and said the attack had 'legitimacy'.

Unsurprisingly, the comment has now been retracted but the sentiment expressed is alarming. The idea that the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo* should have expected it is outrageous. No one should be murdered for freedom of expression or freedom of speech. The journalists of *Charlie Hebdo* were not breaking any laws, they were not inciting people to commit violent acts or persecuting one group, they were producing satire. John Kerry coming out and saying that what happened has a rationale because 'they were angry because of this' is missing the point.

Indeed, Kerry's slip of the tongue is all the more surprising as terrorist groups have always use some perceived insult to justify their actions. The 9/11 hijackers and the London Bombers all had their

justifications, but we didn't hear the U.S Secretary of State then claim there was a rationale or legitimacy. As many of these groups used similar logic to perpetrate their atrocities, *Charlie Hebdo* is no different to Paris last Friday or the London Bombings. For John Kerry to insinuate otherwise is inappropriate in the extreme.

My detractors would argue that *Charlie Hebdo* was mocking a downtrodden people, it was racist and it singles out Muslims. However, the magazine is famous for poking fun at all religions. Indeed, one cartoon depicts the Pope Francis in drag at a carnival and another depicts the birth of Christ in particularly graphic detail. So any accusation of racism and of singling out Muslims does not stand up to scrutiny. Although the cartoons, in my opinion, were in poor taste, no one should have to die because of satire. We should instead place the blame where it belongs - with the perpetrators of this act of terror - and not legitimise their aims.

The attack at *Charlie Hebdo* was an attack on freedom of expression and freedom of speech. John Kerry is wrong to downplay its significance because *Charlie Hebdo* produced controversial cartoons. Thankfully, the world reacted in the right manner in the immediate aftermath, it rallied to the cause of freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Cartoonists and satirists across the world produced mocking images of terrorists and derided the idea that violence will stifle free expression. The lesson the world learned is that the pen will always be mightier than the sword.



One comment

Daniel Gronow

3 Dec '15 at 7:02 pm

I don't see the use of stating that there is 'no rationale' behind terrorism. The corollary seems to be that terrorists are simply deranged, and while that may indeed be the case for a number, it strikes me as unhelpful. It certainly assuages the public outrage following such attacks, but it also makes the notion of a solution or conclusion seem almost impossible. We're not dealing with isolated cases here, which may well be explained away with recourse to 'madness'. The attacks mentioned in the article are linked, and dismissing them as unmotivated offers no avenue for resolution.

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