Before the UN Fights Terrorism, It Needs to Define It

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With the ISIS claiming credit for the terror attack in Nice, we could now assume that Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, the Franco-Tunisian man who drove his truck into a holiday crowd killing at least 84 people, was not a victim of “racism, colonial humiliation, social depravation and Islamophobia.”

Nor was he just mentally deranged, as his father has tried to claim after the tragedy.

He was, as his masters in Raqqa, ISIS’s stronghold in Syria, assert, “a good soldier of Islam” on a mission to kill “the infidel” in large numbers.

But could we call him a terrorist?

For 15 years, the world has tried to agree on a definition of terrorism and failed. The issue has been on the agenda in the G-7 and G-8 summits and at least two summits of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Every year, the United Nations’ General Assembly has grappled with the issue. The issue has also been the bread-and-butter of countless think tanks across the globe, again with no results.

The UN has hit a definitional impasse because a majority of its members still pretend that we have good and bad terrorists. Many intellectuals and even some governments support or tolerate terror groups because they believe that their aims were just or that they would operate only against “others.”

The 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation will never accept that killing people in Tel Aviv by driving a truck into a crowd is an act of terrorism. (This has happened in Israel more than 50 times.)

For years, French governments turned a blind eye to the activities of Algerian terrorists, who incidentally used Nice as a key base in Europe, because they were fighting “a dictatorial regime.

Until recently, Germany was one of the principal centers of the Muslim Brotherhood outside the Arab world.

Belgium, a safe haven for North African and Middle Eastern terrorists since the 1970s, is only now beginning to try to clean the stables. It had ignored the problem for decades.

The mullahs of Tehran regard their clients in the Hezbollah as “heroes of resistance” — not terrorists.

The Qatar-based Islamist televangelist Yussef al-Qaradawi hammers in the theme that killing even Jewish children is “jihad” because it prevents them from growing up to create new settlements in “occupied territories.” And, yet, Qaradawi is on the Qatari government payroll and has been feted in European capitals, including London.

To Russian President Vladimir Putin, those who commits atrocities in Crimea, eastern Ukraine and occupied parts of Georgia are “antifascist” forces, not terrorists.

The Serbian leader in Bosnia, Radovan Karadzic, almost hit a reporter who suggested his “ethnic cleansers,” killing thousands of unarmed Muslims, were terrorists.

“They are Crusaders,” he shrieked.

Terrorism does not exist in outer space.

It is based on firm ground and in the territory of member states of the United Nations. Until recently, Damascus hosted the offices of more than 40 terrorist groups from across the globe. Tehran today hosts the regional offices of at least 20 terror groups, including some from Latin America. Pakistan is a safe haven for the Taliban, the Haqqani Society and numerous other terror outfits.

Turkey maintains a relationship with several terror groups operating in Syria and Iraq that at best could be described as ambiguous.

For decades, Cuba was a safe haven for terrorists from Latin America and Africa. Under President Hugo Chavez, Venezuela assumed part of that role.

While Pakistan recruits and arms terrorists against India in Kashmir, India repays the compliment by financing rebels in Pakistani Baluchistan.

In every case, one country’s terrorist is another country’s “freedom fighter.”

Will the next UN General Assembly, due in September, do better on this issue now that hundreds of people have been killed by terrorists in more than 20 countries in almost every continent?

A universally agreed definition of terrorism and its designation as a threat to all humanity could open the way for global cooperation to deal with a scourge that spares no one. It would enable the international community to adopt punitive measures against states sheltering terrorist groups on any pretext.