

# THE AUSTRALIAN

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## Orlando shooting: hate that Barack Obama dares not speak

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How can Barack Obama get it so wrong over and over again — from Paris to San Bernardino to Brussels and now Orlando?

The US just experienced its most deadly domestic terror attack since September 11, 2001. It was committed by a radicalised Muslim interviewed by the FBI for links with leading jihadists and who pledged allegiance to Islamic State as he massacred 50 people celebrating pride week in a gay nightclub.

In his first response, the US President didn't feel it necessary to name and deplore the connection with Islamist extremism and a politico-religious ideology of hate that specifically targets homosexual "perverts" and calls for their murder.

"We have no definitive assessment on the motivation," he said of the killer, before airily declaring that "we" need the strength and courage to change the way "we" think about the LGBT community. It was like the commander-in-chief planned it so Donald Trump could immediately taunt him over the omission, and reap political - advantage from an atrocity ahead of November's presidential election. The President made a grave error of moral and political judgment in focusing only on the obvious and laudable issue of ease of access to weapons of war in trigger-happy America.

It's not like the words "Islamist extremism" are so hard to utter, and they would give much-needed succour to the struggling, mostly silent majority of moderate secular Muslims. Can't Obama walk and chew gum at the same time — admitting that Islamist-inspired terror and shockingly simple access to weapons of war in Florida are both to blame?

Unfortunately, he is a recidivist.

The Orlando playbook is a redux of Obama throughout his presidency but especially since the Paris attacks of January last year when jihadists murdered journalists, cartoonists, police officers and Jewish shoppers in a spree of killings inspired by al-Qa'ida and Islamic State. First the US State Department offended the French and Jewish victims by stating that the attackers "randomly" targeted "folks" in a kosher supermarket.

A month after these atrocities, the omerta continued at the White House's Countering Violent Extremism summit. I was amazed to witness the absurd

tinging of administration officials and the President around what had become

upcoming of administration officials and the President around what had become evident to most French politicians and ordinary citizens: this was a calculated act of terrorism inspired by a radical Islamo-fascist ideology that had its roots in extremist Sunni Salafist jihadism exported globally from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

Despite President Francois Hollande's initial reticence, the French have been obliged to name their enemy, and it isn't acceptable anymore to simply self-flagellate and blame generalised hate, access to weapons, or even social exclusion and foreign policy.

Still, for Obama and his acolytes, the *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher market massacres were just any old "violent extremism" and woe be it to anyone who dared mention the reason for the war — or religion, that dirtiest of words. The script was monotonously similar after Paris was again attacked by Islamic State fighters last November, then when a pro-Islamic State couple murdered 14 in California, and again post-Brussels in March.

Obama's former speechwriter Jon Favreau defended his former boss, noting all the times he has urged the Muslim community to fight radicalism. When I asked him why Obama couldn't mention the Orlando killer's Islamic State links, Favreau even "guaranteed" me that the next time Obama would speak on the issue he would do so. But why the wait?

Moderate, and reformist, secular Muslims are tearing their hair out. "You want Trump to lose? Me too. Ask Democrats to acknowledge the issue of Islamic extremism and support liberal voices in the Muslim world," Faisal Saeed al-Mutar, an Iraqi-born US-based secular Muslim activist, implored on Twitter.

He also wants Democrats and others to condemn the "Sharia law that punishes homosexuality".

Homophobia is institutionalised by political Islam in many Muslim-majority countries and in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan and Mauritania is punishable by death.

As counter-extremist Maajid Nawaz says, gun laws must be reformed but "homophobia is huge among Muslims. Reform Islam today."