

# THE ORLANDO ATTACK

## A “symbiosis” of role-players from opposing sides

### Definition of SYMBIOSIS (from Dictionary.com):

“any **interdependent** or mutually beneficial relationship between two persons, groups, etc.”  
“a relationship between two [entities] in which each is dependent upon and **receives reinforcement, whether beneficial or detrimental, from the other**”



Early in the morning on Sunday 12 June, the worst terror attack on US soil since 9/11 took place. A gunman, 29-year-old Omar Mir Sadiq Mateen, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) before opening fire in an LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender) nightclub in Orlando, killing 50 and leaving dozens more injured.

The gunman, a US citizen of Afghan descent (living in Port St. Lucie, Florida) was, according to officials, well-armed and well-prepared. Just after 2am local time, he entered the crowded Pulse nightclub where about 350 people were attending a Latin music night.

Details on the exact sequence of events that followed are still being investigated. About 3am, the club posted a warning on Facebook: “*Everyone get out of Pulse and keep running.*”

A hostage situation developed, and police built up their presence around the club. At 5am, authorities raided the building to rescue those still inside. A SWAT team stormed the venue, using explosives and breaking through a wall with an armoured vehicle. Mateen was shot and killed.

This attack on the nightclub should not be viewed as an isolated incident involving a “self-radicalised lone wolf” acting on the spur of the moment. Viewing this tragedy simply as an “Islamic attack on Western democracy” will blur and obscure the contributions of different role-players that led to the actual event. In the bigger picture, there is a kind of “symbiosis” – an “interdependent relationship” between various role-players and factors from different, opposing sides, all of which played some role in the lead-up to the shooting. All should be recognised and addressed:

- *The ‘symbiosis’ of opposing values*
- *The ‘symbiosis’ of opposing worldviews*
- *The ‘symbiosis’ of opposing hardliners*

## THE ‘SYMBIOSIS’ OF OPPOSING VALUES

It seems like there is an “interdependent relationship” and close link between the increasing shifts in moral standards in Western societies (such as an increase in promiscuity) and an increase in radicalised Islam. In 1 Timothy 2:1-3, Paul urges believers to pray for all those in authority so that “***we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness***”. Peace is connected with godly living. When godliness falls away, conflict (and eventually violence) may arise.

Radical Islam ‘feeds’ on the shifts of moral values in the West, while ‘free living choices’ have become a means of opposing and standing up to radical ideologies. The Orlando attack – aimed specifically at a group of people whose lifestyles triggered deep ideological offense – is being likened to the November 2015 mass shooting at the Bataclan theatre in Paris, where the American band *Eagles of Death Metal* (whose music is offensive to some) was playing. *NBC* reported on Sunday morning that while Omar Mateen’s father believed the attack had nothing to do with religion, he connected the targeting of a gay nightclub to his son being “angry when he saw two men kissing in downtown Miami a couple months ago”.

In a press conference on Sunday, US President Barack Obama called the shooting an “act of terror” and an “act of hate”. He expressed his grief for and solidarity with the LGBT community, and spoke of the victims in ‘hero terms’. In his words, Pulse was “... more than a nightclub... [it] was a place of solidarity and empowerment, where people came together to raise awareness, to speak their minds, and to advocate for their civil rights.”



As sad and tragic as the attack was, it is important to clarify whether the victims were truly “civil rights heroes”. The nightclub was primarily a place for pleasure, based on non-traditional sexuality. The club’s website described itself as “the hottest gay bar in Orlando, which offers live entertainment, tantalising libations and three unique rooms for an unforgettable night of fun and fantasy”.

As Christians, we mourn the loss of every life, especially the lives of those who chose to live apart from Christ. There should, however, be no illusions about the victims being ‘heroes’ simply for their lifestyle choices.

## THE ‘SYMBIOSIS’ OF OPPOSING WORLDVIEWS

It seems like there is also an “interdependent relationship” between the worldviews of democracy and theocracy – both need the other to promote themselves. The democratic Western worldview that ensured the “rights” of all citizens is directly opposed to the fundamentalist Islamic worldview that seems to have motivated the Orlando attack, and as the one worldview becomes more entrenched, so does the other.

In the US, there is a deep struggle with the fact that Mateen’s democratic right to own a weapon was the means by which he took away others’ right to live. According to *ABC News* and *Fox News*, Mateen was surveilled and investigated in 2013 after co-workers complained that he made inflammatory remarks and mentioned ties to terrorists. In 2014, Mateen was back in the FBI’s crosshairs, as agents looked into his possible connections to Moner Mohammad Abu-Salha, an American who became a suicide bomber in Syria. But Mateen was seen to not pose any real threat. As an American-born law-abiding citizen without any criminal convictions, there was nothing to stop Mateen purchasing a weapon (which, according to *ATF*, he did approximately a week before Sunday’s attack).

While radical Islam holds up Western democracy as a reason to promote Islamic theocracy, secular democracy (in which the right to armed self-defense is enshrined) is increasing in reaction to deeply fundamentalist values. Both ‘feed’ on each other in a quest to oppose each other.

## THE ‘SYMBIOSIS’ OF OPPOSING HARDLINERS

Then there is the “interdependent relationship” between Western leaders like Donald Trump and radical Islamic leaders like the Islamic State’s Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. While opposed to one another, they ‘feed’ off each other in a quest to gain support. In a December 2015 article in *The Atlantic*, **Dominic Tierney** explored this ‘symbiotic’ relationship: (<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/trump-isis-extremists/420984/> - condensed extracts below)

*“At first glance, Donald Trump looks like Islamic extremism’s worst nightmare. Trump said he would ban the billion-plus Muslims around the world from visiting the US. He would send the medieval IS back to the proverbial Stone Age [and] ‘bomb the \*\*\* outta them’.*



*From another angle, however, Trump and IS are effectively helping each other. They don't communicate. There's no moral equivalence between them. Nevertheless, Trump and IS aid each other's agendas in a strange combination.*

*The Trump-IS symbiosis reveals a bigger story. First, hardliners on opposing sides may communicate a surprisingly similar narrative of the conflict in which they're involved. In their values, IS and Trump are polar opposites. IS insists that women cover their bodies by wearing veils, abayas, and gloves— whereas Trump used to run the Miss Universe Organisation. Trump probably knows little about IS's apocalyptic understanding of Islam. IS would find*

*Trump's politics similarly incomprehensible. And yet they both to varying degrees promote the same story of a clash between the West and Islam.*

*Second, hardliners represent each other's meal ticket. They may rail against the enemy, but the enemy is what keeps them in business. The ultras try to defeat the moderates on their own side by forcing them into a binary choice: either you're with us, or you're with the terrorists (or the infidels). The key to this strategy is the adversary's vitriolic hatred and violence, which sends the moderates fleeing to the extreme."*

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The motivating reason for much of the violence carried out by radical Muslims is not necessarily love for their god – it is more often a hatred for those who do not submit to their god. This is often true for Christians as well. And the 'symbiotic' actions that are carried out from a sense of duty often end up 'creating' and confirming the initial reason for the violence or aggression. There is only one solution for these kinds of divisive, 'symbiotic' vicious cycles: **RECONCILIATION**.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says the following: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God."*

There is a clear Biblical mandate regarding our response to the 'symbiotic tugs of war' described above. It may be easy to condemn the radicals and sympathise with the victims, and it may be equally easy to condemn the 'immorality' of the victims and justify the radicals. But both need prayer and both need to be reconciled to God through Christ Jesus.

Any message – be it from the cathedral, the mosque, the synagogue or the political platform – that generates suspicion, fear and hatred should be rejected. Christians need to pray for **"all people"**, with the hope of *"peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness"* (1 Timothy 2:1-3).



*There is no copyright on this document but please acknowledge the source:*

[www.incontextministries.org](http://www.incontextministries.org)  
[mike@incontextministries.org](mailto:mike@incontextministries.org)