

Commentary ? Are they divided as never before?

Seldom, if ever, has there been so much difference between two nations with such a long history of peaceful coexistence. Long gone are the days when Canadians and Americans could travel between the two countries without any more identification beyond a driver's licence.

That has been replaced with a demand for a passport, a check against possible criminal records, and in the case of travel by air, potentially long lines and use of machines that even take your photographs as additional guard against entry to the U.S. by terrorists. We have even reached the point where some Republican candidates for the U.S. presidency are calling for erection of a border fence, as if this somehow would offer real protection when, in fact, hundreds of miles of the coastline are in the middle of the Great Lakes. In recent months, we have elected a centre-left federal government that espouses policies diametrically different from those of all the Republican presidential candidates.

Nowhere is the difference between the political leaderships demonstrated more clearly than the issue posed by millions of refugees from war-torn Syria.

At a time when Canada is welcoming tens of thousands of the refugees, U.S. President Barack Obama is unlikely to succeed with a plan to admit a token 10,000, with Donald Trump saying the U.S. shouldn't allow any Moslems into the country until some foolproof way is found to guarantee that none was a terrorist in disguise.

Far from showing any sign of a moderation in such menacing fear and hate-mongering, the opposite appears to be the case, with all the publicity given recently to two arrests in the U.S. on terrorism charges, one of a man who came from Syria several years ago and recently posted blogs to the effect that he had returned to his homeland to fight with ISIS, and the other of a Moslem alleged to have been promoting terrorism on social media.

The reality, of course, is that there are already elements in both countries that are promoting terrorist activities and radicalizing young Moslem men and women, and that the best weapon against the phenomenon lies in members of the faith community reporting such activities to the proper authorities.

Critics of the current regime in Canada will say, correctly, that there is always a possibility that some of the 25,000 Syrian refugees the government wants to admit by the end of next month (a deadline that will undoubtedly have to be extended) will be terrorists in disguise, who could at least attempt to kill 'infidels,' perhaps in the style of the Boston Marathon bombers or the couple who killed 14 of the husband's colleagues in San Bernardino, California's Inland Regional Center.

On the other hand, there's something to be said for the theory that such mass killings are far more likely in countries like France or the U.S., where there is so much 'Islamophobia' or anti-Moslem sentiment, which Wikipedia defines as 'the prejudice against, hatred towards, or fear of the religion of Islam or Moslems,' adding that the term had its origins 'in 1997 with the publication of a report by the Runnymede Trust condemning negative emotions such as fear, hatred, and dread directed at Islam or Moslems.'

While we happen to think our government is on the right track, we also would like Canada to take a leading role in efforts to end the civil war in Syria, perhaps by promoting a federation that would give at least some of the country's minorities clout by being able to elect state or provincial governments that would have substantial power.

That obviously is the best way of dealing with the refugee crisis, since undoubtedly most, if not all, of the refugees would prefer to be able to return to their homeland once peace is finally assured.