

The Paris Terrorist Attacks: “Pre-emptive Defense”, A Chronicle Foretold

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The mass bombing in Paris points out the inconsistencies in French Middle East diplomacy. In September 2007, President Nicolas Sarkozy received Muammar Gaddafi lavishly for a five-day visit, graciously allowing the Libyan leader to set up his tent in the gardens of the official residence in Marigny when he visited Paris in December 2007 and signed major military agreements worth some 4.5 billion euros. And in 2008, he extended a personal invitation to the Syrian leader, Bashar al-Assad, to watch the military parade celebrating Bastille Day on July 14.

This contrasts with the feverish activism in favor of military interventions to overthrow their regimes. The about-face regarding military intervention in Iraq, initially ruled out by President Jacques Chirac but now implemented by President François Hollande (deployment of 600 ground troops and the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle with 2,500 marines as part of the “Chammal” operation, more than 200 air raids between September 2014 and August 2015). And now the intervention in Syria, which violates international law, has not been authorized by the Security Council, and was not requested by the Syrian government.

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls legitimized the action by invoking the concept of pre-emptive defense introduced by U.S. President George W. Bush, with the disastrous consequences we are all familiar with, notably the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), whose leaders were once interned in the U.S. military prison at Camp Bucca, Iraq, subjected to degrading treatments.

The bombing raids, started again in September 2014, to no constraints of accountability, generated yet more damage, deaths, orphans, widows, and hatred. According to the NGO Airwars, the “coalition” conducted more bombing raids from January 1 to August 20, 2015 than it had in the previous eight years combined (3,945 as of August 24, 2015).

The use of military action as the core of a security strategy has led to radicalization in Muslim countries (Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Mali, Pakistan...). The *Livre Blanc sur la Défense et la Sécurité de la France*, published in 2013, openly sanctions this policy: “the many military operations in which France has taken part in recent years (Afghanistan, Ivory Coast, Libya, Mali) prove that military action remains an important component of our [national] security”. But security derives first and foremost from negotiation, mediation, and cooperation; a military response is not appropriate because it ultimately only generates more violence. Three hundred and fifteen suicide attacks were recorded in the Middle East from 1980 to 2003; since 2003 they number in the thousands.



Fait accompli? French jets have carried out dozens of sorties on Raqqa, supposedly as retaliation for the Paris attacks, but France may be trying, along with the US, to federalize Syria.

Young Muslims (from Belgium, France, Denmark, Germany, Canada...) join the *jihād* in Somalia, Algeria, and Syria. They metamorphose into terrorists in the name of a cause that will continue to motivate followers as long as it continues to appear legitimate and without alternative in their eyes. This cause is amplified by a growing Islamophobia, discrimination and marginalization of the Muslim community, specially the youth, and the persistence of the Palestinian drama. It is fueled by repeated military operations on Islamic soil, particularly drone strikes, the indiscriminate deaths of innocents raining down from the sky, leaving a seething wake of injustice and humiliation. The former head of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant General Michael Klynn (2012-2014), now admit that drones generate more terrorists than they kill.



The extreme violence by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) may seem less incomprehensible if we put it in the context of some hard, revealing data: an estimated 600,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed following the invasion and occupation of Iraq; 500,000 children died between 1991 and 1998 as a result of sanctions imposed against the regime of Saddam Hussein.

In Afghanistan since 2003 more than 250 000 civilians have been killed. More than 130,000 people disabled, mainly because of landmines, including 40,000 amputees among the civilian population according to Afghan governmental sources, and these figures are considered to be significantly underestimated According to the United Nations, the number of Afghan children and Afghan women killed in the first half of 2015 increased by 13% and 23%, respectively, with respect to the same period in 2014. There are an estimated 5 million orphans in Iraq; 2 million in Afghanistan where 20% of the children will not live to see their fifth birthday according to a report by the World Bank. On April 30, 2015, in the Syrian village of Bir Mahli in the Aleppo Governorate, on the east bank of the Euphrates - a village I found peaceful and hospitable in 1972 when I participated in an archaeological dig at the Citadel of Aleppo - more than 50 civilians were killed by "coalition" bombs, including 31 children and 19 women. The NGOs Airwars and McClatchy have challenged the Pentagon about these blunders. And we must also add the deaths of 18 civilians in Harem on November 5 and 50 in Al-Bab on December 28, 2014; of 70 civilians in Hawija on June 2, 13

in Kafr Hind on July 28, and 11 in Atmeh on August 11, 2015. With 2,449 air attacks in Syria between September 2014 and August 20, 2015, the only civilian deaths publicly acknowledged by the Pentagon (Centcom) on May 21, 2015 were those of two 5-year-old girls. France didn't even care to communicate on this issue.

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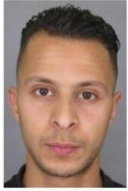
What can we expect when children, the most precious part of our life, are killed or abused, except more grief, hatred and violence? What can we hope to reap from fields sown with so much sorrow and despair? What alternative means of redress is offered to Gaza resident Tawfik Abu Jama, the only survivor of an Israeli bombing raid on July 20, 2014 that killed 26 members of his family, including his wife and his eight children?



In 2014 alone, more than 1.2 million people were forced into refugee status; and the appalling figures continue in 2015 (more than 4 million Syrian refugees). The 71 decomposing Syrian bodies found in a smuggler's abandoned truck in Austria and the drowned body of three-year-old Alan Kurdi washed up on a Turkish beach have shocked the West and should weigh heavily on its conscience, given its fundamental role in their misfortune. But the media consistently cloak the responsibility of the West and its proxies for initiating and expanding wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen and the Horn of Africa. The brutal violence exhibited now in Paris, Beyrouth, Aleppo and elsewhere by combatants in the jihadi movement has grown from this heritage. Terrorism feeds off this violence. ISIL is a phenomenon that has its parallels with the emergence of the Khmer Rouge, originally a minority Maoist rebellion, led by Pol Pot. After the violation of national sovereignty in 1973 and U.S. bombing raids causing some 500,000 deaths, the Khmer Rouge transformed into an extremely violent movement, responsible for the deaths of an estimated 2 million people between 1975 and 1979, a quarter of the country's population.

The French explanation for terrorism, a multi-purpose term covering armed insurrections, rebellions, and resistance movements against occupational forces, is not convincing. Investigations of the issue, such as that by Michael Bond, who studied 500 suicide attacks between 1980 and 2003 and published his findings in the British journal *New Scientist*, underscore the absence of fanaticism, religious extremism or poverty in the great majority of cases. What is highlighted instead are motives driven by dramas in the perpetrators' personal lives or by injustice and humiliation they have suffered, engendering a desire for vengeance and an openness to indoctrination within the tight-knit community of a brotherhood.

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In a February 2015 *New York Times* article, the new Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, commented on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism

“As a Muslim, I can tell you that the problem isn't Islam: it's hopelessness. It's the kind of hopelessness that abounds in the Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps, and in war-weary towns and villages in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and Gaza. It's the hopelessness we see in the poorer neighborhoods of Europe's great cities, and, yes, even in the United States. And it is this hopelessness, which knows no state or religion, that we need to address if we are to stem the tide of terrorism.” {NOTE: Qatar remains an ally of Washington in prosecuting its criminal war in Syria.—Eds.]



Islamophobia will arouse increasingly violent reactions in the Muslim world. Beyond the issues that have nourished the debate on Islam (the *burqa*, caricatures of the Prophet, terrorist plots, plans for a mosque at Ground Zero, burning of the Qur'an, campaign against *sharia*, the ad campaign on buses in Washington DC with a photograph of Adolf Hitler with the grand mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini and the words “*Islamic Jew-Hatred: it's in the Quran*”, expulsion of Muslim girls from a school in the French town of Charleville-Mézières because of their unusually long dresses), there is a real increase in anti-Muslim discrimination and Islamophobic acts that fueled extreme reactions from the “*beurs*”, the youth Muslims with a French passport.



Arbitrary colonial rule created a lot of the trouble we witness today. This is the map of the “French mandate” of Syria (1922). In the wake of the Great War the victorious powers—chiefly Britain and France—simply took apart the Ottoman empire with little regard for ethnic, tribal or religious boundaries or customs.

As the killings in Charlie Hebdo had been a chronicle foretold given the insults and obscenities circulated by this satirical magazine against a religion that constitutes, in many countries and in the disinherited suburbs of the major French cities, the only moral support, the only source of dignity, for marginalized and humiliated communities, the terrorist attacks in Paris are too a chronicle foretold, an expected blowback of France militarism and adventurism in the Middle East and France too long inability to integrate its Islamic young population, the largest one in Europe.

Notes

[1] Henri Roussel, “Delfeil du Ton”, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 2015; see also the book by the historian Emmanuel Todd, *Qui est Charlie?*, éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2015.

Patrick Howlett-Martin is a career diplomat living in Paris.

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