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# The European Union and Terrorism

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European integration, more than nuclear dissuasion, has protected the “Old Continent” from war for the last 70 years. Whilst three generations have enjoyed this unprecedented period of peace, our collective perception of armed conflict now finds itself radically changed [1]. This is all the more so since, in our eyes, the collapse of the Soviet bloc granted the sole monopoly of legitimate violence to the American superpower and its NATO allies, in the name of the defence and promotion of shared, common Western values. If an armed initiative, the threat of employing this or even simply talking about it does not fit in to this monopoly it is described by our media and perceived by our public opinion as illegitimate, barbaric, comparable to terrorism and manufactured by the “axis of evil”. This perception is confirmed by the fact that any armed undertaking against the West and its allies is automatically forced to implement weak to strong strategies the basic elements of which are highly mediated brutality and excessive violence.

## FROM TERRORISM TO ARMED COMBAT AND BACK

In this way the “terrorist” label is applied indiscriminately to subversive, violent movements calling themselves al-Qaeda, to the Tuareg irredentists in Mali or the Russians in Ukraine, to Salafist fighters dotted around the world, to single killers in the West, if they are Muslims and to the militants of Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. This is not about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of one or the other group in their use of violence, but of noting that if we consider them without any degree of qualification or distinction we cannot protect ourselves from these diverse phenomenon or counter them, without engaging in an inept “global war against terror” as did the American neo-Conservative administration, with the disastrous results of which we are all aware. The confusion between war and the fight to counter terrorism has inevitably led to an extension and heightening of danger. By creating a legal vacuum linked to the improbable status of “enemy combatant”, which corresponds neither to the laws of warfare nor to those of civilian peacekeeping, the USA relinquished their own values and increased the number of inextricable situations in Guantanamo, Abu-Ghraib, in “secret prisons” at home and in the territories of their allies, leading to the infringement of the most

basic rights, which has caused hatred, rejection and a desire for revenge everywhere and which has been clearly used by the worst ideologues of the “clash of civilisations.”

In 2002 the military overthrow of the Taliban regime was legitimate and justified. The regime in Kabul was a State power that granted asylum and support to a terrorist organisation that had dealt the USA a severe blow. This said, after the destruction of al-Qaeda and the expulsion of the Taliban, it would have been wiser to have left matters at that, even returning the number of time necessary to prevent a “relapse” in the collusion of the local government with international terrorism, which never included one single Afghani amongst its ranks. Experienced as an illegitimate foreign intrusion by the entire population, jealous of its independence, the 11-year military occupation of the country did not help to stamp out terrorism, which took its action elsewhere, nor did it lead to the establishment of an effective, respectable political regime in a country where the political return of the fundamentalists built on the ruins of a puppet NATO supported regime has already been conjectured. Without going back over the second Iraq war, which was grotesquely triggered on the base of lies about the local regime’s collusion with terrorism, its consequences encourage us to reflect on

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the fundamental differences between armed conflict and defence against terrorist crime.

Al-Qaeda was a terrorist movement in the strictest sense of the term. The residue of the guerrilla comprising the opposition of the international Islamist Mujahedin supported by the West against the Soviet occupants of Afghanistan, Ben Laden's movement was a tightly-knit group with an overall opposition strategy to America and its allies. But it lacked any definite tactic and involved expendable non-professionals of violence within adverse societies, whose aim it was to commit blind attacks as they could, where they could and when they could, as long as the violence was spectacular, highly mediated and that it bore the movement's signature and message. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) truly is however an army of professionals of violence with a leader, a mission, the means, uniforms and signs of recognition, an agenda and precise goals in a limited area over which it intends to take control, to establish itself in the long term. By simply calling itself a State the movement shows that its leaders intend to provide themselves with an institutional and geographical base. This was not the case with Ben Laden at all, at least in the final stages of 1998-2001 who advocated and implemented non-territorial based violence against the whole world.

Hence the only true affiliation to al-Qaeda is to be found in a few small groups in the south of Yemen, which have limited operational capabilities. Moreover Boko Haram, the Somalian Shebab, the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, AQMI and the MUJAO in the Sahel operate according to the same pattern as the Islamic State. They have undertaken guerrilla operations or almost conventional wars of territorial conquest against local governments and when necessary against, the external allies of the latter who come to support them. This is how any citizen from a belligerent country captured in the field is deemed to be an enemy and treated as such, together with a monstrous display in the media, which is designed to impress public opinion. But in spite of some loud threats it seems that these groups do not want, or especially, do not have the operational capacity to wage war within Western societies. Hence AQMI's sabre-rattling against France

when it intervened in Mali, which was complacently relayed by the press, has remained without effect to date.

### **FACING THE MILITARY DANGER BEHIND THE TERRORIST RISK: A REQUIREMENT FOR EUROPE**

The terrorist issue however has not been resolved. It will become all the more acute, both in the case of defeat or victory of these groups in the field. The unchecked filiation of the Peshawar "Services Bureau" supported financially by the Saudi Arabia logistically by Pakistan and technically by American advisors to enlist foreign Islamic volunteers in the Afghan Mujahedin's fight to counter the Soviet occupation, al-Qaeda crystallised the bitterness of these volunteers abandoned by the West after 1990; the jihad against communism was transformed into one which was both universal and desperate. Ben Laden's organisation was the paroxysmal product of what was felt as betrayal and defeat. The possible collapse of the present jihadist armed groups will inevitably have the same effect and they will quite easily find some sensitive individuals amongst the 20 million Muslims living in Europe, like Mehdi Nemmouche, to deal out death and destruction. But victory on the part of these groups will not be a guarantee for appeasement. Taking advantage of a strong foothold in the "grey zones", established in a predatory rent economy which they exercise over the local populations and resources, they will only be able to continue in power via permanent evasion, an extension of their area of control, with constantly repeated offensives, whilst trying to protect themselves from external response via political or terrorist pressure – which will be spearheaded by an unceasing quest for division and violent conflict in the West between Muslim communities and the rest of the population.

Although violent Salafist movements are as active and skilful on the internet and the social networks in convincing followers within the emigrant communities in the West, their first goal is not to recruit fighters or actors but first to build a wall of misunderstanding and hate amongst communities, to cause turmoil and disorder in view of dissuading Western societies

from intervening militarily against them or to support the regimes in power who are combatting them. The militia of the Islamic State, Boko Haram, the Somalian Shebab and AQMI have enough seasoned volunteers, who are familiar with the rigours of the field without burdening themselves with inexperienced recruits, who are poorly suited to local constraints. Their seduction campaign is strictly in line with that of the Muslim Brotherhood – from which nearly all of the executives of Islamic violence emanate – and who, since the 1950's, and according to the recommendations of its theorist of armed subversion, Sayyid Qotb, has turned the political violence exercised against the regimes in power and their Western allies into a privileged means to access power, which they have been trying to take by any possible method for nearly a century. Time, existence underground and the exile into which they often have been forced along with the repression to which they have been subject have led them to develop a real talent for populist, demagogic discourse, for the excesses of religious fundamentalism and the hatred of others, for the use of any cultural, legal and political loopholes in the societies that have hosted them.

Supported financially and ideologically by wealthy citizens on the Arab Peninsula, for whom democratic developments and the influence of Shiite Iran, are equally detestable, since they challenge their privileges and their own political legitimacy, the jihadist propaganda together with the double language of the Muslim Brotherhood have every chance of reaching their target, if the countries of Europe only oppose them with ignorance, political-correctness and the weakness of "reasonable arrangements" which are tantamount to capitulation in open country. Undoubtedly in France, in Europe and the West as a whole, there just a few hundred young people who are "borderline", who have lost all family, cultural and social values, who are prepared to turn to indiscriminate violence on the whim of an opportunity, of unfortunate encounters in their personal life or on the social media. This type of excess is obviously very serious and requires the full attention of our societies and stricter measures of prevention and repression. However it has much more to do with educational, cultural, security, political and internal social issues than with a threat of irreducible ideological confrontation.

This aspect has just been tragically illustrated in France by the attack against the newspaper Charlie Hebdo, the presumed perpetrators of which are semi-professional thugs trained to undertake violence in criminal circles, but who are also in quest of renown and possibly of financing from "generous foreign donors" as they demonstrate their capacity to do harm and their ability to mobilise weak minds. Only the definite identification of the perpetrators will allow us to see whether they acted as an autonomous group of individuals pursuing their own goals or whether they did so on the instruction and in coordination with an external group. For a long time already many observers have quite rightly warned of a possible transition towards the international terrorism on the part of the "Islamic State", if the latter were to lose military ground in the field – which seems to be the case at the moment. We have every reason to fear the return of hate-filled, frustrated foreign volunteers to their home countries as the example of Mehdi Nemmouche illustrates.

However it seems that if Islamic State took this path or if al-Qaeda wanted to change its method in its rivalry with Daesh, these organisations would probably privilege action against American interests and in all events, against "clearer" targets for the Muslim public opinion: political decision makers, emblematic buildings or institutions, highly populated public places etc. Even though Charlie Hebdo was the focus of a great amount of hate and rancour amongst Islamic fundamentalist circles, it is still relatively unknown abroad. The choice of this target by the perpetrators of the attack seems therefore to have been undertaken by a small, local group in France acting within the general context of Islamic violence but without any coordination or instruction from outside. This is a point that the presumed perpetrators seem to confirm. However they acted in tune to a backdrop of international Salafist violence and their action has increased the buzz amongst a public opinion which is legitimately shocked.

Hence Europe has no choice. It will not protect itself from terrorist threats by remaining cautiously neutral, by refusing to intervene militarily and politically against Islamic groups and by continuing to ignore

the existence of the ideological and financial support of Salafist violence. It is in its interest to counter this support forcefully, both politically and diplomatically. It is its duty to commit its armed forces collectively against Salafist barbarity alongside the USA and the legal governments of the Muslim countries, whether they are democratic or non-virtuous. Should we have relinquished our alliance with Stalin's USSR during the Second World War in the face of Nazi barbarity? The greatness of political leaders lies in making difficult choices. The population needs no one to make easy choices. Whether it engages or not in the destruction of the armed jihadists in the Middle East and Africa, Europe will have to face the terrorist threat on its own ground all the more thoroughly since this type of terrorism has a wealth of rear bases at its disposal. It is also vital to develop true judicial and police cooperation in Europe that can detect as early as possible and warn of the damage caused by Salafist propaganda to the most vulnerable citizens. Given the fortunate freedom of movement introduced by the Schengen area it is not of much use to identify those at risk on a national level if our partners in the area are not provided with the necessary information.

#### CONCLUSION

Clearly for the time being Europe does not seem ready to face any of these challenges. No collective action has been undertaken to date to ensure the monitoring and the management of potential perpetrators of

violence. The weight of military commitment against this phenomenon has been left to France and the UK, which are also suspected of excessive subordination to 'Atlanticism' and of entertaining neo-colonial pretensions or power, whilst the general deflation of military budgets in each of the European Union's Member States make isolated interventions that are not pooled and concerted illusory.

As for the inevitable terrorist risk in Europe, which is not a matter for military pre-emption by any means - but as with any criminal threat - is one for the secret services, the police and the services of justice with the support of a common policy of educational, cultural and social prevention; it requires true multilateral cooperation of the 28 Member States without the taboos of "political correctness" in terms of the identification, surveillance, the monitoring and, if necessary, neutralisation of dangerous people or circles, whether they are residents or returnees from the theatres of conflict. It is not an insult to Muslims nor are we stigmatising them to think that we will find Islamists in their midst and that it is firstly in their interest to fight against barbarity of which they are the first victims. If Europe enters the fray in a disorganised manner or worse still, if it refuses to engage, it is doomed to dishonour and destruction.

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