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French Middle East Policy Reaches a Bloody Dead End

By Steven Vujacic
November 18, 2015

The media high-fiving didn't last long. Barely hours following the announcement of the "probable" death of anti-celebrity and throat-cutting ISIS pin-up boy "Jihadi John", Paris was treated to a stunning choreography of terrorist attacks in supposed revenge for the constant and mostly ineffectual French bombing of ISIS targets in Syria.

The eternally hapless president of France did his best to look stern and statesmanlike in response to the massacre but anyone with half a brain must by now be asking themselves whether "Flamby" has a Plan B beyond more sanctimonious rhetoric and flashy air sorties.

The truth hurts. Hollande's trademark denunciations of terrorism failed to hide the simple fact that French policies have consistently played into the hands of jihadists. From the ill-conceived removal of Muammar Ghaddafi, sworn enemy of Islamic fundamentalism, to the current French government's strident defense of the incessant and puerile anti-Islamic insults of Charlie Hebdo, to its farcical attempts to weaken the anti-terrorist regime of Bashar al-Assad by judicial means, (i.e., the announcement of war crimes "investigations"), ISIS' influence and confidence has grown with each French blunder. ISIS has always known exactly what it wants and it senses it is on a big winning streak. As leader of the country with the biggest Arab immigrant population in Europe, one wonders what more Hollande could have done to make life easy for ISIS short of issuing French passports to its entire leadership.

There is only one word to describe France's foreign policy in the Middle East: reckless. France appears to have taken leave of its senses. Instead of maintaining a low profile anti-terrorist approach which guaranteed security at home, it has opted for the worst of all worlds – loud liberal sermons combined with overt and bloody intervention in a hugely volatile part of the world that has strong ties with a large and increasingly alienated segment of French society.

As the death toll rises, I listen in vain for any recognition that France has taken a wrong turn. That defending Western values in the Middle East and North Africa with air strikes, drones etc. is a moral and military dead end, pure and simple. Nothing. No self-reflection. No doubts. The liberal enlightened West never makes mistakes.

Not only do our policies help our enemies, we don't even recognize our friends. If our leaders are serious about crippling this hate-spewing caliphate then why do I not hear a single call to work more closely with Russia and Iran who if anything are more eager than we are to put an end to the ISIS monstrosity? Marches, vigils, t-shirts, fine words and air strikes abound. But no common sense.

So what now? Does Flamby double down with more pointless bombing and the inevitable "collateral damage"? Does he enact draconian laws that restrict public movement? Does he try to convince Tweedle-Dum Cameron across the Channel to "step up" to this new security challenge to take the heat off France? Maybe all of the above.

The refrain of the French Right, of course, is that this is the bloody result of immigration and failed multiculturalism. The rot can be traced, however, to the election of Nicolas Sarkozy whose first trip overseas was to visit George W. Bush. France, we were told, owed America an apology for the Chirac government's decision to abandon its American ally and steer clear of the Iraqi misadventure. We should have smelled a giant rat when Sarkozy begged forgiveness for what could be described as France's most intelligent foreign policy decision since the end of the Cold War.

Almost overnight, the dignity and caution that had served French diplomacy so well for so many years was shoved aside in favor of pro-American foreign policy activism, brainchild of the trendy humanitarian impostor and minister for foreign affairs Bernard Kouchner. The horror of France's transformation reached its climax, however, when Sarkozy fell under the spell of the French Rasputin, the unspeakable Bernard Henri-Levy. Hand-in-hand with the British and Americans, this pair of do-gooders took down Libya's Gaddafi presenting ISIS with opportunities for jihad in Africa beyond its wildest dreams. The idea that French foreign policy should primarily serve French interests sank quickly beneath the waves without an SOS.

Seen in this context, Hollande's deranged policies in Syria are a logical extension of this boastful new foreign policy that promises symbolic "victories" against extremism yet delivers very real fundamentalist blowback. The average Frenchman must by now be pining for the good old days when he could sit back comfortably in the café with his newspaper, Gauloises, and pastis chuckling at the gross stupidities of US foreign policy.

Instead, France now stands naked with a giant jihadist target painted on its back.