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## Paris and the Soldiers of the Caliphate: More War, More Blowback

By Jason Hirthler

November 20, 2015



*“They who put out people’s eyes reproach them of their blindness.”*

Just months after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, Parisians are again coping with urban terrorism. Again there is shock, incomprehension, and finally, postures of defiance. No doubt any nation's population would respond in like fashion. The world watches the global news broadcasts with revulsion and a kind of morbid fascination. The images are ever the same: a grainy swirl of ambulance lights along city streetscapes. Gendarmes cordoning off crime scenes. Anchors frowning at the latest information handed them. Eventually, a grim-faced Prime Minister or President or Chancellor delivering a national response, projecting contained rage and vowing retaliation of unimaginable fury.

### **First Causes and our Incapacity for Self-Reflection**

Grief is natural and entirely appropriate. By contrast, brutal retaliation informed only by a malignant hatred may be natural, but it is entirely the wrong response. Terrorism is a symptom of a larger disease, the disease of capitalist imperialism. To bring peace to the West, we must treat the disease, not just the symptom. Yet our leaders will never do this.

Why? Because every major terror attack is leveraged by the West to occupy greater segments of the Middle East and to suppress free speech, organization, and protest at home. Our oligarchic elite must never concede their own role in fomenting terror by terrorizing vulnerable populations. They are duty bound by the oligarchs that elected them to observe an elite *omerta* about empire. They must never concede that seven Muslim countries invaded, one million Muslims killed, and tens of millions of Muslims turned into refugees has anything to do with terrorism visited on Western capitals, from New York to London to Madrid and finally, again, to Paris. But of course, those figures had everything to do with November 13th.

The entire planet would be a better place if we merely had the capacity for self-critique. We don't. To summon a simple precept from another religion, we should set our own house in order before attending to that of another. We won't. Surely 129 dead and 352 wounded in Paris horribly mirrors the disorder of the Middle East (as did the twin Beirut attacks that left 44 dead last week, scarcely noticed in the West). Friday's terrorist attack was the most devastating in the West since 9/11. But what then does one call the 3,000 Muslims slain by Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama in their drone assassination campaign? What does one call not hundreds, but *hundreds of thousands* of mostly Muslim dead as a result of our invasion of Iraq and subsequent divide and rule strategy? What does one call the deliberate facilitation of an Islamic terrorist army in Syria and Iraq in order to overthrow secularist Bashar al-Assad? Are these too not acts of terror? Francois Hollande called the attacks "an act of war." But then what are French air attacks in Syria that violate national sovereignty and international law without the slightest compunction? What are they if not acts of war also? Consult the United Nations Charter, Francois. Scan the Geneva Conventions. Skim the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **Blind Spots: Religion and Racism**

We say in the West that these people are driven by their religion to these measures. Yet hundreds of millions of Muslims exist worldwide that decry this kind of violence. The only alternative motivation that makes sense is that these extremists are responding to Western imperialism. To

the constant invasion, occupation, and bombing of Muslim countries that sit atop the “greatest material prize in history,” as one national security planner put it during post-war strategy sessions in Washington, when we laid the groundwork of a global empire intent on seizing that prize. The fact is, ISIS would not exist but for U.S.-led attacks on the Muslim world. They are a reactionary force, born of American brutality, shaped in the crucible of a divided Iraq, and unleashed by Western patrons on the only multi-confessional state in the region.

If religion isn't the fundamental issue, what about racism? Isn't it implicit in the column width we afford the Parisian attacks versus what we give to the attacks in Beirut or Baghdad or elsewhere? When brown people die, it hardly merits attention. We dismiss it as some kind of inherent vice in Arab peoples. But when tragedy strikes in the chaste West, the news feed is clotted with paeans to Parisian solidarity and fierce denunciations of the terrorists, plus a healthy percentage of posts that express simple incredulity.

French flags were everywhere, on Twitter to Facebook and Amazon.com. But where were the Lebanese flags after the Beirut attacks last week? Or Iraqi flags after the recent Baghdad attacks? Why aren't there Iraqi flags permanently posted on our sites, since 700 Iraqis were killed in terror attacks in October alone, a number that resembles the death totals just after the invasion in 2003. What about Russian flags after the downing of a Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula? Or when dozens of ethnic Russians were burned alive in Odessa by fascist thugs brought to power with Western aid? The list goes on. The sheer selectivity of our sympathies tells us all we need to know about what kinds of people we value in the West—and what kind of people we don't.

As Jonathan Cook noted in his insightful and necessary article, although we brush aside Arab tragedies, our incapacity to see their religious communities as an alternative to Western values, and our unwillingness to see Arabs and Persians as little more than a benighted peoples in desperate need of edifying gestures, leads us to repeat the follies of the past:

“We are still trying to civilise brown people. We still think we have the right to change them, bend them to our will, improve them by force. We still want to lecture them, condemn them, threaten them, overturn their elections, arm their oppressive leaders, plunder their resources.”

### **The Resilient Bubble of Ideology**

The responses from the mainstream indicate that none of these insights have penetrated the bubble of the beltway or of the MSM. Collectively, the feedback from America is a disturbing mix of sheer madness, fathomless ignorance, and dangerously myopic aggression. Consider:

\*None less than our chief spy, CIA Director John Brennan, produced a freshet of fearmongering drivel designed to justify ever-more invasive surveillance, ridiculing the “handwringing” over surveillance and claiming that the Snowden revelations, coupled with various court decisions declaring some NSA surveillance illegal, have made tracking terrorists exceedingly difficult (no mention of the fact that no Freedom Act reforms have actually been implemented yet).

\*General Barry McCaffrey was especially daft in his remarks. But then, if you are a brass-laden military retiree, there's a job waiting for you in the Mainstream Media (MSM). Appearing twice on MSNBC, where he is a paid shill for the Pentagon, the retired general blamed the Obama administration for "micromanaging" the Syrian conflict and called for a "gloves off" approach to defeating ISIS.

\*New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, sinking like a stone in the Republican race, declared that the United States should allow no Syrian refugees into the country, "not even orphans." New Speaker of the House Paul Ryan said refugee funding could simply be blocked.

\*Donald Trump said he would strongly consider shuttering American mosques.

\*Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz called for more airstrikes with a higher tolerance for civilian casualties.

\* *The New York Times* also publishes an opinion piece by Roger Cohen that claimed, "The only adequate response to the slaughter in France is military and the objective must be to crush ISIS."

\*More alarmingly, Marco Rubio, one of the numberless crackpot candidates of the Republican insurgency, demanded that Article 5 of the NATO Charter be invoked. Article 5 stipulates the now infamous credo that an attack against one is an attack against all—a popular pretext often referenced by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, former Supreme Commander of NATO Forces Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and yesterday by retired NATO Admiral James Stavridis, who declared the Paris attacks an "act of war."

These are the replies of establishmentarians, purblind to the complicity of their own society in the rise of Middle Eastern extremism. Seventeenth century poet and polemicist John Milton wrote in one of his pamphleteering critiques of the Church of England, that, "They who have put out people's eyes reproach them of their blindness." Little has changed. Today we radicalize the Middle East and then reproach them of their radicalism.

### **The Distilled Essence**

We can boil down the problem of terrorism to its purest expression: will kill them, so they try to kill us. Since World War Two, the United States is said to have had a direct hand in the death of millions of people worldwide, either through direct intervention or clandestine activities. William Blum's *Rogue State* and James Lucas's thoroughgoing look at interventions and death tolls in 37 countries are both instructive references. And yet at least two factors prevent Americans from recognizing the bloody global footprint of its government. One is the most sophisticated propaganda system in history. Another may be the fact that our crimes are not the work of a single, deranged despot, a Hitler or a Stalin, but rather the collective accomplishment of many men within a system of imperial capitalism that often disguises its brutality. We have a pantheon of iniquities enacted by men that better resemble Adolf Eichmann than Adolf Hitler. We might heed Hannah Arendt's warning of the "banality of evil." Empire, too, seen from within, appears banal.

Beyond our borders, though, empire is hell on earth. Just ask an Iraqi or Syrian or Afghani or Yemeni or ethnic Russian in Odessa. The system cannot change because the oligarchs that rule the United States will stop at nothing to extend their grip on the world's financial riches, its natural resources, and its thoroughfares of extraction. In order to achieve these goals, they are willing to allow major urban centers of the West to become sacrifice zones.

The power elite—men and woman that gather in the rarefied air of Bilderberg meetings and G7 summits—claim that terrorism is the challenge of our times. It isn't. Imperial capitalism is. Terrorism is the symptom of imperial violence. It is how the defenseless fight back when their societies are destroyed. As such, Washington has no intention of eliminating terrorism from the map. Terror is a valuable tool in the clandestine arsenal of state, discovered by Carter, nurtured by Reagan, rediscovered by Bush, and redeployed by Obama. It is the pretext for the domestic overreach of our intelligence agencies, the authoritarian cast of domestic policing, and the sanguinary stain of counterrevolutionary imperialism we practice abroad.

Remember what the former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said, that Al-Qaeda was a creation of U.S. intelligence agencies. And that 'Al-Qaeda' is Arabic slang for "the database," the original computer file of thousands of Islamic extremists that the CIA trained, the Saudis paid, and the Russians fought in Afghanistan decades ago.

Global hegemony at any price. By any means necessary. That's our national credo. Now Francois Hollande has become our flagbearer, another dark pawn on Zbigniew Brzezinski's *Grand Chessboard*. Syria isn't about terrorism. It's about who rules the world. Paris was collateral damage, part of the grisly cost of full-spectrum dominance.