

Terrorism in Europe

Terrorism and the Risk Society

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Fifteen years on from 9/11 and in the wake of the attacks in Paris, Brussels and many other places, the complex debate on the nature, consequences and social perceptions of terrorism, and on the policy responses it requires, and more specifically the *relationship between ends and means* in this area, continues unresolved.

On the one hand, there is the issue of an unequivocal and explicit definition of terrorism, which, above all, is consistently legal across the globe. The term Terrorism continues to have polysemous, ideological and biased meanings, and at times it generates confusion more than anything else. Some have the tendency to use the concept because of political opportunity, and, in turn, our societies (hypersaturated with information of all kinds) have adopted it as a convention. But the term must be considered in relation to its use within the framework of the constitutional State (internally) and respecting International law (at the international level). We must not be drawn into the logic of 'effectiveness' as a reason for certain breaches of the law: the history of the 'Algerian War' (Independence from France, 1955-1962), Guantanamo, the 'disappeared' of Argentina and Chile, and the long list of crimes that fall into this category leave little room for discussion.

Moreover, the United Nations has never been able to produce a clear definition of the term, precisely because of the political implications of its possible meanings. But the United Nations has produced in recent decades more than a dozen binding resolu-

tions (agreements, etc.) on *terrorist actions*, in other words, on *materially punishable acts* (hijacking ships and aeroplanes, attacks on diplomatic buildings, financial crime). This is the most effective channel, as it runs parallel to the logic of criminal law in a constitutional state: not to judge intentions, ideas, ideologies or future plans, but instead materially punishable acts. And this is the goal: to transnationalize the effectiveness of criminal law in its international dimension, and anti-terrorism policies will be one of its keystones.

Ultimately, we must not attempt to reach an exact and universally accepted definition of the term *global terrorism*, even if it has a generalized conventional usage in the media, public opinion and globally. In the same way that we should not enter too deeply in the discussion on the way that terrorist groups define themselves (freedom fighters, resistance, martyrs, etc.), which is always done according to political opportunity, insofar as they need to find some kind of legitimacy – which they know they lack (or should know) – in a "suitable" language.

We must be prudent when producing classification tables of terrorist groups, but at the same time it is essential for operative purposes. The differentiated identification between terrorist groups in the brackets "national freedom" (IRA, ETA), "revolutionary ideology" (Red Brigades in Italy, Baader Meinhof Group in Germany), and jihadist or radical islamist is valid. But it is an obvious difference. It is of far greater importance, at least as far as attaining suitable intelligence is concerned, to find as much information as possible on the variety and fragmentation of the 'nebulous al-Qaeda,' Daesh, etc. versus other variants of armed groups like Hamas or Hezbollah (whose designation as terrorist groups has often responded to criteria of

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circumstantial political opportunity, or directly to pressures from certain international actors). The analysis must be political (in other words, to establish suitable relations between causes, effects and consequences) and we must avoid replacing analysis with ideological generalizations, often shrouded in animated moral proclamations. One thing is intelligence, another is propaganda. The first must give substance to suitable policy responses, the second – or its variant, “communication” – is, in the end, counterproductive, as it simply adds to the confusion.

The following argument continues to be valid: with respect to jihadism, we should consider that it affects us through three kinds of activities: its capacity for recruitment (in countries that are majority or entirely Muslim, or with sectors of the population of a certain size that are socially Muslim); its *import-export* activity of terrorist militants; and its ‘geography of terrorist acts.’ The first issue, recruitment, has steadily moved geographically and now also takes place in non-Muslim countries (essentially European countries), but with important swathes of the population that have a sociologically Muslim origin. Although the figure for recruits is negligible in numbers, it is potentially a very dangerous element.

Furthermore, the “geopolitics” of terrorist acts on a global scale shows two things: the first is that more terrorist acts have been committed in Muslim countries than in Europe or the United States (from Mauritania to the Philippines, almost all Muslim countries have suffered from the phenomenon), many more Muslims have been killed in jihadist acts (in 2014, 85% of the total number of people killed around the world were Muslim), and this must be incorporated into our political analysis and the way we contribute to public opinion. The so-called Alliance of Civilizations should also adequately explain this on a global scale, as it shows how we are all targets of terrorism and can all be its victims. There is empirical evidence to prove it. The second is that there are large parts of the world where the phenomenon does not exist or is reduced to very specific cases (large areas of Eurasia and Central Asia, Latin America, Africa below the Sahel, with the exceptions of Nigeria and Kenya). In this respect, jihadist terrorism has fragmented, and has moved geopolitically to India and, especially, Pakistan. The question is: do we have an updated “map” or status of the strengths and weaknesses of the 2016 version of jihadism?

Reservations over the evidence of the failure of the so-called “final campaign” of jihadism have been confirmed: the Worldwide or Universal Islamic Emirate. Indeed, the reality is that, since 9/11, al-Qaeda has been *unable* to overthrow any government in any country round the world (whether Arab, Muslim or another), it has failed to conquer any state and there is no evidence to suggest that getting noticed (as happened in Afghanistan with the Taliban) in the way Daesh is doing in Syria and Iraq, creating a pseudostate that is as brutal as it is volatile, is a strategy that can be maintained in the long run. Those who would argue the case of Pakistan, should remember that the FATA (Tribal Areas under Federal Administration) in the west have *never* been under the control of *any government* of Pakistan, or Britain before that, but that does not make Pakistan a failed state by any means. The case of Mali should be assessed in detail, but the part which has been ‘liberated’ by the three al-Qaeda groups is essentially a desert, with the exception of three towns, including Timbuktu. Taking control of a state means finding identity and meaning in a governmental form and structure, which is precisely what the international community can relatively easily persecute and neutralize. The ultimate expression of political victory is becoming the government of a state. For the time being they haven’t been able to do this.

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The strategy of radical jihadism, or that of its supreme leaders, is to become, over time, a factor of growing and constant insecurity, to be able to weaken those it defines as enemies. But it is not necessarily to become *institutionalized* everywhere. And in recent years, besides its weakening, al-Qaeda has tended towards fragmentation, and towards the little and badly organized, increasingly ‘localized,’ decentralized ‘franchise’ format (see Mali, Yemen, etc.). For instance, the way these franchises have

operated in Syria are an example of this. Al Nusra states that it does not have the same goals as Daesh, both in terms of its aims and its methods, and doesn't recognize al-Baghdadi's 'caliphate.'

An additional factor to bear in mind is the potential strategic danger of the increase in technological capability of these groups, their interaction with other forms of global or transnational crime (drug-trafficking, cybercrime, financial crime) around these more advanced technologies, as well as their skills in the field of communications through social networks. Here is where cooperation between governments, whose technological capacity is not negligible, is essential.

The conclusions for governments and the International Community would therefore move along the following lines:

- Intelligence, anticipation, political and social consensus with the natural or traditional structures of the Muslim segments of populations in developed countries and specifically in Europe. How can we increase the integration of these populations into our social fabrics? The victory of the Briton of Pakistani origin Sadik Khan has been one of the big stories of May 2016.
- Prudence when it comes to mixing the ideological debate in the media, among the political elite and public opinion, with the political analysis of the appropriate institutions and agencies, which must be rational and based on causal relationships. They should not allow hurried rhetoric to come before an appropriate strategy *which considers the time factor*, and which must be long lasting. Intelligence must produce adequate, well-founded information; governments must take the appropriate decisions. But if the principle of "functional independence" of intelligence agencies is corrupted when they "seek," if they are told "what to find (weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, for example), then the policy responses to terrorism are poorly designed from the outset. And this happens all too often.

We should not lose sight, in this strategy based on an appropriate relation between ends and means, of the situation of the different policy responses to global terrorism. We must not avoid this debate, as its outcome will be of use to us. Public opinion

needs to understand this when it comes to paying the costs of taking on a long anti-terror campaign. This is where we can find our democratic strength as a political and social model, and as a form of government for societies that are increasingly heterogeneous and subject to transnational factors perceived as bearers of great insecurity (terrorism, financial crisis, climate change, and so on).

Since the brutal murders in Paris and Brussels, from *Charlie Hebdo* to Bataclan, Zaventem and the Brussels metro, a social debate of growing complexity has developed that we should be worried about, as it concerns us all. This complexity, furthermore, has been multiplied by its globalization through social networks, and we must therefore reflect on the responses to such a great challenge. In other words, we have to be careful of those who vent their anger with quick-fix solutions. And not just if they come from far-right politicians. There are many people in the street that feel nervous or afraid and perhaps, without realizing it, favour exorcisms over arguments.

We should first focus on our societies and on those of our institutional and political surroundings. Compared with previous eras, this time, despite the diversity of opinions, there seems to be a consensus on the need for more effective security, policing and legal policies which improve our anticipation and prevention of terrorism but also our subsequent reaction. In other words, the persecution and punishment of those found guilty, within the framework of the constitutional State. Many voices have warned us of the *American* temptation, of the unacceptable Patriot Act and Guantanamo, and, as a result, there are major social and political reservations with respect to this. But another debate – which is strictly social and opinion-based – has grown, and in France it is affecting its sociologically Muslim population. I say *sociologically* to avoid the equation five and a half million Muslims in France = *the* Muslim community. Olivier Roy has given a clear explanation: in France there is a Muslim population (8% of the total), but there is not a *Muslim community*. Its degree of religious practice varies spectacularly, its political affiliation is as diverse as the country's system of political parties, in which (with the exception of the National Front) there is no party with a confessional profile, it has multiple cultural preferences, and, above all, Muslims do not follow a homogenous pattern of civic behaviour.

What then happens is a clash of simplifications, not civilizations, or more accurately a clash of *simplistic perceptions*, when certain media and commentators, but especially a legion of disgraceful internauts, open the floodgates of their Islamophobia onto the networks, creating opinion. And many Muslims, who do not approve of the attacks at all, and what is more, unreservedly consider this jihadism as a true crime, feel like the finger is being pointed at them in ways which are at times vague, at others more vulgar. This is the origin of the French current of opinion along the lines of *I'm not Charlie because...* accompanied by a complex explanation of why they condemn the crimes but cannot approve of the gratuitous and frivolous way this magazine portrays the Prophet. And it's not just Muslims that adopt this argument, many French and European non-Muslims share it. And so we arrive at two issues that are difficult to marry, at least in democratic societies. On the one hand the criteria of opportunity, of social sensitivity, of respect *for the other*, which can be thus resumed: despite calls for freedom of expression, why disrespect so many people, including non-believers, who are offended by the caricatures of the Prophet? On the other hand, there is the principle of legality that has to be very finely tuned, as it must be capable of defending fundamental rights, among them freedom of expression, including its limitations by law, which are only acceptable for reasons strictly linked to the non-negotiable core of the constitutional State. Giving opinions, as controversial as they may be, is a question of individual and collective civic sensitivity. If offence is caused, it is the courts that must resolve it.

Now we can begin to qualify. The concepts of offence, slander and defamation should be invoked only in the cases provided for by law before the courts. Religions, however – each with its own icons, dogmas and red lines – vary in opinion, like any collective body of ideas and convictions, and therefore eventually become the subject of criticism and, in this case, the butt of the joke. Whether ironic or in very poor taste is a question of social self-regulation. And blasphemy was legally abolished in France... in 1666 by Louis XIV! But the spontaneous and mass reaction embodied in *Je suis Charlie* does not seem to have brought together millions of people who take pleasure in the offensive nature of the caricatures and in how they made Muslims feel. What moved them is the underlying issue: one cannot kill over a

difference in opinion. Is that difficult to explain socially? Definitely. Especially if one tries to argue the case in the 140 characters allowed to users of the well-known social network, Twitter.

It is not easy to add something of use in light of the deluge of arguments and condemnations that followed the brutal crime committed against the people of “*Charlie Hebdo*” or Bataclan. And at the same time, everyone, or nearly everyone, is trying to find a way to say with words something that belongs to the world of emotions and sentiment.

Let's start by looking at perceptions and statistics. France has witnessed many acts of terrorism in the last 50 years which have caused many deaths, carried out by the far-right group the OAS (formed by French opponents to Algerian independence), the small left-wing group Direct Action, various groups in defence of the Palestinian cause such as those in the 80s, not to mention the two consecutive acts of terrorism in the busy Saint Michel metro station. There was even an attack on Turkish Airlines in July 1983, in Orly Sud (Paris), which left eight dead and 50 injured, carried out by an Armenian organization protesting against the genocide... of 1915! Therefore, the recent attacks, taken as terrorist attacks, are nothing new and the number of victims only adds to an already long list. Something else about the statistics, underscored by various commentators, is that 86% of the world's victims of al-Qaeda (or other franchises) in the last 12 years are Muslim. And let us not forget that the unfortunate policeman gunned down outside the *Charlie Hebdo* offices was called Ahmed Merabet. But statistics, as providers of objectivity, make a poor match with the social perceptions held for subjects of this nature. And not only those relating to terrorism: the argument has been much repeated that the most deadly form of transport is the private car, yet people are much more afraid of air travel.

Another complex issue is that of the cause and effect relationship, based on solid reasons but not without its contradictions. Since terrorist acts of this nature will, by definition, have a cause (the causal relation is an inescapable factor), our policies of social or civic integration must have failed. This may be, but the weakness in this argument lies in the fact that terrorism is automatically considered to be a reactive action (i.e., a reaction to an initial cause), and our policies proactive (i.e., the ‘originating cause’). The truth is that in France there are more than five million so-

biologically Muslim citizens. The radicalized individuals that have gone to Syria and Iraq number a little over a thousand, and it has been calculated that there are several hundred more in France. Out of five million, are 3,000 people a lot or not many? Do they indicate a failure in our policies of integration? Is the cause-and-effect sequence definitely just one way? *If we hope for public policies that will be 100% effective in eradicating the emergence of radicalized individuals, we are much mistaken. Such policies do not exist.* Furthermore, this viewpoint leaves aside another issue, which is equally important but entirely absent from the debate. All societies have a percentage of individuals whose particular personalities make them more vulnerable to recruitment into causes of a sociopathic and more or less erratic nature: whether sects, drug addiction, religious fundamentalism or indiscriminate political violence. Nothing more should be read into this. It is not an attempt to mitigate or excuse anything, but criminals' mental profiles must be included in the analysis.

And this brings us to a third point: *zero-risk societies do not exist.* Public institutions, governments, the media and opinion leaders must be absolutely clear on this. In 2001, following the 9/11 attacks, I heard a highly influential public figure give the following argument: "I pay my taxes, the State has the duty to protect me and to ensure that these things do not happen." So, whatever the statistics say, what weighs most on public opinion are individual and collective social perceptions.

And the fourth question is: how should we react? Little more can be said about what, today, enjoys an overwhelming consensus. We need to stand up to and withstand terrorism, and defend not just the victims (today's, those from the past and those in the future) but also the social model in which we create, based on the idea of a social contract, the general will. And this includes the debate and criticism surrounding all our social and political imperfections. It is no easy task.

What more can be said? This seems to be the conclusion of today's debates and opinion columns, as we oscillate between a feeling that we are repeating ourselves and trying to make sense out of all this. But we must go on with our life projects, whether individual or collective. People are right to feel anxious.

The same questions are repeated, then bombs explode, and a few minutes of communion are held over the tragedy. It is logical that great individual fear will lead also to a collective one, and this is why we must seek consolation together.

There are various recurring themes today. The fight against terrorism, for example, should not just be down to governments; the social contract makes it our duty to provide support, which should not be – and has no reason to be – unconditional, but is decided on by each individual. Above all it should not be the subject of electoral or electioneering battles. They can call it what they like, but we'll soon see how long the consensus lasts. Public response policies should be a demonstration of the political elite's unified efforts to do its best, yet the truth of the matter is that the results are inconsistent.

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We are becoming increasingly familiar with the profile of those recruited for suicide terrorism and we know that security forces carry out a monumental task, but they must feel greater support socially. Many complaints have been voiced from different corners regarding the uniformed police and military, who certain councillors do not want in our classrooms. But the Belgians and the French want them in the streets more than ever. The victims of terrorism do not just belong to their families and friends, they belong to all of us.

And most importantly, something that is within everyone's reach in our streets and squares: is it not time to get to know personally one of the hundreds of thousands of Muslims that live among us? A student from one of our universities, wearing a headscarf, was rebuked (by a lady) in the Barcelona metro to the sound of "Go back to your own country!" To which she smiled and said: "But I'm from Hospitalet..."¹

¹ L'Hospitalet, is a municipality to the immediate southwest of Barcelona.