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**The trompe l'oeil of jihadist  
terrorism**

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## **The trompe l'oeil of jihadist terrorism**

### *Abstract:*

*Jihadist terrorism represents a challenge for the West, not an existentialist challenge however, but an oversized threat because of the way it instrumentalizes the media and leaves only one option - to believe in it. It is extremely difficult to eliminate this type of terrorism completely. To deal with it, we do not need fewer free societies, but rather stronger societies with firm beliefs. The Spanish experience offers a path to follow which will lead to its defeat. The greatest danger stemming from fundamentalist terrorism is the possibility that it might use weapons of mass destruction.*

### *Keywords:*

*Terrorism, jihadism, Daesh, resilience, weapons of mass destruction.*

## Introduction

*Trompe l'oeil* is defined as a “trap or illusion to deceive someone, making one see what is not really there”. The way in which western societies perceive jihadist terrorism has some similarities with this famous art technique.

This is no coincidence. *Trompe l'oeil* is shapes and volumes drawn on a plane to which the artist has given a three-dimensional appearance. It is an optical illusion designed to deceive minds that usually interpret reality according to specific patterns.

Power is image, a plastic one; it is strength, not action. Terrorism uses the *trompe l'oeil* technique to play a game. That is why, above all, it is with theatrics, art, fiction, and drama, that terrorism seeks to overtake the imagination.

The attacks are staged, scenarios designed by means of a camera to present the specific as general, and to manipulate the conscious through fears and emotions, making the spectators not only integrate themselves on stage, and feel terrorist threats as something close, but also to assume the roles assigned to them. This cocktail of truth (reality), emotion, and fear can dull anyone's mind.

Thus, sometimes, for different reasons, we are convinced, or we are made to believe, that the present threat of Daesh terrorism can destroy Western democracies. Fortunately, this is not the case.

It is not that jihadist terrorism is not a serious threat, it is, but it is not an existential threat to the West. Understandably, Western societies will not turn into some form of Islamic (or however they refer to the religion they practice) bloc simply in response to extremists' demands. Many things must happen before that takes place. Hitler himself was unable to achieve Western dominance, and he had significantly more resources than these extremists. Jihadist terrorists are well aware of this fact.

If these people ever got control over Muslim States, it would be highly problematic for Muslim societies. The terrorists can make their own people suffer greatly, as we have already witnessed.

The problem is that their discourse is ineffective. The West is not their real target, but rather part of their rhetoric. Western victims are high-profile targets. These victims are an expression of power and commitment that serve to legitimize the terrorist groups in their territory, where their real interests are. The issue is that the media coverage of

them is different<sup>1</sup>.

In the words of Moisés Naím, *"The number [of victims] from terrorism is relatively low when compared to other causes of death, but the consequences are disproportionately large"*<sup>2</sup>. The Statista portal has recently published a study that shows that despite the recent terrorist attacks on European soil, the number of people killed by terrorists in EU countries in the past 12 months is lower than the numbers recorded in the 1870s and 1880s<sup>3</sup>. In London during World War II, if only one bomb was dropped in a given day, children were still able to attend school.

The post-heroic society we live in is very impressionable, and demands news and excitement. It seems that it can only live among superlatives. Morbid fascination is needed; Hollywood has accustomed us to everything<sup>4</sup>. Sensational news sells more papers.

Altogether, jihadist terrorism creates a media circus. We are witnessing a proliferation of ideas and presentation of proposals that, for better or worse, aspire to solve such a complex threat all at once. Nonetheless, political problems are rarely solved entirely, what one must do is manage them. Magical thinking is not practical in advanced societies.

In any case, terrorism is a serious concern for the European citizen, and a grave matter that affects us all. Compared to other misfortunes we are exposed to, no matter how low the individual probabilities of suffering a terrorist attack may be, the fact is that we are all potential targets. This fact does not depend on the individual, nor is it predictable. There is widespread interest in understanding both the terrorist phenomena and the fear of being victims of an attack, the latter of which is derived from the breadth of threat.

This worry, fear, or terror experienced by ordinary citizens is precisely the driving force of terrorism, and is just what cannot, and should not, be conceded to the terrorists. Many centuries ago, the Roman historian Titus Livius (Livy) wrote: *"We fear things in*

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<sup>1</sup> AZNAR FERNÁNDEZ-MONTESINOS, Federico "And now, what?", *BEZ*, Weekend edition. <http://www.bez.es/101553310/Y-ahora-que.html>.

<sup>2</sup> NAÍM, Moisés, "The number [of victims] from terrorism", *El País*, March 27, 2016, [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/03/26/actualidad/1459029036\\_595933.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/03/26/actualidad/1459029036_595933.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.statista.com/chart/4093/people-killed-by-terrorist-attacks-in-western-europe-since-1970/>. Viewed 27 March 2016.

<sup>4</sup> AZNAR FERNÁNDEZ-MONTESINOS, Federico, op. cit.

*proportion to our ignorance over them*". Safety is a feeling, a sensation, and each person has their own; it is not necessarily rational.

Moreover, the analyses of the phenomenon and the answers to confront it, sometimes suffer from a necessary balance. For example, categorically affirming that "*Belgium is a failed state*,"<sup>5</sup> means placing Belgium at the same level as Somalia or Syria, something that is surely surprising. Advocating the return of torture for the sake of freedom needs no comment.

It is important not to overreact with regards to time, place, or intensity in response to the current jihadist threat. In this regard, Stephen M. Walt has rightly written, "*Responding to the Brussels attacks by raising the levels of alert, issuing travel recommendations, and airing coverage of melodramatic press news, makes the Islamic State much more dangerous than it really is*"<sup>6</sup>.

The purpose of these reflections is to place the threat of jihadist terrorism in its due terms, and to present the guiding principles of the strategy – firmness and serenity – to significantly degrade jihadist terrorism into a bad memory. In the words of the President of the United States, Barack Obama: "*The challenges which we face require strategic patience and persistence*"<sup>7</sup>.

### **There is no overnight solution**

We are speaking of a long-term struggle; if something is accomplished in the short-term, it will be welcome. Many factors are involved in the definition of the problem, and the playing field is as much national as it is international. In fact, borders are not a solution, but rather part of the problem.

If someone offers to solve the issue in the short term, he certainly does not know or has reflected enough upon the issue; twenty-first century societies are extraordinarily complex, as are their problems.

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<sup>5</sup> See, IRUJO, José María, "The monster in a failed State", *El País*, 22 March 2016, [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/03/22/actualidad/1458667941\\_551597.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/03/22/actualidad/1458667941_551597.html)

<sup>6</sup> WALT, Stephen M., "Monsters of our own imaginings", *Foreign Policy*, 24 March 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/24/monsters-of-our-own-imaginings-brussels-bombings-islamic-state/>.

<sup>7</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Introduction, February 2015. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf). Viewed, 28 March 2016.

In this regard, it is an extremely difficult task to make functional decisions in the heat of the moment, or provide comprehensive, real time coverage of multifaceted geopolitical phenomena, and to do so in a manner palatable to an audience that has become accustomed to instant gratification. However, regardless of what people search for, and the media's tendency to promote analyses based on first impression, we should recognize that complex phenomena must be approached with emotional and intellectual maturity so as not to present apparently magical solutions that do not lead to any useful place. Any serious analysis requires emotional distance. Surgeons do not usually operate on their relatives.

Moreover, Daesh could be a symptom of something bigger. To solve the problem completely and permanently, it is necessary to design an integrated long-term strategy to combat the radicalization and extremism that nourishes these terrorist movements. In this regard, it is more than likely that Daesh is not the last problem of this type.

It is essential to recover the initiative. One cannot trail behind events that the opposition determines. One must follow a strategy and carry out one's own independent movements. Reactive strategies do not deserve to be called strategies. In the twenty-first century, strategic communication is essential.

The main issue is to determine why these things happen, and the causes are geopolitically very complex. It is always more difficult to treat an illness than its symptoms. The underlying reasons for the appearance and consolidation of Daesh, the true pathology, is a much more challenging issue, but as the advocates of vanguardism say: it is not yet the time. The time is for the definition of a coherent strategy to significantly degrade Daesh.

### **Absolute security is a chimera**

No matter what anyone does, no one will ever be one hundred percent safe. It is not possible to totally eradicate terrorism, just as it is not possible to eliminate evil. In the words of John Gray, *"Dealing with evil requires an acceptance that it will never go*

away.”<sup>8</sup> I am afraid it is the same with terrorism. Ensuring the contrary is the beginning of a serious mistake.

There is no single type of terrorism; the motivations of the murderers are varied and changing, and, thus, the possibility to totally eradicate terrorism is void. It is as simple as that. A society as advanced as the Norwegian society has been able to produce someone like Ander Breivik.

Nonetheless, the likeliness of degrading the terrorist threat to a residual phenomenon is highly comforting, but requires that we be able to reflect correctly by recognizing *the distinction between the sheep and the goats*<sup>9</sup>. Globalization has made some individuals powerful, and they have gravitated toward ideological extremities. Some use their power for philanthropy, like Bill Gates, and others to commit atrocities, such as jihadist terrorists. It is a fact of life. Our evolution has created fascinating things, and, at the same time, absolutely horrifying things.

We are not speaking of resignation. Not at all. Terrorism is a terrible and frightening reality that must be combated by internalizing that a residual terrorism will always be present in our lives, as are natural disasters, crime, pandemics, or airplane or traffic accidents.

Any murderer with determination, whatever interests or causes he serves, or believes to serve, more or less insane, manipulated, radicalized, full of hatred or eager for revenge, can kill at any moment. There is no way to avoid it; there is no way to guarantee it will not happen. What is possible is to see that it only happens once in a blue moon.

### The danger of excesses

Without a doubt, the evil that Daesh represents, and the extreme cruelty of their criminal actions are a continuous affront to international law, as day after day they commit abominable crimes against humanity, mass assassinations, exploitation and traffic of slaves, generalized torture, the destruction of irreplaceable culturally or historically significant landmarks and artifacts, or propagandistic beheadings, all aimed at

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<sup>8</sup> GRAY, John, “The truth about evil”, *The Guardian*, 21 October 2014. [http://gu.com/p/42gn8?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](http://gu.com/p/42gn8?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other).

<sup>9</sup> Translator's note: Spanish saying “*no confundir las churras con las merinas*”: not to mix two types of sheep – *churras* (these produce cheap wool) and *merinas* (produce more valuable wool); they may be apparently the same but if you look carefully, they are different.

spreading terror. The US Secretary of State, John Kerry has described the Daesh actions as genocide<sup>10</sup>.

The greatest danger when approaching the problem of jihadist terrorism, a serious threat no doubt, is the lack of moderation, and of focus at the hour of articulating the response. The old and hackneyed action-reaction spiral is used simply because it works. "Man is the measure of all things: of things that are, that they are; of things that are not, that they are not".

It is irresponsible to raise unjustified alarms or proliferate extreme remedies that intensify rather than minimize the problem. We cannot give the terrorists the benefit of a disproportionate response<sup>11</sup> or offer them an unfortunate spectacle of a division among European citizens or among EU nations, because that is precisely their intention.

Legitimacy is what is really at stake in the fight against terrorism. It is better to preserve one's integrity than to compromise one's own values by using immoral tactics to defeat a phenomenon that can only be overcome coercively. A political price would be paid to obtain a tactical victory.

We must do everything possible to neutralize and combat terrorists regardless of the ideologies they stand for, but this fight cannot affect the international system, nor change our societies by conditioning our legality, our values, or our privacy. Our own values cannot be defended by changing them. This would precisely mean the terrorists' success.

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<sup>10</sup> ROSENBERG, Matthew, "Citing Atrocities, John Kerry Calls ISIS Actions Genocide", *The New York Times*, March 17, 2016.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/18/world/middleeast/citing-atrocities-john-kerry-calls-isis-actions-genocide.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/18/world/middleeast/citing-atrocities-john-kerry-calls-isis-actions-genocide.html?_r=0).

<sup>11</sup> In the Algerian war, for example, "The paratroopers have always insisted that they were given a task that was not suited for them, a policeman's job for which they were not prepared, and when faced with the dilemma "them or us?", they chose the obvious. The use of the so-called "*muscle*" interrogations is not in question. In Algeria, torture was used to obtain information that would allow the end of the wave of terrorist attacks. The French insist that their victims were not treated anything like the French soldiers were in the hands of the FLN. It was true, but the crisis of conscience it provoked would cause a political turmoil". Pizarro Pizarro, José A. *The Indochina War, a turning point in contemporary military history*. Doctoral thesis Universidad Complutense, Faculty of History and Geography, 2007, pgs 5 and 6.



Ultimately, terrorism cannot take away our luck and the privilege of living in a democratic system of rights and liberties. We must assume that as members of a free society, *"we've accepted, at least implicitly, that some risk is tolerable"*<sup>12</sup>.

Moreover, maintaining the present system of liberties within a context of less security would be a step forward in defeating terrorism and, paradoxically, would contribute to the restitution of safety because, by assigning it an irrelevant role, terrorism would turn equally irrelevant on a short-term basis.

It is not a bad idea to know someone's enemies in order to know that person. That is an objective evaluation element. Important entities have important enemies; as such, our enemies give us our measure. By entitling an entity as our enemy, we are validating them.

Counteracting jihadist propaganda is essential. Terrorists must not only be combated, they must also be unmasked. In spite of its seemingly illegitimate appearance, terrorism is a political phenomenon and, thus, can only be defeated politically.

If we heed Michel Foucault, *"the truth is a social construct"*, so it is necessary to intensify campaigns to explain the intrinsic evil of Daesh, a terrorist organization incompatible with the civilized world, and thus diminish the fatal attraction experimented by a good number of young people in the region, in Europe, or in remote places.

For too long, it was them who imposed their narrative, not the rest of the world; this was a serious error committed by the Western world. It has taken too long to abandon the absurd and simplistic name of Islamic State, which is what they call themselves; better late than never.

Naming things, as an old proverb from the Middle East says, is to begin to seize them. Names are not neutral; a proper choice allows one to begin from a position of advantage. That is why language is one of the first and main areas of confrontation; language defines the framework, and establishes the rules. Imposing the language and determining the words that must be used is the key. Words bestow legitimacy, acceptance, and normalization.

It is not only a matter of confronting their narrative, but rather of absorbing their frustrations, and offering a better alternative. It is a matter of combating their silences

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<sup>12</sup> KAYYEN, Juliette, "No, America isn't 100 percent safe from terrorism. And that's a good thing", *The Washington Post*, 25 March, 2016. <http://wapo.st/1SaZtmP>.



and giving value to what they do not say, so that their alleged religious rigor is confronted, and that the new models, those they avoid, serve to dismantle their discourse. The convincing nature of their discourse is their greatest weakness.

Ultimately, it is necessary to intensify the creative efforts to combat the appropriation of powerful symbols by Daesh, and to respond proactively to the propaganda messages they spread,<sup>13</sup> always denying them legitimacy as representatives of the Islamic world. The jihadist terrorists only represent themselves, they do not represent the hundreds of millions of Muslims who desire to live in peace.

The extremist interpretation of Islam by jihadist terrorists is a sacrilege for the immense majority of Muslims who are offended by such interested perversion of their religion at the hands of fanatical terrorists. *"These murderers are not ours"*, a young Muslim in Brussels clearly reminded as he exited the first Friday prayer after the attacks. It would be a great help to hear this sentence more frequently throughout Europe.

Furthermore, active integration (not assimilation) policies must be started, and all the leaders of the Muslim communities must also take clear and frequent stances against the killers that claim to represent them. Their concurrence is yet again indispensable. Only Muslims can permanently defeat them, because the fight to settle is also, and above all, amongst them, and for the representation of the Islamic world.

For that matter, it is necessary to get the Muslims to form part of the forefront of that struggle; the fact that the majority of the victims of terrorism are Muslims is never emphasized enough. Legitimacy and representation are two milestones in the fight against terrorism.

We are and will always be stronger than the terrorists as long as we stay together. The fault of terrorism is not that of the European or national authorities; the responsibility to protect us and to degrade Daesh does belong to them.

Western leaders can and must do more, but it will never be enough. Contributing with more means, speaking more clearly, favoring social integration, being positive examples to the citizens, or promoting and intensifying international cooperation are issues that

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<sup>13</sup> DENSELOW, James, "Dismantling ISIL's propaganda machine", *Aljazeera*, 12 July, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/07/dismantling-isil-propaganda-machine-150708105122708.html>

must be addressed and put into practice, but those to blame for the crimes are those who commit them.

It is the terrorists who are weak, it is they who need to kill innocent people with extreme cruelty, simply because they cannot do anything else. They have nothing to offer, only pain, blood and misery, a deplorable combination which will luckily end up being fatal for them and their obscure interests.

When facing a dynamic phenomenon, it is essential to respond equally dynamically. A stance is a static concept that one cannot intend to apply to a diverse and dynamic phenomenon. Therefore, it would be most convenient to adopt “the attitude of no-attitude,<sup>14</sup>” responding proportionately in every case in a response mode, not unlike the axiological principles that have permitted the doctrinal composition of the Western world and that, like water, are adapted to every situation without changing their essence. In fact, that is the rule of law in West Societies.

### **Jihadist terrorism is not an existential threat to the Western world**

As much as Daesh hits us with harshness and great cruelty, it is not as strong as some sensationalists want us to believe. In fact, its military position is conceptually weaker than that of al Qaeda, since “*as difficult as it is to combat al Qaeda militarily, Daesh is less difficult because it is located geographically and practices a hybrid model that combines insurgency and terrorism*”<sup>15</sup>.

The terrorists of the Islamic State, misnamed because they are not a State, nor Islamic, are in retreat on multiple fronts<sup>16</sup>. Their unbridled fanaticism, their unprecedented cruelty, and above all, their numerous heinous crimes have obtained something that

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<sup>14</sup> MUSASHI, Miyamoto. *The Book of the Five Rings*. Miraguano S.A. Ediciones, Madrid, 2004, page 51.

<sup>15</sup> AZNAR FERNANDEZ-MONTESINOS, Federico. “The ideological components of jihadism”, *Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, Cuaderno de Estrategia* 173, page 106. [http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/cuadernos/CE\\_173.pdf](http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/cuadernos/CE_173.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> SLY, Liz, “In Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State is in retreat on multiple fronts”, *The Washington Post*, 24 March, 2016.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/in-syria-and-iraq-the-islamic-state-is-in-retreat-on-multiple-fronts/2016/03/24/a0e33774-f101-11e5-a2a3-d4e9697917d1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-syria-and-iraq-the-islamic-state-is-in-retreat-on-multiple-fronts/2016/03/24/a0e33774-f101-11e5-a2a3-d4e9697917d1_story.html).

seemed impossible: to unite the international community in the search for the near disappearance of Daesh, and with the added commission to carry it out the sooner the better. Comparing the current situation, no matter how painful it may be, with a large-scale war, arguing that we are on the verge of a new and devastating world war is intellectually unsustainable and politically dangerous.

As much as comparisons are odious, the conceptual debate about whether or not we are at war is legitimate, although it is likely to become eternal because there is no judge to settle the debate. "*France is at war*", the French President solemnly declared after the Paris attacks. For others, France is not at war, and the words of François Hollande are simply rhetoric which evokes those of President Bush<sup>17</sup>

Terrorism tries to represent a power that it does not have; it is a fiction of power; that is why its performance is a fiction of war. Assuming that terrorist activities are a war is to negate its fictitious nature, and to give real power to terrorism.

Those who live off of exaggerating bad news, the lovers of pandering, or those who need to justify themselves politically, are obligated to promote a rational analysis of the phenomenon, not to distort reality by spreading defeatist messages, or propose counterproductive or exorbitant measures that, in the long-run, benefit the criminals more than the freedom and rights of the citizens to whom they must serve.

Nothing justifies the murder of defenseless innocent civilians. Doing so casts doubts on the legality of exercising legitimate defense. Distributing justice everywhere and endlessly is absurd, and a serious offense to actual victims, their loved ones, and to the whole of the Western societies. Reducing the level of western democracies, degrading them to combat a fight unable to be resolved, would be the greatest achievement that the killers can aspire.

The best way to combat jihadist terrorism is to grit your teeth, trust those in charge of defending us devoting the resources needed to effectively comply with their obligations. It is also necessary to increase international cooperation, and continue our lives without ever forgetting the victims. The biggest error we could make is to condition our daily activities and our system of rights and liberties in favor of total security, that in the end is impossible to obtain.

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<sup>17</sup> MOREAU DEFARGES, Philippe, "Attentats à Paris: c'est un acte de guerre. Mais non, la France n'est pas "en guerre", *L'Obs*, 17 November, 2015. <http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/1449768-pour-hollande-la-france-est-en-guerre-un-ton-martial-inapproprié-et-contre-productif.html>.

We must be irreproachable in our fight against terrorism, thinking of our own experience. Thirty years later, the society must feel proud of how it behaved when difficulties arose.

Daesh is not strictly a military problem. Its relevance and acting capacity in the West is simply not enough. It is, without a doubt, a political problem, a problem of security, but not of military security. A military presence, as the one Italy or France presently have, would certainly give peace of mind to the startled citizens, and would improve security conditions. However, a toll must be paid in terms of recognizing the capacity of the counterpart, a toll that should be duly weighed. And it contributes very little to dismantling its operative structures.

With meaningful police action, activism management, politically delegitimizing their discourse, offering a better alternative narrative, and including the Muslim community in the process, Jihadist terrorism can be defeated without radicalization.

We cannot fall into a strategic naiveté. All enemies tend to adapt, and western strategy will be answered by jihadist terrorists who are used to skillfully exploit the lack of coherence and continuity in the West's strategic answer<sup>18</sup>. To paraphrase the famous adage by Clausewitz: *"Everything in war is simple, but even the simplest issue is increasingly more complex"*.

If one thinks that the present day Daesh is the most complicated issue we could ever face in the future, there is little imagination. Aside from the foreseeable deployment to other scenarios, the combination of the current fanaticism with the hypothetical access and utilization of the deep technological changes that are already among us could be the coming and horrifying defiance. The combination of terrorism with weapons of mass destruction – these are political weapons – is quite a challenge.

In the present circumstances, jihadist terrorists can only vanquish a giant such as Europe if Europe's leaders become driven by panic, and end up doing precisely what the killers want; in other words, concede them the status of existential threat. They are not, and would not be, even if they obtain access to weapons of mass destruction. But

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<sup>18</sup> GITHENS-MAZER, Jonathan, "To Defeat Daesh Start with Their Strategy", *RUSI*, 6 July 2015. <https://rusi.org/commentary/defeat-daesh-start-their-strategy>.

that is the most dangerous situation<sup>19</sup>, and it is advisable to prepare to confront it because it is sure they are trying it.

In this sense, it is worrisome to validate that the Brussels attacks have revealed the intention of the terrorists to attack nuclear facilities, or to attempt to obtain nuclear or radioactive material<sup>20</sup>.

### **We need firm and calm leadership**

The responsibility of the Western leaders is to rise to this challenge, properly gauge the problem, maintain political unity, guarantee equal opportunities to all citizens, and respond to the murderers and their instigators firmly and calmly, with the full weight of the law, and with all the legitimate arms given by the rule of law to all States and to the international community.

On the short and long-term bases, we must also go to one of the roots of the problem, we must keep in mind that, as Miguel Otero-Iglesias rightly points out, "*security cannot be sustained without equality of access to prosperity and freedom, and that goes for inside and outside of Europe*"<sup>21</sup>

We must keep in mind that counter-terrorism measures are basically the responsibility of the nations. In fact, we must increase international cooperation in police, legal, intelligence, and penitentiary matters. Blaming all wrongs on the European Union would be to move the focus of attention away from effective decision-making centers to keep the problem under control. We must keep in mind that the European Union is an organization with very limited responsibilities regarding security issues.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This worry is reflected in the communiqué of the Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington D.C. on 1 April, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/01/nuclear-security-summit-2016-communiqu%C3%A9>. Viewed, 14 April, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> RUBIN, Alissa J. and SCHREUR, Milan, "Belgium Fears Nuclear Plants Are Vulnerable", *The New York Times*, 26 March, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/26/world/europe/belgium-fears-nuclear-plants-are-vulnerable.html?smid=nytcore-ipad-share&smprod=nytcore-ipad>.

<sup>21</sup> OTERO-IGLESIAS, Miguel. "How do we react after the 22-M?", *Expansión*, 23 March 2016. <http://www.expansion.com/opinion/2016/03/23/56f2f8d546163f26198b45b3.html>.

<sup>22</sup> ARTEAGA, Félix, "The fight against jihadist terrorism in the EU", *AFKAR/IDEAS, issue 45, Foreign Affairs* <http://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/afkar-ideas/la-lucha-contra-el-terrorismo-yihadista-en-la-ue/>.

In the fight against terrorism, there is no doubt about the political will to exchange information. However, these efforts must find the right mechanisms to reflect the results at an operational and tactical level; although it is not easy, because these areas are politically sensitive, the intensification of international cooperation cannot be delayed any longer, it is essential to expand the bottlenecks for the exchange of operative information in real time. A change of culture in this respect is required.

Specifically, it is essential to stop the arrival of new combatants in the conflict areas in Syria and Iraq, and to establish a coherent policy to closely control those who return; it is a threat to all, and that must, therefore, be confronted by all. They are trained people and are used to killing. They are a first-level threat to security which surpasses the threat from the so-called solitary wolves. War is organized violence, violence with a political pace and sense, not an out-of-tune noise produce by the “inspired” actors.

It is likewise necessary to undermine Daesh's significant funding sources; a part of them are clearly criminal.<sup>23</sup> In particular, we must prevent the traffic of oil, one of their sources of financing. Currently, jihadist terrorists are self-sufficient. Unfortunately, at one time, they seized large amounts of money, and abundant sophisticated military material, but gradually they have become short of oxygen and, in time, they will gradually have less.

The surprising initial success of Daesh was partly due to the fact that the world was busy with other issues, and its strategic impact was underestimated. It was born in the geopolitical vacuum of an area of the greater strategic importance, in a geopolitical pivot where different fracture lines (religious: Suni-Chiite; ethnical: Islam-Israel; Arab-Persian; geopolitical: Russia-the West, Iran-Saudi Arabia; ideological-political of the Muslim Brothers-Salafism; democratic-authoritarian regimes...) have come together, which the terrorists skillfully managed, and in which the structures of power of the two States had collapsed.

Fortunately, the feeling that Daesh is winning the battle is over. Very soon, the same that happened to al Qaeda will take place, and they will only appear in the media for a continuous succession of defeats.

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<sup>23</sup> See HERRAEZ SANCHEZ, Pedro. “New wars: Do we want to defeat ISIS? We must attack their financing”, *Expansión*, 22 March, 2106. <http://www.expansion.com/actualidadeconomica/analisis/2016/03/22/56f036d722601df54e8b45f2.html>.



The strategic maneuvers against them have already managed to stop the height of the terrorists, and now the international coalition is achieving the same at operational and tactical levels. There is no doubt that ground forces are needed, the famous “*boots on the ground*”, but it is the countries in the region that must lead the efforts in this area. The ground efforts of the international coalition exist, and they are not insignificant, but they will continue to focus on the valuable contribution of the special forces, a revealing change in the strategy adopted by the White House<sup>24</sup> that has permitted the special force's significant advances in the last months<sup>25</sup>.

At the same time, aid to Iraq must continue for them to build capable, professional, and motivated security forces, and aid must be given to the victims of violence in the region and to the countries that have given them refuge.

It is not a matter of winning a war; in fact, the military problem is resolved; one must determine the economic and human cost of the victory for the West, as well the necessary military means. The issue is to quantify the cost of winning peace, which is something far more ambitious than a series of military operations. Also, peace requires rebuilding the Iraqi and Syrian states; which will take at least one generation. Soon, we will have been in the Balkans for 25 years, but here, it will take longer.

The West cannot go back there simply to leave again; it must assume the cost of such a venture, and it must involve all the surrounding countries; without these countries' concurrence, peace is unlikely. It is a very complex problem politically speaking. Peace and the end of terrorism go through strengthening the states and the societies which they serve, torn societies, tattered societies.

The coalition created to combat the threat from Daesh is, in some respects, exceptional, and certainly necessary because the threat is serious. We are confronting a politically motivated, militarily well-equipped, and ideologically radicalized organization that has resources and significant popular support.

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<sup>24</sup> See McMANUS, Doyle, “Sending special forces to Iraq and Syria is a quiet — and important — shift in policy by Obama”, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 December, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-1206-mcmanus-islamic-state-boots-ground-20151206-column.html>.

<sup>25</sup> On March 25, 2016, the US Defense Secretary, Ashton Carter, announced that the air campaign is “systematically eliminating” the main leaders of the Daesh, including Abd ar-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli, the man in charge of the finances of the terrorist group.



The cohesion of the international coalition must be maintained at all costs, and the efforts of the countries that are at the front line must be recognized and supported by the international community. The air campaign against Daesh must continue relentlessly degrading the terrorist's military capacity. The recovery of Palmyra by the Syrian army was announced on March 27, 2016. This meant a significant loss for the Daesh, territorially as well as propagandistically. Seizing the mythical city of Queen Zenobia, now listed as a World Heritage Site, opened the way to a possible advance to Raqqa, the self-proclaimed capital of the jihadist terrorists<sup>26</sup>. This is good news, but neither Palmyra nor Raqqa are great strategic trophies. It all seems to indicate that sooner or later we will witness a real validation of the strategy pursued by the coalition. The center of gravity of the coming combats will be Mosul. Although it is "still a distant aspiration"<sup>27</sup>, its fall could be the final blow to the Daesh military.

It is worth noting that not everything which must be done involves military activity. In fact, the militaristic aspects aren't even the most important. What can be done militarily is to establish the conditions of peace to start working. The real work will start later, building peace.

### **The valuable example of Spain**

The successful strategy carried out by Spain during the long and terrible fight against ETA's terrorists, *the years of lead*, clearly marked a strategic direction to be followed. In the end, the Spanish democracy triumphed, facing a very serious problem – a threat that was, indeed, existential – simply because Spain and the Spaniards proved to be much stronger and full of democratic legitimacy than a gang of murderers. The Spanish authorities kept a suitable balance between the advisable firmness and the necessary strategic serenity in difficult moments, which unfortunately were not scarce.

Europe should follow the same path. Political unity, solidarity with the victims, increased international cooperation, involvement of the Muslim community in the fight, respect for legality, confidence in the work of the security forces and intelligence

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<sup>26</sup> NAYLOR, Hugh, "Syria's government says it has driven the Islamic State out of Palmyra", *The Washington Post*, 27 March, 2016. <http://wapo.st/1UQnVjk>.

<sup>27</sup> CARRION, Francisco, "Iraq takes the first steps on the road towards the liberation of Mosul", *El Mundo*, 26 March, 2016. <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2016/03/26/56f5768b46163f5c758b4624.html>.

services, and full support to international efforts to significantly degrade Daesh, constitute the strategic actions we must enforce.

The question is not the strength of the terrorists, nor the weakness of the State, as many suggest, but rather the strength of the societies against which the terrorists operate. These, contrary to what it may seem, are well-muscled, although unfit due to years of bourgeois lethargy. However, they are strong, very strong. That is the key.

## Conclusions

It was never sensible to pay attention to the song of the sirens. Considering the complexity of the threat, the fight will not be short, nor will it be possible to guarantee absolute security against jihadist terrorists; we will neither be able to eradicate the problem forever. One hundred percent security does not exist, nor are we able to aspire to a total victory against terrorism.

Terrorism has taken us out of our comfort zone. The balance between restraint and forcefulness in the response the murderers deserve must be the basis of the European and the national strategies against terrorism. One must lose in order to win. We must continue with our lives, enjoying our great fortune of having a system of rights and liberties. Failure to do so would be a victory for the terrorists. They attacked in Paris on a Saturday night, and that was not by chance. We do not need less free societies, but rather more patient and resistant societies.

Jihadist terrorism is not presently an existential threat for the West, and the possibility of turning it into a residual threat depends on our courage and our determination.

The real problem would be if the terrorists obtained access to weapons of mass destruction; these are political weapons. This scenario, as unlikely as it may seem, should be avoided by all means, and must be evaluated simply due to strategic prudence. We all know that it is better to “have and not need than need and not have.” They do not have a chance at victory, even if they secured these weapons.

The Machiavellian strategy confuses strength with power. However, power is not destruction, but rather the capacity to do things, which is something that weapons do not give.

Europe must follow the strategy to combat the jihadist terrorism that worked so well in Spain against a terrible enemy. Political unity, solidarity with the victims, decisive promotion of international cooperation, particularly in police and financing matters, respect for legality, confidence in the work of the security forces and intelligence services, adding, in this case, full support to the international efforts to degrade Daesh. It is necessary to involve the Muslim community in this fight; the delegitimizing element is considerable.

The surprise is over. Time does not pass in favor of the terrorists, and the combination of the strategic firmness and serenity of the West will pay off. The law of gravity is universal: things left to themselves fall of their own weight. Let us not contribute to sustaining them.

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