

Holland “merciless war” only fuels terrorism - Paris November 13 attacks are, by design, meant as a provocation to extinguish the possibility of solidarity between Muslims and non-Muslims across the continent

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Nicole Colson reports on the horrific terrorist attacks in Paris—and the tide of reaction and repression that are already taking shape in the aftermath.

“VOS GUERRES, nos morts.” “Your wars, our dead.”

Those words against a somber black background at the website of France’s New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) encapsulate the grim truth of the devastating terrorist attack in Paris on November 13.

In the aftermath, political leaders and pundits have responded with predictable calls for a further escalation of the so-called “war on terror”—with the iron fist of Western military intervention and imperialism. But it is those policies—centrally, the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq—that have fueled terrorism at home and abroad, while enabling racism, Islamophobia and the repression of civil liberties at home.

The attacks, the worst violence of its kind in Paris since the Second World War, left at least 129 dead and 352 injured at several locations in Paris, including the Bataclan concert theater, the Stade de France soccer stadium and outside of bars and cafes—targets that guaranteed the casualties would come among ordinary people, none responsible for France’s imperialism or the oppression of Muslims. Seven of the attackers were killed—six by blowing themselves up and a seventh in a police shoot-out. Police are currently searching for an eighth suspect.

Just one day before, in the Lebanese capital of Beirut, two suicide bombings took the lives of 43 people and injured scores more—the deadliest suicide bombing to hit the city since 1990.

Although French officials announced soon after the attack that it was the work of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which reportedly claimed responsibility, it remains unclear what degree of involvement the individual attackers had with the fundamentalist Islamic group, and whether they were recruited from the group’s organized ranks or merely individuals encouraged by the organization’s propaganda to commit terrorist acts.

Media reports about a Syrian passport found at the scene belonging to one of the attackers suggested that he may have been either a Syrian refugee or posing as one. The passport apparently showed that he had traveled through Greece and Serbia in early October.

Yet as Patrick Kingsley noted in the *Guardian* [\[1\]](#), speculation that ISIS is using the refugee crisis to

infiltrate Europe is irresponsible at best—and plays into the racist scapegoating of the hundreds of thousands of refugees begging admittance to Fortress Europe.

Already, Poland has used the attacks in Paris to back out of an agreement to take in several thousand Syrian refugees. It's likely that other countries will follow suit. Markus Söder, the finance minister for Bavaria, told a German newspaper: "The days of uncontrolled immigration and illegal entry can't continue just like that. Paris changes everything."

The calls by European leaders for closing and militarizing borders against the supposed threat posed by asylum-seekers makes scapegoats of immigrants and refugees. In fact, Syrian refugees are in part fleeing the repression and violence of ISIS—along with the slaughter overseen by Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and the escalating war from the skies led by the U.S. and Russia—and now France.

Nevertheless, the European right and its U.S. co-thinkers argue that even if a single one of the more than 800,000 people who have fled for their lives to Europe this year was a terrorist, the door should be slammed shut.

That may be precisely the outcome ISIS wants, as Kingsley pointed out:

"Analysts find it strange that a bomber would remember to bring his passport on a mission, particularly one who does not intend to return alive...One theory is that ISIS hopes to turn Europe against Syrian refugees. This would reinforce the idea of unresolvable divisions between East and West, and Christians and Muslims, and so persuade Syrians that Islamic State's self-proclaimed caliphate is their best hope of protection."

STOPPING THE flow of refugees into Europe will not stop terrorism. It will only increase the misery and suffering of those trapped at various borders—and in Syria itself, caught between ISIS and the Assad regime, as U.S. and Russian bombs fall.

In the context of the Parisian attacks, the narrative about the supposed "security threat" from Muslim immigrants and refugees obscures the daily threats to the security of France's Muslim population.

French Muslims suffer discrimination, disenfranchisement and higher unemployment and incarceration rates. Muslims in France are increasingly singled out by both the right and the center-left, under the policy of *laïcité* (loosely translated as "secularism"). Although the concept stems from the struggle to abolish the power of the Catholic Church in political affairs, it is being used today in particular to proscribe the free exercise of religion—Islam in particular—by banning supposedly "ostentatious" religious displays, including the right of women to wear the hijab in schools.

Adding to this, in recent years in France, security measures have been tightened in the predominantly Muslim suburbs, or banlieues. In those areas, and across the country, police routinely carry out "identity controls"—unannounced demands to see people's identity papers that target non-whites and especially young people, including children as young as 13.

The identity controls—similar to "stop-and-frisk" here in the U.S.—target Blacks and Muslims almost universally. According to a 2012 report by Human Rights Watch [2], "People interviewed for the report spoke of being called 'dirty Arab' and 'Arab bastard.' One 19-year-old in Lille told us he had been called 'dirty Arab' so many times, 'it doesn't shock us anymore—it's normal.'"

Despite Muslims accounting for between 7.5 and 9 percent of the population, some 70 percent—perhaps as high as 80 percent—of France's prison population is Muslim. The figure is even higher in Parisian prisons. (In fact, those who carried out the January attacks on the magazine

Charlie Hebdo and a kosher deli all had spent time in prison for petty crimes and seem to have formulated their plans while behind bars.)

While ISIS claimed it was behind the attacks, this has not been confirmed at the time this article was written. The authorities initially stated that at least three of those who carried out the latest attacks were French citizens. These included two French-born men living in Belgium and Ismaël Omar Mostefai, one of those who carried out the attack at the Bataclan theater. Mostefai was reportedly a French-born citizen of an Algerian father and a Portuguese mother [3] whom the authorities “considered a radicalized person.”

In these cases, “securing the border” would be entirely futile, especially if shutting down the border is coupled with an escalation of war in the Middle East.

WHATEVER ROLE ISIS played in these killings, it is clear that it and other forces wedded to a reactionary interpretation of Islam are equally committed to the “clash of civilizations” narrative that Western leaders routinely proclaim.

These attacks are, by design, meant as a provocation [4]—to fuel repression against Europe’s Muslim population and extinguish the possibility of solidarity between Muslims and non-Muslims across the continent.

If this was the goal, it has already had some success. After the attacks, the French government declared a state of emergency that, among other things, allows the government to curtail certain demonstrations and meetings. This sets the stage for the further rollback of democratic freedom of expression in the name of “security.”

Why did ISIS—or whatever forces carried out this attack—choose these particular targets? These were no bastions of conservatism or emblems of the French state. They included cafes and bars, a theater where a band from the U.S. was playing and a soccer stadium. On the contrary, the attackers, as Manu Saadia noted at online news magazine *Fusion.net* [5]:

“went after the heart of progressive Paris. They did not attack the more touristy Champs-Élysées or Notre Dame, or the more bourgeois and conservative left bank, where most of the government ministries are located...”

Tonight’s attacks show the same uncanny sense of symbolism as the January massacres. They targeted neighborhoods where people are more inclined to be tolerant, liberal and progressive.”

THE OFFICIAL response from political leaders—reaction, repression and a further demonization of France’s Muslim population—has already begun.

In the wake of the January *Charlie Hebdo* killings by Islamist gunmen, there were dozens of attacks on mosques and individual Muslims throughout France. By January 14, France’s National Observatory Against Islamophobia had recorded at least 60 separate incidents which included mosques being targeted with “firebombs, gunfire, pig heads, and grenades.”

Such violence and Islamophobia will only be fueled by the rhetoric currently coming from French officials. After the attacks, French President François Hollande of the Socialist Party vowed to “be unforgiving with the barbarians from [ISIS]”—embracing the “clash of civilizations” rhetoric that has been so much a part of the “war on terror.”

“Our fight will be merciless, because these terrorists that are capable of such atrocities need to know that they will be confronted by a France that is determined, unified and together,” Hollande

told reporters near the Bataclan concert hall hours after the attacks.

Prime Minister Manuel Valls ratcheted the rhetoric even higher, with a call to “annihilate the enemies of the republic, kick out all of these radical imams...[and] strip those who besmirch the French spirit of their nationality.”

As this article was being written, French warplanes reportedly struck ISIS targets in the city of Raqqa, the self-proclaimed capital of ISIS in Syrian territory. But such strikes against ISIS—especially American drone strikes—have already caused hundreds of civilian deaths. In August, the *Guardian* reported that at least 450 civilians had died in more than 5,700 drone strikes against ISIS targets—“even though the U.S.-led coalition has so far acknowledged just two non-combatant deaths.” [6] Rather than stop terrorism, such deaths only spur more such violence.

As the Institute for Policy Studies’ Phyllis Bennis noted at *TheNation.com* [7]:

“...wars of vengeance won’t work for France anymore than they worked for the United States...

Terrorism survives wars; people don’t. We saw the proof of that again last night in Paris, and we saw it the day before in Beirut. We were hearing sounds of victory from U.S. war-makers. The Obama strategy was working, they said. ISIS was being pushed back from Sinjar by Kurdish militias. A U.S. air strike assassinated Mohammed Emwasi, known as “jihadi John” from the ISIS videos. Yet the war—a new version of that same “global war on terror”—is still being waged, and clearly it still isn’t working. Because you can’t bomb terrorism—you can only bomb people. You can bomb cities. Sometimes you might kill a terrorist—but that doesn’t end terrorism; it only encourages more of it.”

Some French leaders are already calling for increased state surveillance and a clampdown on civil liberties, as they did following the January attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. But as the *New York Times* reported, “Hollande and his government have already taken controversial and increasingly intrusive steps to track domestic threats. Yet none of those measures managed to stop Friday’s massacres, raising the uncomfortable question of what more can be done.”

MUSLIMS IN France and across Europe have expressed their sorrow at the attacks and their solidarity with the victims. On social media, the hashtags “#IAmAMuslim,” “#NotInMyName” and “#MuslimsAreNotTerrorist” were being adopted by many as a display against the reactionary version of Islam practiced by ISIS.

This is mostly ignored by the mainstream media. In fact, just one day before the attacks in Paris, suicide bombings by ISIS carried out in Beirut killed at least 43 people and wounded more than 200.

Yet Western leaders didn’t hold press conferences or express their sorrow for the families of the victims of that attack. The mainstream media didn’t laud those victims or catalogue their hopes and dreams. While Barack Obama called the Paris attacks “an attack on all of humanity and the universal values we share,” he could spare no such words for our shared humanity and universal values when the victims were predominantly Lebanese Shiite Muslims.

Some humanity, it seems, counts more than others when it comes to lives lost to the terrorism of ISIS.

“When my people died, no country bothered to light up its landmarks in the colors of their flag,” Elie Fares, a Lebanese doctor, wrote in a blog post [8]. “When my people died, they did not send the world into mourning. Their death was but an irrelevant fleck along the international news cycle, something that happens in THOSE parts of the world.”

THE FAR right, particularly France's anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant National Front (FN, by its initials in French), is trying to exploit these attacks in its campaign for December regional elections.

Just hours after the attacks, FN leader Marine Le Pen told reporters that France needed to take back control of its borders "for good," adding, "Fundamentalist Islam must be wiped out. France must ban Islamist organizations, close radical mosques and kick out foreigners who are preaching hatred on our soil, as well as illegal immigrants who have nothing to do here."

It should no longer come as a surprise that French bombs dropped in Syria explode in the streets of Paris: "Vos guerres, nos morts," as the NPA rightly put it. The grim reality is that these latest attacks will almost certainly not be the last. Rather, they represent a new phase of the war on terror (and illustrate the futility of a never-ending war to "fight terrorism").

The challenge now for the left will be to stand against the tide of Islamophobia and reaction; defend the rights of Muslims, immigrants and refugees; and demand that this latest tragedy not be used as an excuse for more war.

A glimmer of that kind of response was on display as a group of far-right protesters—reportedly FN supporters—stormed a vigil for those killed on the day after the attacks, attempting to whip up anti-Muslim sentiment. Holding an Islamophobic banner and screaming "expel Islamists," the FN supporters were chased away by hundreds who had gathered for the vigil, shouting, "Go away fascists." [9]

This is the kind of solidarity we need in the coming days and weeks. Whenever the Paris attacks are evoked to scapegoat Muslims, refugees and other embattled communities in France and across Europe—or to launch another military attack in the Middle East with bombers, drones and commandos—it will be critical to take a stand.

Any attempt to use the terrorist attacks in France to justify war and anti-Muslim bigotry must be opposed as part of a wider challenge to a system that breeds war and terrorism.

Nicole Colson

P.S.

* "Their"merciless war"only fuels terrorism":

<http://socialistworker.org/2015/11/16/their-merciless-war-fuels-terrorism>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/15/why-syrian-refugee-passport-found-at-paris-at-tack-scene-must-be-treated-with-caution>

[2] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/01/26/france-abusive-identity-checks-minority-youth>

[3] <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/14/456026787/paris-prosecutor-to-give-up-date-on-investigation>

[4] See, available on ESSF (article 36392), [Paris November 13 attacks part of ISIS strategy to provoke retaliation and force Muslims out of west: an Arab Spring activist](#).

[5] See, available on ESSF (article 36390), [November 13: The Paris attackers hit the city's young, progressive core](#).

[6] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/03/us-led-air-strikes-on-isis-targets-killed-more-than-450-civilians-report>

[7] See, available on ESSF (article 36382), [After the Paris Attacks, a Call for Justice—Not Vengeance. A lesson from the US: “an “all-out war” on terror only creates more terrorism”](#).

[8] http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/16/world/middleeast/beirut-lebanon-attacks-paris.html?_r=0

[9] See, available on ESSF (article 36391), [After the Paris attack: 'go away fascists' - Far-right Anti-Refugee Racists Forced to Retreat](#).