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Nice attack & Holland's response: the vicious circle of terror and war

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Hollande's promise to respond militarily to the Nice attack just continues the West's vicious circle of terror and war.

At some point, we in the West are going to have to learn that if we intervene militarily in Mali or Iraq or Libya or Syria or interfere in Turkey, or Egypt, or the Gulf, or the Maghreb - then we will not be safe 'at home'

The act was obscene. President Hollande's description - "monstrous" - was adequate so far as it went, but created the old problem. What happens when three or four hundred innocents are killed by a murderer? Or five hundred? Does that become "really monstrous" or "very monstrous indeed"? But the political reaction to this crime against humanity in Nice was mundane to the point of lunacy. Hollande - or "General Hollande" as the French press dubbed him when he sent his legionnaires to fight against Islamists in Mali - announced that France would "reinforce our action in Syria and Iraq."

Sure, I get the point. If Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhrel of Tunisia had anything to do with Isis or Nusra (and when he spoke, Hollande would not have known if this was true), then firing more French missiles into the burned sands of Mesopotamia or the desert around Raqqa in the hope of striking Isis would have no effect other than to reinforce the old "feel good" factor of biffing "world terror" for the sake of it.

Tunisia, of course, is well over a thousand miles from Syria, let alone Iraq, but one bunch of murderous Arabs is much like another to our foreign ministries and if Bouhrel turns out to have "Isis roots" - no matter how self-declared - then the bigger the bombs the better.

Everyone who dares to point this out - and European leaders are always threatening Isis, just as Isis is always threatening the West - is immediately cast out of society as a "friend of terrorists". There is, in fact, a whole vocabulary of abuse for anyone who says that there are reasons for these acts of mass murder which we need to know, however crazed they are. At present, the Isis/Western hate mail to each other is almost identical with King Lear: "I will do such things...what they are, yet I know not, but they shall be the terrors of the earth..."

Of course, I fear we are going in the coming hours to be inundated with painful repetitions of atrocities past: relatives who had "no idea" their son/brother/nephew/uncle might be a violent killer, neighbours who will attest that the attacker was always a quiet man (who probably "kept himself to himself", as they say), Muslims who will again insist on the peacefulness of their religion. In addition to this, we will have politicians who will promise to stamp out "terror" and cops who will praise their brothers-in-arms for their courage (even when the Nice attack was not exactly a triumph for the French security forces).

And we will forget France's fraught colonial history in Algeria and Tunisia, the 125th anniversary of its Tunisian "protectorate" this year – and the 70th anniversary of Tunisia's independence – and the Islamist presence that has grown frighteningly within the body politic of Tunisia since the 2011 revolution. It is no good holding up this painful history as some sort of excuse or "root cause" of the mass murders in Nice. But at some point, we in the West are going to have to learn that if we intervene militarily in Mali or Iraq or Libya or Syria or interfere in Turkey, or Egypt, or the Gulf, or the Maghreb – then we will not be safe "at home".

It's an old story now. In the past, we could go on foreign adventures in Korea or Vietnam without worrying that North Koreans would blow up the London Underground or that the Vietcong would attack New York with airliners. Not anymore. Foreign adventures come at a terrifying cost. Claiming they do not – or pompously declaring that "their" bombs in London or Paris have nothing to do with "our" bombs in Iraq – is dishonest.

At some point in history – though how far into the future, when we will have cut away the foundations of our own freedoms with our own new laws – we will probably have to re-think our relationship with the Middle East and with history. Yes, and with religion.

It's no good just running through the copy cat nature of 'Islamist' crime: a BBC reporter was drawing parallels yesterday with the car-ramming Palestinians who have killed Israelis. But the last phone-video I saw which had any parallel of scale with Nice was a horrifying piece of footage during the Egyptian revolution of 2011 when an Egyptian army trucks was driven at speed – and swerving wildly – into a crowd of peaceful protestors. Why didn't we remember that after Nice? Because the killers were never caught? Because no-one remembers yesterday's news? Or because the victims were Arabs involved in a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know – by and large – nothing

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<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/nice-terrorist-attack-france-isis-francois-hollande-response-syria-iraq-military-bombs-vicious-a7139101.html>