

Counter-Terrorism is a Method of Government¹

Counter-terrorism is magical. Not only does it have the artistry to pass off Chihuahuas as wolves, but it can also silence any protest against it. Back in January [2014], people – vacillating between compassion and surprise – were worried about the two high-school students, 15 and 16 years old, who took the road to Syria and, at the end of the month, became “apprentice jihadists” under judicial supervision.² And no one said anything. Two kids placed under investigation for “participation in a criminal association in relation to a terrorist enterprise”; two kids brought back from Turkey by their families and picked up, in their turn, by the Central Directorate for Domestic Intelligence (the DCRI) in the guise of a welcoming committee. Everything’s in order; let’s move on.

An investigator declared that it was in fact a matter of “discouraging the other youths radicalized by the Internet who had the intention to go down there,” that is to say, they file charges against some people to intimidate the others, and no one is disturbed by this. The Minister of the Interior multiplies by three the number (already inflated by the secret services) of French citizens currently in Syria fighting against Bashar Al-Assad’s army, and no one takes note of this maneuver.

It must be said that, without these kinds of small, *discursive*³ terror operations that typify counter-terrorism, they couldn’t so easily wring the neck of the evidence. What is astonishing are the obvious facts that, for the last three years, they’ve left a people to massacre, bomb, torture, and gas each other through an unleashed counter-insurrectionary apparatus, and that only young people have found this intolerable and have decided to act accordingly.

Morally, it is true: it is either us or them.⁴ Either we are cowards, cynics, and heartless bastards [*cœurs tannés*] who calmly witness the carnage from the safety of our sofas, or we are concerned with “monsters recruited after one month on the Internet” at the end of a “rapid process of self-radicalization.”

Here swallowing the story is the price for our moral comfort. In other times, we wouldn’t have waited to form international brigades of volunteers in which

¹ *Le Monde*, 14 February 2014. Written by Christophe Becker, Mathieu Burnel, Julien Coupat, Bertrand Deveaud, Manon Glibert, Gabrielle Hallez, Elsa Hauck, Yildune Lévy, Benjamin Rosoux, and Aria Thomas, aka the Tarnac 10.

² Cf. *Le Monde*, 29 January 2014: http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2014/01/29/les-deux-lyceens-francais-partis-pour-le-djihad-en-syrie-en-garde-a-vue_4356375_3218.html (French only).

³ English in original.

⁴ An allusion to George W. Bush’s post-September 11, 2001 remark about “the terrorists”: you’re either with us or with them.

future George Orwells would participate,⁵ and it is quite definite that not doing so that we have instead the Al-Nosra Brigades⁶ and hostages. The reeducation of 15-year-old kids through counter-terrorism is what permits them to make good use of the failure to remember the bloody contradiction that exists between the official position of France towards the Syrian regime and its effective paralysis. We can say, and this is hardly an opinion [*à peine arêtes*], that counter-terrorism doesn't centrally target those whom it strikes, but the entirety of the population. Thus, it is not a judicial procedure, but a method of government.

Since then, Edward Snowden's revelations about the activities of the NSA ended up furnishing the proof:⁷ it is in the name of counter-terrorism that they spy on the totality of the population, and it is in the name of counter-terrorism that Barack Obama tries to render this acceptable.

As Napoleon III explains in Maurice Joly's imaginary dialogues between Machiavelli and Montesquieu,⁸ this doesn't pose any problem because "only the rebels will suffer from these restrictions; no one else will feel them." It is enough to organize general anesthesia and amnesia in real time.

The politicians encourage it and the magistrates accept it. It is through a refined application of the laws that they place two high-school students under investigation "for criminal association in relation to a terrorist enterprise." A refinement that allows them to reproach these students for having wanted to go to a foreign country where they would have been able to join groups that would have been able to lead them to eventually commit criminal acts upon their return to France.

One no longer needs to demonstrate a harmful intention; henceforth the crime is defined by its very anticipation. The Tarnac Affair itself is not a simple aberration of the Sarkozy era:⁹ the investigation into it is still going on.

Sheltered behind national security [*le secret-défense*], from within the muffled silence of their offices, police officers and judges continue to preserve and extend the domain of the counter-terrorist battle. In our case, their work consists in doing nothing that would be in contradiction with it. In time, people will forget that there ever was a "Tarnac Affair" and that it laid bare the very logic of this battle.

On this point, as on [all] the others, a change of governors will not at all alter the general physiognomy of the government. There is no Right or Left when it

⁵ A reference to the Spanish Civil War. Cf. Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.

⁶ Said to be a branch of Al Qaeda in Syria and Lebanon.

⁷ Here I have corrected a typo: *achevé d'en administrer la prevue*.

⁸ Cf. "The Thirteenth Dialogue," <http://www.notbored.org/dialogue-in-hell-XIII.html>. Note that Napoleon III doesn't appear in these dialogues, but is certainly the main reference.

⁹ Nicolas Sarkozy was in power, first as the Minister of the Interior, then as the President of France, between 2005 and 2012.

comes to counter-terrorism. If the new tenants of power can only take up Sarkozy's construction of the "anarcho-autonomous tendency of the ultra-Left" as their own, it is because counter-terrorism is a political policy in itself.

The Socialist Party¹⁰ doesn't have the power to be [truly] socialist or to leave behind the global, [neo-] liberal paradigm of security. As for the judges, let's not speak of them, for how could they dare contradict *company policy*?¹¹

¹⁰ Elected to power in 2012.

¹¹ The French here, *la police de la société*, can also mean "the police of society" or "society's police."