

The Other State of Emergency
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(English translation by Jane Kuntz
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What is so discouraging about the terrorist acts is that our discussion of what motivated the operations is as insane as the acts themselves. With each attack of this nature, we restage the grand war drama, the nation in peril and the protector-state purporting to rise up against barbarity. This is what states do, we say: we should have a basic expectation of security, and the state should have the means to provide it. End of story.

But what makes the current situation so much more dismaying is that the crimes committed on 13 November have occurred within a few days of another event about to take place that involves tragedies of a different kind, ones that will require that we come up with very different answers to wholly different threats that have nothing to do with ISIS/Daech. I am referring, of course, to the World Climate Change Conference in Paris, the COP21, which we are now liable to deem less serious, less urgent than the police response to the bloody escapades of those machinegun-toting lunatics.

To do so would amount to a serious misapprehension of the order and scope of the threats looming over states today. Armed fanatics are criminals, no question, but they hardly jeopardize the way we live, think, produce, learn or inhabit space. We need only defend ourselves against them. But nothing in their ideology jeopardizes our deepest-held values, no more than pirates threaten the values of international trade. We have to fight against them, and that's all there is to it. This fight produces no political message or even any tactical originality, and needless to say, no spiritual lesson of any kind. Name one scientist, one citizen, or artist, name a judge, a mother, a musician or athlete who aspires to live under ISIS/Daech rule. I would even add: name a person of faith. This situation has nothing to do with the civil wars of times past that divided from within. This kind of thuggery is a law-and-order matter, not war, despite all the flag-waving and calls to arms.

It's a very different story when it comes to climate change. Global warming threatens all states in every way: from industrial production, business and housing to culture and the arts. It threatens our values at the deepest level. Here is where states are actually at war with each other, battling for market share and economic development, not to mention the soft power of culture. And each of us feels divided against ourselves. If indeed there exists a "clash of civilizations," then this is it, and it concerns each and every one of us. Yet, we know that national governments are just as lost and helpless here as they are when facing the terrorist threat. The police aren't enough. Rather, civil society as a whole has to take its fate into its own hands and compel political institutions to find answers.

We are looking at how dangerous it would be if anti-terrorist measures, however necessary, were to require the French state to limit the COP21 to a diplomatic discussion among bureaucrats and specialists, inside the fortified camp of Bourget, transformed into a kind of Baghdad Green Zone. How ironic that this should happen right when the whole climate issue has finally taken on a civilizational dimension heretofore lacking.

This is why it is important to step up the pressure so that, despite the new security requirements, civil society, whose stake in the matter is enormous, will get the chance to peacefully express its views. Eradicating ISIS/Daech is a long-term proposition, but the death sentence has been issued. The terror may well continue, but it is already yesterday's fight, with nothing new, only one suicide belt added to another. The threat implied in the term "Climate Change," on the other hand, is tomorrow's challenge, and depends on how all of us, not just the police, are able to deal with the issues. It makes no sense to tackle the one problem and neglect the other.

As it turns out—and this should come as no surprise—the two challenges are actually very closely linked. I'm not referring here to the tenuous, or at least too oblique, connection between climate change in the Middle East and the crisis in Syria. Nor am I talking about the horror of the refugees hounded out by the terrorists, by the wholesale destruction of their country, or about the way we have reacted to the matter. Rather, I'm referring to that hideous attraction whereby suicide bombers prefer death and the afterlife to an earthly existence in the now. Candidates for this kind of self-destruction display a simplistic form of nihilism, to be sure, but however inept and atrocious, their acts call to mind the image of our collective suicide that the ever-expanding development model of modernization has yielded. The 13th of November is a foreshadowing of the catastrophe that will follow the failure of the Paris conference and others to come. If you rightly use the word *nihilism* to describe these militant madmen, it would seem to me that the word also applies, but with more far-reaching implications, to those who, in a twisted way, are expressing a death wish of their own. Just like those who kill themselves in the act of killing, people in positions of responsibility who fail to take on the issue of global climate change with the greatest seriousness is shouting in unison with the terrorists: Long live death!

It would be truly tragic if, by rightly seeking out and destroying those who, within a limited time and place, go about killing innocent people, we delay yet again the necessary work of addressing those who would kill on a deliriously massive scale, over a long period, sweeping away life in all its forms, human or otherwise. Though it is legitimate that a well-calibrated state of emergency allows for secure street demonstrations, the powers that be have to remember that they could declare a different state of emergency, an extreme one this time, that could teach the citizenry how to identify and

grapple with the larger enemy. All the more so, since this is a war that finds us very much divided, among nations, territories and peoples, and tragically, within ourselves, as we argue endlessly over the causes and the cures of global warming. Government alone is helpless: it needs all its citizens in this effort. And government should not impede those citizens who, by demonstrating, are trying to help their elected officials — it might even be an occasion to invent demonstrations more innovative than yet another march from Place de la République to Place de la Nation.