

**“C' EST UN ACTE DE GUERRE”:
THE RETURN OF FRANCE’S REIGN OF TERROR**

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As President Hollande stood there ashen-faced, declaring the attacks against unsuspecting civilians in Paris ‘an act of war’* and the pursuit of the attackers ‘merciless’, these words came to mind: “The National Convention declares, in the name of the French people, that it firmly intends to be terrible towards its enemies, generous towards its allies, and just towards its peoples.” Back in 1793, the forces of foreign absolutism, threatened by the liberal Revolutionary ideas taking root on their doorstep and exacerbated by the displacement of both King and Church, decided to undo the French Republic-the very embodiment of such ideas. The undoing of the Republic was to be an inside job, as the foreign forces had been invited and guided through by Frenchmen who preferred to be subjects of absolutism rather than citizens of a free state in which they did not believe and from which they had nothing to gain. The reaction, both past and present, tellingly sums up the reflexes of a state under duress, a state whose survival and physical existence is inextricably linked to a particular way of life considered deplorable by its enemies.

In fact, on that unusually warm Friday night, November 13, what laid dead in the chillingly empty streets of Paris (‘a city of abomination and perversion’ as described in the revengeful ISIS statement which followed the massacre) was essentially that incredibly French but still so universally human characteristic of ‘joie de vivre’. Yet, when people abandoned that stadium under attack, defiantly singing the Marseillaise, the revolutionary French national anthem, shouting “*Liberté, Liberté chérie*”, when on that same night of the carnage people still opened their doors and offered refuge to strangers, when they still queued for hours outside hospitals in the capital to give blood for the wounded, even if curfew for safety reasons had been advocated, the message was sent out loud and clear for the world to see -‘Not afraid’.

Nonetheless, the symbolism of the Eiffel Tower immersed in darkness cannot be missed. It abruptly marks the end of an era, the end of an age of innocence, even if the writing has been on the wall for quite some time now. It was actually there the minute citizens of such a fiercely secular state such as France felt compelled to silence cartoonists in the name of religion (probably unaware or unaffected or even disgusted by the irreverence with which French satirists had irrespectively always treated any subject matter they could lay their hands on- Marie Antoinette becoming forever known as Madame Deficit thanks to them).It was there the minute that pupils at certain schools throughout the country refused to keep a minute of silence for the Charlie Hedbo victims. It was there

when "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite" could not resonate with most people living a pitiful existence in the suburban ghettos and the Rule of Law paled in significance vis-à-vis the sharia for some others. It was there the minute one's own citizens became an enemy lying in wait, thinking their death and the death of others a more glorious prospect than life.

The bubble of perceived peace, safety and prosperity has finally burst. France finds itself not only at war against ISIS, but, above all, at war against itself. Even if terrorism is ultimately contained or destroyed, the question still remains- what is France now and what does it really stand for?