

## **BAD SIGNALS FROM ROME AND LONDON: WHY ARE WE LOSING THE WAR OF IDEAS**

*By Claude MONIQUET, President of ESISC*

**The war on terrorism is first and foremost a war of ideas, an offensive to win over the minds of those would might be tempted to join the *phalanx* of the Islamist army and to seduce their hearts.** We (the democratic world) ought to persuade them that we are not their enemy and that, on the contrary, we represent the progress and their freedom. This is the only way that radical groups can be isolated before being destroyed. Unfortunately, **we are proceeding to lose this indispensable war of ideas and of hearts. And we are losing, because the image that we project is lamentable: yes, some days we are cowardly, corrupt, hypocritical and indifferent. Rome and London have just proven that, by the way.**

We don't read enough Islamist literature. The word « literature » should here be taken in its widest meaning : doctrinal texts, internet sites, the articles and remarks of Bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and their associates. It is extremely revealing. Not so much for what we learn about the political plan of the supporters of armed Salafism – all of which is rather well known – but for the image of ourselves that these texts send back to us. **For the Jihadists, infidels like us are cowardly, hypocritical, corrupt, indifferent to the suffering of others and inclined to betrayal.** Didn't we leave Beirut in the 1980s after several attacks (particularly bloody, it's true) against the American and French troops? Didn't the great and powerful America pull out of Somalia at the start of the 1990s after losing some 15 of its Special Forces soldiers? **By hitting us rather hard and in a rather repeated manner and subjecting us tirelessly to adverse propaganda, the enemy will then manage to paralyse us and achieve his goal, which is to push « the distant enemy » - us - out of the Muslim world and be able, finally, to go after his «nearby enemy» - the «godless regimes» that we support and whose overthrow is the real goal of the Jihad.** And if we are cowardly, say the Islamists, it is because we have sunk, are drowned, have become degraded to put it directly, in a permissive society of sensuality and consumption in which money replaces «the true God». **This same literature also depicts us as hypocrites and indifferent to the suffering of others. The message is clear: no one can trust us because, sooner or later, by cowardice and by interest we will stop supporting our local allies (as the United States did in Viet Nam or France did with the *Harkis* in Algeria). Anyone who bets on us will share our fate or, worse, will face his own tragic fate all alone.**

Unfortunately, twice in a bit less than two weeks, we have just confirmed this dark picture of ourselves.

**One need go no further than Rome for a perfect illustration of cowardice and hypocrisy of the democratic world: it suffices to bring up the *Mastrogiacomo affair*.** In order to secure his liberation, Italy applied «strong pressure» (according to President Karzai) on the Afghan authorities for the release of 5 Taliban fighters in exchange for the journalist. Worst, if possible: the Italian

Republic transferred two million dollars to the kidnappers at the time of the exchange. But they «*forgot about*» the driver and interpreter who were murdered in a horrible manner<sup>1</sup>. That's a double lesson for the Jihadists and, above all, for those who are watching them. Yes, we are cowardly (we negotiate). And yes, we are hypocritical and indifferent to others : we save our compatriots whatever the price but we just leave the « locals » who help us to their terrible fate...

**Cowardice, once again, but backed up, this time, with venality in London.**

A dozen or so British sailors give themselves up without a shot being fired, not even a shot in the air to ward off their assailants (one may be allowed to think that faced with greater determination, the *Pasdarans* would have pulled back). Then they play along with their captors by confessing imaginary mistakes on television and letting themselves be filmed, happy little bunch, for propaganda purposes – all of which could, one might remark by the way, constitute a crime of treason. To cap it all, they added to this unpleasant picture a good dose of venality: barely back home, the British soldiers are selling their memoirs to the press for big sums. **Instead of being courageous, the soldiers of Her Royal Majesty seem to be business minded.**

**This seems like a dream. But it's the enemy's dream. They could hardly have hoped for better that what we are offering them, since we match in every respect in these two news events the image they are trying to paint of us. For our allies, we are offering a nightmare: what is our commitment worth? What is the value of our promises?**

**As for us, somewhere between dream and nightmare, we are only building our own future and, if we don't take ourselves in hand, it will be bleak. The war on terrorism is not just military and repressive. It is also psychological.**

**Hearts and minds! It's time to think of this and to try to abide by the values that we claim to be ours...**

---

<sup>1</sup>A sinister parenthetical remark is needed here: what we are dealing with is not an « execution » as the media say all too often, but an assassination pure and simple. And when one speaks of « decapitation », the work evokes the swift work of the guillotine. Nothing of the sort exists in the Afghan or Iraqi caves: the prisoners have their throats cut with a knife and the neck is literally «sawed off », using this knife to separate the head from the trunk of the body...