

PARIS TERRORIST ATTACKS, ‘AN ACT OF WAR’, HIGHLIGHT DRAMATICALLY INCREASING GEOPOLITICAL RISKS FOR FRANCE

By ESISC Team

On Friday, November 13, a series of unprecedented coordinated terror attacks hit Paris in 6 different locations, including the Stade de France and the concert hall Bataclan. 8 terrorists were killed, including 7 who apparently triggered explosives charges, and at least 128 civilians died, including more than 80 in the attack on the Bataclan. Assailants were heavily armed, using AK-47 rifles, explosive vests and Kalashnikovs, in a complex, multilayered, coordinated operation apparently masterminded by the Islamic State.

The sequence of events is believed to have been the following:

- At around 9:15 pm, explosions were reported outside the Stade de France in the suburb of Saint-Denis during the football match France-Germany. The match was attended by the President Francois Hollande who was rapidly evacuated from the site. At least 3 explosions were apparently triggered by suicide bombers. 4 casualties were reported, including the 3 suicide bombers.
- At 9:20, in rue Alibert, at least 12 people were killed when attackers opened fire against the terrace of the Petit Cambodge ("Little Cambodia") restaurant.
- Minutes after, just 2 streets away, in Rue de la Fontaine au Roi, at least 5 people were killed in a similar shooting attack against the "La Casa Nostra" restaurant.
- At 9:40, in Rue de Charonne, in the 10th arrondissement of Paris, at least 18 people were killed in a shooting at a Japanese restaurant and at the nearby café "La Belle Epoque".
- At around 9:45, in the concert hall Bataclan situated 50 boulevard Voltaire in the XIe arrondissement, gunmen erupted and opened fire against the employees guarding the site, and later shot against the public and took them as hostages. The hostage situation lasted until 1:00 am. More than 1500 people were present for the

concert of the band “Eagles of Death Metal”. According to eyewitness, quoted by BFM TV, one of the gunmen shouted: "It's for Syria" and “Allah Akbar”. Most recent reports suggest that 84 people were killed in the shooting. 4 attackers were killed when they triggered explosive vests.

- In Boulevard Voltaire, another attack was reported. Only the attacker was reported as killed in the incident.

Rumors of other shootings near the Halles, in Belleville, at the Trocadero and near Republic square also emerged over the night, but were later confirmed to be unfounded. Separately, a fire broke out in the migrants camp of Calais on Friday evening. Rumors spread of another terror attack, however the prefect of Pas de Calais confirmed that the incident was related to an electricity dysfunction and “clearly accidental”.

In total, 128 people would have been killed and up to 250 were wounded, including 99 who are considered “absolute emergencies”. Several foreigners would be among the victims, including at least a Portuguese and 2 Belgian nationals.

8 terrorists were killed, though it is unclear whether other accomplices or further gunmen may be present in the capital city. A vehicle, described as from the brands Seat or Golf, is still actively searched in the capital.

An emergency Council of Ministers was called for an emergency session at around midnight in Paris. President François Hollande announced live just before the meeting that the State of Emergency was declared. Border control was also reinstated. Authorities additionally ordered the “White plan”, the mobilization of all available medical staff in Parisian hospitals.

Several subway stations remain shut down on Saturday near the locations of the attacks while the population is requested to stay home. More than 1500 soldiers were deployed in the capital city. The main public institutions and touristic sites were also closed, including the Eiffel Tower. All demonstrations are banned in Paris until at least next Thursday.

Despite the absence of claim of responsibility at that point, President Hollande declared in a new press conference on Saturday morning that the attacks were «an act of war committed by Daesh», confirming that police forces had very strong suspicions over the terrorist group. He also announced 3 days of national mourning.

Hours later, the Islamic State published a statement claiming responsibility for the attacks in Paris. The message, entitled “Statement on the blessed attack on Paris against the crusading France” and written in French, mentions “8 brothers wearing explosive belts and carrying assaults rifles” who targeted specific places in Paris, including the “Stade de France” and the “Bataclan”. The statement affirms that 200

people were killed and more were wounded. The groups claims “France and those following its path must know that they remain the main target of the Islamic State and that they will still face death for leading the crusade, for insulting Islam in France and for hitting Muslims on the land of the Caliphate with their warplanes, which were useless in the stinky streets of Paris. This attack is just the beginning of the storm and a warning to those who want to meditate and learn their lesson”.

Numerous claims of support, praising Paris attacks, were posted on jihadist accounts on Twitter. Several IS members also threatened to carry out further attacks against France in response to its operations in Syria. One of them affirms “France sent its warplanes to Syria to bomb our children. It is its turn today to taste death. Those attacks avenge Syria. After Paris, it will be Roma and London”. Several advices directed to candidates suicide bombers in Western countries were also given under the hashtag #PARISBURNS.

Coordinated attacks in Paris on November 13, became **the second deadliest terrorist attack in Europe since Madrid train bombing on March 11, 2004**, that left 191 people dead and nearly 1,800 wounded.

It is also **the first attack on French soil with the use of bombers wearing suicide belts** and the first attack with such a high level of coordination and complexity. A mixture of operative methods used by terrorists including suicide bombings, AK-47 shootings, IEDs and drive-by shootings indicate a complex and sophisticated terrorist plot behind it that may have been prepared for numerous weeks. This version is confirmed by the latest claim of the President Hollande who said that **the attacks were plotted outside France with some coordination support inside the country**.

Given that France over the past years was among the priority targets both for Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, attacks in Paris on November 13 were by no means a surprise for French security authorities, but the scale of the assault, number of fatal casualties and complexity of the plot clearly represent a very bad signal for French security.

Aftermath of the attack numerous speculations appeared in media, interpreting latest propaganda statements of Islamic State as direct threats to France. Indeed, in the recent weeks Islamic State issued a series of propaganda videos in which France was mentioned among other targets without any particular references.

One of the first direct threats to France and to President Hollande was released early this year in a video, released in February and featuring 3 IS French-speaking members who were addressing directly to the French president Francois Hollande and ‘to everyone living in France’. They warned: ‘Know that the soldiers of the Islamic State are everywhere and that the nightmare has just begun’.

New threats were issued by IS against France since the beginning of French participation in aviation raids against IS in Syria.

A day before the attack, on November 12, Islamic State issued a video threatening to attack Russia ‘very soon’. It was the latest message from IS containing direct threats to a foreign countries. Today many experts claim that the video represented a threat not only to Russia but for the West as well.

Experts claim that several warning signals emerged over the past month suggesting that Islamic State may perpetrate attacks against concert halls. Namely a suspect was detained on August 15 by DGSJ forces for intentions to launch attacks against concert halls in France. The suspect, a French national who allegedly traveled to Syria in May, would have received instructions on how to launch terrorist attack against concert halls and public events. There were also reports about the recent arrest of a 51-year-old man, from Montenegro transporting pistols, grenades and explosives who had been detained during a security check on his vehicle on the highway A8, between Bad Feilnbach and Salzburg, in Austria. The man was apparently aiming to Paris. The exact date of the arrest was not made public so far but according to police sources, this arrest would be linked with Friday’s attacks in Paris. The real links between these two suspects and Paris Friday 13 terrorist attacks can not be ascertained yet.

The attacks for sure would bring **dramatic changes to security and counter-terrorism policies in France and Western Europe** for the nearest future. Immediately after the attack, state of emergency was imposed by the French government and French borders were closed. Security measures were also raised in neighboring countries such as Belgium and Germany. Further changes also would be brought to the policy of France regarding the military involvement in Syria and tracking of those French nationals who participated in jihad in Syria, Iraq or Yemen.

While in the aftermath of the attack, reports intensified in media, considering the attacks in Paris as the ‘epic failure’ of the French intelligence and security authorities. Meanwhile one should recall that at least 10 terrorist plots have been broken up by French security authorities since January.

The necessity of tougher measures has been numerous times highlighted by European security experts since Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015 in Paris. It should be mentioned that following the thwarted attack in Amsterdam-Paris Thalys train in August this year ESISC CEO Claude Moniquet had already warned that “the time has come for a new counter-terrorism strategy”.

There is also a high risk that Paris attacks that are today praised by numerous jihadist supporters online, would provoke a series of **copycats from local lone wolf attackers, not only IS supporters, but also those of Al-Qaeda.**

During the past 2 years EU states have been toughening their own national anti-terror laws. In a bid to curb the flow of French jihadists to Syria, the French government introduced legislation simplifying procedure for detention of suspects at airports. At the same time European government intensified monitoring of internet content and online profiles of suspected jihadists and strengthened communication with representatives of Muslim communities to prevent further radicalisation of Muslims. Meanwhile the deadly attacks on November 13 demonstrated that all these measures are far insufficient and cannot tackle the increasing domestic Islamist terror threat that reached today a new level.

The Paris attack would also bring changes in the agenda of G20 summit that should start on Sunday, November 15 in Turkey. The fight against international terrorism and namely against Islamic State as well as the issue of migrants are to become the main topics of the Summit.

In the long-term perspective the terrorist attack would also contribute to the growth of the level of support for far-right extremist groups and nationalist parties across Europe. It can also trigger important shifts on the regional geopolitical level and to bring changes to security priorities of European, US, Russian and Middle Eastern authorities.

France remains among the principal targets for Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, but only the development and implementation of a coordinated, joint and elaborated counter-terrorism strategy at the EU-level could help to tackle the threat of domestic Islamist terrorism in the region in the nearest future.

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