

ONE YEAR LATER, THE “WAR” IS NOT OVER....

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One year ago, on November 13 2015, war came to Paris. At 21:17, the first suicide bomber blew himself up at the Stade de France. Almost exactly three hours later, at 00:18, the Research and intervention Brigade (BRI) launched their final assault on the Bataclan, liberating the hostages held there. In these three short hours, Islamic terrorism claimed the lives of 130 people and left 683 others wounded.

For years, we had feared a “Mumbai” style attack¹ in the heart of a European capital: a multi-site attack carried out by well-trained and heavily armed terrorists using commando-style tactics, combining three operations: carrying out suicide bombings, taking the offensive with machine guns and other weapons of war, and taking hostages. Authorities had expected this kind of attack. All of the “experts,” including ourselves, had worked on this kind of scenario. Training had been organized to instruct police forces on how to respond to this kind of event. Yet the worst was not avoided. Despite the fact that this massacre happened 10 months after the January Charlie Hebdo attacks. Despite the alarms sounded by the failed attacks in Villejuif and Thalys. Despite the information that was constantly relayed to security services.

On 13 November 2015, as on September 11 in the United States, France had been on red alert for months, but, also as on 9/11, nothing was prevented.

Afterwards, there were other alerts and attacks. March 22, Brussels. June 13, Magnanville. July 14, Nice. July 26, Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray.

Some things are now are sharp, tragic, and clear: the massacre of November 13 and the others that followed are the result of a collective failure, a failure in which everyone involved in security shares responsibility. On November 13, the state failed.

Have we learned our lesson? Surely that is the least we can do for the victims. Certainly, progress has been made: more angles for security services to work with, more coordination, more anticipation, and a “hardened” legislative framework. Do these developments guarantee that other tragedies can no longer happen? Absolutely not. There is no method that allows us to be 100% safe from terror threats. This is especially

¹ From the 26 to the 29 of November 2008, 5 attacks combined with simultaneous hostage taking resulted in 188 deaths and 312 wounded in the economic heart of India.

true when confronting an enemy who is intelligent, determined, and can count on thousands of sympathizers.

Even worse: the rout of IS in Iraq today and in Syria tomorrow combined with the relative “calm” that seems to have settled since the end of July may indicate a false sense of security.

The fatal error: the planned demise of the Islamic “State” in Mosul and Raqqa will not entail the end of IS, which will simply go underground and has already somewhat redeployed in other areas (especially in the Sahel). And this evolution will not reduce the threat of terror attacks in Europe, even if it will probably limit the group’s operational capacities. We will see, no doubt, fewer sophisticated operations that require long-term planning and implement “heavy” networks of several dozen people (which in any case are already the exception) as on the 13 of November, but attacks will doubtless persist all the same.

Moreover, of course, there remains the major risk of attacks executed by individuals who are sympathetic to the Islamic State, or attacks simply carried out by people who are more or less disturbed, who have scores to settle with our society and who will drape their actions with the IS flag, or the flag of some other terror organization, in order to get more publicity. Do not forget that in Nice, on the 14 of July, a lone man, never spotted by intelligence services, using only a simple truck, killed two-thirds of the same number of victims claimed by the complex and military-style attacks in Paris 8 months earlier.

One year later, in the midst of controversy and celebrations, we must remember: the war is not yet over.

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