

# 'Paris Attacks 13.11.15: Analysis'

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Pre-print deposited in [Curve](#) November 2015

**Original citation:**

Renwick, N. (2015) 'Paris Attacks 13.11.15: Analysis'. Phoenix News, volume 1

Coventry University

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# *PHOENIX NEWS*

## *POLICY BRIEF No.2*

Global Security Group  
International Studies Research Cluster,  
School of Humanities  
Coventry University

## **Paris Terrorist Attacks 13.11.15: Analysis**

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**17th November 2015**



Public domain image.

[Source: Annie HARADA VIOT:  
20151114-bataclan-paris-9]

### **Introduction**

The attacks in Paris took 129 lives and left over 352 victims hospitalised. Victims were mainly young people of 15 nationalities from around the world. Casualties would have been even higher if the three suicide bombers who blew themselves up at the Stade de France had succeeded in their goal of entering the stadium itself. The insurgency devastated families, friendships, workplaces and communities. Initial investigations point to the terrorist group being an international complement with planning and coordination taking place in Belgium and France. The French Government responded by imposing a state of emergency, closing borders and launching bombing raids on the ISIL-held Syrian city of Raqqa. Worldwide condemnation has mixed with symbolic global solidarity as iconic landmarks across the world were illuminated in the French national colours.



**Shanghai shows solidarity:**

Pudong Tower illuminated in colours of the French Tricolour  
Public domain image

## Analysis

A number of key points arise in assessing these attacks:

- These attacks are different from the Paris attacks of 7 January, targeting the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and Paris' Jewish community. The attacks at the beginning of the year were, at least in the case of the magazine, highly specific and designed to right a particular wrong. The latest attacks are, quite clearly, more extensive, sophisticated in their planning and logistics and display a disturbingly higher level of organisational and technical capability.
- Unlike the January attacks, these have been carefully crafted, coordinated and choreographed to strike at “soft”, i.e. civilian targets; calibrated to evoke as widespread and intense a sense of fear and revulsion among as broad an audience as possible. This is ‘terrorism’ in its most classic sense – the inculcation of ‘terror’ in the immediate vicinity of the act itself, but more importantly to the perpetrators, in the wider viewing audience. With near instantaneous communication through social media platforms, mobile footage goes ‘viral’ quickly, thereby facilitating the transmission of the terrorist perpetrator’s “message” to a global audience almost immediately.
- The targets selected, ranging from chic bars, concert venue and the bars around the Stade de France, were aimed at Paris’s cultural and entertainment heart. The motivation here is three-fold.
  - o Firstly, these were selected as high-visibility, high impact targets – sending the message that the general public are not safe anywhere, at any time from terror. This was intended to be a delivery of a “message” in the starkest, brutal fashion possible.
  - o Secondly, this is an attack on French and European cultural life and the degenerate, materialistic values they are viewed as embodying. This was not the primary motivation, multiple eyewitness testimonies from cross the target venues, cross-verify attacker reference to Syria. Nevertheless, the choice of

target is telling, with an evident common strand grounded in the clash of cultures.

- o Thirdly, as with the Sharm-el-Sheik airliner attack, the attacks are intended to strike at, the culture and entertainment industries, important components of the Parisian and French economies. The French economy is Europe's third-largest economy and tourism is a major contributor; France is the most visited destination in the world and maintains the third largest income in the world from tourism.
- The aftermath of such attacks, unsurprisingly, lean many to ask if they could not have been avoided, i.e. that the success of the attacks is the result of a catastrophic failure of France's security intelligence community. Intelligence-gathering is far from an exact science. Advanced technology helps, most particularly with communications intercepts and monitoring, but good quality intelligence must still rely on human intelligence (HUMINT). Successfully infiltrating terrorist organisations has never been easy, but given their disaggregated recruitment and operational cell structures, is particularly problematic with regard to al-Qaeda or IS (Islamic State). As a result, counter-terrorism relies on a combination of communications intercept technology, but vitally, on access to credible information from HUMINT. Building the networks, acquiring critical human assets, monitoring, sifting and assessing is complex and challenging. A significant number of French citizens have gone to both Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIL in recent years with around 200 or so returning to France. The surveillance resources required for such numbers outstrip existing capacity. As an officer with French intelligence told the New York Times in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015, "we would need to triple our staff to better protect [Paris]".
- The scale of the attacks do, however, raise significant concerns about the level and quality of intelligence-gathering capacity-the operational organisational structure, human resources and financing of France's security service and of coordination, communication and intelligence-sharing with other security services.
- Are these attacks indicative of a wider ISIL strategy to target other major cities or are they France-specific? The answer is that they are indicative of both. The attacks had a very particular aim of striking at France, for its Syrian engagement. But such attacks also form part of an ISIL strategy and European security services, including that of the UK, have successfully foiled a number of planned attacks in recent years. David Cameron, speaking at a press conference at the G20 in Turkey in the aftermath of the attacks, confirmed that the UK had foiled seven planned attacks on the UK in recent months, including one in the preceding month. This reiterated a statement made in late October by the Director-General of MI5, Andrew Parker, that the UK had prevented six planned attacks in the past year ([The Telegraph](http://www.telegraph.co.uk), 16 November, 2015; [telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)).

## **Policy implications**

There are three areas of policy that need to be considered: resources; coordination, and international cooperation. These arise at three levels: France itself; regionally, at the EU and pan-European level and globally. Reviews by the French Government and by the National Assembly will, of course, seek to assess and identify any organisational weaknesses that allowed the attacks to take place. Questions will be raised about information-gathering and sharing, evaluation and operational response systems. The French leader has announced the creation of 8,500 extra jobs in the police, judicial and border control services. Already, in the wake of the attacks a series of discussions and new measures were agreed at the G20 Summit. French President Hollande, unable to attend the G20 due to the emergency, is travelling to Washington for talks with President Obama and to Moscow with president Putin.

At the EU level, France is now seeking a complete suspension of the Schengen Agreement, the treaty which removed systematic border controls between many of the EU member countries. Under Schengen provisions, suspension is permitted in emergency crises. If agreed, this would amount to a major potential policy shift. Schengen has, hitherto, been regarded by proponents as a *sine quo non*, an essential component and icon of the European project and closer integration of European economies and societies. Closing external borders to the EU may carry short-term political gains for some European leaders. However, the reality is that no matter how far 'Europe' travels down the path towards 'Fortress Europe', the harsh practical reality is that Europe's border controls are a patchwork quilt of efficiency and effectiveness. Strengthened border surveillance and monitoring can, of course disrupt and dislocate potential attackers. But those committed to terrorist acts are unlikely to be seriously deterred or significantly inconvenienced logistically for long.

Increased capacity-building for surveillance is necessary, and European governments are responding to the Paris attacks with announcements of increased budgetary and human resources, but for a pan-European response to be effective, requires Europe-wide commitment to an equal degree and national ability to implement.

This may be harder to achieve in practice. There needs to be a closer coordination, and a more solid European political and material commitment to the relationship with organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE has an extensive engagement with countries in Central and Eastern Europe and has provided important post-Cold War facilitation support for transition societies, but more recently has gradually drifted into something of a Cinderella organisation and its resources, experience and institutional architecture could be utilised to a much greater degree. More widely, policy concerns also arise with regard to NATO. At the time of writing, the NATO Treaty provision that 'an attack on one, is an attack on all', phrasing used by President Hollande following the attacks, has not been formally

activated, unlike the '9/11' attacks. In practice, however, this has already been taken as read by NATO members. Within this context, a further examination of existing information-gathering and sharing structures and processes in the light of the Paris attacks is necessary.

## **The Author**



**Neil Renwick** is Professor of Global Security at Coventry University. A graduate of Durham University and the Australian National University, he has taught and researched international relations, global security, and East Asian Politics around the world for over 25 years, advising international organisations such as the UNDP and NGOs. He is the author of a number of books and numerous articles on international affairs. Professor Renwick teaches Global Security at Coventry and has published on the 'War on Terror'.