



TRANSATLANTIC TERRORISM AND JIHAD IN EUROPE

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(www.rieas.gr) Publication date: 3 April 2016**

Note: A Revision of the paper entitled "The Evolution of Transatlantic Terrorism & the Case of Europe", published by RIEAS on 26 January 2014.

Introduction

One year and a half after the publication of the paper entitled "Evolution of Transatlantic Terrorism & the Case of Europe", on June 29th, 2014, a Jihadist militant group known as the *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)*, also known as *ISIL* and *Daesh* proclaimed the establishment of a Caliphate and demanded the

recognition of its statehood. Today, *ISIS* claims territories equal to the size of the United Kingdom mainly in Iraq and Syria, as well as relatively small areas in Libya, Yemen, Algeria and Egypt.

Less than two years since *ISIS*' statehood proclamation and two terrorist attacks in France and one in Belgium by Jihadist militants, the need to update and heavily revise the paper became profound. Numerous terrorist attacks on European soil, together with the waves of refugees and illegal migrants, gave a new light to transatlantic terrorism and national security research.

History of Transatlantic Terrorism

Historically, terrorism in the United States and Europe was mainly expressed by regional separatist movements, representing far-left or far-right ideologies. From organizations such as: the *Black Liberation Army* and the *Weather Underground Organization* to the Irish *RIRA*, the Basque *ETA* and the Greek *Revolutionary Nuclei*, urban terrorism was visible in the transatlantic world, during the last four decades. Driven by their ideological impulses, domestic terrorists managed to create a sense of instability. Their goal: achieving political aims and making their causes known by attracting national and/or international attention.

According to a research conducted at the University of Warsaw, left-wing terrorism (known as “Red-Terror”) predominantly appeared within the European Continent during the second half of the 19th century. “Red” terrorists demanded the establishment of communist states, detached from the elitism of the European aristocrat rulers (Nikolov, 2012). Up to that point, anti-establishment ideologies were mainly expressed by groups not connected to any state authority.

During the spread of globalization in the 1970s and 1980s, transforming the capitalist Europe into a communist society, detached from international organizations such as NATO and the European Union climbed to the top of the European terrorists’ agendas. Assassinations, kidnappings and bombings became everyday anti-establishment statements. At the same time, the global power vacuum created by the dissolution of the Soviet Union created a ground for cross-border terrorist ideologies to spread. Countries from Africa to the Middle East and South Asia offered grounds for terrorist training and recruitment.

At the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War, radical Muslims were forced to shift away from guerrilla warfare and focus on urban terrorism. Palestinian terrorist organizations such as the *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)* became know-how providers for international terrorist tactics (Moore, n.d.).

Islamic terrorism was stepping under the global spotlight during the 1970s. Most prominently, with the 1970 Dawson's Field incident, involving the hijacking of five airliners (American, British and Israeli) by *PFLP*, followed by a hostage crisis in Zarka, Jordan and the 1972 Munich Massacre, where members of the Palestinian terrorist organization *Black September* assassinated eleven members of the Israeli Olympic team after a hostage standoff. Their motive: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict resulting from the –occupation- of Palestine by Israel (Reeve, 2000).

The ten year Soviet War in Afghanistan (1979 – 1989) became a turning point for the expansion of international terrorism. Jihadists trained in Afghanistan during the war used their military training to fighting targets of Western interests around the globe (Moore, n.d.). At the same time, state sponsored terrorism started to develop. In 1988, the transatlantic *Pan Am* Flight 103 was destroyed by a bomb over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, claiming the lives of 270. Years later, in 2003, Gaddafi's Government in Libya accepted partial responsibility for the attack (Simons, 2003). By targeting American and European airliners, the symbolism of the attacks was profound. The game of terror against the West had begun.

Just four years after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, in 1993, Jihadists made their intentions known by bombing the World Trade Center in New

York City, NY. Few years later, in 1995, the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and in Dar es Saalam, Tanzania were simultaneously attacked. Eight years after the failed attempt to demolish the World Trade Center, America was under attack again. Using four passenger planes, the terrorist organization known *Al-Qaeda* (Arabic for *The Base*) brought down the World Trade Center as well as a part of the Department of Defense (Pentagon) in Washington, DC. Labelled as 9/11 or the New Pearl Harbor, September 11, 2001 claimed the lives of 2,977 innocent people.

The Formation of ISIS

The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, attracted young Muslim men to join the Mujahidin rebels. Among them, the Saudi Osama bin Laden and the Jordanian Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi. In 1989, the Soviets withdrew from the region and both Bin Laden and Al-Zarqawi formed their own guerrilla groups. Bin Laden formed *Al-Qaeda* during the 1990s in and Zarqawi a smaller group named the *Organization of Monotheism and Jihad* (Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad). By 1996, they were both back in Afghanistan running training camps for their separate organizations (VOX, 2015).

As mentioned above, Bin Laden's *Al-Qaeda* terrorized the world, by planning and executing the 9/11 attacks. The response of the United States was

immediate. Afghanistan was invaded by the United States and its allied forces by the end of 2001, marking the beginning of the War on Terror (WoT). At the same time, Bin Laden fled to Pakistan, while Zarqawi fled to Iraq. As fate would have it, in 2003, the United States invaded Iraq determined to hit the secular Sunni dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and dismantle the Iraqi army. However, they paved the way for the formation of *ISIS*. In the words of the U.S. President Barack Obama (D), “ISIL is a direct outgrowth of *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* that grew out of our invasion, which is an example of unintended consequences” (Saul, 2015). More particularly, soldiers from the dismantled Iraqi army, together with radicalized new recruits joined Zarqawi’s insurgency *Organization of Monotheism and Jihad* to fight the Americans.

In 2004, Al-Qaeda formed an alliance with Zarqawi’s group and *Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)* was formed. Two years later, in 2006, Zarqawi was killed in Iraq. By the time the United States troops started to withdraw from Iraq in 2011, a series of antigovernment uprisings known as the Arab Spring began in North Africa and Middle East. One of the countries uprising against their oppressive regime was Syria. However, Bashar al-Assad, the President of Syria refused to resign and a

civil war began between the opposition (Free Syrian Army) and the government (Syrian Armed Forces).

By 2011, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* was a relatively small power. The organization was renamed as *Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)*, led by a religious scholar, named Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. With less than a year as the leader of the organization, Baghdadi's expansion plan was simple: grow its manpower by freeing radical rebels from Iraqi prisons and by recruiting new ones, utilizing social media and propaganda. In 2013, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi declared that *ISI* was in control of all *Al-Qaeda* forces in Iraq and Syria and renamed the organization to *ISIS*. Today, *ISIS* goal is to revive the ancient Caliphate.

Al Baghdadi's plan proved to be extremely successful. Extremist Muslims joined and continue to join *ISIS* by the thousands. Amongst them, citizens of Europe and North America. However, in 2014, United States and its allies led air campaigns against *ISIS*, resulting the loss of one fifth of the territory occupied by the organization. In response, *ISIS* began launching terror attacks outside their territories. Their targets included Muslim countries such as Tunisia and Kuwait as well European and American targets like Paris, Brussels and California.

ISIS Attacks Europe

On the night of November 13th, 2015. Gunmen and suicide bombers attacked Paris, France. Their targets were a packed concert hall, Stade de France, restaurants and cafeterias. The attacks left 130 people dead and many more wounded. It was the deadliest terrorist attack on European soil, since the Madrid bombings of 2004. It was also the second time Paris was under attack in 2015. On January 7th, 2015, two brothers with ties to *Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula*, Said and Cherif Kouachi, armed with assault rifles, entered the offices of the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and killed eleven people. Two days later, and after a hostage crisis and a standoff, both brothers were neutralized. The attackers were French citizens.

But Paris was just the beginning of *ISIS* reign of terror in Europe. On the morning of March 22nd, 2016, four days after the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, the alleged mastermind behind the November attacks in Paris, three coordinated attacks shook the heart of European Union and the capital of Belgium. Three Suicide bombers, managed to detonate explosives inside Brussels Airport and the Maalbek metro station. The coordinated attacks left 35 people dead, including the three suicide bombers. All three suicide bombers were citizens of Belgium.

Recruiting European nationals is a key strategy for *ISIS*. Their goal is to operate without raising any red flags to the European enforcement agencies. The United States based *Council on Foreign Relations* reports that Jihadist networks operate around Europe. More importantly, radical Islam has become popular among second and third generation European Muslims. These individuals are carrying European passports, able to travel visa-free in the United States and other European countries. According to the same report, recruitment centers and sleeper cells operate across Europe, responsible for sending European recruits to the Middle East for advanced training and assisting terrorist recruiters to enter the European continent (Leiken, 2005).

According to an article by the *New York Times*, based on court proceedings, interrogation transcripts and wiretaps, *ISIS* stroke Europe as early as 2014. They carried out small scale attacks, in order to test the European security levels and preparation (Callimachi, 2016). However, Europe failed to connect the dots, treating each case as an isolated incident. Cases included the decapitation of a factory manager, following a car explosion in Lyon, France and a butcher attack in a Paris police station. To avoid detection, *ISIS* adopted a combat doctrine known as *Auftrgstaktik*. The doctrine was developed by the German Army during the 19th

century. More particularly, it gives autonomy to *ISIS* operatives to accomplish their missions within specified timeframes (Charlton, 2016). *ISIS* is also technologically sophisticated, using encryption software to eliminate the possibility of any telecommunication interception.

It is believed that *ISIS* ‘sleeper cells’ operate throughout the European territory. The French Interior Ministry estimates that around 90 operatives are ready to carry out suicide attacks against European targets. *ISIS* reports that 4,000 *ISIS* fighters are already in Europe, ready to fight Jihad (Burweila, 2016). Even if the recent major attacks against Europe have shown that the perpetrators were citizens of Europe, it is important to mention that *ISIS* is the know-how provider on how to orchestrate these attacks, with well-trained Muslim fighters within Europe, *ISIS* is able to provide technical support. In Greece alone, more than 50,000 loosely documented Muslim migrants have crossed the sea borders from Turkey, awaiting to be relocated all over Europe (Symeonides, 2016). Many of them are refugees from the war-torn Syria. However, as pointed out by *ISIS*, a significant number of terrorists have infiltrated the inflow and are difficult to track down.

Conclusion

Enhancing classified information sharing between member states and signing into law the ability to screen European citizens and their communications is clearly a challenge for Europe. Especially when the European creation stands strong on its core beliefs of safeguarding individual liberties. However, as terrorists utilize European nationals, decentralized war techniques and new technologies of encryption, national security demands from the European establishment to explore alternative approaches in fighting terror within its borders.

With terrorists targeting the heart of European Union, it is evident that the balance of power is shifting, while asymmetric threads emerge day after day. Unless, important steps are made to thoroughly screen Europeans who travelled to countries operating terrorist training camps, and properly documenting every single person entering European Union with the migration inflow, everyday life will never be the same again. Europe is forced to reconsider its role as a global power.

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