



Terror Attacks in France: European Response and Internal Political Dynamics

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Introduction

A series of coordinated terror attacks on 13 November 2015 in Paris left around 130 dead and hundreds wounded. The gunmen and suicide bombers targeted public places like the city's concert hall, stadium, restaurants and bars. The Islamic State (IS) claimed the responsibility of the attacks and called them "the first of the storm."ⁱ

After the Charlie Hebdo shooting in January 2015, France had witnessed another series of major terror attacks from the Islamic jihadists. Table 1 shows the terror incidents in France in 2015. The rise of IS has posed serious security threat to

Table 1: Terror Incidence in France (in 2015)

City/Place	Date	People Killed	People Injured
Paris (Charlie Hebdo)	January 7, 2015	20	22
Nice	February 3, 2015	-	3
Saint-Quentin-Fallavier	June 26, 2015	1	2
Thalys Train	August 21, 2015	-	4
Paris (multiple places)	November 13, 2015	130	368
Marseille	November 18, 2015	-	1

Source: CBS News¹²

European countries. In his address to the nation, French President François Hollande held IS responsible for these attacks and described them as 'an act of war'.ⁱⁱ In order to intensify the war against the IS and seek global support, he called on the international community,

particularly the European Union (EU) member states, the United States (US) and Russia to join a global coalition to eliminate the menace of international terrorism.ⁱⁱⁱ The UN Security Council Resolution 2249 also approved the French proposal to “combat by all means” against the IS.^{iv} In addition to external political initiatives, the EU and its member states have also been taking measures for strengthening internal security. The measures proposed by the EU have been creating new complexities in the EU system and divergent trends have emerged in European politics. Paris terror attacks further increased the security concerns.^v Some Central and Eastern European countries renewed their opposition to the quota system to relocate the refugees.^{vi} Slovakia and Hungary appealed against the distribution of refugees in the European Court of Justice.^{vii} In this context, the paper analyzes the European response to the IS and Syrian crisis after the Paris terror attacks. It also examines the internal security measures taken by EU and member states. Finally, it discusses the broader impact on the European political discourse.

The War against IS

France launched military attacks against the IS after the Paris attacks. French President Hollande asked to launch a ‘pitiless’ war against the IS^{viii} and, subsequently, in coordination with the US, France struck a command centre, recruitment centre for jihadists, ammunitions depot, and a training camp for terrorists.^{ix} France has stepped up its political campaign for an effective coalition against the IS. Although the UN Resolution 2249 does not invoke Chapter VII of the UN charter,^x which can be used to authorize military action in order to restore peace and security, the country can use force in self defence. Although it is not clear as to what extent French efforts would be successful in forming the coalition against the IS, at this point of time, French President Hollande’s visit to the US and Russia, as well as a series of talks in Paris have generated solidarity and several commitments for military support.^{xi}

Although there is difference among the major European powers over the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s role in peace talks to resolve the Syrian crisis,^{xii} they support France in war against the IS. The fight against the IS was approved by the German Parliament. Germany has a direct role in the fight against the IS in Syria. German forces

would be deployed against the IS under the EU collective security laws. Germany would also send the reconnaissance warplanes, refuelling aircraft and involve in providing logistics and command personnel and satellite links. In the German Bundestag, 445 members voted in favour of joining the fight against the IS, but 146 parliamentarians voted against it. German opposition, the Left Party rejected the mission. Social Democrats supported the mission.^{xiii} The UK has agreed to provide logistics support as well as permission to use the military bases to fight against the IS. After the approval of Parliament, the UK has also carried out airstrikes against the IS in Syria.^{xiv}

Saudi Arabia has also announced a coalition of 34 countries to fight against international terrorism. The coalition of Arab countries has taken a wider perspective on international terrorism, and states to fight international terrorism in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. How the coalition would proceed with its military strike against the IS is not clear. The Joint operation centre would be based in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh. Iran does not figure in the coalition of the Islamic countries.^{xv} The joint statement on the formation of Islamic military alliance states that more than ten other Islamic countries are supporting the alliance.^{xvi}

Russia-France Cooperation

French President Hollande visited Russia to seek support for the fight against the IS. Both countries discussed the prospects of cooperation. In the joint press conference, both Presidents agreed to extend cooperation against the IS in Syria. Both countries would cooperate in the joint operations involving the military command and intelligence services; navies of both countries have also established contacts. Russia and France would also develop a joint action plan for sea and air strikes. However, the fight against the IS has been further twisted as Turkey shot down the Russian Su-24 bomber alleging its entry in its airspace. Tension mounted between Russia and Turkey over the incident. Russia has imposed economic sanctions and accused that Turkey is involved in illegal oil trade with the IS.^{xvii} The *Executive Order on measures to ensure Russia's national security and protection of Russian citizens against criminal and other illegal acts and on the application of special economic measures against Turkey* issued by the President of Russia bans or

limits imports from Turkey, bans employers, etc.^{xxiii} Russia-Turkey tension would have an impact on both the military campaign against the IS and the diplomatic process aimed at ending the Syrian conflict.^{xxix} French President Francois Hollande called for deescalating the tension between Russia and Turkey.^{xxx} He might also seek help from German Chancellor Angela Merkel to help in easing tension between Russia and Turkey.^{xxxi} Germany urged Russia and Turkey to avoid escalating tension.^{xxii}

Russia has agreed to cooperate with France in Syria. But both nations have difference over the political solution and fate of Basher-al-Assad's regime. Russia has been supporting the Assad government and maintains that the people of Syria should decide the fate of Assad government in Syria. Contrary to the Russian stand, France does not see President Assad as part of a solution in the peace negotiations. Another development in Europe does not seem conducive to ushering cooperation among European countries and Russia. The NATO has invited Montenegro to start accession talks in order to join the alliance.^{xxiii} The recent move of NATO expansion would further deteriorate the relationship among Russia, Europe and the US. Russia has repeatedly warned that NATO expansion towards the east would have retaliatory measures.^{xxiv} In the past, Putin accused the NATO for breaking the promises. In the Munich Security Conference 2007, Russian President Putin said, "...NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at that time: 'The fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee.' Where are these guarantees?"^{xxv}

During the Press conference with his French counterpart, Russian President Putin indicated to the possibility of cooperation with the US;^{xxvi} however, Russia has disagreement with US's policy towards the Syrian government. On the other hand, US President Barack Obama raised doubts about the prospect of forming an expanded alliance

of world powers to battle the IS. He stated that it is unclear whether Russia would shift its focus to combat extremists. US President Obama noted that Russia is increasingly aware that the IS poses a real threat to Russia. He argued, "The question at this point is whether they can make a strategic adjustment that allows them to be effective partners with us." In the military operation, there is also complication and lack of coordination. Russia and the US are accusing each other for not supporting the fight against the IS.^{xxvii} The countries are fighting to get their strategic advantage. Russia wants to control Raqqa and all the oil and gas resources around Palmyra. Control over the IS capital Raqqa would provide strategic advantage for controlling the oil fields.^{xxviii} The coalition of Arab countries may further complicate the geo-strategic scenario in Syria and adjacent region.

In another recent move, which would have implications for Russia-Europe relations, the EU has extended sanctions on Russia for six more months, till July 2016.^{xxix} The EU had imposed economic sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine crisis. The sanctions would expire in January, 2016. The EU maintains that lifting the economic sanctions would depend on effective implementation of the Minsk agreement concluded in February 2015. There is a pro-Russian lobby in the European Parliament, which questions the anti-Russian sanctions. Hungary voiced concerns over anti-Russian sanctions.^{xxx} Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras also criticized the sanctions against Russia.^{xxxi} Although Italy supported the extension of sanctions against Russia, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi called for a debate on the issue.^{xxxii} The EU has targeted Russian energy, banking and defence sectors.^{xxxiii} These European countries are heavily relying on Russian energy supply. Therefore, recent diplomatic efforts have not been able to coordinate military attacks against the IS, and divergence persists among the major powers involved in the military strikes.

EU-Turkey Agreement

Turkey's role is quite important in controlling the inflow of migrants in Europe and the fight against the IS. Turkey is on a major migration route to Europe. According to a report from the International Organization for Migration, over a million irregular migrants and refugees arrived in Europe in 2015, and majority of them came via sea to Greece.^{xxxiv}

Turkey and the EU have struck a deal to try to control the flow of migrants to Europe. Turkey has agreed to check the migrants moving towards Europe. The EU has promised to provide financial support and speed up the accession negotiations. As per the agreement, the EU will provide €3 billion financial assistance to Turkey for controlling migrants moving towards Europe and keeping refugees in its territory. Talks on Turkey's accession to the EU will also be revived. Under the deal, Turkish citizens may be able to travel without visas to Europe's Schengen zone, which allows free movement between many European countries, by October 2016. However, the rules will be relaxed only if Turkey meets certain conditions.^{xxxv} Turkish authorities arrested around 1,300 migrants intending to sail to Greece.^{xxxvi} European Council President Donald Tusk said that the EU will closely watch Turkey's implementation of the deal and will review Ankara's actions on a monthly basis. The EU countries also disagree over the payment of €3 billion to Turkey.^{xxxvii}

Internal Measures to Strengthen European Security

The Paris attacks have raised concerns over the internal security situation and border control management in the EU. European cities are vulnerable to terror attacks. Rob Wainwright, director of EUPOL, noted that IS 'represents the most serious terrorist threat faced in Europe for 10 years.'^{xxxviii} The highest level of terror threat alert was issued in Brussels on 20th November 2015. Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel told about the risk of Paris like terror attacks in the country. Consequently, people were advised to avoid places like shopping centres, concerts, events or public transport stations. Security was beefed up and heavily armed police and soldiers were patrolling the streets in Brussels. Brussels metro system was also shut down. After the Paris attacks, Belgium and particularly its capital Brussels have been at the centre of investigations and raids by security forces.^{xxxix} On New Year eve, Munich police also warned of terror attacks. The Interior Minister of the state of Bavaria, Joachim Herrmann, confirmed that the threat had been linked to the IS.^{xl} The EU and its member states are taking steps to strengthen border control, greater cooperation between police and intelligence agencies, and establish an agency to more effectively control the migrant inflow. The security measures would affect passport-free travel in the Schengen area, including for EU citizens as well. The EU Interior and Justice Ministers held a meeting on 20th November 2015 and agreed to implement

immediately necessary systematic and coordinated checks at borders, including for EU citizens. The system check would be done against police databases.^{xli} The EU intends to strictly monitor travel and money transfers and also seeks to store and assess flight data in the future.^{xlii}

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency

Due to heavy inflow of migrants, the EU and its member states are struggling to control their external borders. The border management agency, Frontex, has limited powers and resources to deal with high level of migrant inflow and security challenges. Weak border security has also created internal security threats. Therefore, the European Commission wants to create a new border and coast guard agency as a response to effectively deal with the refugee crisis and better border management. If all members agree, the implementation of plan will take time. The new agency would have more resources and broader mandate. The European Commission plan calls for more personnel, the agency would have 1000 staff by 2020 and around 1500 experts – who can be deployed quickly in case immediate response is required. The Commission also wants to reserve the right to control sections of border on its own in emergency situations, without the approval of, or when necessary, against the will of individual member states.^{xliii} The agency would also work with neighbouring countries of the EU in order to control the flow of migrants. The agency would have the power to return the illegal migrants. Germany, France and Greece have supported the plan, but Hungary^{xliv} and Poland^{xlv} are against it.^{xlvi}

The EU member states are also taking steps to enhance the security within the country. They found that the current security system is not enough to deal with the challenges of terror threats. Germany has launched a new anti-terror unit 'BFE+'. Fifty agents will begin working at the federal police's Blumenberg location near Berlin immediately. Four more units, comprised of 50 agents each, will soon be deployed in other locations around the country.^{xlvii}

Emerging Political Dynamics in the EU

There are multipronged debates in Europe over the security measures, external policies and other socio-economic issues. The economic crisis has had transformative impact on the

European political discourse. Many European countries are witnessing political change and new political actors are emerging on the political horizons of Europe. Pew Research Centre (Global Attitudes and Trends) has noted, "If the euro crisis has had a paradoxical impact on European views of minorities – high profile anti immigrant, anti-Semitic incidents but also some sympathy for the targeted groups – the political consequence of the severe economic downturn has been clear: rising public support for non-traditional parties, fuelled mostly by anti-EU, anti-austerity populist sentiments."^{xlvi} In the regional elections in France, the right wing party, National Front, which holds anti-immigration opinion, took the lead in the first round of elections. But finally, it could not win a single region due to tactical political move of two main political parties. Marine Le Pen has said that she refuses any 'agreement with Muslims in France,' and she said that citizens with dual nationality "must choose."^{xlix} A poll conducted just after the Paris attacks has put far-right candidate Marion Maréchal Le Pen in the lead to win the presidency of the southern Provence-Alpes-Cote-d'Azur region in regional elections.^l Although the party has been defeated in the elections, it has managed to secure substantial electoral support and achieved a high number of votes and the party is now predicted to be emerging as a major force in French politics.^{li}

The victory of the Law and Justice Party in Poland is also not considered as pro EU political development. The new Polish government may have more nationalistic than regional policy orientation on the challenges the EU faces today. Konard Szymanski, Polish Minister for European Affairs, wrote that there is 'no political possibility' of implementing the refugee quota devised by the EU.^{lii} Some Central and Eastern European countries are not very supportive of the EU measures on internal security. The Hungarian Prime Minister, who has been a critic of European migration policy and has adopted a divergent approach on the migration issue, has been pursuing a similar line for Poland that a new agency should not undermine the sovereignty of member states.^{liii} Slovakia and Hungary have taken the legal route to stop the implementation of refugee distribution. Hungary has also launched a media campaign against the refugees and European policy.^{liv} Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban argued that the migrant crisis is 'not a European problem, it is a German problem.'^{lv} In the Christmas message, the Czech Republic President said that the inflow of migrants is 'Trojan horse-like organised invasion' of Europe.^{lvi} Greece maintains

the cautious line on the migrants and security. It has supported the new agency for controlling the borders and refugees, while respecting the national sovereignty in which it operates. Greece is one of the most affected countries from migration. In an interview, Nikos Xydakis, Greece's Alternate Foreign Minister for European Affairs told, "New European Border and Coast Guard Agency should be responsible for the full management of refugee and migration flows, while respecting the national sovereignty of the countries in which it operates."^{lvii}

Eurosceptic political tendencies would pose challenges to evolving a collective decision at the EU level. Driven by national political interests and current socio-economic challenges, the national parties are not creating a favourable environment for the EU to act as a unit. The divergent political interests and national priority would not help the common spirit of the EU. There is a sense of fear in some Central and Eastern Europe countries that large scale migration would hurt their social and economic fabric. Hence, maintaining cohesion and solidarity in the European response is a challenge for the EU.

Concluding Remarks

Deadly terror attacks are a grim reminder of threats of IS in the European countries. The Western powers are yet to evolve a sustainable solution for resolving the Syrian crisis and bring durable peace and stability in the country. Emerging political trends in the Europe and West Asia do not seem to be favourable for resolving the difference among the European countries and Russia. The EU is taking measures to strengthen internal security and address the regional challenges; however, politics in some EU member states is not very supportive of these common responses as well. The emergence of a new political dynamics in the EU is creating differences within the EU member states and adding complexity in formulating a common response. Some Central and Eastern European countries fear that the new border management agency and internal measures may impinge upon their right to control their borders. Far-right political parties may take advantage of the anti-immigrant and anti-EU sentiments.

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