



The November 2015 Paris Attacks: The Impact of Foreign Fighter Returnees

February 2017

By R. Kim Cragin

R. Kim Cragin is a senior research fellow at the National Defense University, Washington, D.C. She wishes to thank Kira McFadden, an intern at the National Defense University and graduate student at American University, who provided research assistance for this article.

Abstract: This article provides an in-depth analysis of the role of foreign fighter returnees in the attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Western Europe. To do this, it focuses primarily on the operatives and logisticians responsible for the November 2015 attacks in Paris. The threat from foreign fighter returnees remains under-appreciated in expert and policymaking communities. ISIS's rhetorical emphasis on the caliphate, combined with a series of attacks by lone actors, has made it easy for policymakers to misinterpret ISIS's true intentions against the West. This case study illustrates that ISIS leaders have been able to plan and execute parallel strategies within the Middle East (Islamic caliphate) and Western Europe (terrorist campaign). Moreover, they have pursued these parallel strategies through using foreign fighters.

On November 13, 2015, at 9:20 p.m., a man detonated a suicide vest at a soccer match between France and Germany at the *Stade de France* in Paris. This detonation was followed by two others at the stadium, as well as shootings by three armed gunmen at restaurants and bars in Paris' 11th District, and a hostage event at the Bataclan Concert Hall. One hundred and twenty nine individuals died. The assailants included seven individuals from France and Belgium, who had travelled previously to Syria to fight for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Two additional assailants, Iraqis, were sent by ISIS commanders to Europe for the attack. But beyond these immediate operatives, French and Belgian investigators found a total of 30 individuals¹ who were involved in the attacks; 16 of whom had been foreign fighters in Syria or Iraq. This case study provides an analysis of these coordinated attacks.²

¹ Belgian Foreign Minister Reynders cited in "Suspect Salah Abdeslam Planned Further Attacks," *BBC News*, March 26, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35857388>.

² This article draws on multiple primary and secondary data sources. These include relevant books, journal articles, newspaper accounts, and press releases by security officials in Europe specifically on the Paris and closely-related Belgium attacks. This article also uses videos,

© 2017 Published for the Foreign Policy Research Institute by Elsevier Ltd.

The Paris Attacks in Context

The November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris did not occur in isolation. In many ways, they represented one manifestation of broader unrest in the Middle East and North Africa. This unrest began in December 2010 with the advent of the “Arab Spring” in Tunisia. There, Mohammad Bouazizi, a street vendor, set himself on fire to protest his treatment at the hands of Tunisian police. Bouazizi’s action sparked a series of protests that led to the resignation of Tunisian President Zine al-Abdine Ben Ali in January 2011. The revolution in Tunisia was followed by mass protests in Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and, eventually, Syria in March 2011. Importantly, neither al Qaeda nor ISIS played a significant role in these protests. In fact, documents discovered by U.S. security forces in Abbottabad, Pakistan, revealed that then-leader Osama bin Laden struggled to find a way to insert al Qaeda into this broader movement.³ In contrast to Tunisia, however, the protests in Syria had turned violent by July 2011. This spiraling violence provided an opportunity for al Qaeda to re-position itself to take advantage of the chaos in Syria and, subsequently, in Iraq. By March 2013, those who opposed Bashar al-Assad, many of them associated with al Qaeda, had taken control over the city of Raqqa in Syria. Over the course of two years, al Qaeda had gone from being irrelevant to the Arab Spring, to playing a central role in the ongoing unrest. Approximately one year later, ISIS, al Qaeda’s main competitor, declared the creation of an Islamic caliphate in Syria and Iraq with its headquarters in Raqqa.⁴

Much has been written about the historical origins of ISIS and its ties to al Qaeda.⁵ Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), initially travelled from Jordan to Afghanistan in 1989. Zarqawi interacted with al Qaeda leaders at that time and again when he returned to Afghanistan in 2000, where he established a training camp.⁶ But Zarqawi never joined al Qaeda while he was in

statements, tweets, and other primary source materials published by ISIS in English and Arabic. Most of these communications were obtained through the SITE Intelligence Group. SITE maintains an ongoing database of terrorist-related propaganda materials, which can be accessed by subscription. These sources also were used to build a dataset of plots and attacks against the West by ISIS sympathizers. This dataset informs the network analysis of Paris attackers contained in the article and the timeline of events.

³ For further information, see R. Kim Cragin, “The Recent History of al-Qaeda,” *The Historical Journal*, July 2014, pp. 803-824. Many of these documents have been posted online, see <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/resources/bin-laden-bookshelf>.

⁴ Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, *This is the Promise of Allah*, statement released by al-Hayat Media Center, June 30, 2014.

⁵ See, for example, Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015); and William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of The Islamic State* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2015).

⁶ Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 164-165; Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 281-282; and Mary Anne Weaver, “The Short, Violent, Life of Abu Musab Zarqawi,” *The Atlantic*, June 8, 2006, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/>.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات