

## **Explaining the Paris Massacre**

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"The whole world is a battlefield." So states retired U.S. Army Colonel Anthony Shaffer, a former U.S. intelligence officer, in response to the Paris massacre. What do Christians need to know about this crisis?

### **What has changed?**

*Newsweek's* Kurt Eichenwald: "Friday's Paris strike is not just another in a growing cavalcade of terrorist assaults; instead it signals a tactical change in Islamic terrorist strategies—one that militants have been moving towards for years." For many years, Western nations have been fighting jihadist organizations such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. How does the Paris massacre change this global reality?

The strategy employed in Paris on November 13 was first used in 2008, when coordinated attacks in Mumbai killed more than 175 people. It was used again five years later in Nairobi, Kenya, killing sixty-seven at a shopping mall.

Last month, a double suicide bombing struck a peace rally in Ankara, Turkey, killing more than 100. The day before the Paris massacre, a double suicide attack on a crowded urban area in Beirut, Lebanon killed more than forty.

Here's what these strategies have in common: they employed a small number of militants who were already in place and attacked a confined urban area with limited security. In Paris, for instance, jihadists attacked a stadium, concert hall, and restaurants. None of these venues could be secured easily. All contained many civilians with the potential of mass casualties.

Intelligence gathered after the attacks shows a significant level of technical proficiency. For their suicide vests, the attackers used a homemade explosive, tri-acetone tri-peroxide (TATP). Its ingredients are easy to obtain, but it is dangerous to make. Its use, combined with the fact that none of the vests failed, indicates that the devices were made by a professional bombmaker or someone with technical proficiency.

While the Paris attack required considerable coordination and technical support, it was not expensive. Analysts estimate that less than \$50,000 was required to finance the entire operation. Since ISIS possesses significant financial and technical resources, we should expect them to duplicate the Paris attacks wherever they can use militants sympathetic to their cause.

Such jihadists are present in cities across the Western world. Some are ISIS fighters embedded within refugee populations; one of the Paris murderers had a Syrian passport (probably forged) and came to France as a refugee. Some are ISIS fighters returning from Syria and Iraq to their home countries.

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Some are members of sleeper cells placed in Western communities years ago. And some are radicalized at home through ISIS's very extensive social media network. The FBI director recently warned that there are many "thousands" of ISIS sympathizers inside the U.S. The FBI has cases open in every state. Intelligence analysts are working to penetrate ISIS networks, but the jihadists use technology such as PlayStation 2 consoles to stay beneath their radar.

In short, the number of potential attackers in cities across America and Europe is likely high.

In addition, the urban venues they can strike are difficult to secure. Unlike air travel security, which could be tightened through a concentrated focus on airports, this approach is as varied as the locations under threat.

One attempted shoe bomber caused Americans to remove their shoes whenever they pass through airport security. Imagine a world with metal detectors outside every public venue, including grocery stores, schools, theaters, schools, stadiums, and arenas. Imagine the cost of employing security personnel, and the impact on consumers and the larger economy. Then note that 3-D printers make it possible to create weapons no metal detector can find.

In short, what happened in France could happen anywhere. According to analysts, the Paris attacks are the first of many to come.

### **How is ISIS attacking us?**

The self-proclaimed Islamic State came to the world's attention in June 2014 when it seized Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq. Two days later it took control of Tikrit. It now controls land the size of Great Britain or the state of Indiana. It has captured oil fields and bank reserves, and established a geographical presence it calls a "caliphate."

Before the Paris attacks, Western attention was focused primarily on that so-called caliphate. Military operations have been launched to eliminate ISIS leaders and militants, and seize or destroy their assets. We are fighting a battle against a conventional foe that seeks land and wealth, and threatens all who engage it.

However, as with all wars, non-conventional or "asymmetrical" battles are being waged as well. ISIS has established chapters in ten other nations, expanding the global battlefield. It has the most sophisticated social media strategy of any terrorist organization in history, with as many as 90,000 Twitter accounts. Tens of thousands of fighters have joined ISIS from other countries, many lured by social media.

Now it has expanded its strategy on the ground as well. In addition to its urban warfare strategy, ISIS took credit for the bombing of Russia's Metrojet 9268 in Egypt. It is calling for "lone wolf" attacks against any person and nation opposing its caliphate.

Last summer it bragged that it could buy a nuclear weapon from Pakistan. That country's nuclear arsenal is increasing, and vulnerable to attack and theft. North Korea continues its arms trafficking activities, and may be working with radical Muslims. And Russian criminal vendors are reportedly seeking jihadist buyers, especially those intending to harm the West.

Chemical weapons are being employed in Syria, and could be used by ISIS and other jihadists against other targets. And germ warfare continues to threaten us. Former Senator Joe Lieberman, who chairs a Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense, recently voiced his surprise that no jihadist group has yet executed a biological attack. He warned that the U.S. is dangerously unprepared for plots that are relatively easy to execute.

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ISIS makes clear its intention to attack more Western targets. It released a video on November 16 warning of further attacks on countries participating in bombing against ISIS positions in Syria. The spokesman states: "We say to the states that take part in the crusader campaign that, by God, you will have a day God willing, like France's and by God, as we struck France in the center of its abode in Paris, then we swear that we will strike America at its center in Washington.

"I say to the European countries that we are coming, coming with booby traps and explosives, coming with explosive belts and [gun] silencers and you will be unable to stop us because today we are much stronger than before."

### **Why is ISIS attacking us?**

Four factors are motivating the Islamic State in its attacks against Western civilians.

**One:** ISIS claims to be defending Islam. The Qur'an commands Muslims to attack those who attack Muslims:

Fight in the cause of God  
those who fight you,  
but do not transgress limits,  
for God loveth not transgressors.

And slay them  
wherever ye catch them,  
and turn them out  
from where they have  
turned you out . . .  
if they fight you,  
slay them.  
Such is the reward  
of those who suppress faith (Sura 2:190-92, Abdullah Yusuf Ali translation).

According to radical Muslims, the West has been attacking Islam since the Crusades. Our support for Israel is especially an affront to them, since they believe the Jewish state stole its land from its rightful Arab owners. (Muslims believe that Abraham offered Ishmael, not Isaac, to God, making the Arabs the true "chosen people.") Any nation supporting Israel is complicit in this perceived attack on Islam. In addition, our military actions in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria are characterized by ISIS as an attack on Islam.

**Two:** ISIS views all Western citizens as complicit in this attack on Islam.

Since the West is made of democracies, where citizens elect our leaders and support our military, ISIS views all civilians as part of a perceived assault on Islam. In their view, we are as guilty as Germans who supported Hitler or Japanese citizens who supported the Emperor during World War II.

As a result, ISIS militants believe there are no "innocent" Americans, or Parisians. Attacking civilians is an act of war in defense of Islam, they claim.

**Three:** ISIS seeks retribution for attacks against its positions in Syria and Iraq.

Lebanon, Turkey, Russia, and France have this in common: they have all been targeted by ISIS jihadists in recent weeks. And they have this in common: they are at war with ISIS. In its recent video, an ISIS spokesman made clear that it is targeting "the states that take part in the crusader campaign" against it. Dozens of other nations are also part of a coalition against ISIS. Forces from the U.S., Australia, Britain, Canada, the Dutch

In its recent video, an ISIS spokesman made clear that it is targeting "the states that take part in the crusader campaign" against it. Dozens of other nations are also part of a coalition against ISIS. Forces from the U.S., Australia, Britain, Canada, the Dutch government, France, Jordan, Russia, and Turkey have launched air strikes against ISIS targets. As such attacks continue, these nations can expect retribution.

**Four:** ISIS is advancing its apocalyptic vision.

The Islamic State is motivated by an end-times vision in which its role is decisive. Its followers believe that their self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is the eighth of twelve such leaders to appear before history ends. According to their theology, these caliphs will usher in the final battles that will lead to global Islamic conquest and the Judgment Day. Every time they kill another "infidel," they hasten this apocalypse.

In addition to killing us in our cities, ISIS seeks to lure us into battle in Syria. Its eschatology dictates that a final battle, Armageddon-like battle will take place in Dabiq, a small Syrian town near the northern city of Aleppo. Its propaganda magazine is called "Dabiq." Each edition quotes the same prediction: "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify—by Allah's permission—until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq."

If we engage ISIS forces in Syria, we reinforce their rhetoric. If we do not, we allow them to expand their holdings as a base for further global attacks.

### **How can ISIS be defeated?**

The Islamic State represents a threat unlike any we have faced before. In a way, it combines the worst of enemies our nation has faced, but in a constellation that is especially challenging.

#### *Military response*

Like Nazi Germany, ISIS seeks to expand geographical holdings and operate a functioning state. It enacts and enforces laws, collects taxes, operates schools, and provides security to its followers. Defeating ISIS as a state requires conventional military action, including troops on the ground, air strikes, and other strategies.

However, the countries where ISIS has claimed land have the right as sovereign nations to refuse outside intervention. Such action can otherwise be taken only in self defense or where force is authorized by the U.N. Security Council.

Iraq has invited NATO forces to attack ISIS in its territory, but Syria has refused. Syrian authorities have granted such permission to Russia, however. The U.N. has authored no Security Council resolution authorizing force in Syria. So NATO forces must claim that their actions against ISIS in Syria are conducted in self-defense. This is a complicated argument currently being debated.

While international law is being discussed, ISIS continues to seek expansion of its geographical holdings. Its territory constitutes the base for its global operations, and gives legitimacy to its claims to be a caliphate. Clearly, ISIS cannot be defeated unless its caliphate is defeated.

#### *Ideological response*

Like the U.S.S.R., ISIS is driven by a specific ideology. The Communist Party in the Soviet Union sought global domination for its geopolitical, economic, and social agenda. It wanted to abolish democracy and capitalism, replacing them with Marxist-Leninist socialism.

ISIS has a specific ideology. A state that is motivated by a specific ideology

socialism.

ISIS also has a very clear ideology. As stated above, it is motivated by a specific eschatology, believing that it is ushering in the end times when its version of Islam will dominate the world. This ideology is its primary attraction to radical Muslims around the world, and explains its cultural agenda and military barbarism.

Its theology can be summarized by these verses from the Qur'an:

- Christians and "moderate" Muslims are to be attacked: "Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites and be unyielding to them; their abode is hell, and evil is the destination" (9:73).
- Christians are to be conquered: "Fight those who believe not in Allah . . . even if they are of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (9:29).
- Unbelievers who will not repent are to be killed: "Slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captive and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush, then if they repent and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, leave their way free to them" (9:5).
- Enemies are to be punished: "The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His messenger and strive to make mischief in the land is only this, that they should be murdered or crucified or their hands and their feet should be cut off on opposite sides or they should be imprisoned; this shall be as a disgrace for them in this world, and in the hereafter they shall have a grievous chastisement" (5:33).
- Women captives can be raped: "All married women are forbidden unto you save those captives whom your right hands possess. It is a decree of Allah for you" (4:24).
- Those who die in *jihad* are guaranteed paradise: "Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs in return is the garden of Paradise: they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth . . . then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme" (9:111).

Countering ISIS's ideological appeal is critical to stemming and eventually stopping its global expansion. Western powers should do all they can to support non-radical Muslim leaders and nations. We should advance the cause and practice of democracy in the Muslim world. We should provide financial assistance to nations seeking to enact political and economic reforms. We should engage in a social media strategy more sophisticated than that employed by ISIS.

And we should make clear that we are not at war with Islam. To the degree that ISIS can characterize our response to their aggression as an attack on all Muslims, they can call on Muslims to join them in defending Islam (cf. Sura 2:190-2). It is vital that we enlist Muslim leaders to make the case that ISIS does not represent Islam, and that our attacks on ISIS are defending Muslims.

### *Spiritual response*

Here is where ISIS is unlike Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union: its foundational motivation is spiritual. Some Nazi leaders claimed to be advancing Christianity, while the Soviet Union was officially atheistic. Neither appealed to religion as their primary reason for existence.

ISIS does. Its followers are convinced that they are serving Allah, and that their death in the cause of advancing ISIS will guarantee them a place in paradise. They are being deceived by "the deceiver of the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

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Here's the good news: more Muslims have come to Christ in the last fifteen years than in the previous fifteen centuries. Many are seeing dreams and visions of Jesus, and responding to him in personal faith. News reports recently told the story of an Islamic State militant who met Christ in a dream and became his follower. Such stories are becoming more common.

Charles Spurgeon claimed that those who make the greatest impact for the church would have been, apart from salvation, the greatest enemies of the church. Saul of Tarsus is just one example of an enemy of the gospel who became its advocate and missionary.

It is therefore vital that Christians pray daily for Islamic State militants to come to Christ. I pray every morning for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to have a vision of Jesus and turn to him by faith. Imagine the impact his conversion would have on the Islamic State and the world.

In addition, we should pray for our leaders to seek divine wisdom as they act to bring justice in this conflict. We should pray for our military to be safe and effective as they battle this enemy. And we should pray for Christians being persecuted by ISIS to be protected and strong.

In addition to intercession, we should reach out to Muslims in our community. Muslims deserve to know that they are loved by God and his people. Not only will such engagement work against recruitment by ISIS, it will advance God's Kingdom among people for whom Jesus died.

Within the DBU community:

- We have one of the largest international student communities in Texas. It is vital that we make certain our Muslim students know that they are welcomed and appreciated. Some may have family or friends who are directly affected by events in the Muslim world. We can build relationships with these students, showing them God's compassion in ours.
- Other international students may also be affected directly by the tragedy in Paris. It is important that we demonstrate sensitivity to their needs during these difficult days.
- Children of missionaries who attend DBU may be affected by these events. We should also be considerate of faculty who have served in overseas positions, and alumni who have visited, studied, or lived in places affected by terrorism.
- Significantly, we can pray for students to consider short-term or career mission service in France and other areas of need.

Some students may be more open to spiritual conversations in light of recent events. Let us pray for discernment and wisdom as we seek to share God's grace and peace.

## **Conclusion**

The Paris attacks hearken back to the dark days of World War II, when civilians in Great Britain knew they could be the target of German bombs at any time, day or night. How did they respond?

They prepared as best they could, with bomb shelters, provisions, and early-warning sirens. Their leaders and military worked tirelessly to defend them from attack. Then the people went about their daily lives. They refused to cower in fear. And their resolve, and that of the nations that joined them, won the war.

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Now we are engaged in what *The Wall Street Journal* calls "the Long War Against Terrorism." Like Britons of an earlier generation, we must prepare as best we can, with the strongest defensive measures we can build and the most intensive military initiative we can coordinate. Then we must refuse to be afraid.

The Roman Empire thought it would stamp out the fledgling church, but today the Empire is no more and the church numbers more than two billion members. Nero executed Paul, but today people name their sons Paul and their dogs Nero.

Persecution by the enemies of Christ is nothing new. Jesus told his followers, "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Our Lord warned us, "In the world you will have tribulation." Then he called us to "take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

We know how the Bible ends: We win.