

POLICY BRIEF

GREENWICH POLITICAL ECONOMY
RESEARCH CENTRE



**The Paris attack:
People are made to pay for disastrous government
policies**

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No. PB06-2015



UNIVERSITY
of
GREENWICH



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At the time of writing, 129 people have been confirmed dead as a result of the heinous terrorist attack on civilian targets in Paris. It came after a number of recent terrorist attacks in Ankara and Beirut; and the confirmed bombing of Russian plane over Sinai.

There is a wide range of reasoned arguments ([Jonathan Matusitz, Terrorism and Communications, Sage, 2013](#)) on why terrorism occurs and each implies different policies for combating it. The terrorist attacks over the last decade call for new thinking though and here the public is ahead of political scientists and policy-makers. Although united in their abhorrence of terrorist attacks of all types, ordinary people are also asking serious questions about the link between the increased security threat faced by their countries and the explicit or tacit support that their governments have provided to terrorist groups, including finance, training and arming. They are also asking questions about their governments' continued strategic partnerships with countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey, where the governments have been supporting various terrorist groups in Syria to achieve foreign policy objectives. This is a new phenomenon that coincided with military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

True, Al-Qaeda and ISIS terrorists use a religious rhetoric. As such, they share common ground with other terrorists that use religion as a rallying call for support and justification for their actions. However, this is only part of the story. Without explicit or tacit support from Western governments in the past, the organisations that carried out the 9/11 attack in 2001, the London bombings in 2005, the suicide bombings in Süruç and Ankara in Turkey, the Beirut attack and finally the Paris attack may have never developed into the international killing machines they have become.

Despite their religious rhetoric, it is important to recognise that Al-Qaeda and ISIS did not emerge as a reaction to religious oppression in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria. On the contrary, they emerged and flourished as part or consequence of political projects designed and implemented by Western powers. They have been using religion as a convenient tool for filling the institutional and power vacuum created by their benefactors.

To sum up, we are faced with a new type of terrorism for which Western governments are responsible for creating not only a power vacuum that has acted as a pull factor whetting the appetite of terrorist organisations to fill the gap, but also for creating the supply-side conditions in terms of 'human capital' and finance.

ISIS and Western foreign policy failures

The background for this sad state of affairs is common knowledge. The emergence of a unipolar world system in the early 1990s has induced Western governments to push for

* I would like to thank Ozlem Onaran (Greenwich Political Economy Research centre) and David Gow (Social Europe) for their helpful comments and encouragement. An earlier version of this Policy Brief has been published on the Social Europe website.

unrestricted market dominance at home and abroad. Also, triumphalism has become the norm of foreign policy, which embraced military interventions aimed at regime change in contravention to international law and massive public opposition.

One component of the 'regime-change' strategy was to support and collaborate with non-state armed groups. The first pilot exercise was the direct and indirect (through the ISI of Pakistan) support that the American administration provided to the Taliban in Afghanistan in the 1990s. The support took an 'unintended' form during the 2000s, when the Taliban [were slicing off](#) US aid to the failed state that the US intervention had left behind. Then came the Iraq War, which created a large number of Sunni armed groups, including the Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The latter joined other [Sunni insurgency groups](#) in 2006 to form ISIS. The recruitment ground for these groups consisted of Sunnis who lost jobs and livelihoods as a result of Western military intervention in Iraq.

The link between Western interventions and the strengthening of terrorist groups was also evident after the overthrow of Gaddafi in Libya. Under the nose of Western surveillance, Libyan arms depots were looted and weapons sent to Syria through a NATO ally - Turkey. The *Times* [reported on an arms shipment](#) on 14 September 2012 (see also [The New York Times article](#)). This is unlikely to have been the only shipment. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh [wrote an article in April 2014](#), in which he exposed a classified agreement between the CIA, Turkey and the Syrian rebels to create the "rat line" – the covert network used to channel weapons and ammunition from Libya to Syria through Turkey. The funding was provided by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, with full knowledge of the US authorities.

What lies ahead?

Reactions of Western governments to the terrorist attack in Paris do not inspire optimism about the future for three reasons. The first is related to an inherent 'security reflex' through which all states and governments try to 'prove their worth' by securitising the policy context after major terrorist attacks. On its own, emphasis on security after a terrorist attack is a natural reaction and helps assure the public that they can go about their everyday lives. However, the states' security reflex comes with a price tag: curtailment of freedoms and distortion of the state-society balance. This has been the case in the US after the 9/11 attack, in Turkey after the twin attacks in Suroç and Ankara and it is more than likely to be [the case](#) in France.

What is common to the security reflexes so far is increased surveillance, restrictions on migration and freedom of speech, and increasing defence/security budgets at the expense of health, education and social support. In short, the state utilizes the 'security reflex' to re-assert its authority, a significant portion of which it has surrendered to global corporate actors willingly or without much resistance. Initial reactions of the French government indicate that the French state will follow the same course.

The second reason relates to hypocrisy. France and all other Western governments have so far failed on the following fronts:

1. failure to acknowledge (let alone do anything about) the catastrophic consequences of Western military interventions for the peoples of Iraq, Libya and Syria;
2. failure to comply with international law and to stop supporting illegal armed groups with the purpose of achieving foreign policy objectives; and

3. failure to prevent either Saudi Arabia or Turkey (two countries with blatant human rights abuses) from destabilising neighbours mainly for sectarian reasons.

Given this landscape of failures, Western governments' public outcries against terrorist acts by ISIS and/or Al-Qaeda will continue to lack credibility as they are devoid of a sound moral basis. This is a major weakness that ISIS and other terrorist groups will continue to exploit in future. It will also mean that grassroots support for ISIS and other Islamist terrorist organisations will not be swayed by Western state officials' or the media's rhetoric that pits 'Western values' against terrorism.

Finally, Western governments - including France - have failed to distinguish between terrorist attacks that happen without evident negligence by the state as security provider (as is the case in Paris) and those happening as a result of politically-motivated state negligence because of the latter's enmity towards the target.

Such politically-motivated state negligence was the hallmark of two terrorist attacks in Turkey: the target was peaceful demonstrators that the government (and the President) demonised systematically before and after the attacks that killed 33 people in Suruç and 102 people in Ankara. The people and their organisations (including the Peoples' Democratic Party and various trade unions and professional associations) were demonised as supporters of terrorism despite the fact their demonstrations were peaceful and they simply demanded peace, freedom, and justice in the face of increasing authoritarianism in Turkey. They wanted an end to the covering up of corruption scandals, taming of the judiciary and the media, using extreme violence against peaceful protestors, and waging war against the Kurds in Turkey and Syria.

As official rhetoric demonised the opposition, Turkish security forces and courts have repeatedly shown that they will protect the political interests of the ruling government rather than providing security and justice for all. In addition, the government has made it easier for ISIS to attack *in* Turkey by facilitating the movement of both arms and terrorists across its border with Syria. Evidence on shipment of arms in heavy-good vehicles and even ambulances has surfaced, but it was covered up immediately and ruthlessly by the government. Finally, the Turkish government intensified its attacks on Kurdish towns and cities instead of taking a firm stance against ISIS, which it declined to classify as a terrorist group until recently. Therefore, the ISIS attacks in Turkey, as opposed to those in Paris, should be seen as state-facilitated terrorist acts and should be distinguished from the kind of terrorism that happens without politically-motivated state negligence in the targeted country. However, no Western government dared to make this distinction, purely because Turkey is considered a 'strategic partner' in their geo-political, defence and business interests. The continued failure of Western officials to challenge the Turkish government and side with the victims of state-orchestrated terror has not gone unnoticed.

Currently, the heads of Western states are meeting for the G-20 summit in Turkey whose government did not consider ISIS as a terrorist organisation until recently. Even without the state of emergency imposed on the Kurdish region in Turkey and the government's attacks on the media, Turkey's approach to ISIS and the latter's attack in Paris should have been more than sufficient reasons for cancelling the summit. Such a credible and morally consistent act

would have given a clear and strong signal that the international community is serious about fighting ISIS terrorism and those that facilitate it. However, this did not prove to be the case. It appears as if ordinary people will continue to pay the price of disastrous, hypocritical government policies – by, at the very least, having to endure less democratic regimes in the West and ever more authoritarian regimes in the Middle-East; or, in the worst case scenario, by suffering at the hands of the terrorists. One factor could go some way in proving this pessimistic prediction wrong: a massive public outcry against reckless foreign policies abroad and governments' subservience to corporate interests at home.

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