

Europe's terror attacks: The blowback from Western intervention

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In the wake of the terrorist attacks of January 7 in Paris, police across Europe have launched a wave of arrests, rounding up dozens of alleged Islamist militants, many of whom have reportedly traveled to and from Syria, where the US and its allies have fomented a bloody civil war.

Amid press reports of imminent plots being disrupted, it is evident that European security officials were well aware of who the alleged plotters were and had been closely following their movements and activities.

The media, throwing itself into the state-backed campaign to terrorize the public, fails to ask the most obvious questions. How is it, for example, that these individuals were able to freely travel to a foreign war zone, fight there, and then return, no questions asked?

The most obvious answer is that they enjoyed the acquiescence, if not direct support, of elements within the state itself. They were left alone until now because they were deemed to be useful.

For nearly four years, Washington and its Western European allies—France first among them—have politically orchestrated and helped finance and arm a war for regime-change in Syria in which Islamist fighters, like the men who carried out the mass killing at the offices of the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, have served as the principal ground troops.

Weapons, foreign fighters and money have been sent into Syria largely through Turkey, where the CIA set up a secret station to coordinate these operations. Much of the arms and aid flowing to the imperialist-backed “rebels” have come from Washington’s key Arab allies, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Two organizations have emerged as the preeminent armed opponents of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: the Al Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a split-off

that has been condemned by Al Qaeda itself for its excessive brutality.

German reporter Jürgen Todenhöfer, the first Western journalist to travel through ISIS-held areas in Syria since the outset of the latest US-led war in the region, reported last month that fully 70 percent of those fighting to overthrow Syria’s Assad regime are foreign fighters, funneled into the country from throughout the Middle East, Chechnya, Western Europe, North America and elsewhere. According to a recent US government estimate, as many as 1,000 foreign fighters are joining these militias each month.

The death toll in Syria approaches 200,000. Terrorist attacks, mass executions and other crimes have for years been carried out there by the same elements that committed the killings in Paris, without a word of protest from the official circles now promoting the “Je suis Charlie” campaign. They were doing the West’s dirty work.

With the entry of ISIS into Iraq last summer, however, today’s imperialist crimes collided with those of yesterday, creating a serious crisis. The debacle suffered by the Iraqi army at the hands of ISIS was the product of nearly nine years of US war and occupation that ravaged the country, claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, turned millions into refugees, and provoked an intense Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict.

Washington and its allies moved quickly to exploit this crisis, organizing a bombing campaign in both Iraq and Syria and sending thousands of US troops back into Iraq. Yesterday’s proxy forces in the war for regime-change in Syria were transformed into today’s enemies in the revived “war on terror.” This is the political context for the attack in Paris and the warnings of threatened attacks elsewhere.

This is hardly a new story. US imperialism has for

over half a century given its support to Islamist forces, with the aim of combating secular nationalist movements and regimes bent on asserting control over the region's oil wealth or cementing close ties with the Soviet Union.

The most famous example is Afghanistan, where the CIA, working in close collaboration with Pakistani intelligence, sponsored a war by Islamist fundamentalist forces to overthrow a Soviet-backed government in Kabul. The forces that would later emerge as Al Qaeda played a key role in this operation.

Since then, virtually all those designated as prominent targets and suspects in the "war on terror" are individuals well known to the CIA and other intelligence agencies.

There are the 9/11 attacks themselves, in which the principal hijackers enjoyed close ties to the government of Saudi Arabia, Washington's key ally in the Arab world. More than 13 years after the event, the US government has refused to declassify 28 pages from a report produced by a congressional investigation into the September 11 events that deal with Saudi financing for the attacks. Key organizers of the attack were under direct surveillance by the CIA, but were allowed to enter, leave and re-enter the US freely, without even possessing proper visas. Once in the US, they were allowed to train as commercial jet aircraft pilots.

Then there is the case of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born Muslim cleric who was assassinated in a US drone strike in Yemen in 2011. Now blamed for a host of alleged plots, including providing direction to the Paris gunmen, al-Awlaki had intimate ties with the American state. He became the first imam to conduct a prayer service for Muslim congressional staff members at the US Capitol in 2002. Months after the 9/11 attacks, he was brought to the Pentagon to speak on easing tensions between Muslims and the US military.

More recently, in the case of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the key suspect in the attack, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was not only under surveillance by the FBI, but was targeted for recruitment as an informant against the Muslim community. Tsarnaev, who was killed four days after the bombing, was allowed to travel freely to and from southern Russia, meeting with Islamists fighting the Moscow government. Moscow itself warned US authorities about his activities not once, but twice.

As for the gunmen killed last week in Paris, it is acknowledged that they had been under surveillance by not only French, but also US and British intelligence.

How is it that those under surveillance by and in direct contact with police and intelligence agencies are the authors of one terrorist attack after another? The possibility of deliberate provocation can by no means be excluded. It is impossible to say for certain in each of these events whether some form of CIA skullduggery was involved, with events allowed to transpire, carried out by individuals known to the state, either through acts of omission or commission by the authorities.

The media's attempt to present those involved in these acts of terrorism as mysterious and unknown individuals is fraudulent. On Friday, they reported in succession the mass arrests in Paris and the rollout of new US plans to fund and train Syrian "rebels." There was no examination of the connection between these developments.

After the first decade of the "global war on terrorism," in which Al Qaeda was portrayed as an existential threat, these same forces were employed as proxies in Western-backed wars for regime-change against secular Arab governments, first in Libya and then Syria. Now, their actions are once again being exploited to promote war abroad and repression at home.

Ultimately, attacks like the one carried out on *Charlie Hebdo* are the product of decades of imperialist intervention in the Middle East. The wars that have devastated one country after another have unleashed a wave of violence that cannot but spill beyond the region. Meanwhile, Washington and its allies promote and work with the very forces involved in these attacks.



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