

Terrorist Attack in France: A Lesson to India

RAGHVENDRA PRATAP SINGH

Sr. Research Fellow

Department of Defence and Strategic Studies

University of Allahabad, Allahabad

India

Abstract:

Terrorism today poses the gravest threat to a country's sovereignty and integrity. It subverts the fundamental Rule of Law, denies rights to the citizens, endangers the social fabric and threatens political and economic stability. Infact, there has been no global consistency in policies to deal with terrorism. The recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Pathankot were the deadliest incidents on French and Indian soil. The attacks were well coordinated by Islamic fundamentalists on their respective societies. Both the countries had now declared war against terrorism. The article deals with such vital issues like causes, intention, limitation and domestic compulsion to face the growing menace of terrorism. The recent visit of French President to India on January 26, 2016 was an indication for both the countries to come forward and work together to eradicate the evils of terrorism.

Key words: Political Infrastructure Protection, intelligence agencies, global war on terror, ISIS, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda, Islamic State, Muslim fundamentalists, G-20, Charlie Hebdo, domestic response, counter-terrorism, 26/11 Mumbai attack.

INTRODUCTION:-

Recent Terrorist Attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015 left at least 129 people dead and over 350 injured at six different

locations throughout the city. French President François Hollande blamed the Islamic State terrorist organization for this horrible act. The attacks had been the deadliest terrorist incident on French soil over the past several years. In early January, terrorists killed 17 people in three related attacks in Paris. The targets were the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, police officers, and a kosher supermarket. The French governments have long visualised Islamist terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda and, more recently, the Islamic State as the main cause of threat to the country. However, the November attacks have prompted a major escalation in what President Hollande characterizes as a "war" against the Islamic State. French officials had stressed that the threat posed by a group in Syria targeting French citizens in France and elsewhere to make more rapid attacks in France presents a unique and complex challenge, with domestic, European, and international dimensions.

One is aware of the fact that global terrorism has become a cause of major concerns to International community. The impact of terrorism was also felt in India when on 2 January, 2016 terrorists attacked the airbase of Pathankot, India where 1 civilian and 7 security personnel were killed. Besides other reasons, this was perhaps one of the reasons that Indian government invited the French President Francios Hollande on Republic Day on 26th January, 2016 to discuss the issues of terrorism, defence and economic.

TERRORISM REDEFINED:

There is no unanimity among scholars regarding the meaning of terrorism. Most international lawyers argue that the term is an ambiguous and imprecise concept and can have no legal purpose whatsoever.¹ Rosalyn Higgins states that terrorism is a term without legal significance. It is merely a convenient way of alluding to activities whether of state or of individuals, widely disapproved of and in which either the methods use are

unlawful or the targets protected or both.² The events of 9/11 perhaps defined terrorism from legal perspective. The council of the European Union on 13 June 2002 defined terrorism as international acts that caused damage to government facility, transport infrastructure, etc thereby endangering human life and so forth.³ The United States Department of Defence define terrorism as the “calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to include fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally politically, religious or ideological.”⁴

However, the so called academic consensus definition spelt by A. P. Schmid and widely used by social scientists and within the UN itself is – “Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi) clandestine individuals, groups or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat and violence based communication processes between terrorists (organisation), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion or propaganda is primarily sought.”⁵

In India section 15 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Ordinance, 2004 defines terrorist act as “whoever, with intent to threaten the unity, integrity, security or sovereignty of India or to strike terror in the people or any section of the people in India or does any act by using bombs, dynamite or other explosive substances or inflammable substances or firearms or other substances (whether biological or otherwise) of a hazardous nature, in such a manner as to cause or likely to cause death of or injuries to any person or

persons or loss of or damage to or destruction of property or disruption of any supplies or services essential to the life of the community in India or causes damage or destruction of any property or equipment used or intended to be used for the defence of India, any State government or any of their agencies or detains any person or threatens to kill or injure such person in order to compel the government of India or any other person to do so or abstain from doing any act, commits a Terrorist act”⁶.

REASONS BEHIND PARIS ATTACK

The utterly condemnable November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris killing 129 and wounding 352 innocent human beings have terrorized France and the rest of the West. The Islamic State (IS) has claimed ‘responsibility’ with much alacrity and satisfaction. The previous day, IS had killed 43 and wounded 200 in Lebanon, with the Western media and Western governments hardly taking any note of that incident. In contrast, Paris 13/11 has evoked moral outrage and expressions of solidarity with France. The colours of the French flag adorned prominent buildings in many Western capitals. Looking back, Mumbai 26/11 in 2008 that killed 164 people got less international media attention and governmental responses. But the recent terrorist attack on airbase in Pathankot on January 2, 2016, drew worldwide attention.

It is not difficult to point out why Paris was attacked by the Islamic State (IS). When the attack on Charlie Hebdo occurred in January 2015 in Paris France showed a degree of willingness to look deeper into the causes of terrorist attacks. It was felt that the deprived conditions in the suburbs inhabited by Muslim immigrants – inadequate access to education and employment-needed to be rectified, even though there was not much follow upaction. Islamic State (IS) has suffered much under Russian air raids starting from 30 September. It has lost territory in Sinjar, cutting the road connection between Mosul,

its most important territorial possession, and its capital at Al Raqqa. It brought down a Russian airliner carrying Russian tourists from Sharm al-Sheikh in Sinai. As Turkey has tightened its border controls, it is difficult for foreign volunteers wanting to join the IS to get into Syria. It was necessary to keep them occupied and the IS decided to make use of its assets in Belgium and France. To argue that the IS carried out the attacks because it has visceral hatred for Western values is to miss the central point. IS has that hatred, but essentially 13/11 was an act of vengeance against France and others who have been bombing the IS. Hence, there was good reason to anticipate an attack as IS lacks aircraft to bomb Paris.⁷

After the Paris attacks, Vienna hosted a meeting of the International Support Group on Syria (ISGS). The first meeting had been held earlier on 30 October. The role of Basher al Assad came up once again. The US and its allies want him to exit from power as early as possible. But they have realized that, with support from Russia and Iran it was difficult to remove, Assad from power. France has now agreed to destroy the IS but not to remove Assad. Thus, the Western opposition to Assad has become weaker. Yet, there is no clear agreement on this matter and that will come in the way of progress towards a negotiated solution. Turkey and Saudi Arabia remain adamant in their demand for Assad to step down. The US has realised the impracticality of taking that line, and is trying hard to persuade Saudi Arabia and Turkey in this regard. It might or might not succeed. Essentially, the US and its allies are demanding Assad's exit without being able to do anything to enforce it. They lack the necessary political will as well as military means.⁸

The ISGS deliberately made a statement by concealing internal differences. It was then, decided that the UN will arrange for a meeting by January 1, 2016 between the Syrian government and its opposition to start the political process. The ISGS has also supported a cease-fire between the Assad regime and its non-terrorist opponents. The focus was on the

destruction of the terrorists and the responsibility was given to Jordan for listing the terrorists to be destroyed by consultations among the concerned intelligence agencies. This task was not an easy one as wide differences surfaced.

The practical application was such that even the so-called non-terrorist opposition was not prepared to deal with Assad. He has also said that the political process cannot start till the terrorists are defeated. The prospects for eliminating terrorist looked bleaked. All that Vienna 2 had done was to consolidate the opposition to the IS and that too up to a certain point.

At the G-20 summit held on 15-16 November at Antalya, Turkey, Paris 13/11 and the IS dominated the discussions. Obama smiled at Putin when they spoke for 35 minutes, in contrast to their previous meeting in New York in September when Obama's body language was markedly hostile. He has realised that Syria cannot be addressed without Putin's cooperation. Putin has come out of the isolation imposed on him after he annexed the Crimea in early 2014. The US and Russia will coordinate operations against the IS, though their differences on Syria remain and the US cannot easily forget that rebels supported by it were bombed by Russia. Russia has not given its word that it will stop bombing these rebels.⁹

DOMESTIC RESPONSES AND CHALLENGES:

The recent attacks and the growing number of combatants training abroad have challenged the prevailing effective French law enforcement and counterterrorism apparatus. French prosecutors have sufficient powers to pursue terrorist cases. Over the years, it has been expanded through a series of new counterterrorism laws. Nonetheless, recent attacks have exposed the shortcomings. French authorities have been criticized on several occasions for its inability to prevent individuals under state surveillance with known links to use of extreme violence. The perpetrators of the January Paris attacks

and at least two of the November assailants reportedly had been under French state surveillance at various times prior to the attacks. But it was unrealistic to expect any government to monitor effectively every individual identified as a possible threat. They underscore that several of the suspects in recent attacks were "inactive targets who had been quiet for a long time."¹⁰

It is true that planning for the November attacks was out in Belgium. It also highlights the constraints facing French law enforcement authorities and possible shortfalls in intra-European counterterrorism cooperation and information sharing. Over the past year and a half, the French government has bolstered law enforcement budgets and enacted a series of new counterterrorism measures. These include: imposing travel bans on individuals suspected of seeking terrorist training abroad, arresting individuals for speech deemed supportive of terrorism, and blocking websites that encourage terrorism. Enacting a new surveillance law allowing authorities to monitor the communications of anyone linked to a terrorism investigation, without the prior approval of a judge. Internet service providers and phone companies are legally obliged to comply with requests for data. Counter-radicalization programs focusing on the French prison system. According to some estimates, up to half of France's 68,000 inmates are Muslim, and several perpetrators of recent terrorist attacks appear to have been radicalized in prison.

In the aftermath of the November 13 attacks, President Hollande announced a series of additional counterterrorism measures. A three-month state of emergency was declared. The expansion of law to search and seize terrorist suspects was granted. Emergency controls on France's borders were almost sealed with countries with which it normally has open borders. The state's authority was expanded to expel dual-nationals and foreigners who were deemed to pose a terrorist threat. The government also made a provision for creating 10,000 new law enforcement jobs over the next five years.¹¹

Certain critics have well observed that though France has developed a far-reaching law enforcement apparatus to counter terrorism but efforts to integrate Muslims into French society have met with limited success. Critics contend that to help prevent radicalization, the government must do more to address the significant socio-economic disparities between "native" French citizens and those of North African and/or Muslim descent. They argue that many policies adopted in the name of France's secularist values, including restrictions on Islamic dress, may serve to further alienate Muslims who already feel disenfranchised. Some also argue that new laws against speech deemed sympathetic to terrorists and unfairly target Muslims. Combatting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria along with the United States, France has been at the forefront of the international coalition conducting military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq.¹²

Following the November attacks, President Hollande vowed to redouble the military campaign to destroy the Islamic State. Within 48 hours of the attacks, France launched its most aggressive air strikes yet, on the Islamic State stronghold of Raqqa, Syria; the number of French fighter jets conducting airstrikes is to increase from 12 to 38. Hollande has also stressed that he will focus on unifying and bolstering the international military coalition fighting the Islamic State. This would include greater cooperation with the United States, Russia, and countries in the region. Some analysts and French military officials have expressed concerns about France's capacity to sustain the enhanced commitments to counterterrorism operations both at home and abroad.¹³

Like other European governments, France has faced significant budgetary constraints in recent years. About 7,000 French soldiers are currently deployed to military operations abroad, including 3,500 conducting counterterrorism operations in West Africa's Sahel region. Although Hollande says he will not decrease France's defense budget before 2019, he has not proposed to increase it. U.S.-French Counterterrorism

Cooperation President Obama strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks and asserted that the United States would work with France to "bring these terrorists to justice." By all accounts, the United States and France have a long history of close and effective counterterrorism cooperation. This extended to the aftermath of both the January and November attacks, with U.S. intelligence officials reportedly assisting their French counterparts in tracking and identifying suspects. U.S. officials, including some Members of Congress, have backed France's calls for the European Union (EU) to establish a Passenger Name Record (PNR) system to collect airline passenger data in an effort to improve tracking of suspected militants and enhance intelligence-sharing among EU member states. U.S. policymakers have also welcomed French counterterrorism operations in the Sahel region and France's bolstering of military strikes against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.¹⁴

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN APPROACH TO COUNTER TERRORISM:

The 'notion' of Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP) got a setback after the November 13, 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. CIP is about protecting vital infrastructure, which, if attacked, would have serious consequences for the state and society. Such infrastructure includes essential services on which the population depends heavily for various routine but essential activities like managing water and electric supply, maintenance of rail and airline networks, etc. For the last couple of years many states have placed a major emphasis upon CIP and have made significant investments to ensure that the architecture for CIP gets appropriately established. However, the recent attacks in Paris and the nature of targets selected there by the terrorists indicate that the 'process' behind identifying what is Critical Infrastructure has limitations and terrorists could select many more targets that are outwardly not critical.¹⁵

The idea of CIP could be said to have begun when US President Bill Clinton issued Presidential Decision Directive [PDD]-63 in May 1998 to set up a national programme of 'Critical Infrastructure Protection'. Europe too views CIP as an important instrument and has in place the 'European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection' (EPCIP). For its part, India has the 'National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre' (NCIPC), which essentially handles cyber security related issues.

The terrorist attacks in Paris, in Mumbai (26/11) and the recent Pathankot incidents demonstrate that terrorists have not concentrated on Critical Infrastructure as a target of choice. Instead, they focused on those areas where they could inflict maximum damage to human life. The terrorists seem to have shifted their attention to soft targets. This does not mean that Critical Infrastructure has lost its relevance.

The above efforts raises doubt about the governments indecisiveness to handle the critical situation. This raises some basic questions: Are global powers unable to visualise the probable patterns of terrorism? Are the tools used by them to handle current asymmetric threats appropriate? Are attacks like those in Paris exposing the limitations of the existing preparedness and response mechanisms?

It is true that 'terrorists get only one chance but the state has to be vigilant all the time'. The successes achieved by intelligence agencies are normally not known but their one odd failure has large-scale ramifications. Relying on police or military forces are no solutions to eradicate problem and the solution has to be political, economic and socio-cultural. Zero terrorism is not an achievable objective.

Against the backdrop of the Paris attacks, there is an urgency to reassess about the effectiveness of the approaches adopted by major states to counter terrorism. It could be broadly argued that the 'Global War on Terror' being a US construct, the global response also has a US bias. States are mostly building their respective policy structures based on the

US 'interpretation and response' to this challenge. As a result, CIP became a buzzword and the idea spread globally owing to the degree of emphasis given to it by the US and the EU. Post 9/11, many terrorism experts 'mushroomed' and some ended up converting the issue into an academic debate. This led to non-specialists influencing major policy decisions. Various forecasting and modelling techniques borrowed from military studies, management and economics were used to analyse terrorism. Multiple justifications were offered to understand the 'method behind the madness' for various acts of terrorism. Theoretical conceptualisations were evolved to 'situate' terrorism under preconceived 'formats'.¹⁶

None proved effective in eliminating terrorism as could be seen from the continuing activities of ISIS, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda, and Taliban. The Paris attacks only reinforces the case for states to recalibrate their approaches to intelligence gathering, data interpretation and policy response. There is a need to recognise that the necessity of smart language. Analysis based on Cold War era theories are no longer to solve the current problems.

Post 26/11, it appears that India is essentially following the Western model to counter terror-related challenges. The Paris attacks show that such models have limitations. India is often criticised for lacking in 'Strategic Thought'. However, states that are lauded for their 'Strategic Thought' have only faced failures from Vietnam to Iraq to Afghanistan to Syria. The Paris attacks should make India think for itself.

PARIS ATTACKS SIMILAR TO TERRORIST ATTACKS ON INDIA:

The "multiple-coordinated" terror attacks in France, which killed over 100 people bear striking resemblance to the 26/11 Mumbai attacks of 2008 and 2/1 Pathankot incidents. Just like the Mumbai attacks, Paris was attacked by a group of at least eight suicide bombers, seven of whom blew themselves up. The

eighth was killed by security forces. While no terrorist group has claimed responsibility for the attack, the modus operandi had chilling similarities with the Mumbai attack when 10 terrorists who came from the sea route stormed into five different locations killing 166 people and injuring 291.¹⁷

All the attackers were armed with AK-47's and they stormed into popular eating joints, café, pizza corners and sprayed bullets indiscriminately on the diners. Gun toting men stormed restaurants in Paris like La Belle Equipe, Le Petit Cambodge and Le Petit Carillon and fired indiscriminately. In a pattern similar to the Mumbai attacks, where Lashkar-e-Toiba terrorists had taken several guests hostage at the Taj Hotel Mumbai and Trident Oberoi, the assailants in the Paris attacks took several guests hostage at the Le Bataclan concert hall. John Miller, deputy commissioner of intelligence and counter-terrorism of the New York Police Department, told a TV channel in an interview that the Paris attack resembles the Mumbai terrorist attack in terms of low-cost resources and also carried various features of 26/11.¹⁸

CONCLUSION:

The recent attack in France has invalidated a crucial assumption of threat assessments concerning Islamic fundamentalism. It has demonstrated that non-state actors in the form of terror networks are developing the capacity for maximum attacks in densely-policed cities, far from warzones. This sort of an attack has only occurred once before, namely, Mumbai 26/11. The Mumbai attack was considered to be a paramilitary covert operation by Pakistan's spy community. 26/11 was perceived as an outlier by security experts who believed that a comparable assault on western homelands was unlikely, absent, state sponsorship.

Only the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris highlighted the problem of immobilising terrorists who moved location while shooting. Although the two gunmen were eventually cornered

and killed, the fact that they forced the mobilisation of a massive police and military effort to track them demonstrated that even a low-medium casualty attack (which Charlie Hebdo was) can be as disruptive as an event that kills hundreds.

Operational lessons of the latest Paris attack will be analysed by police forces the world over, including India. There are three basis assumptions on which governments can work. First, the Islamic State was responsible, and has shown a higher degree of sophistication than was expected. The attack pattern suggests a method of coordination surprised the world because the planning were not done at a purely local level. This lead to an important question whether logistical preparations were concealed from French intelligence, which has considerable experience of combating terrorism.

This raises the question of whether diversionary terrorist conspiracies were activated elsewhere to draw heat away from the main thrust towards France. In July 2015, IS had warned that it would strike at Paris and counterterrorism analysts believe that the speed with which the November 13 operation was applauded by IS sympathisers online suggests they knew it was coming. Like the misleading electronic intercepts of an overseas terror threat that preceded 9/11, causing US intelligence to look beyond America's borders rather than within them, the question must be asked if the Paris massacre was partially enabled by strategic deception.

The second assumption was that who was the attacker the IS core leadership or middle-managers acting on their own initiative. But it was clear that implementation was guided by local sympathisers. Unlike in Mumbai, where the targets were chosen for their touristic importance, the locations hit in Paris were working class and relatively unremarkable. This raises the issue of radicalisation among the French Muslim population. French Muslims constitute 8 per cent of the total population but nearly 70 per cent of the prison population. According to some estimates, 15 per cent of these prisoners are

susceptible to jihadist indoctrination due to contact with jailed Islamist ideologies. Having a background in petty crime, they are well-positioned upon their release to exploit underworld connections for the procurement of military-grade weapons and explosives. In both the Charlie Hebdo and the November 13 shootings, a correlation seems to exist between petty criminality and terrorism.

The third assumption is that soft targets are being hit by new methods. Before the Paris shootings European security experts had focused on the risk to surface public transport because an attempt was made in August 2015 to massacre passengers on board a long-distance train. Moreover insider attacks on civil aviation were encouraged. The Charlie Hebdo attack two months earlier had demonstrated that IS and Al Qaeda, despite their fierce ideological rivalries, were 'pooling and sharing' resources to hit European cities. The two groups were cooperating on an operational level. In such a situation where the cash-rich IS supplies funds and manpower and the more experienced Al Qaeda provides local contacts. This makes a deadly combination for a much broader range of access to possible targets.

What these three assumption mean to India? While Pakistani-sponsored terrorism remains the biggest threat. It faces competition from genuinely stateless terrorists. No longer is it necessary to have ISI funds for reconnaissance, or fake travel documents issued by Pakistani embassies, to conduct a high-visibility and well-coordinated jihadist attack. Instead, the Paris massacre suggests that Islamic State is growing more sophisticated and recognises the limits of its ability to govern territory.

The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's invitation to the French President, Francois Hollande to be the chief guest on Republic day, i.e. January 26,2016, indicates some kind of solidarity after last year's shooting and bombing by Islamic terrorist in Paris that killed 130 people and evoked memories of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks of 2008 and Pathankot incident on

January 2, 2016. Both the leaders have shown their intention in cooperating in the fight against global militant groups. Hollande had already stated that France and its allies would strike again and again against Islamic State. Both the leaders also resolved to eliminate militant safe havens and choke funds flow to extremist groups as well as expand intelligence sharing and cooperation in cyber security. From Paris to Pathankot, the world saw the cruel face of the common challenge of terrorism.

REFERENCES:

1. See R.R. Baxter, A Skeptical Look at the Concept of Terrorism, Akron, Law Review 7, 1973-74, p.380.
2. C. Walters, Defining Terrorism in National and International Law, p. 2 at http://www.undoc.org/tlbdl/bibliography/Biblio_int_humanitarian_law_Walter_2003
3. A.H.Kydd and B.F. Walters, The Strategies of Terrorism, International Security, 31/1, Summer 2006, pp. 49-80.
4. What is Terrorism at http://www.terrorism_research.com
5. See A.P. Schmid, A.J. Longman er, al. Political Terrorism, New Brinkwick translation books, 1988, pp.5-6.
6. See Indian Section 15 of the UnLawful Activities (Preventive) Amendment Ordinance, 2004.
7. Paris 13/11: What Next? http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/paris_13/11_Kpfabian_241115.
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Ibid
12. See CRS Report R44135, Coalition Contributions to Countering the Islamic State by K.J. McInnis.
13. Paris 13/11: op.cit

14. Ibid
15. http://www.idsa.in/idsa_comments/paris_exposes-the-limitations-of-the-west-approach-to_counter_avlele181115.
16. Ibid
17. The Hindu, November 15, 2015.
18. Ibid.