



## Paris Attacks: A Wake-up Call

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### Attacks that Shook France

The terror strikes in Paris on November 13, 2015, the deadliest in Europe since the Madrid train blasts (March 2004), left 129 dead and many critically injured in attacks by the Islamic State.<sup>1</sup>

In the immediate raids that followed, seven terrorists blew themselves up and one was killed by the security forces. Several arrests followed in Paris and Brussels. The display of resolve and resilience apart, the attacks have caused terror and traumatised France. Even as the French people were picking up pieces and trying to get along with life, President Francois Hollande declared a state of emergency. With the willing support of the Parliament the emergency

was extended for three months. Authorities have been given sweeping powers that date back to the constitutional amendments of the 1950s—power to put people under house arrest without trial and power to block websites among others.<sup>2</sup> For the time being, “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”, enshrined in the French Constitution, have been consigned to some secure vaults. It will be some time before life in France returns to normal.

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The security forces in Paris found weapons and some other incriminating material in a vehicle used by the terrorists which, suggested terror links in neighbouring Belgium. The two countries were prompt in sealing their borders. Domino Effect will be felt in the rest of Europe; travel across porous borders will be controlled in the days to come. Belgium reeling under the threat of similar attacks carried out scores of raids to net the suspects. While searches are continuing unabated, Brussels remained closed for four days: universities, offices, metro and other services were affected.<sup>3</sup> These actions are indicative of two things: one, the terrorists have disturbed the peace in Europe—hitherto considered *safe*—

—which will be difficult to

restore in its entirety, and two: there is strong determination to deal with the terrorists.

### Fight Against Terror: A Splintered World

After the Mumbai terror attacks (2008), world opinion was divided in two indistinct groups: one that empathised with the people of India and the other, a larger group, of those who were indifferent. Similar was the case when Boko Haram took 276 girls hostage in Nigeria last year:

there was abundant sympathy but no united concrete action. Many of them released later were pregnant; some suffered from *Stockholm syndrome*: they developed a liking for their captors (read tormentors) and began supporting their cause. Of those who were held back by Boko Haram, some had started killing for the Jihadist terrorist group.<sup>4</sup>

9/11 was different—it shook loose the perception of imperviousness of the US mainland to terrorist attacks and divided the world into three distinct groups: One that was with the US in their Global War on Terror (GWOT), second: those who did not jump on the bandwagon to fight alongside the US, and the third group—of the ilk of Arundhati Roy<sup>5</sup>—who felt that 9/11 was unfortunate but inevitable; perhaps the Americans had asked for it!

The worst kind of indifference in living memory was apparent when a terror attack left 132 children dead<sup>6</sup> in an army run school in Peshawar last year. The attack—that should have got the world together in absolute and unquestionable solidarity against the terrorists—caused, but a whimper. The feelings that were aired at that time can be summarised thus: “Pakistan Taliban be condemned for killing innocent children. Pakistan is paying for nurturing terrorists in its backyard.” Pakistan’s nurturing and support to terror outfits serving its strategic interests is responsible for the rise of extremism and violence in the country.

India expressed its support for Islamabad and Prime Minister Modi had tweeted: “India stands firmly with Pakistan in fight against terror. Told PM Sharif we are ready to provide all assistance during this hour of grief.” But the prevailing distrust prevented the two neighbours from coming together. General Parvez Musharraf and Hafez Saeed went on record blaming India for the attack!<sup>7</sup> Washington was hopeful that the incident would lead to a major change in Pakistan.

Today, after the Paris attack, the world seems to be even more divided, splintered. There are umpteen opinions and groups: there are the sympathisers, the staunch allies, the reluctant allies, and the allies with vested interests. The

declared enemy is one—the ISIS. The *blue force*, though large and capable, is rather unwieldy and apparently confused; seemingly, divided. While France and Russia have intensified their attacks on the ISIS, President Obama has warned the Americans that overreacting to the Paris attacks would play into extremists’ hands.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Turkey has shot down a Russian SU-24 fighter that allegedly strayed into Turkish airspace.<sup>9</sup> This has added another dimension to the crisis.

### **A Reluctant and Precarious Truce**

A dispassionate (read “naïve”) assessment of the crisis suggests that the US and Russia together could potentially work towards finding some solution. So, there was a spike in the hopes when President Vladimir Putin and President Barack Obama came together unannounced on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit (Turkey, Antalya) to discuss the issue. Not much emerged from their interaction. In fact, when President Putin did speak on the issue, their rift came to the fore. The single issue that they seem to be stuck on is: the future of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria. The US considers his exit a precondition for the democratic process in Syria to commence while Russia believes that a democratic process must decide his continuance (or otherwise) in power. Syria continues to burn while the world braces for the next strike, oblivious of “the time and place” of the impending mayhem.

Intelligence reports suggest that more countries—Russia, the US and other European countries—are on the radar of the ISIS. Paris attacks and the downing of the Russian airliner,<sup>10</sup> coupled with the imminent threat of more attacks has led to a reluctant truce between the US and Russia. Russia, while not giving up its support to Assad, has joined France in intensifying the attacks. President Obama’s warning to the Americans apart, the USAF has also been striking convoys of ISIS trucks awaiting loading.<sup>11</sup> As it stands now, the major world powers, the US, Russia and France are moving in the one direction—to neutralise the ISIS. Their interests are converging but are not focussed yet. A more united and coordinated approach is the need of the hour.

### **Path Ahead for India**

“One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom

fighter." Gerald Seymor<sup>12</sup>

Occasionally, vested interests of the countries that can make a difference impede uniform and impartial response against terrorists. Despite so many terror strikes on its soil, Pakistan has shown reluctance to join India in fighting the menace. Likewise, the US–Russia differences (on Syrian crisis, in this case) are well known. Unanimity on the ways of dealing with terrorism seems difficult, but may not be impossible to achieve. It will come about when people start appreciating that: "Terrorism is a universal phenomenon and a terrorist is a terrorist."

**Geopolitical conditions and terror threats differ from region to region; each situation demands a different way of handling. Yet we could learn from the experience of the others.**

Until people think alike, could "*Ekla Chalo!*" be the policy? Not really. A collective and uniform response is a desideratum to overcome the menace. In all his visits abroad and in all forums, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been iterating the need for the countries of the world to stand united. The focus has been on uniformity of approach.

Paris attacks have jostled the world and it is a time for introspection. We need to look at our security apparatus with a view to strengthen it. Geopolitical conditions and terror threats differ from region to region; each situation demands a different way of handling. Yet we could learn from the experience of the others. In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even considered changing the rules that governed shooting by security forces at stone-throwers. This was to give the security forces a freer hand to deal with increasing number of incidents involving firebombs and stone throwing. Netanyahu's suggestion came at a time when the justice system was finding it difficult to deal—as per the law—with minors who were indulging in *indiscipline*.<sup>13</sup> Israelis seek zero tolerance when they deal with terrorism.

On the suggestion to deal with terror the way Israel does, it is argued that Israel has little choice; it is the question of its survival. Besides, Israel is backed by the US in whatever it does. India cannot follow in Israel's footsteps. But then, should India keep debating Armed Forces Special

Powers Act, and continue to deal with alleged Human Rights violations while stone-pelters graduate (God forbid!) to hurling grenades, and the flags in their hands turn from green to black!<sup>14</sup> Shooting and killing is not necessary to solve problems but demonstration of strong Israel-like resolve to deal with such situations could be an effective step.

In the French Government's response to Paris terror attack, more than 1,200 searches, 165 arrests and seizure of 230 weapons have been made in the security crackdown.<sup>15</sup> More than 30,000 security personnel have been deployed and air strikes against ISIS targets have been intensified. Equally important: emergency has been imposed with no opposition and several rules have been changed under the special presidential powers—all this, in a country where civil liberties are held high.

Beyond doubt, critical times demand prompt and firm actions. Conscious resolve-laden steps taken in normal times can keep critical times away.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "World News", *BBC*, 2130 IST, November 13, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "France State of Emergency Declared for Three Months, Allowing Authorities to Shut Down Websites And Giving Police Sweeping New Powers", *The Independent*, November 19, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/france-state-of-...s-allowing-authorities-to-shut-down-websites-and-a6740886.html>, accessed on November 23, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> "Belgian Police Arrest 16 in Brussels Raids, Fail to Find Paris Attacks Key Suspect", *The Jerusalem Post*, November 23, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/International/Belgian-police-seal-off-streets-around-Brussels-Grand-Place-after-extending-security-alert-434990>, accessed on November 23, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> "Brainwashed Girls among the 200 Kidnapped at Nigeria's Chibok School 'are Now Killing for Boko Haram and Torturing the Islamist Group's Prisoners,' say Witnesses", *Mail Online*, June 29, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3143582/Brainwashed-girls...uring-Islamist-group-s-prisoners->

says-Amnesty-International.html, accessed on November 26, 2015.

<sup>5</sup>Arundhati Roy, "The Algebra of Infinite Justice", *The Guardian*, September 29, 2001, <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/ArundhatiRoy.pdf>, accessed on November 20, 2015

<sup>6</sup>"Pakistan Taliban School Attack Kills 141, Including 132 Children-As it Happened", *The Guardian*, updated December 17, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2014/dec/16/over-100-people-killed-in-pakistan-taliban-school-siege-says-provincial-chief-minister-live-updates>, accessed on November 23, 2015.

<sup>7</sup>Samanth Subramanian, "Mixed Reaction in India over Pakistan School Massacre", *The National*, updated December 18, 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/south-asia/mixed-ction-in-india-over-pakistan-school-massacre>, accessed on November 25, 2015.

<sup>8</sup>"Obama Warns Not to Overreact to Paris Attacks", *TIME*, November 23, 2015, <http://time.com/4123698/obama-paris-attacks-isis/>, accessed on November 23, 2015

<sup>9</sup>"Putin Condemns Turkey after Russian Warplane Downed near Syria Border," *The Guardian*, November 24, 2015,

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/24/turkey-shoots-down-jet-near-border-with-syria>, accessed on November 25, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Now accepted by Putin as a handiwork of the ISIS.

<sup>11</sup>"U.S. Destroys 280 ISIS Oil Trucks in Syria City of Deir-ez-Zor", *NBC News*, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/u-s-destroys-280-isis-oil-trucks-syrian-city-deir-n468126>, accessed on November 24, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> This quote was also used by President Ronald Reagan in one of his addresses to the Nation.

<sup>13</sup>"Netanyahu Hints at Easing Rules on Firing at Palestinian Stone-throwers", *The Guardian*, September 2, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/netanyahu-hints-easing-rules-firing-palestinian-stone-throwers>, accessed on November 23, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Allusion here is to flags of Pakistan and ISIS seen sometimes in the hands of the demonstrators.

<sup>15</sup>"1,200 raids, 165 arrests in Paris since 13/11", *The Times of India ePaper*, November 25, 2015, <http://epaperbeta.timesofindia.com/index.aspx?eid=31805&dt=20151125>, accessed on November 25, 2015.



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