Editorial

Western Europe under Terrorist Attack, also after the Military Defeat of IS

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1 Introduction

The major attacks that in the last two years were committed by members and/or disciples of Islamic State (IS) in notably France, Belgium and Germany raise numerous questions. On the one hand these questions relate to the background, nature and purpose of IS and affiliated or similar Islamist terrorist movements as well as to their attractiveness for that many Muslim youngsters from all over the world. On the other hand these questions concern the policies that are needed in order to contain these movements and to prevent as much as possible the large-scale and smaller atrocities that since many years are being perpetrated by their members and supporters. Not only in Western Europe but also in North America, in particular the United States, Russia, Turkey, the Middle East and the Caucasus, Africa, Asia and Australia.

2 The Origin of the Ideology and Strategy of IS

As far as the background, nature and purpose of IS and its attacks in Western Europe are concerned, it is not that difficult to recognize immediately the
hall-mark of Bin Laden’s *al-Qaeda*. In the preamble of the comprehensive hand-
book this movement in the nineties composed — the *al-Qaeda manual* — it
made no mistake about its motives, intentions and methods. The hard core of
the creed that is being preached in this companion is:

The confrontation that Islam calls for with these godless and apostate
regimes, does not know Socratic debates, Platonic ideals nor Aristotelian
diplomacy. But it knows the dialogue of bullets, the ideals of assassina-
tion, bombing and destruction, and the diplomacy of the canon and the
machine-gun.

The regimes that should be attacked relate to a number of countries in the
Middle East but definitely as well as to the Western states that — from the per-
spective of *al-Qaeda* — support and protect them, first of all the United States
but in its wake equally European states. The overarching aim of the removal,
the defeat, the overthrow or the intimidation of all these so-called improper
regimes is to create the space for the establishment of a new caliphate. The pre-
amble also makes clear that, with a view to the maximization of their impact,
the armed attacks should in particular be committed on public places, “places
of amusement, immorality and sin”, embassies, economic centers, bridges who
connect cities et cetera. In conjunction with this strategy the handbook states
that fighters — in order to be successful — have to operate as secret warriors
on hostile soil, i.e., they should conceal their residences, provide themselves of
false or falsified identity documents, and limit the use of telephones as much
as possible. It is therefore no accident that the handbook is to a large extent
based on the training manuals for special military forces.¹

The attacks that in November 2015 were perpetrated on the *Stade de France*,
some restaurants in the inner-city and the *Bataclan* in Paris as well as the on-
slaughts that in March 2016 were staged in Zaventem Airport and Maalbeek
subway station in Brussels, seamlessly fit into the ideology and strategy the
*al-Qaeda* leadership developed two decades ago and these days are put into
practice by IS and related and/or similar Islamist terrorist groupings all over

¹ This handbook was seized by the police in Manchester in an inquiry related to a supporter
of *al-Qaeda* half-way the nineties. It was for some time posted on the website of the Depart-
ment of Justice in Washington. I consulted this document on 16 January 2002. The contempo-
rary significance of this manual has been underlined last February by the comments on the
attacks in Paris in *Dar al Islam*, the propaganda journal of IS in French. See C. Ehrhardt, ‘Der
IS schickt seine ‘Löwen’ in den Westen’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 March 2016. Also,
e.g., R. Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda; global network of terror* (London: Hurst, 2003), pp. 54–94.