

# **Case study: Paris Terrorist attack November 2015, crisis management and the role of media**

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## **Abstract**

Terrorist attacks are a global phenomenon characterizing not only our era, since the observation of their elements goes back at time. However, the fact, that in nowadays terrorist attacks occur within the heart of Europe, imposes an immediate engagement with the issue, making critical the need for preparation and acquisition of knowledge, in order to effectively manage these crises. The study of facts relating to a “fait accompli” terrorist attack is a good instrument for studying crisis management, i.e. by examining the events, the Organizations that managed the crisis, and the role of Media, we can learn from the effective actions as well as from any mistakes, so that we can be better prepared in the future. This paper is a review of literature on the terrorist attack that happened in Paris in November 2015. Electronic databases (Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect) were searched for articles in English, French and Greek for the period 2015-2016 (i.e. the time of attack and afterwards). Web pages of Organizations and Media were also studied. Since the material found was insufficient, extra material was sought in articles considering crisis and terrorism in general, concerning the last 5 years.

**Keywords:** terrorist attack in Paris, crisis, terrorism, crisis management, Media

## **1 Introduction**

Crisis is a multidimensional concept which includes many other concepts. Attempting to describe crisis in a simple way, someone would speak of a difficult situation that has to deal with, an out of the blue event, an unforeseen need that

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requires immediate action. "Crisis" is an unexpected situation as a result of a single event or a series of events, that is characterized by uncertainty and tension, during which the normal course of events is disrupted. [1] Facts related to crisis are: it may concern from just one person to even the global environment; during crisis, the stability of the system is tested; afterwards, a transition period follows during which, either calmness will return or changes will arrive.

A crisis has many distinctions depending on the criterion by which it is studied (place, time, cause, characteristics). As far as it concerns causality, we identify: a) crisis from direct natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes and floods), b) crisis from indirect natural disasters (e.g. the greenhouse effect), c) damage caused intentionally by humans (e.g. wars, religious riots, terrorist attacks, economic crisis), and d) crisis by man negligence (e.g. nuclear accidents).

"Terrorism" refers to an abusive use of violence combined with a total disregard for the public safety, designed to intimidate citizens or politicians for purposes ideological, religious or political [2, 3]. Terrorism develops into a large and worldwide issue. It is estimated that has led to the death of 130,000 people just for the period of 2006-2013. As it is recorded, most terrorist attacks took place in the early 21th century due to Al-Qaeda's attacks and the war in the Middle East. The 11th of September 2001 attacks at the Twin Towers, in America is a typical attack of that period. Between 2006 and up to 2013 the recorded terrorist attacks have decreased. Still, the number of attacks reaches 90,000. As far as it concerns 2014, the recorded deaths from terrorist attacks reached 32,685, recording an increase of 80% compared to the previous year. [4] There are various types of terrorist attacks, such as hijackings, suicide bombings or attacks with heavy weapons. Over the last years, the most common and at the same time most severe terrorist attack is that of a bomb attack aiming at civilians or official authorities. The areas most affected from terrorism are Near East and South Asia, and especially the countries of Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria [4]. Nonetheless, over the recent years, a spread of attacks to countries outside the ones mentioned has been observed; countries of the rich West, countries major, rich and powerful, such as France in this case. As a result, the phenomenon rises to enormous proportions.

The appearance of such a critical situation and the response to it (i.e. Crisis Management) is neither easy nor pleasant. As these events occur most often unexpectedly, the consequences are often devastating. Even if it seems impossible to predict such a crisis, still a good management is attainable, which means that the intensity of the damage can be reduced. Furthermore, the evaluation of risk (i.e. Risk Assessment) always helps to figure out the difficulty, and has a major role in preparing responses to the crisis [1].

Crisis Management includes four phases: prevention, preparation, response to the incident and rehabilitation [1]. As far as it concerns terrorism, prevention may concern the assurance of effective measures in monitoring and security, as well as the presence and preparation of bodies efficient and well trained to face such a hit when it happens. The response requires an effective reaction to the situation, while rehabilitation includes the short and long-term efforts to restore order and return to

daily routine. The range of a crisis vary from something of small interest to something essential for survival. Either way, in each case, the purpose of Crisis Management should be dealing efficiently with the crisis the moment it happens, eliminating unfavorable consequences, as well as acquisitioning all the necessary knowledge in order to be better prepared for anything similar in the future.

## 2 Main Subject

### 2.1 Paris attacks timeline

On Friday, the 13th of November 2015, a tragic event takes place, the news of which would soon become known all around the world causing unrest. Paris, the capital of France, has received multiple terrorist attacks.

The attacks were designed to hit six different locations-targets, mainly bars, café and restaurants, in central locations of Paris, at such time that it would be certain they would be crowded. Apparently, this was the ultimate goal of the attack, to lead eventually to many human casualties.

At about 21:15 local time of France the first explosion occurs in the suburban area of Saint-Denis, outside the Stade de France. At the time, a football match between France and Germany is in progress. Two more explosions followed. All three explosions take place outside the stadium, in the Northern part, by three men who are wearing identical vests strapped with explosives. Head of the first explosion is a man who was found suspicious during the routine check before entering the stadium. During this attack, the bomber and a passerby are both killed. The second explosion takes place in just ten minutes after the first, at another entrance of the stadium, while the third one occurs at a fast food near the stadium at 21:53. Inside the stadium is also the President of France François Hollande.

21:20 Alongside with the attacks in the stadium, other attacks take place, this time more centrally in the city, in the 10th district, in the Alibert Street. Once more the attacks point at places full of people. One after the other the targets are mostly bars and restaurants. The attackers, who moved around in a black vehicle as submitted by witnesses, are men with semiautomatic weapons who open fire indiscriminately. One target is the restaurant Petit Cambodge, where 15 people are killed and as many are seriously injured. The other target is the bar Le Carillon.

21:32 The attacks continue south, in the street Fontaine au Roi in a similar way. At the restaurant La Cosa Nostra and at the Bonne Biere café 5 more people are killed and 8 others are seriously injured.

21:36 and the attacks continue even more south, always in an identical way. In Charonne street of the 11th Apartment the attackers shoot at people in the La Belle Equipe bar, achieving the death of 19 and the serious wounding of 9 more.

A few minutes afterwards, at 21:40 a man strapped with explosives blows up himself inside the restaurant Le Comptoir Voltaire, which is located on Voltaire Boulevard, leading to his own death along with the serious injury of another man.

The last hit, which culminated the attacks, takes place from 21:40 until 00:20 in

the hall of a concert center called Bataclan, where 1500 people are gathered for a concert of the rock band Eagles of Death Metal. The assaulters strapped once more with explosives and in possession of heavy weapons, of rifles AK-47, enter the main hall and open fire on the crowd without any warning. The attack turned into hostage-taking. Some people manage to hide or cover under the bodies of others who already laid dead. Some attain a way out through an emergency exit found left of the stage, while others head for the roof. Eventually the attack ends with the intervention of special forces who shoot one of the attackers. His belt with explosives blows up, followed by the self-blowing of the other three attackers. According to eyewitnesses, one of the attackers during shooting shouted “For Syria” and “Allah Akbar” (meaning that God is great). Attackers were identified afterwards to be Omar Ismail Mostefai, 29 years old, Samy Animour, 28 years old, and Foued Mahamed-Aggad, 23 years old. The attack at the Bataclan had led to the death of 89 people and to the transit of at least 99 others to the hospital in a serious condition [5-7].

The final account in human loss of these tragic attacks was the death of 130 people - many of them of a nationality other than French - and 8 terrorists, as well as the injury of 350 others, some of which seriously damaged [5].

The day after, the Islamic State took responsibility of the attacks with a message written in Arabic and French, entitled “Declaration on the blessed attack in Paris against crusader France”. In their statement, they confirmed the number of two hundred victims and praised “the eight brothers who strapped with explosives and carrying rifles” managed to hit specific targets in Paris, such as the Stade de France and the Bataclan. Among others, the statement said: “France and those who follow her path need to know that they remain the main target of the Islamic state and that they will continue to face death because they lead the crusade for the promotion of Islam in France and because they hit the Muslims in the Caliphate land with their war planes, which were useless in the stinking streets of Paris. This attack is only the beginning of the storm and a warning to those who want to reflect and learn their lesson” [5, 8].

## **2.2 Organizations that acted in Crisis Management**

By the term “Organizations” we refer to official bodies - both governmental and not - involved in addressing the crisis that has occurred, the terrorist attacks in this particular case. In a situation, such as the one in Paris, and in a crisis, such as a terrorist attack, that has a global interest, it makes sense that the response involves not only the National Organizations but also the European and the International ones.

It is worth mentioning that France has always been on alert lately for terrorist attacks, especially after the attack that took place in January 2015 at the offices of the magazine Charlie Hebdo. During that incident 12 people were killed, including 5 employees of the satirical newspaper. In fact, throughout 2015 many hits that were attempted by various terrorist groups were prevented. Nonetheless, it was not possible to prevent the attack that occurred in November 13th or at least limit the

damage, indicating a methodically planned and a well-executed attack.

## **2.1.1 National bodies**

### **2.1.1.1 Political and military response**

Almost immediately after the first explosion took place in the Stade de France, the French President Hollande left with safety the stadium to coordinate the crisis management. The President made his way to the Ministry of the Interior, where the situation was analyzed and together they undertook the coordination of the crisis. An exceptional Council of Ministers was summoned around midnight and an Interministerial Crisis Center (ICC) was activated under the authority of Prime Minister. President Hollande also called of a convention of the Council of National Defense for the morning after.

Shortly before the meeting, President Hollande with a live announcement informed the public of the events that had took place. He stated that the entire France is declared in a state of emergency, that citizens' movement is prohibited, and that the borders are closed. He asked the French people to remain strong. 1,500 soldiers took the streets, and people were ordered to remain in their homes. The special forces of France, the group RAID (Research, Assistance, Intervention, Deterrence) of the National Police took action in response to this attack. To facilitate police work, checks in homes without the need of order were permitted. Also, the right to confiscate weapons was given. The subway stations of 10th and 11th Apartment were shut down. The day after, Saturday the 14th of November, President Hollande stated through another press conference that the attacks, designed in Syria and executed with the help of domestic citizens, were an act of war by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Furthermore he announced a three-day mourning for the country; schools and Universities were to be closed; tourist attractions such as Disneyland or Eiffel Tower were also to be closed until further notice [5, 9].

In other actions, President Hollande visited the scene of the attack in Bataclan, where he made statements of a war against terrorism. Moreover, he postponed a scheduled visit to Turkey for the G20, where he was replaced by Minister of Foreign Fabius, and Minister of Finance Sapin. President Hollande even asked for an extraordinary convergence of the French Parliament on November the 17th, in order to inform the body, since the state of national emergency would be continued for three more months and the operations against ISIS would expand (from the 15th to the 18th of November the French army executed air strikes of the ISIS database).

On the November 18th, RAID participated in an operation in Saint Denis, where Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the head of Paris attacks, was detected and killed [10].

### **2.1.1.2 Health response**

One of the most difficult issues that one has to deal with in a time of crisis involving many victims is a way to manage large and multiple demands. A

massive destruction overwhelms in no time the health areas with many in need of care [1]. Satisfying knowledge, excellent organization and high efficiency in triage process – both during pre-hospital and in-hospital care - are required. The same goes for the administration of Emergencies Rooms, Surgeries and Intensive Care Units.

The French health system consists of two contingency plans; the Red Plan (Plan Rouge), which involves the response to a crisis situation in a specific area that is declared as an emergency and the White Plan (Plan Blanc), which refers to the organization of hospitals during an unforeseen situation of many casualties, and relates to the procedures of victims' redirection and the way the personnel is properly managing them [11].

During the terrorist attack on November 13, 2015 in Paris there has been a large number of instantaneous deaths, as well as many serious injured. Thanks to good organization and plan execution the authorities managed to avoid increasing the number of deaths [12].

Soon after the attack, the Ministry of Health activates the Health Emergencies Crisis Management (HECMC). It has a triple role: to coordinate the national health system utilities, to analyze the data coming from regional health services responsible for managing wounded as well as to follow up the situation, and to represent the Ministry in the ICC and take part in the established plan [13].

Following the terrorist attack in Charlie Hebdo, France has been constantly preparing for another hit by practicing on hospitals' reaction [12, 13]. In fact, the last exercise of such kind was completed at the same day as the attack at 10:30 in the morning. The French health authorities knew what they had to do, and they have done it well. From the first moments of the attack (21:30) HECMC was already activated, and Plan Blanc had already been initiated [14]. A few minutes after the shootings 8 Medical Emergency Units (SAMU) along with the Fire Brigade (BSPP) were found in the different regions of the attacks, in order to provide first aid at the accident sites. After ensuring being stable, the victims were transported to hospitals by the Mobile Intensive Unit (MICU). At 22:34 the system already operated according to White plan, i.e. all hospitals were mobilized, beds were liberated, all key personnel were called to return to their workplace. The Mechanism of Public Hospitals of Paris (Assistance Publique-Hopitaux de Paris; APHP) was enabled effectively [12, 14]. APHP is a mechanism that can coordinate 40 hospitals, 100,000 health workers, 22,000 hospital beds and 200 operating rooms. On that day, 17 hospitals of APHP were activated for victims' treatment, as well as 2 military hospitals and 25 other hospitals that were recruited. Moreover, the French Blood Bank and the Psychological Support Emergency Units (EPSSU) were also activated. 35 psychiatrics along with psychologists, nurses and volunteers set up a center of psychological support inside a central hospital of Paris, that of Hotel Dieu. Last but not least, there was a plan for "reservoir", i.e. a plan of recruiting more hospitals where the needs would require it [12, 14].

Those who were injured severely were taken to hospitals according to plan.

However, many were those who were not so seriously injured and sought care by going to the nearest hospital by themselves. That night, 643 people received care at one of Paris' hospitals [12]. The final report of deaths were only 4 persons between the 302 heavily injured that were treated in a hospital during that day, of which 2 had ended with hospital admission [12].

### **2.1.2 European bodies**

All European Members, including our country, Greece, expressed their condolences for the attack and declared their support in case France would ask for help. The Institution of the European Union stood next to France even when President Hollande sought support for the air attacks against ISIS.

### **2.1.3 International bodies**

Even from the very first minutes of the attack medical personnel and volunteers of the French Red Cross, which is a part of the International Organization "International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement" (IFRC), were presented in the field for the care of those in need [15].

The leaders of many countries all around the world sent messages of condolences to the wounded Paris and expressed their solidarity. President Obama shortly after the attack stated that "We all stand together in this fight against terrorism". North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expressed its sincere condolences for the attack as well. [16] United Nations (UN) adopted a message of solidarity and condolences too and criticized the attack. [17] Furthermore, the terrorist attack in Paris was the subject of articles adopted by the Security Council of United Nations (UNSC), one of the UN agencies, [18] along with the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Additionally, many large and famous buildings, trademarks of each country all over the world, such as the Empire State Building in America, the Statue of Christ in Brazil, the Sydney Opera House, the City Hall in Kotzia Square in Athens, Greece, were all illuminated in the colors of the French flag.

Finally, the International Community expressed its sympathy on November the 15th at the meeting of G20 that took place in Turkey. There, due to the events, the defaulted themes of discussions were changed into the need of a battle against terrorism internationally, and especially against Islamic State, as well as the refugee crisis in Europe [5].

## **2.3 The role of the Media**

The terrorist attack in Paris was big news. From the very first moment that news came out, and for some time after, the episodes hit the headlines in all the Mass Media, i.e. newspapers, television news, radio broadcasts, magazines, of different nationalities [6-10]. All news agencies, including the Greek one (AΠE-MΠE) [19, 20], reproduced the news. Undoubtedly, someone comes to wonder, whether the Media had any other part dealing with the crisis, besides that of the transponder of

information.

It is widely accepted that the kind of system – mostly the political system - that is applied in a country, is in fact the factor that determines the scope of action of Media. For instance, Media in France act in a remarkably different way than those in Turkey. Still, it is common sense that Media have great power and end up forming the public opinion, although they have no such authorization.

It is an undisputed fact that motivation of profit plays an important role in the attitude of Media regarding such events, for the reason that as bigger the news, the larger the crowd watching the news, and therefore the higher the viewership. Likewise, as bigger the news, the more are the people buying the newspaper, and therefore sales are increasing. And so on. [21]

A terrorist attack is by nature an act of communication [2, 22]. Those that execute such a heinous crime as that of a terrorist attack, want to be heard all around the world, to as many people as possible, for the reason that in this way they will be able to turn the gaze of a whole society exactly right where they want them. Moreover, more damage will be done, because beyond those directly affected by the attack, many more will be terrorized [3, 21]. Nevertheless, the Media, as communicative representatives as they are, they will continue to carry the bad news on the name of the right of free speech and the right to know [2].

Media in a case of crisis, including that of a terrorist attack, are both friends and enemies. On the one hand, Media contribute to crisis management, but on the other hand they act as an obstacle. With regard to their cooperative action, Media are the ones that will provide the link of communication between authorities, crisis management organizations and citizens. For instance, during the terrorist attacks in Paris all the explosions that happened in the Stade de France as well as the events inside the stadium were seen live on TV, since the football game was broadcasting live. Moreover, President Hollande addressed the citizens with a live announcement way before the end of the crisis. Even more, the chief prosecutor of Paris François Molins, who was responsible for the research, was constantly informing the citizens of Paris through the Media, as well as the whole international community, for the progress of the investigations and the effectiveness of the authorities in crisis management. Thus, the transmission of the news achieved social awareness and reassurance, and contribute to the strengthening of social contribution.

Unfortunately, there is also the behavior of the Media that does not contribute in solving the crisis. It regards to actions that lead to misinformation, when the transmitted information comes from unofficial sources, or is not properly crossed. It also regards to panic dissemination or the phenomenon of making something small seem huge. And let us not forget the danger that lurks for individuals who, through the transmission of the information, will endorse these attacks, support the attackers, or even more follow their example in the future [21].

Nowadays, it would be anachronistic and absurd for someone to speak of silencing the Media [21, 22]. But, if there was a more cautious approach to the matter, in cooperation with the competent authorities of crisis resolution, in order to retain

the advantages of Media actions in a crisis and reduce or even eliminate their negative effects, then we would have the most ideal situation.

It would be a great omission not to mention the Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube, Instagram etc.) in this matter, as they may not be included by definition in the Media, yet they are an identification element of communication of our times. Social media are the most effective way of communicating quickly and effectively [23-25], a very important feature concerning the need of information exchange during a crisis. Social Media act just like traditional Media; they are a potential facilitator but also an obstacle [24]. The hashtag *#portesouvertes*, i.e. doors open, overwhelmed the Social Media and was used in Paris to give a chance to those who were exposed in the crisis scenes to get into a safer place, a house of an otherwise unknown man or woman, in order to protect themselves from been injured. Social Media, therefore, give voice to those who are in need [24] and achieve executing plans in time of need [24]. Photographs and videos taken by citizens all around the areas of the attack flooded the internet. Every single person that watched that truly hard to watch material, shared the fear and distress of those living it, feeling almost like they were also being in Paris in that exact moment. Additionally, the Social Media were the mean of achieving rapid transmission of information throughout the whole world. Moreover, it was used from several countries for expressing their initial support for the unjust blow that citizens of Paris had received. Of course, some Social Media operated misleading, as the transmission of erroneous or excessive information could never be avoided in such cases [24]. Last but not least, through Social Media there has been a worldwide expression of support, sympathy and compassion for the people of France by condolence messages, profile images changed in the colors of the French flag, recirculation of French announcements, and applause (i.e. *Like*) to the spirit of resistance that French shown against ISIS, being some of them.

#### **2.4 Injuries due to the attack**

A terrorist attack causes without doubt a great damage, both immediate as well as outlying [3]. Immediate damages are more related to the point of the attack and have to do mainly with the loss of life or the possibility of a large number of injured in need of immediate treatment. Outlying damages, in the other hand, concern not only the point of the attack (e.g. property damage or stress disorders), but also the rest of the world, considering the fact that such an attack is having a global social impact.

Paris, as well as any other European or non-community which has been informed of the crisis of a terrorist attack, is a place that is characterized by intercultural elements. The border of these cities are not the closed borders that used to exist and achieved the presence of native citizens only. The world in our times is characterized of cities consisted of citizens coming from different tribes, speaking of different languages, believing in different religions, but still coexisting

peacefully alongside one another. This element of multiculturalism is in immediate danger after such a crisis, as, for those who have suffered the damage, the enemy has some identical elements with some “different” citizens, who until now lived among them in harmony [3, 26-28]. Not surprisingly, this can lead to suspicion, intolerance and alienation, which, with their turn, may result in even greater damage than the one caused by the terrorist attack itself. It should hardly go without saying that, in some cases, the consequences of the attack have enormous effect on everyday life of immigrants. For instance, in the past, many countries, including France, have forbidden Muslim women to wear their veil in public places, on the occasion of terrorism threat [28].

Last but not least, there is also the damage on the local as well as the global economy. Studies [29-31] have shown that the damages caused by a terrorist attack go beyond the loss of human lives and material destruction. A city like Paris, which is full of tourists all year around, takes a large financial hit after such an attack, as it is reasonable for anyone to consider stop visiting it for the fear of a new attack. [29] Therefore, there is long term economic impact of the country, because of the declining demand in the consumer market (i.e. citizens remain in homes and avoid going out in public places such as bar, restaurants or theatres [3]), together with tourism and airline tickets.

### **2.5 The psychological background of the attack**

A crisis involving a terrorist attack is not limited to the direct damages, meaning the loss of a life or a property destruction. Psychological damages as a result of a terrorist attack have a major effect on peoples’ lives. A terrorist attack is an action of violence or intimidation for possible violence causing fear [3] and guilt; guilt for those who make the decisions – political leaders usually- and fear for the citizens. However, the attack is not aiming in bringing great disaster only to the victims who will be directly harmed. In fact, it intends to cause intense psychological pressure upon several other victims [3]. Terrorism acts thanks to the feelings of fear and doubt of the unknown by someone well known and capable of greatly damaging you [26]. This threat manipulates the feelings of potentially other victims and converts them into psychological disorders, involving from a temporary appearance of a feeling of fear -Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)- to long-term or even permanent post-traumatic injuries – possibility of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

## **3 Conclusion**

Incidents leading to crisis used to happen and will continue to happen. The only thing changing, is the nature of these events, as they come to characterize each era. Nowadays, terrorism is one such phenomenon. And since incidents will always happen, an efficient preparation to reduce their consequences is the solution to the disruption they bring. To achieve this goal, someone has to plan appropriately,

save several resources and continue exercising techniques, that will assure that he is better prepared and will offer him the ability to be able to manage the crisis eventually. This way only, preparation for resolution of a crisis will be effective, as a faster response to the problem will be achieved, leading hence to the best possible result.

The example of the terrorist attack in Paris made us understand that, no matter how strong a country is, it does not mean it will be spared the blow. In fact, a terrorist attack as a crisis incident, only unpredictable can no longer be characterized for any country. For that reason, all those involved in crisis managements should be prepared by acquiring efficient, up-to-date, continuous knowledge, and exercising for preparation.

Finally, the Media provide catalytic effect in managing a terrorist attack, as they act as an energy source for the terrorists. The right of free speech must never be stopped. However, a balance must be found between benefit and damage. Perhaps, a prospect of Media becoming our partners in a crisis management, rather than just the transporters of the information, would be the solution. This is a reflection that arises question for further research.

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