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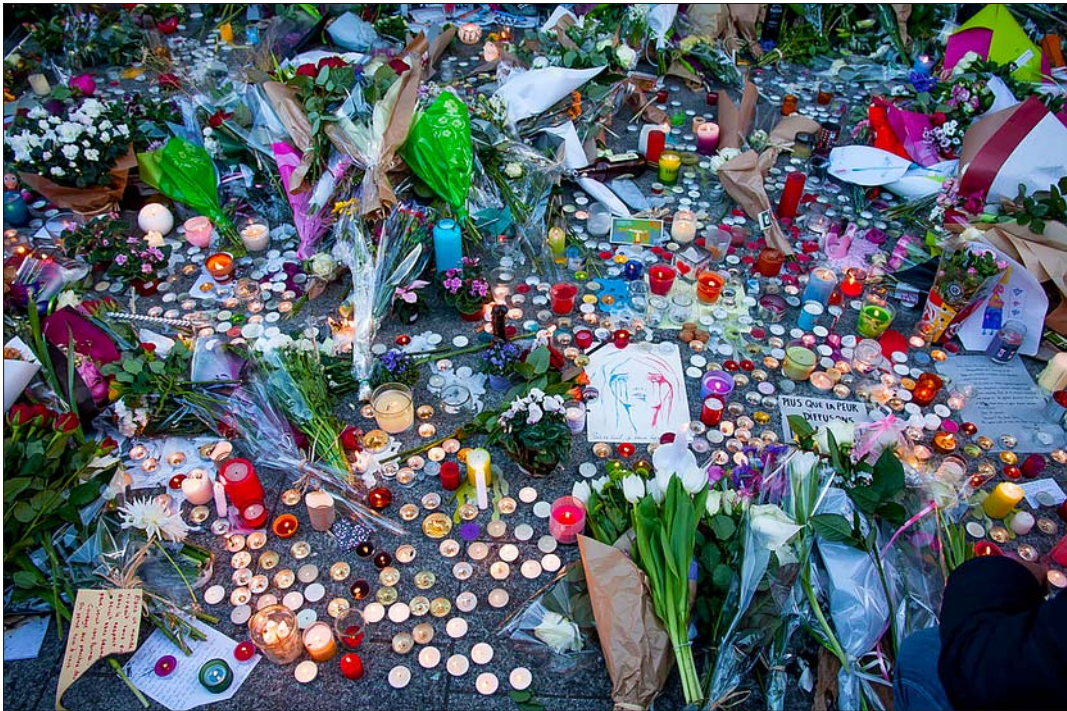


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**COVER  
STORY**



Street memorial to the November 2015 Paris attacks (Jean-François Gornet)

## HOLLANDE - 'WE ARE AT WAR'

On 20th November the United Nations (UN) Security Council voted on a new [resolution](#), or formal proposal. A majority of the 15-member Council voted for the proposal. It authorised the use of military force against the Islamic State (IS). This militant Islamic organisation operates in parts of Syria and Iraq. It is also known as ISIS, ISIL and Daesh.

The French government requested the UN resolution. One week before the UN vote, several small groups of men attacked a sports stadium, restaurants and concert hall in Paris, the French capital city. The men were armed with automatic weapons and grenades. IS leaders declared that they planned and organised these attacks.

François Hollande, the president of France, was at the sports stadium. He was part of a large crowd watching a football match between France and

Germany. During the game there were three large explosions outside the stadium. Later, it was discovered that three suicide bombers had blown themselves up. One had planned to do this inside the stadium, but the officials checking tickets stopped him. Soon after the explosions, Mr Hollande's security team took him away.

At the same time, other gunmen fired at people in several restaurants near the centre of Paris. Another three-man group entered a theatre, or concert hall. An American group was performing. The building was full. The men fired their machine guns into the crowd. Specially trained police arrived and surrounded the theatre. As they entered the building, two gunmen blew themselves up. A third was shot dead.

After the attacks were over, Mr Hollande spoke on live television. He declared that 'we are at war'. He added that

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‘terrorism will not destroy France, because France will destroy it’. The French president also announced a state of emergency. This gives the police and army special powers to arrest people. Later, it was confirmed that 130 people had died. Hundreds were badly injured. Most of the deaths occurred in the concert hall.

French police tracked some of the gunmen to a flat in a building not far from the stadium a few days later. A gun battle followed. Several people were arrested. Three were killed. One is believed to have been the leader of the group. Another gunman managed to cross the border into Belgium. There, Belgian police began a manhunt to find him. French police confirmed that several of the attackers had recently travelled from Syria to Brussels, the capital of Belgium. Three cars used in the attacks were hired in Belgium. Some of the gunmen who blew themselves up were French citizens.

People set up street memorials outside the theatre and restaurants in Paris. Many left flowers and candles. One symbol became popular. It is based on the well-known ‘peace sign’. The lines in the middle of the circle were redrawn to look like the Eiffel Tower. This world famous building is a symbol of Paris.

The Paris attacks shocked many people. Leaders of other European countries and the USA, Canada and Australia quickly declared their support for France. As a sign of solidarity, many well-known buildings in these nations were lit up at night in red, white and blue. These are the colours of the ‘Le Tricolore’ or the French flag.

The IS was set up in north east Syria a few years ago. Its capital is

the Syrian city of Raqqa. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi leads the group. He is rarely seen in public. Everyone who lives in IS controlled areas must follow very strict religious laws. The IS is now believed to have about 30,000 fighters, or gunmen. Last year it took control of a large area of western Iraq. This includes Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city.

IS leaders say they do not recognise countries like Iraq and Syria. Nor do they believe in democracy. The IS, they say, will eventually include all the Middle East and even parts of Europe. They have declared a caliphate. In the past a caliphate was a large Muslim area ruled by one person. This person, who was known as the caliph, was a religious and political leader.

IS gunmen wear black clothing. Many describe them as fanatics who are prepared to commit executions and mass murder. Over the last 18 months, hundreds of Muslims from countries such as the UK, France, Belgium, Germany, and Australia have travelled to Syria to join the IS. Most are young men. Thousands of others have gone to Raqqa from Arab countries such as Tunisia and Libya.

In Islam there is a divide. It is between Sunni and Shia Muslims. This divide, or split, began about 1,400 years ago. Of all the Muslims in the world about 85% are Sunnis. The IS is a Sunni group. It treats Shia Muslims, Christians, Kurds, and people of all other religions very harshly. However, an overwhelming majority of people who follow the Islamic faith dislike the IS. Many are angry. They say that what the IS does goes against their religion.

Last year the USA set up an anti-IS coalition. Many countries joined. However, all are reluctant to send soldiers to places that IS con-

trols. Instead several anti-IS countries have been attacking IS targets from the air. They have also been sending weapons to local groups that are fighting against the IS. The most successful of these are Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq and northern Syria. Nowadays, American and French planes carry out most of the air strikes. This is why the IS chose to attack Paris.

After the Paris attacks, Mr Hollande ordered the Charles de Gaulle to sail to the Syrian coast in the eastern Mediterranean. This large navy ship is a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. As soon as it arrived, the ship’s planes began to attack IS targets. The carrier is named after a famous former French general and president.



Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier

David Cameron, the UK’s prime minister, visited Mr Hollande in Paris. The French president travelled to the USA to speak with Barack Obama, the American president. He also flew to Russia. There he met with the country’s president, Vladimir Putin. Mr Hollande wants all these countries to work together to defeat the IS.

Military commanders all agree that IS will not be beaten by air power alone. Many politicians and people in the USA and Europe don’t want to become involved in a ground war in Syria and Iraq. They argue that forces from Middle Eastern countries must confront and defeat the IS. ■