



January 13, 2015

Jihad Operatives in France Affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS Carry Out Shooting Attacks Killing 17



Video of Amedy (Ahmedy) Coulibaly, who carried out the shooting attack at the kosher supermarket in Paris, swearing his allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the ISIS leader. On the wall behind him is the ISIS flag (Vocativ.com, January 11, 2015).

Overview

1. Between January 7 and 9, 2015, local jihadist operatives carried out a series of shooting attacks in Paris, including a mass shooting attack at the offices of Charlie Hebdo, which had long been in the jihadi organizations' crosshairs (12 killed, ten employees and two policemen); a shooting attack at a Jewish school that was not carried out, apparently because of a traffic accident (one policewoman killed); and a shooting attack and bargaining attempt at a kosher supermarket (four killed, all Jewish). **Seventeen people were killed and more than 10 were wounded.**

2. The attack at the offices of Charlie Hebdo was carried out by two Islamist jihadists of Algerian extraction linked to **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**. The organization issued a video expressing solidarity with the attack and calling on jihadists to carry out additional attacks in France (although AQAP did not officially claim responsibility). The terrorist operative who carried out the attack in the kosher supermarket was a **French**

jihadist who had sworn allegiance to the ISIS leader, which did not officially claim responsibility for the attack (ISIS-supporting jihadists used the social networks to praise the attack).

3. Initial observations regarding the series of terrorist attacks are the following:

1) **France as the country preferable for carrying out terrorist attacks:** In ITIC assessment **France is in the crosshairs of ISIS and other jihadi organizations and operatives**. That is because it joined the campaign against ISIS (which led it to call for "the burning of France" and "smashing the heads of the infidels"), and because the global jihad's operational capabilities in France made such attacks possible. Fundamentally, jihadi capabilities exist because France has a large alienated Muslim population from which jihad operatives are recruited. The jihadi threat in France is reflected in the large number of French foreign fighters who joined the ranks of ISIS and other jihadi organizations in Syria, larger than the numbers from any other Western country.¹ However, the recent attacks illustrated the enormity of the threat that also comes from **local jihadists**, not necessarily only those who had gone to Syria.

2) **The nature of the chosen targets:** The iconoclastic weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo was in the jihadi organizations' crosshairs for many years. In the past the weekly was threatened and its offices were firebombed. The kosher supermarket and the Jewish school where an attack was planned indicate (and not for the first time) **that Jewish institutions in France (and in Europe in general) are targeted by supporters of ISIS and other jihadi organizations** (the attack on Jewish museum in Brussels was carried out by a French jihadist with ties to ISIS).

3) **A relatively high level of operational capability:** In the recent attacks, especially the one on Charlie Hebdo, the terrorist **operatives** demonstrated **greater daring and operational capability** than the other attacks carried out by jihadists around the globe since the beginning of the American campaign against ISIS. The two brothers gained access to the Charlie Hebdo offices, which were apparently secured, apparently having intelligence about procedures, and preplanned their escape from the scene of the attack. The attack on the kosher supermarket and the attack on the school which was not carried out involved a lower level of operational capability,

¹ In September 2014 the French minister of the interior reported that approximately **930 French citizens were either fighting in the ranks of ISIS in Syria and Iraq or planning to join them**. It is the largest number of foreign fighters from any Western country (Britain is second with 500 foreign fighters). For further information see the November 27, 2014 bulletin, "[ISIS, Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization](#)."

possibly because they were spontaneous and intended to magnify the effect of the attack on Charlie Hebdo and support the perpetrators.

4) **The nature of the link between AQAP and ISIS:** The terrorists expressed solidarity with AQAP and ISIS, two rival organizations, the former a branch of Al-Qaeda in Yemen and the latter a jihadi organization challenging the Al-Qaeda leadership. The Kouachi brothers had previous links to AQAP. The collaboration of the terrorist operatives involved in the attacks was apparently **the fruit of local initiatives and interpersonal relations, and not a function of established collaboration between the ISIS and AQAP leaderships**. The local collaboration of operatives from rival organizations **can occur again in other Western countries and may increase the operational capabilities of global jihad operatives in their campaign against the West and the Jewish people**.

5) **Prognosis:** The terrorist attacks in Paris are liable **to encourage jihadist operatives**, both "lone wolves" and organized jihadi networks, **to carry out more attacks in France and other Western countries** (especially those in the coalition against ISIS). The return of foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria and their uniting with local operatives is liable to lead to attacks carried out by operatives handled by ISIS and other terrorist organization headquarters, and to make jihadi terrorism in the West more organized and lethal.

The Series of Attacks²

Shooting Attack at the Offices of Charlie Hebdo

4. On the afternoon of **January 7, 2015**, two terrorist operatives wearing ski masks and armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles entered the offices of the **iconoclastic weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo**, located in the 11th Arrondissement in the center of Paris, where an editorial meeting was being held. They opened fire, shooting and **killing 12 people**, ten Charlie Hebdo employees and two policemen. Ten people were wounded, five of them seriously or critically. Among the dead were four senior cartoonists and the paper's editor. Police forces arriving on the scene did not manage to shoot or catch the terrorist operatives, who fled the scene in a waiting car driven by a third operative.

5. **Three terrorist operatives were involved in the attack: two brothers of Algerian extraction, Said and Chérif Kouachi, who did the shooting, and Mourad Hamoud (aka Hamid), their getaway driver. The Kouachis had links to AQAP**, which issued a video in

² As of January 13, 2015.

support of the attack and urged more attacks be carried out in France. The French police released the names of the brothers after the driver, Mourad Hamoud, left an identity card in the getaway vehicle. On the night of January 7, 2015, Hamoud was apprehended in a town on the France-Belgium border (according to a different version he turned himself in).

6. After leaving the scene of the attack the Kouachi brothers robbed a gas station. On the morning of January 9, 2015, the French security forces tracked them to the town of Dammartin-en-Goële, about 50 kilometers (about 30 miles) northeast of Paris. They holed up in a printing plant with a hostage. The police established telephone communications with them and the brothers claimed they wanted to die as shaheeds. During the afternoon the French security forces rushed the printing plant and the **Kouachi brothers died in an exchange of fire**. The hostage was freed unharmed.

7. **Charlie Hebdo had been a target for the global jihad for many years** for having printed cartoons and jokes about the prophet Muhammad. Three years ago, after claiming it planned to rename itself "Charia [i.e., the sharia, Islamic religious law] Hebdo" and devote an entire issue to Muhammad, **a Molotov cocktail was thrown into the building**, completely destroying its offices. The recent attack was carried out at its new location, whose address was kept quiet.

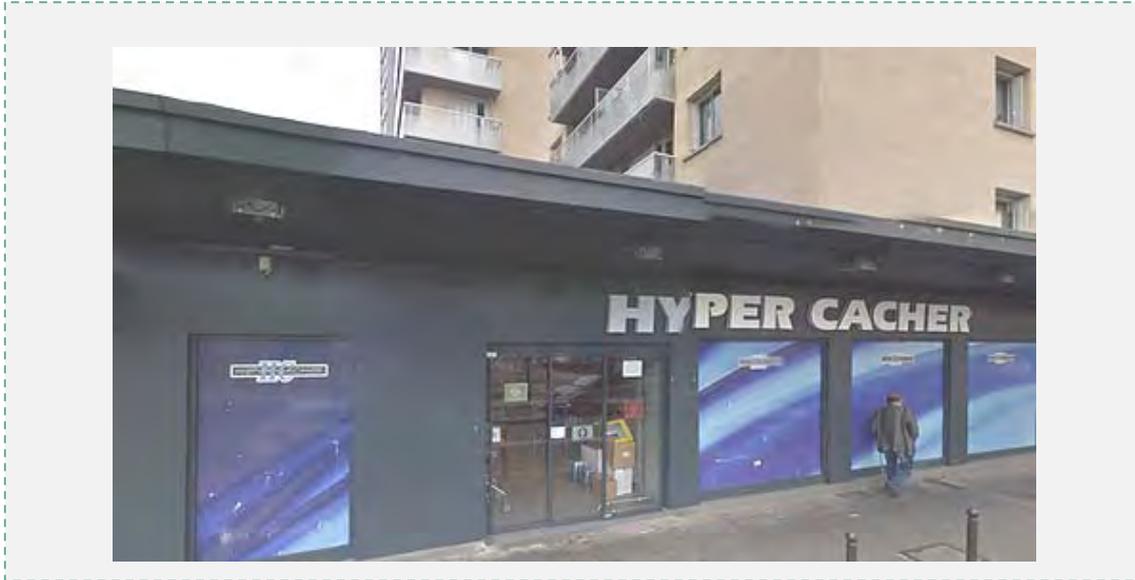
8. AQAP, with which the Kouachi brothers were affiliated, publicly called on jihadists to attack cartoonists who had "insulted the prophet Muhammad" and in March 2013 even issued a notice with the names and pictures of 10 individuals who had "insulted Islam." One of the individuals was Charlie Hebdo's editor, who died in the attack (See Appendix B). The paper's last tweet was a cartoon of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

The Shooting Attack at a Jewish School that Went Sideways

9. On **January 8, 2015**, the day after the shooting attack at the Charlie Hebdo offices, a man wearing a bulletproof vest used an automatic weapon to shoot at police in a southern suburb of Paris. **A policewoman was killed** and a policeman was wounded. **The terrorist operative was later identified as a jihadist named Amedy (Ahmedy) Coulibaly**, who had made a video in which he swore allegiance to the ISIS leader (See below). He fled the scene, and one day later carried out the shooting attack in the kosher market.

10. The attack on the Jewish school was apparently not carried out because of a traffic accident; **the school was located nearby**. A ballistics examination showed that on the previous day Coulibaly had shot and **critically wounded a jogger in a nearby park**.

A Combined Shooting Attack and Bargaining Attempt in the Kosher Supermarket



The kosher supermarket (Hyper Cacher) where the attack took place (Google Street View)

11. The most recent attack in Paris was carried out on the afternoon of January 9, 2015. Amedy Coulibaly took over a kosher supermarket in the eastern part of Paris. He entered the store and indiscriminately shot shoppers. **He killed four of them and took an estimated 15 others hostage.** A Muslim store employee helped another group of shoppers to hide in a refrigerator in the basement. Coulibaly tried **to use the hostages as bargaining chips for the release of the Kouachi brothers**, with whom he was connected and who were at the time in the printing factory in Dammartin-en-Goële.

12. Amedy Coulibaly threatened to kill all the hostages if the police tried to break into the store. Several hours later the police rushed the supermarket, killed Coulibaly and released the hostages unharmed. Four French Jews were killed in the attack: **Yoav Hattab, Phillipe Barham, Yohan Cohen and François-Michel Saada.** They were buried in Israel.

Portraits of the Terrorists – Initial Findings³

Overview

13. So far **three terrorist operatives** are known, who carried out a series of attacks in Paris and maintained personal and operational contact with one another. **They had at least**

³ Updated to January 13, 2015, based on information in the French, global and Arab media.

two identified supporters (a man and a woman); others may have been involved. The French media reported that in addition to Mourad Hamoud, who turned himself in, 16 others were apprehended by the French security forces on suspicion of involvement. **Five of them are still detained**, suspected of being linked to the same terrorist network as the Kouachi brothers.

Said and Chérif Kouachi



Left: French police wanted poster of the Kouachi brothers (New.com.au, January 8, 2015). Right: The Kouachi brothers (Twitter, January 7, 2015).

14. The two terrorists who carried out the terrorist attack at Charlie Hebdo were **Said and Chérif Kouachi**, 32 and 34 years of age, **Muslims of Algerian extraction from Paris**. They were orphaned at a young age and adopted by a family in Rennes. Both brothers had criminal backgrounds. (In the past the ITIC identified other instances of criminal backgrounds among jihadists in Western countries.)

15. According to French sources, **the Kouachis had ties with AQAP**, as the organization may have confirmed (See below). French sources also reported that **they had returned from Syria a number of months ago**. During the attack at the Charlie Hebdo offices a witness heard one of them say that "You can tell the media this is Al-Qaeda in Yemen," i.e., Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AP.org, January 8, 2015). Both brothers had been on the American list of terrorists for several years (AFP.com, January 9, 2015).

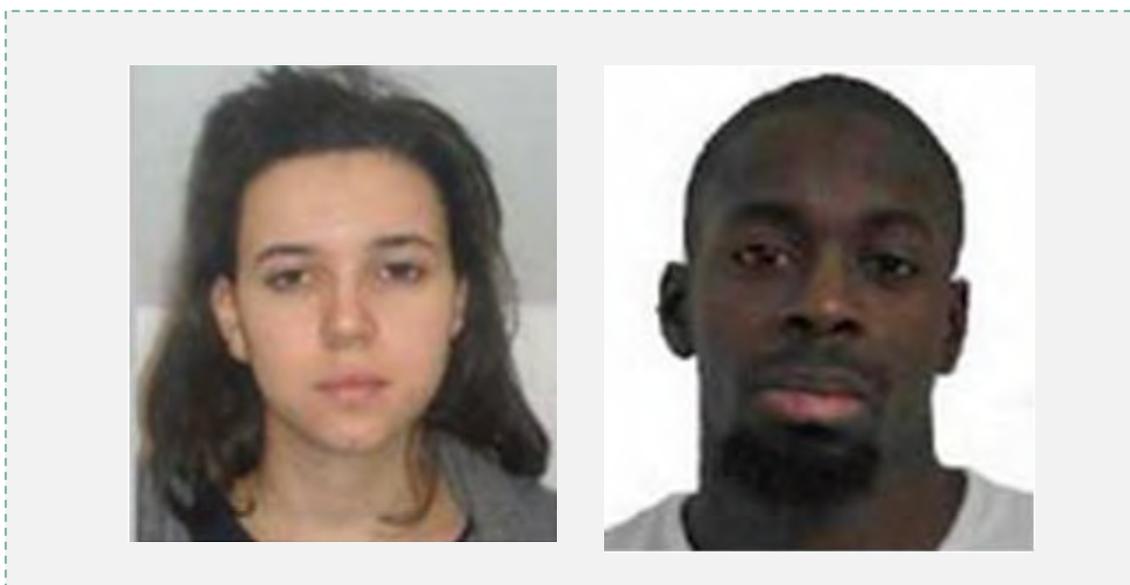
16. Chérif Kouachi had been known to the law enforcement and security authorities in France for a decade. **He customarily listened to the sermons of a Muslim preacher named Farid Benyettou, a mentor for many young Muslims who urged them to go to**

fight in Iraq and who justified terrorist attacks. **Chérif Kouachi was apprehended for the first time in 2005 because of his intention to go to Iraq.** Testifying in 2008, he said he desired to attack Jewish targets in France and in the end decided it was better to fight American soldiers. He was sentenced to three years in prison **for involvement in a network that recruited young Muslims in France to fight in Iraq.** Since he had already been imprisoned for three years, it was considered time served and he was released.

17. While in prison he became acquainted with a jihadist operative named **Jamal Beghal**, who was accused of planning to attack the American embassy in Paris, and who received a ten-year sentence in 2006. Jamal Beghal was also Amedy Coulibaly's spiritual mentor, and of Coulibaly's companion, Hayat Boumediene (Le Monde, January 9, 2015).

18. The news agencies, based on information received from sources in Yemeni intelligence, reported that **Said Kouachi had been in Yemen in 2001 where he met with Anwar al-Awlaki**, an American-born jihadist operatives, who was a senior figure in AQAP (he was killed by a drone in a targeted American attack in September 2011). According to American sources, while Said Kouachi was in Yemen **he spent several months undergoing military training** (Nytimes.com, January 9, 2015). According to ITIC information, **AQAP did in fact recruit Western operatives to its ranks and train them in camps in Yemen.**

Amedy (Ahmedy) Coulibaly



Left: Hayat Boumediene, Coulibaly's companion, who went to Syria through Turkey before the attacks were carried out. Right: Amedy (Ahmedy) Coulibaly (French police photos).

19. **Amedy (Ahmedy) Coulibaly** was 32 years old, French of Senegalese extraction, and lived near Paris. He was one of ten children and from a young age was in trouble with the law for minor misdemeanors. In September 2002 he was accused of robbing a bank. In 2013 he was sentenced to five years in prison for his involvement in liberating a prisoner who was serving a life term for involvement in bombing the Paris Métro in 1995. Coulibaly was released after a number of months (Chérif Kouachi was detained and interrogated for the same attack but released without being charged).

20. **Amedy Coulibaly called himself an ISIS operative and claimed he had coordinated his attack in the supermarket with the Kouachi brothers** (AFP.com, January 9, 2015). A video issued after the attack indicated his support of ISIS (See below). At this point it is unclear if Coulibaly had established ties with ISIS and whether and to what degree he was directly handled by the organization.

21. **Hayat Boumediene** is 26 years old and was Coulibaly's lifetime companion (according to other versions, his wife). They met in 2010 on one of the occasions he was detained. She waited until he was released and they had lived together in a Paris suburb since then. According to an official source in Turkey, she entered the country on January 2, 2015, that is, **she fled before the attacks were carried out**. A video shows her at the airport in Istanbul. In ITIC assessment, she crossed the border into Syria to join ISIS there.

22. In a video posted on ISIS forums on January 11, 2015, more than 24 hours after the attack, Amedy Coulibaly identifies himself as **Abu Bashir Abdallah the African and swears allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**. In it he sits next to a Kalashnikov assault rifle, the weapon he used to carry out the shooting attacks. He says he has been **"a soldier of the [Islamic] Caliphate since its inception," and that France is a legitimate target for attacks "because of what it did to us" [i.e., because it attacked the Islamic State]**. He claims that the operatives coordinated the attacks in Paris. He explains how he helped the Kouachi brothers to prepare the attack, and claims they did things both together and separately. He also claims he gave them several thousand euros to purchase equipment for the attack (Vocativ.com, January 11, 2015).⁴

⁴ According to expert opinion, **the video was not produced by ISIS** because it does not contain the organization's usual elements. It was apparently posted by local French operatives that identify with ISIS and at least some of it was recorded before the attacks. Some of it was apparently edited during the search for the terrorists, in all probability by Coulibaly's helpers.



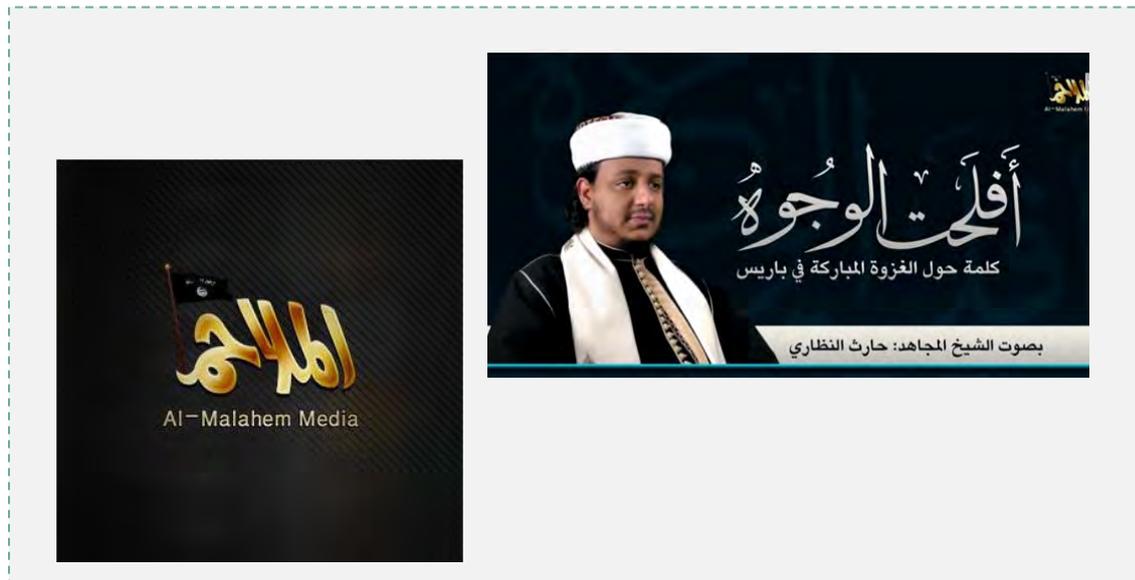
Amedy Coulibaly swears allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and claims France is a legitimate target for terrorist attacks (Vocativ.com, January 11, 2015)

Appendix A

Jihadi Organization Responses to the Attacks in Paris⁵

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

1. On January 9, 2015, an AQAP information outlet called **Al-Malahem Media** issued a message recorded by **Sheikh Harith al-Nazari**, a Muslim cleric affiliated with AQAP. The message did not specifically claim responsibility for the attack against Charlie Hebdo **but praised it and those who carried it out**. It was posted on YouTube on January 9, 2015, and entitled "Al-Qaeda in Yemen takes credit for Charlie Hebdo attack." However, in ITIC assessment, the title is an interpretation of the recording's contents.



Left: The Al-Malahem Media logo (Twitter, January 8, 2015). Right: Harith al-Nazari (YouTube, January 9, 2015).

2. **Al-Nazari praised the attack on Charlie Hebdo**. He claimed that the "infidels," "the enemies of the prophet Muhammad" ("the messenger of Allah"), issued lies about him and took his name in vain. They thought, he said, Allah would not support his messenger but "Allah reached them from a place they did not expect." **The "army of Allah" taught the people of France "how to behave and what the limits of freedom of expression are."** He praised the terrorists, calling them "jihad fighters and heroes," and said, "you have indeed been victorious, I wish I had been there with you." **He also appealed to Muslims**

⁵ As of January 13, 2015.

throughout the world to continue jihad against the infidels to "bring glory in this world and happiness in the next."

3. **Harith Nazari made it clear that France was a target for the jihadists** because "today France is one of the nations of apostasy. It curses the prophets and makes claims against religion. It fights against the [true] believers. Nothing will deter it except the verdict and sentence of Allah." **He appealed to faithful Muslims and called on them to strike the French and make life even more difficult for them. He called on the French to convert to Islam** and stop attacking the Muslims. He claimed the French would not know security as long as they "fight against Allah, his messenger and his faithful believers" (YouTube, January 9, 2015).

ISIS

4. **So far ISIS has not formally claimed responsibility for the attacks in Paris.** However, many jihadist operatives who speak English and French, and ISIS operatives in Syria and Iraq, used the social networks to post and tweet their support for the attacks and **called for more to be carried out against the West.** They also criticized Muslims in the West who expressed support for the victims.

5. Most of the operatives who expressed solidarity with ISIS related to the attack on Charlie Hebdo. Some of them focused on France's oppression of North Africa, especially Algeria, in the 1940s and '50s. That was apparently because the two terrorists who carried out the attack were of Algerian extraction.

6. For example:

- 1) An ISIS operative and his wife in Syria tweeted a picture captioned "Who says jihad fighters don't have a sense of humor?" The picture showed a Kalashnikov and a note reading "Kisses from Syria, bye-bye Charlie" (Twitter, January 8, 2015).



- 2) An ISIS-affiliated tweet: "France goes up in flames for [attacking] the prophet..." A picture was attached of an ISIS operative armed with a rifle, and tanks aiming their cannons at the Eiffel Tower (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, January 7, 2015).



- 3) An ISIS-affiliated tweet showed a picture from the attack and reading, "Allah, preserve the jihad fighters, protect them with your eyes that are always open, direct their fire, do it soon" (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, January 9, 2015).



- 4) An ISIS-affiliated tweet noted that the attack was only the "first reaction" (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, January 7, 2015).



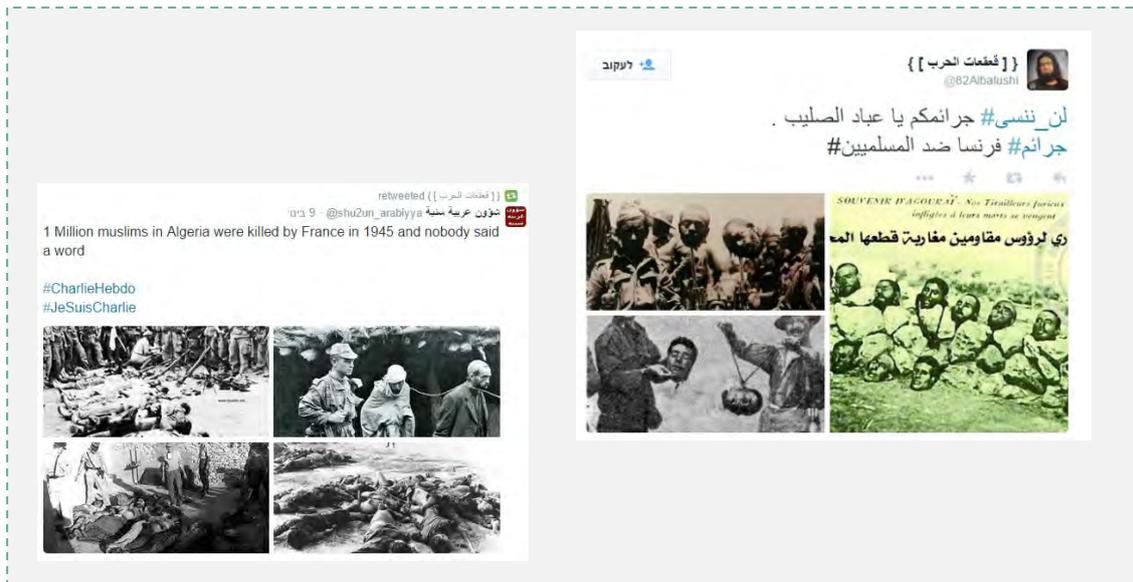
- 5) A tweet with pictures from the scene of the Charlie Hebdo attack with the caption "May your hands be blessed, oh troops of Islam" (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, January 7, 2015).



6) A tweet of a picture of one of the Kouachi brothers shooting a policeman after the Charlie Hebdo attack. The caption reads, "This picture will remain a nightmare to haunt all those who think to attack the good name of our prophet Muhammad, may Allah's prayer and peace be upon him" (Twitter account, January 9, 2015).



7) A tweet reading, "Do not forget your crimes, worshippers of the Cross. The crimes of France against Muslims." There were pictures of the decapitated heads of those who fought against the French in Morocco and Algeria. A tweet on a different account showed pictures of the dead and said that France was responsible for killing a million Muslims in Algeria (Shu2un_arabiyya, January 9, 2015).



Left: Pictures of Algerian victims. Right: The decapitated heads of Moroccans and Algerians (Twitter account, January 9, 2015).

- 8) An ISIS-affiliated tweet: "Allah, receive the lion Ahmedy Coulibaly [as a shaheed in paradise]. He swore allegiance to the Caliph of the Muslims [i.e., the ISIS leader] before he sacrificed himself in an act of self-sacrifice in the trading house of the Jews, the enemies of the [Islamic] faith in France." The tweet included a picture with the words "the lone wolf" (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, January 11, 2015)



Appendix B

Portrait of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

Overview

7. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is a jihadi terrorist organization based in south Yemen. **It is a strong local branch of Ayman al-Zawahiri's Al-Qaeda.** It seeks to take control of Yemen, weaken and destroy the Saudi regime and turn Yemen and Saudi Arabia into countries run according to Salafist jihadism. AQAP regards the United States as its main enemy and has unsuccessfully tried several times **to attack American air traffic.** **The Americans have designated AQAP as the most active and dangerous of all the Al-Qaeda branches.**

8. AQAP had its beginning in the thousands of jihadist operatives who returned to Yemen from the fighting in Afghanistan in the 1990s and established local jihadi networks in. AQAP in its current form was **founded in January 2009** with the unification of the branches of Al-Qaeda in Yemen and Saudi Arabia (Al-Qaeda operatives in Saudi Arabia fled to Yemen in 2008 following harsh preventive measures taken by the Saudi regime, and joined the jihadists there). The organization is headed **by Nasser al-Wuhayshi**, who for several years was an aide to **Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.** Nasser al-Wuhayshi escaped from jail in Sana'a in February 2006 where he was imprisoned for his involvement in the attack on the American Navy's *USS Cole* in 2000.

9. AQAP exploited the weakness of Yemen's central government and the country's instability, which increased after the Middle East upheaval, **and took control of a large area in south and southeast Yemen (including the Hadhramaut region).** The Americans estimate AQAP has close to 1,000 operatives. The organization continues to oppose the weak, United States-supported central Yemeni government and the Iran-supported Shi'ite Houthi rebels in the north. The United States supports the Yemeni administration in its campaign against AQAP with targeted killings carried out by drones. The American attacks have so far led to the deaths of several senior figures in AQAP but have not shaken its grip on south Yemen.

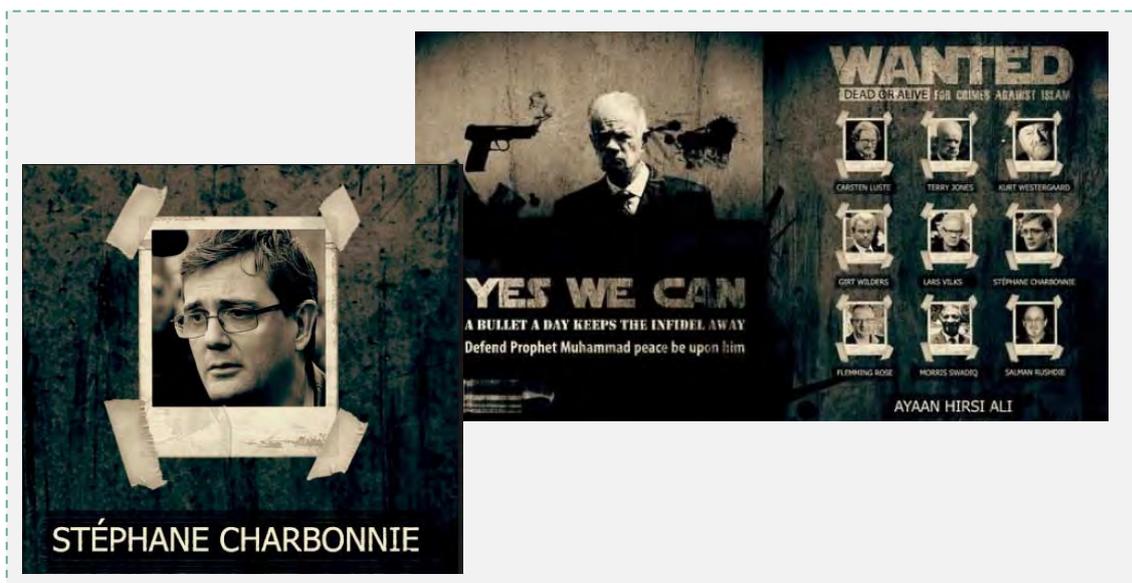
The Battle for Hearts and Minds

10. Like other global jihad organizations, **AQAP places great importance on the battle for hearts and minds.** It makes a significant effort to use the media **to reach English speakers in order to recruit them** to its ranks. Its propagandists encourage Western

activists to adopt its jihadi ideology and carry out attacks against Western targets in the Arabian Peninsula and Western countries. The motivating force behind the propaganda campaign were two American-born activists, **Anwar al-Awlaki**, one of AQAP's leaders, and **Samir Khan**, a media person of Pakistani extraction. Both were killed in an American drone strike on September 30, 2011.

11. One of the organization's anti-Western propaganda activities is the publication of an **English-language magazine called "Inspire."** According to issue Number 13, published on December 24, 2014, the organization's objective is to support the jihad against the United States and provide information necessary for terrorist attacks, such as how to manufacture a bomb and a list of economic targets. It also contained an article explaining how to manufacture an IED that could pass through an airport security check. There was also a list of targets, among them Western airlines. After the coalition began attacking ISIS, **the AQAP called on other jihadi organizations to join forces against the West, their common enemy.**

12. In one of the first issues of Inspire from 2010 Anwar al-Awlaki called on jihadist operatives to attack cartoonists who had "insulted the prophet Muhammad." Issue Number 10, published in March 2013, contained a notice with pictures labeled "Wanted dead of alive for crimes against Islam." **There were pictures of 10 men who had "committed crimes against Islam" and the jihad supporters were encouraged that "A bullet a day keeps the infidel away."** Among the "wanted" was Stéphane Charbonnie, the editor of Charlie Hebdo, who was killed in the attack on January 7, 2015.



Left: Stéphane Charbonnie, the editor of Charlie Hebdo, killed in the attack on January 7, 2015. Right: AQAP's "wanted dead of alive" poster, as it appeared in Issue #10 of Inspire.

The Connection between AQAP and ISIS

13. **The relations between AQAP and ISIS are hostile.** AQAP refuses to join the self-proclaimed Caliphate of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Moreover, a Syrian opposition website reported that AQAP had released a video attacking Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi for having caused a split among global jihad fighters.

14. In a recorded message issued on November 15, 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi claimed that jihadi organizations in Saudi Arabia and Yemen had joined the ranks of the Islamic State and that Islamic State provinces had been established in both countries. So far it is unclear which organizations al-Baghdadi was referring to, apparently insignificant local organizations and/or operatives, or he was just boasting to glorify ISIS's capabilities.

15. The collaboration of the terrorist operatives involved in the attacks in Paris was, in all probability, **the result of local initiative and the personal relations between jihadist operatives, and not a function of established collaboration between the leaderships of ISIS and AQAP.** Such local collaboration between rival jihadi organizations may also occur in other Western countries, and it can increase the operational capabilities of global jihad operatives in their campaign against the West.