

Anthony Tucker-Jones reports on the latest spate of jihadist terror atrocities and asks whether this is part of an existing terrorist trend or something new

SLAUGHTER ON

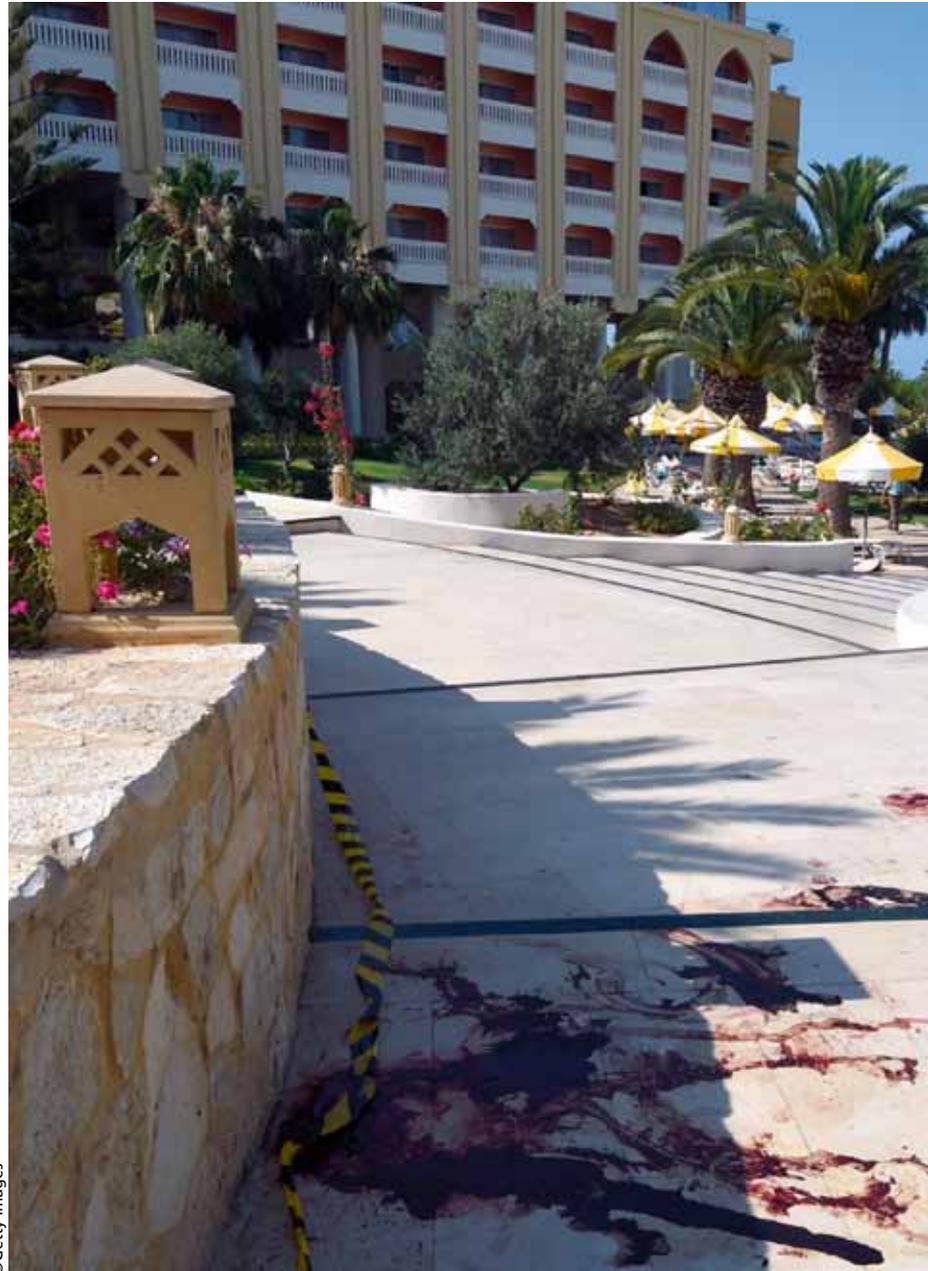
The summer of 2015 will be remembered as the summer of the triple terror attacks during the holy month of Ramadan. Islamic militants killed innocent civilians in separate attacks in France, Kuwait and Tunisia on 26 June. It's unclear just how co-ordinated these assaults were, but ISIS was swift to take responsibility for the atrocities. Both France and Tunisia were still coming to terms with the Islamist terror attacks earlier in the year. These latest outrages add to the litany of woe, with the killing of both Christians and Muslims. In particular, the UK has been left stunned by the worst loss of British lives to terrorists since the bombings in London on 7 July 2005 that claimed 52 lives.

Tragically, neither the French or Tunisian attacks were a surprise. In contrast, the suicide bombing in Kuwait is unprecedented. Although the Sunni majority rules Kuwait, there is no history of notable sectarian violence with the Shia community. This is in sharp contrast to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia which have seen considerable sectarian bloodshed in recent years. The attack on Kuwait's Shia population is the bloodiest ever, and they appear to be the latest victims of what is essentially a Shia-Sunni civil war fuelled in part by tensions between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran.

The attack in France follows in the wake of the shootings at the offices of satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in 2014 and a Jewish supermarket in Paris in January 2015. The French are working hard to head off further terror attacks and this latest development, in light of the country being home to the largest Muslim population in Western Europe, is deeply troubling.

The senseless attack in Tunisia is another blow to the country's fledgling democracy which is based on a fragile secular-Islamist coalition. Some argue that Tunisia's solitary success in transitioning to democracy in the wake of the Arab Spring makes it fair game for Islamists seeking to derail secular rule in favour of an Islamic republic. Equally, such attacks will continue to devastate Tunisia's crucial tourist industry, coming as it does in the wake of the attack at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis in March 2015.

The first of the three latest attacks took place in south-eastern France. The target was the Air Products gas and chemicals factory at Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, a town southeast of the city of Lyon. The attacker, 35-year-old Yassin Salhi, was a delivery driver from Saint Priest, also in the Lyon area. He reportedly rammed his delivery vehicle into the factory entrance triggering an explosion. What made this attack particularly vile was that Salhi had already killed and decapitated Hervé Cornara, believed to be his manager. Cornara's head was discovered impaled on a fence post, while Salhi was caught at the scene. French intelligence quickly stated that Salhi was not known to them, though this proved not entirely true



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as Salhi had been on a French terror watch list for two years from 2006.

The second attack occurred at Kuwait's Shia Imam Sadiq Mosque in the al-Sawaber district of Kuwait city. The suicide bomber was identified as Abu Suleiman al-Muwahid by a group called Najd Province, which is affiliated to ISIS. The Kuwaiti interior ministry identified him as Fahd Suleiman Abdulmohsen al-Qaba'a and a Saudi citizen. The mosque was packed with 2,000 worshippers, and the bomb killed about 30 and wounded another 200.

The third attack struck near the hotels Imperial Marhaba and neighbouring Bellevue Park at El Kantaoui, north of the Tunisian city of Sousse. The attacker,

Bloody aftermath: at least 27 people were killed in the gun attack on the Tunisian resort of Sousse

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Seifeddine Rezgui, went on the rampage armed with an assault rifle and grenades. He killed 38 people (of whom around 30 were British) and wounded another 36 before the security forces eventually shot him dead.

Rafik Chelly, Tunisian Secretary of State for Security, initially claimed Rezgui was a “cleanskin” and was not known to the authorities. It has since emerged that he was a member of an Islamist society while at university in Kairouan. The city has a track record for Islamic militancy, with links to Libya’s Ansar al-Sharia. This group was responsible for killing the US Ambassador to Libya in 2012, which resulted in Washington declaring the organisation a terror group. Tunisia, struggling to cobble together a workable coalition between the country’s

secular and Islamist politicians, did not follow suit until the following year. Since then, many of Ansar al-Sharia’s Tunisian supporters have joined ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

For some time the Tunisian authorities have been grappling with the dilemma of what to do about the 3,000 Tunisian fighters who have gone to fight jihad in Iraq, Libya and Syria. If they are locked up on their return, there is always a danger of radicalising them even further. But it is believed that some of these fighters are now running militant networks in Tunisia.

Certainly Rezgui was not acting alone; someone procured the firearms and grenades for him, and there have been arrests. Intriguingly, a retired British policeman reported seeing a second gunman shooting tourists on the beach in front of the Imperial Marhaba Hotel – though Tunisian authorities say the forensic evidence does not support this. They have announced that, of the 12 people arrested in connection with the attack, eight face charges. While the Tunisian government claims to have stopped the network that supported Rezgui, the reality is that over the last few years there have been regular clashes with “rebels”, especially in the western Chaambi Mountains.

The Tunisian authorities have also since confirmed Rezgui was trained in Libya, along with the two Tunisians who stormed the Bardo museum in March, killing 21 people. The Libyan link, however, was clear in Rezgui’s martyr photograph, which showed him with two Kalashnikov assault rifles. The Tunisian security forces use Western-supplied firearms, and one of the Kalashnikov’s was an AK-74M or AK103.

Throughout the summer of 2011, Libyan opposition forces fighting in Tripoli, Sirte, Bani Walid and elsewhere were regularly seen sporting brand new Kalashnikov AK-74M or AK100 series assault rifles. The former is the standard type of weapon in use with the Russian Army and was accepted into service in the early 1990s. The AK-103 is essentially a re-chambered AK-74M firing the larger 7.62mm round.

There were reports prior to the revolution that former Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was about to manufacture the AK-103 under licence as part of a massive modernisation programme for the Libyan Armed Forces. Russia has declined to comment on the issue, so it remains unclear how many AK-74M or AK-103 are currently in circulation in Libya. The general consensus is that the Russian state-owned arms exporter, Rosoboronexport, shipped the AK-103s legitimately to Tripoli and the Libyan Procurement Directorate before the arms embargo was implemented. Essentially, the AK-103s are looted sample guns and, along with the AK-74M, are available on the Libyan black market.

Terrified holidaymakers in Tunisia were aghast at the attack, as Rezgui did not fit the accepted profile of a

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jihadist. Looking like a westernised Tunisian, he was clean-shaven and dressed in football-style dark shorts and tee-shirt. His appearance on the beach carrying a parasol concealing his firearm gave no reason to arouse suspicion. The Tunisians have since beefed up security on their tourist beaches. Units deployed will include police commandos known as the GCGN (Groupement de Commando of the Garde National). This, however, will be a short lived measure and will do little to reassure visitors in the long run. The Tunisian authorities will no doubt be seeking advice on what can be done to secure its cultural landmarks such as the El Djem amphitheatre, which are hugely popular with visitors.

At the time of Rezgui's killing spree there were around 20,000 British holidaymakers in the country, some 6,000 of whom were in the Sousse resorts. Many of them were immediately repatriated, while people planning to travel to Tunisia have rebooked their holidays for different destinations. This exodus and the resulting publicity will cost Tunisia an estimated \$515 million – a quarter of its annual tourism earnings. British tour operators have now been left scrabbling to reassess the desirability of offering package holidays to Tunisia. At the same time, the British government has announced that it is stepping up efforts to stop radicalisation at grass roots and to stop impressionable youths travelling to war zones.

Trying to counter and forecast future attacks is ultimately a very difficult challenge. What is clear is that Ramadan may increasingly become a problematic month for the West; the 26 June attacks occurred in the first week of the holy month. This trend first occurred during the conflict in Algeria, and ISIS now seems to have

latched onto Ramadan as a preferred time to escalate attacks.

In the meantime, the British government is debating the veracity of conducting air strikes against ISIS targets in Syria. At the same time it has been struggling with accepted terminology for the group: Islamic State, ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham) or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). British Parliamentarians have been arguing the use of any of these terms bestows a legitimacy that ISIS does not deserve – as it is neither Islamic in its practices or a recognised state. The Middle East, including Arab media outlet Al Jazeera, uses the term Daesh – short for Al Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa'al Sham. Ultimately the name does not matter; what is a threat is the vile ideology that it espouses.

Turkey has made it clear that it is losing patience with the situation in Syria, where President Assad's regime is losing control day by day. In particular, Turkey is alarmed at Syria's Kurds declaring an independent state in the north running along the Syria border with Turkey. The Turks reason they need to establish a security buffer inside Syria to enable them to control the flow of refugees and militants. In reality, Turkey does not want the Turkish Kurds' aspirations for independence rekindled.

What is clear is that ISIS's hold on parts of Syria and Iraq continues to inspire attacks on both Western and Shia targets. Tunisia, to its cost, has discovered that the same holds true for neighbouring Libya. It is now vital that the European Union increases its efforts to promote democracy and good governance in both countries or they will go the same route as Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Armed security was stepped up across Tunisia following the June shootings, amid fears of further attacks

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