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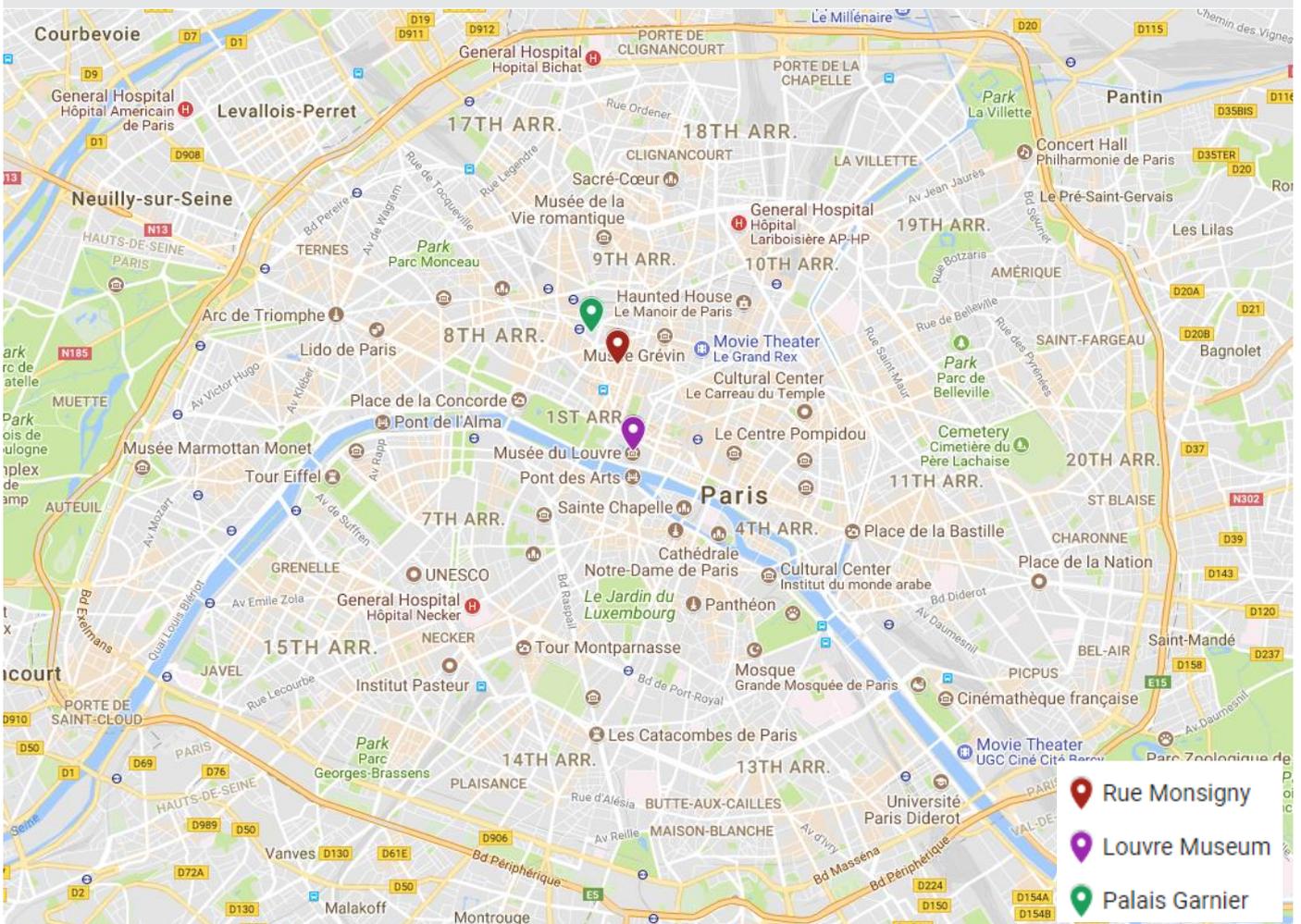




Terror Attack in Paris’s Opera District

KEY POINTS

- Two people, including the attacker, have been killed after a suspected terror attack in Paris’s Opera district.
- Several others have been injured after the stabbing attack on the evening of 12 May 2018.
- Islamic State has claimed that one of its “soldiers” carried out the attack



SITUATIONAL SUMMARY

Terrorism: Islamic State has claimed that one of its “soldiers” carried out a knife attack in the Opera district of Paris which has left two people dead, including the attacker. Four others were wounded but none are now believed to be in a life-threatening condition. The attack occurred at about 2100hrs local time on 12 May as the assailant began stabbing passers-by on rue Monsigny. Reports



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suggest that the attacker tried to enter several bars and restaurants in the popular nightlife district but was prevented from doing so by those inside.

Police arrived within minutes and first attempted to disable the assailant with a stun gun before shooting him dead once the attacker came at them. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe has claimed that police had shot the attacker dead within nine minutes of the first emergency call.

The exact profile of the attacker is unclear at this time. A judicial source has reported that the assailant was male and born in 1997 in Chechnya, Russia. The same source has also reported that his parents have been taken into custody. Those at the scene report the attacker shouted "Allahu akbar" or "God is great" in Arabic.

SOLACE GLOBAL COMMENT

Despite Islamic State claiming responsibility for the attack, the attacker's link to the terror group is unclear at this stage. It is possible that he was inspired by the terror group rather than having any specific direct links. Islamic State regularly takes responsibility for attacks which are undertaken in its name or inspired by its ideology. Attacks of this kind are expected to continue as Islamic State territory in the Middle East deteriorates. European nations fear the impact of returning fighters as well as those inspired by the terror group. France is an active partner in the anti-Islamic State coalition, making it a legitimate target in the eyes of the caliphate.

The attack does seem targeted rather than random. The Opera district is a popular nightlife location with many bars and restaurants. Many people were on the streets at 2100hrs as the attack occurred. The area is also popular with tourists, as it lies between the main opera house in Paris and the Louvre museum.

The attack in Paris comes with France still on high alert following a string of terror incidents since the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks. Since 2015, more than 245 people in France have been killed in terrorist attacks. The French government has since launched Operation Sentinelle where thousands of troops have been deployed across the country. The increase in troop deployments allows for greater security to be given to high-risk areas such as transport hubs, tourist sites, and religious buildings. It is believed that this increased security is what allowed for the quick response to the Paris attacker and prevent further deaths of civilians.

Operation Sentinelle was initially launched alongside a state of emergency, implemented after the November 2015 Paris attacks. President Macron declared an end to the state of emergency in November 2017, after signing a sweeping counterterrorism law into force. The law gives security agencies more authority to conduct searches, to close religious facilities, and to restrict the movements of people suspected of extremist ties. Human rights groups have criticised the bill as establishing a permanent state of emergency. Many commentators have praised the new laws, highlighting how since the November 2015 attacks in Paris, terrorists have generally conducted low-technology attacks. This may suggest that access to explosives and firearms has been stifled somewhat.

Travellers should be prepared for a tense atmosphere in Paris and across France in the short-term. There is likely to be an increase in the frequency of evacuations and cordons due to suspicious packages and events. All police instruction should be followed immediately to avoid any misunderstanding which could lead to a forceful police response.



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SECURITY ADVICE

LOW TERRORISM RISK



If caught in a potential terrorism incident, travellers are advised to RUN – HIDE – TELL – FIGHT. RUN – If in a location where gunfire or explosions are heard, leave the area or building by any safe and available exit immediately. HIDE – If unable to run away, find suitable cover or barricade yourself in a room. Remember to silence your phone and turn vibrate off. TELL – Inform emergency services or alert someone who is able to do it for you. Once police arrive, comply with their instructions and do not make any sudden movements. FIGHT – As a last resort, if confronted with a gunman, it is recommended to fight back by using the element of surprise by shouting, screaming and running fast at the attacker. If sheltered with others, convince them to do the same and rush the attacker all at once. Ensure the person entering the shelter is the attacker and not law enforcement.

For most travel to France, Solace Global would not advise clients of the need for enhanced security or medical measures, depending on traveller profile. Travellers are advised to use travel-tracking technology with an intelligence feed for all travel in the continent. This should enable a traveller to be alerted of any security updates within their vicinity, and to update others of their movements in case of an emergency.