

Connecting unrelated events is a side effect of terrorism

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Flowers at the entrance to the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry, paying tribute to the murdered Russian Ambassador to Turkey, Andrei Karlov. Moscow, 19 December. [Shutterstock.com]

The Berlin Christmas market attack, the assassination of Russia's ambassador in Ankara and the Zurich Mosque killing. While none of these events are related, international media and Donald Trump have not hesitated to connect them, writes Dr. Marta Dominguez Diaz.

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On Monday (19 December), a man opened fire at a mosque in central Zurich, injuring three people. The same day, a truck plowed into pedestrians at Berlin's Christmas market, killing at least 12 people and injuring 48. Meanwhile, the Russian ambassador in Turkey was shot dead by an off-duty police officer at an art gallery in Ankara.

Scarce information has emerged from the three events so far; Swiss police are collecting evidence before making declarations, German police do not have a confirmed suspect, and many ambiguities surround the Turkish-Russian case. With so little information, there are still a few things that deserve further reflection.

It seems quite likely that the attacks are unrelated. Yet, the three events have been connected by commentators from various sources, from *The Guardian* to the *New York Times*. Donald Trump also linked the three on the day of the attacks, on Twitter, writing "Today there were terror attacks in Turkey, Switzerland, and Germany – and it is only getting worse. The civilized world must change thinking!"

Connecting unrelated atrocities as if they were part of an orchestrated scheme reveals one of the devastating effects terrorism is having in Europe and North America, a price our collective psyche is paying that will surely have secondary effects. Days like the 20th of December trigger a state of shared paranoia which, albeit difficult to control, is more dangerous than helpful. Actually, the only thing that the three cases evidently share by now is that they all seem to involve, in some capacity, Muslims. Yet it is likely that the similarities between the three stop there.

The nature of the attacks is clearly different in terms of the targets. What happened in Berlin bears resemblance to the Nice attack committed in July this year, when a truck drove into crowds celebrating Bastille Day for what at least, for the moment, seems jihadi-inspired.

By contrast, by now the incident in Zurich looks similar to something that occurred in Eastern Switzerland back in August 2014, when a young adult was killed inside a mosque in St Gallen. Back then, the case received far less attention, possibly because it was considered an 'internal dispute' within a Muslim community and not something that would affect the wider (read, mainly non-Muslim) public. The 'civilised world' – to use Donald Trump's words – did not apparently need to do anything about it.

One may wonder whether a gun attack, injuring three people in Switzerland, would have reached the American public, Donald Trump included, if we could not hastily conclude that it was a 'terrorist' act. Would we have been concerned about the Muslim victim(s) if their murder had not coincided with the killings in Berlin? Would they have received the same media attention?

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