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## ISIS's Last Gasps

The killing of three people in the south of France by a man claiming allegiance to Isis will make people doubt if this murderous cult is as dead as governments had announced and people had hoped. The answer is that the attack in the Carcassonne region by a single gunman, said to be a Moroccan petty criminal from the area, proves very little about the strength of Isis as a continuing threat.

It will always be easy for a single killer, who in this case has been named as 36-year-old Redouane Lakdim, to shoot down passers-by chosen at random or trapped in a supermarket. Lakdim demanded the release of Salah Abdeslam, a survivor of the Isis gang which killed 130 people in Paris on 13 November 2015, but there is no evidence so far that the killer, who has been shot dead by police, was part of a cell or that this was an attack organised from above or from outside the country.

Even if there was some degree of organisation behind the killings, it is important to take on board that atrocities carried out by Isis are geared to produce maximum publicity. Often, they happen close to iconic places in capital cities such as the Westminster or London Bridge attacks, or on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice in 2016 when 86 people were mowed down and killed by a lorry deliberately driven into them. The very cruel and arbitrary nature of the murders are designed to achieve the maximum publicity.

Isis is far less important than it was three years ago when it controlled territory in western Iraq and eastern Syria the size of Great Britain. At that time its terrorist operations in

France and elsewhere could call on the resources of a de facto state that had money, weapons, expertise and the capacity to inspire its gunmen and suicide bombers.

This is no longer true to anything like the same degree.

The Islamic State died with the capture of its great strongholds, Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, in the second half of 2017. It does still have its hideouts in the deserts of the region and has benefited from the dispersal of effort in the campaign against it by the Iraqi government's confrontation with the Iraqi Kurdish authorities over Kirkuk, and the Turkish invasion of Afrin that has diverted the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) which had previously been fighting it. In a small way, Isis is back in business in its heartlands, though on nothing like the scale on which it previously operated.

Wherever there is chaos in Islamic countries, Isis will find opportunities to lodge itself and expand. Much of its most savage violence takes place largely below the radar of the international media, notably in Afghanistan where an Isis suicide bomber killed 33 and wounded 65 Shia celebrating the New Year in Kabul on 21 March.

Applause from social media sympathetic to Isis may give the impression that it still has a large base of support, but this is doubtful. Such support peaked when it was a new and rapidly expanding force in 2014 and 2015. Even then, it never became a vehicle in Europe for other social and political discontents and it is unlikely that this will happen now.