

French counter-terrorism post-2015 Paris attacks: between the imperatives of internal security and the necessity of external cooperation

مكافحة فرنسا للإرهاب بعد هجمات باريس عام 2015: بين متطلبات الأمن الداخلي وضرورات التعاون الخارجي

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Abstract:

Even though terrorism has always existed throughout French history, the Charlie Hebdo murders in January 2015 and the terrorist attacks of 13 November in Paris marked a turning point in the trans-nationalisation and hybridization of the existential terrorist threat, with France becoming the new target of globalised terrorism, particularly Al-Qaeda and Islamic State.

The study aims, through “causal process tracing” (CPT) methodology, on the one hand, to explore the multidimensional impact of these terrorist attacks and their ongoing effect on the collective memory of French society. On the other hand, it attempts to review major changes in domestic policy on counter-terrorism governance, including the development of exceptional measures and new institutional structures, as well as international anti-terrorism cooperation. Therefore, France's counter-terrorism strategy should prioritise addressing the core causes of terrorism rather than relying solely on securitisation and militarisation.

Keywords: Anti-terrorism cooperation, Counter-terrorism, Domestic security, External security, France, Paris terrorist attacks of 2015.

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Introduction

Following the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015, President François Hollande addressed the Congress in Versailles in a speech declaring a “war on terrorism” to deal with the phenomenon of transnational terrorism, which represents a threat to France’s republican values, proposing a “joint” response and various exceptional and multidimensional measures at the national level to counter terrorism¹. Additionally, France has established new anti-terrorism cooperation policies to address this issue in the aftermath of the 2015 attacks in Paris, while considering the equilibrium between the necessity for global partnerships and internal security measures. This is why the contribution examines the role of French counterterrorism governance in addressing the transnational terrorist threat, which has the potential to significantly impact national, regional, and global security, including the dynamic interrelationship between terrorism and security.

This study focuses on a crucial question that addresses the issues mentioned above:

How has the new existential terrorist threat following the Charlie Hebdo shooting in January 2015 and the 13 November attacks in Paris shaped France's domestic counter-terrorism governance and anti-terrorism cooperation policies at the regional and international levels?

The following sub-questions complement this central question:

1. How has terrorism in France evolved through the process of historical phases, including global terrorism, which blurs the line between internal and external security?

2. Why has France been targeted by networks affiliated with Al-Qaeda and Islamic State?

3. In addition to efforts to improve anti-terrorist cooperation following the 2015 Paris attacks, what are France's primary strategies for countering terrorism in terms of extraordinary institutional and legislative measures?

The underlying hypothesis that will be tested throughout the study concerns the common thread of interdependent variables that analyses French counter-terrorism public policies in the period following the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks through domestic strategies that mix hard and soft measures, primarily attributed to the extraordinary laws and policies that prevent violent extremism. Similarly, the overhaul of French foreign policy agendas has enhanced regional, transregional, and international cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

The study is based on a “causal process tracing” (CPT) methodology, which is an analytical tool that aims to identify and explain, within a historical process, the causal mechanisms that led to the phenomenon and thereby designate the processes by which certain initial causes (the variables) transmit their causal force and produce their final concrete effects². Thus, the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 are considered initial variables that have profoundly impacted French counter-terrorism policies at the domestic, regional, and international levels (final effects). Meanwhile, the

intermediate causal mechanisms were clearly illustrated through the step-by-step causal chain, the identification of actors and the decision-making process, as well as the inter-institutional cooperation, which was completely revolutionised following the 2015 attacks.

The research adopted the “theories of public policy analysis” as its foundational structure, focusing specifically on counter-terrorism strategies. More specifically, it employed the “institutional approach,” which focuses on how institutions influence political decision-making, the rules, and strategic relationships of organisations and political actors.³ Indeed, the terrorist attacks of 2015 significantly influenced French institutions in terms of coordinated decision-making to tackle transnational terrorism. Consequently, French strategies for countering and preventing violent extremism are developed through its legal framework and institutional systems, alongside the inter-agency harmonisation for counter-terrorism operations between different services, such as the national army, police, gendarmerie, and intelligence security services. Correspondingly, France has bolstered its cross-institutional collaboration in both regional and international anti-terrorism efforts.

Furthermore, the theoretical lens of “Critical Security Studies”—incorporating the Copenhagen, Welsh, and Paris Schools—provides a suitable framework for examining French counter-terrorism strategies through the interconnected dynamics of securitisation, politicisation, and criminalisation.⁴ Thus, considering transnational terrorism as an asymmetric and existential threat justifies extreme and exceptional measures in terms of counter-terrorism policies⁵. While from a theoretical and analytical perspective, securitisation is a “contested concept”.⁶ At the operational level, counter-terrorism actors have placed it at the top of the security agenda with a triple function: performative, political, and normative,⁷ in response to the rise of hybrid terrorist threats posed by non-state actors, which constitute a growing challenge for countries and institutions on a global scale. In so doing, hybrid terrorism is defined by synchronised and coordinated action that specifically targets governments’ structural vulnerabilities and seamlessly moves between several national and international interfaces.⁸

The analysis will be divided into three parts; the first will focus on terrorism and counter-terrorism in France, including a historical overview of the evolution of terrorism as a constant existential threat with multiple facets, while highlighting the characteristics of the current French approach to counter-terrorism. The second section will then concentrate on the 2015 terrorist assaults in France, specifically against Charlie Hebdo, and the terrorist attacks of November in Paris, which left a multifaceted and enduring impact as a new target of globalised terrorism. Finally, the study has shown France’s responses to the 2015 terrorist attacks, including national counter-terrorism measures and strengthened international cooperation, with an assessment of French policies on counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism (CT/PVE).

First: Terrorism and counter-terrorism: the French approach

Terrorism is an evolving phenomenon that has consistently been prevalent throughout French history. On the one hand, there are many different aspects of terrorism in France, from revolutionary movements to postmodern and globalised terrorism. On the other hand, it undeniably constitutes an existential threat to national security, which has a significant and ongoing impact on French counter-terrorism policies.

1. The evolving phenomenon of terrorism: A constant existential threat in French history

The concept of terrorism has its roots in the French historical context. Specifically, during the French Revolution, this term emerged to define a certain form of violence. It particularly referred to actions carried out by the government, which were integral to its governing principles and claims to power, essentially ruling by instilling fear. Over time, the definition expanded to encompass various forms of violent actions⁹. However, starting in the latter half of the 19th century, it shifted from being viewed as a means of state control to acts of violence aimed at the state itself. This particular kind of violence has been a persistent issue for France, from the 19th century to the present day. Additionally, France was the target of international terrorism in the early 1900s. The wave of terrorism continued during the interwar period, especially because of the situation in the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans. This terrorism did affect the French people in those areas. But there was also terrorism in France's national territory. This led to the 1934 murders of Yugoslavian King Alexander and French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou in Marseille. After World War II, the Cold War intensified the level of international terrorism. The conflict between the Eastern and Western blocs led to the creation of different groups. Indeed, these groups targeted or operated in France, and the geopolitical situation and decolonisation movements deeply influenced them. Also, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia carried out terrorism by targeting Turkey's allies in the West, especially in France.¹⁰

The rise of non-state actors, which represented asymmetrical threats, was something France had to deal with after the Cold War ended. Because of this, the changing nature of transnational threats—especially international terrorism—has become a security dilemma characterised by its diffuse and unpredictable nature. This has been particularly evident in the unstable post-bipolar era and evolving geopolitical context of globalisation¹¹. However, in the early 1990s, France saw the emergence of new terrorist groups associated with international jihadism, targeting particularly deprived social communities in the French suburbs. The interaction between domestic and international terrorism in France is operated through former members of the Salafist part of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the armed Islamic group (GIA), and the influence of extremist thoughts related to the geopolitical context of the Gulf and Afghan wars, which together formed the basis of the jihadist groups¹². But, during this time, France was dealing with domestic terrorism that also

had strong international connections, like the attacks at the Saint-Michel/Notre-Dame station on line B of the Paris RER in 1995. That's why terrorism in France reflects the sociocultural and identity crisis, delinquency, and the failure of the republican model in the face of the suburbs. These factors lead people to join “nihilistic jihadism”, considered an extremist movement that advocates the use of violence and get involved in regional conflicts like those in Afghanistan, the Gulf Wars, and the Arab Springs, with new waves of terrorism leading up to the attacks of November 13, 2015, which were the height of global terrorism linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State¹³.

The expansion of global insecurity, due to the emergence of transnational terrorist threats, has de facto rendered national borders almost obsolete, with a strong interconnection between internal and external security¹⁴. This has deeply influenced the French perception of terrorism as an “existential threat”, being exploited within the framework of a securitisation process without distinction between subjective and objective security, that is, by differentiating “real” threats from “false” threats, making terrorism a referential object of security and public policy within the French context¹⁵. In doing so, the French political discourse on the construction of an “internal enemy” figure since the 1980s, followed by the episode of the 1995 attacks, has been based on a series of amalgams around the symbolic categories of the “immigrant” and the “foreigner”, the “Muslim” and the “suburban youth”, or the “terrorist”. The first Gulf War in 1990-1991 and the attacks of September 11, 2001, further hardened the construction of the hybrid figure of the threat with the “external enemy” associated with a collective French perception and supported by a security discourse and the return of the colonial imagination¹⁶.

2. Protean shapes of terrorism in France: from anarchist movements to globalised terrorism

In the field of terrorism studies, David C. Rapoport argues that a wave theory of modern terrorism has evolved since the late 19th century. The theoretical framework is based on a generational model that links early terrorist groups to contemporary global terrorist movements according to their common characteristics, particularly ideology and strategy, including a dynamic and periodic cycle with the potential to adapt to changing circumstances by exploiting technological, legal, and institutional vulnerabilities but sharing the same worldview of violent and extremist action¹⁷. As a result, the history of global terrorism has evolved in a typical “periodisation waves” pattern, transitioning through the phase of “pre-global terrorism”, characterised by a very heterogeneous series of actors, but whose form and nature changed towards the end of the 19th century due to various political and technical reasons, with the emergence of “globalised terrorism”, which has been built through different waves, including anarchist, anti-colonial, new left, and religious¹⁸. France has seen the emergence of several types of terrorism since the end of the 19th century. Of these, revolutionary and anarchist terrorism are notable because they advocate for radical change using armed rebellion and violent action, linking them to terror. Thus, France

experienced a series of so-called “anarchist” attacks between 1892 and 1894, inspired by German revolutionaries and the doctrine of Russian nihilists¹⁹, leading to terrorist attacks on French soil, particularly those against the Chamber of Deputies in 1893. The cycle of anarchist attacks partially concluded with the assassination of the President of the Third Republic, Sadi Carnot, by an Italian anarchist, Sante Geronimo Caserio, during the Lyon Exposition²⁰.

The second wave of terrorism was international and “anti-colonial” in nature, unlike the anarchist wave, which arose from a national political situation. Indeed, with the end of the Second World War, the decolonisation movement had obviously had a considerable influence on the legitimacy of the independence of the newly formed states considered by the West as “terrorist organisations”; this was also accompanied by lexical evolutions such as the “freedom fighters” and “resistant’s”²¹. In France, several attacks during the 1970s-1980s period were carried out by the Carlos group. In relation to the international terrorist Carlos Illich Ramirez Sanchez, during the “years of lead”, Europe in general and France in particular were the targets of anti-imperialist attacks.²² Meanwhile, “state-sponsored terrorism,” which stems from external conflicts, concentrates on France, particularly Iran, which plans attacks in France that result in the deaths of 14 people and the injuries of 300 others, most notably in Paris in 1986, as revenge for France's backing of Iraq²³. However, there have also been significant “separatist and regional terrorist movements” in France. This was especially true for the Basque movement ETA, the Corsican National Liberation Front, and the Breton independence movements. Furthermore, active terrorist groups were “far-left terrorist groups” like “Action Directe,” which carried out multiple targeted killings, including the 1985 murder of General Engineer René Audran and the 1986 murder of Renault CEO Georges Besse.²⁴ But in the 1990s, a fresh wave of jihadist-affiliated domestic terrorism in France grew more intense, with the “nebula” of franchised international terrorism from Al-Qaeda²⁵ and the Islamic State. As a result, the terrorism landscape in France encompasses a range of radical movements, particularly in relation to state and separatist terrorism, including jihadist, far-left, and far-right movements.²⁶

3. Characteristics of the current French approach in the fight against terrorism

The foundations of France's policy for preventing and combating terrorism are changing, thus reflecting a focus on a core set of institutional and operational actors and becoming more prominent as the terrorist threat shifts. French counterterrorism is based on a contextually relevant model and is administered under a security umbrella that is agreed upon by both left and right political factions. Indeed, in the context of globalized and changing insecurity challenges, counterterrorism and preventive measures are both the result of the redefinition of new domestic enemies and a reflection of the shifting nature of threats. The institutional and structural context of French decision-making has reshaped strategic priorities in the wake of persistent terrorism and the changing nature of warfare, with the development of a counter-terrorism policy rooted in a consensual national framework despite operational

constraints, accompanied by certain internal contradictions.²⁷ As a result of these changes, public counterterrorism policies have been rethought, and state missions have adjusted their sovereign prerogatives in managing the transnational terrorist risk. Moreover, the new measures not only aim to address the shortcomings of traditional security architectures but also to respond to the growing sense of insecurity among the French people. Thus, French counter-terrorism policies are also characterised by an innovative reaction to the deficiencies of specialised prevention and, more broadly, to containing emergencies during terrorist attacks.²⁸

The French counter-terrorism approach reflects a frontal opposition between the terrorist challenge and democratic governance, often perceived as a confrontation between the security imperative, on the one hand, and individual human rights, on the other hand; between the rule of law and the state of emergency. Additionally, French anti-terrorism policies occupy a middle ground between strict responses to crises and a continuous adaptation of the law, which reflects an abrupt discontinuity in response to ongoing insecurities; however, this approach does not include a regulatory intermediate level that balances normality with urgency and security with fundamental rights, representing a third path based on the paradigm of police powers²⁹. French counter-terrorism is built around a centralised and specialised approach at the political and judicial levels, which is further supported by the institutionalisation of preventive measures, with the progressive improvement of coordination between the various government, intelligence, and police services since the introduction of the first anti-terrorist legislation in 1986. The fight against terrorism has been depoliticised by the inclusion of court procedures about terrorism with independent judges, even though special or exceptional procedural standards are still used to deal with terrorist crimes.³⁰ Thus, France sees the emergence of criminal prevention, in addition to the construction of a system of attenuated control of the fight against terrorism at the political level. This control is exercised by the Parliament and the Constitutional Council, while judicial control of the fight against terrorism is carried out exclusively by the Council of State and the Criminal Chamber of the Court of Cassation³¹.

Secondly: The 2015 terrorist attacks: France as the new target of globalised jihadism

The Islamic State and Al-Qaeda in particular have made France the new focus of international jihadism. Thus, the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan murders were part of a series of terrorist attacks that occurred on French soil in 2015. These terrorist events are part of a specific internal and external context, and have undoubtedly left an enduring effect and an imprint engraved in the collective memory of French society.

1. An overview of the 2015 terrorist events: the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan attacks

The terrorist threat in France has increased considerably, particularly in 2015, which was marked by several deadly terrorist attacks³², most notably the attack on 7 January 2015 against the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris,

which was stormed by two heavily armed assassins, killing 17 people and injuring 11 others. The killers were brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, aged 34 and 32 respectively, both second-generation immigrants. The reason given was to defend the Prophet Muhammad, previously insulted by Charlie Hebdo cartoonists³³. In this light, the attack on Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 was linked to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); the attack is mainly explained by the need of al-Qaeda Central to appeal to an increasingly heterogeneous audience in Europe in general and in France in particular with an extended operational campaign on amplifying trends in attacks related to symbolic targeting³⁴. Subsequently, on November 13, 2015, a series of synchronised attacks swiftly followed each other in Paris. The terrorist cell that planned and executed the attacks was composed of nine attackers who divided into three groups, simultaneously targeting the Stade de France (football stadium) in a suburb located north of Paris, the bar and restaurant district, and the Bataclan concert hall. The attacks involved successive suicide bombings, followed by a series of mass shootings using firearms and explosives. The final toll was 140 dead (130 victims and 10 terrorists or their relatives) and more than 413 injured, making these attacks the worst mass killings ever recorded in French history, claimed by the Islamic State (IS)³⁵.

The 2015 Paris attacks illustrated the evolution of the aspects of terrorist cell formation by combining the tactics of single-actor terrorism with group terrorism affiliated with IS and al-Qaeda. They carried out a series of simultaneous attacks targeting random crowds of primarily civilian targets. Regarding the weaponry used in the Paris attacks, there have been numerous noteworthy developments in the meantime. Traditionally, bombs were more common, but firearms, during the 2015 Paris attacks, were the primary tool. But the novelty in terms of the *modus operandi* was undoubtedly the use of a vehicle to commit mass murders.³⁶ The Paris attacks have de facto imposed an existential dilemma both for the French political authorities and for the actors in the fight against terrorism. The National Intervention Scheme (NIS), which mobilises all institutions, has sparked multifaceted steps in response to this unprecedented emergency. In fact, operations have been aided by enhanced coordination between the national police and gendarmerie, with their field operational devices piloted by the operational cell responsible for coordinating the action of all the units involved, especially the national police intervention force (FIPN), the elite Research, Assistance, Intervention, Deterrence unit (RAID), the search and intervention brigade (BRI), and the national gendarmerie intervention group (GIGN)³⁷.

2. Historical context of the 2015 Paris attacks: between internal and external factors

In 2015, France experienced a series of terrorist activities that surpassed all previous waves of terrorism in its history. The scale of terrorist attacks has proliferated geographically throughout the country, so in the whole of the Île-de-France region, attacks orchestrated by isolated people or in small groups have

occurred in Paris, Nice, Villejuif, Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, and Oignies. However, among these tragic events, the attacks of November 13, 2015, in Paris were undoubtedly the ones that caused the most devastation³⁸. The lack of border control and globalised security flaws in a dual-sided game between the interior and external world that promotes the trans-nationalisation of coordinated operations through “foreign terrorist fighters” (FTF) are the causes behind the ISIS attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015. Terrorist-organised networks, which rely on both groups and lone wolves, have reinforced the dynamic of terrorist tactical innovation and adaptive operational capability, which is closely based on the control of terrorist outsourcing with the assistance of FTF.³⁹

There are several reasons why France has been a main target for jihadist groups affiliated with the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. On one hand, an array of variables related to the French local context justify the causes. Therefore, the jihadists criticise France for its “anti-Muslim policy” domestically, citing the discrimination and injustice faced by French Muslim women as justification for the French authorities' implementation of the law of 2010 that forbids the wearing of the Islamic veil as a symbol of secularism and the law of 2004 that bans religious signs in schools. Thus, the jihadists are mainly trying to influence French Muslims, who represent about 8% of French society, to mobilise them to support the jihadist cause, presenting themselves as the only valuable option. In fact, the terrorist groups GIA, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Islamic State all criticise France for its disgraceful colonial past and its hegemonic influence during the postcolonial era that supported atheist regimes.⁴⁰ The external environment is also a major factor in the jihadist attacks against France. The attacks are in retaliation for French airstrikes on Islamic State territory, as well as French participation abroad in anti-terrorism operations linked to the wars in Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria.⁴¹

2. The impact of the 2015 terrorist attacks: a multifaceted dimension

The Paris attacks have had a lasting impact on French society, with a profound imprint on the collective national memory. The events are considered the most significant since the attacks of September 11, 2001, by French public opinion. The attacks of November 13th have particularly left varied traumas within French society, including an atmosphere of fear, a strengthening of security concerns, and a collapse of social cohesion⁴². The 2015 Paris attacks, however, demonstrated that racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-Muslim sentiments are inherently violent. The ensuing increase in fear and insecurity shaped Muslims' everyday lives, with sociological and cultural effects labelling them as violent offenders and the threat they pose to European societies in general and France in particular. The creation of a threat to the French republican model of coexistence between all minorities within the framework of tolerance and cohabitation, as well as the accusation of Muslims as disloyal and dangerous citizens, poses significant ramifications of the Paris attacks.⁴³

Consequently, the 2015 Paris attacks had a considerable short- and long-term economic impact on macroeconomic and stock market indices, with a cost for gross

domestic product (GDP) amounting to \$12 billion for France and \$22 billion for the world economy. With the devastating effects of the “fear factor” on financial markets and investments, the terrorist attacks of November 13 in Paris and the Charlie Hebdo shooting in January 2015 had severe economic and financial repercussions overall. This is especially true given that Paris is a popular travel destination for millions of people worldwide. With nearly 85 million annual tourists, tourism contributes up to 7% of the French gross national product (GNP). Paris and the Île-de-France, which constitute the main pole of economic activity in France, generate 30% of the country's GDP. Following this series of terrorist actions, Paris suffered a decrease of 750 million euros in terms of tourist income, as indicated by the tourist office of the Paris region⁴⁴.

Thirdly: France's response to the 2015 terrorist attacks: between domestic counter-terrorism measures and strengthened international cooperation

The Charlie Hebdo shooting in January 2015 and the terrorist attacks of November 13 in Paris constituted a decisive turning point for French anti-terrorism policies, leading to major changes in domestic policy, in particular the development of exceptional measures and new institutional structures. These transformations have enabled the establishment of preventive governance models to counter the hybrid terrorist threat. Moreover, French counter-terrorism cooperation efforts at the international level have been intensified by a combination of hard and soft strategies aimed at stemming transnational terrorism.

1. France's Domestic Counter-terrorism: The extraordinary measures and new institutional architectures as models of governance

Immediately after the 2015 Paris attacks, France's national security alert system, “Vigipirate,” was triggered, with an increase in alert levels following the Council of Ministers' declaration of a state of emergency. At the same time, deputies and senators were gathered in Versailles with urgent measures related to the fight against terrorism⁴⁵. This was initiated with “Operation Sentinel,” launched after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015 by mobilising between 7,000 and 13,000 armed forces for internal security purposes⁴⁶, as a symbol of the militarisation of the fight against terrorism within France, which has taken a new turn in the aftermath of the attacks of January 2015 as a reflection of the warlike drift of the fight against terrorism⁴⁷. In particular, the July 24, 2015, intelligence law recognised the growing significance of surveillance in the ongoing war on terrorism, along with providing intelligence services with tools previously exclusive to the judicial police, making administrative repression a weapon within counter-terrorism policy. Furthermore, the June 3, 2016, law has reinforced the administrative police's overall authority to combat terrorism. The law of October 30, 2017, on “Strengthening Internal Security and the Fight against Terrorism” (SILT), confirmed this restrictive trend⁴⁸.

In the French context, the normalisation of extraordinary institutionalised anti-terrorist measures dates back to the colonial law of 1955, which was established in response to the Algerian National Liberation Front in November 1954 during the

Algerian War. Indeed, these practices resurfaced in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 13 November 2015 and were at the heart of political discourse, particularly with the enactment of the SILT law. In line with the historical colonial tradition, which constantly targets the ‘postcolonial enemy inside’ with immigration linked to the imaginary of the former colonies. Thus, French political actors have turned to the discursive construction of the terrorist threat in the context of exceptional measures extended to the legal continuum, targeting suburbs and Muslim places of worship as sources of danger. The anti-terrorist measures were accompanied by the transformation of the exceptional threat into permanent emergency policies and a war against terrorism after the attacks of November 13⁴⁹. More significantly, despite their differing ideologies, Emmanuel Macron's and François Hollande's anti-terrorist policies mirror the same strict security measures and views of the Muslim community. As evidenced by his far-right security strategy, Macron has also adopted an active posture against “Islamist separatists,” which is in line with conservative and nationalist inclinations.⁵⁰

Following the 2015 Paris attacks, French counterterrorism efforts have increasingly centred on enhancing both horizontal and vertical interinstitutional cooperation, along with intentions to mobilise the public as part of targeted campaigns against terrorist acts. In this sense, a new “Stop-Jihadism” campaign was launched by the government on January 28, 2015, to involve the entire population in the prevention of terrorism and to accustom citizens to live under constant threat and to report to the authorities any suspicious activity or individual⁵¹. However, a set of institutional mechanisms in terms of preventing violent extremism has also been put in place in the first place in the French public school that plays a central role in the government's deradicalisation strategy led by the Ministry of National Education through the strengthening of civic education. In addition, deradicalization programs in French prisons were quickly developed after the Paris attacks of 2015 as part of the Radicalization Prevention Units (UPRA) later replaced by the “Radicalization Assessment Districts”, but there are also rehabilitation programs namely the “Prevention Center of Radicalization”, and the rehabilitation programs such as the “Prevention Center of Radicalization, integration and Citizenship” (ICPC) as well as the public-private partnership of the French government for the deradicalization of people convicted of terrorism with the RIVE program (Research and intervention on extremist violence), then the Individualized Accompaniment and Social Re-affiliation program (PEERS)⁵².

Counter-terrorism has become a significant security concern for French public opinion since the 2015 terrorist attacks. The French National Assembly intensified debates on the threat posed by organised terrorist networks like Daesh, lone individuals, and Al-Qaeda. The discussions centred on the need for law enforcement agencies to continually adapt to the terrorist threat and strengthen mission coordination between the gendarmerie and basic and intermediate units of the national police.⁵³ Furthermore, in response to the attacks, the parliamentary

intelligence delegation developed a National Intelligence Policy Plan (PNOR) to coordinate and direct the actions of the intelligence services, improve operational anticipation capabilities, and increase the effectiveness of their central and local missions.⁵⁴ In this context, a new inter-agency structure was set up on the premises of the Directorate-General for Internal Security (DGSI). The permanent staff (Emap) brings together the intelligence services and the judicial police services to strengthen coordination between the services in the prevention and fight against terrorism. Another tool for inter-institutional cooperation was the creation of the operational steering committee (CPO), which brings together representatives of the Emap, the Élysée task force, and the anti-terrorism section of the Paris public prosecutor's office.⁵⁵ The terrorist attacks of 2015 were the catalyst for significant change in terms of inter-institutional coordination and the articulation of counter-terrorism governance at the strategic and operational levels around the Directorate-General for Internal Security (DGSI) and the Directorate-General for External Security (DGSE). The enhanced institutional coordination provides an adequate response to the challenges of counter-terrorism through complementary structures, information sharing, and threat anticipation.⁵⁶

2. French international anti-terrorism cooperation: an array of strong policies and soft mechanisms

In addition to exposing the shortcomings of the EU's counterterrorism strategy, the 2015 Paris attacks marked the establishment of a new revolution in the institutionalisation and reformulation of the CT's governance in the areas of legislation, cross-border cooperation, and information sharing, including the operational coordination of the EU's intelligence and law enforcement agencies. At the same time, interinstitutional cooperation has been strengthened with the pivotal role of the Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA) and the Foreign Affairs Council. In the legislative field, the EU counterterrorism strategy has been very significant with the adoption of the European Security Agenda COM (2015) 185 and also with Directive 2017/541 on the fight against terrorism, which aimed to fill gaps in terms of CT governance but, above all, to prevent, arrest, and prosecute foreign terrorist fighters. This dynamic has been accompanied by an updated and increased mandate from Europol and the EU's Justice and Home Affairs agencies; thus, after the Charlie Hebdo attack, an Internet Reference Unit (IRU) was created, with the final adoption of the Passenger Name Record (PNR) Package in 2016⁵⁷.

French cooperation in the fight against terrorism, whether in the Sahel as part of Operations Serval and Barkhane or in Syria and Iraq with Operation Chammal—all these French military interventions are part of the international coalition initiated long before the attacks of 2015. But following the attacks of January 2015, French operational counter-terrorism efforts have tripled, particularly after the attacks of 11/13, and the degree of threat posed by jihadist networks from Syria to France through the influx of foreign terrorist fighters and air strikes has intensified to destroy the Islamic State⁵⁸. The UN Security Council's decisions authorising the use of armed

force definitely demonstrate the militarisation of counterterrorism. Thus, in reaction to the attacks in January 2015, France joined the coalition against Daesh and engaged the military instruments to “wage the war on terrorism,” which the French anti-terrorist legislature interpreted as extraterritorial terrorism sanctions.⁵⁹ However, what is even more crucial is that these actions affirmed “the preponderant principle of the fight against terrorism” in the French security perspective, based on the admission of connections between external instability and domestic security⁶⁰.

However, France's international action against terrorism after the 2015 Paris attacks was complemented by soft policies on the prevention of radicalisation and the strengthening of international cooperation in various fields, in particular the fight against terrorist financing within the framework of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). In addition, French engagement within post-conflict stabilisation missions aims to reduce the territorial influence of terrorist groups and their financial, human, and logistical networks. Thus, France has been actively involved in the fight against foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), in particular at the UN and within the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), by strengthening the commitment of the UN system in the fight against transnational terrorism, which is based on a global political, security, and development approach⁶¹.

3. Assessment of the French policies on counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism (CT/PVE)

The French approach to combating terrorism involves both proactive and stringent measures, yet it ironically encounters certain constraints. Despite increased surveillance following the 2015 Paris attacks, which classified over 400,000 people as “Fiche S” (a security risk to the state), it is clear that the terrorist threat is not going to be manageable, particularly with the rise of lone actors who are difficult to identify and detect.⁶² Since the adoption of the 2015 Intelligence Act, on the one hand, intelligence and the military have become central elements of France's counter-terrorism security arsenal; on the other, new institutional mechanisms have been implemented, namely the national commission for the control of intelligence techniques (CNCTR), the national centre for intelligence and counter-terrorism (CNRLT), and the national counter-terrorism centre⁶³. The evolving nature of institutional frameworks propels intelligence from shadow operations to the forefront, making it a component of governmental public policy while simultaneously presenting a danger associated with increased securitisation and militarisation measures⁶⁴. Nevertheless, the French approach to fighting terrorism frequently struggles to maintain human rights and civil freedoms. These include the right to a fair trial, the right to privacy, and freedom of expression. In practice, these essential democratic values have been significantly strained since the 2015 attacks in Paris. The failure of French counter-terrorism policy is due to the indiscriminate targeting of individuals suspected of terrorism, particularly Muslim and Arab communities and individuals, who are essentially treated as security risks and seen as an issue for

integration. This situation arises from connecting terrorism with immigration, which carries the danger of unfairly grouping all foreign individuals.⁶⁵

French international cooperation in the fight against terrorism, which has taken the form of asymmetric military action by the armed forces against terrorist groups in the Sahel and Mali, Syria, and Iraq to recapture territories that had been lost, certainly weakens the Islamic State and contributes to slowing the advance of jihadist movements, but it does not destroy them. On the contrary, they retain their capacity to cause harm and their adaptability to change. Moreover, France's international cooperation to counter terrorism financing has its limitations and encounters certain constraints due to the increasing number of foreign terrorist fighters engaging in the 'micro-financing' of terrorism activities, necessitating the active involvement of both the private sector and public financial institutions to effectively address this evolving issue. Despite the continued inadequacy of aid policies for development when confronted with rising global terrorism, there is a similar pattern with the budding domain of international efforts aimed at forestalling radicalisation⁶⁶. In the context of a French "domestic" environment rooted in "methodological nationalism," which limits measures intended to combat violent extremism and is seen as a new perspective on alleged radical Islamic ideology, and an "external" landscape influenced by the process of Europeanization, where models and standards for deradicalisation are specifically managed by European supranational arenas, these PVE strategies have been reduced to a result of political and bureaucratic manoeuvring⁶⁷.

Conclusion

The research concluded by scrutinising the existential and emerging terrorist threat impacting French national security after the 2015 attacks in Paris, notably the Charlie Hebdo shooting in January 2015 and the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, events that triggered a considerable shift in French counter-terrorism strategies by striking a balance between the requirement for external cooperation and the imperatives of domestic security. On the one hand, the study's analytical setting facilitated understanding the historical relationship between the origins and causes of French terrorism, ranging from anarchist movements to postmodern and globalised terrorism connected to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. On the other hand, the 2015 attacks in Paris have had a direct impact on the governance of French counter-terrorism at the national, regional, and international levels.

Upon concluding this article, the following recommendations have been established:

1. Terrorism in France has evolved in a series of "periodic phases"; it is therefore imperative that the French approach to counter-terrorism focus more on the root causes while recognising that this pathology is a symptom of globalisation and interdependence that blurs the traditional boundary between internal and external security.

2. French counter-terrorism governance must be in line with the core republican principles of the rule of law and maintain a balance between freedom and security, regardless of the steps taken in the wake of the 2015 Paris attacks, from strengthened legislation to new institutional architectures, particularly the establishment of the National Centre for Counter-Terrorism within the National Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Centre (CNRLT).

3. It is crucial that French soft mechanisms and policies on deradicalisation and prevention of violent extremism (PVC) be reshaped within a new framework that prioritises national cohesion among different religious and ethnic minorities. Moreover, these strategies must never be perceived as unfairly targeting immigrants and Muslims.

4. It is undeniable that the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 were the starting point for numerous regional and international anti-terrorism cooperation initiatives, particularly in the fight against terrorist financing and stopping the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, although the effects of these measures continue to be quite constrained and remain inadequate. Indeed, it is essential to reconsider France's interventionist strategies aimed at halting the spread of the Islamic State, shifting the focus away from relying on militarisation and securitisation, and moving towards more comprehensive and humane approaches to anti-terrorism cooperation.

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