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France's Terrorism Fight

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The fight against terrorism is one of President Emmanuel Macron's political priorities. Activities in this field are carried out in two main directions, one, in the country, through new institutions and regulations and, two, abroad, through military operations and by increasing development assistance in Africa and the Middle East. More and more evidence indicates that they have been having the expected operational and political effects. The number of detected and subverted terrorist plots is increasing and Macron's initiatives in this area can count on considerable public support.

[France's Strategic Review of National Defence and Security, adopted in October 2017, describes terrorism as the country's greatest threat](#), with Islamists in particular increasingly the source, given the instability in Syria, Libya, or the Sahel. Macron is aware that the effectiveness of France's counter-terrorism efforts will be a key political test for him. Since the beginning of his presidency, he has undertaken a number of actions to bolster these efforts, both at the national and international levels.

Scale and Types of Threats. Among EU countries, France is particularly vulnerable to radicalism. Of the 5,500 known European fighters who between 2012 and 2017 fought for the militant group Islamic State (ISIS) on the territory of Syria and Iraq, about 1,900 were French. According to the special services, about 300 have returned to France. Given their military experience and contacts with other ISIS fighters, as well as the potential for connections with the global terrorist network, the threat to France's national security should be described as serious. Since 2015, 250 people in France have been killed in terrorist attacks. The source of the threat is, above all, international terrorist organisations (namely ISIS, Al-Qaeda). They train and send militants to France to conduct attacks or terrorist plots. These organisations often interact through various social networks with radical influential representatives of Muslim communities in France. Therefore, the terrorist threat also has an internal dimension. Economic and socio-cultural problems in the country have increased the size of "ghettos," now inhabited by about 5 million people, mainly Muslims, since the 1990s. Social exclusion combined with the failure of cultural integration act as a kind of sub-resource for radicalisation.

New Anti-Terrorist Institutions and Regulations. Macron has centralised decisions and actions regarding the fight against terrorism. He also has given the services more latitude in their response. First, he created the National Counter-Terrorism Centre, supervised by the national coordinator of special services, an official of the presidential administration. None of Macron's predecessors controlled so much anti-terrorist policy. In addition, on 13 July, the government adopted a new strategy to fight terrorism. It assumes an increase in the role of the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI, which will employ 3,000 new officers), which should affect the intensification of intelligence and preventive activities. The strategy also assumes more effective punishment for terrorism. The creation of a national prosecutor's office for terrorism is meant to help accomplish that goal. To improve monitoring of people considered prone to radicalisation, now estimated at 24,000, a special team for profiling and monitoring suspected terrorists will be launched in 2019 as part of the existing Central Directorate of the Judicial Police.

Fulfilling an election promise, Macron announced the end of the state of emergency on 1 November 2017, in place throughout the country since the attacks of 13 November 2015. At the same time, from 30 October 2017, a new anti-terrorist law came into force, which maintained several instruments of the state of emergency although assessed by a large portion of the public as repressive. It strengthens the powers of the administrative authorities: the minister of internal affairs and prefectures, especially in arrests and searches. In addition, administrative authorities may order the immediate closure of a place of religious worship or the dissolution of a legal public gathering if they consider the activity there provokes discrimination, hatred, or violence, or is being used to prepare a terrorist attack.

On 28 February, a new strategy for counteracting radicalisation was released and it marked a turning point in the policy until then of limiting Islamic fundamentalist influence. It contains a number of tools to combat extremist views propagated by people deemed to be radicalised. In addition to one operating in Ile-de-France, the French department including the capital, three new de-radicalisation centres will open, one each in Lyon, Lille, and Marseille. These units will be located far from city centres and will be where people once radicalised will be isolated and rehabilitated, for instance, former ISIS fighters.

External Fight against Terrorism. Macron also recognises that for the fight against terrorism to be effective at home, it has to include efforts in the Middle East and Africa aimed at reducing the threat of attacks in Europe. This has led to the continued involvement of the French military in the Sahel and in the Middle East, following after the previous administration, but he has also increased the annual budget for these operations by €650 million. These include the anti-terrorist operations *Barkhane* in the Sahel (ongoing since 2013 with 4,500 troops), and *Chammal* in Syria and Iraq (since 2014, involving 1,200 troops). The focus on the Sahel is because of high activity in this area by ISIS and Al-Qaeda, the significant number of French fighters from these outfits returning to their home country, and France's traditional economic interests.

Given its economic difficulties, France is constantly seeking allies to help with military and logistical support. On 2 July 2017, at a summit in Bamako, Mali, on the initiative of France, the countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger formed a combined anti-terrorist force called the G5 Sahel Group. Its budget is about €272 million. By the end of 2018, it should reach half of the target of 10,000 troops participating.

Military activities are complemented by development aid, which according to Macron is too little appreciated in counteracting Islamist radicalisation. On his initiative, the Alliance for the Sahel was established to launch programmes supporting agriculture, investment, and education in the region. The French government announced a gradual increase in spending on development aid in Africa and the Middle East from the current 0.38% of GDP up to 0.55% by 2022.

Conclusions and Perspectives. According to the special services, since the beginning of Macron's presidency, around 20 attacks have been prevented, including 12 of a large scale. This may indicate that the reforms in anti-terrorist policy have yielded operational results. The implemented reforms have also visibly improved coordination between French institutions, in particular, with the DGSI, where staff was established to improve cooperation with territorial intelligence units, judicial police, and cybersecurity services. According to a report from 16 April by the parliamentary committee on foreign affairs, the *Barkhane* operation has accomplished its desired objectives, with dozens of terrorist network leaders killed or removed, and *Chammal* has resulted in 2,209 ISIS fighters killed or incapacitated. Thanks to this, France has significantly contributed to the defeat of ISIS, in particular, the re-taking of Iraq's Mosul and Syria's Raqqa. However, this success would not have been possible without significant support from the U.S., which between 2014 and 2018 has spent about \$14.3 billion dollars for this purpose.

On the other hand, at the level of domestic politics, Macron in the 16 months of his presidency has devoted a lot of attention to the fight against terrorism, so he wants to present his government as successful. Its policy in this area enjoys high and stable public support, at over 80%, which may help the president restore general trust in him, currently polling around 20%.

Given the general impasse in Polish-French relations since 2016, to change this situation, the Polish government could consider broadening cooperation in specific areas currently of interest to both sides. Undoubtedly, the fight against Islamist terrorism is one of them. Poland's permanent involvement in the international coalition against ISIS is a key asset in this case. What is more, the Polish authorities have declared that they are ready to increase the involvement of Polish troops, for example, in Afghanistan or Iraq, if NATO requests it.