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France's Counter-Terrorism Policy in Response to the Threat of Jihadist Terrorism since 2001

Introduction

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, contemporary Europe confronts a range of challenges that directly impinge upon the internal security of both European Union (EU) member states and those outside its structures. The continent has been drawn into a crisis precipitated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine – a conflict whose repercussions extend far beyond the two belligerent states, affecting the wider European community. Additional pressures, such as irregular migration and organised crime, have also emerged as pressing concerns for numerous European countries. Against this backdrop of multifaceted threats, a variety of proposals and policy responses have been advanced. Yet these approaches do not always converge with either the collective interests of the EU or the priorities of its individual member states.

Jihadist terrorism remains a grave threat to the security of Europe and the world more broadly. The terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 prompted the European Union to express full solidarity with the United States and to pledge its support in the global fight against terrorism. Among European states actively engaged in countering international terrorism, France occupies a prominent position. Within the European context, it is particularly exposed to terrorist activity, although such activity stems from the radicalisation of only a marginal segment of its Muslim population.

This study addresses the following research problem: What measures has France undertaken in the field of internal security policy since 2001 in response to the threat of jihadist terrorism, and to what extent have these measures contributed to mitigating that threat? In this context, the main research question is: How has France shaped its security policy towards jihadist terrorism between 2001 and 2024, and what have been the outcomes of these efforts? Additionally, the study addresses the following specific research questions:

1. What were the major Islamist terrorist attacks on French territory after 2001, and what political and institutional responses did they provoke?
2. How have French strategies and instruments of internal security evolved in the fight against terrorism (including legislation, intelligence services, border control, and policies towards Muslim communities)?



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3. What role has international cooperation (within the frameworks of the EU, NATO, and the UN) played in shaping France's security policy against jihadist terrorism?
4. What challenges and prospects define the further development of France's security policy in relation to jihadist terrorism?

The central methodological premise of this article is that France's security policy in response to the threat of jihadist terrorism represents a complex political and institutional endeavour. Decisions taken by state authorities are shaped by the interplay of internal factors – such as social conditions, ethnic tensions, and integration policies – and external influences, including cooperation within the EU, NATO, and the UN, as well as shifts in the global security landscape following 11 September 2001. From this perspective, the effectiveness of France's counterterrorism strategy can be understood systemically, as a careful balancing act between safeguarding national security and upholding civil liberties.

A second assumption recognises that jihadist terrorism in France is inherently dynamic and adaptive, evolving in step with political, technological, and social change. In response, France's counterterrorism strategy has progressively broadened its arsenal – from conventional policing and intelligence measures to “soft” approaches, including initiatives aimed at preventing radicalisation and fostering civic engagement.

The article also proceeds from the premise that security policy is not merely a compilation of political decisions, but also a reflection of France's republican values and national identity. The analysis therefore considers the tension between the tradition of *laïcité* (state secularism) and the necessity of engaging with representatives of Muslim communities – an element that constitutes a key determinant of policy effectiveness.

At a theoretical level, the study draws upon classical concepts of state security and terrorism, as well as the multidimensional security paradigm, which encompasses military, political, social, and cultural dimensions. The empirical section examines selected cases of terrorist attacks in France and the corresponding governmental responses, including legislative reforms, counterterrorism operations, and deradicalisation initiatives.

The selection of sources is guided by criteria of timeliness, reliability, and representativeness. Both primary materials – such as Europol data – and secondary sources, including academic studies, think-tank analyses, and press reports, are employed. This approach allows for a balanced integration of theoretical argumentation, through the analysis of security concepts, with empirical assessment, in the evaluation of political and institutional practice, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of France's counterterrorism policy since 2001.

Internal Security in France, 2001–2024

Terrorism cannot be understood as a series of random acts; rather, it encompasses phenomena that profoundly shape the political, social, and economic life of modern states. Terrorist attacks elicit intense social reactions and leave enduring marks on collective memory. The unpredictability of future targets and locations – exacerbated by the mobility and operational methods of perpetrators – renders countering such threats

exceptionally challenging. In the twenty-first century, terrorism is, without question, a threat of global significance (De la Fuente, Gizicki, Taracha, 2015, p. 11).

As Włodzimierz Fehler and Ilona Rytek-Baniak observe: "The issue of ensuring internal security is not merely an important task but, due to a range of constantly shifting conditions – particularly in the area of public safety and public order – it represents a continuous challenge for the security policies of modern states. This also applies to France, which in recent years has faced numerous large-scale social protests, a surge in terrorist acts, incidents of vandalism, and various, often extensive, forms of public disorder. [...] The changing political, social, and technological conditions, along with the evolving forms and nature of threats to internal security, have led (and continue to lead) the French state to introduce legal, organisational, and institutional adjustments within its internal security system" (Fehler, Rytek-Baniak, 2023, p. 34). For the purposes of further academic discussion, it is useful at this point to recall the definition of internal security. According to Andrzej Kitler, the term refers to: "the prevention of threats arising within the state, directed against the state as a political, legal, and coercive institution, within whose territory rules for maintaining internal order have been established. In other words, since threats to the interests of the state may emerge either externally or internally, actions aimed at eliminating them may likewise be directed outward or inward" (Kitler, 2023, p. 119).

When analysing the security of individual states alongside that of the international system as a whole, it is essential to consider their mutual interrelations. This is particularly pertinent among countries that share a relatively homogeneous cultural sphere and are linked through integration and alliance frameworks. France, as a state aspiring to the status of a major power, conceives its sphere of influence and security as extending well beyond Europe (Zięba, 2022, p. 1).

Security policy, as a form of state activity, is inherently dynamic. This dynamism stems from the multitude of determinants, instruments, and methods through which it is enacted – elements that collectively underpin the internal functioning of the state. Such measures remain sensitive to shifts in the security environment, even as they safeguard the identity of the state and the core principles of its existence. France exemplifies a country whose security policy is distinctive among its allies. It continues to exercise authority over several regions in Africa, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean – territories that once formed part of its colonial empire. Furthermore, the French security apparatus possesses unique institutional characteristics: it operates under the prerogatives of both the President and the Prime Minister, which, in periods of cohabitation, can give rise to challenges in coordination and the implementation of policy (Drygiel-Bielinska, 2023, *passim*).

Globalisation was identified as a key vector in the analysis of France's strategic environment presented in the 2008 White Paper on Defence and National Security. The subsequent 2013 White Paper reaffirmed its significance while recognising the profound transformations that had occurred in the interim – most notably, the emergence of sudden and unpredictable crises that have intensified the prevailing sense of uncertainty. The situation in the Middle East remains highly volatile: in Syria, violence continues to escalate, while the absence of a resolution to the Arab–Israeli conflict – particularly concerning the establishment of a Palestinian state – fuels instability

across the region. The White Paper acknowledges the difficulty of anticipating the evolution of circumstances in this geographical area. It further notes the lack of any indication that the terrorist threat might abate in the short or medium term. On the contrary, it observes the geographical expansion of terrorism, particularly within weak or fragile states embroiled in local conflicts. In this context, the document underscores regions such as the Sahel and Sahara, northern Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Afghanistan – Pakistan corridor (Pawełek-Mendez, 2013, *passim*; see also: Roy, 2006).

France's current internal security system constitutes one of the principal components of the country's broader national security architecture, and its structure does not differ fundamentally from those of other EU member states. It comprises a command subsystem alongside several executive subsystems. The command subsystem encompasses the institutions of public authority: the head of state, the head of government, ministers, parliament, central and regional administrative bodies, local governments, military command structures, and the heads of institutions tasked with responsibilities relating to internal security. Its primary function is to ensure the continuity of decision-making and the effective exercise of state authority.

Operating alongside the command subsystem are the executive subsystems, which possess competencies in the fields of public safety and order, constitutional security, rescue and emergency services, border protection, and crisis management (Fehler, Rytek-Baniak, 2023, p. 35).

Since the 1950s, France has confronted a wide spectrum of terrorist threats encompassing nearly every ideological strand of the phenomenon: anti-colonial terrorism in the 1950s; left-wing, separatist, and nationalist terrorism in the 1960s; and jihadist terrorism, which has been recognised as a new and evolving threat since the 1980s. At present, two distinct phases in the escalation of terrorist threats in France can be discerned: the first, predominantly domestic in character, and the second, international in scope, commencing in 2015. Although the number of jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks declined somewhat in 2021, they continue to be regarded as a primary national security concern (Olech, 2021, pp. 1–2).

Despite the fundamentally European character of its strategic culture, France exhibits several distinctive traits that shape its position relative to other states in the transatlantic sphere. These include universalism, independence, the indispensability of allies, global stature, rationalism, and a defensive orientation (Drygiel-Bielińska, 2023, p. 62).

Terrorist actors have long exploited the weaknesses and limitations of France's domestic and foreign policies, effectively testing the country's capacity for detection and rapid response to terrorist activities. The 2015 Paris attacks revealed critical flaws and gaps in the national counterterrorism framework, highlighting the urgent need to intensify and strengthen efforts aimed at addressing this persistent threat (Gruszczak, 2022, p. 27).

In 2023, President Emmanuel Macron announced an intensification of measures aimed at strengthening France's internal security, including a substantial increase in the personnel of services responsible for public order. These initiatives are scheduled to take place between 2023 and 2027, and the Élysée Palace has actively promoted

the slogan: "Security in your neighbourhood is a priority." According to President Macron, this process will be historic, as it is considered essential to safeguarding the interests of the French state.

The planned expansion of personnel within France's internal security services is intended to enhance the presence of the state apparatus at the interface with citizens and to address sources of tension observed in numerous regions, for example in the suburbs of major French cities. This situation has compelled the authorities to implement an effective security policy aimed at protecting both the interests of France and the safety of its citizens against internal threats (Gregorczyk, Gregorczyk, 2016, p. 12).

To prevent the escalation of domestic tensions and criminal threats, the role of the National Gendarmerie (Gendarmerie nationale) has been strengthened. In its policing duties, the Gendarmerie provides security in suburban and rural areas, as well as along strategically significant transport routes. Classified as a military service, it is subordinate to the Ministry of Defence in the execution of its military responsibilities. Its hybrid nature enables it to perform a wide spectrum of functions – from routine policing and specialised units for civil unrest to structures capable of formal cooperation with the military in combat operations beyond French borders. Within the National Gendarmerie exists an elite counterterrorism unit, the GIGN (Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie nationale), which functions as the formal strategic reserve for responding to terrorist threats. In addition, the Gendarmerie actively combats cybercrime, adapting to the evolving challenges posed by both criminal and terrorist activities (Raubo, 2023).

Counterterrorism constitutes one of President Macron's political priorities, pursued along two complementary dimensions: domestically, through the establishment of new institutions and legal frameworks, and internationally, via military operations and enhanced development assistance in the Middle East and Africa. Analysts have observed tangible operational and political effects of this policy. The number of foiled terrorist plots has increased, and Macron's initiatives in this area enjoy substantial public support (Jurczyszyn, 2018, p. 1).

The legal measures introduced in France since 2001 demonstrate that the authorities have taken proactive steps to neutralise internal security threats within the framework of the law, with a particular focus on challenges related to terrorism (Marczuk, 2016, p. 121; Gueguin, 2018).

France occupies a prominent position in the focus of terrorist networks, largely due to its colonial legacy and the declared hostility of jihadist groups. This vulnerability is further compounded by France's military presence in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, with bases deployed across various regions worldwide. At present, France hosts individuals who have previously participated in multiple conflicts and are veterans of jihad in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Bosnia. These individuals maintain connections within jihadist networks and continue to pose a threat to France's internal security (Mazurek, Rękawek, 2016; FRS, *Fondation...*).

A particularly significant issue associated with jihadist terrorism is illegal immigration, which France has struggled to manage for many years. Immigration can be exploited by Islamic terrorists in dynamic ways, such as moving operatives under the cover of migrants or refugees, or in static ways, by utilising dormant cells already pres-

ent within the country. In France, homegrown terrorism – perpetrated by the descendants of immigrants who arrived decades earlier – also represents an important dimension of the threat. The French administration has, moreover, made errors in integration policy, for example by placing immigrants in isolated areas, providing inadequate educational opportunities, or tolerating religious and cultural isolation within Muslim communities. France now faces the complex challenge of identifying and monitoring Muslim environments, which are often transnational in nature. To ensure the effectiveness of such intelligence and monitoring efforts, France must mobilise its domestic security services and institutions and make fuller use of available channels for international cooperation, including Europol and Interpol (Brylonek, 2018, pp. 89–90; Sobol, Moncrieff, Gaggioli, 2023).

Jihadist Terrorism in France after 2001 and Methods of Counteraction

Given the persistent threat of Islamic terrorism in France, the words of former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls resonate with particular clarity. Following the attack in Nice on 14 July 2016, he remarked that “[...] terrorism is and will remain a part of our daily lives.” (Adamska, 2020, p. 12).

Among EU member states, France is particularly exposed to terrorist attacks. Of the approximately 5,500 Europeans who fought within ISIS structures in Iraq and Syria between 2012 and 2017, roughly 1,900 were French nationals. According to intelligence services, around 300 of these individuals have returned to France, representing a real and ongoing threat given their experience as ISIS combatants. In the context of jihadist terrorist activity, it is important to emphasise that the primary sources of threat are terrorist organisations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda (Jurczyszyn, 2018, p. 1).

Between 2012 and 2015, 18 jihadist attacks occurred on French territory, of which four were successfully executed. These attacks were carried out by individuals affiliated with ISIS or by those returning from the Middle East after having fought within the organisation. The preparations for these attacks involved both French and Belgian jihadists (Rękawek, 2015, p. 1). From 2015 to 2022, France ranked among the foremost European countries in terms of terrorist activity, with over 87.5% of attacks classified as jihadist in nature (Stempień, 2022, p. 29; Izak, 2011, pp. 116–124).

In 2023, France recorded eight jihadist-related attacks – including successful, failed, or foiled attempts – compared with four in 2022 and five in 2021. In the same year, 62 individuals were arrested for involvement in jihadist organisations, compared with 93 in 2022 and 96 in 2021 (TE-SAT..., 2024).

The terrorists responsible for jihadist attacks in France between 2015 and 2021 frequently emphasised their Islamic faith, justifying their actions on religious grounds. Many of these individuals were either first-generation immigrants or descendants of immigrants, born on French soil (Latosińska, 2021, p. 41). France is particularly vulnerable to terrorist attacks, which tend to occur predominantly in major urban centres. In Paris alone, attacks were carried out in 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020, and 2021. Other notable incidents occurred in Nice (Nice, 2016; Nice, 2020), Carcassonne (Carcassonne, 2018), and Lyon (Lyon, 2019). A key component of France’s counterterrorism strategy

is prevention, which has been systematically strengthened since 2015, with a focus on the comprehensive neutralisation of threats. Under the Law Strengthening Internal Security and the Fight Against Terrorism (*la loi renforçant la sécurité intérieure et la lutte contre le terrorisme*), regulations were introduced to facilitate improved cooperation among security services. Among the most significant measures are legal provisions allowing the establishment of protective zones to secure major events. Additionally, investigative procedures, searches, and seizures have been adapted to the modus operandi of terrorist actors (Olech, 2021, pp. 3–4).

In combating terrorism in the Middle East and the Sahel, France applies analogous measures on its own territory. The focus has been on countering Islamic radicalisation, enhancing the coordination and authority of counterterrorism services, combating online propaganda, and implementing judicial reforms (Wróblewska-Łysik, 2015, p. 83; Rande Europe, 2018).

In France, the counterterrorism system involves intelligence services, the police, the military, and the Gendarmerie. For a long-term strategy against terrorism, the activity of specialised services is crucial. These include the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI), the General Directorate for External Security (DGSE), the Directorate of Intelligence and Security of the Armed Forces (DRSD), the Military Intelligence Directorate (DRM), the National Directorate for Intelligence and Customs Investigations (DNRED), and the Financial Action Against Illicit Funds Service (TRACFIN). Elite counterterrorism units also play a central role: the Investigative and Intervention Brigade (BRI), the Commando Brigade (BAC), Republican Security Companies (CRS), the National Gendarmerie Intervention Group (GIGN), and AGIGN. The Special Operations Command oversees the deployment and scope of military involvement in counterterrorism operations, reporting to the Chief of Defence Staff and the President of France. Additionally, the Municipal Police (Police Municipale) maintains units trained in counterterrorism (Olech, 2021, pp. 5–6). It is also worth mentioning RAID (Recherche, Assistance, Intervention, Dissuasion), established in 1985, which serves as an elite special unit of the French National Police (*Ministère de l'Intérieur*..., 2024).

Despite strengthened coordination among counterterrorism services and institutions, failures have occurred, underscoring the need for continual system improvements. The triple attack in March 2012 in Toulouse and Montauban, carried out by Mohammed Merah, exposed insufficient coordination between intelligence services and the police. In response, the DGSI – reporting directly to the Ministry of the Interior – was reinforced with additional personnel. Analytical practices for handling both secret and open sources were revised, leading to the creation of central territorial intelligence services (Service Central du Renseignement Territorial, SCRT). The competencies of the Central Directorate of Public Security of the Police, which had previously analysed only open sources, were expanded. Methods for collecting and utilising intelligence gathered by local gendarmerie brigades at the central level were also adjusted. This was particularly important, as jihadists frequently store weapons and conduct training outside major urban areas (Wróblewska-Łysik, 2015, p. 84).

The cornerstone of France's counterterrorism system is the Vigipirate plan, originally developed in 1978 in response to the terrorist threats of that era. A new govern-

mental Vigipirate plan was drawn up in 1995 and subsequently revised in December 2016. Its core principles include the promotion of a collective security culture and the establishment of three threat levels. The basic level of vigilance ensures general security and precautionary measures in public spaces and transport systems. The elevated level involves intensified security measures in response to a credible risk of attack, including the protection of critical infrastructure such as train stations and airports. The highest, alarm level – indicating an imminent threat or the presence of a confirmed terrorist group – is activated immediately following an attack or upon identification of a threat. This level remains in force for the duration of the threat (Olech, 2021, p. 11).

Despite reforms to the counterterrorism system, including enhanced powers for intelligence services and cooperating institutions, the threat posed by jihadist terrorists capable of shocking French society remains significant. France's security policy continues to face risks generated by radical Islamist actors, necessitating ongoing and increasingly effective monitoring and infiltration of Muslim communities where jihadists may reside. This represents a substantial challenge that previous French governments have struggled to address fully in terms of neutralising existing threats (Latoński, 2021, p. 55).

Jihadist attacks are often highly spectacular, targeting city centres and frequently incorporating suicide components in the name of Allah, thereby generating widespread fear and panic. Such attacks are characteristic of ISIS and Al-Qaeda operations (Olech, Dudkiewicz, 2021, pp. 51–53). France's large population provides terrorists with opportunities both to recruit personnel and to achieve significant media exposure. Notable examples include attacks near sports venues, shopping centres, and entertainment areas, as observed in Paris (Moczydłowska, 2023, p. 91).

A particularly notable event occurred in 2015, when jihadist terrorists carried out simultaneous attacks in Paris, resulting in 129 fatalities – including 89 at the Bataclan concert hall – and approximately 350 injuries. A state of emergency was declared for a period, as further attacks were carried out by jihadists affiliated with ISIS or Al-Qaeda (Olech, Dudkiewicz, 2021, pp. 55–56).

In 2015, one of the bloodiest attacks in France occurred with the assault on the offices of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. Two terrorists, Chérif and Saïd Kouachi, stormed the editorial office, killing 11 people and wounding a further 11. The attackers were linked to Al-Qaeda (Olech, Dudkiewicz, 2021, p. 59). These synchronised attacks caused a profound social shock. The targets included freedom of the press (*Charlie Hebdo*), the Jewish diaspora (hostages at the Hyper Cacher store), and law enforcement (police officers in Montrouge). The attacks were widely interpreted as an assault on the fundamental values of France. The subsequent "Republican marches" demonstrated the solidarity of French citizens protesting against religious extremism, antisemitism, and violence (Wróblewska-Łysik, 2015, p. 72).

Following the Paris attacks, under the "attack-alarm" level of the Vigipirate plan, key locations and facilities were reinforced with additional protection. Both civilian and military forces were mobilised, and changes and restrictions were introduced in educational institutions. Crisis centres were also established within ministries and prefectures (Ziółek, 2016, p. 40). In the same year, in Nice, three French soldiers were attacked by a jihadist. In Givors, a Muslim man, shouting slogans in support of the

Charlie Hebdo attacks and calling for assistance to ISIS, attacked two bus drivers, wounding one. On 19 April 2015, an Algerian jihadist was arrested in Paris, charged with murder and planning an attack on a church in Villejuif, a suburb of the capital (Olech, Dudkiewicz, 2021, p. 60).

Attacks on Christians are part of a deliberate strategy by jihadists aimed at provoking a global conflict. Their goal is to trigger an anti-Islamic backlash in Europe and beyond, which could lead to further radicalisation among Muslims. In France, Christian communities remain particularly vulnerable to jihadist attacks (Wróblewska-Łysik, 2015, p. 73).

In 2015, a terrorist armed with a firearm from Morocco attacked passengers on the Amsterdam – Paris train and was only stopped thanks to the intervention of US Army soldiers who happened to be on board. In the same year, in Toulon, an ISIS-linked terrorist attempted to acquire combat resources to attack the local naval base; the plot was foiled by vigilant French intelligence services. On 29 December 2015, in Nice, a Chechen attacker carried out an assault on a local restaurant, wounding one person (Olech, Dudkiewicz, 2021, p. 61).

Since 2015, counterterrorism duties under the Vigipirate plan have been carried out by French soldiers as part of Opération Sentinelle, which secures sensitive sites across the country. A total of 10,412 soldiers and 4,700 police officers and gendarmes were mobilised to protect 830 vulnerable locations, including schools, places of worship, diplomatic and consular offices, and newspaper offices. Since its inception, attacks against soldiers guarding these sites have occurred regularly (Olech, 2022, p. 134).

In 2016, an ISIS terrorist rammed a car into four soldiers standing guard outside a mosque in Valence, near Lyon. In the same year, ISIS terrorists attacked a police station in Paris' 18th arrondissement (Buttes-Montmartre). On 13 June 2016, two police officers were attacked in Magnanville, Yvelines, by a Muslim assailant linked to ISIS (Olech, Dudkiewicz, 2021, p. 61).

Between 2015 and 2018, French authorities analysed approximately 20,000 cases under the FSPRT system (*Fichier de Suivi des Personnes et Radicalisations à caractère Terroriste*) to prevent radicalisation. However, these efforts were limited in scope, and authorities were unable to monitor all cases effectively or achieve meaningful results from deradicalisation initiatives. "Soft" prevention measures remained largely experimental and did not produce the expected outcomes (Ciach, Kosmynka, Kozłowski, Machnikowski, 2022, p. 64). In 2018, a terrorist attack in Carcassonne resulted in four deaths and 15 injuries. On 11 December 2018, a jihadist from ISIS carried out an attack at a Strasbourg Christmas market, killing five people and wounding 11. Notably, around 2,000 Strasbourg residents are monitored by French authorities due to links with Islamic radicals. Although Strasbourg accounts for only 2% of France's population, it is home to 10% of individuals suspected of terrorism (Olech, Dudkiewicz, 2021, p. 65).

In 2019, an ISIS terrorist planted an explosive device in Lyon, injuring fourteen people. On 3 October 2019, at the headquarters of the Paris police prefecture's intelligence directorate, officer Mickaël Harpon murdered four individuals with a knife and wounded two others. Harpon was affiliated with ISIS and had access at work to sensitive information, including data on Muslims monitored by French intelligence services (Olech, Dudkiewicz, 2021, p. 66).

A causal analysis of jihadist attacks in France between 2001 and 2024 suggests that jihadist terrorism in the country is the outcome of complex political, social, and ideological processes. The primary driver of rising terrorist activity has been the radicalisation of segments of the Muslim community, who perceived French policies towards the Middle East and North Africa as hostile to Islam. French military interventions in Afghanistan (2001), Libya (2011), Mali (2013), and Syria (2015) provided organisations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS with a pretext to call for retribution against French citizens. A second, domestic factor has been the socio-economic marginalisation of parts of the immigrant-origin population, particularly in the suburbs of major cities (banlieues). High unemployment, lack of prospects, and a sense of exclusion increased the susceptibility of young people to jihadist propaganda disseminated online. The rise of social media enabled radical groups to recruit and indoctrinate individuals in a decentralised manner that was difficult to detect. These processes contributed to a surge in jihadist attacks, peaking between 2015 and 2017. The attacks revealed the scale of the threat and underscored the need to reform the French security system. In response, the state declared a state of emergency, expanded the powers of intelligence services, and intensified preventive measures and deradicalisation programmes.

Since 2017, the number of large-scale attacks has declined, reflecting more effective coordination among security services, enhanced international cooperation within the EU, and the weakening of ISIS structures. Nevertheless, the threat has not been entirely eliminated, with terrorism increasingly taking the form of so-called “lone wolves” – individual attackers inspired by jihadist ideology but operating without direct organisational support.

Conclusion

An analysis of France’s policy towards the threat of jihadist terrorism between 2001 and 2024 allows for several conclusions regarding the research problem: the effectiveness of French counter – terrorism measures and the directions of their evolution. It can be asserted that French security policy since 2001 has undergone a profound transformation, moving from a reactive model of incident response to an integrated system founded on prevention, surveillance, and inter-institutional cooperation.

In addressing the primary research question, it is evident that France has consistently developed a comprehensive counter-terrorism framework, combining legislative, institutional, and operational measures. The introduction of a series of counter-terrorism laws, alongside the strengthening of intelligence services’ powers, has contributed to increased effectiveness in both preventive and operational activities. At the same time, however, this process has given rise to significant legal and political dilemmas concerning the boundaries between security and individual rights. The analysis indicates that the French security system has increasingly shifted towards a model of preventive security, in which control and surveillance have become the state’s principal instruments of action.

With regard to the specific research questions, it should be emphasised that the most serious terrorist attacks since 2001 have served as turning points, after which

successive waves of security reforms were implemented. The evolution of French counter-terrorism policy has clearly proceeded in stages: from military and repressive responses to a more balanced approach incorporating “soft” measures – educational, social, and deradicalisation initiatives. Nevertheless, empirical analysis shows that the effectiveness of these programmes in curbing radicalisation within marginalised communities remains limited.

It also appears entirely justified to assert the necessity of maintaining a balance between “hard” and “soft” security measures. Excessive reliance on repressive tools – including expanded electronic surveillance or prolonged states of emergency – can generate social tensions, erode trust in public institutions, and, paradoxically, contribute to further radicalisation among segments of the Muslim population.

At the international level, France’s cooperation with the EU and NATO has significantly enhanced its capacity for intelligence-sharing and coordinated action. Nevertheless, French security policy has retained a distinctly national character, shaped by republican traditions and the specificities of its public administration. In summary, France’s counter-terrorism policy since 2001 has been operationally effective, contributing to a reduction in successful attacks and an improved capacity of security services to respond. At the same time, its social and long-term effectiveness remains limited, as the issues of marginalisation and social exclusion affecting some young Muslims – a potential reservoir of radicalisation – have yet to be fully addressed. From the perspective of security theory, it can therefore be concluded that France has achieved a high level of state resilience (institutional and operational), but has not fully developed social resilience – a key factor for sustainable internal security. In the future, effective countering of jihadist terrorism in France will require not only further enhancement of security instruments but also a deepening of integration policies, measures to combat social exclusion, and the strengthening of public trust in the state.

In conclusion, France’s policy towards the threat of jihadist terrorism since 2001 exemplifies a hybrid security model in which preventive, repressive, and educational measures coexist in dynamic equilibrium. The findings of this analysis may serve as a reference point for further research on the evolution of European counter-terrorism strategies and for reflection on the relationship between security and liberty in modern liberal democracies.

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Summary

France seeks to position itself as a regional power within Europe, pursuing policies designed to wield significant influence both within the European Union and beyond. This ambition is intended not only to secure France's standing on the international stage but also to safeguard its internal and external security. Contemporary terrorism, however, poses one of the most pressing threats to the security of Europe and the wider world. Within the EU, France is particularly exposed to terrorist attacks – a vulnerability compounded, among other factors, by the return of French citizens who fought as ISIS combatants. As a result, counter-terrorism has become a central priority for successive French administrations. These efforts unfold on multiple fronts. Domestically, the state has introduced a series of legal and institutional measures; internationally, it engages in military operations and provides assistance programmes targeting selected countries in Asia and Africa. At the same time, persistent economic and social challenges have fostered the emergence of isolated communities, home to roughly five million Muslims. The limited success of France's integration policies, coupled with widespread social marginalisation, has contributed to the radicalisation of certain segments of the population – an issue that lies at the heart of the country's vulnerability to terrorist threats.

Key words: France, terrorism, security, threat

Polityka antyterrorystyczna Francji w odpowiedzi na zagrożenie terroryzmem dżihadystycznym od 2001 roku

Streszczenie

Francja dąży do pozycjonowania się jako regionalne mocarstwo w Europie, realizując politykę mającą na celu uzyskanie znaczącego wpływu zarówno w Unii Europejskiej, jak i poza nią. Ambicja ta ma na celu nie tylko umocnienie pozycji Francji na arenie międzynarodowej, ale także ochronę jej bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego i zewnętrznego. Współczesny terroryzm stanowi jednak jedno z najpilniejszych zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa Europy i całego świata. W UE Francja jest szczególnie narażona na ataki terrorystyczne – na co wpływa między innymi powrót obywateli francuskich, którzy walczyli jako bojownicy ISIS. W rezultacie zwalczanie terroryzmu stało się priorytetem kolejnych francuskich rządów. Działania te realizowane są na wielu frontach. W kraju państwo wprowadziło szereg środków prawnych i instytucjonalnych; na arenie międzynarodowej angażuje się w operacje wojskowe i zapewnia programy pomo-

cowe skierowane do wybranych krajów Azji i Afryki. Jednocześnie utrzymujące się wyzwania gospodarcze i społeczne sprzyjają powstawaniu odizolowanych społeczności, w których mieszka około pięciu milionów muzułmanów. Ograniczony sukces francuskiej polityki integracyjnej, w połączeniu z powszechną marginalizacją społeczną, przyczynił się do radykalizacji niektórych grup społecznych – problemu leżącego u podstaw podatności kraju na zagrożenia terrorystyczne.

Slowa kluczowe: Francja, terroryzm, bezpieczeństwo, zagrożenie

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