

FRANCE: EXTREMISM & COUNTER EXTREMISM

On the evening of November 13, 2015, eight assailants carried out a deadly and highly coordinated set of attacks throughout Paris, killing at least 129 people and seriously wounding more than 350. In response to the massacre, French President Francois Hollande labeled the night of carnage an “act of war” and ordered a national state of emergency.

On the morning of November 18, 2015, two suspects died during a gunfight with French police officers at an apartment in the Paris suburb of St.-Denis. At least two suspects were killed in the raid. One suspect, a woman, exploded a suicide vest after opening fire on the officers. Another male suspect died when a grenade detonated. The Paris attacks mastermind Abdelhamid Abaaoud was also reportedly killed in the raid. Seven suspects were taken into custody.

The wave of jihadist attacks, claimed by ISIS, come in the wake of France’s deadly January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and a thwarted August 2015 shooting attack on a France-bound train from Amsterdam.

Overview

On November 13, 2015, eight assailants attacked sites throughout Paris: the Stade de France, the Bataclan concert hall, and restaurants in central Paris: Le Carillon, Le Petit Cambodge, La Belle Equipe, Cafe Bonne Bière, Comptoir Voltaire, and La Casa Nostra. The death toll has been staggering; at least 129 victims and more than 350 wounded, 100 of whom are reportedly in serious condition. Seven of the eight assailants have been “neutralized,” six dead via suicide belts and one killed in a shoot-out with the police. As of November 16, one suspect tied to the attacks, Salah Abdeslam, remains at-large. At least one suspect, known as “Ahmad al Muhammad,” carried a Syrian passport, believed to be counterfeit, and traveled through Greece; another, Ismaël Omar Mostefaï, is a French ex-convict who was arrested for low-level crimes from 2004 to 2010; his suspected accomplice, French-born Samy Amimour, was the subject of a police wanted order. The “mastermind” of the attack has been identified by French authorities as Belgian-born Abdelhamid Abaaoud. A number of the suspects—including Abaaoud, Bataclan assailant Bilal Hadfi, Stade de France assailant Ibrahim Abdelsam, and suspected accomplice Salah Abdeslam—were born in Belgium. At least two of the suspects—Abaaoud and Hadfi—are understood to have spent time in Syria before traveling back to Europe. (Source: [New York Times](#), [CNN](#), [Guardian](#), [New York Times](#))

ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attacks, calling them “the first of a storm.” Witnesses reported one assailant shouting “Allahu Akbar” at the Bataclan music venue. One of the attackers reportedly told captives, “It’s Hollande’s fault, [...] he should not have intervened in Syria.” In response to ISIS’s claim of responsibility, French President Francois Hollande has scaled up airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria. The president labeled the attacks “an act of war” and declared a national state of emergency, the first since 2005. Following the terror attacks, France and Belgium conducted a series of raids and crackdowns on suspected jihadist cells, seizing advanced weaponry and heightening scrutiny in the Brussels suburb of Molenbeek, an alleged hotbed of radicalization and criminal behavior.

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The death toll from the November 13 attacks far exceeds the toll from France's *Charlie Hebdo* and associated attacks. From January 7 to January 9, 2015, 17 people were killed at the Paris offices of satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and a kosher supermarket in the three-day slaughter by terrorists acting in the name of both ISIS and al-Qaeda. French counter-terrorism forces put an end to the deadly terrorist siege through a coordinated counter-terrorism operation. The following day, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls declared a national "war on jihad." (Source: [BBC News](#), [New York Times](#))

Since the January assault on French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and subsequent hostage and shooting attacks, France has made sweeping changes to its national counter-terrorism program, deploying thousands of military personnel to sensitive sites throughout the country, and working to pre-empt terrorism by greatly expanding its counter-extremism program. To that end, France launched a new campaign, "Stop-Djihadisme" (Stop Jihadism), in an effort to counter the threat of Islamic extremism throughout French society. As the campaign's government-run website boasts, France has begun to institute counter-jihadism measures to its education and prison systems, allocate additional resources to its counter-terrorism agencies, and enforce the country's November 2014 anti-terror law.

France's Stop-Djihadisme campaign, so named on January 28, 2015, aims to give French citizens the tools to spot and prevent radicalization. The government-run website promoting this campaign holds a number of resources and info-graphics geared to help citizens spot and prevent jihadism. In light of the program, the government has begun to institute changes to the following sectors of French society:

- **Education:** France's Ministry of Education has presented [11 measures](#) to prevent radicalization and promote secular, republican values within France's school system.
- **Prison:** The French government has announced numerous measures to address the jihadist networks and radicalization crisis within its prison system. Most notably, the government has announced its plans to reform a select number of its prisons based on the country's 2014 Fresnes prison experiment. In that experiment, 20 Islamist inmates were segregated from other inmates in an effort to curb the spread of Islamist radicalization. The government also pledges to deploy additional counter-intelligence staff and Muslim chaplains to service its prisons.
- **Legislation and law enforcement:** France has begun to enforce its November 2014 anti-terror law. As authorized by the new law, France has started to rescind the passports of suspected jihadists, and censor websites that promote jihadist ideology. The country has promised to allocate more resources and jobs to its counter-intelligence apparatus in order to better monitor the jihadist threat. Immediately following the January 2015 attacks, France made dozens of arrests against suspected jihadists. On March 17, 2015, France's

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interior minister announced that the government has cut welfare benefits to 290 French citizens who have left the country to join jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria.

In addition to tackling extremism domestically, the government has also redoubled its commitment to the international fight against terrorism and terrorist groups, including ISIS. Following the January 2015 attacks—performed in the name of both ISIS and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—the French parliament voted nearly unanimously to continue airstrikes against ISIS. The country has also pledged additional resources and personnel to the anti-ISIS coalition. On November 15, 2015, France scaled up anti-ISIS attacks in Syria, launching airstrikes against the terrorist group’s self-proclaimed capital of Raqqa. (Source: [New York Times](#))

As France aims to curb terrorist attacks on its soil, it simultaneously struggles to stem the tide of French foreign fighters to jihadist groups abroad. According to authorities, France has become the largest source of Western fighters to Iraq and Syria, with more than [1,850](#) French nationals having traveled there as of November 2015.

In addition to the deadly January and November attacks, there have also been attempts that were only narrowly avoided. On August 21, a young man—believed to be suspect Ayoub El Khazzani—boarded a high-speed train from Amsterdam to France armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle, pistol, ammunition, and a box cutter. Two Europeans and three Americans, including two U.S. servicemen, intervened by disarming the man and preventing what French President Francois Hollande said could have been “[a true carnage.](#)”

(Sources: [New York Times](#), [Stop-Djihadisme](#), [Atlantic](#), [France24](#), [Le Figaro](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Recruitment and Radicalization in France

French jihadists recruit assailants both online and in person. In November 2014, ISIS released a recruiting video aimed at French Muslims, calling on jihadists to execute attacks in France if they could not make it to ISIS-held territory. The group has also launched a French language magazine, *Dar al Islam*. Girls from Marseilles and elsewhere in southern France have left the country to join ISIS. Many were radicalized and recruited online via propaganda videos targeting teenage girls. In the wake of the attacks on November 13, 2015, ISIS has again incited French citizens to violence and threatened further attacks on France and other Western countries.

In France, Islamist radicalization and recruitment also often transpires in prisons, where Muslims constitute a disproportionate percentage of the inmate population. There are a number of notorious French-born jihadists who have allegedly been radicalized in France’s prisons. They include:

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- *Charlie Hebdo* assailant Chérif Kouachi and kosher supermarket gunman Amédy Coulibaly. The two assailants spent significant time in prison before they executed attacks in January 2015. The two are reported to have met each other in prison at some point between 2005 and 2006.
- Mehdi Nemmouche, who attacked the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014. Nemmouche spent five years in a French prison for robbery and was “known to have moved in radical Islamist circles.”
- 2012 Toulouse gunman Mohammed Merah. Merah had also engaged in petty crime— theft and driving offenses—that landed him in prison. It was within France’s prisons that Merah began reading the Quran and, according to reports, may have been radicalized.

(Sources: [Daily Mail](#), [CNN](#), [Taipei Times](#), [Economist](#), [Reuters](#), [Washington Post](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [New York Times](#), [Guardian](#), [BBC](#), [New York Times](#))

Foreign Fighters

According to French officials, [1,850](#) French nationals have joined ISIS and other Syrian jihadist groups as of November 2015.

France is also the only European country to have one of its nationals, David Drugeon, publicly named as a member of the elusive al-Qaeda cell ‘the Khorasan group.’ French national Mehdi Nemmouche was reportedly a jihadist with ISIS before he returned to Europe and executed the May 2014 attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. *Charlie Hebdo* assailant Chérif Kouachi and his brother Said both allegedly traveled to Yemen to train with AQAP.

(Sources: [Le Figaro](#), [L’Express](#), [Telegraph](#), [Reuters](#))

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

November 13 ISIS Attacks

At approximately 9:20 p.m. on November 13, 2015, the first of three suicide bombers detonated explosives outside the Stade de France, targeting a match between the French and German soccer teams. French President Francois Hollande, a spectator at the game, was immediately evacuated from the stadium. Minutes later, a gunman opened fire a few miles away in the 10th arrondissement, killing diners at a Cambodian restaurant. Another shooting occurred at the bar La Belle Equipe in the 11th arrondissement. A few minutes later, gunmen entered the crowded Bataclan nightclub, where the American band “Eagles of Death Metal” were performing. The attackers held concert-goers hostage, firing automatic weapons randomly into the crowd. French authorities reported there were “three coordinated teams of terrorists” responsible for the attacks, which killed at least 129. Most of the murders occurred at the Bataclan concert hall. ISIS took

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responsibility, warning that the attacks were the “first of the storm.” (Sources: [CNN](#), [BBC News](#), [Guardian \(London\)](#), [New York Times](#))

The coordinated set of attacks, while horrifying, do not come without precedent. For years before the November assault, France suffered through violent attacks by Islamic extremists as well as nationalist terror groups and right-wing extremist groups. In January 2015, France suffered the worst attack on its soil in 50 years, when gunmen attacked the offices of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and later killed shoppers at a kosher supermarket. (Source: [Le Figaro](#))

The Charlie Hebdo Attack

According to witness reports, the January 7 *Charlie Hebdo* attackers claimed to be associated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP officially claimed responsibility for the attack on January 14. Witnesses report that the assailants cried out “*Allahu Akbar*” (God is great) and announced, “We have avenged the Prophet Muhammad.” The assailants forced themselves into the *Charlie Hebdo* building and killed twelve, including the magazine’s editor-in-chief, Stéphane Charbonnier, magazine cartoonists, other staff, and two police officers.

Chérif Kouachi and Said Kouachi were the two prime assailants. Before the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, Chérif had been arrested multiple times on jihadist-related charges. In 2005, he was arrested while attempting to travel to Syria to fight U.S. forces in Iraq. In 2008, he was arrested, charged, and convicted for his involvement in a local jihadist network in Paris. In 2010, he was arrested and charged for plotting to help a former member of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), Smain Ait Ali Belkacem, escape from prison. In 2011, Chérif’s brother and fellow assailant, Said Kouachi, allegedly traveled to Yemen to link up with AQAP. It was then that he reportedly met with notorious AQAP cleric Anwar al-Awlaki.

Following the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, assailants Chérif and Said Kouachi fled the scene and traveled to Dammartin-en-Goele, where on January 9 they besieged a printing building and took two hostages. One escaped and the other was freed when French armed forces stormed the compound, killing the Kouachi brothers.

(Sources: [Guardian](#), [International Business Times](#), [CNN](#), [BBC News](#), [BBC News](#), [CNN](#), [France24](#), [Reuters](#), [New York Times](#))

Kosher Supermarket Hostage Attack

The *Charlie Hebdo* shooting was followed by two related acts of violence in Paris on January 8 and 9. On January 8, a French police officer was shot. On January 9, a gunman attacked a kosher supermarket and took multiple hostages. Both acts were carried out by extremist assailant Amédée Coulibaly, who pledged allegiance to ISIS in a video that emerged after the shootings. In the video, Coulibaly admitted links to the *Charlie Hebdo* attackers and also claimed

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responsibility for a planting a car bomb in Paris. Police have linked Coulibaly to a shooting that severely wounded a jogger on January 7.

Coulibaly was a convicted armed robber and drug dealer whose arrest history dates back to 2001. He was a convert to Islam and a suspected Islamist. Coulibaly may have been radicalized in prison, where he converted to Islam and met *Charlie Hebdo* attacker Chérif Kouachi at some point between 2005 and 2006. Kouachi and Coulibaly share a mentor: Islamist Djamel Beghal, a terrorist convicted of plotting to bomb the U.S. embassy in Paris. Like Kouachi, Coulibaly was arrested in 2010 for plotting to break former GIA member Smain Ait Ali Belkacem out of prison.

On January 9, French armed forces attempted a rescue mission, storming the kosher supermarket and killing Amédy Coulibaly. Coulibaly's live-in partner, Hayat Boumedienne, is the second suspect in the kosher supermarket attack. Boumedienne has reportedly fled to Syria.

(Sources: [Daily Mail](#), [Guardian](#), [CNN](#), [L'Obs](#), [Guardian](#), [Guardian](#))

History of Violent Islamist Groups in France

From 1994 to 1996, France was the victim of a series of attacks by the Algerian-based Armed Islamic Group (GIA). In December 1994, the GIA hijacked a French airplane in Algeria, allegedly with the intention of crashing the aircraft into the Eiffel Tower or blowing it up over Paris. Through 1995 and 1996, the GIA carried out a series of bombings in France that in total killed 16 and wounded over 300. These bombings mainly targeted France's transit infrastructure, including the Paris metro and rail system, though one car bomb was set off near a Jewish school, wounding 14.

(Sources: [New York Times](#), [Le Figaro](#), [New York Times](#))

Violent Islamist 'Lone Wolf' Operations

France has been the victim of a series of lone wolf attacks in recent years. The attacks include:

- **November 2011:** *Charlie Hebdo*'s offices are firebombed, although no one is injured.
- **March 2012:** Over the course of 11 days, French-born Mohammed Merah goes on a shooting spree in Montauban and Toulouse in southern France, killing seven and injuring five.
- **May 2013:** A convert to Islam stabs French soldier Cedric Cordiez.
- **May 2014:** French-born jihadist Mehdi Nemmouche kills four at the Jewish Museum in Brussels.

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- **January 2015:** On January 7, Cherif and Said Kouachi launch a deadly assault on the offices of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 12 in the name of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In the days following the attack, gunman Amedy Coulibaly goes on a shooting rampage, killing a policewoman before taking and killing hostages at a kosher supermarket in the name of ISIS.
- **June 2015:** On June 26 a man, believed to be suspect Yassine Salhi, drives into an American-owned gas factory in southeastern France. He throws gas canisters in the yard outside, and decapitates a man (Salhi's boss), covering the victim's head in the Muslim declaration of faith, "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet." A flag emblazoned with Islamist inscriptions is found at the site of the attack.
- **August 2015:** On August 21 a man, believed to be suspect Ayoub El Khazzani, boards a Thalys train from Amsterdam to France armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle, pistol, ammunition, and a box cutter. Two U.S. servicemen and two Europeans observe the suspect preparing to attack and intervene, preventing the suspect from inflicting what French President Francois Hollande said could have been "[a true carnage](#)." El Kahzani was kept on an international watch list and had reportedly traveled to Syria in 2014.

(Sources: [BBC News](#), [Telegraph](#), [Le Figaro](#), [Guardian](#), [Daily Mail](#), [Telegraph](#), [Guardian](#), [Reuters](#), [New York Times](#), [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#), [New York Times](#))

Anti-Semitism

France has seen a recent surge of attacks on Jews and Jewish sites, including the January 9 hostage attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris that killed four Jews. Several victims of Islamist-inspired lone wolf operations were Jewish, including four of the seven victims from the March 2012 shooting spree in southern France. Increasingly, Jewish businesses and sites have become targets of extremist attacks. In addition to the Jewish Museum in Brussels, Jewish synagogues and businesses in France were firebombed, besieged and vandalized, particularly in the summer of 2014, when protests in support of Gaza residents and against Israel escalated into violence. Jews have been increasingly emigrating from France in light of anti-Semitic violence. In May of 2014, a poll revealed that 74% of French Jews have considered emigration. (Sources: [France 24](#), [Anti-Defamation League](#), [Tablet](#))

On November 18, 2015, following the November 13 Paris attacks, a Jewish school teacher was reportedly stabbed by three assailants in Marseilles. According to reports, the assailants declared themselves ISIS supporters and used anti-Semitic phrases while attacking the teacher. (Source: [BFMTV](#), [Le Monde](#))

Islamic Extremist Attacks Abroad

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French nationals have been victims of Islamic-extremist attacks abroad. In 1983, Hezbollah targeted the American and French Marine Barracks, killing 58 French service members and 241 Americans. In 2002, French expatriates were the victims of the bombing of a French naval defense contractor's bus in Karachi and an attack on a Limburg supertanker off Aden. In recent years, French civilians and service members have been kidnapped and murdered in Afghanistan, Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Yemen. (Sources: [New York Times](#), [France Diplomatie](#))

Nationalist and Separatist Extremist Incidents in France

In the past, France has faced attacks from both extreme-right groups like the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS) in the 1950s and 1960s, and extreme-left groups such as Action Directe in the 1980s. Separatists, mainly Basque or Corsican ultra-nationalists, have also carried out terrorist attacks on France. (Sources: [Encyclopedia Britannica](#), [Le Figaro](#))

Timeline of Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

- **November 13, 2015:** ISIS terrorists simultaneously attack public sites in Paris, killing at least 129 and wounding more than 350 in the worst attack on France's soil since World War II. ISIS has claimed responsibility, calling the attacks the "first of the storm." (Source: [New York Times](#))
- **August 2015:** On August 21, a man believed to be suspect Ayoub El Khazzani, boards a Thalys train from Amsterdam to France armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle, pistol, ammunition, and a box cutter. Two U.S. servicemen and two Europeans observe the suspect preparing to attack and intervene, preventing the suspect from inflicting what French President Francois Hollande said could have been "[a true carnage.](#)" El Kahzani was kept on an international watch list and had reportedly traveled to Syria in 2014. (Sources: [Telegraph](#), [New York Times](#))
- **June 26, 2015:** Yassine Salhi drives into an American-owned gas factory in southeastern France. He throws gas canisters in the yard outside, and decapitates a man (Salhi's boss), covering the victim's head in the Muslim declaration of faith, "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet." A flag emblazoned with Islamist inscriptions is found at the site of the attack. (Sources: [Telegraph](#), [Guardian](#), [Reuters](#), [New York Times](#))
- **January 7, 2015 – January 9, 2015:** Brothers Cherif and Said Kouachi launch a deadly assault on the offices of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 12 in the name of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The *Charlie Hebdo* attack is the deadliest on French soil in over 50 years. In the days following the attack, from January 8 to January 9, gunman Amedy Coulibaly goes on a shooting rampage, killing a policewoman before taking and killing hostages at a kosher supermarket in the name of ISIS. (Sources: [Guardian](#), [Daily Mail](#))

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- **May 24, 2014:** French-born jihadist Mehdi Nemmouche kills four at a Jewish Museum in Brussels. (Source: [Guardian](#))
- **May 25, 2013:** Muslim convert and Islamist Alexandre Dhaussy stabs a French soldier in a suburb of Paris. (Source: [Reuters](#))
- **March 2012:** Gunman Mohammed Merah goes on shooting spree in southern France, killing seven. (Source: [BBC](#))
- **November 2, 2011:** *Charlie Hebdo* offices are firebombed. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- **2009-2011:** Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) kidnaps a number of French citizens. (Sources: [Christian Science Monitor](#), [National](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [France24](#))
- **October 2002:** A bomb explodes next to a French tanker in Yemen, killing one crew member. (Source: [NBC](#))
- **May 2002:** A bomb explodes in Karachi, killing 11 French navy experts. (Source: [NBC](#))
- **December 3, 1996:** A bomb explodes at Port Royal station in Paris, killing two and wounding seven. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- **October 1995:** On October 6, a bomb explodes at a metro station in Paris, injuring 12. (Source: [New York Times](#)) On October 17, a bomb explodes in a train in Paris, injuring 29. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- **September 1995:** On September 3, a bomb explodes in an open-air market in Paris, injuring four. (Source: [New York Times](#)) On September 4, police find an unexploded bomb in a public toilet in Charles Vallin square in Paris (Source: [New York Times](#)) On September 7, a car bomb explodes near a Jewish school in Lyons, wounding 14. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- **August 1995:** On August 17, GIA bombs Paris's Arc de Triomphe, wounding 17. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Independent](#)) On August 26, police find an unexploded bomb on a railway track near Lyons. (Source: [Reuters](#))
- **July 1995:** On July 11, The GIA assassinates Muslim cleric Abdelbaki Sahraoui at a mosque in northern Paris. (Source: [Independent](#)) On July 25, a bomb claimed by the GIA explodes at the Saint-Michel metro station in Paris, killing eight and injuring around 150. (Source: [Associated Press](#))

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- **December 24, 1994:** The GIA hijacks Air France Flight 8969 and kills three hostages before France's GIGN storm the aircraft in Marseilles, freeing the remaining passengers. (Source: [BBC](#))
- **1983:** Hezbollah bombs French Marine Barracks in Beirut, killing 58 French service members. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- **August 1982:** Gunmen open fire and throw grenades at a restaurant in the Jewish quarter of Paris, killing six and wounding 22. (Source: [Reuters](#))
- **June 18, 1961:** The OAS bombs a train, killing 28. (Source: [Le Figaro](#))

Domestic Counter-Extremism

According to French authorities, France has become the largest source of Western fighters to Iraq and Syria, with [1,850](#) French nationals having traveled to join Syrian jihadist groups. Following the January 2015 Paris attacks, France has reworked and bolstered its overarching counter-terrorism and counter-extremism effort, making sweeping changes to a number of its outlets and programs.

Legislative Efforts

France has escalated its counter-terrorism efforts through legal means, enacting 14 bills since 1986 to improve its counter-terrorism infrastructure. In November 2014, French parliament passed the French 'Patriot Act,' which authorizes a travel ban on suspected terrorists. The law aims to stop them from leaving France to commit "terrorist activities, war crimes or crimes against humanity" abroad. The law also authorizes the government to block websites that "glorify terrorism."

Since the January 2015 attacks, elements of the French Patriot Act have already been enforced. France suspended the passports of six would-be jihadists on February 23, 2015. The first case of a government-censored jihadist site was also reported recently, on March 16, 2015. [Five](#) websites have been censored by the French government as of March 2015.

Following the November 13 attacks in Paris, French President Francois Hollande has called for new and speedy legislation that would allow the police to conduct raids without a warrant and place people under house arrest. President Hollande has also called for amendments to the Constitution that would allow the state to take exceptional security measures when needed. Additionally, he has appealed to French courts for broader surveillance powers and the right to strip citizenship from convicted French terrorists with dual citizenship. President Holland is also looking for approval to extend France's state of emergency for three months.

(Sources: [Le Monde](#), [VICE News](#), [Daily Mail](#), [Le Monde](#), [New York Times](#))

Counter-Terrorism Infrastructure

The French counter-terrorism unit “Groupe d’Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale” (GIGN), formed in 1973, conducts counter-terrorist operations and hostage rescue operations both in France and abroad. France has managed to thwart a number of attempted terrorist attacks on its soil, including plots to target the Eiffel Tower. In response to the *Charlie Hebdo* and hostage attacks, GIGN forces led a counterattack. On January 9, France’s armed forces killed the suspected assailants in both attacks and reportedly freed their respective hostages. Following the January 2015 attacks, France has announced its plans to direct additional resources to France’s counter-intelligence infrastructure. (Sources: [GIGN](#), [Daily Telegraph](#), [Le Figaro](#), [Stop-Djihadisme](#))

Meanwhile, following the January 2015 attacks, France mobilized troops and deployed upwards of 10,000 security personnel to protect [830](#) “sensitive sites,” including synagogues, airports, railway stations and major tourist attractions. Nearly [half](#) of the security officers were sent to protect Jewish schools. (Sources: [Le Figaro](#), [Washington Post](#))

Recruitment and Radicalization

According to the U.S. Department of State’s 2009 and 2010 Country Reports on Terrorism, French officials are increasingly concerned about Islamist radicalization in French schools and the French prison system. The government has initiated a number of programs, some in conjunction with other European Union member states, to limit radicalization in the prison system. In 2010, the government also began to consider introducing after-school programs targeting at-risk youth.

Following the January 2015 attacks, the country’s Ministry of Education has adopted 11 measures to counter radicalization. The measures are aimed to promote secular values in France’s schools. (Sources: [Congressional Research Service](#), [Stop-Djihadisme](#), [education.gouv.fr](#))

In addition to countering extremism in France’s school system, France is increasingly working to counter Islamic extremism in its prisons. Muslims make up a disproportionate percentage of the prison population in France. In 2008, an estimated [60-70 percent](#) of the prison population in France were Muslim, though Muslims were estimated to comprise only 12 percent of the population. A report from October 2014 found that [60 percent](#) of France’s prison population comes from “Muslim origin or culture.”

Since the January 2015 attacks, France has begun reorganizing its prison system in order to isolate jihadist inmates from other inmates. This program is based on a 2014 experiment conducted in France’s Fresnes prison, in which 20 inmates, all considered to be jihadists, were grouped together and isolated from the other inmates. France has also announced its plans to

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increase to the number of imams that will serve in its prison system. (Sources: [Washington Post](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [Gouvernement](#))

Radicalization has also been suspected to take place in a number of France's mosques. In 2013, France's Interior Minister announced the deportation of a handful of radical imams who allegedly incited their congregations to violence against France. To combat online terrorist recruitment, France's 'Patriot Act' bill authorizes its government to monitor and block forums and websites that "glorify terrorism." (Sources: [France24](#), [VICE News](#))

Foreign Fighters

France's 'Patriot Act' institutes a travel ban to prevent aspiring terrorists from leaving the country to fight abroad. The Act also sanctions the government to monitor and block jihadist websites, which is expected to combat the ability of recruiters to facilitate the travel of French nationals to Iraq and Syria.

In March 2015, France's interior minister announced that the government cut welfare benefits for 290 French citizens who had left the country to fight with jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria.

(Source: [VICE News](#), [France24](#))

List of Notable Designated Entities

The GIA, AQAP, and ISIS are included under France's list of designated terrorist groups. (Source: [La Direction Générale du Trésor](#))

Extremist and Terrorist Financing

Although France claims it does not pay ransom, hostages have credited the French government for funding their release. In July 2014, the *New York Times* reported that French nationals made up a third of 53 hostages taken by al-Qaeda over the past five years. In the fall of 2013, \$40 million was allegedly paid to free four French nationals held by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). From 2010-2011, \$17.7 million was allegedly paid to free three hostages held by AQIM, one of which was a French national. In 2011, \$10 million was allegedly paid to free three French nationals held by AQAP, though the source of the payment was not determined. According to the *Times*, France typically delivers ransom money through intermediaries like state-controlled French company Areva, a nuclear giant. The company has denied funneling ransom fees on behalf of the French government. (Source: [New York Times](#))

AQAP is funded primarily through robberies and hostage operations. On French TV, *Charlie Hebdo* attacker Chérif Kouachi claimed that his operations were financed by AQAP radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Newsweek](#))

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In addition to extremist groups based abroad, France is grappling with the growth of radical Islamist charities and organizations on its soil. The government's strong ties to Qatar, which stands accused of financing radical Islamist organizations abroad, has led to growing criticism by the French right.

According to CEP surveys and polling data (below), 30 percent of respondents in France believed the government is not spending enough to combat extremism.

In the aftermath of the January 2015 Paris attacks, the French government has pledged more money and resources to combating terrorism. (Source: [Stop-Djihadisme](#))

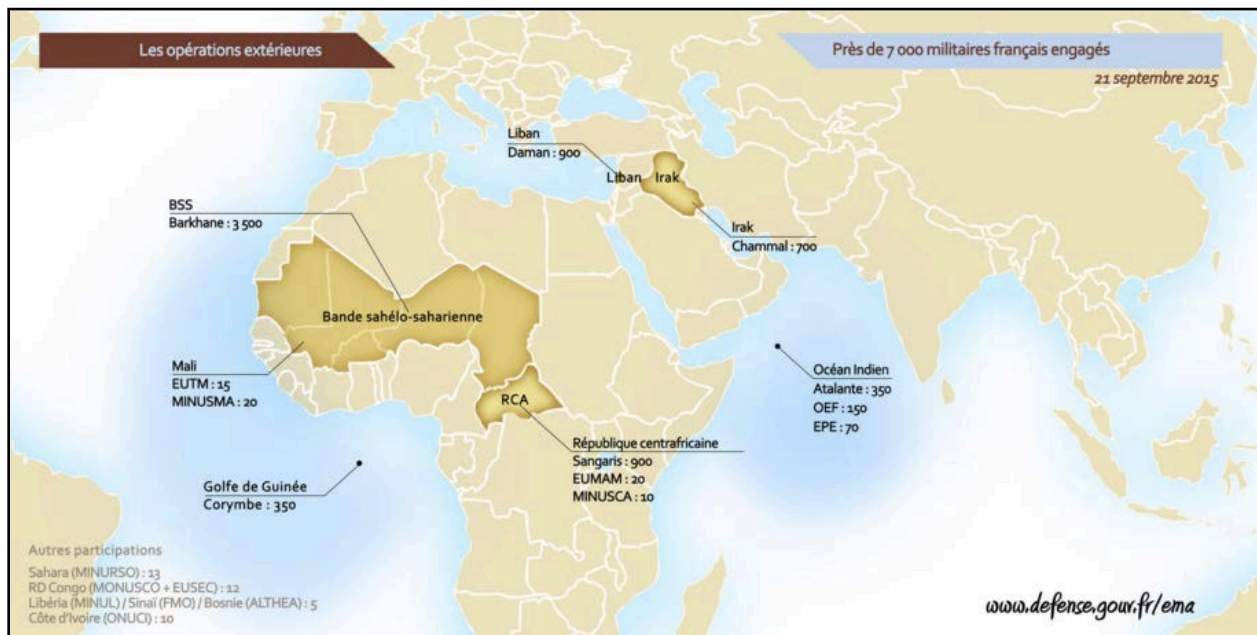
International Counter-Extremism

France was the first country to join the international coalition to fight ISIS. On January 13, 2015, the French Parliament voted almost unanimously (488 to 1) to continue anti-ISIS airstrikes in Iraq. Since the January 2015 attacks, France has also deployed an aircraft to use in the fight against ISIS, and raised the number of its deployed military personnel to more than 3,000. In the aftermath of ISIS's November 13 attacks, France expanded its airstrikes to Syria, targeting ISIS's so-called capital in Raqqa. (Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Daily Mail](#), [Wall Street Journal](#))

Foreign Military Engagements

As of November 2015, France deploys more than 7,000 military personnel dispatched for military operations throughout the world. Of these, upwards of 3,000 military personnel were sent to the Sahel region in Africa for Opération Barkhane, a counter-terrorism effort launched in July 2014. Around 900 military personnel are engaged in counter-terrorism efforts in the Central African Republic. France has also dispatched 350 military personnel to the Gulf of Guinea, while 700 French military personnel are engaged in Iraq and 900 are engaged in Lebanon. When coalition forces evacuated Afghanistan, 150 French military personnel were among them. Thousands of additional French military personnel have been deployed to the Indian Ocean. (Source: [Le Ministère de la Défense](#))

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(Source: [Le Ministère de la Défense](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/ema))

French Forces in Africa

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has executed attacks in Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Niger. French forces responded to Islamist extremists in Mali with [Opération Serval](#), starting [airstrikes](#) in January 2013. The operation lasted until July 2014, when it was replaced with a broader effort in North Africa called [Opération Barkhane](#). The force is made up of about 3,000 French troops working alongside soldiers from Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Chad. The mission's main objective is counter-terrorism, according to France's defense minister. Opération Barkhane, based in the Chadian capital N'Djamena, has the authority to cross borders as it targets Islamic extremism in Mali, Chad, and Niger. Barkhane will also create regional military bases in north Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Accompanying the French soldiers are six fighter jets, 20 helicopters, and three drones.

Recent French intervention in the Central African Republic (CAR) has taken the form of peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN. In March 2013, the rebel Seleka coalition overthrew the CAR government and in the following months carried out "grave human rights abuses against civilians, including pillage, summary executions, rape, and torture." The predominantly Muslim group then faced reprisals from "anti-balaka" Christian militias. In response, the French-led Operation Sangaris was launched in December 2013, under UN Security Council Resolution 2127. By December 2014, France began to withdraw troops as the UN peacekeeping force reached its peak strength but retains a rapid reaction force in its former colony. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [National Interest](#), [Reuters](#), [Reuters](#), [Human Rights Watch](#))

French Forces in Afghanistan

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France has been involved in the war in Afghanistan since 2001. It has participated in operations both through NATO and as part of coalition forces led by the United States. France has participated in [Opération Pamir](#) alongside the International Security Assistance Force, [Opération Héraclès](#) for the naval and air components, [Opération Epidote](#) to train of the Afghan Army, and [Opération Arès](#) from August 2003 to January 2007 for special operations within Operation Enduring Freedom. After an Afghan soldier killed four French troops in 2012, then-President of France Nicolas Sarkozy threatened to suspend French operations. His successor, François Hollande, withdrew 2,000 of the 3,400 French troops in Afghanistan in June 2012. France reported 150 military personnel in Afghanistan before complete withdrawal. (Sources: [New York Times](#), [Reuters](#), [Le Ministère de la Défense](#))

French Forces Against ISIS

On September 19, 2014, France became the first country to join the U.S. in airstrikes against ISIS. The country has deployed 700 military personnel for [Opération Chammal](#), and reaffirmed its commitment to fight ISIS following the January 2015 attacks.

In the aftermath of the deadly attacks on November 13, 2015, France has conducted a set of airstrikes against ISIS targets in the terrorist group's stronghold of Raqqa, Syria. (Sources: [Guardian](#), [Le Ministère de la Défense](#))

Public Opinion

The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) polling has shown that the French public, relative to public opinion in the U.S. and other European countries, views Islamist-based extremism as one of its greatest threats.

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	USA	UK	Spain	France	Germany	Netherlands	Sweden
1	Taliban 73%	Taliban 75%	Taliban 66%	Taliban 74%	Taliban 78%	Taliban 66%	Taliban 44%
2	Muslim Brotherhood 53%	Muslim Brotherhood 58%	Muslim Brotherhood 50%	Muslim Brotherhood 68%	Muslim Brotherhood 62%	Muslim Brotherhood 53%	Shi-ite extremism 39%
3	Palestinians 47%	Shi-ite extremism 53%	Shi-ite extremism 48%	Islamic Revolutionary Guard 66%	Hezbollah 58%	Shi-ite extremism 46%	Muslim Brotherhood 37%
4	Hezbollah 46%	Hezbollah 47%	Islamic Revolutionary Guard 45%	Hezbollah 65%	Shi-ite extremism 56%	Hezbollah 45%	Sunni extremism 35%
5	Shi-ite extremism 46%	Sunni extremism 46%	Sunni extremism 44%	Boko Haram 64%	Hamas 54%	Islamic Revolutionary Guard 45%	Islamic Revolutionary Guard 31%
6	Islamic Revolutionary Guard 43%	Islamic Revolutionary Guard 46%	Hamas 44%	Shi-ite extremism 60%	Islamic Revolutionary Guard 52%	Hamas 43%	Hezbollah 30%
7	Sunni extremism 42%	Boko Haram 42%	Hezbollah 39%	Sunni extremism 58%	Sunni extremism 49%	Sunni extremism 42%	Hamas 28%
8	Hamas 38%	Hamas 41%	Boko Haram 34%	Hamas 55%	Palestinians 41%	Boko Haram 40%	Boko Haram 24%

CEP survey and polling data shows that 30 percent of respondents in France believed the government is not spending enough to combat extremism.

When responding to the question of policies they considered to be most effective in dealing with countries that permit extremism, French respondents answered as follows:

- Imposing tough economic sanctions against that country, 28 percent
- Engaging in aggressive diplomacy with the country to resolve the issue, 16 percent
- Taking military action in the country to root out the Islamic extremists, 14 percent
- Providing direct economic aid to the government to stabilize their economies, 6 percent
- Supporting opposition or moderate forces with money and other tools, 7 percent
- Ignore them, 10 percent
- Supporting opposition or moderate forces with arms, 7 percent

Most of the French respondents favor imposing tough economic sanctions against a country that allows extremism.

Finally, compared to other European countries, most French respondents (52 percent) believe that fighting Islamist extremism should be a top priority.