

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

On March 11, 2015, ISIS released a video showing a young boy executing an alleged Israeli spy. The victim in the video was identified as Arab Israeli Muhammad Musallam. On March 14, 2015, Agence France-Presse reported that the young executioner was identified as “Ryan,” a 12-year-old French national and the stepbrother of 2012 Toulouse gunman Mohammed Merah.

The recent ISIS execution video comes on the heels of the January 2015 terrorist attacks on French soil. The January 7, 2015 attack at the offices of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was the deadliest terrorist attack in France in more than 50 years. The attack was followed two days later by the taking and murder of hostages at a kosher supermarket.

In the aftermath of the January 2015 terrorist attacks, France has made sweeping changes to its national counter-terrorism program. On January 28, 2015, the government launched a new campaign, “Stop-Djihadisme” (Stop Jihadism), to counter the threat of Islamic extremism at numerous levels of 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 carry out the country’s November 2014 anti-terror law.

### **Overview**

On January 10, 2015, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls declared a “war on jihad.” The implications of this declaration have been far-reaching. Government efforts to counter jihadism are poised to revise the country’s educational, judicial, and prison systems, among other areas.

**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.

**Legal response and law enforcement:** France has begun to carry out 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

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

the jihadist threat. Immediately following the January 2015 attacks, France made dozens of arrests against suspected jihadists. On March 17, 2015, France’s 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.

**Stop-Djihadisme public service information:** The Stop-Djihadisme campaign aims to give French citizens the tools to spot and prevent radicalization. The site holds a number of resources and infographics that aim to help citizens spot and prevent jihadism.

**International counter-terrorism:** France has redoubled its commitment to the international fight against ISIS. Following the attacks, French parliament voted nearly unanimously (488 to 1) to continue airstrikes against ISIS. The country has also pledged additional resources and personnel to the coalition against ISIS following the January 2015 terrorist attacks.

(Sources: [NYTimes](#), [Stop-Djihadisme](#), [Atlantic](#), [France24](#))

#### *French citizens in ISIS: recent execution by Toulouse-born child*

As France overhauls its counter-terrorism infrastructure at home, French citizens have continued to conduct jihadist attacks abroad. According to French government estimates, nearly [1,300](#) of its citizens have joined the ranks of jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria. ISIS’s recent use of a Toulouse-born child to execute an alleged spy highlights the radicalization threat France currently seeks to combat.

*The video:* The March 2015 video produced by ISIS media shows the execution of Arab Israeli Muhammad Musallam. In the video, an alleged ISIS member displays Musallam’s Israeli passport and claims Musallam is a spy for Israel’s counterintelligence force, the Mossad. Musallam then states that he joined ISIS to collect intelligence for Israel on weapons, bases, and Palestinian recruits. He declares, “I tell my father and my son: Repent to God. I say to the spies who spy on Islamic State: You will not be successful, they will expose you.” The same ‘admission’ has appeared in the February issue of ISIS’s English-language magazine, *Dabiq*.

Following Musallam’s statement, a young boy—identified by French schoolmates as 12-year-old French-born “Ryan”—appears with an adult ISIS fighter, identified by French authorities as his stepfather, Sabri Essid. In a southern French accent, Essid praises anti-Semitic attacks in France and commands Ryan to execute Musallam. Ryan then shoots Musallam in the forehead with a 9mm semiautomatic handgun. Ryan then shoots Musallam’s body three more times while chanting “*Allahu akbar*” (God is great).

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

French authorities have identified Sabri Essid using photos from the funeral of Mohammed Merah, who killed seven people at a Jewish school in Toulouse, France in 2012. Essid and his family left France for Syria in spring 2014.

According to reports, 12-year-old Ryan was a student at École Élémentaire Publique Vergers middle school in Toulouse. His former teachers have described him as well integrated, playing on a local soccer team and attending birthday parties. The school reported him absent on March 11, 2014. His former classmates identified him in the video.

(Sources: [Reuters](#), [Associated Press](#), [International Business Times](#))

### **Radicalization and Foreign Fighters**

French jihadists recruit 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*. Recently, 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 France, Islamist radicalization and recruitment often transpires in jails, where Muslims constitute a disproportionate percentage of the inmate population. French-born jihadist Mehdi Nemmouche, who attacked the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014, spent five years in a French prison for robbery. In prison, Nemmouche was “known to have moved in radical Islamist circles.” Both *Charlie Hebdo* assailant Chérif Kouachi and kosher supermarket gunman Amédy Coulibaly spent significant time in prison. The two reportedly met there at some point between 2005 and 2006. Toulouse gunman Mohammed 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](#))

According to French officials, [1,089](#) French nationals have joined ISIS and other Syrian jihadist groups as of the end of October 2014. The French government now puts the total number of recruits at nearly [1,300](#). France is also the only European country to have one of its nationals, David Drugeon, publicly named as a member of the Khorasan group, an elusive al-Qaeda cell.

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

French national Mehdi Nemmouche was a jihadist in Syria before he returned to Europe and executed an attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels.

(Sources: [Le Figaro](#), [Stop-Djihadisme](#), [L'Express](#), [Telegraph](#))

### **History of Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents**

The *Charlie Hebdo* assault is the deadliest terrorist attack on French soil since 28 were killed in an attack by an extreme-right wing group, the OAS, in 1961. For years before the January 2015 assault, France suffered violent attacks by Islamic extremists as well as nationalist terror groups and right-wing extremist groups.

(Source: [Le Figaro](#))

#### *Violent Islamist groups*

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 more than 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*

In November 2011, *Charlie Hebdo*'s offices were firebombed, although no one was injured. Over the course of 11 days in March 2012, French-born Mohammed Merah went on a shooting spree in Montauban and Toulouse in southern France, killing seven and injuring five. In May 2013, a convert to Islam stabbed French soldier Cedric Cordiez. A year later, French-born jihadist Mehdi Nemmouche killed four at the Jewish Museum in Brussels.

(Sources: [BBC](#), [Telegraph](#), [Le Figaro](#))

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

#### *2012 Toulouse gunman Mohammed Merah*

The 2012 Toulouse shootings were a series of attacks carried out by French-born Mohammed Merah. The attacks took place in the southwestern French cities of Montauban and Toulouse between March 11 and March 22. Three French paratroopers, a rabbi, his two children (aged four and five), and another eight-year old child were shot and killed by Merah. Another five were injured.

According to his older brother Abdelghani, Merah was a French national of Algerian origin who had been brought up in an anti-Semitic household. In an interview with French newspaper *Libération*, Abdelghani said, “I want to denounce the hatred in which we were raised, the hatred my brothers’ Salafist friends transmitted to them, denounce the unthinkable that my brother committed.” Abdelghani cited an incident in which another brother, Abdelkadar stabbed him seven times for refusing to break up with a girlfriend of Jewish origins.

According to reports, Mohammed Merah had been under French surveillance for years. French authorities were allegedly tipped off to Merah’s jihadist ties after he attended at an al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan.

The young executioner in ISIS’s March 11, 2015 video, identified by schoolmates as “Ryan,” is reported to be Mohammed Merah’s 12-year old stepbrother.

(Sources: [BBC](#), [Los Angeles Times](#), [Liberation](#), [CNN](#))

#### *Anti-Semitism in France*

France has seen a recent surge of attacks on Jews and Jewish sites, including the January 9 hostage taking at a kosher supermarket in Paris that left four dead. Several victims of Islamist-inspired lone wolf attacks 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 have been 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 percent of French Jews have considered emigration.

(Sources: [France 24](#), [Anti-Defamation League](#), [Tablet](#))

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

#### *Islamic extremist attacks abroad*

French nationals have been victims of Islamic extremist attacks abroad. In 1983, Hezbollah targeted the American and French Marine barracks, killing 241 Americans and 58 French service members. 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](#))

#### *Charlie Hebdo attack*

The January 7, 2015 shooting at the offices of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was the deadliest terrorist attack in France in more than 50 years. According to witness reports, the *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 12, including the magazine's editor-in-chief, Stéphane Charbonnier, magazine cartoonists, other staff, and two police officers.

(Sources: [Guardian](#), [International Business Times](#), [CNN](#), [BBC](#), [BBC](#))

Chérif Kouachi and his brother Said 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 and convicted for his involvement in a local jihadist network in Paris. In 2010, he was arrested 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,

**COUNTER  
EXTREMISM  
PROJECT**

*FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

allegedly travelled to Yemen to link up with AQAP. It was then that he reportedly met with notorious AQAP cleric Anwar al-Awlaki.

(Sources: [CNN](#), [France24](#), [Reuters](#), [New York Times](#))

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 both Kouachi brothers.

*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 and killed. On January 9, a gunman attacked a kosher supermarket and took multiple hostages, killing four. Both acts were carried out by extremist assailant Amédyc 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 responsibility for planting a car bomb in Paris. Police have linked Coulibaly to a shooting that severely wounded a jogger on January 7.

(Source: [Daily Mail](#))

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 help former GIA member Smain Ait Ali Belkacem escape from prison.

(Source: [Guardian](#))

On January 9, French armed forces attempted a rescue mission, storming the kosher supermarket and killing Amédyc Coulibaly. Coulibaly's live-in partner, Hayat Boumedienne, is the second suspect in the kosher supermarket attack. Boumedienne reportedly fled to Syria. An alleged interview with her appears in the second edition of ISIS's French magazine, *Dar al Islam*.

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

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM

### *Timeline of major extremist and terrorist incidents*

- June 18, 1961: The OAS bombs a train, killing 28. (Source: [Le Figaro](#))
- August 1982: Gunmen open fire and throw grenades at a restaurant in the Jewish quarter of Paris, killing six and wounding 22. (Source: [Reuters](#))
- 1983: Hezbollah bombs French Marine Barracks in Beirut, killing 58 French service members. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- 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](#))
- 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](#))
- 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](#))
- 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](#))
- 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](#))
- December 3, 1996: A bomb explodes at Port Royal station in Paris, killing two and wounding seven. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- May 2002: A bomb explodes in Karachi, killing 11 French navy experts. (Source: [NBC](#))
- October 2002: A bomb explodes next to a French tanker in Yemen, killing one crew member. (Source: [NBC](#))
- 2009-2011: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) kidnaps a number of French citizens. (Sources: [Christian Science Monitor](#), [National \[U.A.E.\]](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [France24](#))
- November 2, 2011: *Charlie Hebdo* offices are firebombed. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- March 2012: Gunman Mohammed Merah goes on shooting spree in southern France, killing seven. (Source: [BBC](#))
- May 25, 2013: Muslim convert and Islamist Alexandre Dhaussy stabs a French soldier in a suburb of Paris. (Source: [Reuters](#))

## **COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT**

### *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

- May 24, 2014: French-born jihadist Mehdi Nemmouche kills four at a Jewish Museum in Brussels. (Source: [Guardian](#))
- January 7, 2015: On January 7, Cherif and Said Kouachi attack the offices of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 12. The same day, a jogger is severely wounded, allegedly by Amedy Coulibaly. (Sources: [CNN](#), [Daily Mail](#))
- January 8, 2015: A policewoman is shot and killed, allegedly by Amedy Coulibaly. (Source: [Daily Telegraph](#))
- January 9, 2015: Amedy Coulibaly takes hostages at a kosher supermarket in Paris and ultimately kills four Jewish hostages. (Source: [Daily Telegraph](#))

### **Domestic Counter-Extremism**

According to French authorities, France has become the largest source of Western fighters to Iraq and Syria, with nearly [1,300](#) French nationals having travelled to ISIS territory. 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 to counter extremism and terrorism*

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 so-called “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 18, 2015.

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

#### *Counterterrorism 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

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

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](#))

#### *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 increase to the number of imams that will serve in its prison system.

(Sources: [Washington Post](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [Gouvernement](#))

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

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 AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb). 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.

## **COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT**

### ***FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM***

(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](#))

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 its counterterrorism infrastructure.

(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.

(Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Daily Mail](#))

#### *Foreign military engagements*

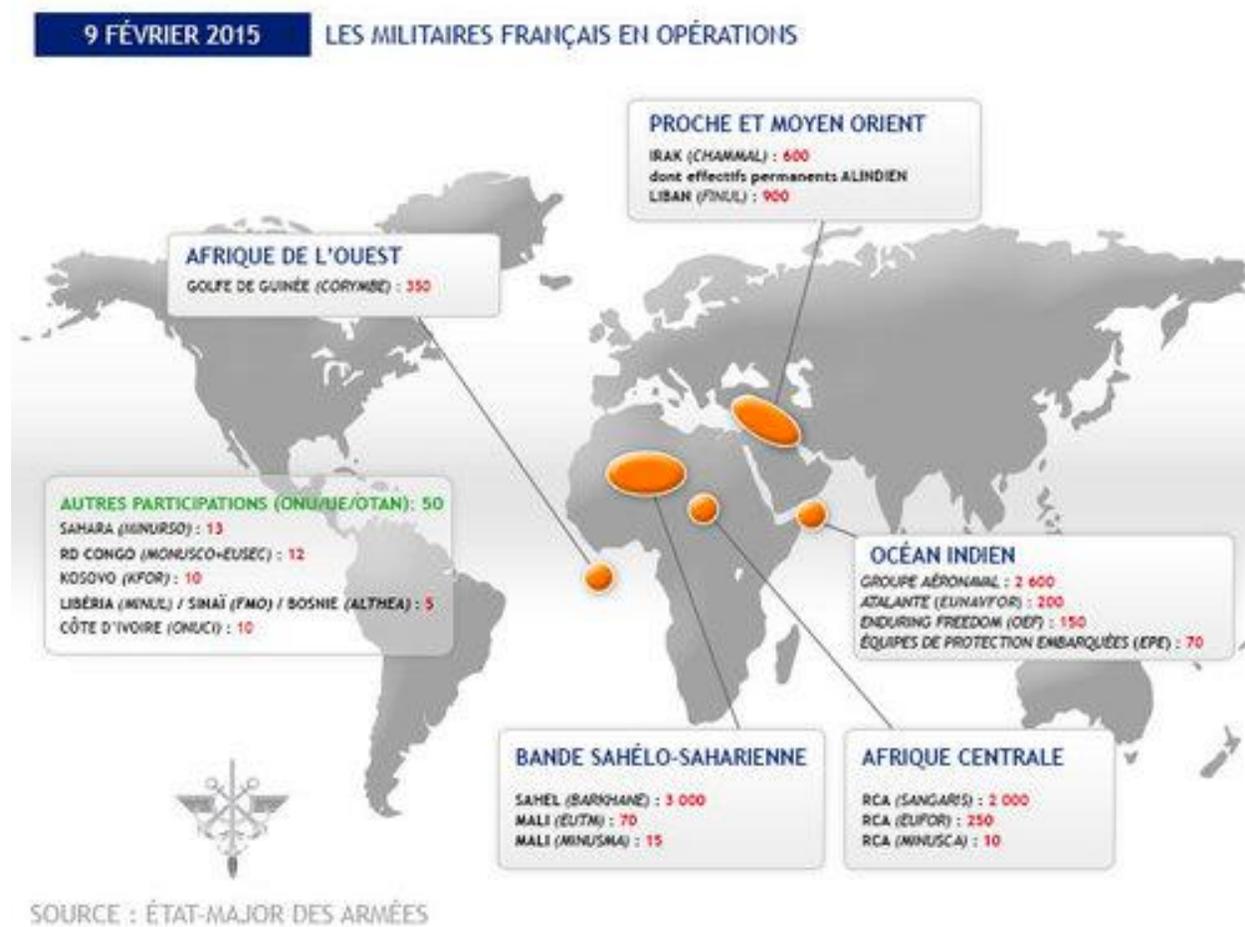
As of February 9, 2015, France had 10,200 military personnel dispatched for military operations throughout the world. Of these, upwards of 3,000 military personnel were sent to the Sahel region in Africa for Opération Barkhane, a counter-terrorism effort launched in July 2014. Upwards of 2,000 military 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 600 French military personnel are engaged in Iraq and 900 are engaged in Lebanon. When

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM

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](#))



(Source: [Le Ministère de la Défense](#))

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### *FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

#### *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. Operation 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-Selaka" Christian militias. In response, the French-led Operation Sangaris was launched in December 2013, under U.N. 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*

France has been involved since 2001 in the war in Afghanistan against the Taliban and other terrorist groups and their allies. 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 naval and air components, [Opération Epidote](#) to train 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 has since withdrawn the remaining 150 personnel.

(Sources: [New York Times](#), [Reuters](#), [Le Ministère de la Défense](#))

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM

### French operations against ISIS

On September 19, 2014, France became the first country to join the U.S. in airstrikes against ISIS. The country has deployed 3,200 military personnel for [Opération Chammal](#).

(Sources: [Guardian](#), [Le Ministère de la Défense](#))

### Counter Extremism Project’s Research on France

The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) has conducted extensive polling and surveys of influential and public opinion in Europe on the threat of extremism. CEP found that France, relative to the U.S. and other European countries, sees Islamist-based extremism as one of its greatest threats.

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

**COUNTER  
EXTREMISM  
PROJECT**

*FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM*

According to CEP surveys and polling data, 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.

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## FRANCE: EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM

