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USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2021 - Chapter 1 - France

Overview: France is a key partner of the United States in the global fight against terrorism. Bilateral U.S.-France counterterrorism cooperation is strong. France is a longstanding and important member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

The terrorist threat in France remained high. Security services were concerned by lone-actor attacks carried out by individuals already in France, including those inspired by or affiliated with ISIS. French officials also were concerned by right-wing extremists able to form cells and organize attacks. The government adopted new laws to enhance the government’s ability to tackle what it described as Islamist separatism, and to make permanent some of the security measures temporarily imposed under the State of Emergency following the 2015 terrorist attacks. French law enforcement and intelligence agencies thwarted at least five attacks in 2021 and arrested at least 50 individuals, including 19 linked to REMVE actors.

2021 Terrorist Incidents: At least two suspected terrorist attacks took place in 2021, with limited casualties:

- On April 23, a Tunisian national stabbed and killed a police employee while shouting “Allāhu ‘akbar” outside a police station in a suburb of Paris. Police shot and killed him. The National CT Prosecutor’s Office is investigating the case.
- On November 8, an Algerian national attacked two police officers with a knife, injuring one, in Cannes. The suspect reportedly carried out the attack “in the name of the Prophet [Muhammad].” Police shot and injured the assailant. The investigation is ongoing.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: On August 24, France adopted the law “Upholding Respect for Principles of the Republic,” also known as the “Anti-Separatism” law, to address concerns that radical Islamists had created parallel societies that indoctrinated members with ideas contrary to the values of the French Republic. France adopted the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Law on July 30, which expands the terrorism prevention tools available to security agencies and makes permanent some of the temporary measures imposed by the 2015 State of Emergency, including search and seizures, the use of algorithms to analyze internet browsing data, home visits for suspected terrorist or radicalized individuals, and closures of “suspicious” religious places found to promote radical Islam or terrorist ideology. The CT and Intelligence Law also allows the government to

impose additional “administrative” measures for up to five years on certain convicted terrorists following their prison release. An estimated 59 terrorist inmates completed their prison sentence and were released in 2021.

France has robust law enforcement and intelligence services that detect, deter, and prevent acts of terrorism on its territory. The Internal Security General Directorate is the lead agency for the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, coordinating with all other relevant intelligence and law enforcement services.

The French armed forces continued Operation Sentinel, a domestic deployment of up to 7,000 soldiers who enhance security at sensitive sites and large events throughout the country. France has a fully operational interministerial API/PNR capability to screen arriving and departing passenger data against other police and administrative databases.

France maintained its longstanding policy against the repatriation of French FTFs, repatriating minor children of FTFs on a case-by-case basis. As of December, France had repatriated a total of 35 minors — with the last operation conducted in January 2021. An estimated 300 French FTFs and their family members have returned to France in accord with a 2014 French-Turkish agreement whereby Türkiye coordinates with France to deport French nationals believed to have entered Türkiye from Syria. All adult FTFs returning to France have been systematically prosecuted since 2016. Minors, depending on their age, may face legal action if they are suspected of having participated in terrorist activities. Minors not believed to have participated in terrorist activities are enrolled in an extensive rehabilitation and reintegration program.

High-profile terrorist cases in the judicial system included the following:

- On September 8, the Special Criminal Court opened the trial for the 2015 coordinated terrorist attacks at the Bataclan concert hall and other sites. Twenty men, including five presumed dead, are accused of involvement in the coordinated attacks that killed 130 people, including one American. France cooperated with U.S. government agencies as part of the investigations. One U.S. victim is a witness in the trial.
- On September 21, the Special Criminal Court of Appeals increased Tyler Vilus’s sentence to life in prison for overseeing the executions of prisoners in Syria from 2013 through 2015.
- On February 3, the Riom Court of Appeals ordered the release from prison of Algerian national Kamel Daoudi. Daoudi was sentenced in 2020 to one year in prison for violating the terms of his house arrest. Daoudi was convicted in 2005 for planning a 2001 terrorist attack against Embassy Paris and had been under house arrest since 2008 until his incarceration.
- On April 14, the Paris Court of Appeals ruled to pave the way for a trial to look into the 1982 anti-Semitic terrorist attack in Paris that left six dead, including two U.S. citizens. Norwegian national Walid Abdulrahman Abou Zayed, a suspected shooter, was extradited to France in 2020.

France observed a rise in what it calls “far-right extremism” or “politically motivated terrorism.” There were at least five far-right terrorist plots that French services thwarted since 2017. The National Antiterrorism Prosecutor’s office investigated at least six far-right terrorist cases that involved 55 individuals. The neo-Nazi group Honor and Nation reportedly targeted government officials, a freemason lodge, and COVID-19 vaccination centers and called for a coup d’état under the leadership

of Rémy Daillet. On August 26, a far-right man was arrested in Colmar for fabricating four pipe bombs with pieces of uranium purchased online.

On November 23, 13 members of far-right group Recolonization France were arrested throughout France following the police discovery of a weapons cache and numerous neo-Nazi objects. In a February 3 ruling, a court in Besançon convicted neo-Nazi Philippe Tribout to two years in prison for carrying out a racially motivated attack on February 1 against a man of Arab origin. The Paris Correctional Court convicted six far-right extremists of terrorism, sentencing them to five to nine years in prison on October 12. The government banned at least two far-right associations, including *Génération Identitaire* and Alvarium.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: France is a member of FATF, and France's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) Tracfin is a member of the Egmont Group. France also is a member of the Defeat-ISIS Counter-ISIS Finance Group. France continued to investigate and prosecute financing of terrorism cases in 2021. In June, six family members of a 2015 Bataclan terrorist were arrested for financing terrorism. France is also a member of the Counter-ISIS Finance Working Group for the Defeat-ISIS Coalition.

Countering Violent Extremism: As part of its efforts to counter Islamist separatism, the government announced it would end foreign government funding of imams from Algeria, Morocco, and Türkiye within four years, replacing this program with imams trained within France. France increased scrutiny of religious schools to identify and close "illegal schools" run by "religious extremists." Since 2020, the government had shuttered 21 mosques for ties to radical Islam. Out of 2,500 mosques in France, 92 have suspected ties to radical Islam. Bordeaux, Montreuil, Paris, Sarcelles, and Strasbourg are members of the Strong Cities Network.

International and Regional Cooperation: France is a founding member of the GCTF and is active on the UN Security Council ISIL and al-Qa'ida Sanctions Committee. France undertook joint CT operations with several EU partners and played an active role in CT capacity building in West Africa's Sahel region with the Coalition for the Sahel and Task Force Takuba. The nation is a major contributor to the Defeat-ISIS Coalition and is a member of the Foreign Terrorist Fighter, Counter-ISIS Finance, Stabilization, and Communications Working Groups.

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