**Counterterrorism: the French experience**

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I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to this prestigious event, and feel really honoured to have the opportunity to exchange with such a distinguished assembly.

Let me start with some relevant points to be mentioned related to **the way France has dealt** with one of the ISIS campaign applications: **when ISIS targeted France’s own territory**. This background will allow me to provide you with a frank assessment for the debate which will then be opened.

France has harshly and directly experienced terrorism attacks carried out by extremist organizations, in the flesh, on its own territory, and twice in one year, despite all the security resources and capacities the authorities claimed they have deployed on both external and internal levels to fight and prevent such a scenario.

**On the home front:**

1. The **Charlie attack** in January 2015 was officially ranked by the authorities as a violent action targeting one of the so-called French founding values: freedom of expression.
2. Eleven months later, **the November attacks**, simultaneously targeting several café terraces and a concert hall in the heart of Paris, as well as a football stadium at the gateway of the French capital has since been officially and definitively stamped as a **declaration of war** against the country and its citizens, with discriminating no other specific targets but **French society** at large and its lifestyle **as a modern democracy living in peace on its lands – but making/waging war abroad.**
3. The Charlie attack created a **stunning effect** by both the government and public opinion. The January 11 march organized in emergency by the government, gathering hand in hand worldwide head of states including some for whom freedom of expression means threats to national security. No matter how it may have impacted the symbol or provided with additional arguments/rationale - if needed - to the jihadi recruiters of an existing collusion and conspiracy linking western democracies and dictatorial regimes. No need to mention that some of the regimes which were represented at this event are among those who have contributed to create a radical opposition at home then abroad to stay in power for the sake of western interests on the behalf of the fight against terrorism. However, the March was mainly aimed at **showing France as a victim of a common enemy able to hit everywhere and everyone** – and consequently at **denying any kind of responsibility or failure in what happened.**
4. After the Paris attacks in November, which killed over 130 people, **emotion and national unity soon gave way to questions and concerns**. What is wrong with our intelligence system? Most of the perpetrators were indeed already monitored and had been recorded/targeted as potential threats due to their links with extremist groups. So what is wrong with our legal system that has already voted a dozen anti-terrorism laws over the past fifteen years? With almost 2.000 French citizens linked to jihadi networks in France, and some 600 others who are fighting alongside ISIS in Syria and Iraq, France represents, right behind Belgium in proportion to the population ratio, the highest number of European jihadists. Why? Especially since Most of the January and November attack perpetrators were born in France. How can French citizens decide to kill fellow citizens?
5. Unsurprisingly, and now a worldwide well-worn security logic of after each attack or aborted attack since 2001, the government announced in the wake of November attacks, further reinforcement of an already strengthened security system, prepared new antiterrorist bills, and immediately enacted a three-month state of emergency further widening the powers of police and security agencies. The President is now calling upon the parliament and the senate to vote in favour of extending this very exceptional measure for another three months and amending the constitution to carve in stone this provision.

**On the external front:**

. Diplomatic shift: In the name of self-defence and preventive action, showing a radical strategic shift of its approach of the SYRAQ crisis, France, as one of the first countries to join the international coalition against ISIS, began in September 2015 to expand the perimeter of its airstrikes across the Syrian territory. Before the attack, bombing Syria was rejected by the French government as it would only help reinforce the Assad regime. Now, after the attacks, this option has become legitimate as an appropriate action to respond to ISIS attacks and avoid the next ones. Assad’s case would be addressed in a second time to overcome disagreements within the coalition on Assad’s fate.

The November attacks have largely contributed to creating a new almost full consensus within the political class at the end of November 2015 to agree to extend the broader military engagement, and cover up/hush persistent opposition voices for the sake of a much needed national unity to defeat the enemy.

. sharing the burden: Costly in term of human losses, security capacities and state finance provision, the national effort deployed both internally and externally, to be sustainable and efficient in the global mobilization against ISIS definitively needs to be shared with France’s allies.

**At the international community level,** the UN Security Council has granted France political support with the unanimously adopted resolution (2249), reaffirming the engagement to resort to “all necessary measures, in compliance with international laws “ to fight ISIS – but not to resort to using force, as it has not been placed under chapter VII of the UN charter.

**At the EU level,** France has called upon an efficient and operational cooperation between the EU intelligence agencies, more necessary than ever, to be as well developed with third country partners in the region. It has also invoked Article 42-7 of the European Union Treaty on at the Foreign Affairs Council held on November 17 to call upon state members for aid and assistant on a bilateral basis. France has underlined that the use of article 42-7 TUE was “ a political act” to be separated from similar clauses of the NATO treaty, notably in reference to Article 5 (military assistance) which has only been invoked once since the 9/11 attacks.

**At a bilateral level,** Germany along with the UK and the US has favourably responded to France’s call in engaging more military capacity against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. To compensate in parallel the French war effort on the other fronts, countries like UK, Ireland, Finland and Germany have committed to reinforce their military contributions in Africa to support France’s global action against terrorism, while Belgium as well as Austria and Portugal are currently studying different options aimed at sustaining France’s effort in Mali.

**Lessons learned / Assessment**

On the security aspects: analyzing the failures

* Lack of coordination between the different national intelligence agencies
* Persistent lack of coordination at the UE level
* Necessity to better understand the nature of the threat/ the enemy to be able to anticipate its next evolution
* As a direct practical implementation of it, monitoring criteria has to be constantly updated as this kind of threat and moves accordingly to the measures to counter it and actions taken to fight ISIS

On the strategic aspects:

ISIS can be defeated by military force on its territories. That doesn’t mean the world will be rid of it:

* ISIS can redeploy dynamically in other areas where it has already set up operational bases (notably in MENA and Asia) and activate sleeping cells (Europe).
* its ideology could not only survive but become even more powerful

**Preserving our territory is a matter of immediate emergency**. But we need to be aware of the well-known perverse effects of a sole-security policy as well as its counterproductive effects that also play ISIS’s game and contribute to boost its ideology.

We have to think of **a long-term approach,** which has to do with the roots of the phenomenon. The issue of home-grown cells has again not yet been properly addressed. Europe’s societies should question their models as they are longer attractive for a growing part of our youth, thereby allowing ISIS to be an alternative offer. This requires a strong and concrete political will,

It might be useful if a large audit were to be carried out in each country in Europe at a national level on how each citizen defines his identity as a French national, or German, Italian, Spanish, British and so on. What are the funding common values that form our community? What means secularism? What really covers the principal of equality? This moves appears as another emergency to handle in order to face the next evolutions of the threat, if it is not already too late.