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From the IRA to the Islamic State: The Evolving Terrorism Threat in Europe

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**A report of the CSIS
Transnational Threats Program**

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Europe faces a significant threat from terrorism, particularly from Islamic extremists and far-right groups. Europe's challenges with terrorism have largely gone unnoticed in the United States, whose strategy documents like the U.S. Department of Defense's *National Defense Strategy* have shifted away from counterterrorism and toward competition with states like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. In addition, Europe's increasingly aggressive approach to terrorists—including prosecuting individuals for planning to travel abroad to join terrorist groups, censoring extremist internet material, punishing internet companies that fail to remove extremist material, and improving intelligence cooperation—have also largely gone unnoticed in the United States.

This report takes a renewed look at Europe and compiles data on the terrorism threat. It also examines the counterterrorism response by European governments, especially the United Kingdom and France. The report highlights several trends:

- The number of failed, foiled, and successful terrorist attacks perpetrated by Islamic extremists in Europe increased by 725 percent between 2007 and 2017, though 2018 numbers will likely decrease.
- Islamic extremist material on the internet and social media platforms is pervasive, which will likely contribute to further radicalization in Europe. Far-right material is also increasingly available online.
- Terrorism from Islamic extremist groups accounted for 3.78 percent of all attacks between 2000 and 2017, but a notable 71.15 percent of all fatalities.
- The geographic distribution of attacks in Europe has increased. European Union countries that have experienced Islamic terrorism now include such countries as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland.
- Most recent terrorist attacks have been simple (using such weapons as vehicles, knives, and crude incendiary devices) and failed to kill large numbers of people.
- Terrorism from far-right extremism in Europe has been on the rise since 2000, as groups and networks have radicalized because of such issues as refugees and asylum-seekers from Syria and other countries. In 2017, Europe saw the highest number of right-wing attacks in over two decades.

The current threat and response in Europe have several implications for the United States. First, the terrorism threat in Europe should give Americans pause. The threat of attacks from groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda to U.S. allies like the United Kingdom and France is at one of the highest levels since 9/11. In addition, the number of active Salafi-jihadist fighters and groups worldwide are both at near-peak levels since 1980, indicating that the global threat remains substantial. Consequently, the recent paucity of successful attacks against the United States at home or abroad, which are inspired or directed by groups like the Islamic States and al-Qaeda, may be temporary.

As the European experience highlights, the internet and social media will likely remain a major tool of the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other groups for radicalization, recruitment, fundraising, and other terrorist activities. The ease of accessing online information is particularly concerning because it allows for more rapid radicalization than previously seen. Savvy terrorist networks and individuals will be able to incorporate advances in commercial technology, such as encryption. Some extremists will—and already have—moved their videos from large platforms like YouTube to smaller platforms like Dailymotion.¹ Others have moved to the Dark Web. The evolution of commercial technology and the diffusion of internet and social media platforms will require Western governments to continually train government personnel, hire experts from technology companies and academia, update laws, and work with the private sector. Companies that cannot effectively take down content that supports terrorism should be held accountable, including through legal means.

European governments, including France and the United Kingdom, have been aggressive in combating extremist ideology. They have put significant pressure on social media companies



ABOVE Britain's Prince Charles, Prince of Wales (R) and Imam Mohammed Mahmoud (L) visit floral tributes left close to the scene of the Finsbury Mosque attack in the Finsbury Park area of north London on June 21, 2017, following a vehicle attack on pedestrians.

📷 John Nguyen/AFP/Getty Images

"Most significant Islamic extremist terrorist plots and attacks in Europe have been perpetrated by citizens of European countries. Similarly, in the United States, the number of terrorists that are refugees or asylum seekers has been small."

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to take down content that advocates or otherwise supports terrorism or violent extremism, including if the content violates company terms of services. Restricting extremist access to social media requires companies to continue to devote staff time and engineering resources to detecting such content and taking it down. Voluntary compliance with government requests may not be sufficient to persuade some of these companies to spend as much money, time, and effort as the task requires.

Second, disengagement programs will remain challenging. Numerous European governments have shifted away from using the term “deradicalization” (which requires changing an individual’s mindset and ideological beliefs—a tall order) and toward terms like “disengagement” (which involves dissuading an individual from violent or other illegal activity). U.S. policymakers should consider a similar shift and focus on helping disengage individuals from violence and other illicit behavior. Particularly acute challenges include countering extremist ideology in prisons. If not dealt with properly, prisoners can breed a new generation of jihadists. In the United Kingdom, more than 80 of the 193 prison terms issued for terrorism offences between 2007 and 2016 will run out by the end of 2018. These numbers could be even higher, however, since prisoners are eligible for release halfway through their sentence. The United States

lacks a systematic disengagement strategy and should look to European governments for lessons.

Third, the rise of violent right-wing networks in Europe—including in response to immigration concerns—should be a warning to the United States. In the United Kingdom, for example, extreme right-wing groups did not present a significant terrorism threat until recently. Partly in response to rising domestic concerns about refugees and asylum-seekers from countries like Syria, the United Kingdom has experienced right-wing threats such as the Finsbury Park mosque attack in June 2017. France has also experienced some far-right extremism. In June 2018, for example, French authorities arrested 10 suspected far-right extremists—including a retired police officer and a retired soldier—from the group Action des Forces Opérationnelles in an alleged plot to attack Muslims. The terrorism threat from violent right-wing extremists in the United States also appears to be growing. The number of terrorist attacks by far-right perpetrators in the United States rose over the past decade, and quadrupled between 2016 and 2017.²

Far-right extremists in the United States and Europe have also used the internet and social media to spread propaganda and coordinate their actions more effectively. Of continued concern in the United States are white supremacists and

anti-government extremists, such as militia groups and sovereign citizens, that have plotted attacks against government, law enforcement, racial, and religious targets. Violent left-wing groups also present a threat, though far right-wing groups appear to be better armed and larger in size. U.S. federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies—including the Joint Terrorism Task Forces—need to continue devoting adequate resources to collecting intelligence on extreme right-wing groups, networks, and individuals.

Fourth, despite the anti-immigration rhetoric espoused by right-wing extremists, Europe has not experienced a major problem with extremism from newly-arrived refugees or asylum seekers. Most significant Islamic extremist terrorist plots and attacks in Europe have been perpetrated by citizens of European countries. Similarly, in the United States, the number of terrorists that are refugees or asylum seekers has been small. Between 2002 and 2015, less than 0.0003 percent of new refugees coming into the United States—a statistically insignificant number—posed a terrorism threat. Refugees have historically played—and will continue to play—a critical role in ensuring U.S. economic prosperity and cultural diversity. In addition, the threat to the U.S. homeland from settled refugees has been low. Virtually none of the major terrorist plots since 9/11 have involved refugees. Even in those cases where refugees were arrested on terrorism-related or even criminal charges, years and even decades often transpired between their entry into the United States and their involvement in terrorism. In almost all instances, a would-be terrorist's refugee status had little or nothing to do with their radicalization and shift to terrorism. The threat from refugees and asylum seekers has been heavily overstated in both Europe and the United States.

Fifth, and perhaps most important, there is a long history of U.S.-European counterterrorism cooperation that needs to continue, despite some transatlantic friction. For example, the FBI and MI5 have long cooperated against the "Provisional" Irish Republican Army (IRA) to curb fund-raising and other activity in the United States. U.S.-European intelligence, military, law enforcement, and diplomatic cooperation continued after the

Cold War. As the U.S. military considers shifting its priorities from counterterrorism to state competition, particularly if it withdraws troops from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa, the United States' ability to conduct counterterrorism operations will diminish regionally. As such, Washington will need to increasingly work with allies to conduct these operations, collect intelligence, and build the capacity of local partners.

European countries have been—and will continue to be—the United States' most reliable and competent allies. Effectively countering diverse and decentralized networks of terrorist across multiple regions—such as Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—will not succeed without close international collaboration. U.S.-European counterterrorism cooperation is now more important than ever.



Introduction

**FROM THE IRA
TO THE ISLAMIC STATE:
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THREAT IN EUROPE**

Counterterrorism has quietly taken a back seat in the hierarchy of U.S. national security interests for a variety of reasons. First, the number of attacks in the United States has been relatively low compared to levels in Europe.

Since January 2017, for example, there has been only one major Islamic extremist attack in the United States. On October 31, 2017, Sayfullo Saipov, who was inspired by Islamic State propaganda, rammed his vehicle into cyclists and pedestrians along the Hudson River in New York City, killing 8 people and wounding a dozen more. There have been numerous foiled plots, such as the FBI's arrest of Demetrius N. Pitts (aka Abdur Raheem Rahfeeq), who was inspired by al-Qaeda and was allegedly planning a July 4, 2018, terrorist attack in Cleveland.¹ In December 2018, the FBI arrested two individuals in Ohio—Damon Joseph and Elizabeth Lecron—for plotting separate terrorist attacks. Second, some U.S. government officials have argued that the Islamic State has been “crushed” following its loss of territory in Iraq and Syria.² Third, U.S. leaders have shifted their focus from counterterrorism against non-state actors like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State to competition with states like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. As the unclassified version of the Department of Defense's National Defense Strategy notes, “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”³

This focus on state adversaries is understandable and, in some ways, long overdue. But as the European experience illustrates, the threat from terrorist groups remains substantial. Andrew Parker, director general of The Security Service (MI5), the United Kingdom's domestic intelligence agency, recently noted that “Europe faces an intense, unrelenting and multidimensional international terrorist threat. Daesh continues to pose the most acute threat, but Al Qaeda and other Islamist terrorist groups haven't gone away.”⁴ In June 2018, the British counterterrorism strategy, CONTEST, similarly stated: “The threat from terrorism, globally and in the United Kingdom, is *higher* than when we last published CONTEST in 2011. The United Kingdom is facing a number of

different and enduring terrorist threats.”⁵ The July 2018 French government plan against terrorism characterized the threat as “endogenous, diffuse, [and] pervasive.”⁶

The threat in Europe will likely remain significant for the foreseeable future as European countries face a threat from radicalized individuals—including the families of foreign fighters, individuals released from prison, and those that turn to violence following human and online radicalization processes.

Research Design

In light of these developments, this report asks three main questions. First, what is the terrorism threat to Europe, and how has it evolved over time? Second, how have European governments responded? Third, what are the implications for the United States?

To answer these questions, this report utilized a mixture of qualitative and quantitative information. The research team compiled and analyzed hundreds of primary source documents, including the writings, statements, and internal memorandums of Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other terrorist leaders.⁷ It also examined primary source documents from several European governments and European Union bodies. For quantitative data, the team collected information from multiple sources, such as the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland, Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).⁸ In addition, the team interviewed dozens of subject matter experts and government officials during trips to the United Kingdom and France. Over the course of the research, members of the research team also interviewed government officials from Germany, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, and other European countries.

While the report provides a broad overview of terrorism trends in Europe, it also includes two case studies: the United Kingdom and France. Both chapters are organized the same way. They begin with an overview of the terrorist threat, then outline counterterrorism efforts, and conclude by



ABOVE A British soldier drags a Catholic protester during the 'Bloody Sunday' killings January 30, 1972 when British paratroopers shot dead 13 Catholics civil rights marchers in Londonderry.

BELOW A young Catholic rioter (C) throws a stone March 2, 1972 in Londonderry at a British armored jeep during a rally protesting against the January 30 'Bloody Sunday'.

📷 Thopson/AFP/Getty Images; Boui de Torout/AFP/Getty Images

highlighting emerging challenges. The purpose is not to assess the effectiveness of UK and French government counterterrorism programs per se but rather to better understand how each country responded to a rapidly-evolving situation. We chose these cases to ensure variation in several areas.

First, we wanted some variation in the nature and type of threat. France has faced a more recent threat from Islamic State-directed attacks, as illustrated in the November 2015 Paris attacks. The United Kingdom has most dealt with extremists inspired by the Islamic State and, to a lesser degree, al-Qaeda, as well as threats from right-wing and Northern Ireland extremists. Second, France and the United Kingdom have different social, cultural, and historical experiences with terrorism. France has a long history of dealing with terrorist groups connected to former colonies in Francophone Africa, including Algeria, while the United Kingdom experienced five decades of violence associated with Northern Ireland. Third, the United Kingdom and France have different strategies, organizational structures, laws, and approaches to counterterrorism. Our decision to focus on France and the United Kingdom was not intended to minimize or overlook the threat and counterterrorism approaches in other European countries, which we have tried to integrate in other chapters of the report.

Outline of the Report

The rest of this report is divided into the following chapters. Chapter Two examines terrorism and counterterrorism trends in Europe. Chapter Three focuses on the United Kingdom, including its evolving counterterrorism strategy best captured in the 2018 version of *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*. Chapter Four assesses French lessons. And Chapter Five outlines several policy implications for the United States.



Terrorism Trends in Europe

**FROM THE IRA
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This chapter examines the evolving terrorist threat to Europe. It looks at historical trends, including the shift in attacks from groups like the IRA and the Basque separatist organization Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) to more recent attacks by Salafi-jihadist groups. To do this, it utilizes several data sets to examine trends in fatalities from terrorist attacks; numbers of completed, foiled, and failed attacks by Salafi-jihadist groups; trends in extreme right-wing attacks; tactics like weapon types and targets; and overall terrorism arrests in Europe. The chapter has several broad findings.

First, there was a significant increase in Salafi-jihadist activity following the rise of the Islamic State in 2014, with the number of failed, foiled, and completed attacks in Europe more than doubling from 2016 to 2017. Second, however, the estimates for 2018 are likely to decline somewhat, perhaps because of the Islamic State's loss of territory in Iraq and Syria (which decreased the number of individuals inspired to conduct attacks) or effective Western targeting of Islamic State and al-Qaeda external operations cells. Third, there has been a rise in extreme right-wing violence, with numbers increasing by 43 percent from 2016

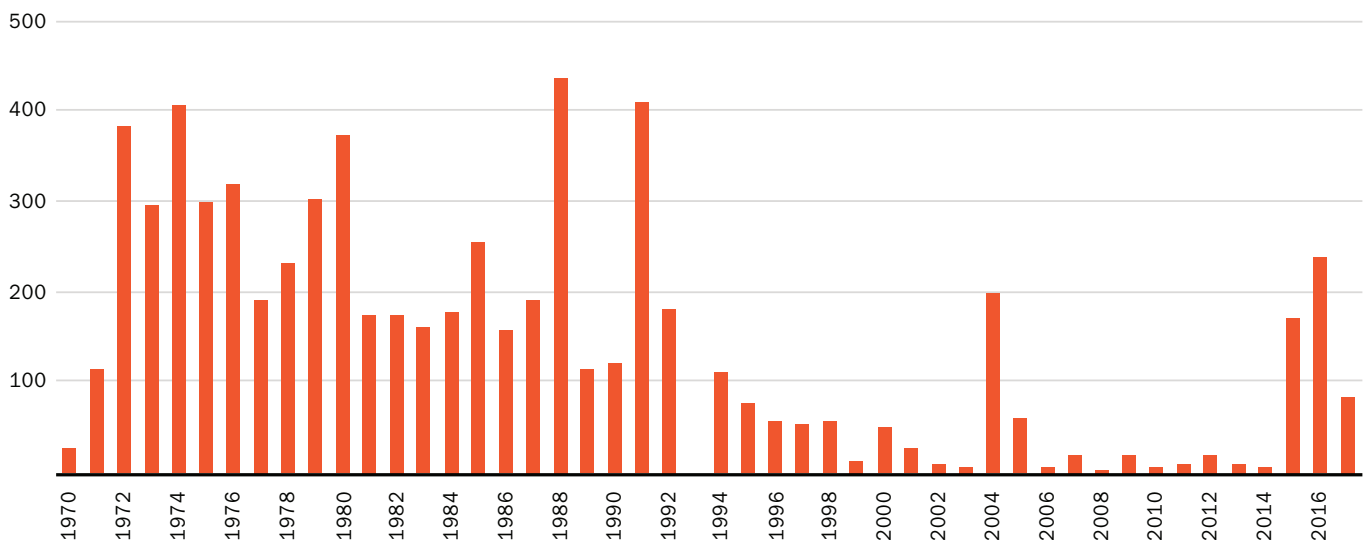
to 2017. Several countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Czech Republic, Belgium, and Portugal, have dealt with violent right-wing groups and individuals. Fourth, there has been a shift from complex attacks (such as the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London attacks) to simple ones, where cells and individuals used vehicles and knives. Yet while it may be easier to acquire equipment and material for simple attacks, they generally do not kill as many people as complex attacks and bombings.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. The first explores historical trends in Europe. The second section analyzes the rise of the Islamic State and implications for Europe. The third examines trends in tactics and targets. And the fourth section provides concluding thoughts on counterterrorism developments in Europe.

Historical Trends

Fatalities from terrorist attacks in Europe have declined somewhat since the end of the Cold War, as highlighted in Figure 2.1. Europe experienced a wave of terrorism during the Cold War from ethno-nationalist groups like the IRA and ETA. European governments also had to deal with extreme left-wing groups like the Italian Brigade Rosse (Red Brigades) and the Greek Revolutionary

FIGURE 2.1
Number of Fatalities per Year¹



No data available for 1993

Organization 17 November. In addition, terrorist groups and state sponsors in the Middle East and North Africa attacked European targets. Examples included the June 1985 Egyptair Flight 648 bombing (which killed 60 people) by the Abu Nidal Organization; the December 1985 Rome and Vienna airport attacks (which killed 23 people) by the Abu Nidal Organization; the December 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 (which killed 270 people) by a network linked to the Libyan government; and the 1995 bombings in Paris (which killed 8 and wounded 157 others) by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Despite terrorist activity in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, mass casualty attacks were rare.

Following the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement in Northern Ireland and the collapse of the Soviet Union (which discredited Marxism-Leninism, an ideological inspiration for numerous left-wing groups, and dried up Soviet aid), fatalities from terrorism in Europe began to significantly decline by the mid-1990s.

After September 11, 2001, fatality numbers in Europe briefly rose because of two major attacks, which marked a shift toward Islamic extremism. One was the March 11, 2004, attack in Madrid, which left 191 dead and 1,755 injured—which was the largest number of casualties from an attack in continental Europe since World War II.² The terrorists, who were predominantly North Africans, carried 13 improvised explosive devices concealed in blue sports bags into the Alcalá station. They placed the bombs in the luggage and seating areas aboard four trains. After placing the bombs and setting the timers, the terrorists exited the trains, which continued toward Madrid.³ While al-Qaeda leaders were not directly involved in the Madrid plot, the Madrid attackers were inspired by al-Qaeda's ideology. Some of them also had a connection to al-Qaeda through Amer Azizi, a deputy to Hamza Rabi'a, al-Qaeda's head of operations in Europe and North America.⁴

The second major attack was in London on July 7, 2005. Beginning at 8:50 am, four suicide bombers—Mohammad Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Hasib Hussain, and Germaine Lindsay—conducted coordinated attacks in central London with the help of senior al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistan. Three of

the bombings were on London's subway system, the Underground, and one was on the number 30 double-decker bus traveling east from Marble Arch. The final toll was calamitous: 56 people were killed, including the four suicide bombers, and over 700 were injured.

UK intelligence assessments had been warning about an imminent attack. In April 2003, the Joint Intelligence Committee specifically identified the London Underground as a potential target.⁵ An alarming report in May 2005 from the government's Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), which was based at MI5's headquarters and responsible for assessing terrorist threats to the United Kingdom, concluded that the "threat from Al Qaida (AQ) leadership directed plots has not gone away and events in Iraq are continuing to act as motivation and a focus of a range of terrorist related activity in the United Kingdom."⁶ In early 2005, the Joint Intelligence Council argued that suicide techniques could become the preferred technique for extremist attacks in some areas of the world. But suicide attacks would probably not become the norm in Europe, it surmised. Still, MI5 warned that "the most significant threat to the United Kingdom and to UK interests overseas comes from Al Qaida and associated networks. The threat to the United Kingdom remains real and serious."⁷

Following the July 2005 London attacks, the number of fatalities from terrorist attacks in Europe remained low for the next decade. But the threat remained serious from Salafi-jihadist groups—especially al-Qaeda. The United Kingdom was a major target. Al-Qaeda leaders based in Pakistan attempted to leverage the United Kingdom's large Pakistani émigré community. MI5 assessed that it could provide good coverage for only 0.13 percent of the known terrorist threat, a reasonable level of coverage (with some gaps) for 6 percent of the threat, limited coverage (with significant gaps) for 33 percent of the threat, and inadequate or no coverage for 61 percent of the threat.⁸ In 2001, MI5 knew of approximately 250 primary investigative targets within the United Kingdom, but they estimated that there were over 500 targets by July 2004 and 800 by July 2005. To deal with the threat, UK government agencies ramped up their coverage of Islamic

"[In 2004] MI5 assessed that it could provide good coverage for only 0.13 percent of the known terrorist threat."

extremists. Roughly 56 percent of MI5's resources went to Islamic groups in July 2005, up from 23 percent in 2002.⁹

There were also several close calls. In 2006, MI5 and the Metropolitan Police foiled a major plot to blow up airlines en route from the United Kingdom to the United States and Canada using liquid explosives. The UK intelligence collection and analysis for the effort, codenamed Operation Overt, was impressive leading up to the August 2006 arrests. "We logged every item they bought, we sifted every piece of rubbish they threw away (at their homes or in litterbins)," according to one British police account. "We filmed and listened to them; we broke into their homes and cars to plant bugs and searched their luggage when they passed through airports."¹⁰ As British police later acknowledged, "When a key figure, Abdulla Ahmed Ali, returned from Pakistan in June 2006, we searched his luggage and resealed it without him noticing. Inside ... were bomb-making components and their discovery led to a step change in the operation."¹¹ In addition, on April 8, 2009, UK police arrested Pakistani national Abid Naseer and ten associates in Liverpool and Manchester, England for involvement in another al-Qaeda-linked terrorist plot. The counterterrorist effort was code-named Operation Pathway and was again led by MI5.¹²

The Rise of the Islamic State

The emergence of the Islamic State in 2014, however, presented Europe with another serious phase of terrorism. Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-

Baghdadi proclaimed the existence of a pan-Islamic caliphate in 2014.¹³ After overrunning Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq, in the summer of 2014, an Islamic State spokesman issued a proclamation outlining the importance of a pan-Islamic caliphate:

The sun of jihad has risen, and the glad tidings of goodness have shone forth. Triumph looms on the horizon, and the signs of victory have appeared.

Here, the flag of the Islamic State, the flag of monotheism, rises and flutters. Its shade covers land from Aleppo to Diyala. Beneath it the walls of the tyrants have been demolished, their flags have fallen, and their borders have been destroyed ...

It is a dream that lives in the depths of every Muslim believer. It is a hope that flutters in the heart of every mujahid monotheist. It is the caliphate. It is the caliphate—the abandoned obligation of the era ...

Now the caliphate has returned. We ask God the exalted to make it in accordance with the prophetic method.¹⁴

Al-Baghdadi adopted the name and title of Caliph Ibrahim al-Baghdadi, and the Islamic State focused its strategic goals on expanding its control of territory and—eventually—plotting and inspiring attacks in the West. In addition, there were approximately 5,000 individuals from European Union countries—particularly Belgium, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom—that traveled to Iraq and Syria to support militant groups, with as many as 1,500 returning to Europe.¹⁵ As Figure 2.2 highlights, the number of failed, foiled and completed Salafi-jihadist attacks in Europe increased from 2 in 2014 to 17 in 2015, 13 in 2016, and 33 in 2017.¹⁶ As explained in more detail in Chapter 4, France became a primary target for Salafi-jihadist attacks. Between 2014 and 2016, Europe witnessed several major attacks such as: the January 2015 attacks against the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and other targets again in Paris, France; the November 2015 attacks against the Bataclan theater and other targets in Paris; the March 2016 attacks at the Brussels Airport and Maalbeek metro station in Brussels, Belgium; the July 2016 attack by

Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel driving a 19-ton truck in Nice, France; and the December 2016 attack at a Christmas market in Berlin, Germany.

In 2017, the number of failed, foiled, and completed Salafi-jihadist attacks more than doubled from the year before. The geographic distribution of attacks also increased. After 2014, European countries experiencing jihadist-related terrorism included the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland—among others. Notable examples of attacks in 2017 included:

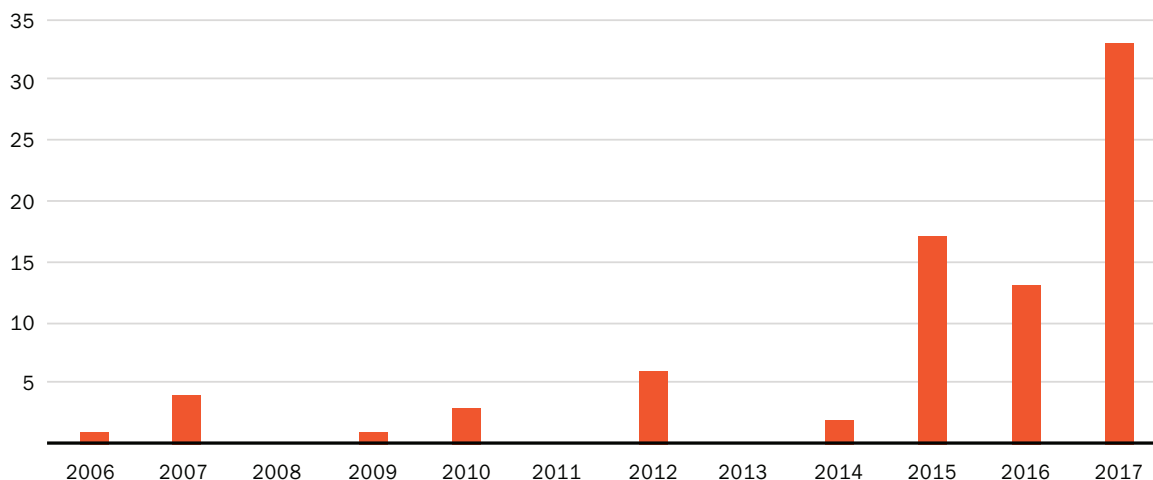
- **United Kingdom:** The March 22 attack by Khalid Masood at Westminster Bridge in London, using a sports utility vehicle and carving knives, which killed four people; the May 22 attack by Salman Abedi at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England, using explosives, which killed 22 people; the June 3 attack by Khuram Butt, Rachid Redouane, and Youssef Zaghaba at London Bridge—involving a van and knives—which killed eight people; and the September 15 attack by Ahmed Hassan at Parsons Green, which injured 30 people but failed to kill anyone.
- **Sweden:** The April 7 attack by Rakhmat Akilov using a vehicle, which killed five people.
- **France:** The April 20 shooting attack by Karim Cheurfi at Champs-Élysées in Paris, which killed one police officer; the October 1 attack by Ahmed Hanachi at the Marseille railway station, which

killed two women; the June 6 attack by Farid Ikken, who was wielding a hammer in front of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, which wounded a French soldier; and the August 9 attack by Hamou Benlatrèche against French soldiers patrolling as part of Opération Sentinelle in Paris, which wounded six soldiers.

- **Germany:** The July 28 attack in Hamburg by Ahmad Alhaw using a knife, which killed one and injured six people.
- **Spain:** The series of August attacks by a cell of Salafi-jihadists, including the August 17 attack on La Rambla promenade in Barcelona by Younes Abouyaaqoub using a vehicle, which killed 15 people and wounded at least 130 others.

There were several Salafi-jihadist strikes in 2018, such as the attack by Chérif Chekatt at the Strasbourg Christmas Market in France in December 2018, which killed at least five people; the March 23 attack in Carcassonne and Trèbes, France, where Redouane Lakdim hijacked a car, shot at police officers, and took hostages in a supermarket; the May 12 attack in Paris, France, in which Khamzat Azimov, armed with a knife, stabbed five people in a neighborhood near the Paris Opera; and the May 29 attack in Liège, Belgium, in which Benjamin Herman conducted a knife and small-arms attack that killed two female police officers and a teacher. There were also a number of foiled

FIGURE 2.2
All Failed, Foiled, and Completed Attacks by Salafi-jihadists in Europe¹⁷



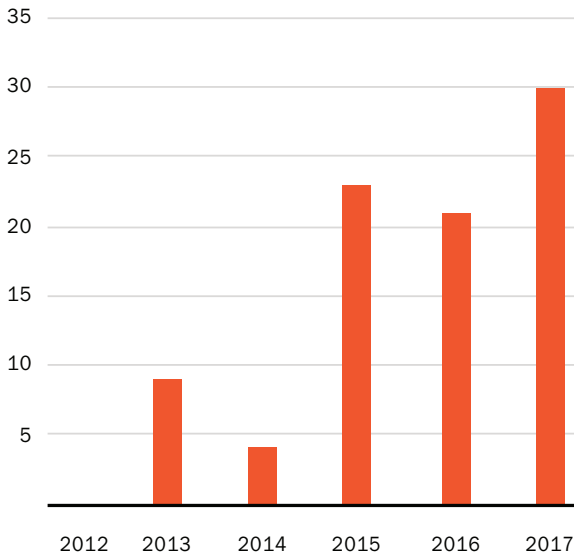


ABOVE Members of Iraqi forces along with high-ranking officials gather to take pictures in the remains of the Grand Mosque of Al-Nuri at the site where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi gave his first sermon as leader of the Islamic State (IS) group in 2014, on July 2, 2017.

📷 Ahmed al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images

FIGURE 2.3

Extreme Right-Wing Attacks in Europe (2012–2017)²¹



plots. In September 2018, for example, police and intelligence officials in the Netherlands disrupted a major plot to conduct several terrorist attacks. “The suspects were looking for AK-47s, handguns, hand grenades, bomb belts, and the building materials for one or more car bombs,” announced the Public Prosecutor’s Office in the Hague.¹⁸

Rise of Right-Wing Extremism

In addition to Salafi-jihadist groups and individuals, the data also indicate that Europe faces a threat from extreme right-wing groups. As Figure 2.3 highlights, there has been a significant rise in extreme right-wing attacks—from 9 in 2013 to 21 in 2016 and 30 in 2017. In fact, 2017 included the highest number of right-wing attacks in Europe since 1994.¹⁹ European Union Security Commissioner Sir Julian King expressed concern about the “growing menace” of right-wing extremism, remarking: “I’m not aware of a single EU member state that is not affected in some way by right-wing violent extremism.”²⁰

Right-wing extremists have developed and executed sophisticated plots in the past. In 2011, for example, 77 individuals died in a series of

attacks carried out by a lone right-wing extremist in Oslo and the island of Utoya. Examples of violent right-wing groups include factions like the Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland (IBD, Identitarian Movement Germany) and supporters of the Reich Citizen ideology in Germany; Britain First in the United Kingdom; the Generace Identity (Generation of Identity) movement and the Pro-Vlast movement in the Czech Republic; Soldiers of Odin in Belgium; and the Blood & Honour organization in Portugal.²¹

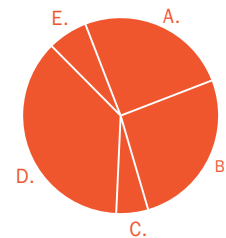
Europe also faces a threat from extreme left-wing and ethno-nationalist groups and individuals. Left-wing groups include the Federazione Anarchica Informale / Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale (FAI / FRI, Informal Anarchist Federation / International Revolutionary Front), Organosi Epanastatikis Aftoamynas (Revolutionary Self-Defence Organization), and Omada Laikon Agoniston (Group of Popular Fighters). Most left-wing terrorism in Europe has been based in Greece, Italy, and Spain. Ethno-nationalist groups include dissident Republican organizations in Northern Ireland like the new IRA, Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH), the Continuity IRA (CIRA), and Arm Na Poblachta (ANP).²²

FIGURE 2.4

Terrorist Attacks in Europe by Weapon Type (2014–2017)²⁴

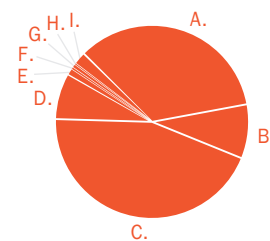
Number of Jihadist-Related Attacks in the EU

A. Explosives	19
B. Firearms	20
C. Incendiary	4
D. Melee	28
E. Vehicle	5



Number of Terrorist Attacks in the EU

A. Explosives	393
B. Firearms	103
C. Incendiary	504
D. Melee	88
E. Vehicle	14
F. Chemical	3
G. Other	5
H. Sabotage Equipment	2
I. Unknown	25



Tactics and Targets

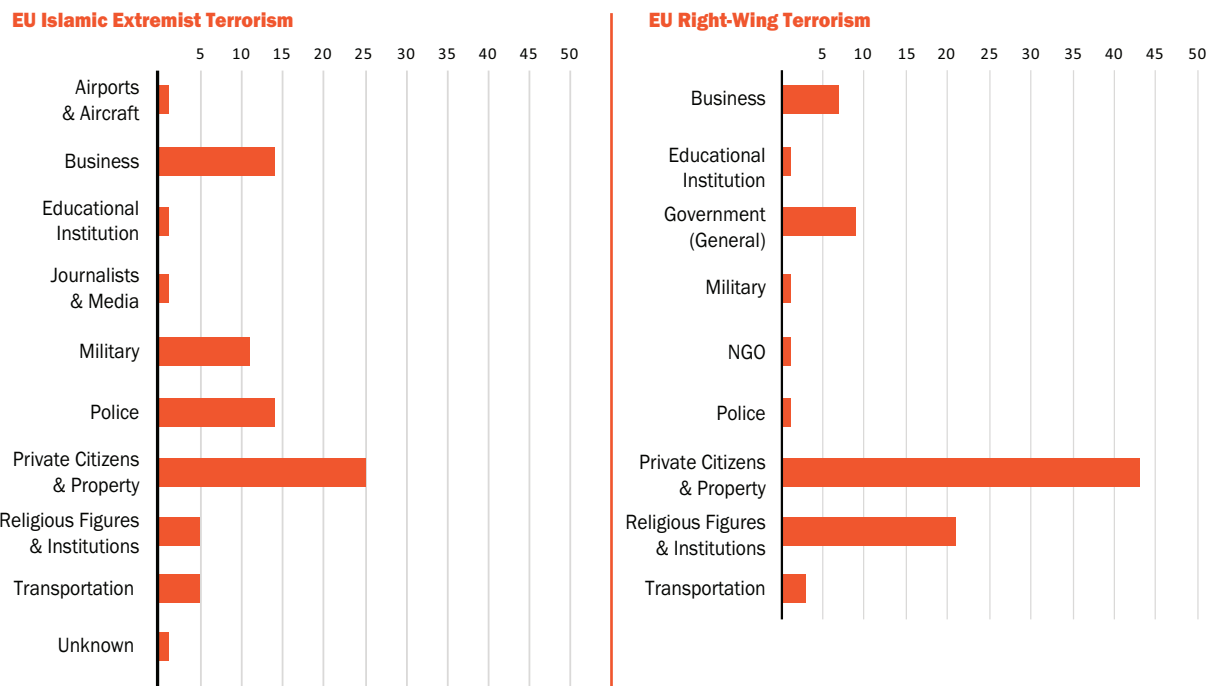
Terrorist tactics have also evolved. Simple attacks have become *de rigueur* among terrorists in Europe. Vehicles were used as a weapon in 11 percent of attacks in 2017 by Islamic extremists, though only 3 percent by all terrorists (which include extreme right-wing, left-wing, religious, and ethno-nationalist violence). Other common types included melee weapons (which are used in hand-to-hand combat like knives, swords, or axes), incendiary devices, and firearms. As Figure 2.4 shows, the trends were similar over the past several years. Vehicles were used in 7 percent of jihadist attacks between 2014 and 2017, but only 1 percent of all terrorist attacks. Melee attacks using weapons like knives comprised 39 percent of jihadist attacks between 2014 and 2017, but only 8 percent of all attacks.²³ Terrorists used vehicles against civilians in numerous attacks, such as July 2016 in Nice, France; December 2016 in Berlin, Germany; March 2017 in London; April 2017 in Stockholm, Sweden; and August 2017 in Barcelona, Spain. There have also been a handful of vehicle attacks in the United States, including the October 2017 attack along

the Hudson River Park bike path in New York City and the August 2017 attack at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.²⁴

While increasingly common, the data suggest that these simple attacks generally do not kill large numbers of people. The July 2016 Nice attack, which killed 87 people, was an exception, in part since it involved a 19-ton rental truck plowing into civilians at a Bastille Day celebration. Instead, complex attacks that involve multiple perpetrators armed with improvised explosive devices and guns are likely to be more lethal. For example, the July 2005 attack in London killed 56 people, and the November 2015 attack in Paris killed 130 people (excluding the terrorists).

There also exists a difference in the type of target pursued by Islamic extremist and right-wing terrorists, as shown in Figure 2.5. In the past five years, Islamic extremists have focused on targeting private citizens, businesses, the military, and police—often symbols of the “infidel” government, its citizens, and Western civilization. This development marks a change from previous years, when Islamic extremists in Europe plotted mass-casualty attacks and targeted aircraft

FIGURE 2.5
Terrorist Attack by Target Type (2013–2017)²⁵





ABOVE Police officers and rescue workers stand near a van that ploughed into a crowd leaving a fireworks display in the French Riviera town of Nice on July 14, 2016.

📷 Valery Hache/AFP/Getty Images

and transportation targets. In recent years, right-wing terrorists have focused on private citizens and religious institutions, such as mosques.

European Counterterrorism Responses

While this chapter focuses on the terrorism threat to Europe—not counterterrorism responses by European governments—it is still worth noting that European governments have been aggressive in targeting terrorists in recent years. Part of the

challenge for governments is addressing the means through which individuals access jihadist literature and media. Publications such as *Inspire* and *Dabiq* have shared Salafi-jihadist ideas across the internet in an attempt to radicalize Europeans. In addition, as Western technology companies have cracked down on jihadist chat rooms and messaging channels, jihadist communications and propaganda have switched to other platforms, making it more difficult for European counterterrorism officials to penetrate these networks.

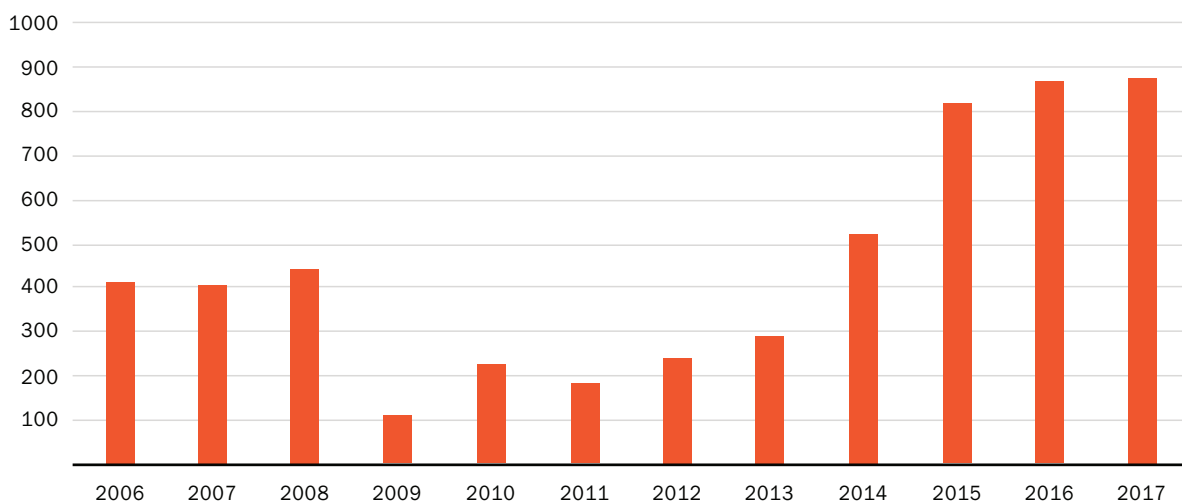
But European governments have increased their counterterrorism efforts, including human intelligence (HUMINT) collection and surveillance. Extremist clerics are also treated more severely. In Britain, the hard-line Finsbury Park Mosque Imam Abu Hamza was extradited to the United States, where he was sentenced to life in prison in 2015. Censorship of extremist internet material, once seen as both unfeasible and unduly harsh, is now common and has significantly reduced the availability of jihadist propaganda. A new European Union law imposes fines on internet companies that fail to remove extremist material within 60 minutes of being posted. In 2018, a European Parliament special committee recommended that member countries take such actions as “close without delay mosques and places of worship and ban associations that do not adhere to EU values and incite to terrorist offences, hatred, discrimination or violence”; “ban and remove all religious literature within their territory that incites to violent and terrorist acts”; “asks for such literature to be removed from online platforms and shops”; and “act against satellite TV channels propagating hate speech.”²⁶

France passed a law in 2017 making it easier to shut down radical mosques. Austria closed seven mosques and deported 60 imams in 2018. Italy deported 313 extremists between 2015 and 2018. Britain stripped more than 100 suspected Islamist

militants of their citizenship in 2017.²⁷ A few countries, such as France, have been increasingly willing to use military forces against Salafi-jihadist groups outside Europe. France has been particularly active in the Sahel as part of Operation Barkhane, which began in 2014 and has involved aggressive counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda and Islamic State-linked groups. The anti-Islamic State coalition deployed to Iraq in 2014 also had a large European component, and some countries sent special operations forces to Iraq to detain or kill their own citizens fighting with the Islamic State. These new practices have been accompanied by more-aggressive rhetoric. In November 2015 after the Paris attacks, then-President François Hollande declared that “France is at war.”²⁸ In 2017 Foreign Minister Florence Parly said: “What we want is to go to the end of this combat and of course if jihadists die in the fighting, then I’d say it’s for the best.”²⁹ European countries have also focused on de-radicalization and disengagement programs at home. In addition, there has been a notable rise in arrests, as highlighted in Figure 2.6. The rise in arrests may reflect intelligence successes, as well as an increased threat.

To look more specifically at what the threat is in some European countries and how their counterterrorism programs have evolved, we now turn to two case studies: the United Kingdom and France.

FIGURE 2.6
Jihadist-Related Terrorism Arrests in the European Union (2006–2017)³⁰





United Kingdom

This chapter focuses on the evolving terrorism threat to the United Kingdom, the government's response, and future challenges. In examining these issues, the chapter combines qualitative and quantitative information.

On the qualitative side, it incorporates interviews with British counterterrorism officials and non-government experts, as well as primary and secondary sources. Among the most important sources were documents like the 2018 version of *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*, David Anderson's "Attacks in London and Manchester: Independent Assessment of MI5 and Police Internal Reviews," and primary source documents from the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other groups regarding the threat to the United Kingdom.¹ In addition, the chapter compiles and analyzes such data as the number and type of terrorist plots, attacks, tactics, arrests, investigations, and subjects of interest (SOIs).

The remainder of this chapter is organized into three sections. The first provides an overview of the terrorism threat to the United Kingdom. The second section examines the evolution of the United Kingdom's response. The third identifies future challenges.

The Evolving Threat

The United Kingdom has a long and diverse history of dealing with terrorism. The "Troubles" in Northern Ireland, for example, began in the 1960s and then escalated in 1969 when riots broke out in August and the UK deployed troops. Violence continued over the next several decades. In one of the most spectacular attacks of the conflict, the "Provisional" Irish Republican Army (IRA) nearly assassinated UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher on October 12, 1984, at the Grand Brighton Hotel where she was attending the Conservative Party conference. Several years later, IRA operatives fired mortar shells at 10 Downing Street in February 1991, where Prime Minister John Major and his war cabinet were meeting. One of the shells exploded in the back garden, a few yards from the cabinet office, but no

one was killed. Between 1969 and 1998, the IRA conducted attacks that led to more than 3,300 deaths, 48,000 injuries, and billions of pounds in economic damage because of the cost of reconstruction after attacks, insurance premiums, the negative impact of foreign investment in Northern Ireland, and other factors.²

As Figure 3.1 highlights, the most violent periods of terrorism in the United Kingdom since 1970 were caused by the IRA. The high number of deaths in 1988, however, was a result of the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, which was perpetrated by Libyans and led to the death of 271 people.

Only three years after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which paved the way for a political settlement in Northern Ireland, al-Qaeda perpetrated the 9/11 attacks and ushered in a wave of violence in the West—including in the United Kingdom. On July 7, 2005, Mohammad Sidique Khan and three colleagues conducted suicide bombings in central London.³ As shown in Figure 3.1, the July 2005 attacks caused the largest number of deaths from terrorism thus far after 2001.

Over the next several years, the United Kingdom faced a wave of terrorist plots, though there were few successful attacks because of effective counterterrorism operations from UK police and intelligence agencies. Among the most serious was in 2006, when MI5 and Special Branch disrupted an al-Qaeda plot, led by Abdulla Ahmed Ali, to take down airliners traveling from the United Kingdom to Canada and the United States with liquid explosives. The UK counterterrorism effort led to the seizure of 200 mobile phones; 400 computers; and a total of 8,000 CDs, DVDs, and computer disks that contained over 6,000 gigabytes of data. Nearly 70 homes, businesses, and areas such as public parks were searched.⁴ In addition, the Bank of England ordered banks to freeze the assets of 19 individuals for possible participation in terrorist acts.⁵

By 2006, MI5 identified around 1,600 individuals who posed a direct threat to UK national security and public safety because of their support for terrorism. By 2007, that number jumped to at least



ABOVE Policemen stand near the wreckage of the 747 Pan Am airliner that exploded and crashed over Lockerbie, Scotland, December 22, 1988.

BELOW A security officer from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) carries a sign and speaks on a bullhorn warning departing passengers that 'liquids and gels' are no longer permitted on airline flights August 10, 2006 at Washington Dulles International Airport in Dulles, Virginia.

📷 Roy Letkey/AFP/Getty Images; Paul J. Richards/AFP/Getty Images

2,000 individuals.⁷ Over the next several years, MI5 and other UK government agencies worked to thwart terrorist attacks tied directly or indirectly to individuals operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and other countries. Most of the plots were orchestrated or inspired by al-Qaeda. With the rise of the Islamic State, however, the terrorist threat from Islamic extremist groups began to shift away from al-Qaeda and toward the Islamic State. In September 2014, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the spokesman for the Islamic State, released an audio speech encouraging attacks in Europe: “If you can kill a disbelieving American or European ... then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be.”⁸ Al-Adnani reiterated similar calls to attack Europeans, including British citizens, in January 2015, March 2015, and May 2016.

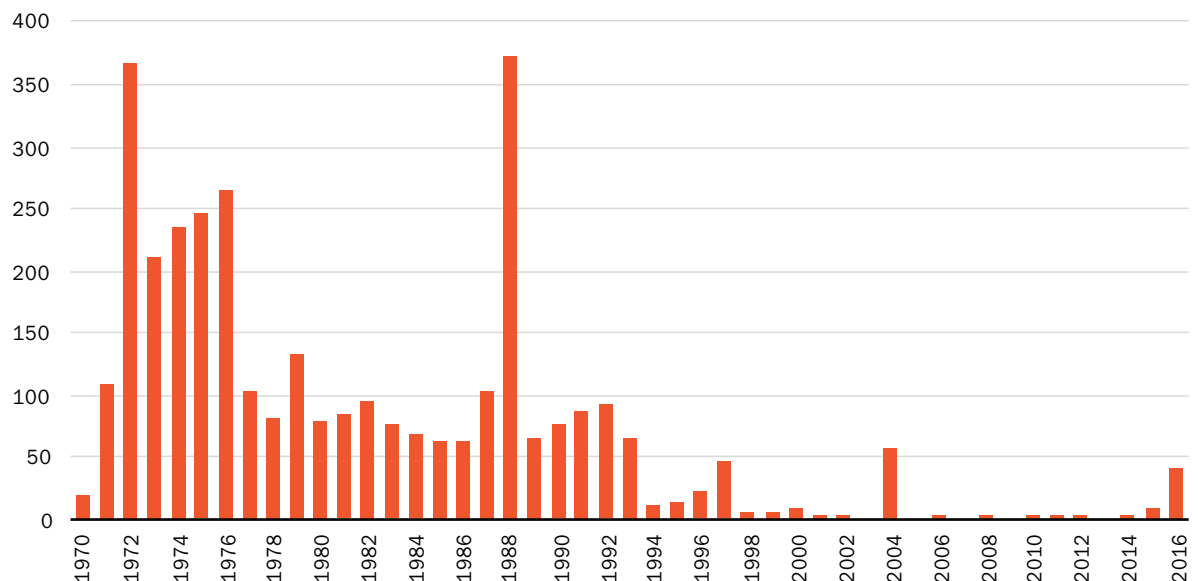
Figure 3.2 highlights the number of attacks in the United Kingdom, which shows a major decline after 9/11 and then an increase over the past five years.

Today, the terrorist threat to the United Kingdom can be characterized by several developments: a continuing threat from Islamic extremists; a convergence of top-down and bottom-up components; simple terrorist tactics that are designed to kill quickly; and an increasingly violent extreme right.

A Persistent Threat: Despite the Islamic State’s loss of territory in Iraq, Syria, and other locations like Libya and Nigeria, the United Kingdom faces a significant, multi-dimensional threat from Islamic extremists. The Islamic State—not al-Qaeda—remains the most significant threat at the moment because of its unparalleled ability to inspire attacks; its aggressive on-line propaganda campaign; and its relationship to UK groups like al-Muhajiroun, which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Several trends highlight the continuing threat.

First, there were four successful attacks in 2017 in the United Kingdom perpetrated by Islamic extremists, the most in UK history from Islamic extremism.¹⁰ On March 22, British-born Khalid Masood, a convert to Islam, drove a sports utility vehicle into pedestrians crossing Westminster Bridge in London, killing three people. Masood then took two carving knives out of his vehicle and stabbed to death police officer Keith Palmer. On May 22, British-born Salman Abedi detonated an improvised explosive device in the foyer of Manchester Arena, killed 22 people; 10 of them were under 20 years old. Abedi had recently returned from Libya. On June 3, three men—Khuram Butt (British), Rachid Redouane (Moroccan), and Youssef Zaghba (Italian and Moroccan)—drove a van into London Bridge, killing two people. They then jumped out of the van

FIGURE 3.1
Deaths Due to Terrorism in the UK (1970–2016)³



"There were four successful attacks in 2017 in the United Kingdom perpetrated by Islamic extremists, the most in UK history from Islamic extremism."

PAGE
20

and killed six more people using large knives. Butt had direct links with al-Muhajiroun. On September 15, an 18-year old Iraqi asylum seeker named Ahmed Hassan tried to detonate a bomb using triacetone triperoxide (TATP) on a District line train at Parsons Green Underground station in London. Thirty people were treated for burns and other injuries.¹¹

Second, the number of terrorist plots and arrests remains high. There were more failed, foiled, and completed attacks in the United Kingdom than anywhere else in the European Union in 2017.¹² Between December 2013 and May 2018, British intelligence and law enforcement agencies thwarted 25 plots from Islamic extremist groups.¹³ Most of these plots were inspired by the Islamic State and its ideology, rather than directed by Islamic State operatives. By contrast, al-Qaeda inspired comparatively few plots in the United Kingdom during the same period.¹⁴ Based on the attacks and plots, the United Kingdom's Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre kept the threat level high

in the United Kingdom.¹⁵ As Figure 3.3 highlights, the total number of arrests in the United Kingdom for terrorism-related activity from June 30, 2017, to June 30, 2018—including from international terrorism cases—declined somewhat from the previous one-year period, though it was still at near-peak levels over the past decade. The total number of people charged for terrorism-related activity from June 2017 to June 2018 also decline somewhat, but was also at near-peak levels.

Convergence of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Radicalization: The terrorism threat in the United Kingdom has also emanated from a confluence of top-down and bottom-up factors. Terrorist experts have long debated whether terrorism is driven primarily by leaders (top-down) or local networks (bottom-up). Top-down approaches tend to focus on the role of external radicalizers, such as a recruiter for a terrorist group or a charismatic figure that helps radicalize attackers through human or virtual interaction. This socialization process then

FIGURE 3.2
Number of Terrorist Attacks in the UK (1970–2017)^a

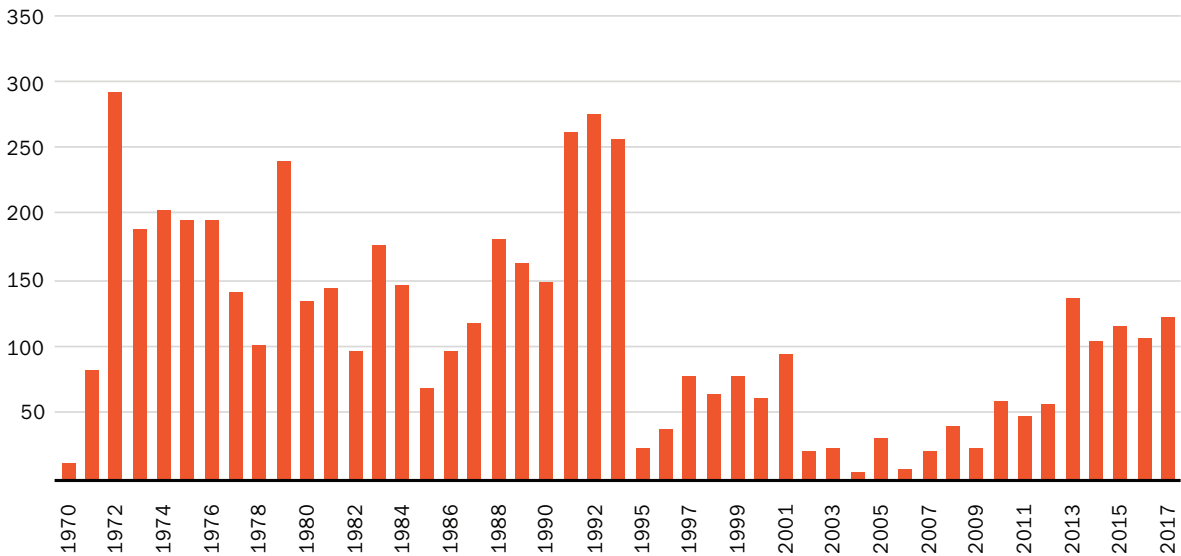


FIGURE 3.3

Number of Persons Arrested, Charged, and Convicted After a Charge for Terrorism-Related Activity in the UK¹⁸

Data taken from July 1–June 30

Arrested for terrorism-related activity											
Category	'07–'08	'08–'09	'09–'10	'10–'11	'11–'12	'12–'13	'13–'14	'14–'15	'15–'16	'16–'17	'17–'18
Domestic	30	34	24	28	29	31	16	30	13	61	75
Northern Ireland related	3	2	6	2	3	6	15	4	4	8	3
International	186	170	94	102	206	190	196	294	258	354	234
Not classified	-	-	6	8	3	43	38	44	29	26	39
Total	219	206	130	140	241	270	265	372	304	449	351

Charged for terrorism-related activity											
Domestic	10	7	7	2	4	5	5	4	4	26	27
Northern Ireland related	2	-	3	-	-	2	10	3	3	5	3
International	36	34	35	38	46	42	57	113	79	106	58
Not classified	-	-	3	6	-	10	13	15	8	2	4
Total	48	31	38	36	50	59	85	135	94	139	92

Convicted after a charge for terrorism-related offenses											
Domestic	9	7	6	2	3	5	4	3	4	23	8
Northern Ireland related	2	-	2	-	-	-	6	2	3	1	-
International	12	18	17	26	40	32	44	98	65	93	36
Not classified	-	-	2	4	-	9	13	12	8	2	2
Total	23	25	27	32	43	46	67	115	80	119	46

State and practice the “real Islam.”²⁶ It is unclear whether any of them would have conducted attacks without access to Islamic State propaganda, making the top-down an important part of the radicalization process.

In short, top-down and bottom-up activity have been necessary to understand the terrorist threat in the United Kingdom, but neither are sufficient. Top-down actions by groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are important to establish and

propagate the ideology, encourage and motivate supporters to conduct attacks at home and abroad, and explain how to procure the necessary materials. Bottom-up activity, on the other hand, is essential to conduct attacks.

Tactics and Targets: Terrorist tactics in the United Kingdom have also become increasingly simple. Between 1998 and 2015, nearly three quarters of terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom were crude bombings, followed by smaller

stimulates a change in behavior and may eventually led an individual to participate in terrorist activity.¹⁶ On the other hand, bottom-up theories argue that radicalization is primarily caused by interaction among local social networks, particularly face-to-face relationships. This local interaction, in turn, contributes to radicalization and a decision to take part in extremist activity—including violence.¹⁷

The terrorism threat in the United Kingdom has generally been a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes. The leadership of groups like al-Qaeda and, more recently, the Islamic State has been important in inspiring—and occasionally helping direct—UK citizens and others to plot attacks or otherwise support terrorism. During the al-Qaeda wave of terrorism in the United Kingdom after 2001, al-Qaeda operatives like Rashid Rauf, Abu Ubaydah al-Masri, and Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi were critical in helping radicalize and train UK plotters, fundraise, plan operations, and support terrorist activity.¹⁹ More recently, individuals like Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the spokesman for the Islamic State, helped radicalize individuals in the United Kingdom through propaganda and inspired some to conduct attacks.²⁰ Islamic State propaganda has been widely read among UK radicals, from magazines like *Dabiq* to social media forums like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram.²¹ In short, the Islamic State's role from the top has been critical by keeping up a steady stream of propaganda, encouraging supporters to conduct terrorist attacks, and ensuring they have the technical capabilities (however simple) to attack. This top-down role was, in part, the vision of individuals like Abu Bakr Naji, who wrote in *The Management of Savagery*: "It only remains for us to create media information and effective (religious) propaganda so that this meaning may be conveyed to the Umma—all of the Umma—without complication beneath the shadow of that terrible battle whose foretokens have appeared."²²

There has also been bottom-up radicalization. Local individuals and networks have been instrumental in sifting through propaganda from the Islamic State and other groups, participating in social media and internet forums, developing personal relations, and following instructions on

"Strong gun laws and aggressive law enforcement in the United Kingdom mean that bladed weapons like knives have been more common than guns."

how to build bombs or otherwise conduct attacks. Radicalization has generally happened at the local level. But a connection to—and inspiration from—terrorist leaders is often critical. MI5 Director General Andrew Parker referred to the United Kingdom threat as "three-dimensional," since it emanates from overseas, at home, and online.²³ The online component has often been the medium for connecting the top to the bottom. These virtual forums can be helpful because extremists can insert people into "echo chambers" that amplify their messages and suppress contrary opinions.²⁴

The internet and social media platforms don't cause radicalization, but they can act as facilitators and catalyzers of an individual's trajectory toward violence—and help connect the top-down and bottom-up processes.²⁵ These platforms have allowed UK terrorists overseas to contact family members and associates in the United Kingdom, creating networks and clusters of extremists.

In the four successful attacks in 2017 by Islamic extremists, all utilized Islamic State propaganda pushed out by the group's leadership and media enterprise. Salman Abedi was in contact—at least indirectly—with an Islamic State figure in Libya. Khuram Butt was inspired by Islamic State propaganda and even posed with an Islamic State flag in the Channel 4 television documentary, "The Jihadis Next Door." Youssef Zaghba expressed an interest in travelling to Syria to join the Islamic

percentages of stabbings (15 percent), vehicle attacks (12 percent), and other types of attacks. But the percentage of stabbings and vehicle attacks increased over time.²⁷ Strong gun laws and aggressive law enforcement in the United Kingdom mean that bladed weapons like knives have been more common than guns. Vehicular attacks have also become more common since the July 2016 attacks in Nice, France. Vehicles were used in two of the four attacks in 2017 (Westminster Bridge and London Bridge). On August 14, 2018, Salih Khater, a UK citizen from Birmingham who was in his late twenties, drove a silver Ford Fiesta into a crowd of pedestrians and cyclists in London and then crashed it into a security barrier outside the Houses of Parliament. No one was killed, in part because of the rapid response by armed Metropolitan Police Service officers and the security measures in place at the Houses of Parliament.

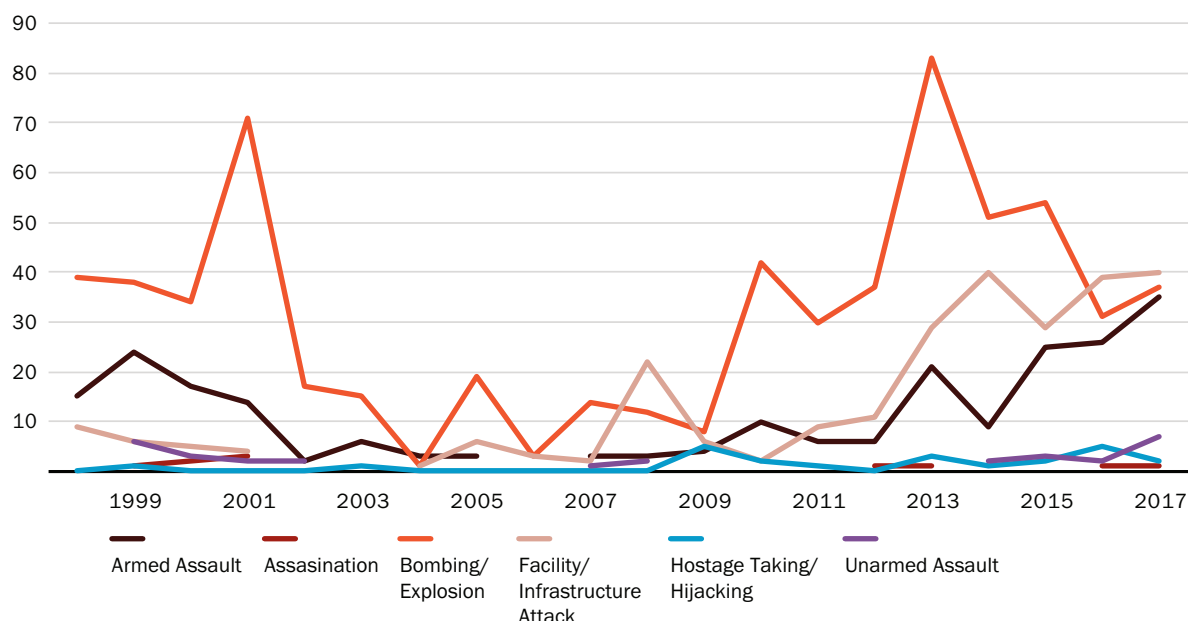
In several cases—including Westminster Bridge and London Bridge—both vehicles *and* bladed weapons were used, much like the May 2013 attack against a British Army soldier Lee Rigby, in southeast London. In a few cases like the Manchester and Parsons Green attacks, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were used.²⁸ In other explosive or bombing attacks—often perpetrated by ethno-nationalist groups—simple explosives like pipe bombs,

grenades, or letter bombs were used. Finally, all the recent attacks in the United Kingdom were cheap. In Europe more broadly, none of the attacks in Europe since 2014 cost more than 10,000 Euros. The majority cost less than 1,000 Euros.²⁹

In addition, recent plots or attacks in the United Kingdom have targeted civilians (40 percent), followed by urban soft targets (42 percent), military targets (31 percent), and critical infrastructure (4 percent).³⁰ UK citizens overseas are also a target. Since 2011, 63 UK nationals have been killed in terrorist attacks overseas—more than in the United Kingdom itself. Most of these attacks were at tourist sites, such as in Sousse, Tunisia in June 2015, where 30 UK nationals perished; and the Bardo Museum in Tunisia, where one UK national was killed.³¹ See Figure 3.4 for additional information.³²

Other Shades of Terrorism: There has also been a threat from extreme right-wing groups and individuals in the United Kingdom, most of whom have connections to far-right groups in Europe and abroad. Before 2014, extreme right-wing groups did not present a significant terrorism threat in the United Kingdom. But this began to change with rising domestic concerns about refugees and asylum-seekers from countries like Syria. In December 2016, the UK government banned the extreme right-wing group, National Action, under

FIGURE 3.4
Terrorist Tactics Used in the UK (1998–2017)³²



the Terrorism Act 2000.³³ National Action, a neo-Nazi group, encouraged members to prepare for a “race war” in the United Kingdom and held training camps where individuals sparred and conducted weapons training. The UK government took further action in September 2017, banning Scottish Dawn and National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action as aliases of National Action.³⁴

Among the most prominent right-wing attacks occurred on June 16, 2016, when UK Labour member of Parliament Jo Cox was murdered by right-wing extremist Thomas Mair. Almost a year later, on June 19, 2017, Darren Osborne, a 47-year old British man, drove a van into Muslim worshippers near Finsbury Park Mosque, London, killing one person. Osborne sentenced to life imprisonment after being found guilty on charges of terrorism-related murder and attempted murder.³⁵ On June 23, 2017, Marek Zakrocki, a known supporter of the far-right party Britain First, drove a vehicle into an Indian restaurant in London, injuring several people. He was armed with a kitchen knife and a baton-torch, and he told police: “I’m going to kill a Muslim. I’m doing this for Britain. This is the way I am going to help the country. You people can’t do anything. I am going to do it my way because that is what I think is right.”³⁶

Northern Ireland-related terrorism also remains a serious threat, and some dissident republican terrorist groups continue to carry out terrorist attacks. Between 2011 and 2017, there were 127 attacks in Northern Ireland, mainly targeting the Police Service of Northern Ireland, prison officers, and the armed forces.³⁷

UK Counterterrorism Efforts

Since 2003, the UK government’s counterterrorism strategy, or CONTEST, has focused on mitigating the problem of terrorism. UK counterterrorism documents and public comments from senior officials have generally eschewed language about ending terrorism, defeating terrorist groups, or preventing all attacks. As CONTEST bluntly acknowledged: “The aim of CONTEST is to *reduce the risk* to the United Kingdom and its citizens and interest overseas from terrorism, so that

people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.”³⁸ Following the initial publication of CONTEST in 2003, the United Kingdom published updates in 2006, 2009, and 2018. In each of these versions, UK counterterrorism was divided into four components:

- **Prevent:** stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.
- **Pursue:** stop terrorist attacks from happening in the United Kingdom and overseas.
- **Protect:** strengthen the United Kingdom’s protection against a terrorist attack in the U.K. or overseas.
- **Prepare:** mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack if it occurs.³⁹

The 2018 version had several notable updates. The purpose of this section is to highlight some of the changes in UK counterterrorism strategy, not to provide a comprehensive overview. It focuses on several developments: legal authorities; cooperation between MI5 and the police; the internet and social media; closed subjects of interest; desistance and disengagement programs; and the extreme right wing.

Expanding Legal Authorities: The UK government also increased its legal authorities to combat terrorism. For example, the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 gave the government wide-ranging surveillance power, including the ability to intercept and access the communications of UK citizens. The Act required internet and phone companies to keep bulk records of all users for up to a year. It also compelled telecommunications companies to maintain the capability to remove encryption or to provide data when the government served a warrant, notice, or other authorization. To help safeguard liberties, the government established an Investigatory Powers Commissioner’s Office and judicial commissioners as independent judges to oversee warrants.⁴⁰

Despite these steps, the Act was highly controversial. Opponents charged that it unnecessarily undermined civil liberties, constituted mass surveillance and a breach of privacy, and gave the UK government unprecedented and unnecessary authority to intercept communications, conduct



ABOVE Flowers surround a picture of Jo Cox during a vigil in Parliament Square on June 16, 2016 in London, United Kingdom.

📷 Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

equipment interference, and seize internet and cell phone data.⁴¹ The United Nations special rapporteur on privacy charged that the UK government had failed to recognize the consequences of mass surveillance, and worried that the act might authorize “bulk interception of communications, and intelligence-sharing practices that may not be proportionate or necessary.”⁴²

The Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Acts of 2000, 2006, 2008 and 2015 also established additional penalties for terrorism. The 2015 Act contained provisions designed to prevent people from travelling to Syria, Iraq, and other battlefields; stop them from returning if they conducted terrorism-related activity; and curb the spread of jihadist ideology. Previously, the Home Secretary had to personally authorize

each seizure of a passport by Royal Prerogative. Under the 2015 Act, police and border officials could temporarily confiscate the passport of suspected terrorists on the spot. In addition, under “temporary exclusion orders,” the Act permitted the government to ban from the country suspected terrorists with UK passports for two years. Suspected terrorists could also have their passports cancelled and placed on international “no fly lists” to prevent them from returning to Britain. Those that returned could be prosecuted, face restrictions on their movements, or compelled to attend disengagement programs. In addition, the Act stipulated that airlines had to disclose more passenger data in advance. Airlines that refused to provide advanced passenger lists could be banned from landing in Britain. Public bodies like colleges, schools, prisons, and councils

also had a new legal duty to prevent people being drawn into terrorism, including stopping extremist preachers from lecturing on campus.⁴³

Much like the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, there were numerous critics of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. Some charged that the Act would result in divisive ethnic profiling, like that seen under Stop and Search laws, and place an unlawful burden on educational institutions and staff.⁴⁴ Others charged that the Act was undemocratic. As one academic concluded, the act “is itself an attack on British democracy” and “Prevent’s insistence on the importance of democracy, while denying the contestation of ideas which is integral to the working of a democracy, further evacuates the concept.”⁴⁵

In addition, the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 provided the Home Secretary with a mechanism for dealing with terrorist suspects that were not prosecuted or deported. The government has the power to freeze and forfeit the assets of terrorists in the Terrorist Asset Freezing Act 2010 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 introduced a range of measures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces. It created a new offense for breach of pre-charge bail conditions related to travel in terrorism-related cases. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 also enhanced powers to allow for the retention of biometric data where a person had a previous conviction overseas for any offense, as well as within the United Kingdom.⁴⁶

Police and Intelligence Cooperation: The United Kingdom has established an effective model to collect intelligence on terrorists and arrest them before they perpetrate attacks. Intelligence investigations are led by MI5’s “desk officer system” involves the use of desk officers to collect and disseminate intelligence, work with local police from the Counter Terrorism Command (CTC) or SO15, investigate and assess threats, and work with other agencies like the Home Office and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) to identify and counter threats. The desk officer is responsible for investigating a single target or a group of targets, and works in teams alongside other officers responsible for related targets. MI5

works closely with Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP). As former MI5 Director General Jonathan Evans remarked: “the most important change in counter terrorism in the United Kingdom in recent years has been the development of the relationship between the police and the Security Service ... It is no exaggeration to say that joint working between the police and MI5 has become recognized as a beacon of good practice.”⁴⁷

While this model has prevented numerous terrorist attacks, it is not perfect. As the UK’s Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament remarked in its report, *The 2017 Attacks: What Needs to Change?*: “[The 2017] attacks revealed that there were still problems around the sharing of MI5 information with CTP, and the involvement of CTP in MI5 decision making.”⁴⁸ The report also criticized the police and MI5 for having substantial cultural differences and incompatible information technology systems, which negatively impacted some operations.

Despite these challenges, the UK’s counterterrorism model and expanded legal authorities contributed to a rise in the number of arrests and convictions for terrorism-related offenses after 2010. From 2010 to 2017, the United Kingdom made 2,029 terrorism arrests. As Figure 3.5 highlights, 412 of those arrests were made in 2017, representing the highest annual number since data collection began. This high number is driven in part by investigations by the security and intelligence agencies and law enforcement in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in 2017. As of March 2018, they were handling over 500 live investigations, involving some 3,000 individuals. The volume of recorded intelligence leads managed jointly between MI5 and Counter-Terrorism Policing more than doubled over the last 12 months.⁴⁹ One example of a successfully-investigated lead was Tarik Hassane and Suhaib Majeed. They were inspired by the Islamic State and plotted to carry out drive-by shootings of police, soldiers, and members of the public. They were convicted of conspiracy to murder and preparation of acts of terrorism.⁵⁰

Several examples of failed plots help illustrate British counterterrorism actions based on the cooperation of CTP, MI5, and other UK agencies. Nadir Ali Syed was arrested in November 2014 for suspected

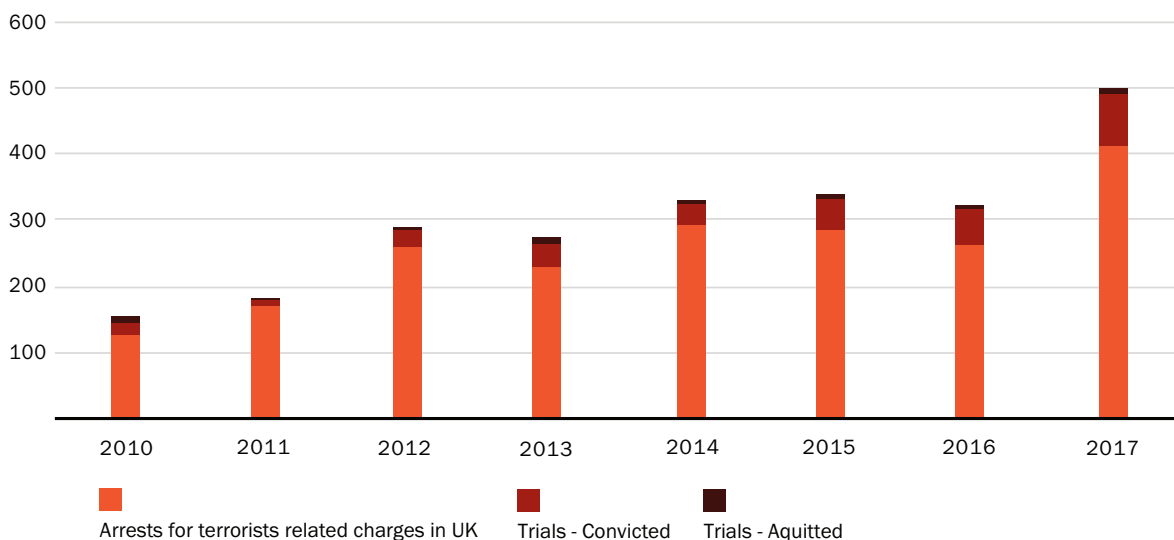
involvement in a plot to behead one or more members of the public. Syed and several of his associates were charged with preparing an act of terrorism. Syed was sentenced to life in 2016 with a minimum term of 15 years. In addition, Junead Khan devised a plot to attack U.S. military personnel stationed at a UK Royal Air Force base. Khan was arrested in July 2015, convicted of preparing an act of terrorism, and sentenced in 2016 to life imprisonment with a 12-year minimum sentence. Haroon Ali Syed attempted to procure an explosive device and firearms for an attack in the United Kingdom after being inspired by the Islamic State. He was arrested in September 2016 and sentenced in July 2017 to life imprisonment for preparing an act of terrorism.⁵² In addition, four extremists from the West Midlands—Naweed Ali, Khobaib Hussain, Mohibur Rahman, and Tahir Azaz—were found guilty of preparing to carry out a terrorist attack inspired by Islamic State and al-Qaeda propaganda. They possessed a meat cleaver with the word “KAFIR,” Arabic for infidel, etched on the metal blade, along with an incomplete pipe bomb and a samurai sword.⁵³

Combating Activity on the Internet and Social Media: The Islamic State has used strategic communications, social media, and messaging apps more effectively than previous terrorist groups—including al-Qaeda—to spread their terrorist narratives

and radicalize. For the Islamic State and other groups, the internet is not a cause of radicalization but a facilitator and a catalyzer.⁵⁴ Extremist use of the internet has rapidly evolved and effectively adapted to a constantly shifting online media environment.⁵⁵ Terrorists have used a range of video platforms including YouTube, social media services like Facebook and Twitter, messaging and Voice over the Internet Protocol services like Telegram and WhatsApp, and the Dark Web to radicalize, recruit, threaten, fundraise, and inspire attacks. Khalid Masood, the 2017 Westminster Bridge attacker, researched violent attacks, knives, Islamic State, and vehicle types online as early as April 2016. He also browsed YouTube for videos related to terrorists. In addition, Masood shared his jihad document, “Jihad in the Quran and the Sunnah,” with numerous WhatsApp contacts. Shortly after, it was sent via iMessage and SMS to additional contacts.⁵⁶

To combat the terrorist use of the internet and social media, the UK government has developed a more aggressive approach. The GCHQ, the United Kingdom’s intelligence organization responsible for providing signals intelligence and information assurance to the government and armed forces, has worked in partnership with the Ministry of Defense to conduct offensive cyber operations against the Islamic State and other terrorist groups.⁵⁷

FIGURE 3.5
Arrests and Proceedings for Terrorist-Related Offenses (2010–2017)⁵¹





ABOVE Theresa May, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, addresses the 72nd UN General Assembly on September 20, 2017, at the United Nations in New York.

📷 Timothy A. Clary/AFP/Getty Images

The UK government also adopted a somewhat confrontational approach toward the private sector, actively pushing industry to take a more proactive approach to take down terrorist content on their platforms. Over 300,000 pieces of terrorist material were removed from the internet between February 2010 and June 2018.⁵⁸ At the UN General Assembly in September 2017, UK prime minister Theresa May held an event with the leaders of France, Italy, and other countries that called for industry to go further in automating the detection and removal of terrorist content online. Her message to the private sector was pointed:

The tech companies have made significant progress on this issue, but we need to go further and faster to reduce the time it

takes to reduce terrorist content online, and to increase significantly their efforts to stop it being uploaded in the first place. This is a major step in reclaiming the internet from those who would use it to do us harm. But ultimately, it is not just the terrorists themselves who we need to defeat, it is the extremist ideologies that fuel them. It is the ideologies that preach hatred, so [sic] division and undermine our common humanity. We must be far more robust in identifying these ideologies and defeating them across all parts of our societies.⁵⁹

The relationship between the UK government and technology companies is best characterized as one of “calibrated tension,” rather than a close partnership. Most private sector firms have a

"MI5 and the police disrupted nearly a half dozen right-wing terrorist plots in the United Kingdom in the first half of 2018."

business interest in limiting government intrusion and maximizing profit, while the government sees itself as protecting national security. As Prime Minister May argued, the government “must clearly strike the balance between protecting our people and protecting their freedoms.”⁶⁰

The Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) in the Home Office, as well as the Global Coalition Against Daesh Communications Cell in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, have developed programs to counter online terrorist content and support civil society organizations involved in counterextremism initiatives in the United Kingdom. Examples of formal and informal partners include:

- The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a global counter-extremism organization. The institute has conducted research on extremism, built grassroots networks, constructed influencer mapping software and other technology to respond to extremism, established an education program, and provided advice to governments and cities across the globe.⁶¹
- Quilliam, a London-based organization that was founded by former Islamic extremists in 2008. It conducts and publishes research, and it engages in activities from policy advice to media advocacy.⁶²
- Moonshot CVE, a company that uses data mining, analysis, and reporting software to respond to violent extremism.⁶³
- Imams Online, an organization that aims to educate, network, and equip prospective Muslim leaders and help them “showcase positive Islamic content.”⁶⁴
- Active Change Foundation, a community-based organization that helps prevent extremism and violent street crime through training, workshops, and other activities. It started counter-speech campaigns like #NotInMyName.⁶⁵
- Far-Right Extremism in Europe Initiative (FREE), which provides educational resources on far-right extremism in a variety of countries.⁶⁶

Better Handling of Closed Subjects of Interest: The United Kingdom’s intelligence and law enforcement agencies also made a concerted effort to identify individuals that were no longer

subjects of interest (SOIs) but could still present a national security threat in the future. SOIs are individuals in which MI5 created a Key Information Store record, or file, because of national security concerns. A broader objective was also to establish closer links between the Prevent and Pursuit components of CONTEST. There are currently around 3,000 active SOIs either associated with MI5 priority investigations or that came to MI5’s attention as part of a lead generated through new intelligence. Each active SOI record is subject to quarterly case review and has an assigned lead investigator responsible for reviewing incoming intelligence and maintaining the record.⁶⁷

As UK officials recognized, there was a significant gap with the approximately 20,000 closed SOIs since 2009. Closed SOIs are those individuals who were part of an MI5 priority investigation but who were given a holding code which indicated that they were no longer assessed to represent a national security threat. When SOIs are closed they are categorized according to the amount of residual risk, from low to high, that they are likely to pose in the future.⁶⁸

The attacks in 2017 highlighted the challenges with SOIs. Khalid Masood, the Westminster Bridge attacker, was a closed SOI who had been the subject of an MI5 priority investigation for almost two years. His plans were not picked up by MI5 or any other government agency. Salmen Abedi, who detonated the bomb at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, was also a closed SOI. Abedi had been an SOI for two brief periods while MI5 and the

police investigated the nature of his connections with other extremists. He was subsequently cleared. Yet despite his status as a closed SOI, an opportunity was missed by MI5 to trigger an alert when Salman Abedi traveled to Libya in April 2017. He was in Libya between April 15 and May 18, four days before the attack, and could have been questioned and searched at the airport under the Terrorism Act 2000.⁶⁹ Khuram Butt, one of the perpetrators in the London Bridge attack, was a live SOI and had been a suspect in an assault against a member of the Quilliam organization in July 2016. He had been identified as a grade “P2H” (Priority 2 High) risk by MI5, indicating that he was involved in high risk extremist activity linked to attack planning.

These cases—particularly Masood and Abedi—indicate that the UK system needed to do a better job of dealing with closed SOIs. Unlike individuals referred to the Channel program because of concerns about extremism, there were no UK resources from Prevent devoted to closed SOIs—despite their potential for extremism. Consequently, the UK government began to identify closed SOIs of concern and to provide resources so that they might not radicalize in the future. This recognition led to the establishment of a Desistance and Disengagement Program.

Adding Desistance and Disengagement: The United Kingdom added programs to its Prevent work to support individuals released from prison and minimize recidivism. The program began running a pilot test around 2017, focusing on individuals subject to court-approved conditions, including all terrorism and terrorism-related offenders on probation license. It also included those on Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures and those who returned from conflict zones in Syria or Iraq and were subject to Temporary Exclusion Orders. This development may be significant. During a counterterrorism investigation, an MI5 desk officer reviews countless individuals on the fringe of the main targets. If not picked up, these individuals become SOIs. They may be radical, but not worth MI5 resources at that stage. Before the desistance and disengagement programs, MI5 could do nothing more about these people apart from continuously

review them. Now they can be passed down to a local Desistance and Disengagement Program to prevent these individuals from resorting to violence.

Much like with the 20,000 or so closed SOIs, the Desistance and Disengagement Program reflected increasing collaboration across Prevent and Pursue. Through the program, the United Kingdom is attempting to provide a range of intensive tailored interventions and practical support designed to tackle the drivers of radicalization and to address personal grievances that the extremist narrative has exacerbated. Support could include mentoring, psychological support, and theological advice.⁷⁰

Increasing Attention to the Extreme Right Wing:

The United Kingdom also expanded its focus on other forms of terrorism—particularly the extreme right wing. JTAC, MI5, and the police were given additional resources to assess and investigate extreme right-wing terrorism. These resources have contributed to recent policing actions. In 2017 and early 2018, the United Kingdom arrested 27 individuals on suspicion of being a member of National Action, 15 of whom were charged with terrorism offenses. In addition, MI5 and the police disrupted nearly a half dozen right-wing terrorist plots in the United Kingdom in the first half of 2018.⁷¹ Some extreme right-wing individuals and groups have developed viable explosive devices and acquired firearms, along with a desire to perpetrate attacks.⁷² As the UK government concluded in 2018: “We assess the threat from extreme right-wing terrorism is growing.”⁷³ The threat from extreme right-wing groups and individuals is likely more acute in the United Kingdom than in anywhere else in Europe. As Europol concluded, “Five foiled, failed or completed terrorist attacks attributed to rightwing extremists (RWE) were reported for 2017: all of them by the United Kingdom.”⁷⁴

Emerging Challenges

Moving forward, the evolving nature of terrorism suggests that the United Kingdom—like other countries—will face multiple challenges. First, the internet and social media will remain a major tool of the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other groups for radicalization, recruitment, fundraising, and other

terrorist activities. The ease of accessing online information is particularly concerning because some individuals are radicalizing faster than ever before.⁷⁵ Savvy terrorist networks and individuals will be able to incorporate advances in commercial technology, such as encryption, in order to further their messaging. They will also move to—and between—different internet and social media platforms, including non-Western platforms like Telegram, which will force governments to adopt whack-a-mole approaches. Some of these technology companies may be unwilling to work with the United Kingdom or other Western governments. Others may have limited resources, staff, or technological sophistication to identify and take down terrorist propaganda. Some UK extremists will—and already have—moved their extremist videos from large platforms like YouTube to smaller platforms like Daily Motion. Others have moved to the Dark Web. The evolution of commercial technology and the diffusion of internet and social media platforms will require the United Kingdom to continually train government personnel, hire experts from technology companies and academia, update laws, and work with the private sector.

Second, UK intelligence, military, diplomatic, and development assets will likely remain a limited presence overseas, while some UK allies—such as the United States—shift from countering terrorists to competing with state-based adversaries like China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. The threat from Salafi-jihadist groups, networks, and individuals like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda is likely to remain high. According to Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) estimates, the current number of active Salafi-jihadist groups across the globe (67 groups) is at the highest level since 1980.⁷⁶ The regions with the highest number of groups are the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia—with particularly high numbers in such countries as Syria, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In addition, the current number of Salafi-jihadist fighters—with a high of 230,000 globally—is also at near-peak levels.⁷⁷ Together, the data suggest that there is still a significant pool of Salafi-jihadist fighters, even with the decline in territorial control of the Islamic State in countries like Iraq and Syria. Many of these

extremists will not threaten the United Kingdom at home or abroad, since they are likely to target other countries or local regimes. But such large numbers—along with a vibrant internet and social media presence—suggests that the threat will remain serious.

Third, the UK government's shift in focus and resources toward extreme right-wing groups and individuals raises potential concerns about how the move will impact other threats—particularly from Islamic extremists. MI5 is in the process of recruiting 1,000 additional officers. This will likely provide additional desk officers to take on right-wing targets, in coordination with CTP.

Some Muslim communities and organizations have complained that the UK government unjustly persecutes Muslims. In June 2018, for instance, the Muslim Council of Britain accused the government of “turning a blind eye” to Islamophobia and demanded “a wide-ranging inquiry into Islamophobia in the Party.”⁷⁸ But the UK government has been careful not to focus on Islam but on countering a small minority of violent individuals with an extreme interpretation of their religion. Will the United Kingdom be able to successfully balance these threats? While violent right-wing activity is concerning, it does not present the same degree of threat as Islamic extremists. There are far fewer serious right-wing plots than Islamic-motivated ones, and most far-right groups and individuals lack the capabilities and intentions of extreme Islamic terrorists.

Fourth, there will likely continue to be a domestic threat from some returning foreign fighters (and their families) and those released from prison. Approximately 900 people of national security concern to UK law enforcement and intelligence agencies traveled from the United Kingdom to Syria to join the Islamic State or other groups. Of these 900, approximately 20 percent were killed while overseas, around 40 percent returned to the United Kingdom, and the remaining 40 percent remained in Syria or traveled to other countries in the Middle East or other locations.⁷⁹ The majority of those who returned did so before the rise of the Islamic State in 2014 and were investigated on their return. Only a small number of travelers returned in the last two years, and most were women and young children.



France

**FROM THE IRA
TO THE ISLAMIC STATE:
THE EVOLVING TERRORISM
THREAT IN EUROPE**

This chapter explores the Salafi-jihadist threat to France, the government's response, and future challenges. The threat to France from Salafi-jihadist violence at home and abroad has persisted over the last decade.

Since 2014, France has suffered more than 250 deaths and over 2,000 casualties due to Salafi-jihadist violence at home.¹ France has struggled to handle its foreign fighter phenomenon. Approximately 1,230 French adults joined the Islamic State and other Salafi-jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria through 2016.² French rhetoric has evolved with the growing threat—Paris harshly criticized Washington for using the expression “war on terrorism” after the attacks on September 11, 2001, however, French officials resorted to the same vocabulary after the attacks in Paris and its suburbs in November 2015.³ Following the 2015 attacks, French officials began to frame the Salafi-jihadist threat and its homegrown offshoots as an existential challenge. The word “terrorism” appears 21 times in France’s latest strategic review. France has reshuffled its security, intelligence, justice, and military apparatus accordingly. In the absence of a new white paper on terrorism since 2006, France’s counter-terrorism strategy is summarized in incremental documents published annually, most recently in July 2018.⁴

France is now mobilizing its entire society—including state institutions, civil society organizations, and citizens—to tackle the issue of radicalization. This includes undermining the Islamic State’s narratives and multi-disciplinary experiments aimed at reintegrating radicalized individuals into society. The French notion of “radicalization” is broad, and it refers to a resolve to use violence to fulfill ideological convictions.⁵ French counter-radicalization efforts are summarized in the February 2018 interagency “Prevent to Protect” action plan.⁶ France also regulates behaviors that are not necessarily considered crimes in the United States, such as the use of extremist language or acquisition of vast weapon arsenals. Plots that never resulted in a concrete attempt to carry out a violent action, or lacked pre-planning, are routinely counted as “terrorism.”

The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the terrorist threat to France by examining the impact of jihadist activity overseas, the history of domestic jihadism in France, profiles in French jihadism, and the patterns of terrorist plots and attacks in France. The second section outlines French counterterrorism efforts, including detection and monitoring, legislative reforms, prosecutions, countering radicalization, building societal resilience, and more. The last section examines emerging challenges, specifically returning fighters, and France’s prison population.

The Evolving Threat

This section examines the historical and current terrorism threat to France. It begins by assessing the impact of jihadist activity overseas and then shifts to domestic sources of tension, profiles of French jihadists, French jihadist beliefs, and attack patterns.

Jihadism against the French Overseas: France has faced-off against several generations of fighters, supporters, and groups. Over the second-half of the twentieth century, extremist networks leveraged connections in Algeria, Afghanistan, and Bosnia, where French foreign fighters traveled to gain battlefield experience.

The first wave of French jihadism emerged in the early 1990s. The jihadist’s motive was to compel France to change its foreign policy toward Muslim majority countries, especially in North Africa. In response to French efforts to dismantle groups supporting Islamist rebels during the Algerian Civil War, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) carried out a wave of terrorist attacks. The second wave began with French fighters who came back from Afghanistan and Bosnia at the end of the 1990s. Only a few dozen individuals returned, conducting a mix of terrorist and gang-like activity. A series of criminal incidents linked to jihad financing led to the discovery of connection between European jihadists and Americans.⁷ In the early 2000s, European countries dismantled several terrorist cells and networks linked to al-Qaeda.⁸ In France, authorities foiled plots against the World Cup, the Grand Mosque of Paris, Strasbourg Cathedral, and

the American embassy in Paris. The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Arab Spring also provided new hotbeds for French jihadists, who later climbed to the higher ranks of the Islamic State.

North and West Africa became an additional source of concern for France. In 2013, France deployed troops to Mali to fight Salafi-jihadist groups, which led to more threats against French interests.⁹ Salafi-jihadist propaganda unsuccessfully attempted to depict the French intervention in the Sahel as against Islam. The security situation is deteriorating again in the Sahel despite French efforts to set up a regional force, the G5 Sahel, to fight terrorist groups.¹⁰ Terrorists regularly target French or Western assets—such as mines, factories, and military bases—along with expatriates and local governments. Most of the groups operating in the region, such as Iyad Ag Ghali's Jama'a *Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin* (JNIM), are primarily regional actors and attract few foreign fighters.

History of Domestic Jihadism in France:

France—much like the United States—became a priority target for Salafi-jihadists for military, political, and cultural reasons. France was indirectly included in Osama Bin Laden's 1998 speech against "crusaders."¹¹ French secularism, the 2004 French law imposing a limited ban on headscarves for employees working in public institutions, and the 2010 prohibition on concealing one's face in public places (explicitly aimed at the burqa, the outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover their face and body), led to a series of plots and attacks by outsiders. France's tradition of protecting free speech may also have incentivized attacks. For example, a 2007 ruling by a French court allowed for the publication of Muhammad cartoons in the satirical publication *Charlie Hebdo*.¹² The paper's headquarters was attacked by brothers Chérif and Saïd Kouachi in January 2015.

In France, violent jihadists started to structure an online community in the 2000s, appealing to a broader audience via the online forum *Ansar Al Haqq*.¹³ This development preceded the use of social media by the Islamic State a decade later. During the 2000s, a few groups (such as the Buttes-Chaumont network) attempted to send French

volunteers abroad or attract media attention as conservative religious activists (such as Forsane Alizza).¹⁴ The outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011 prompted French Salafi-jihadist networks to hail both religious and moral principles to appeal to potential supporters.

The Mera attack in 2012, in which Mohammed Mera attacked French soldiers and later a teacher and children at a Jewish school, was a wake-up call for French security services.¹⁵ A handful of other events like the rise of the Cannes-Torcy cell, a jihadist network identified by French security services in 2012 after their involvement in a grenade attack against a Jewish grocery store in Sarcelles, also heightened French officials' attention to the Salafi-jihadi threat. By the end of 2012, over 200 French citizens traveled to fight in Iraq and Syria, more citizens than had gone to Afghanistan and Bosnia in the 1980s and 1990s. After the first French airstrikes in Iraq, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the spokesman for the Islamic State, urged supporters to target French civilians in September 2014.¹⁶ Inspired jihadists responded to Adnani's call three days later, where three police officers in Joués-les-Tours were wounded in a knife attack. French authorities slowly dropped the "lone wolf" narrative as it became clear that a loose network of jihadists was operating in Europe.

French extremists who left for Iraq and Syria joined jihadist groups based on reputation, accessibility, and individual connections.¹⁷ The majority went to the Islamic State. But some like Omar Diaby (aka Omar Omsen), who formerly had connections to Forsane Alizza, founded their own *katiba* (or battalion). Others saw themselves as preachers for the global jihad. Rachid Kassim, a French propagandist who directed attacks on French soil before being killed in an airstrike in Iraq in 2017, was among this group.¹⁸ During the January 2015 events in Paris, three generations of a nebulous jihadist movement reunited.¹⁹ The massacre at the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* had tectonic political consequences for France. Two of the three perpetrators, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, claimed their attack on the behalf of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The third one, Amedy Coulibaly, declared he was an Islamic State



ABOVE A woman is evacuated as rescuers ferry an injured person into an ambulance in 10th arrondissement of the French capital Paris, on November 13, 2015.

BELOW Football fans leave the Stade de France stadium following the friendly football match between France and Germany in Saint-Denis, north of Paris, on November 13, 2015, after a series of gun attacks occurred across Paris as well as explosions outside the national stadium where France was hosting Germany.

📷 Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images; Franck Fife/AFP/Getty Images

"North and West Africa became an additional source of concern for France. In 2013, France deployed troops to Mali to fight Salafi-jihadist groups, which led to more threats against French interests."

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supporter—the first attack claimed on behalf of the group on French soil.²⁰ The three perpetrators acted in coordination.

Profiles in French Jihadism: The geographic distribution of radicalized individuals in France today reflects in part this history. Socio-economic, cultural, and political variables certainly play a role. Low-income areas and the border region with Belgium, as well as the Mediterranean coast, offer a fertile ground for radicalization. Bigger cities like the Parisian suburbs, Marseille, Lyon, Lille, and Nice also act as breeding grounds.²¹

Networks of friends and skilled individuals also played a key role in pushing others to leave France. First-generation radicalized individuals from the 1990s, who stayed in France, inspired others and created communities of supporters. Djamel Beghal, for example, was a French-Algerian convicted of the plot against the U.S. embassy and was eventually released from prison in July 2018. Second-generation individuals who had left for Syria and Iraq actively reached out to potential recruits, such as Omar Diaby in Nice, and Adrien Guihal and the Clain brothers in Toulouse. Finally, groups of relatives and friends—structured around small businesses more so than mosques—encouraged friends to leave France from areas like Lunel in the south and Trappes in the Parisian suburbs. Trappes, which was home to fighters who left France for Iraq in the early 2000s, later claimed the unenviable record of the highest number of jihadists per inhabitant.

A growing number of assessments challenge the widely spread belief that there is no typical profile for French jihadists. Most are young; the average

age is just over 24 years old.²² Other features may include a disturbed family background, lack of integration in the labor market, low level of education (50 percent have no diploma), and petty criminality. The absence of a stable family obligation appears to be a key explanatory factor for violent engagement.²³ Religious converts comprised between 50 percent and 80 percent of all civil society organizations, but only 35 percent of all convicted for terror-related activities. This discrepancy may reflect a strong inclination of families of converts to report conservative religious practices. As in the United Kingdom, French security services have assessed that converts are more radical and violent. Some of these converts achieved higher ranks in jihadist groups, especially as the Islamic State publicized their cases for propaganda purposes. According to individual data of 130 convicted terrorists, 91 percent of the jihadists had French citizenship and virtually none were refugees.²⁴ Most were French-born citizens whose two parents were from the Maghreb.²⁵

Women pose an important security challenge. They represent 26 percent of all monitored individuals (though 50 percent of them are minors). Until 2016, female returnees often escaped prosecution because of an apparent “gender bias” or the Islamic State’s initial decision to bar women from fighting.²⁶ But in October 2017 the Islamic State urged all individuals, including women, to take up arms: “Today, in the context of the war against the Islamic State, it has become necessary for female Muslims to fulfill their duties on all fronts in supporting the mujahideen in this battle.”²⁷ Women have been versatile and often



ABOVE Bystanders watch from afar the scene of an explosion in Gao, northwestern Mali on July 1, 2018. French soldiers operating in troubled northern Mali were targeted by 'terrorists' in an ambush, the third attack in the country in just days.

📷 Stringer/AFP/Getty Images

highly radicalized, and have played an important role in spreading extremist ideology.²⁸ They have been involved in several plots, including a notorious failed attempt to blow up a car at Notre Dame Cathedral in September 2016.²⁹ Hayat Boumeddiene, wife of Amedy Coulibaly, one of the Charlie Hebdo-affiliated attackers, is suspected of aiding Coulibaly and the Kouachi brothers in planning the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Her story was published in the Islamic State publication, *Dar al-Islam*, in February 2015.³⁰

Finally, as early as 2010, French scholars outlined the need to address the radicalization of minors. The most comprehensive study analyzed 133 minors monitored or prosecuted for radicalization.³¹ French government policies against minors accused of terrorism became increasingly repressive after 2016, despite criticisms from civil society organizations.³²

French Jihadist Beliefs and Motivations: While a comprehensive analysis of the motivations of French extremists is beyond the scope of this study, existing research suggests several themes. First, the Islamic State has been the predominant jihadist organization in France based on its conquest of territory and ideological appeal. Second, contrary to most revolutionary organizations, the Islamic State has offered social and economic mobility for those who emigrated to Iraq and Syria.³³ Third, radicalized individuals demonstrate increasingly persistent convictions over time, though religious beliefs are not necessarily coherent and reflect the scattered corpus of doctrinal references they rely on.³⁴ Fourth, convicted Salafi-jihadists also emphasize other motivations: a rejection of French society, local discrimination, a desire to help populations allegedly persecuted by the West, and a resentment of France's past actions (particularly in North Africa). While some radicalized individuals have struggled with mental illness, most motivations are rational. And though Islamic State propaganda may be effective, radicalization still primarily rests on individual choices and adherence to the Islamic State's goals.

Patterns of Plots and Attacks in France: Since 2014, at least 83 Salafi-jihadist plots have been uncovered, with the overwhelming majority

planned by the Islamic State. The Islamic State has pursued an approach aimed at undermining institutions. Twelve of these eighty-three plots have led to successful attacks, causing 250 fatalities and over 2,000 casualties. Jihadist publications such as *Dabiq* and *Inspire* often provided inspiration for targets.

The nature of the plots and attacks are wide-ranging: some aimed at causing mass casualties and triggering an irrational response (such as the Paris attacks in 2015); those against high-value targets (such as *Charlie Hebdo*); those aimed at undermining social or religious cohesion (such as attacks against churches or Jewish communities); those aimed at punishing practices disapproved by the Islamic State (such as gay clubs and swinger clubs); and those attempting to undermine the 2017 presidential election. The overall threat level remains high, with four broad patterns of possible terrorist attacks:

- Attacks planned and executed by the Islamic State or al-Qaeda. The November 2015 Paris attack is a good example. The Islamic State's territorial losses in Iraq and Syria make it unlikely that such attacks will occur in the near-term, especially after aggressive Western targeting of the Islamic State's external operations networks. But as al-Qaeda attempts to resurge, one of these organizations may try to carry out a major attack to out-compete the other.
- Attacks by veterans or trained individuals with some international connections – though not members of either the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.³⁵ More individuals may fall in this category as extremists are released from jail, though they are likely to be well identified by French security agencies and under close monitoring, at least for the coming years.
- Attacks by less experienced and lower-tier individuals acting alone or in small groups, though who may nevertheless operate within known jihadist networks.³⁶ Many of these individuals may be inspired by groups like the Islamic State.
- Attacks by individuals with no known connections to Salafi-jihadist groups.

The number of fatalities remains moderate when compared to the number of attacks, with 95 percent of the fatalities occurring in three events: January 2015 in Paris, November 2015 in Paris, and July 2016 in Nice. The low level of fatalities may be due, in part, to the effectiveness of surveillance—discussed later in this chapter—as well as the difficulty of securing weapons. In France, firearms are authorized with a license, and hunting rifles are common in rural areas. Unlike in the United States, however, France requires stringent background checks for licensing and ownership. Few plots in France have involved guns. In only one attack—the June 2017 Champs-Élysées car-ramming incident—did the perpetrator have authorization to possess guns.³⁷ While illegal weapons may have been relatively easy to smuggle into France from Central and Eastern Europe by criminal networks until the 2000s, they have become increasingly difficult because of factors such as higher jail terms for supporting terrorism.³⁸ Consistent with other countries, vehicles have been increasingly used as weapons.³⁹ Several plots have also involved TATP explosives or gas canisters. There have also been reports of attempts to buy or produce chemical or biological material to carry out attacks in France and other European countries.⁴⁰

French Counterterrorism Efforts

France has built its counterterrorism institutions substantially in recent years. It created several interagency coordinating bodies at the strategic and operational levels to mitigate institutional competition and improve the government's reaction time. Furthermore, French counterterrorism plans have been updated annually since 2014. The last time was in July 2018 in the *Action Plan Against Terrorism*.

The Centre National de Coordination de la Lutte contre le Terrorisme (CNCLT), created in July 2017 and supervised by the president, ensures counterterrorism coordination at the strategic level and provides the president with analysis.⁴¹ The Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (DGSi), which oversees counterterrorism activities on French territory, has the lead for operations. Local

offices located in *Préfectures* help detect emerging threats (called *Objectifs*) at the local level, then passes intelligence to the national level. Since 2015, the DGSi also coordinates a special interagency body called “Allat,” which centralizes operational intelligence collection efforts. At the institutional level, the Anti-Terror Coordination Unit (UCLAT) is charged with assembling a complete picture of the terrorist threat. It centralizes, discusses, and dispatches information and intelligence to other governmental agencies, has the authority to assign a task to an agency, and can impose intelligence-sharing activities. While the authority of UCLAT has often been challenged by other political and institutional bodies, its expertise is now well-established.⁴² France's intelligence services have greater authority to investigate internal terrorism cases than U.S. intelligence agencies. Examples include the legal authority to access a suspect's smartphone and other electronic devices. When this proves impossible, the police may seek a warrant to physically gain access to the device.

Radicalization Detection and Monitoring: An additional layer of detection and monitoring rests on citizens. The French government created an emergency phone number that allows the public to report potentially radicalized individuals to the *Centre National d'Assistance et de Prévention de la Radicalisation* (CNAPR). A call entails the creation of a file based on an individual case assessment. This bottom-up monitoring initiative initially raised eyebrows in a country where, since World War II, spontaneous reporting to the police was a national taboo. Yet, soon after its creation, the CNAPR was overwhelmed by calls from relatives, parents, and co-workers.

Relevant personal data for 20,000 persons of interest are stored in a file called *Fichier des signalements pour la prévention et la radicalisation à caractère terroriste* (FSPRT). This database includes raw data about potentially radicalized individuals. It contains dozens of categories to facilitate the identification of possible networks and includes data such as a person's job, address, and phone numbers. Over 11,000 individuals have been actively monitored, and 4,000 are considered “pre-terrorist” high priorities. These high priorities may pose a hazard

"France's intelligence services have greater authority to investigate internal terrorism cases than U.S. intelligence agencies."

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to French society but have not necessarily taken any steps toward conducting an attack. The database has helped identify possible perpetrators and their networks. In a recent case involving Khamzat Azimov, the database helped identify the perpetrator, who was a low-priority individual, and also the circle of more radicalized individuals to which he belonged.⁴³ The number of files is not necessarily representative of the threat level in France. Rather, it may indicate how much the country increasingly monitors what it considers visible signs of radicalization.⁴⁴

Response and Target Protection: Response units have been reformed to improve their reaction time and overall efficiency when faced with multi-location attacks. Tailored exercises now train for different types of attacks. One month before the 2018 Carcassonne attack against a supermarket, for instance, the local police had trained to respond to a similar plot.

Since 2016, the new Schéma National d'Intervention (SNI) has provided more flexibility to manage crises.⁴⁵ It calls for a layer of 750 heavily armed local response units that are able to immediately respond to a massive attack on French territory.⁴⁶ Three types of specialized SWAT units—for Paris, urban, and rural areas—would then neutralize the remaining threat. The SNI also features an "Absolute Emergency Procedure" that would allow any unit to carry out an immediate response during a massive attack, even outside of its area of competence.⁴⁷

France also has a long history of attempting to deter terrorist attacks by using street patrols. The

Vigipirate plan was reformed in the 1990s in the aftermath of the GIA attacks. In 2015, French authorities established an armed protection force called Sentinelle. It includes up to 10,000 soldiers, and its goal is to protect sensitive sites (such as synagogues, churches, and mosques), tourist areas, and special events (such as concerts and festivals).⁴⁸ Sentinelle soldiers carry loaded weapons, and they are authorized to shoot in an emergency—although theoretically only in self-defense.⁴⁹ Sentinelle patrollers seized a terrorist during an incident in Marseilles in October 2017, seconds after he killed two women with a knife. Sentinelle is evolving to better respond to multiple attackers (up to eight patrollers, increased mobility, and coordination with law enforcement officers) and lower its average reaction time.

Terrorist threats against tourist or crowded locations have sometimes led the French government to enact radical "passive defense" measures or cancel events. In the summer of 2016, the government closed the European Cup's fan zones and cancelled a trade fair in Lille because of terrorist threats. As of June 2018, a thick glass wall has been built around the Eiffel tower to prevent a truck attack. These additional layers of protection are designed to decrease the likelihood of a successful attack.

Legislative reforms: Since the rise of the Islamic State in 2014, the French parliament passed seven major laws against terrorism. These laws include the following developments:

- Created a crime named "individual terrorist enterprise";
- Banned convicted jihadists from either leaving the country or coming back to France if they were overseas;
- Increased jail terms for individuals that expressed public support for terrorist acts;
- Extended administrative powers for taking actions such as closing pro-jihadist web sites;
- Set limits on cash withdrawals;
- Increased the monitoring of internal and cross-border cash flows;
- Increased sentences for incitement of terrorism;

- Lowered the threshold of firearm use for police officers;
- Expanded intelligence collection in prisons and monitoring activities by several degrees;
- Created several databases related to terrorism;
- Created an intelligence service in prisons.

Between November 2015 and December 2017, the country was also under a state of emergency, a rarely used constitutional provision used to restore public order. The state of emergency granted the administration extended powers like house searches with no warrant (4,469 cases in total), compulsory orders of residence (754), and closure of radical mosques (19, most of them later reopened after having changed their imams and preachers). The police claim that they foiled 32 plots thanks to these provisions.⁵⁰ While some criticized the measure as an infringement on the rule of law, it had the support of all major political parties and more than 80 percent of the population in August 2017.⁵¹ Its main provisions were passed in an October 2017 law that also focused on individual surveillance and background checks for job applications.⁵² In July 2018, the government has released a new plan that intends to create a specialized national counterterrorist office.⁵³

Jihadist Prosecutions: Recent figures reflect France's focus on prosecutions as a key element of its counterterrorism strategy since the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in 2015.⁵⁴ As of May 2018, around 1,600 persons were being prosecuted or investigated for pro-jihadist activities: 260 were in jail, 450 waiting for their trial, and approximately 880 were being investigated. According to a study by the Center for the Analysis of Terrorism (CAT), the number of sentences dramatically increased from only 10 in 2012 to 240 in 2016. Maximum pre-charge detention period is 5 days, though it can be extended to 6 days in case of an imminent risk of terrorist action.⁵⁵

Laws punishing terrorist and Salafi-jihadist activities have become increasingly severe. The average jail term for having been involved in pro-jihadist activities increased by one year and three months between 2016 and 2017.⁵⁶ For example:

- Any individual attempting to leave France for Syria with the intent of joining the Islamic State or another radical group can be sentenced to 10 years in prison as a participant "in an established group or an association established in preparation, materialized by one or more acts."⁵⁷ This means that any preparatory act can be used as judicial evidence, even if the plot is later dropped.
- After January 2015, any person involved in assisting Islamic State military operations, border police, or militia patrols could be sentenced to up to 30 years in jail.
- A conspiracy to commit to terrorism is considered a crime. To prevent any monitoring gap due to inaccurate intelligence or fake death announcements, French authorities prosecute those believed dead until legal evidence of their death is obtained (DNA recovered from body, for example).

Systematic prosecution expands well beyond fighters and returnees and includes all Islamic State supporters who fall under French jurisdiction and their networks. For example, 15 individuals were jailed after the January 2015 attack at a Hypercacher kosher supermarket in Porte de Vincennes, though the attack itself included only a single perpetrator.⁵⁸ Activities aimed at financing and supporting departures for Syria have led to numerous investigations. The aim is to discourage non-radicalized families from assisting Islamic State relatives there.⁵⁹ While guaranteeing free speech, France is particularly tough on public expression of support for extremist activities or participation in Islamic State propaganda. Offenses can be punished by three years in jail and extended to five years for online activities or if there is encouragement to commit a crime.

European and international cooperation: Many of the Salafi-jihadist plots and attacks in France have been perpetrated by transnational networks. In 1995, for example, the GIA attacks against France were financed by Rachid Ramda, who was from London.⁶⁰ The network responsible for the 2015 Paris attacks had its logistical base in Molenbeek, Belgium, and was linked to individuals

in other European countries, including Greece and Austria. The group responsible for the 2017 attack in Barcelona had connections in France and possibly intended to strike the Eiffel Tower.⁶¹ In addition, the Islamic State gained traction in Europe by building significant outreach capabilities online—with servers, content providers, community managers, financiers, in addition to perpetrators—requiring coordinated efforts to dismantle it.

The European Union adopted a strategy on terrorism as early as 2005, and enacted legislative changes on issues such as data collection, money laundering, border control, and information sharing in all member states. It also promotes informal cooperation through an EU-sponsored Radicalization Awareness Network. European countries also use EU cooperation mechanisms via Europol and Eurojust to coordinate police and justice investigations. They can put together joint investigation teams, which France and Belgium did in 2015. When several countries open separate investigations against the same individual, they hand over the case to the country able to bring the most severe charges. Counterterrorism efforts are also bilateral. In 2017, France and the United Kingdom launched a joint action plan to improve the removal of terrorist content from the internet, support civil society efforts to promote counter-narratives, and improve access to data for investigative purposes and access to digital evidence across borders.

Cooperation with governments outside of the European Union and the private sector has varied. Counterterrorism cooperation with Turkey is limited to such areas as forced repatriation of Islamic State supporters. While the “Cazeneuve protocol,” signed in 2015 and implemented by UCLAT, made possible the repatriation of more than 200 individuals, Ankara tied data exchanges to Paris’ cooperation in undermining Kurdish groups in Europe, a non-starter for France. The United States has also cooperated with Europe and provided France with access to databases and intelligence on individual cases. In situations where there is an imminent attack, a specific protocol enables France to request data from these companies. Judicial investigations require French authorities to request assistance

from the U.S. government to reach out to U.S. companies, since they are operating under U.S. law. This requires a “probable cause” and negotiations with U.S. federal authorities and the local judge in charge. This process causes delays that complicate efforts to bring charges against suspected terrorists.

Countering radicalization: France established the Comité Interministériel de la Prévention de la Délinquance et de la Radicalisation (CIPDR) to centralize interagency coordination to counter radicalization in France.⁶² The CIPDR designs and promotes detection, training, support, reinsertion, and resilience programs. In 2014 and 2016, the CIPDR issued plans to counter radicalization featuring dozens of ambitious measures. The CIPDR also invested over \$100 million to support civil society organizations working on “deradicalization.” This reflected a hope that Islamic State supporters could be “cured.”⁶³ Yet in 2017, the French Senate released a critical assessment of the programs, which lamented that radicalization had become a business and argued that there was a significant mismanagement of funding.⁶⁴

In February 2018, the CIPDR dropped the concept of “deradicalization” for a more modest “disengagement from violence” and issued a new plan featuring sixty measures.⁶⁵ The plan encompasses the spectrum of places where radicalization starts and focuses on “secondary prevention—including efforts to reach segments of the population that may be sensitive to Islamic State propaganda but are not radicalized yet. The plan encourages the mobilization of French society, including teachers, civil servants, and local representatives. It also includes the private sector, research institutions, universities, and athletic clubs. In some ways like the United Kingdom’s Channel program, when early warning signs of radicalization are detected, a team of experts analyzes the family and social environment of the individual. The team then proposes assistance based on advice from social workers, psychologists, and religious leaders. According to the Ministry of Interior, about 3,000 people and 1,000 families get some assistance from French institutions. Approximately 45 percent of recipients are under 18 years old and 70 percent are under 25.”⁶⁶



ABOVE A photo taken on June 26, 2015 outside the Hypercacher kosher supermarket at Porte de Vincennes in Paris, shows a police car parked behind a metal barrier with a sign featuring the portraits of Yoav Hattab, Yohan Cohen, Philippe Braham and Francois-Michel Saada, the four victims of a bloody hostage drama during a jihadist attack on January 9.

📷 Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images

Disengagement: France's efforts to change the behavior of radicalized individuals through non-coercive measures have been met with some skepticism abroad. Despite initial setbacks, however, French authorities believe that such efforts will be successful. In 2016, a deradicalization center sponsored by the Ministry of Interior opened in Pontourny. The initial assumption was that strict supervision by government officials, training, and education on French values could change the views of those radicalized. Participation was voluntary. But the center raised opposition from locals, who refused to host "potential terrorists." The experiment was quickly stopped after one of the participants attempted to leave for Syria.

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Justice started a different experiment with 14 individuals, called Research and Intervention on Extremist Violence (RIVE). Unlike the deradicalization center in Pontourny, RIVE activities were mandatory. They were assigned to convicted individuals, sometimes as an alternative to jail terms. The RIVE experiment, based on part-time attendance (10 or more hours per week), focused on strengthening ties with French society. It featured support for reintegration, including employment and housing. This experiment, which was not publicized at the time of its creation, avoided the media and popular backlash that precipitated the closure of Pontourny.

Lessons learned from both Pontourny and the RIVE experiment have led to new projects in Paris, Lyon, and Marseilles. These projects assume that authorities can help mitigate factors that increase a radicalized person's willingness to carry out a violent action, such as isolation and an inability to build a stable family environment. The experiment started with a small number of individuals that supported the Islamic State, including providing financing and logistics, but who never participated in violent acts. Participation is offered as a substitute for jail. Housing will be provided for those living in a challenging family environment, while family support will be sought for other cases.

Resilience: Resilience-building efforts, known as "grassroots prevention," have become a top priority of the French government. They can roughly be defined as efforts to build an online, religious,

and societal firewall against Salafi-jihadist ideology, resting on a combination of overlapping governmental and civil society initiatives. Efforts to undermine Islamic State online propaganda in France can be classified in three broad categories, depending on whether they are medium-oriented, user-oriented or content-oriented.

First, if individuals find online content that may be illegal, they can report it to a specialized online platform called PHAROS, which is operated by the French Ministry of Interior's cybercrime unit.⁶⁷ Individuals can also directly reach out to online platforms, such as Telegram.⁶⁸ However, this approach is expensive and doesn't prevent internet flooding by jihadist accounts, since new websites and channels open just as others are suppressed. Second, the French Parliament has repeatedly attempted to crack down on users of pro-Salafi-jihadist websites. Laws aimed at prosecuting individuals that visited jihadist websites have been ruled unconstitutional by the High Court, which argued that it would constitute an infringement on free speech unless such consultation is linked to an intent to commit a crime.⁶⁹ The ruling also protected researchers that analyzed radicalization and access such content. Third, French authorities have put pressure on social media companies like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to remove extremist content from their platforms.

France, the United Kingdom and other European countries have also engaged in a direct dialogue with online companies to encourage them to more quickly remove terrorist content from their platforms. At the European Union level, France and its partners have actively supported the EU Internet Forum and the EUROPOL's EU Internet Referral Unit (IRU), including the development of a common tool to track companies' performance in removing terrorist content from their platforms and services. Dialogue with social media companies has also led to increased efforts to develop algorithms aimed at better identifying potentially harmful content. Google's "Redirect" project, for example, aims to redirect radicalized individuals toward positive content online, though it seems to have worked poorly in France thus far.⁷⁰

In addition, French counter-narrative efforts have shifted from campaigns like "Stop Jihadisme," which

"Islamic State efforts to undermine the French ideal of peaceful coexistence among communities — the *vivre-ensemble* — have also largely backfired."

involved composing and releasing anti-Islamic State videos and messages, to other approaches. After the March 2018 terrorist attack in Trèbes, where French police officer Arnaud Beltrame sacrificed his life to save a hostage, the authorities and the media focused on the heroic act rather than on the terrorist attack and the extremist ideology.⁷¹

France's secularist principles (called *laïcité*) have sometimes been accused of acting as a cause of radicalization, a narrative that Islamic State propaganda has even encouraged. Yet such claims are incorrect.⁷² *Laïcité* guarantees the right of individuals to practice any religion—or no religion at all. The state is not allowed to financially sponsor any religion.⁷³ Calls to ban Salafi practices as enabling violence, for example, have been repeatedly rejected as unconstitutional.⁷⁴ Yet this neutrality of the French state toward religious beliefs is anathema for extremists.

The rise of the Salafi-jihadist threat has led the government to support religious counter-messaging emanating from private institutions. While expelling radical foreign preachers, French authorities also seek to act as a facilitator rather than just as a regulator. They train religious leaders and encourage dialogue between the state and religious entities at the local and national level. For example, the French Ministry of the Interior sponsors university curricula on religion and programs—such as the “Emouna” initiative at Science Po—that brings together religious leaders. State support should remain low-profile, since extremists flag those who cooperate with government agencies as “traitors” or “spies.” In addition, public and private efforts to promote interreligious dialogue and solidarity have increased in recent years. In the summer of 2016, the assassination of two policemen and a priest led representatives of Christianity, Judaism, and

Islam to issues statements of solidarity. Muslims prayed at churches a week later and thousands demonstrated against the terrorists, effectively undermining far-right criticism against Islam.⁷⁵

Societal Resilience: Islamic State efforts to undermine the French ideal of peaceful coexistence among communities—the *vivre-ensemble*—have also largely backfired. Although a surge of Islamic State activity happened alongside an increase of far-right movements in Europe, repeated attacks have failed to have any lasting impact on the French electoral system. The far-right performed reasonably well during the local elections after the November 2015 attacks, and the National Front reached the second round of the 2017 presidential election. But these organizations have failed to progress much further. Unlike in several other European countries, including the United Kingdom, there have been no far-right terrorist attacks against Muslims in France. However, two networks have been uncovered over the past several years.⁷⁶

Emerging Challenges

This section highlights two key emerging challenges: returning fighters and their families, and prison radicalization.

Foreign Fighter Returnees: French society will continue to face a major threat from foreign fighter returnees. Intelligence agencies don't have a clear understanding of the whereabouts of all foreign fighters and their families in Iraq and Syria. As of May 2018, an estimated 260 adults have returned to France from Syria and Iraq, including 186 men and 74 women. They were accompanied by 77 minors under 13 who could not be prosecuted, though there were 8 minors between 15 and 18

who were prosecuted.⁷⁷ Between 650 and 700 adults remain abroad. Of those abroad, around 300 may be actual fighters, over 100 are in various jails (mostly held by Kurdish forces in Syria, though others are in countries like Iraq and Turkey), and the rest are presumed dead.

Much like with the United Kingdom, France's policy since November 2015 has been to target as many foreign fighters as possible in combat. Former president François Hollande publicly acknowledged that French authorities helped target their own citizens in Syria.⁷⁸ Almost 90 percent of the French population supported this activity.⁷⁹

Contrary to many other countries, almost no French Salafi-jihadist fighters have returned to France after 2016. Turkey's border closure, severe jail terms, and high death rates in Iraq and Syria contributed to a low level of returning fighters. This leaves unresolved the question of French citizens currently detained by Syrian Democratic Forces and the Iraqi government. France's current policy is that Islamic State supporters should be handled in the countries where they have committed crimes, guaranteed a fair trial, and not be sentenced to the death penalty. This policy of threat externalization may have to evolve at some point. There are concerns that Salafi-jihadists might escape from jail or be exchanged for other prisoners by Kurdish fighters. In addition, some Islamic State supporters—including women—have requested repatriation for fear of being killed abroad.⁸⁰ Some experts have suggested that France should eventually opt to create detention centers abroad, while granting prisoners the same legal rights they would be granted on French soil.

Underage returnees pose a different, and potentially larger, challenge to the French government, which claimed in October 2018 it will now repatriate those under 13 years old.⁸¹ According to the French law on nationality, 500 to 600 children born in or brought to Syria and Iraq by radicalized French nationals may be de facto French citizens.⁸² The reintegration of these children, who have been exposed to Islamic State propaganda, raises a number of challenges. French legislation has evolved to deal with minor returnees who may have been forced to participate in violent activities. The minimum age for police interviews has been lowered from 13 years old to

10 years old. The main challenge is to help deal with their traumatic experience and avoid reproducing the same resentment and disaffiliation that led one or both of their parents to support the Islamic State. The French government designed special programs to support children, especially those younger than 5 years old.⁸³ These programs attempt to protect and preserve ties with non-radicalized relatives to prevent alienation from French society.

Radicalized Prisoners: As of July 2018, approximately 1,600 prisoners were considered radicalized.⁸⁴ Among those radicalized, 1,100 were common law prisoners and 510 were involved in terrorist activities. Some recent studies have dismissed the commonly-held view that prisons are a breeding ground for radicalization.⁸⁵ Prisons have certainly facilitated radicalization in some cases, such as with the extremist Djamel Beghal and his influence on Saïd and Chérif Kouachi. Previous experiments in four prisons (Lille-Annoeullin, Fresnes, Fleury, and Osny), where radicalized individuals were isolated from other detainees but jailed together, have been abandoned. Intelligence collection in prisons has been reinforced with a dedicated unit trained to monitor detainees and identify possible networks. Some detainees have been able to coordinate illegal activities outside – or even plan attacks.⁸⁶ The old system often depended on wardens and Muslim imams, who acted as auxiliaries for the intelligence services. But this approach led to several challenges, such as undermining the legitimacy of the imams.⁸⁷

Today, radicalized individuals are normally subject to individual assessment for four months in six radicalization assessment areas (*quartiers d'évaluation de la radicalisation*, or QER). A team of psychologists, religious experts, legal experts and prison workers often classify detainees into the three categories—common law, dangerous, or isolation—according to their level of violent engagement and propensity to proselytize. However, not all prisons follow such procedures, and they defer to their personnel to identify potential extremists. Faced with returnees and a growing number of radicalized prisoners on French territory, the prime minister announced in February 2018 that space for 1,500 inmates would be created in separated quarters



ABOVE French gendarmes patrol in front of the Strasbourg cathedral while searches are conducted on December 12, 2018 for the gunman who opened fire near a Christmas market in Strasbourg, eastern France, the night before.

📷 Patrick Hertzog/AFP/Getty Images

exclusively dedicated to radicalized detainees. Yet it may take several years before these new prisons become fully functional. The French authorities have made clear they do not intend to change their non-repatriation policy for adults in the meantime.

Post-prison monitoring of radicalized individuals is also a major challenge. In December 2018, Chérif Chekatt, who had radicalized in French prison and supported the Islamic State, killed at least five individuals and wounded 12 others at the Strasbourg Christmas Market. A few dozen individuals will be released by 2021.⁸⁸ The only obligation for a released jihadist is often to report any change of residence or travel abroad. Post-jail monitoring may also involve intelligence monitoring and social reintegration. Because these

individuals are considered a risk to French society, the government is actively working on long-term, post-jail monitoring that may involve intelligence monitoring and efforts aimed at social reintegration. Moving forward, successfully countering Islamist terrorism is only half way toward peaceful coexistence. After an acrimonious 2017 electoral campaign that resulted in the old party system being swept away, President Emmanuel Macron issued a warning about the consequences of terrorism and division in society: “I know where I come from. I did not sail the tranquil waters of our political tides. My path was borne out of a singular fracture of history. An anomaly, within a mourning and anxious France. Were I to forget this, a perilous road would lie ahead.”⁸⁹



Policy Implications for the United States

**FROM THE IRA
TO THE ISLAMIC STATE:
THE EVOLVING TERRORISM
THREAT IN EUROPE**

This chapter focuses on policy implications for the United States. There are numerous social, cultural, political, legal, and other differences between the United States and European countries, just as there are between European states. Yet several themes from the European experience are worth highlighting. The chapter discusses some of the most important issues that came from our analysis in this report, though it does not offer an exhaustive list.

It is divided into six main sections: the persistence of terrorism from Islamic extremists, the danger of extreme right-wing violence, refugees and asylum seekers, the internet and social media, prisons and prison release, and burden-sharing.

Continued Threat from Islamic Extremists

As argued in Chapter 2, a wide range of data indicates that Europe faces a significant threat from terrorism, particularly from Islamic extremist groups. The number of failed, foiled, and completed attacks in 2017 was up 725 percent from 2007, 450 percent from 2012, and 154 percent from 2016 levels. While 2017 had the highest numbers in recent European history, the number of failed, foiled, and completed attacks in 2018 likely declined. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) concluded that “there has been an *increase* in the frequency of jihadist attacks” in Europe, which “cause more deaths and casualties than any other terrorist attacks.”¹ Most of these attacks were perpetrated by homegrown terrorists, who were European citizens that were radicalized in their own countries. In addition, the tactics in these attacks varied considerably and included vehicles used to kill pedestrians, rudimentary improvised explosive devices (IEDs), knives, swords, small arms, and blunt objects like hammers.² In two cases, Islamic State supporters attempted to produce ricin in France and Germany.

More broadly, Salafi-jihadists across the globe continue to pose a threat. The current number of

active Salafi-jihadist groups across the globe (67 groups) is at the highest level since 1980, according to CSIS estimates.³ In addition, the current number of Salafi-jihadist fighters—with a high estimate of 230,000 globally—is also at near-peak levels.⁴ Many of these extremists are not plotting attacks inside the United States or Europe. But such large numbers—along with a vibrant internet and social media presence—suggests that the threat will remain serious. The number of radical converts in the West highlights a link between Salafi-jihadist networks overseas and Western societies, where non-Muslims may be influenced by extremist ideas and individuals.

While the terrorism threat will likely remain significant, radicalized Europeans have focused on plotting or inspiring attacks in Europe—not against the U.S. homeland. Consequently, the chief terrorism problem in the United States does not come from would-be terrorists traveling from Europe, including through the Visa Waiver Program. Instead, extremists from Europe may be more dangerous in communicating with radicalized Americans through the internet and social media forums about fund-raising, traveling to jihadist battlefields, plotting attacks, and supporting other terrorist activities.

This reality suggests that U.S. law enforcement, intelligence, military, and diplomatic officials need to continue closely cooperating with European governments bilaterally and multilaterally, including to help bring charges against suspected terrorists being prosecuted in their home countries. It also indicates that the United States should continue to improve cooperation—including intelligence sharing—between the FBI and police through such structures as the Joint Terrorism Task Forces. The British desk officer model and the cooperation between MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing are useful examples of how to collect intelligence on terrorists and arrest them *before they perpetrate attacks*.

Danger of Extreme Right-Wing Backlash

The rise of violent right-wing networks in Europe—including in response to immigration concerns—should be a warning to the United States. In the

"The rise of violent right-wing networks in Europe — including in response to immigration concerns — should be a warning to the United States."

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United Kingdom, for example, extreme right-wing groups did not present a significant terrorism threat until recently, partly in response to rising domestic concerns about refugees and asylum-seekers from countries like Syria. In 2016 and 2017, the United Kingdom banned National Action, Scottish Dawn, and National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action under the Terrorism Act 2000.⁵ France has also experienced isolated acts of far-right extremism. In June 2018, for example, French authorities arrested 10 suspected far-right extremists—including a retired police officer and a retired soldier—from the group Action des Forces Opérationnelles in an alleged plot to attack Muslims. They had stockpiled rifles, handguns, homemade grenades, and ammunition around Paris, the Mediterranean island of Corsica, and the western Charentes-Maritimes region.⁶ In Europe more broadly, there are growing concerns about possible attacks from violent right-wing groups, particularly National Socialist-oriented and neo-Nazi groups.

In the United States, the terrorism threat from violent right-wing extremists is growing. Between 2007 and 2011, the number of far-right attacks was five or less per year. The number of attacks then rose to 14 in 2012; continued at a similar level between 2012 and 2016, with a mean of 11 attacks and a median of 13 attacks per year; and then jumped to 31 in 2017.⁷ FBI arrests of right-wing extremists also increased in 2018.⁷ To its credit, the Trump Administration's *National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America*, released in October 2018, warned that the United States faces a threat from individuals motivated by "racially motivated extremism, animal rights extremism, environmental extremism, sovereign citizen extremism, and militia extremism."⁸

The rise of internet and social media forums has allowed far-right extremists in the United States and Europe to spread propaganda and coordinate their actions more effectively. Of particular concern in the United States are white supremacists and anti-government extremists, such as military groups and sovereign citizens that have plotted attacks against government, law enforcement, racial, and religious targets. Right-wing networks have used Twitter (with hashtags like #nationalist and #ultraright in Twitter posts), posted videos on YouTube, established Facebook pages, created Instagram accounts, and communicated on social media sites like Gab and through Voice over Internet Protocol applications like Discord.

Most of the extreme right-wing plots and attacks in the United States have been from individuals and small networks, not groups.⁹ In addition, most of the plots and attacks used firearms and crude explosives, which are relatively easy to acquire. The trends in 2018 were similar, including the October 27 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting by Robert Bowers, and the arrest a day earlier of Cesar Sayoc, who sent pipe bombs to prominent Democrats. Both were far-right extremists. In December 2018, the FBI arrested Elizabeth Lecron, a 23-year-old woman from Toledo, Ohio, for plotting a terrorist attack inspired by previous far-right perpetrators like Dylann Roof.

The challenge for the United States is to devote sufficient attention and resources to stop the *further rise* of right-wing extremism.¹⁰ The goal should be to bring far-right activity to a manageable level and to prevent attacks. Several steps are important.

First, U.S. federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies—including the Joint Terrorism Task Forces—



ABOVE Hundreds of white nationalists, neo-Nazis and members of the 'alt-right' march down East Market Street toward Emancipation Park during the 'Unite the Right' rally August 12, 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

📷 Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

need to continue devoting adequate resources to collecting intelligence on extreme right-wing groups, networks, and individuals. Violent left-wing groups like the Animal Liberation Front also present a threat, though far right-wing groups appear to be better armed and larger. Penetrating far-right networks, identifying extremists on social media forums, and arresting terrorists before they attack won't be easy. Most right-wing extremists are lone actors, who don't often talk about their plots by phone or e-mail that can be intercepted by intelligence and law enforcement agencies.¹¹ However, they may be active on social media forums, which can be

monitored. In addition, there is no federal statute in U.S. code for domestic terrorism.¹² There is also no domestic terrorist organization designation like there is for international terrorists (such as the U.S. State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organization designations) to focus attention on threats from right-wing or left-wing extremists.¹³ Implementing statutes for domestic terrorism or designating domestic terrorist organizations, however, presents a number of policy challenges that need to be considered.

Second, the U.S. government needs to work closely with the private sector—including social media companies—to combat right-wing extremism,

as it has to some degree in combatting Islamic extremism. Some European states, including France and the UK, have put significant pressure on social media companies to remove content that advocates or otherwise supports terrorism.

Limited Threat from Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Europe has not experienced a major problem with extremism from newly-arrived refugees or asylum seekers—and the problem is even less significant in the United States. Most significant terrorist plots and attacks in Europe have been perpetrated by citizens of European countries, though there were some exceptions. In May 2017, for example, Germany convicted a 20-year old Syrian refugee, Shaas al-Mohammad, of membership in the Islamic State.¹⁴ That same year, Polish security agencies arrested a Russian citizen from Chechnya for fighting with the Islamic State in Syria. He was registered in Poland as a refugee.¹⁵

More broadly, groups like the Islamic State have occasionally attempted to smuggle supporters into Europe through countries like Greece and Italy as refugees or asylum seekers. At least two Islamic State operatives involved in the terrorist attacks in France in November 2015—Ahmad al-Mohammad (or Ukasah al-Iraqi) and M. al-Mahmod (or Ali al-Iraqi), who blew themselves up at the Stade de France stadium in Paris—traveled from Syria to Europe using falsified documents and posing as asylum seekers through the Greek island of Leros. They had, however, failed to obtain a permanent refugee status.¹⁶

But these exceptions are outliers, since most plotters and attackers have been citizens of European countries. These attacks also happened in a crisis context where migrants could temporarily enter the European Union without security screening, a situation that lasted only two months in 2015. As one Europol report concluded, “terrorist use of the migrant flow has been observed, but it is not deemed systematic.”¹⁷

In the United States, the number of terrorists that are refugees or asylum seekers has been miniscule. Virtually none of the major terrorist plots since 9/11

have involved refugees. Between 2002 and 2015, less than 0.0003 percent of refugees coming into the United States—a statistically insignificant number—posed a terrorism threat.¹⁸ Brian Jenkins found in his study of jihadism in America that “only a tiny fraction of those who enter the country as temporary visitors, permanent immigrants, or refugees have subsequently turned out to be terrorists.”¹⁹ The overwhelming terrorism threat to the United States comes from U.S. citizens.²⁰

Even in those cases where refugees were arrested on terrorism-related or even criminal charges, years and even decades often transpired between their entry into the United States and their involvement in terrorism. Perhaps the best-known refugee case involved Waad Ramadan and Alwan Mohanad Shareef Hammadi, who were arrested on federal terrorism charges in 2009 in Bowling Green, Kentucky. They had been granted refugee status, though U.S. government agencies were unaware of their terrorist activities. Upon investigation, their fingerprints were found in a vast store of unprocessed biometric data and the FBI determined both men had been complicit in attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and were continuing to provide support to Iraqi terrorist groups. The Bowling Green arrests led to numerous changes in how the United States processed refugees and asylum-seekers. The Obama administration re-vetted 58,000 refugees already in the United States and established a new requirement for background checks on visa applicants from Iraq.²¹

Still, there are several issues worth monitoring. To begin with, the Islamic State and other Salafi-jihadist groups have attempted to recruit individuals trying to enter Europe—and potentially the United States.²² This reality suggests that U.S.-European intelligence and law enforcement cooperation remains essential, particularly with the movement of refugees and asylum seekers coming from such countries that have major jihadist battlefields, such as Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Of particular importance will be continuing programs like Operation Gallant Phoenix, which includes intelligence and information-sharing between the United States, European countries, and other partners about foreign fighters. As the U.S.

"Virtually none of the major terrorist plots since 9/11 have involved refugees. Between 2002 and 2015, less than 0.0003 percent of refugees coming into the United States — a statistically insignificant number — posed a terrorism threat."

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff explained, "Gallant Phoenix allows allied nations not only to share intelligence on the foreign fighter threat, but also to get that information back to their law enforcement and homeland security agencies so they have visibility on the movement of foreign fighters in order to deal with this challenge."²³ In addition, the flow of refugees and asylum seekers has fueled extreme right-wing movements in Europe—and certainly could in the United States.

Extremist Material on the Internet and Social Media

As the European experience highlights, the internet and social media will likely remain a major tool of the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, far-right, and other groups for radicalization, recruitment, fundraising, and other terrorist activities. The ease of accessing online information is particularly concerning because some individuals are radicalizing faster than ever before.²⁴ Savvy terrorist networks and individuals will be able to incorporate advances in commercial technology, such as encryption. They will continue to move to—and between—different internet and social media platforms, including non-Western platforms, forcing governments to adopt whack-a-mole approaches. As the UK's Intelligence and Security Committee summarized in 2018:

There has been an enormous growth in the volume of extremist material that can be found online. Studies have shown that almost all attack planners between 2012

and 2017 have downloaded, shared or consumed radical and extremist media of some kind. However, the quantity of material and the ease with which it can be uploaded, versus the difficulty and time it takes to remove it, means that the authorities will always be "playing catch up."²⁵

In Europe, some companies have started to yield to political and judicial pressure, but newcomers may be reluctant to cooperate with Western governments. Others may have limited resources, staff, or technological sophistication to identify and take down terrorist propaganda. The United States should hold companies accountable that cannot effectively take down content that supports terrorism, including through legal means. Restricting extremist access to social media requires companies to continue to devote staff time and engineering resources to detecting such content and closing it down. Voluntary compliance with government importuning may not be sufficient to persuade these companies to spend as much money, time, and effort as the task optimally requires.

Challenges in Implementing Disengagement and Countering Radicalization

Conducting disengagement and countering radicalization remain challenges in the United States and Europe. Some European governments, including the United Kingdom and France, have

shifted away from using the term “deradicalization,” which requires changing an individual’s mindset and ideological beliefs. Instead, they focus on terms like “disengagement,” which involves dissuading an individual from violent or other illegal activity.²⁶ U.S. policymakers should consider a similar shift and focus on helping *disengage* individuals from violence and other illicit behavior.

A particularly acute challenge is radicalization in prisons and after release from prisons. If not dealt with properly, prisoners can breed a new generation of jihadists. In the United Kingdom, more than 80 of the 193 prison terms issued for terrorism offences between 2007 and 2016 will run out by the end of 2018.²⁷ These numbers could be even higher, however, since prisoners are eligible for release halfway through their sentence. For example, Anjem Choudary, the extremist preacher jailed in 2016 for encouraging individuals to support the Islamic State, was released in October 2018.²⁸ France may have a bit more time, with a number of prisoners expected to be released around 2021. But there are some exceptions. In July 2018, French authorities released and expelled to Algeria the extremist Djamel Beghal, a French-Algerian convicted of plotting to attack the U.S. embassy in Paris and who also played a role in radicalizing other jihadists.

The United States has done little systematically to minimize radicalization in prisons—and even less to ensure that those released from prison remain disengaged from violence. At the very least, U.S. policymakers should take a close look at European programs—such as the United Kingdom’s Desistance and Disengagement program in the Home Office and France’s pilot disengagement centers.

The British and French experiences also provide a broader perspective on preventing radicalization. While U.S. efforts have been primarily focused on behavioral radicalization, several European countries have developed whole-of-society responses to counter radical content (such as images, speeches, and narratives). The French approach, which makes spreading extremist ideas a prosecutable offence, reflects a different cultural and legal system that would be difficult

to implement in the United States in its entirety. However, non-repressive measures aimed at strengthening societal resilience could be applied to areas where local communities condemn the Salafi-jihadist ideology, including in Minnesota, Colorado, and California.²⁹

The Value of U.S.-European Cooperation

There is a long history of U.S.-European counterterrorism cooperation that needs to continue. U.S.-European intelligence, military, law enforcement, and diplomatic cooperation continued after the Cold War ended, as did mutual support for those populations affected by terrorism. After the 9/11 attacks, the United States and the European Union’s law enforcement agency signed its first cooperation agreement, which allowed for the exchange of “strategic and technical information” on issues like terrorist activities.³⁰ The U.S. Treasury Department also set up the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program (TFTP), which has generated intelligence that has disrupted terrorist networks. The United States and European Union revised the TFTP several times, including in 2010, when the EU-U.S. TFTP Agreement addressed significant security and privacy concerns.³¹

In an effort to further integrate information sharing, the United States and the EU signed an agreement in 2011 to share Passenger Name Records (PNR) for foreign air transportation between the United States and European Union.³² There are other examples of U.S.-European counterterrorism cooperation, including through NATO. A December 2017 NATO-EU joint declaration adopted 34 new actions, including steps to improve the capacity of partner governments to counter terrorist, cyber, and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats.³³

As the U.S. military’s force posture shrinks for conducting counterterrorism, including in such areas as the Middle East and Africa, Washington will need to increasingly work with allies to conduct counterterrorism operations, collect intelligence, and build the capacity of local partners. European countries have been—and will continue to be—

essential allies. France has been an important partner in Francophone Africa, including in the Sahel, where French forces have conducted operations against terrorists linked to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. The United Kingdom and other NATO allies, such as Germany and Italy, have been valuable partners in Afghanistan since 2001. Effectively countering diverse and decentralized networks of Salafi-jihadists and other extremists across multiple regions—such as Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—will not succeed without close collaboration. This reality makes U.S.-European counterterrorism cooperation more important than ever today.

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Executive Summary

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France

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Policy Implications for the United States

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On the cover

ABOVE IRA gunmen pose during a training and propaganda exercise in Northern Ireland, February 12, 1977.

BELOW An image grab taken from a propaganda video uploaded on June 11, 2014 by jihadist group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

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