



A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTER-TERRORISM CAPABILITIES OF SOME NATO MEMBER STATES

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Terrorism is a scourge that tends to become a normality in the everyday lives of the European citizens, despite the development of the systems that respond to the terrorist actions. The recent attacks in France (October 29, 2020) and Austria (November 02, 2020) confirm this sad reality. In this article, we aim to identify the directions of action of some European states that, in spite of being NATO partners, oppose the perception of the phenomenon of radicalization of Islamism, in order to combat terrorist actions.

Keywords: terrorism; radicalization; terrorist attacks; response; France; Turkey.

Preliminary Considerations

The effects of globalization, the migration flows, the international context defined by the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya or the situation in Nagorno Karabakh, the measures imposed at the international level to stop the financial flows that finance terrorist activities, the increase of the alert level at border crossings are part of factors highlighting the growing global and, in particular, European concern for limiting risk factors that tend to turn into terrorist threats. Are additional measures justified? In the current conditions, the main effort is directed by most states towards the management of the health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, by combating the economic crisis that is foreshadowed as a result of the restrictions imposed for limiting the spread of the virus. Material and human resources are almost entirely absorbed by the health crisis. The restrictive measures imposed on the population, in an attempt to stop the spread of the virus, in addition to the beneficial, palpable effects confirmed by statistics, also bring an effect of increasing social tensions, exacerbating social and racial conflicts and here we refer in particular to the movement "Black Lives Matter"¹ in the United States, to the exacerbation of older faults

springing from the colonial past, for religious reasons, if we refer to France² or even the decline of the population's confidence in the state's ability to handle severe situations, crises, irrespective of their nature. In the absence of social events and with the drastic limitation of social interaction, the Internet has reached unprecedented proportions in terms of level of interaction with everyday activities, from socializing to shopping, from the educational process to the official communication space, from the debate environment to criminal space. The activities associated with crime or terrorist activities were also connected to the new reality. The beheading of a history-geography teacher near Paris, specifically in the town of Conflans Saint-Honorine, on October 17, 2020, the killing of three other people in a cathedral in Nice on October 29, 2020 or the attack in the evening of November 3, 2020 on the citizens of Vienna, all these represent unfortunate evidence that Islamic radicalization, the activation of independent terrorist cells or the planning of terrorist attacks are possible in the light of the new reality generated by the health crisis. Although "Islam is the religion of peace"³, the recruitment of new followers or the radicalization of the followers of the Islamic religion, even if we are talking about European citizens, born and raised in Europe, seem to know a process of intensification proportional to the increase of time spent online and the level of inherent social tension, generated by the restrictive measures imposed to prevent SARS-CoV2 infection.

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In parallel with the management of the health crisis, terrorism remains a fundamental, current issue, which determines new directions of action in order to reduce the terrorist threat and protect the fundamental interests of its citizens. In this article, we shall deal with France and Turkey in the light of the diplomatic conflict between the two countries, highlighted by the statements of their presidents⁴, triggered in the context of tense relations amid conflicts in Syria, Libya and the eastern Mediterranean, following President Macron's reactions launched in the public space after the terrorist attacks that shook France in the autumn of 2020, in spite of being states that are members of the North Atlantic Alliance and the common fight to eradicate the terrorist phenomenon.

Turkey

Faced with a series of terrorist attacks since 1960 and culminating in the attack on the Reina nightclub in the Ortakoy district of Istanbul, Turkey suffers on several levels from this affliction.

The series of terrorist attacks (approximately 20, if we refer to the period 2015-2020) have largely affected the economy of this country, where an important share is represented by tourism and trade.

The PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) separatist group, DHKP/C (Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front) and the Kurdish separatist group TAK (Kurdistan Freedom Falcons) are the main threats to the state, according to the Ankara government, for which terrorism represents, from a legal point of view, "any act performed by one or more persons belonging to an organization, in order to change the Republic, the political, legal, social, secular and economic system, affecting the indivisible unity of the state or destroying its authority, putting and endangering their existence, eliminating fundamental rights and freedoms or harming state security, affecting public order, through measures of pressure, force and violence, terror, intimidation, oppression or threats"⁵.

A list of terrorist attacks that have taken place on the Turkish territory in the recent years strengthens the definition of the terrorist act, in the legal sense of the Turkish authorities:

- in June 2015, two attacks were recorded in Diyarbakir, near the border with Syria, in which six people were killed and several injured;

- on July 20, 2015, in Suruc, Sanlurfa province, a suicide bomber blew themselves up, killing 33 people and injuring over 100;

- on October 10, 2015, two successive explosions, caused by suicide bombers, near the main station in the Ulus area of Ankara, caused the death of 86 people, injuring other 186;

- on December 23, 2015, at Sabiha Gokcen Airport in Istanbul, a bomb exploded, killing one woman and injuring another;

- at the beginning of 2016, more precisely on January 12, a suicide bombing in Sultanahmet in Istanbul, killed 10 tourists and injured 15 others, in an area heavily frequented by foreign tourists;

- February 17, 2016. A car bomb exploded near a military car near the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces in Ankara, killing 28 people and injuring 61 others;

- March 13, 2016. A bomb attack, which took place in the central area of Ankara, in Kizilay Street, killed 34 people and other 125 were injured⁶.

- March 19, 2016. A suicide bomber blew themselves up in Istiklal Street in the central area of Istanbul: 4 people died and 36 were injured;

- April 27, 2016, at Bursa, near the Great Mosque, a symbol of the city, a woman detonated a bomb hurting 13 people;

- May 2016, a bomb attack at a Gaziantep police station: two police officers were killed and 23 were injured;

- June 7, 2016, a bomb attack in the Vezneciler district: among the victims were 7 police officers and 4 civilians, and other 36 people were injured;

- June 28, 2016, Istanbul Ataturk International Airport: three suicide bombers blew themselves up at the Arrivals terminal. Forty-two people died and 239 were wounded, many of them foreigners;

- August 20, 2016, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a wedding party and killed 50 people injuring 94 people⁷;

- August 24, 2016, the explosion of a bomb on the road between Antalya and Kemer resulted in the injury of 2 police officers;

- October 6, 2016, an explosion took place in Yenibosna district, Istanbul: 10 people injured;

- October 14, 2016 a rocket attack took place in Antalya, towards Kemer. No casualties were reported;

- November 4, 2016, Diyarbakir, a car bomb was detonated: 8 people died and over 100 were injured;



- November 24, 2016, a bomb exploded near the governor's office in Adana: 2 people were killed and 21 others injured;

- on December 10, 2016, a bomb was detonated near the stadium of the Besiktas football club, located in a tourist area of Istanbul, in which 44 people, mostly police officers, were killed and more than 150 people were injured;

- on January 1, 2017, the attack on the Reina nightclub in the Ortakoy district of Istanbul, frequented by foreigners: 39 people killed and 69 injured⁸.

- on September 12, 2019, Diyarbakir, a car bomb was detonated: 7 people died and 10 were injured;

- July 5, 2019: A car bomb exploded in southern Turkey, near the border with Syria. Three people died and 2 were injured⁹.

To counter this wave of attacks targeting Turkey and its interests, the Ankara government set itself a trilateral strategy: fighting by all means against the PKK, participating in the international anti-DAESH coalition and fighting the DHKP/C. It was actually one of the first countries to join the United States in 2001 in the fight against terrorism. In May 2002, the European Union placed PKK and DHKP/C, the organizations that posed the greatest threat to Turkey, on the list of terrorist organisations. In fact, with the integration of Islamic parties such as Refah Partisi or Adalet ve Kalkmma Partisi (AKP) into the party legal system, with the state's democratic reforms of 1990-2000, the only major problem left was the Kurdish separatism. Ankara's counterterrorism strategy was based on a 2006 law that establishes drastic punishments for those guilty of terrorist acts or terrorist propaganda. The law includes challenged measures, such as blocking or suspending the publications or sites suspected of terrorist propaganda. Access to personal data and communications may be blocked without a warrant or prior warning, in the event of a suspicion of terrorism.

Beyond the institutional architecture created to reduce the terrorist threat or internal unrest (materialized by the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2015), Turkey remains a fully involved partner in the battle against DAESH, while pursuing its own security objectives. In fact, President Erdogan stressed at the time of the launch of the military operation against DAESH that the Turkish government does not differentiate between PKK and DAESH, considering them equal threats. Thus,

the military operation "Spring of Peace" launched on 9 October 2019 is the third major intervention of Turkey in Syria since 2016. While Ankara considers it an anti-terrorist operation, with the stated aim of eliminating terrorist elements from the Syrian border region, especially members of the Kurdish YPG militias (who contributed to the fight against DAESH), NATO allies challenge its opportunity. Moreover, Turkey intends to create a 30-kilometer strip inside the Syrian state, under the justification of a "safe zone". The presence of the YPG near its borders is perceived by Ankara as a threat, as opposed to the strategy of some allied states in the fight against DAESH, including France, which has a different vision in relation to its own interests.

France

One of the western states most affected by terrorism, France does not recognize, from a cultural point of view, their ethnic minorities. They consider that religion is totally separate from the state and belongs to the private sphere, resulting in the fact that no form of religious organization can replace or contradict the provisions of the Constitution.

Although in France, from a social point of view, there is a large Arab-Muslim community, made up of both immigrants (many of them illegal) and French citizens, it is difficult to make an accurate estimate of the number of people who make it up because it is forbidden to collect ethnic or religious data during the periodic censuses. All the theories and estimates converge on the reality that Islam is the second largest religion in France after Catholicism.

As France colonised much of Africa in the past, a sense of historical revenge seems relatively easy to mobilize.

Hence, from a cultural, social or historical perspective, the confrontation between Islamism and the values of the Republic has deep roots. However, Islamist terrorism is a relatively recent phenomenon, with the first Islamist attacks hitting France between December 1985 and September 1986, claimed by the Hezbollah group in response to the involvement in the Lebanese civil war. Since 2012, the situation has changed radically, with France beginning to be hit by a series of jihadist attacks. Since the Islamic State proclaimed the "caliphate" in June 2014, France has become the



country most affected by Islamist terrorism¹⁰. An enumeration of the terrorist attacks committed on the territory of France supports this statement:

- on March 15, 2012, Mohamed Merah shot dead three soldiers, in the middle of the street, in Toulouse and Montauban, and on March 19, he shot three children and a teacher in Toulouse, being killed, on March 22, by the police;

- on January 7, 2015 the terrorist attack at the headquarters of the French satire publication Charlie Hebdo of Paris, France: 12 people died and ten others were injured. The three perpetrators of the attack were identified. Two of them were Franco-Algerian brothers Said Kouachi (34) and Cherif Kouachi (32), and the third, Hebdo Hamyd Mourad (18), turned himself in to police.

- on November 13, 2015 – Armed men and suicide bombers carried out a wave of attacks in Paris, targeting restaurants, a concert hall and the neighbourhood of Stade de France, killing 130 people and injuring hundreds. Eight "terrorists" lost their lives in the attacks, seven of whom blew themselves up. In parallel, terrorists opened fire with automatic weapons at restaurants and terraces at Bataclan, Charonne, Bichat, Le Petit Cambodge, and Fontaine au Roi, at the intersection of Faubourg-du-Temple. The other suicide bombings took place near the Basilica of Saint-Denis;

- on July 14, 2016, a 31-year-old Tunisian man behind the wheel of a truck hit the crowd gathered in Nice to watch the fireworks launched on the occasion of France's National Day, killing 86 people and injuring more than 400, according to official estimates;

- July 26, 2016. Two men took several hostages in a church in the Normandy region. The priest of the church was killed, while another hostage was seriously wounded;

- on September 26, 2016 a man opened fire in front of a supermarket in Port-Marly, and seriously injured two people, later barricading himself in his own apartment;

- April 20, 2017 a policeman lost his life and two others were injured during an exchanged fire on the famous Champs-Élysées boulevard in Paris, the aggressor being shot;

- March 23, 2018 four people lost their lives and other 16 were injured during three attacks in Carcassonne and Trebes (southern France), including a gendarmerie officer;

- on May 12, 2018 a young man armed with a knife killed a passer-by in Paris and injured four others;

- August 23, 2018 a man armed with a knife killed two people and seriously injured a third person, in the city of Trappes, on the outskirts of Paris, being subsequently neutralized by law enforcement;

- September 9, 2018 seven people were stabbed in the centre of Paris in broad daylight;

- October 8, 2018 a man was killed and two others were seriously injured in an exchange of gunfire in a bar in Toulouse. The bombers fled with a motorcycle, unidentified;

- December 11, 2018, at least two people died and ten were injured in an exchange of fire near a Christmas market in Strasbourg, causing panic;

- June 27, 2019, two people were wounded with gunfire, in front of the mosque in Brest;

- October 17, 2020, a teacher was beheaded in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, near Paris;

- October 29, 2020, a 21-year-old Tunisian man killed three people in a cathedral in Nice.

France's response to the wave of terrorist attacks was swift and energetic: immediately after the multiple attack in Paris in November 2015, a state of emergency was established throughout the country. The continuation of the attacks led to its successive extensions (6 in number) supporting the suppression of 32 attacks¹¹, offering the possibility of extended house arrest, administrative searches without the approval of the judiciary authorities, the creation of security zones or the dissolution of associations or groups participating or facilitating acts associated with terrorism. Operation Sentinelle¹² was launched in January 2015, in which the armed forces support the forces of the Ministry of the Interior¹³, by creating joint patrols, with the mission of maintaining public order, contributing to a massive presence in public places, means of transport or objectives of tourist interest. The main purpose is to deter, prevent or intervene as soon as possible in any public event or terrorist act. In fact, after the attacks in Paris and Nice in October 2020, President Macron decided to increase the number of soldiers involved in the operation from 3,000 to 7,000, in an attempt to stop the series of terrorist attacks.

On October 30, 2017, France adopted a new anti-terrorism law that gives increased powers to law enforcement, while limiting the control of the judiciary over their actions. Proponents of these



measures believe that they will create the necessary conditions to stop the terrorist and extremist rise in France. The law gives increased powers that include decisions related to border control or the closure of places of worship. Moreover, it practically legislates some measures applied during the state of emergency, granting them permanent status, with the intention of increasing efficiency in the fight against terrorist acts.

Conclusions

Two NATO member states, frequently hit by terrorist attacks with severe economic or social consequences, actively involved in eradicating the terrorist phenomenon, partners in the international anti-DAESH coalition, are in full diplomatic conflict, triggered by recent verbal disputes between their Presidents, against the background of the recent attacks in France. Two weeks before the attack on the professor in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, Macron described Islam as a religion of "crisis" and announced new measures against the "Islamic separatism", a statement that drew reactions from several Muslim-majority states, with Turkey at the forefront, urging world leaders to protect Muslims "if there is oppression against Muslims in France", as Erdogan said in a televised speech. The dispute degenerated, even resorting to the mutual withdrawal of diplomatic officials or calls for a trade boycott of products originating in the two countries.

We are thus witnessing the channelling of the energies of two partner states, towards a dispute that, paradoxically, limits or diminishes the capabilities of the systems of prevention of the terrorist actions of the two countries in the fight against terrorism.

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