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OVERVIEW OF THE FRENCH EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS IN 2022

The year 2022 marks the gradual end of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been a period of intense activity for extremist movements in France, allowing them to carry out more consistent propaganda actions and recruitment activities. The unprecedented health crisis had indeed confronted the French security forces with daily crisis situations, limiting their ability to monitor the developments of extremist movements. The uncertainty linked to the pandemic situation had also allowed the development of conspiracy theories, favoring propaganda and radicalization within the different movements. In 2022, the national and international news, marked by the French presidential elections and the war in Ukraine, had a different impact on the three main movements present in France. The number and scale of terrorist actions in the country nevertheless decreased during 2022, even if disparities are observed within the jihadist movement (I), the French ultra-left (II) and the ultra-right (III).

I) Jihadism: Decline in activity and regular arrests

The jihadist movement remains the main terrorist threat for France, despite a decrease in its activity during the past year. If the year 2021 had seen four jihadist attacks¹ only two took place in France in 2022². The first was in the central prison in Arles. On March 2, around 10:15 a.m., in the prison gym, Frank Elong Abé, 36, attacked Yvan Colonna, an Corsican terrorist convicted of the assassination of Prefect Claude Erignac. The jihadist, of Cameroonian origin, had left France to join the Haqqani jihadist network in Afghanistan in 2011, before being captured by U.S. forces in 2012³. He then spent two years in the military prison of Bagram in eastern Afghanistan, before being sent back to France in 2014 where he was sentenced to nine years in prison for terrorist conspiracy. He was detained in three different prisons (Vendin-le-Veil, Condé-sur-Sarthe and Nantes) where he would be the cause of fourteen incidents, including an escape attempt during which he took a hostage. He was then identified as a particularly high risk prisoner (*détenu particulièrement signalé* or DPS) and subjected to stricter security measures. Transferred to the Arles correctional facility in 2019, Elong Abé did not cause any more incidents but shows clear signs of radicalization⁴ such as asking about his former jihad companions, calling his mother a "*infidel*" and the imams of the prison "*spys*". He also spoke of his desire to die "*as a hero*", "*elevated by Islam*". Despite these elements and two recommendations from members of the prison administration, the jihadist was not placed in a radicalization assessment unit (*quartier d'évaluation de la radicalization*, QER), which might have been

1 For the full range of jihadist attacks in France in 2021, see: RODDE, Alexandre. *Le Jihad en France: 2012-2022*. Éditions du Cerf, 2022, 384 p.

2 Two additional events, the stabbing of a transsexual in Nice and the murder of a military doctor in front of a school, had elements that suggested a terrorist character. Nevertheless, the elements revealed during the two investigations tend to indicate the contrary.

3 BONIFAY, Sébastien. Yvan Colonna : what we know about Franck Elong Abé, his attacker [online]. *France 3 Régions, France Tv Info*, 30 March 2022. Available at: <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/corse/corse-du-sud/cargese/yvan-colonna-ce-qu-on-sait-sur-franck-elong-abe-2483590.html>

4 A.S., with COHEN, Lou-Sarah. Yvan Colonna's death : Franck Elong Abé's radicalization underestimated by the penitentiary ? [online]. *TF1info*, April 2022. Available at: <https://www.tf1info.fr/justice-faits-divers/mort-d-yvan-colonna-pourquoi-l-administration-penitentiaire-a-sous-estime-la-radicalisation-de-franck-elong-abe-2215737.html>

more appropriate⁵. He is seeing Yvan Colonna on a regular basis and he accused of "*blasphemy*" against the prophet. On March 2, due to a lack of vigilance and poor use of video surveillance, the jihadist was able to close a door. He then beat and asphyxiated his victim for about nine minutes, placing a plastic bag over her head. Colonna died three weeks later, after a stay in hospital where he remained in a coma. The National Anti-Terrorist Prosecutor's Office (PNAT) requested a terrorist qualification for this assassination⁶. The second jihadist attack occurred on November 22 in Annecy and was also qualified as terrorist by the PNAT. Noé E., a 22-year-old jihadist, had already been arrested in 2016 for an attempt to leave for Syria, before being sentenced to three years in prison. In 2019, under electronic bracelet, he was sentenced again for apology of terrorism. Registered in the automated judicial file of perpetrators of terrorist offenses (Fijait), he had to declare all his trips abroad to law enforcement. From November 2 to 7, he nevertheless went to Kosovo and Saudi Arabia, without informing anyone. He was arrested on his return on November 22. At his parents' home where he lives, investigators discovered a will in favor of an Islamist association, written on October 30, where Noé E. describes himself as a humble servant of Allah, as well as a machete, a hunting knife and a tactical vest that he had bought recently⁷. The investigations also revealed a potential project of attack on the Annecy Christmas market. In custody, he threatened a policewoman. While a police officer notified him that his custody will be extended for "public insult", the jihadist threw himself on the officer shouting "*Allah Akbar!*" and tried to seize his weapon. He was subdued by multiple officers, without injury. In addition to these two attacks, which resulted in the death of one, there has been a regular number of arrests in jihadist circles: in May in the Drôme⁸, in July following a repatriation from Syria, in September in the Val d'Oise, in October in Paris and in December in the Bas-Rhin. Eight attacks were also foiled, according to the Ministry of the Interior, which mentioned a return of exogenous jihadism in France⁹.

The decrease in activity in the number of terrorist actions of the jihadist movement occurs during a transition period. Since January 2020, 250 individuals convicted of terrorist conspiracy, including a minority returning from Iraq and Syria, have been released, including about 80 in 2022. These individuals, taking advantage of the contacts and networks they were able to build up while in detention, present a growing terrorist risk. Two planned attacks by "released" individuals were thwarted, in December 2021 in the Val-de-Marne¹⁰ and on November 22, 2022 in Annecy, as mentioned above. While these projects have proven to be unsophisticated, the generational shift between released convicts and aspiring jihadis may allow for a return to more sophisticated and lethal attacks. The current format of atmospheric jihad, by poorly trained individuals preferring simple modes of action (mainly bladed weapons and car ramming attacks), could therefore evolve, particularly as a result of the influx of firearms on French soil¹¹.

II) Ultra-left: stable number of actions and progression of radical ecology

The violent activity of the French ultra-left movement has continued in 2022. After a sharp change in the 2019-2020 period, and as the Covid-19 pandemic appears to be ending, militants continue to favor a strategy of "sabotage" aimed at the destruction and disabling of "*logistical, energy-related, and technological infrastructures*."¹². The absence of physical victims, with the exception of law enforcement officers, which are regularly targeted, allows them to maintain minimal media coverage. The number of actions claimed, mainly arson, amounted to 160 cases in 2022. The activity of ultra-left militants was particularly marked between January and April. The arrest of a propagandist in early summer, however, curbed claims and made it more difficult to accurately monitor the activity of the movement. Nevertheless, there are a number of consistent elements compared to the previous year. The main target of the French ultra-left remains the

- 5 "Inspection of the operation of the Arles central prison following the attack on Yvan Colonna", General Inspection of Justice, July 2022.
- 6 L'OBS with AFP. The antiterrorist prosecutor's office asks for a requalification of the indictment of Yvan Colonna's attacker [online]. *L'Obs*, 22 March 2022. Available at: <https://www.nouvelobs.com/terrorisme/20220322.OBS56056/le-parquet-antiterroriste-demande-une-requalification-de-la-mise-en-examen-de-l-agresseur-d-yvan-colonna.html>
- 7 PHAM-LÊ, Jérémie. Testament, Saudi Arabia and assaulted policeman : the disturbing journey of Noah, recidivist terrorist apprentice [online]. *Le Parisien*, November 27, 2022. Available at: <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/testament-arabie-saoudite-et-policier-agresseur-linquietant-periple-de-noe-apprenti-terroriste-recidiviste-27-11-2022-VEJ2CYOLZFC3BJUU3POMPOITQQ.php>
- 8 TRIOMPHE, Damien. A high school student preparing to commit a terrorist act in Valence arrested in the Drôme [online]. *France bleu*, 25 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/faits-divers-justice/un-jeune-de-18-ans-s-appretant-a-commettre-un-acte-terroriste-arrete-dans-la-drome-1653492377>
- 9 Eight attacks have been foiled in France since the beginning of the year, announces Gérald Darmanin [online]. *France Tv Info*, 20 September 2022. Available at: https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/terrorisme/huit-attentats-ont-ete-dejoues-en-france-depuis-le-debut-de-l-annee-annonce-gerald-darmanin_5371558.html
- 10 PHAM-LÊ, Jérémie, DÉCUGIS, Jean-Michel. A planned knife attack during the Christmas period foiled by the DGSI [online]. *Le Parisien*, 8 December 2021. Available at: <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/un-projet-dattentat-au-couteau-durant-la-periode-de-noel-dejoue-par-la-dgsi-08-12-2021-ZSXQ356GDJB7FGIUIEEVHL4F34.php>
- 11 See RODDE, Alexandre, Trafic d'armes et terrorisme : Analyse et anticipation de la menace [online]. *Les Notes du CREOGN*, October 2022. Available at: <https://www.gendarmerie.interieur.gouv.fr/crgn/publications/les-notes-du-creogn/trafic-d-armes-et-terrorisme-analyse-et-anticipation-de-la-menace>
- 12 These words are from several publications shared on the social networks of the movement.

infrastructures linked to telecommunications (relay antennas and fiber optics cabinets), which represent 30% of the actions claimed. While businesses were among the main targets last year, it is now political targets (15%) and those related to the energy sector (13.8%) that are among the most targeted. Indeed, the ultra-left is the only movement that regularly strikes political facilities or property (such as the offices of elected officials or candidates, or campaign vehicles) and was the most active during the presidential campaign. It is interesting to note that, during this period, ultra-left activists largely favored damage to the premises of the French Communist Party, which was targeted at least six times between March and April. From September onwards, the radical environmentalist tendency of the movement showed renewed activity, communicating widely online and using violent rhetoric. It also carried out large-scale attacks at the end of the year. Two of them show a significant operational capacity: the illegal demonstration in Sainte-Soline (Deux-Sèvres) on October 29, against the project of retention basins of water, which gave rise to significant violence against the crowd control gendarmes present (61 injured, 22 of them seriously)¹³ and the intrusion organized on December 10 by the collective "Soulèvement de la Terre" in the Lafarge cement plant in Bouc-Bel-Air (Bouches-du-Rhône), where a hundred activists have caused damage, the amount of which is estimated at nearly 4 million euros¹⁴.

The threat posed by the ultra-left is particularly diffuse on the in France and has manifested itself in illegal actions undertaken in 61 departments. If Haute-Garonne remains, since 2019, the most affected department, with almost 15% of actions on its territory, a decline within the departments of Île-de-France can be seen compared to the previous year. On the other hand two departments in the southeast, see a clear increase in the activity of ultra-left activists: Isère and Savoie. Other departments, where the presence of the movement was historically strong, have nevertheless seen a sharp decline in the number of actions claimed, such as Drôme and Loire-Atlantique, which could indicate a greater discretion on the part of militants.

The rhetorical hardening of the ultra-left movement, particularly on the themes of radical ecology and accusations of "police brutality", coupled with a much greater capacity for mobilization than that of the ultra-right or jihadism, can lead to significant risks of violence. Because of its many international connections, the movement is also very reactive to events that have taken place abroad, such as the arrest or detention of European activists or the Iranian feminist revolts, which are used as pretexts to justify arson attacks in France. This need for an international monitoring, to better understand the French ultra-left, makes it more difficult to understand the movement in detail, and makes it more difficult to anticipate its activity on the national territory.

III) Ultra-right: no terrorist action but gradual rise in power

In 2022, the activity of the French ultra-right remains very limited¹⁵. No ultra-right terrorist actions have been committed within the movement. However, several of its activists have been involved in personal conflicts that have proved fatal. Loik le Priol and Romain Bouvier murdered Federico Aramburu in Paris in March¹⁶ and Martial Lanoir shot and killed a motorist in Paris in May¹⁷. These homicides are not ideological in nature, but reflect the capacity for violence and the possession of firearms by a number of activists. Beyond these incidents, brawls between ultra-right and ultra-left militants remain frequent, sometimes with the use of knives or tear gas¹⁸¹⁹. Law enforcement agencies also made numerous arrests

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- 13 PARROT, Clément, PAOLO, Philippe. Bassines agricoles : 61 gendarmes ont été blessés lors d'une manifestation d'opposants dans les Deux-Sèvres, selon Gérald Darmanin [online]. *France Tv Info*, 29 October 2022. Available at: https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/environnement/direct-bassines-controversees-des-manifestants-forcent-les-grilles-du-chantier-a-sainte-soline-dans-les-deux-sevres_5447065.html
 - 14 VERGNENEGRE, Annie. A cement plant of the Lafarge group targeted by environmental activists near Marseille [online]. *France 3 Régions, France Tv Info*, 12 December 2022. Available at: <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/provence-alpes-cote-d-azur/bouches-du-rhone/marseille/une-cimenterie-du-groupe-lafarge-ciblee-par-des-activistes-ecologistes-pres-de-marseille-2673272.html>
 - 15 A major incident, the shooting in rue Enghien (Paris), which left three people dead in the Kurdish community, could have suggested a terrorist attack, but the investigations showed that the qualification of a racist crime seemed more relevant. The desire for "revenge" and the self-proclaimed hatred of the shooter, his solitary character and his lack of political demands illustrate the absence of a terrorist character.
 - 16 OCEAN PRESS with AFP. Death of the ex-rugby player Federico Martin Aramburu : the last suspect questioned by the BRI of Nantes [online]. *Ouest-France*, 23 March 2022. Available at: <https://www.ouest-france.fr/pays-de-la-loire/nantes-44000/mort-de-l-ex-rugbyman-federico-martin-aramburu-le-dernier-suspect-interpelle-par-la-bri-de-nantes-7990066e-aaac-11ec-8f65-86ac8778a6b3>
 - 17 ZEMOURI, Aziz. Paris : un militant d'extrême droite suspecté de meurtre en garde à vue [online]. *Le Point*, 14 May 2022. Available at: https://www.lepoint.fr/faits-divers/info-le-point-paris-garde-a-vue-pour-un-militant-d-extreme-droite-suspecte-de-meurtre-14-05-2022-2475573_2627.php#11
 - 18 CAREZ, Celine. The neo-Nazi student wore a T-shirt glorifying Pétain, read "Mein Kampf" and wielded a knife [online]. *Le Parisien*, March 11, 2022. Available at: https://www.leparisien.fr/paris-75/letudiant-neo-nazi-portait-un-tee-shirt-a-la-gloire-de-petain-lisait-mein-kampf-et-maniait-le-couteau-11-03-2022_TPKPL6NRY5FGFF3N4ZBN3YAKVU.php
 - 19 MAZZOLA, D., with AFP. Aggression à l'arme blanche : une figure de l'ultradroite lyonnaise placée en garde à vue pour violence [online]. *France 3 Régions, France Tv Info*, 11 June 2022. Available at: <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/auvergne-rhone-alpes/rhone/lyon/agression-a-l-arme-blanche-une-figure-de-l-ultradroite-lyonnaise-placee-en-garde-a-vue-pour-violence-2559464.html>

within the movement during the year. These arrests targeted active groups, such as those linked to Rémy Daillet in March²⁰ or "Vengeance Patriote" in May²¹ but also lone individuals who were gathering weapons for an attack, in the Haut-Rhin and Ardèche in June²² and in Moselle in September²³. This series of arrests shows a progressive rise in the operational capacity of the movement, which now includes more than a thousand people which are the S²⁴ carded, including a certain number from conspiracy movements.. The French ultra-right is also seeking to reinvest in hooligan circles²⁵, notably by organizing "fights" between groups of supporters inside and outside stadiums.

National and international news has also had an impact on the movement. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict was the subject of lively debates within the movement between supporters of a traditionalist Russia "*opposed to Western values*" and supporters of a "*white and Christian*" Ukraine invaded by "*Bolshevik*" troops²⁶. As the conflict evolved, activists mainly positioned themselves in favor of the Ukrainian side, saluting some of its activists fighting in Ukraine. In contrast, ultra-right activists have reacted very little to the 2022 campaign and presidential election, confirming an accelerationist tendency that considers that "*there is no political solution*". This trend is also illustrated by the regular discovery of weapons during searches conducted within the movement, and contributes to a rise in the operational competence of the movement. The possibility of arms and ammunition trafficking from Ukraine, or the manufacture of 3D printed and/or improvised weapons is a real risk within the French ultra-right²⁷. Moreover, if the arrested groups remain relatively inoperative in their approach, the possibility of an isolated act should not be ignored.

The year 2022 is marked by a relative calm in the terrorist threat in France. Several underlying trends nevertheless require particular vigilance. The jihadist movement, which remains the main threat in France, is seeing a significant number of its militants being released from detention, giving it greater operational competence in the years to come. The increasingly violent rhetoric of the ultra-left, based on an eschatological sentiment towards the issue of global warming, could lead to a shift in strategy from sabotage to physical violence against people. The ultra-right, although not very active, benefits from the departure of a certain number of its militants to the Ukrainian conflict, allowing tactical training and access to substantial weaponry, which could potentially be used in terrorist actions in France. As always, French extremist movements have been able to adapt to constantly changing international and national news, for the purposes of propaganda, recruitment and violent action. These changes in the threat require particular vigilance on the part of the internal security forces in 2023, particularly because of the organization of the Rugby World Cup in France in the fall of 2023.

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The content of this publication is to be considered as the author's own work and does not engage the responsibility of the CREOGN.

- 20 M.F. with AFP. Ultradroit : Seven people arrested in a terrorism case linked to the conspiracy theorist Rémy Daillet [online]. *20 minutes*, 23 March 2022. Available at: <https://www.20minutes.fr/justice/3258403-20220323-ultradroite-sept-personnes-interpellees-dossier-terroriste-lie-complotiste-remy-daillet>
- 21 M.F., with AFP. Ultradroite : Eleven people arrested, linked to the group " Vengeance patriote ", [online]. *20 minutes*, 18 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.20minutes.fr/justice/3292783-20220518-ultradroite-onze-personnes-interpellees-liees-groupe-vengeance-patriote>
- 22 PHAM-LÊ, Jérémie. The drift of "HeinrichHimmler88", alias Angel B., a young neo-Nazi suspected of a mass murder project [online]. *Le Parisien*, 4 June 2022. Available at: <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/la-derive-dhenrichhimmler88-alias-angel-b-jeune-neonazi-soupconne-dun-projet-de-tuerie-de-masse-04-06-2022-DQZZY3R2DNFDPACE525DYDBMBI.php>
- 23 PROUTEAU, Thomas. Un activiste d'ultra-droite interpellé et mis en examen pour entreprise terroriste individuelle [online]. *rtl.fr*, 13 September 2022. Available at: <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/la-derive-dhenrichhimmler88-alias-angel-b-jeune-neonazi-soupconne-dun-projet-de-tuerie-de-masse-04-06-2022-DQZZY3R2DNFDPACE525DYDBMBI.php>
- 24 PROUTEAU, Thomas. Ultradroit : 1.300 militants are now on the S list [online]. *rtl.fr*, 26 January 2022. Available at: <https://www.rtl.fr/actu/justice-faits-divers/info-rtl-ultradroite-1-300-militants-sont-desormais-fiches-s-7900118003>
- 25 HOURCADE, Nicolas, interviewed by Axel PERRU. Is the ultra-right making a comeback in soccer stadiums? [online]. *Marianne*, May 11, 2022. Available at: <https://www.marianne.net/societe/police-et-justice/lultra-droite-fait-elle-un-retour-en-force-dans-les-stades-de-foot>
- 26 These words are from several publications shared on the social networks of the movement.
- 27 See RODDE, Alexandre. Trafic d'armes et terrorisme : Analyse et anticipation de la menace [online]. *Les Notes du CREOGN*, October 2022. Available at: <https://www.gendarmerie.interieur.gouv.fr/crgn/publications/les-notes-du-creogn/trafic-d-armes-et-terrorisme-analyse-et-anticipation-de-la-menace>