



REPORT

EUROPEAN SUMMIT: ISLAMIST RADICALIZATION AND TERRORIST THREAT

CLOSING SESSION

Monday December 6, 2021

On Monday December 6, 2021, **ELNET** organized the closing session of the European Summit on Islamist Radicalization and Terrorist Threat at the French National Assembly, under the patronage of **Sandra Boëlle**, MP of Paris and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, in partnership with the **Foundation for Political Innovation (Fondapol)** and the **Montaigne Institute**. The keynote speakers were **Marlène Schiappa**, Deputy Minister to the Minister of the Interior in charge of Citizenship, former Prime Minister **Manuel Valls**, **Bernard Cazeneuve**, former Prime Minister, **Jean-Louis Bourlanges**, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and **Chems-Eddine Hafiz**, Rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris.

Political leaders and experts drew up a **geostrategic analysis of the last 20 years**, by assessing the threats that Europe is facing and made proposals for the future, in the context of the trial of November 13, 2015 terror attacks, held at the High Court in Paris.

FRANCE AND THE THREAT OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM

After the opening remarks by **Dr. Arié Bensemhoun**, Executive Director of ELNET France, **Sandra Boëlle** and **Victor Poirier**, Director of Studies at the **Montaigne Institute**, **Marlène Schiappa**, Deputy Minister to the Ministry of the Interior, gave an overview of the terrorist threat by recalling the dogged work of law enforcement agencies. Since January 2017, France has experienced **14 Islamist terrorist attacks, which caused 25 deaths and 83 injuries** while French services have managed to thwart **36 attacks**. **The threat remains extremely vivid and requires vigilance**, even if the concerns of French population has shifted to the health crisis and economic worries in recent months. This concerns both France and its European neighbors. She mentioned the diversity of terrorist profiles, which are multi-faceted. Human resources are not sufficient: this is why the government has ensured since 2017 that the services retain legal capacity to act in compliance with the rule of law, despite the end of the state of emergency. First describing other measures and recalling the action of Parliament, the minister was then keen to **distinguish Islam from Islamism**, she called “a liberticidal political project”.

IS NOVEMBER 13, 2015 “FRANCE’S 11/09”?

Former Prime Minister **Bernard Cazeneuve** was then interviewed by **Michael Darmon**, a journalist at i24News. First, he refuted the idea of a “French-style 9/11” with regard to November 13, 2015, because of the **discrepancy of strategy and modalities between Al-Qaeda and ISIS**. ISIS intends to constitute a proto-state and relies on a network of actors without experience on the ground. Shocking the population is the objective. However, both terrorist organizations want to provoke psychological damage and make Western democracies vulnerable. He also believes that the government’s action in the fight against terrorism is necessarily in line with the previous governments. **“We cannot politicize the fight against terrorism,”** he said. He explained that his government has been confronted with 3 categories of terrorists: the “revenants”; those who have not left but follow the propaganda of ISIS online or in mosques. They are under the surveillance of the territorial intelligence service, which was restructured in 2014. And those who suddenly take action, without being on the radar. Apprehending the latter is a real challenge. According to **Bernard Cazeneuve, this is not a 20-year war**. Islamism, “this totalitarian and retrograde ideology” has been imposing itself on the contemporary world for a longer period.

FOLLOWING TALIBAN’S TAKEOVER IN AFGHANISTAN: A TRANSLATANTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM TWENTY YEARS AFTER 9/11

David Khalfa, Director of Programs, introduced the following roundtable which was moderated by **Isabelle Lasserre**, Deputy Editor-in-Chief at **Le Figaro**.

Gen. Christophe Gomart, former Commander of Special Operations and Director of Military Intelligence recalled that **France only entered the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) in 2003**. The war against Al-Qaeda has made French military forces more seasoned, its equipment evolve and become interoperable with its American ally. French contingents gradually increased until the troops withdrawal at the end of 2014. **France joined its American ally in the Levant and the US joined France in the Sahel**. **Gen. Gomart** recalled that French commitment in Afghanistan was first part of NATO deployment and then under the American command.

Few European countries were involved in the fight against terrorism. According to him, terrorism will keep recruiting. While Al-Qaeda was the most powerful group at the time of 9/11 attacks, ISIS changed the situation. Sunni groups are now pitted against each other. In Afghanistan, the Taliban are now being attacked by the Islamic State. He also believes that **while development keeps being an issue for Africa, terrorism will continue to feed on poverty**.

From Washington, **Benjamin Haddad**, Senior Director of the Europe Center at the **Atlantic Council**, spoke about the evolution of the United States’ strategic posture in the fight against terrorism and in its relationship with the Middle East. After the sudden withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, Joe Biden fully justified and took responsibility that **military efforts would now be more focused on “vital US national interests”, with the Indo-Pacific and China in sight**, to the detriment of Europe, Africa and the Middle East. **There is a real continuity between Obama’s, Trump’s and Biden’s presidencies**: while the style has differed, the message has remained the same. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was implemented in defiance of the requests for flexibility from certain European countries. As for the “pivot to Asia”, it had already been announced by Obama. **Europeans are not aware of this long-term structural change in the United States. The United States has entered a “post 9/11” era**, to quote Ben Rhodes, one of Obama’s advisors.

Jean-Louis Bourlanges, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee, explained that there should be no mistake: **the American withdrawal from Afghanistan is a double failure**. First of all, it is an operational failure: the Americans left under the worst possible conditions for civilians and their allies. One should not blame the Americans, but it is a fact. **The continuity between Obama, Trump and Biden exists, but a discontinuity of parties and the uncertainty about the American strategic doctrine remains**. A rational discourse from the French may be heard, saying that **France must take advantage** of the American withdrawal to mobilize the Europeans. This requires an Indo-Pacific strategy (especially after the AUKUS crisis) and action in Africa. And since the Americans are withdrawing from the Middle East, **it is up to the Europeans to assert themselves**. The mobilization should be both at the military and technological levels.

Suzanne Raine, Professor of War Studies at King's College and former Director of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre of MI6, analyzed the situation from the British perspective. While one may talk about a "post 9/11" era, **the Taliban have moved into another era**. On one hand, **the quick collapse of the country is a damning indictment of Western intervention**: Afghanistan was barely surviving before the Taliban took over. On the other hand, **the West is facing multiple practical and legal problems**: the relationship with political Islam and how setting up a financial mechanism without violating anti-terrorism sanctions. **This depends on the crisis resolution in Syria** which remains unresolved and on the issue of citizens from 60 countries still detained in the northeast of the country with uncertain legal status.

According to **Yoram Schweitzer**, Director of the Terrorism and Low-Intensity Conflict Program at INSS (The Institute for National Security Studies), and a former Special Forces member, **the criticism of the U.S. withdrawal was quick, but nobody knows how the situation would have evolved**. Biden has finally implemented what his predecessors wanted. It could have been executed in a more orderly way, but contingent plans do not always work as intended. The Chiefs of Staff's statement about a "strategic defeat" was too hasty. At this point, **neither the Taliban nor Al-Qaeda will use Afghanistan as an export ground for international terrorism as they did 20 years ago because of their own constraints**, their current status, and the lesson learned from U.S. retaliation after 9/11 attacks.

Anne-Clémentine Larroque, historian and analyst at the Ministry of Justice, highlighted the responsibility of Western countries in Afghanistan. Protecting the Western value system as an objective failed. The jihadist obsession is to attack the Western educational system. Since the trial of *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper and the 3 attacks suffered by France in this context, **the opposition between the French value system and the Islamist normative system has become obvious worldwide**. The confusion between Islamism and Islam remains total at a time when Muslim heads of state such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Emir of Qatar, the Pakistani government, or the spokesman of Hamas, are defending the same positions about France as the jihadist organizations. On the other hand, **the confusion between jihadist ideology and that of the Taliban must be rectified**. **Never have so many territories worldwide been affected by the Islamist ideology using terrorism as a mode of action**. The French and European territories of jihad and the planification of attacks have been overtaken by another kind of actors which do not belong to the two major Islamic terrorist organizations (such as the Chechens or the Pakistanis).

According to the Director of Research of the Soufan Center, **Dr. Colin P. Clarke**, there has been a **decentralization of jihadist movements away from large networks to affiliated ones**. Jihadist networks have moved much closer to sub-Saharan Africa, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, the Sahel, and even to new strategic locations such as South Asia and Afghanistan. Besides, the situation in Afghanistan will get worse in 2022, because terrorists have managed to control hot spots in Libya, Somalia, the Philippines. If the current situation is not so bad, it could become so very soon, **as the Taliban have inspired other groups**. In addition, **climate change may be a trigger of destabilization**, with increasing numbers of refugees. As Western attention shifts from counterterrorism to power competition, jihadist groups will have new opportunities to create safe spots and to plot attacks.

Dr. Hans-Jakob Schindler, Director of the Counter Extremism Project and an expert on counterterrorism at the United Nations Security Council, identified 4 major security issues in Afghanistan today. First, **international terrorism**. The Khorasan region is a breeding ground for **ISIS-K (ISIS in Khorasan)** and inspires operations abroad as in Germany in 2019. Second, **the re-emergence of Al-Qaeda** in the country, without needing to rebuild training infrastructure. Indeed, Al-Qaeda has already moved closer to the Taliban and did so in Syria before. To some extent, the Taliban's victory is Al-Qaeda's victory. Third, **the humanitarian and economic crisis**. The collapse of **the economic system will cause a massive flow of refugees to Europe**. The terrorist risk also stems from this demographic aspect. Many Taliban will be given Afghan passports and will pass themselves off as refugees. Europe must be prepared for this eventuality, just as the United Nations Security Council is already taking Pakistan's troubled game very seriously.

THE IDEOLOGICAL FIGHT AGAINST ISLAMISM, A CHALLENGE FOR THE REPUBLIQUE

The second roundtable was devoted to the fight against Islamist ideology within civil society and was moderated by **Laure Daussy**, a journalist at *Charlie Hebdo*. First, **Carine Azzopardi**, a journalist and civil party in the trial of the November 13 attacks, explained that she did not hear the words "Islamist terrorism" in the debates. Only Bernard Cazeneuve, Minister of the Interior at the time, had uttered them immediately. Thus, **collective pedagogy is necessary**. This is the reason why she signed a tribune in the newspaper *Libération*, asking for the **recognition of Islamism as the trigger** of this jihadist attack. According to her, **many people still deny reality**. However, it is necessary to name things because **"when the enemy designates you, pacifism is not relevant anymore"**, especially when the Islamists target indistinct victims. Indeed, it is no longer a question of targeting journalists or Jews as in previous attacks. On the evening of November 13, everything responded to the doctrine of the "godless".

Najwa El Haité, a lawyer and deputy mayor of Evry-Courcouronnes, recalled the importance of the distinction between "Islam" and "Islamism". **Islam is a religion that the vast majority of Muslims practice in peace. Islamism, on the other hand, is a political belief. The enemy is therefore Islamism**. In France, it began to develop in the 1980s. She made the typology of the **influential Islamist groups in France**:

- **The "Tabligh Jamaat"** created in 1927 in India to re-Islamize Indian Muslims
- **The Salafists**, who follow the teachings of Saudi Arabian sheikhs and do not recognize the French democratic system
- **The Muslim Brotherhood** (1928) who are political activists and elected in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. The organization was nevertheless banned in Austria, a unique situation in Europe.

She explained that **"French-style" secularism is misunderstood** by young people and their families. According to them, it is an "anti-Islamic principle". Trainings are organized for public agents and the population to assert that freedom of conscience is fundamental. She recalled that **Islamist movements feed on social determinism and urban ghettos. The Republique has to ensure social mobility for all**.

As the Director of the **Observatory of Fundamentalisms** in Brussels, **Fadila Maaroufi** explained that she has lived for a long time near the municipality of **Molenbeek, regarded as a hub of Islamist terrorism**. Out of 19 municipalities around Brussels, several are still affected by radicalization, the hatred of the Jews and the "godless", which remains very strong. A large Maghrebi population lives in these municipalities. Fadila Maaroufi was not surprised when the attacks of 9/11 occurred. She added that Islamist books are still sold in bookstores in France and Belgium. Following her master's degree, she infiltrated Salafist women's groups in Brussels and came up against the political authorities in 2015-2016. She then decided to work on these issues by co-founding the **Observatory of Fundamentalisms**, aiming to:

- Lead field research to understand the phenomenon of radicalization and Islamism
- Offer social support to teachers, police agents and Muslim people who are under pressure
- Analyze social networks, in order to explain the difference between jihadism, salafism, radicalism... The topic is still a taboo in Belgium.

Fadila Maaroufi also wanted to draw attention to the phenomenon of entryism of specific associations in Brussels but also in the EU.

FROM NOVEMBER 13, 2015 TO A POST-DAESH ERA: THE ROLE OF INTELLIGENCE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

Patrick Calvar, former Director of French internal security agency (the DGSI), pointed out that the seminal law in France was the "intelligence law" of July 2015 that came into force in October 2015. **Before it, the services were acting within the rule of law framework** and could only do telephone interception, get connection data (detailed bills), make physical surveillance and resort to human sources. The digital revolution had not yet been considered. The question of **the price to pay for more security** arises. How far is one prepared to go, especially with regard to border controls? Today, **international cooperation mainly rests on data exchange, but European laws protecting data may prevent this cooperation.**

As the former Director of the International Department of Shabak and senior fellow at the International Institute for Counterterrorism (ICT Herzliya), **Oz Noy** explained that the **Israeli services have been confronted with the evolution of terrorist modus operandi, especially during the attacks in France** in 2015 and worldwide. According to him, there are **4 major changes**:

- In the past, activities were local, now they are inter-regional.
- What took weeks can now be done in few days. The amount of information has increased exponentially.
- The sources are multiple: cyber content and data are now added to human intelligence.

According to Oz Noy, **cooperation and coordination with other countries organizations are crucial.** Israel has been facing the "lone wolves" phenomenon for several years with two types of profiles: those who belong to an organization, and those who do not. Although the motivations are sometimes nationalistic, **personal motives, psychological factors or the attacker personality have real impacts.** These different situations are challenging. First, tracking these profiles that blend into the population and are effectively outside of the traditional terrorist targets, is a major challenge, especially in democracies. Second, the combination of human and technological intelligence is also at stake.

IS ISLAMISM ISLAM'S DISEASE?

Chems-Eddine Hafiz, as the rector of the Great Mosque of Paris and writer of the *Manifesto against Islamist Terrorism*, spoke about the link between Islam and Islamism. He was interviewed by **Sara Daniel**, a journalist and Middle East expert. Since the beginning of the 1980s, successive **governments have intended to organize "the Islam of France"**. All the ministers of the Interior in charge of religions have tried to "create a body that could represent Muslims in France," he said. But wanting **one body only** to represent Muslims in France **is always a failure.**

The Great Mosque of Paris left the Council for French Muslims (CFCM) several times. After the assassination of Samuel Paty, **Chems-Eddine Hafiz** pleaded to stop the denial. It is no longer possible to accept killing "in the name of Allah". **The State should not interfere in the organization of Islam and should not put Islamists and Republicans together around the table.** It is better to keep these organizations apart. The Charter he signed on January 18, 2021 was a huge progress since it recalls the Republic principles and claims that there is no "State racism" in France. He insisted on the need to **distinguish between Islam and Islamism. Islam has been sullied by Islamism** while Muslims simply want to live as normal and respectful citizens without infringing on the freedoms of others. **Religious people must draw society's attention to possible aberrations because they know the religious practice.** Their role is to propose a counter-discourse to explain what the reality of Islam is.

CONCLUSION

Former Prime Minister **Manuel Valls** concluded the summit by recalling the importance of these debates to win this fight against Islamism and terrorism and gave the audience an appointment on **March 27, 2022** for the next summit.

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