

Militancy/Terrorism

**23**

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France Alert (UPDATE): One killed, three injured in Islamist stabbing attack in Mulhouse, Haut Rhin department on February 22; Islamist threat to remain elevated

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Current Situation

- On February 22, an Algerian national carried out a stabbing attack near the Marche du Canal Couvert de Mulhouse market in Mulhouse, Haut Rhin department. One civilian was killed, and three police officers were injured in the attack.
- The suspect is reported to have shouted “Allahu Akbar” during the attack. Authorities say he was already known to police on suspicion of radicalization and was on the “Fichier des Signalements pour la Prevention de la Radicalisation e Caractere Terroriste” (FSPRT) terrorism prevention watchlist. Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau indicated that the suspect possibly suffered from schizophrenia and was under house arrest at the time of the attack.
- Following the attack, President Emmanuel Macron stated that the incident was an “Islamist terror act.” Parquet National Anti-Terrorist (PNAT), the counter-terrorism prosecutor’s office, has taken over investigations on suspicion of attempted murder connected with a terrorist enterprise. PNAT stated that local police officers were the suspect’s intended target.

- Interior Minister Retailleau stated that the suspect arrived in France in 2014 and was later convicted of glorifying terrorism. He also claimed that France attempted to deport the suspect to Algeria ten times, but the deportation was delayed due to administrative issues with Algeria. Retailleau stated that France should take a harder stance against issuing visas to Algerian nationals

Source: [BFMTV](#)

Assessments & Forecast

1. This attack, coupled with an Islamist stabbing in Apt, Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur on January 25, reiterates the continued heightened threat of Islamist terrorism in France, with the Vigipirate national threat level remaining on the highest "Emergency Alert" level since March 2024. Indeed, according to PNAT, 85 anti-terrorism investigations were conducted in 2024 for Islamist-related incidents alone – a 70 percent increase in such investigations compared to 2023 – and nine attacks were foiled.
2. Additionally, the attack reiterates the risk of Islamist lone actors carrying out such attacks in France, with these plots more likely to be successful due to the lower risk of detection by authorities. Moreover, it highlights the continued preference for attacks with bladed weapons, given their easy availability, ease of execution, and lack of extensive planning needed. That the suspect targeted local police also aligns with past Islamist attacks, with April 2024 reports by a French think tank indicating that 37.2 percent of attacks between 2013 and April 2024 worldwide targeted military entities, and 14.9 percent targeted police
3. **FORECAST:** The threat of Islamist attacks in France, and regionwide, is expected to remain elevated in the near to medium term. In addition to law enforcement and government entities, areas with higher footfalls, such as tourist attractions, public venues (including shopping centers and cultural centers), sports venues, transportation hubs, and other religious institutions (including churches and synagogues) are vulnerable to such attacks. The primary threat of successful attacks will continue to emanate from lone actors utilizing rudimentary tactics, such as stabbings and vehicle rammings. The risk is especially elevated during Ramadan, scheduled to begin on February 28, as this period is marked by heightened religious zeal.
4. In addition to an Islamic motive, given the suspect's background, it is also possible that a political motive linked to tensions between Algeria and France played a role in the attack. The deterioration in diplomatic relations between the countries in recent weeks has already led to calls for violence, with at least seven Algerian online influencers arrested in January for inciting attacks in France in support of the Algerian government. Given this, it is possible that the assailant was incited to act by such calls for violence.
5. Moreover, that the suspect was already known to police and yet was not deported is likely to draw criticism of authorities' perceived failures in tracking at-risk suspects. This is especially so amid reports that only seven percent of deportation orders are enforced in France, with deportation orders to Morocco and Algeria among the least enforced. Moreover, past high-profile violence carried out by foreign nationals awaiting deportations also drew backlash. This includes the rape and murder of a college-aged woman in Paris by a Moroccan national in September 2024, which led to large-scale anti-immigration protests, including by right-wing groups.
6. **FORECAST:** Given this precedent, the fact that both the latest suspect and the suspect in the January 25 Apt stabbing were on the FSPRT terror watchlist, and yet remained in France, is likely to draw further anti-government criticism. As such, anti-immigration protests and subsequent counter-protests are liable to manifest in Paris and nationwide. Such protests will carry a heightened risk of unrest, given the potential involvement of far-right or far-left organizations.

Recommendations

1. Travel to France may continue while maintaining heightened vigilance for potential Islamist terrorist threats nationwide.
2. Travelers are advised to remain cognizant of their surroundings, including any suspicious behavior of individuals. Alert authorities immediately upon witnessing suspicious items or behavior.
3. If a potential stabbing, shooting, explosion, or vehicle ramming manifests, leave the area immediately if possible, or take shelter at a secure location.
4. Move away from large groups to mitigate the risks of a stampede and of presenting a bigger target for a possible secondary attack.
5. Remain cognizant of authorities' updates regarding evolving security protocols at public events.
6. Maintain heightened vigilance in the vicinity of any far-right, anti-immigration, or far-left protests in cities in France due to the heightened risk of unrest.
7. For further questions, please contact intel@max-security.com