

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF THE TERRORIST THREAT?

Friday 27 september, 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m., Azur room



Patrick Zimmermann, Marie-Christine Dupuis-Danon, Didier Le Bret, Christine Dugoin Clément and Alexandre Malafaye

Two planes hit the World Trade Center, a third hit the Pentagon, a fourth missed the White House, 3,000 dead in a few hours... 11 September 2001 marked a turning point in the history of international terrorism, leading to conflict in Afghanistan and American intervention in Iraq. These events favoured the creation of Daesh, in reaction to what Bin Laden had already called 'American imperialism'.

Although it has many faces and motivations (Islamic, anarchist, ethnic, cyberterrorism and bioterrorism), terrorism systematically targets civilians and innocent people. It represents 85% of the victims of conflicts in the world. But, as Alexandre Malafaye, founding president of Synopia, pointed out, depending on which side of history one is on, terrorists can be called resistance fighters. 'Let us not forget that the Nazis, while considered evil today, themselves considered the French Resistance to be terrorists during the war. Words always have meaning.' Patrick Zimmermann, admiral, director of Westwind Strategies and former deputy director of the Military Intelligence Directorate, looked

back at the origins of the word terrorism, derived from terror. It is also the name given to the period of the French Revolution extending from 1793 to 1794 under the influence of Robespierre, from whom Patrick Zimmermann quoted this sentence: 'Virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless,' before

MODERATION

Alexandre Malafaye, Founding President of Synopia

SPEAKERS

Marie-Christine Dupuis-Danon, CEO of the consulting firm C3COM, internationally recognised specialist in financial governance and criminal finance issues

Christine Dugoin Clément, Researcher at the 'Risks' chair of the IAE Paris-Sorbonne and at the Artificial Intelligence Observatory of Paris-Panthéon-Sorbonne

Didier Le Bret, Ambassador, Director of the Diplomatic and Consular Academy of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs

Patrick Zimmermann, Admiral, Director of Westwind Strategies, former Deputy Director of the Military Intelligence Directorate

adding: 'This quote from Robespierre leads to mixing two contradictory things, virtue and terror, which we find in the history of communism as well as Salafism.'

Some figures to take stock of terrorism in the world. In 2023, it claimed 8,300 victims, an increase of 22% compared to 2022 but a decrease in the number of attacks, which have become more deadly. Thirty countries around the world were subjected to an attack, and 90% of them are countries in crisis, located in conflict zones. In the West, 23 attacks were committed, including seven in the United States, and five by the extreme right. Patrick Zimmermann emphasised this point: 'Terrorism has no ideological boundaries; it is always hatred of the other that prevails.'

Technology isn't bad in itself, it all depends on the use we make of it

Christine Dugoin Clément

A hatred of others that feeds on social networks. Christine Dugoin Clément, researcher at the 'Risks' chair of the IAE Paris-Sorbonne and at the Artificial Intelligence Observatory of Paris-Panthéon-Sorbonne, knows this field well. She tempered the mistrust that one might have towards these social networks. 'Technology isn't bad in itself. Just like a hammer that can be used to hit someone or to build a shelf, it all depends on the use we make of it, deadly or humanitarian.' It is true that the Islamic State has promoted significant radicalisation through digital channels, so we must avoid falling into this



trap and not ignore traditional recruitment channels. However, the strength of social networks lies in their speed of propagation and their ability to disseminate emotional content to generate direct reactions, without reflection. The goal is clear: 'To strengthen itself, to swell its ranks, to weaken its adversaries by fuelling divisive debates.' Christine Dugoin Clément also notes the skill with which these terrorist groups have taken control of these new technologies by drawing inspiration from the codes of traditional media and large tech companies. The arrival of artificial intelligence, whose production costs have considerably decreased, will increase the creation of custom text and counterfeit images in the years to come.

But behind the ideology there is also another financial issue. Marie-Christine Dupuis-Danon, CEO of the consulting firm C3COM, studied the question: what is money used for in a terrorist organisation? 'Money buys two things: power to anchor oneself in a territory, to have an army, to maintain it and to



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buy weapons, and influence to disseminate one's ideology, to recruit and to succeed in planting a seed in the minds of individuals to rally them to one's cause.' Because, in reality, an attack does not cost much. The most expensive one in contemporary history was that of 11th September estimated at \$500,000. A small amount on the scale of international financial flows. By comparison, the Charlie Hebdo attacks cost the Islamic State 25,000 euros, those of 13th November at the Bataclan, around 80,000 euros and the one against the teacher, Samuel Paty... the cost of a kitchen knife.

Hezbollah is very involved in cocaine trafficking with Latin American partners

Marie-Christine Dupuis-Danon

These terrorist groups have three sources of income: investing in legal businesses such as agricultural companies or setting up currency exchange offices. Then comes the illegal drug trade, 'Hezbollah is very involved in cocaine trafficking with Latin American partners', but also in money laundering, human trafficking and trafficking in organs and antiquities. As a last resort, these organisations take over resources available in the controlled territories and also receive donations. 'We know that the Islamic State has a system of compulsory almsgiving, which requires its followers to donate 2.5% of their income to the cause.' When put together, the financial resources obtained are astronomical. On the other hand, what means do we have to fight against these terrorist groups? Didier Le Bret, ambassador, director of the



Diplomatic and Consular Academy of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, was national coordinator of intelligence and the fight against terrorism from June 2015 to August 2016. It was a particularly difficult period on French territory. 'We were trying to cope with something that was like a tsunami,' he recalled. If the climate is less tense now, it is also because additional resources have been allocated to anti-terrorism services. In 2024, for example, several attacks were foiled without this being mentioned in the press. To improve their capacity for action, the six French intelligence services, formed around the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) and the General Directorate for External Security (DGSE), have learned to pool their resources. 'Until now, everyone has acted within their own area of expertise. There was a common objective, and the State had to provide more financial, human and even legal resources.' This is one of the key issues in the fight against terrorism, which is not to play with the enemy's weapons so as not to compromise our democratic system. 'When we look for ways to be more efficient, we can quickly infringe on individual freedoms. The fight against terrorism is always a question of balance.'