



Managing Islamist Terrorist and Radicalised Prisoners

France's Strategy between 2015 and 2023

Mohammed Chirani



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Counter-Terrorism

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Abstract

This policy brief delves into France's strategy for managing Islamist terrorists and radicalised prisoners (2015-2023). The first part spans the evolution of challenges within the French prison system, covering the return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and responses to terrorist attacks carried out between 2015 and 2018. The second part details key approaches for managing radicalised inmates, encompassing assessment, prison regimes, rehabilitation, monitoring, and post-release reintegration. The last section explains why it was necessary to identify the Salafi-jihadism threat to tailor prison approaches specifically to this ideology. The recommendations underscore the importance of effective communication regarding the necessity to tailor prison regimes to levels of violent radicalisation while upholding human rights. Finally, the policy brief advocates adapting counter-terrorism strategies to address Salafi-Jihadi ideology. The analysis presented in this paper draws upon the professional experience of its author, who in prisons has dedicated six years to working in P/CVE within the French prison system, as well as insights gathered from open-source materials.

Keywords: Prison regimes, terrorist Islamist offenders, violent radicalisation, assessment, rehabilitation, disengagement, Salafi-Jihadism, counter-terrorism

Acronyms

CGLPL	Contrôleur général des lieux de privation de liberté [Inspector General of Deprivation of Liberty]
CIPDR	Comité Interministériel de Prévention de la Délinquance et de la Radicalisation [Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalisation]
DAP	Direction de l'administration pénitentiaire [Directorate of Prison Administration]
DCSR	Détenus de droit commun susceptibles de radicalisation [Ordinary detainees suspected of being radicalised]
DPS	Détenu particulièrement signalé [Prisoner with a particularly high profile]
MLRV	Mission de lutte contre la radicalisation violente [Mission to combat violent radicalisation]
PAIRS	Programme d'accueil individualisé et de réaffiliation sociale [Individualised support platforms for social reaffiliation]
PPRV	Programme de prévention de la radicalisation violente [Programmes to prevent violent radicalisation]
QER	Quartier d'évaluation de la radicalisation [Radicalisation Assessment Unit]
QI	Quartier d'isolement [Isolation unit]
QPR	Quartier de prise en charge de la radicalisation [Radicalisation Management Unit]
SNRP	Service national du renseignement pénitentiaire [National Prison Intelligence Service]
TIS	Terroriste islamiste [Islamist terrorist]
UD	Unité dédiée [Dedicated unit]

Introduction

The terrorist attack on 2 December 2023 near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, resulting in the tragic death of a German tourist, marked the first case of a recidivist terrorist offence outside prison in France since 2016. The assailant, who served a four-year prison term for attempted terrorism from 2016 to 2020, was a radicalised individual with serious psychiatric disorders. Despite completing his period of probation in April 2023, ongoing security monitoring was maintained due to his risky profile. This incident has refocused attention on the role of the French prison system in managing and monitoring post-release terrorist offenders.¹ It is noteworthy to recall that France is the largest source of Western fighters to Iraq and Syria, with an estimated 1,409 French nationals having travelled to the conflict zones.² As a result, French prisons have had to grapple with an unprecedented influx of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and individuals implicated in terrorist attacks on French soil. Therefore, from 2014 to 2023, the number of detainees for Islamist terrorist offences (Terroriste Islamiste, TIS) has risen from 90 to 391, peaking at 531 in 2020.³ To this figure, we must add 462 inmates convicted of common crimes identified as Ordinary Detainees Suspected of being Radicalised (Détenus de droit Commun Susceptibles de Radicalisation, DCSR)(see Table 1).⁴ The terrorist attacks of 2015 marked a turning point, prompting a more robust legal approach to counteract terrorist offences.⁵ The 2016 law toughened the sentences for those involved in terrorist criminal associations,⁶ leading to a rise in convictions.⁷ The broad legal definitions of terrorism-related offences⁸ resulted in the imprisonment of individuals engaged in logistics without explicit radicalisation.⁹ Furthermore, a shift in the perception of women's involvement in armed jihadism occurred after a failed terrorist attack in September 2016 at Notre Dame de Paris.¹⁰ Subsequently, women were systematically prosecuted and arrested,¹¹ signifying a shift from their earlier perception as victims.¹² This change resulted in the detention of 71 women in 2019¹³ reaching a peak of 98 by the end of 2023.¹⁴

1 Paule Gonzalès. "Attaque à Paris : Armand Rajabpour-Miyandoab, un « détenu renfermé et influençable » à très haut risque, [Paris attack: Armand Rajabpour-Miyandoab, a «withdrawn and impressionable detainee» at very high risk]", *Le Figaro*, 3 December, 2023. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/attaque-a-paris-armand-rajabpour-miyandoab-un-detenu-renferme-et-influencable-a-tres-haut-risque-20231203>

2 Foreign Terrorist Fighters Knowledge Hub, www.foreignterroristfighters.info/, 1 August, 2023. <https://www.foreignterroristfighters.info/country/fr>

3 "Déclaration de M. Jean-Jacques Urvoas, ministre de la justice - Sécurité pénitentiaire et action contre la radicalisation violente, [Statement by Mr Jean-Jacques Urvoas, Minister of Justice - Prison security and action against violent radicalisation]", 25 October, 2016. <http://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/200913-declaration-de-m-jean-jacques-urvoas-garde-des-sceaux-ministre-de-la->

4 Pierre Bienvault. "Le difficile suivi de sortants de prison radicalisés, [The difficult follow-up of radicalized prison leavers]", *La Croix*, 5 December, 2023. <https://www.la-croix.com/france/Terrorisme-difficile-suivi-sortants-prison-radicalises-2023-12-04-1201293319#:~:text=L'attentat%2C%20perp%C3%A9tr%C3%A9%20samedi%202022,par%20les%20services%20de%20renseignement>.

5 Cour des Comptes, "Les moyens de la lutte contre le terrorisme, [Means of the fight against terrorism]", May 2020, p. 114 <https://www.ccomptes.fr/system/files/2020-07/20200715-rapport-moyens-lutte-contre-terrorisme.pdf>

6 *Ibid.*, p.18.

7 For example, sentences for terrorist offences of six and a half years in 2016 increased to ten years in 2017. Marc Hecker. "137 Shades of Terrorism. French Jihadists Before the Courts." *IFRI-Institut français des relations internationales*. Paris, France, Focus stratégique n° 79 bis, April 2018, p.34. <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/focus-strategique/137-shades-terrorism-french-jihadists-courts>

8 Laurence Blisson. "Risques et périls de l'association de malfaiteurs terroriste, [Risks and Perils of Terrorist Conspiracy]", *Délibérée* 2, no. 2 (2017):16–20. <https://doi.org/10.3917/delib.002.0016>

9 As per the characteristics or description of 353 detainees evaluated at the Radicalisation Assessment Units (QERs), 8 percent were identified as non-radicalised logisticians. In Xavier Crettiez, and Romain Sèze, "Sociologie du djihadisme français. Analyse prosopographique des terroristes incarcérés, [Sociology of French Jihadism. Prosopographical Analysis of Incarcerated Terrorists]", Ministère de la Justice, 2022, p.85. https://medias.vie-publique.fr/data_storage_s3/rapport/pdf/287439.pdf

10 Two young women left a car filled with gas bottles near Notre Dame Cathedral. It was only a wrong choice of fuel that prevented the explosion. AFP, "Attentat Raté de Notre-Dame En 2016 : Les Deux Accusées et Leurs Versions 'Opposées'". *Le Monde*, 1 October, 2019. https://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2019/10/01/attentat-rate-de-notre-dame-en-2016-les-deux-accusees-et-leurs-versions-opposees_6013732_1653578.html

11 Christiane Besnier et al. "Les Filiales Djihadistes En Procès. Approche Ethnographique Des Audiences Criminelles et Correctionnelles (2017-2019), [Jihadist networks on trial. Ethnographic Approach to Criminal and Correctional Hearings (2017-2019)]", *AFHJ*, December 2019, p.49. <https://afhj.fr/recherche-les-filieres-djihadistes-en-proces/>

12 Women benefited from a certain "gender bias in which they were seen more as victims of manipulation than as actors in their commitment. But this perspective changed, particularly since the failed gas canister attacks on Notre-Dame de Paris in September 2016". Géraldine Casutt, "Quand le djihadiste est une femme," *Inflexions* 38, no. 2 (2018), p.95. <https://doi.org/10.3917/infle.038.0087>.

13 Contrôleur général des lieux de privation de liberté (CGLPL), "Personnes radicalisées et respect des droits fondamentaux en prison, [Radicalised people and respect for fundamental rights in prison]", *vie-publique.fr*, 15 January, 2020, p.10 https://medias.vie-publique.fr/data_storage_s3/rapport/pdf/274641.pdf

14 Pierre Bienvault. "Le difficile suivi de sortants de prison radicalisés, [The difficult follow-up of radicalized prison leavers]", *La Croix*, 5 December, 2023.

The prison administration faced the challenge of violent radicalisation on three different levels. First, although the management and monitoring of approximately one thousand TIS and DCSR represents less than 1.5 percent of the prison population, estimated at around 70,000,¹⁵ they can have a “powerful effect” and “disruptive influence” on the general prison population.¹⁶ Prisons can be used as a breeding ground for radicalised violent extremists, and “a school for terrorism”,¹⁷ as many terrorist offenders are believed to have met or been radicalised in prisons.¹⁸ Secondly, terrorist attacks in prison have become a major political concern, leading to the prioritisation of “immediate security and protection of professionals” at the expense of “long-term surveillance”.¹⁹ For instance, French prison guards led the largest strike action in thirty years in January 2018 following a terrorist attack at the Vendin-le-Vieil prison, south of Lille.²⁰ Finally, the issue of monitoring after release from prison and preventing terrorism recidivism adds another dimension to this complex challenge.²¹

Table 1. TIS and DCSR in French Prisons from 2015 to 2023²²

Islamist terrorist offenders in prison (TIS)

02/2015	02/2016	02/2017	02/2018	02/2019	02/2020	02/2021	02/2022	01/2023	12/2023
159	252	411	514	506	531	486	434	417	391

Prisoners convicted of common crimes identified as radicalised (DCSR)

2015	10/2016	02/2017	02/2018	02/2019	02/2020	06/2021	02/2022	01/2023	12/2023
700	1,336	1,294	1,133	1,037	892	658	568	550	462

Total TIS and DCSR

2015	2016	02/2017	02/2018	02/2019	02/2020	2021	02/2022	01/2023	12/2023
859	1,471	1,705	1,647	1,543	1,423	1,144	1,002	967	853

The figures aim to illustrate to the reader how the number of terrorists and the radicalised individuals increased initially and then began to decrease. It is important to include the figures because they are referenced in the grid to detect radicalisation, explaining the decrease in the number of DCSR after the introduction of the new grid. Additionally, they demonstrate the number of individuals released from prison, which is referenced in the section regarding the release of the prisoners. Having introduced the respective topic, this policy brief will focus on the French approach to dealing with TIS and DCSR in prisons between 2015 to 2023. To contextualise this strategy, the article will begin with a general overview of the evolution of the prison regime in

15 AFP, "Isolés, Fichés, Suivis... Comment La France Gère Les Individus Radicalisés, [Isolated, filed, monitored...How France deals with radicalized individuals]", *Le Point*, 13 December, 2018. https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/isoles-fiches-suivis-comment-la-france-gere-les-individus-radicalises-13-12-2018-2279126_23.php

16 Julia Rushchenko. "Terrorist recruitment and prison radicalization: Assessing the UK experiment of 'separation centres,'" *European Journal of Criminology*, 16(3), (2019), p.4-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370819828946>

17 Clarke Jones. "Are prisons really schools for terrorism? Challenging the rhetoric on prison radicalization," *Punishment and Society* 16, no. 1, (2014): 74-103 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1462474513506482>

18 For example, Charlie Hebdo assailant Chérif Kouachi and kosher supermarket gunman Amédy Coulibaly met each other in Fleury-Mérogis prison. Hugo Micheron. "Ebb and Flow: The Three Cycles of Jihadism in Europe, Program on Extremism," The George Washington University, October 2022, p.22. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/three-cycles-of-jihadism-in-europe>

19 Gilles Chantraine and David Scheer. "Performing the enemy? No-risk logic and the assessment of prisoners in 'radicalization assessment units' in French prisons." *Punishment & Society*, Vol. 23(2), (2021), p.16. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1462474520952147>

20 A terrorist prisoner affiliated with al-Qaeda injured three guards with a pair of scissors and a razor blade. France 24. "Unions Block Prisons in France after Attack on Guards," 15 January, 2018. <https://www.france24.com/en/20180115-france-unions-block-prisons-france-after-attack-guards>

21 Marc Hecker. "Once a Jihadist, Always a Jihadist? A Deradicalization Program Seen from the Inside." *IFRI-Institut français des relations internationales*. Paris, Focus stratégique n° 102 bis, February 2021, p.76. <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/focus-strategique/once-jihadist-always-jihadist-deradicalization>

22 The author of this paper has revised and updated some of the figures in the table to provide more accurate data. Assemblée Nationale, "Commission d'enquête chargée de faire la lumière sur les dysfonctionnements au sein de l'administration pénitentiaire et de l'appareil judiciaire ayant conduit à l'assassinat d'un détenu le 2 mars 2022 à la maison centrale d'Arles, [Commission of Inquiry tasked with shedding light on the dysfunctions within the prison administration and the judicial system that led to the murder of a detainee on 2 March 2022 at the central prison in Arles], 24 May, 2023, p.157. <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/16/organes/autres-commissions/commissions-enquete/ce-dys-fonctionnements-assassinat-maison-centrale-arles>

managing the population between 2015 to 2018. Next, it will detail the approaches in the place for assessing, disengaging, and managing detainees in prison, as well as monitoring and reintegrating them upon release. Finally, this brief will explain how the implementation of the French approaches required a clear definition of the terrorist threat, namely the Salafi-Jihadi ideology.

France's Strategy to Counter Violent Radicalisation in Prisons

Following the January 2015 terrorist attacks, the Minister of Justice initiated the segregation of terrorism-related prisoners to manage and counter the spread of jihadist ideology with a targeted approach. Five dedicated units (Unité Dédiée, UD) were established with a total capacity of 117 places and aimed to assess the risk of violence and proselytising other prisoners.²³ However, on 4 September 2016, two prison guards were assaulted in the UD of Osny Prison by a 23-year-old man affiliated with ISIS convicted of terrorism offences. One of the guards had his throat cut with a homemade knife and sustained serious injuries.²⁴ This alarming incident led to prison guards staging a demonstration and prison staff unions mobilising, denouncing the inadequacy of dealing with individuals imprisoned for terrorism linked to radical Islam.²⁵ Under the pressure of these circumstances the Minister of Justice announced the termination of the UDs as part of a plan aimed at enhancing prison safety and countering violent radicalisation.²⁶ The deradicalisation approach was abandoned and removed from political communication on countering extremism, leading authorities “to shift their focus toward disengagement rather than deradicalisation”.^{27,28} This new strategy emphasised the need for assessments as a prerequisite for rehabilitation, replacing the UDs with six Radicalisation Assessment Units (Quartiers d'évaluation de la radicalisation, QER). Detainees are placed in appropriate regimes based on their assessed profiles, with the most dangerous, and proselytising individuals housed in high-security conditions, with around 300 dedicated spaces for such profiles.²⁹ It is important to highlight that Osny's attack was the first of four others to follow within French prisons. Four of them targeted prison guards, while the fifth one involved an inmate.³⁰ The Osny terrorist incident marked a “turning point in the relationship between the prisoners and the guards in this type of unit”.³¹ Prisoners transferred to special units or solitary confinement are now subject to “massive tightening of security conditions”:³² more frequent body searches, cell changes, camera surveillance, restrictions on personal belongings, etc. Each terrorist attack in prison would systematically lead to stricter security rules, making it

23 The director of Fresnes Prison, responding to a surge in jihadists imprisoned for terrorism by the end of 2014, took the proactive step of segregating these prisoners into a distinct area apart from the general prison population. Following the January 2015 terrorist attack, the Minister of Justice was inspired by the Fresnes prison experiment and urgently announced its replication. CGLPL, *Personnes radicalisées*, 2020, p.4-5.

24 *Ibid.*, p.6.

25 Catherine Fournier. "Le grand blues des surveillants de prison face aux détenus radicalisés, [Prison guards' big blues against radicalized inmates]", *Franceinfo*, 20 September, 2016. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/terrorisme/osny/le-grand-blues-des-surveillants-de-prison-face-aux-detenus-radicalises_1831633.html.

26 "Déclaration de M. Jean-Jacques Urvoas, ministre de la justice, [Statement by Mr Jean-Jacques Urvoas, Minister of Justice]", 25 October, 2016.

27 CGLPL, *Personnes radicalisées*, [Radicalized Individuals], 2020, p.7.

28 While deradicalisation seeks to bring an individual to abandon their ideology, disengagement aims to remove the risks of involvement in illegal or violent actions, without necessarily addressing the underlying ideology. Crettiez, and Sèze, *Sociologie du djihadisme français*, 2022, p.97.

29 "Déclaration de M. Jean-Jacques Urvoas, ministre de la justice, [Statement by Mr Jean-Jacques Urvoas, Minister of Justice]", 25 October, 2016.

30 According to the anti-terrorism public prosecutor, there have been a total of five terrorist attacks in French prisons. Four of them targeted prison guards, while the fifth one involved an inmate: 1) The first one was the Osny prison attack. 2) On 11 January 2018, while being held in solitary confinement at the Vendin-le-Vieil prison, a terrorist affiliated to al-Qaeda attacked three prison guards with a pair of round-tipped scissors and a canteen knife. 3) On 5 March 2019, a radicalised inmate affiliated with ISIS and his wife, who was killed during the assault, attacked two prison guards with a ceramic knife in the family life unit of the Condé-sur-Sarthe prison. 4) On 21 June 2019, a terrorist offender with a mental health issue attacked a woman guard with an iron bar and a pick at Le Havre prison. However, this attack is the least severe, and the author was judged not responsible for his actions due to his mental health 5) On 2 September 2022, a Corsican nationalist was strangled by a terrorist inmate for “blasphemy” in a high-security prison, leading to his death three weeks later. *Assemblée Nationale, Commission d'enquête chargée de faire la lumière*, 2023, p.159-160.

31 Chantraine, and Scheer, *Performing the enemy?* 2021, p.8.

32 *Ibid.*, p.6.

difficult to maintain the balance between rehabilitation and safety. In this regard, the Inspector General of Deprivation of Liberty (Contrôleur Général des Lieux de Privation de Liberté, CGLPL)³³ has denounced several times “the excessive conditions” under which radicalised prisoners are held in those units.³⁴ However, within the Directorate of Prison Administration (Direction de l'Administration Pénitentiaire, DAP), and more specifically at the Mission to Combat Violent Radicalisation (Mission de Lutte contre la Radicalisation Violente, MLRV)³⁵, reconciling the immediate need for security of prison staff with the overarching objective of disengaging radicalised inmates has consistently posed a significant challenge.³⁶ Nevertheless, despite the intention to uphold decent detention conditions to facilitate the rehabilitation of radicalised inmates, there have been instances of excessive and unchecked measures. For example, draconian measures were imposed on detainees at the Radicalisation Management Units (Quartiers de prise en charge de la Radicalisation, QPR) of Condé-sur-Sarthe prison following a terrorist attack in which a radicalised detainee in ordinary detention seriously wounded two guards in a knife attack.³⁷ It is crucial to underline the context in which the French strategy to counter-terrorism in prisons was implemented. From 2016 to 2019, four terrorist attacks targeted prison staff, who remained highly exposed to the risk of terrorism and, as a result, needed protection. Focusing on these four attacks helps to contextualise the demands for regrouping TIS and DCSR made by the unions representing prison guards.³⁸

To appease union demands and end the prison guards' strike following the 2018 terrorist incident at Vendin-le-Vieil prison, the Ministry of Justice committed to grouping 1,500 TIS and DCSR in secure units.³⁹ The rationale behind this calculation was as follows: approximately 500 TIS combined with over 1,000 DCSR at that time would account for the 1,500 secure unit spaces. Such an indiscriminate grouping could have exacerbated the radicalisation of the most vulnerable individuals and potentially led to the formation of significant jihadist networks.⁴⁰ The primary concern at the DAP was to buy time and raise awareness among politicians and prison guard unions about the disastrous long-term consequences of such a grouping. Ultimately, any communication regarding the 1,500 spaces disappeared from political discourse, allowing the prison administration to return to a more realistic target of 450 completely secure spaces.⁴¹ Hence, while implementing the policy described below, the penitentiary administration had to reconcile the following imperatives: short-term staff security along with the disengagement and rehabilitation of radicalised prisoners through suitable support of their medium and long-term exits.

33 The Inspector General of Deprivation of Liberty in Prisons (Le Contrôleur général des lieux de privation de liberté, CGLPL) is an independent administrative authority tasked with ensuring the protection of the fundamental rights of individuals deprived of their liberty.

34 The Inspector General considers that “the detention regime applied in the QERs and QPRs is characterised by a severity similar to that in effect in solitary confinement QIs. In practice, detained individuals placed in these units are subjected to a form of isolation that goes unnamed. The issue arises as to whether the assessment and rehabilitation objectives of the QER and QPR are compatible with the security approach adopted by the prison administration.” CGLPL, *Personnes radicalisées*, 2020, p.37.

35 La Mission de lutte contre la radicalisation violente (MLRV), which is attached to the Director of Prison Administration at the central level, is responsible for implementing the prison administration's strategy for combating terrorism in prisons. The mission office is composed of a multi-disciplinary team that includes a director, a magistrate, a legal expert, geopolitical specialists, a sociologist, an Islamologist, a probation officer and a psychologist.

36 Doctrine QPR, *Stratégie française de lutte contre la radicalisation violente*, [French strategy to counter violent radicalisation], DAP, 2019.

37 As an illustration, full-body searches are conducted routinely with every movement of the detainees, in the presence of multiple guards, employing methods that demonstrate little regard for the individual's privacy and dignity. A case in point is the use of flashlights by the guards at Condé-sur-Sarthe to illuminate the intimate areas of the individual. CGLPL, *Personnes radicalisées*, 2020, p.40-42.

38 The former director of French Prisons, Mr Stéphane Bredin, recalled that “social dialogue within the prison administration is very tough,” mentioning “the very tough social conflict in January 2018, which was repeated in a milder form in January and February 2019, and which concerned, in particular, the treatment of radicalised prisoners”. Assemblée Nationale, *Commission d'enquête chargée de faire la lumière*, 2023, p.161.

39 AFP, “Isolés, Fichés, Suivis... Comment La France Gère Les Individus Radicalisés, [Isolated, filed, monitored...How France deals with radicalized individuals]”, *Le Point*, 13 December, 2018.

40 Tinka Veldhuis. *Prisoner Radicalization and Terrorism Detention Policy: Institutionalized Fear or Evidence-Based Policy Making?* (Routledge, 2016)

41 Even the target of 450 secure places has not been reached. In 2019, the number of secure places was estimated to be 354, including QERs, QPRs, and QIs, which has not changed significantly since then. *Cour des Comptes, Les moyens de la lutte*, 2020, p.117.

Key Approaches to managing TIS and DCSR

The issue facing the prison system was to effectively manage approximately one thousand TIS and DCSR based on their risk levels. This was essential to prevent the recurrence of mistakes that were observed in the district, such as the case in Iraq where numerous high-ranking ISIS's members at some stage went through a US-operated detention facility, commonly referred to as the "Academy" of jihad within extremist circles.⁴² The dilemma facing the French prison system was to "group or disperse".⁴³ Should the detainees be dispersed in the ordinary regime, with a risk of proselytising and violence? Or grouped with an increased risk of them becoming more radicalised and spreading terrorist networks?⁴⁴ Dispersal is the most widespread approach for handling terrorism-related offenders, adopted by many countries worldwide, including Belgium and Germany.⁴⁵ However, in the French context dispersal of approximately one thousand TIS and DCSR in ordinary detention is risk taking (i.e. a risk of proselytizing or acting out).⁴⁶ In contrast, the Netherlands adopted a "centralised containment" approach, commonly referred to as the "concentration model" for handling terrorist offenders within two high-security prison facilities. In 2017, the maximum number of extremist offenders held under this model was 46.⁴⁷ However, the capacity to concentrate these detainees can be attributed to the significantly lower number when compared to the much higher figures found in French prisons. On the other hand, the UK implemented a mixed regime, with the introduction in 2017 of "separation centres" for the most dangerous and actively proselytising individuals.

The regime is a combination of a concentration of prisoners separated from others and dispersed in an ordinary regime also referred to as a "mixed method". The approach provides greater flexibility for handling the specific population of detainees, given its non-homogeneous nature, and thus, a uniform approach should not be employed.⁴⁸ In the same way, the DAP has implemented a mixed strategy with clear criteria and objectives to effectively manage a large number of TIS and DCSR with highly diverse profiles (see Appendix).⁴⁹ In this regard, the analysis of the profiles of the 353 detainees assessed for this at the QERs revealed seven distinct jihadist profiles such as delinquents (11 percent), individuals outraged by injustice (12 percent), masculinists/warriors (11 percent), non-radicalised logisticians (8 percent), non-affiliated individuals in search of meaning (21 percent), those seeking escape from routine or problems (18 percent), and notably, only 19 percent identified as proselytes convinced by the ideology.⁵⁰ The French strategy for managing TIS and DCSR crystallised with the National Radicalisation Prevention Plan (PNPR) of February 2018. Measures 55, 56, 57, and 58 in the plan successively outline the assessment in the QERs, followed by the implementation of a mixed strategy involving placement in QIs, QPRs, and the ordinary regimes. Lastly, the plan includes monitoring after release from prison.⁵¹

Assessment in QERs

Since 2017, six QERs have been deployed throughout France, the latest one opened at Fresnes prison in 2022 for the assessment of women following the shift in French strategy concerning

42 Martin Chulov, "Isis: The inside Story", *The Guardian*, 11 December 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/sp-isis-the-inside-story>.

43 Chantraine and Scheer. *Performing the enemy?* 2021, p.3.

44 Veldhuis. *Prisoner Radicalization*, 2016.

45 Rushchenko. *Terrorist recruitment*, 2019, p.5.

46 Chantraine and Scheer. *Performing the enemy?* 2021, p.16.

47 Liesbeth van der Heide and Olivia Kearney. "The Dutch Approach to Extremist Offenders," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, February 2020, p.7. <https://www.icct.nl/publication/dutch-approach-extremist-offenders>

48 Rushchenko. *Terrorist recruitment*, 2019, p.5-15.

49 Cour des Comptes, *Les moyens de la lutte*, [The means of the fight], 2020, p.10.

50 Crettiez, and Sèze, *Sociologie du djihadisme français*, [Sociology of French Jihadism], 2022, p.85.

51 CIPDR. "Le Plan national de prévention de la radicalisation (PNPR), [The National Plan for the Prevention of Radicalisation (PNPR)]", Comité Interministériel de Prévention de la Délinquance et de la Radicalisation, (Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalisation), 23 February, 2018. <https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/prevenir-la-radicalisation/mise-en-oeuvre-du-pnpr/>.

the repatriation of women from Syrian camps.⁵² The evaluation process has a duration of 15 weeks and is aimed at assessing 12 TIS and DCSR.⁵³ Thanks to the six QERs, the capacity of the DAP to assess TIS and DCSR amounts to 234 individuals per year, which has enabled to assessment of almost all prisoners prosecuted for terrorism in just over two years.⁵⁴ In 2022, as per the MLRV assessment, 11 percent of the most violent and proselytising prisoners were placed in QI. In contrast, 22 percent of the individuals deemed at risk of proselytising, but receptive to rehabilitation programmes were assigned to QPRs. The remaining majority 67 percent, identified as vulnerable and posing no risk in terms of violence or proselytising, were placed in common detention.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the suggested assignments within the QERs can be influenced by significant political pressure,⁵⁶ causing concern among professionals who remain apprehensive about the possibility of another attack. This caution leads them to be very meticulous when the conducting assessments for placing a detainee in ordinary regime.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the imperative to ensure that QPR and QI spaces are fully utilised has resulted in a broad qualification of the two criteria: risk of violence and proselytising.⁵⁸ Despite these facts, most of the detainees, including vulnerable individuals, non-proselytising and non-violent offenders, non-radicalised logisticians, and individuals in the search of meaning, are integrated into the general population within the ordinary regime.⁵⁹

Mixed Strategy: Grouping in the QPRs, Isolation in the QIs, and Dispersal in Ordinary Regime

The French prison doctrine of October 2019 regarding the QPRs stipulates that these units are designated for “detainees who exhibit a high degree of ideological proselytism, particularly of the Salafi-Jihadi ideology, or they are prone to violence associated with this extremist ideology. The presence of these persons in regular detention facilities could potentially disrupt the institutional order”. In addition, the respective doctrine emphasises that these individuals are also receptive to disengagement programmes”.⁶⁰ In this case, six QPRs for men with the total capacity of 189 places were deployed,⁶¹ and a seventh QPR for women opened with 29 places, bringing the overall capacity to 219.⁶² The opening of a second QPR for women in Roanne in January 2024 with 14 places addressed a gap identified by the Court of Accounts (Cour des Comptes)

52 Christophe Ayad and H el ene Sallon. "La France Rapatrie plus de 50 Femmes Djihadistes et Enfants D etenus En Syrie, [France Repatriates More Than 50 Jihadist Women and Children Detained in Syria]", *Le Monde*, 6 July, 2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/07/05/paris-rapatrie-plus-de-50-femmes-djihadistes-et-enfants-detenus-en-syrie_6133409_3210.html

53 The assessments are carried out by a multidisciplinary team of approximately seventeen professionals, encompassing psychologists, social workers, prison security staff, probation officers, prison directors, and religious mediators. Each offender undergoes between 3 and 4 interviews per professional, totalling 16 to 20 interviews on average. A bi-weekly multidisciplinary meeting assesses progress and shares findings. Evaluation involves interviews, observation of group dynamics to identify leaders, ideologues, and vulnerable individuals, and analysis of inmates' reading and writing to gauge their ideologies. The final synthesis highlights elements such as the risk of violent or proselytist behaviour, level of radicalisation, risk and resilience factors, and the ability to engage in rehabilitation programmes. Cour des Comptes, *Les moyens de la lutte*, 2020, p.117.

54 Assembl ee Nationale, "Compte rendu n o 24 - Commission d'enqu ete sur les dysfonctionnements et manquements de la politique p enitentiaire fran aise – Audition de la MLRV- 15e l egislature, [Record No. 24 - Commission of Inquiry into the Malfunctions and Shortcomings of French Prison Policy – Hearing of the MLRV – 15th Legislature]", October 21, 2021, p.7. https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/comptes-rendus/cepolpenit/115cepolpenit2122024_compte-rendu.pdf

55 Assembl ee Nationale. Commission d'enqu ete charg ee de faire la lumi ere, [Commission of Inquiry to shed light on the matter], 2023, p.159.

56 Political pressure is evident in the growing influence of prison guard unions demanding a more repressive policy, pushing the prison administration to demonstrate its strictness with radicalised detainees. The author of this article witnessed, on multiple occasions, the pressure exerted by prison guards to transfer certain detainees to QI or QPR, even though the majority of the multidisciplinary team favoured placement in the ordinary regime.

57 Chantraine and Scheer. *Performing the enemy?* 2021, p.16.

58 At the beginning of 2023, the QPRs occupancy rate was only 51 percent, Pierrick Baudais, «Les d etenus radicalis es sont-ils bien pris en charge? [Are radicalized inmates well taken care of?], *Ouest France*, 31 May, 2023. <https://www.ouest-france.fr/terrorisme/les-detenus-radicalises-sont-ils-bien-pris-en-charge-448de0b8-ffaa-11ed-a786-1c739936b602>

59 Crettiez, and S eze. *Sociologie du djihadisme fran ais*, [Sociology of French Jihadism], 2022, p.89-93.

60 Assembl ee Nationale, Commission d'enqu ete charg ee de faire la lumi ere, 2023, p.167.

61 Mission minist erielle projets annuels de performances. "Annexe au projet de loi de finances pour l'administration p enitentiaire, [Annex to the Finance Bill for the Prison Service]", Budget g en eral, 2022, p.5. <https://www.budget.gouv.fr/documentation/documents-budgetaires/exercice-2022/le-projet-de-loi-de-finances-et-les-documents-annexes-pour-2022>

62 Rehabilitation focuses on behavioural change and disengagement by offering specialised programmes such as storytelling, islamology, restorative justice, non-violent communication, and how to deal with conspiracy theories.

in 2020.⁶³ The Court was concerned about the shortage of spaces in separate units for women, a problem that could worsen if the 488 adults⁶⁴ detained in the Syrian camps were to return.⁶⁵ Segregating the most dangerous and subversive individuals involved in terrorism could play a significant role in preventing violent extremism amongst the general prison population.⁶⁶ However, it does not deter the formation of networks among the most radicalised inmates, and it can exacerbate their hostility due to stricter security measures. Additionally, the actions of bringing together diverse profiles of radicalised prisoners may present challenges in terms of rehabilitation.⁶⁷ Therefore, tailoring treatments in separation units is crucial for the strategy's effectiveness. This customisation should consider factors like the inmates' backgrounds, ages, training, and sentences. Different approaches should be employed for individuals serving indeterminate sentences as opposed to those with scheduled release dates.⁶⁸ On the other hand, prisoners assessed as the most radicalised, proselytising, violent, and resistant to disengagement programmes are placed in solitary confinement QIs. As of 31 January 2020, there were 80 of them.⁶⁹ The focus is on security, and while interviews with psychologists, educators, probation advisers, and religious mediators are conducted when prisoners are willing, there is a deficiency in rehabilitation programmes.⁷⁰ The CGLPL has denounced this action, asserting that placement in QIs "results in excessive and disproportionate security measures in light of the law".⁷¹ In contrast, prisoners assigned to ordinary regimes take part in programmes to prevent violent radicalisation (Programme de Prévention de la Radicalisation Violente, PPRV). They can also benefit from the multidisciplinary support provided by probation services, educators, and psychologists.⁷² This latest approach offers the advantage of potentially facilitating a shift in the perspectives of the radicalised individuals through their interactions with the general prison population.⁷³

Monitoring and Rehabilitation after Release from Prison

Since 2018, 486 TIS have been released after serving their sentences, with 84 of them released in 2023.⁷⁴ Besides ensuring follow-up, the challenge for the prison service is that most of these TIS come out disengaged and/or identify non-disengaged individuals who represent a high level of risk.⁷⁵ To ensure continuous rehabilitation for radicalised detainees, the RIVE initiative was implemented in Paris from 2016 to 2018. In 2019, a new programme known as 'Individualised Support Platforms for Social Reaffiliation' (Programme d'Accueil Individualisé et de Réaffiliation Sociale, PAIRS), launched four centres in Paris, Marseille, Lyon, and Lille, offering support for 125 individuals. These centres provide psychological, socio-professional, and religious assistance,

63 Clément Marna."Femmes terroristes « revenantes » : le centre de détention de Roanne ouvre une nouvelle unité, [«Revenant» female terrorists: Roanne detention centre opens new unit]", *Le JDD*, 14 January, 2024. <https://www.lejdd.fr/societe/femmes-terroristes-revenantes-le-centre-de-detention-de-roanne-ouvre-une-nouvelle-unite-141182>

64 According to the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Knowledge Hub, 440 French women are still in Syria. www.foreignterroristfighters.info/, 1 August, 2023. <https://www.foreignterroristfighters.info/country/fr>

65 Cour des Comptes, *Les moyens de la lutte*, [The means of the fight], 2020, p.10.

66 Rushchenko. *Terrorist recruitment*, 2019, p.14.

67 Chantraine and Scheer, "Performing the enemy? (2021), p.2.

68 Julia Rushchenko. "Prison management of terrorism-related offenders: is separation effective?" Technical Report. UK, London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2018, p.37.

69 Véronique Brocard. *Les Sortants*, [The Leavers], (Paris: Les Arènes. 2020), p.271.

70 The placement in QI prevents detainees from participating in educational activities, training, or work.

71 CGLPL, *Personnes radicalisées*, [Radicalized Individuals], 2020, p.33.

72 These prevention programmes have been deployed in 79 prisons since 2017. The PPRV lasts between 3 and 5 months, with at least two group sessions a week and regular individual meetings with the inmates. They bring together around ten inmates (mixed group of terrorist offenders, radicalised and other common prisoners) in workshops run by the multidisciplinary team. Cour des Comptes, *Les moyens de la lutte*, 2020, p.118.

73 Rushchenko. *Terrorist recruitment*, 2019, p.4.

74 Pierre Bienvault. "Le difficile suivi de sortants de prison radicalisés, [The difficult follow-up of radicalized prison leavers]", *La Croix*, 5 december, 2023.

75 Before 2016, there were no specialised structures or trained probation officers for individuals involved in Islamist terrorism or radicalisation upon release from prison. A terrorist attack in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray on 26 July 2016, where a priest was murdered by two terrorists, one of whom was under judicial supervision, prompted the prison administration to swiftly implement a monitoring programme for terrorists released under judicial supervision. Vincent Daniel. "Cinq questions sur la situation judiciaire d'Adel Kermiche, un des terroristes de Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray," *Franceinfo*, 27 July, 2016. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/terrorisme/saint-etienne-du-rouvray/quatre-questions-sur-la-situation-judiciaire-d-adel-kermiche-un-des-terroristes-de-saint-etienne-du-rouvray_1565219.html.

with weekly hours of programming ranging from 3 to 20 depending on the profiles of released prisoners.⁷⁶ An assessment of the programme in 2020 revealed encouraging results, showing that no terrorist offenders who participated in the RIVE and PAIRS during open custody have reoffended after four years of operation.⁷⁷ This underscores the importance of the continuing disengagement initiatives in France.⁷⁸ As so, a new public procurement contract signed in 2022 has doubled the nationwide capacity from 125 to 250 places, potentially allowing French authorities to monitor all terrorist offenders leaving prison.⁷⁹ Additionally, in parallel with the rehabilitation process, security monitoring is ensured by the intelligence services. In this regard, the National Prison Intelligence Service (Service National du Renseignement Pénitentiaire, SNRP)⁸⁰ collaborates closely with the MLRV at both central and local levels to monitor TIS and DCSR during and after their release from prison.⁸¹ It is crucial to emphasise that implementing the French approach required a clear definition of the terrorist threat by designating the Salafi-jihadi ideology, which is not an abstract concept without operational consequences. From this determination of the ideology's exact nature, the entire counter-terrorism policy would evolve, encompassing detection, assessment, grouping or dispersal in detention, and the types of disengagement programmes.

Targeting Salafi-Jihadism Threat: A Prerequisite for Strategy

For the first time, the DAP's doctrine has explicitly named the enemy: the Salafi-Jihadi ideology instead of the more general term of radical Islam which can be a source of confusion.⁸² Given that "violent Islamist extremism is an umbrella concept for different forms of violence",⁸³ the French approach focuses on Salafi-Jihadism because it reflects the threat picture in the French prisons.⁸⁴ In this regard, 48 percent of terrorist offenders assessed in the QERs are affiliated with ISIS and 6 percent with al-Qaeda, while 25 percent are not affiliated with any ideology⁸⁵ but were involved indirectly in terrorism offences due to the extensive qualification of terrorism in French law.⁸⁶ As mentioned, all terrorist attacks within prison have been committed by Salafi-jihadists

76 Assemblée Nationale, "Question N°26319 - Assemblée Nationale, [Question no. 26319 - National Assembly]", 5 October, 2021. <https://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q15/15-26319QE.htm>

77 Hecker, *Once a Jihadist*, 2021, p.75-76.

78 *Ibid.*, p.72.

79 Assemblée Nationale, "Compte rendu de réunion n° 17 - Commission d'enquête chargée de faire la lumière sur les dysfonctionnements au sein de l'administration pénitentiaire et de l'appareil judiciaire ayant conduit à l'assassinat d'un détenu le 2 mars 2022 à la maison centrale d'Arles- Audition de la MLRV- 16e législature, [Minutes of meeting n° 17 - Commission of inquiry tasked with shedding light on the dysfunctions within the prison administration and the judicial system that led to the murder of a prisoner on 2 March 2022 at the central prison of Arles- Hearing of the MLRV - 16th legislature]", 28 February, 2023, p.18. https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/16/comptes-rendus/cedysap/16cedysap2223017_compte-rendu

80 One of the primary missions of the SNRP is to combat terrorism and radicalisation. Ministère de la Justice. "Le service national du renseignement pénitentiaire [The National Penitentiary Intelligence Service]", 2022. <https://www.justice.gouv.fr/ministere-justice/organismes-rattaches/service-national-du-renseignement-penitentiaire>.

81 The SNRP has implemented an automatic alert system for the release of terrorist offenders, notifying local Prison Intelligence Services, partner intelligence agencies, and judicial services about the date and time of release. The Departmental Evaluation Groups (GED) at the prefectures oversee the monitoring of released terrorists at the local level. CIPDR, "Le dispositif territorial de prévention de la radicalisation violente". Comité Interministériel de Prévention de la Délinquance et de la Radicalisation, 2019 <https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Dispositif-territorial-de-pr%C3%A9vention-de-la-radicalisation-violente-1.pdf>

82 "The generic concept of Islamist radicalisation leads to confusion between Islamism, Salafism, and religious rigorism. Salafi-Jihadi ideology, which is claimed by Islamist terrorist organisations, postulates that neither preaching nor political commitment is sufficient to bring about an Islamic state, thus encouraging recourse to violence through the concept of a global jihad, which is perceived as legitimate. This ideology, which can take various forms, is disseminated by several media accessible in prisons. In detention, proselytising ideologues pose a major risk to detainees who, because of their social exclusion, are vulnerable to the discourse of disruption and calls for violence that these inmates carry." Doctrine QPR, DAP, 2019.

83 Magnus Ranstorp. "A practical introduction to Islamist extremism," *RAN Centre of Excellence*, 2019. P.5. https://utveier.no/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/09/ran_factbook_islamist_extremism_december_2019_en.pdf

84 Boris Toucas, "France's Determined Struggle Against Salafi Jihadism: Lessons Learned", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, Washington D.C. 22 August, 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/frances-determined-struggle-against-salafi-jihadism>

85 Crettiez, and Sèze, *Sociologie du djihadisme français*, [Sociology of French Jihadism], 2022, p.76.

86 Blisson, *Risques et périls de l'association*, [Risks and perils of the association], 2017.

either from ISIS or al-Qaeda.⁸⁷ In general, “Salafi-jihadists are inherently supportive of violence, which is predetermined by their ideological outlook”.⁸⁸ Therefore, all tools and programmes of assessment and disengagement set up focus on this ideology. Unlike other European countries, “the prison administration has recognised the need to use the ideological leverage in the disengagement process”,⁸⁹ by deploying a grid for the detection of Salafi-jihadism, mediators of religious fact and disseminating alternative literature.

Grid for the Detection of Violent Radicalisation in Prison

The first grid for the detection of the violent radicalisation in prison, established in 2016, was confusing items related to religious practices and ideology.⁹⁰ The use of this tool by prison staff, combined with the emotions surrounding the several terrorist attacks between 2015 and 2016, led to an overestimation of the number of DCSR, which reached 1,336 in 2016.⁹¹ However, the conception in 2019 of a simple, accessible, and practical grid for screening/detecting violent radicalisation designed for prison staff, made it possible to better distinguish religious practice (Islam) from violent extremism (Salafi-Jihadism).⁹² The aim was to focus on the unlawful and the violent aspects of an ideology and its expression while excluding manifestations of faith that comply with the law.⁹³ Thanks to this new detection measure, from 2016 to 2023, the number of DCSR has fallen by two-thirds, from 1,336 to 472 DCSR (see Table 1).

Mediators of Religious Fact

The DAP has established a new team of professionals known as Mediators of Religious Fact (médiateurs du fait religieux) to handle matters related to Salafi-jihadism.⁹⁴ These professionals, equipped with knowledge in religious social sciences and practice, are pivotal in combating the violent radicalisation from an ideological perspective.⁹⁵ They play an important role in assessing and disengaging radicalised detainees, as well as providing training for prison staff. It is essential to highlight that the role of a mediator of religious fact differs from that of a Muslim chaplain. The latter oversees the spiritual support of the detainees and adhere to professional confidentiality. Muslim chaplains are employed by independent Islamic organisations, in accordance with the principle of secularism (laïcité).⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the mediator of the religious fact is an expert in religious sciences and Islamology, hired by the MLRV to assess, evaluate, and disengage individuals from Salafi-jihadism.

The nature of jihadism has underscored the importance of mediators, whose ideological and the high religious expertise contributes significantly to the assessment and disengagement pro-

87 “Groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS adhere to the Salafi-jihadi school of ideological thought [...] a majority of terrorists and foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) who left for Iraq and Syria originate from this ideological strand” in Ranstorp, *Islamist extremism*, 2019. P.5

88 Jakob Guhl. “Theoretical Overview: Gen-Z & The Digital Salafi Ecosystem,” ISD, Theoretical briefing, November 2021, p. 8. <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/theoretical-overview-gen-z-the-digital-salafi-ecosystem/>

89 Crettiez and Sèze. *Sociologie du djihadisme français*, [Sociology of French Jihadism], 2022, p.97.

90 The first grille d'évaluation de la radicalisation violente of 2016 [the first Violent Radicalization Assessment Grid of 2016] is available in Brocard, *Les Sortants*, 2020, p.279.

91 “Déclaration de M. Jean-Jacques Urvoas, ministre de la justice, [Statement by Mr Jean-Jacques Urvoas, Minister of Justice]”, 25 October, 2016

92 Jean-Baptiste Jacquin. “Dans les prisons françaises, le défi de la prise en charge des détenus radicalisés, [In French prisons, the challenge of caring for radicalized inmates]”, *Le Monde*, 12 November, 2020. https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/11/12/dans-les-prisons-le-defi-de-la-prise-en-charge-des-detenus-radicalises_6059403_3224.html

93 Crettiez, and Sèze. *Sociologie du djihadisme français*, [Sociology of French Jihadism], 2022, p.97.

94 While ‘religious mediator’ may be a more familiar term, it’s essential to note that, due to French secularism, referred to as laïcité, the term ‘mediator of religious fact’ emphasises a neutral approach by incorporating Islamology and social sciences. This role remains impartial and distinct from that of a Muslim chaplain.

95 Claire De Galembert. “Des acteurs religieux dans la boîte à outils de la politique de lutte contre la radicalisation: aumôniers et médiateurs du fait religieux dans les prisons françaises, [Religious actors in the toolbox of counter-radicalisation policy: chaplains and mediators of religion in French prisons]”, *Déviance et Société*, Vol. 46, (March 2022), p.290. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-deviance-et-societe-2022-3-page-289.htm>
96 Ibid, p.298-311.

cess.⁹⁷ Currently, there are 20 mediators, with the Minister of Justice aiming to increase this number to 75.⁹⁸

Identifying Radical Books and Promoting Alternative Libraries

In 2020, the prison administration commissioned a researcher to analyse 270 religious and radical books circulating among over 200 detainees in the QERs. Findings confirmed the presence of problematic books promoting Salafi-Jihadi ideology (*takfir*, *taghout*, *al-wala wa al-bara*, etc.).⁹⁹ This prompted the development of a screening process and user guide for identifying such books.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, 79 percent of assessed detainees in QERs read religious books in detention. Therefore, prisons “appear to foster a demand that could be channelled through literature”.¹⁰¹ This led to the creation of an alternative literature library with approximately 200 books, which were distributed in QERs, QPRs, and the 79 prisons housing TIS and DCSR.¹⁰²

Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude, the French government has dedicated substantial financial and human resources to counter-terrorism within the prison system.¹⁰³ Despite these efforts, a tragic incident unfolded on 2 September 2022 as a Corsican nationalist was strangled in a high-security prison by a fellow terrorist inmate, accusing him of ‘blasphemy’ leading to his death three weeks later.¹⁰⁴ This marked the fifth terrorist attack within the prison system, notably targeting an inmate instead of the prison guards. The terrorist incident sparked violent riots and attacks in Corsica and reignited Corsican independence movements.¹⁰⁵ Amidst the context of the 2022 presidential elections, the far-right exploited this terrorist assassination framing it as the perceived state complacency to address the threats of terrorism.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, a parliamentary commission of inquiry was formed to investigate the deficiencies within the prison administration and the judicial sys-

97 Crettiez and Sèze. *Sociologie du djihadisme français*, 2022, p.100.

98 De Galembert, *Des acteurs religieux*, [Sociology of French Jihadism] 2022, p. 291.

99 According to Maher Shiraz, Salafi-Jihadism is defined by five essential characteristics:

“The doctrine of *al-wala’ wa al-bara’* establishes lines of loyalty and disavowal; *takfir* delineates Islam against everything else and protects it against insidious corruption from within; *tawhid* and *hakimiyya* explain what legitimate authority should look like and who it should serve; and *jihad* prescribes the method for this particular revolution.” Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, (UK: Penguin. 2017), p.15.

100 The books were classified into 3 categories:

- General Islamic books on the different topics of Islam (rites, spirituality, generalities, etc.);
- Salafi books circulating in the Quietist and Rigorist Salafi movement (ritual religious practice, invocations, dogma, etc.);
- Problematic books (revolutionary salafism explicitly promoting a sectarian breakaway discourse). It is important to stress that only the last category of books was banned in prisons for security reasons. All others were allowed in accordance with the freedom of religion.

101 Crettiez and Sèze. *Sociologie du djihadisme français*, [Sociology of French Jihadism] 2022, p.100.

102 The literature concerns islamology, spirituality, testimonies of repentant terrorists, the quest for identity, history, geopolitics, storytelling, and psychology. Mohammed Chirani, “Idéologie djihadiste: ‘le désengagement [Jihadist ideology: ‘disengagement’]”, *France Culture*. April 2021. <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/questions-dislam/ideologie-djihadiste-le-desengagement>

103 At the national level, the MLRV network employs 482 staff members, comprising 20 mediators of religious fact, 115 educators and psychologists, probation counselors, as well as prison supervisors and directors, “Compte rendu de réunion n° 17, 2023, p.15. Within this workforce, 259 individuals are exclusively designated to the QER and QPR units. Moreover, from 2015 to 2021, the French authorities allocated more than 48 million euros to the development and deployment of professionals and their training, dedicated facilities, and partnerships with external institutes and experts in the field of P/CVE in French prisons. Assemblée Nationale. *Compte rendu n° 24*, 2021, p.4,10. On the other hand, the increase in the number of prison staff dedicated to counter-terrorism has been evident in the expansion of the prison intelligence service (SNRP), which has grown from 27 employees in 2014 to 329 in 2020. *Cour des Comptes, Les moyens de la lutte*, 2020, p.56.

104 Yvan Colonna, convicted for the assassination of Prefect Claude Erignac in Corsica in 1998, was classified as a ‘Prisoner with a particularly high profile’ (DPS) with enhanced surveillance. The gravity of the situation is heightened by the fact that another DPS, Franck Elong Abé, strangled the Corsican nationalist without any surveillance in the gym of a high-security prison.

105 Grégoire Sauvage. “Affaire Colonna : comment expliquer la flambée de violences qui secoue la Corse, [The Colonna affair: how to explain the outbreak of violence in Corsica]”, *France 24*, 14 March, 2022. <https://www.france24.com/fr/france/20220314-affaire-colonna-comment-expliquer-la-flamb%C3%A9e-de-violences-qui-secoue-la-corse>.

106 Marine Le Pen. “Décès d’Yvan Colonna : le gouvernement doit s’expliquer, [Death of Yvan Colonna: the government must explain itself]”, *miafrance.fr*, 22 March, 2022. <https://miafrance.fr/communiqués/deces-dyvan-colonna-le-gouvernement-doit-sexpliquer>

tem related to this grave incident.^{107,108} This latest terrorist attack serves as a stark reminder of a fundamental reality that Western societies often struggle to acknowledge: “There is no such thing as zero risk”,¹⁰⁹ particularly when managing over one thousand TIS and DCSR within the prison system. Furthermore, while evidence indicates that “re-offending rates for released terrorist prisoners is surprisingly low”,¹¹⁰ terrorist-related incidents are frequently sensationalised by the media and exploited for political gain, especially in the context of extreme polarisation under pressure from the far-right. In the French context, the occurrence of five terrorist attacks in prisons between 2016 to 2022 translates to a mere 0.5 percent risk, with five terrorists or radicalised individuals who have committed violence among more than one thousand detainees. Is it truly justifiable to formulate a security policy grounded on such a minimal 0.5 percent risk? Is it rational to implement severe measures and compromise the fundamental rights of 99.5 percent of radicalised or terrorist detainees due to the actions of just 0.5 percent of them? The French model has endeavoured to combine the hard and the soft approaches amidst extreme political polarisation. Despite facing challenges like repeated strikes by prison guard unions and terrorist attacks inside and outside prisons, the balance between security and rehabilitation has, for the most part, been preserved. Drawing from the French approach to addressing violent extremism in prisons, the following three recommendations are suggested.

Firstly, it is of the utmost importance that, when dealing with the terrorist offenders in prisons, governments need to engage in effective strategic communication. This process involves the collaborating with prison guard unions, sensitising the media, and informing public opinions about the risks associated with a this policy solely focused on security aspects, without distinguishing between the various profiles of terrorists and radicalised prisoners. While such a policy may satisfy security measures in the short-term, it could have severe long-term consequences.

Secondly, it is crucial to emphasise that in democratic societies, upholding the rule of law means tailoring punishments to individuals while safeguarding the human rights. Therefore, placing the terrorist and radicalised prisoners in solitary confinement should be reserved for the verified cases of violent threat as their management requires special attention and rehabilitation alongside the security measures. Those with proselytising tendencies ought to be placed in specialised separate units, where security conditions must be proportionate and individually adapted to the diverse profiles of the prisoners. Striking a balance between the security demands and the imperative of rehabilitation is paramount.

Finally, the French government and European countries should refine their overall strategy for combating violent Islamist extremism, specifically targeting the threat of Salafi-jihadi ideology, and adapting their approach to its specific nature. In the French context, a review of legislation related to Islamist separatism is recommended, with a priority on distinguishing Salafi-Jihadi ideology from other non-violent Islamist movements.¹¹¹

107- Assemblée Nationale. Commission d'enquête chargée de faire la lumière, [Commission of Inquiry to shed light on the matter], 2023.

108 The commission's investigation revealed a series of deficiencies, including “failures”, “errors”, and “inaction” within the public authorities. Despite clear evidence of the inmate's dangerousness, there were obstacles to his transfer for assessment in the QER. The opposition from the counter-terrorist judge, coupled with the inmate's psychological issues that could have disrupted the assessment process, resulted in the denial of transfer requests to QER made by prison management on five separate occasions between 2019 and 2022. Paul Gonzalès. “En prison, la «gestion calamiteuse» du cas Elong Abé, tueur d'Yvan Colonna”, *Le Figaro*, 30 May, 2023, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/assassinat-d-yvan-colonna-le-rapport-d-enquete-parlementaire-pointe-les-defaillances-des-autorites-20230530>.

109 “Le risque zéro n'existe pas, [There is no such thing as zero risk]”, in Brocard, *Les Sortants*, 2020, p.271.

110 Andrew Silke and John Morrison. “Re-Offending by Released Terrorist Prisoners: Separating Hype from Reality,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, September 2020, p.6. <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2022-12/Re-Offending-by-Released-Terrorist-Prisoners.pdf>

111 The law of 24 August 2021, “Strengthening respect for the principles of the Republic”, has established departmental units to combat Islamism and community withdrawal (CLIR). However, the concept of ‘Islamist separatism’ remains vague and unclear. Christophe Ayad et Louise Couvelaire, “Lutte contre le « séparatisme islamiste », [Fight against «Islamist separatism»]: l'arsenal renforcé de l'Etat,” *Le Monde*, 10 January, 2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2022/01/10/lutte-contre-le-separatisme-islamiste-l-arsenal-de-l-etat-renforce_6108806_3224.html

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Appendix

Summary of the Strategy for Managing Islamist Terrorists (TIS) and Radicalised Detainees (DCSR)¹¹²

Levels of Radicalisation	Placement	Objectives
A highly proselytising or violent individual who is incompatible with a rehabilitation programme.	Solitary confinement in the Isolation Units (Quartiers d'isolement, QI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete separation from the rest of the prison population - Staff safety - Containment of radical propaganda - Preparation for placement in QPRs or ordinary detention
Proselytising or potentially violent individuals accessible to rehabilitation programmes	Grouping in the Radicalisation Management Units (Quartiers de prise en charge de la radicalisation, QPR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete separation from the rest of the prison population - Staff safety - Containment of radical propaganda - Possible disengagement (renunciation of violence while remaining radicalised) - Preparation for placement in ordinary detention
Radicalised public of opportunity or vulnerable, and non-proselytising public	Dispersal in the Ordinary Regime Detention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social reintegration and rehabilitation - Social and professional inclusion

¹¹² Assemblée Nationale, "Commission d'enquête chargée de faire la lumière, [Commission of Inquiry to shed light on the matter]", p.159.

About the Author

Mohammed Chirani

Mohammed Chirani is a consultant in P/CVE, with six year of experience in risk assessment and disengagement of radicalised prisoners, as well as policy implementation to address violent extremism within the French prison system. Prior to his position as a policy officer combating violent radicalisation within the Directorate of French Prison from 2018 to 2021, he worked for three years as a consultant and mediator of religious fact in prisons. Notably, Mohammed contributed to implementing the ideological aspects of the French counter-terrorism policy to combat Salafi-Jihadi ideology in prisons. This included initiatives such as the creation and structuring of a new professional system of mediators of religious fact, the development of a grid for detecting violent radicalisation, and the introduction of alternative literature to counter radical books in prisons.

Mohammed served as a policy officer in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as a delegate of the Préfet for the sensitive suburbs in Seine-Saint-Denis. Mohammed holds four master's degrees in Public Affairs, Religions, Islamology, and Conflict Resolution, from Sciences Po Paris, l'Institut Catholique de Paris, L'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, and Trinity College Dublin (respectively). He has published two books : *Réconciliation française, notre défi du vivre ensemble* (Bourin éditeur, 2014) and *Islam de France, la République en échec* (Fayard, 2017).



International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism

International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)

T: +31 (0)70 763 0050

E: info@icct.nl

www.icct.nl