

Paris, France



Country Risk Overview

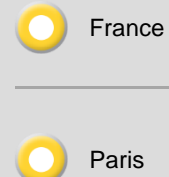
Prepared for

Press & Media

Risk Scale



Risk Rating



Main Question to Be Answered

What are the consequences of the Paris terrorist attacks for the security situation in France and its Western European neighbour countries?

Major Risks

Heightened security measures across Europe

Persistent risk of isolated terrorist attacks in France and neighbouring countries

Distinct possibility of lone-wolf attacks in the next couple of days

Potential risk of mass panics triggered by false alarms, bomb threats or firecrackers

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Recent Developments

On the night of Friday, 13 November, at least eight gunmen and suicide bombers carried out a series of coordinated attacks in the French capital Paris, killing 132 and wounding hundreds. The Islamic State (IS) has assumed responsibility for the attacks. At least one of the perpetrators is still at large. On Wednesday morning, the ensuing manhunt resulted in an anti-terror operation in the Paris suburb Saint-Denis. A woman blew herself up and another suspected terrorist was killed in the event.

Immediately after the attacks, a countrywide state of emergency has been declared for France, and a new law has been announced that is aimed at expanding its duration to three months. Border controls have been reintroduced and security measures have been increased, particularly in Paris and its metropolitan area. Next to France, terror threat levels have been raised and security measures have been stepped up in numerous European countries, including Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

In response to the terrorist attacks, the French air force carried out airstrikes on IS strongholds in Syria on Tuesday. President François Hollande said that France was at war and, in an unprecedented step, requested support from other EU member states, a measure envisaged in the Maastricht treaty if the territory of a member country is under attack. While all EU members have already confirmed their support, the decision will most likely not result in a direct military involvement of most member countries.

Impact

Immediately after the attacks, France and most Western European neighbour countries have increased random controls of passports and vehicles as well as controls at border crossings. As a consequence, prolonged waiting times have to be taken into account at airports and railway stations, particularly when travelling to or from France.

Security protection has been raised in the vicinity of all venues deemed vulnerable to terrorist attacks, including French institutions, foreign embassies, Jewish institutions, US military premises, railway stations, airports and nuclear plants. High security measures are also in place at venues of major public events and mass gatherings. On Tuesday evening, a football match in Hannover was cancelled at the last moment following intelligence on an imminent terror plot. Another match in Brussels had already been cancelled the day before. Such countries as France and Belgium have taken provisions to deploy military forces for the protection of mass events.

Outlook

In the next couple of weeks, the increased security and early prevention measures currently in place as well as the heightened security awareness of the public will make attacks of a similar scope as those seen in Paris somewhat less likely. However, minor attacks against soft targets remain a distinct possibility:

- The current media attention could inspire radicalised isolated individuals to carry out additional attacks in France or other European countries.
- These so-called lone wolves generally do not have the connections, knowledge, technical skills or financial possibilities to carry out attacks similar to those seen on 13 November. Nevertheless, they may inflict human losses and spread terror.

- Due to the inconspicuousness of the perpetrators, lone-wolf attacks are generally far more difficult to prevent by security forces than more sophisticated attacks that involve a higher number of participants, more preparation and communication, and hence are easier to detect.
- Possible attacks by lone wolves include indiscriminate stabbings or shootings in crowded areas, driving cars into crowds as well as hostage takings in bars and restaurants. Targeted attacks against representatives of the state and media, security forces, as well as religious and societal groups, such as Jews or Israelis, are also conceivable.
- Due to the high degree of public attention and widespread insecurity, there is also a distinct possibility of panics in the next couple of days that could be triggered, for instance, by false alarms, false bomb threats or firecrackers.
- Security raids and anti-terror operations could result in persecution, shootouts and the detonation of explosives with a distinct possibility of harming uninvolved bystanders.

The risk of the above-mentioned lone-wolf attacks is expected to remain largely unchanged in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the risk of more sophisticated terrorist attacks on European soil is deemed to increase in the medium to long term. This conclusion is drawn from the following considerations:

- At present, terrorism is at the top of the security agenda of all Western European states. Security measures have been stepped up throughout the continent and public attention is high. Nevertheless, both intelligence gathering and protection measures have limits and can hardly be sustained at the current level for a prolonged time period, especially if no noteworthy attacks take place on European soil for some time.
- Following the recent airstrikes against IS targets in Syria, France is likely to remain a major target of the jihadist group. The IS has already threatened France with further attacks in future.
- At the same time, the group announced further attacks against states participating in airstrikes against its strongholds in Syria and Iraq. A participation of further Western European countries in the fighting, possibly in relation to France's request for support from other EU member states, could increase the terrorism risk in these countries as well.
- Friday night's attacks have made it clear that IS is capable of carrying out sophisticated attacks in Europe. Despite the heightened security measures that had been in place in Paris ever since militant Islamists killed 12 people in an attack on the office of the magazine Charlie Hebdo in January 2015, the militants were able to launch a number of simultaneous attacks that required intense planning and preparation.
- Apart from the countries actively involved in fighting jihadist groups, there is also an increasing terrorist risk in Western European countries with large numbers of nationals that fought alongside Islamists in Iraq and Syria and have returned to their home countries. These fighters potentially have the connections and skills to carry out more sophisticated attacks.
- The fact that for the first time in Western Europe several suicide bombers were involved in a terrorist attack raises further concerns. Suicide bombers are capable of carrying explosives into crowds at venues which cannot, or hardly, be controlled by security checks, such as public spaces, sports events (e.g. bicycle races and marathons), carnival parades, protest marches and demonstrations. The use of more suicide bombers in future terrorist attacks has to be expected.

Recommendations

In EXOP's Global Risk Database, you can find up-to-date and comprehensive recommendations of our risk analysts on how to adequately respond to the situation described above.

If you do not have access to EXOP's Global Risk Database, we will gladly send you our recommendations. Please feel free to contact us.



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