



الائتلاف الإسلامي العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب  
ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION

# Book Review

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## 137 SHADES OF TERRORISM French Jihadists Before the Courts

EDITED BY MARC HECKER



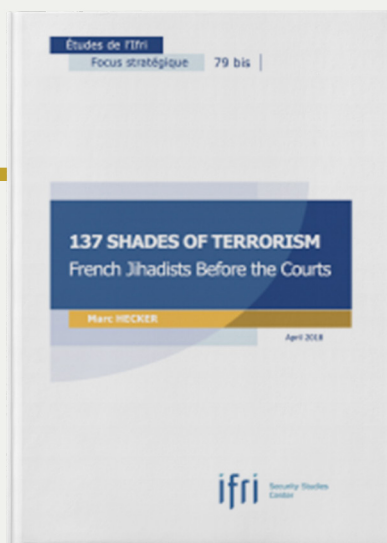
# Book Review

Monthly Book Review  
Series of Terrorism Issues

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**137 SHADES OF TERRORISM**  
**French Jihadists Before the Courts**  
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## About the Report

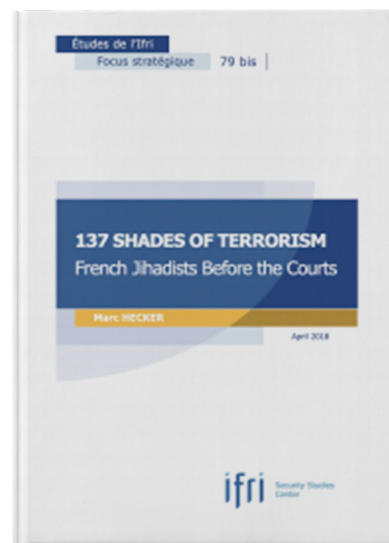
In April 2018, the Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri) issued a report entitled: “137 Shades of Terrorism: French Jihadists Before the Courts” by researcher and director of publications, Dr. Marc Hecker.

The report is especially important because it presents a realist approach to the backgrounds of the 137 jihadists in France who joined fighters in Iraq and Syria and were involved in the conflicts there, making use of the legal sources and the hearings which took place in French courts of law. This allows for a formation of a deeper understanding of the dimensions of EU citizens’ engagement in radical organizations in conflict areas in the world more than what is allowed by theoretical or analytical studies.

The study takes a qualitative and quantitative approach to reach a comprehensive understanding of the manner in which individuals are recruited in terrorist organizations and the identity of the recruits. Dr. Hecker noted that the outcomes present a challenge to and a deviation from the belief that there is not stereotype of jihadists. The report offers two types of analysis: quantitative and qualitative.

The quantitative analysis covered six areas: gender and age, place of residence, level of education and integration in the labor market, criminality, funding jihadist activities, and nationality and religion.

The qualitative approach taken by Dr. Hecker sheds light on the backgrounds of jihadists in France including biography, process of radicalization, trials, prison and the issue of relapse, and intergenerational links.



## Qualitative Analysis of Judgments in Terrorist Cases

France is one of the most affected Western countries by the phenomenon of terrorism, the Syrian Jihad and an influx of returnees. Over a thousand French citizens have been in Syria and Iraq, and hundreds have been arrested before leaving the country. The country has recorded the highest number of attacks and attempts since 2015, due to 3 main factors which includes a 1) weak security situation, 2) changes in legislation that allows targeting “lone wolves”, and adding content online to incite terrorism and finally 3) changes in judicial practices that criminalizes glorification of terrorism.

Given the insights that can be pulled from documented court records, Hecker analyzed the following:

- Gender and age
- Place of residence
- Level of education and integration into labor market
- Criminality
- Funding jihadist activities
- Nationality and religion

## Gender and Age

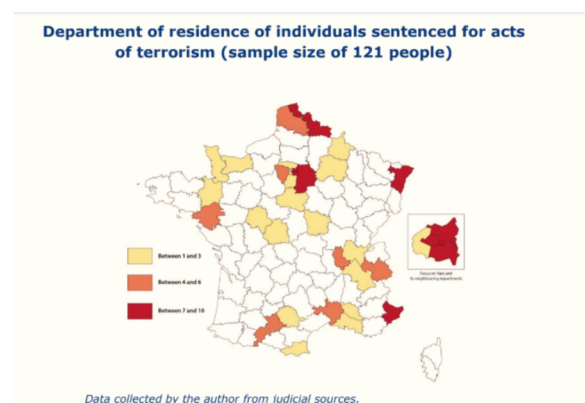
The 137 cases reviewed, are made up of 131 men and 6 women. Hecker, argues that the low number of women is due to French judicial gender bias, which tends not to prosecute women involved in terrorist networks. This comes from the idea that women are victims rather than equal partners in terrorism, but recent changes in French judicial practices considers women returning from Syria women or involved in Jihadi cells as potential terrorists rather than victims used by their husbands.

The 137 cases reviewed in this study did not include minors, making the average of Jihadists, 26; it was also found that in 2017 the average age decreased to 24 years old.

## Place Of Residence

The results of the study, covers 121 of the 137 Jihadists cases reviewed. Based on this review, the results demonstrated a clear decentralization and disperisment of individuals living in France. Hecker argues, this could be a result the accessibility of Jihadist rhetoric disseminated on the internet. The formation of terrorist hubs, can be attributed to the presence of recruiters, and by group dynamics – which “favors the involvement of several persons in the same neighborhood”.

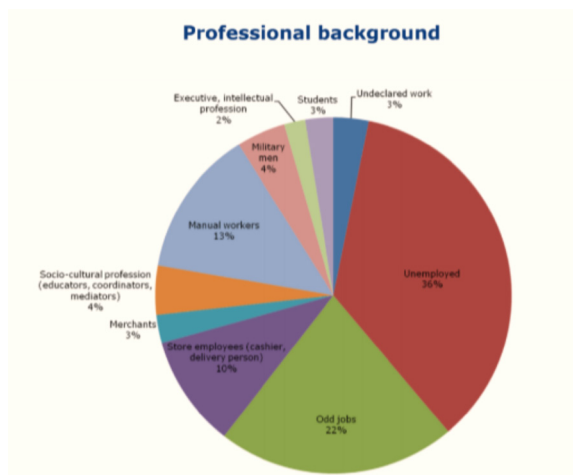
Another important finding, is that 40% of individuals in the case come from “priority” or poor neighborhoods, suggesting that many of the individuals convicted for terrorism come from underprivileged backgrounds and weak cultural capital, such as language, education, skills, etc.



## Level of Education and Integration into Labor Market

Based on the existing data provided by the judicial courts, which included information on 68 of the 137 Jihadists, demonstrated that 47% had no high school diploma and dropped out of school, 24% completed high school, 25% completed some sort of vocational training, 3% received bachelor degrees and only 1 percent had a doctorate level degree. The sample provided demonstrated that the individuals reviewed had low levels of education compared to the average French youth.

These numbers would indicate the possibility that low level education, would mean difficulty



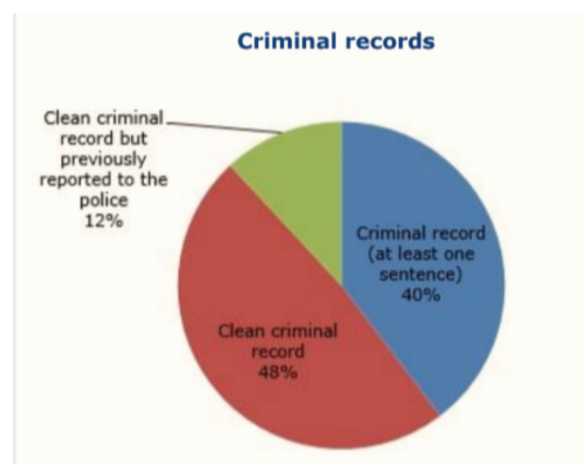
find work within the labor market. Based on the existing data provided individuals reviewed had an average of 1000 Euros a month; in cases where police seizure of luxury items such as smartphones, computers, tablets and video game consoles were found hidden income from illegal activities was a possibility.

## Criminality

Based on the existing data provided a review of 126 individuals was provided by the judicial courts, which concluded the following results, 40% had criminal records, 12% had clean records but were reported to the police, and 48%

had clean criminal records. “The most common convictions included violence, theft, fraud, drug-trafficking and traffic violations.

Of the 126 cases reviewed, sentences were given to 96 individuals, 22 had been sentenced to fixed prison terms (was not clear if they actually served jail time), 4 had spent more than 2 years in prison. Hecker makes the argument that, that although a significant number had contact with law enforcement, prisons do not seem to be the places of radicalization for the cases reviewed in this study. It was noted that the most serious terrorist offenders did spend time in French prisons.



## Funding Jihadist Activities

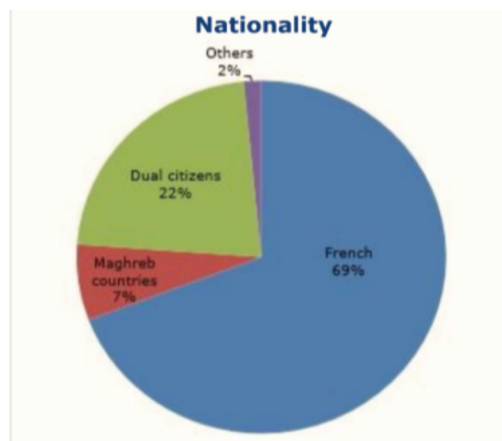
The study collected financing of terrorist activities of 59 individuals convicted for terrorism; the information concluded the following that 37% of individuals received money from jihadist networks, 47% from personal savings, 21% from crimes such as scams and theft, and 15% from family support (does not necessarily mean family knew where money was spent).

Findings also suggest that amounts generated from these sources ranged from several hundred to several thousand euros, indicating threats are from “low-cost jihadism” and does not need sophisticated financing.

## Nationality and Religion

In the sample of 137 people, data was provided on the nationality of 130 individuals, which is broken down as follows, 90 French citizens, 20 dual citizens (14 French-Moroccans, 10 French Algerians and 5 French Tunisians), 11 foreigners (3 Moroccans, 3 Algerians, 3 Tunisians, 1 Indian, and 1 Pakistani).

The data concludes, that much of threat faced in France is the result of “homegrown terrorists”, 69% of the individuals convicted were born and grew up in France.



Another important factor is the idea of “migration”. Out of the 137 cases, 136 individuals were reviewed in this sampling. The results concluded that 74% of convicted terrorists were born from Muslim families and only 26% were Muslim Converts.

## Quantitative Conclusions

Quantitative results would conclude that most jihadists reviewed had lower levels of education, suffered from unemployment or poor integration in the labor market, higher levels of criminal activity and had strong ties to the Maghreb or Sub-Saharan Africa.

## Qualitative Analysis

Although the quantitative analysis provided important insights, Hecker argues that qualitative

analysis is necessary in understanding the Jihadi profile in France. Hecker considers 4 main categories

- Biography
- Process of radicalization
- Issues concerning traits
- Intergenerational links.

## Biography

In this category, Hecker makes the argument that based on existing documentation in judicial records that there are significant commonalities, such as 1) troubled childhoods and homes, 2) lack religious education or commitment, and 3) psychiatric history.

### 1. Troubled Childhoods

Many of the convicted jihadists came from broken homes, suffered trauma or a family history of mental illness. Hecker gave over 20 examples of complex situations within the report, the following is a small sample of identified cases:

- Jameel B. described his father as a “Caid” (a criminal boss) who had spent several years in prison. He was placed in several homes.
- Youssef E. was frequently separated from his mother, who was hospitalized due to psychiatric illness.
- Sydney D. never knew his father. His mother, a drug addict, died when he was twelve. He was placed in homes and with foster families.
- Ibrahim O. never knew his father. His mother had seven children with different fathers. She was given a suspended prison sentence for child abuse.

In addition, to the review of the 137 cases, Hecker also engaged with professionals in child protection services working in the court system, who noted that among minors involved in terrorism that the death of close ones and sexual abuse were common.

This type of background provides a valid



understanding of what makes certain individuals vulnerable to radicalization, resulting in a noticeable correlation between trauma in early childhood and radicalization.

## 2. Religious Practice

Another important commonality is religious practice. Hecker argues, that many authors in the field argued that many of the radicals studied showed low levels of religious knowledge, particularly minors involved with jihadism. He makes the argument that the same is true for the cases reviewed for this study. Testimonies and psychiatric experts on different cases noted the lack of commitment and religious or political responsibility to Islam. Rather many of the people recruited were “simpletons” and lacked real religious education.

## 3. Psychiatric History

Based on the 137 cases, all of the individuals reviewed were ruled to be criminally responsible by psychiatric experts, no one in the sample was exempt from prosecution.

## 4. Process of Radicalization

1) Long process of radicalizations that can take months to several years, no such thing as overnight radicalization.

2) The internet alone is not sufficient for radicalization. Internet plays an important role for the following:

- Existing groups to reference religious texts and videos
- Criminal associations can be forged over the internet, people can meet online and be recruited face to face.
- Once an individual an group has been radicalized the internet serves as a means of communication.
- Internet can be used to plan an act or departure to jihadi zone.

3) Group dynamics play a significant role, and challenges the idea of “lone wolves, this is true for the reviewed 137 cases. Many of the individuals studied knew each other for long periods of time; many were childhood friends or family members.

## Trials, Prison, and the Issue of Relapse

The French judicial system has evolved greatly, specifically since it has been on the forefront of Jihadi attacks. Since 2015, the French government has taken steps to criminalize Jihadi activity, regardless of whether it happens in or outside of France. Prior to 2015, Jihadis could return to France and face light sentences like 4 to 4.5 years in prison. An individual could plead misguidance and remorse would be let off with a slap on the wrist, only to relapse and return to Jihadi zones and fight.

Today, sentences are severe and Jihadis can serve anywhere from 10 to life sentences in prison. The issue is becoming more important as returnee fighters come home to France, or are released from their prison sentences.

## Intergenerational Links

A significant element among convicted jihadists in France is intergenerational links. This phenomenon refers to relationships between older generations and vulnerable youth. Many of the cases reviewed, noted relationships with older who influenced and recruited youth. Many of these older figures, were jihadists. An example given, is a case linked to Syrian jihad, where poor neighborhood in Trappes became a recruiting ground for youth in a restaurant named Chicken Planet. The restaurant was visited by older figures who would try and covert or promote jihadi rhetoric.

Now more than ever, transgenerational links are vital, as many returnee jihadists have had children, who have had a radical education and have been exposed or experienced violence. What

will this mean in terms of future threats in France?

## Conclusions

Hecker argues, that although there is no “one-size fits all” profile for jihadists, there are trends that can be observed – for instance an immigrant family suffering from poverty, low education, unemployment, and criminal activities is more likely to be vulnerable to joining terrorism – but the majority of these profiles will not join terrorist groups.

The report aims to consider significant reoccurrences in jihadi profiles, in order to develop policies and strategies that target actions to prevent radicalizations, such as working on unemployment, low education and censoring online jihadi propaganda.

### Timeline of Terrorist Attacks on France

The following pages provide a timeline of attacks that have occurred in France between 2011 – 2017.

**2011**

**November 2, 2011: Paris, France , Offices of Charlie Hebdo firebombing**  
**Perpetrators: N/A**

**2012**

**March 11- 22, 2012: Toulouse, France, Ozar Hatorah Jewish School Shooting/ French Paratroopers**  
**Perpetrators: Mohammed Merah, French Citizen**

**2013**

**May 25, 2013: Paris, Stabbing of French Soldier**  
**Perpetrators: Alexander Dhussay, French Citizen and convert to Islam**

**2014**

**December 20, 2014: Joue les Tours, France – Stabbing of Police**  
**Perpetrators: Bertrand Nzohabonayo, “Bilal” French Burundi Citizen, convert to Islam**

**December 21, 2014: Dijon, France Vehicle Ramming**  
**Perpetrator: Nacer Ben K, French Citizen, hospitalized for mental disorders over 156 times.**

**December 22, 2014: Nantes, Vehicle Ramming**  
**Perpetrator: Sebastien Sarron, French Citizen, history of mental illness**

## 2015

January 7 2015 ,9-: Ile-de-France – “Charlie Hedbo Shooting

**Perpetrators: Said and Cherif Kouach, French Citizens, orphans**

February 3, 2014: Nice, France, Stabbing of Soldiers near Jewish community center and Jewish radio station.

**Perpetrator: Moussa Coulibaly, French Citizen, Malian Origin**

April 19, 2015: Villejuif, Shooting and thwarted church attack

**Perpetrator: Sid Ahmed Ghlam, Algerian National**

June 26, 2015, St. Quentin-Fallavier Beheading

**Perpetrator: Yassin Salhi, French Citizen**

August 21, 2015: Oignies, Train Shooting & Stabbing

**Perpetrator: Ayoub El Khazzn, Moroccan National**

November 13 2015 ,14-: Paris, Shooting & Suicide Bombing

**Perpetrators: Salah Abdeslam, Ibrahim Abdeslam, and Omar Ismaïl Mostefai, French Citizens**

## 2016

January 1, 2016: Valence, Vehicle Ramming into Guards protecting mosque.

**Perpetrators: French Citizen, Tunisian descent**

January 7, 2016: Paris, Shooting of Police Officers/Fake Bomb

**Perpetrators: Tarek Belgacem, Tunisian – EU Citizen via Romania**

June 13, 2016: Magnanville, Stabbing

**Perpetrators: Larossi Abballa, French Citizen – Moroccan Descent**

July 14, 2016, Nice, France, Bastille Day, Vehicle Ramming

**Perpetrators: Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, French Citizen, Tunisian**

July 26, 2016: Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, France Normandy Church Beheading

**Perpetrators: Adel Kermiche, French Citizen and Abdel Malik Petitjean, French Citizen – Convert to Islam**

2017

February 3, 2017, Paris, France, Carrousel du Louvre Shopping Mall Shooting of French Soldier

**Perpetrators: Abdullah Reda al-Hamamy, Egyptian National**

March 18, 2017, Paris, France, Ile-de-France, Orly International Airport

**Perpetrators: Ziyed Ben Belgacem, French Citizen**

March 23, 2018, Carcassonne and Trebe Shooting

**Perpetrators: Redouane Lakdim, French Citizen and Moroccan**

April 20, 2017, Paris France, Champs-Élysées Shooting

**Perpetrators: Karim Cheirfi, French Citizen**

June 6, 2017, Paris, France, Notre Dame Cathedral Hammer attack against police

**Perpetrators: Algerian National**

June 19, 2017, Paris, France, Vehicle Ramming and bombings into Convoy of Gendarmerie Vehicles on Champs-Élysées

**Perpetrators: Djaziri Adam Lotfi, Egyptian National**

August 9, 2017, Paris, France, Levallois-Perret Attack, vehicle ramming into soldiers

**Perpetrators: Hamou Benlatrèche, Algerian National**

October 1, 2017, Marseille, Paris, Knife stabbing of 2 women

**Perpetrators: Ahmed Hanachi, Tunisian Illegal Immigrant**



### Report Author: Marc Hecker

#### Director of Publications, Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri).

Marc Hecker holds a PhD in political science from University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. He graduated from the Institut d'Études Politiques of Strasbourg and holds a Masters (DEA) in International Relations from University Paris 1 Panthéon - Sorbonne. He also spent one academic year at Trinity College, Dublin.

He published several books: *La presse française et la première guerre du Golfe* (L'Harmattan, 2003), *La défense des intérêts de l'Etat d'Israël en France* (L'Harmattan, 2005), *War 2.0: Irregular Warfare in the Information Age* (Praeger, 2009 with Thomas Rid) and *Intifada française?* (Ellipses, 2012). His articles appeared in major journals (Policy Review, Internationale Politik, Commentaire, Etudes, etc.) and in newspapers (Le Monde, Le Figaro, Les Echos, Libération, etc.).

Dr Hecker is Ifri's Director of publications and Editor-in-Chief of *Politique étrangère*. He teaches a course on «terrorism and asymmetric warfare» at Sciences Po.

## About (Ifri)

### Ifri, a Leading French Think Tank on International Questions

Ifri is ranked 2nd most influential think tank in the world after Brookings Institution (USA) and is followed by Carnegie Endowment (USA), according to the University of Pennsylvania's Global Think Tank Report 2017\* which reviewed more than 7,000 think tanks from 182 countries.

Ifri is also ranked as the first think tank in Western Europe followed by Bruegel (Belgium) and Chatham House (United Kingdom).

The World Policy Conference (WPC), created and organized by Ifri, is ranked as the third «Best Think Tank Conference» after the Shangri-La Dialogue (Singapore) and ROME MED - Mediterranean Dialogues (Italy)."





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