

Firstly, it confirms that the system of international relations is deeply destabilized and harbors many risks and threats to international security. According to the authors of the report, this is caused by several reasons. Among them is the rise of new centers of industrial and military forces and the emergence of new powerful state and non-state actors, who are quick to seize new weapons and technologies, as well the weakening of multilateral governance mechanisms worldwide. Secondly, in this report, the French military leadership places the highest priority on Islamic terrorism (or, as it is repeatedly emphasized in the text, jihadist terrorism), considering it the primary threat to international security. Political correctness is thrown out the window!

Although this statement is cliché of itself, its appearance in one of the most important public documents of the French Ministry of Defense speaks volumes. If we ignore the Anti-Russian sentiments which deals with the alleged threats posed by Russia (which is defined in the report as one of France’s primary military rivals!), admittedly, for the first time since 2013 (back then, the previous issue of the Strategic Review was published), the text of the Review contains enough objective analyses of the state of affairs concerning the spread of the terrorist threat in Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It further says that deeper understanding of the gravity of the situation is finally coming to the leading military circles of Europe after their frenzied support of the ‘democratic’ revolutions in the Middle East.
Of course, from Paris, as well as from other European capitals, it is difficult to expect genuine recognition of their considerable share of responsibility for the chaos and permanent instability which spread like fire to these regions. The destabilization began as a result of the Arab Spring that of late 2010 – early 2011, the events either inspired directly by the European countries or strongly supported by them, including with military force (as it happened in Tunisia, Libya and covertly in Syria).

However, we can finally hear from the instigators that these color revolutions begin to directly (and quite negatively) influence the stability and security of European states, including France itself.

The authors of the report quite rightly speak about the long-term nature of terrorist threats. They acknowledge that even the imminent destruction of the pseudo-caliphate ISIS will not lead to their weakening or disappearance. It is difficult to disagree with their analysis that the jihadist ideology itself (called both Salafi and Wahhabi by different sources) has not died out and is still supported by young people in the most deprived segments of society in many Middle Eastern and North African countries. It is also difficult to argue with the fact that, after the defeat in the Levant countries, the jihadists will either go underground in their homelands or immigrate. In fact, they already are fleeing to Libya and the Sahara-Sahel region (Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania). They also seek haven in the countries of Eastern, Southern and Central Asia.

The statement that many terrorist organizations in African countries (such as Al-Shabab, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda) will clash, unite, change and spread across many states of the African continent is equally fair. They are expected to appear in the area from Somalia to Nigeria, weakening in some places and intensifying in others. New terrorist groups will also emerge. The battle with them will be long and difficult, the French experts rightly claim, especially as they explore new military technologies and weapons – drones, cryptography, modern communications, secret operations skills, WMD (chemical weapons), etc.

The proposed strategy of combating this evil on the African continent is based on known algorithms developed by the French government. First of all, it includes combining their military power in the framework of Operation Barkhane and the capabilities of the Sahel G5 (the aforementioned Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso) with the support of the EU to create a united force to fight terrorists and extremists. The report, of course, could not fail to mention the characteristic ideals of the European Union: the development of democracy in African countries and their economic recovery serving as a pill against terrorism. At the same time, it recognizes that Islam in sub-Saharan Africa defy the injustice of the incumbent authorities with their actions (previously, this insinuation was taboo in Europe).

The authors of the report also refer to the waves of migration that have swept over Europe as a threat to the continent, for which terrorist groups are partly responsible. Though their concerns are justified, the authors do not even offer to combat the immigration problem with forceful measures. They obviously understand that it would be wrong to combat jihadist Islam with solely military methods and present a broader approach, in which brute force is coupled with intelligence, security, justice, education and diplomatic measures (though even this will not be enough).

All in all, there is no point arguing with the many assessments and suggestions of the report. They reflect France’s view on the situation and are aimed at working out strategies to protect French national interests.

The highly biased perception of Russia’s role in the conflict is alarming and causes much discord. Condemning Russia for its ‘illegal annexation’ of Crimea, French experts refuse to recognize its role in the antiterrorist struggle. They purposefully neglect mentioning Russia’s successes in this field, considering all Russian endeavors in Syria merely attempts to uphold the current regime.

It seems that achieving complete objectivity will require the following steps from the authors of the report: recognizing the inability of France as well as other Western powers to defeat the terrorists and admitting Russia’s capability and great potential in the fight against terrorism. Many countries in the Middle East and Africa already realize this, having seen the effectiveness of Russia’s method of projecting force.

Defeating terrorism and its consequences (among them the influx of immigrants from Africa) is possible only if countries unite against the threat. The sooner this is understood in Paris, which seems to have been determined by Washington and its allies as one of the preferred channels for a dialogue between the West and Moscow, the sooner it will be possible to start developing a common strategy to combat terrorism and its various ugly manifestations, including those on the African continent.

**Pogos Anastasov, political analyst, Orientalist, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern**
Outlook."