Since the Madrid and London bombings, Europeans elsewhere—fearful that they may become the next targets of Islamist terrorism—are finally beginning to face the consequences of the long, unchecked growth of radical Islam on their continent. The July bombings in London, while having the distinction of being the first suicide attacks in Western Europe, were not the first time terrorists targeted a major European subway system. Ten years ago, a group linked to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé—GIA) unleashed a series of bombings on the Paris metro system. Since 1996, however, France has successfully avoided any major attack on its soil by an extremist Muslim group. This is due not to any lack of terrorist attempts—(only last September, France arrested nine members of a radical Islamist cell planning to attack the metro system)—but rather to the efficiency of the French counterterrorist services.¹

France is now home to between five to six million Muslims—the second largest religious group in France, and the largest Muslim population in any Western European country.² The majority of this very diverse population practices and believes in an apolitical, nonviolent Islam.³ A minority of them, however, are extremists. Islamist groups are actively operating in France today, spreading radical ideology and recruiting for future terrorist attacks on French soil and abroad.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of France’s Islamist groups, the evolving threats they have posed and continue to pose to French society, and the response of the French authorities to these threats. While the French Republic may boast an impressive counterterrorist record, it also pursues flawed and sometimes contradictory policies toward its Muslim communities that fail to address many of the underlying vulnerabilities in French society that radical Islamists seek to exploit. The October-November 2005 riots in the low-income, predominantly immigrant suburbs or cités on the
outskirts of Paris and other French cities illustrate just how explosive the situation in these areas has become.

**The Origins of Discontent**

To understand the evolution of radical Islam in France, it is important to understand the country’s history of Muslim immigration. Most of the immigrant workers that went to France in the 1950s and 1960s came from the former French colonies of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. They provided inexpensive labor, with the added benefit of being French-speaking due to France’s long colonial involvement in North Africa. These workers were not deeply religious—their religious practices reflected primarily received socio-cultural traditions—and they had no long-term plans to stay in France. Nevertheless, many of the Maghreb countries sent preachers unfamiliar with France and its values to serve the religious needs of the Muslim workers in their adopted country.⁴

In 1973, in response to economic difficulties, France dramatically reduced immigration, but a year later allowed legally settled immigrants to reunite with their families. This sudden change of policy led many migrant workers to abruptly decide to bring over their relatives and stay in France. This precipitated decision proved to be as traumatic for France’s migrants as for the French, who were equally ill-prepared. French society considered these immigrants to be inferior and treated them as second-class citizens. Sensitive French memories of a recently lost Algerian war, a defeat that deeply marks France to this day, only heightened their prejudice.

“With the Algerian war,” writes Benjamin Stora, a French authority on Algeria, “colonial racism starts its crossing of the Mediterranean.”⁵ The rampant racism in French society today manifests itself in various ways, such as the unofficial identity checks conducted by the police, often on the sole basis of délit de sale gueule, or “suspicion on the basis of a shady look.” A 2005 official report concluded that racial discrimination is widely practiced in the job market and goes largely unpunished.⁶ A man from the Maghreb, for example, whether he is a French citizen or not, is five times less likely to get a job than a white Frenchman. With very few exceptions, migrants and their offspring have not been economically or socially integrated into mainstream French culture.⁷ A more worrisome poll, released in late December 2005, revealed an increase in racist ideas and their acceptability to the French.⁸ (This latest opinion poll, however, might be tied to the violent urban riots of the previous month.) Meanwhile, a more positive aftermath of the unrest was a renewed debate on affirmative action (labeled “positive discrimination”), as well as the
questioning of a law passed by the National Assembly earlier last year compelling public schools to present French colonization in positive light.

In addition to racial bias, the immigrants faced a multitude of cultural shocks in their adopted country. The traditional model of the North African family was severely tested, and family dynamics changed radically. In numerous cases the father lost his “hegemonic position in the patriarchal edifice,” often because he was unemployed.9 New family structures, such as single-parent families, began to emerge and women assumed more active roles in family life.10 This gender division in adapting to life in France prompted many men to reassert their status by becoming “religious models” and adopting a more radicalized version of Islam than they had previously practiced.

In the 1980s, Arab youth organized a number of demonstrations to protest racism, most famously the “Marche des Beurs” (the “March of the Arabs”). These demonstrations produced few significant results, however, and their sponsoring organizations soon expired. More long-lived have been radical groups that followed the path of the Tablighi Jamaat, a neo-fundamentalist Islamic missionary group from India that established itself in France in the 1970s. This organization and others like it, many of them backed by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, advocate different versions of salafi Islam and have found an audience among France’s immigrant community.11

The Quest for Identity

The second and third generation of immigrants—those most profoundly affected by an identity crisis and most bereft of a sense of belonging to the Republic—are most directly involved in the growth of Islamism and radical Islam in France.12 While the first generation retains many of its past North African cultural references, the younger generations occupy the more challenging territory that lies between their parents’ and grandparents’ traditional culture and French modernity. These younger generations, raised for the most part in a secular France replete with prejudice, no longer see themselves as Algerians or Moroccans or Tunisians. Rather, they seek a more satisfying source of identity, often by embracing a universal Islamic identity that supersedes any specific ethnic or national identity. For many, the term “Arab,” which evokes their parents’ immigrant past, is rejected and replaced by “Muslim” or “Islamist.”

The fear such terminology invokes in mainstream French society, moreover, only serves to enhance its appeal among Arab youth.13 Many Arab youths in France openly admire Osama bin Laden, whom they consider a modern Muslim Robin Hood challenging the master of all oppressors, the Unit-
ed States. Radical, fundamentalist preachers are successful among young French Muslims because they directly address their questions and anxieties. Rejecting French institutions, the salafi movement attracts a growing crowd of followers by playing on their feelings of exclusion, sending clear and simple messages, and making extensive use of conspiracy theories.

An insightful study by the scholar Samir Amghar points out that becoming a “born-again Muslim” offers a more positive and gratifying self-image to the young Arab than the other two possibilities available to him in French society: being stigmatized as a delinquent by the mainstream society and the media, or being branded a “traitor” for attempting to adapt to French norms. Being a born-again Muslim allows a young man to be seen with respect by everyone in the cites. This phenomenon, however, is not limited to those born into Muslim families: The number of conversions to radical Islam in the suburbs is increasing among non-Muslims as well. Conversions often happen as a copycat phenomenon, especially among groups of youths. For instance, when one member of a group converts, the rest with whom he might share a background in petty crime or delinquency may sometimes convert out of solidarity or peer pressure, even though they may themselves have little predilection for religion to begin with. “Neighborhood solidarity” mutates into a “fraternity of old combatants.”

Converts reveal a greater tendency to adopt an extreme version of their new religion; they often desire to prove more dedication to the faith and to make more sacrifices. A significant number of French Muslim converts, moreover, have had various social and judicial problems before their conversion. A June 2005 report of the French intelligence services found that one-third of converts had previous problems with the police. The report also showed that almost one-half of converts were uneducated, as well as five times more likely to be unemployed than the rest of French society. In some cases, converts seem to be especially attracted to the jihad lifestyle: The so-called “Kelkal Group” and the “Roubaix Gang,” two terrorist cells from the 1990s, and the more recent Safé Bourada cell, all counted converts among its members. For born-again Muslims and converts alike, radical Islam offers a way out of poverty and the limited options of the cités, and it opens up a new romanticized world in which they assume the “idealized image of the international combatant.”

Jihadist movements aim to nurture a strong identification between young, dispossessed French Muslims and the worldwide mujahidin movement, their “global band of brothers.” Dr. Anne Speckhard, who studied the “Chechen cell” arrested in a Parisian suburb in 2002, has noted that cell members “strongly identified with the traumas of their...‘fictive kin’ living outside of Europe and
acted as terrorists within Europe on behalf of them.” The growth of this identity has been facilitated in recent years by the explosion of Islamist media outlets on the Internet and satellite TV. These resources have helped jihadists to use major international issues—for example, the War in Iraq—to radicalize and recruit young French and European Muslims. In December 2004, to help curb this phenomenon, the French government banned al-Manar, a television propaganda instrument for the Iranian-backed terrorist group Hezbollah that is fiercely anti-Semitic.

**The Recruiting Grounds**

France’s cités or banlieue—the low-income suburbs around major cities like Paris, Lille and Lyon—have become home to the majority of non-French ethnic populations as the previous native inhabitants have gradually moved out. Through the 1980s and 1990s, Arab youth increased the rate of petty crime, drug abuse and urban violence in these neighborhoods to such an extent that some became known as “lawless zones” (zones de non droit) where policemen were advised not to go.

Faced with the major social and security problems created by this situation—and in the absence of any traditional organization providing Arab youth with boundaries or purpose—municipal authorities began to rely on various local Islamist associations to help stop delinquency and drugs. In exchange, these groups were given official recognition. Many authorities later described such recognition as a “fundamental mistake” and emphasized “the perverse effects of that delegation of social control.”

According to the Christian preacher Christian Delorme, who had been an early supporter of Lyon’s Muslim Youth Association, that group triggered a “hardening of religious identities”—even though it and others like it, especially the neo-fundamentalist tablighi movement, had been instrumental in decreasing delinquency.

Other associations held to be nonprofit organizations according to a 1901 French law were nothing more than terrorist fronts.

Various French commissions have issued official reports about the volatile situation in the cités. These areas concern authorities both because of their lack of security and, more recently, because of their being a welcoming environment for the propagation of radical Islam, especially among the youth. A number of jihadists were indeed born in these neighborhoods, especially those around Lille, Paris and Lyon. Authorities tend to neglect, however, the economic challenges that the cités present. Olivier Roy, a French specialist on radical Islam, has described the willful blindness of the French government: “If the suburb is first of all a problem of Islam, then there is no social problem.
It is an old tradition of French social-democracy to use secularism to conceal the economic debate.” It is important to look at the cités not only from a security perspective, as the media and French officials do, but also from an economic perspective as Roy does.

The October-November 2005 riots around Paris and in other cities highlighted all the existing problems in the cités: unemployment, hatred for all French authorities (police, medical personnel and firefighters were all attacked during the riots), overpopulated subsidized housing, poor public services, and an unsafe environment. The recent rampage provided stark evidence of the explosive situation that has built up in the cités over the years. The riots caught the world by surprise and woke up the French government from its apathy, as various changes were proclaimed to come in a near future. Despite the fact that the riots did not in general bear a religious character, Pierre de Bousquet de Florian, the director of France’s domestic intelligence service (Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire—DST), commented that Islamists are in a position to draw upon and exploit the discontentment of those living in the suburbs.

A Multitude of Radical Islams

Radical Islam is not monolithic in France; significant political and cultural divisions are emerging between various radical movements. The well-established Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF), founded in 1983 and headquartered in a Parisian suburb, is beginning to lose some of its appeal among the youth. An Islamist movement linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, the UOIF recognizes the authority of the Qatari-based Egyptian Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who has justified suicide bombings or “martyrdom operations” against Israeli civilians and American forces in Iraq. Moreover, it has also lent support to Tariq Ramadan, a so-called “Muslim moderate” who is another apologist for attacks on American armed forces in Iraq. Among other setbacks, the UOIF did not do well in recent elections for the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM), the official Muslim representative body in France, losing a number of the seats it had held since 2003. The French scholar Farhad Khoroskhavar attributes part of UOIF’s declining popularity, in fact, to its very willingness to participate in the French democratic system. The UOIF’s political setbacks, however, did not diminish its longing for greater official recognition: it was the only Muslim organization that tried to take advantage of the riots by giving them a religious base in emitting a fatwa (religious edict) against the suburbs’ surge of violence. Importantly, their fatwa was neither acknowledged nor implemented by the rioters, confirming that the events were not religious in the first place.
While the UOIF continues to attract a more “elitist” audience drawn from the Muslim middle class and university students—and is seen as representing a “more bourgeois” Islam—it is largely absent from the cités. In these areas two radical groups, the salafis and the Tablighi Jamaat, vie for control of an “Islam of the poor.” The tabligh, which excludes politics from its doctrine, has waged a successful proselytizing campaign that appeals to a mostly older crowd (aged 30 and above). As Roy notes, even those who join neo-fundamentalist movements like the tabligh may not remain in them for long, because their practice is so rigorous and time-consuming. Furthermore, many ardent youth are deterred by the apolitical nature of the tabligh. This demographic tends to be drawn to the even more radical and political approach of the salafi, who reportedly often prey on tabligh members.

The competition between these groups makes the exact role of the tabligh in recruiting or nurturing jihadists very unclear, especially when former tabligh members become more radical. The latest counterterrorist operation in France points out the ambiguous role of tabligh in participating and waging jihad. While some tabligh centers may be used by anonymous terrorist operatives simply to take advantage of the group’s well-recognized apolitical line, selected tabligh believers are indeed sent to attend Pakistani madrasas—known by the intelligence community to be safe havens for terrorists—in order to deepen their religious knowledge. Police sources also indicate that at these madrassas a different kind of selection takes place, between those who will pursue “intellectual” and “operational” vocations. Those in the latter category may be sent to training camps, following the paths of French convert Hervé Djamel Loiseau, who was found frozen to death in Afghanistan, or American convert John Walker Lindh, arrested in 2001 while fighting American and the Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the salafi presence in the cités is mostly influential among the 15-to-30-year-olds who are unemployed or university dropouts, and who respond to the salafi claim that Islam represents a rebuke to the exclusionary nature of French society. The salafi success is also dependent on the charisma of its leaders, who are often trained in Saudi Arabia and are able to provide answers to young men’s search for identity. The salafi preachers, who operate at every hour of the day, conduct a very efficient and targeted recruiting—for example, by offering combat sports classes to an impetuous youth. According to a French intelligence report, the number of salafi conversions in five years has equaled the number obtained by the tabligh in twenty five years. The salafi rely primarily on the influence of the environment—of friends and family ties—to win converts, while the tabligh win converts mainly through proselytizing.
Yet another fertile field for the growth of radical Islam is found in the French prison system, with its harsh living conditions and large Muslim population. The already-alienated inmates are easily drawn to an ideology that rejects mainstream society and blames it for their woes. Few imams are allowed into the prisons, moreover, because French officials screen them carefully to prevent an influx of potential militants.\textsuperscript{42} But this strategy can backfire. According to Pierre Raffin, director of La Santé detention center, self-proclaimed “authorities” in Islam among the prisoners fill the spiritual vacuum created by the absence of state-approved imams.\textsuperscript{43} And while authorities supposedly control the attempts of radical Islamists to recruit in jail, they acknowledge the influence of these individuals and sometimes broker deals with them to ease tensions within the prisons.\textsuperscript{44} Their “control” has clearly been inadequate; the arrest of the terrorist Safé Bourada revealed that he had indeed recruited other members of his cell while he was in jail. The dismantling of another terrorist cell late last year further confirmed that jails provide an ideal ground for jihadists, as three men among the arrested worked in the same prison.\textsuperscript{45} This is a problem facing other Western countries as well, as shown by a similar case in a California prison in the summer of 2005.\textsuperscript{46}

At the very heart of the struggle for Muslim souls is not the jail, but the mosque. Here moderate and radical imams vie for control—whether to use mosque funds for traditional religious purposes or to allow the mosque to become a recruiting and proselytizing center for radical Islam. Because the zakat—the obligation to give alms which compose one of Islam’s five pillars—is not officially controlled, the misappropriation of financial resources is always a possibility. In the late 1990s, for instance, five million French francs collected from the zakat were found at the home of an imam active in a tabligh Parisian mosque. More recently, significant money transfers were discovered on the bank account of one of the arrested men who worked in a detention center, and who also preached at a local tabligh mosque.\textsuperscript{47}

An undercover journalist reporting on the activities of the radical Karim Bourti has shed light on some extensive financial abuses occurring in and near mosques.\textsuperscript{48} Bourti—a charismatic recruiter who claimed to have converted several jihadists, including Loiseau and Brahim Yadel, a man previously held at Guantanamo—collected money in and outside mosques. He then used these funds to support his colleagues Boualem Bensaid and Smain Ait Ali Belkacem, who are both serving life sentences for their involvement in the 1995 Paris metro bombings. Thanks in part to this money, Belkacem is still able to maintain and control a group of followers in jail.\textsuperscript{49}

Radicals make regular attempts to take over control of mosques. They
usually fail, however, because of the prompt intervention of police, who are tipped off by incumbent imams or other Muslim informants. When imams openly preach radical ideas to community members, the police move expeditiously: they warn the mosque rector and, if the warning goes unheeded, they expel the radical imam from the mosque. Then, in accordance with the government’s “zero tolerance” policy, they deport him from France. Several imams from Algeria, Turkey, and Iraq have already been deported, including the Algerian-born imam Abdelkader Bouziane of Lyon, who was expelled in 2004 for advocating, among other things, stoning and wife-beating.

**Targeting France and Beyond**

In a videotape released after his arrest last November in Pakistan, the Syrian Abu Musab al-Suri, aka Mustafa Setmarian Nasar, proclaimed that it “is our legitimate right to strike at France because we are at war with that country.” Al-Suri, sometimes called the “red head,” is suspected of involvement in the London and Madrid bombings, and is connected to the Algerian GIA. Today, France breeds two kinds of terrorists: those who plan to perpetrate attacks in France, and French nationals who target foreign countries. With the internationalization of jihad, the nature and targets of terrorism have evolved from the Iranian-sponsored attacks of the 1980s to a more recent Sunni radical transnational threat.

In 1985 and 1986, bombs rocked such famous Parisian tourist sites as the Champs Elysées and large department stores at the Galeries Lafayette and Marks & Spencer. French counterterrorist services eventually tracked down the perpetrators of the attacks to the Fouad Ali Saleh group, a cell of Middle Easterners and North Africans residing in France. While much about this group remains unknown, it is clear that the patron of the attacks was Iran.

The next terror wave in France took place in the early 1990s and was closely intertwined with the legislative elections in Algeria. The Islamist Salvation Front (FIS), which was favored to win those elections, was prevented from attaining power by a government-organized coup that declared martial law and outlawed the Islamist party. France supported the coup. In its wake, the GIA, comprised of Arab veterans of the 1980s Afghan jihad, swiftly gathered various Algerian dissident groups under its umbrella. It soon called for the departure of foreigners from Algeria, and started kidnapping and killing foreign hostages, as well as countless Algerian civilians.

Following the kidnapping of French diplomats in 1993, French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua launched “Operation Chrysanthemum” which aimed to round up Algerian Islamist sympathizers who had come to France.
and Europe after the 1991 coup and gathered in the Algerian Brotherhood in France (FAF), a hotbed of the FIS. The subsequent arrests included important radicals involved with the network of Mohammed and Brahim Chalabi, which supplied the radical vigilantes in Algeria with weapons, intelligence and fake identification papers. These 1994 arrests enabled French authorities to uncover various links between Algerian organizations, NGOs active in France—such as the Association Educative des Musulmans de France, set up by the Chalabi brothers—and their criminal and terrorist activities.

The GIA responded quickly in December 1994 by hijacking an Air France airplane departing from Algiers for Paris via Marseille. The French police raided the plane on the ground in Marseille, thereby thwarting the hijackers’ plan to crash the plane into the Eiffel Tower. They also arrested more Algerian terrorists, but still failed to disrupt some of their networks, notably in Lyon, home of the terrorist cell primarily responsible for the attacks in the French capital in the following summer. In early July 1995, the assassination of FIS founder Imam Abdelbaki Sahraoui (who worked at a Parisian mosque) provoked a series of bombings targeting French civilians that began a fortnight later. These attacks included the famous 1995 bombings of the Parisian metro stations at Saint Michel and Blanche, and were carried out in the name of the GIA by the French-Algerian Khaled Kelkal, a man who had been recruited by Safé Bourada.

International jihadists made their first appearance in France in 1996 when a violent group of thugs known as the “Roubaix gang,” which was famous for committing armed robberies with heavy artillery, booby-trapped a car before a summit of the G7. The police defused the bomb and, during a gun battle, killed most of the gang members—members who had grown up in a suburb of Lille and included converts and the sons of immigrants. Their cell leader, the former medical student Christophe Caze, had gained experience in jihadist paramilitary activities during the war in Bosnia, where he also established contacts with various radicals. One of them was Fateh Kamel, who was discovered because of information collected on Caze. The Canadian-based Kamel recruited Ahmed Ressam, who was later arrested in 1999 at the U.S.-Canada border, and was convicted in the United States of possession of fifty kilograms of explosives intended for an attack on the Los Angeles International Airport.

It is now clear that the nature of the terror threat in France has changed since the mid-1990s. Groups acting on behalf of countries and/or nationalist claims have been replaced by ones promoting global jihad. Their weapons have also evolved, from the homemade bombs of 1986 to more unconventional tools of destruction. During arrests made in 2002 in Vénissieux, a
suburb of Lyon, for example, traces of ricin were found. That same year, two groups of men were arrested in the Parisian suburbs of La Courneuve and Romainville as they planned an attack, most likely a chemical strike against Russian interests in Paris.

Over the past decade, numerous arrests have confirmed the international thrust of the new generation of terrorists. In 1998, Algerian radicals were discovered to be planning an attack on the eve of the World Cup. In 2000, another Algerian cell calling itself the “Non-Aligned Mujahidin” and close to al-Qaeda was dismantled in Frankfurt as it intended to strike a famous Christmas market in the area. A year later, six men linked to al-Qaeda, including their French-Algerian leader Djamel Beghal, were arrested while planning a suicide car-bombing against the American embassy in Paris ordered by the senior al-Qaeda leader Abu Zubayda.

The dismantling of the terrorist cell led by Safé Bourada illustrates the threat that France still faces. In September 2005, after two and a half years of surveillance, Bourada and other members were arrested near Paris as they were planning to bomb three targets: the Parisian metro, the headquarters of the French security services, and an airport (recovered evidence did not specify Charles de Gaulle or Orly airport). Three of the members of Bourada’s cell frequented the same mosque, and one of them, Mohammed Benyamina, had worked as a local halal butcher. Benyamina had previously been arrested in Algiers, and Algerian authorities had informed the French, as they believed Benyamina had visited Algeria to establish relations with the Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), a Salafist offshoot of the GIA created in the late 1990s with close ties to al-Qaeda. Algerian officials also thought that Benyamina may have tried to contact Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s operatives in Iraq during a prior stop in Syria. Ultimately, many consider the GSPC to be the most likely perpetrator of the next attacks in France.

Ansar al-Fath (Partisans of Victory) was created by the charismatic Bourada. In 1995, he had been arrested and imprisoned for his involvement in the metro bombings. Bourada had recruited the main perpetrator of the attacks, Khaled Kelkal, and helped fellow planners Ali Touchent (later killed in Algeria in 1997), Boualem Bensaid and Smain Ait Ali Belkacem, as well as the group’s financier, London-based Rachid Ramda, who was only recently extradited by Britain. While in jail, Bourada also recruited some of his fellow inmates, and then in 2003, after his release, went to Cairo for one year to learn Arabic and deepen his knowledge of the Quran. On his way back to France, he stopped in Turkey, where he, too, is suspected to have sought to establish contacts with Zarqawi’s men. Other members of Bourada’s cell,
including Kaci Ouarab, were in Lebanon earlier this year. Ouarab is thought to have undergone training in Lebanon in weapons and explosives—knowledge that he seems to have later shared with two other cell members, both of whom were Muslim converts from Orleans who met Bourada in jail.\textsuperscript{58}

Ansar al-Fath has pledged its allegiance to Abdelmalek Droukdal, the new emir of the GSPC who embraces Zarqawi and the jihad in Iraq (Droukdal applauded the slaying of two Algerian diplomats in Iraq.) Last September, a GSPC communiqué on the Internet denounced France as its “No. 1 enemy.”\textsuperscript{59} A recent French counterterrorist report expressed concern over the latest efforts by North African radical groups to work closely with one another.\textsuperscript{60} In the past months, several men suspected of being sent by Zarqawi to establish contacts with the GSPC were arrested in Algeria. French Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy also recently mentioned indirect links between the GSPC and Zarqawi’s organization.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{French Jihadists Abroad}

Many French jihadists have acquired their training and experience in foreign countries. Though not all of these militants return to France, those who do come back pose a greater danger after passing through terror camps and establishing connections abroad. French jihadists have fought in conflicts in Bosnia, Kashmir, Chechnya and, from the Soviet departure in 1992 to as late as 2001, in Afghanistan. In fact, dozens of French jihadists went through training in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan—far more than the seven French citizens arrested there by America and held at Guantanamo Bay.\textsuperscript{62}

Before the bombings of July 2005, London provided another favorite gateway to jihad. French-Algerian reporter Mohammed Sifaoui infiltrated a cell of radicals in France in 2000, and testified to their many links to Islamist radicals in “Londonistan.” French Algerian Omar Saiki, convicted in France in the 1998 plot to attack the World Cup, went to Abu Hamza’s Finsbury Park Mosque in London after serving his prison sentence and being stripped of his French nationality. From there, he stayed in contact with radicals on the other side of the Channel, and was caught on tape claiming to represent the GSPC in France.

Other potential French jihadists did not even need to travel as far as London. They benefited from a crash course in jihad at terror camps operating throughout France from the mid-1990s until 2002. When the French terror suspect Ibrahim Keita was arrested, he revealed that he and others had set up camps in the forests of Fontainebleau, Normandy, the Alps and elsewhere. Keita and others—most of them veterans of the Afghan jihad—are accused of involvement in the killing of the Afghan rebel leader Ahmed Shah Massoud in Afghanistan on
September 9, 2001. One of the alleged organizers of the French camps, Brah- him Yadel, was detained at Guantanamo before being extradited to France.

The 2001 arrest of the English-born “shoe bomber” Richard Reid on a plane taking off from Paris led to another recent series of arrests in France—arrests that again revealed the international character of terrorist networks. Last May, Ghulam Mustapha Rama, leader of the Pakistani association Chemin Droit, was charged with setting up a cell to send recruits to terrorist training camps in Pakistan. Rama preached at a mosque in Saint-Denis that was financed by the Saudi-based Al Haramain charity, and was thought to be the local contact for the Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar e-Toyba. Authorities linked Rama and two of his recruits to Richard Reid, even though no direct relation could be established in court.

In January 2005, a French cell that recruited for the Iraqi insurgency was dismantled. The leader of the cell was 23-year-old Farid Benyettou, who benefited from the reputation of his brother-in-law, a GSPC member who was arrested in the World Cup plot and expelled to Algeria in 2004. Benyettou is suspected of having recruited at least seven people at a Parisian mosque for the Iraqi jihad.

France’s success in thwarting terrorists on its own territory has not always extended to French terrorists abroad. A Lyon-area resident, Nizar Nouar, perpetrated the 2002 Djerba synagogue bombing attack claimed by al-Qaeda. So far, seven Frenchmen have died in Iraq, two of them in suicide attacks. The most famous French terrorist abroad remains Zacharias Moussaoui, the so-called “twentieth 9/11 hijacker,” who was arrested on a French tip and convicted in the United States in 2001. In addition to Moussaoui, other French terrorists have also been captured abroad. In Morocco, French convert Robert Richard Antoine Pierre, nicknamed “the Emir with Blue Eyes,” was arrested in 2003 on charges of organizing and training cells to attack key sites in Morocco. Meanwhile, Australian authorities apprehended the French Caribbean convert Willie Brigitte, accusing him of planning to attack Australian power plants either for al-Qaeda or Lashkar-e-Toyba.

The Changing Face of Terror

French police generally believe that those who are planning terrorist attacks against France are unlikely to recruit delinquents with police records. Rather, French authorities believe Islamist radicals will aim to recruit operatives with a clean past in order minimize their contact with the rest of the cell. Indeed, the arrests of Bourada and his group demonstrate the increasing care terrorists are taking to assign each cell member discrete tasks.
In the founding document of *Ansar al-Fath*, Bourada stipulated not only the group’s goals, but also the responsibilities of each member, which included helping their imprisoned comrades, tactics for derailing police surveillance, and supporting their “brothers” waging the jihad abroad. In addition, individual member were assigned very specific tasks in which they operated alone. For example, to fulfill his “public relations” operation in Algeria (and perhaps Syria), Benyamina stopped attending the group’s meetings for some time so as to attract as little police attention as possible.

Many French jihadists would be quite difficult to profile. Ranging in age from their teens to late thirties, they do not all fit the stereotype of poor, illiterate men marginalized from society. While some chose jihad after failing in their professions or becoming disenchanted with their options for the future, many are quite well educated. Bourada was once a university student; Daoudi of the Beghal cell, a computer scientist; Caze, a medical student; and Ali Touchent, the Algerian organizer of the 1995 attacks, an architecture student. Moreover, while the French jihadist often does belong to the second or third generation of North African immigrants, that is not always the case. Since their earliest days, the jihadist ranks in France have included a number of European converts. And as the counterterrorist French judge Jean-Louis Bruguiere has said, authorities are increasingly concerned that “light-skinned converts” and women may become recruiting targets for al-Qaeda. This concern has since been proven real with the first female European convert-turned-human bomb in Iraq last December. A man was later arrested in France in connection with the woman’s deadly mission.

Most jihadists undergo profound personal changes before disappearing into the movement. Cutting family ties is often one step along the path of radicalization, as the cases of both Khaled Kelkal and Zacharias Moussaoui demonstrate. Lionel Dumont, recently convicted for his involvement in the so-called “Roubaix Gang,” was described by a family member as having “deeply changed…becoming weirder, more secretive.” For others, the process is even more precipitous and leads very quickly to jihad abroad—especially in Iraq. For example, Mohammed A., a suspected French citizen fighting in Iraq, was a young delinquent in France who sought out Benyettou as a mentor. Within two weeks he became a radical and then convinced his father to let him go to Syria to study. Mohammed’s whereabouts are currently unknown. Other recruits from his neighborhood have reportedly died in Iraq.

According to head of the *Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire* (DST), Mr. de Bousquet de Florian, jihad “first-timers”—such as the Afghan and the Bosnian alumni—still constitute a danger and continue dominating the ranks
of the French jihadists. He added, however, that the new generation of jihadists tends to be “younger, more frustrated but more engaged and radicalized.” He cited as evidence the participation of French citizens in insurgent attacks against Americans and Iraqis in Iraq. Currently, the exact whereabouts of at least a dozen French citizens in Iraq are unknown.

Counterterrorism Made in France

France currently holds one of the best counterterrorism records in the world. Based on its early experience in combating both national and international terrorism, it has adopted policies that effectively address both imminent and long-term threats. The country’s success can be attributed to the cooperation between its judiciary and police in making preventative arrests, its ability to gather qualitative human intelligence, its efficient international cooperation, and the increasing enforcement of its “zero-tolerance” policy.

France began to shape its legal arsenal following the 1986 Champs Elysées and department store attacks. After the attacks, an antiterrorism law directed at the “association of criminals in relation with a terrorist enterprise” was enacted and, a decade later, strengthened by an additional piece of legislation establishing that “conspiracy to commit to terrorism was itself a crime.” In 2004, another law, known as the “Perben Law II,” was passed to address problems arising from the evolution of criminal behavior. These laws grant significant power to a small group of magistrates who specialize in terrorism. Cases involving terrorist activities are centralized in the Court of Paris, and the examining magistrate manages the investigation through a variety of means, including indictments, house searches and phone taps. As Jean-Louis Bruguière has noted, the magistrate “plays a leading role in France in the fight against terrorism.”

The collaboration and trust between various French agencies also contribute to the success of the counterterrorist system. Though their work sometimes overlaps or operates on parallel tracks, the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure, the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST) and the Renseignements Généraux (RG), along with police and judicial bodies, have produced positive results. The two main services involved in counterterrorism—the DST and the Direction Centrale des Renseignements Généraux (DCRG)—could potentially become even more efficient if they were merged.

To empower French police and judicial authorities, the French Parliament passed an anti-terrorism bill in late December 2005. This additional law, first introduced by Minister Sarkozy last September, constitutes the
eighth legal counterterrorist enactment of the last decade. The bill mainly applies to three main fields: interrogation, counterterrorist surveillance, and jail sentencing.

Other parts of the bill facilitate police access to personal data, such as license plates, credit cards and identity cards. Phone companies and Internet cafés will have to keep computer data information for one year, an initiative to be applied among all European Union members. Police will keep tab on citizens traveling to certain countries known for their links to radical Islam, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan and Iraq. Finally, a provision inspired by the British after the London bombings greatly increases video-surveillance in public spaces, such as airports and train stations, as well as radical mosques and bookstores. While all these proposals are criticized by human rights organizations as damaging to civil liberties, a substantial majority of the French public supports giving up some of their liberties in exchange for greater security.

The French police already have access to a formidable amount of intelligence gathered by a small network of informants in the cités and the radical mosques. What France lacks in the funds and technology available in the United States, it makes up for it through this human intelligence. A month before the 9/11 attacks, for example, the French alerted American authorities to the suspicious activities of one of its citizens, Zacharias Moussaoui, who was subsequently arrested. French intelligence also tipped off other countries about two suspicious individuals in Spain and England—men who eventually became involved in, respectively, the Madrid and the London bombings. Even when France’s foreign policy puts it at odds with the United States, its counterterrorism operations fully cooperate with the Americans. Last summer the Washington Post revealed the existence of “Alliance Base,” a secret counterterrorism center based in Paris where exchanges between the two countries take place. The issuing of international warrants, such as the one leading to the recent arrest of Djamel Beghal in Dubai, is another example of France’s commitment to international cooperation.

**Foreign Money and Foreign Teachers**

The French republican notion of the modern nation-state places secularism at the heart of the public sphere and draws distinct lines between the public and private, secular and religious domains. A 1905 law separating church and state prohibits the government from getting “involved in the internal organization of churches.” However, numerous loopholes allowed the French state to provide some funding for religious places, which it did for the Mosque of Paris, established in the mid-1920s.
Today, most of the financial support for French mosques comes from foreign countries. Both Algeria and Morocco have used their sponsorship of Islamic institutions in France to influence and keep an eye on their overseas citizens, and have battled each other for power over the communities settled in France. Others countries, such as the Gulf States, have gained influence even though very few of their citizens have settled in France. Through its missionary activities, Saudi Arabia has been responsible for spreading its radical vision of Islam, Wahhabism, among the Muslim Arabs of France. The rapid spread of the salafi movement has also been made possible by generous Saudi donations and has been propagated by Saudi-trained preachers. Those who have studied in Saudi Arabia confirm the influence of that country’s radical teachings. France accepted Saudi religious and financial sponsorship both because of the law of 1905 and also because of the strong financial and economic relationships between the two countries. Before 9/11, moreover, Wahhabism was seen as a defense against the “radicalisms of the era, like Iranian Islamism, Arab nationalism or communism.”

That thinking changed on September 11, 2001. Several Saudi charities throughout the world have been closed for financing terrorist activities or preaching jihad. These include the Al Haramain Foundation, the International Islamic Relief Foundation (IIRO), and the Benevolence International Foundation. In 2002, France also shut down the Saudi Global Relief Foundation (Fondation Secours Mondial), which was supervised by the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs. However, another charity blacklisted by numerous Western countries, the Hamas-affiliated fund called the Comité de Bienfaisance et de Soutien aux Palestiniens (Committee of Benevolence and Support for Palestinians) continues to function in France despite its direct involvement with terrorist activities in the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

Foreign countries have also managed to circumvent the 1905 law when the French public primary school system introduced programs to promote immigrant cultures and to teach immigrant children their native languages. Bilateral agreements enabled countries like Algeria to send teachers to France who reportedly, in several cases, preached politics and religion in the classroom in defiance of French law. Over the last few years, official French commissions have recommended reforming and even revoking these arrangements. The commissions concluded that continuing these programs posed a threat to integration and also raised security concerns.

France has also begun to focus on improving the transparency of Islamic financial networks. In March 2005, then Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of the Fondation Pour les Oeuvres de l’Islam
de France, a public foundation whose purpose will be to openly channel and monitor all financial transactions for mosques.\textsuperscript{96} Authorities are also studying the two-fold financing of radical Islam in France: the “macro” financing that comes mainly from French ex-colonies and Middle Eastern states, and the “micro” financing of radical jihadists that relies on such illegal activities as counterfeiting designer clothes and accessories (a Moroccan specialty), falsifying official documents, and trafficking in drugs and arms. The well-known connection between criminal activity and terrorism was on display in 2005, when two members of the Bourada cell were arrested as they attempted to steal money from a prostitute. French police revealed that some of the men arrested in December 2005 had committed armed robberies. These men, accused by Minister Sarkozy of indirect links with Zarqawi, also had connections to Bourada’s cell, as well as with the so-called “Frankfurt group.”\textsuperscript{97}

A financial system used to support jailed terrorists was also brought to light recently. The radical recruiter Bourti sent money to his convicted friend Belkacem that helped him win a group of admirers in prison. According to police sources, a great part of the money sent to his jail is collected during the zakat in mosques; the donors are frequently unaware of the final destination of the money.\textsuperscript{98} One must keep in mind that terrorism is relatively inexpensive; the approximate cost of the 1995 metro attacks was less than 100,000 French francs.

Deportation is another tool the French employ in their battle against terrorism. Over the last few years, in accordance with its “zero tolerance” policy, France has expelled more than two dozen imams who fueled anti-Western feeling with inflammatory rhetoric. Shortly after the London bombings, Interior Minister Sarkozy promised an even greater effort on “tracking radical elements” and taking action against radical preachers—expelling them to their birth country and stripping them of the French nationality in some cases.\textsuperscript{99} Recently, the British, Dutch, and Italians have taken similar actions.

French officials have focused on radical imams, monitoring their sermons on a weekly basis. In recent years, officials have also closed down a number of radical and salafist mosques.\textsuperscript{100} More informal methods of spreading radical Islam, such as underground meetings and the use of the Internet and cassettes, now pose a new problem, and one less easy to monitor than preachers.\textsuperscript{101} But the French government can—and indeed has—taken steps to reduce the threat from radical foreign imams. In 2005, it instituted a program both to boost the number of French-trained imams and to instruct them on the values of the French Republic.\textsuperscript{102} As of 2004, however, the majority of imams in France were foreigners, many of whom did not even speak French.\textsuperscript{103}
France has tried to promote moderate Islam in other ways as well. To make up for Sunni Islam’s lack of official representation in France, the government helped set up the first representative body of Muslims in France, the aforementioned CFCM, which held its first elections in 2003. However, the French government demonstrated little confidence in France’s moderate Muslims when it passed legislation in 2004 banning the headscarf inside public schools. Instead of appealing to those moderate French Muslims who had supported the state’s decision, a French delegation sought the blessing of a rather dubious foreign authority: Shaykh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi of Cairo’s al-Azhar University, famous for his fatwas condoning suicide bombing in Israel and Iraq.

**The Next Step**

Despite the success of French counterterrorism efforts in preventing attacks on French soil, the country still faces a serious threat today emanating from radical jihadist Islam, which adds recruits to its ranks every day by exploiting, among other things, the identity crisis characteristic of Arab youth born in France. These younger generations have replaced the national identification of their parents’ homelands with a boundless Islamic identity, free of physical frontiers. The radical salafi version of Islam is seen as giving this youth a sense of purpose, especially in the cités where socio-economic problems have hindered the development of any alternatives.

To counteract this alienation from mainstream society, authorities need to launch a campaign in the Arab immigrant community to assist families who see radical changes in their offspring and would like to take action against it. France also needs to address problems generated by its own laws—laws that affect how it handles the challenges posed by a large expatriate Muslim community with foreign attachments. As discussed earlier, foreign actors in the religious and cultural life of the French Muslim community have played a large role in the development of radical, particularly salafi Islam. By keeping its hands out of the religious sphere, the French government inadvertently has created a vacuum for foreign actors to step in. Its contradictory decisions regarding radical groups active in France produce other difficulties as well.

While the government has tried to promote a “French Islam” through the creation of, for example, the CFCM, they have also undercut such efforts by turning to well-known radicals such as Shaykh Tantawi for support. And while the government has banned some charities such as the Fondation Secours Mondial for their links to terrorist activities, it has failed to take any action against the Hamas-affiliated Comité de Bienfaisance et de Soutien aux Palestiniens.
Moreover, the French government has expelled radical preachers, while it has continued school programs that allow foreign teachers to undermine French Republican principles in the classroom. These actions send mixed messages to France’s Muslims that carry a strong odor of unfairness, and that encourage rather than deter those who seek to radicalize France’s Muslims.

It is essential that French authorities recognize and assess the complex psychological, social and economic factors contributing to the growth of radical Islam in its various forms. The attraction radical Islam holds for “up-rooted” young Arabs has combined with France’s failure to improve the lives of its poor Muslim populations to create a lethal mix. Only by addressing the various ingredients of this mix will the state be able to act effectively. It must augment its successful counterterrorism measures with actions that help to promote the participation of France’s majority moderate Muslims in the life of their adopted country.

Notes


2 One should keep in mind how difficult it is to determine the exact number of Muslims in France (and the exact number of extremists); one can deal only with approximate figures, as French law forbids any census based on religion. The French Haut Conseil a L’Intégration (HCI) agrees that there are approximately (more than) four million Muslims. See Rapport du Haut Conseil à l’Intégration, *Islam in the Republic*, November 2000, p. 26.

3 French Muslims have diverse origins—from North Africa stretching to Asia—and practice their religion in very different ways. It is, therefore, difficult to speak of a French Muslim community as if it were united; it is more accurate to speak of a mosaic of Muslim identities in the French religious landscape.


8 Le Monde, July 13, 2005.

9 Higher rates of unemployment among Muslims, compared to other religious groups, make this segment of the French population more subject to the difficulties of unemployment and its consequences.

It should be noted that Salafism is composed of several branches, some which are non-violent and are only concerned with the purity of its members. On the other end of the salafi spectrum, groups such as Egyptian Takfir, Algerian GIA and GSPC represent its most violent form.

This explanation is advanced by Olivier Roy, who adds that the identity crisis is common to modern westernized societies and not specific to the Muslim communities, in both L’Islam Mondialisé (Editions du Seuil, 2004) and La Laïcité dans l’Islam (Editions Stock, 2005).


Roy, Islam Mondialisé, pp. 218-9

The term was coined by Olivier Roy.

See Amghar, “Islam de France.”


Ibid.


Secretary of State to Durable Development Mrs. Tokia Saifi commented on the “fundamental mistake made by the officials” by handing “the keys of the neighborhood to Islamists” in exchange for a return to quiet, such the cessation of setting cars in fire. Christophe Deloire and Christophe Dubois, Les Islamistes Sont Déjà Là, Enquête sur une Guerre Secrète (Albin Michel, 2004), p.97. See also L’Express, November 21, 2002.


Ternisien, La France des Mosquées, p. 187.


The Roubaix gang was headquartered in a suburb of Lille, and was composed of young delinquents who were also part of an Islamic movement (Roy, Islam Mondialisé, p. 211). Young French jihadists from la Courneuve, a suburb of Paris, committed attacks in Marrakech, Morocco in 1994 (Ibid., p. 210). In the Lyon suburbs several counterterrorist actions took place, notably against the Algerian imam Benchellali and his entourage for their connections to the Chechen rebels, while his son Mourad was arrested in Afghanistan and held by the Americans at Guantanamo Bay.


Valeurs Actuelles, November 18, 2005.


33 Ibid.


36 For instance, Hervé Terrel in *Exils et Royaumes* noted that two *tabligh* attendees were involved in the 1986 bombings committed in Paris by the Fuad Ali Saleh group. In 1994 two other ex-*tablighis* conducted a terror attack in Marrakech, Morocco (*Le Monde*, September 26, 2001).


38 Personal interview, 36.

39 Amghar, “Islam de France,” pp. 18-26


41 Ibid., p. 234. The screening of imams by French authorities is the result of the cautionary tale of the Kelkal case. Khaled Kelkal, who was chiefly responsible for the Paris bombings in the mid-1990s, was re-Islamized in jail. See also Ternisien, *La France des Mosquées*, p. 102.

42 Stasi Commission, pp. 42, 61.


44 *Le Monde*, November 29, 2005

45 In August 2005 a synagogue and a military center based in Los Angeles were to be the targets of a thwarted terror attack. The terrorists met in jail and converted to their new religion, jihadism


48 Personal interview.

49 *Le Figaro*, December 8, 2005; see also *Le Monde*, December 5, 2005.


55 Other locations seem to have been potential targets for the Frankfurt group, including a synagogue or a church.

56 The French researcher Ali Laïdi added that the GSPC was “created at the demand of al-Qaëda associates,” who were distrustful of the GIA because of its reputation of being infiltrated by

57 Associated Press, October 10, 2005.

58 Libération, September 29, 2005.


60 Libération, December 14, 2005.

61 Out of the seven, four were handed to French authorities in August 2004 (BBC News, August 4, 2004).

62 Deloire and Dubois, Les Islamistes, p. 48.

63 L'Express, November 27, 2003.

64 Associated Press, May 12, 2005; see also Valeurs Actuelles, December 13, 2002.

65 The man, Ghulam Rama, and two Frenchmen of North African descent were charged with terrorism for their alleged roles in a network to recruit jihad fighters (Associated Press, June 16, 2005, and Valeurs Actuelles, December 13, 2002).


67 Le Monde, October 3, 2005; see also Le Figaro, September 27, 2005.


70 The Guardian, December 1, 2005; see also L'Express, December 15, 2005.

71 Kelkal, the alleged GIA mastermind of the Parisian subway attacks in 1995, was re-Islamized in jail under the influence of a cellmate. He was killed while being chased by the French police (see Leiken, Bearers of Global Jihad? Immigration and National Security after 9/11, p. 61). Moussaoui was arrested in the United States in 2001 and later charged for his connections to al-Qaeda and his possible participation in attacks on U.S. soil. Moussaoui was re-Islamized after his passage through the Finsbury Park Mosque.

72 Le Figaro, December 7, 2005; for more information on Dumont's sentencing, see Le Monde, December 17, 2005.


74 The Observer, July 31, 2005.


76 Le Monde, May 24, 2005.


78 See Jean-Louis Bruguier, “Terrorism: Threat and Responses.”

79 Ternisien, La France des Mosquées, p. 43.
See, for example, a poll conducted by the French newspaper *Ouest France* that found 76% of the French surveyed were satisfied by the government’s actions in the face of the terror threat (*Ouest France*, September 11, 2005).


85 Ternisien, *La France des Mosquées*, p. 43.

86 Ibid. p. 282. The Mosque of Paris illustrates well this battle for influence waged between Morocco and Algeria to the benefit of the latter. Today, the mosque is headed by Boubakeur, who is often criticized for his alignment with Algiers. Ternisien has noted that these countries have lost influence with the younger generations, unfamiliar with their parents’ homeland.

87 It should be acknowledged that there are differences between conservative Saudi Islam and radical salafi.


91 The IIRO in France was implicated in a cell recruiting for jihadists to Iraq through the Iqra Mosque in the Parisian suburb of Levallois in June 2004. For more information, see Jean-Charles Brissard and Damien Martinez, *Zarkaoui, Le Nouveau Visage d’Al-Qaida* (Paris: Editions Fayard, 2005), pp. 266-7.


94 Boyer, *L’Islam en France*, p. 95. For the ex-mayor of Dreux, Françoise Gaspard, “many of the ELCO preach religion and were at the heart of the creation of radical fundamentalist structures” (Dubois and Deloire, *Les Islamists*, p. 88).

95 The Stasi Commission and the HCI recommended ending the ELCO, including the suppression of these teachers; the HCI added a ‘denunciation’ of bilateral agreements (HCI Report, p. 80).


102 Frank Peter, “Training Imams and the Future of Islam in France,” *ISIM Newsletter* 13, December 2003. The solution of the French government to implement a new school for the training of imams is too recent to have a real impact yet.

103 In France today only 9% of imams are French, a number that includes many recently nationalized Moroccans; in 1992 there were 6% (Ternisien, *La France des Mosquées*, pp. 31, 103, and Boyer, *L'Islam en France*, p.15, ftnt. 2).