

Security Threats: A French Perspective

Tuesday, March 8, 2011 – Arlington, VA

The Terrorism, Transnational Crime, and Corruption Center (TraCCC) welcomed Professor Alain Bauer, President of the High Council for Strategic Education and Research to the President of France (CSFRS) and the French National Crime Council, as well as Professor Xavier Raufer, Director of Studies at the Center of Contemporary Criminal Threats (DRMCC) at the University of Paris and President of the Expert Group to the CSFRS, to George Mason University (GMU)'s Arlington campus on March 8.

Following introductions by Dean Edward Rhodes of the GMU School of Public Policy, Dr. Anne Schiller, Vice President for Global Strategies at GMU, and TraCCC Director Dr. Louise Shelley, Professor Raufer explained that he would focus on how security issues are conceptualized in France and that Professor Bauer would discuss how the French government has restructured itself in response to changing security threats.

Initially, Prof. Raufer talked about how the resumption of terrorist attacks in France in the 1980s forced French analysts to think differently about terrorism and led to explorations of “collective crimes,” in other words the combination of terrorism and organized crime. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse and with the idea of a growing relationship between crime and terrorism, French analysts developed the phrase “the dark side of globalization” to describe growing networks of criminals and terrorists who easily adapt licit trade channels for illicit means in the wake of the free trade boom of the 1990s. Prof. Raufer argued that while many in the West remained confined by state-centric models of global affairs, French thinkers were ahead of the curve in understanding the importance of and security threats inherent in transnational networks. Then Prof. Raufer moved on to explain why Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda have become largely irrelevant in the French view. Arguing that young Arabs are not interested in Bin Laden and al Qaeda, Prof. Raufer suggested that even though al Qaeda cells will continue to carry out attacks, radical forms of political Islam in Middle Eastern countries pose greater threats.

At this point, Prof. Bauer rose to speak and led off by noting how in criminal/terrorist matters, what we think of as new is actually what we have forgotten. Referring to two terrorist groups in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the People’s Will (Imperial Russia) and the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO), Prof. Bauer noted that terrorist methods used today are highly reflective of these “groundbreaking” groups. By losing sight of context and perspective, the West has fought a “war on terror” in which we did not know who the enemy was and thus how to fight. Moreover, the West has largely failed to understand the hybridization of crime and terrorism and how these two issues must be studied together in order to grasp “globalized gangsterization.”

Both Prof. Raufer and Prof. Bauer also noted the rise of counterfeits as a major threat. In particular, they pointed out high death rates in Africa from the sale of counterfeit drugs and how widespread sales of other counterfeits can have deadly consequences. In examining the scale of this problem, Prof. Raufer and Prof. Bauer both referred to a store several times the size of the American mega-retailer Costco in Sharjah, UAE, which sells only counterfeit goods. Not only

are financial costs high for producers of original goods, but profits from the sale of counterfeits benefit state, corrupt officials, criminals, and terrorists.

Turning the audience's attention to how the French government has restructured itself to better respond to new global threats, Prof. Bauer discussed how he worked with Prof. Rauber to develop a "State of the Threats" report for policymakers. This document did not require new research, but instead used news reports and historical knowledge to note precedents for events that have a high likelihood of occurring again. When Nicholas Sarkozy became Minister of Interior in 2002, he approached Prof. Bauer and Prof. Rauber to develop a mechanism for crime prediction. After his election to France's highest office, President Sarkozy requested that Prof. Bauer and Prof. Rauber create a similar mechanism for predicting and thus preparing for national security threats. This resulted in the creation of CSFRS. In order to provide French policymakers with the information they need, the CSFRS relies on atypical thinkers to offer different frameworks. According to Prof. Bauer, the result has been that 90% of information presented by the CSRS is accurate, 5% is false, and 5% has not been seen.

Ultimately, both Prof. Rauber and Prof. Bauer believe that effective analysis of security threats involves an extensive lateral understanding of context as well as the ability to interpret "weak signals." For them, strategic surprise does not exist, only strategic blindness. If analysts are unable to learn the lessons of history and context, then politicians certainly cannot be expected to.