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Europe's "Home-Grown" Terrorism Threat:

How and Why the Dynamics of European Terrorism Have Emerged and Evolved

By Mark Huband

When a distant relative of the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh was stabbed to death as he cycled to work in Amsterdam on November 2, 2004, a chain of events was unleashed that have transformed European perceptions of the terrorist threat facing the continent.

At his most polite, Theo van Gogh was outspoken. At his most forthright, he was renowned for his rudeness, which he imparted liberally on all who fell into his view: Jews, Christians, Muslims, Amsterdam city councilors, and Dutch people generally. As a filmmaker he was respected for his quirky accounts of daily life. But he became embroiled in controversy when he teamed up with Ayaan Hersi Ali, a Somali-born liberal member of the Dutch parliament, to make a film about Islam. The film, called 'Submission,' is highly critical of Islam's treatment of women. When Mr. van Gogh was stabbed, a knife was rammed into his chest, a note attached to it threatening to kill Ms. Hersi Ali for her role in the film and her criticisms of the Muslim religion into which she had been born.

Popular anger at the stabbing led to mosques in various parts of the Netherlands being burned to the ground, and churches being attacked in a series of tit-for-tat reprisals. Meanwhile, the Dutch security service, the AIVD, has uncovered an Islamic extremist cell with which Mr. van Gogh's alleged killer was loosely associated. It is the unraveling of the network that has revealed both the extent to which Muslim extremists in Europe remain intent on and able to plan significant terrorist attacks, as well as the nature of the radicalization process on the continent that has spawned new terrorist cells.

Referring to the incidents in the Netherlands as an "historic development," one senior European counterterrorism official said that the exposure of the terrorist "Hofstadnetwerk" with which Mr. van Gogh's killer was linked, had revealed how the global Islamic terrorist threat had evolved since war was declared on it in the wake of the September 11 attacks. The AIVD has revealed links between members of the "Hofstadnetwerk", which translates as the "Court Network" and extremists in Switzerland, Morocco and Spain. The Netherlands-based group is suspected of being in the process of hatching plots to attack various government buildings – including the AIVD headquarters – and to kill high profile individuals.

Understanding how and why the dynamics and character of the threat to Europe have emerged and evolved requires significant leaps away from the perception of the threat which became reality on September 11, 2001. It took the

From time to time, topics of current interest warrant that we publish them outside of our regular quarterly publications. The topic of European counterterrorism and in particular the recent murder of Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam, is one such topic. Recently, Mark Huband, a writer for the *Financial Times*, contributed the following article for the spring edition of the *NYU Review of Law and Security*. Due to its timely nature, we have chosen to bring it to you now, along with excerpts of pieces that raise additional questions about counterterrorism in Europe. These articles and excerpts are part of the Center on Law & Security's larger project: "Prosecuting Terrorism: The Global Challenge," which focuses on European counterterrorism, transatlantic counterterrorism and the legal and social position of Muslims in Western societies.

September 11 attacks for us to begin to grasp the reality that had been in the making for at least a decade. But what we learned about Al Qaeda from and in the aftermath of September 11 were the details of what it had once been. That is not to say that there was no detailed awareness prior to September 11 as to what kind of threat Al Qaeda posed. But by the time substantial resources were being poured into the campaign to confront it, the form the threat took was no longer that which had allowed it to create the team of hijackers that changed the course of history.

Security officials and terrorism experts in several European countries say that although intelligence information about the Islamist threat is still being gathered on a global scale, the recruitment of extremists, as well as their organization and planning and decision-making in Europe is increasingly done within each country's borders. Europe, it seems, has now given birth to its own, 'home-grown' threat, which some are likely to brand 'the enemy within'.

The trail of evidence that Al Qaeda left behind in the training camps of Afghanistan provided an insight into the scale of its ambitions, the rigidity of its ideological positions, the geographical scale of its recruitment, and the sophistication of its strategy. What this evidence did not do in any really substantial form, however, was offer useful insights into its capacity for survival in the event of the loss of its Afghan base. In short, the Al Qaeda we learned about from the evidence it left behind was the Al Qaeda of the past.

Despite Al Qaeda having tapped into a deep well of discontent and radicalism during its formative years, the threat today is made all the more unpredictable for not being in the hands of the network's original architects. Just as few of them could have predicted how successful the September 11 attacks were to be, few could have predicted how the radicalism to which Al Qaeda gave voice would be picked up. And it is in Europe that many aspects of the new threat are most salient.

Despite the complexities, several characteristics of the threat to the continent have now become clearer.

First, whereas in the late-1990s and immediately after 9/11 it was to some extent possible to focus counterterrorism efforts on particular communities in Europe, this is no longer the case.

Second, whereas plans for attacks in

Libyans associated with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group – the LIFG – which had thrown in its lot with Al Qaeda. Subsequently, Algerians associated with the GIA or GSPC emerged. More recently, Moroccans loosely tied to groups based in Morocco, became the major focus of attention.

But these aspects of the terrorist identity are no longer relevant. The Madrid train bombings of March 11, 2004, have revealed as much, by showing that an Egyptian probably masterminded the attacks, while working closely with a Tunisian, who together ran a terrorist cell

"The Islamist extremist cause in Europe is the single greatest challenge now being faced."

Europe such as one on the Strasbourg Christmas market, or against buildings in France and Italy, appear to have been hatched when Al Qaeda's leadership still had a functional global reach, more recent plots are the product of more localized planning.

Third, new recruitment to the Islamist cause means that whatever may be learned from detainees captured as a direct consequence of information gathered from people directly linked to Al Qaeda, there are many new faces that have yet to appear above the parapet. In Europe, a key new factor is the number of recruits of European racial type, who have converted to Islam. To date, this group is small, but it has nevertheless thrown up a number of radical elements who have found their way into extremist circles.

In the past, certain patterns have been discerned that have made it feasible to focus counterterrorism activity on particular national groups. At specific points there were spikes in activity by that was numerically dominated by Moroccans.

Equally, the function of the relationships built up between like-minded Islamists across Europe in the past few years is as fluid as the roles played by the emerging cells

In Italy, for example, evidence has yet to be found that terrorist suspects are receiving funds from outside the country, and the signs would seem to be clear that they are self-financing. Small businesses have been found to be financing cells in the country, occasionally through tax evasion, while evidence of extortion - if only on a small scale - has been unearthed within the Muslim community, with the proceeds also being used to finance the radicals. In addition, small sums have been made in relatively minor narcotics deals, with the largest sum from such a deal struck by individuals allegedly linked to Islamist extremism being around €200,000, though deals of around €8,000 are far more common.

The interplay between Islamist terrorism and organized crime is most clearly seen in the area of document forgery. The increasingly highly developed skills of forgers within Islamist ranks, and the growth in people smuggling in Europe conducted by organized crime gangs, suggests that the methods used by the terrorists to finance their activities ought to be intensifying the focus of law enforcement authorities on the links between the two.

But even with such dangerous liaisons as this, it is new recruitment to the Islamist extremist cause in Europe that is the single greatest challenge now being faced. Recent events in the Netherlands have revealed a great deal about the process of radicalization and recruitment, and three factors are seen by terrorism experts as explaining what has taken place, not just in supposedly liberal-minded Holland, but elsewhere on the continent.

First is what some experts say is a deliberate strategy launched by the extremists that is intended to unite the moderate majority of Muslims behind extremist causes by provoking generalized anti-Muslim backlash. This aim has been central to the thinking of Ayman al-Zawahiri, the deputy leader of Al Qaeda, since the early 1980s. Al-Zawahiri is the architect of Al Qaeda's strategy of attacking the United States and the other Western allies of Muslim governments, with the aim of precipitating the fall of those governments when the West finds its support for them too costly. Ever since he launched an insurrection in his native Egypt in the 1990s, Al-Zawahiri has sought to mobilize populations around the radical banner. His efforts have failed, but the strategy is still apparently being sought by his adherents, and the aim of extremists in the Netherlands appears likely to be intended to force a wedge between Muslims - both radical and moderate - on the one hand, and wider Dutch society on the other.

As the French writer on Islam, Gilles Kepel, says: "The extremist circles are a very tiny proportion of people, and are not representative of people of Muslim descent in Europe, who – I believe – are becoming increasingly secular and Europeanized. But because these small [extremist] groups are ready to resort to violence, it gives them tremendous exposure. Holland's response to the provocation means that people are setting fire to mosques. And this will lead to radicals being able to secure the solidarity of the Muslim masses."

A second element encouraging radicalization is a feeling among young Muslims of marginalization from European society. Evidence from the arrest of Muslim extremists in Europe has revealed that economic hardship is not a primary reason behind the radicalism, as many of those arrested are found to have been educated or professionals. But what has become clear in some European countries is that economic success has not brought social integration, and may even have contributed to the resentment felt towards Muslims by Europeans opposed to integration. This has intensified the immigrant Muslims' sense of being secondclass citizens because of their religion or racial background. The consequences of marginalization apparent multifarious.

Some experts say it has led to a breakdown in authority within the Muslim community, as the young become disillusioned with elders with whom they share little and whose example they are no longer inclined to follow. "Younger Muslims educated in Britain, for example, don't actually accept what the older generation of Muslims says about religion or culture," says Humayun Ansari, a leading writer on Islam in Britain at London University. "They find themselves in a sort of vacuum. Their experience tells them that

"France has demanded that Muslims integrate within society whereas the UK and the Netherlands have followed more multicultural paths where differences are encouraged. All three have nevertheless experienced the emergence of radicalism."

Mark Huband Security Correspondent for The Financial Times. He is the author of three books. the most recent of which is Brutal Truths, Fragile Myths: Power, Politics and Western Adventurism in the Arab World (Westview Press). An award winning journalist, formerly was correspondent for The Guardian. The Observer. and The Times. He lives in London.



there's not much on offer here. So, how does one become empowered if there is alienation? It is then that religion does play a role," he said.

Despite the apparently frightening power and ambition of the extremists, however, government policies are widely seen as capable of influencing the outcome of the security threat in Europe, and thereby limiting the marginlization. Another U.K.-based academic, Azzam Tamimi, director of the Institute of Islamic Political Thought, argues that, "Ideology on its own does not make a radical. Ideology provides justification, but the social situation creates the radicalization."

France, the Netherlands and the U.K.,

where terrorists have been active, have followed different paths aimed at creating harmony between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities with a view to engineering social relations that will discourage radicalization. France has demanded that Muslims integrate within society whereas the U.K. and the Netherlands have followed more multicultural paths where differences are encouraged. All three have nevertheless experienced the emergence radicalism. But their ability to confront it as security issue, without fostering widespread disharmony, has been the major test which some now see the Dutch



Judge Jean-Louis Bruguière and Mark Huband at the Center on Law & Security's conference: "Prosecuting Terrorism: The Global Challenge."

as failing by not being sensitive enough to Muslim concerns. As Dr Tamimi says: "Right from the beginning, the Dutch should have seen that this was going to be a disaster. If you accept the Muslim community in your midst, you have to respect their religion."

The problem facing European governments as they try to hinder what one U.K. security official describes as the "radicalization escalator" is that no measures will be wholly adequate. Ultimately, the decision of an individual to follow an extremist path, will be determined by personal aspiration. Security officials in the U.K. are working to determine if the arrest in August 2004 of

eight men from Britain's Pakistanidescended community was a signal that efforts to discourage radicalism within the long-established Muslim community had failed.

Surveillance of suspected extremists in the U.K.'s Pakistani community began in early 2003. Until then the focus had been on Algerians, whose network had direct links to extremists in France and North Africa. MI5, the domestic security service, and London's Metropolitan police antiterrorist branch, expanded their surveillance in response to intelligence that gave clues to how Al Qaeda was adapting to the loss of its Afghan base after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001.

An important element of the network's response was to devolve decision-making to and recruit among indigenous Muslim communities targeted countries. As one U.K. security official said after the arrests in August: "It's not a threat that we have imported. It's activity we are definitely capable of growing ourselves. They are not down and outs. They are young, British, educated, and the sort of people that years of policy have been intended to try and bring into the fold. They are part of a new generation that has emerged since September 11."

He went on to say that while the arrests were a significant step in the counter-terrorist effort launched since the attacks of September 11, 2001, there was barely any understanding of where the root of the "home-grown" suspect lay. "We don't really understand the process of radicalization. We didn't become aware of this particular case so early on that we understand the root whereby these guys got to the point that they are at now. Understanding where this has come from is a part of the response to 9/11 that is least developed. What is needed is a government-led process of tackling radicalization."

The emergence of this apparently new facet to the threat in Europe, raises the question of why Europe as a whole is a target. The bombings in Madrid on March 11 certainly seemed to have been designed to influence the outcome of the Spanish election. Even so, just as the impact of the September 11 attacks on the global economy could not have been predicted, nor could the fallout from the Madrid attacks.

In both cases, the fallout was almost as dramatic as the attacks themselves.

A truce offered to European countries on April 15, 2004 by Osama bin Laden served to clarify what may amount to Al Qaeda's strategy. Flush with the success it claimed in changing the political landscape in Spain, bin Laden hoped to split the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq by offering European countries a three-month respite from terrorist attacks if they withdrew their forces. The offer reaffirmed a fact long-misunderstood in the West, that Al Qaeda's central goal is to expel non-Muslims from the Islamic world, rather than just to bring fear to the lives of Americans, Europeans and others. The Al Qaeda leader's later address to the world on the eve of the U.S. election, appeared to have a similarly strategic message: "Your security is not in the hands of Kerry or Bush or Al Qaeda. Your security is in your own hands, and each state which does not harm our security will remain safe," he said in a statement broadcast on October

Europe, it seems, is a target as a result of what it is doing in the Islamic world – and specifically in the Middle East and North Africa – rather than as a consequence of a 'clash of civilizations.' Clearly it is bin Laden who has defined the extent of this European role. Any country allied to the U.S. is fair game. Any country that plays any kind of a role in the war on terror is equally deserving of extremist ire. As for states that have sent troops to Iraq, they had better watch out.

But the radicals who are not the graduates of Al Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan, and are instead part of the social fabric of European countries, are a phenomenon that is as likely to reflect resentment of their own circumstances as much as they reflect anger at the political realities of the Middle East. If foreign forces withdrew from Iraq, or the House of Saud Were to fall, or the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem were to become the heart of a free and independent Palestine, would their feelings about the European societies of which they are a part, be diluted? Probably not.

As Al Qaeda becomes more disparate, localized or regionalized radicalism is likely to become more of an issue. Counterterrorist efforts ought to reflect this. Success in the efforts to confront the threat in Europe will depend upon achieving greater uniformity in the standards of intelligence gathering and counterterrorist activity. The great variation in the performance of police and intelligence agencies across Europe is not only the result of disparities in the resources devoted to them. Clearly there is also a question of willingness, and that in

turn stems from different perceptions of the threat.

Streamlining the flow of intelligence information on terrorism has soared up the list of security priorities since the Madrid bombings. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, in which 191 people died, the European Union appointed a counterterrorism coordinator, charged with improving cooperation among EU member states. Within hours of his appointment to the post, Gijs de Vries warned that: "People should not put their expectations too high in the sense that absolute security can ever be provided. That, in our open societies, which we must maintain, is unfortunately impossible."

But the failure of the Dutch authorities to detect and act on the potential threat posed by Mohamed Bouyeri – the man charged with killing Theo van Gogh – was partly due to inadequate co-ordination between branches of the Dutch security service. Bouyeri's radicalization had been noticed, as had his association with known radicals. But limited resources, as well as misperceptions of his aims, had allowed him to slip through the net.

Such security flaws are seen as damaging to the Europe-wide counterterrorism effort at a time when the emergence of radicals from within European countries is transforming the threat profile. "Terrorism is understood to be events like September 11. But then we have somebody who kills a guy on a bike. So we weren't prepared for anything," said Edwin Bakker, a terrorism and security expert at the Netherlands Institute for International Affairs, referring to Mr. van Gogh's death. He said the fragmentation of the network once connected to Al Qaeda made the need for cross-border co-operation even greater, investigations focus on previously unknown individuals who are in the process of radicalization, rather than people arriving from abroad.

But the urgency of identifying the threat within Europe is now seen as in need of acceleration in the face of a new threat. In the past few months radical Muslims with military experience gained in Iraq are being placed under intense surveillance in several European countries as fears have grow among security officials that they plan to use their skills in terrorist attacks. European intelligence services have traced the journeys of Muslims from European countries to Iraq, as well as others who traveled to Iraq from North Africa via Europe. According to a senior intelligence officer responsible for

Recent events from the Center on Law & Security*

Thursday, September 23rd, 6 to 8 pm

Torture: The Road to Abu Ghraib and Beyond
Featuring: Joshua Dratel, Stephen Gillers, Anthony Lewis, Dan Mori,
Burt Neuborne, Dana Priest, Samuel Rascoff

Lipton Hall, 110 West 3rd Street

Wednesday, October 27th, 6 to 8pm (Co-sponsored with the Foreign Policy Leadership Council)

American Foreign Policy: Where Do We Go From Here?
Featuring: Leslie Gelb, Walter Russell Mead, Lee Wolosky
Greenberg Lounge, Vanderbilt Hall, 40 Washington Square South

Monday, November 1st, Reception: 7:30 to 8 pm, Discussion: 8 to 9 pm
What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building
Noah Feldman discusses his new book, followed by a book signing
Greenberg Lounge, Vanderbilt Hall, 40 Washington Square South

Monday, November 8th, 7 to 9 pm

The Trial of Saddam Hussein: Legal vs. Political Visions
Featuring: Gary Bass, Noah Feldman, Stephen Holmes, Tom Parker
Vanderbilt Hall, Room 204, 40 Washington Square South

Tuesday, November 9th, 3:30 to 4:30 pm (Co-sponsored with the Brennan Center for Justice)

Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib Seymour Hersh discusses his new book Lipton Hall, 110 West 3rd Street

*Proceedings from the events are available upon request

Upcoming Publications...

Be on the lookout for the following...all coming out in Winter 2004-5:

The Terrorist Trial Report Card

The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib (Cambridge University Press), Edited by Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel

NYU Quarterly Review on Law and Security, Issue #4: "Torture"

NYU Quarterly Review on Law and Security, Issue #5: "European Counterterrorism"

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following their activities, some are now returning to Europe.

"They are coming back with security experience, ranging from skills in how to lose people who are trailing them, as well as having the qualities of guerilla fighters. They also know how to do surveillance," the officer said. Veterans of the 16-month insurgency in Iraq have been found in the Netherlands and other European countries, but have not been discovered joining extremist networks that are already operating in European countries, the intelligence officer said, adding: "It's too early to know what their role is. But it is clear that the skills they have gained are of major concern."

This article was excerpted from the NYU Review of Law & Security Issue #6, forthcoming in Spring 2005, This issue, devoted to European Counterterrorism, will also include articles by Antoine Garapon, Ronald Noble, Jean-Louis Bruguière, Armando Spataro, Daniel Benjamin and others.

Excerpts From Judge Jean-Louis Bruguière: The French Experience with Counterterrorism

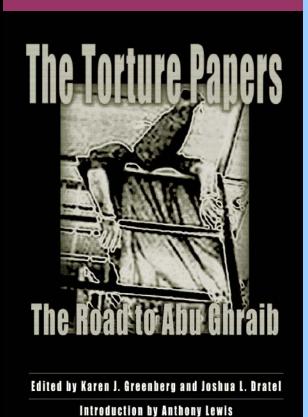
The following remarks were delivered at the Center on Law and Security's annual conference on "Prosecuting Terrorism: The Global Challenge," which was held in June 2004. Judge Bruguère identified some of the more pressing dangers that confront European law enforcement today.

France is a country with a great deal of experience in the fight against terrorism. France has the unfortunate privilege of being one of the European nations hit by all forms of terrorism.

The country has been dealing for more than twenty years with separatist activities carried out by domestic terrorist groups. There are terrorist groups with operations in Corsica, the Basque region, and the Guadeloupe-West Indies. But, more recently, France has had to deal with radical Islamist networks linked to Al Qaeda. These groups are operating against the country's interest, against French nationals abroad and at home.

Since 1986, France has implemented an original legal scheme to combat terrorism. This scheme has recently been applied to the increasing threat of Islamic terrorism. The recent attacks in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, and the bombings in Madrid on March 11, 2004, which killed almost two hundred people and injured and maimed over a thousand more, are evidence that the terrorist threat is grave and still challenges the world.

The Islamist threat is actually increasing and such a threat is still before, not behind, us. In Europe we have to deal with a loose conglomeration of terrorist networks that is protean, mutant, and changing. This movement is composed of



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numerous cells and networks that are spreading in an erratic way over a large area and without any specific plan.

This situation is exacerbated by the post-war situation in Iraq, which has served in Europe, and especially in France, as a catalyst to the recruiting process for new Jihad members. Iraq today is considered by radical Islamists to be a new land of Jihad.

In addition, in the Caucasus, radical Islamist cells are being trained by Chechnyan groups linked to Al Qaeda. They are learning how to use high tech warfare as well as chemical weapons.

Such an evolution is a major concern in Europe, and we should adapt our legal system in order to fight more efficiently against these networks. Because Al Qaeda and its associates, including the large conglomeration of Islamist cells in Europe, have globalized the threat, we must [react with] a global response that is both political and diplomatic. [The response] must also involve the financial, intelligence, law enforcement, and judicial [sectors].

Excerpts From Peter Bergen: Al Qaeda & Its Future

Peter Bergen is one of the leading experts on Al Qaeda and the author of Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden. In a recent talk delivered to the Colloquium on Law and Security he raised questions about the changing role of Al Qaeda in Europe.

Who joins Al-Qaeda?...I mean, one thing that strikes me is there are no Iraqis. When I was doing research for my book, it was obvious to me that Al-Qaeda has stronger roots in Brooklyn than in Baghdad...The average age of an Al-Qaeda member is 26. Many [of the organization's members] are married. Most are from a middle class background... someone like Mohammed is emblematic. He's an Egyptian Major who has a PhD in Psychology, who speaks languages...It turns out that asking who



Peter Bergen

"The cases in [the United States] have been, without exception, cases of bad judgment but not of terrorism."

joins is like asking, "Who joins the Rotary Club?" It is a bourgeois endeavor.

Meanwhile, I'm also very interested in what is currently going on in Europe. I think it is obvious that what happens in Europe is crucial to what happens to Al- Qaeda and the future of this whole movement.

There are 20 million Muslims in Europe, and many have been alienated for one reason or another for good reasons. I mean if you are a Pakistani in some northern town in Britain, you have every reason to be slightly annoyed. Likewise, in Algeria and in France. So, it is not class discrimination, it is alienation that is the problem.

If you look at the 9-11 attack, it is inconceivable that it could have taken place without the Hamburg cell. Look at Ahmed Rassam, the Algerian who came via Corsica and then Pakistan and then Canada to try and blow up LAX Airport. He is emblematic of this trend. Look at al-Britani, the convert from Hinduism to Islam, who was arrested back in August. He was casing financial institutions in this country in 2001. Look at Richard Reid, the socalled 'Shoe Bomber' who got a case of cold feet on the American Airlines flight. All of these people are the same. The cases in this country have been, without exception, cases of bad judgment but not of terrorism.

They are not like the case of Ramsey Yousef. The future Ramsey Yousefs and Mohammed Attas are probably going to be people from Europe. I think al-Britani is also a case that I want to look into in some more detail. Another case is the one involving the two British middle-class Pakistanis who walked into a jazz club in Tel Aviv, near the American Embassy in April 2003, and one of them blew himself up. It is extraordinary for a British person to be involved in a suicide attack. I think it is a first, anyway. If they can do it in Israel, they certainly can do it here. So I think this is an area which, obviously, bears closer examination.

The views presented here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Center or its staff.

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Names of Note

Leading figures in the European War on Terror:

Jean-Louis Bruguière,

Magistrate, Ministère de la Justice, Chief of France's Antiterrorism Office

Baltasar Garzón, Investigating Judge, Spain's National Court

Kay Nehm, German Federal Prosecutor General, Germany

Ronald Noble, Secretary General of Interpol

Gijs de Vries, European Union's Antiterrorism Coordinator

The Center on Law and Security's Annual Conference

"Prosecuting Terrorism: The Global Challenge: Focus on Europe"

May 26-28, 2005 at NYU's La Pietra campus in Florence, Italy.

Topics Include:

- Iran and Europe
- Lessons from Madrid
- The Van Gogh Murder in Context
- 3 X 3: France, Spain, and Italy: Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia
- Chechnya and Terrorism

Thank You
Thanks go to our dedicated, tireless staff.

Editor

Karen J. Greenberg

Editorial and Production Staff

Kristin Henderson Elizabeth Oliner

Graphic DesignDana Lawit

