France

Quick Facts

Population: 67,106,161
Area: 643,801 sq km; 551,500 sq km (metropolitan France)
Ethnic Groups: Celtic and Latin with Teutonic, Slavic, North African, Indochinese, Basque minorities
GDP (official exchange rate): $2.575 trillion (2017 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated May 2018)

Introduction

France houses a large Muslim minority, primarily of North African provenance. While many immigrants are non-observant (in line with a general French tendency toward secularism and a de-emphasis of religious affiliation), Islamist organizations actively promote a resurgence of a politicized and ideological Muslim identity. Target groups include youth, especially in the ethnic ghettos of cities where immigrant populations are concentrated. There is considerable tension within the Muslim leadership between advocates of secular French identity and proponents of the Islamist goal of a communitarian cultural separatism. In addition, the trans-Mediterranean immigration patterns and historical French colonial ties to North Africa contribute to a spillover of Islamist terrorist activity from Algeria into France. Jihadist activists with links to al-Qaeda move between Algeria and France, as well as other European countries. French Islamism, in turn, has become part of global jihadist networks.

The Islamic State, also known as ISIS, has recently become a dominant fixture in Islamist terrorist activity in the European Union, particularly France and Belgium, with its ideology often times taking root among young, isolated French or Belgian nationals with secular immigrant parents. Online networking, along with the recruitment of European nationals to train in Syria and subsequently return to the EU, has led to a surge in attacks inspired, or planned, by the Islamic State—including but not limited to the January 2015 attack on the Charlie Hebdo newspaper and a Jewish supermarket, the November 2015 Paris attack, and the July 2016 attack in Nice.

The response of the French state has evolved from earlier efforts to portray itself as the bridge between the Arab world and Europe to a more recent insistence on the value of French identity and the importance of secularism, exemplified in regulations such as the 2011 prohibition on concealing one's face in a public space. Furthermore, in contrast to the weak French response to terrorism in the 1980s, France more recently has developed an effective and robust set of counterterrorism and surveillance practices.

Islamist Activity

Union des organizations islamiques de France (UOIF)

Founded in 1983 as a small circle of foreign student activists with Islamist leanings, the Union of Islamic Organizations in France has grown into an umbrella organization claiming to represent between one to two hundred Muslim groups in France.[1] It plays a role in coordinating activities among its member associations, and is the owner of some mosques in the major cities of France. The UOIF is the French member of the London-based Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe, active in promoting the study of Islam through its European Institute for the Human Sciences, dedicated to Islamic theology and related studies, with two campuses in France.[2] The UOIF has also established several specialized organizations, including the Young Muslims of France (JMF), the Muslim Students of France (EMF), and the French League of the Muslim Woman (LFFM).[3] These organizations contribute to the dissemination of Islamist positions and the construction of separatist communitarian identity politics. While the UOIF presents itself simply as an advocate of Muslim interests, critics point out that it engages in a "double discourse," paying lip service in public to the priority of tolerance for secular French values while at the same time promoting Islamist content (replete with intolerance, misogyny, homophobia and anti-Semitism) to its target populations.[4]

The UOIF has attained considerable public and political resonance through a disproportionate role within the French Council of the Muslim Religion (CFCM), which was established in 2003 by then-Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy as the official representative body for Muslims in France.[5] The CFCM's responsibilities pertain to interactions between the French state and the Muslim community (e.g., the construction of mosques, oversight of halal food, provision of Muslim spiritual services in the military and in prisons, etc). In contrast to the CFCM's administrative and technical functions, the UOIF has wider cultural and political ambitions. "In France, the extremist UOIF has become the predominant organization within the government's Islamic Council where it can eclipse moderate or secular Muslim voices," experts have noted.[6] While the inclusion of the UOIF in the CFCM may have been intended as a strategy of cooptation to move the latter toward the center, it has allowed the relatively small UOIF to emerge as an influential representative of the much more diverse and generally less ideological Muslim population in France.[7]

While the UOIF's explicit goals include the religious, cultural, educational, social and humanitarian needs of the Muslim population of France, with priority given to facilitating religious practice, critics allege that it is close to the Egyptian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and pursues a goal of communitarian separatism.[8] This agenda involves two aspects: transforming France into a safe haven for radicals engaged in militant Islamist politics in North Africa or elsewhere, especially in the Arab world, while at the same time exercising political identity pressure on the Muslims in France to conform to increasingly repressive interpretations of Islam, a sort of "reactionary and paternalist populism."[9] "The UOIF tries to rein in the Muslims of France. Some associations affiliated with the movement claim the right to say who is a good Muslim and who is, therefore, an apostate," observes Islamic studies expert Fiametta Venner. "This is all the more alarming since these people are not theologians—almost none of the directors of the UOIF pursued studies in this area—and they have a very narrow vision of Islam. They are satisfied with instrumentalizing the religion to pursue a reactionary political project of separatism."[10]

During the 2012 election campaign, Nicolas Sarkozy criticized the UOIF for ties to extremist preachers. Ahmed Jaballah, the President of the UOIF since 2011, insisted on the apolitical character of the organization, while attributing Sarkozy's criticisms to electoral politics. In addition, he articulated a vision of a moderate Islam within the context of French secularism as an alternative to radical tendencies, implicitly carving out a space hospitable to the Muslim Brotherhood but less welcoming of Salafist positions.[11] However, the UOIF has since come under intense pressure, following its designation as a terrorist group by the United Arab Emirates in 2014. National Front politicians, specifically the party's

president, Marine Le Pen, has called for the organization's dissolution.[12]

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is a terrorist group based primarily in Algeria, although it operates more widely in North Africa and has links to Europe. Over time, it has transformed from an organization committed to a local Islamist insurgency into a wider network pursuing a program of global jihad.

The precise size of AQIM's membership remains elusive. Yet even if its numbers are small, the group has acquired considerable resources thanks to profitable kidnappings and participation in drug trafficking. In 2012, General Carter Hamm, then the head of U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), called AQIM "al-Qaeda's best funded, wealthiest affiliate" and ascribed to it the dominant role in the Malian insurgency.[13] The uprising began in early 2012 and involved AQIM and other Islamist groups building an alliance with Tuareg separatists. That alliance remained unstable and largely collapsed due to the participants' adherence to strict sharia.[14] Yet initially, the insurgency appeared poised to penetrate the southern part of the country and threaten the national government in Bamako. In response, French President Francois Hollande authorized a military expedition to prevent an Islamist takeover.

The French presence in Mali, a former colony, has potentially set the stage for new forms of Islamist terrorism in France itself. While France's intervention was met with considerable support from the Malian community in France, the leading French counter-terrorist judge, Marc Trévidic, expressed concern that it could contribute to the recruitment of new terrorists among Islamist sympathizers in France, especially among the young and marginalized members of immigrant communities.[15]

While AQIM is recognized a threat to Europe and the west, because of Al-Qaeda's original focus on attacking western targets an AQIM attack in Europe has not materialized. A 2013 RAND Corporation analysis of AQIM argued that the group lacked the infrastructure and willingness to launch an attack on the West while maintaining their control of the Sahel and its other North African priorities.[16] Al-Qaeda remained a strategic rival of the Islamic State, but is thought to enjoy support and loyalty of some of the same groups in sub-Saharan Africa.[17] In a 2018 audio message, the AQ leader Ayman al Zawahiri threatened to attack French interests "from Abidjan to Ouagadougu, and from the Atlas mountains to Mauritania."[18]

The Islamic State

The influence of AQIM, and other Islamist groups in France, was dwarfed by the emergence of the Islamic State. The Islamic State is a combination of Salafi jihadists and Ba'athist military and intelligence personnel who, once ousted from power in Iraq in 2003, took advantage of the civil unrest and disenfranchisement of Sunni Arabs, not only in Iraq, but also in Syria—and whose territorial control metastasized during the civil war to include nearly nine million inhabitants. That lasted only until 2016-2017, when Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian-Kurdish forces, separately, with Western support, drove ISIS fighters and officials from all of the cities it briefly held.[19]

In addition to occupying territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIS has presented a global terror threat known for inspiring attacks throughout the West, particularly in France. France has become a consistent target for ISIS-inspired attacks due to hatred and resentment towards France by Salafists caused by its colonial occupation of Algeria, its occupation in Mali, and its participation in U.S.-led coalitions intended to defeat the organization in the Middle East.[20] ISIS recruits followers through online platforms as well as through prisons and existing terror cells, and the open borders in the European Union make it easier for EU nationals to slip into Iraq or Syria for militant training. As of Fall 2017, approximately 1,700 people were estimated to have left France to join ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq. Several hundred are thought to have been killed in battle, and several hundred more returned to France; the Foreign Minister said 500 fighters remained at the end of 2017.[21] Thereafter, the ability of those same people to return to France to recruit

more followers while operating in isolated areas has led to a string of deadly ISIS-inspired attacks.[22]

The January 2015 attack on the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, and the attack on a Jewish supermarket that took place in the days that followed, were carried out by three French citizens, two of whom were inspired by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (which eventually took credit for planning the attack) and a third, Amedy Coulibaly, who was inspired by ISIS and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.[23]

In November 2015, ISIS claimed full responsibility for the attacks on the city of Paris where eight gunmen, armed with both explosive belts as well as machine guns, killed 129 people across 6 locations throughout the city, such as the Bataclan theater and a national soccer stadium where President Francois Hollande was attending a match. The Islamic State claimed that the attacks were retaliation for French airstrikes against ISIS fighters in Syria. The attackers were a mix of French and Belgian nationals, many of whom were believed to have visited Syria, committed previous crimes, had a previous terrorism connection, and were radicalized through existing terror cells or prison encounters.[24]

ISIS inspired attacks also occurred during the summer of 2016, first with the successful attack on Bastille Day in which Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel drove a 19-ton truck through a crowded street in Nice, killing 84 people. ISIS claimed Bouhlel was a "soldier of the Islamic State" and French officials believe he was radicalized through a terror cell in Nice.[25] Also in July 2016, two French nationals raided a church in Northern France and took five people hostage, eventually killing an 84-year-old priest. Both attackers pledged allegiance to ISIS, and one of the attackers was on the radar of police and intelligence agencies for over a year and tried to visit Syria at least once in 2015 before being stopped at the Turkish border.[26]

Even as ISIS waned as a military-political entity in Syria and Iraq, it continued to inspired small-scale attacks in France throughout 2017. A French soldier shot a machete-wielding man outside the Louvre in February,[27] and a police officer shot an attacker who had seized a soldier's firearm at Orly airport one month later.[28] Several other isolated assaults were committed against uniformed forces and civilians, leading to a dozen serious injuries and two deaths. Large caches of explosives and weapons were seized in Montpellier and Marseille. Though ISIS declined as a territorial power, its message has not been entirely extinguished among a subset of the French population. Counter-terrorism officials took their fight online, where radicalization had sometimes occurred, but also to prisons and social workers. Scholars of political Islam debated whether France was witnessing the radicalization of Jihad (an idea defended by Gilles Kepel) or rather, the "Jihadization" of radicalism, which was Olivier Roy's argument that Islamic terrorism was this generation's youth revolt.[29]

Islamism and Society

Islam, barely present in France before 1945, arrived along with a wave of immigrant labor, primarily from North Africa. After Catholicism, Islam is now the most common religion in Europe. Muslims make up between five to ten percent of the total population, and Islam is the religion of two-thirds of all immigrants. Since 1872, French law has prohibited any identification of citizens by religion, even for census purposes, so precise numbers are hard to come by, but the CIA World Factbook counts 63-66 percent of the French population as Christian (overwhelmingly Catholic), 0.5-0.75 percent as Buddhist, 0.5-0.75 percent as Jewish, 23-28 percent non-affiliated, and 7-9 percent as Muslim.[30] In addition to immigration, many in France's Muslim population are indigenous citizens, having converted from another religion. The Pew Research Center, along with national polls conducted in 2010, found the number of converts at that time at between 70,000 and 110,000.[31] Of the sixteen million Muslims living in the European Union, about a third live in France, concentrated in the Ile-de-France region around Paris, in the south of France and in the country's industrial north.[32] Increased Muslim immigration and recent domestic terror attacks have taken their toll on non-Muslims' attitude towards Islam.[33] For example, an April 2016 poll conducted by IFOP, a French polling center, found that 47 percent of French people felt that Muslims posed a threat to their

national identity, up from 43 percent in 2010. The same poll also found that more than 60 percent thought Islam was both too influential and visible in France.[34]

Of the French Muslim population, about a third describes itself as "observant." An extensive secularization of the Muslim population is consistent with the decline of observant practices in other religious traditions in the country. However, there are indications that Muslim youth practice their religion at rates higher than the Catholic majority: 65% of practicing Catholics are older than 50, while 73% of practicing Muslims are younger than 54.[35] As of 2016, there were approximately 2,500 mosques in France.[36] In some instances, the construction of new mosques has led to protests, yet Muslim advocates complain that the floor space available for Muslim prayer services remains insufficient.[37]

The rise of a minority Islamism within the Muslim community can be viewed in part as a reaction against the modernization of lifestyles within immigrant communities. The mobilization of Islamist identity frequently involves younger generations rebelling against the aspirations for integration harbored by older generations of immigrants.[38] It was estimated that around one hundred Salafi prayer spaces continued to operate in 2017.[39] The number of individual Salafis in France was estimated to have tripled from 5,000 to 15,000 in the first half of the 2010s — mostly in Paris, Lyon and Marseille. "The great majority of French Salafis are quietists who condemn militant jihad," but the prayer spaces were still considered to be a sort of jihadi "airlock."[40] There were attempts to close down Salafist mosques, including some without links to violence or terrorism.[41] A French mosque in Yvelines lost its appeal to the Conseil d'Etat after it was established that it had hosted sermons of a "threatening nature" towards Christians and Jews, and which "glorified terrorism."

Islamist recruitment in France has multiple dimensions. One key venue is the mosque, although of the total number of mosques very few (approximately 120) are considered sources of potential threats.[42] In the months between December 2015 and August 2016, a total of 20 mosques were shut down by French authorities under suspicion of preaching radical Islam. In the same timeframe, France's Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, called for a temporary ban on foreign funding, the most common form of financing, for French mosques to further curb radicalization.[43] In some cases, the mosque imam provides the radical ideology, but in others jihadist recruiters may be active without the knowledge of the imam. Significant recruitment, including proselytization, likewise takes place in prisons; French prison populations are often more than 50 percent Muslim, at times reaching 80 percent in certain areas.[44] Activists reach out both to non-observant Muslim inmates, as well as to non-Muslims who are prospects for conversion. A third avenue of recruitment involves contact with French jihadis—i.e., veterans of the conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and Iraq—who have returned to France and who may form ad hoc groups to support or carry out terrorist attacks.[45] In addition to recruitment in prison and by former jihadis, groups like ISIS target young, often disillusioned French Muslims, both men and women and often-times non-religious, through propaganda videos and social media. Recruiters target those most vulnerable and likely to be radicalized due to lack of societal integration and portray messages of strength, unity, and promise if they become ISIS fighters. Attracting younger recruits online has been incredibly successful in getting men and women to travel to Syria, causing the French government to launch an anti-ISIS communication campaign called Stop Jihadism in early 2015 to try to dissuade French youths from joining the group.[46]

The conflict between modernizing pressure and Muslim identity underlies the controversy surrounding the headscarf, or hijab. Islamist pressure to establish separatist communitarian identity focuses on symbols and practices to separate Muslims from secular French society. In 2004, facing a growing Muslim population in public schools with increasing numbers of women wearing the headscarf, the French government promulgated a law banning ostentatious religious symbols in the schools, in the spirit of laicité, [47] or France's embrace of secularism based on "freedom of conscience and freedom of worship, separation of public institutions and religious organizations, and equality before the law irrespective of their beliefs or beliefs."[48] A 2011 law banning any face covering in public places only added to the controversy around

both the hijab and the burqua, and intensified the conversation around religious freedom. While the laws also pertain to Christian and Jewish symbols, the Muslim headscarf or veil has received the most public scrutiny. These controversial laws underscored the gap between French norms of secular modernity and the neo-traditionalism of Islamist behavior. A primary goal of Islamism involves the assertion of patriarchal norms and the resistance to the spread of equal rights to Muslim women.[49]

Muslim immigrant populations are frequently concentrated in the ethnic ghettos of the banlieues, the working-class suburbs surrounding French urban centers, where they remain marginalized, facing discrimination and weathering high unemployment rates. This concentration of social problems has led repeatedly to outbreaks of mass violence. In 2005, in response to the deaths of two teenagers in Clichy-sous-Bois, near Paris, local rioting erupted, spreading rapidly across the country. A state of emergency was declared, resulting in three thousand arrests. Damage to property totaled 200 million Euros.[50] Another series of riots broke out in 2009.[51] Such periodic unrest has contributed to a profound social anxiety about sécurité, a term which has implications stretching from crime-in-the-streets to terrorism. Furthermore, the banlieues serve as prime recruitment locations for groups such as ISIS, who capitalize on the lack of opportunity and upward mobility that creates discontent amongst some susceptible young Muslims. The situation has only worsened in recent times, as the communities become labeled as guilty or complacent for the recent string of terror attacks in France, creating a dangerous vacuum for radicalization.[52]

Islamism and the State

A modern liberal democracy with a tradition of secularism dating back to the eighteenth century, France is also a key ally of the United States, despite occasional foreign policy differences. French troops have played an important role in the war in Afghanistan, involvement in Libya, and the coalition to fight ISIS, even as the French state is actively engaged in resisting Islamism, both domestically and internationally.

Building on its history of colonialism, France aspired to become the European gateway to the Arab world through a systematic courting of the post-colonial regimes of North Africa. Public discourse in France, therefore, tended to be more pro-Arab than elsewhere in the West. However, the rise of an emphatically religious Islamism ran counter to French commitments to laicité, generating policy shifts under Sarkozy, an open promotion of French national identity. In October 2009, then-Minister of Immigration Eric Besson called for public debate over "the theme of what it is to be French, what are the values we share, what are the relations that make us French and of which we should be proud." He insisted on a particular valorization of Frenchness: "We must reaffirm the values of French national identity and the pride in being French."[53] This effort by the state to mobilize a focus on nationality was intended as an effort to overcome immigrant (and especially Islamist) separatism, and in the years since, this discussion has shifted increasingly toward secularism. To question the role of religion in the public sphere in France is, above all, a vehicle to inquire about the status of politicized Islam.

Yet the conflict between the republican secularism of the state and the politicization of religion inherent in Islamism continues. In 2009, a debate began over prospective legislation to ban full-length cloaks, the burqa and the niqab (the latter leaves the eyes uncovered) from public venues. Initially proposed by a Communist mayor of a town with a high Muslim population, its intention was to protect women and to defend French values of secularism. It was adopted with the support of conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy and his party, but the Socialist Party did not oppose it; current Socialist President Hollande has indicated that he does not plan to pursue a retraction of the ban, which has strong popular support.[54] Clothing bans were once again the subject of debate in 2016, when over 30 towns in coastal France imposed a ban on a full-length swimsuit, often referred to as the burkini. While the ban was overturned by some French courts, local officials as well as national figures, such as Prime Minister Valls, were vocal in their opposition to the swimsuit. In the midst of the burkini controversy, the mayor of the Riviera town at the center of the controversy told Muslim women "[i]f you don't want to live the way we do, don't come,"

while Prime Minster Valls referred to the swimsuit as a "symbol of the enslavement of women."[55]

French counterterrorism practices have faced criticism on civil rights and human rights grounds. The promulgation of laws criminalizing terrorist conspiracies (rather than simply terrorist attacks themselves) has elicited denunciations on the grounds that they represent an ominous expansion of state power. However, this pursuit of conspiracies has been defended as the only way to prevent catastrophic attacks, such as the successful disruption of the plans for terrorist violence at the 2014 World Cup at the Stade de France.[56] Still, Amnesty International and other watchdog groups continue to criticize France for its prosecution of conspiracy charges as a "criminal association in relation to a terrorist undertaking."[57]

With regard to any connection between terrorism and asylum seekers, it is worth noting that the countries that have been the hardest hit by terrorist attacks ranked lowest in terms of refugees accepted, including France (along with Belgium and the UK).[58] A handful of French terrorists took advantage of chaos at Europe's Southeastern border by pretending to be refugees, taking advantage of lax vetting procedures. Some had fake Syrian passports, registered as refugees in Greece, passed through Budapest on the Balkan Route. The terrorist threat came not from refugees but from thousands of native-born Muslims—roughly one-fourth of whom were converts—who traveled (or attempted to travel) to Syria or Iraq.[59] Nearly all terrorists involved in the attacks of the past two years were the products of French society, born in France or raised there from a young age.

For civil rights activists, the situation was exacerbated by 2008 legislation that authorized preventive detention in certain cases. After the completion of a sentence, an individual whom a judge deems to be dangerous may face an extended sentence for renewable periods of one year. In addition, the police were granted the authority to develop intelligence files on all individuals over the age of thirteen who are deemed to represent a threat to public order. While criticisms of this counterterrorism regime continue, France was successful in thwarting large-scale domestic attacks for several years leading up to the 2012 Toulouse shootings. Until then, there had been no return to the violence of the 1980s, when terrorists seemed able to act in France with impunity and little fear of sanction. After the Toulouse attack, it was revealed that the perpetrator, Mohammed Merah, had been under surveillance but was nonetheless able to carry out the killings, which lead to public criticism of the counterintelligence community. Marc Trévidic, the former counter-terrorism magistrate, argued that counterintelligence agencies may respond by pulling back their operations precisely in order to avoid this sort of criticism in the future: "After Merah, our policemen are afraid […] They don't want to monitor people for a long time after they come back [from foreign travel to Islamist territories], because if they monitor someone and this guy commits a bomb attack it will be terrible a second time for [the counterintelligence agency]."[60] The alternative, an early arrest of a potential terrorist, would likely not be upheld due to a lack of sufficient evidence.

However, after it was disclosed that the extremist cell that included the Charlie Hebdo attackers had already been known to French intelligence authorities prior to their attacks, French lawmakers responded with a new law designed to intensify intelligence gathering and surveillance. In early 2015, a law was drafted to update the legislative framework to help French security services better define the purposes and types of intelligence-gathering, set up a National Commission for Control of Intelligence Techniques, and authorize new methods to collect metadata from internet providers.[61] While the law passed overwhelmingly in the National Assembly, it is particularly controversial among civil liberties groups because of its provision allowing French authorities access to "digital and mobile phone communications of anyone linked to a 'terrorist' inquiry without prior authorization from a judge." To quell the fears of vocal opponents and concerned citizens, President Hollande has pledged that the law would be reviewed by France's constitutional council to ensure its lawfulness.[62] Other elements of the counter-terrorism effort raised eyebrows amongst civil liberties lawyers. A court sentenced a French mother to two years' imprisonment for wiring money to her jihadi son in Syria. France even began target assassinations of its

own jihadis nationals in Syria, sidestepping the death penalty ban and provoking no particular outcry.[63] President Macron declared an end to the State of Emergency that began in November 2015 and ended in November 2017.

In the aftermath of the 2015 terrorist attacks, France also introduced new certification procedures for preachers and closer scrutiny of mosque funding. Dozens of imams, civil servants, and teachers graduated annually from multiple anti-radicalization programs in Paris, Strasbourg, Aix-en-Provence, Lyon. In 2015, all 1,800 imams in France were assigned an obligatory educational program of 130 hours of classes over one year. The government invested another €1.5 million in sundry imam-integration projects. In the wake of the Bastille Day attack and the burkini ban controversy of 2016, former Prime Minister Hollande saw an opportunity to address the compatibility of Islam and French secularism by setting up the Foundation for Islam in France in August 2016. With the goal of improving relations between France's Muslim population and the French government, Hollande chose Jean-Pierre Chevènement to lead the foundation. In addition to the Foundation, Hollande publicly stated that France must find a way for the state to play a role in financing and building mosques and training clergy to eliminate the possibility of radicalization of imams who are trained abroad.[64] An "imam charter," meant to assist imams in combatting radicalization, was signed in March 2017.[65]

In 2017, the Foundation for Islam was given a start-up fund of €5 million to pursue "the goal of helping French Islam become autonomous, in funding and in its approach" to religion.[66] Funds could also be solicited from any Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member state to sponsor special programming — but not the CFCM's core budget itself. "France must overcome the rifts that our adversaries want to exploit," Chevènement, the foundation director, said. "The Islamic State's strategists do not hide that they want to throw our country into civil war."[67]

Chevènement added that French Imams may be "trained in those countries that fight against jihadi terrorism" so long as they fulfilled a series of specific requirements, i.e. be Francophone, obtain a diploma in legal and civic education from one of twelve French universities, and hold a degree in Islamic studies.[68] "The young people being radicalized are very removed from Islam… Only qualified theologians can help to religiously reorient them — they have become disconnected because they have broken ties to their countries of origin without having integrated in France."[69]

There has been some exchange with North African nations to assist France in anti-radicalization efforts. In May 2017, the Tunisian minister of religious affairs, Ahmed Adhoum, proposed the creation of a religious attaché to Tunisian embassies in Europe, which would allow imams and preachers to travel to European nations to combat radicalization. The French and Italian ambassadors to Tunisia expressed interest in the project.[70] Morocco offered to train fifty French imams per year at its new Mohamed VI Institute in Rabat, a religious school meant to combat radicalization, and Algeria offered to do the same at the Dar al-Imam in Algiers, or the University in Constantine.[71]

The election of a new President, Emmanuel Macron, in 2017 lent new energy to the Islam dossier. One of President Macron's future ministers wrote in 2016, "We must impose a Concordat-like set of rules so that [Islam] is totally blended into the Republic […] French Islam means firmly accepting cutting all religious ties with foreign countries."[72] This was one of the institutional forms that the President invoked in an interview with the Journal du Dimanche when announcing that he would be revisiting the concept of the French Council for the Muslim Faith, the institution that Nicolas Sarkozy helped bring to life in 2003, based on Jean-Pierre Chevenement's own consultations with Islamic associations in the late 1990s. Among the issues still in need of resolution after thirty years of consultations: an approved place to train Islamic theologians and imams for the republic.

Endnotes

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