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French and U.S. Communities Work Together to Counter Terrorist Radicalization ^[1]

Note from the CPD Blog Manager: This piece originally appeared in DipNote, the official blog of the U.S. State Department.

France and the United States know the threat and impact of terrorism all too well. Despite our global efforts to defeat and degrade terrorist organizations, groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda will continue to attempt to carry out attacks and inspire others to violence.

To bolster the United States' partnership with France to counter terrorist radicalization and recruitment, the State Department has encouraged policy makers, researchers and practitioners from both countries to exchange good practices and lessons learned. Included in these efforts are traditional speaker programs and the Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program

(IVLP), and also new innovative initiatives such as the Strong Cities Network, and the City Pair CVE Partnership Program, which is a partnership with the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Beginning in 2015, our key engagements have led U.S. and French participants to develop new programs or update existing ones to counter the terrorist threat:

- The State Department helped establish the Strong Cities Network, which includes Bordeaux, Montreuil, Paris and Sarcelles. Through this global network of local governments, French members have been able to share best practices with other members around the world. Bordeaux, for example, has presented on its Center for Prevention of Radicalization (CAPRI) at Strong Cities Network events in Australia, Lebanon and Turkey.
- The U.S. Embassy Paris facilitated the first visit of homeland security expert Dr. Erroll Southers of the University of Southern California (USC) to France several years ago to share his knowledge on terrorist radicalization and recruitment and soft targets protection. Subsequent visits to France by Southers led to USC's Price School of Public Policy signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Université Paris II Panthéon-Assas for their Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Studies degree program. In November 2017, USC's Price School and its Safe Communities Institute hosted a Global Summit on Homegrown Violent Extremism featuring French experts that Southers met through previous engagements.
- Marseille participated in a City Pair with Orlando and Tampa in December 2016, six months after the Orlando Pulse nightclub attack in which an ISIS-inspired terrorist killed 49 people. The Marseille delegation met Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, the Orlando Police Department, and community leaders to hear firsthand accounts of their response to that incident. Marseille had its own encounter with terrorism in October 2017 when an ISIS-inspired man murdered two women at the central train station.

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- Toulouse participated in a City Pair with Atlanta in November 2017. One of their stops included Clarkston, Georgia, which serves as a model on how to build the resilience of new communities. The exchange provided Toulouse delegates with new approaches on how local governments can work with civil society organizations on countering terrorist radicalization and recruitment.

- During a City Pair in December 2017, a delegation from Lyon learned about New Orleans' efforts to promote resilience in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, after-school programs, and the protection of soft targets in the French District. Based on the exchanges, delegates are developing programs to engage vulnerable youth in Lyon.
- Strasbourg visited Boston in May 2018 through the City Pair and learned about local government and community responses to the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013, including the One World Strong organization formed by survivors, as well as programs to address gang violence and youth delinquency. One World Strong has subsequently worked with survivors of terrorist attacks in Nice and Paris. Based on their exchange, Strasbourg delegates are organizing an international conference this fall to discuss ways to promote community resilience and counter terrorist radicalization and recruitment.
- Local government and community leaders from Paris visited Chicago and Los Angeles through the City Pair in March 2019. In Chicago, the delegation learned about the Illinois Targeted Violence Prevention Program, which educates communities on how to identify and address the warning signs of radicalization. In Los Angeles, the delegation met with Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) program staff as well as Homeboy Industries, which helps former prisoners reintegrate.
- The U.S. Embassy Paris in April 2019 partnered with the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS) to organize a workshop for City Pair alumni and other State Department exchanges from Belgium, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Participants shared lessons learned from their exchanges, including how Vilvoorde, a Belgian municipality just north of Brussels, reduced foreign terrorist fighter departures by developing programs to engage vulnerable youth. A member of Manchester's City Council talked about how they took lessons from their exchange with Boston into account for the planning of the one-year remembrance of the June 2017 terrorist attack by an ISIS affiliate that killed 22 people.

The attacks in Marseille, New York, Nice, Orlando, Paris, San Bernardino and Strasbourg over the past four years are examples of how lethal even one or a few determined individuals can be. Exchanges between France and the United States on countering radicalization and terrorist recruitment remain timely and important—for all of our national security.
