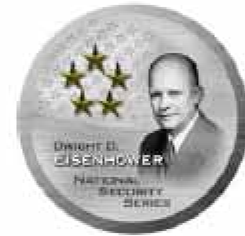

"'The Global War on Terror': A European Perspective"

October 11, 2005

Speaker: **Xavier Raufer**, Director, Department on Organized Crime and Terrorism, Institute of Criminology, University of Paris

This meeting, jointly sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Center's Division of International Security Studies and West European Studies, the RAND Corporation, and the U.S. Army's Eisenhower National Security Series, was part of an ongoing series on terrorism and homeland security.

The University of Paris's Institute of Criminology, which Professor Raufer currently directs, has conducted research and published studies on terrorism and cross-border crime since 1987. The rigorous and systematic study of these phenomena is the prerequisite for the formulation of effective policies to counter the challenge they pose to international society.

Raufer observed that the principal forms of modern terrorism (anarchist, revolutionary, nationalist, and religious) all originated in Europe. The first Islamic terrorist attack outside the Middle East occurred in Paris in December 1985, and over the following decade France alone was struck an additional 17 times. The major European countries (each with its own specialists, intelligence officers, and police forces) have had considerable experience in dealing with terrorism and that historical legacy can provide valuable insights as the trans-Atlantic community now confronts a common threat.

Raufer argued that an inadequate or faulty conceptualization of the problem has promoted flawed, even counterproductive, policies. He noted that an enormous counter-terrorism effort goes into the compilation of lists – individuals (who must be watched, captured or prevented from boarding airplanes) and organizations. Al Qaeda frequently has been depicted as a stable and recognizable IRA-type organization with a general staff and Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi in the role of commander of the Baghdad brigade. But the current jihadi movement is chameleon-like. "Collecting information," Raufer stated, "is not *thinking*." Hence, while the "Echelon" network is capable of intercepting millions of telephone calls, faxes, and emails, its utility for providing timely warning has been limited because the keywords programmed into the system to trigger an alert have been inadequate.

To develop effective policies, officials must understand "the mental universe" of the Islamic extremists. A telling example of this persisting cultural gap was the American response to the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks: the nation was on heightened military alert and commercial flights were empty. The prevailing view was that Bin Laden would be more prone to attack on the one-year mark than on any other random date. But Bin Laden operates from a different cultural conception of time and date – one in which anniversaries are not celebrated and important religious holidays shift according to the lunar calendar.

However vague or fuzzy, the major Western countries do have a common vision of the real dangers in the post-9/11 era. Major texts – NATO's final communiqué at the Prague summit in 2002, the White House's National Security Strategy document of September 2002, and the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy – all highlight the same prevailing threats and themes: terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failing states, and organized crime. But translating that vision into effective collective action remains a challenge.

Raufer concluded that we must look at terrorism and organized crime as parts of a continuum. The early detection of threats is much like preventive medicine: It requires careful study of the disease, development of some key medicines and therapies, and investment ahead of crises that may not show immediate payoff. Above all, it requires that officials move beyond short-range thinking and strive to understand the essential nature of the threat facing Western societies and how our enemies think.