

The 751 No-Go Zones of France

by Daniel Pipes

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<http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2006/11/the-751-no-go-zones-of-france>

Translations of this item:

- Indonesian

[Author's note: Please note that the update of Jan. 16, 2013 substantially changes my understanding of the ZUS.]

They go by the euphemistic term *Zones Urbaines Sensibles*, or Sensitive Urban Zones, with the even more antiseptic acronym ZUS, and there are 751 of them as of last count. They are [conveniently listed on one long webpage](#), complete with street demarcations and map delineations.

What are they? Those places in France that the French state does not fully control. They range from two zones in the medieval town of Carcassonne to twelve in the heavily Muslim city of Marseilles, with hardly a town in France lacking in its ZUS. The ZUS came into existence in late 1996 and according to a [2004 estimate](#), nearly 5 million people live in them.

Comment: The proliferation of ZUS suggest that the French state no longer has full control over its territory. (November 14, 2006)

Nov. 28, 2006 update: For an insight into how bad things are, the police in Lyons demonstrated on Nov. 9, denouncing "violence against the forces of order." Things have reached a pretty sad state when the police have to demonstrate in the streets against the criminals.

Jan. 5, 2008 update: In a remarkable statement, [Michael Nazir-Ali](#), the Pakistani-born bishop of Rochester, writes in the *Daily Telegraph* about the situation in Great Britain:

there has been a worldwide resurgence of the ideology of Islamic extremism. One of the results of this has been to further alienate the young from the nation in which they were growing up and also to turn already separate communities into "no-go" areas where adherence to this ideology has become a mark of acceptability. Those of a different faith or race may find it difficult to live or work there because of hostility to them.

Jan. 16, 2008 update: [Paul Belien](#) of *Brussels Journal* provides an update on the ZUS, connecting them to organized crime in a way that helps explain police reluctance to intervene:

In May [2007], the French voters elected Mr. [Nicolas] Sarkozy as president because he had promised to restore the authority of the Republic over France's 751 no-go areas, the so-called zones urbaines sensibles (ZUS, sensitive urban areas), where 5 million people - 8 percent of the population - live. During his first months in office he has been too busy with other activities, such as selling nuclear plants to Libya and getting divorced. While the French media publish nude pictures of the future (third) Mrs. Sarkozy, the situation in the ZUS has remained as "sensitive" as before.

People get mugged, even murdered, in the ZUS, but the media prefer not to write about it. When large-scale rioting erupts and officers and firemen are attacked, the behavior of the thugs is condoned with references to their "poverty" and to the "racism" of the indigenous French. The French media never devote their attention to the bleak situation of intimidation and lawlessness in which 8 percent of the population, including many poor indigenous French, are forced to live. Muslim racism toward the "infidels" is never mentioned.

Xavier Raufer, a former French intelligence officer who heads the department on organized crime and terrorism at the Institute of Criminology of the University of Paris II, thinks that organized crime has a lot to do with the indifference of the French establishment.

The ZUS are centers of drug trafficking. According to a recent report of the French government's Interdepartmental Commission to Combat Drug Traffic and Addiction (MILDT) 550,000 people in France consume cannabis on a daily basis and 1.2 million on a regular basis. The annual cannabis consumption amounts to 208 tons for a market value of 832 million euros (\$1.2 billion in U.S. dollars). MILDT estimates that there are between 6,000 and 13,000 small "entrepreneurs" and between 700 and 1,400 wholesalers who make a living out of dealing cannabis. The wholesalers earn up to 550,000 euros (\$820,000) per year. Since they operate from within the ZUS the drug dealers are beyond the reach of the French authorities.

The ZUS exist not only because Muslims wish to live in their own areas according to their own culture and their own Shariah laws, but also because organized crime wants to operate without the judicial and fiscal interference of the French state. In France, Shariah law and mafia rule have become almost identical.

Mar. 8, 2008 update: Britain has "ethnic" no-go areas for military personnel in uniform, the *Times* (London) reports today at "[Military uniforms in public 'risk offending minorities'](#)."

Certain areas in Britain will still have to remain off-limits for servicemen and women in military gear, despite the Government's desire for a nationwide uniform free-for-all, senior RAF sources acknowledged yesterday. ... one senior air force source said that military commanders had to be aware of potential problems of personnel wearing combat and other military clothes in the street. "We're aware of the sensitivities, for example, in some ethnic minority communities which is why we need to have a dialogue with local authorities and police if we don't want to cause a problem."

Mar. 16, 2008 update: John Cornwell, a leading historian and commentator on religion, is generally skeptical of Nazir-Ali's no-go areas but finds that if anyplace fits the profile, it's [Bury Park](#) in Luton:

Luton, like other enclaves, has experienced a spate of incidents that look all too like attempts to make Bury Park a no-go area to non-Muslims. Between November of last year and last month there were 18 attacks – all registered by the police – on five non-Muslim homes in the area. One couple, Mr and Mrs Harrop, white residents in their eighties, have had bricks hurled through their windows. The home of Mrs Palmer, a widow of West Indian origin, aged 70, has been attacked four times; on one occasion a metal beer keg crashed through her bay window while she was watching TV.

Such attacks are not typical of the activities of the sort of radicals who preach a global Islamic state, or potential terrorists, who, according to one of my MI5 informants, merge into a background of "innocent normalcy" till the last minute. DCI Ian Middleton of Bedfordshire police says: "It's the perception of the victims that their Muslim neighbours are to blame, and we have to respect that. But we have our doubts." Middleton suspects, as does Margaret Moran, MP for Luton South, that the attacks could be the work of small groups of white or Muslim extremists, stirring up racial and inter-religious hatred for its own sake.

I was to come across comparable "no-go" incidents in other parts of Britain, such as threats against Muslim converts to Christianity, and attacks on visiting social workers and Salvation Army facilities.

July 28, 2008 update: For information on the German case, see Kristian Frigelj, "[Unter Feinden](#)," *Die Welt*. The teaser explains that "In many German urban areas, the police hardly dare enter because they are immediately assaulted." **July 29, 2008 update:** For a translation of this article, see "[In Enemy Territory](#)."

Jan. 12, 2009 update: I consider the potential political import of these no-go zones at "[Muslim Autonomous Zones in the West?](#)"

July 19, 2010 update: Due to problems with Turkish delinquents, German police want their counterparts from Turkey to come in and patrol problem areas of [North Rhine-Westphalia](#). Also today, Baron Bodissey discusses the general issue of no-go zones at "[A Little Piece of Dar al-Islam](#)."

Aug. 22, 2011 update: Soeren Kern returns to this subject with an important overview at "[European 'No-Go' Zones for Non-Muslims Proliferating](#)."

Islamic extremists are stepping up the creation of "no-go" areas in European cities that are off-limits to non-Muslims. Many of the "no-go" zones function as microstates governed by Islamic Sharia law. Host-country authorities effectively have lost control in these areas and in many instances are unable to provide even basic public aid such as police, fire fighting and ambulance services.

The "no-go" areas are the by-product of decades of multicultural policies that have encouraged Muslim immigrants to create parallel societies and remain segregated rather than become integrated into their European host nations.

He then surveys developments in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

Aug. 4, 2012 update: The French Interior Ministry has created a new type of no-go zone, called [Zones de Sécurité Prioritaires](#) (ZSP), or Priority Security Zones. The first batch contains 15 of them, basically the Muslim-majority regions of major cities like Lille, Paris, Strasbourg, Lyons, and Marseilles, as well as in French Guyana.

Aug. 24, 2012 update: [Soeren Kern](#) explains these new zones in "France Seeks to Reclaim 'No-Go' Zones."

Sep. 1, 2013 update: [80 ZSP](#) now exist.

Jan. 16, 2013 update: I had an opportunity today to travel at length to several *banlieues* (suburbs) around Paris, including Sarcelles, Val d'Oise, and Seine-Saint-Denis. This comes on the heels of having visited over the years the predominantly immigrant (and Muslim) areas of Brussels, Copenhagen, Malmö, Berlin, and Athens.

A couple of observations:

- For a visiting American, these areas are very mild, even dull. We who know the Bronx and Detroit expect urban hell in Europe too, but there things look fine. The immigrant areas are hardly beautiful, but buildings are intact, greenery abounds, and order prevails.
- These are not full-fledged no-go zones but, as the French nomenclature accurately indicates, "sensitive urban zones." In normal times, they are unthreatening, routine places. But they do unpredictably erupt, with car burnings, attacks on representatives of the state (including police), and riots.

Having this first-hand experience, I regret having translated what the French government terms *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* as *no-go zones*. One can indeed "go" in them.





A typical sight in the commercial areas of "94," one of the most heavily Muslim areas of France.



Typical housing.

Nov. 11, 2013 update: Andrew Harrod discusses the problems in Bonn at "[Germany's Sharia No-Go Zones.](#)"

Oct. 1, 2014 update: The Swedish police published a report on 55 areas of heightened criminal activity under the anodyne title of [En nationell översikt av kriminella nätverk med stor påverkan i lokalsamhället](#) ("A national survey of criminal networks with great influence in the local community"). No ethnicity is mentioned but many happen to be regions with Muslim majorities.

Jan. 13, 2015 update: [Nigel Farage](#), leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party, says that most big French cities have "no-go zones" where non-Muslims, including police, cannot enter:

It's happening right across Europe. We have got no-go zones in most of the big French cities. We've been turning a blind eye to preachers of hate that have been coming here from the Middle East and saying things for which the rest of us would be arrested. In parts of northern England we've seen the sexual grooming of under-age girls committed by Muslim men, in the majority, and for all of these things we are seeing the law not being applied equally, we're seeing the police forces not doing their job because we've suffered from moral cowardice. We have through mass immigration and through not checking the details of those people who have come to our countries, we have allowed big ghettos to develop and when it comes to confronting tough issues we're run a mile and that is why

we're in the mess we're in, we've been led very badly. ... So, wherever you look, wherever you look you see this blind eye being turned and you see the growth of ghettos where the police and all the normal agents of the law have withdrawn and that is where Sharia law has come in."

He added that he is "hoping and praying" that similar no-go zones do not develop in British cities.

Jan. 14, 2015 update: Jack Sommers, a UK-based reporter for *Huffington Post*, posed this series of questions to me about the ZUS and their equivalents elsewhere in Europe:

Could you describe the places you visited in more detail? What were your impressions of these places before you visited them? Did you feel personally safe visiting them? Do you think there is any truth to the claims being made that police and non-Muslims fear to visit them?

My reply:

I have visited predominantly immigrant (and largely Muslim) areas of Athens, Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, the Hague, Malmö, Paris, and Stockholm. In the case of Paris, I spent time both in Belleville and in such suburbs as Sarcelles, Val d'Oise, and Seine Saint Denis. I have also visited the equivalent areas of Dearborn, Michigan, and Sydney, Australia, plus analogous areas of Israel, including Jaffa, Nazareth, eastern Jerusalem, Baqa al-Gharbiya, and Umm al-Fahm.

Before my travels, I expected these areas to be similar to the worst areas of the United States, such as the Bronx or Detroit, where buildings are decrepit, streets menacing, and outsiders feel distinctly unwelcome.

My experiences starting in 2007 belied this expectation. All the immigrant areas turned out to be well maintained, with safe streets, and no sense of intimidation. I walked around, usually with camera in hand, and felt at ease. I encountered no difficulties at all.

That said, there is a reason why the French government calls these regions *sensibles* (sensitive, delicate). They contain many social pathologies (unemployment, drugs, political extremism), they seethe with antagonism toward the majority society, and are prone to outbreaks of violence.

So, from an American point of view, these areas are a bit confusing: potentially dangerous, yes, but in normal times very ordinary looking and with no sense of foreboding. Thus, the term no-go zone does not accurately reflect the situation.

Jan. 16, 2015 update: I reply to a critique that my visits do not amount to evidence at <http://www.danielpipes.org/comments/220430>

Jan. 17, 2015 update: Research into the term *no-go zones* referring to Muslim habitations in Western Europe done by the pseudonymous Yoel Natan finds its earliest use to be on my website, DanielPipes.org: An Australia resident who calls himself "[fed up](#)" wrote on March 22, 2006, that "In Sydney, Australia, we have large areas of our city that are deemed no-go zones."

The next use appears to be by the Norwegian analyst who calls himself [Fjordman](#), on July 13, 2006, who defined "Muslim no-go zones" as places "where anything representing a Western institution (post office truck, firemen, even mail order delivery firms) was routinely ambushed with Molotov cocktails."

Then came [my](#) use of the term on November 14, 2006. My originality was in translating *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* as *no-go zones*.

Jan. 20, 2015 update: I offer a more skeptical view of the ZUS today at "[Does Europe Have No-go Zones?](#)" in *The Blaze*.

Dec. 2, 2015 update: I offer another – my third, more nuanced, and, I hope, final – assessment of the no-go-zone issue today at "[Muslim 'No-go Zones' in Europe?](#)" in the *Daily Caller*. In it, I settle on the term "partial no-go zones."

Related Topics: [Criminality](#), [Muslims in Europe](#), [Radical Islam](#)

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