Terrorism in Europe and the Middle East

by

Prof. Farhad Khosrokhavar (*)

Europe has a tradition of terrorism based on the extreme left ideology (Red Brigades in Italy, Action Directe in France, Fraktion Roter Armee in Germany) or nationalist-regionalist tenets (Basque movement in Spain, Corsican movement in France, Sin Fein in Northern Ireland …). The emergence of Islamist terrorism is a new phenomenon in this part of the world but some of the converts believe in the utopian role of Islam in the same fashion as the middle class leftist youth in the 1960s and 1970s about Marxism or communism. Islamic terrorism partially feeds on the exhaustion of leftist ideologies which mobilised part of the youth in Europe and which is not any more convincing to the eyes of the people in this part of the world[1].

The Middle East has a tradition of radical Islam as a minority phenomenon that has been revitalised in the last three decades through the war in Afghanistan against the former Soviet Union and other events in the Middle East (the Taliban, the war against them by the West after September the 11th and the war in Iraq since 2003.

The Muslim immigration to Europe

Terrorism is mostly related to the immigrant population from the Muslim world in Europe, their offspring and a minority of converts. In the 1960s and 1970s Europe's industrialisation attracted many immigrant workers. The offshoots of this population, from second and third generations, have many problems related to their integration within European countries.

In Europe, radical Islam has different origins, mainly related to the colonial background (France, England) or to the immigration of Muslims in the last few decades from the Moslem world (Germany, Spain). Still, each country has its specific history and its culture of "integration" and radicalisation is related as well to the local, regional history as to the global.

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[1] In Latin America the leftist-marxist ideology is still of some import in few countries where trafficking and terrorism go hand in hand in the name of communist tenets.

The French and English cases

In France, radical Islam has two different roots. The external one is mainly grounded in the Algerian extremist networks, the GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé) directed by the military branch of the FIS (Front Islamique de Salut) after it was denied the power by the military in 1992 in spite of its gaining the majority in the vote for the parliament. There was (and still is) an animosity between the GIA and the French government due to the support the latter gave to the Algerian army against the FIS. But the GIA would not have been able to operate in France without the Algerian diaspora and more generally, the Maghrebin disaffected youth in the French poor suburbs[2]. Some 1,5 million people of Algerian descent, around 700 thousand from Morocco and some 350 thousand from Tunisia live in France and among them, a tiny minority has been active for the GIA. Some terrorist networks were set up in France in the 1990s and enrolled young peoples from the poor suburbs. Among them, some people like Khaled Kelkal[3] who was exposed to racism and few Muslim converts were involved. Some cells from GIA were in touch with Al Qaeda and found in this way connections within France. Otherwise, autonomous Al Qaeda networks have been exceptional in France.

Radicalism has been enhanced through links with England much more than other European countries. Religious radicalism has had a tinge of post-colonialism marked by the rancour against the former colonizers by the children of those colonized, residing in France. The people who take part in radical Islam are mostly recruited among those young people who feel themselves as belonging neither to the country of their parents (North African ones) nor to France in which they are rejected as "Arabs". They have a deep ambivalent attitude towards themselves: they believe they are hated and despised by the French and for this reason, consider themselves as free to oppose to this indignity their own violence[4]. Islam gives them the opportunity to legitimize their feeling of rejection by canalizing it into a sacred cause. In this way, they take their revenge on the society and at the same time, accede to the salvation of their soul. They attain a twofold goal by engaging under the banner of radical Islam: they fight against a society which has never accepted them as such and they fight for Islam against the entire West. This fight raises them in their own view and provides them with a dignity that was denied them in their daily life before adhering to radical Islam. Through their engagement

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[2] See Farhad Khosrokhavar *L'islam des jeunes*, Flammarion, 1997.

[3] See Dietmar Loch "Moi, Khaled Kelkal" (the interview was made on october the 3rd, 1992), *Le Monde*, october the 7th, 1995. In this interview, the social roots of Kelkal's Islamic radicalism are spelled out by himself. In our own interviews, many young boys of the poor Paris suburb (Argenteuil in 1997) pretend to be treated like « insects » by the French people.

[4] For a more detailed information see Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers* : *New Martyrs of Allah*, Pluto Press (distributed in the US by Michigan Press University), 2005.

they gain the salvation (they become martyrs if they die), they accede to a new honour and dignity and they find meaning and sense for their life which was, previously, meaningless and without any end.

Another factor that encourages the advent of this affect is the way this population feels despised by the society at large. Racism is strongly felt, particularly through the advent of the Extreme Right[5] (Lepen group and dissident ones). This is reinforced by the restrictions imposed through the Laïcité which bans the Islamic signs in the public sphere and holds the communities as the moral negation of true and genuine citizenship. The victimization feelin is quite strong among many young men in the French poor suburbs who believe that they have no future. The radical Islamic groups benefit from this predisposition of the young people (overwhelmingly male) of North African origin who consider themselves as stigmatized by the society and banned by it. In this way, they are open to radicalization and if any network succeeds in getting in touch with them, some overstep their fears of repression and accept to act against those whom they hate and who, they think, are against Islam because they have reduced them to misery and on the international scene, defend Israel and all the anti-Islamic forces. The conjunction of identity problems, racism and economic exclusion creates a fertile ground for radicalization and violence among a tiny minority of this disaffected youth. Islamisation brings a sense of existence to them and radicalization gives them a new dignity as warriors of a just cause against a corrupt and ruthless society. This generation of inhabitants of poor suburbs, mostly of North African origin can be easily manipulated. Paradoxically the Media are the major source of their inspiration. The tragic spectacle of Palestinians dying under the attacks of the Israeli army and the indifference of the public opinion to the fate of Chechnians and other Muslims in the world easily convince them that the West in general is against Islam. The antagonistic attitude of some French political groups (the Extreme right) towards them is easily generalized, through the images of the TV, to the entire Western world. The deduction is peremptory: the West is against Islam and the genuine Moslems should fight against it in order to recover their dignity and their honour.

The police repression and infiltration among terrorist group since the 1990s has brought a halt to their acts within French borders. Some of these groups went to Great Britain and the presence of a Maghrebin diaspora there (around some 40 thousand Algerians among them) helped for a while to build up the new groups. But since the September the 11th 2001, the situation has changed and these groups are under police scrutiny.

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[5] See Michel Wieviorka (editor), *Violences en France*, Seuil, Paris, 1999.

Islamic radicalism is partially rooted in the disaffected Youth of North African origins or the converts mostly belonging to the same "Banlieues", although the networks are of Algerian (and through a branch of GIA related to Al Qaeda) and more generally North African origin[6]. This makes the French case a unique one. The English one is much more marginal. It involves members of radical Muslim groups belonging to the association Al Mohajirun or affiliated to other networks suspected of having ties with Al Qaeda. But these people form a tiny minority and up to now, only a dozen of them have been put under arrest. The French case, with the high number of people imprisoned, preserves its peculiarity concerning radical Islam so far.

In Holland, one might think of some kind of "hyper-fundamentalist" Islam in the case of the Moroccan who killed Theo van Gogh and who was affiliated to a group of Muslims with no proven direct ties to Al Qaeda or any transnational Muslim organisation. This type of group who allegedly belongs to Al Qaeda has not so much to do with the real organisation which has been destroyed in its real capacity to act directly in its former structure. This new type of Al Qaeda may be called a "metaphoric Al Qaeda": the mere fact that radical Muslims refer to it shows the prestige it enjoys within the radicalized youth in the Western European countries.

Some 1,6 million Muslims live in Britain and among them the Pakistanis are the majority. Their case is not unlike the North Africans in France who came there after independence, in order to promote industrialisation there. The English model of integration is totally different from the French model: recognition of communities, acceptance of a degree of cultural heterogeneity which is much higher than in France where any citizen is supposed to be part of the society individually and without the interference of any community. The only legitimate community is the French Nation where every citizen is a full member. This theoretical stance is of course far from being real in daily life. In the same fashion, the recognition of communities in Britain does not mean respect for different ways of lives. In practice, racism in both countries feeds on the otherness of the Muslim migrants and their inability to become full-fledged citizens. Frustration in both countries is high on the part of many Muslims who feel stigmatized and rejected, even though they have British or French citizenship.

In England, the July 2005 terrorism was perpetrated by four people who were British citizens: three of Pakistani origin and one, a convert from Catholicism of Jamaican roots. All four were raised in Britain and none was an immigrant. The Pakistanis are like the Algerians in France the target of racism and although part of their community is successful in business or in the public sector (in the same way as part of the North African population, called in France the

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[6] See Omar Guendouz : *Les soldats perdus de l'islam, les réseaux français de Ben Laden*, Editions Ramsay, 2002.

"Beurgeoisie"[7] is successful), still most of them feel segregated and exposed to racism and contempt by the other citizens. The rate of unemployment, like the North Africans in France, is much higher than the average in Britain. The culture of tolerance in Britain allowed many radical Muslims from North Africa but also from other parts of Muslim world to migrate to England and gather in some famous mosques (Finnsbury Park mosque among others) and spread the message of radical Islam. The gentleman's agreement between the British authorities and the radical community in Britain was broken after September the 11 and with the arrest of some of its members and the promulgation of the anti-terrorist laws the next year, a situation of antagonism like that which prevails in France emerged. The new generation of radical Muslims had in the Muslim middle classes some roots, through organisations like Hizbu Tahrir whose leaders professed an anti-Israel and a pro-Palestine stance. Radicalisation was fed upon by some links with the Al Qaeda (Khan, the leader of the group which committed the terrorist act in July 2005 in London had ties with Al Qaeda leaders through his journeys in Pakistan) but the main breeding ground for it was England and the simmering discontent among part of the Muslim youth, due to social conditions, racism and the involvement of the British troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In England, repression did not exist until 2001 and the anti-terrorist laws with their complementary laws in 2004 and 2005 have been late comers. England and particularly London were looked upon as "Londonistan"[8] by the Islamic radicals and up to September the 11 attacks against the US, Great Britain was considered a safe haven against pursuits in France or elsewhere. This implicit agreement was torn apart after the promulgation of anti-terrorist laws in 2001 but the British police was not in a situation to infiltrate the Islamic radicals in the same fashion as the French. The terrorist attack of London in July 2005 rang the bell of the last "mutual understanding" between the government and the Islamic radicals. The fight against Islamic radicalism became the same almost all over Europe and the judicial framework for it is being promulgated in many countries.

The major problem in Britain as well as France is that both have populations of the former colonies who suffer from racism and the de facto inequality between them and the other ordinary citizens. The suspicion towards terrorism has caused as well a new wave of intolerance and this feeds in its turn radicalisation of a minority within their Muslim communities in the long run.

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[7] See Rémi Leveau & Withold de Wenden, *La Beurgeoisie,* Paris, Editions du CNRS, 2001. (*Note by C.I.R.*: 'Beur' is a pejorative term for a disadvantaged Frenchman of North African descent or a second-generation North African living in the cities and suburbs in France).

[8] See Dominique Thomas, *Londonistan, la voix du djihad*, Michalon, 2003.

Two major problems arise: one is related to globalisation and the emergence of networks which are flexible enough to be built quickly by people who do not act within rigid hierarchies and who are therefore able to hide themselves from police scrutiny in many cases. On the other hand, the simmering discontent among part of the Muslim youth makes England and France fertile grounds for recruitment of future terrorists. Repressive policies in the short run and social policies in order to fight racism and to promote, through affirmative action Muslims in Europe are necessary to prevent the push towards radicalisation on the part of the European Muslims.

In countries like Germany, Islamic radicalisation seems, up to now, mainly directed towards the country of origin of the most important Muslim community, the Turks. Turkey seems to be the target rather than Germany, but with the advent of a new generation of Germans with Turkish origin, this situation might change in the future.

Jihadism in a globalized world

One major factor, besides the discontent of part of the Muslim youth in Europe for social reasons is the crisis of the Muslim countries which is reported in real time by the television and the utopia of a neo-umma carried out by it[9]. Two distinct groups appear on the scene. The first is made by a new Muslim middle class who is a minority among the immigrants from Muslim countries in Europe. This new middle class has everything to lose if radicalisation occurs among the Muslims in Europe and a more negative image of Islam and Muslims is widespread among the people. Still, a tiny minority of its members opt for radicalisation and separate from the mainstream Muslim middle class in Europe. The main reason is their identification with the neo-umma in the world at large and in Europe in particular. Seeing their fellow Muslim people downtrodden and stigmatized through racism in Europe and looking on the TV the faith of Muslims in the world at large and the crisis of Muslim societies, they come to the firm belief that Islam is being repressed as much within Europe as without it and in both cases, the oppressors are the "white" Europeans and more generally, the wicked West, mainly America. Compassion, in this situation goes to this imaginary neo-umma rather than to their compatriots: their sufferings in connection with terrorist attacks are minimized in comparison to the plights of the Muslims all over the world. In a way, the identification with this imaginary neo-umma (which does not exist in the way the radical Muslims describe it)

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[9] See; Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d'Allah*, Flammarion, Collection Champs, 2003 ; Olivier Roy, *L'islam mondialisé*, Seuil, 2002 ; Gilles Kepel, *Fitna, Guerre au cœur de l'islam*, Gallimard, 2004 .

prevents their moral attitude towards their fellow citizens whom they reject and gives them justification for terrorist acts in the name of a radicalized representation of Islam.

For the excluded and "disaffected" youth in Europe, the combination of economic deprivation and cultural stigmas makes it much easier for them to become radicalized in the name of Allah. In this case, they come to the conclusion that their sufferings and those of the Muslims in other parts of the world, Palestine, Bosnia, Iraq or Chechnia have the same roots: western fight against Islam. Their enrolment in terrorist networks is based on a strong feeling of victimization which is rooted in their dramatic situation in Europe: in France in the so-called "banlieues" (poor suburbs), in England in poor districts and in many European countries, their segregation in enclaves or ghettoes (or perceived as such by many of them) and the absence of any prospect for a brighter future, all these factor go hand in hand to make this population a fertile ground for radicalisation and in few cases, terrorism. Even though many do not get involved in terrorist activities due to the renewed vigilance of the police and the secret services, still their world outlook is that of deep victimisation and a negative perception of the "white" man.

The two groups, either from the Middle classes or from the excluded categories of people, find a common language through networks and their opposition to the West. The military actions in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Palestinian and Chechnian problems are reminders of the West's involvement in the fight against Muslim countries.

The predicament of Muslims all over the world is seen through the looking glass of this neo-umma: in countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere, the governments are considered as the "puppets" of the West and should be fought against. In the West itself, the struggle should go on in order to punish both, the Western governments and their "lackeys" in Muslim countries. The globalized neo-umma, unlike the real Muslim communities, does not recognize either frontiers or nations and the ideal is not so much to topple a specific government in a particular country but to set ablaze the entire world in order to promote the neo-califat and bring about the neo-umma within this institution.

In the same fashion as the leftists of the 1970S were self-proclaimed avant-garde of the proletariat, the new radicalized Muslims believe to be the vanguard of the Muslim umma (community) but this creed is not grounded in reality and is simply a mental and imaginary construction with no support in the real world. Therefore the majority of the Muslims who suffer from terrorist acts like Egyptians (terrorism in Charm el Cheikh in August 2005) reject these acts to the utmost but the terrorist groups are a tiny minority who do not follow the majority of Muslims.

Another category of people who become Jihadists in Europe are the converts. Most of the converts adopt a spiritualist Islam which has nothing to do with terrorism. But a tiny minority of them espouses the radical Islam and engages in terrorist activities in order to be part of the neo-umma at war with the perfidious and depraved West. To these people the West is treacherous and anti-islamic in essence. Their new identity as Muslims is offended by the lot of many Muslims all over the world and the partial and antagonistic attitude of the Western countries towards the plight of the Muslims. They have to prove to themselves and to the others the sincerity of their faith by opposing their former societies and by declaring war to the very same countries where they were born and raised. The chasm between their new faith and the societies into which they were born finds a sacred legitimacy through their identification with the neo-umma. By fighting an impious West they underline their rupture with it and their ties to a new imaginary Islamic community for which they are ready to sacrifice their life and to put to death their fellow countrymen.

Jihadism in the Middle East and their ideology

Contrary to Europe where most of the Jihadists are from the lower and lower-middle classes and are marked by cultural uprootedness, in the Muslim world most of the Jihadists are from the modernized middle classes and their adhesion to Jihadism translates their deep disappointment towards Muslim governments that are seen as the "lackeys of the West", corrupt, and unable to cope with the Muslims' pride (mainly Arab but more and more Muslim as the Pakistani case pinpoints) and submitted to humiliation by the West, mainly America who is perceived as the main culprit in the Arab mistreatment by Israel.

These modernized middle classes mostly belong to the scientific and engineering circles, among them one finds doctors, scientists, engineers and all those who have a modern scientific education. These new Jihadists are impatient with the political elites in the Muslim countries and they combine the rejection of the Islamic governments (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan…) and the opposition to the West, mainly the United States. Their motto is change, the fight against the close (Muslim governments) and far enemies (America, the West) and the establishment of Muslim rule and law all over the Muslim world in the name of a radicalized version of Islam.

Terrorism marked by Marxist or Communist ideologies had a set of tenets that claimed direct bearing on economics. Right or wrong, this ideology could be expressed in a rationalised way

by its proponents. The wave of anarchist terrorism originating in Russia and spreading throughout Europe and America had also a corpus of ideological schemes that could be argued and exposed in a "rational" manner. The extreme left ideologies of the 1970s were also marked by mental constructions based on the denunciation of imperialism and the fight for the Proletariat and the praise of anarchy as the best type of government on earth. All these ideologies claimed roots in social, political and economic sciences. The fact that they were tendencious and non rational did not prevent them from having a corpus of ideological "evidences" that claimed the Enlightenment's fatherhood or the utopias of Progress as their core material. The Jihadist ideology is the less developed among the three radical currents already mentioned. There are three major "ideas" which underline its ideological construction. The first one is the idea of the "neo-umma" already underscored. This is not a factual entity but a cultural construction based on a mythical Islamic community. The second ideological tenet is a demonic West[10]. This idea has a dual origin. The first is in the leftist ideology of imperialism. The second goes back to the "dar ul kufr" as opposed to "dar ul islam" (respectively the House of Impiety and the House of Islam). According to jihadist interpretation, Muslims should endeavour to convert the non Muslims and spread Islam all over the world. Those countries which are populated by non Muslims are at a state of war with Islam and every Muslim should contribute, directly or indirectly to their forced or peaceful conversion to the religion of Allah. This is the root of the third major idea, Jihad. In Islam it is traditional to distinguish between two types of duties: if Islam is in danger, every Muslim has to engage in the fight to preserve it (fardh al ayn). If the fight is to spread Islam, Muslims should contribute to it through financial means or otherwise, without having to be involved directly (fardh al kifayah). For the Jihadists, Islam is the only valid religion and one has to go to the extreme to establish its rule the world over. In the same vein, Islamic radicals believe that Islam is in danger through the malevolent action of the West (particularly the United States) and therefore, Muslim should accept even martyrdom in order to fight against an enemy who is militarily and economically the most potent.

These three sets of ideas are connected to a utopian world order which is not explicit. The Palestinian, Chechnian and other radical actions are based on an explicit national project, whose realisation means the recourse to martyrdom. The new Al Qaeda type ideology is not fighting for an explicit goal. The Palestinian, Chechnian or Iraqi predicaments are mentioned as reasons to engage in war against the West but the ultimate goal is not explicitly political.

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[10]See Ian Buruma & Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism : A Short history of Anti-Westernism*, Atlantic Books, 2004.

The neo-califat is everything but clearly delineated. The fight against an impious and "arrogant" West seems to be the only tangible motive which mobilizes the sympathizers of Jihadism.

The way Islam is instrumentalised shows as well the "modernity" of this type of movement[11]. It is much less the reproduction of tradition than a regressive and oppressive form of modern action based on new technologies (Internet, networks…) and a religious ideology which finds some precedents in the past but which, in its logic of action and its ways of challenging the West is directly related to the modern world. European youth which gets involved in this ideological enterprise has itself a dual root. It considers itself as non-European and non-Pakistani or non-Algerian… The generation which becomes the spearhead of Jihad is doubly stigmatized: in Europe it is rejected and considered as non-European. In the country of the parents (North Africa for the French Muslims, Pakistan or India and Bangladesh for the British Muslims) it is as well considered at best as Foreigner. In both cases this generation is denied a clear identity, doubly marginalized, doubly rejected. Islam in its radical version allows this generation to take revenge against the host society where it is born or raised and against the society of the parents, ruled mostly by non-Islamic governments. The simultaneous opposition to the West and to the East gives a sense of a new dignity to the proponents of radical Islam. The disaffected youth of the poor suburbs in France or poor urban districts in Britain feel in this way a new honour against the background of their rejection by European societies. They become heroes of a sacred cause and break up the ties with their past when they were nothing and no one. They inspire fear and this is a revenge against their indignity and their insignificance of the past. They recover thus a new identity in which they believe to act as the heroes of a new age. The middle class Muslims who join the radical Islamic groups become the messengers of the neo-umma to which they believe to belong, the new identity taking precedence over their being members of the European middle classes. Compassion for their fellow Muslims in the Islamic countries and the excluded downtrodden Islamic youth in Europe become more potent than their sympathy for the societies in which they live. Islam becomes a new sacred identity that overshadows all the past identities to which they belonged: that of immigrant families, that of European citizens and that of middle class people.

Contrary to the Muslims in the United States who are mainly from the middle and upper middle classes and who identify with the "American dream", Muslims in Europe and in the

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[11] See Diego Gambetta (editor) *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

Middle East have solid reasons for discontent. Victimization, in both cases, operates in different fashions to produce a deep sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with the prevailing situation. Jihadist networks take advantage of this feeling to promote the cause of Jihad in an extremist fashion.

(*) Farhad Khosrokhavar is a full Professer at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris. The text is a résumé of his speech at the Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation at the Department of Political Science, University of Aarhus (Denmark) on September 11, 2008.