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**The
Challenges
of
Euro-Islam**

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Even if Islam-related terrorist attacks in Europe never achieve the level of those perpetrated in the United States or Indonesia, western Europe has played a major role as a base for planning and organization for al Qaeda's cells: the World Trade Center (WTC) attack was planned by the Hamburg cell of al Qaeda; Ahmed Ressam was linked with a French radical network; Richard Reid was recruited in a British jail; and Zacharias Moussaoui found his calling in a London mosque.

Moreover, al Qaeda is not the only radical Islamic group active in western Europe. Other networks (like Kelkal in 1995 and the Roubaix group in 1996) have acted independently, mostly sharing ideas and recruiting along patterns similar to those of al Qaeda. Similarly, new independent groups could arise in the future. The issue of radicalization and violence thus goes beyond the present problem posed by al Qaeda and could continue or increase even if al Qaeda itself is destroyed.

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This is, roughly speaking, the scope of the challenge of Euro-Islam.

Who Are the Terrorists?

Islamic radicals in western Europe fall roughly into three categories: foreign residents, second-generation immigrants (most often native-born), and converts.

The first category is that of young Middle Easterners who come to Europe as students, mostly in modern disciplines, who speak Arabic, and who are from middle-class backgrounds. The WTC pilots are an excellent example of this first category, who often become born-again Muslims only after coming to Europe and before joining a radical group.

The second category is made up of second-generation European Muslims, some educated but many more school dropouts, who usually come from rather destitute neighborhoods. They speak European languages as their first language and often are European citizens.

The third category, the smallest in number but not necessarily in significance, is made up of converts, many of whom became Muslim while spending time in jail.

Members of all three categories follow the same general trajectory of radicalization, the key to which is that they break ties with their milieu of origin. They almost invariably become born-again Muslims (or converts) by joining a mosque known to host radical imams, and soon after that (in the span of less than a year), they turn politically radical and go (or try to go) to fight a jihad abroad. Before September 11, that meant going to Afghanistan. Since May 2003, it may mean going to Iraq.¹

1. Hard evidence and data remain elusive; see Desmond Butler and Don Van Natta, Jr., "Trail of Anti-U.S. Fighters Said to Cross Europe to Iraq," *New York Times*, December 6, 2003.

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It is noteworthy that almost *none* of these radicals have gone to their country of origin or of their families' origin to wage jihad. And they have usually gone to the "peripheral" jihad—to Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir, or New York—rather than to the Middle East. (Two Pak-Britons did perpetrate a terrorist attack in Tel Aviv in spring 2003, but this is, so far, the only exception to the rule.)

In addition, almost all of these terrorists broke completely with their families only after entering their process of radicalization. Having done so, they usually became urban nomads of sorts, often changing places and even countries. Thus, these terrorists are largely supranational and socially atomized. They also tend to have a Westernized trajectory in studies (urban planning, computer science), in languages (all are fluent in Western languages), and in matrimonial affairs (often marrying or dating European women).

Such a Western profile is not only a function of their sociological situation, it is also a condition of success: they live in total immersion in a Western society. The strength and the weakness of Islamic radicals in western Europe is precisely their lack of rooting among the European Muslim population. The strengths are that they can hardly be spotted by the police before going into action or be traced by police penetration of the local Muslim population. It is also difficult to penetrate their networks because they are cut off from the outside world and are highly mobile. But the weakness is that they have problems of recruitment and logistics because they do not relate well to ordinary "civilian" fellow Muslims.

Reasons for Radicalization

There is no clear-cut sociological profile of the Islamic radicals beyond that sketched out above. There is nothing exact or pre-

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cise to link them to a given socioeconomic situation. More precisely, the reasons that may push them toward violence are not specific enough and include such characteristics shared by a larger population that deals with similar situations in very different ways. Explanations based on poverty, exclusion, racism, acculturation, and so forth may contain kernels of truth, but they are not specific enough to be of much practical help in stopping terrorists from acting.

For example, there is clearly a generational dimension at work here. Islamic radicalism is a youth movement. Frustration is obviously a key element in their radicalization, but it seems to have more to do with a particular psychological dimension than with a social or economic one. A common factor among known radicals is a concern for self-image and a desire to reconstruct the self through action. In this sense, young radicals are more in search of an opportunity for spectacular action where they will be personally and directly involved than with the long-term, patient building of a political organization that could extend the social and political base of their networks. They are more present-oriented activists than future-oriented constructivists. They are thus far different from the Comintern agents of the 1920s and 1930s.

This narcissist dimension explains both the commitment to suicide actions and the difficulty such people have in working underground without the perspective and prospect of action. Without terrorism, they do not exist. This commitment to immediate or midterm action, as opposed to long-term political action, is probably the greatest weakness of radical Islamism in Europe, but it also makes them very hard to catch and stop.

But clearly, only a small fraction of alienated Muslim youth evinces these characteristics. Very few become terrorists. There is no obvious or practical way to tell one trajectory

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from others because, as noted above, it is less sociological than psychological.

Another significant pattern in Euro-Islamist radicalization is the blending of Islamic wording and phraseology with a typically Western anti-imperialism and third-worldist radicalism. For the most part, Euro-Islamist targets are the same ones that the Western ultra-Leftist movements of the 1970s identified. Islamists, however, seek mass terrorism, and they do not target political or business personalities, as the European ultra-Left used to do. Nevertheless, the paradigm of ultra-Leftist terrorism from the 1970s might provide a bridge in future to non-Islamic radicals, perhaps even to some in the so-called antiglobalization movement.

But again, such ideologies are believed by many Islamic residents in western Europe, and only a few such ideologues become terrorists. So, we can array several perhaps necessary conditions for identifying an Islamist terrorist in Europe, but we cannot specify what the sufficient conditions are.

Threats and Perspectives

Since September 11 and the anti-Taliban campaign in Afghanistan, Islamist terrorists have been faced with two new problems that have immediate consequences for their ability to act in or from western Europe: organizational problems and political problems.

No longer is there easy sanctuary for Islamist radicals in EU countries to meet, train, and forge esprit de corps and links with other groups—in a word, to coalesce a ragtag collection of activists into a cohesive and disciplined organization. It is becoming far more difficult to get organized and maintain communications with leaders within and outside the country. A specific dimension of al Qaeda was its “veteran’s solidarity”:

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many young radicals, who met first as a group of “buddies” in a Western country, turned into an efficient cell only after having lived in Afghanistan or after being led by someone who had been in Afghanistan and returned. Moreover, a distinctive pattern of al Qaeda was that personal links between veterans of the Afghan jihad had turned into an efficient but flexible chain of command, which is obviously no longer the case.

As to political problems, the West’s “demonizing” of Islam has put the Muslim population in the West on the defensive. Although this demonizing may have turned some individuals more radical, it has convinced most Muslims living in the West to adopt a clearer attitude and to advocate a greater integration into Western societies. European authorities have contributed to isolating the radicals by responding positively, at least in terms of rhetoric, to that quest for recognition and integration. Isolation among and alienation from the European Muslim population is now one of the radicals’ main challenges.

As a consequence of these developments, two new patterns of Islamic radicalism will probably develop. The first we may call “franchising.” Local groups based on local solidarities—most likely those of neighborhood, extended family, and university—with few or no ties to al Qaeda, will assume the label and act according to what they see as al Qaeda’s ideology and strategy. The second will be a quest for allies and support *beyond* the pale of Islamic fundamentalism. Radicals may try to find allies and fellow travelers at the expense of the purity of their ideological message. They could find it among the European ultra-Left or, less probably, the ultra-Right. They could find allies among other “liberation” movements (for instance, ex-Ba’athis in Iraq). Some might even serve as proxies or “gun-holders” for rogue states.

Counterterrorism in Europe

Whatever the differences among the European countries, including their appraisal of U.S. policy, EU members share many elements in common.

First, all European governments are reluctant to drastically alter their legal systems and basic political approaches to terrorism. The reason is that the issue of homeland security was raised and essentially settled a long time ago due to a more “indigenous” terrorism (ETA, IRA, Baader-Meinhof, Action Directe, Brigadi Rossi, and so on). In this sense, the Europeans have a more seasoned and experienced counterterrorism homeland apparatus than do the Americans. In countries where the “Islamic” threat had been identified at least a decade ago (as in France), the security apparatus is rather efficient. The recent crisis has engendered greater cooperation among the different countries, as well as with the United States, in most cases. But this cooperation has not led to the importation of political differences among governments into the security function, partly because procedures are institutionalized and partly because this is not a new concern. This has remained much the case even after the March 2004 train bombings in Madrid.

Second, as far as European countries are concerned, the fight against terrorism is a matter of police and intelligence, not military action. These tools are efficient to the extent that transnational cooperation works. In this sense, the new terrorist threat has accelerated a trend already in existence.

The growing isolation of Islamic radicals in Europe should allow the Europeans to continue with this “soft” approach: police and intelligence services are efficient and will probably be sufficient tools of counterterrorism for Europe. However,

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such a policy will never totally eradicate terrorism. The European tradition of terrorism and political violence that has forged the experience of the counterterrorist institutions makes it easier for young activists to become violent. Put a little differently, the stigma attached to doing such violent things is relatively weaker. Young guys who want to become radical and seek out some sort of spectacular action to validate their confused and injured manhood will not be stopped by this soft approach. Even concentrating on root causes—on the sociology and motivations of the radicals—while important for understanding the radicals' mode of recruitment, will be of little use in drying up the ground on which these radicals prosper. The aim of European policy is not eradication; it is making terrorism a residual factor that can be lived with.

Such a "soft" approach is sustainable in Europe only under one condition: that Islamic radicalism remains a fringe movement. The real danger is in Islamic radicalism enlarging its social base or connecting with other potentially radical movements or governments. The challenge is not to go at the roots of terrorism, as European government spokespeople never tire of saying, for that is well-nigh impossible and will not eradicate terrorism in any case. The challenge is to prevent the radical fringe from finding a broad political base among the local Muslim population.

To regain their momentum and create that base, Euro-Islamic radicals will have to achieve two strategic goals: mobilize other Muslims and link up with non-Muslim radicals.

Eventually, Euro-Islamic leaders will try to mobilize a sufficient part of the Muslim community to provide shelter, logistics, recruits, reliable communications, and so on. To do that, the activists will have to change their patterns of recruitment, which are currently based on spotting some individuals and taking them out of their social milieu. They will have to

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engage in a more collective *dawa* (“proselytizing”), which would put them on the same path as many nonpolitical conservative and even fundamentalist organizations (like the Tabligh or the Salafis). Interestingly enough, many radical groups (like the London-based Hizb ul-Tahrir) share the views of al Qaeda but think the latter has been premature to launch jihad. They believe that one should first mobilize the Muslim community through intensive proselytizing and political activity.

Eventually, too, Islamist leaders will probably try to establish some sort of joint venture with the remnants of the European extreme Left who share the same hatred for “imperialism.” Converts may play a particularly significant role here. Let us not forget that Carlos the Jackal himself converted to Islam in jail and is now praising Osama bin Laden to the hilt.

Pushing for a “Western” Islam

The key issue is thus the attitude of the Muslim population in Europe toward radicalism and terrorism. And for three main reasons, the Muslim population in Europe is a far larger political stake, and plays a far greater political role, than the Muslim population in the United States.

First, unlike the United States, Muslim migrants are the main source of immigration in Europe. Second, that migration originates from the close neighboring southern countries. Legal immigration to the United States is far more diverse in its origins. Third, that migration has created the bulk of the underclass and jobless youth. (In the United States, migrants want to find, and generally do find, jobs that make them quickly upwardly mobile.)

The social, geographic, political, and strategic implications

of Muslim immigration to Europe are intertwined. In that light, European countries should pursue a double objective: isolate the Islamic radicals with the support of their own Muslim population, and seek out at least the neutrality of the non-violent conservative fundamentalists among them. Two different approaches have been in competition in Europe in this regard. The *multiculturalist* approach, tried mainly in Great Britain, treats Muslims as a minority group that should be addressed collectively and that should possibly benefit from a specific status. The *integrationist* approach, which describes that of France, seeks to grant full citizenship to Muslims as individuals but not to consider them as a separate community under any ethnic, cultural, or religious paradigm.

Neither approach seems to be working all that well. The multicultural approach tends to create ghettos. In Great Britain, the Dobson Report (2001) advised the government to stop pushing in this direction and to adapt a more integrative approach. The integrationist approach, however, ignores the quest for a new identity among uprooted Muslims. In France, amid an ongoing debate, the government has decided to establish an official representation of Muslims as a faith group, but not as a cultural or ethnic minority.

However awkwardly, a common approach is slowly emerging in Europe—dealing with the Muslim population in purely religious terms. Encouraging the emergence of a European Islam will help integrate the Muslims, weaken links with foreign countries, and provide a Western-compatible religious identity. The problem thus far is that some governments (like that of France), as well as the bulk of public opinion, equate European Islam with “liberal” Islam. Calling on the Muslims to adapt the basic tenets of Islam to the Western concept of a religion is a mistake.

For example, to officially sponsor “good and liberal” Mus-

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lims would be a sort of kiss of death. It would deprive such liberal organizations and leaders of any legitimacy. Besides, the main motivation for youth radicalization is not theological, because youth is not interested in a theological debate. Instead, political radicalization is the main driving force. Moreover, modern secular states should not regulate theology as a matter of policy.

Is there a better approach? Yes. Genuine pluralism is the best way to avoid confrontation with a tight-knit Muslim community. Conservative and even fundamentalist views of religion are manageable in a plural environment, as shown by a host of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish cases. A pluralistic approach allows civil society to reach the cadres of youth who could be ideal targets for radicals and neofundamentalist groups.

State policy should be based on integration and even “notabilization” of Muslims and community leaders on a pluralistic basis. The priority should be to weaken the links with foreign elements by pushing for the “nativization” of Islam and for preventing the deepening of the ghetto syndrome. Transparency should be the aim.

If that general proposition is accepted, then certain proposals seem to follow logically. First, there should be much tighter control on fund-raising and subsidizing from abroad, which also means better access to open domestic fund-raising and subsidies (for building mosques, for example). Second, governments should establish more links between Islamic religious teaching institutions and the university and academe. Third, religious representation should be encouraged without monopoly. Fourth, mainstream political parties should court and enlist Muslim leaders. Fifth, social policy must avoid confronting Muslims with black-and-white choices. It must, instead, work to let Muslim youth experience a diversity of

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opinions in line with the spectrum of political diversity in the West.

In this sense, the debate on the issue of supporting or not supporting the U.S. military campaign in Iraq has had a positive impact. In Great Britain, as well in France and elsewhere in Europe, Muslims did not feel isolated or targeted; rather, they felt as though they belonged to mainstream public opinion. In this sense at least, in the European context, the debate between so-called old and new Europe has superseded the debate on the “clash of civilizations.”

Such a policy of encouraging pluralism will meet the aspirations of mainstream Muslims in Europe—Islam recognized as a Western religion, Muslims as full citizens—while avoiding the creation of a closed community, ghettos, and minority status. This policy will contribute to the isolation of the terrorists and prevent them from building a dangerous political constituency. Approaches that by design or error drive Muslim communities inward and into themselves will backfire, to the regret of all concerned.