



## **The Continued Misunderstanding of the Salafi Jihad Threat**

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In an article titled "Al Qaeda finds new partner: Salafist group finds limited success in native Algeria" (The Washington Post, October 5, 2006) by Craig Whitlock, Western sources, including French and American, assert that the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (originally a local Algerian group) has become global by joining with al Qaeda.

While the article is very interesting and informative, the analysis of the International Salafi movement by Western sources and expertise shows a continuous misunderstanding of Jihadism and its strategies. For in the essence of the article there is an assertion that the Algerian Salafists were restricted to fight their Government for "local" reasons, but it was U.S. intervention in the region that "compelled" the Combat Sala-

fists to join al Qaeda worldwide. This assertion and other little informed debates taking place in the U.S. these days are committing an analytical sin: Projecting onto the Jihadists an alien thinking, most likely because of the pressures of American politics.

The academic, expert, and journalistic assertions that Jihadists in general and Salafists in particular, are initially local, then become international, is derived from how Western scholarship monitors the Islamists actions but in many cases fail to analyze the motives and thinking process of these Jihadists. The Salafists for example, do not consider their Jihad as solely confined to a particular country, even if their actions are restricted to the boundaries of a particular country. Salafists and other

Jihadis are international by essence, by ideology, and by ultimate goal. It is not the foreign policies of Western powers that "open their eyes" on the necessity of initiating action internationally, but it is their analysis of the feasibility of such action, in conformity with their ideology.

"La hudud lil jihad illa qudrat al mujahideen" is in the center of their strategies: "There are no frontiers to the capacity of the Mujahidin." The decision to go global, regional, or to stay local, depends on a calculated process, not on an emotional reaction. In The Washington Post article, one can see the following analytical issues:

The article said Ayman al-Zawahiri, declared that al-Qaeda, had joined forces with an obscure Algerian underground network and would work in tandem with the group to "crush the pillars of the crusader alliance."

First, al Qaeda, as in many other occasions, declares in the open that it has achieved a new step, while in reality the joining of the forces has been done a while ago. One has to be attentive to the statements made by the Salafists years ago in support of Bin Laden. But some of the "formal" declarations are issued more so for Jihadi politics than for reporting news.

Second, the Salafi Combat Group is not an "obscure" group to Algerian and Arabs. It is as well known as Hamas in Gaza or the Janjaweed of Darfur. However yes, these Jihadists were unknown to the American pu-

blic, for the simple reason that they were not reported appropriately. Actually, leading scholars in the 1990s have argued that the Salafi Jihadists in Algeria were a "force for change."

Three years ago, in the Detroit Terror case, the expert of the defense, Professor Bernard Haykel said that Salafists are peaceful.

This month, an article written by Amy Waldman in The Atlantic Monthly continues the cover up for that ideology; the article charging that defining the Salafists as Jihadists is a "bashing of Islam."

Dangerous conclusion when hundreds of Muslim reformist writers are warning the world about the spread of Salafism as Terror ideology. Hence, the American public wasn't educated enough, for many political reasons, as to what is Salafism, who are the Salafists and what are their strategies. Thus, when a main Jihadi Salafi group is cited in the speech of Zawahiri, it "suddenly" moves from "obscurity" to the light of news.

Ironically, The Washington Post says, "the Algerian partner, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, had fought the Algerian government in a barbaric civil war for almost a decade."

Isn't it strange that such barbarity wasn't a subject of interest in the American or international debate neither before nor significantly after 9/11?

The Salafists in Algeria killed tens of thousands of civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, as well as journalists and rock stars. However, our mainstream media didn't dedicate enough space to report about their horrors and their ideology for years.

The Washington Post article subtly put conclusions in the mouth of Zawahiri when the article stated: "The new alliance had different targets in mind. 'Our brothers will be a thorn in the necks of the American and French crusaders and their allies, and a dagger in the hearts of the French traitors and apostates.' "

The Post explains this statement as "the latest sign of how, with al-Qaeda's help, the Algerian network has rapidly transformed itself from a local group devoted solely to seizing power at home into a global threat with cells and operations far from North Africa."

In reality, after a thorough review of the group's literature, activities, and actions over the past many years, one would rapidly conclude that the Salafists weren't just a "group devoted solely to seizing power at home."

These arch-Jihadists are believers in the restoration of the Caliphate and aimed at establishing a Taliban regime in Algeria, as a prelude for a worldwide campaign for Jihadism. Unfortunately, the way some in academia and media describes the Jihadists as "solely" dedicated to fight local government wrongly inform the audiences. The Salafists, all

Salafists, like all Jihadis, are international in essence. Not understanding this part of the equation leads to massive mistakes in analysis. For there is a difference between, on the one hand being "nationalists" and turning "internationalists," and on the other hand being "local internationalists" and when opportunities arise, "moving to the larger sphere of action." The Algerian Salafists have always been "local internationalists," and many among them have fought in overseas wars. All what the Zawahiri declaration is doing is to confirm that the GSPC has become a formal associate in al Qaeda: a license was issued.

The article confirmed the "group known by its French initials GSPC has emerged since as an umbrella for radical Islamic factions in neighboring countries, sponsoring training camps in the Sahara and supplying streams of fighters to wars in Iraq and Chechnya, according to counterterrorism officials and analysts in Europe and North Africa."

The Washington Post added that "in the past year, authorities have broken up cells in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland, including one group that allegedly plotted to shoot down an Israeli airliner in Geneva."

Recently, statements made by the Group pushed France to classify it as "one of the most serious threats currently facing France." The French Prime Minister believed that the Salafists were a "real and permanent" risk to France, in part because of its military involvement in Leba-

non and Afghanistan, as well as its policy of forbidding Muslim girls to wear head scarves in public schools. Which means that the group is not "solely dedicated to changing Government in Algiers.

Another interesting fact revealed by the article is that the GIA, parent organization to the GSPC "subscribed to an Islamic ideology called takfir, a belief that any Muslim who does not embrace strict, medieval codes of conduct is an apostate deserving of death." This is precisely what Western counter-Terrorism agencies haven't yet absorbed fully. And this is the concept for which defense teams in terrorism court cases in the West and in the U.S. are battling hard to cover up. In Jordan and other Arab countries, Takfir "is" terrorism. In America and other democracies, pro-Wahabi lobbies argue that it is a matter of religion only. Salafists action is centered on Takfir, which is a doctrine that renders individuals and communities "infidels."

The article stated that until 2001, the GSPC wasn't trusted by the rest of the international jihad, per Louis Caprioli, former director of international counterterrorism for the DST, the French counterintelligence service: "That's when the GSPC started to become international. It used to be focused solely on Algeria."

Here is another analytical mistake: The GSPC didn't change its ideology to become "international."

In the documents I reviewed from terrorism cases in Rotterdam, De-

troit and Idaho as well as an ocean of material online and from other sources, all indicate that the Algerian Salafists have always been "internationalists," they have supplied many battlefields with Jihadists. But the world Jihadi war gradually absorbed their resources internationally. Also, their networks reached the level of continental-sufficiency in Europe and beyond, permitting their actions to grow further. In addition, the local conflict with the Government and society in Algeria reached a dead end, for the moment. In short the Combat Salafis didn't have a change of heart because of Fallujah and thus are heading to Detroit or Los Angeles. They have always been at War with the infidels were ever their leaders asked them to. And true, that they will be increasing their activities against France because of the French involvement in Afghanistan and Lebanon, and the scarf affair as well. But if this tells the observers anything, it is about the essence of the Salafi mission as international.

The amazing ingredient in this whole matter is how analysts actually fall into the propaganda trap of al Qaeda and its allies. Just because Zawahiri declared that the GSPC's "demand for membership" has been now been accepted, arguments for a "sudden change in the Salafists' deployment are sought and expanded. However the pragmatic analyses by Algerian experts are the closer to reality such as "an alliance could bring benefits to both sides. If the Algerians could win al-Qaeda's endorsement, it would erase their network's pariah status in radical

Islamic circles, making it easier to raise money and logistical support. In turn, al-Qaeda would gain a local affiliate and an operational foothold in North Africa."

The Post article cites French experts who still emphasize that the Salafist "underground in Europe is no longer fighting solely for a national cause. That has enabled it to recruit large numbers of Tunisians, Moroccans, Syrians and other extremists who do not hold a stake in the Algerian conflict."

Again, Xavier Raufer, a terrorism specialist at the University of Paris and a former French intelligence officer, repeat the analytical mistake: All Jihadists have an ideological stake in every single battlefield for Jihad. But the leadership determines - for whatever reason - which battlefield is to be reinforced. These are decisions made at a strategic level: Should the European cells strike Europe, send fighters to the Sunni triangle or head towards Somalia and Darfur.

We need to begin understanding their logic and not to apply Western logic on them. A reference in the article to a US counter terrorism official captured the reality in pragmatic terms: "The GSPC, they saw the handwriting on the wall," the U.S. counterterrorism official said. "If they just stuck to fighting the Algerian government, all they would be is a minor thorn in their side. So they had to reach out."

But the most important error in analysis is in the final conclusion of the report.

Citing a French expert, Xavier Raufer, the article says "many of the Salafist group's foot soldiers in Europe have never been to Algeria, but are motivated to join the network because of Islamic anger over conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Israel," Raufer said. "For them, it's an easy time," he said of the recruiters. "When they preach, a lot of people are furious. A lot of Muslims are outraged at what's going on."

While it is true that Salafists born in Europe and never having been to Algeria are motivated to join the network, the reason behind it is deeper than just a so-called "Islamic anger over conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Israel." These are the reasons invoked by the ideologues, the Salafist propagandists and al Qaeda. The reasons to join are a conviction that they are joining the Jihad, and pleasing Allah. They have been conditioned to see the world as a struggle between infidels and Islam. And it is through this prism that all matters related to international relations are seen and read.

Jihadists who have never been to Palestine, side with Hamas; those who have never seen the jungles of the Philippines, side with Abu Sayyaf; those who were born in Algeria and were shooting policemen and journalists, decided suddenly to travel to Chechnya to behead Russian soldiers and shoot children in Breslan.

And to bring it back home to the exciting, and often misinformed, debate, we always need to use the Jihadi prism. Yes the Jihadists have been heading to Iraq to fight the American and British infidels, but as

a part of a global Jihad against all infidels, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, where ever the opportunity arises and whenever the "emirs" see it fit strategically.

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