



## Today's Islamist Radicalization in Spain

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Analysis n° 273

April 30, 2008

In the mid 1990s, after the first police operations in Spain against the Algerian Armed Islamic Group's (GIA) Islamist terrorist cells in Barcelona and Valencia, it became evident that the prisoners all fit the profile for radicalized individuals. They had come from overseas and were using our country, Spain, as a transit area on their way to France or other European countries with significant and well-established Muslim communities. Others were waiting to return to their home countries in Maghreb to pursue their terrorist activities. Spain is once again being viewed as a transit country, as it was in the past. Most important is the matter of the general migratory phenomenon which increased unnaturally at the end of the decade. At the time, the phenomenon remained unnoticed hence there was a lack of concern regarding the education of young Muslims, and their possible radicaliza-

tion. This radicalization was not given any thought, despite the atrocious terrorist strikes against our Algerian neighbor, where Spanish citizens have been dying at the hands of the terrorists since 1992. Also overlooked were the bloody attacks on the Paris subway system in 1995 and 1996.

In those days, the issue of exceptionally high migration was not considered a problem despite a growing Moroccan community settling in our soil, and becoming increasingly bigger in terms of gender and age, once the family regrouping process started. Next in line to the Moroccans was an emerging community of well established Pakistanis in Catalonia, which has grown significantly in recent years. In the mid-1990's, Spain's traditional role as transit country became that of a host country for Maghrebian immigrants, especially from Morocco. Within

Spain, the Muslim communities in Ceuta and Melilla were not seen as potential hotbeds of instability. Their possible linkages to jihadist terrorism were not yet perceived as a threat to Spain or to the rest of Europe, even though it was already extremely lethal in Algeria and in France. It should be noted that even in the mid 1980's when our country began studies regarding the future of the Spanish cities in North Africa, the stability threat was seen more in Moroccan vindication and nationalist activism than in possible acts by Islamist radicalism.

This perception began to change after the mid 1990s, but especially in the current decade, both before and after 9/11. The emerging globalization of terrorism became increasingly visible with al-Qaeda attacks. Many of these had Spanish partners or Spanish residents in terrorist enterprises (9/11 Spanish cell; the Spanish connection with the attack against La Ghriba Synagogue on the island of Djerba, Tunisia; Spanish links with suspects attempting against the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; and more). This detection of jihadists in Spain, whether naturalized or residing in the country, and linked to different armed conflict areas in the Balkans, Chechnya or other places, would force security forces and intelligence agencies to pay increasing attention and recognize this emerging threat.

### **This past decade's lessons regarding police operations and judicial processes**

Before dismantling Abu Dahdah's cell which was linked to the 9/11 attacks, many participant's names were already known to security forces and intelligence agencies for being tied to transnational jihadism. These names include Syrian-Spanish Moustafa Setmarian (aka Abu Mussab al Suri) and Spanish-Moroccan Jamal Zougam. Their meetings and actions within Spain as well as abroad played a large role in feeding transnational jihadism. For example, there was an important meeting between Jamal Zougam and Abu Qutada in London. Also, Moustafa Setmarian fled from Spain in the mid 1990s to London where he played a key role in the publication of al Ansar, the Algerian GIA's inflammatory bulletin. He was also in connection with abu Qutada and years later became a main ideologist of the most violent form of Salafist jihadism. Later, he was captured in Pakistan and sent to Guantanamo.

This trend continued to grow over time. With different police operations and judicial processes, it is clear that Spain faces the harsh reality of jihadist indoctrination and proselytism in full bloom. The judicial process against those involved in the 3/11 attacks is enlightening. It affects individuals of different ages and backgrounds. Some were professionals with different levels of education, some were Spanish resi-

dents, others were Spanish nationals, and some illegal immigrants. They were remarkably scattered all over the nation. The police operations carried out in recent years have dismantled jihadist cells in places with significant Muslim populations, where logic suggests radicals would go easily unnoticed. They were able to hide better and have more success in their proselyte activities in places such as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Alicante, Ceuta or Melilla, among other places. However, they also had success in areas with a low percentage of Muslims such as Teruel, Burgos and Vitoria. The *Operation Nova* trial, the verdict of which was delivered on February 27, 2008, demonstrates something which is also visible in other countries enduring Salafist jihadist terrorism, be it Arab Muslims or Westerners. That is the vitality of jihadist proselytism inside the prison system. It is growing among Muslim inmates at the top of the list, among who is a considerable number of young people being jailed for petty crimes.

As the Muslim immigration phenomenon is relatively new in Spain, the age profile of jihadist terrorist suspects shows mostly middle-aged individuals. The cases involving young people have not been completely dealt with yet. Some such cases have, however started to appear. It is likely that this trend will only continue to grow in the future due to family regroupings and the natural development of families. Also important to watch is the ir-

regular number of minors entering into the country. The present legislation hardly allows sending minors back to Morocco for two main reasons.

For one thing, from a chronological approach, the influence of the family and the circle of friends must be considered in their affect on spurring typical Islamist radicalization. Family circles such as the Ahmidan brothers and cousins, Almallah Dabas as well as others, all connected to the 3/11 attacks, demonstrate the importance of family bonding. Because of the grouping tendencies in Muslim communities, the circle of friends is especially important. These friendships most commonly are linked to the prayer room/mosque rather than recreational places commonly used by Spanish youths. This grouping tendency is partially due to economic reasons, the distrust they may provoke on the rest of the population, and also the idea of separate communities some of them hold. These reasons not only cause groups to easily develop, but also makes it more difficult for social agents to abort them and for security forces to infiltrate them.

In the case of detainees, indicted and convicted or not, it is important to emphasize the geographic link. This link makes the war on terror more difficult, proselytism much easier, and causes the progressive creation of a radicalized community. This link goes beyond belonging to the same country because it fre-

quently extends all the way to the city of birth, or even to the neighborhood, when no direct family ties exist, as previously mentioned in this article. Besides the Moroccan origin of many of the detainees, arrested in police operations during recent years, one detail must be added, they come from places such as Tetouan or Tangier. Extremely notable, is the fact that they seem to come from remarkably specific districts of these cities. Before this, in the 1990's, the links among Syrian citizens were significant; they were bonded by their antagonism towards the Assad Alaouite clan, and by their affection for the most radicalized sectors of the Muslim Brotherhood, a very harshly repressed movement for decades in this Mid-Eastern country. Such were the cases of Setmarián, Abu Dahdah or the Almallah Dabas brothers.

In most of these cases, these people entered into Spain already bearing the radicalization virus. They took advantage of our country and the liberties enjoyed here, in parallel with the radicalization offered in a global context by the growing al-Qaeda network. Since 1998, the worldwide Islamic Front against Christians and Jews has created links to analyze this global reality and studying formulas to join it. In this regard, the radicalization process in Spain has occurred, taking advantage of the instruments open societies make easily available to individuals who are ready to embrace such messages which spread so freely.

Another factor is that Spain does not create obstacles for the Muslim population through access television channels as other countries have. For example, in France, they have al Manar TV which belongs to Lebanese Hizbollah, and websites with daily broadcasts showing a simplistic and Manichean vision of reality in terms of "friend or foe," or "fair or unfair causes." These create a chronic perception of wrongdoing among some Muslims, wrongdoings that require reparations, even by force if necessary.

On the other hand, there is a growing trend among some Western societies to achieve greater multiculturalism. This is a helpful aid in gaining access to this militant publicity among Muslim groups. Less than a decade ago, the Muslim population was practically nonexistent in Spain. Times have changed, and it now seems inevitable that very soon, larger swaths of the younger Muslim population will be influenced by these radical messages specially designed for them. Qatari TV network al Jazeera emerged in 1996 as a breath of fresh air, inviting free and uninhibited debate in the Arab-Muslim world, boasting about having interviewed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. It now however, has fallen into an alarmist and extremely Manichean discourse, and played along, publicizing the deeds of bloodthirsty al-Qaeda terrorists. It has also given free unwarranted publicity to violent opponents of some Arab-

Muslim regimes, labeled as apostates by Salafist jihadists in order to legitimize the fight against them.

### **Trends of young people's radicalization in Spain**

The Spanish jail population with ties to Salafist jihadism continues to grow. Because of this, it is even more urgent to prevent radicalization among the relatives and friends of terrorists. With their friends and family imprisoned, it is likely they will feel victimized and attempt to carry on the terrorist work. It is necessary to assume that the Muslim population as a whole, especially its youth, will feel besieged or marginalized as a community by Christians. It is imperative that the public powers try to change this.

The establishment of the Salafist jihadist ideology or any other variety of radical Islamism must be prevented. The way to do so is to filter the access to these messages by both young and old. These messages are spread by radicalized preachers in mosques, discreet prayer rooms or more clandestine prayer places. It is also important for security forces and intelligence services to watch for these messages being spread via the Internet, and through broadcast networks such as al Jazeera or Lebanese al Manar.

While the former has faced diverse control measures in several Arab countries, the latter is a tool for Hezbollah's terrorists to broadcast its radical messages. This has be-

come such a common occurrence, that France has stopped allowing it to broadcasting. It is important to remember that the manipulated world of images also reaches illiterates. In Arab-Muslim countries, these large percentages of the population are a force to reckoned with. They could easily be recruited using this rather unsophisticated form of mobilization. Also, Internet access is loaded with opportunities but also with risks for the youngest. The internet exposes viewers to an array of miscellaneous messages, some of which are particularly harmful to the youngest and most naïve minds.

Many analysts find it shocking that the cybercafés, which began to appear in Maghreb at the beginning of this decade, have acted as a window to the modern world and are perceived as potential access routes to the pernicious messages of al-Qaeda. Just as the appearance of satellite dishes in the mid 1990s, the cybercafés are being used to attract even younger followers to Jihad war in Maghreb, Europe, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Because of this, in March 2008, the British government presented an innovative initiative to increase controls on Internet and digital products such as video-games, in order to protect minors from all kinds of violent messages. They especially focused on those related to terrorism, hoping to have a positive effect on the process of neutralizing the transmission of radical messages and restraining jihadist proselytism.

A profile of ever younger candidates joining the terrorist enterprise is emerging. This can be seen in events such as the series of suicide-bomb explosions in the spring of 2007 in Morocco, and the sectors of al-Qaeda recruitment in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) today in Algeria. A precedent has been set for minors acting as suicide terrorists with the deaths of at least 30 coast guard officials in the port of Dellys on September 8, 2007. An identical process can occur on European soil if the right circumstances for indoctrination arise. Recently, we have even seen evidence al-Qaeda recruiters seeking children between 10 and 12 years old. So far this has occurred in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan which are geographically far from Spain and Europe but very close in terms of Salafist jihadists' proselytist activism. The information super-highway brings Madrid, Baghdad, Paris and Algiers into the same network, easily accessible to the bloodthirsty jihadist ideology and its perverse combat methods.

### **Summary of the main power ideas**

In Spain, there has been a process of radicalization in the Muslim population. Fortunately this has been minimal and in chronological terms, rather late. However it has accelerated greatly in recent years.

Radicalization has obviously more greatly affected people from countries with larger Muslim communities (Morocco) and historically established communities (Syria).

However, in some places despite having a Muslim minority, radicalism has appeared (Algeria). Other cases, such as Tunisia, are less significant though they are useful in demonstrating the ubiquity of the terrorist threat in the Arab-Muslim world. As in other European and Western countries, jihadists have taken maximum advantage of living in an open society with access to Internet and diverse mass media, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of religion (camouflaging among believers) in order to spread the Salafist jihadist ideology. Multicultural societies possessing this type of make up, and promoting the view of "live and let live," are suited for the establishment of ghettos where jihadists seem to find a place to live and work very effectively.

Arab-Muslim immigrants' integration with the native population for daily activities such as children's education, work, leisure, extracurricular activities, etc., must be supported in order to break the Manichean vision of "them and us," which according to Salafist jihadist ideology, creates antagonism, hatred, and the desire for confrontation.

Special attention must be given to the spreading of jihadists' networks and cells. There is a worrisome concentration in Catalonia where Maghrebian communities co-exist with an important Pakistani community. We must closely watch for proselytism among young people,

and not so young people, due to the vicinity of the border with France and the rest of the European Union.

Prisons have been and continue to be particularly attractive for proselytism. More human and material means are required to prevent jails from becoming schools for Salafist jihadism. In some places this has already occurred. One should not forget that common crime circles are especially attractive for Salafist jihadists because they take offer covertness for their terrorist goals.

The “traditional friendship with the Arab world,” the understanding for “Arab causes,” and the old location of al Andalus on Spanish soil turn our country into fertile ground for present and future increased proselytism. In the most recent external message by Ayman al Zawahiri on April 3, he repeats his threats against Spain, and considers Ceuta and Melilla as “inseparable entities of Spanish crusaders.” Messages such as this one serve to keep the combatant flame alive. They act as

reminders for followers that Spanish soil must remain a priority.

The new young Muslim community has not only arisen due to the family regrouping process and the natural development of immigrated families, but also due to the amounts of Moroccan minors entering illegally into Spain and settling down in our country. This makes the control of Salafist jihadist propaganda and construction of a Manichean vision of the world absolutely necessary. This is an important issue to address now and the future.

Spain must learn from other European countries and adopt clear measures for restraining the power of radicalized messages. They cannot worry that they are violating rights or sacrificing liberties. It is not about sacrificing rights. It is instead about protecting democracy and freedom; it is about fighting against the enemies of democracy and freedom that are in our midst and just outside our borders....

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