Abstract:

The death of Ibrahim al-Hashemite al-Quraishi, the leader of ISIS, at the hands of US forces, encourages rethinking what threat jihadism poses today. More than 20 years have passed since the 9/11 attacks. Enough time to make a calm reflection and attend to the political and strategic lessons from the case, as well as to assess the threat. The strength that Salafism proves the military relevance that the solidity of the narrative for terrorist movements. The main success of Al Qaeda has been to spread the word jihadism. The threat of lone wolves is scarce so we can expect a return to the great attacks.

Keywords:

Jihadism, salafism, Al Qaeda, ISIS, terrorism.

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Animula vagula blandula
Hospes comesque corporis
Quae nunc abibis in loca
Pallidula, rigid, nudula
Nec ut soles dabis iocos

Emperor Hadrian[1]

In any investigation the preliminary questions, those that seem the most obvious, are always the most transcendental; they determine the framework for development, its rules and, not infrequently, even its result, so this can in some way be included in the premises.

The first issue for a correct analysis of jihadism is that the most accurate keys to analysis are political; in other words and contrary to appearances, they are not strictly religious. To quote Carl Schmitt*:* "Moral and other religious clashes become political clashes and can lead to the reorganising of decisive struggles based on the friend-enemy distinction. But if it comes to this, then the decisive confrontation is no longer religious, moral or economic, but political".[2]

What he is saying is that religious clashes are ultimately political clashes. Having said that, while their accurate understanding depends on knowing the religious keys that justify them, these must be transcended because they alone are insufficient and make for an incomplete or even mistaken analysis. And going one step further, the references are theirs, or in other words they are not ours.

In the case of the Christian world, the references are to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, the Law and the Prophets; and not to relations with other religious denominations, the problem of violence, the social dimension of religion or the role of women. The same can be said of the Islamic world, where the answer is also gleaned from the analysis of the doctrinal body on the periphery of which the answers can be found.

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[1] Tender, floating soul of mine,
guest and companion of my body,
you will descend to those pale, rigid and naked places,
where you will have to renounce the games of yesteryear.

[2] SCHMITT, Carl. (1991) *The concept of the politician.* Alianza Editorial, 1995, p. 33.

Thus, those who are closer to Western theses are often called moderates and those who are not are labelled radicals, ignoring the fact that the basis for differentiation is not so much militancy or proactivity as the nature of the convictions involved, the approach to the world and the responses stemming from it.

In Islam, unlike in Catholicism, there is no hierarchy (with slight nuances in the case of Usuli Shi'ism) and no unity of doctrine. In this religion, like in the Protestant world, preaching is de facto predominant over doctrine. Its development will obey as much religious principles as historical praxis.

Indeed, Islam was constructed around Arab culture as a political option. But at the same time Islam is not monolithic; it is a creed that is superimposed on a local culture, so a Bosnian Muslim is not the same as an Egyptian, Malay or Arab Muslim. To paraphrase Gellner, two men are of the same religion if they recognise each other as such; or as Edward Mortimer points out, " I can only define Islam as the religion of Muslims and for me a Muslim is someone who calls himself a Muslim...There is only what I hear Muslims say and what I see them do".

To this effect, there is no clear and precisely defined orthodoxy, only a tradition or, more precisely, several equally valid traditions; we are dealing with a community of the faithful, in its most gregarious sense, rather than with a dogmatic group". In fact, what is at the heart of what is being defended in religious wars is an understanding of community. Moreover, it often seems that the more pain, the more orthodoxy; or in other words, religiosity is often measured by the level of adherence to the most demanding branch of the religion, irrespective of this branch's adherence to its doctrinal foundations.

Indeed, it could be argued that globalisation has brought not only North and South into contact, but also East and West, and Islam into contact with itself. And in doing so it has become aware of its diversity, which has given rise to a struggle. This in turn has prompted a process of rationalisation based on a single formula, which claims to be the true Islam over and above the culture on which it is based or even set apart from it. And this process rests, in part, on the West, which acts as an anvil that supports what is in fact a conflict between branches of the same religion.

As Freud points out, major conflicts do not occur between major differences but between minor ones. In the case at hand, they are not inter-religious differences but intra-religious

ones within the religions with the "heresies": Catholics and Protestants, Shiites and Sunnis, and even the Salafist groups.

THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF JIHADISM

The word terrorism was introduced by Robespierre to designate a revolutionary period he led. His name was recorded in a famous speech associating virtue and terror: "the virtue without which terror would be disastrous, the terror without which virtue would be impotent".

In this way, the ideology, the narrative - the virtue - was inextricably linked with the means - the terror - in a dangerous symbiosis that equated the two. This is solid base to which terror attaches itself, its force determining the very strength of terrorism itself. Virtue must be impervious to terror. Such a combination obviously requires delicate management to prevent ideology from being contaminated by violence; something which is difficult to achieve.

Narration allows for an all-encompassing approach to what is being explained while rejecting what is left out, providing man with the precise references he needs. As Munckler argues, "concentration on ideological façades... also satisfied the need to take in the panorama easily with the naked eye and to see it without effort".[3]

Moreover, if war is basically an act of communication that incorporates a supplement of violence, terrorism is a political activity that is staged in the media through a certain amount of bloodshed. Violence is part of terrorism, but terrorism is not only violence; in fact, violence, its methodology, is not even the most important aspect of terrorism; most important is the discourse it serves or whose promotion it seeks, which embodies an eminently political proposal. Ideological rearmament translates into significant military rearmament because the message is also part of the action, together forming an integral whole.

To this effect, the centre of gravity of terrorism is not the terrorist but the discourse he sustains and which he helps nurture through his actions. Without putting an end to this, there will be no end to the phenomenon; no matter how many terrorists are stopped - a

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[3] MÜNKLER, Herfried. (2002) *Old and New Wars*. Siglo XXI Editores, p. 119

necessary containment task, though not a definitive solution - others will emerge from the narrative to replace them.

Last, the first Islamic organisations appeared before the Cold War, the movement not constrained by the confrontation between the superpowers. It was simply given no attention or considered relevant. The Muslim Brotherhood Organisation was founded as early as 1928 (four years after the end of the Caliphate and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire) by Hassan Al Banna, an Egyptian teacher. This organisation included terrorist cells.

However, it was not until the 1970s/80s that the phenomenon was consolidated and definitively launched, coinciding with years not only of serious social, economic and political crisis, but also of cultural clash with the West stemming from the emergence of the mass media.[4] In this context, organisations with an Islamic ideology would begin to appear more frequently. This was also the beginning of the so-called "modern interpretations of Islam".[5]

Under the slogan *"the Koran is our Constitution"[6]*, these associations aim to proceed with 're-Islamising'[7] society from below. It is not a matter of taking control of the state but of changing society and, from this basis, forcing the state to adapt.[8] It is about building an authentically Islamic space and then expanding it.[9]

The theoretical corpus for such a development would come from leading intellectuals like Sayyed Qutb, Hassan al-Turabi, Mawdudi, Hanafi and, on the Shiite side with its particularities, from Khomeini and Ali Sariati . Most of them would undergo a process of radicalisation that would lead to their imprisonment and even death.

What is more, these associations were endowed with the internationalist vocation implicit in pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism and would lead to the creation of different national branches. By moving on the religious plane, they would simultaneously be able to incorporate different discourses (economic or political, always substantial in the West and

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[4] KEPEL, Gilles. (2002) *Jihad.* Ediciones Península, Barcelona, pp.57 and ff.
[5] GONZÁLEZ FERRIN, Emilio. (2002). *The word descended.* Ediciones Obelisco, 2002, p. 185.
[6] PÉREZ LÓPEZ-PORTILLO, Raul. (1999). *Algeria The end of the Islamist dream.* Silex, Madrid, p. 105.
[7] KEPEL, Gilles. *Jihad.* Opus cited, p. 95 et seq.
[8] KHADER, Bichara. (2006). "Localised Islamist terrorism Globalised Islamist terrorism. Un ensayo de definición." in VV. AA. *Tackling terrorism.* Government of Aragon, p. 191.
[9] IBIDEM.

also in political Islamism) without incurring a serious structural contradiction, which would result in diffuse and populist approaches. They are *catch-all-parties.*

As Oliver Roy predicted, the early 1990s saw the culmination of the integration and trivialisation of these Islamist movements, eventually taking on Islamo-nationalist overtones. The institutionalisation of Islamism goes hand in hand with its renunciation of the revolutionary path and its framing within the logic of the nation-state, in addition to the pushing aside of transnational ideological references in favour of national objectives. In turn, this means its de-ideologisation and a limited re-Islamisation of customs and law distinct from the intended re-Islamisation.[10]

It is a movement in backward motion. If Westernisation has had its limits in the Islamic world, so has Orientalisation. Moreover, while Islamism is led by Islamising politicians, Salafism is led by clerics.

Modern Salafism emerged in the 1960s in Saudi Arabia for geopolitical reasons, under the tutelage of its leaders and as an instrument of struggle against Nasserism. The fusion of this thought with Wahhabism was a powerful reagent that resonated with and energised the group, later taking on a life of its own. The Saudi rulers also sought to lead the Muslim world and gain legitimacy in the eyes of their people.

Notably, the Russian-Afghan conflict in the 1980s forged a cadre of highly motivated activists experienced in armed combat, who were later distributed among the Muslim countries of origin and served to germinate new movements there. Al-Qaeda's commitment in Afghanistan met with multiple doctrinal challenges as the Taliban's peculiar interpretation of Islam hindered the organisation's commitment to religious purity, but they were overcome clearly for operational reasons.

Thus, the problem with jihadism is that it embodies an ideological approach rooted in Islamic tradition - especially in the Middle East and with Wahhabism - through modern Salafism. This is what gives it doctrinal roots, contributing to the structuring and persistence of terrorist movements while legitimising the violence practised in their name. It also has an important social anchorage in the Islamic world, in addition to the age-old merit of an entire spiritual tradition, whose name it has appropriated. Salafism is a key concept in

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[10] ROY, Oliver. (2003). *Globalised Islam.* Editions Bella terra.

understanding jihadism and is the reason for its strength. This is an essential issue because as Mohammed Sifaoui points out:

"It is not Bin Laden who dictates every order or plans every attack, but rather the Islamist ideology... he designates the target states, shows the way forward and explains the motives for his operation. If he is to make a terrorist action lawful, he must first proffer ideological arguments, which he will present as theological ones, so that the operational cells that accept his leadership and his "combat" will take action. In this way, the executors are not under the conviction that they are obeying Bin Laden but that they are obeying a divine mandate, which is sacred and therefore indisputable".[11]

In accordance with the purest Islamic tradition, the jihadist ideal, the model of the hero, is not that of the battle-hardened military man but that of the jurisconsult, because the path this figure cuts is presented through knowledge, example and commitment; it is life and law in one, so we are not dealing with just an orthodoxy but rather an orthopraxy. In this way "virtue" rules over "terror".

Thus, in the opinion of some authors, not only is there a remarkable parallel between Abd el-Krim el-Khatabi and Osama bin Laden, but there is an even greater one with Azzam regarding lifestyle. Abd el-Krim attained the status of judge of judges under the Spanish administration with whom he worked and who he knew before he became the *Lion of the Rif*, his intellectual qualities overshadowing those of Bin Laden.[12]

Contrary to what at times appears to be the case, neither Daesh nor al-Qaeda members are psychopaths; they are different actors underpinned by specific religious beliefs. Some of them, and this is undoubtedly the case in al-Qaeda as a primary insurgent movement, are well trained and religiously and politically aware, like classical revolutionaries, while others are manifestly not, especially in Daesh, where training was not as relevant. Their leaders must not be intellectually belittled - quite the contrary. They are *alim*, scholars of the law. Their intended irrationality only speaks to the analyst's capacity for understanding. This does not mean that they should not be combated, in fact quite the contrary: they should be the object of preferential and differentiated attention.

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[11] VERSTRYNGE, Jorge. (2005). *Peripheral warfare and revolutionary Islam.* Editorial Viejo Topo, p. 61.
[12] DEMPSEY, John. *al-Qaeda in international law.* Doctoral Thesis, Universidad Antonio de Nebrija. 06.03.2015.

The term jihadist is used to describe those who, in a cathartic way and believing themselves to be at the forefront of Islam, advocate armed struggle as opposed to religious preaching. In this way, new life is breathed into old discourses and given new meaning, including the anti-imperialist one. In any event, it is not a monolithic phenomenon but, as always, a plural and diverse one that admits different objectives, means and methods in the name of an Islam that is intended to be achieved by force.

THE RELIGIOUS BASIS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

The word Salafism - an idea that is lost in the very early days of Islam - comes from the term *Salaf al-Salifh,* the Pious Ancestors, referring to the four Perfect *Rashidun* Caliphs, successors of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman and Ali and, more broadly, to the three generations to which they belong and who, because of their proximity to the Prophet, are considered most perfect. We must be clear that we are talking about a Sunni movement; for the Shiites the successor to Muhammad was Ali, and the figures of the other three *Rashiduns* are not examples but are atrocities.

The roots of the modern version of this movement go back to the Hanbali school (characterised by its literalism in Qur'anic exegesis), through thinkers such as Taqi ad-Din Ahmed Ibn Taymiyya, reform movements such as Wahhabism, and traditions of Indian origin such as the *Ahl-e Hadith* (the people of the *Hadith*).

It was originally a theological and not a political category, and so does not describe the political condition of the user. What it does assume is a literal, decontextualised and even deliberately anti-rationalist approach to scripture. Salafism condemns the praxis of an Islam that it judges to be westernised and rational, while at the same time considering other renewal movements, such as *Tabligh,* to be doctrinally weak.

It attempts to return to the very early days, to the pristine purity, absent of any degradation resulting from an increasingly imperfect imitation, if not contamination brought about by contact with the West. Salafism claims to make no concessions to modernity and seeks no concordance between the Islamic and the modern, rejecting any intermingling with foreign elements and the overlap of similar ideas. Salafism consequently promotes the incorporation of the rule in its entirety, since the *Sharia* is not derived from or shaped by society but is a transcendent God-given ideal. To reject a part is thus to reject the whole. There is Islam only if the state fully applies the *Sharia*, otherwise what exists is *yahiliyya*

[the age of ignorance and impiety, historically referring to the time before Muhammad's preaching, although radicals use it to refer to the present time]; and rejecting Islam is an act of *riddah* ("*apostasy*", the most atrocious crime as it involves rejecting Islam), punished by placing them outside the community, and allowing, following in the wake of Ibn Taymiyya, war to be waged against them as they are worse than infidels. It is *takfir*, a kind of excommunication, that can be used improperly because it is abusive and, in any event, non-traditional. Moreover, such movements turn the exceptional into the norm, leading to the misrepresentation of religious movements.

Takfirism has been pushing out its boundaries to reach not only infidels of all kinds (including *Ahl-Kitab*, Jews, Christians and Sabeans, traditionally protected minorities, *dhimmies*) but all those who do not follow its doctrine (including, in Abu Qatada's version, women and children). An intolerance that seeks the transformation of the old society by means of the blatant exercise of horizontal violence. Moreover, the violence is enhanced by the independent power given to the perpetrators, embodied in the principle that "the mujahedin on the ground knows best", a transposition of the idea that Allah knows best.

Last, in addition to the purity of doctrine, Salafism focuses on preaching *(Dawa)* with a view to strengthening the faith, preserving the cohesion of the community and upholding the Islamic moral order. This is a discourse that concurs with fundamentalist activism and with it - as with any discourse of renewal - promotes rupture with the more moderate Muslims.

Salafism and Salafists are words that the radicals not only accept but they claim for themselves, insofar as they presuppose a stronger and more traditional acceptance of Islam; while elevating their political discourse to its highest religious terms by giving it intellectual and, as we have seen, also a military potency. The conceptual mutation they advocate is thereby validated. With these doctrinal incorporations, Salafi jihadism has gradually lost its connection to nineteenth-century Salafism. Thus, while Salafism rejects reality in the name of purity, Salafi jihadism strives to change it by transforming the creed (*'aqida*) as needed to achieve full conformity with the concept of jihad in Ibn Taymiyya's tradition; and it even goes as far as to incorporate fundamentalist thinkers with the aim of rooting itself in more traditional Islamic thought.

In this, there is something not only proscribed but persecuted by Islam, in the same way as is innovation. Another key element of its ideological construct is the *hisba*, an institution based on the Koranic verse *"you are the best community that man has ever had, you command good, you forbid evil and you believe in God"* (3.110). The *hisba*

consists of commanding the good, the lawful, *(halal)* and forbidding the evil *(haram)* in accordance with the *Sharia*; in other words, ignoring positive law.

The radicals' appeal to the faith and commitment of the faithful is the most compulsive of arguments in a society called to activism. As the hádiz commands, "he among you who sees something unlawful must prevent it with his hand, and if he cannot with his tongue, and if he cannot with his heart and this is the weakest degree of the Faith (Imam)"[13] The *hisba* was traditionally applied by the rulers by "the hand" and the clerics by "the word", while by the people only by what was left, "the heart".

Transferring this obligation directly to believers gives it a new revolutionary dimension by making every man a censor and an activist. This generates a diffuse but permanent social control, passive in terms of the expectation of response (everyone knows the "*should be"*) but also active and corrective ("*with the hand*") and the responsibility of any Muslim.

Another key concept relates to the community of the faithful, the *Ummah*. This is a transcendent entity built on the horizontal relations of virtuous men: "*Believers and believers are each other's friends, they command what is established and forbid what is reprehensible*" (9,71). It is itself a civil society proposal, reinforced by other elements such as *asabiyya,* a kind of tribal solidarity.

The doctrine of *al-wallah wa-l-bara*, which upholds the ideas of the separation of the world into believers and non-believers while disdaining any other category in between, brings forth sectarianism.

Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, spiritual father and later critic of Abu Mus'ab Al Zarqawi, links the doctrine of *al-wallah wa-l-bara* with the profession of faith, promoting the separation between fidelity (respect for divine laws) and infidelity (respect for human laws), and linking them with *Tawhid* (the confluence of everything around God, which is emphasised in many radical videos where the index finger is used to underline this fundamental fact), and from there with *jihad* and *takfir*.

Regarding al-Qaeda, the lack of a solid doctrine was identified in the 1980s and 1990s as a factor of the organisation's weakness, leading to its reinforcement by academics as a corrective response. From al-Suri's perspective, its doctrinal sources include

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[13] AN NAWAWI. (2005). *The best of the Garden of the Righteous.* Comunidad Musulmana de España, Motril, p. 98.

fundamentalist elements, the most important of which are *hakimiyya* (the rule of God in all matters, i.e., the direct transposition of a sectarian vision of the *Sharia*) and the legal and political doctrine of Ibn Taymiyya's Salafism, especially the aforementioned principle of *al-wala wa al-bara*. To these we can add elements of the legal and political tradition of Wahhabism and the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood.[14]

JIHADISM AND FRAGMENTATION.

Because of its origin, Salafism is not a single movement but, for reasons of culture and language, a magma, a hazy mass of them; heavily influenced by the Arab world. In fact, it can even be seen as an Arab attempt to retake the reins of Islam of which they are the founders.

Moreover, it intermingles the local and the global; there are *Umma* (Islamic community) oriented branches, morally oriented ones, and sectarian ones such as al-Zarkawi. On the one hand it combines quietism, clarity and universalism, while on the other it also includes activism, rigidity, fragmentation, political dissolution and localism. Moreover, its purism has been unable to escape the debates of the present and has been de facto hijacked by other struggles.

Wiktorowics[15] classifies Salafists into three main groups, without going into the continuity there is between the categories: purists (*salafiyya al ilmiyya* scholars), politicians (they are activists or *harakis*, supporters of political action), and jihadists*(salaffiyya al jihadiyya*) united by a common creed and separated by the interpretation of the world in which they must operate; but without the emphasis that other authors place on the important doctrinal debates that underpin each of these interpretations.

As can be seen, this is a spectrum that ranges from the most absolute academicism to the most operational domains and includes a kind of tele-preacher with huge social influence. And everything also depends on the nature of the problems addressed. When the problems being addressed are of a more national nature, the more Islamo-nationalist

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[14] BRYANJAR, Lia. "Destructive doctrinarians" in MEIJER, Roel. (2009). Globalsalafism. Hurst & Company, London, p.286

[15] WIKTOROWICS, Quintan. "Anatomy of the Salafi movement*", Studies in conflicts and terrorism* num. 29 no 3 (April-May 2006).

ideologies dominate; if they are less specific, it is the more Salafist doctrines; and if the population has suffered the hardships of conflict, it is the Salafist-jihadists'.

In this regard, there are authors who believe that it is a mistake to see *al-Qaeda* as an organisation in its own right, as in reality it represents an ideology. From this perspective, we are faced with an amorphous space that serves to house a kind of international Islamism, where Islamic brotherhood transcends national and cultural differences and immediate ideological objectives. In this way, the ideology serves as the lowest common denominator for different local movements, giving them a certain structure that generates synergies at the global level. These organisations are Sunni and claim to be multiracial, even if al-Qaeda's base is primarily Arab, as already noted.

Indeed, the name al-Qaeda can be claimed for themselves by anyone who identifies with this ideology. From this perspective, we are dealing with a transnational social movement of undefined form made up of a multitude of potential activists who maintain a certain relationship among themselves, which is a function of doctrinal affinities that mean they coincide to varying degrees regarding achieving certain ideologically predefined objectives.[16] The truth is that new words had to be invented to describe what was also presented as a new reality that was incomprehensible at the time but which has undergone a process of normalisation.

The problem with this latest terrorism is that globalisation is not concluded, it is not constituted. We are faced with a "glocal" approach, an aggregation of local elements with global results; the criticism is that the alignment between the local and the global is still poor. A new word is attempting to describe an equally novel phenomenon, "alqaedism".

The origins of al-Qaeda lie in the Afghan conflict. It was an evolution of the *Maktab-al-Jidmat* (MAK) organisation of Abdullah Yusuff Azzam, promoter of the idea of global jihad, which Bin Laden would join. It is an Islamic fraternity that transcends national and cultural differences and immediate ideological goals.

Since its inception its terrorist activity has occurred in waves. 9/11 marked both a milestone and a ceiling; it has not been able to overcome its own success, which has made it a prisoner. These attacks placed al-Qaeda at the forefront of the world, gave it global visibility and generated a "call effect" that made the organisation a rallying point for

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[16] DEMPSEY, John. *al-Qaeda in international law.* Doctoral Thesis, Universidad Antonio de Nebrija. 06.03.2015.

anyone dissatisfied with the current order, at the cost of bestowing the organisation an importance that was not in keeping with its true military capabilities and thus with the expectations it raised. Its actions meant that its political gamble was seen as viable and consequently as a danger to Western security.

However, it gradually lost social support as it failed to live up to the expectations it raised. This may have been because of the jihadist organisations' failure to adapt to the social and cultural framework in which they operate and their inability to bring about real transformation in line with the Islamic values they advocate. This explains the geographical enmeshment, the encapsulation to which these movements are subjected. The result of this conjunction is, as Jon Juaristi calls it, a melancholic loop[17].

The West's retrenchment in response to this challenge led to the centrifugation and flattening of the parent organisation's structures, causing it to lose its capacity for coordination and command over its affiliates and depriving it of initiative and reducing its media relevance to the point where it was left out of the news altogether. It is jihad without leaders, a *jihad* without a formalised structure, popularising the concept of a *"bunch of guys"*, in reference to informal groups which, once formed, are inspired in their attacks by the directives that emanate from a central core which, in most (but not all) cases, lacks direct operational control over them. Al-Qaida has thus evolved from an organisation with a relatively hierarchical structure into a polymorphous hybrid in a semi-franchised hazy mass.

The Madrid and London attacks, for all their significance, failed to surpass the ceiling set by 9/11, resulting in the organisation gradually losing its initiative and visibility; world stock markets fell for several years after 9/11, for several months after 11-M and for just days after the London events; the markets, since then and in general, pay little attention to its actions. Moreover, since that date, it has been unable to successfully carry out any new attacks of this magnitude in the West. Attempts to force a civil war between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq were strongly challenged by these groups, politically backfiring and rejected and opposed by the very people they had come to support at the time. Bin Laden's death in 2011 was the physical culmination of a decline.

The rise and fall of ISIS/Daesh is another example as part of a shorter cycle. This organisation was part of al-Qaeda until the end of 2013, but strategic differences - its focus

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[17] JUARISTI, Jon. *The melancholic loop.* Espasa, 1998.

on local power, territorial consolidation, a marked tendency to use horizontal violence and its anti-Shiite activism - and the weakness of the parent organisation in relation to the affiliate's operational capabilities in the area, led to its departure.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

In 2002 President George W. Bush stated that "the only thing that is modern in the activists' approach is the weapons they want to use against us". The key to terrorism lies where it always has, in the exploitation of the media.

Power is first and foremost an image. Its secret is that it is rarely used since this use has a cost in terms of legitimacy; it is a power not an act, which is why the media serve to reduce the actual use of power, while at the same time increasing its effectiveness through their capacity to magnify it and direct it depending on the chosen audience. Its main attribute is to raise itself and to be a constructor of truth, such that this is exercised through its production. Only he who in possession of the truth has the power; and at this level of dispute, terrorism has the options that are not available to it in the military domain. The fact is that it is best understood if it is kept simple; terrorism therefore has an advantage from the perspective of political communication.

To this effect, the use of extreme violence and its primacy even over preaching (the medium over the message), together with sophisticated communication strategies and advanced means of editing, can give Daesh a notable impact in terms of audience and act as an attractor; however, it has a long-term cost in term of alienating this organisation from the moderate Muslim. Moreover, Abu Qatada subordinates preaching and political action to a *jihad* directed first and foremost against the enemy nearby; and he goes even further than many Salafists in his contempt for human reason.

In his 2004 work "*The Management of Savagery*", Abu Bakr Naji proposed the generation of chaos by manipulating religious and nationalist elements, polarising societies and winning their territory for the *Umma*. Polarisation was achieved by forcing sides, reducing the space for neutrality with violence and stifling any further debate. Several phases were envisaged until the process finally culminated in the installation of an Islamic State; Daesh seemed to be in a state of what Naji called "*vexation and exhaustion*" and identified as a kind of "*Alzarkawism*". This would be followed by a state committed to providing more and more services, although which ones was not specified as part of its magical thinking.

Under this logic, if there is one thing where strategies of al-Qaeda and Daesh coincide it is in media activism, in the care of the message and the means for its transmission. In an interview, Bin Laden himself acknowledged that this accounted for more than 90 per cent of the effort in preparing for battle. Daesh has gone even further by incorporating social media, improving editing, and incorporating the latest production techniques, while also exponentially increasing the number of publications, creating a powerful media network and even kidnapping and using a journalist as a presenter.

Jihadist group action is simultaneously developed in a dual dimension that is not entirely misaligned, combining terrorism (fictitious power) and insurgency (deployment of capabilities, real power). First, by trying to set itself up as a representative of Islam, which is a validation of its religious proposal and in practice works to the benefit of the second, which is where its real, achievable objectives lie.

The result is horizontal violence - in the form of either insurgency or terrorism. Violence directed against Muslims themselves, however, has been identified as a strategic vulnerability because of its overuse - aimed at transforming society - and as a vertical, exclusively terrorist violence, which also serves the former purpose, directed against the West and thus against local political leaders who they regard as their proxies insofar as they do not fully implement Islamic norms. In this way, the second level of action serves to place the jihadists at the forefront of Islam, to delegitimise their political enemies and to contribute to victory on the first level, the real axis around which their political-religious proposal gravitates. The dual dimension of terrorism is also evident in al-Qaeda's strategy. At the intra-Islamic level, this strategy seeks to take advantage of the institutional and social weakness of a good number of states; and at the supra-Islamic level, it manifests its commitment through the use of so-called *"lone wolves"*. At the local level, this translates in turn into an instrumentalisation of violence for real operational purposes, into an insurgency directed against established power, while at the global level its use is primarily instrumental and media-driven. Al-Qaeda is first and foremost committed to fighting the "*distant enemy"*, criticising the obsession with toppling apostate regimes without first toppling those who actually make their survival possible.

Thus, as far as the West is concerned, the aim is to take the fight directly to their societies at the hand of those who live there, thus defeating the logistical and preparatory challenges of the terrorists while overcoming all security measures, fracturing the community and forcing its members to speak out. It is no longer a question of large,

complex attacks (of which there are many recorded precedents of failures, even resulting in the death of those who prepared them due to lack of training) aimed at the screen, but of simpler, more homespun actions such as hit-and-runs, stabbings, and so on;emotionally impactful actions carried out by inspired people, detached from the group, and therefore very difficult to control by the police. This gives individual initiative free rein and holds up examples of people who, in their everyday work, can act in the service of religion. Again an inspiration for the group; they are the lone wolves.

In this context, the internet has proved to be of paramount importance. The network of networks is interesting because of the proliferation of emission centres and nodes that generate a flat, polycentric structure. It has been identified as the jihadi distance university because it fosters brotherhood and solidarity, enabling a kind of virtual and mental jihad (war is first and foremost an attitude), while fostering jihadi scholars and the transfer of ideas, and conferring the movement with flexibility and dynamism.

This has enabled al-Qaida to adapt to the scenario and evolve from an organisation with a relatively hierarchical structure to a polymorphic hybrid in a semi-franchised hazy mass. We are dealing with a very diverse and heterogeneous group whose concerted action is, as can be sensed, complex and very difficult. At the centre of it all and as a totem is al-Qaeda, as the fruit of its past successes.

CONCLUSIONS AND THREAT ASSESSMENT

The emergence of a group like al-Qaeda - the result of the ebb of globalisation and endowed with solid doctrinal foundations, which are also the outcome of the review of Islamic tradition - has contributed to the dynamisation of a type of terrorism which, due to its novel nature, has been included under the "indigenous" name of jihadist.

Moreover and notably, al-Qaeda's main achievement was to have popularised the use of a word "jihadist", which serves as a surname and lowest common denominator for different local movements, giving them a certain structure and generating synergies at the global level.

Al-Qaeda and its affiliates grew from 8 centres of operation in 2008 to 16[18]. The number of groups grew from 3 in 1988 to 31 in 2010 and to 49 in 2013, following the '*Arab Springs*', implying a kind of '*alqaedism*'[19] built on a system that links franchising and legitimisation in a mutually beneficial way. This figure may now exceed 60 as al-Qaeda expands along African shores, although in the West - now preoccupied with the imaginaries of the rise of China (gestated in the shadow of jihadism) and the crisis in Ukraine - it seems to have disappeared.

However, the usefulness of terrorist violence has limits that are set by its normalisation as a phenomenon; terrorism needs to remain exceptional to be operational. Terrorism has to be in a permanent state of innovation and cannot over-reiterate its procedures, as it has done, without losing its gleam and thus the initiative that is essential for its survival. It needs to ignite emotion by moving from one impactful action to another, or by taking a long pause between its actions, which is something to consider when assessing al-Qaeda's future course of action.

The broad use of horizontal violence made by these organisations- against Muslims themselves and with a view to bringing about the transformation of societies, considering that 90% of those killed by terrorism are Muslims - and their inability to resolve the conflicts they enter into, together with their criticism of the practice of Islam at the local level, have led to weariness and thus to the alienation of populations involved at its base level and even to its rejection. *AQIM'*s failure to create a pan-Maghrebi identity is a good example. The need to change targets and return to traditional and "distant" enemies as a way to improve its link with society undoubtedly comes from here.

Terrorism by individual actors - the so-called lone wolves - has caused fewer than 700 deaths in Europe since 2001. The "military" value of their actions is thus low, even if the value of an attack cannot be measured in terms of physical impact but rather of political and media impact; as we said back in 2011, amidst the uproar and not few voices of protest, this strategic formulation does not pose a substantial threat despite the great human drama that results from its actions.

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[18] BERGEN, Peter; HOFFMAN, Bruce; HURLEY Michael. "Jihadist terrorism: A thread assessment". Bipartisan Center, September 2013.
[19] IBIDEM

In any case, far from activating the Muslim community in the West, these organisations' commitment to limited and unconnected individual actions that hardly occupy any space in the media can deactivate it. And this when neither in 2001 and even less so now are the objective conditions in place for such a movement to succeed in the Islamic world at the global level, or even at the local level. In this regard, in the medium term, Afghanistan - which is an insurgent movement - looks set for a new civil war.

A war is a symphony whose drama and *leitmotif* is that it makes sense, a political sense that is; while the attacks perpetrated by lone wolves are little more than disjointed disturbances. Nonetheless, their impact politically and security-wise has been extraordinarily high. The cost for airport security since the 9/11 has been much higher than the material damage caused by the attacks themselves. The cost of lone wolves is cheap, bringing us back to terrorism as a fictitious activity. Having said that, as we have seen, it cannot be considered a minor issue either, given the damage which, aside from the economic damage, it is capable of doing to the governance structures of societies. Terrorism cannot destroy a society, but it can change a government and subvert a country's constitutional order and seriously damage its economy. An attack, at least without weapons of mass destruction - another issue to be considered as a terrorist desire - does not physically sink a state, but subsequent propaganda can. The return to major attacks is associated with the very survival of jihadism; the lone wolves are no longer able to deliver in either political or informational terms.

It is, after all, a symbolic violence with which the media strike at the fracture lines, at the seams of society, which are perfectly identifiable by terrorists who in many cases are members of the same social corpus. Well-directed terrorism, even though it may seem otherwise and there are occasional exceptions, always comes from within. By way of example, there is the relationship between Mustafa Setmarian, one of al-Qaeda's military leaders, and our country where he lived, which is not unrelated to the possible targeting of certain locations in our country and in the past. Notably, the word Al Andalus has mythical connotations in the Islamic world. Likewise,the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla have also raised their voices, with the jihadist organisations seemingly joining the pseudo-anti-colonial movements and thus reinforcing their discourse. Add to this we can add the people of Spanish nationality who, as we have already seen with Setmarian, have even occupied top positions, which in practical terms is not unrelated to the targeting of objectives.

Let us not forget that with 11-M Spain suffered the most important attack in Europe since the Second World War. Not to mention the Barcelona attacks of 2017, which were much smaller but more recent in time. Moreover, and to paint a complete picture, we must remember that al-Qaeda established one of the most important cells in Western Europe in Spain as early as 1994.[20]

In line with all the above, the 2021 National Security Strategy addressed this concern, continuing to consider jihadist terrorism one of the main threats to national security. However, the soul of jihadism, its particular Salafism, like in Hadrian's poem, has already begun its own transit to the world of intellectual shadows.

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[20] REINARES, Fernando; GARCÍA-CALVO, Carola; VICENTE, Álvaro. (2019) *Jihadism and jihadists in Spain.* Real Instituto Elcano, 10.