

MIDDLE EAST SALAFISM'S INFLUENCE AND THE RADICALIZATION OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE

[Juan Jose Escobar Stemmann](#)*

MERIA Journal Vol. 10 No. 3 (September 2006)

This article discusses the Salafi ideology behind the recent terror attacks in Europe, including the Madrid (March 2004) and London bombings (July 2005) and the role of such attacks in the radicalization process among certain sectors of Europe's Muslim communities.

The Madrid terrorist bombings in March 2004 and the London attacks in July 2005 showed that Europe is no longer just a logistics base or shelter for international terrorism but has instead become one of its main battlegrounds. Jihadi ideology, in particular the proselytizing conducted by radical preachers, has led to the emergence of groups capable of carrying out independent terrorist attacks in Europe. What type of ideology lies behind these attacks? What role does it play in the process of radicalization of certain sectors in Europe's Muslim communities?

SALAFISM AS A METHOD

Jihadi ideology is based today on what is commonly known as Salafism, an ambiguous concept that has served to designate various and very different movements throughout the years. The term is derived from the word *Salaf*, which means "to precede." In Islamic vocabulary, it is used to describe the followers of *al Salaf al salih*, the virtuous fathers of the faith who were the companions of the Prophet. The group includes the first three generations of Muslims.^[1] Since they learned Islam directly from the Prophet, they understood the true meaning of the religion. Salafis aim to eradicate the impurities introduced during centuries of religious practice. Interpretations not based on the original sources of the religion are viewed as distortions that lead Muslims to stray from the path of God. Salafis have constructed a method (*manhaj*) to help the search for religious truth. It is a methodology for determining the correct interpretation of the religion, based on the Koran, the Sunna, and the example of the first Muslims.

The method is based on a series of core concepts, foremost among them the *tawhid* or belief in the uniqueness of God.^[2] Another essential concept in Salafi ideology is *bid'a* or any innovation in the faith. Salafis argue that since the Koran and Sunna reveal the true nature of Islam, any innovation is a distortion of the path to God and is therefore to be rejected.^[3] Salafis also devote considerable attention to the science of the *hadiths*, and call themselves the "People of the Hadith" (*Ahl al-Hadith*). In their opinion, the hadiths are, according to the Koran, the most important source of religious knowledge and guidance, providing the best example of how Islam was practiced when it was first introduced. Hence, many Salafi scholars devote themselves to the science of the hadiths in order to eliminate those that are false and thus be able to propose an exact version of the tradition of the Prophet. Lastly, Salafis consider the division of Muslims into separate schools to be unacceptable, because there can only be one correct interpretation or opinion. One of the main problems the Muslim community is experiencing is precisely this blind adherence or imitation (*taqlid*) of a particular school. Salafis insist, therefore, that the truth is to be found in the sources, not in the texts written by jurists.

Salafism is thus a path and a method to search for religious truth, a desire to practice Islam exactly as it was revealed by the Prophet. The Salafi mission is grounded on avoidance of *bida'* and *shirk*, strict adherence to the principle of *tawhid* and a desire to transcend the differences between the various schools, as well as the quest for religious truth in the original sources of Islam.[4]

AMBIGUITY OF THE TERM

The connection between late nineteenth century Salafis to the terrorists behind the attacks in Europe is a complex one. The ambiguity arises, because the very name Salafism embraces different sociological and historical realities. Initially, the Salafi movement formed part of a project for the renaissance of Muslim thought initiated by authors such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdo, who were fascinated by the progress made in the late nineteenth century by the West. The project openly sought to reconcile the desire to return to the practices of the original companions of the Prophet with the modernization and application of reason to Islam.[5] The movement coexisted alongside a minority sect of followers of the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in Saudi Arabia, which would ultimately inherit the concept of Salafism as we know it today. In most Arab countries, the reformist Salafism of Afghani and Abdo eventually dissolved into the nationalist movement after connecting and uniting, during the period of the Protectorates, clerics who had graduated from traditional courses and young nationalists who had studied at European universities. It is worth recalling that Alal al-Fasi, the founder of the Istiqlal party in Morocco, was also a Salafi. Following independence, Salafism was forced to give way to political action, which was dominated by nationalism and socialism. Displaced from the political scene, Salafis focused their efforts on educating through private schools, or in some cases--such as that of Morocco--by entering Court to serve the conservative Islam promoted by Hassan II.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Salafism enjoyed at best a marginal and largely local presence in the majority of Arab countries. It had become a form of apolitical pietism along very similar lines to the Hanbali School, which was based on a literal reading of the Koran and excluded all use of reason in interpreting the Holy Scriptures. The concept of Salafism once again became associated with the puritan reformism advocated, among others, by Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. During this period, doctrine was produced largely in Saudi Arabia, where authors such as Ibn Otheimin, Nasr Al Din al-Albani,[6] Ali Hassan al-Halabi, and the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Baz, laid the ideological foundations of modern Salafism, bringing its content more into line with the ideas propounded by the founder of Wahhabism.

The Salafi movement benefited from Saudi Arabia's designs to spread Wahhabi Islam, and its development came to be tied closely to events in the country. Funding Salafi schools and publications and offering a strict vision of Islam very similar to Wahhabism became the best way to promote the peculiar vision of Wahhabi Islam while also enhancing the influence of Salafi sheikhs [7] and fostering Salafi thinking in the majority of Islamist movements throughout the Arab world.[8]

SALAFISM: BETWEEN PIETISM AND JIHAD

Although some authors have linked Salafism to organizations such as *Takfir wa-Hijrah*, which emerged in the 1980s as manifestations of Islamist radicalism and called for a jihad against the establishment, the general consensus is that, prior to the 1990s, Salafism was primarily a pietist and apolitical movement that did not pose a threat to the different Arab regimes. This explains the broad support received from Saudi Arabia and even the use that some regimes made of Salafi conservatism to counter more political Islamist movements. The Salafi method advocates changing society by modifying individual behavior. To correct society and restore it to the true path individuals must be persuaded to return to Islam. Change has to be effected through education (*tarbiya*) and the science of the hadiths. On the political level, Salafis acknowledge only God's sovereignty; they reject the concept of nation-state and stress the importance of the *umma* or supranational political religious community. Still, Salafis do not see themselves as revolutionaries, but rather as guardians of the faith.

The 1990s saw the emergence of a clear split between reformist or academic Salafism (*Salafiyyah al-ilmīyyah*) and fighting or "Jihadi" Salafism (*Salafiyyah al Jihadiyyah*). The origin of the split was the Gulf War. Saudi Arabia responded to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait by inviting U.S. troops onto its soil. This decision ended the fragile internal balance in the country while also helping radicalize the most important sect of Saudi Islamism (*al Ahwa al Islamiyya*), whose most prominent representatives, Salman al-Awda and Safar al-Hawali, targeted not only liberal intellectuals or the religious establishment in their sermons, but also the State and its institutions.^[9]

Some Salafi scholars, until then engrossed in apolitical pietism, turned radical. The fight against the non-believers (*kafir*) became a religious obligation and the main leitmotiv of this sect. The concept of *takfir* (declaring someone to be non-believer) became the major source of conflict among Salafis, causing a rift in the movement throughout the Arab world.

Reformist Salafis consider that all applications of *takfir* require a clear and proven violation. Muslim leaders, they argue, cannot be declared to be non-believers, because there is no clear evidence proving that they have ceased to be Muslims. Consequently, a jihad against Arab regimes is not permitted. The most radical Salafis base their interpretation of jihad on the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah ^[10] and, like him, they consider that actions by governments that are contrary to Islamic law can be considered proof in order to declare them non-believers. The *takfir* thus became an instrument that could be used to oppose any regime whatsoever through armed struggle.

The main advocate of this new approach was Isam al-Barqawi, better known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a Jordanian who--during his stay in Afghanistan in 1984--published a book entitled *The Creed of Abraham (Millat Ibrahim)* in which he outlined the doctrine of jihad based on the Wahhabi tradition. Radical Salafism merged with ultra-intransigent Wahhabism. In 1991 al-Maqdisi, who had links with the most radical circles of Saudi Islamism, published a book called *Proof of the Infidelity of the Saudi State*, which was distributed widely in the Arabian Peninsula. In 1992, he left Peshawar for Jordan, where he headed the Salafi organization *Bay`at al-Imam* until he was detained by the Jordanian authorities in 1996 and accused of plotting to kill the

negotiators of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. His work influenced the principal ideologists of fighting Salafism in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s.[\[11\]](#)

In tandem with the evolution of Salafism, Jihadi ideology gradually gained ground in Afghanistan and eventually merged with Salafism. Its chief proponent was Abdallah Azzam, who in 1984 founded the *Maktab al-Khidamat* (MAK), an office for recruiting Arabs to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Azzam was to have a decisive influence on Usama bin Ladin. In his work, *The Main Obligation of Muslims is to Defend the Land of Islam*, Azzam writes that jihad is a moral obligation for all Muslims, the sixth pillar of the faith. Using an epic and mystic language, he sets out a vision of the world based on strict Salafism and on calls to martyrdom, stressing the permanent state of humiliation suffered by the *Ummah*, as a result of the actions of "crusaders and Zionists." His work was to have a decisive influence on the Jihadi radicalism of the 1990s.[\[12\]](#)

Fighting Salafism acquired its current format thanks to the various European-based ideologists, among them Abu Qutada, who is for some the spiritual father of al-Qa'ida. In his work *al-Jihad wal-Ijtihad* he laid the foundations for this radical sect, using three fundamental ideas. The only way to build the Islamic State and establish God's sovereignty is by fighting; all other means are excluded, particularly preaching or participation in politics. The fight is a religious obligation and priority in the struggle must be accorded to the nearest enemy (Arab regimes), not the far away one (the West). Up to the late 1990s, these ideas imbued the tenets of organizations such as the Salafi Group for Liberation and Combat in Algeria.[\[13\]](#)

The global proliferation of fighting Salafism and its fusion with jihadi ideology were further consolidated under bin Ladin. His declaration of war on the West--backed by the creation in 1998 of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders--caused groups that had originally been set up to provide logistical support to al-Qa'ida (e.g. the Islamic Group of Moroccan Combatants) and had originally sought to purify and punish society, to now set their sights on the West. The struggle was no longer confined to the nearest enemy but also to those further away. Fighting Salafism assumed the role of globalizing the jihad born out of the Afghan experience and became the core ideology of the new radical Islamism.

INFORMAL NETWORKS AND SALAFI ACTIVISM

In order to understand the role played by Salafism in the process of radicalization of Muslim communities and how this process operates in Europe, one must first examine its characteristics as a movement in the Arab world. In contrast to other formal organizations, Salafism lacks hierarchical structures. The Salafi network structure is decentralized and segmented. The different groups are led by sheikhs or scholars with varying degrees of knowledge of the science of the hadiths, but not necessarily having ties with each other. There is also some element of competition between the sheikhs, each defending his interpretation of the *Salaf*, or true path, as the correct one. The most important scholars enjoy considerable support among students, who often recommend them to others on account of their vast knowledge of religious issues. There exists only an informal hierarchy based on the reputation of the different sheikhs recognized by the Salafi community. The proliferation of sheikhs means that there is no elite or clearly-defined leadership. This decentralized and cellular structure, in which anyone with religious knowledge

can claim leadership of a group, explains how easy it has been in Europe to create groups or autonomous cells willing to blow themselves up without the need for direct orders from a higher authority.

Salafi activism operates through informal networks, the very same networks that have ensured the transmission of Islamic knowledge down the centuries and have proven extremely effective in creating a common Muslim identity. They mobilize in social networks created out of personal relationships and shared beliefs. Surveys of Jordanian Salafis reveal that friends played a crucial role in their conversion to Salafism.^[14] The recruitment process is carried out directly during discussions on Islam. Devout Muslims socialize in circles of friends for whom Islam plays an important role in their lives. Religion is a recurring theme in such circles. Through daily interaction, Salafis explain their theology to their friends until the latter are convinced of the truth of their perspective. In many cases, entire groups of friends convert to Salafism, given that all of them are exposed to the same lessons, speeches, and ideas. The blend of friendship and religious networks creates a high degree of group solidarity, which is still one of the main features of Salafi groups in Europe, enabling the network to survive close scrutiny by intelligence and security services in western countries.

Most of the new recruits and followers in the Arab world come from other Islamist movements. These movements interact in mosques, lessons, and religious meetings. As a result of such contacts and their own religiousness, they are favorably disposed to Salafi thinking, a situation that does not arise outside Islamist movements. Two groups form the basis for recruitment. The first is the *Jama'at al-Tabligh*, a missionary movement founded by Muhammad Ilyas in India in 1927 to "re-islamicize" the Muslim community. Although the group tends to stay out of politics or social issues, its most socially committed members are potential recruits for the Salafi movement. The second group is the Muslim Brotherhood. It is not difficult to find Salafi scholars who have previously been members of the Brotherhood. Similarly, militants close to Salafism tend to be the most conservative, and at times most radical, sectors of the Muslim Brotherhood.^[15] This trend is seen in Europe as well, although experience shows that Salafism also attracts people who have no religious background whatsoever.

The movement uses a range of mechanisms typical of informal networks--personal interaction, activities in mosques, seminars, and lectures--in order to spread Salafi beliefs. Mobilization used to be achieved primarily through religious classes delivered in mosques. Tighter police controls and repression have resulted in classes being moved to private homes, where surveillance is much more difficult. Publications also play an important role in spreading Salafi ideas. Scholars are prolific publishers, and their writings are distributed widely in the Muslim world. Tape recordings and internet facilitate the reproduction of classes and sermons by Salafi scholars, connecting audiences in time and space, thus leading the community to a greater sense of unity. The fact that a European Salafi can listen to a sermon by Sheikh Abu Qutada live on the internet creates a strong sense of an imagined community, transcending national borders and uniting Salafis through a shared religious discourse.

SALAFISM IN EUROPE

The emergence of Salafism in European Islam is a relatively new phenomenon. During the 1980s, the functions of socialization and ultra-rigorous adherence to Islam were exercised by the *Tabligh* movement. This organization preached a highly demanding form of orthodoxy, including disengagement from unholy society and visits by followers to poor neighborhoods to recuperate a population that had strayed from the true path. The *Tabligh's* glory days in Europe were from the mid-1970s until the early 1990s, during which it targeted disaffected sectors (immigrant workers with no cultural access to European societies). However, it failed to adapt to the coming of age of young Muslims who had been educated in Europe and sought a more intellectual approach, which the movement was unable to provide. Consequently, it no longer occupies a central role on the European Muslim scenario, although it still survives as a minority movement, and one of its branches is a member of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM).[\[16\]](#)

The Salafis' arrival in Europe, particularly France--where they have established themselves more solidly than elsewhere--coincided with the emergence of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria. In France, where it proved impossible to turn FIS Salafism into political action, the trend adopted an essentially religious approach characterized by disengagement from the habits and customs of French society. Its influence spread throughout Europe thanks to the Algerian diaspora. On account of its focus on the Holy Scriptures and strict interpretations of these, it proved more successful in meeting the demands of a young generation brought up in the deliberately uncultured propaganda of the *Tabligh*.

The division between reformists and "fighting" Salafis has also been replicated in Europe. Reformist Salafism has found favor among the unemployed youth in the suburbs of major cities. This is thanks largely to the proselytizing work carried out in certain European mosques by Salafi Imams who have enjoyed, and still enjoy, considerable backing from Saudi Arabia. The number of followers continues to grow, thanks partly to the scholarships awarded every year by Saudi Arabia to enable young Europeans to study at the Umm al-Qura University in Medina. Furthermore, Islamic centers run by the Muslim World League (*Rabitat al-'Aalam al-Islami*) tend to be in the hands of clerics who preach a very strict form of Islam, very close to Salafism. Although opposed to violence, they preach a form of Islam that calls for a complete cultural break with unholy Europe. They have flooded the internet with websites purporting to be strictly apolitical and featuring frequent consultations with renowned Saudi Salafi sheikhs on a range of social issues. In addition to France, sizeable communities that follow the tenets of Salafism are found in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden. Although in principle they do not pose security problems, their principles and references to the scriptures coincide with those of fighting Salafism, and hence the passage of militants from one faction to the other is not difficult.

Fighting Salafism emerged in Europe in the mid-1990s through the armed Algerian groups. The fact that most of these were infiltrated by al-Qa'ida illustrates the gradual convergence between global Jihadism and this form of Salafism. The nearest precursor is Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (GIA), whose European wing--under Khaled Kelkal--carried out several attacks in France in 1995 and 1996. The editor-in-chief of its mouthpiece in Europe, the weekly publication *al-Ansar*, was Abu Qutada, later to become one of the leading ideologists of fighting Salafism.

When the group's infrastructure came under pressure in France, its cells were divided up among Belgium, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and Spain.[\[17\]](#)

The demise of GIA leader Jamal Zitouni in 1996 caused a split within the group, apparently at the behest of Usama bin Ladin, who was opposed to the campaign of brutal attacks against civilians in Algeria carried out by the GIA under Zitouni. The al-Qa'ida leader gave his support to the creation of the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), establishing direct ties with its head Hasan Khattab, who until then was the leader of the GIA network in Europe. In August 1998, Khattab's followers joined the GSPC, making it not only the main Algerian terrorist group, but also the main group in Europe with al-Qa'ida links, having inherited the GIA networks there.[\[18\]](#)

Nineteen ninety-eight was also an important year in terms of the formation of a series of groups with radical Salafi leanings in the Maghreb countries. The European cells of these groups have become one of the main threats to Europe's security. Also sponsored by the al-Qa'ida network, which lays down the strategies to be followed, organizations such as the Moroccan Islamic Combatants Group (GICM), the Tunisian Combatant Group, and the Libyan Islamic Combatant Group were set up to provide logistical support to al-Qa'ida. The groups grew up around Salafi preachers, and their militants are drawn from run-down districts outside the big cities, not from the popular medinas or industrial zones, the traditional breeding grounds for Islamist movements. This new generation of Islamists is totally excluded from society and lacks any sense of national belonging. They are the product of the rift between the non-integrated population of the suburbs and the rest of society. They are organized in separate independent groups, lacking a unified leadership, and drift into banditry and crime under the jihad banner.[\[19\]](#)

The new Salafi groups in the Maghreb countries share a number of common features: They have dropped the term jihad in their names, using instead the word "combat" (*qital*); they maintain close ties with their counterparts in other Maghreb countries--which explains the presence of various Maghrebi nationals in the cells formed in Europe; and they use former combatants from Afghanistan to extend their influence among Muslim communities in Europe. Although originally set up to provide logistical support to al-Qa'ida, the September 11 attacks and the growing repression in the Maghreb countries led these groups to redefine their priorities and become independent players on the international jihad scene. This is the backdrop to the attacks in Casablanca and Madrid.[\[20\]](#)

FROM RADICALIZATION TO RECRUITMENT

The transition from Salafism to terrorist militancy is easy given the radicalization that accompanies integration in the Salafi community. Support for or justification of terrorism, rejection of integration in host societies, and the creation of an Islamic State in Europe are all ideas shared by those who adopt Salafism as their system of values and behavioral model. The transition to more extremist positions is explained by a series of factors unrelated to religion but nonetheless skillfully exploited by terrorist networks. These factors include the perception of double standards in Western foreign policy, which preaches democracy yet tolerates oppression of the Ummah. Extremist propaganda exploits the regional conflicts in Palestine, Chechnya, and Iraq as examples of the global campaign against Muslims.

Similarly, the feeling of powerlessness with respect to the situation of Muslims in the world and the lack of outlets for such frustrations become arguments to switch to terrorism. Other contributing factors include the perception of widespread Islamophobia in European society and Europe's media following the attacks of September 11 and the impression that anti-terrorism laws are applied abusively against Muslims. The radicalization process begins with the emergence of anti-integration tendencies and the desire to disengage from the host society. It continues with hostility towards the host society, rejection of the principles and institutions of liberal democracy, and the growing acquisition of violent attitudes, all of which make individuals a potential target for recruiters.

The final stage of the radicalization process is recruitment: the gradual process of manipulation and monitoring, during which the recruit is encouraged to join the jihad. The process concludes in a military training camp where the recruits receive military and ideological instruction to enable them to become *Mujahidin*. No-one disputes today that in recent years many *Mujahidin* living in Europe have taken part in the so-called "peripheral jihad": Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and now Iraq.

Almost all of the recruiters have military experience in peripheral jihad conflicts. They have undergone strict military and religious-ideological training, in Afghanistan for the most part. They are therefore linked in some respect to the al-Qa'ida network. They are persons capable of inspiring admiration, respect, and a sense of leadership. They also tend to have some experience in the field of religious doctrine. To help them in their role, recruiters are aided by "spotters" who often provide the senior *Mujahidin* recruiters with information on people they consider are ready to make the step up to terrorist militancy. Recruits tend to have little knowledge of the Koran, and thus it is easy for the recruiter to mask with religious content their core message: namely, that Islam is under threat from enemy action, particularly by the United States, Israel, and, generally, the corrupt west.

Recruiters target three risk groups in particular. First-generation Muslims: This group accounts for the bulk of activists in European countries where immigration is a recent phenomenon. As the investigations into the Madrid attacks have shown, this group includes immigrants who have integrated with their host society, as well as others who have not and who have turned to crime for a living, thus evidencing the close ties between Islamist networks of Maghrebi origin in Europe and common crime perpetrated by Maghrebi immigrants. Conversion of common criminals to radical Islamism helps activate both networks jointly. The recruitment process need not necessarily take place in mosques. Prisons, refugee centers, and shelters for needy immigrants are also venues for activities designed to convert young Muslims into terrorist militants.

Second or third-generation immigrants: This group constitutes the bulk of recruits in European countries where Muslim immigration has existed for several decades. Identity problems lead these young people to the path of jihad, where they find respect, brotherhood, and a new identity offered by Islamist fighters who guide them through the recruitment process. They feel part of a battle between good and evil. The recruiter guides them in the right direction while also addressing their existential concerns. The identity crisis suffered by these generations is compounded by the perception that they are ostracized by the rest of society, which views them

as a "foreign body" that has failed to integrate properly. In these cases, mosques controlled by Salafi preachers (al-Quods in Hamburg, Finsbury Park in London, Chatenay-Malabry in Paris, or al-Tawfik in Brussels) become the main recruitment posts, attracting young persons on the edges of society. Recruitment of students and young professionals is also being carried out increasingly in universities.

Finally, the third group targeted by the recruiters is the converts: Although fewer in number, their ranks are growing faster in terms of their importance in Muslim communities. Some--usually the leaders--are from middle-class backgrounds and convert to Islam because Muslims are "the only ones who fight the system." In the 1980s, they would have signed up to radical left-wing movements. Today, however, conversion to Islam is one of the options for European rebels to find a cause. The cases of John Walter Lindt, the American of Christian origin who was arrested in Afghanistan during the U.S. offensive against the Taliban; Richard Reid, the Briton arrested with a bomb in his shoes on a flight to the United States in December 2001; or Jose Padilla, who was arrested in the Chicago airport in May 2002 and charged with passing information to al-Qa'ida to help them build a radioactive bomb, are good illustrations of how converts can radicalize.[\[21\]](#)

Recruitment is supplemented by two important events. Firstly, the recruit offers up his testimony for posterity as a devout Muslim, manifesting his wish to die in combat as a martyr in the war against the enemy. Secondly, he begins a course of military and ideological training to prepare him for jihad. Prior to 2001, such training was conducted in Afghanistan or Pakistan,[\[22\]](#) but since then it has been organized more selectively in Europe and lately, also in Iraq, which has become today a powerful magnet for dozens of young European Muslims. The fall of the Taliban regime had major consequences for the recruitment process. As the Madrid and London attacks showed, the profile of activists has changed. Without a transition or a period in Afghanistan, immigrants who led ordinary lives (some of them fully integrated with society) turned from being butchers, switchboard-operators, or estate agents into the activists who perpetrated a terrorist massacre.

Mosques are losing their importance in the radicalization process that leads Salafis to become terrorists, whereas religious courses in private homes, visits by itinerant radical recruiters, and Internet are all gaining importance in the radicalization and recruitment process. This situation should make us reflect on the true nature of the threat we currently face. There is no doubt that barring radical ideologists from entering Europe or arresting them is not enough to prevent the violent actions that ensue when young and not necessarily disenfranchised people come into contact with the jihadi ideology.

CONCLUSIONS

Salafism is first and foremost a method for the search of the religious truth; a desire to practice Islam exactly as it was revealed by the Prophet. It is a religious method whose influence has spread throughout the Arab world and also in Europe, thanks to the support received from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, which have helped expand this peculiar vision of Islam that is very close to Wahhabism. Its influence is on the rise and it has successfully impregnated several Islamist movements, including some sectors of the Muslim Brotherhoods. In Europe, it has

become a powerful magnet for generations of young Muslims who suffer identity problems, reject European citizenship, and use their cultural alienation to justify the adoption of a form of universal Islam stripped of its heritage of traditions and adaptable to all societies. Although in principle Salafism is apolitical and opposes violence, it preaches an Islam that calls for cultural rupture with Europe. Moreover, its principles and textual references coincide with those of fighting Salafism and its followers have therefore become the preferred targets of jihadi recruiters.

The fighting version of Salafism has also become the core ideology of the global jihadism sponsored by al-Qa'ida and the radical utopia of Abdallah Azzam. This ideology, aided by the proselytizing work of radical clerics, has led to the emergence in Europe of small groups with the capability to carry out independent terrorist strikes. Europe is no longer a mere logistics base for international jihadism, but a scenario for terrorist action. In the past, Islamist networks operating in Europe restricted their activities to providing logistical support for the cells that planned attacks in other parts of the world. The destruction of its operations base in Afghanistan has caused a transformation of the al-Qa'ida network, which is no longer an organized structure but a trademark or label conferring even greater impact on actions undertaken by local groups. Europe is facing a long term threat that will require not only measures to ensure appropriate integration of its Muslim communities, but also decisive action to confront an ideology that has declared a global war against the West.

**Juan Jose Escobar Stemmann is a Diplomat. He is currently the Deputy Head of Mission in the Spanish Embassy in Jordan. He has previously served in Bulgaria, Nicaragua, and Morocco. He also was Head of Unit for Euro-Mediterranean Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Madrid. He was a lecturer on Islamic movements in North Africa in the Instituto Gutierrez Mellado for Defence Studies in Madrid. His publications include "Islamic Movements in the Muslim world" in Perspectivas Exteriores (2003), edited by FRIDE, Politica Exterior, and Instituto Elcano. He is a frequent collaborator of the magazine Politica Exterior, where he has written many articles about political Islam and the process of democratization in different Arab countries. He has also published several articles about the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in different publications such as Dialogo Mediterraneo. His main research interests are Islamism, democratization in the Arab world, and terrorism. He has participated in several seminars organized by the Center of Defence Studies in the Spanish Ministry of Defence and in different working groups in the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He intends to publish a book next year on political Islam in the Arab world.*

NOTES

[1] See Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood and State Power in Jordan* (New York: SUNY, 2001), p. 112. This author notes that the last *Salaf* was the jurist and founder of the Hanbali School of jurisprudence, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. However, the term is also frequently used for well-known reformists who followed the example of the companions of the Prophet, such as Hamid al-Ghazali (1111), Ibn Taymiyyah (1328) or Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1792).

[2] Following Wahhabi doctrine, Salafis divide the concept of *Tawhid* into three components: 1) *Tawhid al-rububiyyah*, the quality of being the only Lord and sovereign of the universe. This dimension of the *Tawhid* is accepted by all Muslims. 2) *Tawhid al-asmaa' wal-sifat*, or the belief in the unity of the names and attributes of God. Salafis interpret this dimension of the *Tawhid* in the sense that all the names and attributes given by the Koran to God should be interpreted in their literal sense, without associating them with human traits. This dimension of the *Tawhid* is an important source of dispute in Islamic doctrine. 3) *Tawhid al-ilahiyyah*: God alone may be worshipped. This dimension leads Salafis to condemn adoration of saints and the practices introduced by Sufis, who see saints as intermediaries between God and man. The opposite of *tawhid* is *shirk*, the use of intermediaries to worship God. Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism*.

[3] A practice for which no proof exists in the Koran or Sunnah is considered *bida*. For example, Salafis condemn Muslims who pray more than five times a day, because the practice was not approved by the Prophet. Muhammad Abu Shakra, a leading Jordanian Salafi, in response to a question on his views of Islamic extremism in Algeria, said that both this term and "fundamentalism" are bid'a, since they do not appear in the Koran. The concept of bid'a is also used to reject foreign cultures and traditions (jeans, consumerism, etc.). Instead, practices that were carried out during the times of the Prophet are advocated.

[4] Salafis believe that salvation is obtained by following their path. They call themselves the "helped group" (*Al-ta'ifah al-mansurah*) or "saved sect" (*al-firqah al-najiyah*), names that appear in the Koran and that the Prophet used to designate his companions. The Prophet, who predicted that the Ummah would fracture into different tendencies after his death, told his followers to seek guidance from the Sunnah and Koran. Salafis believe that concentrating on these two sources of Islam is the best way to guarantee God's protection on judgment day.

[5] See Mohammed Tozy, "El islamismo marroqui frente al reto del Salafismo," *Akfar-Ideas* (Summer 2004).

[6] This Syrian scholar of Albanian origin (1914-99) played a key role in spreading the current interpretation of Salafism in the Middle East. Educated in Saudi Arabia, where he taught at the University of Medina until the late 1950s, his disagreements with the Saudi *ulemmas* on certain ritual issues forced him to leave the country and move to Syria, where he established his school. The repression of Islamists by the Syrian regime in 1979 forced him into exile in Jordan, where

he promoted Salafi ideology and became one of the main influences on the new generation of Salafi sheikhs. See "Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?" ICG Report, No. 31, September 21, 2004, p. 3. Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism*, p. 119 ff.

[7] Mohammed Tozy illustrates the growing interdependence between the Salafi sheikhs and the Saudi authorities when he cites the case of the Moroccan sheikh Ahmed Maghraui, who in 1976 founded an association called *Da'wah wa Qur'an* in Morocco with Saudi backing. By 2001, the sheikh headed a network of over one hundred schools in 30 different towns and cities, Tozy, "El islamismo marroqui frente al reto del Salafismo," p. 6.

[8] Many moderate Islamist movements in the Arab world have sectors that are close to Salafi thinking. Examples include the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, where the most conservative sector is led by activists who are heavily influenced by Salafi ideology. A paradigmatic case is the Algerian FIS, one of whose main leaders--Ali Belhadj--represented the Salafi sect, having himself been heavily influenced by a Mecca-based Algerian Salafi sheikh, Abu Baker al-Jazairi. Under Belhadj's influence, the FIS advocated very rigorous behavior and a return to the basic scriptures, similar to Wahhabi interpretations. See Gilles Kepel, *Fitnah: guerre au Coeur de l'islam* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), p. 307.

[9] See ICG Report "Saudi Arabia Backgrounder," p. 5. Al-Awda and al-Hawali are considered the main precursors of the radicalization of Saudi Islamists and the men behind the creation of the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), which in 1993 became the main opposition movement against the Saudi monarchy. Its headquarters are in London, where its leaders have held contacts with the ideologists of international jihadism. Both men were arrested by the Saudi authorities in 1994 and released in 1999 after renouncing their former ideas. However, the name of Salman al-Awdah has emerged in the investigations into the March 11 bombings. One of the main suspects in the Madrid attacks, Egyptian Rabel Osman Ahmed, who was arrested by Italian police, apparently said in a phone conversation intercepted by the police that his stay in Spain had been financed by al-Awdah.

[10] Ibn Taymiyyah lived during the times of the Crusader and Mongol invasions, a circumstance that conditioned his theories on the jihad. When the Mongols invaded Dar al-Islam they eventually converted to Islam. The dilemma arose as to whether the war against them should be considered a jihad or a war between two Muslim entities. In his *fatwa* on the Mongols, Ibn Taymiyya acknowledged that they practiced the five pillars of Islam, but this did not automatically make them true Muslims. The mainstream view was that under the *Shari'a* they were Muslims, but Ibn Taymiyyah introduced a new evaluation criterion: Whether or not they respected the five pillars, if someone did not follow one of the precepts of the *Shari'a*, they ceased being Muslim and could therefore be declared *kafir*.

[11] Among others, Nasir al-Fahd, Hamud al-Shuaybi, Ali al-Khudair and Saud al-Utaybi, who was one of the main al-Qa'ida leaders in Saudi Arabia. This Salafi sector is largely responsible for the attacks on Western interests in the country since 2003. See ICG Report, "Saudi Arabia Backgrounder."

[12] Azzam viewed the Afghanistan war veterans as a mobile strike attack force that could operate anywhere in the Arab world. His work goes beyond the political and ideological radicalism of Qutb (who inspired organizations like *Takfir wa Hijrah* or the Islamic jihad in Egypt) and calls for the construction of a radical utopia in which violence is a religious obligation, part of an international and pan-Islamic jihad against oppression. Azzam was one of the first authors to include Andalusia among the Muslim lands to be retaken through the jihad. See Gustavo de Aristegui, *El islamismo contra el Islam*, (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2004), p. 82 and p. 175. See also Jason Burke, *Al Qaeda* (London: Tauris, 2003), p. 72 ff.

[13] Along with Abu Qutada, other Salafist clerics resident in London played a key role in the radicalization of reformist Salafism. They include Sheikh Omar Bakri, leader of the *al-Mujahirum* organization that supports the immediate restoration of the caliphate and the conversion of the whole of Europe to Islam, or Abu Hamza al-Masri, who was responsible for sending many British and European Muslims to Afghanistan and is one of the ideologists of the Freedom Party (*Hibz ut Tarir*) in Europe. See Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda* (London: C. Hurst, 2002), p. 117.

[14] See Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism*, p. 133.

[15] Jordan is a prime example of this trend, which is also seen in other Arab countries. Prominent scholars of the Brotherhood, such as Muhammad Rifat and Mashur Hasan Salam, left the organization to devote themselves exclusively to the science of the hadiths, taking their followers with them. However, some Salafis remain in the Brotherhood in order to pursue its aims. They tend to be the hardliners within the organization. *Ibid*, p. 136.

[16] See Kepel, *Fitna*, p. 307. Although its importance as a movement has diminished somewhat, the *Tabligh* is still an access route to Salafi ideology in Europe. The only Spanish national held in Guantanamo, Hamed Abderraman Hamed, was a member of the organization prior to his recruitment by Salafi recruiters who eventually persuaded him to go to Afghanistan.

[17] In April 1997, Spanish police arrested eleven suspected GIA members in Valencia, who were later sentenced to seven years in jail. They included Allekema Lamari, who is believed to be the leader of the cell that carried out the March 11 strikes in Madrid and who blew himself up along with the other members of the cell in a flat in the Leganes district of the city.

[18] See Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, p. 124. The author notes that, despite the contacts between Hattab and bin Ladin, the GSPC did not sign the constitution of the Islamic Front for the jihad against Crusaders and Jews, in order to avoid being associated with al-Qa'ida and thus have more scope for its actions in Europe. Years later, the GSPC admitted its links with al-Qa'ida and spearheaded the organization's penetration in sub-Saharan Africa.

[19] See Selma Balala, "Misere et Jihad au Maroc," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (November 2004).

[20] See Darif, in op. cit. p. 78.

[21] See Olivier Roy, "Al Qaeda, label ou organisation," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (September 2004).

[22] As was the case of the Spaniard detained in Guantanamo. After recruitment in Ceuta by a Mujahidin, he paid his own trip to Afghanistan to receive military training.