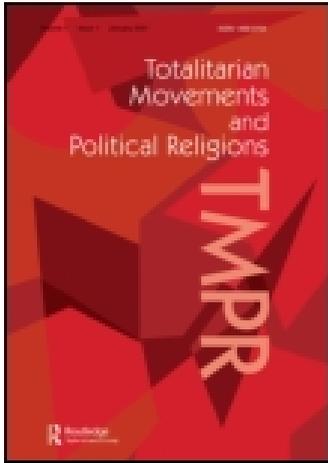


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Islamism and the West: Europe as a Battlefield

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ABSTRACT *While commentators have focused their attention almost exclusively on terrorism, the presence of radical Islam in Europe is extremely complex and multifaceted. European jihadists, a few thousand individuals scattered throughout the continent who openly challenge the societies they live in, unquestionably pose an imminent security threat, but other Islamist groups and movements, while not adopting violent means, pose an equally significant if not a greater threat to Europe, albeit one of a different nature. After examining the history, development, and modus operandi of the jihadists, the article analyses the characteristics of two other Islamist movements operating in the European arena. One is Hizb al-Tahrir, a group that openly opposes any system of government not based on the shari‘a, but does not presently advocate ‘offensive’ jihad to further its goal of creating a global Islamic state. The other is composed of the networks that trace their roots to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups that, while publicly purporting to support democracy and the integration of Muslim communities within the European mainstream, quietly work to radicalise Europe’s Muslim population.*

Rome is a cross. The West is a cross and Romans are the owners of the cross. Muslims’ target is the West. We will split Rome open. The destruction must be carried out by sword. Those who will destroy Rome are already preparing the swords. Rome will not be conquered with the word but with the force of arms.¹ (Abu Qatada al-Filistini, al-Qa‘ida’s so-called ‘ambassador to Europe’)

Islam will return to Europe as a conqueror and victor, after being expelled from it twice – once from the South, from Andalusia, and a second time from the East, when it knocked several times on the door of Athens. I maintain that the conquest this time will not be by the sword but by preaching and ideology.² (Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, head of the European Council for Fatwa and Research)

The year 710 witnessed the first contact between Europe and the then nascent Muslim world.³ Raiders led by legendary commander Tariq ibn Ziyad crossed from Morocco to Spain and began a drive into the continent that ended only 22 years later, when Charles Martel defeated them at Tours and Poitiers. The following 13 centuries have been characterised by continuous tensions and periodic conflicts between Europe and the Muslim world. In the Middle Ages, when

Europe was in a state of cultural and economic crisis and Muslim civilisation was at its peak, the latter seemed to have the upper hand. While they never managed to penetrate into the heartlands of Europe, Muslims occupied or laid siege to its southern and southeastern extremities. By the seventeenth century, the fortunes of these two protagonists were reversed. The 1699 Treaty of Karlowitz, signed by the Ottomans after the failure of their second siege of Vienna, marked the beginning of the decline of Ottoman influence in Europe. European powers slowly surpassed the Muslim world in economic, cultural and military achievements, and began their expansion into Muslim lands. By the beginning of the twentieth century, only a few pockets of the Muslim world were not under the direct or indirect control of various European powers.

The end of the Second World War heralded a new era of Muslim–European relations. European countries slowly came to the realisation that they could no longer afford empires and, more or less reluctantly, granted independence to their colonies in the Middle East and North Africa. At the same time, the economic boom that swept the continent in the aftermath of the Second World War led European countries to meet their need for cheap, unskilled labour with immigrants coming largely from Muslim countries. Taking advantage of the historical ties that linked their countries, large numbers of Algerians, Tunisians and Moroccans found jobs in France, just as Pakistanis and Indians did in the UK and Turks did in Germany. Belgium, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries also attracted immigrants from various Muslim countries. Both sides envisioned this migratory movement as a temporary and fruitful solution to existing economic problems. The Europeans assumed that these immigrant workers would stay for only a few years, contribute to the growth of the economy, and then go back to their countries of origin. By the same token, migrant workers originally planned to use the fruits of their hard labour to build a new life for themselves in their home countries. Given this mutual perception of temporariness, Muslims were virtually an invisible presence in Europe, and as a result few mosques were built for them and few organisations were established to represent them.⁴

The economic crisis of the 1970s led European countries to restrict their existing immigration policies.⁵ Nevertheless, the influx of Muslim immigrants continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s through mechanisms such as family reunification, generous asylum policies and illegal immigration. Today, virtually all European countries host a Muslim minority and, while no official data is as yet available, most estimates put the number of Muslims living in Western Europe at about 15 million.⁶ The new Muslim presence in Europe has created some of the problems that often come with any large immigration wave: financial difficulties for the newcomers, tensions with the native population and cultural misunderstandings. While some of these tensions, particularly the cultural ones, are peculiar to Muslim communities, similar problems have faced other immigrant groups in Europe over the last 50 years.

However, during the last few years another sort of problem affecting the fringes of the Muslim community has surfaced. The presence of radical Islam, in all of its different manifestations, has increasingly become apparent among Muslim communities in virtually every European country. Suffering from only limited competition from other interpretations of Islam, which could not match its resources and activism, political Islam has found fertile ground in Europe and has made impressive inroads among local Muslim communities. Moreover, until recently, European authorities have for the most part been unprepared even to

recognise the danger that the spread of such ideologies among their Muslim communities could present.

Forewarnings of the existence of this problem had surfaced at the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s. In 1989 the Muslim world's rage against Salman Rushdie, which culminated in the issuing of death threats by the Ayatollah Khomeini, was sparked by protests and a book burning organised by Muslim organisations in the British city of Bradford.⁷ In 1995 militants linked to the Algerian Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA, Armed Islamic Group) – many of whom had grown up in France – orchestrated a string of bombings throughout France that took the lives of eight and injured more than 100. In the second half of the 1990s networks of jihadists, mostly linked to outfits in North Africa, were dismantled in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium and the UK. The fact that radical preachers had set up networks and taken over mosques in several European cities, potentially radicalising thousands of young European-born Muslims and immigrants, also constituted another indication of the problems that lay ahead.

Despite all of these warning signs, few Europeans grasped the magnitude of the problem. More importantly, they generally failed to perceive the presence of radical Islam on their territory as a direct threat to their own security or to a harmonious social life. Radical networks, while loosely monitored by the authorities, were believed to be targeting their wrath against Israel and the 'infidel regimes' in the Middle East or North Africa. The common belief was that Europe was simply a convenient base of operations for them, and that the jihadists would not dare to carry out attacks inside Europe itself for fear of losing that base. Throughout the 1990s such unspoken 'covenants of security' shaped the policies of most European countries, which, with the notable exception of France, refused to aggressively pursue jihadist networks.

Both the magnitude of the problem and the flaws of such policies became dramatically obvious in the aftermath of 9/11. The investigation quickly revealed that the core hijackers and some of the masterminds behind the attacks had met, been radicalised and orchestrated the plot in Hamburg, Germany. The European authorities' heightened attention to jihadist networks led to scores of arrests in several European countries between 2002 and 2003. The March 2004 Madrid train bombings, the November 2004 assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, the July 2005 London bombings and the myriad attacks thwarted in several European countries (including Italy, France, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, as well as several in the UK and Spain) made it painfully clear that jihadist networks had gained a significant foothold in Europe and that their presence represented a direct and imminent threat to European security.

Yet jihadist terrorism is only the tip of the iceberg, the most visible manifestation of a larger problem. Europe faces today a tripartite threat from radical Islam, of which the terrorist threat is the most immediate and evident but not necessarily the most dangerous one. This tripartite threat can be visualised as a pyramid. At the top of it are the violent jihadists, a few thousand individuals scattered throughout the continent who openly challenge the societies they live in and are willing to spill blood to achieve their goals. Below them are what can best be defined as 'peaceful revolutionaries', groups and networks that openly express their opposition to any system of government that does not strictly conform to *shari'a* (Islamic law), yet do not, at least openly, resort directly to violent means to further their agenda. Finally, the base, the largest section of the pyramid, is occupied by groups that publicly purport to support democracy and the integration of

Muslim communities within the European mainstream, but quietly work to radicalise Europe's Muslim population⁸.

Each of these components of radical Islam has a different presence, structure and *modus operandi*. Each, consequently, presents a different kind of challenge to European policymakers and intelligence agencies. While Europeans are finally paying attention to the jihadist threat and have begun to devise new solutions to contain it, they still have only a limited understanding of the other two aspects of the threat.

The Tip of the European Islamist Pyramid: The Jihadists

Individuals that espouse Salafism and some of the most militant interpretations of Islam began to establish a presence in Europe in the mid-1980s. Their numbers were reinforced at the end of the decade and during the first years of the 1990s, as small groups of so-called 'Afghan Arabs' (veterans of the Afghan *jihad* against the Soviets) and other committed jihadists who had escaped prosecution (or worse) in the Middle East and North Africa settled in Europe. Exploiting the freedoms of the West, these violent Islamists continued to support their groups' activities in their countries of origin through propaganda, fundraising and recruitment. Europe constituted the ideal logistical base for groups such as the Egyptian group al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group) or the Algerian GIA (and thence the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat, GSPC – Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting), which established extensive networks throughout the continent.

In the beginning most of these groups limited their interaction to the superficial rhetorical endorsement of their respective struggles but remained divided by nationality. Yet by the second half of the 1990s, several of them began to gravitate toward the orbit of al-Qa'ida, embracing its message of global *jihad*. It was in places such as Bosnia, Chechnya and of course Afghanistan that jihadist groups from various countries made contact and decided to join forces, fighting not only against their traditional 'near' enemies (i.e. their respective 'occupiers' or regimes in the Muslim world), but also against 'the far enemy', i.e. the West. A key role in this cross-pollination of ideas and methods among jihadist groups was played by some of Europe's most radical mosques, such as London's Finsbury Park, Milan's Islamic Cultural Institute, Vienna's Sahaba or Hamburg's al-Quds, which became popular meeting points for radicals from all countries. The networks that had long operated independently in Europe soon became 'franchises' for al-Qa'ida on the continent, which significantly contributed men, funds, and logistics to their growth.⁹

The aftermath of the attacks of 9/11 brought significant changes to the relationship between European networks and al-Qa'ida. The resulting US invasion of Afghanistan and the global crackdown on al-Qa'ida-linked networks limited the ability of the core al-Qa'ida organisation to control its cells and its affiliated groups worldwide. On the run and in hiding, al-Qa'ida's leadership became unable to function as it previously had and was forced to relinquish much of its operational control over its global network.¹⁰ While a certain level of coordination still existed, European networks began to operate more autonomously, still loyal to al-Qa'ida's ideology but virtually independent in their day-to-day operations.

As they became more independent, these European cells progressively began to change their focus. Global conflicts such as Afghanistan, Palestine and above all Iraq continued to attract the attention of European jihadists, many of whom travelled to regions where al-Qa'ida was battling American forces. Nevertheless,

since 9/11 a new phenomenon has increasingly emerged that might be called the 're-localisation' of *jihad*. While still perceiving themselves to be part of the global jihadist movement, the networks operating on the ground in Europe, like their counterparts in other areas of the world, started to pay more attention to their immediate environment. Viewing all Western countries as hostile to Islam, both those that joined American efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq and those that did not, they began to focus their wrath on all of them, often placing an equal emphasis on global political affairs and domestic issues involving tensions between local Muslim communities and the native population. Therefore, in the eyes of jihadists operating in Europe, countries such as Spain, the UK and Italy bore equal guilt for discriminating against their Muslim populations and for having sent troops to Iraq. Even countries that had distanced themselves from American efforts in the Middle East were now considered enemies, because their media criticised Islam and, more generally, because their societies were not Islamic.

Moreover, these jihadist networks have experienced a generational change over the last few years. Most of today's militants, particularly in northern European countries, are second-generation Muslim immigrants in Europe (with a small but significant number of converts). This development brought changes to the world-views and agendas of the new networks. Even though they feel a strong sense of alienation from the European society into which they were born, these young men are more closely linked to their host European countries than to their ancestral lands, of whose customs and language they are often ignorant. Therefore, while they are concerned about the plight of the global *umma*, they are equally if not more affected by events that take place in their own backyard. Seeing the world through the lenses of the most radical interpretations of Islam, they believe that Islam is under attack globally and that actions in defence of it can take place with equal justification and effectiveness in the West or in Muslim land.

Such an attitude has been perfectly summarised by a 2004 report by the Dutch domestic agency, the Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD, General Intelligence and Security Service), which is entitled *From Dawaa to Jihad*. The report warned that 'within the local networks in particular in the Western world (especially in Europe) al Qaeda's ideology is interpreted in an even more extremist way than by the al Qaeda's leadership itself. Often the actors in the networks are not really driven by strategic tactical considerations; they see themselves as participants in a mythical, apocalyptic final battle with Evil (the Western world) in the context of which, in principle, all exponents of Evil (in fact any Western citizen) should be destroyed'.¹¹

Today we can visualise the reality of jihadist networks in Europe as being positioned along a continuum. At one extreme, we find genuine homegrown or 'self-starter' groups: small clusters of mostly European-born radicals with no ties to external groups that act with absolute operational independence. At the opposite side of the spectrum, we see compartmentalised cells contained in a well-organised network and subjected to a hierarchical structure, as was the model of jihadist groups operating in Europe in the 1990s. In between these two extremes, there is a whole spectrum of realities according to the level of autonomy of the group. The most commonly recurring model seems to be that of the 7 July 2005 London bombers: a small group of young men, most of whom were born and raised in Europe, who know each other either from the mosque or from the neighbourhood, and who become radicalised in Europe.¹² Only a few of these locally groomed jihadists nowadays manage to travel abroad to obtain the necessary bomb-making expertise

from various al-Qa'ida affiliated groups, expertise that would allow the group to make the transition from an amateurish cluster of friends to a full-fledged terrorist cell.

Even though most European countries have made significant changes to their legislation in order to deal more effectively with terrorism, the challenge posed by jihadist networks, wherever they sit on the above continuum, is daunting. In the UK alone, MI5 believes that there are around 4000 terrorist suspects and 200 jihadist networks spread throughout the country.¹³ Intelligence officials believe that smaller but comparable numbers of jihadists operate in other European countries, even in traditionally 'quiet' areas such as Scandinavia and Eastern Europe.

The 'Peaceful' Revolutionaries

A complete rejection of Western values and a proclaimed desire to establish an Islamic state worldwide are the characteristics not only of jihadist groups, but also of several seemingly non-violent organisations operating in Europe. The most organised among these 'peaceful' revolutionary movements is Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (HT, Islamic Liberation Party). Founded in Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem in the early 1950s, HT has developed into a global movement with branches on virtually all continents, including Europe.¹⁴ HT's worldview is simple: all the solutions to man's political, economic, cultural and social problems are to be found in Islam, and the only way for humanity to achieve justice is to abandon any man-made system (including democracy) and establish a Caliphate encompassing not only today's Muslim world, but the entire globe.¹⁵

HT aims at 'disseminating the Islamic intellectual and political thoughts widely in Muslim societies so as to challenge the existing status quo', and vows to do so while never resorting to violence.¹⁶ Its rhetoric is sophisticated and skillfully tailored to the ears of Western Muslims. HT, in fact, does not simply appeal to the disaffected masses of unassimilated European Muslims. Members of HT tend to be highly educated young professionals who are second-generation Muslim immigrants in Europe, and their ranks are buttressed further by a small cadre of converts. The organisation's members are active in spreading HT's message through an unrelenting propaganda effort. This includes websites and publications in various European languages, leaflets in Muslim neighbourhoods and in front of mainstream mosques and even videos on YouTube.¹⁷ HT conferences, attended by thousands of sympathisers, are regularly held in the UK, Denmark, Austria and Germany. HT is so strong in Europe that, in what is a seemingly counterintuitive but telling move, several of its members have travelled to the Middle East to spread the organisation's message and re-Islamise the Middle Eastern masses.¹⁸

HT generally stops short of expressly advocating violence, primarily in order to avoid closer scrutiny and crackdowns by the authorities. Its literature and speeches state that Islam is under attack, that Muslims have a duty to defend their fellow Muslims worldwide, and that they must establish the Caliphate in order to mount this defence. However, HT refrains from specifying exactly how Muslims should do so. Nevertheless, while HT does not openly endorse violence, it provides powerful ideological tools to radicalise Muslims. The jump from embracing HT's worldview to committing violent acts in order to further its goals is a short one. For this reason, HT is often identified as a 'conveyor belt' to terrorism.¹⁹

Recently, there have been indications that HT preaches violence in small gatherings, or when it believes that the media or intelligence agencies are not monitoring its activities. Shiraz Maher, a former HT regional director in the UK, who has left the group and produced a documentary for the BBC about it, is clear in his belief that HT does not completely reject violence: 'Hizb ut-Tahrir despises democracy and believes *shari'a* law must be imposed over the whole world', says Maher, 'by force if necessary'.²⁰ Majid Nawaz, another former senior HT member, asserts that 'they [HT] are prepared, once they've established the [Islamic] state, to fight other countries and to kill people in the pursuit of unifying this state into one state'. Nawaz also acknowledges the disruptive impact that his former group's teachings have had on society at large: 'I think that what I taught has not only damaged British society and British Muslim relations and damaged the position of Muslims in this society as British citizens, I think it's damaged the world.'²¹

European governments have been faced with seemingly insurmountable difficulties when dealing with HT. Some, such as the UK, planned to ban it, but desisted after realising that the lack of direct links to terrorism would have posed severe legal challenges to the decision.²² Others went ahead and outlawed the organisation, but only with limited practical effects. Germany, for example, banned HT in January 2003 due to its anti-Semitic rhetoric and because, according to the authorities, it 'opposed the principle of international understanding and ... approved of violence as a means for achieving its political aims'.²³ HT appealed the decision, but after a lengthy legal battle a German court upheld the ban.²⁴ Despite the ban, the group still operates underground and often organises events using a different name.

Islamisation by Penetration of the System

At the bottom of the pyramid is the numerically most significant component of political Islam in Europe: the Muslim Brotherhood and other 'participationist' Islamist movements such as the Pakistani Jama'at-e Islami (whose influence is largely limited to the UK) or the Turkish Milli Görüş (headquartered in Germany, but active in all European countries with a sizeable Turkish population). Unlike the jihadists and the 'peaceful' revolutionaries, such organisations have made a conscious decision to avoid unnecessary confrontation and have instead opted for a clever and flexible policy of engagement with the European establishment. Covered by a veneer of moderation, Brotherhood-linked organisations operate with the assent and, in many cases, even with the active support of Western governments. Despite this marked difference in tactics, such Islamist organisations share a large part of the worldview and aims of the other segments of the Islamist pyramid.

The history of Islamist organisations in Europe began approximately 50 years ago, when many members of the Brotherhood, who were often fleeing persecution in their home countries, spent significant amounts of time or permanently settled in various European countries. These Islamists founded some of the first Muslim organisations in the West, which at the time of their foundation were little more than student organisations with a few hundred members. At that point, most of these individuals and organisations simply aimed at spreading the Brotherhood's ideology to the small number of Muslims living in the West, while focusing their political efforts on influencing their native countries in the Middle East and North Africa.²⁵

Yet by the end of the 1980s, the Western Brothers began to view the Muslim presence in the West differently. In various seminars held in France, top Brotherhood scholars started to redefine some centuries-old religious qualifications, stating that the traditional distinction between the *dar al-Islam* (land of Islam) and the *dar al-harb* (land of war) did not reflect the current reality. While the West could not be considered *dar al-Islam* because the *shari'a* was not enforced there, it could not be considered *dar al-harb* either, because Muslims were allowed to practice Islam freely and were not persecuted. The scholars decided, therefore, that it was possible for them to create a new legal category. They concluded that the West should be considered the *dar al-da'wa* (land of preaching), a territory where Muslims live as a minority, are respected, and have the affirmative duty to spread their religion peacefully.²⁶

The implications of this decision go far beyond the merely theological aspect. By redefining the nature of the Muslim presence in the West, the Brothers also changed the nature of their own role in it. The characteristics of this new role are precisely outlined in the seminal book *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*, published in 1990 by the top Muslim Brotherhood ideologue, Yusuf al-Qaradhawi.²⁷ Al-Qaradhawi devotes a large section of his book to the presence of Muslim minorities in Western countries and the unprecedented opportunity that this phenomenon may represent for the Islamist movement, which, in al-Qaradhawi's words, can 'play the role of the missing leadership of the Muslim Nation [*umma*] with all its trends and groups' in guiding and shaping the minds of Muslim immigrants living in the West. While the Islamist movement can exercise only a limited influence in Muslim countries, where hostile regimes keep it in check, al-Qaradhawi realises that the Brotherhood can operate freely in Europe where, thanks to its activism and ample financing, it can overshadow other currents of Islam.

Al-Qaradhawi has a simple recipe for how the Islamist movement can become the guide of Muslim communities in the West. 'Try to have your own small society within the larger society', says al-Qaradhawi, 'your own Muslim ghetto'. The Egyptian cleric advocates the creation of a web of Islamic centres, think tanks, magazines, mosques and conferences so that the Islamist movement can spread its politicised version of Islam among Western Muslims. At the same time, al-Qaradhawi advocates moderation and relative openness when dealing with non-Muslims. At least in these early stages, he writes, confrontation can only damage the movement, whereas displaying a moderate façade will allow the Brothers to operate under the radar screen.

From the beginning of the 1990s, the Western Brothers began to implement this new strategy specifically designed for the West. First, they severed all formal ties to the Middle East, which was viewed as a liability. Being identified as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West was obviously counterproductive, so official affiliations were shed. However, the move was purely cosmetic, since the ideological affinity between the Western Brothers and the various Middle Eastern branches remained unaltered. In order to operate more efficiently and without attracting unnecessary scrutiny, the international Brotherhood started to function not as a structured organisation of card-carrying members, but rather as an ideological movement that transcended formal affiliation. As Muhammad Akif, the Supreme Guide of the Egyptian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, said: 'the Muslim Brotherhood is a global movement whose members cooperate with each other throughout the world, based on the same religious worldview – the spread

of Islam, until it rules the world ... We do not have an international organisation; we have an organisation through our perception of things.²⁸

Free from embarrassing official affiliations, the Western Brothers began to work on their two-pronged plan. Internally, when dealing with the Muslim population, they concentrated their efforts on radicalising the burgeoning local Muslim communities through the dissemination of propaganda and the establishment of a network of mosques and activities that al-Qaradhawi had advocated in his book and that Arab Gulf supporters had financed through their ample donations. Externally, when dealing with Western elites (be they politicians, intellectuals, or the media), the Brothers have displayed a moderate façade, purporting to advocate integration and democracy. Officials of Brotherhood-linked organisations understood that infiltrating rather than clashing with the system was the best way to obtain what they wanted; after all, the harsh open confrontations promoted and adopted by jihadist Salafist groups such as al-Qa‘ida had led nowhere, at least within the West up to that point in time. Western Brothers have astutely realised that the most fruitful tactic entails cozying up to Western elites and gaining their trust. The Brothers have understood that, by becoming the privileged partners of elements of the Western establishment, they can obtain significant powers which will help them further their goals.

This evolution has taken place in virtually all of the European countries where the Brotherhood has established a presence. Today organisations created by the Brotherhood as its Western offshoots, such as the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF, Union of Islamic Organisations of France), the Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland (IGD, Islamic Society of Germany), and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), have gained positions of prominence within their countries’ Muslim communities. Even though their conservative and politicised interpretation of Islam is generally not shared by the majority of Muslims residing in the West, Brotherhood-linked organisations have often managed, through activism and foreign funding, to overshadow other Muslim organisations, become the favourite partners of most Western governments and, consequently, develop into the *de facto* representatives of Muslim communities in the West.

In the West violence and confrontation have therefore been replaced by a cleverly engineered mix of penetrating the system through a process of dissimulation and simultaneously radicalising the Muslim population. Brotherhood leaders publicly proclaim the group’s dedication to integration and democracy, represent themselves as mainstream, and portray themselves as the representatives of the various Western Muslim communities in the media and in dialogues with Western governments. Yet, when speaking Arabic, Urdu or Turkish before their fellow Muslims, they often drop their ‘moderate’ façade and embrace radicalism. While Brotherhood representatives speak about interfaith dialogue and integration on television, the group’s mosques preach hate and warn worshippers about the evils of integration into Western society. While they publicly condemn the murder of commuters in Madrid and school children in Russia, they continue to raise money for Hamas and other terrorist organisations.

Even though they do not officially advocate the use of violence in the West (although they do so in Iraq and the Palestinian territories), it can be argued that these Islamist groups pose a challenge that is far more insidious than that posed by other Islamist organisations that openly challenge Western governments and values. Thanks to their public words of moderation, they often manage to establish

preferential relationships with European elites. In some cases, they are even seen as 'partners' in the struggle being waged by European governments against radicalisation. The legitimisation and power they acquire through these government endorsements allow them to augment their status within the Muslim community and, hence, their ability to radicalise it.

Most European governments have been unable to accurately assess the aims of Brotherhood-linked organisations and, consequently, to draft coherent policies for dealing with them. A telling example of this confusion can be seen in the internal debate within the British government over its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. In several public speeches during his time in office, former Prime Minister Tony Blair identified the Brothers as the ideological forefathers of modern Islamist terrorism, and various British top security officers have highlighted the impact of its philosophy on the radicalisation of young British Muslims.²⁹ Yet other parts of the British government take a different stand, as was perfectly exemplified by a 2005 internal memo from the Foreign Office in connection with the visit to London of the aforementioned Yusuf al-Qaradhawi. While the Foreign Office admitted that al-Qaradhawi's open support for suicide bombings in Iraq and Palestine was troubling, it also acknowledged that 'they are not unusual or even exceptional amongst Muslims', both in the Middle East and the UK. Endorsing the cleric's visit to the UK, the Foreign Office praised al-Qaradhawi's role in 'promoting mainstream Islam' and suggested that 'having individuals like Qaradawi on our side should be our aim'.³⁰ Like the governments of most Western countries, the British government's attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood seems almost schizophrenic.

Participationist Islamist organisations concentrate their efforts on radicalising European Muslim populations, while anaesthetising and penetrating the official governing system. Operating within the legal framework, and often with the support of European governments, their activities create the foundations upon which other, more radical groups build. They represent the base of the Islamist pyramid and, as such, a problem that Europeans have been unable to address effectively.

A Difficult Way Out

The image of the tripartite Islamist pyramid attempts to describe various Islamist forces operating in Europe schematically. Other elements have also contributed to the spread of radical Islam on the continent. For example, the Tabligh-i Jama'at, a transnational missionary organisation tracing its origin to South Asia, has a growing influence in several European countries. Operating out of their European headquarters in Dewsbury, Yorkshire, the Tablighis have disseminated their message through an extensive network of wandering missionaries and mosques.³¹ The Tabligh-i Jama'at is a highly conservative yet mostly 'quietist' movement whose message focuses on personal faith and ostensibly shuns political involvement. Nevertheless, its conservative outlook has, in some cases, laid the foundations for the radicalisation of some European Muslims who later left the movement and joined more militant organisations. Moreover, even though members of Tabligh have rarely been directly involved in terrorism, the authorities fear that terrorists could have infiltrated the movement in order to recruit among its followers.³²

The Tablighis are just one of the many organisations and movements that have led to the growth of forms of highly conservative Islam in Europe. All the

elements of the tripartite Islamist pyramid have contributed to a capillary dissemination of the Islamist message. For example, while only a minority of European Muslims embraces Islamist ideology, whether in its jihadist or in its other forms, Islamist ideas and terms have become mainstream among large segments of European Muslim communities. Muslim majority neighbourhoods in large European cities are now witnessing the growth of a disturbing new subculture that mixes violent urban behaviours, nihilism and Islamic fundamentalism. Many young, often European-born Muslims feel a disturbingly intense sense of detachment from, if not sheer hatred for, their host societies, which causes them to embrace various antagonistic or even violent messages. While some turn to Salafism, others embrace a confusing, ill-defined blend of countercultures, ranging from US-inspired hip-hop to Islamic fundamentalism.

As a result, Europeans face a difficult situation nowadays. The top layer of the pyramid can be confronted with legal tools, and European intelligence agencies have achieved remarkable successes in dismantling terrorist networks and preventing attacks. Yet, these represent only short-term solutions. Permanent security and social harmony can be achieved only when the lower levels of the pyramid, which often function as conveyor belts towards the genesis of violent Islamists, will no longer appeal to European Muslims. It is at this level that Europeans find themselves unable to formulate coherent assessments and policies. Is any form of political Islam a threat to Western democracies, or should Europeans worry only about the violent variants? Are so-called 'moderate' Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, reliable partners in finding a solution to radicalism, as some experts believe, or are they part of the problem, the first step on the path to extremism? And what partners should governments choose within the Muslim community to defeat radicalism? Positions on this issue not only differ dramatically, but often swing back and forth in a schizophrenic fashion. Europeans, along with their North American counterparts, need to find answers to these questions in order to develop long-term solutions to the threat to Western pluralistic societies posed by the diverse manifestations of radical Islam.

Notes

1. Philip Webster and Richard Ford, "Extremist Clerics Face Prosecution for Backing Terror," *Times of London*, 14 July 2005.
2. "Leading Sunni Sheikh Yousef al-Qaradhawi and Other Sheikhs Herald the Coming Conquest of Rome", *Middle East Media and Research Institute* (MEMRI), Special Dispatch no. 447, 6 December 2002.
3. Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.3–25.
4. Jørgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp.vii, 8–21, 24–7, 40–44.
5. Joceline Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.11–16.
6. The exact number is highly debated and is virtually impossible to establish with certainty. Fifteen million is the number estimated by the 2004 US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report, as well as by a 2005 study by the Pew Research Center entitled *An Uncertain Road: Muslims and the Future of Europe*.
7. Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West: Islamic Movements in America and Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp.126–46.
8. A similar division has been made by other scholars. Anthony McRoy makes a bipartite distinction between 'participationist' and 'rejectionist' groups. See Anthony McRoy, *From Rushdie to 7/7: The Radicalisation of Islam in Britain* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2006), p.4 and Part I. A similar but tripartite division is adopted by Jeffrey Bale, who makes a further distinction between violent and

- non-violent rejectionists. See Jeffrey M. Bale, "Hiding in Plain Sight in 'Londonistan'", in Michael Innes. (ed.) *Denial of Sanctuary: Understanding Terrorist Safe Havens* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), pp.139–51.
9. Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 2005). Part I.
 10. Bruce Hoffman, "The Changing Face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27/6 (November–December 2004), p.551–2.
 11. AIVD, *From Dawat to Jihad: The Various Threats from Radical Islam to the Democratic Legal Order* (The Hague: AIVD, 2004), p.28.
 12. Government of Great Britain, House of Commons, "Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005", 11 May 2006, pp.13–21.
 13. Kevin Sullivan "At Least 4,000 Suspected of Terrorism-Related Activity in Britain, MI5 Director Says", *Washington Post*, 6 November 2007.
 14. According to the Hizb ut Tahir Britain website, available at: <http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/who-is-ht/prominent-members.html> (accessed 15 February 2008).
 15. Zeyno Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, report published by the Nixon Center, December 2004, available at: <http://www.nixoncenter.org/Monographs/HizbutahrirIslamsPoliticalInsurgency.pdf>.
 16. Hizb ut Tahir Britain website, available at: <http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/who-is-ht/our-method/our-method.html> (accessed 15 February 2008).
 17. Most European branches of HT run sophisticated and frequently updated websites. See, e.g., the website of HT Britain (<http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/>), Denmark (<http://www.globalkhilafah.com/>) and Holland (http://www.expliciet.nl/component/option,com_frontpage/Itemid,1/).
 18. "Britons' Trial in Egypt Begins", *BBC News*, 29 March 2003, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2899605.stm
 19. Zeyno Baran, "Fighting the War of Ideas", *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2005).
 20. Tom Harper, "Islamists Urge Young Muslims to Use Violence", *Telegraph*, 10 October 2007.
 21. Interview with Maajid Nawaz, *BBC Newsnight*, 11 September 2007.
 22. Nigel Morris, "PM Forced to Shelve Islamist Group Ban", *The Independent*, 18 July 2006.
 23. Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2004*, p.204.
 24. Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2005*, p.208.
 25. Lorenzo Vidino, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Conquest of Europe", *Middle East Quarterly* 12/1 (Winter 2005), pp.25–34.
 26. Xavier Ternisien, *Les Frères musulmans* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), pp.190–92.
 27. Yusuf al-Qaradhwawi, *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase* (Swansea: Awakening Publications, 2000).
 28. Ternisien, *Frères musulmans* (note 26), pp.110–11.
 29. See, e.g., Tony Blair, "A Battle for Global Values", *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2007), p.80.
 30. See the 'restricted' internal memo prepared by Mockbul Ali of the British Foreign Office on Yusuf al-Qaradhwawi, 14 July 2005, available at: <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Observer/documents/2005/09/04/Document1.pdf>.
 31. Elke Faust, "Close Ties and New Boundaries: Tablighi Jama'at in Britain and Germany", in Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.), *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp.139–59.
 32. See the FBI memo cited in Lisa Myers, "FBI Monitors Islamic Group for Terror Ties", *NBC News*, 18 January 2005.