

IDEOLOGY OF

RADICAL-ISLAMIC GROUPS : EUROPEAN IMPLICATIONS

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As far as radical -and violent- islamic groups are concerned, the situation of Europe is characterized by two factors :

- 1- The persistence of already familiar threats existing since roughly a decade,
- 2 - The appearance of new threats coming from previously quiet countries and from new, and dangerous, alliances and coalitions.

I - PERSISTENCE OF FAMILIAR THREATS

To these days, the lebanese Party of God, or Hezbollah, remains an extremely dangerous organization -perhaps the most sophisticated terrorist group in the world- as two actions perpetrated last march by his intelligence unit will show :

- March 7, 1992 : murder of the security officer of Israël's embassy in Ankara, Turkey,
- March 17, 1992 : Spectacular destruction of Israël's embassy in Buenos-Aires, Argentina.

The second operation was more sensational, but the first one really worried Turkey's security officials, as well as other specialists from several other countries : the detonator used to rig the car was not connected to the ignition system of the engine, as it usually is. The terrorists new that the security officer had a special remote-control device that not only opened the doors, but also started the engine from a distance. The bomb was thus connected to the clutch pedal and exploded only when the driver entered the car and pressed it. Connecting such a bomb took more than one hour; not to mention several weeks of observation and surveillance of the security officer, the car, its parking places etc.

As you know, at an historical and ideological level, the Lebanese Hezbollah that existed under the form of underground network since the end of the sixties chosed to declare its existence -symbolically- during Israël's invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982. Since then, Hezbollah has been a constant threat for the West and has hit several european countries (bombings, hostage-taking, hijackings, suicide-sacrifice missions etc.). Every official experts I have recently seen, from Spain, Italy, Turkey and France, beleived that Hezbollah remains for the years ahead a major threat for Europe. And as the emphasis of this session is on ideology, I would like to somewhat insist on the three traditions from which the lebanese Party of God is drawing its revolutionary energy and its capacity to keep its secrets.

Indeed, Hezbollah is the heir of :

- A millenium of shi'ite extremism, of struggles against a wordly power by definition always illegitimate and unjust. Its doctrine is one of protest for all the discontented, the downtrodden in the Arabic and Muslim world;
- A tradition of secrecy, conspiracy and deceit as old as shi'ism itself. Within the islamic world, from the very beginning and most of the time, the shi'ites were persecuted, martyred and reduced to clandestine activities. To survive 12 centuries of riots and massacres, persecution and conquests requires a formidable ability to adapt and retaliate. These communities which faced what is probably the longest struggle for survival in history developed an unequalled practice of mystery and conspiracy. Just imagine that in the sole domain of terrorism, the shi'ites have an incredibly rich collective history going back a millenium. In Europe, the very oldest forms of clandestine armed struggle, wether nationalist or revolutionary date back to the end of the 19 th. century...

From these immemorial experiences, Shi'ism drew its *modus operandi* which is that of a sect. It covers many aspects (theological, legal, ritual, etc.) but above all it trains the novice in the practice of an extraordinary battery of techniques of mental discipline, dissimulation and devious maneuvers, which have been given the general name of "taqiya" (the precaution). The *takiya* is both an order for caution in the face of danger and a method for not revealing esoteric secrets. It arose at the time when the Umayyad caliphs invented a test to detect the Shi'ites : people were forced to insult Ali and his family, and anyone who objected was immediately put to death. The Shi'ite behaves externally like a Sunni, while preserving his original beliefs and allegiances, which require him to struggle against and to reverse the existing power. In a non-Shi'ite territory -- and that includes Sunni states-- the Shi'ite has for 12 centuries led the life of a conspirator, scorning in private what he praises publicly, and he only applies the moral laws within his community. The *takiya* becomes compulsory "when human life is in danger without an equivalent prospective gain." This prohibits a believer from stupidly committing suicide in a moment of exaltation, but authorizes any sacrifices profitable to the community.

c) Last, but not least, a long tradition of voluntary sacrifice for the benefit of the community ("Shahadat") and a marked taste for martyrdom. About this concept, one of the tapes recorded by Khmeini in 1978 for his followers in Iran gives a exact definition of the clear thinking, voluntary martyrdom :

"People say sometimes that the hero is the engine of history. This is wrong. The soul of history is the martyr. So bare your chests to the army, for the Shah will make use of the army, and it will obey him. We are told that the soldiers are troubled, that they do not know what to do, but they will obey orders. How could they disobey when they are bound by military discipline? One day, they will rid themselves of the devil's discipline, and will adopt that of God. In the meantime, if the order is given and they fire on you, bare your chests. Your blood, and the love that you will bring to them in dying, will convince them. The blood of each martyr is like the sound of a bell that will awaken a thousand living beings."

"Takiya" and "chahadat"... plus the proven art of manipulating the major modern media, all of this gives Islamic terrorism a style and a flavor all of its own. These actions are always conceived theatrically and dramatically, in three acts : (a) warning; (b) impressive strike; (c) reverberation effect.

-The target is specifically warned and threatened, at times by high-ranking officials, and in a dramatic manner;

-The act is carried out with an overwhelming violence;

-Immediately afterwards, when public opinion and the media are still shocked, a psychological campaign of deception and demoralization is triggered, as an echo, designed to increase tenfold the effect of terror.

Example : the recent bombing of Israël's embassy in Buenos Aires followed exactly this pattern. So, we are still confronted to this very dangerous -and now recognizable- form of terrorism but other threats, new ones, are emerging in the Middle-east, this time in the Sunni community.

II - APPEARANCE OF NEW THREATS

Since last year the main new threat in the domain of terrorism and islamic activism, as far as Europe is concerned, is Sudan.

Since the end of the lebanese civil war -or the end of this stage of the civil war- Sudan has become the new heaven for the Sunni radical muslim groups close to the Muslim brotherhood tradition.

Hassan al-Turabi, the excessively shrewd and brilliant leader of Sudan's National Islamic Front has helped these movement to overcome the crisis they had faced during the Gulf war and to reorganize. Indeed, the disarray which swept through the islamic movement in the aftermath of the Gulf war gave Turabi the chance he was waiting for since the end of the seventies : to unite the Sunni radical islamists wich found it difficult to accept the leadership of Iran, a Shi'a country.

Turabi succeeded in uniting these movement and at the same time had his leadership gladly accepted by Teheran because, as a Sudanese Sunni ideologically close to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, he had a chance to overcome the centuries -long suspicion between Sunni and Shi'ites. One has to remember that Turabi's major intellectual influences are Syed Qutb, the number one ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim brothers in the sixties but also Ali Shariati an iranian shi'ite writer and the number one of the iranian islamic revolution.

Turabi's vision of Sudan, representing the deprived muslim masses against the wealthy and pro-western muslim states of the Gulf -and against the West itself- has been well received in Teheran. But going further than a mere coalition of muslim radical movement at the middle-eastern level, Turabi has also worked to create an alliance between the radical nationalist organizations (palestinians, lebanese etc.) and islamic groups from both Sunni and shi'a faith; all of them claiming to represent the dispossessed masses in the region. The alliance that exists in the occupied territories between Hamas and Georges Habash's PFLP has been, as an example, forged in Khartoum.

The 25th of April 1991, in Khartoum, an "Arab and Islamic popular conference" has created a larger coalition of islamic and nationalist groups between the Egyptian islamic Jihad, the Tunisian Annahda movement, the algerian Islamic Salvation Front, the palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, but also the PLO and the PFLP.

Further than the Middle-east, Turabi is also orchestrating the spread of radical and violent islam to the muslim part of Africa.

CONCLUSION

All these hostile coalitions, the threats coming from old but also from new quarters impose a state of vigilance to Europe. Working together, European academic experts and officials should be able to understand better the ideologues, the situations of the middle-east in order to avoid repeating the analytical blunders made before and during the Gulf war, when almost every government in Europe expected a massive wave of terrorism that did not happen. That could not happen because terrorism in the Middle-east is a game that has rules and strict rules indeed and is not used randomly or as the result of a whim. As a conclusion, here are four of these rules :

Rule n°1 : Disregard ideological postures and rhetoric and look for real communal interests.

Maneuvers in this region always derive from the most cold-blooded "realpolitik". Political ideals are there at best to legitimize one's actions; at worst, to disguise them. Abu Nidal and Ahmad Jibril -who are allegedly progressives, Marxist, Arab nationalists, and fervent admirers of Mao Tse Tung style warfare- find easy to return to the folds of Islam when need be. The renowned pan-Arabist Haffiz al-Assad allies with persians against Arab Iraq. During one month in 1979 Arafat declared on the one hand to Imam Khomeini that the islamic people of Palestine would free Jerusalem under his guidance, and on the other told Saddam Hussein that Jerusalem would be freed by the union of Arab progressives and nationalists.

Rule n°2 : Terrorism is dangerous weapon for the user as well as for the victim. Thus, always look for strategic reasons behind an important terrorist act.

A specular transnational attack, such as the destruction of Pan Am 103 or UTA 772, or the wave of bombings in Paris in September 1986 is always motivated by strategic reasons. The doctrine governing the use of terror is similar to that for nuclear weapons. Both are extremely dangerous and reserved extraordinarily grave threats, essentially for self-defense and revenge. Claims from "previously unknown groups", asking, for example, for the release of prisoners, are simply pretexts, smoke screens to increase confusion and hide their instigators from public view and the targeted country.

Rule n°3 : Terrorism cannot be used any time : it's a weapon for the middle or the end of the game

Each act of terrorism perpetrated or originating in the Middle-east is an indirect strategic operation accompanying one of the great regional conflicts, such those between Israel and the Palestinians, Iraq and Iran, or Libya and its several neighbors. All of these conflicts go through a succession of hot and cool episodes. Terrorism is used during a hot episode for self-defense or incapacitation of the enemy, or after the event has ended for revenge. (The motivation of revenge is frequently ignored by Western analysts, but is extremely important in the Middle-East.) But it has not, at least until now, been used at the beginning of an episode. This is one reason why the invasion of Kuwait was not accompanied by a wave of Iraqi-Sponsored terror attacks.

Rule n°4 : Terrorism is used only when real masterminds and the real sponsors say so, not when some dictator declares Jihad.

Controlling terrorist groups is a dangerous game. Today's friend is almost for sure tomorrow's bitter enemy. Sharing the same ideology, exchanging favors or dispensing money is not enough to ensure control. That is why the sponsoring state controls at least one of several key elements in the terrorist apparatus. These include authorizations to leave and return to the host country, holding hostage families of the terrorist groups' leaders, and controlling high-tech weapons components and sophisticated means of communication. Thus, even though Saddam Hussein was able to assert some control over some elements of the Middle Eastern terrorism vehicle, he did not control all the vital elements, the "ignition key". States that controlled other elements had no motivation to assist Saddam. Syria wanted Saddam's adventure to turn into a catastrophe. Iran found the situation ideal to settle old accounts with Baghdad. Libya also had accounts to settle : Saddam has shipped arms to the Chadian President, Hissene Habre, Qadhafi's number one enemy in Africa, and Qadhafi was vexed by Saddam's posturing as the "white knight" of the Arab nation. Similarly, in spite of his verbal support for Saddam, Arafat was unhappy with Saddam's hold on PLO accounts in Kuwait, the return of Abu Nidal's group to Baghdad, and his request to have the PLO's intelligence apparatus placed at his disposal. For all of these reasons, Saddam could not command a dramatic form of terrorism during the Gulf crisis and, later, war. There still remains, however, the possibility of a revenge campaign when the coalition troops quit Iraq and the vicinity. (May 1992) ■