

Global Jihad, Islamic Radicalism, and the Challenge to Europe

by Matthias Küntzel

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My approach towards Global Jihad and Islamism is different to other approaches in at least two respects:

First I think it is crucial to comprehend the Islamists’ ideology, their understanding of the world. As a German political scientist I had to ask myself how Auschwitz could happen, how my own parents were able to adore Hitler when they were young. So I had to study ideology, especially antisemitic ideology in order to understand what prompted the Nazis to commit mass murder. After 9/11 I started to apply this approach to Islamism in order to comprehend what Islamists are doing.

Second, I detest racism. My book about Germany and Iran has been translated into Farsi; my book about the Muslim Brotherhood has been translated into the Arabic language. This says something about my relationship towards secular and modern Muslims or ex-Muslims in the Muslim world. I therefore reject both kinds of contemporary racism: Right-wing racism which is malicious because it bears hatred against nearly every Muslim, and left-wing racism which tries to excuse nearly every Muslim – even if he or she behaves in an

antisemitic or racist way. I thus oppose every approach that constructs a kind of “homo islamicus” by applying different standards to Muslims than to non-Muslims. Some say that Holocaust-denial by a French citizen is awful but Holocaust-denial by an Arab citizen is understandable. I disagree. We must not deny to Muslims the capacity for self-reflection and critical debate which we claim for ourselves.

Let me now approach our common topic: global jihad and Islamism – a topic that triggers fear, a topic that triggers horror and a topic that creates also a great deal of helplessness.

Regrettably, the fear is justified. Suicidal terror such as in Paris or in Brussels can happen anytime anywhere. Suicide terror is frightening as such because its perpetrators are devoid of that very instinct that normally unites all human beings: the survival instinct. It is frightening because every form of deterrence is inoperable, and the very foundations of democracy – freedom and trust – are heavily undermined.

The feeling of horror is justified as well if we look at the barbarism of the Islamic state: we have the ten-years old suicide murder girl who killed 19 adults in Nigeria, we have the course for young people from eight years who learn how to cut throats by using living material, we have the Islamic State’s official instruction manual for the abuse of female prisoners, which are considered to be slaves along the lines of the Koran and so on.

At first glance, the Islamic State is a phenomenon that defies the categories of our political thinking. At first glance means: As long as we ignore the underlying ideology of this movement. However, if we take the Islamic State’s ideology into account, we will note that the Islamic state’s policy is only slightly different

from the policies of other Islamist forces, such as Iran's state policies or the machinations of Hisbollah or Hamas.

What I intend to do is to transform this feeling of horror into a state of knowledge about our enemy's motives and aims. Our enemy, which is at the same time the enemy of most Muslims in the world, is Islamism in all its manifestations – and this is my first point:

Many think Hisbollah is Israel's problem, al-Qaida is the United States' problem, the Muslim Brotherhood is Egypt's problem and so on. I consider this approach to be wrong. We all are facing a global movement and a global war that draws its energies from the Kor'an and its afterlife promises. We all are facing a strategic long term challenge that the entire world has to cope with – politically and militarily.

The Muslim Brotherhood

Global Jihad and Islamic Radicalism started in 1928 with the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood. This happened during the same decade in which Mussolini's fascism and Hitler's National Socialism came into being.

The Muslim Brothers constitute for the global Islamist movement what the Bosheviks were for the Communist movement during the last century: the ideological reference point and organizational core that decisively inspired all subsequent tendencies. Al Qaida's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri started as a member of the Muslim Brothers, Recep Tayyip Erdogan stems from a party which was massively influenced by the Brotherhood, Ruhollah Khomeini got his inspiration from them while Hamas serves as the Brotherhood's official branch in Palestine.

We just have to study the Brotherhood's official emblem in order to comprehend what Islamism is about.

Here, we have a green circle – green as the colour of Islam; the circle as a symbol for the globe. The Brotherhood was indeed the first Islamist movement that systematically set about building a kind of “Islamist international”.

Within this circle, we see two crossed and dangerous looking scimitars – the symbol for militant jihad. In the upper triangle between the tops of the swords, we see a red book which is the Kor'an. Islamism combines both aspects, indeed: A verbatim understanding of the Koran and the call for jihad. In the lower triangle we have the Arabic phrase “Wa-aiidu”, which is the beginning of a verse of the Koran with the meaning of “Prepare yourself!” And indeed: The scripture that unfolds the overarching ideology of Islamism is the Kor'an.

Not every Muslim who refers to the Koran, is an Islamist. But each and every Islamist refers to the Koran.

We know that the bulk of the Muslims do not share the Islamists' interpretation of the Kor'an. It would be wrong and self-deluding however, to claim that those who understand certain passages of the Koran literally, misuse or misunderstand this text. For there is today no authority to decide whether, for example, the command to “strike off the disbelievers' heads” (Sura 47, verse 4) is to be understood literally or metaphorically.

There are, however, four common features that earmarks the global Islamist movement's interpretation of the Kor'an; features that constitutes the common ground for al-Qaida, the Islamic state, Hisbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and the rulers of Iran.

Legislation of Allah

Characteristic no. 1 concerns the law: Who is allowed to legislate? The Islamist's answer is crystal-clear: Only Allah is allowed to legislate. Thus, Article 2 of the Iranian constitution highlights the "sole decision-making authority and legislation of Allah" while the Islamic State's "code of conduct" demands "the world-wide application of the law of Allah". Our societies are called the "world of arrogance" because we presume to make our own laws, rather than being under the will of Allah. Here we have the very essence of the Islamist program: away with democratic self-determination! Obey Allah and his holy sharia law!

We have at this point an intersection between Islamism and orthodox Islam. If you support the absolute claim to validity of the Koran then you have to support the sharia and you have to despise democracy. If you want to bridge this contradiction between the holy scripture and modern democracy you have to reject the claim that this book constitutes the mandatory truth for all time. There are historical models for this rejection. The movement of the Mu'tazila, for instance, historicized the Koran and coined an Islamic rationalism. Between the end of the eighth and the beginning of the eleventh century, this movement was quite influential.

Militant Jihad

Characteristic no 2 applies to the principle of jihad. There is, however, a difference between salafism and jihadism. The word "salafia" stems from the Arab *a-salaf as-salih* which refers to the "righteous ancestors" that is Mohammed and his direct successors.

A salafist is not necessarily a jihadist, for there is a brand of salafism which we call the "purist" brand: They are not interested in the outside world, as long as

they can live out their sectarian understanding of religion, such as, for example, the Amish people in the United States. They are weird but not dangerous.

Islamists, on the other hand, are dangerous because they practice a militarized jihad. They want to fight the infidels (including all Muslims that do not share their approach) with weapons. They pursue a mission, an utopia: They want to “liberate” the whole world by subjugating it under Sharia law. This note is struck by the Brotherhood’s founding manifesto, reiterated at every opportunity to this day: “Allah is our goal, the prophet our model, the Koran our constitution, the Jihad our path.”

This aspiration is confirmed by the Arabic phrase “Wa-aiidu” which is part of the Muslim Brotherhood’s emblem. It means “prepare!” and marks the beginning of sura 8, verse 60 of the Koran which demands: “Prepare to arm against them [the nonbelievers] with all the men and cavalry at your disposal, so that you may strike terror into the enemies of Allah.” Cavalry is of course a term of the seventh century. Today, we have perhaps to replace the word “cavalry” with “nuclear laboratory”. The full text of this verse is, by the way, also quoted as an obligation in Article 151 of the Shiite Iranian constitution.

Jew-hatred

Characteristic no. 3 is the Jew-hatred of the global Islamist movement. Today, to be a Jew is enough to place one under a death sentence. In every German-Jewish community, security is the issue of the day in the face of Jihadis from the Islamic State who are eager to kill Jews: They have already targeted the Jewish museum in Brussels, the Synagogue in Copenhagen, the Kosher supermarket and the Israel-connected concert hall in Paris, the Jewish school in

Toulouse. Today again, thousands of Jews are fleeing Europe because of fear. Isn't that appalling?

In the early Islamic Medina, the confrontation with the Jews and the fight against them was a prerequisite for the establishment of Islam. Thirteen centuries later, antisemitism was the driving force that transformed the tiny religious sect of the Muslim Brotherhood into a mass movement.

What is the source of the Islamists' Jew-hatred? The Middle East conflict is often cited as a reason, but this is much too simplistic. The first source are the scriptures of early Islam. Hostility toward Jews has existed since Islam came into being. Hamas, in its official charter, quotes the Prophet Muhammad as saying: "The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: 'O Muslim, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him.'" This is a particularly cruel Hadith. We imagine the trembling Jew who tries to survive by hiding behind rocks and trees. However, the rocks – the symbol of non-living nature – and the trees – the symbol of living nature – both want his death – as if the whole universe is eager to kill this sole and trembling Jew.

A second main source was provided by Nazi-propaganda during the Thirties and Forties of the last century. Just as the Nazis had radicalized widespread Christian anti-Judaism in Europe, they did their utmost to radicalize the latent anti-Judaism that originates in early Islam. Nazi Germany, for example, paid substantial sums of money to support the Muslim Brotherhood's anti-Jewish campaigns in Egypt. Nazi agents, such as Wilhelm Stellbogen were in close

touch with the Brotherhood and organised secret “Palestine meetings” in order to spread the Nazi’s Jew-Hatred in Egypt.

Between 1939 and 1945, a Berlin radio station broadcast its lies about a supposed Jewish world conspiracy into the Islamic world every evening. Its professionally produced programs were broadcast in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, and were very popular. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the Hamas charter has also adopted this legacy. The Jews, we read in Article 22, “stood behind the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution and most of the revolutions we hear about... They stood behind World War I ... They stood also behind World War II. ... There is no war going on anywhere without them having their finger in it.”

Whether in the case of the alleged Muhammad quote or here, in both cases Hamas uses sources to justify its hatred of the Jews that are older than Israel. Modern Jew-hatred, however, is focused on Israel, the destruction of which is propagated and prepared by every Islamist movement, and especially by the rulers in Teheran.

Longing for death

Characteristic no. 4 is the readiness to die – summarized in the infamous Islamist slogan: “We love death as you love life!”

Islam is not the only creed in which the hereafter is praised ; the Kor’an however recommends the longing for death more than any other holy text. Let me quote just one example, surah 29 verse 64: “And this worldly life is nothing but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is truly the life.” Hassan al –Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, called

on his followers to love death more than life. “Prepare yourself to do a great deed”, he wrote in a well-known essay under the title “The Art of Death”. “Be keen on dying and life will be granted to you, so work toward a noble death and you will win complete happiness.” These notions struck a deep chord, at least with the ‘troops of God’, as the Muslim Brothers liked to be known. Whenever their cohorts marched in close formation through the streets of Cairo, their voices rang out with this song: “We are afraid not of death but we desire it ... How wonderful death is...Let us die in redemption for Muslims”, followed by the chorus: “Jihad is our course of action ... and death in the cause of God our most precious wish.”

Suicide bombing, however, was excluded even by the Muslim Brotherhood because every kind of suicide is contrary to Islam. That is why in Soviet occupied Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989 not a single suicide attack took place. The systematic employment of Muslims as guided human bombs with the aim of killing as many people as possible was invented only in 1982 by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini. More than ten years passed before Sunni Islamists also accepted this distortion of Islam which has nevertheless become the calling card of today’s Islamist movements.

Europe’s response?

This four-point program – only Allah’s law is valid, jihad is our path, the Jew is our main enemy and death is better than life - applies to the IS and to Iran, to Shiite Hezbollah and to the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. It is a common program and a common global war and thus a global challenge to Europe and the world. But what about the Western response, today?

There is no response to global Islamism as such. There is no common effort, for example, to outlaw suicide bombing politically and legally as a crime against humanity.

Instead, European governments make the goat the gardener and recommend a partnership with Iran in the fight against the Islamic State. That is like recommending a partnership with Hisbollah in order to fight Hamas.

Iran has been a silent supporter of al-Qaida and the Taliban – both Sunni-oriented - for decades. They tactically supported the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and they tactically support the rise of the Islamic State in the Sinai right now.

We all recall that the United States financed Osama bin Laden during the Eighties in order to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Washington, at that time, ignored bin Laden's ideological program. 9/11 was the result of this mistake.

Today, the West seem to be willing to repeat this very mistake by ignoring Teheran's ideological program and the global program of Islamism as such.

This is my critique of the policy of the European Union and the West:

It refuses to take the ideological program of Islamism as a new and totalitarian movement into account. However, if you refuse to recognize the ideological basis of Islamism, you cannot draw the necessary conclusions. You betray the progressive Muslims throughout the world and you show fear where you may have to prove your strength. The result is a feeling of helplessness, not determination.

I wished I could close with an optimistic outlook, but I can't. We are living through a period of appeasement. The quicker this phase is overcome, the less terrible the consequences will be.

This lecture and seminar is also available as a video (including the Q & A session) on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqKkkBo3jaQ> .

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