

Miroslav Mares\*

## **STRATEGIES OF ISLAMIST EXTREMISM IN EUROPE\*\*2**

**ABSTRACT:** This paper explains various strategies of contemporary Islamists extremism in Europe. The author identifies the most important variants of Islamist extremism and deals with their goals and with strategic approaches how to achieve these goals. Quasi-legalist strategies as well as violent forms of interest-empowerment are described. The author uses sources from various Islamist organizations and analyses these materials within the framework of modern insurgency. A comprehensive outlook and threat assessment of Islamist extremist strategies are included in this article.

**KEY WORDS:** Islamist Extremist; strategy; Europe; political violence; Insurgency

### **Introduction**

Contemporary Europe is facing a rise of Islamist extremism. Various strategies are used by Islamist extremists to undermine the legal and societal order of European democratic constitutional states. The aim of this article is to identify the most important strategies of contemporary Islamist extremism in Europe. Previous typologies of insurgency (Merari) and categories elaborated by German “theoreticians of extremism” are used as an analytical framework (Jesse & Thime).

Extremism is in this article understood as an anti-thesis of democratic a constitutional state. It includes intolerant approaches

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\* Faculty of Social Studies of the Masaryk University, Joštova 10, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic, mmares@fss.muni.cz

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towards other political and religious beliefs and the leaders and activists of which struggle to establish dictatorship. Islamist extremism is a part of religious extremism based on intolerant sovereignty of religion. Islamist extremism uses in political and societal sphere the principles and values from Islamic religion, which are incompatible with the values and democratic character of modern Western democracies. The final goal is to establish and develop a caliphate or other state form based on this non-democratic use of Islamic religion and its political dimension. The achievement of these goals is carried out by various actors (from the point of view of political strategies and tactics as well as from the point of view of sub-confessions of Islam) (Bötticher & Mares 244-245).

### **Strategies of religious-political movements**

Contemporary Islamist extremism consists of many different actors and ideological and religious variants. Islamist extremism can be characterized as a social movement in a transnational area (Vertigans 163), however, this movement is very heterogeneous and some parts – at least temporarily – fighting each against the other (mostly it is valid for the Shia-Sunni conflict). The spectrum of strategies can be conceptualized on an axis where one pole can be characterized as a non-violent quasi-legal activity and the second pole as mass militancy, including a war against “non-believers” (Bötticher & Mares 258-261).

The activities of selected actors of the Islamist extremist movement can be combined. They can include both violent strategies (terrorism) as well as electoral party political strategies (Jesse & Thieme 21). The term strategy can be used in relation to Islamist extremism in its political meaning (Raschke & Tils 127) as well as in its military meaning (Collins 4). Some authors even in relation to current Islamic fundamentalism use the term “militarisation of the religion” (Gemein & Redmer 205).

On European territory a broad concept of insurgent strategies can be used. The term insurgency is used in various and very different meanings. In this article we can start with the definition by Bard O’Neill: “a struggle between non-ruling group and ruling authorities in which the nonruling group consciously uses political resources (e. g. organizational, expertise, propaganda and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of one or more aspects of politics” (O’Neill 15).

In this article the broader conceptualization of insurgency elaborated by Ariel Merari is respected. His categorization can be used for an analysis of non-religious as well as religious movements, including Islamist extremism. Merari distinguishes between the following forms of insurgent strategies:

1. Coup d'état (sudden, forceful stroke in politics, especially a sudden overthrow of a government);
2. Violent Revolution (violent radical social, political or economic change, Merari uses the term Leninist revolution);
3. Guerilla (a diffuse type of war, fought in relatively small formations, against a stronger enemy);
4. Riots (mob violence, usually non-organized in the sense that the rioters are neither totally controlled by a leader nor organized in units or another hierarchical structure; sometimes they are intentionally incited by organized political activists);
5. Terrorism (a systematic use of politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine state agents, usually intended to influence an audience);
6. Non-Violent Resistance (demonstrations, labor strikes, hunger strikes, merchandise boycott, refusal to pay taxes etc.) (Merari 217-223).

It is important to mention that Merari is focused on insurgent strategies. Terrorism is sometimes used also in the context of repressive governmental violence (including war terrorism etc., revolutionary or contra-revolutionary terrorism etc.) (Kraus). In the future Islamist extremists can also use military strategy of regular war against European countries.

### **Contemporary Islamist Extremist Spectrum in Europe**

With the knowledge of the previous definitions and concepts we can categorize the contemporary Islamist extremist spectrum in Europe. In the Sunni as well as in the Shia spectrum we can find organizations and networks which use quasi-legalist methods, and violent organizations and networks. Sometimes violence can be used only in a non-European area, while in Europe the group propagates non-violent behavior (as the Muslim Brotherhood). The line between extremism and non-extremism seems to be unclear in many cases. For example, the foundations and groups supported from Islamic countries announce fight against extremism and

terrorism on the one hand and they promote anti-Semitic and intolerant materials on the other hand – as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth – WAMY (Stand for Peace 10-11). As Alex P. Schmid writes:

trying to distinguish between non-violent (religious) extremists and violent (religious) extremists is futile seems inescapable. It makes more sense to look at what both groups of extremists share in their political outlook. The idea that one can hold extremist beliefs without being inclining to use extremist methods to realise them when the opportunity presents itself – something attributed to non-violent extremists – is naïve and dangerous. Religious Islamist extremism is a unitary phenomenon of which violent and non-violent extremism are two sides of the same coin. To be clear: this statement refers to the ideology of Islamism and not to the religion of Islam (Schmid 20).

With respect to the above mentioned problems we can identify the spectrum of Sunni extremist organizations which in Europe are not using violence (at least up to now) – mostly the Muslim Brotherhood and its cover groups – as the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE) (Kandel 150-159). The second important representative of this stream is the Party for Islamic Renewal (Hizb ut-Tahrir). In Europe also the dogmatic group Tablighi Jamaat is active, with its roots in Asian theological school Deobandi (Kandel 165-169). Support for extremist Islamism is carried out by various Islamic foundations (Burr & Collins 237-262). The relatively new Sharia<sup>4</sup> movement combines violent and non-violent methods.

The Militant and clearly violent Sunni spectrum (so called Jihadism) is connected with the activities of global networks –Al Qaeda and affiliated groups (as the Islamic Jihad Union – IJU) and currently also with the Islamic State (IS). The “virtual Jihadist ummah” is an important part of this spectrum (from the point of view of radicalization of new supporters). Ideologists and strategists of Jihadism are spreading their concepts with the help of the internet as well as extremist Muslim meeting points (mosques, community centres etc.) (Brachman 189). Branches of regional terrorist groups operate on the European territory mostly with logistic goals, as the Hamas, Caucasus Emirate or Taliban (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) (Bötticher & Mares 268).

Shia extremist networks consist of groups which promote “Khomeinism” (as a result of the Islamic revolution in Iran) by non-violent methods and of violent groups affiliated with the Hezbollah structures in Europe and with hidden units of the al-Quds

– a special branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (Kraus). Also in the Shia networks selected centres play an important role, as the Islamic Centre Hamburg (Bötticher & Mares 274).

### **Quasi-Legalist Strategies**

Islamist extremists try to use European legal environment for their own purposes. They claim their own legal demands – sometimes using unclear words – with the goal to establish non-democratic rule according to a non-democratic interpretation of Islam, or they try to harm seriously the human right standards of current European countries (in the fields of human women’s rights, pluralism, freedom of speech, rights of sexual minorities etc.).

For example, according to Jytte Klausen “the Muslim Brotherhood now seeks influence through a strategy of integration into European societies” (Klausen 209). The legal Muslim organizations organize various actions for the public, where the “positive image of Islamism” should be presented. However, as during the so called Peace congress in Oslo 2013 in 2013, in fact extremist views were presented there. In this congress activists Fahad Qureshi from the group Islamic Net defended death penalty for homosexuals, gender segregation, stoning etc. After a wave of criticism this organisation wrote (quoted with original spelling mistakes):

The Chairman of Islam Net, Fahad Ullah Qureshi asked the audience, and the answer was clear. The attendees were common Sunni Muslims. They did not consider themselves as radicals or extremists. They believed that segregation was the right thing to do, both men and women agreed upon this. They even supported stoning or whatever punishment Islam or prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) commanded for adultery or any other crime. They even believed that these practices should be implemented around the world. Now what does that tell us? Either all Muslims and Islam is radical, or the media is Islamophobic and racist in their presentation of Islam. Islam is not radical, nor is Muslims in general radical. That means that the media is the reason for the hatred against Muslims, which is spreading among the non-Muslims in western countries (Islam Net).

Muslim extremist groupings were trying to use norms against discrimination in such a way that also legitimate criticism of selected parts of dogmatic Islam and political Islamism should be prohibited. The campaign against blasphemy was typical after publishing of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in Denmark. During this campaign

non-violent mass demonstrations were combined with violent demonstrations and terrorism (Ranstorp & Hyllengren 11).

The establishing of Sharia zones is the next strategy how to establish Islamic extremist rule. The demands, to put parts of the Sharia to civil and commercial law are step by step enhanced to create zones where Sharia should be applied also in penal law and where the traditional European law is not valid. In some countries, as in the United Kingdom or in Germany even vigilante units were established with the goal to control public areas in Muslim quarters (Deutsche Polizeigewerkschaft). This strategy to establish Sharia-Zones is also combined with violent elements.

### **Terrorism**

Terrorism is used as a strategy of Islamic insurgency against European countries and democratic legal order. Petter Nasser identifies four forms of the use of European territory for Islamist terrorist purposes. The first form can be characterized as Europe as a support base (it was typical of the activities of the Al Qaeda in the 1990s). The second form is the so called classical Jihad in Europe (connected mostly with the situation in traditional Muslim countries, as the bombing perpetrated by the Armed Islamic Groups – GIA – in France in 1995). The third form is called global Jihad in Europe against targets from abroad (US, Russian or Israeli targets) and the fourth form is called “Global Jihad against Europe” (Nasser 180-186).

Small cells connected with global networks or individual freelancers are the most important perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Europe. In the journal Inspire published by Al-Qaeda the following targets of individual jihad in 2012 were defined:

1. Main political figures who lead the campaign against the Muslims such as the heads of states, ministers, military and security leaders;

2. Large strategic economic targets, such as: The Stock Exchange, power and oil installations, airports, harbors, railroad systems, bridges and highway intersections, tunnels on the highways, metro systems, tourist targets... and so on, [targeting] resources and sources for the economy;

3. Military bases and barracks where the armies are concentrated, especially the American military bases in Europe;

4. Media personalities and media centers that are leading the war against the Muslims and justifying the attacks on them, coming from the Zionist and Zionist-friendly Crusader media institutions;

5. Centralized information and computer centers that are in control of connecting the different institutions within the state, because this will completely paralyze the activity within that state;

6. Places where Jews are gathered, their leading personalities and institutions in Europe, avoiding places of worship and synagogues;

7. Official offices of the governmental institutions of those countries that are waging war, both on the state level and on the level of unions and political and military alliances, in the case where they participate in the aggression. Such as the offices of the NATO and the European Union... this requires decisions that have been studied carefully from a political perspective;

8. Buildings of the security services and the central intelligence in the capitals of America and allied Western states;

9. Striking civilians in general, to deter them or for retaliation (avoiding women and children when separated from men in places especially designed for them, like schools and the similar) (Al-Suri 23-24).

In fact, mostly the Jewish and military targets and targets connected with alleged blasphemy against Islam (cartoonists, as in Charlie Hebdo in 2015) are attacked in Europe. The al-Qaeda was during the first decade and in the first years of the second decade the main organization from the point of view of planning and inspiration for Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe (of course, with the exception of Russia, where Caucasian terrorist groups operate). Only some attacks were committed by other groups, for example the plot in Cyprus and the attack in Burgas against Israeli tourists in 2012 by Hezbollah (Levitt 8-9). A new phenomenon are attacks connected with the Islamic State, as in Brussel in 2014 or in Copenhagen in 2015. The return of foreign fighters – mostly related to the conflict in Syria and Iraq – is a huge challenge for contemporary counter-terrorism policy (Verfassungsschutz Nordrhein-Westfalen). They have potential to enhance terrorism to more serious forms of violence.

### **From Riots to the War For Caliphate**

For the current era terrorism seems the most dangerous strategy of Islamist insurgency in Europe. However, in the future it can be combined with more serious violent forms and as a final strategy the traditional military offensive with support of guerilla warfare and riots behind the main frontline can be used. However, this

situation depends on the development in the traditional Islamic countries, mostly in the Middle Eastern area. If Islamist extremists with aggressive anti-European goals are able to win power in these countries, they can start mass military attacks against Europe. During such offensive guerilla warfare and mass riots can complicate the situation in Western Europe where local caliphates can be established (Mareš 97-99).

Because of this threat it is important to analyze previous riots and mass violence committed by Islamist extremists. Mass riots occurred in French suburbia in 2005, however, at that time the Islamist ideology motivation was only one of more factors behind these riots (many rioters of West African origin were not Muslims). They were supported also by European leftist multi-cultural activists (Mareš 95). However, these riots inspired the future “Islamic urban guerilla” in Europe (Centrum strategických studií).

Violent demonstrations and riots in Europe can complicate the current situation and the development of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe in the near future. The cases of clashes between Islamic extremists and their opponents were observed in Germany, where also street violence and violent demonstrations are typical of the Salafist scene (Behnam 24-26). Psychological war connected with terror against “non-believers,” prisoners, moderate Muslims etc. will be used, as contemporary media strategy of the Islamic State shows. In 2014 the Islamic State published also a map with territories of parts of Europe (and specific Andalusia) in the borders of previous Muslims rule (Lewis). Another map claims the whole globe for the IS (Al-Tamimi).

With respect to the previous fact, we can repeat the previous findings about the combined strategy of Islamist extremists. It can be characterized in the following steps:

1. Restoration of Islamic regimes in traditionally Islamic regions (by means of terrorism, civil war, revolutions and coups d'état);
2. Establishment of new Islamist states in territories in which contemporary Islamist separatist movements are agitating (guerilla warfare, terrorism);
3. Subversive activities of Islamists in the diasporas of Western democracies as well as other non-Islamist regions (quasi-legalist Islamism; use of Western anti-discrimination norms for prohibiting criticism of Islamism; terrorism, mass unrest, formation of an Islamist parallel society [also with the help of demographic expansion; in general acquisition of the most important positions and influence in originally non-Islamist states]);
4. War of Islamist states against non-Islamist states (classical war, war and terrorism with ABC-weapons, utilization of the Islamist diaspora for sabotage and uprisings) and systematic Islamisation of other territories;



5. Establishment of Islamist rule with strict application of sharia on a global scale;
6. Maintenance of Islamist rule by means of totalitarian regimes – theocratic state structures and ideology, suppression, execution and liquidation of opponents, reformists and non-believers, control of private lives by means of secret police and theocracy – with the support of state-guided fundamentalist control organs (Bötticher & Mares 259, Schmid 19-20).

## Conclusion

Contemporary Islamist extremism is adapted to European legal and societal environment. It uses quasi-legalist strategies as well as various forms of violence. Geopolitical connections between traditional Islamic area and extremist communities in European countries open a broad spectrum of possibilities for a combination of various forms of attacks against European democratic constitutional states. It is important not to see current issues, as riots or individual terrorist attacks, as isolated acts. They create a base for strategic use in the long term perspective.

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