

International Workshop  
**POLITICAL VIOLENCE, ORGANIZED  
CRIME,  
TERRORISM & YOUTH**  
(NATO, HSD.EAP.ARW 982906)

**Islamist terrorism as a threat to Europe:  
the scope and limits of the challenge**

By

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**Hosted by**



13-14 September 2007  
**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY**  
Ankara/TURKEY

# Islamist terrorism as a threat to Europe: the scope and limits of the challenge

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## 1. Introduction

In terms of the impact on global security, some landmark international events since 11 September 2001 seem to point the global actors in two different directions.

The first direction, or trend, is catalyzed by the US post-9/11 'war on terrorism' that has conflated anti-terrorism with the need to 'win the war' on terrorism. It may employ different instruments, but still heavily, or even primarily, relies on the use of overwhelming military force.

The second trend is highlighted by the dramatic situation in a number of conflict and post-conflict areas (such as Afghanistan and Iraq) aggravated by some adverse consequences of the 'war on terrorism' itself, such as the military involvement in those areas under the banner of anti-terrorism or a combination of anti-terrorism and WMD non-proliferation. The second trend emphasizes the ever-growing need to 'win the peace' and a greater demand for actors capable of building sustainable and lasting peace while integrating security concerns. The demand is so great that a state's international security status is likely to be measured not just by its ability to 'win the war', its traditional military and security potential, but increasingly by its ability to 'win the peace' through non-military means.

As applied to anti-terrorism, the 'winning-the-war' approach championed by the US is based on the view of Islamist terrorism as not only the main terrorist challenge, but also a primarily *external*, exogenous threat to US homeland. This threat has also been seen as either primarily military nature or, more recently, as the one that at least has a clear military dimension. In contrast, for Europe, there's a significant *internal dimension* to terrorist challenge, which may be no less if not more important than its external dimension. That also partly explains the prevailing European perception of this threat as largely non-military in nature and the primary reliance on non-military tools to counter it.

How do these different trends play up for Europe through its part in the global anti-terrorism campaign? Whether and how do they reflect the nature of main terrorist threats to Europe and prevailing anti-terrorism approaches in Europe? To answer these questions, we need to start with three basic questions: (a) what is Europe? (b) what is terrorism? and (c) how serious is the terrorist threat in general and Islamist terrorism in particular to Europe at present and in both foreseeable and more distant future?

### ***What is Europe?***

Europe is a rather loose concept. Do we mean EU Europe, plus such non-EU states of ‘Western/Central Europe’ as Norway and Switzerland? Or do we imply a much broader ‘Council of Europe’ Europe? (including Russia, Ukraine and several non-European post-Soviet states)? While there’s a temptation to view the region in the broadest possible terms, for the purposes of this paper, the notion of Europe in the EU/EU-plus format should be employed. This notion excludes the so-called ‘new Eastern Europe’, particularly Russia where not just the dynamics of terrorism/antiterrorism, but the very nature of the state and society is specific enough to justify a separate analysis. For the same reason, it also excludes such an EU candidate country as Turkey. It should be noted that some terrorism data collection and research methodologies are even more conservative in their definitions of geo-political regions: the US-based MIPT database, for instance, still keeps the regional divisions between Western and Eastern Europe (dating back to the Cold War times) for the purpose of data collection on terrorism.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the only dataset available on internal, or domestic, terrorism in Europe since 1950 focuses on 18 Western European countries exclusively.<sup>2</sup>

As the main responsibility for anti-terrorism—in Europe and elsewhere—still rests primarily at the national level, it is also important to address ‘Europe’ both as individual states and—to the extent it is applicable—as a common entity, with attention paid to the EU dimension.

### ***What is terrorism?***

There is still no internationally agreed definition of terrorism, although some progress has been made on this at the UN. While definitional issues can hardly be addressed in detail in this paper,<sup>3</sup> it focuses on at least three key characteristics a combination of which helps distinguish terrorism from other forms of violence and security threats.

First, what distinguishes terrorism from plain, economically-motivated crime is its political motivation. An act of terrorism is always more than just profit-oriented crime, and what turns it into something more than crime is its *political goal* (that may also be formulated in ideological or religious categories and may range from a specific to a very abstract one). Terrorism is a tactics to achieve a political goal, which is an end in itself and not just a secondary instrument or a ‘cover’ for advancement of other interests, for instance, for illegal economic gains in the case of organized crime groups.

Second, the main victims and targets of terrorism are *civilians and non-combatants*—either by design (on purpose), or by its indiscriminate nature. This criterion distinguishes terrorism from classic guerrilla tactics that implies the use of force by the rebels mainly against regular government security forces, even as both these different tactics may be used by the same group.

<sup>1</sup> The MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, URL <<http://www.tkb.org>>, compiled by the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT), Oklahoma City.

<sup>2</sup> The TWEED (Terrorism in Western Europe: Event Data) database, compiled by J.O.Engene, University of Bergen.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of definitional issues and typology of modern terrorism, see ‘Introduction’ to: Stepanova, E., *Terrorism in Asymmetrical Conflict: Ideological and Structural Aspects* (Oxford University Press, upcoming).

The third characteristic is the *asymmetric nature* of terrorism as ‘the weapon of the weak vs. the strong’. It best explains the specifics of this mode of operation. Terrorists are too weak to challenge their main opponent—the state—conventionally and choose an asymmetrical response—attacking ‘soft targets’, mainly unprotected civilians and civil infrastructure, in order to exert pressure on a qualitatively stronger opponent. Asymmetry here implies not merely a gap in capabilities, but also a status asymmetry of the main protagonists (an asymmetrical confrontation between a sub-national or transnational non-state actor and the state, or a groups of states). Asymmetrical nature distinguishes terrorism from other forms of politically motivated violence against civilians, such as repressive actions by the state itself or ‘symmetric’ inter-communal and sectarian violence.<sup>4</sup>

To sum-up, *terrorism is the use or threat to use force by non-state actors against civilians or non-combatants to achieve political goals in asymmetrical confrontation against the state or international system.*

## **2. How big is the threat?**

Europe did not wake up to terrorism as a security challenge on 11 September 2001. Some European countries have faced more traditional types of terrorism for a long time—more recently, for decades and, historically, since terrorism emerged as a systematic and conceptualized tactics of political violence in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ethno-separatist terrorist in Spain and the UK or left-wing terrorists in Germany, Italy and elsewhere in Europe provided examples of some of the world’s most dangerous terrorist groups. But the events of 9/11 and subsequent attacks, both worldwide and in Europe, by a new kind of Islamist terrorist cells with a transnational agenda highlighted the emergence of a new type of terrorism. It is to be distinguished from the use of terrorist means, often in the context of ongoing broader armed conflicts, by locally-based armed non-state groups and movements combining radical nationalism with Islamism. This type of terrorism is associated with the post-al-Qaeda networks of semi- or fully autonomous cells in different parts of the world that may not even be operationally linked, but pursue similar or common quasi-religious politicized goals and agenda with a global outreach, not confined to any single local/regional context.

As certain skepticism has been voiced regarding the scale or the imminence of terrorist threats, especially as long-term security challenges, both for Europe and more generally, the issue needs to be further explored.

### ***Terrorism as a threat to international security***

To assess the relative weight and gravity of terrorism as a threat to international security in general, it needs to be placed in context of other modern forms, dynamics, and trends in violence and armed conflicts. In conflict and peace studies, there’s been much discussion recently, based on analysis of some newly available and more complete data, about the gradual, but quite significant decrease both in the number of wars and conflicts and in battle-related deaths over the last 15 years. Still, data points to some worrying trends too some of which are one way or another related to terrorism.

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<sup>4</sup> This does not, however, preclude the blending of asymmetrical terrorism and, for instance, symmetrical sectarian warfare, especially of the state itself assumes sectarian character, as in Iraq.

While the number of armed conflicts, particularly of classic major state-based ones, and of battle-related deaths is declining, there's no comparable, major decrease in violence not initiated by the state (non-state violence). The good news is that non-state violence is generally less lethal than major wars; the bad news is that it is increasingly and primarily directed against civilians. Non-state violence, whether ultimately directed against the state or against other non-state actors, becomes increasingly intertwined and integrated with one-sided violence against civilians. Of all forms of violence, terrorism most tightly integrates one-sided violence against civilians that are its immediate targets with anti-state violence against its ultimate and stronger opponent—the state or the state-based international system.

In the age of information and mass communications, of critical importance is not just the real level and scale of conflict potential, but its destabilizing effect for state, public and international security and the extent to which it is perceived as destabilizing. While the number of armed conflicts may have decreased after the end of the Cold War, it does not yet mean that their destabilizing potential has also decreased. It is not the mere number of conflicts and battle-related deaths that matters. As evidently demonstrated by effects and consequences of high-profile terrorist attacks, today it no longer takes several millions of battle-related deaths to seriously affect or destabilize international security and significantly alter security agenda. While the number of civilian deaths caused by 9/11 attacks (about 3000) was hardly comparable to the huge battle-related or civilian death-toll from major post WWII wars such as those in Korea or Vietnam, its impact and repercussions for the global security are comparable with those events. This is what asymmetry is all about. Violence takes and will continue to take increasingly asymmetrical forms and terrorism perhaps is the most asymmetrical of all forms of violence.

Thus, of critical importance is not just and not so much the real scale of armed violence in the form of terrorism, its direct human costs, but its destabilizing effect on national, international and human/public security that is usually not commensurate with and goes far beyond its actual damage. What matters is its ability to seriously affect politics or, as in the case of 9/11, even significantly alter global security agenda. This is why sheer numbers and quantitative indicators hardly suffice for terrorism: some terrorist acts may reach their purpose and have the intended destabilizing effect even if they do not result in direct fatalities, while very few, comparatively rare high-profile, mass-casualty attacks can have an enormous impact.

Still, of all forms of armed political violence, terrorism is clearly on the rise *even in terms of sheer numbers*, most dramatically—since the 9/11 attacks that did not mark a peak of global terrorist activity. In 2006, the number of terrorist incidents was the largest ever recorded and has almost reached 6500, a 30% increase from the previous year and a 3.7 times increase from the total for 2001. The 2006 terrorism death toll has almost reached 12000 (a 46% increase from the previous year) and exceeds the 2001 fatalities total by 2,6 times.<sup>5</sup> If one of the main goals of the global anti-terrorism campaign were to curb or diminish terrorist threat worldwide, five years on, the situation has gravely deteriorated. Overall, since 9/11 terrorist activity worldwide has increased three-fold. The sharpest rise has been observed in large-scale attacks (eight-fold since the early 1980s).

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<sup>5</sup> MIPT (note 1).

### ***Terrorism as a threat to Europe compared to other regions***

How serious are terrorist threats to Europe, compared to other parts of the world? Both over the last 50 years and over the last decade, Europe had relatively high levels of terrorist activity on its soil. According to MIPT data, since the late 1960s (1968-2006), Western Europe ranked only fifth in terms of fatality rates of international terrorist attacks. However, in terms of international incident rates (2741) over the same period, Western Europe was just slightly behind the world's top region—the Middle East.

The level of internal, or domestic, terrorism in Europe throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—early 21<sup>st</sup> century has also been relatively high. Out of 18 Western European countries the only two unaffected by internal terrorism over the 1950-2004 period were Finland and Iceland. Based on both terrorist incident and death count, the UK remained the most severely affected country, followed by France, Spain, Italy, Germany and Greece.<sup>6</sup>

Over the last decade—since 1998—in terms of domestic and international incident rates combined, Western Europe was third (3037 attacks) following the Middle East and South Asia. Still, for three years in a row prior to 9/11 (1999–2001), Western Europe had the highest numbers of terrorist attacks and, for the three following years (2003-2005) made it to the world's top three regions on this count.<sup>7</sup> For broader, 'geographical' Europe, the indicators of terrorist activity have of course been much higher. The data given above does not, for instance, include data on 'Eastern Europe' dominated by terrorism of the Chechen/Russian origin. Eastern Europe had the highest number of terrorist attacks in the world in 1998 and the highest number of fatalities in 1999. On the latter count, it also made it to the world's top three regions from 2002 to 2004 (from Dubrovka to Beslan).

Terrorism indicators and dynamics for Europe come in contrast to the data on terrorism in the US homeland. With the striking and very untypical exception of 9/11 in 2001—which immediately brought the US to the first place in terms of terrorism-related deaths for that year—for the rest of the last decade, both prior and following 9/11, the US has not even made it to the top three either by the no of attacks or by the number of victims. The US homeland and North America in general demonstrated the lowest levels of terrorist activity in the world (with annual number of attacks ranging from 6 to 18 and numbers of deaths from 0 to 3).<sup>8</sup>

While these low homeland levels are to a large extent balanced by the very high level of terrorist threats to American soft targets abroad, overall, contrary to some public perceptions, terrorist threat to European states and their citizens on European soil is much higher at the moment than terrorist threats to the US homeland. The latter, with the strange exception of 9/11, had been and remains one of the most secure places in the world.

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<sup>6</sup> In total, 9730 'domestic' terrorist incidents and 2956 terrorism-related deaths caused by internal terrorism have been recorded for Western Europe for the period since 1950 until 2005 in the TWEED dataset (see note 2 and Engene, J.O., 'Five decades of terrorism in Europe: the TWEED dataset', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 115-116). TWEED defines 'internal terrorism' as the one that originates and takes place within the political systems of Western European countries. Engene, J.O., 'Five decades of terrorism in Europe: the TWEED dataset', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 115-116.

<sup>7</sup> MIPT (note 1).

<sup>8</sup> MIPT (note 1).

### ***Terrorism as compared to other security threats to Europe***

The final question is how big is terrorist threat to Europe compared to other security threats: (a) to the so-called traditional (military) threats; and (b) to other urgent nonmilitary threats? This is a crucial question that has to be answered, for instance, in order to select an adequate critical infrastructure protection strategy—an all-hazards one or a primarily terrorism-oriented one.

It is hardly surprising that, in the radically changed security environment when the Cold War type threat of large-scale military aggression in Europe highly improbable, other, essentially non-military security threats have moved to the forefront. In this context, there are two extreme ways terrorist threat to Europe may be perceived in comparative perspective. One extreme would be to depoliticize this threat by putting it on par with more typical and regular law enforcement challenges such as economic (organized) crime, human and drug trafficking and thus to underestimate the essentially political nature and risks of terrorism. An opposite extreme would be to view terrorism as an existential threat for Europe, giving it a much higher priority over a range of all other pressing security challenges.

European states, both individually and collectively, to their credit, have by and large managed to avoid both extremes, swaying somewhere in between. Even with higher probability of terrorist attacks on European soil (as compared to the US homeland), overall, European terrorism threat assessment has been more balanced than that of the US. Terrorism was already seen as an important or even the main non-military threat in European states such as the UK, Spain or France well before 9/11. In post-9/11, but pre-Madrid European Security Strategy of 2003, terrorism was listed as one—and as the first one—of the five main interrelated security threats to Europe, along with proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); regional conflicts in neighboring states or in regions that may affect European security; state failure; and organized crime.

The only area where terrorism threat assessment by Europe's leading states increasingly mirrors the super-alarmist approach of the US is an interface of the two main 'strategic' threats to the West: (a) terrorism and (b) proliferation of WMD and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials. The case in point is the important, but significantly hyped, threat of WMD/CBRN-terrorism (notwithstanding the fact that most catastrophic, mass-casualty attacks have been carried out by limited, conventional means and did not require WMD/CBRN to produce the intended effect).

### **3. Types of terrorist threats to Europe**

The question about the scope and scale of the terrorist threats to Europe is closely linked to the nature and typology of these threats. There are several typologies of terrorism.

(a) *Domestic or international?* While this traditional way to categorize terrorism has never been too strict, the demarcation between domestic and international terrorism has become increasingly blurred over the recent years, both in Europe and elsewhere. On the one hand, even groups with localized agenda that does not go beyond national borders or a certain region may internationalize their funding, logistics, planning and other activities, often to a significant extent (a classic example is ETA and IRA terrorism). On the other hand, as demonstrated by terrorist

attacks of 2004 and 2005 in Madrid and London, respectively, even Islamist cells pursuing transnational quasi-religious globalized agenda may not necessarily be 'outsiders' and a purely 'imported' phenomenon originating outside Europe, but grow within Europe and involve and be led by second- and third-generation European citizens. Against this background, it is not surprising that Europol in its analytical assessments of the terrorist threat has even decided to no longer use the distinction between domestic and international terrorism.<sup>9</sup>

(b) According to *motivational typology*, terrorism is usually categorized as either secular ideological/socio-polical (left-wing, right-wing, ecological etc.), or nationalist (anti-colonial, national liberation, ethno-separatist etc.), or religious. While this typology is hardly accurate when applied to many groups that are driven by more ideology than one and combine socio-political and nationalist or religious and nationalist motivations, it is still broadly used. With all possible reservations about its adequacy, it can still be said that while secular ideological/socio-political terrorism has stabilized, it has been overshadowed by separatist terrorism that persists in Europe and by religious (quasi-religious)—primarily Islamist—terrorism that is on the rise.

Most of the total of 498 attacks carried out in Europe in 2006 resulted in little material damage and *were not intended to kill*. The vast majority of these attacks (424) were carried out by ethno-separatist groups (60 per cent of attacks of this type took place in France, to be closely followed by Basque separatists' activity in Spain). This also conforms to the general historical pattern in internal terrorism in Western Europe: more than 80% of internal terrorism incidents initiated by terrorists in this region over the 1950-2004 period were perpetrated by ethnic-nationalist groups.<sup>10</sup>

The second largest category, in terms of the number of incidents committed, were left-wing and anarchist terrorists responsible for 55 attacks in the EU, mainly in Greece, Italy, Spain and Germany.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the number of Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe in the mid-2000s—as well as through the entire period from 2001 until 2007—has been relatively small. Nevertheless, it is this type of terrorism that poses the gravest terrorist threat to Europe in the early 21st century, as it is the one responsible for the bulk of terrorism-related deaths. *Islamist terrorism aims at mass casualties*. As demonstrated by Madrid and London attacks, this 'new' Islamist terrorism also effectively results in mass casualties, if it is not preemptively disrupted, prevented or, which is often the case in Europe, fails to achieve the intended result due to technical deficiencies of the explosive devices and lack of technical experience of the part of the perpetrators. While there were only 309 terrorism-related fatalities in Europe since January 2001 until July 2007 (as of the time of writing this paper), the vast majority—at least 250 deaths in Spain, the Netherlands, and the UK—were caused by Islamist terrorists.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Islamist terrorism in Europe

Whatever typology of terrorism is used, there's no dispute among all the anti-

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<sup>9</sup> Europol, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2007* (Europol: The Hague, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Engene (note 6), p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> Europol (note 9), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Assessment based on MIPT data (note 1). Over a longer period—since the late 1960s—ETA still holds the first place in the EU in terms of terrorism-related deaths (about 850).

terrorism actors ranging from MI5 to Europol and among experts that the threat posed by the new type of Islamist terrorism for Europe has grown substantially. There is a clear trend to emphasize this new type of Islamist terrorism that may grow up on European soil, but pursues transnational agenda, over other types of terrorist threats to Europe. Investigations against Islamist terrorists are clearly a priority in the EU: they comprised half of 706 people arrested on terrorism grounds in the EU in 2006 (mostly in France, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands).<sup>13</sup> The rate of arrest on Islamist terrorism-related charges per Muslim capita in Europe is almost five times that of the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Europe did not wake up to Islamist terrorism as a security challenge on 9/11. While the Islamist terrorist presence in Europe was first introduced decades ago, Algerian and Egyptian Islamists tended to confine their agenda to political struggle in their home countries. Until mid-1990s, when the first Islamist attacks with a broader agenda and of the more endogenous type can be traced, the *direct* threat from Islamist terrorists to Europe was insignificant. But 9/11 and a number of subsequent high-profile Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe and elsewhere highlighted the emergence of a new type of terrorist activity by a network of semi- or fully autonomous cells in different parts of the world that may not even be operationally linked, but pursue similar or common quasi-religious politicized goals and agenda with a global outreach, not confined to any single local or regional context.

At the end of the 1990s and in the early 2000s, the Islamist terrorist threat in Europe has also gradually, but steadily shifted from infiltration by outsiders to the domestic production of perpetrators that pursue transnational agenda. By the mid-2000s, over 80 per cent of arrested Islamist terrorists in Europe (as well as in the United States) were part of the Muslim diaspora, most in second and third generation,<sup>15</sup> rather than pure outsiders, visitors or recent migrants.

So far, the most lethal Islamist terrorists that have ever been based in Europe remain those of the Hamburg cell which served as a European component in preparation of the 9/11 attacks. While there has not been a major terrorist attack in Europe since the July 2005 bombings in London—that marked the first case of Islamist suicide bombings in Europe—dozens of attempts were disrupted since then. There have been far more suspected radicals under surveillance in Europe in the mid-2000s than at any point since 9/11. Europol vaguely describes Islamist terrorism as a threat for foreseeable future, while MI5 warns that the *current* Islamist threat would ‘last a generation’. It is also suggested that Europe may see increased participation in the global jihad.

### ***Migration, radicalization and Islamist terrorism***

The recent rise of Islamist terrorism in Europe has often been directly and sometimes even primarily linked to the growing Muslim migration and Muslim minorities in Europe and the problems of their marginalization, socialization and integration. This link is questionable at best and extremely complex and indirect, at most.

On the one hand, migration is an objective process driven by fundamental socio-

<sup>13</sup> See Europol (note 9), p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Sageman, M., *Radicalization of Global Islamist Terrorists*, Testimony to Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, 27 June 2007, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Sageman, M. (note 14), p. 1.

economic dynamics. These include demographic decline in Europe where immigration is already responsible for 70 per cent of population growth and development difficulties (traumatic modernization) in the North Africa, other parts of the Middle East, South Asia etc., with rather pessimistic mid-term projections of the development of these regions.

Terrorism, on the other hand—including terrorism of Islamist bent—is a heterogeneous phenomenon that cannot be reduced to any single set of explanations, such as socio-psychological behavioral patterns alone. Negative socio-cultural experiences of European Muslims, including migrants, in their immediate social environment may of course help explain why some of them become more susceptible to quasi-religious/political radicalization, but hardly explain why this radicalization leads to violence in the form of mass-casualty terrorism. Nor is this link necessarily a binding one: radicalization of Muslim migrants or minorities does not even necessarily lead to *violence*: a number of professedly radical movements do not resort to violence or promote it. Even if radicalization does lead to violence, the latter does not necessarily take the form of terrorism. In fact, of all forms of migrant and anti-migrant violence in Europe terrorism is not the most common one, even as it remains the most high-profile and the most deadly one.

There is also a risk here of underestimating the role of other driving factors behind Islamist terrorist behaviour that may have little to do with problems of socialization or lack of social integration. This is particularly true for those Islamist terrorists who, unlike some of the poorly integrated recent immigrants, may be very well integrated second generation citizens of European countries (one can hardly be integrated better than the leader of the Leeds group) or even European converts (who are a small minority among terrorists of this type, but show that not Islamist terrorists in Europe are even migrants or their descendants). In contrast, the radicalization process of recent migrants involves social isolation and identity crisis resulting directly from a transplantation into an alien culture of people most of whom were not Islamists, let alone militants, at home. Apparently, for different categories of European Muslims and Muslim migrants, the impact of socio-psychological factors in the process of radicalization may vary.

An excessive focus on the impact of immediate social circumstances of Muslim migrant and citizens may have an effect of de-politicizing terrorism—perhaps, the most politicized of all forms of political violence, of downgrading the importance of broader international political agenda, re-interpreted in quasi-religious way, for both ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ jihadists in Europe. There is no single social profile of Islamist terrorists and the profound nature of their resentment is not always and not necessarily a product of their poor social integration. So while their formative socio-cultural experiences in Europe may have prepared them to champion what they believe is the cause of fellow-Muslims suffering around the world, they frame their actions in quasi-religious, political neo-anti-imperialist discourse of global confrontation with the West, stimulated by what they see happening in *Iraq*, *Afghanistan* and elsewhere (as noted in a London bomber’s Al-Jazeera videotape: ‘our attacks will intensify and continue until you pull your forces out of Afghanistan and Iraq’)<sup>16</sup>. In sum, the focus should be on the mix of certain home-grown negative socio-psychological conditions, experiences or perceptions with the impact of broader, international political realities re-interpreted in line with a powerful and

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<sup>16</sup> An attacker Shehzad Tanweer quoted in the transcript of the video released on 8 July 2006 at the Middle East Media Research Institute’s TV Monitor project’s web site, URL <<http://www.memritv.org/Transcript.asp?P1=1186>>.

universalist quasi-religious ideology.

### ***Muslim youth and terrorism in Europe***

Much has been said and written about the 'youth' factor and aspect in Muslim radicalization in Europe, including the way it is commonly seen as related to the rise of Islamist terrorism. Furthermore, it is often stressed that Islamist terrorism in Europe is 'young' and is becoming even younger, especially since 11 September 2001. It has been argued that if previously 'security services faced terrorist structures mostly made up of experienced jihadists, often with Afghan experience in common, between 25 and 40 years old, more and more we now find very young people, who by definition have no 'past' in Islamist circles'.<sup>17</sup> Attempts to explain away the entire phenomenon as impulsive violent behaviour by idealistic young people who seek glory as a way out of their individual and social problems are not uncommon either.

Against this background, some words of caution are needed and some questions need to be asked. How young are these people? Is there a direct link between the revival of religious identity or socio-political radicalization of young Muslims in Europe and Islamist terrorism? More generally, is the age factor one of the decisive ones in turning to terrorism or is it just a reflection of a generally higher predisposal of younger people to all forms of violent behaviour? Is it a prime driver or just one of the many secondary, facilitating conditions—and hardly a binding one—for Islamist terrorism in Europe?

To start with, a tendency to depict Islamist terrorism in Europe as an almost exclusively 'youth' activity may not be fully accurate and is contradicted by the more systematic and more recent data. For instance, according to Europol's analysis, despite the high number of people arrested in Europe on terrorism grounds in 2006 (with suspected Islamist terrorists comprising half of 706 arrested) there was *a relatively small number of young suspects*. More than two thirds of the arrested suspects were in fact aged between 26 and 41.<sup>18</sup> In some European countries, though—notably Britain—Islamist terrorists and terrorist suspects do seem to be younger: e.g. most of the 19 people arrested in the UK on 10 August 2006 in connection to the alleged airplane plot were aged between 22 and 25, with one of the arrested as young as 17. Overall, however, it seems that the main age category for Islamist terrorists in Europe is young adults and, less so, adults, rather than teenagers.

However, this fact does not yet in itself provide sufficient grounds for attempts to directly link the broad religious revival among European Muslims, especially among the younger generation, and a political dimension to that revival—to violent behaviour in general and to such a specific form of violence as terrorism, in particular. That religion is playing a progressively higher role in self-identification of European Muslims of various citizenship, ethnic background and social status is a plain fact. That this trend is most evident in the younger generation of Muslims is hardly disputable either. One of the many manifestations of this trend is, for instance, by the popularity of youth associations acting as front organisations for the

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<sup>17</sup> Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging threats, Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives, *The Radicalisation of Muslim Youth in Europe: The Reality and the Scale of the Threat*, Testimony of Claude Moniquet, Director General, European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, 27 Apr. 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Europol (note 9), p. 20.

Muslim Brotherhood in many European countries. A single Hizb-ut-Tahrir conference in Britain (March 2004) alone brought together about 10 000 Muslims, many of them young people.

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QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (LZW) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.



**Fig. 1. Terrorist activity in Europe per age group (%), 2006.**

Source: Europol.

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In the UK in particular, faith identity among young Muslims has become stronger than ever. As revealed by the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey data, faith ranked second on identity after family among Muslims. This trend was particularly strong amongst young people aged 16-24. However, their high level of religious identification (74%) was not unique for their faith group. It was, for instance, paralleled by high indicators for young Sikhs and Hindus (63%), in contrast to just 18% of Christians of the same age for whom religion ranked only 7th out of 15 factors.<sup>19</sup> According to a January 2007 survey by a conservative British think-tank, 74 per cent of young British Muslims (age 16 to 24) would prefer Muslim women to wear a veil or hijab (as opposed to only 28 per cent of those over 55). 37 per cent of the younger set would also prefer to live under Shariah law (as compared to just 19 per cent of Muslims over 55 years old). While this points to a growing religiosity, it is interesting to note that in the 16-24 age group the same proportion (37 per cent) said they would also like to see Shariah to reflect ‘modern ideas about human rights... and tolerance of religious conversion’.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Home Office, *Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism* (London, Apr. 2004).

<sup>20</sup> It can also be mentioned that, for instance, more Muslims supported free speech than members of the general population. Zeller, T., ‘Survey: young Muslims in Britain are more

However, there is still a tendency to confuse two processes or to view the one as a logical and binding progression of the other while it is not. On the one hand, religious self-identification among Muslims in Europe is growing. Significant minorities among them express profound anger at the Western policies, including those of their own governments, towards 'the Muslim world'. But while, for instance, in the early 2000s between 64-80% of British Muslims have strongly opposed the intervention in Afghanistan and about 80% opposed the intervention in Iraq, an ever greater proportion (67-85%) did not think that further terrorist attacks would be justified. A minority of Muslims (7-13%) may even sympathize with some of the groups that employ terrorist means or think that some terrorist attacks, on balance, 'can be justified'.<sup>21</sup> All this, however, does not, in and of itself, make these people terrorists and an overwhelming majority of them would not even think about resorting to violence themselves. On the other hand, few self-starter Islamist cells choose to resort to violence in the form of mass-casualty terrorism against civilians. While in the first case, it is broad, if not necessarily mainstream, social trend and popular sentiment, in the second case, small, exclusive, fanatical 'vanguard-type' violent cells. The problem is that the former by no means automatically leads to the latter—rather, these are different manifestations—the broader and more common one and the violent extremist one—of the same set of problems.

How much can the 'youth' factor be helpful in explaining the disjunction between these two processes, i. e. where the general socio-political dissatisfaction and moral outrage interpreted in quasi-religious form transforms into violent action in the form of terrorism? In the end, the links between age and Islamist violence and terrorism in Europe seem to boil down to at least four main aspects, none of which is a binding or decisive one in itself.

First, the significant number of young Muslims among Islamist terrorists may partly reflect a much broader demographic reality: Muslims are generally considerably younger in Europe than much of the rest of the population. For instance, over half of Muslims in Britain are under 25, compared with a third of the population as a whole.<sup>22</sup>

Second, in taking a decision to start a terrorist cell and mount a terrorist attack, the younger generation is generally more susceptible to—and is more likely to be struck by—a deep feeling of moral outrage at the actual and perceived political and social injustices against Muslims both on a local and on a global scale. Young adults are also more likely to interpret their moral outrage as a recipe for more radical 'direct action', including violence. Coupled with the generally higher susceptibility of youth to radical ideologies and to 'differential-aggressive bonding' long noted by social psychologists,<sup>23</sup> this anger becomes part of their identity through ideological discourse and extremist group membership. The youth factor may also be relevant to some extent to explaining the next step—the resort to violence and particularly the choice of terrorism as a violent mode of operation. Terrorist means may

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politicized. Blame multiculturalism?', *The New York Times* (30 Jan. 2007).

<sup>21</sup> E. g., according to the Policy Exchange survey (January 2007) in the UK, 13 per cent of the younger age group (16-24) said they admired organizations like al-Qaeda. See Zeller (note 20).

<sup>22</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office (note 19).

<sup>23</sup> See, e. g., Flaherty, L. T., 'Youth, ideology, and terrorism', *Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 27, 2003, pp. 29–58; Pinderhughes, C.A., 'Differential bonding from infancy to international conflict', *Psychoanalytical Inquiry*, vol. 6, 1986, pp. 155-173

particularly appeal to younger extremists as they generally tend to have less tolerance for delay and are more impatient to express their anger through violent action.

Still, this anger is not only a 'generational' phenomenon that results in 'mindless violence' driven by immediate social grievances or 'purely' religious zeal—it is interpreted and formulated in highly politicized—quasi-religious, rather than purely religious—almost anti-neo-imperialist categories and has an explicit political focus and goals, however abstract. As noted by a young moderate Muslim leader in Britain, 'what is needed is a debate about the root cause of terrorism, which is our country's foreign policy'.<sup>24</sup>

Third, the youth, including European Muslim youth, are generally much better familiar with, and more prone to use, modern forms and means of information and communication, particularly the Internet. This is especially important in view of the structures of the contemporary post-al-Qaeda transnational violent Islamist movement. Its multiple cells are often autonomous and self-generated and formed on a voluntary basis, but are inter-connected by collective radical quasi-religious ideological discourse and manage to act as parts of the same movement for the sake of the same final goal. The recent replacement of face-to-face radicalization with on-line one and the switch from static extremist web-sites calling to violence to interactive Islamist fora as key instruments in radicalization certainly have their bearing primarily on younger people.

Fourth, while no single social pattern of Islamist terrorists in Europe can be traced and the latter, including young radicals, may come from very different social background, including the well-educated middle class, the younger people may still have 'less to loose' in socio-psychological sense and in social and socio-economic terms when taking a decision to turn to terrorist activity.

In sum, it is true that socio-political-religious radicalization of Muslims in Europe mostly affects relatively young people. This radicalization of young Muslims of different ethnic and social background takes place in Europe on a growing scale. But to link this radicalization directly and primarily to Islamist terrorism is an overstretch. It also reflects a dangerous tendency to degrade Islamist terrorism to an extreme, abhorrent 'excesses' of typical 'youth radicalism'.

## 5. Anti-terrorism in Europe

This account would not have been complete without at least mentioning some of the specifics of European approaches to anti-terrorism. While normally compared to the US counterterrorism policy and practice, the EU where primary responsibility for anti-terrorism lies with the member-states is not exactly comparable with the United States. For instance, the UK and Spain historically practiced much stricter antiterrorist measures shaped by decades of fighting the IRA and ETA, respectively. With frequent intra-EU discussions and disagreements, any EU-wide approach to anti-terrorism can only be the very minimal common denominator at least and an added-value framework at best.

Still, there are some common features in European states' anti-terrorism policies and a developing EU dimension to anti-terrorism. Even if limited and slow to develop, this dimension is essential for effective anti-terrorism in Europe, given the unique characteristics of the European space that terrorists are have been able to

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<sup>24</sup> Osama Sayeed of the Muslim Association of Britain, quoted in Alam, F., 'Vision of a new Islam', *Observer* (4 Apr. 2004).

take advantage of: a combination of freedom of movement and permeability of borders inside the Schengen area with multiplicity of judicial and police systems. To this some would add relative reluctance of Europeans to enhance the powers of security agencies for the sake of preserving civil liberties.

The post-9/11 anti-terrorism campaign helped booster European states' national capacities on anti-terrorism that increased its general effectiveness and produced some positive results even in countering more traditional types of terrorism (for instance, it was only in the aftermath of 9/11 that Greece, after 25 years of fruitless efforts, was able to finish off its left-wing Revolutionary Organization 17 November).

The 9/11 events and their aftermath also helped booster European cooperation on anti-terrorism, especially in the realm of Home and Justice Affairs. In 2001, the EU established its own common definition of terrorism and agreed to common penalties on terrorism crimes; pursuant to the UNSC Res. 1390 the EU agreed on Common Position on enacting its own list of terrorist groups and individuals. At the end of 2005, under UK Presidency, the EU Counter-terrorism Strategy (with four priority goals – prevent, protect, pursue and respond) was finally agreed on by EU Justice and Interior Ministers and approved by the Council. The European Council has designated a Coordinator for counter-terrorism, Gijs de Vries (established a peer review process to evaluate domestic competencies of member-states and coordinate counter-terrorism mechanisms). Finally, the EU has even set up the solidarity clause in favor of countries struck by terrorism (Article 142 of the draft European Constitution).

The main specifics of European anti-terrorism approaches (as compared to the United States) are the following.

First, anti-terrorism is mainly viewed as a task for law enforcement and intelligence rather than the military. Center of gravity is not a military option, but *intelligence, law enforcement and judicial activities and cooperation*. ESDP is not at the core of EU anti-terrorism efforts (there was very limited increase in defence spending after 9/11, and only in the UK and France). It may be argued that this non-military focus is partly balanced and facilitated by Europe's other, NATO 'hat' and by the Alliance's attempts to get a 'counter-terrorist' profile for itself. Still, European non-military focus in the area of anti-terrorism is not just a matter of convenience or division of labour, but reflects some genuine European preferences and the way Europe grasps the specifics of this threat.

With operational *intelligence* best done at national level, the most valuable and sensitive information needed to dismantle networks and prevent attacks may be shared, but on a task-specific basis, rather than at 25 (it may for instance lead to simultaneous arrests in several European countries in a joint operation). It remains to be seen whether there should be more formal EU-wide mechanisms for sharing operational intelligence. Overall, Europe's intelligence cooperation with the United States, both prior to and after 9/11 (exemplified by arrest of Ahmed Resam on Canadian border even before 9/11), has been more balanced than in the military sphere.

In the area of *Justice and Home Affairs*, the European Arrest Warrant has been enacted; European Evidence Warrant is in progress; despite all the difficulties, information exchange has been enhanced; cooperation between members and Europol/Eurojust is growing (the two support 20 cross-border terrorism investigations). In terms of border protection, the European Border Agency was established and the Council agreed to include biometric features into national

passports and to improved security standards in ports and airports; Visa Information System is under discussion.

Second, most European approaches to anti-terrorism put a far greater emphasis on prevention (the first pillar of the EU anti-terrorism strategy is 'Prevent' which illustrates a strategic difference with the US-style 'war on terrorism'). Also, greater attention is paid to political, socio-economic, ideological and other causes of terrorism; and to the processes of radicalization and recruitment. Initiatives here range from analyzing how extremists use Internet, trying to limit radicalization in prisons to attempts to draw a direct link between Islamist terrorism and the issues of immigration, Muslim diasporas and integration, even if there are serious problems with the way this link is often drawn.

In sum, while Europeans suffer more attacks on their soil than the US, anti-terrorism in Europe is more balanced and more specifically tailored to anti-terrorism needs than the US approach. Anti-terrorism in Europe is also generally more oriented towards prevention and addressing the various types and combinations of causes of terrorism, primarily non-military in nature, and more measured, nuanced, and multi-sided. Most problems with the EU approach and antiterrorism cooperation within Europe are less related to antiterrorism than they are to general problems of the functioning of the European institutional bureaucracy. Still, Europe can make more, especially of its analytical and especially human intelligence capabilities (quite significant on terrorism), better information sharing (including better access to national/EU databases by competent authorities, with appropriate data protection rules, and of its more comprehensive conception of security).

While, as noted above, US citizens are much more at threat from terrorists abroad than they are at home (where they are, in fact, very secure, almost terrorism-prone), Europeans are no less, if not more, at threat at home than they are abroad. Against this background, critics, especially in the US, often argue that European states are slow to bolster domestic protection beyond law enforcement efforts (in areas such as transport security, emergency preparedness and response, critical infrastructure protection, protection against chemical or biological incidents). In contrast to law enforcement and intelligence, funding for these purposes is less visible and more scattered. But that may also partly reflect Europe's strategic choice that seems to be different from the US approach. While in terms of homeland security, the United States has launched wholesale reorganization of its domestic security and border protection institutions, the European states opted to work within existing institutional framework integrating anti-terrorism into it and making it more flexible to respond to wider range of security challenges and disasters, both natural and mad-made, with more limited personnel and funds (which is also a more economic system).

Over the last couple of years, there may have been some rapprochement between European and US approaches to certain aspects of anti-terrorism (such as the growing attention to prevention and preventive disruption as compared to post hoc coercion and enforcement, to the radicalization processes that may lead to terrorism etc.). On the one hand, limited reassessment of the US approach in favour of a slightly more nuanced one, at least on the part of the US intelligence community, came about, primarily as a result of US failures in the war on terrorism anywhere with the exception of the US homeland. On the other hand, high-profile jihadi terrorist attack in Europe in Madrid (March 2004) and in London (July 2005) have produced a tougher European approach on terrorism. Examples may range from introduction of tougher legislation and stepping up the powers of executive at

the expense of judiciary to the inclusion of entire Hamas rather than just its militant wing into the EU terrorist list.

### ***Anti-terrorism and human rights***

Still, on some issues, any further rapprochement between the US and its European allies on anti-terrorism is impeded by remaining differences. The area where the nuances are the greatest not just in terms of governmental policies and legal practices, but in term of broad public attitudes is the need for adequate protection of fundamental human rights in the fight against terrorism. These include the absolute prohibition of torture—a right that cannot be derogated from, even with diplomatic assurances—and the right to fair trial, both of which were violated by the US which is one of the main reasons for declining public support in Europe for the US war on terrorism (according to the Pew Center data, it fell below 50 per cent in Britain and France and reached the low of 16 per cent in Spain).

But in Europe itself, the erosion of human rights by government counterterrorism policies has been a well-developed tendency long before 9/11—e. g. over decades in relation to *Northern Ireland* (where violations in the name of security included torture, ill-treatment and unfair trials). Majority of people detained under anti-terrorism/emergency regulations in Europe over the previous decades have been subsequently released without charge (which is often the case with the Islamist terrorist suspects today).

Much of the current public debates on terrorism and human rights in Europe is about the discriminatory nature of certain measures undertaken in the name of anti-terrorism, in law and/or practice (even as there is little credible data available on the extent of this discrimination, as official collection of statistics and records on this issue is prohibited for the most part). The main problem with these debates is that many of the measures perceived as associated with antiterrorism and most commonly heavily—and fairly—criticized on human rights grounds in fact have little to do with counterterrorism as such.

Most heavily criticized security measures justified by authorities in the name of antiterrorism, in practice, may not be particularly well-tailored to the specific needs and priorities of counterterrorism in the genuine sense, let alone effective in meeting them. It is as true for discriminatory use of stop-and-search powers, privacy concerns over enhanced data retention and other vastly enhanced law enforcement and executive powers as for most kinds of profiling, computer-generated screening of the populations (*Rastefahrung*) etc. Massive violations of human rights, particularly during a large-scale public emergency following a terrorist attack, have more to do with the need for authorities to quell the population and preserve their public image, with crisis management rather than anti-terrorism as such. 'Core' activities most specific for anti-terrorism—scrupulous human and technical intelligence-gathering and analysis and preventive disruption or terrorist acts and networks—are carried out on a permanent basis, even in absence of any emergencies, and primarily not by police, but by counterintelligence/security services (which in most countries have the powers they need). They do involve serious legal and human rights problems and implications, but those are of a somewhat different nature than those that have received the bulk of public attention.

A more informed and subtle way to address these issues and a more relevant question to ask would, for instance, be: How to achieve a balance between counterintelligence capabilities and the judiciary? How to make counterterrorism

both functional and legal, how to balance the need, specific for counterterrorism, to conduct much of the intelligence-collection, analysis, targeted surveillance, preventive and preemptive activities on a permanent basis, even in absence of a terrorist incident itself and before (!) it occurs—and the need to conduct these activities in due process of law? A related problem is a barrier between intelligence and its use for judicial purposes involving the problem of secrecy of evidence.

## 6. Conclusions

Even as on September 12, 2001 European allies readily invoked NATO Article 5, by now it is clear that Europe—both individually and collectively—is not waging a ‘war on terrorism’. Rather, it tries to improve its capacity to prevent and counter terrorist threats of different types and at different levels, sometimes interrelated, with a growing emphasis on Islamist terrorism.

The rise of Islamist terrorism in Europe results from a combination of political impulses to react to international and domestic ‘injustices’ committed against the Muslims with socio-psychological factors of radicalization, re-interpreted through the prism of relatively simplified, quasi-religious ideology. This further underscores the erosion of a distinction between interior and exterior in terrorism/anti-terrorism, between homeland and external security – a trend that will continue and will be one of the new century’s security characteristics. In this context, broadening Europe’s strategic vision and especially European states’ individual or collective involvement in armed conflicts beyond its immediate environment (particularly in Muslim-populated Middle East, South or Southeast Asia) may somewhat increase the risk of terrorism for Europe, but not necessarily in the form of externally-driven attacks – it may give domestic, self-starter Islamist terrorists new motivations and justifications for their attacks.

While Islamist terrorism poses a considerable threat to Europe, this paper cautions against super-alarmist approach. It also questions whether, of all forms of violent threats, it is terrorism that will necessarily be the main manifestation of Muslim radicalization in Europe or, indeed, the main long-term security challenge for Europe in the 21st century. Terrorism—politically motivated asymmetrical attacks or threats to use force indiscriminately or specifically against civilians—is an extreme, highly politicized and very specific tactics which cannot be easily applied by each and every radicalized group and which is only effective under certain circumstances and conditions. While socio-political, quasi-religious radicalization, in combination with other factors, may provide grounds for such extremely asymmetrical form of political violence as terrorism, the link is not necessarily a binding one.

Socio-political radicalization of young Muslims in Europe may take many forms, does not necessarily lead to terrorism and may in fact be more likely to transform into other, more widespread and more mass-based forms of violence and protest actions than terrorism. They may range from further consolidation of ‘grey areas’ not controlled by authorities and a mix of delinquency, hate crime and vandalism to public disorders, revolts, riots, violent breakthroughs by migrants etc. Urban unrest in France in the Fall of 2005 that did not involve violent Islamists may be no less or more indicative of the type of threats to Europe from Muslim radicalization than even high-profile terrorist attacks on European capitals by self-generating Islamist cells with a transnational agenda.

