

# THE GLOBAL JIHADI THREAT

MODULE 5: ISLAM IN THE WEST: INTEGRATION, ISOLATION, RADICALIZATION

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Credits

Music

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The Global Jihadi Threat

Module 3: Islam in the West: Integration, Isolation, Radicalization

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Overview

This module will focus on the role of Islam in the West, some of the challenges relating to the integration of Muslims into Western society and the process of radicalization occurring in some Muslim communities in the West with the attendant threat of increased “home-grown” Jihadist terrorism.

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Birth of Islam

When Islam was founded by the Prophet Muhammad, no one could conceive of a day when Believers would have to live under “infidel” rule. Indeed, when the Prophet was initially unable to convince most of his fellow Meccan townsmen to embrace the faith of Allah, he preferred to emigrate with his followers rather than remain under non-Islamic rule. In 622, Muhammad and his companions moved to the town of Yathrib (renamed Madina al-Nabi – city of the prophet – or Medina for short) where he was able to set up a self-governing Islamic community. This emigration is known as the Hijra and constitutes the first year of the Islamic lunar calendar. In leaving Mecca for Medina, Muhammad was not only ensuring his own survival and that of his community (many Meccans believed that Muhammad’s new faith would be bad for business as Mecca was a center of pilgrimage for idol worshippers) but also establishing the principle that Muslims could not remain good Muslims so long as they lived under non-Muslim rule.

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### Expansion of Islam

As Islam expanded into a global empire, the expectation among Muslims was that it would conquer the entire world and thus bring the “one, true religion” to all of humanity. Islam’s geographic expansion, of course, eventually came to an end and it became necessary for Muslims to make a distinction between the lands of Islam and those existing outside of Islam. Accordingly, Muslim theologians developed the concept of Dar al-Islam (house or abode of Islam) and Dar al-Harb (house or abode of war). The Abode of Islam was those lands under Islamic rule, where peace was expected to reign and where non-Muslims could live as Dhimmis – second class, but protected, minorities. The Abode of War was those lands under non-Muslim rule, where Jihad was to be waged in order to bring them into the Dar al-Islam.

Gradually though, as the Islamic Empire reached its outer geographic limits and had to face the reality of political rule and the need to conduct diplomacy with outside powers (often in order to ward off threats to the territorial integrity of the Empire), concepts such as Dar al-Hudna (Abode or House of Calm), Dar al-Ahd (Abode or House of Truce) or Dar al-Sulh (Abode or House of Ceasefire), were created to reflect states of temporary peace between Islam and various non-Islamic states. All of these concepts allowed for Muslim states to live in relative harmony with non-Muslim ones (rather than having to be engaged in a perpetual active Jihad with the entire Dar al-Harb), but they did not directly address the issue of Muslim populations living under “infidel” rule.

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### Crisis within the Empire

In the early centuries of Islam, as the geographic scope of the Islamic Empire expanded, there was no real problem of Muslims coming under Infidel rule since the Dar al-Islam was growing and most of the people within the Abode of Islam were non-Muslims who were only gradually becoming Islamicized. However, after the setbacks of the Crusades, Spanish Reconquista and Mongol invasions, Muslims found themselves under non-Muslim rule and they faced an important theological dilemma regarding whether or not it was permissible for them to remain where they were now that the lands in which they lived had reverted from being part of the Abode of Islam to being part of the Abode of War.

At the time, most Islamic theologians called upon Muslims in such a position to follow the Prophet’s example during the Hijra and emigrate with their families to Islamic lands.

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### Demise of the Islamic Empire

Over time however, as Islamic lands came under European colonial domination or were wrested from Muslim control through indigenous nationalist movements (such as in the Ottoman-ruled Balkans at the turn of the Twentieth Century), most of the world's Muslims found themselves under non-Muslim rule. Clearly, in such a situation, performing a Hijra was no longer a realistic strategy. Eventually, after the weakening and eventual demise of the European empires and the gradual granting of independence to Islamic lands following the two World Wars, this problem seemed to be solved for most Muslims - though extremists questioned whether the new indigenous leaders had really established authentic Muslim states and viewed those newly-independent governments as lackeys of the West, and their members apostates, responsible for the weakening and corruption of Islamic societies.

As the European empires relinquished control over the Dar al-Islam however, a new theological problem for Muslims emerged as the Dar al-Islam began increasingly to come to Europe and other parts of the Western world through the vehicle of Muslim immigration.

With the experience Muslims had of non-Muslim rule in their own homelands and eventually with their experience as immigrants in non-Muslim homelands, their theologians, particularly those living in the West, developed additional distinctions to reflect this new reality.

The terms, Dar al-Amn (Abode or House of Safety) and Dar al-Shahada (Abode or House of Testimony) are of more recent vintage and designed to reflect the position of most Muslims in the West. The first term, Dar al-Amn, implies a land which, while not under Muslim rule, affords Muslims physical protection and allows them to practice their faith and way of life. The latter term, Dar al-Shahada, similarly implies a location where there is no religious coercion and Muslims are free to "bear witness" to their faith.

Interestingly enough, because most Muslim countries have state-appointed ulemma (religious scholars), imams (prayer leaders) and muftis or qadis (religious judges) who follow the government line on religion, some Muslims, including the Swiss-Muslim theologian, Tariq Ramadan, consider Western countries to be the only places where one can be free to be a true Muslim and practice the faith and way of life without any governmental interference or coercion. At the same time however, most of these people reject Western values and lifestyles and rail against them - seemingly oblivious to the obvious paradox in their thinking.

According to the extremist Sheikh Abu Hamza al-Masri, convicted in February 2006 in the UK for incitement to murder, Muslims in Europe should not undertake hijra to Muslim lands; rather, Muslims in the West should: "go into a Muslim environment, not a Muslim country, because in our countries we have Muslims but we do not have Islamic states... I

say to Muslims get out of these societies... I have to be the Moses in the house of the Pharaoh.” In other words, as the French scholar of Islam, Olivier Roy posits, the Dar al-Islam no longer exists as a discrete territory, but rather is an environment.<sup>1</sup> One could perhaps even go so far as to say that it is a state of mind.

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### Integration & Identity Transformation

Generally-speaking, first generation Muslim immigrants in the West in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (as opposed to some temporary “guest workers”) tended to desire to integrate within their new societies. The phenomenon of radicalization, while spurred on in some cases by first-generation immigrant Imams who often do not even speak the language of their host country, is more common among Muslim youth in Europe and America (particularly in Europe). These youth (usually second or third-generation immigrants, though some are first generation – particularly in countries without an established Muslim population), have often lost their links with the old country (sometimes including the ability to speak the native tongue) and thus are forced to engage in the creation of a new, universalized (and idealized) Islamic “culture.” Indeed, the very concept of a “universal Islamic culture,” is a product of life in the West. In the Islamic world, there is no “Islamic culture,” but rather a range of cultures corresponding with the different countries, ethnicities and traditions – all of which include an Islamic component.<sup>2</sup>

Young Muslims from a wide variety of national backgrounds in the West therefore, having largely lost their native cultures (Algerian, Pakistani, Palestinian, Egyptian, etc.), band together and adopt a substitute concept of an “Islamic culture” which they view as a purer form of Islam shorn of familial, tribal, local or national customs. Accordingly, the new generation of Western-born and educated Muslims do not want to be Pakistanis, Turks or Moroccans; they want to be Muslims first.<sup>3</sup>

As Roy explains the process of identity transformation:

“Passage to the West changes the nature of religiosity because it entails: 1) the dilution of the pristine culture, where religion was embedded in a given culture and society; 2) the absence of legitimate religious authorities who could define the norms of Islam, coupled

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<sup>1</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Umma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-25.

with a crisis of the transmission of knowledge; and 3) the impossibility of any form of legal, social or cultural coercion.”<sup>4</sup>

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### The Identity of Globalized Islam

It should be no surprise that the interpretation of Islam adopted by those who wrap themselves in the mantle of an “Islamic identity” is often a Salafist one. Indeed, this new concept of a universal Islamic nation, culture and identity lends itself well to the global Jihadi movements (whose members outside the West, tend also to be estranged from their national roots and often forgo their own national struggles in favor of the larger global Jihad, with which they identify much more readily).

One of the things that characterizes this “globalized” Islamic revivalism is its anti-intellectual stance and its highly personalized nature. To the adherents of this new, universal “Islamic identity,” faith is something that needs to be felt and enjoyed at the personal, individual level and not to be analyzed, interpreted and made into dogma, schools of jurisprudence and the like. Emotion is more important than logic, sensing something is more important than understanding it.<sup>5</sup> This approach, too, lends itself to the simplistic, literalist and unquestioning attitude of the Jihadists.

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### The Radicalization Process

An additional element that ties together radicalized Western Muslims is the collective anger in the face of real or imagined discrimination. Socio-economic discrimination is, of course, endemic in the West, as it is elsewhere; but the combination of a sense of alienation from Western values and a sense of economic marginalization and hopelessness can often form a highly combustible mix. This is not to say however, that all “home grown” Jihadist terrorists in the West come from disadvantaged backgrounds and that they were unable to learn the local language and otherwise integrate, acquire an acceptable education, etc. Many of them, such as the assassin of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh and the 2005

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 31.

London bombers were well-integrated into their host societies.<sup>6</sup> Effective terrorism, one must bear in mind, requires effective, and capable, terrorists at the middle and upper ranks of their organizations and the smarter, more educated and better integrated such an individual is, the more dangerous he or she will be.

Radicalization, it should be remembered, is not necessarily the result of one's real-life experience and the racial slights one has had to endure or the barriers that have been put in one's way. Radicalization could also be the product of imagined slights and barriers and failures attributed to society that are really the product of one's own inadequacies.

Solving problems of integration among Muslims is of course necessary in order to avoid the creation of Muslim ghettos (which already exist in much of Europe, such as in the some of the Parisian suburbs or banlieues) that may, and frequently have, become centers for lawlessness and "no-go zones" for the authorities. Moreover, from a counterterrorism perspective, such neighborhoods could potentially serve not only as breeding grounds for Jihadists, but also as logistical centers with bomb-making facilities and the like.

Effective integration helps reduce societal frictions, increases equality of opportunity for all, and is an integral part of the democratic ideal. There is therefore little question that it should be pursued as a policy goal on its own merits – the question, of course, is how and, as usual, "the devil is in the details." Moreover it should be born in mind that effective integration is not a panacea for terrorism. Effective integration of Muslims in Europe and the United States may reduce the attractiveness of Jihadism for some and reduce the logistical support base for Jihadis, but it will never eradicate the phenomenon as there will always be murderously-inclined extremists, whether poorly or well-integrated.

Nevertheless, a weakening of the radicalization process among some Muslim youth in the West will have an impact in weakening, perhaps even to a significant degree, the home-grown Jihadist threat. One obvious way to counteract radicalization is through the promotion of moderate, non-Islamist, non-Salafist and non-Jihadist, interpretations of Islam that can make their peace with the pluralistic and often largely secular nature of Western societies, accept integration with the larger society and eschew all forms of violence.

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 246.

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## Components of Isolation

One of the most significant problems, however, in promoting moderate interpretations of Islam among Muslim youth in the West (or in the Muslim world for that matter), is that moderate Muslim theologians and thinkers are invariably undermined by the concept of Al-wala Wal-bara.

The notion of Al-wala Wal-bara (Loyalty and Separation) is important to understand in grasping why contemporary moderate Muslim figures are generally ineffectual in guiding the “Islamic conversation” in a more temperate direction. This term refers to a state of siege during the early history of Islam and to subsequent historical losses such as the destruction of the Muslim Caliphate in Iberia (during the course of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries) and the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258. Al-wala Wal-bara implies a kind of “circling of the wagons” in Islam. In other words, the isolation of the Umma (Islamic community) from threatening outside forces that might bring about its disintegration. Muslims are thus called upon to only trust and befriend other Muslims and to maintain enmity and actively fight non-Muslims. This concept is based on the Quran, Sura 5:51:

O ye who believe!  
Take not the Jews  
And the Christians  
For your friends and protectors:  
They are but friends and protectors  
To each other. And he  
Amongst you that turns to them  
(For friendship) is of them.

Throughout the generations, Muslim extremists have used this concept to justify the maintenance of a strict social separation between Muslims and non-Muslims and to reject any attempts at ecumenicalism or social integration. They have also used this principle to justify killing other Muslims whom they suspected of close association with infidels.<sup>7</sup> This, alongside the claim that those Muslims were practicing Shirk (idolatry) through following a corrupted form of Islam full of Bid'a (innovation).

Extremists thus have a powerful theological argument against any attempts to move towards mutual understanding and cooperation between Muslim minorities and non-

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<sup>7</sup> Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 135.

Muslim majorities in the West and those Muslims who do advocate these things are often labeled apostates for not adhering to the principle of Al-wala Wal-bara.

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### Jihadist Recruitment and the West

As far as recruitment of young Western Muslims into terrorist cells is concerned, the Jihadist movements typically try to create a sense of comradeship, a kind of “brotherhood in Islam.” Jihadist cells attached to a particular sheikh will attempt to create strong social bonds between members while isolating them from the broader society. The lack of any recognized religious hierarchy within the Jihadist movement contributes to the decentralized, cellular structure of Jihadist groups in which anyone with some religious knowledge becomes a “sheikh” and can lead a group.

Once formed, these groups target three categories of potential recruits: 1) first-generation Muslims (in countries whose Islamic community is of very recent origin, 2) second and third-generation Muslims in countries with a longer-standing Muslim presence, and 3) converts to Islam.<sup>8</sup> Among all three groups, petty criminals have often been targeted both within and outside the prison systems.

The recruitment process itself involves a gradually increasing isolation of the recruit from family and friends, frequent meetings and outings with “brothers” designed to bond the recruit to other group members and intensive indoctrination focusing on the real and imagined “sins” of the West and the rewards of Paradise. Eventually, the recruit is typically sent abroad (before 9/11 this was to camps in Afghanistan) to undergo training. At each stage of the process, the recruit is made privy to increasingly sensitive information and achieves an enhanced status within the organization. The entire process typically takes approximately a year and a half.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Juan J.E. Stemmann, “Middle East Salafism’s Influence and Radicalization of Muslim Communities in Europe,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (September 2006): 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Brian M. Jenkins, *Unconquerable Nation: Knowing Our Enemy, Strengthening Ourselves* (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 2006), 86-91.

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### Challenges Facing Western Society

The challenge thus for Western societies is multifaceted. Western countries must decide how best to integrate Muslims in a manner that will encourage their acceptance of pluralism, democracy and moderate interpretations of Islam while at the same time allowing Muslims to give voice and form to their religious faith. It is not clear whether this should be done by banning religion from the public sphere and making it a purely private affair (along the lines of the French model), treating Muslims as part of an institutionalized collective (as is the practice in parts of Western Europe and Scandinavia), or recognizing Muslim religiosity as a manifestation of individualism and individual rights (as in the United States). In any case, it is clear that Western authorities need to gain a deeper understanding of Islam and Muslims and must maintain an intensive and ongoing engagement with it and them.

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### References

1. Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Umma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 158, 25, 33, 23-25, 151, 31.
2. Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 246.
3. Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 135.
4. Juan J.E. Stemann, "Middle East Salafism's Influence and Radicalization of Muslim Communities in Europe," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (September 2006): 8-9.
5. Brian M. Jenkins, *Unconquerable Nation: Knowing Our Enemy, Strengthening Ourselves* (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 2006), 86-91.

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### Closing Credits

Music