

The Afghan-Pakistani Islamist movement as a cause of instability in the Wider Middle East

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Abstract

The remarks presented in this article focus on the importance of Afghan-Pakistani Islam with the Salafist, Takfirist and internationalist holy war tendencies and linkages within the context of the Iraq-Lebanon axis. The subversive potential of the Islamist movement, combined with the export of Shi'ite Islamist extremism through Tehran, emerge as significant factors of instability in the region. Also, the tolerance exhibited by Washington, with regard to the formation and activity of extremist Salafist movements, to counterbalance Iran's export of Islamist subversive practices to the countries of the region (Lebanon, Iraq, Hamas-Gaza), is considered dangerous and requiring revision. Finally, a general strategy plan is proposed for establishing peace in the region, by removing the ideological footholds of the cores of the nationalist and internationalist Islamist movement.

Keywords: *Afghan-Pakistani Islam, Hanafism, Malikism, Shafi'ism, Hanbalism, Salafist movement, Takfirist movement, Waziristans, Jamaat-i-Islami party, Jamaat-i-Ulema-i-Islam, Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal, Deobandis, Wahabites, Al Qaeda.*

Introduction

This paper focuses on the strategic importance of preserving the political stability of Pakistan. Because of the actions of the internationalist Islamist movement, a possible disruption of stability in this country would result in the disruption of global stability, with harsh international consequences in the field of international security, as well as in the economic, political and social sectors.

It is therefore necessary to examine the internationalist Islamist movement in terms of specific areas within which it is (re)produced. Such areas are the Afghan-Pakistani borders and Iraq, as well as strategic points of dispersion, such as the Lebanon.

The area of the Afghan-Pakistani borders should be analysed very carefully, given that it constitutes a pocket producing human resources and supplying them to the internationalist Islamist movement, towards the Iraq-Lebanon axis. It is also a laboratory for testing the possibilities of co-operation between the Salafist Takfirist movement and various Al-Qaeda offshoots.

Attention should therefore turn to the examination of the possibilities for survival of the Musharraf regime in the face of the pressures applied by this internationalist movement. More specifically, we should examine the pressures applied by its Takfirist tendency. However, to succeed in this effort, we should briefly present the dynamics of the Salafist Takfirist movements

and its analogues on the Shiite extremist side, as expressed on Afghan territory. It is obvious that we should identify the intense radicalism of the Pashtoun Shiite movement, which Al-Qaeda, sooner or later, will try to exploit, by also operating from the Southern Afghan territories.

We also point to the connexion between Al-Qaeda and the other laboratory of the developing Takfirist movement, on Iraqi territory. The connexion renders this development possible and, consequently, extremely dangerous.

This paper would be incomplete if we failed to classify the forms of the modern Islamist movement in the area examined, with regard to ideology and terminology. This effort opens up a dialogue, which is considered useful in terms of scholarly communication of matters relevant to the modern Islamist movement and the security issues that arise from its activity.

A. Matters of terminology and ideological tendencies of the modern Islamist movement.

The main rôle for the production of the two main ideological tendencies, of warriors, included in the Islamist Sunni jihadist branch, is played by the Pakistani religious schools (the madrassas). The main ideological tendencies rely on the austere Sunni doctrine and the principle of fighting against the “Christian crusaders”, the “Zionists” and the “wicked heretical Shiites”. This is the beginning of the tendency for a “nationalist Islamist movement”, whose primary enemy are the three aforementioned groups and the Salafist - Takfirist Islamist movement, that is characterised by a highly internationalist orientation and that includes an enemy, as an absolute priority for confrontation, namely, the “tempted and treacherous Islamic regimes” which “alienated” themselves from the Prophet’s Word and the requirements of Shari’a. These regimes “disorient” and “infect” the Umma, through their existence and activity. The Pakistani religious schools, in their majority, adopt gentle wordings, bordering on disaffection with the West. But among these schools, there are important ones, whose influence increases after each and every clumsy act of Western manipulation. These, too, are expressed through the above-mentioned triptych, with some leakages also towards Salafist Takfirism.

A.1. Salafism, Takfir and their Ideological Combinations

The Salafists are, essentially, servants of the Wahabite interpretation of Islam, even if they deny it. They estimate that their wisdom exceeds all four traditional Law Schools of Islam -Hanafism, Malikism, Shafi’ism and Hanbalism- and, in this manner, they return to the fundamental principles and values of the Koran and the Sunnah. The founder of Wahabism was Mohammed Ibn Abdel Wahab (died in 1791). He was extremely scholastic, a strict interpreter of Islam and the spiritual leader of the Saud royal family.

According to Gilles Kepel (*Jihad*, Gallimard), they are divided into two sub-groups: (a) the “holy war Salafists”, whose leader is the Egyptian Mustafa Kamel, called - - “Abu Hamza” by his “jihadic” name, a fugitive in London and Imam of the temple in Finsbury Park until his arrest by the British authorities, in May 2004; and (b) the “Sheikhist Salafists”, who do not intervene in politics, but, on the contrary, follow to the letter the “fatwas” (i.e. the religious rulings) issued by the Sheikhs of Saudi Arabia. The Salafists denounce the Muslim Brotherhood and the mysticist Sufi as servants of “innovation” (*bid'a*), “polytheism” (*shirk*) and “pantheism” (*wadatoul woujoud*). The most radical among them throw “anathema” (*Takfir*) at their other brothers. This tendency of Salafism is connected with “Takfirism” and complements the internationalist tendency of Sunni Islamist extremism. Takfirism is an ancient religious-political conceptualisation of the Islamic world, that has resurfaced and crystallised into political practice, as a result of the defeat of the Arab world by the Israelis, during the 6-day war of 1967. It fosters the concept that the decline of the Umma was the result of the alienation of the Faithful from the orders of Islam and that therefore, any Muslim who loyally followed the religious requirements and did not apply the Shari'a to the letter is considered an “infidel” and that it is against this infidel that the Jihad of the true Faithful must turn. The latter, in addition, must abandon the social web of the decadent Islamic societies, throw “anathema” (*takfir*) at them, must create their own, autonomous cores, and turn their Holy War against all those “disoriented” former Muslims who have betrayed Islam and its values. In 1971, this tendency was reformulated as Islamist political ideology, by the Egyptian Shukri Mustafa¹.

The essence of Takfir, as defined by Shukri himself, as the scholar of his organisation, the Jama'ah al-Muslimeen (League of the Faithful), is based on aphorism and the anathematic renouncing of every Muslim “*kafir*”, i.e. serious and continuous sinner, not respecting the principles and the orders of the Shari'a. The members of the Jama'ah al-Muslimeen consider themselves to be the only true Faithful².

Thus, in the 1970s, many small Takfirist cores appeared throughout the Arab world and, during the 1980s, were to be found alongside the Mudjahedin of Afghanistan, during the Afghani resistance against the Soviets. Important personalities, later renowned executives of Al Qaeda (القاعدة), like Ayman al-Zawahiri and the Uzbek Tahir Yuldashev and Sheikh Essa, emerged as committed and ideologically formed members of the Takfirist movement. In Iraq, Takfirism was represented by one of the most renowned members of Al-Qaeda, the person responsible for the organisation in this country, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, murdered on 7 June 2007.

These personalities have spread Takfirism to a significant number of medium- and lower-ranking members of Al Qaeda, who were not in any way related to this idea during the 1990s. However, since 2003, this ideological approach has been assimilating the “disoriented” Muslim leaders -who “alienated themselves from the Islamic principles and the Shari'a and forgot the ecumenical call of Islam for the internationalisation of the Umma”- with

all that is hateful in Western and, more specifically, Anglo-American militarism. Thus, they even turned against the modest Islamists of the two Waziristans, as well as, more reasonably, against President Musharraf.

However, the Messianism of Takfirism must not be confused with the nationalism that characterises most parts of the Pakistani, as well as of the Afghani, Islamist movement and, naturally, must not lead the political élite of the West to Procrustean conclusions that may provoke immense explosions.

Yet another important element of Takfirism, which is characterised by the utmost importance geostrategically, is the everlasting hatred of the Takfirists for the Shi'a. Even the Sunni Taliban nationalist movement, with its ideological principles formed before 1996, despised the Iranian Shi'a and considered it to be a more significant perversion, even when compared to the "Western crusaders" and their "Zionist allies". Hence, the tolerance of Iran for the US operations against Al-Qaeda. However, things have evolved since then and US foreign policy has, on many occasions, exhibited tolerance against the Sunni Salafists and, therefore, the Takfirists, because Iran's nuclear programme constituted the maximum possible danger for the security of the region. These concerns were supplemented by the manipulation of the Lebanon's Hezbollah by Tehran and by the controversial –at least in military terms- conflict between the Israeli armed forces and Hezbollah, which created new causes of instability in the region. Also, the concerns about a possible hegemonic role of a nuclear weapons-equipped Iran in the Greater Middle East, is shared by the Wahabi regimes of the Gulf, led by Saudi Arabia. The whole situation is extremely complex, and it is highly probable that Saudi Arabia finances Salafist Takfirist movements, estimating that in this way it reduces Tehran's geostrategic power in the Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Also, there is the serious hypothesis that Washington tends to "disregard" these activities, because it probably considers them as complementing its anti-Iranian policy in the Greater Middle East. It is a confused situation with a strong likelihood of creating new Islamist Frankensteins, new Islamist Golems, which will ultimately be outside the control of any Western or Western-oriented power. It is all about games replayed, and unfortunately lost but, which alas, did not leave to their players, any experience.

A.2. The spectrum of new concepts of the Islamist internationalist phenomenon

With the present state of affairs, it is noticed that the game of apprentice magicians is being supplemented by the use of new terminology on Salafist movements and the new concepts that define them.

Therefore, in order to comprehend the meaning and the use of the new definitions, we should, in my opinion, clarify the following:

(a) one can be a Salafist, i.e. an internationalist Islamist and exercise the jihad throughout the Umma, without however being Takfirist, in other words, not fighting the jihad against the government of one's country, even if

considered infidel;

(b) one can be a Salafist and a Takfirist, in other words fight the Jihad against the “infidel” government of one’s own country;

(c) one can be an Islamist and aim at the imposition of the Shari’a in his country, without however being Salafist or Takfirist;

(d) one can be a member of the Taliban, and be simply an Islamist. This was the case with the Taliban of Afghanistan, until 1996;

(e) one can belong to the Taliban and be a Salafist, without being a Takfirist, but fight as a Mudjahid in any part of the world to which one is sent by the Sheikh. This is mainly the case with Al Qaeda’s warriors; and

(f) one can belong to the Taliban, while being a Salafist Takfirist and exercising armed Jihad, first in one’s country and then in the world, or at the same time. This, again, would depend on the orders of the Sheikh.

Consequently, based on the new terminology promoted by the US State Department and the Department of Defense, the Salafists are called “Jihadists” and “extremists”, so as to be distinguished from the others, who may perhaps be Islamists, but do not resort, on most occasions, to armed Jihad. It is true that it is a difficult situation for the US, and Washington has resorted to this change of terminology in order to “raise the forearm”; otherwise it risks being considered as opposing the whole -more or less- of that part of the Islamic world that lies between discontent and radicalisation, to the detriment of its best interests. What is the interesting at this point is the attempt to define and draw new boundaries according to the standards of international Islamic radicalism; and this time, the attempt to decide is being shared between “nationalist extremists” (or, at best, “radicalists”) and “internationalist extremists”; rather than between real moderates and extremists. It seems, however, that the standards have become very high...

B. The Pakistani Islam

The US support for the local tribal, Sunni radicalist element that aimed to form a reliable and potent resistance to the Soviets in 1978-79, and subsequently against the Taliban during the post-1995 period, have boosted radical Sunnism, and, in particular, the Salafist tendencies. Given, however, the compulsory co-existence of Sunnis and Shiites, who account for 75 percent of the total population in Pakistan, the tension between Sunnis and Shiites was more or less expected. Consequently, these tensions undermine the security climate in the country, and present a risk of future instability in the region.

The above-mentioned particularities have, to date, prevented Islam from functioning as a gluing factor in Pakistan's ethnic composition. The Pakistani ethnic mosaic, after 1971, is as follows: The Pundjabis account for 56 percent of the total population, outnumbering the Sindhis (17 percent), the Pashtouns (16 percent) and the Baluchis (3 percent), as well as to the tribal linguistic-ethnic pockets of the northern and north-western areas, which cumulatively

account for the remaining 8 percent.

The Pundjabis, relying on their numeric superiority, apply intense pressure on the public sector, the parliament and the water resource management sector, the latter being of the utmost importance to the national economy. The Sindhis and the Baluchis react openly to this oppression, followed by the Mokhadjir in Karachi. If we study the geographical distribution of these ethnic pockets, we can easily observe their dispersion, on both sides of the Pakistani border: either towards Afghanistan and Iran (in the case of the Baluchis and the Pashtouns), or towards India (in the case of the Pundjabis and the Sindhis). The Indus River is, more or less, a linguistic and ethnic borderline between them. Pakistan is still territorially determined by the borders constructs of the Colonial Era³.

B1. The hearths of the Pakistani Islamist movement and the Pakistani operational base of the nationalist Islamist movement.

The border of Pakistan with India was determined by the colonially inspired “Radcliffe Line” of 1947⁴, which left the dispute over Kashmir unresolved. There, native guerrillas enter the Indian side from the Pakistani side of the control line (LOC), usually supported by artillery fire. These guerrillas fight against the Indian régime. The “Line” is also the point of entry for Mudjahedin, internationalist-type, Islamist movements, based in Pakistan and closely related to Al Qaeda.

Also, the ties of the Pakistani secret services, created between 1979 and 1988, with Sunni extremist Islam, are so deep, psychologically, spiritually, culturally and ideologically, that they could not be broken easily after the end of the Afghanistan war (1988). The war, and the spirit of cordiality that developed has left behind strong ties between both sides. The strength of these ties is also reinforced by the tribal nature of Pakistani society. Social tribalism enhances pyramid-like ties and automatically incorporates persons that in any other case, or Western social structure, would remain unaffected. The Pakistani government, and its secret services, must therefore work very attentively in this respect.

B.2. The Agreement of 5 September 2006 between Islamabad and the Taliban of the NW provinces and its consequences on the Afghan-Pakistani Islamist movement

Between 2003 and 2006, Al Qaeda had already created its bases in the northwestern provinces of Afghanistan, concentrated in Northern and Southern Waziristan, consisting of some forty thousand experienced warriors, Uzbeks, Chechens and Arabs, upsetting the Taliban administration of Afghanistan, which had been losing warriors, who preferred to fight the Pakistani government in the tribal zone (Pakistan), instead of reinforcing the Afghani Resistance⁵. Of course, from a strategic viewpoint, these internationalist aims of Al Qaeda completely disoriented the Islamist

movement in Afghanistan.

Also, the effort of both Al Qaeda and its supporters, to establish Islamic states (Emirates) in Northern and Southern Waziristan (in the North of Pakistan) has created tensions between Islamabad and the Taliban of the region, on the one hand, and Al-Qaeda, on the other⁶.

Consequently, the Taliban administration in Afghanistan reacted, in an effort to safeguard the planned attack against the NATO forces in Afghanistan, during the spring of 2006. This priority made the leader (in hiding) of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammed Omar,⁷ send the –now late-Mullah Dadullah⁸ as his envoy to persuade the Pakistani Taliban of Waziristan and the local factions of Al-Qaeda to focus on this anti-NATO objective, and not to use forces elsewhere.

This intervention by Dadullah was catalytic and led to the signing of the Agreement of 5 September 2006 between the Pakistani Armed Forces and the Taliban of the Tribal Zone. Naturally, this agreement provides for the compulsory withdrawal of all "foreign" warriors from the region.

However, the ceasefire has allowed the Pakistani secret services to promote their already strong ties with the leaders of the Taliban of the two Waziristans. These leaders demanded from the Pakistani government, and so they received, large amounts of weapons, and significant amounts of money, as well as flattering invitations by Musharraf's government in Islamabad.

Today, it is clear that relations between the Pakistani military and Islamabad's special services, on the one hand, and conservative political Islam and the Salafist movement, on the other, constitute neither the simplest nor the clearest situation one can think of. Musharraf, having broken apart –and practically eliminated– the parliamentary opposition during the 2002 election (i.e. the Muslim League of Mr. Nawaz Sharif and Mrs. Benazir Bhutto's Peoples Party) allowed, perhaps beyond the point he had planned, the reinforcement of the political influence of the Islamists of Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (Alliance for Action)– which he favoured– in the political scenery of his country. It must however be noted that the components of the Alliance are nowadays clearly found in the régime's opposition.

This is because, on the one hand, the Jamaat-i-Islami party of Mr. Qazi Hussain Ahmad remains determined over the issue of Kashmir, while the Jamaat-i-Ulema-i-Islami party of Mr. Rahman has adopted a more flexible stand towards the issue, nevertheless preserving intact its relations with the Taliban. However, today the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal party governs the north-western provinces, and also participates, with the pro-regime forces of the Muslim League, in the alliance governing Baluchistan.

According to Gérard Chaliand⁹, it is important to note that Al Qaeda's foreign warriors number only around one thousand, mainly Uzbeks, Chechens and Uighurs¹⁰. Since March 2007, these "foreign" Al Qaeda Mujahedins have been expelled by the warlord Nazir, and are hiding somewhere in the area of N. Waziristan, the tribal zone in the Pakistani North and the Afghan Tora Bora cave complex. He estimates that the terrorist

training camps in the area have been eliminated and that the very small number of newly attracted warriors are subjected to a training of only a very few days, mainly in explosives, in the area of the radical Madrassas. He also estimates that the manpower core of Al Qaeda has been mainly eliminated¹¹. As for the peripheral branches of the movement, Chaliand contends that they have been neutralised since 2006. According to the French analyst, Al Qaeda is managed only by the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri and approximately ten assistants of his, including the Libyan Abu Leith, and is based in the tribal zone and the nearby borderline Afghan area. Still according to Chaliand, their method consists of creating small, autonomous holy war cores, characterised by a lesser degree of professionalism, and are formed basically for reasons of mimesis. Chaliand thinks that Ben Laden is probably already dead.

It is not, however, our belief that the issue of the Islamist holy war internationalist movement can be resolved with the death of Ben Laden. I find that Chaliand's approach is quite figure-focused and underestimates the ideological fervour of Islamic radicalism. Moreover, I do not think it is easy to complete the cleansing operations in the area of the Waziristans and the tribal zone, something that would resolve the problem. This holds particularly true in this case, where the single death of a civilian or even the death of a dispassionate Muslim by American or Pakistani troops is a source of argument for the extremist Takfirists and, furthermore, increases the attractiveness of their case for the locals. What is more, the small number of foreign warriors is not negligible, when it comes to its quality aspects, if one takes into account the strong organisation and the degree of loyalty and fanaticism of these warriors. The quality aspects relate to: (a) the recruitment and initiation to Takfirism of Pashtouns of the region; and (b) the obstacles to the more dispassionate nationalist Islamists, in comprehending the dead-end of continuous conflicts and in discussing with the Pakistani government. Either this government is headed by President Musharraf, or by someone else, less exposed to charges of "compliance" and "co-operation with the conqueror".

On the other hand, it is not easy for the US to restrict the uncontrolled activity of the Islamist internationalist Mudjahedin based on Pakistani soil, operating against India's Kashmir and intervening inside India's territory. An example is the suicide attack of 1 October 2001 against the Parliament of Srinagar, with a death toll of 35, in India's Kashmir. The activity of these Mudjahedins has also been expanded, on the basis of a Takfirist ideology, into Pakistani territory. A typical example of this Takfirist expansion is the recent conflict, of March 2007, at the Jamia Hafsa madrassa, at the Lal Masjid complex in Islamabad, with a death toll of about a hundred persons. It is clear that the instigators of this conflict aim to impose a Taliban-type Shari'a in Islamabad.

Consequently, we should accept that Pakistani Kashmir, through the transfusion of warriors into its territory from all the above-mentioned parties and their holy war wings, functions as a power projector, and as a conveyor belt transferring the extremist Islamist movement, of Pakistani origin, and

that it maintains close ties with the internationalist Islamist movement and, therefore, with Al-Qaeda.

We should also emphasise Islamist criticism – criticism with political status- against Musharraf's regime. In particular, the most important religious party of Pakistan, Jamaat-i-Islami, has at the core of its programme the transformation of the regime into a theocratic state, in order to be able to function as a prime mover of Umma.

However, this political platform, even though it originates from an Islamist party that is both conservative and austere, even though it relies on political principles, is a close relative of the internationalist discourse of Al-Qaeda, which it allows to appear as the power that is both substantial and more efficient. It is understood that some will consider such tactics to be compulsory, so as to prevent the real extremist Salafists from speculating at the expense of this political party, both at the level of the electorate and in society. But it must be remarked, at this point, perhaps with some oriental spirit, that "a dog that barks and hunts his tail, sometimes gets angry... and then bites, and bites first his own tail". As an example, we could consider possible a civil war between the supporters of the nation-state, on the one hand, and the servants of a radical pan-Islamism, on the other. In Pakistan, traces of such conditions are readily found, and are becoming more and more alarming.

A "perfect" explosive mixture of this type is the co-operation between the branches of Deobandis and Wahabites, given the close ties which their supporters maintain with the pro-Taliban Pashtouns¹² on the Afghan-Pakistani border. This tendency is also expressed by the abovementioned fanatic anti-Shiite Islamist party, Jamaat-i-Ulema-i-Islam.

These two tendencies, which are the cause of inevitable tensions, are all but welcomed by the Taliban leadership of the north-western provinces, since they understand their mistake in having accepted, heartily, the "Egyptian"¹³ and other "foreign" warriors of Al-Qaeda that rushed into the region, the day after the Anglo-American intervention in Iraq, in 2003.

The strategy of the foreign warriors, inspired by the principles of Takfir¹⁴, is to attack primarily the "treasonous" Islamic governments that co-operate with the Americans, hence to the detriment of Musharraf, and, second, the internationalist-like expansion of Islamist revolution throughout the Umma. This strategy is already being implemented in Iraq, through the infiltration of the country by Al-Qaeda¹⁵.

In conclusion, it can be said that there is a possibility, as well as a serious probability, of the creation of a huge gap between the internationalist and the "patriotic" Islamist tendencies. In other words, this would be a deep gap between the Salafist Takfirist movement and the Islamist movement, which aims only to establish Shari'a on the territory of the Umma that the movement considers its own, i.e. the region and the populations which, in Western political terms, bear the characteristics of a state entity. It is also very important to note the strong opposition between the two above-mentioned Sunni Islamist ideotypes and their hated Shiite Islamist

movement.

What is more important, however, is that the practice of applying “Takfir” is exercised by non-state elements and that it is a practice imported from abroad. In Western terms, it is therefore a paradoxical phenomenon of an imported “revolutionary patriotism” signed by the Takfir, e.g. of the Saudis, the Chechens, the Egyptian, and other Mudjahedins, on the territory, e.g. of Iraq, and against the “traitor government of Baghdad”. Of course, this is a paradox only in Western terms, given that patriotism is in this context closely related to the specific geographical area and the population in question. It should be noted, however, that Islam does not accept “fragment states”, which it considers to be an utmost treason of the Shari’a and the Faith of Islam. The Umma is one, international and indivisible. In Islamist terms, the “nation of Islam is not limited to ‘artificial state frontiers’”. The frontiers of Islam match the “frontiers of Faith”.

C. Afghanistan

The current situation in Afghanistan is indeed a source of concern. NATO’s inability to enforce law and order and some degree of security in the country is well known and makes the risk of wider destabilisation in the area [Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Gaza] more than obvious. The basic destabilising factor, in the case of Afghanistan, is, once more, to be found in the Islamist movement of Pashtoun origin, that interconnects the extremist forces around the Afghan-Pakistani border, linking them also to Iran.

This linkage with Iran is fostered by the Shiite branches of the Islamist Movement of the Pashtouns and, given the developments in Iraq and the tense Irano-American relations, there is a serious risk that the internationalist Islamist movement, under the umbrella of Al Qaeda or any other analogous internationalist Islamic organisation, might exploit – temporarily- the overall dynamics of these Afghani movements (both Sunni and Shiite). The complexity of the Islamist movement on the Afghan-Pakistani border and the rôle of the Pakistani north-western provinces (Northern, Southern Waziristan and the Tribal Zone) are characterised by two fundamental ideological components: (a) the nationalist Islamist approach, relevant to the greater part of the Taliban Afghani and Pakistani resistance; and (b) Takfirism, relevant to a lesser extent to the Taliban Islamist movement within the territory of Afghanistan and Pakistan and to most parts of Al Qaeda on the territory of these two countries.

In conclusion, it can be said that Afghanistan can function as a laboratory of Al Qaeda for homogenising the internationalist Islamist movement with Takfirist characteristics. This possibility is based on the violent radicalism of the Pashtoun Shiite movement, which Al Qaeda will sooner or later try to exploit. The only way to achieve this objective is to temporarily camouflage Al Qaeda’s intense Salafistic characteristics, so as to

enable the integration of the Pashtoun Shiite movement, under its auspices. The connexion of Al-Qaeda with the other laboratory of the developing Takfirist movement in Iraq, makes this development possible and, consequently, extremely dangerous.

D. The Iraqi Islamist Movement

Al Qaeda began the dispatch of warriors, from the two Waziristans towards Iraq, immediately after the American intervention of 2003. This stream was accelerated, because of its strategic and ideological contrast to the Taliban. What is also worth noting is an erroneous American strategy. As soon as Paul Bremer¹⁶ was appointed Director of Reconstruction in Iraq, he dissolved all the security forces that had existed since the era of Saddam Hussein. Despite the objections raised by the local anti-Saddam groups, like the Association of Muslim Scholars, which distinguished serious risks in this method, he insisted in finishing it. The first risk was the unguarded borders, which allowed the inflow of all kinds of Islamist extremist warriors through the territory of Iran and Syria¹⁷. It is within in this very context that Iraqi territory was also infiltrated by elements of Al Qaeda. Mohammed Bashar al-Faidi, representing the Iraqi Association of Muslim Scholars, estimates that “this policy by Bremer was consciously developed and aimed to attract the warriors and the members of Al Qaeda to Iraq, where he considered it would be easier for the Anglo-American forces to exterminate or capture them, rather than on Afghani or Waziristan territory¹⁸”. Besides, President Bush himself, answering a question posed to him on 2 July 2003, as to whether he considered that Al Qaeda would exploit the war in Iraq to concentrate its forces there, replied: “If they want to attack us there, I tell them to come. We have the way to deal with them¹⁹”. Naturally, the local Islamist forces of resistance in Iraq do not wish to cede the Islamist resistance movement to the internationalist Takfirist tendencies or even to the leadership of Al Qaeda. It is characteristic that in April 2007, Al-Jazeera broadcast a declaration made by Ibrahim al-Shammari, spokesman of the Islamic Army in Iraq, related to the discontinuation of relations between his organisation and Al Qaeda. What is more, as he stated, “the differences, in terms of targets, between the two organisations are such and so deep, that almost always it is preferable to negotiate with the United States than with Al Qaeda²⁰. The declarations of Mohammed Bashar al-Faidi point in the same direction, also using particularly harsh words for Al Qaeda's foreigners: "All the foreign elements that infiltrated the undisciplined civil guards are a curse for resistance. They fight for the control of Iraq, so as to fulfil their own plans. Al Qaeda has infiltrated [NB: the Iranian movement of Islamist resistance] through the secret services, not taking into consideration the various religious divergences such as Takfirism. In the end, however, the Iraqi people will pay for the results of these situations”. However, the Iraqi Ulema does not ignore the Iranian intervention and states “... the same also holds true for the Iranian

secret services that support and promote the Shiite civil guards. They, too, want to dominate Southern Iraq and, to date, have managed to assassinate some thirty Shiite Sheikhs [NB: dissidents]. The Sheikhs of the South want to unite with the Iraqi resistance movement against the conqueror, but the civil guards that are supported by Iran try to obstruct them”²¹. Consequently, the situation, as is now being created within the framework of the Islamist movement in Iraq, has much in common with the situation created within the framework of the corresponding Afghani and Pakistani movement.

Also in this case, there is obvious confrontation and differentiation between the nationalist resistance Islamist movements (Afghani: Taliban, Pakistani: Taliban and Sunni nationalist tendencies; and Iraqi: Sunni and Shiite tendencies, the latter, in addition subject to the influences of Tehran) and the nationalist Takfirist movements that are subject to the control of Al-Qaeda through *Tanzim al-Qaeda fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*, an organisation led by Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi. Its web address is <http://almagribi.blogspot.com/> and, as is apparent from its characteristics (ISP: Google Inc., Mountain View, CA, USA) its information is hosted in the USA²².

One thing is certain, however. It is the fact that the Salafist Takfirist organisations, offshoots of Al Qaeda, are failing to impose themselves on the local nationalist Shiite radical organisations. However, these Al Qaeda offshoots are fully aware of the communication and mass media game. In this context, many operations of a significant resistance spectrum in Iraq are attributed by the mass media to Al Qaeda, even though they do not belong to it. And this is due to the delay by the Iraqi nationalist resistance organisations in claiming the attacks, and to their lack of experience in this domain. Still, according to Mohammed Bashar al-Faidi: “Even James Baker²³ acknowledges that Al Qaeda is a humble gear in the overall mechanism of the Iraqi resistance. We nowadays pay the heavy cost of accepting Al Qaeda in our organisation, open heartedly²⁴”. It is, however, concluded that this gap, created between Al Qaeda and the other forces of resistance in Iraq can easily lead to some sort of negotiation with the US, a negotiation that would render acceptable, for Washington, the participation of representatives of the Sunni resistance groups in a new government in Baghdad, with the exchange being the withdrawal of all “foreign” nationalist Islamists of Al-Qaeda from Iraq.

E. The Lebanon

In the Lebanon, a new situation must be confronted, which could lead to the dissolution of the country. On the one hand, there is a significant issue, that of the Hezbollah attempt to change the constitution and establish a “really democratic” participation of the Shiite ethnic-religious element in the government of the Lebanon. On the other hand, another issue has recently emerged: that of Fatah-al-Islam, at the Palestinian refugee camp in Nahr al-Umar.

In this case, it is appropriate to identify the Salafist element, which is composed, in terms of human resources, of “foreign” warriors. These warriors arrived at the camp during September-October 2006, after the asymmetrical conflict between Israel’s armed forces and Hezbollah, in July and August of 2006. None of these warriors had a family, or at least some relatives living in this camp. This fact significantly facilitated their unreasoned actions. They are Saudis, Pakistanis, Iraqis, Tunisians, etc. Certainly, the fact that the outcome of the conflict between the Mudjahedin the Lebanese army, has turned against the former, means that any “outside” assistance to the warriors of the Fatah-al-Islam was not sufficient. This would not be the case, if Hezbollah had any sort of contact with the internationalist Takfirist movement. In any case, we should be both attentive and alert.

F. The West’s dangerous games with the Islamist movement

Prominent international journalists, like Seymour Hersh²⁵ and David Samuels²⁶, have officially denounced this type of dangerous policy. In the case of the Lebanon, Hersh denounces the financing of the Salafist powers in the country, like Fatah al-Islam by Saudi Arabia and, possibly by indirect means, even by the Hariri government.

Similar views on to America’s rôle, accompanied by strong criticism for Washington, are given by Ralf Peters²⁷, retired American colonel, since the winter of 2004, in an official publication of the US armed forces, the US Army War Collage Quarterly *Parameters*. Peter’s stance, as expressed in the publication, was similar, with regard to the US involvement in Afghanistan, to that against the then USSR²⁸.

It must be noted that ideologically and politically, Hersh and Samuels are diametrically opposed to the conservative retired colonel Ralph Peters. They agree, though, with one another, all three of them validly expressing their ideological and political views in the US. In our view, an efficient diplomatic approach between Syria and the US would better serve the case of Hezbollah’s taming, than the dangerous oriental games of the “my-enemy’s-enemy-is-my-friend” type. Such practices have been tested on many occasions in the region and have proven to be unsuccessful and to create “Franksteins”.

Conclusions

The following actions are considered necessary, for the Quartet, in order to eradicate the Islamist subversive danger in the area of the Eastern Mediterranean:

(a) positive political developments, at a first stage, regarding the Palestinian issue. Its achievement would remove a significant moral basis from Hamas, as well as from the international Islamist movement that is

active in the region. In case that the government of Abu Mazem cannot deliver, other personalities of the Palestinian side, might also prove helpful in this respect. Naming such persons in an article such as this, would not help the situation at all.

(b) co-operation between the Musharraf regime and its parliamentary opposition is urgently required. The organisation of elections in Pakistan and the gradual return to democratic stability would assist in the governmental control of religious schools and the creation of new ones, not urging their students to extremism. This can only be achieved by a government accepted by Pakistani society.

(c) co-operation between a democratic Islamabad with India's government so as to settle the issue in Kashmir is yet another high-priority matter.

(d) the preservation of US forces in Iraq, until the results of the above-mentioned actions are clear, is indeed necessary. Their withdrawal would be frivolous, demagogic and erroneous for the cause of peace and security in the region. It is, for this reason, necessary to persuade US political circles fostering such a withdrawal, that, in so doing, they will not serve the interests of peace and security in the region. The aim for Iraq should be a fair distribution of its oil and gas resources, in the context of a lax confederation of autonomous federal states. The poorest, in terms of energy reserves, the Sanjak of Baghdad, should be constitutionally protected and supported, on a permanent annual basis, by the Sanjaks of Mosul (North) and Basra (South).

(e) the US-Syria dialogue must be consolidated and given essence. Damascus should cease all its involvement in the destabilising activities of the internationalist holy war movement in the region, and emerge as a power of Western mentality, security and stability. The post-Ba'ath modernisation of Damascus, both gradual and cautious, would allow for this positive evolution of the régime. And this is indeed a cause that must be encouraged by the West. To summarise: Damascus should not, under any circumstances, be left to the Salafists of the Muslim Brotherhood or to Hezbollah, of Iranian inspiration. It is my belief that Greece's support for this dialogue could be significant, given that it is a country with traditionally excellent relations with the Arab world, the US and Israel. Moreover, it is the only country in the south-eastern Mediterranean that has been both an EU member-state and a NATO member 27 and 58 years respectively.

(f) It is absolutely necessary that the Western experimentation ceases now, in terms of tolerating the formation of "good Salafist Golems" which, ultimately, turn against the West in a most destructive manner. We should not forget the legend of the Rabbi of Prague, Lev Ben Bezalel. It must be made clear that the newly acquired Takfirist internationalist concept of the holy Islamic war is the best service to Al-Qaeda and the origin of great troubles for the area of the Greater Middle East. This phenomenon was not observed during the late Colonial period, just as it was not observed, at least not on this side or ideologically, during the first half of the 20th century. For it is essentially new.

Endnotes

1. Shukri was born in Assiut, Egypt and was imprisoned by Nasser. He worked zealously and pushed to the limit the concepts and the interpretations of Islam and Islamic duty of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), a renowned scholar of Islamic radicalism and spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during the 1950s and the 1960s.
2. The movement assassinated, in 1977, the Egyptian Minister of Religious Affairs Sheikh Dahabi, and was contained after the arrest and hanging of Shukri by the Egyptian authorities. According to Gilles Kepel, GIA of Algeria had already joined Takfirism.
3. In particular, the disputed borders with Afghanistan constitute the so-called "Durand Line", demarcating the border since 1893 and representing the extreme limit of the British domination during the period of the "Great Game" that brought the Russian Empire into confrontation with the Western Powers on the borders of Central Asia and the Indian Ocean, during the 19th cent. It is a riddled borderline, allowing the smuggling of weapons and narcotics and the trespassing of Mudjahedin refugees (after 1980) and Taliban (since 1995).
4. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, (1899-1977), 1st Viscount Radcliffe, British lawyer, famous for drafting the borderline between India and Pakistan in 1947, under the guidance of Sir Archibald Percival Wavell (1883-1950), 1st Earl Wavell, British field marshal and Commander of the British Army forces in the Middle East during WWII.
5. Indeed, the developments were more intense: the Takfiri ideologist Uzbek warlord Tahir Yuldashev, based in North Waziristan, issued a Holy Fatwa ordering exactly this strategic priority. The polemarchs of the Taliban administration in Waziristan, as well as Sadiq Noor, issued analogous orders.
6. Syed Salem Shahzad, "Al-Qaida contre les Talibans", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, juillet 2007, p. 12.
7. Chief of the Taliban in Afghanistan and, *de facto*, head of state, from 1996 to 2001. Of Pashtoun origin.
8. One of the most competent warlords-commanders of the front in NW Afghanistan. Killed on 13 May 2007, during a conflict with the Afghan armed forces in Helmond, province of S. Afghanistan. He participated in the six-member Executive Council and was the military leader of the Taliban and a close collaborator of the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, still at large.
9. G. Chaliand, "Afghanistan: Ben Laden est probablement mort", *Le Figaro Magazine*, available at: lefigaro.fr/magazine/20070713.MAG000000300_ben_laden_est_probablement_mort.html, 13 juillet 2007 [access date: 8 August 2007].
10. Populations of Turkish origin, coming mainly from the Chinese province of Xinyang.
11. E.g. Mohammed Atef, former second-in-command of the organisation in Afghanistan, who was killed in November, 2001 during an air attack in Kabul, Khalid Cheikh Mohammed, head of operations, Ramzi Ben al-Shib, head of supplies and logistics and Zin Abidine Abou al-Zoubeida, responsible for recruitment, who were arrested in Pakistan between 2002 and 2003.
12. Imtiaz Alam *The News*, Karachi, 20 October 2001 in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Jean Luc Racine, Au Pakistan, quel Islam pour quelle Nation?, décembre 2001, p. 12-13.
13. The camp of the "Egyptian" warriors of Al-Qaeda is composed of extremely politicised supporters, with a sound ideological orientation. Most of them are ex-members of the "Muslim Brothers" organisation, rejecting the parliamentary stance that is represented by the Central Organisation in Egypt. For these people, whose level of education is usually high (engineers, doctors, lawyers, etc.), the Afghan war field was an extremely opportune situation to build strong ties with one another. Many of them were former members of the military, members of the Islamic Jihad movement, of the well-known doctor Ayman al Zawahiri, who later evolved as no. 2 in Ben Laden's organisation. They were also members of the group that assassinated the Egyptian President Anouar Sadat in 1981, to punish him for having signed the Camp David Accords, three years earlier.
14. Takfir / Anathema.
15. Also, by Osama Bin Laden himself since 1997, when he was in Islamabad and had already been influenced by Takfirism, initiated by the Somalian Abu Obadia and the Egyptians Abu Haf and Saiful Adil, as witnessed by Hudaifa Azam. The latter is son of the late doctor Abdullah Azam, who, in 1980, had formed the "Maktab al-Khadamat al-Mudjahedin al-Arab" organisation,

to support the Afghani resistance. He was murdered in 1989 and his position taken over by Bin Laden. This assassination is still mysterious and attributed by some to Osama Bin Laden himself, because of the disputes which developed between the two men.

¹⁶. Paul Bremer was the UN envoy to Iraq, from May, 2003 until June, 2004.

¹⁷. *Los Angeles Times*, "Italian Police uncover Al Qaeda link in Syria", 17 April 2003. Also, Condoleezza Rice declared on 21 May 2005: "It really is time for Syria to realise that it is clearly out of step with where the region is going", and expresses her concern for the security of the Syrian-Iraqi border, an issue over which the US is obviously displeased by Syria's stance: "in particular about Syrian behaviour on its own border, about the support for terrorists that appears to be taking place from Syrian territory, about perhaps financial support that is coming from Syrian territory", thus declaring, *urbi et orbi*, America's certainty in relation to the participation of Syria in the Iraqi resistance. Also, evidence on the infiltration of revolutionary cores into Iraq, primarily from the Syrian and secondarily from the Iranian border, is found in many publications and studies on the revolution in Iraq, e.g.: Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor, *Anbar Province and Emerging Trends in the Iraqi Insurgency*, "The Role played by funding the Iraqi insurgency"; and Jane's Intelligence Focus, 27/9/2005, by Michael Knights and Zack Snyder.

¹⁸. This association is, now, one of the components of the anti-American resistance in Iraq. The information is given by Dr. Mohammed Bashar Al-Faidi, spokesman of the Association of Muslim Scholars to Syed Salim Shahzad, Director of the Pakistani agency of "Asia Times Online"; see: Syed Salim Shahzad, "Al Qaida contre les talibans", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, p. 13.

¹⁹. Syed Salim Shahzad, op.cit., p. 13.

²⁰. *Ibid.*, p.13.

²¹. *Ibid.*, p.13.

²². Such organisations are: (a) Jaysh al-Taifa al-Mansura; (b) Ansar al-Tawhid; (c) Al-Ghuraba; (d) Al-Jihad Al-Islami; (e) Al-Ahwal. These six organisations have formed a holy war Salafist Takfirist National Council, named Moudjahedin Choura, from which they have excluded other, equally radical, Sunni holy war organisations that they do not control, because they are characterised by an intense nationalist orientation. The tensions and assassinations between the organisations are a common phenomenon. Such organisations are: (a) Al-Jaysh Al-Islami fi Al-Iraq, the website of which is hosted in the US [<http://www.iaisite.info/>]; ISP: Zipa LLC, New Orleans, LA, USA]; (b) Harakat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamiyya Hamas-Iraq, the website of which is hosted in the US [<http://www.hamasaliraq.com/>]; ISP: Layered Technologies Inc., Frisco, TX, USA]; (c) Jaysh Abu Bakr Al-Sidiq, the website of which is also hosted in the US [<http://www.jaishabibaker.net/>]; ISP: SoftLayer Technologies Inc., Dallas, TX, USA]; (d) Jaysh Rijal Al-Tariqa Al-Naqshabandiyya the website of which is also hosted in the US [<http://www.alnakshabandia-army.com/home/>]; ISP: Bluehost Inc., Orem, UT, USA]; (e) Al-Jabha Al-Islamiyya Lil-Muqawama Al-Iraqiyya the website of which is hosted in Germany [<http://www.jaami.info/>]; ISP: SCHLUND-CUSTOMERS, D-76135, Karlsruhe, Germany] as well as many scepticism fora, propagating holy Islamic war, such as: (a) the Al-Faluja Group, the website of which is hosted in the US [<http://www.al-faloja.org/vb/>]; ISP: SoftLayer Technologies Inc., Dallas, TX, USA]; (b) Alam Al-Romansiyya the website of which is hosted in the US [<http://vb.roro44.com/index.php>]; ISP: Layered Technologies Inc., Frisco, TX, USA]; (c) the Al-Nour Group, the website of which is hosted in the US [<http://www.alnour.hyperphp.com/vb/>]; ISP: eNET Inc., Columbus, OH, USA]; (d) the Shumukh Al-Islam Group the website of which is hosted in the US [<http://www.shmo5alislam.net/vb/>]; ISP: R & D Technologies LLC, Las Vegas, NV, USA]; (e) the Al-Ramadi Group, the website of which is hosted in the US [<http://rmadi.top-me.com/login.forum?redirect>]; ISP: SoftLayer Technologies Inc., Dallas, TX, USA]; (f) the Al-Buraq Group, the website of which is also hosted in the US [<http://www.alboraq.info/forum>]; ISP: SiteGenie LLC, Rochester, MN, USA]; and (g) the Al-Mustaqbal Al-Islami Group, the website of which is also hosted in the US [<http://www.islamic-f.net/vb/>]; ISP: United Collocation Group Inc., San Francisco, CA, USA]. What is extremely interesting is that all these groups run propaganda websites promoting the Sunni nationalist holy war movement in Iraq, that is hosted in the... US, despite the known security and electronic monitoring measures that have indeed been complemented by the most stringent federal legislation. What is, actually, the case?

²³. Referring to the Baker-Hamilton Memorandum entitled “The Iraq Study Group Report”, of December 2006.

²⁴Shahzad. Op. cit., p.13.

²⁵. Seymour Hersh, “The redirection: A strategic shift”, *The New Yorker*, 3 May 2007.

²⁶. David Samuels, “Grand illusions”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Washington DC, June 2007.

²⁷. “Infatuated, as usual, by the mirage of a restored status quo ante bellum, we still face the same enemy as a decade ago. Another reason for leaving Saddam in place was our fear of offending neighbouring Arab monarchs and leaders, who themselves dread deposition. Our reward has been their discreet approval of the worst terrorists in history (no Arab or other Islamic state has made a serious effort to interfere with Osama bin Laden or his confederates; *on the contrary, many are quietly gleeful at American suffering, even while professing their “deepest sympathies,”* and elements within Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have provided funding or other support for anti-American terrorism)”.

²⁸. “If any conflict of the last three decades requires a revised assessment, it is the Soviet engagement in Afghanistan. Blinded by the brinkmanship and the reflexive opposition of the Cold War era, we failed to see that the Russians, in this peculiar instance, were the forces of civilisation and progress. I do not defend their tactical behavior, *but they did attempt to sustain a relatively enlightened, secular regime against backward, viciously cruel religious extremists—whom we supported, only to reap a monstrous harvest. Our backing of the most socially repressive elements within the Afghan resistance (because they were the “most effective”) backfired beyond all calculation. Incredibly, blinded again by the seeming verities of the Cold War, we trusted the advice of Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence Agency (ISI), an inherently anti-Western organisation that has since supported both the Taliban and Osama bin Laden, as well as lesser terrorists, providing them weapons, funds, safe havens, and free passage to the rest of the world.* Afghanistan, as we realise all too well in the autumn of 2001, has become the terrorist haven of the world, and we helped to make it so. We were determined that Communism would not be allowed to destabilise the region. Now, in one of the bitter returns of history, our military forces in the skies over Afghanistan may face American-made and American-provided surface-to-air missiles. *Our folly in Afghanistan should be final proof of the falsity of the dictum that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Sometimes, the enemy of your enemy is just practicing for the big game”.*