

Favourable situations for the jihadist recruitment: The neighbourhood of Principe Alfonso (Ceuta, Spain)

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Introduction

The Spanish mass media have transmitted during the past weeks various news concerning the presence of jihadist activities in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla (two enclaves of Spain in North Africa): including the detention of suspected jihadists implicated in the terrorist attack of Casablanca in May 2003; the expulsion from the Spanish Army of three members belonging to professional troops for their supposed sympathy with radical Islam; and the appearance of a declaration on a internet forum from a group called Nadim al-Magrebi, calling for jihad against Spain and demanding expressively for the ‘liberation’ of both cities through terrorist attacks¹.

The March 11 attacks and the hundreds of detentions exercised before and after this date have demonstrated that the jihadist militancy is extended all over the Spanish geography, especially in Madrid, Catalonia, Eastern Andalusia and Eastern Spain (Valencia and Murcia). However the situation is far worse in Ceuta, especially in the neighbourhood of Principe Alfonso, to the point that *it can be affirmed that this district is one of the most favourable social situation for the jihadist recruitment in Spain*. Analyzing the motives that allows us to formulate such conclusion is the purpose of this *Athena Paper*.

The neighbourhood of Principe: social and economic marginalization

The neighbourhood of Principe is located on the outskirts of Ceuta, close to the border with Morocco. About 12.000 people live in it and all of them, except countable exceptions, have Moroccan/Muslim origins. This is what differs from its possible parallel in Melilla: the Hidum cañada (known as the ‘Death cañada’), a marginal neighbourhood where there still exists a minimum presence of Spanish population. The twelve thousands neighbours of Principe represent nearly half the Muslim population of Ceuta: 27.000 of a total of 71.500 that the city inhabits.

Principe is with no doubt a ghetto. Apart from the ethnical concentration, there exists from some years ago a clear slum phenomenon, lack of urbanization, unemployment, illiteracy, delinquency and other symptoms of social and economic marginalization. For years numerous families living in Principe benefited from the income generated by the trafficking of drugs and human beings. However, the constabulary successes in the 90s’ against drug bands and the effectiveness of the measures against illegal immigration decreased remarkably these types of financial income. Consequently, the neighbourhood’s economic situation has even more deteriorated.

To this context of marginalization there adds another very serious problem of security. The following points summarize the situation²:

- The district of Principe is a clear example of the “broken windows” criminology theory. That is to say, the houses’ and the urban furniture’s

physical deterioration and the abundance of graffiti transmit the implicit message that “everything is allowed”. This therefore attracts more disorder and restrains the citizens of the area, with the consequent worsening of the informal social control. This generates a vicious spiral leading to more delinquency.

- To this we have to add the practical non-existence of an institutional control. Only one or two pairs of local police officer patrol the district. The National Police and the Guardia Civil, of uniform, only enter in case of an emergency or a raid. The little police presence is a consequence of the enormously dangerous nature of the district and of the risk that the agents run as soon as they walk on the streets. Only months ago strangers burned the office of the local police in Principe. A little later they set fire to the only local police car in the zone. In addition the ambushes to the police cars that exceptionally circulate around the streets are frequent. On some occasions, in order to prepare a trap to the police, they make an urgent call.
- This abandonment has given rise to a situation of circulatory chaos within the district and not even urban buses can circulate nor come near safely to it. Some neighbours have offered themselves as volunteers or civic agents to replace the police functions but with little result.
- Under these circumstances, it is therefore not surprising that the social and political aspiration of some neighbours -mainly adolescents- are more and more transgressive. The burning of rubbish containers is a common practice, even as a way to protest against problems poorly related to the Administration, like the tragic murder of a girl from the neighbourhood from a delinquent only some weeks ago.
- One last worrying indicator is the possession of firearms by neighbours dedicated to drug trafficking and common delinquency. According to the testimonies gathered by the local press, the shootings are relatively frequent.

Radicalization symptoms and jihadist recruitment

All the elements that we have just described wouldn't convert the Principe neighbourhood into a case very different of other Spanish cities' marginal areas, if it wasn't for the fact that in this particular case, signs of salafist radicalism and even jihadism can be discerned. This is not something new. More than four years ago, the then General Director of the National Police, Juan Cotino, affirmed that in Principe “there is cultural hotbed for Islamic fanaticism”³. Nevertheless, in the last months an intensification of these symptoms has been noticed. Precisely, we are talking about the following ones:

- **The burning of two ‘morábitos’** (the Sidi Embarek one and the Sarchal one) in January and April of 2006 by some unknown people. In September

of 2005 there had been already a previous attempt against the one of Sidi Embarek but the preparations were discovered on time (the anonymous preparators tried to explode two butane gas cylinders against the religious building). The 'morábitos' are a kind of small hermitage that lodges the tomb of people considered holy by Muslims. Their construction and veneration constitutes a habitual practice in the north of Morocco, nevertheless, it is considered something aberrant by the salafists. Consequently, the burning of both morábitos more than a simple violent act and islamophobic aggression could be considered like a salafist violent action.

- The existence of **greater informal control within the district of Principe concerning the opposed behaviours to the Islamic moral** has also been detected, especially one of salafist inspiration. That is to say, there are people telling off boys for playing games on the street with girls, or others that incite young people to pray, to stop smoking or take drugs as they are inappropriate habits of a good Muslim. We still do not have any news of 'moral squads' (for example a group of young people that intimidate or even attack girls that don't wear the veil or men who drink alcohol in public), but in accordance with the preceding symptoms it would not be too strange to say that they already existed or that they appeared not long ago.
- There is also information concerning the presence of some 'psychologists' that know how to gain the trust and the loyalty of adolescents and young people within the district. **There are reasons to think that we could be talking about jihadist recruiters.**
- **The presence of at least one radical preacher proceeding from Saudi Arabia in one of the small mosques of the district.** Traditionally the ministry of Religious Matters of Morocco has controlled the speech of the mosques of Ceuta and Melilla choosing their respective imams and taking care of their wages. This is a practice well-known and tolerated by the Spanish Administration. This allows Morocco to supervise the Muslim community's activities in both cities in order to control the Islamic political opposition. In addition, it is possible that this mechanism is another way to obtain strategic intelligence on the social and political situation in both cities that Morocco claims for itself. However, within Morocco (mainly prior to the attacks in Casablanca) numerous preachers of Saudi inspiration and formation defied the controls of the authorities, preaching in mosques ruled by themselves, particularly in very poor suburbs or rural populations⁴. This is what apparently has been happening for example in Casablanca, Tetuan and Tangier, and thus happens nowadays in the neighbourhood of Principe.
- More and more the tensions and problems related to the district's marginalization **are interpreted as a conflict between Islam and Christianity** (in Ceuta and Melilla it is frequent that the native Spaniards are denominated 'Christians' whether or not they profess or not this religious creed). The same individuals that encourage young people to behave as good

Muslims attribute the district's marginality state to the Christian dominion of the city. With that speech they stimulate hatred towards the political power and the "Christian" society.

- Finally and in relation to the previous aspects, there also exists indications that **some of the ambushes that have undergone the police cars within the district have been organized by individuals of salafist inspiration** that have used minors to carry out these attacks. Sometimes, in the middle of the tumult and the stoning some shouts referring to the 'Intifada of Ceuta' have been heard. It has to stand out that, in agreement with the Manichaean vision of Ceuta's society that the radicals transmit; the police forces are the clearest exponent of the 'Christian power and occupation'.

Implications in antiterrorism matters

From the optics of the antiterrorist prevention, the facts and symptoms analyzed up till this point paint a worrying picture. The reasons are the following ones:

a) The Principe district is on its way to become an area controlled partial or totally by the radicals. One of the salafists' aims consists in creating within Europe urban areas of Muslim majority where the sharia (the Islamic way of life), interpreted to its way, regulates the behaviour and the coexistent norms of the population. The European for Council Fatwa and Research's own president, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, a mediatic star in Al-Jazeera, has openly recommended it in several occasions⁵. The high ethnic concentration of Principe, the Administration's minimum presence, the social control which they are beginning to exert on groups of young people (in some cases inspired by the salafist ideology), and mainly the construction and reinforcement of an identity of confrontation Islam vs non Muslim are all factors contributing to the creation of a Muslim ghetto ruled, partial or totally, by the salafists. Although some of those aspects are due to causes that have nothing to do with Islamic radicalism, it is very possible that the salafists are building a strategy in order to orientate these conditions to their favour and for the control of the neighbourhood.

b) A situation of this nature could greatly facilitate jihadist recruitment. The insecurity and the marginalization existent in Principe generate a hostile and uncertain position for the isolated individual. Consequently, close social networks acquire greater importance (especially for the young people) like an ambit that provides security, recognition, material needs and a feeling of belonging. We are talking about social networks based on kinship, neighbourhood, and mainly friendship bonds (a group of friends).

In that context the activity of jihadist recruiters can achieve great success if it manages to attract towards its cause some members of those social networks. The rest will follow easily the same way. It has been proved that the radical pick up usually make use of social networks to recruit new followers or to obtain material

resources. For example, it is through a friend - and normally accompanied by him - as a potential recruit begins to attend meetings where tapes with radical sermons are listened, videos of combats in Iraq projected, or where they talk about the oppressive situation Islam is undergoing. Those meetings are the previous step before other more compromised activities with jihadism.

The importance of the social networks in the jihadist recruitment has been sufficiently contrasted by numerous studies⁶; and there are reasons to suspect that in the district of Principe **particular groups of friends, familiar bows, and perhaps even old common delinquency and drug trafficking networks, could be used for the jihadist recruitment.** In addition, in the case of the common delinquents, the radical salafist preaching offers the advantage that it legitimizes from a religious point of view its illicit activities if these are realized with the purpose of supporting the jihad. That is to say, the delinquent can rebuild his own image of himself and to those surrounding him, becoming from now on a 'good Muslim'.

c) Another worrying conclusion derived from the radicalization of certain sectors of Principe, consists of the **possible jihadist recruitment of young neighbours** of the district **who simultaneously belong to the professional troop of the military garrison of Ceuta.** The news that we were mentioning at the start of this essay concerning the expulsion of three members of professional troop of Ceuta and Melilla (where a third of almost 8.000 military men are of Muslim origin) is of great concern. Apparently these individuals were not only exercising radical ideas but they were also trying to attract other companions to their cause.

The interest of this type of recruitment for the jihadist movement turns out to be clear. We are talking of persons with military instruction, who could steal ammunition (for example cartridges and some grenade during exercises or manoeuvres), and could facilitate critical information about the vulnerabilities of the defensive system of the city.

Without doubt this type of radical recruitment will always be a minor phenomenon. But the great problem is that its direct effects could be of enormous concern and, mainly, that the suspicion of its existence would recommend the practice of greater control measures that involuntarily could hurt the sensitivity of thousands of the Muslim military loyal to the army and Spain. Thereby, the discovery of new precise cases of radicalism within the Spanish armed forces (and precisely of young people recruited in Principe) could seriously harm the climate of harmony and own comradeship of a really operative military force.

d) Finally, in relation to what has been discussed up to this point and looking at the situation in its most negative aspect, the presence of radical elements - and even of a jihadist character - in the neighbourhood of Principe **could provoke the appearance of a directly hostile terrorist cell against the Spanish society and, particularly, against Ceuta's population.**

A terrorist attack in the city would generate a climate of insecurity, of alarm and of major polarization of the population which would be favourable to the interests

of the radical leaders⁷. After the analysis in this article, there are reasons to think that, once the radical leaders that have activists ready to carry out a terrorist attack (possibly suicidal), are provided with material means to execute (weapons or explosives) and considering that the essentials of their infrastructure might survive the consequent police reaction, they might decide to realize an attack that destabilizes even more the fragile intercultural coexistence of the city.

¹ *El Mundo*, 4 November 2006; *El País*, 5 November 2006

² It can be found a complete list of incidents in the local newspaper *El Faro de Ceuta*.

³ *El Faro*, 14 February 2002.

⁴ Abdeslam Maghraoui, "Tras la conexión terrorista marroquí: políticas estatales y wahabismo saudí", *Análisis del Real Instituto Elcano*, No 63, 7 de abril de 2004; Carlos Echeverría, "Libertad, democracia y desarrollo en el Magreb siglo XXI: los desafíos de seguridad", Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos, 15 de marzo de 2006.

⁵ Reuven Paz, "The Non-Islamic States in Europe," The Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM), December 2005.

⁶ Mark Juergensmeyer. "Terror Mandated by God", *Terrorism & Political Violence*, Vol. 9, No 2, 1997, pp. 16-23; Jessica Stern. *Terror in the Name of God. Why Religious Militants Kill*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Petter Nesser, *Jihad In Europe - A survey of the motivations for Sunni Islamist terrorism in post-millennium Europe*, (Forsvarets Forskningsinstitutt Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2004), Donatella Della Porta, "Political Socialization in Left-Wing Underground Organizations: Biographies of Italian and German Militants", in Donatella Della Porta (Ed.), *Social movements and violence: participation in underground organizations*, (Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1992), pp. 79-98; Luis De la Corte, *La lógica del terrorismo*, (Madrid: Alianza, 2006), pp. 309-327.

⁷ Javier Jordán & Luisa Boix, "Al Qaeda and Western Islam", *Terrorism & Political Violence*, Vol. 16, No.1, 2004, pp. 1-17; Juan Avilés, "Londres 7-J: Análisis de urgencia", *Análisis del Real Instituto Elcano*, 11 de julio de 2005.

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Book Chapter:

Hafez, Mohammed M. "From Marginalization to Massacres. A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria", Wiktorowicz, Quintan (ed.) *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 37-60