

Hybridization of Conflicts

BY ALAIN BAUER

At a basic level, historically wars and conflicts were easy to understand: a cause, an enemy, a war. Things seemed clear, consistent, and predictable. There was symmetry and each side had its counterpart. The enemy was able to negotiate. It was all at least somewhat straightforward, if tragic.

This was the case for centuries – up until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Then in the early 1990s a nebula appeared that we Occidentals referred to as “al-Qaeda” (or more formally the “World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders” – less effective for marketing, but more accurate). The emergence of al-Qaeda irreversibly altered the conventional and often automatic, “terrorism / international state sponsor” analysis. Terrorists no longer had need of state sponsorship, and terrorism became de-linked from strictly nationalist motives. Terrorism evolved beyond the ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, a Basque separatist organization), the IRA (Irish Republican Army), or PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) type of organization.

France has had the misfortune to experience revolutionary terrorism since its own revolution of 1789, and indeed the term terrorism, derives from the French “terrorisme,” which was used to describe the atrocities committed by the French government during the Reign of Terror. This paper reviews the revolution in terrorism affairs since the 1960s.

The post-war fight against terrorism in France faced its greatest challenge in 1962 as Algeria gained independence. Algeria’s secession from France was marked by a bloody conflict pitting Algerian insurgents against the French Secret Armed Organization (OAS) backed by powerful military groups opposed to the separation of this part of the national territory (considered by many French to be like Brittany or Burgundy – an integral part of the French state, and not an “occupied colonial territory.”) Terrorist attacks were committed by Algerian nationalists directly against their French occupiers.

In the 1970s, terrorism entered a new phase with attacks on French soil by Palestinian nationalist and aligned groups (Carlos the Jackel and Abu Nidal), International Revolutionary Action

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Groups (GARI), Armed Core Groups for Popular Autonomy (NAPAP) and later campaigns by Action Directe (modeled on the German Red Army Faction).

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The bombing of a Paris-Toulouse train in 1982 constituted a turning point in the type of terrorism conducted on French soil: this was the first attack led by internal operatives directly against civilians, and not against public buildings, or by outside operatives against foreign interests in France. The bombing was followed by a swathe of other attacks in 1982-1983.¹ Extremist movements in Brittany (Breton Liberation Front - FLB, Breton Revolutionary Army - ARB), the Basque Region (ETA - IPARRETARAK) and Corsica (National Liberation Front of Corsica - FLNC - later split into branches including the FLNC Canal Historique, the FLNC Canal Habituel, the Union des Combattants and others) carried out a series of attacks against public buildings, and even assassinated the Corsican prefect (Governor), Claude Erignac, in 1998.

In 1985-86, a series of attacks linked for the most part to Palestinian and Armenian groups changed the French intelligence services' conventional approach to meeting the terrorism challenge. On February 23, 1985, a bomb exploded in a Marks & Spencer department store in Paris; on March 9, 1985, the Rivoli Beaubourg cinema was targeted; in December 1985, two bombs went off in Paris department stores, Printemps and Galeries

Lafayette. On February 3, 1986, the Claridge Shopping Gallery on the Champs Elysées was hit; while another bomb was diffused in a public lavatory near the Eiffel Tower only minutes before it was due to go off. On February 4, 1986, the Gibert Bookstore was rocked by an explosion, a precursor to a similar attack on the FNAC Bookstore in the Forum des Halles the following day. Divergent opinions initially pointed the finger at perpetrators ranging from unhinged individuals to Abu Nidal and the Armenian ASALA. The Committee of Solidarity with the Arab and Middle East Political Prisoners (CSPPA) later claimed responsibility for the attacks. The explosives used in the bombings were traced back to Lebanon, where they were linked to similar explosives used in 1983 in attacks against French interests in that country. At the time, French hostages were being held in Lebanon and tricky negotiations were underway.

On March 17, 1986, three days before Jacques Chirac took office as Prime Minister, another bomb went off in a high-speed TGV (Tres Grande Vitesse) train. On March 20, another shopping gallery on the Champs Elysées was hit. The same day, a device failed to go off in an Express Transit System (RER) commuter train. On September 4, a new wave of attacks began with a device that failed to detonate in the RER, followed by an explosion in the Paris City Hall Post Office on September 8. On September 12, a busy cafeteria on the Champs Elysées was hit. The CSPPA claimed responsibility for all attacks. Syrian and Lebanese groups, along with the Abdallah family—one of whose members, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, was on trial in Paris—were all thought to be involved.

A successful operation by the French National Territory Surveillance Directorate

(DST) in early 1987 identified the Fouad Ali Saleh group—and its German counterpart, the Hamade group—behind all the attacks. The pro-Iranian group, in retaliation for French military support for Iraq, was thought to have provided logistical support to Lebanese Hezbollah operatives, known for their “technical skills” and their penchant for car bombings: their campaigns included attacks against Lebanese President Gemayel, against the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in April 1983, and against the Beirut barracks (headquarters of French and U.S. forces in Lebanon) in October 1983. Difficulties in identifying those responsible, attempts to apply outdated and antiquated methods of analysis to atypical cases hopelessly shoehorned into conventional molds, and the growth of front organizations and false-flag operations (a classic spy novel theme) long perplexed French government counter-terrorist agencies. Many lapses leaked from this mix of confusion in identifying the perpetrators and an approach emerged based on compilation rather than analysis. These mistakes would be remembered and learned from after 1995.

On July 11, 1995, the Imam of a Paris mosque was assassinated. On July 15, police were shot in Bron, near Lyon. On July 25, a bomb exploded in the RER. On August 17, a device rocked Place de l’Etoile in Paris. On August 26, an attack on a TGV high-speed train failed. On September 7, a bomb attack targeted a Jewish school in Villeurbanne, near Lyon. On October 6, a bomb constructed out of a gas canister exploded in the Paris metro. On October 17, another device went off in the RER. Fingerprints found on the bomb aimed at the TGV identified Khaled Kelkal, an Algerian emigrant living in the Lyon area. He was killed in a shootout with police during his

arrest. Kelkal was the first identified “hybrid” in the French territory. Born in 1971 in Mostaganem, Algeria, his family moved to Vaulx-en-Velin, a suburb of Lyon, when he was an infant. He became a juvenile delinquent while a teenager. His older brother Nouredine was sentenced to nine years in prison for armed robbery. In 1990, Kelkal was placed on probation for four months for trafficking stolen cars. A few months later, he was arrested for theft using stolen cars. He was sentenced to four years in prison. While incarcerated, he met Islamists attempting to recruit for radical organizations in Algeria. After his release, Kelkal regularly attended the Bilal Mosque in Vaulx-en-Velin headed by Imam Mohamed Minta, a fundamentalist preacher. In 1993, Kelkal went to Algeria. He was there recruited by one of the radical branches of the GIA (Islamic Armed Group), headed by Djamel Zitouni, whose aim was to “punish France.”

Almost at the same time, Lionel Dumont, a former French soldier converted to Islam after serving with peacekeepers in Somalia. He joined the French Army in 1992 but turned to Islam, renamed himself Abu Hamza, and joined the Civil War in Yugoslavia as a Bosnian Mujahedeen. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison in the 1990s for the murder of a Bosnian police officer. He escaped from Sarajevo prison and fled to Japan in 2002, where he lived quietly, using a fake passport to enter and leave the country. He was later accused of participating in the Gang de Roubaix, which unsuccessfully tried to set a car bomb during the G7 meeting in Lille in March 1996. There, he met another French convert to Islam, Christophe Caze, a medical student. In late 1996, the cell they created with other former Bosnian Mujahid began operations in order to fund themselves for their future

attacks. On January 27, 1996, they stole a car but fired on the police with assault rifles, injuring one of the police officers. On February 8, 1996, they robbed a supermarket but had to flee when the police arrived. While firing on the police, they killed a car driver, Hammoud Feddal and stole his vehicle. On March 25, eight members of the gang assaulted a Brink's armored truck. But they couldn't access the money and fled. On March 28, the group parked a car, with four gas tanks beside a police precinct in Lille. The whole building was supposed to be destroyed by the blast. However, the bomb malfunctioned, destroying only the car. The following day, a French anti-terrorist SWAT team, surrounded their location and stormed the house. The men inside fought back with assault rifles, screaming that they'd

rather die than surrender. After a heavy gunfight, the roof of the building collapsed. Four terrorists were dead and two police officers injured. The others members of the gang, managed to escape. Several hours later, Caze was killed by Belgian police. After German police arrested him, Dumont was extradited to France, where he was convicted for his role in a number of violent crimes and sentenced to 25 years on appeal. For the second time, hybrids were acting, but their hybrid nature remained unnoticed by the French law enforcement system.

This wave of attacks would be a precursor to events in 2001, beginning with the assassination of Afghanistan's Northern Alliance Commander Ahmed Shah Massoud in his home in Takhar Province, and the subsequent



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Pan Am Flight 103, 21 December 1988. Air Accident Investigation Branch.

terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in New York, and the Pentagon. However, the French government's response in 1996 was entirely different from its reaction in 1986. Far from being left in the dark, police and intelligence services succeeded in unraveling the terrorists' modus operandi and methods of organization, with extensive help from a network of contacts set up by specialized counter terrorism Judge, Jean-Louis Bruguière, head of the 14th section of the Paris prosecution office.

Elsewhere in the world, in the wake of the explosion that caused the crash of Pan Am flight 103 in Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988, the September 1989 bombing of UTA flight 772—which hit the ground in Niger's desert—was also linked to Libya. Though state sponsorship of terror continues to this day, this was the last grand terrorist act truly organized by a state. In New York, in February 1993, a group that never claimed ties to al-Qaeda succeeded in carrying out an attack on the World Trade Center; other attacks against the UN headquarters and tunnels in New York city were thwarted.

On December 24th, 1994, a commando unit of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), an Islamist group seeking the overthrow of the Algerian government, wearing police uniforms, hijacked an Air France Airbus at Algiers Airport. The terrorists killed three passengers, with the intention to blow up the plane over the Eiffel Tower in Paris. When the aircraft reached Marseille, the GIGN, a specialized SWAT team within the French Gendarmerie, stormed the plane and killed all four hijackers. The GIA's plan appeared to foreshadow the September 11, 2001 attacks by al Qaeda against the United States. At the time, Algeria was devastated by a civil war between former members of the Islamic Salvation Front, which won the

first round of parliamentary elections in 1991, and the Algerian Army which stopped the electoral process after alarming results from the first round.

The "Declaration of War against the United States" issued by Osama Bin Laden on August 23, 1996 saw the first step towards the globalization of Salafist terrorism. The emergence of a flexible worldwide network - a terrorist "society," sharing ideology and resources but without any real central body - triggered a powerful movement towards the restructuring of terrorism. Having in the past had ties to governments, in many cases connected to the two major superpowers, these emerging groups later joined forces with Arab states (Libya and Syria) and Iran (a middle eastern but non-Arab State) for political reasons fuelled by national conflicts.

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These terrorist groups however have become truly autonomous, linked by a common ideology not tied to any specific claim (over territory, language or political power sharing) but to a mythology born from a radical interpretation of the Quran. As seen in the attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa (August 1998 in Kenya and Tanzania), against a U.S. navy destroyer off the coast of Aden in 2000, in Peru, in Pakistan, in Uzbekistan, in Saudi Arabia and against targets in Europe, such as Strasbourg, such groups are now carrying out

or attempting to carry out wide-ranging attacks around the world.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, following the assassination of Commander Massoud, showed the ability of terrorist networks linked to the nebulous "al-Qaeda" to carry out simultaneous strikes on U.S. soil. Based on systems already put in play in the Philippines in 1995

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during the foiled attack by Ramzi Yousef² and drawing on methods used in Lebanon, the simultaneous nature of the four (or five) attacks brought an increased level of risk without really involving a change in modus operandi. For the first time since the emergence of contemporary terrorist organizations, state terrorism, or terrorism related to power sharing (in terms of political or linguistic representation or recognition), gave way to an obscure entity underpinned by radical, eschatological, theological thinking focused on an ultimate goal - the kingdom of heaven on earth - and immune to any form of compromise through negotiation.

In 2002, my colleague Xavier Raufer published a note titled, "Organized crime 1995-2002: Mafias, Cartels and Gangsterterrorists," stating that, "The world of crime has changed. It even has nothing in common with yesterday's world. As of today, due to immeasurable consequences, two criminal scenes that

yesterday were perfectly distinct: "political" on one hand, Mafioso on the other; have amalgamated into a single one. The abolition of the bipolar world order has caused more than walls to crumble, which, in Berlin and elsewhere, rendered impassable the frontiers of the former Eastern Bloc. Other psychological obstacles have disappeared. The binary representations of yesterday's world - West against East and political against criminal - no longer make sense. The players in the "political" (guerrillas, militias, national liberation movements, terrorist groups) and "common" (organized crime, Mafia groups, cartels) arenas which yesterday were evolving in distinct worlds suddenly found themselves on the same stage sentenced to brusque mutation or disappearance."³

This brutal evolution mainly took place throughout the nineteen eighties and nineties but the large international conferences of 1994 and 1995 revealed these hybrid entities half way between terrorism and gangsterism: degenerate guerrillas for whom the media coined the phrase "gangsterterrorists." In March 1993, a wave of attacks, unprecedented in the history of terrorism, ravaged Bombay, India's economic capital. Thirteen booby-trapped cars, motorcycles and suitcases, operated by state of the art electronic remote control systems, exploded simultaneously at the Stock Exchange, the headquarters of Air India, in large hotels and in the business district. There were 317 deaths and more than 1,200 injured. Shortly afterwards, the investigation led to the discovery of more than four tons of C4 plastic explosive, several thousand electronic detonators, 500 grenades and hundreds of Kalashnikov assault rifles in various caches in the city. Again in April, 25 rockets and 32 very powerful homemade bombs were found in the

Bombay suburbs. Armed groups abound in the region: Sikhs fighting for a “free Khalistan”, Kashmiri Mujahideen, Sri Lankan “Tigers” fighting for Tamil Eelam. Which of them organized this terrorist maelstrom? If not them, which other known terrorist network disposes of these colossal reserves of arms and explosives? None. The perpetrators of the carnage were simple gangsters, obeying Dawood Ibrahim, a “godfather” of the Bombay underworld, himself a refugee in Dubai for several years.

In France itself, a first “gangterrorist” group operated in Nice. The investigation into the wave of attacks that shook the city in January 1993 closed two months later with the arrest of twenty local gangsters. The bombings,

seven in total, targeted businesses and the chambers of a barrister; two rockets were also fired on a local prison and there was an arson attack on police warehouses. At the time, a “political” terrorist group, the “Corsican Revolutionary Armed Front,” claimed responsibility for these actions. But the Nice police identified the guilty party as an “ambitious and violent” local gangster. The campaign of attacks was in reality just an episode in the war of succession of a Nice gang leader assassinated in 1989. To impose its law on Nice, the Oliveiro gang eliminated its rivals: four murders between September and October 1992. This settling of accounts however was insufficient; Oliveiro then resorted to the supreme weapon to finish the job; terrorism.



The U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in the aftermath of the August 7, 1998, al-Qaeda suicide bombing.

Since then, the gangterrorist reality has imposed itself via several other spectacular cases. In Corsica, in January 1997, the chief prosecutor at the Bastia Court of Appeal announced that there had been 574 bomb attacks on the Island in 1996, 148 of which were “political” (following 602 in 1995, 154 of which were “political”). Now said the magistrate, “political” or otherwise, the bombings are the doing of the same individuals whose activities appear to be 25 percent terrorism and 75 percent plain gangsterism.

In 2005, Raymond Kelly, NYPD Police Commissioner, agreed to my suggestion to let an academic/police group conduct an analysis of ten terrorist cases. The ensuing paper was redacted by Micah Silber and Arvin Bratt and published in 2006 under the title, “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat.”⁴ The document highlighted that the radicalization process is composed of four distinct phases:

- Stage 1: Pre-Radicalization
- Stage 2: Self-Identification
- Stage 3: Indoctrination
- Stage 4: Jihadization

Each of these phases is unique and has specific signatures. All individuals who begin this process do not necessarily pass through all the stages; many stop or abandon this process at different points. Although this model is sequential, individuals do not always follow a perfectly linear progression. Individuals who do pass through this entire process are quite likely to be involved in planning a terrorist act.

The phases of radicalization were precisely defined;

Pre-Radicalization

Pre-Radicalization is the point of origin for individuals before they begin this progression. It is their life situation before they were exposed to and adopted jihadi-Salafi Islam as their own ideology. The majority of the individuals involved in these plots began as “unremarkable” - they had “ordinary” jobs, had lived “ordinary” lives and had little, if any criminal history.

Self-Identification

Self-Identification is the phase where individuals, influenced by both internal and external factors, begin to explore Salafi Islam, gradually gravitate away from their old identity and begin to associate themselves with like-minded individuals and adopt this ideology as their own. The catalyst for this “religious seeking” is a cognitive opening, or crisis, which shakes one’s certitude in previously held beliefs and opens an individual to be receptive to new worldviews. There can be many types of triggers that can serve as the catalyst including:

- Economic (losing a job, blocked mobility)
- Social (alienation, discrimination, racism – real or perceived)
- Political (international conflicts involving Muslims)
- Personal (death in the close family)

Indoctrination

Indoctrination is the phase in which an individual progressively intensifies his beliefs, wholly adopts jihadi-Salafi ideology and concludes, without question, that current conditions and circumstances require action to support and further the cause. That action is

militant jihad. This phase is facilitated and driven by a “spiritual sanctioner.” While the initial self-identification process may be an individual act, as noted above, association with like-minded people is an important factor as the process deepens. By the indoctrination phase this self-selecting group becomes increasingly important as radical views are encouraged and reinforced.

Jihadization

Jihadization is the phase in which members of the cluster accept their individual duty to participate in jihad and self-designate as holy warriors or mujahedeen. Ultimately, the group will begin operational planning for the jihad or a terrorist attack. These “acts in furtherance” will include planning, preparation and execution. While the other phases of radicalization may take place gradually, over two to three years, this jihadization component can be a very rapid process, taking only a few months, or even weeks to run its course.

The developments discussed above demonstrate that there is another stage in the evolution – the progression to “gangsterrorism” and that the prisons and the penal system are reinforcing this process. Unlike the stages discussed above however, gangsterrorism can either proceed or follow the process of jihadization.

When the Merah case occurred in March 2012, the French Intelligence was extremely efficient in detecting it, yet totally unable to understand it. In March 2012, a few weeks before the Presidential election, a French paratrooper was shot dead in Toulouse. A second attack killed two uniformed soldiers and seriously injured another in a shopping center in Montauban. On March 19, four people, including three children, were killed at a

Jewish school. The perpetrator was identified as Mohammed Merah, a 23 year-old French-Algerian petty criminal who became an Islamist terrorist. Merah attacked French Army personnel because of French involvement in the war in Afghanistan. He also admitted during the siege of his flat that he attacked the Jewish school to avenge Palestinian children, but that it was a secondary target after he failed in killing another French soldier. French investigators believe that Merah’s radicalization began in prison and increased after two journeys to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Dumont, Caze, Kelkal, Merah, and so many others were considered exceptions, because it is hard for a software programmer to imagine things he does not understand, and for the bureaucratic machine to adapt to unknown or unwritten developments or scenarios. Due to technological fetishism, we believed that systems are able to replace human brains. They do not. They are very useful to confirm or reject human hypotheses, but not to replace them.

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The Colombian FARC, the Somali Pirates, Karachi’s mobs, some of the Indian Gangs, AQIM in Mali and Niger, the Mexican Cartels are all now military forces that are not only using “revolutionary taxation” for political purposes, but indeed hybrids or mutants; and above all criminals.

The contemporary international community is besieged today by globalized crime manifest along a spectrum of complexity,

efficiency, and threat, from high-tech criminal finance to street gangs. Their territories are expanding from lawless marginal neighborhoods to anarchic megacities and “liberated territories.” Financial flows are generated through trafficking of humans and goods, including drugs, counterfeits, and even foods. And cybercrime will be the next frontier when European drug markets begin to weaken.

Reality is sometimes hard to accept and it rarely adapts to our bureaucratic preferences, or our pre-conceived mental constructs. What is happening now is not a strategic surprise. It is merely an evolution of events clearly recorded since the middle of the 1980’s but not identified. After any catastrophe or tragedy, a commission is appointed to explain, “why did this happen?” And the commission, always, discovers that those in charge knew almost everything, but exerted huge efforts to not believe the truth. Because in fact the truth does not set bureaucracy free. Truth is a disturbance in a perfectly organized system based on retroaction and rear mirror viewing. In our world, asymmetric warfare or atypical thinking is annoying, and this explains why we so often fail at countering them effectively. **PRISM**

NOTES

¹ Assassination of an Israeli diplomat, car bomb in Rue Marboeuf in front of the head office of a Syrian newspaper and in front of an Israeli bank, anti-Semitic attacks in Rue des Rosiers, bombs in two Paris restaurants, explosions in Saint Charles station in Marseille and in the Paris-Marseille high-speed TGV train.

² The main organizer of the first attack on the World Trade Center, in 1993.

³ Xavier Raufer, “Organized crime 1995-2002: mafias, cartels and ‘gangsterrorists’” (2002).

⁴ Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt. “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat,” NYPD Intelligence Division. http://www.nypdshield.org/public/SiteFiles/documents/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf (2006).