Islamic Extremism – Analyzing the Risks

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Abstract

Islamic extremism, especially the terror networks, represents the greatest threat for the internal security of Germany. After the attacks in Madrid, the bombings in London have again shown that in many cases, regionally operating cells are able to carry out attacks without centralised preparation and control. Even Germany and Bavaria are considered areas of activity for networks of Islamic terrorists which are not only seen as areas for retreat and rest, but also as areas to prepare attacks, and even as potential targets of attacks. Even though the risks emanating from Islamic terrorism are evident, the dangers coming from political Islamism must not be underestimated either. Not only are they a breeding ground for terrorist activities, they also aim at the indoctrination of Muslims living in western societies. Islamism seeks to prevent their integration into the state and social order, trying instead to build up parallel societies in which the national legal system is no longer valid. A long-term objective is the elimination of the political and social order of the country concerned and the establishment of a world-wide rule of Islam.

For the development of effective strategies to counter this, it is necessary to deal with the ideological basis and to get the most accurate idea possible of the real potential of danger. This is the duty of the Protection of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. A comprehensive and up-to-the-minute exchange of information among all security authorities is absolutely necessary too. To accelerate this exchange of information and to compile existing knowledge, various federal institutions as well as institutions in Bavaria have been founded.

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Islamic Extremism – The Greatest Threat to the Internal Security of Germany

At present, Islamic extremism (Islamism), and in particular international Islamist terrorists, pose the greatest risk to the internal security of Germany. In spite of national and international success in combating terrorist networks, the threat to the western world has not been reduced with lasting effect. The Madrid and London attacks of 2004 and 2005 as well as the thwarted attempts at carrying out attacks in the United Kingdom and Germany in recent years have shown that cells of different size and composition, operating regionally, can indeed carry out or plan attacks without requiring any central planning and control. Several court proceedings, including in Bavaria, have shown that Germany has been considered an area for preparing terrorist attacks as well as a potential target of such attacks. Security authorities, and in particular intelligence services, focus primarily on the tasks of early recognition of planned attacks as well as identifying and taking to court potential perpetrators. Fast and up-to-the-minute exchange of information among several authorities, and especially between the intelligence services on the one hand, and law enforcement and judiciary on the other, is the order of the day. Moreover, in-depth engagement with the ideological foundations of Islamist terrorism is needed for the purpose of pinpointing tendencies towards radicalization in Islamist circles.

The Current Situation

Several plans for attacks thwarted in the past have clearly shown that Germany is not only considered an area for preparations and rest for jihadists, but also a valid target of attacks. In this context, prime examples are the attempted simultaneous "suitcase bomb" attacks planned against two German regional trains on 31 July 2006, and in the 2007 foiled attacks by the "Sauerland Group." The three activists arrested belonged to an Islamic terror group called "Islamic Jihad Union" (IJU) and had been able to procure on the open market a large quantity of hydrogen peroxide and other ingredients to make explosives and military detonators. The material they had accumulated would have sufficed to make explosive devices that would have detonated with greater force than those used in the Madrid and London attacks. The suspected assailants had gained most of their knowledge about the construction of explosive devices by attending IJU training camps in Pakistan. The bombers' preferred potential targets were American facilities or airports. Aided by two other people, one of them had reconnoitered an American base in the Federal State of Hesse on New Year's eve 2006/2007. In the course of the investigations, it became clear that the perpetrators were making serious efforts to launch several attacks in Germany, presumably simultaneously, and to cause as much damage to life, limb and property as possible.

In March 2008 Cüneyt Ciftci, a Turkish national who had lived in Bavaria until 2007, carried out a suicide attack in Afghanistan by driving a truck carrying

explosives into a military camp, claiming several other lives in the process. He made a "martyrdom" video about his terror mission. He is thus the first suicide bomber with Islamist terrorist motives to have been born, raised and socialized in Germany.

In 2009, Jihadists turned their sights more specifically on Germany itself. Threats disseminated on the Internet were expressed by several Islamist terror groupings such as Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The messages included statements from top Al-Qaeda leaders such as Osama bin Laden and his deputy (and later successor as Al-Qaeda chief) Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. The new dimension was that the terrorist groups specifically threatened attacks within Germany and appeared on screen with German speaking individuals.

Between 11 September and 9 October, with unprecedented frequency, eleven audio, video and written messages from al-Qaeda and other Jihadist groups were released containing references to or threats against Germany. This concentration of messages was part of a large-scale propaganda strategy clearly designed to influence the Bundestag elections on 27 September. The propaganda offensive reached its pinnacle with the hate video entitled "The Call to Truth" and an online message called "Security – a shared fate" featuring German Al-Qaeda member Bekkay Harrach. The background images for the "Call to Truth" video included the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, the skyline of Frankfurt am Main, the Oktoberfest in Munich, Hamburg Main Station and the Cologne Cathedral. Speaking German, the man featured on the video made threats in connection with the deployment of Bundeswehr troops in Afghanistan.

The "Security – a shared fate" video presented Bekkay Harrach in front of a red curtain wearing a suit and tie rather than martial Taliban attire, as is usually the custom in this kind of hate video. His intention undoubtedly was to make visual reference to a speech made by Barack Obama on 4 June at Cairo University – when the US President stood in front of a red curtain as he addressed the Muslim world. Harrach explained that in a democracy the entire nation is responsible for the decisions made by its government. Therefore all Germans were a legitimate target of attack if they failed to vote for a new Federal government that would withdraw the Bundeswehr from Afghanistan:

> In a democracy, only the people can order their soldiers back home. If the German people decide to continue the war, however, they have passed sentence on themselves.

To varying degrees, all the videos share in an attempt to reach the target groups with a mix of theological, moral, emotional and political arguments. Typically, these Jihadist statements use quotations, above all select verses from the Qur'an, to add religious legitimacy to the speaker's remarks. For example, promises are made that taking part in armed conflict offers not only the chance to expunge previous sins but, at the same time, to attain "martyr" status and elevation to the highest level of human worth in the eyes of God.

Some messages talk about issues in detail: for example, if anyone is worried that his commitment to Jihad means neglecting his family, he need have no fears. One video points to the good infrastructure in the training camps, explaining that "they are very family and children-friendly with their hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and schools."

Even though the videos were not followed by attacks and were unable to influence Germany's general election or its foreign policy, they do serve to recruit, mobilize and emotionally charge young Jihadists and sympathizers. Their effects are therefore to be taken quite seriously. More so than in previous video offensives, these self-portraits in the realm of real battle areas make a greater impression than messages from other Islamist propaganda forums which Germans find rather abstract. Therefore, this type of video could prove a spur to Islamists domiciled in Germany when they see that "German Mujahideen" have moved up the ranks of Al-Qaeda and that some now enjoy leadership positions. The intention is to demonstrate that German Islamists have obviously reached positions that entitle them to speak on behalf of Al-Qaeda.

Since early 2009, the German security services have registered a considerable increase in planned, attempted and (actually) completed travel from Germany for the suspect purposes of participating in violent Jihad or receiving terrorist training. The presumed destinations were terror camps in crisis regions such as Afghanistan and Pakistan or conflict zones where the individual could join the fighting. As Al-Qaeda is widening its regional presence, the security services are working on the assumption that terrorists are also being trained in locations in Yemen and Somalia. People resident in Germany who may be counted as potential Islamists often travel to strongly Islamic states. The purposes of these trips range from family visits and holiday travel to religiously motivated pilgrimages, Arabic language courses and Qur'an studies or even time spent in terrorist training camps and participation in violent Jihad. Generally speaking, whenever people with Islamist tendencies travel to Islamic states, there is always a possibility that the process will make a major contribution to their radicalisation and recruitment, up to and including participation in Jihad and the perpetration of terror attacks. This poses a considerable security risk to Germany and western security interests abroad.

German Federal security services have information on a total of 215 people with connections to Germany who have an Islamist or terrorist background and are thought to have received paramilitary training at some point after 1990 or to be contemplating such training. These people include German nationals from an immigrant background, German converts to Islam and nationals of other countries who have in the past spent a period of time residing in Germany. Since 2001, around 40 of these people have played an active role in fighting in crisis areas.

The only way to protect the country from such attacks is their early identification in the planning stage. This requires among other things well-founded information about current developments in the local "scene" so as to pinpoint radicalization tendencies early on. Doing so is an intelligence task, which in

Germany is fulfilled by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. The task is rendered difficult by the fact that there is no standardized perpetrator profile, as the analysis of explosive attacks planned and carried out so far has shown. While the perpetrator groups in the United Kingdom and Spain were people who had lived in the countries for a long time or had even grown up there, the perpetrators of 11 September 2001 were young students from the Near East, and the attacks are believed to have primarily been planned centrally in Afghanistan. Whereas some of the London attackers were even second- or third-generation immigrants who had been raised in the country in apparent integration, the "suitcase bombers" had come to Germany to study. The New York and London perpetrators committed suicide attacks, the attackers in Madrid and Germany's "suitcase bombers" sought to get away. This inconsistent profile makes it difficult for the security authorities to identify potential perpetrators early on. It is true that after the event certain common traits can be identified, such as discontinuities in personal biographies or attendance at Islamic seminars. However, these characteristics apply to a large number of people who never come into any direct contact with Jihadist terror acts at all. Another important influence is that of charismatic personalities who play a central role in a communication network. Through personal conversation or via the Internet they exert a crucial influence on the individual's process of radicalization.

For this reason, security services must focus on various perpetrator profiles without giving rise to the impression that Muslim immigrants at large are under suspicion. After all, Muslims are not a monolithic group, neither in Germany nor elsewhere in the world. A realistic look reveals considerable differences according to ethnicity and geographical origin, denomination and religious orientation, education, age, as well as affinity or non-affinity to the political culture of the country a person migrated to. As for figures, Germany has roughly 30 Islamist organizations with a following of circa 32,000 persons, out of which 5,500 live in Bavaria.

This corresponds to roughly one per cent of about 3.2 million Muslims in Germany. However, this low percentage should not be taken to mean that Islamist organizations are isolated within the Muslim population, and there are several reasons for this. If we include the families of the members, which is especially legitimate against the backdrop of the enormous importance of the family as a social institution, the number is considerably higher. Beyond that, the potential for mobilization and attracting sympathizers is hard to pin down with accuracy. In any event, Islamists must not be considered terrorists across the board. The large majority of Islamists living in Germany seeks to achieve their goals while adhering to the local laws (legal Islamists). They deliberately want to give the impression of being a mere religious community, exclusively existing for the purpose of attending to the religious and social needs of Muslims living in western countries. They pretend to pursue goals that are in keeping with the constitutional framework and seek an inter-religious dialogue.

Out of 5,500 Islamists in Bavaria, only about 500 advocate violence as a means of reaching their political goals. In this context, they primarily focus on their home countries. Looking at the membership figures of the organizations in isolation, however, does not do justice to the potential threats emanating from them. The people connected with terrorist activities in Germany are almost exclusively individuals independent of any organization or followers of splinter groups attached to foreign organizations with Islamist terrorist connections. About 50 persons in Bavaria are believed to be connected with networks of a terrorist orientation.

In view of this situation, the following critical question arises: Where is the boundary between the legitimate exercise of freedom of religion as a fundamental right and unacceptable political endeavors to undermine the free democratic fundamental order?

Ideological Background

The Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BFV) observes so-called extremist activities, that is, endeavors directed against the free democratic fundamental order of the Federal Republic of Germany. The most important principles of this fundamental order are respect for human rights, including, without being limited to, people's right to life and free development, the sovereignty of the people, as well as the principles underlying the separation of powers, a multi-party system, and the independence of the courts. If Islamist groups direct their political activities against these principles, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution will classify them as extremist and observe them. In such a case, we refer to them as Islamic extremists or Islamists. Islamism is an ideology and political doctrine claiming universal and absolute validity. It is an ideology directed *against* the central values and procedural rules of a free democracy as well as any and all forms of integrating or assimilating Muslims into our order of state and society. For Islamists, Islam is the only basis and criterion for everything they think and do. Islam is the sole foundation of individual conduct and public order, decreed by God and unchangeable by human beings.

Islamists also believe that Islamic teachings provide both ultimate ethical principles and specific instructions for action in politics, economy, law and culture, all based on the two normative sources of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunnah, which are thus superior to any national constitution. Such an interpretation of Qur'an and Sunnah is incompatible with a free democratic fundamental order. It contradicts fundamental democratic principles such as the sovereignty of the people, the majority principle, the separation of powers and the right to education and parliamentary opposition. A doctrinaire claim to the inviability and absolute binding force of the Islamist readings of Qur'an and Sunnah also runs counter to the approach of a free democracy to human rights, whereby all people are by nature equal in terms of human dignity, an idea which underlies all other fundamental rights. For Islamists, the legal status of individuals is solely dependent on their belonging to the Muslim religious community. Islamists also use literal interpretations of certain Qur'an quotes as a reason why women

are discriminated against in many areas of daily life and deprived of their fundamental rights. These restrictions of the principle of equality impact significant parts in the central element of western democracies, i.e. human rights. According to Islamist ideas, Islam is translated into reality via the Sharia legal system which is directly binding for state and society and delineates the framework of Muslim life. It legitimizes inhuman penalties incompatible with prevailing Western values. The separation of state and religion in western countries is not only rejected as "un-Islamic," it is also fought actively.

Islamism is thus characterized by intolerance towards other faiths and moderate Muslims alike. Due to its claim to absolute validity, Islamism calls for active combat against all the unfaithful and the world-wide spreading of Islam, if necessary by subjugating all non-Muslims. Western ideas of democracy and society are rejected if they do not conform to the Qur'an and Sharia law. Islamist Muslims will thus be hard to integrate into democratic systems and they do not seek to become integrated. Islamism in a democratic state is inevitably not only hostile towards democracy but also towards integration. Islamist groups also put up massive resistance to integration by seeking to influence primarily young people so as to make them reject our democratic order and free society. This task is fulfilled *inter alia* by private Islamist madrassas run by extremist organizations.

Islamist Groups in Germany

The majority of Islamist groups active in Germany primarily aim at replacing the governmental systems in the home countries of members by an Islamic societal order based on Qur'an and Sharia. However, a complementary strategy aims at offering Muslims social, cultural, economic and religious institutions that cover all areas of life, thus preventing them from becoming integrated in German society. Islamic centers, self-contained religious circles and mosques used by fundamentalists thus play an important role in the recruitment of militant fighters who are provided with the relevant ideology there. For Islamists, the issue of violence for the purpose of reaching political goals is mainly a matter of tactics. According to Islamist theorists, "Jihad" (which translates literally as an internal struggle, striving, or Holy War) as an instrument of making the Islamist societal order materialize includes any means leading to victory. Hence, the majority of Islamist groups from the Arabic region advocates violence as a means of reaching their political goals. Other groups rely on non-violent political activities to change society.

About 2.5 million out of the 3.2 million Muslims in Germany are of Turkish origin. Thus, Turkish Islamist groups are more important and have more influence on social and political life in Germany and the Muslims living in the country than Arab groups. At this point, it is worthwhile mentioning one group which differs from other Islamist groups in several instances. It is the Islamist group with the largest membership in Germany, the "Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs e.V." (IGMG).

Unlike other Islamist groups, the IGMG is engaged in political activities, not violence, and has put much effort into building a legally impeccable image for several years. The organization has a total of about 26,000 members in Germany, out of which 4,800 live in the state of Bavaria. The IGMG is a rallying point for followers of the former Virtue Party (FP) and the current "Felicity Party" (SP) of former Turkish Prime Minister Erbakan. In June 2001 the "Virtue Party" was prohibited by the Turkish Constitutional Court for reasons of "anti-laicist activities," e.g., a violation of the principle of religious neutrality of the Turkish state. IGMG has about 500 local groups throughout Germany; the number of groups located in Bavaria is 70. Unlike other Islamist organizations, the outward impression IGMG seeks to create is one of conformity with the German constitution as it engages in the "interreligious dialogue" and participates in the "Open Mosque Day," on which occasion it presents itself as cosmopolitan and tolerant. However, the impression one gains from internal IGMG events is often entirely different.

The "Muslim Brotherhood" (MB) founded in Egypt in 1928 is the oldest and, ideologically, most influential movement of political Islam. It is a multi-national organization consisting of national chapters. The basic ideology of the MB is geared to the establishment of Muslim theocracies. This goal for the distant future is what unites all movements within the Muslim Brotherhood. MB ideology has spread throughout the Muslim world and has led to the formation of numerous militant Islamist organizations. These include the Egyptian MB offspring "Jihad Islami," which emerged in the 1970s and which inter alia carried out the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat in 1981. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden's successor as the leader of "Al-Qaeda," was first a leading figure in "Jihad Islami." The Algerian "Front Islamique du Salut" (FIS) and the Palestinian organization HAMAS are also rooted in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The "Islamische Gemeinschaft Deutschland e.V." (IGD)—Islamic Community of Germany—is considered to be the German headquarters of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood branch; it has been active in Germany since the 1960s. The total membership in Germany is about 600, more than 120 of these live in Bavaria, and the organization also has a seat at the "Islamischen Zentrum München" (IZM). It is also a member of the "Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe" (FIOE), founded in 1989. FIOE was formed under a resolution adopted by a general assembly of representatives of the major Islamic centers, societies and associations in Europe. The followers of IGD seek to present themselves to the public at large as a representation of Muslim interests loyal to the German legal order. Hardly ever do they express reservations in respect of western democracies or the political and social order in Germany in their public announcements.

Terrorist Networks and How the Office for the Protection of the Constitution Combats Them

After the logistic basis of "Al-Qaeda" in Afghanistan had been destroyed in 2001, far-reaching changes took place in international Islamist terrorism. The solid world-wide network structures which had been created in the "Al-Qaeda" training camps in Afghanistan disappeared and came to be replaced by small local autonomous terrorist cells which have interiorized the ideology "Al-Qaeda." The former terrorist cadre organization "Al-Qaeda" has turned into a loose community of "religious fighters" who plan their activities in small groups and act independently. A new generation of perpetrators is able to prepare and carry out attacks without instructions from al-Qaeda central authorities. The ideas and goals of Bin Laden, the deceased but iconic leader figure, can be and are disseminated via the Internet. Direct contact between leaders and terrorist cells is no longer required. Thus, the terrorist network can make up for an environment in which it has become more difficult to operate by means of using the Internet. Lacking training facilities after the destruction of camps in Afghanistan have come to be replaced by a kind of "virtual training" on the Internet, and so-called "terrorist manuals" including instructions for bomb building and explosives handling are circulated on the WWW as well.

Information about arms, practical combat training, fitness programs and survival training is also available online. The Internet is used for religious and ideological instruction, too. Thus, violence-prone Islamists around the world may acquire terrorist know-how without running the risk of being identified because they have been to training camps. This is a new kind of threat that should not be underestimated.

How can the security forces respond to this type of threat? The only chance of preventing potential attacks lies in the early recognition of planning processes as well as identifying emerging radicalization. Intelligence services are primarily called upon in this context to be pro-active. Another thing that is indispensable is the up-to-the-minute exchange of information among all security authorities concerned, especially the intelligence services and the police. To speed up the exchange of information, bundle existing knowledge and create a cluster of analytical capacity, a joint counter-terrorism centre ("Gemeinsames Terrorismusabwehrzentrum," GTAZ) was created in Berlin; it brings together about 180 specialists from various law-enforcement authorities at the federal level and the Länder (the separate German states); the federal chief prosecutor and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees are also represented. There are daily briefings and the flow of information is enhanced via co-ordination fora. Bavaria has additional bodies serving to improve co-ordination among various authorities in combating international Islamist terrorism. A special organization structure in the Bavarian police headquarters is worth mentioning at this point: AKIS = Aufklärung krimineller islamistischer Strukturen (identification of criminal Islamist structures) is in charge of en-

suring close co-operation between police, public prosecution, the Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution, tax investigators, etc.

The AKIS aims at gathering information on relevant connections and structures among criminal Islamists across the boundaries of individual offences. The working group titled BIRGiT – Beschleunigte Identifizierung und Rückführung von Gefährdern aus dem Bereich des islamistischen Terrorismus/Extremismus (fast-lane identification and repatriation of persons with a background in Islamist terrorism/extremism who pose a threat) was created by the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior in October 2004. Its task is to make Islamist extremists leave the country in a consistent way, or if this is not possible, to limit their leeway for action to the greatest possible extent if they are dangerous (e.g. by surveillance measures). The aim is to make it clear to potential terrorist sympathizers that the approach to extremism or support for terrorist activities in Bavaria is "zero tolerance." Various authorities, including e.g. the Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the Bavarian Office of Criminal Investigation, co-operate in the BIRGiT working group, which gives it a special clout.

Specifically, the working group is composed of the following elements:

- A representative of the unit in charge of aliens' matters at the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior. This person is seconded by the police to ensure the law enforcement angle is handled appropriately, and heads the working group;

- Representatives of the units in charge of aliens' matters and Central Offices for Repatriation in Upper Bavaria and Central Franconia. In complicated cases, these are empowered to order expulsions and residence-terminating measures;

- Employees of major aliens' authorities (Munich and Nuremberg) specializing in residence-terminating measures, and of local aliens' authorities in individual cases, as well as

- Specialists representing the Bavarian Office of Criminal Investigation and the Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

Representatives of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees are brought in on a case-by-case basis if matters of asylum law need to be dealt with, and so are representatives of the Bavarian Office of the Prosecutor, in the event of procedural matters. The group works together as a team when preparing the basis for issuing orders. The officers exchange general information about the situation of persons posing a threat to help the employees of aliens' authorities who specialize in issues of extremism among aliens, and, by the same token, to help the others understand the implications of aliens' law and the work of the aliens' authorities. In case of difficult legal problems, workshops or joint seminars are held to find in-depth approaches. The intense co-operation among representatives of different professions as well as theorists and practitioners has proven very fruitful; as a result, creative solutions resting

on a sound legal and specialist basis can be found. By networking among a number of institutions and authorities, processes and proceedings have been streamlined and accelerated.