1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore the different religious terrorist organizations that operate in the Maghreb neighborhood (particularly Morocco), especially those oriented to have an effect in Spain.

There are 2 objectives within this paper, first of all to analyze different Islamist terrorist organizations that operate in Spain or the Maghreb and compare them. Following the 2004 Madrid train bombings milestone, I would like to show an overview of the most relevant terrorist organizations in the area. Second, try to identify some other religious organizations that are involved in religious terrorist activity in Spain but are not Islamist; say Christian extremism, sectarian violence, etc…

2. TERRORIST GROUPS OVERVIEW

For the “Islamist terrorist groups” analysis I have chosen the following groups:

- Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group
- Takfir wal Hijra - Martyrs for Morocco.
- Salafia Jihadia (Morocco)
- Abu Nayaf Al Afghani
- Abu hafs al masri
2.1 Islamist terrorist groups

The framework of the analysis will include its ideology, areas of operation and potential targets. Furthermore, I will try to provide some information regarding the past activities of the group as well as any known leader.

Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (Groupe Islamique Combattant Morrocaín (GICM))

Ideology: The Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, or GICM, is dedicated to the creation of an Islamist state in Morocco. In addition, the group actively supports al-Qaeda's terrorist objectives against U.S. and Western European countries. Moroccan members of GICM were trained in Afghanistan terrorist-training camps. GICM and al-Qaeda are allies and the two groups share members.

Areas of operation: Afghanistan, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Morocco, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom

Financial sources: Trafficking falsified documents; Suspected of arms smuggling

Origin: The roots of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group can be traced to the Moroccan organization, Shabiba Islamiya. Shabiba Islamiya split into two factions and GICM emerged as one of the two factions. According to certain reports, at the time of GICM's founding, it was primarily comprised of mujahidin who had fought in the Soviet-Afghan war. The group was formed in the 1990s.

Activities: Moroccans associated with the GICM are part of the broader international terrorist movement. In November, 13 members of a suspected Belgian GICM cell went on trial in Brussels for allegedly providing material support to the group. GICM is one of the groups believed to be involved in planning the May 2003 Casablanca suicide bombings, and has been involved in other plots. Members work with other North African extremists, engage in trafficking falsified documents, and possibly smuggle arms. In the past, the group has issued communiqués and statements against the Moroccan Government. In the last year, a number of arrests in Belgium, France, and Spain have disrupted the
group's ability to operate, though cells and key members still remain throughout Europe. Although the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades, among others, claimed responsibility on behalf of al-Qaida, Spanish authorities are investigating the possibility that GICM was involved in the March 2004, Madrid trains bombings. It has issued communiqués criticizing the current Moroccan government.

**Current goals:** GICM is an active member of the international jihad movement. In addition to its presence in North Africa, GICM members are positioned in Western Europe. The group fosters relationships with other North African extremists. According to a pro-government paper in Morocco, a GICM member confessed to police that GICM requested help from al-Qaeda. The GICM member stated that Usama bin Laden's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, met with a senior member of GICM. While GICM is dedicated to the creation of an Islamist state in Morocco, it is clear that the group has more international ambitions. In October 2005, the group was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department.

**Leaders:** Mohamed Guerbouzi (Leader)
Serhane ben Abdelmajid Fakhet “El tunecino” (Operational Commander)

**Organization:** The group has chosen the system of independent cells. This means that each cell is totally isolated from its peers, preventing communication (or betrayal) from one to the other. The militants are totally unaware that they form part of a much larger organization. It is for this reason that an emir is appointed to lead a cell for which he is directly responsible. Thus, militants operate as independent members of an independent organization.

To achieve this, it uses two methods: first it isolates the cells one from another; secondly, it saves energy by recruiting individuals from pre-existing groups either in Morocco or elsewhere.
**Takfir Wal Hijra**

**Ideology:** Takfir Wa Hijra, whose name means "rejection of sins and exodus" in English, is regarded as one of the most fundamentalist of the Islamist groups operating today. Takfir Wa Hijra is best analyzed as a pan-Islamic religious sect or cult, whose membership allegedly includes al-Qaeda deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri and Iraqi terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, rather than an organized terrorist group. Its members, who reportedly can never leave the sect once joining, attempted to assassinate Usama bin Laden in 1995 in Sudan for his "liberal" views.

**Areas of operation:** Algeria, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom

**Origin:** The radical Islamist movement Al-Takfir Wal-Hijra originated in Egypt in the 1960s as a radical offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Believing that much of the world is heretical, members of the movement adhere to a strict Salafi interpretation of Islam, and aim ultimately to return to what they consider to be a true Islamic society—the Islamic caliphate.

**Activities:** Takfir Wa Hijra, whose membership includes Egyptians, Syrians, Palestinians, Lebanese and other Arabs, operates throughout the Arab and Muslim world and also has cells in Europe. The group suffered a setback in 1999 and 2000 when Syria-backed Lebanese troops crushed one of its strongholds in northern Lebanon, capturing and killing a number of its members. Authorities in a number of Arab countries have arrested members of the group, however Takfir Wa Hijra remains active, and has recently been linked to the November 2004 murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Moroccan sources have asserted that Takfir members in Morocco have formed an operational alliance with the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in neighboring Algeria.

**Leaders:** As an ideology, Takfir Wal-Hijra today operates with no overall central structure; it is impossible to attribute one leader to the movement. There are, however, some figures within the movement who are worth noting:
- **Shukri Ahmed Mustafa** (1944-1978). (Founder)
- **Youssef Fikri** (aka: the “Emir of Blood”) was the spiritual leader of a Takfir Wal-Hijra group in Morocco. Captured in 2002 in Casablanca and sentenced to death.
- **Bassam Ahmed Kanj**
- According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Takfiris are guided by fatwas issued by influential radicals, such as the “blind sheikh,” **Omar Abdel Rahman**

**Organization:** Takfir Wal-Hijra is not simply a terrorist organization. Instead, it is better described as a radical ideology than an organization per se—a web of Islamic militants around the world connected only by their beliefs. As a result, it has been depicted by some as an “Islamic fascism” of sorts. Indeed, Takfiris are seen as so extreme that even many radical Islamists such as Abu Hamza described Takfiris as “nothing but a bunch of extremists”.

**Abu Nayaf al Afgani**

**Ideology:** The group seeks mainly to end Spanish support for American led efforts in the war on terror, citing “…Spanish…aggressions against Muslims in sending new troops to Iraq and announcing its intention to send new units to Afghanistan.” The group’s moniker contains two such references, as "Nayaf" refers to the Iraqi holy city of the same name ("Najaf" in Romanized Arabic), while "Afghani" is undoubtedly an allusion to American operations in Afghanistan.

**Areas of operation:** Spain

**Origin:** April 2004

**Activities:** In April 2004, Abu Nayaf al-Afghani faxed a statement to a Spanish newspaper that claimed responsibility for an unsuccessful train bombing against a high speed train en route from Madrid to Seville.
One month after the Madrid bombings, Spain elected Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's socialist government came to power. He fulfilled his campaign promise to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq in June 2004, satisfying one of Abu Nayaf al-Afgahi's chief objectives. However, Zapatero doubled (from 250 to 500) the number of Spanish soldiers in Afghanistan.

**Current goals:** The group seeks mainly to end Spanish support for American led efforts in the war on terror

**Organization:** Other sources attribute the March 11 attacks to the group Abu Dujana Al-Afghani Ansar Al-Qaeda Europe, which appears be an alias for Abu Nayaf al-Afghani. A separate Al-Qaeda linked organization, the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade, also declared responsibility for the Madrid attacks, and although it faces similar questions about the validity of its claims, it is generally regarded by authorities as having carried out the attacks. While Abu Dujana Al-Afghani Ansar Al-Qaeda Europe and Abu Nayaf al-Afghani are likely the same operational group with aliases, the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade is probably an operationally distinct group loosely aligned with Abu Nayaf al Afghani. All of these groups are thought to share al-Qaeda's ideological convictions, though the extent to which they coordinate their actions is not fully known.

**Abu Hafs Al-masri Brigades**

**Ideology:** The Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade has accepted the call for a holy war against western civilization most associated with al-Qaeda. The brigade attacks (or claims to attack) western civilians for their complicity in atrocities committed by western governments against Muslims worldwide.

**Areas of operation:** Spain, United Kingdom

**Origin:** August 1, 2003

**Activities:** Doubts of the group's existence stem from the fact that several of their claims are clearly false. The 2003 blackouts, for example, were caused by technical errors. The Abu Hafs group, however,
referred to the incident as one of its "operations" -- "Operation Quick Lightning in the Land of the Tyrant of This Generation."

The London-based Arabic language newspaper Al-Quds al-Arabi has received letters from this group, in which it has claimed responsibility for:

- the blackout of August 14, 2003 in the northeastern United States and Canada;
- the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on August 19, 2003;
- the bombing of two synagogues in Turkey on November 15, 2003 and the British consulate and HSBC bank in Istanbul on November 20;
- an hotel bombing in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2003;
- the 11 March 2004 Madrid attacks;
- a letter published July 2, 2004 endorsing the three months Al Qaeda ultimatum against Europe of April 14, 2004
- The terrorist bombings in London in July 2005

Current goals: In July 2005, the group published a statement on the web that may have been meant to signal more attacks to European cells. In February 2006, a statement signed by the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades appeared online threatening "bloody war" on Denmark. This was in relation to the controversy over the Muhammad cartoons published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten

Leaders: Fakhet, Serhane ben Abdelmajid

Organization: The Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade may be the name of an active al-Qaeda cell in Europe or the organization that oversees al-Qaeda's European operations

Named for infamous al-Qaeda terrorist Mohhamed Atef aka Abu Hafs, the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade is known only through statements published through the London Arabic language daily al Quds al Arabi. Through this publication, the group has claimed responsibility for several large terrorist strikes, including the July London bombings, the 2004 Madrid train bombings, and the massive blackouts that occurred in
North America in the summer of 2003. The attacks for which they claim responsibility are generally attributed to al-Qaeda, or al-Qaeda-linked groups. Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's #2, has claimed responsibility for the organization on more than one occasion. The group appears to be recently formed (as Atef was only killed in late 2001), but it may reflect only a name-change in memory of Atef for a pre-existing off-shoot or operational division of al-Qaeda.

The group is named after a former policeman Mohammed Atef, aka Abu Hafs, of Egypt, who was a member of Ayman al-Zawahiri's al-Jihad al-Islami (Islamic Jihad). Al-Masri means "the Egyptian" in Arabic. He became a relative to Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaida leader, after his daughter married bin Laden's son, Mohammed bin Laden. He was killed by U.S. airstrikes in Afghanistan in late 2001. He has been adopted as a "martyr" to the fundamentalist cause.

**Salafia Jihadia**

**Ideology:** The group's goals are to overthrow "impious" Arab governments, pressure the West to stop support of "corrupt" Arab regimes, and achieve these objectives through violent jihad.

**Areas of operation:** Morocco

**Financial sources:** Members of Salafia Jihadia have been charged with arson, petty crime, kidnapping, drug dealing, and murder

**Origin:** Mid to late 1990s

**Activities:** Planning and executing a massive coordinated suicide bombing in Casablanca on May 16, 2003 that resulted in 45 casualties. The attack targeted a private Spanish club (Casa de España) near the Spanish consulate, the Israeli Alliance Club, a Jewish cemetery, the Belgian consulate, and a hotel popular with businesspeople. All 14 suicide bombers, including the two who backed out at the last minute, were from the same downtrodden suburb of Casablanca, Sidi Moumen. This attack led to a
surge in general membership as well as an influx of "religious theorists" into the group, mostly from the Assirat al Mostaquim (Straight Path) religious association.

In all, 31 Salafia Jihadia members were found to be responsible, 10 of which were given the death penalty. Salafia Jihadia’s spiritual leader, Mohamed Fizazi, was given a sentence of 30 years in prison.

The investigations following the March 2004 Madrid bombings (claimed by the al Qaeda-affiliated Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade) uncovered several pieces of evidence that suggest elements of Salafia Jihadia played at least a minor role in the attack. In fact, Spanish authorities working with their Moroccan counterparts questioned many Moroccans, including several members of Salafia Jihadia, regarding their involvement in the attack. One of the investigation's prime suspects is Jamal Zougam, a Moroccan who was spotted on one of the trains shortly before the bombs were detonated. A member of al-Qaeda's Spanish cell led by Abu Dahdah (indicted in Spain on charges of aiding preparations for the September 11th attacks), Zougam is alleged to have planned the Madrid attacks and planted at least one of the bombs himself.

Zougam had close ties with Salafia Jihadia elements and reportedly shared a safehouse with Salafia Jihadia terrorist Abdelaziz Beyaich, who took part in the Casablanca attack. A wiretap obtained by a French private investigator also revealed that Zougam participated in a meeting with Salafia Jihadia leader Mohamed Fizazi in 2001. Fizazi is known to have preached at a Hamburg Islamic center frequented by 9/11 operational leader Mohammed Atta.

**Current goals:** Though much of Salafia Jihadia's top leadership was captured soon after the Casablanca attacks, the group still poses a threat to regional stability due to its flattened organizational structure and substantial base of contacts with other fundamentalist groups in the region.

**Leaders:** Mohamed Fizazi was born in the late 40s’ in Tangiers, Morocco.

In the early 90s’, began to preach the more extreme Wahhabism doctrine and called his group of followers Salafia Jihadia. In 1999 Mohamed Fizazi became the Imam of the Al Quds Mosque in Hamburg,
Germany. Mohamed Fizazi also had connections to some of the Madrid Trains Bombing suspects such as Hasan El Haski, who was involved also in the 2003 Casablanca Bombings, Jamal Zougam, who met with hims and offered financial assistance to Salafia Jihadia in 2000, and Abdelaziz Benyaich.

Mohamed Fizazi was among 87 people, most of them Salafia Jihadia members, sentenced in Morocco in 08/2003, in a trial that centered on the Casablanca Bombings. Mohamed Fizazi received a 30-year sentence after being convicted for preaching radical Islam in Mosques and meeting with the Casablanca attack’s perpetrators.

Mohamed Fizazi has shown no remorse and in 05/2007 participated in a widespread Moroccan prison hunger strike that lasted over 20 days.

**Organization:** Salafia Jihadia recruits mainly from Morocco’s suburbs, rife with poverty and poor social conditions. This group is one of the largest terrorist groups in Morocco, and it is a close ally and offshoot of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM), which was one of the original fundamentalist terrorist groups in Morocco. Salafia Jihadia is compartmentalized, fairly decentralized, and "more of a doctrine than an organization", lending credence to the belief that the organization is actually a network of loosely-affiliated Moroccan fundamentalist groups.

Salafia Jihadia is made up of many small, local, and autonomous cells. It is alleged that some of these cells receive operational help from the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) and strategic guidance from al Qaeda in Iraq’s leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. This suggests that Salafia Jihadia is responsible for operational planning and the delegation or execution of actual attack plans. Some also allege that to facilitate terrorist suspect processing and conviction, the name "Salafia Jihadia" was created by the Moroccan government as a catch-all categorization for the many different Salafist groups that operate in Morocco.
2.2 Islamist terrorist comparison

Motivation. The analyzed groups have a common ideology that can be sketched as a fight to reach the instauration of a political system according to the laws of Islam (sharia), by attacking invasive western powers or impious Arab regimes. But within this broad description, there are substantial differences, for instance some groups like “Takfir wal Hijra” are globally oriented (pan-Arab), not caring about any particular country and looking towards a general overthrow of all regimes in the area to build a global Islamic regime, being particularly strict in their interpretation of Islam. Other groups like “GICM” are more specifically targeting a particular country (Morocco) to overthrow the government and have an Islamic republic.

Furthermore, there are groups like “Abu Nayaf al Afghani” that have a very clear and precise objective: “end Spanish support to America in its war on terror”. Spain is often described as an occupied Islam-land, the former Al-Andalus, dating back to the 711-1492 Muslim domination, therefore some of these groups also advocate for the re-conquest of the peninsula.

Areas of operation. Most groups have links in their neighboring countries as well as in Europe, whether these countries are their target or not. This is most likely due to the large proportion of immigration going to Europe and the increasing mobility of population. For instance we can mention how Mohamed Fizazi moved from Morocco to Hamburg (Germany) where he got involved in further radicalization of the immigrant population. This spread is useful in order to accomplish some of the logistic operations of the group, like fund raising, and also to mingle with other groups and share information or in a safer place than their own country.

The “global jihadist” groups are more open to conduct actions irrespective of the area, while the “targeted country” groups are more likely to attack specifically their objective’s interests.
Objectives. The objectives targeted by these groups can be classified basically in 2 groups:

1) “Impious/corrupt Arab regimes”. So the groups try to attack against domestic targets to destabilize the regime with a final goal of creating an Islamic revolution against the government. These groups claim that the ruling party is imposed and maintained by foreign powers.

2) “Global Jihad”. These groups target interests of “foreign powers” in order to disrupt their influence or modify their behavior (as in the train bombings in Madrid). But the objectives are not circumscribed to foreign countries (as in the Casa de España bombing in Casablanca 2003), and can target objectives outside. Their final aim, connected to Al-Qaeda philosophy, is to weaken the western powers in a global battle for domination.

Enabling environments/Recruiting. As per the available information, most groups’ recruitment is based in impoverished neighborhoods, areas that provide the appropriated Precipitant Conditions of poverty and other grievances that impulse the individuals to embrace these “extreme ideologies” expecting that it will change their situation for the better. Furthermore, the “isolated cell” organization scheme enhances the radicalization of individuals, once they start getting involved in the group’s activities. Notwithstanding the above, there are some relevant differences among groups, for instance the “Takfiris” have a much more extreme ideology while other groups are less strict.

Organization. Most of the analyzed groups share a common pattern that is better described as a “radical ideology” than a proper organization. Most groups have independent cells, where one cell is completely independent and isolated from the rest. This way, militants are unaware that they belong to a larger organization. This de-centralized structure is more complex and difficult to manage to the detail (lack of direct reporting and fluent communication with management). But it has advantages like the absence of “hubs” that can be interfered by the government. And even in the case of suffering from government infiltration, this spy will never get to know information of other cells than his own.
In network theory, this type of organization will avoid the “Small-world” or “Scale-free” prediction for the existence of hubs and create several “cliques” very densely connected among each other, but isolated from the rest of the network. Most human organizations (and many other networks like proteins, internet, etc...) tend to form “scale-free” networks where there are several hubs highly connected while the rest have fewer connections. Other types of human organizations, like the military, tend to organize in trees, with a strict hierarchical network. In both cases they are likely to suffer from infiltration, since once inside the organization is easy to navigate and identify the power nodes (leaders). But this particular setting of isolated “cliques” is very robust to infiltration since you will only have access to the infiltrated sub-group, but very rarely to the rest of the network.
3. Non Islamist terrorism in Spain

It is an objective for this research paper to find different types of “religious terrorism” operating in Spain in order to compare their differences and similarities. In spite of the comprehensive research carried out, including conversations with the 2 most relevant Political Affairs think-tanks (“Real Instituto Elcano” and “Fundación FRIDE”), I have found no evidence of any group performing continuous terrorist activities with non-Islamic religious ideology within Spain.

Despite the abovementioned fact, there is evidence of isolated violent actions that have been supported or encouraged by extreme social movements related to conservative and Christian sectors of the society. Again, this should not be considered as “organized Christian terrorism”, but it has to be included in the analysis due to the use of violent methods (i.e. theater bombings) and the significant pressure that these groups were placing in the society in order to achieve their political/religious objectives.

In the case of the “Alfil Theater bombing” ultra-conservative catholic and neo-fascist groups were showing discontent and demonstrating in order to dissuade Leo Bassi (the artist) to continue representing his play “Revelations” (a provoking atheist play against religious manipulation). Even relevant and well known public characters like the Cardinal of Toledo stated that the play was “a terrorist attack against religious freedom” creating more social tension. This situation could have been the catalyst for the incident that took place the 1st March 2006, where a home-made bomb was found within the theater set to explode at the time of the play with over 200 spectators in the theatre. The bombing was never claimed by any known group and it is likely that some anonymous individual, moved by his own beliefs, took the initiative.

In 1977 “Sala Villarroel” (another theatre) also suffered a bombing while representing a leftist/revolutionary play by Alfonso Sastre: “La sangre y la ceniza. Diálogos con Miguel Servet”.

Furthermore, there are sensitive issues like “anti-abortion” and “anti-euthanasia” movements that are backed by conservative and religious sectors that often impact Spanish society. These groups
demonstrate and put pressure on the hospitals and doctors that do this practice in their professional work. In 2007 the case of Luis Montes at the Severo Ochoa hospital in Madrid, a doctor that was accused of using illegal sedation in order to provoke the euthanasia on patients that asked for it, became popular nationwide generating harsh debates among conservative-Catholics and progressive-liberals.

As a conclusion, although I found no evidence of non-Islamic religious terrorist operating in Spain, there are some isolated events and enough social tension to include this as a part of this study on religious terrorism in Spain.

4. CONCLUSION

The counter-terrorism strategy case of Spain, and particularly with the example of the Madrid train bombing in 2004, is a clear example of a transition from a primarily ETA-focused strategy based in international cooperation, infiltration, political and legal pressure to a more broad strategy that includes the religious terrorism as a main threat. The narrow focus in “nationalistic/separatist” terrorism suddenly became obsolete with the impact of the International Islamist Jihadism after the 11th September attacks in New York.

The counter-terrorism strategy has evolved to include in its surveillance environment many other different actors like mosques, imams, immigrants, social clubs, businesses, etc... mostly operating in other languages and in a wide range of countries from EU to the MENA region. The completely different ideology, objectives and operation strategy of the new threat has forced the intelligence services to adapt to the new situation, for instance by hiring Arabic language experts able to understand web-sites and other communications. Nowadays much more information is known about the different threats that may affect Spanish national security and the diversity of the different groups, but still one of the defining factors is the diffuse organization of these terrorist groups. As shown in the analysis of the 5
selected groups (which is a small subset of the groups operating in the area) it is a difficult task to
disentangle the diverse links and connections among many of the different groups and also where the
limits of the organization are.

There are several characteristics common to this new kind of organization that makes it more difficult to
fight, and that the homeland security professional should pay special attention:

- **Diffuse structure and lack of a usual chain of command.** Instead, these groups have an
  **underlying ideology** that catalyzes and facilitates the terrorism activity. (GE, PC, ET, OA)

- **Independent cells.** Working in isolation one from another, and even without knowing the
  existence of other cells. This feature is especially useful to prevent infiltration and secrecy.

- **Cultural and language differences.** It is essential to understand the grievances that motivate
  these individuals to join terrorist groups so that, in addition to the police fights on the ground,
  the battle can also be fought in the minds of the potential terrorist. Preventing recruitment is a
  valuable weapon against these organizations.

Looking into the future, it will be a very interesting subject of study the effect that the ongoing
revolutions affecting the MENA region will have in the current status-quo that the terrorist organization
have in the area. Whether these groups will take advantage of the instability to achieve its goals or if by
the contrary, this social movement apparently based in citizenship, freedom and democracy, will work
against them.
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