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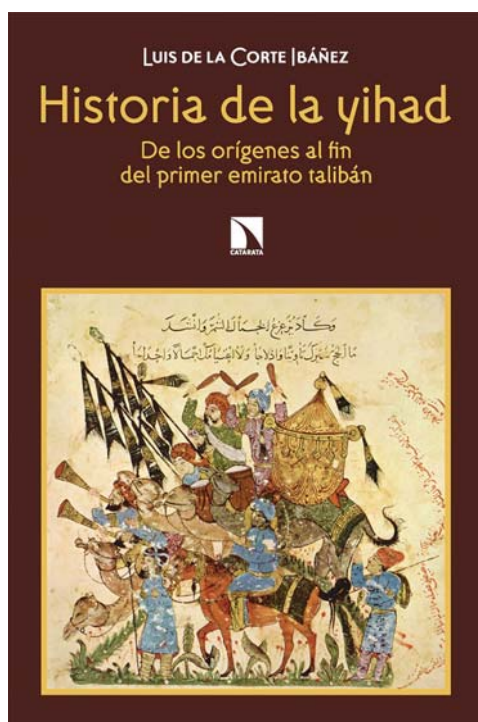
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RECENSION

*HISTORY OF JIHAD: FROM THE ORIGINS TO THE END OF
THE FIRST TALIBAN EMIRATE*

Luis de La Corte Ibáñez, Catarata Publishing House, 2021

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Throughout history, there has been national terrorism, confined to a specific territory; transnational terrorism, where the bases or sanctuary are in one territory and its field of action and objectives in another; and international terrorism, whose objectives are likewise in one territory, but its field of action is the whole world. However, since 9/11, global terrorism has appeared, where both the objectives and the field of action of the terrorists is the whole world.

These attacks brought in their wake in a sea of experts and dilettantes who struggled to explain a phenomenon imbued with a significant cultural distance that made it difficult to understand. Suicide terrorism was a media sensation and of great interest because of the images that recreated this explicit violence and challenged the world. To this effect, it could even be said that a kind of “terrorism industry” emerged to respond to this urgent demand for knowledge.

Al Qaeda’s main achievement, it could likewise be said, has been to have popularised the word “jihadist”, which serves as a surname and lowest common denominator for different local movements that have been given a certain framework, generating synergies at a global level. A new word is trying to describe an equally novel phenomenon, “al-Qaedaism”, a term for a set of jihadist groups integrated into a sort of semi-franchial nebula at the centre of which is al-Qaeda, which acts as a source of emulation and inspiration thanks to the legitimacy gained from 9/11.

However, jihadist movements have also parasitised conflicts of a different nature, transforming their key elements and nature into religious ones, without really resolving them and even ending up fighting the conflicts they had originally come to support.

China has claimed its place. China’s peaceful rise arguably went unnoticed - though not by all - in the media noise generated by jihadism. Nonetheless, more than 20 years have passed since 9/11, long enough for a dispassionate analysis to draw useful lessons for other situations on how this all came to be.

Jihadism has currently fallen out of the media spotlight, depriving the phenomenon of many of the forms of emotionality it sparks or are associated with it, and making de facto analysis now more objective and thus of particular academic interest. In addition, there are numerous primary sources and multidisciplinary analyses that call for reflection on the path that led to 9/11 and a re-reading of what has been worked on so far.

This is precisely what is offered in the book *Historia de la Jihad: de los orígenes al fin del primer emirato talibán* (History of Jihad from its origins to the first Taliban emirate), published by Catarata. Far from being a response to the information effect provoked by the terrorist attacks and the subsequent dilettantism, it has been written conscientiously and aseptically by a renowned psychologist, Luis de la Corte Ibáñez, professor of social psychology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, with a long curriculum in the study of terrorism. In addition and notably, Professor de la Corte directs the Strategic Studies and Intelligence area of the Institute of Forensic and Security Sciences of the Autonomous University of Madrid.

The development of the book work is linear, using history as its leitmotiv and bibliographical sources of the highest solvency. De la Corte is an inveterate realist and this process and means of proof is in line with that logic of thought. This is a rigorous overview of the warlike jihad, which starts from its origins and ends up focusing on its contemporary manifestations, with the main point of interest the 9/11 attacks. The book itself is a succession of historical events linked to each other, establishing various connections.

Because Islam is a traditionalism, history is fundamental to its understanding. The roots of jihadism lie in the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith, with which the book begins. Significant are the role of the Hanbali legal school for its literalism in Qur'anic exegesis, thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyya and reform movements such as Wahhabism.

The word Salafism - an idea from the mid-era of Islam - comes from the term *Salaf al-Salifh*, the Pious Ancestors, referring to the four Perfect *Rashidun* Caliphs, successors of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman and Ali and, more broadly, to the three generations to which they belong and who, because of their proximity to the Prophet, are considered most perfect.

Citing Ernst Renan, the book begins with the origins of Jihad and an analysis of the role of its contribution to the spread of Islam as a religion, community and civilisation through a selection of events, situations and ideas that have decisively shaped the history of religion, community, civilisation and Islamic thought.

The Islamic world had developed of its own accord since the Crusades. In this context and after several centuries of isolation, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt demonstrated the weakness of North African societies vis-à-vis the West. Then came the trauma of a colonisation and the crimes and massacres that took place. Moreover, it did not deliver the promises of development that had served as its doctrinal foundation.

At the end of the 19th century, the awakening of Islam and its regenerationist attempts at reform were driven by leading intellectuals. The first Islamic organisations appeared in this context long before the Cold War, although they received little attention in the West. The Muslim Brotherhood Organisation emerged as early as 1928, four years after the end of the Caliphate and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire by Hassan Al Banna, an Egyptian teacher. Then came the process of decolonisation that associated Islam with nationalist movements and took place in the context of the Cold War.

In this framework, which is linked to the oil crisis, the internationalisation of Palestinian terrorism, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Iranian revolution and the war in Lebanon would all take place. Other geographical areas joined this movement too, sometimes with different and superimposed overtones to the religious ones, such as the Kashmir conflict and the dynamics in the Philippines.

It was in the 1970s/80s that the phenomenon of Islamic associations was consolidated and definitively launched, coinciding with years of serious social, economic and political crises, and also cultural shock.

The proximate causes of the resurgence of Islam in political life that followed are to be found in such familiar issues as the Arab-Palestinian conflict, and the enduring sense of grievance it entailed for Arab nations. The success of the Iranian revolution which, despite being Shiite, demonstrated that the proposal to Islamise modernity was not in fact a utopia but a practicable reality. The ideological expansion of Wahhabism, financed by Saudi Arabia and materialised by school teachers, served to help spread ideas and thinkers, such as Qutb and Faraj and his work "The Forgotten Obligation", giving them doctrinal body and cohesion. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan provided military training for fanatical warriors and would help to coordinate the movement by creating common bonds. The failure of the Arab socialist path and of states to fulfil their role would delegitimise them and lead many organisations to brand secular-oriented governments as infidels. In short, by the late 1970s there were already ideas, doctrine, leadership, indoctrination, resources and trained personnel in place.

The political Islamism that is presented as a response to such dilemmas would be presented as a comprehensive solution based on the claim to be the meeting point between religion and politics. These movements have been transformed by their gradual insertion into the machinery of the state by introducing a possibilism affecting the application of the doctrine that would eventually lead to its trivialisation.

The politicisation of jihad occurred simultaneously alongside the Islamisation of conflicts such as the Palestinian one. The countries affected by this new jihadism were Lebanon - with the emergence of Shia jihadism - Israel and Palestine, Egypt and Algeria, which experienced a second war. However, it also shook other areas such as Indonesia, the Philippines and even Afghanistan. The end of communism reactivated the Islamic effervescence throughout Central Asia - particularly in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan - and in the Caucasus - Chechnya - reaching as far as the Balkans, where its activity was a failure.

Modern Salafism emerged in the 1960s in Saudi Arabia for geopolitical reasons, under the tutelage of its leaders and as an instrument of struggle against Nasserism and the socialist Arab way. The fusion of this thought with Wahhabism was a powerful reagent that resonated with and energised the group, later taking on a life of its own.

In this context and at this time, with the non-transparent support of US and Pakistani services, it would appear as a network of networks. This was Al Qaeda (AQ), which would not demobilise at the end of the Soviet conflict. AQ was an evolution of the *Maktab-al-Jidmat* (MAK) organisation of Abdullah Yusuff Azzam, promoter of the idea of global jihad, which Bin Laden would join. It is an Islamic fraternity which, despite being under the protection of Arab ethnicity, transcends national and cultural differences and immediate ideological goals. Under the cover of the Afghan safe haven, the network forged a cadre of highly motivated activists experienced in armed combat.

However, tactical differences between the leaders - Abdullan Yusuff Azzam favoured guerrilla warfare in the framework of a conventional conflict, while Bin Laden advocated global terrorism using the MAK's own channels - eventually led to the rift and

is probably one of the reasons for his assassination, which has never been clarified and which many attribute to the Saudi Arabian as the beneficiary.

The radicalisation of Sudan would also be important in the development of the jihadist movement. In this process, the role of the leader Hasan al-Turabi, who established relations with the great Islamic and world terrorist leaders of the time, stands out. The country was fractured as the Muslim north ruled over the animist and Christian African minorities in the south. Al-Turabi invited Bin Laden to the country, which led al-Qaeda also to Somalia, Eritrea and Yemen. The attacks against the World Trade Center in 1993, and against Egyptian President Mubarak in 1995 while he was in Addis Ababa, left the Sudan in an uncomfortable position, leading to the return of al-Qaeda troops to Afghanistan, where there were training camps that had been attended by Muslim groups from all over the world since the last decade of the 20th century, and from which two new figures would emerge: Setmariam and al-Zarqawi.

Al Qaeda consolidated a solid organisational structure in this territory, while taking care of the training and selection of its leadership, reinforcing old relationships that arose in the heat of the conflict with the Soviet Union, such as the one with the Haqqani network. At the same time, it accentuated its anti-Western narrative, focusing on the “distant enemy” strategy, which not only acted as a rallying point, but it also considered most of the regimes installed in Muslim countries as illegitimate and subsisting under Western protection. Using a media strategy and a strong anti-American dialectic, the aim was to provoke or force a disproportionate response - which he did not fear - from the US that would legitimise his cause and finally awaken the Muslim people.

Thus began the great campaign against the US that would lead to the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the USS Cole in 2001. For its part, al-Qaida was steadily building up the means and capabilities for its global operations, while the United States did not react or pay attention to the obvious challenge posed by both al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Al Qaeda's ambition to strike at the United States crystallised in the 9/11 attacks, the culmination of the campaign, which were inspired by an attempted attack on Paris conceived from Algeria. The attacks were the result of an intelligence failure on the part of the US, the root cause of which was an underestimation of the capabilities of these groups which, in turn, meant that the information available was under-exploited.

The 9/11 attacks brought Al Qaeda to the forefront of the world, giving it global visibility and turning the organisation into a rallying point for many of those dissatisfied with the current order and giving them hope of being able to change it, while imbuing the organisation with a relevance that was out of keeping with its real military capabilities. The attacks were an outlet that channelled the identity hatred and frustration of significant segments of the Muslim population. The network's actions meant that its political gamble was seen as viable and consequently as a danger to Western security.

Luis de la Corte's work, as announced, ends in Afghanistan with the fall of the first Taliban emirate, something that, in his opinion, surprised Bin Laden, who did not

consider that the Americans were going to carry out a ground deployment in response to 9/11. Furthermore, in the epilogue to the work, he analyses the reasons for the Taliban victory in 2021 and the strategic errors - or lack of strategy - that led to this situation.

This is a necessary work, a relevant and pertinent research paper that appropriately commemorates a date of the utmost geopolitical interest. This is done in an unemotional and rigorous way by someone who is a reference in terrorism studies in our country.

The criticism that can be made is related to the methodology followed and the author's realist reference. It provides an encyclopaedic exposé of facts and data but is sometimes lacking in strategic analysis and the drawing of consequences that go beyond the historical facts and are useful to us today. We would also have liked to have seen a more in-depth and detailed discussion of the ideological and religious transformations of the Salafist Islamist movement, and its differentiations and nuances in relation to the facts and in terms of their significance from a security perspective.

In any case, it is a brilliant piece of work. Analogies can be drawn with Gustavo de Arístegui's *La Jihad en España* or Gilles Kepel's work, even if their optics and ambitions are different. It is for this reason and for its academic timeliness that we can only congratulate the author for his compilation and analytical effort, which we take this opportunity to support from the Institute due to its relevance in our country.

Spain must produce its own and more research on security-relevant issues. We cannot simply rely on the research others produce for their own use and in bulk. Agriculture and thinking are strategic needs of nations.

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