

**« SHARIA4BELGIUM »**

**AN ATYPICAL BUT EXTREMIST SALAFIST ORGANISATION  
STEPS ON THE BELGIAN STAGE**

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This Saturday, May 22 2010, will be a test for the fledgling organisation **Sharia4Belgium**, after it has applied for a permission to demonstrate in the centre of the European capital to protest the recently passed law, which seeks to ban the Burqa in public spaces. **The city of Brussels refused their request** and it remains to be seen whether the group decides to go ahead with the protest, and if so, how many supporters will take the streets. **However, a worrisome prospect is the fact that the known British extremist, Anjem Choudary, vowed to be present with “several hundreds” of his comrades, adding that “blood will run in the streets”.**

Beyond this circumstantial actuality, it will be interesting to track the evolution of this group, which is hiding its extremist agenda rather badly, in the upcoming months.

**1) Salafist but not violent?**

**Sharia4Belgium** is the latest<sup>1</sup> among extremist groups that publicly try to take the lead in more radical fringe of Muslim youth in Belgium. Additionally, it is the **most interesting one, as it openly claims its salafism<sup>2</sup> and engraves itself in a clearly defined international universe.**

To our knowledge and to this day, the group refused to organise itself under the framework of a registered and recorded association. **The foundation of the group traces back to the winter of 2009-2010, and the organisation seems to be recruiting primarily among Dutch-speaking Muslims in the Antwerp region.**<sup>3</sup> This is reflected in its two

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<sup>1</sup> We have to recall the Arab European League (AEL), founded by Dyab Abou Jahjah and the *Equality Party* of Nordine Saïde. The AEL was based on a “baathist” approach and was not religious, whereas the second pretended, among others, to defend the rights of “immigrant” youth, but found itself, at least at its inception, under a stark Iranian influence.

<sup>2</sup> Salafism is a Sunni doctrine that advocates a return to the original Islam, based solely on the Qur’an and the Sunna, proscribing any interpretation of the text and any “modernisation” of dogma by urging that only the examples of the pious companions of the Prophet – the Salafis – are worthwhile following. They organise themselves in two branches, one “non-violent”, purely political branch and another “army” devoted to terrorism. Al Qaeda is the most known terrorist organisation devoted to this second branch.

<sup>3</sup> As the AEL did previously.

main communication channels<sup>4</sup>, which diffuse information almost exclusively in Dutch. Although one can stumble upon a video or a small text in English, French is completely omitted.

From the outset, **the texts published on the Sharia4Belgium website can be characterised by a forthright condemnation of the democratic system, which is seen as a manifestation of the Kufr.**<sup>5</sup> They advocate a strict observance of the Sharia and the total submission of women to religious costumes or what passes for that.<sup>6</sup> A section of the website (*Vrouwen in Islam*, in English, *Women in the Islam*) is reserved for the fairer sex.

In the text entitled “Who are we?”, available both on their website as on the “Youtube” channel, the anonymous *Sharia4Belgium* leaders, cite a verse from the Qur’an – “ (...) After the Prophet recited the verse: *“Verily, this is my way, leading straight: follow it and do not follow other paths; they will stray you from my path”*.”<sup>7</sup> This clearly defines their goals to bring believers to a right understanding of Islam, while fighting against the “deviations” and “divisions”, because *“The Islamic norm is the way to live in the Islamic faith, actions and transactions. This is the best way of living that humanity has ever witnessed in its history and this norm must be understood”*.<sup>8</sup>

This is not really original, considering and compared to what can be found on other websites professing the *Da’wah*.<sup>9</sup> Not really threatening either. Moreover, *Sharia4Belgium* clearly seeks to reassure. On the traditional presentation page: “*Frequently Asked Questions*”; one can read the following:

*“Do you approve of terrorism?” Answer: “No (...) We want a world in which people of all religions can live side by side without the slightest fear of violence. **We condemn the encouragement and incitement of terrorist acts directed against women and innocent children**, regardless of their faith, skin colour or age. Our site does not provide an incentive for terrorism in any form – whether it be direct or indirect. We only call on Muslims to return to the word of their Lord, and this we have never done by means of violence or by killing people with bombs.”*<sup>10</sup>

Other question: “*Are you opposed against the West?*” Answer: “*No, we love the West; as it was created by Allah. We also like the East. We are sane individuals and do not have a high blood pressure. This site is not intended to sow hatred against individuals (...)*”.<sup>11</sup>

Finally; “*Will you detonate yourself?*” Answer: “*If I wanted to blow myself up, I would not be working on this website. I’m not suicidal either. We do not encourage attacks and **strongly condemn violence against innocent people***”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The group disposes of a **website** (<http://www.shariah4belgium.com>) and a “**Youtube**” **channel** (<http://www.youtube.com/user/shariah4belgium#p/a/f/2/LHj2UeAQQ30>), on which it diffuses video snippets.

<sup>5</sup> The Kufr is the disbelief of one who refuses to believe in Islam (which is thus a *Kâfir*). The term is more than merely pejorative.

<sup>6</sup> We will not enter into a sterile controversy, but the Islamic “veil” for instance, is not considered a requirement for many contemporary thinkers. A fortiori, the wearing of the veil, the Niqab or Burqa, are not religious obligations, despite the claims of their defenders.

<sup>7</sup> Verse 153 of the 6th Sura (chapter) of the Qu’ran (“The Cattle”)

<sup>8</sup> « *Wie zijn wij?* » [Who we are]

<sup>9</sup> The Da’wah (call) designates different forms of proselytism used to spread the Islamic message.

<sup>10</sup> « *Veel gestelde vragen* » : [Frequently Asked Questions]

[http://www.shariah4belgium.com/shariah4belgium/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=2&Itemid=6](http://www.shariah4belgium.com/shariah4belgium/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=2&Itemid=6)

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

<sup>12</sup> Idem.

Note that the **only clear and unambiguous condemnation of terrorism focuses on attacks “against women an innocent children” and “against innocent persons”**. We know the rhetoric, used on numerous occasions by others beforehand, which leaves open the possibility of attacks against military personnel, policy makers, blasphemers, or generally, anyone who is “not innocent”.

## **2) The influence of Anjem Choudary and *Sharia4UK***

It is worthwhile mentioning that the group boasts of having received a message from the Palestinian-Jordanian preacher **Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi**, one of the mentors of notorious terrorist **Abu Musab al-Zarqawi** and according to American security experts “the most influential Jihadist theorist alive”.<sup>13</sup> This message and its content have not been delivered to the public as of yet.

**More interesting however, are the referrals the group claims and the international connection in which it nestles itself.** This will allow for a better understanding of the actual goals - although hidden from the limelight – of *Sharia4Belgium*.

*Sharia4Belgium* has clearly been inspired by the example of *Sharia4UK*, founded in 2007-2008 by **Anjem Choudary, a former London lawyer who became a self-proclaimed preacher and theologian.**

Moreover, Mr. Choudary “posted”, on March 28 a message of support to the Belgian group on several Internet sites: *“I offer my complete support to all m brothers in Belgium, who stated that Islam is the alternative and offers, in fact, the Belgian people a better way of life than the one they are currently experiencing. Democracy and liberty have shown their failure...”*

Anjem Choudary is far from an unknown figure in Great Britain. Together with his partner **Omar Bakri Muhammad**, he led a particularly radical movement, dubbed, « *al-Muhajiroun* »<sup>14</sup>, which after briefly disappearing in 2004 resurrected at the end of last year. Subsequently, he became involved – among others, under the pseudonym **Abou Luqman** – in two other groups that can barely discerned from *al-Muhajiroun* : *al-Firqat un-Naqiyah*<sup>15</sup> et *al-Ghurabaa*<sup>16</sup>, which both had a short lifespan.

These two organisations communicated with their members through a **secure discussion forum on which a British undercover journalist discovered messages from Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri and attacks against the Queen. (Who Choudary had called on to turn Muslim)**

Omar Bakri left Great Britain shortly after the 2005 terrorist attacks and was informed thereafter that he would not be allowed to return to the U.K.

This forced exile of his friend – with whom he remains in close contact, proven by both of their signatures on recently published texts – has not calmed the religious zeal of Anjem Choudary, who created *Islam4UK* two years later. This new organisation was also banned, on January 14, under the *Terrorism Act 2000*.

**This group, like its predecessors, has always tried to tread on a narrow line: not to say too much to avoid a ban, but just enough to be considered a disseminator of radical Islam and, beyond that, of Jihad.**

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<sup>13</sup> *Combatting Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy*, West Point.

<sup>14</sup> « *The Emigrants* », finally banned January 14, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> « *The sect of the Savior* », banned on July 17 2006 by the Home Office.

<sup>16</sup> « *The Foreigners* », banned on July 17 2006.

**Thus, we condemn the attacks against “the innocents” but we omit to denounce terrorism, we will stigmatise democracy while at the same time claiming to seek the coexistence of religions and cultures, and we encourage civil disobedience (for example, against the laws seeking to ban the veil).**

So far the speech, but the practice is far more radical. Besides the fact that Choudary is considered by some as a major recruiter of British volunteers for various jihads prevailing throughout the world; he has been prosecuted for several charges of having defied the law **by organising illegal demonstrations in which one could read sings (mostly held by masked youngsters) promising democracy “to the fires of hell” and the death to all apostates or “blasphemers”**.

The tactic is simple and classic in subversive circles, regardless of their ideology: prompting the authorities to react in order to create incidents and be considered as a martyr. The movement is thus mystified and gains capacity for mobilisation and recruiting.

Therefore, it is more disturbing to ascertain that Mr. Choudary declared a few days ago in reference to the Saturday protest in Brussels; *“There will be hundreds of British Muslims who will travel to Belgium to join forces with thousands of our brothers who are fighting against tyranny... Blood will run in the streets.”*

It is doubtful that “thousands” of protesters will gather to support the Burqa – or even “hundreds” for that matter. However, it is sufficient for Sharia4Belgium and its mentor, Anjem Choudary, to gather several dozen of supporters and provoke unrest, which in turn could lead to riots in order to achieve a victory (the venue is chosen in “sensitive” neighbourhoods, which have been the centre of tensions in recent months).

Ultimately, everything depends on the self-control and organisation of the police forces, who must enforce the law and public order without yielding to provocations.

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