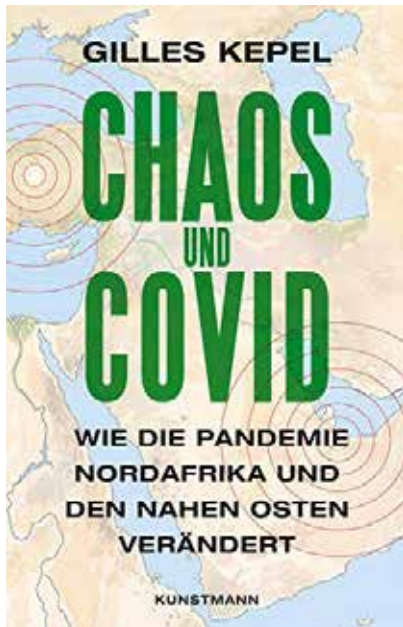


KATARZYNA MANISZEWSKA

**Book review: Gilles Kepel,  
*Chaos und Covid. Wie die Pandemie Nordafrika  
und den Nahen Osten verändert*<sup>1</sup>**



Gilles Kepel (born 1955 in Paris) is a French sociologist, political scientist, professor at the Institut d'études politiques de Paris (Paris Institute of Political Science) and author of numerous publications. He is considered one of the most important sociologists in France and an outstanding expert on Islam, and his expert comments are often quoted in the media. Among other things, his famous book *The Revenge of God* has been published in Poland (French edition in 1991, Polish in 2010).

The book under review is not available (at the time of preparing this review, i.e. December 2022) in Polish,

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<sup>1</sup> G. Kepel, *Chaos und Covid. Wie die Pandemie Nordafrika und den Nahen Osten verändert* (Eng. *Chaos and Covid. How the pandemic is changing North Africa and the Middle East*), München 2021, published by: Antje Kunstmann GmbH. Original title: *Le prophète et la pandémie. Du Moyen-Orient au jihadisme d'atmosphère* (Eng. *The prophet and the pandemic. The Middle East on the path of atmospheric jihad*), Paris 2021, published by: Gallimard. Translation from French into German by Jörn Pinnow.

nor has it been published in English. It was reviewed in its German edition entitled *Chaos und Covid. Wie die Pandemie Nordafrika und den Nahen Osten verändert* (in English: *Chaos and Covid. How the pandemic is changing North Africa and the Middle East*). It should be noted that the German translation does not fully convey the meaning of the French title: *Le prophète et la pandémie. Du Moyen-Orient au jihadisme d'atmosphère* (in English: *The prophet and the pandemic. The Middle East on the path of atmospheric jihad*). The term *jihadisme d'atmosphère* appears in the title of the original, which needs clarification as it is a new concept presented in Kepel's book. In Polish, it can be translated as follows: *dżihad atmosferyczny* (atmospheric jihad), *dżihad atmosfery* (jihad of the atmosphere), *dżihad wynikający z atmosfery* (jihad arising from the atmosphere), *dżihad nastrojów* (jihad of moods; and this is the term the author will use later in the review which has been originally written in Polish) or *dżihad ambientowy* (ambient jihad).

To some extent, the publication under review is a continuation of Kepel's earlier book *Away from Chaos. The Middle East and the Challenge to the West*, the English edition of which was published in 2020 by Columbia University Press. In that publication, the author took a look at the regional and global consequences of the Arab Spring, with a particular focus on the political processes leading to - broadly defined - radicalisation. In his latest book, Kepel looks again at the processes taking place in the Middle East. Contrary to the German translation of the title, however, it is not the pandemic that is its main thematic focus. The author shows the interconnectedness of various global events and processes, which are focused as if through a lens in the regions of the world under discussion, i.e. the Middle East and North Africa. Kepel guides the reader through the meanderings of politics in the region towards a global view, showing how the changes taking place there affect Europe, especially Western Europe. Not only the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, but also, and perhaps most importantly, the oil market collapse underpinned the upheaval in the Middle East in 2020. Among other things, Kepel discusses the building of new alliances in the region, describing the Abraham Accords and the Turkey-Iran-Qatar axis and the role of the Muslim Brotherhood, and analyses the interests and actions of Russia and China. It shows that the geopolitical situation in the Middle East and North Africa is also contributing to a paradigm shift in terrorism. The section of the publication devoted to the phenomenon that

Kepel identified and called the mood jihad will probably be of most interest to readers of the journal "Terrorism - Studies, Analysis, Prevention".

The book under review contains 335 pages, and consists of a prologue entitled *2020: pandemic, petrol and prophet*, three chapters (subdivided into subsections) sequentially titled *Divided in the Gulf Region*, *The Very Middle East*, *From North Africa to the Suburbs of Europe*, and an epilogue entitled *Sentiment Terrorism and Islamic Separatism in the Light of World Politics*. It also includes an afterword to the German edition entitled *From Gaza to Wurzburg*, as well as appendices: a timeline, an acknowledgement and an index of names.

The chapters are arranged in a coherent and logical manner, guiding the reader along the author's path of reasoning and showing the causes and roots of terrorist sentiment. Noteworthy are the previously unpublished political maps by Fabrice Balanche, correlating with the content presented in the chapters of the book. They clearly illustrate the issues of alliances and conflicts in the region. The publication opens with a map on the Abraham Accords (map 1), showing their supporters and opponents, the interests of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the attitudes of Russia, China and the European Union to the agreement. Further maps were devoted to Turkey (maps 2 and 3), its interests and expansion in the Mediterranean, the health consequences of the pandemic (map 4), the economic impact of the oil crisis (map 5), Saudi Arabia and Vision 2030 (map 6) in relation to King Abdullah's development programme (2005-2015), Qatar (map 7), Iraq (map 8), Iran (map 9), Russia's military and economic activities in the region (map 10), Syria (maps 11 and 12), Lebanon and the religious division by region (map 13), Israel and the threats to it (map 14), the Maghreb and migration (map 15), Libya (map 16), and China and its interventions in the region (map 17). The publication concludes with a map showing jihadist attacks in Europe (map 18). It presents the numbers of terrorists in Europe, with a particular focus on the situation in France nationwide and in relation to Paris and the surrounding areas of the capital. Interestingly, the map indicates which of the attacks carried out on French soil have been claimed by the so-called Islamic State. This is important because sentiment terrorism is sometimes - as the example of France shows - used by ISIS, even though it is not directly linked to the organisation.

The reviewed publication presents the hypothesis that there is now a new type of dynamic within the phenomenon of terrorism. The author calls it a mood jihad, and considers the absence of the need

for any organisational structure, even networked and loosely connected, as a characteristic feature. At the same time, the jihad of moods needs its 'representatives' (inspirers) on the Internet, but their online activities are, as a rule, not supposed to break the law. To refer to them, Kepel uses the term *entrepreneurs de colère*, coined by Bernard Rougier, another French researcher (similar in meaning to hater, it can be translated literally into Polish as 'entrepreneurs' or more appropriately as 'constructors' of anger, rage, fury). According to the hypothesis under discussion, 'constructors' attack, but in a way that is acceptable within the principles of democracy and freedom of speech. For example, they do not directly call for someone to be killed, but consistently vilify and gradually dehumanise the victim, thus carrying out an initial 'targeting'. At the same time, due to the circulation of this content on the Internet, there are those who, being radicalised and ready to use violence, decide to be executioners - executors of self-righteousness. This hypothesis is supported in the book by examples. They discuss in detail the dynamics of moods fuelled on the Internet, leading over time to terrorist attacks. The events surrounding the murder of teacher Samuel Paty, for example, are described in detail. Kepel analyses the content published online, the false information that intensified violent sentiments, profiles the authors of this content and the role of the Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France (CCIF), an organisation disbanded after Paty's murder. The researcher highlights the importance of victimisation in the strategy of the 'constructors of anger' to portray Muslims as victims of Islamophobia and used deliberately to incite hatred.

In his latest publication, Kepel consistently develops his theory of the dialectic of jihadist development. He is one of those scholars who believe that jihadist terrorism is not a finished concept but an evolving phenomenon. Each of its successive phases is, to some extent, a response to the previous one (or, more precisely, a response to the ineffectiveness of the previous one). In earlier publications, Kepel identified three phases in the development of modern jihadism, starting with the Afghan jihad. According to him, sentiment terrorism is the fourth stage. Analysis of these stages and reflection on Kepel's hypotheses may lead to interesting conclusions in the context of the fight against terrorism. For it is undoubtedly the case that Kepel's thought brings a lot of valuable content to the study of terrorism, even if there are researchers expressing a different view (the most famous opponent of Kepel is the French political scientist Olivier Roy).

The publication under review is not a classic scholarly monograph (note the almost complete lack of footnotes), it is essayistic in nature. Nevertheless, it is worth reading because of its author's achievements and his well-established position in the world of science, as well as the presentation of the innovative concept of jihadist sentiments in an analytical and evidence-based manner. The book may be of interest not only to scholars of the phenomenon of terrorism, but also to students of security studies, political science and international relations. It is therefore to be hoped that the book will be translated into Polish and that the translator will find terms that are fully adequate to the concepts used by the French scholar and that these terms will be able to enter the Polish scientific circuit. For Kepel's ideas are certainly worth critical reflection, especially since, as the author stated in an interview with the Europe 1 radio station<sup>2</sup>, the key to countering jihad in Europe lies in knowledge supported by research, thanks to which we can gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and develop more effective preventive methods.

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<sup>2</sup> *Qu'est-ce que le «djihadisme d'atmosphère» ? Les explications de Gilles Kepel* (Eng. What is «atmospheric jihadism»? Gilles Kepel's explanations), Europe 1, 10 II 2021, <https://www.europe1.fr/politique/quest-ce-que-le-djihadisme-datmosphere-les-explications-de-gilles-kepel-4024277> [accessed: 12 XII 2022].