

CONDUCTOR: Hello to everyone. Today is a very special day for Temas de Hoy, the publishers that I represent. Eight years ago, just after I joined this firm, I started conversations with Antonio Salas, a journalist who infiltrated the neo-Nazi movement and wanted to publish a book about his investigations. The book, published in 2003, was deeply controversial and caused a wide reaction. Subsequent investigations and denunciations led to consequences still ongoing. Less than a year ago, Antonio Salas participated as a protected witness in the trial against Hammerskin celebrated in the Provincial Court of Madrid, which led to an exemplary ruling at the European level, since for the first time members of a neo-Nazi group were convicted as members of an illicit association.

After that, in 2004, we published "The year I trafficked in women". This book, which was also deeply controversial, investigated women trafficking networks in Spain. Also in Mexico, the government was forced to investigate networks that trafficked young girls from Chiapas. Shortly after that, as a consequence of the Madrid bombings of the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, Antonio Salas decided to infiltrate Islamic terrorism. For the last six years, he has been living as Mohammed Abdala, The Palestinian. We have here the personal photo album in which Antonio Salas elaborated his life. Antonio is here with us behind this curtain, because for security reasons his identity needs to be preserved. Antonio, what can you tell me about this album?

ANTONIO SALAS: This album has been the passport for my travels into a number of countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and Latin America. I tried to reconstruct the supposed biography of Muhammad Abdala from his birth to the present day. I knew that in many countries, especially when living among armed groups, my things would be searched, I would be monitored and controlled, and wanted that album to be found among my possessions. In the album I included real photos of my childhood, with my real parents and grandparents, supposedly of Palestinian origins, alongside photos of my cover story, my alibi. I needed some justification if I wanted to become a *jihad*, a martyr, a mujahidden, a warrior of Islam. Therefore I thought of making some photos, with the collaboration of a friend, one of the escorts that I had met while working on "The year I trafficked in women", of Arabic origins, with some objects brought from Palestine. Paintings, decorative objects, all I could think of that you could find in an Arabic home, so I could prove that she had been my wife. This story I combined with a real story, the story of one of the victims of the second Intifada, Talar, aged 25, who died during a raid by an Israeli patrol in northern Palestine and the West Bank on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, in case anybody wanted to check whether the story I was telling was true. From that moment, I also included photos of my travels, my life among different terrorist organisations, people I met, until the album was complete. I would say that the album was my safe conduct. It has taken me out of a few tight spots in many countries.

C: We are watching now images from the presentation of "Diary of a Skin" with Esteban Ibarra, president of the Movement Against Intolerance, who cannot be with us today because a new trial, against Bould and Honour, another of the organisations mentioned in "Diary of a Skin", is starting today. But let's carry on, because there are many issues that we want to talk about, and we want to leave some time to answer some of the many questions that have arrived through different media. I think that we should talk about the Jackal. At some point he becomes your mentor. How do you reach him? How do you reach the Jackal? What is the Ilich Ramirez Repatriation Committee?

AS: The truth is that reaching Carlos the Jackal was very complicated. Before I started this investigation I knew nothing about terrorism. Not that I know much now, but at any rate then I knew even less. I knew that Carlos the Jackal was an almost legendary character about whom many movies had been made and many books had been written, but until one of the courses on terrorism that I followed, of the many that were being organised in Spain, in this case, one organised by the Defence Ministry in Jaca in late 2005, I had no real notion of who the Jackal really was. I learned that his name was Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, that he was an icon, probably the most famous and lethal terrorist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, born in Venezuela, converted to Islam, member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and responsible for many terrorist operations in the 70s and 80s in Europe and all over the world. After that he became one of my objectives. My first trip to Venezuela was a fiasco, and I didn't manage to reach his family. It was very complicated and I achieved nothing, but for Castillo, a painter that had been his class mate at the Fermin Toro School, in Caracas. I had to go back to Venezuela on several occasions to find Ilich's family. Finally, I ended up having a close and warm relationship with Vladimir Ramirez, I met his mother Eva Sanchez, his nephews, in short, all the family. Then I created, as a cover story for my investigation, the Ilich Ramirez Repatriation Committee. My first direct conversation with Ilich Ramirez happens just a few days after the Venezuelan presidential elections in 2006, I think that it was on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December. Luckily for me, Vladimir Ramirez had agreed to let me film an interview with him, and while the camera was on Ilich made a telephone call to his brother Vladimir from the maximum security prison where he was confined, and thus I was able to have this first conversation, which started in Arabic, with the Jackal. I had to wait two years, until 2008, for him to be transferred to another prison with looser levels of security, La Santé, in Paris, where he had free access to the telephone. From that moment, we called me weekly, sometimes two or three times a week, as web master for his website and responsible of his presence on the internet. I taped hours and hours of conversations about all sort of issues.

## VIDEO

C: What can you tell us about this conversation? What do you think these words mean?

AS: He is one of the most significant figures of revolutionary struggle and terrorism of all times, and in this conversation is him, and not me, who affirms to have been charged with the task of supervising the bombing against Carrero Blanco, Franco's prime minister, which totally changed Spanish history. According to his testimony, he trained members of the Basque ETA in Algerian training camps during the 70s. I think this is a very interesting example of the cooperation that has always existed, way before the speculations generated after the Madrid bombings, between different terrorist organisations, in this case of Arabic origins, for example the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, where Ilich belonged, and other organisations such as the ETA, the Columbian FARC, the Baader-Meinhof or the IRA. There has always been close cooperation, and I have experienced it during these years I have spent among terrorist groups.

C: Have you said farewell to the Jackal?

AS: No. I was lucky because it was him who stopped our conversations, not me. It was something I had been worrying about, because if it had been me who interrupted these conversations probably he would have been suspicious. But in the latest European elections he had the daring, or the temerity, to openly support a political party blatantly pro-Zionist and anti-Israeli. This caused an important scandal in Israel, and the Israeli government complained to President Sarkozy, causing his penitentiary privileges to be taken away from him, for example, telephone access. Therefore, I have not been able to tell him how I really was an infiltrated journalist, and how I had been using him as a cover for the infiltration. However, I have sent him a signed copy and a letter, explaining my reasons and who I really am.

C: Let's talk about your contact with armed groups in different countries. Here we have a sample of the many hours of footage obtained by you. We are going to reproduce a small sample while we comment on it. What is this, Antonio, could it be shooting practice?

AS: Yes, this is hidden camera footage, with a member of the Tupac Amaru group, converted to Islam, Sidi, he is a Muslim.

C: We are watching a conversation where you were being told that [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

AS: Exactly, exactly.

C: [UNINTELLIGIBLE] Well, now we are seeing the weapons. These images have already been commented upon, because the weapons carry some marks that prove that they belong to the army, is that right?

AS: Yes, these were not the images that we were going to show, but never mind. These images were filmed during my military training. According to my comrades in Bolivarian groups, of the many that exist in Venezuela, there are camps where military training can be obtained, up to six just around Caracas. I had applied to access the FARC's training camps in Colombia, and I actually had a personal interview, to hand over my written application, with a representative of the Colombian guerrillas, and pass to Colombia through the Green Roads. My application received a favourable answer just a few days before Raul Reyes' camp bombing, in Ecuador, which had international consequences that I guess will be discussed later. From then, and due to my insistence on receiving military training before returning to Venezuela, I was authorised to enter a specific camp. I was put into a car and driven for days until reaching a camp where for the first time I held an assault rifle; they had FALs, of obvious Venezuelan manufacture, Israeli UZIs, American M4s, the AK, not 47, but 130, of Soviet origins, Kalashnikovs, grenade launchers, in short, all sorts of weapons. I think it is important to highlight that these camps are organised by Bolivarian groups, in a fully unofficial manner.

These groups are very enthusiastic about the revolution, but the service they render to this revolution by keeping armed resistance activities is questionable. If it ever made sense, which is very doubtful, it did only in those years when the guerrillas confronted right wing governments, which is the origin of these Bolivarian groups still operating in Venezuela.

C: We will discuss these further later on, because some of the questions are reaching us from Venezuela. I don't know if we can watch the footage on the Tupac Amaru group's statement. How is a terrorist statement made, Antonio?

AS: I belong to a generation that no longer had to do the compulsory military service. I had never had a gun in my hands and I had never seen a machine gun or any of those weapons; only in American movies. Nevertheless, after months of training with the manuals I had been given and the rest, I passed the exams. Maybe that is why they accepted my application to take part in the filming of some of the statements being issued in Venezuela, both before and after the presidential elections in 2006, by groups like La Piedrita, Alexis Vive, all Bolivarian groups from the 23 de Enero and other areas of Caracas or of Venezuela at large. They appear hooded and armed, warning of the consequences if America or any other country interferes in Venezuela again. Some of these statements had already been issued by members of the groups I had infiltrated, and finally, after I got to the camps, my participation in one, several, actually, of them was agreed. My first surprise came from the infrastructure around them. When you watch a terrorist statement from Al Qaeda, Hamas, ETA or any other organisation, you never imagine the infrastructure around it. Apart from the people giving the statement, there are armed people keeping guard, it's much more complicated than it seems. I took the risk and smuggled a hidden camera, in order to have, let's say the "making of", what stands behind the filming of these statements.

C: Everybody can watch this footage on the web site that we have created for Antonio. [www.antoniosalas.org](http://www.antoniosalas.org), and it will also be distributed to the media. We have to proceed, because the book is full of interesting issues and making a summary is truly difficult. In April 2009, a plot to assassinate Evo Morales was unearthed. What can you tell us about this?

AS: When I created the official web site for Carlos the Jackal I knew that I was placing a bait, a magnet for members of terrorist groups worldwide. And it worked. It worked really well. One of the first people to contact me through the website was a Eduardo Rocha, who claimed to be a converted Muslim, born in Bolivia but at the time one of the representatives, as vice-president, of the Islamic community in Hungary. He sent me an email for me to pass his greetings to Carlos the Jackal, written in a suspiciously friendly tone, as if he had really had a close relationship with Ilich Ramirez. Then, I asked the Commander Ilich Ramirez who this character was, and he told me that he had indeed been his contact in Hungary in the operations carried out during the 70's and the 80's. He encouraged me to keep in touch with him and from that moment on I became the middleman, so to say, between Ilich Ramirez and Eduardo Rocha. For around a year, maybe longer than a year, Ilich would send me postcards and letters for me to forward to Rocha in Hungary. Rocha sent me his books, and I even wrote two books on Arabic issues in order to reinforce my identity as Mohammed Abdala, that I sent to him too. It was quite a fluent relationship. Once I had confirmed that this was an interesting character, for example, he had been correspondent for several British and Spanish media in

the Balkans War, until he changed the camera for a gun, creating the first international militia on the Croatian side, I realised that an interview with him would be of enormous value for my investigation. Coincidentally, I was the last person to have an interview with him, a very long and intimate one, for a gazette that I distributed in several mosques and revolutionary centres, called “Los papeles de Bolivar”, and which notwithstanding being printed by photocopying, was published in English, French, Basque, Arabic and Spanish.

C: I have right now the issue of “Los papeles de Bolivar” with that interview with Commander Eduardo Rocha. Is this when your investigation reaches an end? Did you know anything about this terrorist plan? Tell us more.

AS: In his last email, 4 or 5 days before he was shot to death, he asked me to send his sister Silvia, in Bolivia, a packet with copies of his book, for distribution among the Bolivian Islamic community. The very day that I sent the packet, 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> of April, last year, Friday I think, on leaving the mosque I went to a cyber-cafe, opened my email and found hundreds of news released by the media all over the world, publishing that Eduardo Rocha had been shot down during an anti-terrorist operation alongside two other members of his alleged terrorist group. The remaining members were arrested. They were planning to assassinate Evo Morales. For me this set off all the alarms, telling me that I had gone too far. When I started this investigation I assumed the risks of approaching armed groups, of smuggling hidden cameras. What I could not have imagined is that my name would be linked to the attempted assassination of a president, because, after Rocha’s death, when all Bolivian journalists and information services started trying to find out about Eduardo Rocha, the first thing they found on the web was his last interview with some Mohammed Abdala, who additionally was web master for Carlos the Jackal. As you can imagine, from that point on, speculations, conjectures and wild guesses spiralled up, and many people started looking for me too.

C: After you finish your investigation, you start writing the book that we are presenting today. Many questions have already been raised. I have a sample here of all the questions that have been sent through different media, and we will try to answer as many as possible. Don’t you think that the Islamic community will find your infiltration offensive?

AS: To the contrary. I think that the main victim, or the first victim, of jihadist terrorism is the Islamic community. Not only because statistically most victims of jihadist attacks in the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Africa are Muslims, of Arabic race even, but because jihadist terrorism is a blasphemy for Islam, for the international Islamic community, which is not necessarily Arabic. I have tried my hardest, sincerely and from the first day, to be a good Muslim. I have always respected the five precepts of Islam, and despite the difficulties of being a good Muslim, or a good Christian or Jew, in these days, I think that the Islamic community will have nothing against me. Quite the opposite.

C: What about Hugo Chávez?

AS: I don't know. It is impossible to say. I have tried to be absolutely impartial. I don't represent any interest, I work for no TV network, for no information service, for no editorial line, I don't represent any political party, I have loyalty for nobody but my readers, which are the only funding that this investigation, as with the previous ones, has had. Therefore, the book is cruelly objective. I merely tell what I have experienced, as a European Muslim journalist infiltrated into Bolivarian organisations, keeping contacts with other insurgent, terrorist, whatever we wish to call them, organisations. And I think that if president Chavez reads it with an impartial eye he'll find that the book reveals many interesting facts.

C: We have questions from Latin America. For example, from Colombia, through Periodista Digital, Dora Glottman, from Radio Caracol asks: according to your investigation, what sort of training do the FARC receive in Venezuela?

AS: I did not receive any training with the FARC in Venezuela. After going through several filters I had a personal interview with their representative, also filmed with a hidden camera, in order to hand over my written application to join the training camps, but in Colombia. Nevertheless, it is true, and I think I am revealing no secret here, that the FARC receive cooperation, support and sympathy from the Bolivarian groups. For example, in neighbourhoods like the 23 de Enero, where for the first time in the world, a statue to Manuel Malulanda, Tirofijo, has been erected. It is from these Bolivarian groups, and it is important to understand this. These groups are made up by people with a guerrilla tradition going back to the 50s, that for decades have maintained that weapons can be a form of language, a way to the Revolution. When Chavez enters office, many of them enter powerful positions in the Venezuelan security forces. It is them that organise unofficial training programs, in different training camps where you can train in the use and maintenance of short-range weapons, long-range weapons, rifles, grenade launchers and even explosives.

C: We have a question from Caracas itself: Eduard Marquez asks: did you know that Chino Carias had been expelled from the Tupac Amaru group? Chino Carias is a character mentioned many times throughout the book. What do you have to say?

AS: My experience, as a mere tourist who has spent several months in Venezuela over the past six years, is that the Bolivarian groups are in fierce competition with one another. Although all of them share the same devotion, loyalty and love for Hugo Chavez, there are power struggles and clashes that have led to the assassination of six of my comrades, friends with whom I lived in those years. They got killed, one by one, within the internecine wars between different factions, such as Carapaicas, Alexis Vive, La Piedrita, or Tupac Amaru. The Tupac Amaru movement was actually created in Uruguay during the 70's, and evolved into a number of organisations, for example in Peru, Argentina and Venezuela. I know that Chino Carias was expelled from one of the sub-groups of the political wing of Tupac Amaru, legalised several years ago, and organised his own cell, in this case armed and not of a political nature, called Capitulo de Venezuela, which right now is in close cooperation with similar groups in Peru through Alberto Carias himself.

C: Another question from Planeta de Libros: is there any truth behind the alleged relationship between Venezuela and Islamic terrorism?

AS: When I started this investigation I knew nothing about the Arabic world, Islam, terrorism or the revolutionary history of Latin America. Thus, when I started my research, I believed everything I read, everything that was written in books and newspapers, and started elaborating a list of things to be checked. There is an enormous bibliography, scores of articles, about the supposed Al Qaeda training camps in Isla Margarita, in Venezuela, including information allegedly leaked by members of the DISIP, the Venezuelan information services, saying that Mustafa Setmarián, for example, a historical member of Al Qaeda, was living in Venezuela under Chavez's protection. Many articles have also been published, and still are, yesterday for example, about Hezbola Venezuela and the supposed presence of Hezbola in the Bolivarian Republic; lots of things that I did my best to prove. I went to Isla Margarita to get in touch with the Islamic community there, accused of being members of Al Qaeda, and I can certify what is true and what is false in this entire story. The same applies to Mustafa Setmarián and Hezbola Venezuela. In this very moment, after Teodoro Darnott, founder of Hezbola Venezuela, was convicted to 10 years in the first conviction for terrorism in Venezuela, I am in charge of Hezbola Venezuela, so I think I am in a position of authority to separate the truth from the lies. And what I found is that there is a fierce and merciless political manipulation of terrorism. It already happened in 2006, right before the elections. And of course, there are no Al Qaeda training camps in Isla Margarita. The leader of the Islamic community was questioned after 9/11 along with many other people that had returned from trips to Arabic countries around the time of the attacks.

C: From A3 News, Ramon Ongil asks if you fear for your life, and what can you tell about the safety measures that you follow to protect your identity.

AS: Of course. I am no hero. Obviously, when you decide to undertake this sort of investigation you assume risks and you feel the danger, and when you decide to make it known to the public, this fear increases. What I cannot say much about is the security measures that I follow, and which are as comprehensive as possible, and which are not very different from those followed by anyone threatened by ETA or any other terrorist group. I think this is pretty obvious.

C: From Barcelona, from the web site Planeta de Libros: was the language barrier very difficult to overcome? When did your accent stop giving you away?

AS: Never. The accent gives me away to this day. I did some Arabic courses, regular and intensive ones, in Northern Africa in 2004 and 2005. At that time, after the 11M and the 7J, the Madrid and London bombings, logically all European security forces were very actively investigating jihadist terrorism. In fact I found it very moving that many police agents, even mere agents, joined the same Arabic and terrorism courses that I was following in order to try to learn anything that could be of help. In Northern Africa I coincided with police agents from Italy, Germany, and other countries, and there I realised that our accent could be identified

when speaking Arabic. Italians spoke Arabic with an Italian accent and Germans with a German accent, and therefore it was easy to see that I would speak my little Arabic with a Latin accent. That was one of the reasons that led me not to try to impersonate a fully Arabic person in the first place, and looked for an origin in a country with a marked anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist political drive, such as Venezuela, to place the character. That is why Mohammed Abadala, although supposedly of Palestinian origins, was born in the state of Merida, in Venezuela.

C: From Cadiz: I would like to know what you have found most shocking in this investigation, I mean, did you have some preconception that you have dismissed?

AS: Everything. I started this investigation with a heap of prejudices based on my ignorance of Islam, the Arabic culture and terrorism. I, probably as do many of our viewers, sincerely believed that all Arabs were Muslims, that all Muslims were Arabs, that all Muslims were terrorists and that all Arabs were terrorists. As I integrated into the Arabic community and converted to Islam, joining the umma, the community of believers, I realised that not all Arabs are Muslims, that not all Muslims are Arabs, and of course that not all Arabs are terrorists and that not all terrorists are Muslims. I think that we are somewhat trapped by preconceptions, and I left them behind as I got deeper into my investigation.

C: I am going to proceed with the last questions, because we are running out of time. From Periodista Digital, Juan Jose Miralles, who publishes a blog and has released several academic texts, holds the view that the first front for the West in this Fourth World War is jihadist terrorism which has declared a fourth generation war on it, the first target of which is winning back al-Andalus, Spain, in order to fulfil the prophecies of Mohammed himself, the Islam of the prophesied mahid, the cult Caliph that will regain the kingdom of Spain. This is the Islam, along with its leaders, that needs to be persecuted. He wants to know what you think about his opinions on this confrontation between Islam and the West.

AS: I know Miralles' blog. He has been one of my constant sources, because the first stage for an infiltration like this implies learning a huge amount of theory. Reading a lot and researching a lot for a long time. However, when Islam is seen from the outside, we normally make the mistake of seeing it as a coherent and unified whole, and that couldn't be further from the truth. Islam is divided by as many secessions, sects, clashes and personalities as Christianity. The Muslims make the same mistake, thinking that all Christians are just the same, while we know that there are scores of sects, branches, orthodoxies, etc., different churches that call themselves Christian. The same happens with Islam. Apart from the division between Sunnites and Shiites, which is the most widely known, there are many terrorist groups that follow different and conflicting lines. Morabits, wahabists, in short, a large number of conflicting groups. Therefore, there is no unified plan. Mohammed's words have been very freely interpreted by different organisations as a justification for spurious interests. Regarding the conquest of al-Andalus, I don't think the problem is coming from where it's been suggested, because Al Qaeda faced a fiasco in Iraq; the support that they expected to receive from the Iraqi resistance, after they offered their help, once proven that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction and that there had been no previous links between Saddam Hussein and Bin Laden, all the men that they were expecting to join Al Qaeda never did so. This fiasco in

Iraq drove Al Qaeda to Northern Africa and this affects us more, the Spanish and the French, responsible for the colonial presence in Northern Africa, in countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, the Sahara, etc. Therefore, my opinion is that the imminent danger for al-Andalus comes from the Maghreb, and not from this supposed jihadist international of all terrorist groups, which in fact, when seen from within, are as divided as the Imams of the different mosques in Spain, unable to unite among themselves.

C: We have to finish, Antonio. We are watching the first reactions, and the debate about the ethical limits of this kind of journalism has already been reopened. How can you defend yourself against the accusations of sensationalism, and of placing your ethical limits beyond those of other people?

AS: I am not even going to try. The publication of "The year I trafficked in women" was treated by the media in the same way that this new publication will be. Furthermore, I suspect that this one will be politically brandished in a way that is beyond my control. But when the controversy about "The year I trafficked in women" happened I was in Ramallah, already in the course of this investigation, and read criticisms from a journalist who said that if I had such guts, why didn't I infiltrate jihadist terrorism and go to Palestine. And I was reading this in a cyber-cafe in Ramallah. I could not explain to this journalist that I was already there. Thus, I have no need to defend myself and have no intention to do so. My defence is my work, what is written in the book and what I filmed with my hidden camera, and all documents that will be visible on the internet. Regarding ethical limits, I have broken none. Fortunately, characters like Ilich Ramirez himself realised that I was much more valuable working legally than committing any illegal action. They insisted over and over again, and there are many conversations in which this is recorded, for me not to participate in any illegal action, and thus to remain able to keep his presence on the internet and even represent him in meetings celebrated in Sweden and other countries. I have never committed a crime; sometimes it's been difficult to travel with my own documentation, and to stay within the law, respecting those moral and ethical codes that I probably share with the same journalists that criticise me.

C: Many more issues could be raised here, Europe, the possible support from certain groups, from other terrorist organisations, such as ETA, etc. We will keep the debate open on our website, in Antonio Sala's website, where there is an internet forum and a blog where Antonio Salas will comment on your reactions. The book is an extraordinary work of journalism, but the issues raised by Antonio were too wide, so additional documents will be available on this website which we believe to be almost compulsory for everybody interested in today's world. Here we finish this virtual press conference. Thank you very much.