



The Goal of the Jihad

Posted GMT 4-3-2007 14:33:20

I am not much for predicting the future, so when it comes to detailing the next moves of the jihadists I can't tell you what they're going to do -- but I can tell you about the ultimate goal they're working toward.

President Bush has said that they are hoping to establish an Islamic state from Spain to Indonesia. He could have added in the Americas, too, for their goal is global. This goal is important for many reasons, although a lot of analysts have dismissed it on the grounds that the goal is unattainable. Not too long ago Reuters ran a story about the jihadist plan to establish a caliphate. To show you how important they thought it was, they ran it as part of their "Oddly Enough" feature series, which usually contains stories about man-eating chickens and Jell-O wrestling.

The story quoted a Saudi analyst Faris bin Houzam, and an anthropologist in London, Madawi ar-Rasheed, who both dismissed the caliphate as a serious threat. Ar-Rasheed said: "This is just part of (al Qaeda's) war of slogans."

Of course, it should go without saying that however unlikely the prospect of success, the jihadists will soldier on, attempting to advance their cause by both violent and non-violent means.

Also, to dismiss the caliphate as "just part of (al Qaeda's) war of slogans" fails to recognize how potent slogans can be in formulating public opinion -- witness the success of the Palestinian cause in winning global support through canny use of terms like "occupation" and "apartheid" (and "Palestinian" itself). However unlikely its realization, the quest for the caliphate is increasingly popular -- at least by the evidence of election results in the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere, and that fact could have extraordinarily serious consequences.

The idea of the caliphate itself also needs to be thoroughly understood by those of us who don't wish to live under one. Why do they want to establish a caliphate at all? It isn't just so that they can establish the rule of Islamic law: Saudi Arabia itself today is governed by Islamic law, but not by a caliph. The caliph was for Sunni Muslims, who make up 85 to 90 percent of the Islamic world today, the successor of the prophet Muhammad as the spiritual, political and military leader of the Islamic community. The great Islamic empires of the Middle Ages were ruled by caliphs.

But in 1924, the new secular government of Turkey abolished the caliphate. This is identified by jihadists today as the source of all their troubles. Western influence, disunity, laxity in Islamic observance -- all this has been traced by jihadists to the loss of the caliphate.

For example, this is from the Turkish branch of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, an international political party whose stated goal is reviving the caliphate -- or khilafah:

It was a day like this 79 years ago, and more specifically on the 3rd of March 1924 that...the criminal English agent, Mustafa Kemal (so-called Ataturk, the "Father of the Turks"!) announced that the Grand National Assembly had agreed to destroy the Khilafah; and...the establish...a secular, irreligious, Turkish republic....

Since that day the Islamic ummah [nation, community] has lived a life full of calamities; she was broken up into small mini states controlled by the enemies of Islam in every aspect. The Muslims were oppressed and became the object of the kuffar's [that is, unbelievers'] derision in Kashmir, Philippines, Thailand, Chechnya, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Palestine and other lands belonging to the Muslims [...]

So the crime took place and the kuffar tightened their grip over the Islamic lands and tore it up into pieces....In place of a single Khilafah state they established cartoon states and installed rulers as agents to carry out the orders of their kuffar masters. They abolished the Islamic Sharee'ah [religious law] from the sphere of ruling, economy, international relations, domestic transactions and judiciary.[...]

"Without the Khilafah, the Islamic lands will remain torn up and the Islamic peoples will remain divided. Without the Khilafah the kafir, crusader and colonial states will continue to control us, plunder our resources and create divisions amongst us.

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Without the Khilafah, the Jews will continue to occupy our sacred places and kill and humiliate our brothers in Palestine. Without the Khilafah, the Islamic peoples in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kashmir, Uzbekistan and so on will continue to be killed...Without the Khilafah, those Muslims who do not work seriously for its implementation will be sinful and incur the anger of Allâh, even if they fast, pray, make Hajj [pilgrimage] and pay Zakah [alms]. This is because the work to establish the Khilafah Rashidah is a fard [obligation] on every Muslim, and it should be conducted with the most extreme effort and utmost speed.[...]

And there is something else also. In Islamic law, jihad warfare may be defensive or offensive. Jihad is ordinarily fard kifaya -- an obligation on the Muslim community as a whole, from which some are freed if others take it up. Jihad becomes fard ayn, or obligatory on every individual Muslim to aid in any way he can, if a Muslim land is attacked. That is what jihadists argue today -- that the American presence in Iraq and Afghanistan makes jihad fard ayn, or obligatory on every individual Muslims.

But still, that is just jihad for the defense of Muslim lands. There is also offensive jihad, in line with Muhammad's command that Muslims offer non-Muslims conversion to Islam, subjugation as inferiors under Islamic rule, or war. But in Islamic law, only the caliph is authorized to wage offensive jihad.

That's a primary reason why jihadists want to restore the caliphate. Some would even say that they've already done so. In 1996 the Taliban's Mullah Omar went to the shrine of the Respectable Cloak of Muhammad in Kandahar and stood on the roof of the shrine wrapped in the cloak. His followers proclaimed him Emir al Momineen, or leader of the believers -- a title of the caliph. So far, however, only a jihadist group in Algeria has joined the Taliban in accepting Mullah Omar as caliph.

In any case, the desire to restore the caliphate ultimately highlights the expansionist, imperialist, totalitarian, globalist aims of the jihad movement, even as today it presents itself as a defensive action against Western evils. This is, I believe, a crucial point for our understanding the enemy properly, so that we can formulate the proper defensive responses. If we don't understand what we're up against correctly, we will not defend ourselves properly against it. And that is, unfortunately, in many ways the fix we're in today.

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