

Members of Jihadi Forums Revive Debate on the Question:

Is it Permissible to Harm the Innocent?

Background

The Saudi religious scholar, Sheikh Naser bin Hamad Al-Fahd, known as one of the senior Muslims religious scholars in Saudi Arabia and as being close to the Al-Qaeda organization, published on May 2003 a fatwa granting religious legitimacy to the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States and Britain and against their citizens.

The fatwa, published on the Sheikh's website www.al-fhd.com¹, received publication in additional Islamic websites identified as supporting Al-Qaeda and global Jihad. The detailed fatwa is 27 pages long and refers to the religious Islamic foundation allowing Muslims the use of non-conventional weapons. In the fatwa, Sheikh Al-Fahd explains that the Muslim world is waging today a defense war and not an elective war against the United States and Britain. In addition to the religious foundation, the moral aspect supporting the use of these weapons is also emphasized, as the United States was the first to use it during World War 2. According to this fatwa, in a defensive war, it is permissible not to differentiate between harming military personnel and harming innocent civilians, including women, children and the elderly. Also, such action should not be shunned even if many Muslims are harmed by it.

Almost six years later, the debate regarding the legitimacy of harming innocent people continues to be the focus of differences of opinion on Jihadi forums,

¹ The Sheikh's website is no longer active, but the fatwa can be downloaded in various Jihadi online forums.

particularly against the backdrop of increasing criticism against the Jihadi organizations, for harming innocent Muslim and non-Muslim civilians. Members of the Jihadi forums debate between themselves regarding the legitimacy of attacking targets where there are Muslims. Al-Qaeda and the global Jihad organizations do not want to be perceived as harming innocent Muslims, and they therefore justify their targets marked for attack as sites with a concentration of civilians or western government officials, particularly Americans and Muslims who are collaborators. It is therefore safe to assume, that the Jihadi organizations will focus on places where there are no Muslims. The attack on the Danish embassy in Pakistan (June 2008), for example, was perpetrated when the embassy offices were closed to the public.

An apologetic message written by the propaganda manager of the Al-Qaeda organization in the Maghreb

In September 2008, the "Al-Hesbah" Jihadi forum, which has not been active since November 2008, published a Spanish translation of the statements made by Salah Abu Muhammad, the person in charge of propaganda in the Al-Qaeda organization in the Islamic Maghreb – AQIM, to the Muslim population there.² The text in Spanish is a propaganda document addressed to the Muslims in the Maghreb, with the aim of convincing them that the Al-Qaeda organization does not act against innocent Muslims during the attacks perpetrated by the global Jihad, who are associated with Al-Qaeda. This was done against the backdrop of the increasing criticism against those organizations, owing to the harm caused to innocent Muslims.

² <http://www.al-hesbah.info/v/showthread.php?t=190949>

Harm caused to innocent civilians during the terrorist attack in Mumbai on November 2008

Following the attacks in Mumbai on 26-29 November 2008, one of the surfers on the "Al-Faloja" forum posted correspondence on the site, which deals with the legitimacy of the attacks, during which many claimed that innocent people were killed.³ One of the surfers explained in response, that none of those harmed were innocent, as India is essentially a heretic country, and therefore all its citizens were infidels as well. Another surfer stated that this question has been raised again and again, since September 11, and the answer to this question is one: "The attack in Mumbai was legitimate, just as the attack in Bali (October 2002) was legitimate, just as the attack in London (July 2005) was legitimate, just as the attack in Madrid (March 2004) was legitimate, and so on."

A revived debate on the issue following the attack in the heart of Cairo – 22 February 2009

At the end of February 2009, one of the active surfers on the Jihadi forum "Hanein" raised the following issue for debate: "Who are the people who should not be killed during wartime?"⁴, apparently against the backdrop of the Cairo attack perpetrated on February 22 in an area packed with tourists. One of the forum managers explains that Islam does not permit the killing of civilians and those who are not involved in the war, unless there are specific circumstances. He states, that the non-Muslim population should not be harmed, even if their country is a dictatorship. The same is true with regard to foreign tourists or personnel who are in Islamic countries on foreign contracts. Other surfers joined

³ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=37116>

⁴ <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=91726>. It should be pointed out that the original debate was raised on the forum of the Muslim Brotherhood: <http://www.ikhwan.net/vb/showthread.php?p=589192>

these sentiments and called for not harming innocent civilians. However, there were those who hinted that even innocent civilians – such as tourists, engineers, etc. – were a legitimate target, as they are perceived by Islam as infidels, as they breach Islamic values.



The site of the attack in Cairo

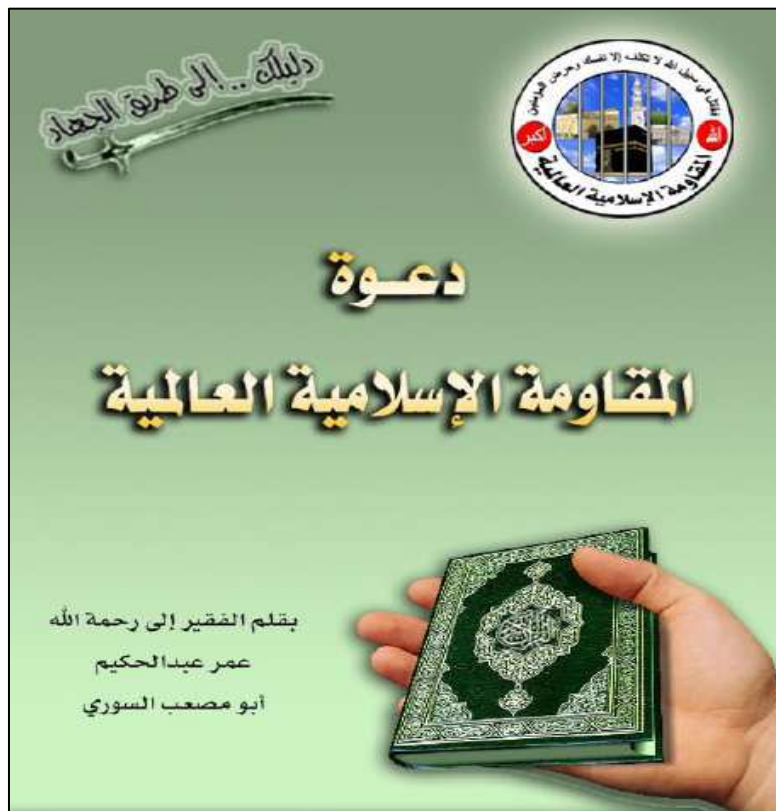
One of the surfers states that the Americans used spies and translators from various Arab countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait and Iraq. The significance of this, he contends, is that the latter also participated in the killing of innocents, and therefore their blood may be shed, as well as that of the citizens from the countries which they came from.

Against the backdrop of the Cairo attack, many messages against the attack were posted on the forums. For example, at the beginning of March 2009, one of the surfers, active on the Islamic forum "Atahadi", wrote that he disagrees with the Mujahideen regarding the security of the tourists. Whilst he contends that neither they nor their property should be harmed, despite the fact that tourism is forbidden, the Mujahideen believe otherwise. He attacks the Egyptian president,

Hosni Mubarak, and states that as he does not act according to Muslim religious law, and enables foreign tourists to enter Egypt, who feel free to behave as they wish; this is the reason for the terrorism. The writer also believes that according to religious law, it is forbidden to harm Muslims, not even by instilling fear in their hearts. He sides with qualitative attacks to bring down the Egyptian regime, such as killing the Coptic Father Shnoda.⁵

Other responses were also noted. One of the surfers on the "Al-Faloja" forum, quoted citations from the famous book written by Abu Musab al-Suri, "Da'wat Al-Muqawamah Al-Islamiyyah Al-'Alamiyyah" – "The Global Islamic Resistance Call", which permits harming innocents. In the book, which is 1600 pages long, Abu Musab Al-Suri writes about the targets which can be attacked: "Every type of tourism, such as tourist companies, delegations of foreign tourists and their offices, airlines etc. These are the ambassadors of despicableness, corruption, wild behavior and decadence. They are the contemptible mirror of the occupation which has taken over our country and turned it into the back yard of restfulness and tranquility for the people of the heretics who do as they wish."

⁵ <http://www.atahadi.com/vb/showthread.php?t=3825>



**Abu Musab Al-Suri's book –
"The Global Islamic Resistance Call"**

Another debate following the attack in Yemen against South Korean tourists – 15 March 2009⁶

On 15 March 2009, a suicide bomber from the Al-Qaeda organization exploded amongst a group of South Korean tourists in the city of Shibam in South-East Yemen. Four tourists were killed in the explosion. Following the attack, a number of messages were noted on Jihadi forums, which dealt with the legitimacy of harming innocent civilians.

One of the surfers on the "Al-Faloja" forum explained the rationale for the attack by stating that South Korea assisted the U.S. in occupying Iraq and was still

⁶ http://ict.org.il/Portals/0/Internet%20Monitoring%20Group/JWMG_Terrorist_Attacks_Yemen.pdf

aiding it in Afghanistan, and for being one of the most loyal countries to the U.S. Following his remarks, a discussion ensued with another surfer, who wondered whether it was permissible to kill citizens whose countries harm Muslims, only because they were citizens of these countries. He mentioned India as a country which was against Islam and stated that there were many Indians who worked in the Gulf States and it was very easy to harm them, but he wondered whether it was right to do so. The surfer objected to the fact that the previous surfer had turned the Jihad commandment against the heretics into one of killing and protested: "We will kill the citizens of all the heretic countries who participate in the war against Islam. Does this annoy you? We will kill them, slaughter them, bomb them and rejoice [...]". Other surfers sided with him.⁷ Another surfer on the forum justified the killing of the South Korean tourists and other tourists for being heretics, basing himself on the Koran, the hadiths and the Muslim commentators. He explained that South Korea had participated in the war against terrorism and was also a part of the allied forces in Iraq, and he brings as proof, the permit granted by the Prophet Muhammad to kill an important sheikh, even if he only assisted by giving advice against the Muslims.⁸

However, it should be noted that there were also other opinions, albeit they were a minority. One of the surfers on the "Hanein" forum stated that the last Al-Qaeda attack against the South Korean tourists constituted a "mark of shame on the foreheads of the Al-Qaeda soldiers". He wondered "where was the honor in killing civilians?" and said the attack should be condemned and they should admit that they had erred. Others, however, claimed that the Muslims' land, particularly the Arabian Peninsula, is not designed for tourism, and emphasized that "South

⁷ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=52398> ;<http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=52398&page=2>

⁸ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=53233>

Korea is a strategic ally of the U.S. [...] an integral part of the Crusaders' army, and its soldiers were fighting in Iraq against our brethren the Muslims."⁹

Planning Attacks for the Tourist Season

In May 2009, one of the surfers on the "Al-Faloja" forum raised the issue of foreign tourists arriving in Arab countries during the tourist season and states that this field is a major one for Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. He explains how to execute the strict planning required for killing tourists, including the choice of time, place and weapons. Most of the surfers side with him and mention the Jewish, American, Russian and European tourists. Only one of the surfers discusses the matter from a different angle and asks what good will it do. He says that first of all this is a religious matter, where even the religious clerics do not have a definite ruling. Secondly, he explains that the assassination of a number of tourists will not harm the country in the long run, but will endanger the Mujahideen. He also quotes at length from Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, the spiritual teacher of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi – as to what is permitted and what is constructive, and shows that even he uses good judgment in the matter. One of the supervisors of the forum refers to this and says that he understands Al-Maqdisi's words differently. In any event, the surfer provides a number of other proposals instead of killing tourists, such as increasing propaganda amongst the public and distributing Jihadi films, in order to "break" the taboo which the western media has placed on the subject: amending Jihadi books such as the book of Abu Musab Al-Suri, which has many grammatical and printing errors; translation of the reports of strategic institutions in the United States; fundraising for the Mujahideen etc.¹⁰

⁹ <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=95796>

¹⁰ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=59076>