

Switzerland as a target for radical Islamist propaganda¹

As Al-Qaeda continues to reach out to new target communities, the organization must translate its ideological material into foreign languages.

On November 3, 2008, a member of the Al-Qaeda affiliated "Al-Hesbah" online forum, named Ansar, posted² a message written in Arabic and French by Mu'iz Al-Din Al-Qayrawani, a fighter in Afghanistan.³ In the message, Ansar requested that visitors to the forum distribute Al-Qayrawani's message and send a copy of it to the Swiss press.



Al-Qayrawani's photo as it appears on the Al-Hesbah forum

The message, directed to the Swiss people, strongly discourages Switzerland from cooperating with President Bush in his attacks against Islam. Al-Qayrawani states that Switzerland has a long tradition of adopting neutral policies and avoiding international and territorial conflicts; it "has thereby founded a society

¹ See previous publications addressing propaganda by global Jihad organizations and their plans to attack European targets such as the Netherlands and Denmark:
<http://www.ict.org.il/ResearchPublications/JihadiWebsitesMonitoring/tabid/320/Default.aspx>

² <http://www.al-hesbah.info/v/showthread.php?t=197576>

³ The letter is signed by Mu'iz Al-Din Al-Qayrawani, the Islamic Afghan Emirate, October 8, 2008.

that has become a symbol of security and stability." Nevertheless, Al-Qayrawani adds that the Swiss people are "today at a dangerous crossroads" and are becoming involved in "one of the most dangerous conflicts in the world." He claims that Switzerland is being drawn into the conflict, against its will, by the "forces of exploitation and tyranny." He blames Swiss politicians for ignoring the interests of the Swiss people and instead "deciding to tie their country's policies to the interests of a number of colonial countries who wish to control the world."

At the same time, Al-Qayrawani blames Jewish and Zionist organizations for the theft and loss of Swiss property, which he largely attributes to Ruth Dreifus, a Jewish woman who served as the Swiss President in 1999. He stresses that he has no interest in Switzerland's internal affairs as long as they remain isolated from the security concerns of Muslim nations.

Al-Qayrawani continues to blame the Swiss government for declaring "war on Islam and the Muslims" and for joining the Zionist-American "camp of evil." He claims that Switzerland is aiding American and Italian intelligence forces, supplying them with data on Muslims allegedly involved in terrorist activities. Al-Qayrawani provides a long list of examples of Switzerland's involvement in anti-Islamic policies.

Al-Qayrawani describes how American aircrafts are granted access to Swiss airspace, allowing them to "smuggle kidnapped Muslims." He also mentions a raid on the Geneva Islamic Center conducted by Swiss forces, in which computers were seized under the pretext that the center's employees were affiliated with

terrorist groups or activities.⁴ He continues to formulate accusations against Swiss politicians that “blindly follow Bush's policies,” calling upon them to “abandon the cult following Bush or the person who will replace him [...]”



The Islamic Center in Geneva

The Islamic Center in Geneva was established in 1961 by Said Ramadan, the son-in-law of Hassan Al-Bana, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Egypt. The Center includes a large mosque, a cultural center, a school and a lecture hall. The center receives 19 million Riyals from Saudi Arabia.⁵

In his message, Al-Qayrawani claims to have been a victim of a violent Swiss police raid. He says his wife, Umm Ubeida,⁶ also received humiliating and demeaning treatment and was not allowed to put on her veil. Al-Qayrawani writes that he cannot express the extent of pain and humiliation he suffered during the raid, promising punishment to those responsible. He claims he was

⁴ Thanks to an undercover agent operating from the Geneva Islamic Center, in December 2005, Swiss intelligence uncovered plans to attack an El Al aircraft with an RPG missile. See: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3252772,00.html>

⁵ For the official site of the Islamic Center in French, see: www.cige.org. Regarding the Saudi funding of the center, see: <http://www.kingfahdbinabdulaziz.com/main/m4502.htm>

⁶ Before presenting the contents of the message, Ansar explains that “Umm Ubeida” was once married to the murder of Ahmad Shah Massoud’s (1951-2001), leader of the “North Alliance” in Afghanistan. Massoud was murdered under bin Laden’s orders by two assassins posing as journalists, shortly after 9/11.

arrested for managing two internet websites that supported and preached the cause of Jihad, one in Arabic and the other in French.⁷ His arrest, he says, will not prevent the spread of Jihad, as there are tens of thousands of other Muslims just like him, who will preach in the name of Jihad; "and if one of us dies as a shahid, there are a dozen others who will take his place, because we believe wholeheartedly that true life continues after death or killing [...]". Al-Qayrawani concludes his message with a call to the Swiss people to believe in Allah, in his commandments and his laws.

Al-Qaeda's interest in spreading its ideology to new target populations also becomes apparent in online discussions between forum members on their individual contributions to propaganda efforts. On November 5, 2008, one forum member posted a message on the "Al-Boraq" Jihadi online forum, in which he attempts to clarify the ways in which Jihadi forum members can aid in the propaganda war.⁸

Mushrif17, an Al-Boraq website administrator,⁹ states that forum members have a number of important tasks, including:

1. "To defend the Mujahideen, particularly recently as the forums have been swamped by impostors."
2. "Distributing links with photographs of terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Mujahideen in Arab and foreign forums."
3. "To think of the Mujahideen in a constructive way and not believe what the weak and sick say about them."

⁷ This is the "Minbar Ahl Al-Sunna" website, <http://www.minbar-islam.com>, which is no longer active. In a message posted on the "Lahzat Al-Arabiya" online forum on May 9, 2005, Minbar Ahl Al-Sunna website's management wrote that Al-Qayrawani was permanently removed from the website following an armed raid by Swiss police on his apartment. During the raid, Al-Qayrawani's computers were confiscated and he was arrested: <http://www.lahdah.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13581>

⁸ <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread.php?t=72682>

⁹ Member of the forum since December 2007.

4. "To keep silent and avoid referring to speeches and responses made by the Mujahideen groups."
5. "Setting up websites in foreign languages, which address public opinion in western communities and expose the crimes conquering forces in occupied Islamic countries."
6. "To support the Mujahideen and not make things difficult for them by asking them questions about every detail reported in the media."
7. "To avoid researching the Mujahideen's weaknesses, particularly since many of the youth had never been in Iraq beforehand."
8. "To wish them victory and success."
9. "To prepare the ground and explain the sanctity of Muslim blood, the purpose of the Mujahideen and the goals of the Jihad and its necessity."

Insights:

Based on the above correspondence, it is clear that forum members are making significant efforts to expand the propaganda of Al-Qaeda and other Jihadi organizations and reach new target populations – particularly western populations. As part of this goal, forum members seek to provoke western society to act against their governments' policies and, at the same time, promote understanding of the Mujahideen's actions.

Switzerland serves as a breeding ground for Jihadi propaganda, as forum members are asked to send messages in French and Arabic to the Swiss media. A strong, unequivocal message is being sent to avoid collaborating with the anti-Islamic front led by the United States.

In order to fulfill this goal, forum members and global Jihadi activists must translate propaganda material into additional languages and set up websites in foreign languages. It is therefore evident that members of Jihadi forums are considered to be a central pillar in these organizations' propaganda campaigns.