

The Global Jihad Brotherhood:

Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

Sep 24, 2001



Brief Analysis

In his September 21st speech to Congress, President George W. Bush mentioned two terrorist groups in addition to Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda: the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Both groups are fighting the regimes of their homelands but serve the interests of global Jihad as well.

The Egyptian Islamic Jihad

The Egyptian Islamic Jihad is the oldest group in the front of radical Islamism, and can be regarded the closest to bin Laden and his members of Al-Qaeda. Its present leader, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, a physician, has been mentioned in the past year as the would-be successor of bin Laden in Al-Qaeda.

The group was founded in the late 1970s by young intellectuals, students, and graduates from the ranks of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who criticized the lack of militancy of the Brotherhood, which sought to become a legitimate political party under the old conservative leadership. Those founding Islamic Jihad were influenced by the Islamic militancy developed in prison during the 1960s by the Islamic radicals imprisoned by Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser, especially Sayyid Qatub. Motivated by disappointment from the Brotherhood, the limited freedom of political activity set by the late President Anwar al-Sadat, the peace agreement with Israel in March 1979, the effect of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the emergence of materialistic and nationalist Egyptian middle class, they found refuge in the militant writings of Qutb and his interpretation of jihad. Under the ideological guidance of Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman, they adopted and developed jihad against the secular state, Western ideas and culture, and the lack of social justice, as the sole way of struggling. In their ideological consolidation they were influenced also by the foundation in Egypt of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), by Dr. Fathi Shqaqi and Dr. Bashir Nafi`, who sought to establish a world movement of Islamic Jihad based around the Palestinian issue and under the effect of the Islamic revolution in Iran. The organ of the Islamic Jihad -- Al-Mukhtar al-Islami -- edited by Shqaqi and Nafi`, expressed the new ideology developed by both the Palestinian and Egyptian Jihadists.

On October 6, 1981, members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad managed to assassinate Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat, and opened a decade of violent, uncompromising struggle with the Egyptian authorities. This included other militant Islamist groups as well, such as Al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah whose leader Dr. Rifa`i Taha has also joined bin Laden's front in Afghanistan, and Al-Takfir wal-Hijrah, which contributed the idea of refutation of the Muslim secular state and society to the platforms of Al-Qaeda. The harsh retaliation of the Egyptian authorities and the growing resentment among the Egyptian public toward murderous terrorism against tourists, officials, Coptic Christians, and innocent civilians, led to the split of Islamic Jihad into three centers of leadership. One was mainly in Egyptian jail, under the command of `Abbud al-Zummur, who in the past two years began to push the group into political rather than terroristic activity. The second found refuge in exile in the Muslim community in the United States, under Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman. This group was active in the 1990s in several terrorist operations on American soil, such as the murder of Rabbi Meir Kahana in 1990, the car-bombing in February 1993 of the World Trade Center, and an attempt to explode the Brooklyn Tunnel in New York City in 1995. The third leadership resides

in Afghanistan under Dr. Zawahiri, and was involved in the major terrorist activities related to Al-Qaeda against American and Egyptian targets outside of the U.S. Members of this group are located in Yemen, Sudan, Pakistan, and other Muslim communities all over the world.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan -- Harakatul Islamiyyah -- was founded in 1996, from followers of the Muslim Brotherhood and several small groups of the Central Asian "Wahhabi" trend, which is only loosely related to the Wahhabi school of Islam predominant in Saudi Arabia. It is under the leadership of Mohammad Tahir Farouq (Tohir Yuldashev) as commander and Al-Zubair bin Abd al-Rahim as the religious authority.

IMU's members include individuals who fought in Tajikistan's 1992-97 civil war on the side of the Islamists, who lost. Thousands of militants fled Tajikistan to the safety of the Islamist networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since the mid-1990s, IMU fighters have trained at camps in Afghanistan, some controlled by Osama bin Laden -- IMU is believed to receive assistance from the Taliban. Since early 1999, its activities have become more violent. The IMU has a clear record of terrorist activity including a 1999 car bombing in Tashkent (the capital of Uzbekistan) which killed sixteen people, and the August 2000 seizure of numerous hostages, including four American mountain climbers, who were able to escape after being held hostage for six days. In the past two years, most of the activity of the IMU took place in neighboring Kirghizistan, where thousands of Uzbeki Islamists have taken refuge.

On August 25, 1999, the IMU published its first platform and declaration of Jihad against the Uzbeki regime, whose leadership was actually the former leadership of Communist Uzbekistan during the Soviet era. The declaration, "A message from the general command of the Islamic movement Uzbekistan," signed by Al-Zubair bin Abd al-Rahim, announced the primary objective of its Jihad as "the establishment of an Islamic state with the application of the Shari`ah, founded upon the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah". An interesting point in the declaration was the "regret that Foreign Mujahideen (Al-Ansaar) as of yet have not entered our ranks". This shows the desire of the IMU to globalize its struggle, following the successful model of the Chechen Islamist rebels.

On September 15, 2000, the State Department issued a fact sheet in conjunction with its designation of the IMU as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under U.S. law. In its annual report of Patterns of Global Terrorism for the year 2000, published in April 2001, the State Department added the IMU to the list of international terrorist groups.

Besides the IMU, there are two other Uzbeki Islamist groups which are influenced by the Islamist trends of the Arab world. The first, Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami -- the Islamic Liberation Party, was accused by the Uzbeki authorities of several terrorist operations in the 1990s, including an attempt to assassinate Uzbeki president Islam Karimov in February 1999. Hundreds of its members have been imprisoned in the past two years. The second is the official Muslim Brotherhood, which acts so far as a political group rather than a terrorist one, but some of whose members joined the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan.

Conclusion

The notion that the whole world is a platform for Islamist Jihadist activity, either against various Muslim regimes or the United States and Israel as major enemies, has become common to many Islamist groups, using the Afghan struggle of the 1980s as a model and Afghanistan as a base. Their Jihad is perceived as a war of self-defense against a "global conspiracy of the Americans and the Jews", and hence all violent means are legitimate. This global Jihad brotherhood is at the core of the Al-Qaeda network, enabling its affiliates to cooperate easily and to build joint "task forces" of various nationalities for terrorism, fund-raising, money-laundering, training, supplying of arms, and other activities.

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