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### Anti-Semitic Themes in Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihadi Literature

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- There is a connection between contemporary Muslim apocalyptic literature and jihadi movements. Both have a core belief in a grand anti-Semitic conspiracy theory designed to demonize the Jewish people. This theory has recently been exported throughout the Muslim world, where it fuels anti-Semitic tendencies and violent movements.
- Anti-Semitic and other conspiracy theories in the Muslim world are resistant to facts and even to education. Because these theories answer emotional needs, they are likely to keep growing in popularity.
- Anti-Semitism is a powerful force for radicalizing Muslims, and is even used in attempting to convince Christians to join in a grand alliance against the Jews. In doing so Muslims emphasize their belief that the Antichrist, or *dajjal*, is Jewish.

Anti-Semitic themes are ubiquitous in contemporary Muslim literature. Although many of these are either academic or rabble-rousing in nature, those within the genres of jihadi or apocalyptic literature convey an imperative to act. Jihadi literature is either mainstream, associated with dominant religious groups or trends within Islam, or radical, associated with counterestablishment or radical reform groups in Islam.

Both the mainstream and radical trends can be quite violent; often the establishment figures are co-opted by political elites who seek to use jihad or anti-Semitism to focus hatred on an acceptable target (usually either Israel or the United States). These establishment figures, such as Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, direct their violent and apocalyptic statements at these targets while discouraging revolution within the Muslim world. Radical figures, however, view these establishment religious leaders as essentially creatures of the West and subservient to the Arab and Muslim political elites, and seek to overthrow all of them together and radically reform the Muslim world.

Anti-Semitism can be defined as characterizing Jews as an existentially evil force pursuing some sort of historically rooted, global conspiracy to dominate, manipulate, and

change the world. Most of these conspiracy theories are based, or are intellectually dependent in one way or another, on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This document first appeared in Arabic translation in 1951.<sup>1</sup> It started to gain wide currency in the 1960s and eventually was translated into other Muslim languages such as Persian, Bahasa Indonesian, Hindi-Urdu, and so on. The *Protocols*, together with a wide range of attendant documents, provides an intellectual and sometimes even religious basis for anti-Semitic beliefs.

The anti-Semitic conspiracy literature also ascribes to Jews a demonic power to influence people. From an Islamic standpoint, this means that Jews or their agents are trying to harm or alter Islam in a fundamental way. For example, in the 1970s the Ayatollah Khomeini maintained that the Jews were trying to change the Qur'an by deleting from it all the verses that deal with Jews or anti-Jewish polemic.<sup>2</sup> Such notions continue to play an important role in the jihadi organizations' efforts to create a black-and-white distinction between faith and infidelity. The idea that the Jews are trying to distort Islam evokes a wide and immediate response.

What is most repugnant in the Muslim anti-Semitic literature are the sexual and blood-libel themes. Perverted sexuality is linked to Jews in caricatures and other images and in written texts. Examples of the blood-libel theme are Sulayman al-Bawwab's 1996 book *Children Are Bloody Meals on the Tables of Jews (Awwlad wala'im damawiyya `ala ma'idat al-Yahud)*, and former Syrian defense minister Mustafa Tlas's 1986 book *The Unleavened Bread of Zion (Fatir Sihyawn)*, which revisits the 1840 Damascus blood libel.<sup>3</sup> Such material, while important in regard to Muslim anti-Semitism generally, does not figure extensively in the jihadi or apocalyptic literature.

## The Muslim Apocalypse

Muslim apocalyptic literature describes a timeline of terrifying events that lead from the present to the end of the world. As far as anti-Semitism is concerned, the main focus is on the figure of the Antichrist, known in Arabic as the *dajjal*. The *dajjal* as well as his followers are said to be Jewish. In the classical Muslim apocalyptic literature, apart from this theme, anti-Semitic material is not extensive. But in the contemporary literature of this kind, anti-Semitism-stemming from the conspiracy theories of the *Protocols* and related works-is widespread.

This literature now heavily emphasizes the *dajjal*, who his Jewish followers are, his alleged intellectual affinities with the various strands of Judaism, and what he is likely to do to Muslims and Islam. The overarching idea is that the Jews are striving to corrupt Islam and religion generally, and to impose Godless norms on the whole world. The global nature of the threat posed by the Antichrist leads Muslims even to try and convince Christians to join in a grand alliance against the Jews.

Such literature is now highly popular throughout the Muslim world. Beginning in 1994, this author has collected about 250 documents from the Arabic-speaking world alone that are apocalyptic in nature. Often their covers feature lurid anti-Semitic caricatures in the style of European anti-Semitic literature. There may be a hook-nosed figure with claws inserted deep into a globe, or the *dajjal* with the Star of David dangling from his neck. Sometimes these sights are combined with other fabulist or pseudoscientific images.

Another example that combines all these themes, a book by Hisham `Abd al-Hamid of

Egypt, features a Jew with the Star of David around his neck, his image beamed down from a UFO as he speaks to Masonic black-clad acolytes. They stand before a golden temple marked "the United Nations" that has been draped with Stars of David. The Jew, then, is entirely alien, has hidden acolytes everywhere who are prepared to do his will, and rules the world through the United Nations.<sup>4</sup>

Such literature has now been widely translated. Languages include those of Central Asia-especially of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and also Khyrgistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Each of these countries is either emerging from or still under authoritarian rule, and radical Muslims in them portray their leaders as tools of the Jews, who use them to fulfill the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Various apocalyptic books are sold on the streets in these countries, almost all translated from Arabic. Although the primary source is Egypt, some also come from Saudi Arabia and Morocco. The translated volumes preserve the original covers.

Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are rapidly diffused in these countries and become part of the local environment. In Indonesia, even mainstream Muslim organizations such as the Muhammadiyah, with an estimated membership of thirty million, now speak of the *dajjal*, describing how he manipulates the Indonesian government and tries to destroy Islam in the country.

Central Asia is even easier for apocalyptic writers. For example, the unpopular Uzbekistani government of Islam Karimov, which is the main literary focus of central Asia, is easily demonized as Jewish or said to be an agent of the *dajjal*. Small pamphlets on the topic are to be found all over Uzbekistan; despite the repressive regime, such material is available from local radical Muslims and radical websites.

Literature of this kind is also widespread in Pakistan, usually not translated from Arabic. Material originally written in Urdu features the same conspiracy theories with a similar blend of traditional Muslim and contemporary anti-Semitic themes. This spills over into India, especially its Urdu-speaking Muslim population, particularly in Delhi and among Muslim communities in Kashmir and in the south.

### **Linking Apocalyptic and Jihadi Literature**

In the Muslim community worldwide, the conspiratorial mindset prevails and is not subject to debate. Even when the likes of Osama Bin Laden and his intellectual offshoots make calls to fight the "Zionist-Crusader" conspiracy, there is no coherent intellectual or religious opposition. Even Muslims who oppose Bin Laden and al-Qa`ida, or intellectually reject the premises of radical Islam, often believe in the worldwide conspiracy against Islam and sometimes charge that radical Muslims are its dupes.

Prevalent in the conspiratorial trend is a major tradition of radical Islam known as the *hadith al-Thawban*-the tradition of Thawban, one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>5</sup> This tradition is ascribed to the Prophet, who, with Thawban merely playing the role of narrator, speaks of a time in the apocalyptic future when the nations of the world will seek to destroy the Muslims. For radical and many other Muslims, this describes contemporary geopolitics. According to the tradition, Muslims at this apocalyptic time are numerous, but are weak because they have abandoned jihad and must reembrace it.

There is overlap, then, when jihadi ideology is projected into the apocalyptic future. The

*hadith al-Thawban* is clearly linked to conspiracy theories that account for the Muslims' weakness. But the fit is not always good. Most radical jihadi organizations tend to be activist, whereas apocalyptic groups are sometimes deterministic, believing that it is God who will take care of matters. An example is the prophesizing of Sheikh Bassam Jirrar of Hamas, who predicted in 1995 that Israel would come to an end in 2012, later revising this to several different years. These predictions were based on gematrical calculations by Jirrar, a mathematician by training, that he derived from Sura 17 of the Qur'an.

Jirrar was severely criticized in Hamas for encouraging fatalism. If people came to believe that Israel would expire through God's will, they would not strive to bring this about. Tensions between activist and determinist trends are common. Radical Muslims have made similar attempts at prediction usually focusing on the destruction of the United States. Most jihadi groups, however, are activist.

### **Among the Believers**

The author first encountered the power of conspiracy theory when arguing with two Egyptian engineers in the Sinai in 1985 who insisted that then-President Ronald Reagan was a Jew. Conspiracy theories have special power as a belief system, an alternate universe. Evidence is irrelevant when confronting these notions. In this case, the facts that Reagan was Irish and that most American Jews did not vote for him or sympathize with him had no effect. The two engineers had been fully educated in the United States and were fluent in English. Education, too, tends to have no impact on conspiracy theories.

The author encountered another example in Turkey in 2005—a country usually viewed as friendly toward the West and Israel. The holders of the conspiracy theories were a group of radical Naqshbandis, a highly orthodox strain of Sufis, in Istanbul. When they discovered that the author was of British ancestry, they exclaimed, "No British, no British! British are Wahhabis!"

It emerged that the primary conspiracy theory in Turkey among the Naqshbandis and their supporters is that the British were the ones who created Wahhabism. They did so via a spy, sent two hundred years ago, who implanted this belief system and thereby inflicted radical Islam on the rest of the world.<sup>6</sup> In these Naqshbandis' view, then, anyone of British ancestry was linked to radical Islam. This theory appears designed to relieve the Naqshbandis of any sense of responsibility for radical Islam, which they abhor, while placing the onus for its creation on a foreign nation.

It was only later, when given five different tracts on this theory in an Istanbul book market, that the author realized how widespread it is. At least one of these works was in English, and others could be seen in Arabic and other languages such as Russian, Spanish, German, French, and Farsi.

### **Conclusion**

Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are at the nexus between Muslim apocalyptic and jihadi literature. Hatred of the Jews, the belief in their essential malevolence throughout history and at present, is the glue that holds these groups together, serving as a potent recruitment tool in outreach to uncommitted Muslims and to non-Muslim anti-Semites. Both the anti-Semite Roger Garaudy of France and Abdul Aziz Mayatt, leader of the

British Nazi Party, were motivated by anti-Semitism in converting to Islam. Similarly, the prominent American Nazi William Pierce expresses reverence for Islam.

The anti-Semitic conspiracy theories will continue to gain popularity because they answer emotional needs for many Muslims and others.

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### Notes

1. Muhammad Khalifa al-Tunisi, *Al-Khatar al-Yahudi: Brutukat hukama' Sihyawn* (Cairo: Matba`at Dar al-Kitab al-`Arabi, 1951). [Arabic]
2. Cited in his *Vilayat-i Faqih*, in *Islam and Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1981), 127.
3. David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 66.
4. Hisham `Abd al-Hamid, *Iqtaraba khuruj al-masikh al-Dajjal: Al-Sahayina wa-`ibadat al-shaytan yamhaduna li-l-khuruj al-masikh al-Dajjal bi-atbaq al-ta'ira min muthallath Bermuda* (Cairo: Dar al-Bashir, 1997), cover. [Arabic]
5. Sources are cited in al-Silfi, *Al-Fawa'id al-hisan min hadith Thawban* (Casablanca: Dar Ibn `Affan, 2001), 8-10 [Arabic]; discussion in Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, 182-83. The tradition is cited in the first lines of Bin Laden's 1998 proclamation; see Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, trans. James Howarth (London: Verso, 2005), 59.
6. See *Confessions of a British Spy and British Enmity against Islam*, trans. M. Siddik Gamus (Istanbul: Hakikat Kitabevi, 2001); Arabic "original": *I'tirafat al-jasus al-Inglizi* (Istanbul: Hakikat Kitabevi, 2005); discussion in Daniel Pipes, *The Hidden Hand: Middle Eastern Fears of Conspiracy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 210-12.

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