

Moderate Senior Saudi Cleric Sheikh Al-'Abikan in Lectures and Writings: Jihad in Iraq is Illegitimate; The Muslim Brotherhood's Ideology is the Cause of Terrorism

Sheikh Abd Al-Muhsin Al-'Abikan, advisor to the Saudi Justice Ministry and member of the Saudi Shura Council, recently made several statements about the illegitimacy of the jihad in Iraq and about the need to establish a high committee to fight the phenomenon of accusing other Muslims of apostasy (takfir) – a phenomenon which he deems one of the causes of terrorism. Al-'Abikan also stated that the Muslim Brotherhood ideology is the cause of terrorism.

The following are statements made by Al-'Abikan, in his writings and television appearances:

No Religious Legitimacy for Jihad in Iraq; the Occupation Must Be Removed by Peaceful Means

Recently, Al-'Abikan stated that the Jihad in Iraq is not legitimate according to *Shari'a* (Islamic religious law). In a May 27, 2005 interview, he told the Saudi daily *Al-Riyadh* that there was "no Jihad" in Iraq and that nothing was to be gained by the fighting there that was being called "Jihad."

According to Al-'Abikan, the fighters blowing themselves up with explosive belts or car bombs are carrying out suicide operations, not martyrdom operations. He also clarified that killing during these operations was not an act of war, but an act of treachery – because for the most part, the target was peaceful people, which is forbidden by *Shari'a*.

Al-'Abikan further said that in a time of occupation, an attempt must be made to remove the occupier by peaceful means, without bloodshed.¹

In response to the interviewer's question about whether or not the war in Iraq constituted resistance to an occupier, Al-'Abikan explained:

"There is a difference between Jihad for the sake of defense which is conditional upon the permission of the ruler, and Jihad for the sake of defense which is not. Jihad for the sake of defense which does not require the ruler's permission is waged when a man is attacked in his home with the aim of killing him, taking his property, or harming his honor. However, in the case of an overall occupation, which is aimed at seizing overall control, the *Shari'a* does not say that the occupier is to be fought; it says that there must be an attempt to remove the [occupying] ruler by peaceful means which do not entail bloodshed."

In response to another question, about whether Iraqis' defense of their besieged cities constituted legitimate Jihad, Al-'Abikan added: "Whoever says that the Americans are killing everyone or besieging every house – it isn't so, because the siege is in specific neighborhoods in which the people who carry out explosions and kill Americans and those who help them have barricaded themselves. When Allah instructed us to kill the attacker, the meaning was [in the context of] a defensive war by those who are attacked; [the meaning was not people] who attack and then barricade themselves – for someone like this is not considered to be

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defending his life, nor is he considered a warrior of Jihad for the sake of defense."ⁱⁱ

Al-'Abikan made similar comments during a May 17, 2005, symposium in Riyadh: "I am not saying that Jihad should be abolished. But there are rules for Jihad, and only expert religious scholars are permitted to issue *fatwas* on this issue. [The decision to wage] Jihad is in the hands of the rulers, and none [other]. What is happening in Iraq does not strengthen [the claim] that it is resistance. Everyone there engages in corruption and harms women's honor, under the guise of Jihad."ⁱⁱⁱ

Al-'Abikan has also expressed criticism of religious scholars who issued *fatwas* calling for waging Jihad in Iraq. In an interview, he told the Saudi daily *Al-Riyadh* that these scholars were dissenters and sinners, who should stand trial for the damage they had caused to Iraq because of such *fatwas*. This damage, he said, has taken the form of civil war, damage to the security of Iraq's residents, and the destruction of public and private buildings. Even Iraq's residents, he said, are against the presence of foreign resistance elements who have come to wage Jihad: "Several Iraqis have called us [i.e. the Saudis] to say: 'We do not want Saudis, Jordanians, Egyptians, and others coming to us. Get them away from us. They have aroused problems here and undermined security – and all we want is security.'"^{iv}

On another occasion, he said that these scholars who issue these *fatwas* would not be exonerated of the crimes they have caused, which include killing, destruction, devastation, and civil war.^v

In a July 6, 2005, interview to the Saudi daily *Al-Watan*, Al-'Abikan was asked whether his courageous position on Iraq created prompted a negative attitude towards him on the part of Islamist parties, and to what harassment he has been subjected as a result. Al-'Abikan responded that he has been subjected to verbal and internet harassment, and that this stems from ignorance, lack of awareness, and impiety. "However," he said, "many scholars within and outside the Saudi kingdom, and scholars from Iraq itself, strongly supported my [religious] opinion."^{vi}

"I Am Willing to Publicly Confront Bin Laden and Others"

Al-'Abikan has expressed a willingness to publicly confront Osama bin Laden and his supporters, saying: "Those who believe in the ideology of Al-Qaeda have little knowledge of

Islam. So I have challenged them, several times, to a confrontation, in the media and outside it. Some of them have sat with me in my home, or in a mosque, or in other places, but none has ever managed to produce a convincing argument... Yes, I will publicly confront bin Laden and others, such as Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, publicly^{vii}... I am willing to confront anyone who defends the ideas of Al-Qaeda, at any time."^{viii}

Terrorism is Completely Opposed to the Islamic Religion, and Blackens its Image

On July 22, 2005, Saudi TV's Channel 1 aired a lesson on religion delivered by Al-'Abikan, in which he said:^{ix} "...Unfortunately, some have abandoned the truth of the Koran, the proper *Sunna*, and the *Sira*, and have adopted a fanatic, extremist and rigid line, which runs counter to the Koran and the *Sunna*... Our religion is a religion of kindness and of compassion, not a religion of violence...

"The Prophet treated people with moderation and compromise, not extremism... He treated infidels and enemies in a proper and good way, without an iota of extremism.

"When the Prophet conquered Mecca... he did not exploit his enemies' weakness and the strength of Allah to impose Islam on them, because 'there is no coercion in the religion' [Koran]... This is [an approach of] compassion towards people... The Prophet lived among his most extreme enemies from among the Jews and treated them properly. He accepted the invitation of [whoever] invited him, and even ate the poisoned food of the Jewess... yet despite this, the Prophet did not treat her the same way she treated him. The Prophet also visited a sick Jew, and called upon him to join Islam... All this proves that our religion is a religion of compassion, and not a religion of violence, as the terrorists do today.

"Terrorism as defined today in the world is prohibited by the *Shari'a*. This terrorism seeks to cast fear upon peaceful people, Muslim and non-Muslim, whom it is forbidden to kill according to the *Shari'a*. This terrorism is forbidden, and these people [the terrorists] have nothing but violence. The distressing pictures and stories we see and hear... of beheading... arouse disgust...

"Attacking the Twin Towers on 9/11 harmed all Muslims. This operation was forbidden from many aspects... It placed us in a position of defending Islam and the Muslims, after we had held our heads high and spread our religion as a

religion of moderation and generosity, and doors had opened to us throughout the world. We established [Islamic] centers, we built mosques, and Islamic propagators had opportunities everywhere, and we were not restricted at all. This was a [period of] great comfort which should have been used to spread Islam, and to present its beautiful face to people, so that they would join Islam and strengthen the Muslims... When Islam spreads in these countries, and the number of Muslims grows – they will have a majority, their opinion will carry weight, and they will have an influence on the politics of these countries... That way we could have at least attained security, or could have turned these countries into Islamic countries. This is not inconceivable...

"[The terrorists] have brought this to a halt with their evil deeds, their ignorance in the politics required by Islam, and [their lack of discrimination between] good and corrupt... Now we suffer from the accusation that our religion is a religion of violence and terrorism, and that our curricula preach violence, hatred, aggression, and oppression...

"... Extremism has led [the terrorists] to *takfir*, or, in other words, to accusing [other Muslims] of apostasy... The authority to declare *takfir* is Allah's alone, and no man has that authority."

"A High Committee to Fight Takfir Must Be Established"

Al-'Abikan has been extremely critical of the phenomenon of accusing other Muslims of *takfir*. During the Riyadh symposium he said: "Thought in the spirit of the Khawarij,^x and accusing the other of apostasy, are the causes of terror. So is some preachers' adherence to mistaken positions, as well as [certain] well-known movies and books, which are behind the incitement to terrorist operations."^{xi}

In an interview with the Arabic-language London daily *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Al-'Abikan called for establishing a high committee to fight the phenomenon of *takfir*: "I maintain that we must establish a high committee to fight the concept of *takfir*. [This committee] would study the subject thoroughly... Some preachers agree when asked to give a lecture on terrorism, but then, when they come, they talk only about honoring parents... The idea of *takfir* exists in several of our schools and universities."^{xii}

Al-'Abikan told *Al-Riyadh* that *takfir* was "an idea of the Khawarij, but graver still, for even the early Khawarij, about whom the Prophet Muhammad warned and whom he ordered killed,

did not do everything that those who accuse governments and people of apostasy are doing today. [Those who accuse others of apostasy are using this] *takfir* as a tool for persuading people to rise up against the regime. Only in this way ... will they be able to realize their ambition to gain power and to attain their political goals. And only people who are persuaded to believe that the regime is heretical will aid them..."^{xiii}

In his *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* interview, Al-'Abikan attributed the phenomenon of *takfir* and the terrorist attacks to the recent tendency among Saudi religious circles to prefer the Hadith and the Sunna as religious sources over *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence. He stated: "There is no doubt that the Saudi religious circles' interest in the science of Hadith comes at the expense of Muslim jurisprudence.

"This is evident in the young generation, which is influenced by the statements of sheikhs who have condemned the adherence to the legacy of jurisprudence (*taklid*), and have called for endorse only the [actual historical] conduct of the Prophet (*Sunna*)...

"In these Islamic circles [who use *takfir*] there is hardly a single real scholar; most of them are interested in the tradition [Hadith] only, and their knowledge of *Shari'a* is minimal. This is one of the reasons why the *takfir* catastrophes and bombings have befallen us."

Al-'Abikan accused those who distribute religious cassettes of exploiting people's interest in religion in order to convey extremist messages: "The damage began when some people began to head [gatherings], to give lectures, and to produce cassettes. They encountered people's willingness to listen to religious cassettes, to preaching, and to lectures, and took advantage of this willingness to direct them religiously and politically...

"Had they used the people's good feelings in a positive way, and directed them towards constructive channels, we would have had a wise and temperate society."

Al-'Abikan continued by saying that these preachers had been influenced by foreign political ideas and by Khawarij-influenced ideas. These ideas, he explained, are the essence of the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. He also stated that some of these preachers only preached these ideas for the money, and for jobs..."^{xiv}

A Call to Reject Extremism

In a July 6, 2005 interview with the Saudi daily *Al-Watan*, Al-'Abikan was asked about a reformist intellectual movement that is emerging in the kingdom that is calling to reject violence,

fanaticism, and partisanship; struggling against *takfir*, excessive strictness, and extremism; and calling to accept all Saudis, of all schools and beliefs, under the umbrella of the state.

Al-'Abikan responded: "It is undoubtedly obligatory to fight *takfir*, excessive strictness, fanaticism, and the imposing of restrictions without [sufficient] basis [in Islamic law]... The public should follow the instructions of those who are firmly grounded in Islamic law and who know what is damaging and what is beneficial.

"They should not follow the words of someone who has a narrow view of religion, maintaining that he is the only one who understands Islam. All this requires cautioning the people and explaining the danger of unfounded *takfir*..."^{xv}

Al-'Abikan further said: "The principle of dialogue is found in the Koran, and also in the tradition of the Prophet. The dialogue conducted by the Prophet Muhammad with the unbelievers is recorded in the books of the *Sira* [Muhammad's life], and none can deny it. Religious scholars still act according to it. It is necessary to maintain dialogue.

"However, it should be [conducted] wisely and quietly... Allah says in the Koran [16:125]: 'Call [the people] to the path of Allah with wisdom and gentle exhortation, and debate with them with superior arguments.' However, it is forbidden to allow people to spread poison and misleading ideas, which result in damage to the country [Saudi Arabia], to the citizens and to all Muslims [worldwide]..."^{xvi}

The Muslim Brotherhood Ideology is the Reason for Terrorism

In a lecture titled "The Gap Between the Saudi Youth and the Religious Scholars," delivered during a meeting organized by the King Abd Al-Aziz Public Library in Riyadh, Al-'Abikan said that the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood movement was the reason for the emergence of some of the armed terrorist groups in several Arab countries, among them Saudi Arabia. According to him, "the aim of most of the Islamist groups is political, not religious... One of them is the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Their ideology was the reason for many of the explosions and civil wars, since [the movement's leaders] amuse themselves with the religious aspect while, in truth, they are interested in the political aspect."^{xvii}

Al-Arabiyyah TV, December 8, 2004

The following are excerpts from an interview with Sheikh 'Abd Al-Muhsen Al-'Abikan. (To view this clip, please visit <http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&PI=410>.)

Interviewer: "Sheik 'Abd Al-Muhsen Al-'Abikan, should the Iraqi people sit, wait, and hand out flowers to the Americans?"

Al-'Abikan: "When they didn't sit [doing nothing], did they do anything worthwhile? I advised them. The truth is that anyone who advises the Iraqis and commiserates with them... I commiserate with the Iraqis and consider myself to be one of their most sincere advisors, because my advice was beneficial to them.

"Those who advised them to fight are the ones who caused their deaths and brought them to the destruction we witness today.

"All they got from this resistance was death and destruction. Did they drive out the occupier through their actions? We have seen what happened in Najaf. In Najaf they were told: 'Become a political party and hand over your weapons,' but they refused. Only after the destruction, the killings, and so on did they accept the demands. Why didn't this happen before the destruction, killings, and death? This is true for the residents of Falluja as well."

MBC TV, September 11, 2004

The following are excerpts from Sheikh Al-'Abikan's weekly religious ruling program. (To view this clip, please visit <http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&PI=260>.)

"At first, some Palestinians sold their homes and lands to Jews, a long time ago, and then the Jews had a place of their own, and later a very small state, before the West Bank and the Gaza Strip [were occupied]. Matters became complicated, and UN soldiers from a few countries were stationed there. These forces separated between the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and between the Jews in the Israeli State.

"Who made them start their expansionism? History is very clear about this. President Jamal 'Abd Al-Nasser is the one who started it by telling [the UN forces]: 'Get out and we will throw them into the sea. We will throw the Jews into the sea.' I tell you the problem is that those who caused the destruction were Muslims. I heard him when I was small. He said in his speeches, 'Let's throw them into the sea.' Afterwards... the forces left.

He told those forces to leave. He is the one who began fighting the Jews, and then there was defeat.

"When some Arabs began fighting the Jews, they took over the West Bank and Gaza. We know that after the Jews took the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, things stabilized: There was no killing and we didn't hear a thing. Later, there was... Some people with interests brought troubles upon them. It started with all [the talk about] 'the children of the stones'... We would always hear about 'the children of the stones.' As if adults weren't even involved. Only the children: 'the children of the stones... the children of the stones...'

"Things developed. At first it was merely stones and such, and then it developed into destroying houses, killing people, and using weapons. Later, things got worse. This is what caused [former Saudi mufti] Sheikh 'Abd Al-'Aziz ibn Baz to say, 'You must make peace.' But they did not respond."

MBC TV, April 30, 2004

On his weekly religious ruling program, Sheikh Al-'Abikan was asked about Osama bin Laden. He replied as follows. (To view this clip, please visit <http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=51> .)

"I advise brother Osama bin Laden and brother Sa'd Al-Faqih, with whom I have a friendly relationship and with whom I held meetings before they left Saudi Arabia and by Allah, I wish them all the best... My advice to these honorable brothers is that whoever committed sins should return to Allah, because the gates of repentance are open.

"They must first turn to Allah in repentance for what they have engaged the Muslims in and for the civil strife, the disasters, and tragedies caused by the instructions we hear from them through the media. There are messages that come from brother Osama bin Laden and brother Sa'd Al-Faqih. I hope Allah directs them to the righteous path.

"I say that they are our brothers even though they wronged us. Just like 'Ali said when he was asked if the Khawarij were infidels. He replied, 'They escaped unbelief. They are our brothers even though they wronged us.' We say they are our brothers even though they wronged us."

MBC TV, July 31, 2004

On his weekly religious rulings program, Sheikh Al-'Abikan spoke against terrorism; following are excerpts: (To view this clip, please visit

<http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=178> .)

Al-'Abikan: "Not everyone who belongs to another religion is your enemy. No. Moreover, some Muslims are an enemy."

Host: "Isn't religion about mutual relations?"

Al-'Abikan: "Religion is about mutual relations. The enemy can be Muslims or non-Muslims. Sometimes your greatest and worst enemy is a Muslim. This has actually happened.

"As we know, the disasters and tragedies, which befell us were caused by some Muslims who attacked their neighbors, shed their blood, violated women's honor, and destroyed buildings, even though they were Muslims. The enemy is an enemy, whether Muslim or not.

"What is happening in Iraq now is not Jihad at all. Why is that? Because true Jihad, as set by Allah and established by the Prophet Muhammad has rules: what the Prophet and his companions would do. Jihad does not mean harming Muslims who cooperated with non-Muslims, as claimed. Not just anyone can raise the banner of Jihad, because Jihad is the prerogative of the Muslim ruler as decided by the Islamic religious scholars.

Host: "Who said it is Jihad when the number of Iraqi casualties is so high?"

Al-'Abikan: "That's just it. The problem with people is that they hear some muftis who quote from the jurisprudents things that are not relevant. The rulings of Sheikh Al-Islam ibn Taymiyya, and of all other jurisprudents, do not apply to the current situation in Iraq. Other religious rulings apply to Iraq.

"They take the words of jurisprudents on other circumstances, not the current circumstances, and implement it here. Adjusting to reality is important, brothers!

"A jurisprudent is not someone who memorizes the religious law by heart, 'Thus said so-and-so and thus said such-and-such'... He reads or memorizes a religious legal book, and then he comes and acts as if he were a cassette, 'Thus said so-and-so and thus said such-and-such'."

Saudi TV Ch. 1, June 19, 2005

The following are excerpts from an interview with Saudi cleric Sheik Abd Al-Muhsen Al-Abikan, which aired on Saudi TV's Channel 1 of on June 19, 2005. (To view this clip, please visit <http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=724> .)

Abikan: "[We should] expose the false slogans spread by the West, claiming that they are the people of democracy, of justice, and of freedom,

and that their regimes bring about good for all mankind. If we compare these societies to Muslim society, Muslim society would be superior in all aspects. In fact, they are more advanced than us only in modern technology and material development, but at the expense of social behavior. These societies lack many things. The woman... They say there must be equality between men and women? Equality in what way? For example, they talk about equality in how they are treated, but, in fact, they have no equality. The woman is more advanced than the man. The husband, opens the car door for his wife, and lets her speak before him. Is this equality? No, it's the opposite. This is advancing the woman before the man. Western men should object to this."

Host: "She has the same rights as others."

Abikan: "Western men should say: 'You've given women preference instead of equality.' Equality should mean, for example, that the woman has to walk next to the man. If they enter a place, they should enter together, or whoever gets there first. Why should he open the door for her? Why is he carry the bags, while she walks ahead? You see such things. The woman walks ahead, and the man lags behind with the bags. Is this equality? They are spreading empty and false slogans. This is not equality but rather the opposite. They have turned upside down what religious law has decreed with regard to men and women in Islam. If we compare the status of women in our society and in the West, we find that our women enjoy a status of respect. The woman is honored, protected, and respected, and she enjoys the full rights accorded to her in Islam, whereas in other societies she is persecuted. She goes out to public places like men, and serves the men, and works twice. At home, she has an important task –raising her children. She's burdened by hardship of working outside, as well as the hardship of working at home. Who is supposed to prepare the meals and make the home suitable for living and for a happy marital life? Who will carry out this task? The woman, of course. Is she a servant? In this case, she won't be able to do this work. This is a woman's basic work, and if she goes out it is more work. In other words, they have burdened her with more work, on top of her basic work, and they have oppressed and exploited her. On the other hand, in our society, she is honored and respected, thank God."

MBC TV, August 28, 2004

The following are excerpts from Sheikh Al-'Abikan's weekly religious ruling show. (To view this clip, please visit

<http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=256> .)

"Can we implement in Iraq what the clerics have said? Certainly not. According to the clerics, people should adhere to their imam and wage Jihad against an enemy who wants to take their property and kill them. Iraq, on the other hand, is under the control of Iraqis, no matter who they are. Today, I've shown you a book proving that an imam is considered an imam even if he was appointed by an infidel, as the clerics decreed.

"The honorable Sheikh Dr. Abu Al-Manar Al-'Alami, an Iraqi Sunni cleric, and several [other] Iraqi clerics called me two or three days ago and said that he and the clerics with him support what I say, and say: 'We want stability so the situation will stabilize and then the occupier will leave.'

"What was the result of the actions of Muqtada Al-Sader and his supporters in Najaf? What was the result of their actions? We have warned against this. In the beginning, they resisted, revolted, and fought. But after hundreds were killed and injured, and houses and buildings were destroyed, only then did they surrender. Why didn't they surrender from the outset? This way bloodshed would have been prevented and homes and buildings would have been protected. They even damage the oil from time to time. People need stability and a sense of security."

Former Saudi Minister: "Why Don't Other Sheikhs Have the Courage to Speak Out Like Al-'Abikan?"

On June 7, 2005, former Saudi communications minister Ali Bin Talal Al-Jihni published an article in the London *Al-Hayat* daily, in which he wrote: "The Saudi religious scholar Abd Al-Muhsin Al-'Abikan is practically the only one amongst the Muslim scholars who raises his voice, time and again, to say that suicide and the killing of others in Iraq must not be defined as martyrdom. Al-'Abikan is not the only one who knows that [such] suicide is a crime, the responsibility for which is borne not only by the young people who were led astray and purposely committed suicide, but also by those who use them as fuel to accomplish their goals.

"What prevents the scholars from raising their voices to support the honorable sheikh [Al-'Abikan]? Perhaps one reason is their desire to win the sympathy of those who call suicide martyrdom. Or it may be for purely political reasons, or out of fear of the wrath of young Saudis, or for personal reasons. Perhaps they fear

the religious scholars themselves, who know full well what Al-'Abikan knows, but who lack his courage...

"Worse than those who support the suicide bombers are those who are silent. They are ipso facto supporters who for various reasons do not

raise their voices to condemn and accuse Al-Zarqawi and his supporters throughout the world. Every Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim, who is following events, knows that the argument that Iraq is 'occupied' has become a pretext to take over the regime."^{xviii}

ⁱ *Al-Riyadh* (Saudi Arabia), May 27, 2005, as summarized by the paper.

ⁱⁱ *Al-Riyadh* (Saudi Arabia), May 27, 2005.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Al-Watan* (Saudi Arabia), May 18, 2005.

^{iv} *Al-Riyadh* (Saudi Arabia), May 27, 2005.

^v *Al-Watan* (Saudi Arabia), May 18, 2005.

^{vi} *Al-Watan* (Saudi Arabia), July 6, 2005.

^{vii} Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi (whose real name is 'Issam Muhammad Taher Al-Burqawi), a Palestinian currently incarcerated in Jordan, is considered Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi's spiritual mentor.

^{viii} *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (London), May 15, 2005.

^{ix} Channel 1 (Saudi TV), July 22, 2005.

^x The Khawarij was a group that broke away from the forces of Caliph 'Ali bin Abu Taleb and formed Islam's first religious opposition group.

^{xi} *Al-Watan* (Saudi Arabia), May 18, 2005.

^{xii} *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (London), May 15, 2005.

^{xiii} *Al-Riyadh* (Saudi Arabia), May 27, 2005.

^{xiv} *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (London), May 15, 2005.

^{xv} *Al-Watan* (Saudi Arabia), July 6, 2005.

^{xvi} *Al-Watan* (Saudi Arabia), July 6, 2005.

^{xvii} *Al-Watan* (Saudi Arabia), May 4, 2005.

^{xviii} *Al-Hayat* (London), June 7, 2005.