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first major suicide attacks in the country after quite a long period, where several attacks took place but in rural areas outside of the Algerian capital. They marked the renewed operational ability of the part of the GSPC that merged into Al-Qaeda, to launch lethal attacks in a country that witnessed the killing of about 150,000 people, most of them Muslim innocent civilians.

Later in April 2007, the Saudi authorities arrested 172 Saudis suspected of being Al-Qaeda terrorists. It seems therefore, that the article by Dr. Naser al-Omar was initiated by the Saudi authorities, as part of their theological/ideological campaign against Al-Qaeda, including a planned project to de-radicalize jailed Saudi Islamists and those who return from Iraq, or released from Guantanamo and other prisons outside of the Kingdom. The Saudi campaign is taking place on the background of growing numbers of Jihadi-Salafi arrestees in the Kingdom, what means that the support for the organization is slowly but surely growing again. Furthermore, the Saudi authorities face serious accusations about the share of Saudi nationals in the number of Jihadi suicide bombers in Iraq, which constantly stands in the past three years on about half of them. Suicide bombings in Iraq, especially against civilians including Shi'is, are carried out almost solely by Al-Qaeda.

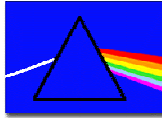
De-Radicalization of Islamists is becoming now a trend in Arab countries, as well as in the United States regarding Iraqi insurgents. Therefore, the prospects of its success might be significant in countering the on-going Salafist Jihad, especially in light of the rapid growing effect of the Jihadi indoctrination through the Internet, and self-radicalization in many parts of the Muslim world or Muslim communities in the West.

#### **Dr. Naser al-Omar's fatwa**

Dr. Naser Al-Omar was born in Buraydah/Qasim in Saudi Arabia in 1952, to one of the most respected families of the Najdi aristocracy—Bani Khaled—whose origins are in the tribe of Quraysh. He is a professor of Islamic religion in the Islamic university of Imam Muhammad bin Saud, in Riyadh.

His article/fatwa is quite different from other Saudi writings on the issue of terrorism in the past year, since he is very cautious and hesitant and it clearly seems that it was imposed upon him. He tries to refrain from direct accusations towards the Jihadis, since the explosions “might have been carried out by people who cover by religion a wish for revenge against oppression or injustice, or by criminals who do not wish to appear as such.” However, in both cases these are people who are totally “ignorant of religion.”

In one point al-Omar is clear-cut: the killing of innocent Muslims or foreigners on Muslim soil. “Do they think that by exploding a building or killing a tourist, they will defeat a state and establish a new regime? ... We do not approve wrongdoings [by governments] or ignore their deeds and submit to their rule. However, it should be done according to religious law and not by terrorizing people who are protected or weak, and



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whose blood and property are secured... Good intention—even if it is really good—is not enough as long as it is not in accordance with Islamic law.” Furthermore, if the ruler or the government do not rule through Shari’ah law, they should not be opposed unless there is a ruling by a group of Islamic clerics, who agree upon their wrongdoings beyond any reasonable doubt.

But, here is the “catch”. Jihad according to Dr. al-Omar, as well as all Muslims, exists till the end of history. However, “it has its rules and therefore, legitimacy, in certain places such as Palestine, Iraq, and other regions, but Jihad should not be done by terrorizing protected [foreign] people or innocent Muslims.” Like most Saudi scholars and clerics who are recruited to protect the Kingdom against Jihadi terrorism, even though he prohibits terrorism against innocent people—Muslims or protected non-Muslims— Al-Omar legitimizes through the back door the Jihadi terrorism in Palestine and... Iraq. By doing so he does not differ from the ambivalence of most of the Saudi scholars, on questions of terrorism, suicide bombings, and fighting occupation. Whatever is prohibited in Saudi Arabia and Arab or Muslim countries is always legitimate of course in Palestine, but also in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> There exist other rules.

### **The response of Abu Yahya al-Libi**

The response to Al-Omar was not too late and came from one of the new “stars” of the class of Jihadi “Internet scholars,” Hasan Muhammad al-Qaed, better known as Abu Yahya al-Libi. In 11 July 2007, Al-Fajr Information Center of the supporters of global Jihad posted in Jihadi forums his response, titled “The Disperse of the Diamonds in Discussing the Denier of the Explosions in Algeria,” in a very fancy form, which emphasizes its significance.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the response is written in a form similar to Qur’anic exegesis, where the original text is presented “verse after verse” and in between is the analysis of Al-Libi.

Al-Qaed, a Libyan who was one of the first Arab volunteers to Afghanistan, was until the end of 2001 the webmaster of the website of the Taliban. He was captured in 2002 in Karachi by Pakistani and U.S. forces and was imprisoned in Bagram. In July 2005, he and three other Arab prisoners managed to escape from that prison. In October 2005 he published a long report on the prisons where Jihadis were detained and the methods of the American interrogators,<sup>4</sup> and since then he became a known scholar through his articles in Jihadi forums. He is part of a popular group of Jihadi scholars who know how to effectively use the Internet for Jihadi indoctrination, and his popularity in Jihadi forums is rising. He is also a good example for the on-going popularity and glorification

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<sup>2</sup> On the U.S. frustration from the Saudi positions on Iraq see the NYTimes, 27 July 2007, URL - [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/27/world/middleeast/27saudi.html?\\_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/27/world/middleeast/27saudi.html?_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin)

<sup>3</sup> Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Nathr al-Jawahir fi Munaqashat al-Mu`taridh ala Taffirat al-Jazaer*. See on-line in: <http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=140297>

<sup>4</sup> See on-line in: <http://w-n-n.com/showthread.php?t=4271>



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of the first generation of “Afghan Arab” scholars, who are still regarded as the founder generation of Jihadi-Salafism.

In 2006, Al-Libi published three articles in which he stated his main points of view. One was “Our war: Between the Harshness of Yesterday and the Achievements of Tomorrow.”<sup>5</sup> The other was: “Jihad or Resistance,” on the terminology of the Jihad,<sup>6</sup> which served as an introduction to a broader discussion on the “War of Terminology.”<sup>7</sup> His fundamental assumption is that the war between Islam and the infidels is eternal, will take a very long time, and each side will not stop until it totally wins over the other. Therefore, the use of the term resistance-*Muqawamah* (which is used by some Jihadi scholars, above all by Abu Mus’ab al-Suri) is misleading and tends to relate only to part of the comprehensive meaning of Jihad -- the defensive one against occupation. In his article “Our war”-*Ma`rakatuna*, he especially warns against the “tricky enemy from within,” which is Arab and Muslim governments or other elements within Arab societies, that show sympathy for the Mujahidin but they only want to take control over their Jihad and betray them in the future. “The Mujahidin should know that these are more dangerous and hostile to their Jihad, and wish to thwart them even more than the Crusaders.” The conclusion is that victory can be achieved only by pure reliance in non-compromising “total” Jihad in its purest Islamic interpretation. Al-Libi’s lack of trust in many Muslim elements within the Ummah, is clear. The only way to secure victory is through “rivers of blood of Martyrs, High mountains of remains of torn organs, and souls carried by zealotry for religion, searching of Martyrdom, and running towards the broad gardens of paradise.”

According to Al-Libi most of the Muslims, in Algeria or elsewhere, are weakened by oppression—*Mustadh`afin*—and only a small group of Mujahidin can defend them, since the infidel enemy includes many circles and only the Mujahidin are motivated by the true principles of Islam. “We should fight all the infidels, whether apostates or Crusaders, nationals or foreigners, Arabs or non-Arabs, their names be Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika, Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz, Abdallah bin Hussein, Mu`ammar Qadhafi, or George Bush, Tony Blair, Sarkozy, or Olmert.” However, the main question raised by Dr. Abu Omar was “what was the fault of the Muslim societies and nation that suffer so much from this Jihad?” And here is the “catch” of Al-Libi and his Jihadi colleagues, whom he tries to represent: “the poor nation is oppressed and attacked by the “fire” of the Devilish laws, from which the Mujahidin try day and night to liberate them. In other words, the way to liberate the Muslims from the Devil is only by encouraging and inciting them to take part in militant Jihad and involve them in the military aspect of Jihad.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ma`rakatuna: bayan Shiddat al-Ams wa-Ihtiraz al-Ghad*. See on-line at: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=4328>

<sup>6</sup> *Jihad am Muqawamah?* See on-line at: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=3895>

<sup>7</sup> *Harb al-Mustalahat*. See on-line at: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=4032>

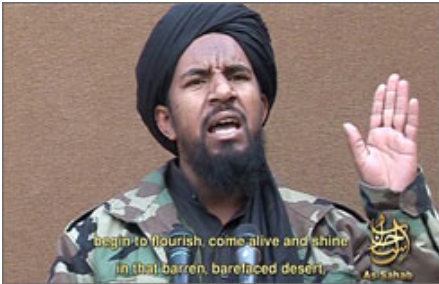


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Al-Libi also opposes the differentiation made by Abu Omar and others between Iraq, Palestine, or Chechnya, where the fight is against the foreign infidel occupation and hence, Jihad is legitimate and blessed; and the Arab lands, where it is prohibited since these lands are not occupied. According to Al-Libi, there is no one religious proof to distinguish between these various lands. “The apostate Arab governments are those that enable the occupation of the foreign infidels in Muslim lands.” Therefore, Islamically there is no difference at all between the Jihad in those occupied lands and in lands occupied by Arab apostates. By doing so, he reaffirms the principle of the Algerian and Jihadi Takfir—excommunication—of all those elements within Muslim societies that do not accept his form and definition of Jihad.

### Conclusion



Jihadi terrorism in Muslim lands and against Muslims is one of the Achilles heels of Al-Qaeda and global Jihad and a good reason for criticism. Abu Yahya al-Libi’s response is therefore, not just a reply to Al-Omar’s opinion, but also a fundamental element in the growing debate over terrorist attacks against Muslim civilians or in Muslim lands. In the past two years, since the bombings in London and Amman in 2005, and criticism over the murderous attacks against Shi’i civilians in Iraq, there is some on-going debate between two schools within Al-Qaeda or global Jihad: older scholars such as Abu Basir al-Tartousi and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi, in face of the class of Saudi Jihadi-Salafi scholars, who provide full support for what we may call the “Zarqawi doctrine” – the indiscriminating violence against everyone who does not support the Jihadi-Salafi ideas. The “Zarqawi doctrine” is quite similar to the Algerian Takfir of the 1990s, and hence, the debate between Al-Omar and Al-Libi on the Algerian background is significant. It is also important since the “upgrading” of Iran and the Shi’a to the first row of enemies by the successors of Zarqawi in Iraq, backed by Arabian Jihadi-Salafi scholars, such as the Kuwaiti Hamed al-Ali and several “Internet scholars” such as Al-Libi.

In the background stands also the question of what exactly is the position of the old central leadership of the “Mainstream Al-Qaeda,” especially Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the “Amir” of the Islamic State in Iraq, who is anonymous, seems so far to follow the “Zarqawi doctrine.” In 8 July 2007, in his last videotaped speech on the Jihadi Internet, he even threatened the Iranian government—the “Persian dogs” as he called them—and gave Iran an ultimatum of two months to withdraw its



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support from the Iraqi Shi'is, and "to stop interfering directly and indirectly in the affairs of the Iraqi State of Islam." His call was aimed at "all Sunnis, and the Salafi-Jihadist youths in particular in all parts of the world, to get ready for this war and make the preparations for it. I ask you not to spare any effort once our instructions are given to you." Abu Omar was talking as if he made himself "Amir" of an entire Islamic Caliphate in all parts of the Muslim world, not just the Islamic state in Iraq. Such a pretentiousness was made for the first time by a leader recognized by Al-Qaeda, and raises another question as to the control of "mainstream Al-Qaeda" over the Jihadi insurgency in Iraq, or in other regions such as the Maghreb, Lebanon, or Somalia.

Al-Baghdadi also spoke a little differently from his past speeches about the Iraqi Shi'is, trying to distinguish between their Shi'i leadership and the public. Nevertheless, in the meantime, we are witnessing a growing use of indiscriminating suicide bombings and attacks against Muslims in other parts of the Muslim world, in Algeria, Somalia, Pakistan, and most recently in Libya. Algeria has been traditionally a significant model for Arab movements, both nationalist and Islamist, and several of the leading Jihadi-Salafi scholars (Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, Abu Qutadah al-Filastini, Abu Basir al-Tartousi) were deeply involved with its Jihadi groups and their internal conflicts and debates. Since that, the response of Abu Yahya al-Libi is significant too.

It seems that out of all the Jihadi insurgencies and terrorism, Algeria is still a model and supporters of Al-Qaeda are proud to present the renewed Jihad there as a great achievement. On 8 August 2007, a member of a Jihadi forum posted a statement issued by Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, in which the group claimed responsibility for attacking a patrol of the Algerian police in northeast Algeria. A 13-minute and 27-second video, which is part of the "Under the Shadow of the Swords" series, was provided and showed the attackers without masks, as well as the terrain, the equipment used, and the equipment gained. One of the main effects of this video was the self-confidence presented by the Algerian group. The Algerian model is also important on the background of the failure of Al-Qaeda and global Jihad to find a model in Palestine. Hamas is not only a "thorn" in face of Al-Qaeda's ambitions, but is also criticized a lot by al-Qaeda's scholars for many of its "sins." One of the harsh critics was Abu Yahya al-Libi himself, in a long videotape in April 2007.

In the past year, Abu Yahya al-Libi is playing a significant role not only in defending or promoting the positions of Al-Qaeda and global Jihad, but also as one of the "theologians" of global Jihad in face of attacks by opposing Muslim clerics. The fact that he belongs to the first generation of Al-Qaeda members, grants him more influence and glory within the supporters of global Jihad, especially through the Internet. In the two years since his escape from prison, he joined the ranks of the Jihadi-Salafi scholars that advocate the "Total Jihad." His formal Islamic education is not at all clear. Nevertheless, his readers on the Internet are not looking at his diploma, but only at the bottom line of



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his conclusion – the legitimacy for the “total Takfiri Jihad,” where the rules of engagement permit every move that promotes the Jihadi target, or “catch as much as you can.”

However, it should be noted that for those who try to understand the mindset of the Jihadi scholars through their indoctrination over the Internet, Abu Yahya al-Libi and his colleagues make it an easier task than the ambivalent and double-language writings of their counter-part scholars, especially the Saudis. The role of the “Internet scholars,” either the well-known among them who appear by their real names, or those who hide in Jihadi forums behind nicknames, is to back and legitimize the extreme positions, which their audience want to hear. Such writings are integral part of what has recently become a legitimate branch of Jihad—the Jihadi propaganda. It provides lot of satisfaction and a sense of identity and belonging to a growing number of “students” in the Open University for Jihad Studies. Zealot scholars like Al-Libi, model topics like Algeria, or numerous videotapes from Iraq or elsewhere, are part of a system that hotwires the imagination of radicalized youth, who can join Jihad starting from home. They are no longer regarded as dodgers from Jihad or *Mutaqa`idin*, the term first coined by Sayyid Qutb for those who do not join the military Jihad. The “total Jihad” of al-Libi, including in Muslim countries and against Muslim “apostates,” enables them to channel many emotions of frustration, personal or social stress, hatred, and fears, into a legitimate Jihad, religiously approved by real or false scholars.