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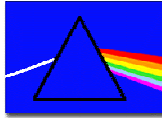
scholar of Medieval times Ibn Sirrin.¹ The high selling rates of this book can provide us an indicator for rising apocalyptic notions.

Interpretation of visions—*Tafsir* or *Ta'wil al-Ru'a*—is a legitimate Islamic science. In hard times or during “historical earthquakes” people tend to consult such old literature as well as living scholars who are known in this field. In modern times there are only few such persons that profess the interpretation of visions according to all the Islamic criteria and rules. It is a result of feelings of crisis, insecurity, instability, or fear of the future. Since all the aforementioned cases were a result of a sense of defeat, political instability, or national and personal disasters, a sense of dooms-day or the Day of Judgment in its Islamic meaning, became widespread, and visions related to it spread among many Muslims.

Unlike the afore-mentioned events, the September 11 attacks were perceived in a completely different way. This was the first time in modern Islamic history in which the West was humiliated by such an imaginary attack on its own soil. This was a turning point in the relations between the Arab and Muslim world and the West, and a continuance of the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan in 1988-89, which led to its final collapse in 1990. For the first time in their modern history Muslims felt as if they were going to reconstruct the spread of Islam in the 7th century and the defeat of the Crusaders in the 11th century. The Jihadi and nationalist insurgency in Iraq, which feeds the motivations and enthusiasm of growing number of Islamist youth to search for Jihad, look for the “culture of death and sacrifice,” and self-radicalize themselves, is another factor in the growing sense of Jihadi pride, which also hotwires the sense of the apocalypse.

This notion has emerged in an atmosphere of historical sense encouraged by Arab national movements. Arab rulers have always sought to link their wars to the glory of past Islamic history. The 1973 war between Israel and Egypt and Syria was “the battle of Badr” from early Islamic history Saddam Hussein tried to promote the Jihadi sense of his wars in 1980-88, 1991 and 1998. Arab and Muslim secular regimes have even sought to link their countries to pre-Islamic history—ancient Egypt, Babylon, or the Phoenicians—in order to provide their nationalism a long and glorified historic dimension. The late Iranian Shah linked himself to Koresh and celebrated the 2500th anniversary of his reign in 1970, with the fanciest festival ever made in the Middle East. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is shaped by claims and aspirations derived from the Bible, the Qur'an, and early history, by both sides. Palestinian secular scholars relate themselves to the Canaanites who lived in Biblical Palestine before the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, thus “proving” their priority and ownership over Palestine. Even the global war against Jihadi terrorism led by the United States in these days bears a notion of fundamentalist Christian aspirations of the Good against the Evil, a kind of reflection of the Divine eternal

¹ Muhammad Ibn Sirrin, *Tafsir al-Ahlam al-Kabir*. Ibn Sirrin lived in the 8th century and is regarded as the biggest authority in Islamic history for interpretation of dreams and visions, after the Prophet.



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struggle. There is also reflection of sort of a Jihad/Crusader war, in which history, religion, and even myths, are playing major roles. Such an atmosphere is an ideal greenhouse for a sense of the Apocalypse and apocalyptic discourse, especially by young supporters of global Jihad, who sense that the turning point of history runs in their favor.

Jihadi Apocalyptic Discourse

In the past five years that followed the September 11 attacks, the collapse of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the declaration of a global war against Jihadi terrorism, and throughout the American occupation of Iraq on one hand, and the Jihadi Sunni insurgency there on the other. Another major development occurred in the apocalyptic Jihadi discourse. Jihadi scholars and sympathizers were viewing the historic moment as clear signs for the start of the process that would lead to the Day of Judgment or Resurrection, with all the apocalyptic rituals that should precede it according to the Islamic belief. The traditional Islamic terms of the *Dulab*—circle of a century between each *Mahdi*; The *Mahdi*; *Mujaddid al-Zaman*—the person who renews the apocalyptic signs; *Al-Masih al-Dajjal*—the false Messiah or Anti-Christ that would appear before the Day of Resurrection; *Al-Rayah al-Soud*—the black flags that will come to fight from Khorasan in the East; the event of Armageddon; Lot of *Ru'yah*—visions; and *Ahlam*—dreams; all these terms became commonly used in the Jihadi discourse. We should also bear in mind that all this started only a short while after the Millennium of the year 2000, along with the apocalyptic visions that swept the whole world, either by religious or supernatural emotions, or the secular realistic fear of the global collapse of the computer systems.

A sizable number of Jihadists publish their dreams and visions of the *Salaf*, the Prophet, historic events from early Islamic history, and all kind of odd visions in Jihadi forums. There they ask for solutions, interpretations, and explanations that would prove that Bin Laden, Zarqawi, Al-Qaeda, modern Jihad, the September 11 attacks and other Jihadi terrorist operations, are all signs of the coming apocalypse. One Saudi scholar—Abu Bashir al-Najdi—became the “leader” of the interpreters of Jihadi visions.

There are even several Islamist web sites and sections in Islamist forums, which are dedicated to dreams and visions, thereby promoting the sense of the Apocalypse. All of them are related to Al-Qaeda, global Jihad and the rise of Jihadi “forces” to confront the “Evil West.” Two of the more popular of these web sites these days are the “forum of Hermageddon”² and the web site and forums of the “Charms and Wars.”³ The phenomenon in general is interesting from another aspect, which is the spread of apocalyptic visions, even though within the Islamic doctrines, by Jihadi-Salafis, primarily Saudi supporters of global Jihad who were educated by the Wahhabi educational system. Wahhabis have always used to fight many of these apocalyptic visions, fearing the

² See *Muntada Hermageddon*: <http://hrmageddon.com/vb/index.php>

³ See *Muntada al-Malahem wal-Fitan*: <http://alfetn.net/vb3/index.php?>



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deviant effect they might spread. Islamist millenarianism in Saudi Arabia around the year 1400H (1978), was one of the reasons for the seizure of the *Ka`bah* by Juhayman al-`Utaybi and his group of followers, which caused a trauma in the kingdom. Yet, the apocalyptic writings of Al-`Utaybi found a respected place in the largest “library” of Jihadi-Salafiyyah in the web site of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.⁴ The `Utaybi affair is also used as a legitimate fight against the “apostate Saudi kingdom.” Al-Maqdisi is one of the leading Jihadi-Salafi scholars to attack the Saudi apostasy and his fundamental book *Al-Kawashef al-Jaliyyah fi Kufr al-Dawlah al-Su`udiyah*—The Clear Signs of the Apostasy of the Saudi State—is very popular among supporters of global Jihad.⁵ In his analysis of the `Utaybi affair in this book, Al-Maqdisi forgave `Utaybi and his group, which he admitted to know them personally. He described them as “naïve and miserable people,” who just believed in the idea that “Muhammad bin Abdallah al-Qahtani was the *Mahdi* and `Utaybi had just planned to declare his loyalty to him according to the Islamic doctrines.”

The apocalyptic aspirations of supporters of global Jihad, especially as they appear on Jihadi web sites and forums, are all linked to Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, the “new Crusaders,” the wish to reconstruct the victory of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, and the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). There is also a yearning for creating symmetric war between the Muslim world and the West. Between the lines one could sense that the equality and symmetry between the two civilizations was the ultimate target in deleting the sense of Muslim humiliation by the West. Another element to notice here was the eager search for Islamic heroes and war heritage, which would renew the spirit of the *Salaf*—the first generation of Muslims and the companions of the Prophet. It was not just a result of Islamic influence or religious sentiments, but also a result of social factors and segments of Arab culture.

One of the principal books reflecting these apocalyptic aspirations was written by the Saudi scholar Abu Jandal al-Azdi—Fares bin Shawwal al-Zahrani—one of the leading scholars of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, under the title “Bin Laden – the Renovator of Times and Oppressor of the Americans,” in 606 pages.⁶ The book is using terms, superlatives, and perceptions that place Bin Laden in line with the greatest Islamic scholars of history, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab, or Hasan al-Banna, even though Bin Laden is far from being a cleric or scholar. Yet, his ability to create such a tremendous turning point in Islamic history makes him a candidate for such a position in the eyes of the Jihadi Salafists.

⁴ See: <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?i=90> It should be noted that most of his writings were posted on this site in 2005.

⁵ The book has been downloaded from the Internet 53039 times.

⁶ Fares bin Shawwal al-Zahrani, *Osama Bin Laden Mujaddid al-Zaman wa-Qaher al-Amrikan*. See the book on-line in: www.tawhed.ws/r?i=972



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From time to time Jihadi forums feature persistent postings about the connection between Al-Qaeda and recently also the Taliban, to the Islamic prophecies of the Apocalypse. In a recent one dated March 6th 2006, the author was trying to prove through a very detailed analysis of the Islamic prophecies and traditions on the issue and the present confrontation between the Mujahidin and the West, that we are witnessing the signs of the Apocalypse⁷ -- Osama's army is the army of the *Mahdi*. This army will conquer Iraq, Syria, and Palestine—*Bayt al-Maqdis*—and will give the authority to the *Mahdi*, then to Jesus/Issa and from here the defeat of the enemy—*Al-Dajjal*—is secured. No one in the forum opposed his analysis or doubted it.

One of the enthusiastic supporters of the practice of permanently searching for apocalyptic signs, is the Saudi Sheikh Sulayman al-`Alawan, one of the leading Saudi clerics in support for global Jihad. In one of his articles titled “The Disputes over the Mahdi,” which can be viewed as a *Fatwa*, he encouraged the Mujahidin to deal with the subject.⁸

Dealing with [the issue of] the *Mahdi* and the signs of the hour—*a`lam al-Sa`ah*—is one of the most important elements to encourage innovative effort of thinking—*Ijtihad*—and to sail on the boat of salvation... It is the best thing to do in order to spread religion, to prepare the soul for meeting Allah, and to promote the Divine Law.

The Jihadi-Salafi encouragements, along with the sense of a historic moment, and the great expectations created by Al-Qaeda and global Jihad, have brought about a greenhouse for apocalyptic views. The ongoing Jihadi insurgency in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Chechnya, as well as worldwide Jihadi terrorism, give further rise to this sense.

The Israeli-Hizballah conflict

The recent conflict in Lebanon is perceived by the majority of Arab and Muslim publics and some governments as another turning point. In their eyes Hizballah was the winning side in the battle against “the undefeated Israeli army” and defeated this modern military force despite the inferior means at its disposal. In Islamic eyes Hizballah's victory was also a significant achievement in the search for symmetry with the enemy, a long target of Islamists in modern history. Hasan Nasrallah became the new image of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, especially that in American and Israeli eyes this conflict was perceived as integral part of the war against global Jihadi terrorism, and against the global “axis of evil.” Nasrallah and Hizballah were also viewed in Arab and Muslim eyes as those who regained the lost Arab and Muslim honor, another highly significant element of Arab and Islamic culture. Hizballah became the continuation of the Afghan and Arab Mujahidin

⁷ See on-line in: <http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=56593>

⁸ Sulayman bin Nasser al-`Alawan, *Al-Naza`at fi al-Mahdi*, published in 23 January 2003 on his web site www.al-alwan.org



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who defeated the Soviets, the Mujahidin in Iraq, and a model for the heritage of Islamist warfare.

Yet, there was a catch. Nasrallah is an Arab but a personal representative of the Iranian Shi'i supreme authority Khamenai, and Hizballah is a Shi'i movement and perceived as the long arm of Iran. It was not an issue for Arab nationalists or secularists, but supporters of global Jihad could not swallow such a bitter pill. Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri assumed a somewhat vague position towards Hizballah. A speech of him was circulated in Jihadi forums in 26 July 2006, sparked a hot debate among the Sunni Jihadis, which lasts to this day. The confusion created by Al-Zawahiri came to an end by several analyses of his speech, published by known Jihadi-Salafi scholars. The most important of these analyses, which was circulated on the Internet through the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), was written by the Egyptian Dr. Sayf al-Din al-Kinani on 28 July 2006, under the title "The Puzzle of the Oppressed and the Red Lines."⁹ The bottom line of his interpretation of Zawahiri's speech was the necessity of the fight for Palestine and Lebanon by the Muslims, but... the only Muslims are the Sunnis. Shi'is are not Muslims so their fight against Israel is not regarded Jihad and serves foreign interests. Another popular *Fatwah* against Hizballah was the renewal of an older one from April 2002, by the Saudi Salafi cleric Abdallah bin Jaberin.¹⁰ This *Fatwah* and many other articles, primarily in the Salafi web site of Nur al-Islam (www.islamlight.net), used sever anti-Shi'i discourse, however, with some ambiguity because it seemed as if they did not know whom to hate more – the Shi'is or the Jews. One of the Salafi scholars on this site—Khubab bin Marwan al-Hamad—stated in a long article, written in an apocalyptic nature, that the Jewish attack against the Lebanese Muslims was part of a test by Allah as a result of their disbelief and corrupted culture adopted from the West. However, for him too, any support for Hizballah and the Shi'is was prohibited, as a result of a long series of sins they had carried out.¹¹

The bitter and violent conflict in Iraq between Sunnis and Shi'is and the orthodox Salafi nature of the Jihadis did not allow them to accept any praise, sympathy, or support for Hizballah. Towards the end of the violence in mid-August the conclusion of the vast majority of Jihadis was clear-cut – the sacred principle of *Al-Wala' wal-Bara'* (loyalty and rejection) according to the Jihadi-Salafi interpretations, prevented any form of support for Hizballah, Nasrallah, or Iran or any sympathy for them, even though the Shi'i movement was fighting the Jews, protected Hamas and the Palestinian Jihad, and caused

⁹ Dr. Sayf al-Din al-Kinani, *Lughz al-Mustadh`fin wal-Khutout al-Hamra'*, see on-line in – <http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=77320>

¹⁰ See on-line in -- <http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=2870&Itemid=25>

¹¹ Khubab bn Marwan al-Hamad, *Ya Ikhwanana fi Lubnan firru ila Allah wa-a`ddu anfusakumi* (Our brothers in Lebanon, find refuge with Allah and prepare yourselves). See on-line in – <http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=2868&Itemid=25>



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an image of Israeli defeat. Hizballah was permanently named “*Hizb al-Shaytan*” (Party of the Devil) or “*Hizb allat*,” after the pre-Islamic idol of the Arabs in Mecca. Hasan Nasrallah was named only Hasan Nasr, in order not to add Allah to his name.¹²

In many ways, it looks as if the victorious image of Hizballah has created even more rage among the Sunni Jihadis. Since they use to think in terms of conspiracy theories, the war was viewed as part of the Iranian conspiracy to take over the Middle East and create an occupying “crescent” from Iran, through Iraq, to Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. The leading role in demonizing the Shi’i aspirations on an Islamic religious basis was—as it has been in the past year or two—in the hands of the Kuwaiti Sheikh Hamed al-`Ali, the only Jihadi-Salafi cleric of the younger generation who is currently out of jail. In several articles—some of them bearing the nature of a *Fatwah*—Al-`Ali closed any possible door for any support for Hizb al-Shaytan.

In a *Fatwah* he published on August 6, 2006, Al-`Ali attacked the “Iranian organized campaign to destroy the Muslims... This is no longer a dispute between Sunnis and Shi’is but a Safawi imperialist racist conspiracy, similar to the Zio-Crusader one. Furthermore, the Iranians may side with the Zio-Crusaders, like they do in Iraq.”¹³

But, his most important *Fatwah* however, was circulated on August 14, 2006, right after the cease-fire between Israel and Hizballah, which created outrageous responses by Jihadis, who started interpreting the situation as an Israeli or “Zio-Crusader” victory.¹⁴ In his *Fatwah*, he paved the way for the sense of the apocalypse on the background of the conflict between the Safawids (Iran) and the Zio-Crusaders. According to him the Israeli-Hizballah created a chaos that will be solved only by a much broader war with Iran. According to Al-`Ali, the “Safawi/Irani project is more dangerous than the Zio-Crusader one, and confronting it and provoking its plans is a religious duty. The Iranian plot—*Fitnah*—is not preventable and it is a matter of doomed fate. The Safawids are preparing their swords against the Muslims and directing their arrows against them, and it, no doubt, will be soon. The Muslims should fight back and thwart the Iranian conspiracy. Al-`Ali concludes his article by calling for a Jihad against Iran – “Allah has ordered us to wage a Jihad against them—the apostate Shi’is—in addition to the Jews and the Christians.”

¹² For an analysis of former anti-Hizballah attitude of Sunni global Jihad groups, see – PRISM Occasional Papers No. 1 vol. 2 (February 2004). See on-line in –

http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_no_1_vol_2_-_Hizballah_or_Hizb_al-Shaytan.pdf

¹³ See on-line in --

http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=com_ftawa&task=view&Itemid=35&catid=1400&id=16233

¹⁴ Hamed al-`Ali, *Tahzir al-Ummah al-Muslimah al-Mahdiyyah min Khatar al-Juyoub al-Mundassah al-Safawiyyah*. See on-line in – <http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=15869>



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Another accusation towards Hizballah was that the movement was “the new Ataturk,” and was going to try to destroy the Muslim world from within, the same as Ataturk eliminated the Islamic Caliphate of the Ottomans.¹⁵

To conclude, the hatred towards the Shi`ah and the worldview of the global Iranian conspiracy against the Sunnis—the only true Muslims—created a sense of an inevitable clash, sometimes described as part of the apocalypse. The “tricky” Iranians as well as their proxies, such as Hizballah, are disguising their true plan by waging a conflict with the Jews and the West, in which they gain lot of popularity and support.

The War in Lebanon and Armageddon

A step further ahead was an article posted in early August 2006, on several Jihadi sites, which linked the war in Lebanon to the battle of the Armageddon in 2008. The article, by the Saudi scholar Dr. Saleh Sa`doun, a sociologist in the seminar for teachers in Riyadh, was titled “Has the big war between the good and evil started?”¹⁶ Al-Sa`doun, who frequently deals with the apocalypse in one of the Salafi web sites that is dedicated mostly to the issue (www.almawa.net), claimed that with the war in Lebanon the ultimate global war of the apocalypse, has started before the planned time. Furthermore, unlike previous aggressions in the Middle East, where the orders to start the war “came from Tel-Aviv to Washington and London, this time the orders were sent from Washington to Tel-Aviv, under the cover of the building of the new Middle East.”

According to the article, the war in Lebanon was planned to start a process of two years with well-organized stages, in which the destruction of Lebanon by the Jewish army will end by a boycott and than siege on Syria, and a global war in the northern part of Palestine, in Lebanon, and in Syria. But the author is optimistic. This war, which has already been prophesied in the Bible with a promise that the Jews will be winning as they were the “good side” will end with the victory of the Arabs and the Muslims. The explanation of this reverse is that the prophecy has been granted to the Jews while they were the chosen people by Allah. Since then however, Allah regretted and gave the position of the chosen nation to the Muslims. Therefore, the Muslim nation is nowadays the “good party” and the Jews and the Christians are the “evil party,” and doomed to be defeated.

¹⁵ Osamah Shehadah, *Hal yakun Hizballah Ataturk `Asrina?*” See on-line in -- http://www.islammemo.cc/Taqrer/one_news.asp?IDnews=931 and in – <http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=15898>

¹⁶ Dr. Saleh al-Sa`doun, *Hal Bada`at al-Malhamah al-Kubra al-Faselah bayna al-Khayr wal-Shar*, 4 August 2006. See on-line in – <http://www.almawa.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=627&Itemid=61> and in – <http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=81094>



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Conclusion

Among supporters of global Jihad the violent conflict between Israel and Hizballah created a notion of three major axes of conflict that reached a crucial and historic stage:

- The conflict between the “Zio-Crusader” conspiracy and the Muslim Sunni world.
- The new publicly acknowledged clash between the Sunnis and an Iranian Shi’i conspiracy within the Middle East.
- The conflict between supporters of global Jihad and their rivals from the Muslim Brotherhood which for the first time since 1979 and the Islamic revolution in Iran, have sided so clearly with Iran.

But the debate over the attitude towards Hizballah and Iran further revealed a new phenomenon within the Jihadis themselves – a generational conflict between the “old Al-Qaeda” and its supporting scholars, and the younger generations of clerics, operatives, and the self-radicalized followers and sympathizers of global Jihad. What started two years ago with the criticism of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi over Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi and his policy in Iraq, went on with the critical letter of Ayman Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi over his policy towards the Iraqi Shi’is and the criticism of Abu Basir al-Tartousi over suicide operations against innocent civilians in Europe, has reached some highlight with the dispute that followed Zawahiri’s speech in July 2006, in which he showed some respect for the fight against the Jews by Hizballah, even though he did not mention the movement. The on-going uncompromised fight against the Iraqi Shi’is by the Sunni Jihadi insurgents, based on Zarqawi’s policy and supported by the younger generation of Jihadi clerics, became the main doctrine of the new generations of Jihadis. Zarqawi is dead, but his anti-Shi’a policy remained dominant. Moreover, it looks as if the younger generations of global Jihad hold more dogmatic views than their predecessors from the Afghan era of the 1980s. They look at what happened to some of their models, such as the Saudis Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah, who moved from rebellious positions to pragmatic ones.

In July 2006, Dr. Salman al-Awdah issued a Fatwah in support for Hizballah. He did not only permit such a support but also said it was a duty, despite the disagreements with Hizballah. He also said in an interview that those who oppose any support for Hizballah are effected by the insurgency in Iraq, where the Sunnis claim that the Shi’is assist the Americans in killing Sunnis. His position was strongly opposed by scholars of global Jihad in Jihadi forums. One of them accused Al-Awdah of creating an internal plot—*Fitnah*—among the Muslims by supporting the apostate Shi’i movement.¹⁷

¹⁷ See Abo Torab, “*Risalah Maftouhah ila Salman al-Awdah* (Open Letter to Salman al-Awdah), 31 July 2006, in – <http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=77712>



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For the majority of supporters of global Jihad, the sense of the apocalypse is not necessarily based upon the strict orthodox Sunni doctrines. The past five years created a sense of historical period, where the Sunni Muslims are slowly but surely achieving more symmetry with their enemies, fight back, create an heroic heritage, and marching ahead. Al-Qaeda and the affiliated groups of global Jihadi strategy also created an ethos with heroic models—Bin Laden, Zawahiri, Zarqawi, and others.

Yet, in the debate over the attitude towards Hizballah, we see for the first time an internal enemy who calls itself Islamic, and serves as the Anti-Christ – Hassan Nasrallah, Hizballah, Iran, and the entire Shi'i community. The sense of the apocalypse has added to the line of “normal” enemies—George Bush, the Jews, the United States, or the rest of the West—a new one who represents another kind of a plot against the Sunnis. This is a kind of Takfiri sense of the apocalypse, in which the enemy includes everybody who differs from their Jihadi mindset, Muslim or not. It shows that the heritage of Zarqawi might have had more effect on the younger generation of Jihadis, than had that of his mentors. The self-radicalized new Jihadis are mostly affected by the reality of Iraq rather than of any other region, and with a very dogmatic way, which denies any sense of pragmatism.

One of the most significant elements of the growing anti-Shi'a Jihadi Sunni discourse, which also emerged from the Iraqi scene, was the growing demonization of the Shi'a, Iran, and now Hizballah/Hizb al-Shaytan. Demonization is also a result of growing sense of the apocalypse and the forthcoming crucial war. The intensive talk about the confrontation with the Iranian plot/conspiracy, a new element in the Jihadi discourse, is significant.