

## Salafi-Jihadist Groups Exploit the Movie "Innocence of Muslims" to Recruit Supporters and Foment Terrorism against the West

The uploading to YouTube of an American anti-Muslim movie titled "Innocence of Muslims", which presented the Prophet Muhammad in a derisive and demeaning manner,<sup>1</sup> incited a tidal wave of Muslim anti-American protest against the US and the West on September 11, 2012. Most of the protest was violent, subsuming attacks on symbols associated with the West – such as the torching of a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant in Beirut, and the attempt to storm the US and German embassies in Sudan. To date, the protests have culminated in the death of US Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens, who was killed when rockets were fired at the US embassy in Benghazi on September 12, 2012.



From the movie, "Innocence of Muslims"

It is our assessment, based on past experience, that global jihadist elements will in the short term strive to perpetrate terrorist attacks against American and Western targets worldwide, and parlay Islamic rage into additional support for their cause, all while whipping up a frenzy of violent protest against the movie. In the medium and long term, it is possible that they will also try to assassinate those who made and acted in the movie.

Al-Qaeda and other Salafi-jihadist groups responded to the movie's appearance by promising not to remain silent while the Prophet Muhammad was being defamed. The following were among their specific responses:

- On September 13, 2012, the **Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan** called for war against US soldiers, to avenge the American movie deriding the Prophet Muhammad. According to the Emirate, all mujahideen must staunchly defend the honor of the Qur'an and the

<sup>1</sup> The movie was apparently produced by a Copt named Nakoula Basseley Nakoula upon his release from [a US] prison in June 2011.

Prophet Muhammad, as must ulama'a [religious scholars] and clergy, who should explain to the Muslims the crimes of the US and its inappropriate, inexcusable behavior toward Islam.<sup>2</sup>

- On September 14, 2012, **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)** noted that the movie was just one more aspect of the Crusader war against the Muslim Nation. AQAP praised the indomitable Muslim defense of the Prophet's honor.<sup>3</sup> It then claimed that the following conclusions should be drawn from these recent events:
  - Defending the honor of the Prophet is an Islamic-legal obligation incumbent on the Muslim Nation.
  - We must capitalize on this event, and concentrate our efforts to eject US embassies from Muslim lands and continue demonstrations and protests, as is occurring in several Muslim countries. The success of Libya's Muslims in killing the US ambassador in Benghazi is to be praised. Removing US embassies and consulates is a step toward liberating Muslim countries from American hegemony and arrogance.
  - Muslims in the West must fulfill their obligation to defend the Prophet's honor, especially as they can attack the enemy with the greatest ease.
  - The US should heed the words of Sheikh Osama bin Laden, but also know that actions speak louder than words.
- On September 18, 2012, **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)** announced that the American movie was distinct proof of America's intention to fight [all of] Islam, and not terrorism, as it falsely claims. The US, propounded AQIM, continues to deceive Muslims with claims that its intentions are good. Moreover:<sup>4</sup>
  - The Muslims are to be highly praised for gathering with intent and purpose to defend the Prophet's honor. The Libyan Muslims who killed the US ambassador in Benghazi are worthy of special praise. They have shown the right way to protect the holiest sanctities of the faith, and to defeat an overconfident enemy.
  - The Muslims must stoke their protests. Young Muslims should replicate the actions of those in Benghazi, and "remove the American flag from all US

<sup>2</sup> <http://al-fidaa.com/vb> (Arabic).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb> (Arabic).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb> (Arabic).

embassies in our capitals, trample them underfoot and then burn them, evict or kill US ambassadors and representatives, and purify the defiled [Muslim] lands to avenge the [besmirched] honor of the finest of men [the Prophet Muhammad]." AQIM appealed to Muslims in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania, in particular, to do this.

- The US must understand that its ugly deeds strengthen the Muslims' tenacity.
- Ahfad Uqbah [The Descendants of Uqbah], a jihadist media institution affiliated with the Salafi-jihadist movement in Tunisia, which is active primarily on Facebook, published what it claimed was the identity of [one of the people] who made "Innocence of Muslims": an Egyptian-American lawyer named Maurice Sadek, who heads an association of American Copts. Ahfad Uqbah further claimed that Sadek had made a name for himself by opposing the Muslims and Arabs, and accused him of having ties to Israeli leaders.<sup>5</sup>



The banner purportedly identifies the maker of "Innocence of Muslims" and states, "Is there a lone wolf!!" – that is, is there any one Muslim willing to assassinate him?

- On September 16, 2012, a prominent Egyptian Salafi-jihadist, **Ahmad Ashush**, issued a religious-legal ruling [fatwa] obligating every Muslim to "kill anyone who participated in this movie...[it is permissible to kill] the producer, director and actors...The contemptuous [people] who produced this movie...are infidels who oppose Allah and His Messenger, and therefore can have no protection and know no security. Their murder is a certain obligation, and every Muslim must fulfill it."<sup>6</sup>
- **Muhammad Al-Zawahiri**, another prominent Egyptian Salafi-jihadist and the brother of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri, promised that the demonstrations against the movie in front of the US embassy [in Cairo] would not be the last, and that Muslims

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/AhfaduUkbaa> (Arabic).

<sup>6</sup> [http://ansarsharia.blogspot.co.il/2012/09/blog-post\\_1165.html](http://ansarsharia.blogspot.co.il/2012/09/blog-post_1165.html) (Arabic).

would not forgive this insult. He added that future protests would be non-violent, in accordance with the law, and asked that moderates in the US and Europe condemn this and other the indignities visited upon the Muslims. At this juncture, he said, the least the US could do would be to invoke the hate-crimes law against the movie's makers. Al-Zawahiri also demanded that the US release Omar Abd Al-Rahman from prison, to placate the Arab and Islamic world.<sup>7</sup>

- In an interview with the online Jordanian newspaper *Al-Sawdana*, prominent Jordanian Salafi-jihadist **Sheikh Muhammad Al-Tahawi** claimed that “the global jihad movement knows the truth about the American position, [as it has] already been exposed to the US plan in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, the Islamic Maghreb [North Africa] and Palestine. Only weapons can stand between us and the US regime”. Al-Tahawi urged Muslims in Jordan to defend the Prophet’s honor.<sup>8</sup>
- Jihadist Web forums also joined this effort. A supervisor of the forum Ansar Al-Mujahideen, who uses the alias Gharib, asked that forum members open a virtual workshop where they would design banners devoted to the issue.<sup>9</sup>



The banner reads: “A design campaign of the descendants of al-ansar [Muhammad’s supporters in Medina], in aid of the master of humanity, leader of al-muhajirun [Muhammad’s first supporters in Mecca], and al-ansar [Muhammad’s later supporters]”

Given the above, we believe Al-Qaeda and other Salafi-jihadist groups will exploit the rage of the Muslim masses, which was aroused by the movie, and channel it into increased displays of enmity against US and Western embassies and further terrorist activity against Western targets. On the pretext of avenging the Prophet’s humiliation, global jihad groups will engage the sympathies of Muslims, thereby strengthening their base of popular support.

<sup>7</sup> <http://al-fidaa.com/vb> (Arabic).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb> (Arabic).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb> (Arabic).

Evidence of such exploitation is already extant. For example, on September 14, 2012, the **Afghan Taliban** launched a multifaceted attack on Shorab Air Force Base in Helmand Province, in southern Afghanistan, where American, British and Afghani forces serve – among them the UK's Prince Harry.<sup>10</sup> On September 18, 2012, **Hezb-e-Islami**, the second-largest Islamic revival movement in Afghanistan after the Taliban, claimed as its own a woman suicide attacker who, in proximity to the Kabul airport, detonated herself near a busload of employees of a foreign company that was under contract to the US.<sup>11</sup> On September 14, 2012, some 30 armed Salafi-jihadist Bedouin stormed the North Camp Army Base in Item, near Kufr Al-Jura southeast of El-Arish in the **Sinai Peninsula** (an area under



From a video clip of the attack on the Shorab Air Force Base

the control of Sheikh Zawid). The attack was stymied by a Colombian Brigade, part of the UN Peacekeeping Force,<sup>12</sup> and subsequently by the Egyptian Army.<sup>13</sup>

This is not the first time that global jihad groups have harnessed an incendiary event to promote their interests. In 2005, the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten* ignited a wave of protests throughout the Muslim world, which then led to a protracted period of terrorist attacks against Western targets. In an audio statement issued on April 23, 2006, Sheikh Osama bin Laden, then-leader of Al-Qaeda, claimed that each and every Muslim was commanded to kill anyone who mocked or disrespected Islam. Similarly, on May 12, 2006, then-senior Al-Qaeda leader Sheikh Abu Yahya Al-Libi stated that Muslims must physically fight Denmark and other Western nations

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.shahamat-arabic.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=20695:2012-09-15-08-45-59&catid=1:news&Itemid=2](http://www.shahamat-arabic.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20695:2012-09-15-08-45-59&catid=1:news&Itemid=2) (Arabic).

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.france24.com/fr/20120918-attaque-suicide-contre-minibus-a-kaboul-moins-dix-morts-insurges-afghan> (French).

<sup>12</sup> The UN Peacekeeping Force in Sinai Peninsula consists of 300 Colombians, 80 Americans and 35 Uruguayans. See: <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/26028-colombians-injured-in-egypt-protests-over-muhammad-film.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.almesryoon.com/permalink/25950.html> (Arabic).

that had published the caricatures, and that mere demonstrations and protests would not suffice. Their comments continued to echo long after: Al-Qaeda attacked the Danish embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan on June 2, 2008.

The timing of this particular wave of anti-American protests coincides with two important events. The first, of course, is the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The second is the official declaration, on September 11, 2012, by current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri of the death of Abu Yaha Al-Libi in a drone strike in Waziristan in June 2012.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, on September 15, 2012, AQAP announced that it would avenge Al-Libi's assassination, as well as responding accordingly to the American movie's denigration of the Prophet Muhammad. According to AQAP, Al-Libi's<sup>15</sup> murder only increased the resolve of the Libyan people to avenge his death by attacking those who had trammled the Prophet's honor; the murder of the US ambassador was proof of this. The fury of Libyans, Egyptians and Yemenis and their determination to strike at US embassies should prove, according to AQAP, that America is not waging a war against certain groups or organizations, as President Obama tells the American people, but rather is fighting the whole Muslim Nation. And here the Muslim Nation has come out in force to protest this persecution; the Muslim Nation has broken the bonds of oppression, and chosen to follow the path of the mujahideen martyrs.<sup>16</sup>

It thus would seem that the American movie is being used by jihadist groups as a pretext to spur the Muslim masses to hurl their wrath at Western targets, chiefly the US and its embassies. In so doing, they are trying to "ride the tiger" of protest to achieve at least some of their aims – such as expelling Western forces from Muslim lands.

We may thus reasonably assume that global jihad groups will not let the intensity of this affair slacken. Rather, they will exploit it to the utmost, using it to incite the Muslim masses and foment terrorism against the US and the West. In the near future, at least, we may

<sup>14</sup> <http://al-fidaa.com/vb> (Arabic). For a profile of this influential Al-Qaeda leader, see Jihadi Website Monitoring Group, "Abu Yahya Al-Libi: Profile of an Al-Qaeda Leader", 6.3.2012. <http://www.ict.org.il/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=dWYyuf0CkCig%3d&tabid=320> (English).

<sup>15</sup> The moniker indicates Abu Yahya's Libyan origin.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb> (Arabic).

therefore expect to see global jihadists riding the tidal wave of protest against the slighting of the Prophet Muhammad.