



AL QAEDA'S AGENDA FOR IRAQ

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September 4, 2003 -- 'IT is not the American war machine that should be of the utmost concern to Muslims. What threatens the future of Islam, in fact its very survival, is American democracy.'" This is the message of a new book, just

published by al Qaeda in several Arab countries.

The author of "The Future of Iraq and The Arabian Peninsula After The Fall of Baghdad" is Yussuf al-Ayyeri, one of Osama bin Laden's closest associates since the early '90s. A Saudi citizen also known by the *nom de guerre* Abu Muhammad, he was killed in a gun battle with security forces in Riyadh last June.

The book is published by The Centre for Islamic Research and Studies, a company set up by bin Laden in 1995 with branches in New York and London (now closed). Over the past eight years, it has published more than 40 books by al Qaeda "thinkers and researchers" including militants such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's No. 2.

Al-Ayyeri first made his name in the mid '90s as a commander of the Farouq camp in eastern Afghanistan, where al Qaeda and the Taliban trained thousands of "volunteers for martyrdom."

Al-Ayyeri argues that the history of mankind is the story of "perpetual war between belief and unbelief." Over the millennia, both have appeared in different guises. As far as belief is concerned, the absolutely final version is represented by Islam, which "annuls all other religions and creeds." Thus, Muslims can have only one goal: converting all humanity to Islam and "effacing the final traces of all other religions, creeds and ideologies."

Unbelief (*kufr*) has come in numerous forms and shapes, but with a single objective: to destroy faith in God. In the West, unbelief has succeeded in making a majority of people forget God and worship the world. Islam, however, is resisting the trend because Allah means to give it final victory.

Al-Ayyeri then shows how various forms of unbelief attacked the world of Islam in the past century or so, to be defeated in one way or another.

The first form of unbelief to attack was "modernism" (*hidatha*), which led to the caliphate's destruction and the emergence in the lands of Islam of states based on ethnic identities and territorial dimensions rather than religious faith.

The second was nationalism, which, imported from Europe, divided Muslims into Arabs, Persians, Turks and others. Al-Ayyeri claims that nationalism has now been crushed in almost all Muslim lands. He claims that a true Muslim is not loyal to any particular nation-state.

The third form of unbelief is socialism, which includes communism. That, too, has been defeated and eliminated from the Muslim world, Al-Ayyeri asserts. He presents Ba'athism, the Iraqi ruling party's ideology under Saddam Hussein, as the fourth form of unbelief to afflict Muslims, especially Arabs. Ba'athism (also the official ideology of the Syrian regime) offers Arabs a mixture of pan-Arabism and socialism as an alternative to Islam. Al-Ayyeri says Muslims "should welcome the destruction of Ba'athism in Iraq."

"The end of Ba'ath rule in Iraq is good for Islam and Muslims," he writes. "Where the banner of Ba'ath has fallen, shall rise the banner of Islam."

The author notes as "a paradox" the fact that all the various forms of unbelief that threatened Islam were defeated with the help of the Western powers, and more specifically the United States.

The "modernizing" movement in the Muslim world was ultimately discredited when European imperial powers forced their domination on Muslim lands, turning the Westernized elite into their "hired lackeys." The nationalists were defeated and discredited in wars led against them by various Western powers or, in the case of Nasserism in Egypt, by Israel.

The West also gave a hand in defeating socialism and communism in the Muslim world. The most dramatic example of this came when America helped the Afghan *mujahedeen* destroy the Soviet-backed communist regime in Kabul. And now the United States and its British allies have destroyed Ba'athism in Iraq and may have fatally undermined it in Syria as well.

What Al-Ayyeri sees now is a "clean battlefield" in which Islam faces a new form of unbelief. This, he labels "secularist democracy." This threat is "far more dangerous to Islam" than all its predecessors combined. The reasons, he explains in a whole chapter, must be sought in democracy's "seductive capacities."

This form of "unbelief" persuades the people that they are in charge of their destiny and that, using their collective reasoning, they can shape policies and pass laws as they see fit. That leads them into ignoring the "unalterable laws" promulgated by God for the whole of mankind, and codified in the Islamic *shariah* (jurisprudence) until the end of time.

The goal of democracy, according to Al-Ayyeri, is to "make Muslims love this world, forget the next world and abandon *jihad*." If established in any Muslim country for a reasonably long time, democracy could lead to economic prosperity, which, in turn, would make Muslims "reluctant to die in martyrdom" in defense of their faith.

He says that it is vital to prevent any normalization and stabilization in Iraq. Muslim militants should make sure that the United States does not succeed in holding elections in Iraq and creating a democratic government. "If democracy comes to Iraq, the next target [for democratization] would be the whole of the Muslim world," Al-Ayyeri writes.

The al Qaeda ideologist claims that the only Muslim country already affected by "the beginning of democratization" and thus in "mortal danger" is Turkey.

"Do we want what happened in Turkey to happen to all Muslim countries?" he asks. "Do we want Muslims to refuse taking part in *jihad* and submit to secularism, which is a Zionist-Crusader concoction?"

Al-Ayyeri says Iraq would become the graveyard of secular democracy, just as Afghanistan became the graveyard of communism. The idea is that the Americans, faced with mounting casualties in Iraq, will "just run away," as did the Soviets in Afghanistan. This is because the Americans love this world and are concerned about nothing but their own comfort, while Muslims dream of the pleasures that martyrdom offers in paradise.

"In Iraq today, there are only two sides," Al-Ayyeri asserts. "Here we have a clash of two visions of the world and the future of mankind. The side prepared to accept more sacrifices will win."

Al-Ayyeri's analysis may sound naive; he also gets most of his facts wrong. But he is right in reminding the world that what happens in Iraq could affect other Arab countries - in fact, the whole of the Muslim world.

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