



## Preventing the West from Understanding Jihad

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In the years that followed 9/11, two phenomena characterized the Western public's understanding of the terrorists' ideology. The first characteristic stemmed from the statements made by the jihadists themselves. More than ever, Islamist militants and jihadi cadres didn't waste any opportunity to declare, clarify, explain, and detail the meaning of their *aqida* (doctrine) and their intentions to apply Jihadism by all means possible. Unfortunately for them, though, those extremely violent means changed the international public opinion: the public now was convinced that there *was* an ideology of Jihadism, and that its adherents meant business worldwide.

From Ayman al Zawahiri in Arabic to Azzam al Amriki in American English, via all of the videotapes

made by "martyrs" in Britain, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the public obtained all the evidence necessary. Against all the faulty academic literature of the 1990's, the statements by the jihadists themselves were very convincing.

The second phenomenon of help to the public was the surfacing of a new literature produced by alternative scholars, analysts, journalists, experts, and researchers who, from different backgrounds and countries, filled in some of the gaps is "jihadi studies." Producing books, articles, and blogs from Europe, India, the Middle East, and North America, a combination of Third World-born and Western-issued scholarship began to provide the "missing link" as to what Jihadism is all about. These factors came to-

gether to shift the debate from "Jihad is spiritual yoga" to "Why didn't we know it was something else as well?" And this triggered in response one of the last attempts to prevent jihad from being understood.

In the 1990's, apologist literature attempted to convince readers and audiences in the West that jihad was a "spiritual experience only, and not a menace." [1] That explanation has now been shattered by Bin Laden and Ahmedinijad. So in the post-9/11 age, a second strategy to delay public understanding of Jihadism and thereby gain time for its adherents to achieve their goals has evolved. It might be called the "good cop, bad cop" strategy. Over the past few years, a new story began to make inroads in Washington and the rest of the national defense apparatus. A group of academics and interest groups are circulating the idea that in reality jihad can develop in two forms: good jihad and bad jihad.

The practice of not using "Jihad" and "Jihadism" was lately defended by two academics at the National Defense University [2] who based their arguments on a study published by a Washington lobbyist, Jim Guirard.[3] On June 22, 2006, Jim Garamone, writing for the American Forces Press Service, published the study of Douglas Streusand and Harry Tunnel under the title "Loosly Interpreted Arabic terms can promote enemy ideology." Streusand told CNN that "Jihad is a term of great and positive import in Islam. It is commonly defined as striving or

struggle, and can mean an internal or external struggle for faith." [4]

The article was posted under the title "Cultural Ignorance Leads to Misuse of Islamic Terms" by the US-based Islamist organization CAIR. [5] Since then the "concept" of deflecting attention away from the study of Jihadism has penetrated large segments of the defense newsletters and is omnipresent in Academia. More troubling though, is the fact that scholars who have seen the strategic threat of al Qaeda and Hezbollah have unfortunately fallen for the fallacy of the *Hiraba*. Professor Michael Waller of the Institute of World Politics in Washington wrote recently that "Jihad has been hijacked" as he bases his argument on Jim Guirard's lobbying pieces.[6] Satisfied with this trend taking root in the Defense intelligentsia of America, Islamist intellectuals and activists are hurrying to support this new tactic.

The good holy war is when the right religious and political authorities declare it against the correct enemy and at the right time. The bad jihad, called also *Hiraba*, is the wrong war, declared by bad (and irresponsible) people against the wrong enemy (for the moment), and without an appropriate authorization by the "real" Muslim leadership. According to this thesis, those Muslims who wage a *Hiraba*, a wrong war, are called *Mufsidoon*, from the Arabic word for "spoilers." The advocates of this ruse recommend that the United States and its allies stop calling the jihadists by that name and identifying the concept of Jihadism

as the problem. In short, they argue that "jihad is good, but the *Mufsidoon*, the bad guys and the terrorists, spoiled the original legitimate sense." [7]

When researched, it turns out that this theory was produced by clerics of the Wahabi regime in Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood as a plan to prevent jihad and Jihadism from being considered by the West and the international community as an illegal and therefore forbidden activity. It was then forwarded to American- and Western-based interest groups to be spread within the United States, particularly within the defense and security apparatus. Such a deception further confuses U.S. national security perception of the enemy and plunges democracies back into the "black hole" of the 1990's. This last attempt to blur the vision of democracies can be exposed with knowledge of the jihadi terror strategies and tactics, one of which is known as *Taqiyya*, the doctrine on deception and deflection. [8]

First, the argument of "good jihad" raises the question of how there can be a legitimate concept of religious war in the twenty-first century to start with. Jihad historically was as "good" as any other religious war over the last 2,000 years. If a "good jihad" is the one authorized by a caliph and directed under his auspices, then other world leaders also can wage a "good crusade" at will, as long as it is licensed by the proper authority. But in fact, all religious wars are proscribed by international law, period.

Second, the authors of this lobbyist-concocted theory claim that a wrong jihad is called a *Hiraba*. But in Arab Muslim history, a *Hiraba* (unauthorized warring) was when a group of warriors launched itself against the enemy without orders from the real commander. Obviously, this implies that a "genuine" war against a real enemy does exist and that these hotheaded soldiers have simply acted without orders. Hence this cunning explanation puts "spin" on jihad but leaves the core idea of jihadism completely intact. The "spoilers" depart from the plan, attack prematurely, and cause damage to the caliphate's long-term plans. These *Mufsidoon* "fail" their commanders by unleashing a war of their own, instead of waiting for orders.

This scenario fits the relations of the global jihadists, who are the regimes and international groups slowly planning to gain power against the infidels and the "hotheaded" Osama bin Laden. Thus the promoters of this theory of *Hiraba* and *Mufsidoon* are representing the views of classical Wahabis and the Muslim Brotherhood in their criticism of the "great leap forward" made by bin Laden. But by convincing Westerners that al Qaeda and its allies are not the real jihadists but some renegades, the advocates of this school would be causing the vision of Western defense to become blurred again so that more time could be gained by a larger, more powerful wave of Jihadism that is biding its time to strike when it chooses, under a coherent international leadership.

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## Notes

[1] See John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* 3rd edition. (New York: Oxford University Press) 1999.

[2] May 23, 2006

[3] "Hiraba Versus Jihad," the *American Muslim*. August 2003.

[4] See Henry Shuster, "Words in War," CNN, October 19, 2006.

[5] Quoting the American Forces Press Service on June 29, 2006.

[6] Michael Waller. "Making Jihad Work for America." *The Journal for International Security Affairs*. Spring 2006

[7] (7) See James Fallows, "Declaring Victory," *Atlantic Monthly* (September 2006).

[8] (8) According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Taqiya*: "spelled *Taqiyah*, Arabic *Taqiyah* ("self-protection"), in Islam, [is] the practice of concealing one's belief and foregoing ordinary religious duties when under threat of death or injury to oneself or one's fellow Muslims. The Qu'ran allows Muslims to profess friendship with the unbelievers (3:28) and even outwardly to deny their faith (16:106), if doing so would save them from imminent danger," on the condition that their hearts remain attached to faith. Also see Larry Stirling, "On Taqiya' and 'Fatwas,'" *San Diego Source*, September 25, 2006; also Walid Phares, "*al-Taqiya*: The Muslim Method of Conquest," *Freeman Center for Strategic Studies*, December 1997.