



Extremism...Yemen and Pakistan



An Islamic tribal system equipped with an ideological *Jihadi* culture continues to confront the political authorities in *Yemen* and *Pakistan*. Despite their differences in size and population, both countries are fertile ground for the development of Jihadism. They share two major characteristics that help the extremists' cause, chronic poverty and the mountainous regions that allow these groups an unchallenged scope of operation in the name of *Allah*. What distinguishes the *Jihadi* groups operating in both countries from those operating in other countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Algeria is the overt cooperation that these Salafi *Jihadi* groups receive from various tribal chiefs as well as covert support from numerous members of the government and the police. These Yemeni/Pakistani groups also share the same basic ideology that was ingrained in the *Jihadists* who fought in Afghanistan and have found their way back into Yemen or the Afghan-Pakistan border. Despite U.S. pressure, the campaigns by both governments to fight the extremists have lacked consistency and effectiveness.

In reviewing the latest events in both countries, the extremists have not merely been responding to both governments' half-hearted crackdowns, but have also been increasing their scope of operations and the brutality of their attacks. Another change in tactics has been the direct targeting of the internal security apparatus in Yemen instead of limiting their attacks to foreigners. In Pakistan, the latest successful attempt at targeting the government was the bombing of the Marriott hotel on the night the entire leadership was scheduled to have dinner there.

Writing in *Alarabiya* earlier this month¹, *Muhammad Seif Haydar* commented that, while the role of *Al-Qaeda* in Yemen has been ideologically associated with Bin Laden's *Hadramawt*² roots, the movement has always taken into considerations the geopolitical role that Yemen could play in the entire region. One of its leaders, "*Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri*", who is presently incarcerated in Pakistan, stated that the mountainous terrain coupled with rampant poverty makes Yemen a natural fortress for *Al-Qaeda*'s members. *Haydar* has also warned that lately the Yemeni-Saudi alliance has contributed to the strengthening of the Yemeni extremists and increased their audacity in challenging the authorities.

Writing in *Al-Hayat* newspaper,³ *Khalil Al-'Anani* analyzed the ideological similarities between Yemen and Pakistan, which according to him play an instrumental role in the development of *Jihadi* violence. Speaking about the psychology of the masses, *Al-'Anani* states that in both of these countries suicide operations have become part of an accepted culture bordering on a divine phenomenon. The weak political systems, lack of central authority and the pervading tribal allegiances in Yemen as well as Pakistan have permitted the *Jihadi* culture to grow and expand. Instead of commanding authority and requesting allegiance from the tribal and religious factions, the government finds itself perpetually in the role of politic broker between these factions. *Al-'Anani* adds that both countries have also played complementary parts in expanding the role of *Al-Qaeda*. In the beginning of the movement, Yemen was known to be the transit point where *Al-Qaeda* fighters were trained and supplied with ideology and

¹ September 17th, 2008 - <http://www.alarabiya.net/views/2008/09/17/56762.html>

² Many Yemenis are believed to have joined *Al-Qaeda* due to sympathy and connection to the Bin Laden clan whose origin are traced to the *Hadramawt* region in Yemen.

³ September 25, 2008 - <http://www.alhayat.com/opinion/09-2008/Item-20080924-954f2702-c0a8-10ed-01ec-19d736a6c9cc/story.html>

logistics. It was Pakistan that became the center of operations from where the Jihadi activities in Afghanistan and around the world were launched. The recent expansion of indiscriminate killing in both countries has shown that, while *Al-Qaeda* as a central organization has been losing power, the emerging decentralized Jihadi cells are exhibiting an extreme ideology and brutality that matches or exceeds *Al-Qaeda*. *Al-'Anani* also states (with some justification) that the United States has also become the unifying catalyst for the pervading ideology among these groups. For all of them the U.S. is the rallying point in what they consistently label as the war against the Crusaders and their followers.

While *Al-'Anani* generalizes in his description of the similarities between the two countries he nevertheless articulates well the ideological undercurrents that permeate large factions of Arab and Muslim sub-cultures. Also, although *Al-'Anani* concentrated his analysis on Yemen and Pakistan, he concludes his article by lamenting that the extremists are present in a continuous geographic belt expanding from Pakistan in the East to Mauritania in the West. These extremist sub-societies, he states, feed on a “deaf” culture that does not recognize peaceful coexistence and targets not only those who are culturally different but also their own internal population.

PI 563 - October 5, 2008

Return to: www.politicalislam.org

Political Islam Online holds copyrights in all translations & analyses presented on this site. Materials may only be cited or reproduced with proper attribution.