



SPECIAL SERIES

The Man Who Once Secretly Ruled the “Islamic Jihad” Speaks out

The media gave little attention to the reference in *Zawahiri's* last broadcast to “those who change their minds while in prison.” Experts agree that he was speaking of that most secretive of men, known as Dr. *Fadl*. *Fadl*, perhaps the most important modern thinker responsible for shaping the violent Islamic *Jihadi* movement, was once *Zawahiri's* closest companion. In his broadcast, however, *Zawahiri* accused *Fadl* of espousing a non-violent position in a letter recently made public and using inappropriate historical analogies to legitimize them. *Fadl* is currently serving a life sentence in an Egyptian prison from where he has recently written a lengthy exposé on his views. *PI Online* will be publishing annotated reviews of some of those writings which are soon to be published in Arabic.¹ By way of introduction, we present this background information on the enigmatic Dr. *Fadl*.

The Emir of Islamic Jihad

Dr. *Fadl* is an Egyptian born in 1950 as “*Sayyid Imam ‘Abdel-Aziz el-Sherif.*” Along with *Zawahiri*, *Fadl* formally organized the *Jihadi* movement in *Peshawar* and established the camps on the Afghan-Pakistan border in 1986. It was then that he took his *nom de guerre*, “‘*Abd-el-Qadir Ibn-‘Abdel-‘Aziz.*” *Fadl*, however, stayed behind the scenes. It was *Zawahiri* who assumed the public role because his English skills enabled him to establish better contacts with the media. As a result, outsiders, and even lower-ranking members of the *Jihadi* movement, erroneously assumed that *Zawahiri* was the Emir of the group. In fact, in 1989, *Fadl* was secretly elected Emir of the movement, which he continued to lead until 1993. As Emir, *Fadl* was the ideological architect, formulating and implementing most of the ideological principles that shaped the *Jihadi* movement.² For example, he legitimized the use of *takfir*³ and the resulting execution of the accused heretics.

His earlier years

Dr. *Fadl*, like *Zawahiri*, was trained as a medical doctor and became a surgeon, a profession he continued to practice while being involved in the *Jihad* movement. *Fadl's* support for violent uprising reaches back long before his *Peshawar* days. Following the 1967 Egyptian-Israeli war, a young *Fadl*, together with *Zawahiri*, is believed to have formed the “*Maadi*” cell” advocating *Jihad*. It was not until the time he was accused in the murder of President *Sadat*, however, that the Egyptian authorities mentioned him for the first time. *Fadl* was acquitted, in *absentia*, because it was shown that he had left Egypt for Saudi Arabia in 1981, shortly before the assassination of *Sadat*. *Zawahiri* joined him in Saudi Arabia in 1984, after being released from prison.⁵ Then in 1986, they left together for Afghanistan.

Fadl Moves On

The Islamic *Jihadi* movement was rocked in 1993 when Egyptian authorities uncovered the names of more than 800 of the movement's underground militants known as “The *Fath* (Conquest) military vanguards.” Most were subsequently arrested. In the ensuing “blame game” members of the movement who had taken refuge in the

¹ The Egyptian Newspaper “*AlMasri alyoum*” and the Kuwaiti one “*al-Jaridah*” are releasing the total manuscript in a series of articles on their pages starting on Sunday 11/18.

² Dr. *Fadl* is known to have written two books: *al-‘Umdah fi l’dad al-‘Idda’* [Principles of Jihad Preparation] and *al-Jami’ fi Talab al-‘Ilm al-Sharif* [A Compendium for the Search of Noble Knowledge] – both books represent *Al-Qaeda's* principles.

³ See *PI Online* article [PI 511].

⁴ *Maadi* is relatively affluent suburb of Cairo

⁵ *Zawahiri* was indicted along with over three hundred other extremists for the assassination of *Sadat*. He asserted all along that he only knew of the plot a few hours before the assassination took place.

Sudan demanded a new leader. As a result, *Fadl* resigned and was ultimately replaced by *Zawahiri*. *Fadl* then left the movement, moved to Yemen and restarted his medical practice in *Sana'a*.

Sentencing, Capturing and Incarceration

During one of the most notorious trials to ever take place in Egypt – the 1999 trial of those who became known as “the Returnees from Albania” – it was publicly revealed for the first time that *Fadl* was the Emir of the Islamic *Jihadi* movement from 1989 to 1993. The title “Returnees from Albania” was coined by the Egyptian press, referring to the accused who were being tried for the failed attempt to blow-up the Egyptian embassy in Albania. Although *Fadl* had never set foot in Albania, many of those arrested in Albania identified *Fadl* as the past Emir of the group. As a result, he was convicted, in *absentia*, and sentenced to life in prison. In 2001, he was arrested by the authorities in Yemen and was eventually delivered to the Egyptian security forces in February 2004. He is currently serving his sentence in the Egyptian prison of *Torah*.

Non-Violence “Review⁶”

There is no doubt that many will attribute “the non-violent” position in *Fadl*'s recent writings to pressure from the Egyptian authorities and an attempt to buy himself a release from prison.⁷ While such skepticism is justified, many behavioral scientists who have studied the movement insist that it is unlikely a *Jihadi* would yield to such pressure. Nothing short of a genuine change in the core beliefs would lead a *Jihadi* to advocate non-violence.

More importantly, however, as the creator of the *Jihadi* philosophy, there is probably no one better equipped to understand and counteract it than *Fadl*. The details of his recent writings should therefore be of interest to all those studying or observing Islam and the Middle East. In cooperation with Mr. *Khalil Al-Anani*,⁸ *PI Online* will run excerpts and commentaries on those writings as the series becomes available.

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⁶ The *muraja'a* (the review) refers to a process of reinterpreting Islamic jurisprudence. There are recent examples of use of the process by members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian prisons to renounce violence.

⁷ The Egyptian authorities are expected to release many Jihadists before the end of the year.

⁸ Egyptian strategic analyst, specializing in political Islam