

## Another Wave of Jihadist Adjustment Internal Debates of the Movement

---

**KAMAL HABIB**

*Expert on Islamic Groups, Egypt*

A year after releasing the Egyptian Islamic Jihad's first self-evaluation, "Advice Regarding the Conduct of Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World," Sayyed Imam al-Sharif has produced the "Treatise on Exposing the Exoneration."<sup>1</sup> We do not know why the author called his "second debate" with al-Qaeda the "Exposure," but it appears from our reading that the "regressive change" he presents in this piece is of lesser importance than the contents of the first self-evaluation. The first document elucidated a new foundation for "building on new traditions for a local jihadi movement," characterized by an internally stable organization committed to changing the political system through peaceful means, not violent confrontation. The new foundation also relied on the use of methodological tools in understanding religious texts, drawn from the schools of Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence established by prominent religious jurists. This is what has been referred to as Islamic Jihad's transformation from the Islamic jurisprudence of the necessary and exceptional to the jurisprudence of the organization and primary movement.

It appears that Sayyed Imam has this time written a book from which the purity

---

1 Translators note: Ayman al-Zawahiri answered Sayyed Imam's "Advice Regarding the Conduct of Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World" (the "Advice") with a refutation entitled "A Treatise Exonerating the Nation of the Pen and the Sword from the Blemish of the Accusation of Weakness and Fatigue" (the "Exoneration"). Sayyed Imam responded to Zawahiri with his "Treatise on Exposing the Exoneration" (the "Exposure"), the subject of this article.

of religious science and the caution of the theologian have been removed. The original and important debate over jurisprudence and religious science in the first book has sunk to a level of triviality unbecoming of a theologian and philosopher. Sayyed Imam's debate over methodology and controversial issues has been reduced to a personal quarrel between his new jihadi current and the old movement represented by al-Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden.

In this second self-evaluation we have moved from the level of ideas to the level of personalities, from the level of sources and derivations of religious law to the level of slander, accusations of treason, lies and deception. The tone of the "Exposure" connotes a sense of "regressive change." Instead of continuing the debate from "Advice"

---

**The original and important debate over jurisprudence and religious science in the first book has sunk to a level of triviality unbecoming of a theologian and philosopher.**

---

on those issues for which no conclusion was reached, Sayyed Imam has resorted to personal and verbally abusive attacks, calling into question the entire revisionist project.

The most-telling sign of the gap between the first and second self-evaluations (as of this writing the second was still being serialized) is the difference in their respective reception and stimulation of public debate. The first

document was well-received and stimulated a broad public debate on the issues, with many experts weighing in about their meaning and significance; the second document has been met on all sides with silence, disinterest and even annoyance and resentment. To confirm this one needs only review the displeasure and anger expressed in readers' comments in the newspapers which published the "Exposure."

### **First: The Psychological World of Sayyed Imam and his Self-Evaluation**

The psychological change that drives a religious person toward a critical self-evaluation of his ideology is among the most complex and difficult types of change, as he moves from a position thought to bring him closer to God to a new and different stance. Revising one's religious ideas is among the most challenging processes for the human psyche, much more significant than any re-evaluation of nonreligious ideas. Through an in-depth understanding of the psyche of Sayyed Imam, we will find that he has a capacious and potent mind, evidenced by his interactions with the religious world.

In his memoirs, he recalls joining Islamic Jihad forty years ago as a comrade of Ayman al-Zawahiri, adopting the most strict and harsh interpretations (ijtihadat) of Islam. Although jihad and its precepts fall under the rubric of religious jurisprudence and were dealt with by the old religious jurists as matters of religious law, Sayyed

Imam elevated jihad to the level of doctrine. Therefore, with jihad he was not confronting an issue of religious law, but rather a pillar of doctrine.

Doctrinal issues by nature tend to favor a consensus opinion, leading to the exclusion and possibly the expulsion of those whose opinions diverge from the norm. One who takes refuge in doctrine actually seeks a psychological state that enables him to envision the world in an abbreviated and simplistic fashion. This state allows him to take the reins in his own hands, as it becomes he who rules the world, not he who is subject to its rules. He becomes both the judge and the ruler, the one who knows, explains and interprets all matters. One who views the world through the perspective of doctrinal adherence enjoys a feeling of supreme confidence. He sees himself as the embodiment of the “complete person,” striving to restore the Caliphate and the rule of Islam.

The dispute that erupted between Sayyed Imam and the Islamic Jihad — of which he was at one time the emir — was both sharp and very violent before Sayyed Imam adopted his new philosophical position. Sayyed Imam wrote in his famous “Compendium of the Pursuit of Divine Knowledge,” one of the principal sources rationalizing the violence of Islamic Jihad, that some Islamic organizations considered Islamic Jihad are illegitimate. When Islamic Jihad tried to omit the parts of his book that discussed this, Sayyed Imam launched a campaign of critiques against al-Zawahiri’s character. The extent of his anger far outweighed the mere excision of parts of his book; Sayyed Imam was reacting in an almost narcissistic way.

In reality, many who pursue religious knowledge tend to be overly sensitive about the scope and value of their effort. Even though their effort is noteworthy their self-perception is greater; hence the origin of Sayyed Imam’s anger and harsh campaign against Islamic Jihad. His move, from supporting an organization in which he spent the greater part of his life, to a new position of militant opposition challenged and complicated his psychological perspective. Additionally, his transformation into an opponent of Ayman al-Zawahiri, a friend with whom he had lived for a long period of time, likely signals a degree of personal stress. Sayyed Imam’s religious world is replete with both terrible suffering and dramatic human dimensions. He was certainly under no duress while writing his book freely and with full conviction, yet his “violent and extremist” psychological nature made him subject to wild fluctuations and reversals in his personal dealings and writings. Thus, he went from one extreme philosophical position to the opposing stance on the extremist spectrum. Sayyed Imam’s self-evaluations, in my view, play out a reflection of the perpetual plight of man.

Born in 1951, Sayyed Imam is now nearly sixty years old, the same age as Zawahiri. The first self-evaluation maintained Sayyed Imam’s status and prestige among the new

generations of the jihadi culture, but an invisible hand then pushed him toward an unprecedented war of words with Zawahiri. It would appear that the disputatious nature of groups such as Islamic Jihad make them unable turn a blind eye toward any perceived encroachment on their ideas, beliefs and visions.

In this second analysis, Sayyed Imam remains imprisoned and subject to psychological duress. Although not necessarily forcing him to write anything oppositional to his beliefs, this potentially steers him in a certain direction. With the second self-

---

**Self-evaluation had a major effect on the debates within the Islamic jihadi currents of the world. Because of this, Zawahiri cannot ignore Sayyed Imam's first self-evaluation.**

---

evaluation the security services apparently saw an opportunity to discredit Zawahiri and bin Laden that they did not wish to pass up; but the victim here became Sayyed Imam's reputation among the people and the new generation of jihadists. However, Sayyed Imam's current psychological state had no impact on what he wrote in the "Exposure," as it represents his

seizure of a chance to address new issues he wishes to see reformed.

### **The Meaning of the Second Self-Evaluation**

Sayyed Imam's second self-evaluation, "Treatise on Exposing the Exoneration," contains a number of themes:

1 – Identifying the first self-evaluation as an opening statement to set forth the general contours of the new approach embodied in the new jihadi current. As a result, there is still a need for a second self-evaluation to confirm, remind and promote for readers the principles set by the first self-evaluation. The second self-evaluation also precludes further revisions on these issues to come in the future.

2 – These ideas had a major effect on the debates within the Islamic jihadi currents of the world. Because of this, Zawahiri cannot ignore Sayyed Imam's first self-evaluation. Likewise, it has not been possible for Sayyed Imam to ignore what al-Zawahiri wrote in his own "Exoneration."

3 – Ideological disputes remain a deep-rooted characteristic of these organizations, which elevate the authority of their ideology to the level of doctrine. As such, the principle arena in which each group can prove its relative worth and following is in the ongoing ideological debate.

4 – The ideological line represented by al-Qaeda still poses a major challenge to

the new jihadi ideological project that Sayyed Imam is trying to forge. As such, the second self-evaluation is part of the psychological campaign launched against al-Qaeda's partisans to shake their image and prestige among the Egyptian and Arabic circles that are their audience.

5 – Although those undertaking the self-evaluations are still in great need of a foundation and frame of reference on which to build the new ideological project, emotion remains predominant and there is a lack of realistic future planning. The legitimacy of the new framework of authority, derived from the old ideology, requires a great amount of concerted, intelligent effort.

6 – Islamic Jihad's self-evaluation project is currently limited to the level of elites, with only Sayyed Imam taking up the burden of ideological confrontation with the old jihadi project. At the level of individual issues, the project is still in its infancy, and has not moved on toward deeper and more complicated issues like al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya has.

7 – The violent discourse of the second self-evaluation and its outpouring of insults, curses and defamation represent a diminishment of both its author and the self-evaluation project as a whole.

8 – The second self-evaluation challenges the ideas of Zawahiri and bin Laden but also distorts their character. However, due to the religious and emotional character of the Arab and Islamic people, this strategy may backfire. The youth might end up supporting Zawahiri and al-Qaeda because of their uncertainty about the level of discourse presented in the "Exposure," even sensing that security elements might be behind its argumentation.

9 – The growing importance of issues such as national security, democratic change, defusing internal conflict and building new generations capable of understanding and coexisting with the age, while at the same time capable of navigating issues pertaining to religious law and legitimacy, necessitates that the self-evaluation file be at the center of attention for Arab and Islamic regimes. Yet there is still — at least in the Egyptian case — a security file that state security officials wield at the expense of self-evaluation, preventing movement toward the building of a true revisionist current. Arab countries must deal with the self-evaluation file within the framework of politics, not security.

10 – The self-evaluation movement must stress the importance of liberating revisionist discourse, and those who propagate it, from the bonds still imposed upon them by the security agencies. These forces prevent Islamic Jihad’s leadership from interacting freely with society, the elite and the media to explain their ideas and interact with the youth — to whom this discourse is directed. There must be confidence in this new discourse and those who propagate it, so that they may present it, defend it and play the role of a legitimate component of the public Islamic culture for the youth and the community. The Egyptian state has made great strides in this regard in the case of al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya, and it is expected that it will at a later stage follow up with progress on Islamic Jihad’s revisionist process. Nonetheless, there are still important steps that must be taken to integrate the members of al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya—and Islamic Jihad later on if the success of its current self-evaluation continues—into society and into political life. This issue still requires creative ideas.

11 – In this context also lies the importance of integrating the representatives of this revisionist discourse into the local foundations and institutions responsible for guiding and creating public opinion. This includes ministries responsible for religious propagation, such as the Ministry of Religious Endowments and the departments of al-Azhar, and even religious newspapers and satellite television stations. It is likewise important to find satellite television stations via which they can express themselves ideologically and resume calling others to the faith (da’wa), since their ideological power cannot be restricted at all times.

### **Third: The Content of the Second Self-Evaluation**

The content of the “Exposure” does not differ greatly from the “Advice,” except that the latter was both broader and more comprehensive. The author now defines the

---

**For the first time an organized campaign has been launched against the two most important figures in al-Qaeda, along with a warning to the youth and all Muslims against being tempted by their ideology.**

---

bin Laden/Zawahiri approach as “the criminal al-Qaeda ideology,” which he says undertakes wholesale murder. Likewise, he portrays bin Laden and Zawahiri with a number of negative attributes he did not use in his previous work, to such a degree that we could call this document an organized campaign to stain and distort their reputations. This is the first time that such an organized campaign has been

launched against the two most important figures in al-Qaeda, along with a warning to

the youth and all Muslims against being tempted by their ideology; it even goes so far as to liken them to the devil. This campaign conforms with the security agencies' view of al-Qaeda's ideology as an obstacle to the self-evaluation of other Islamic organizations, as well as a source of social tension and political anxiety that could potentially lead to a return to religious violence. It also conforms to the international campaign against terrorism launched by the United States on al-Qaeda, which still represents its primary threat. For Sayyed Imam, this campaign is above all a response to the psychological wound inflicted on him by Zawahiri's "Exoneration."

The contents of the "Exposure" comprise the following:

1 – The author does not use a table of contents in the introduction to this book as he had done in the previous one. However, he concludes the "Exposure" with an outline of its contents:<sup>2</sup> "this treatise comprises, in addition to the introduction, four chapters: the first is 'exposing the lies and slanders of Zawahiri,' the second is 'exposing the errors in religious law made by Zawahiri,' the third is 'exposing Zawahiri's obfuscation of the issues for the reader,' and the fourth is 'exposing Zawahiri as a seeker of fame and stardom.'"

2 – In the second chapter,<sup>3</sup> Sayyed Imam calls Zawahiri an "international liar," because he said the "Advice" was supervised and financed by the U.S. Embassy and intelligence services. Sayyed Imam confronts Zawahiri with Quranic verses with proclamations such as "those who fabricate lies are those who do not believe in the verses of Allah." He also accuses Zawahiri of being an agent of the Sudanese intelligence services because he promised to carry out ten operations in Egypt on their behalf. Sayyed Imam describes Zawahiri as a traitor and of giving false testimony while a sinner, accusing Zawahiri of striving to save himself at the expense of his brothers. According to Sayyed Imam, Zawahiri and al-Qaeda's claims that they are resisters against the American-Jewish campaign and a symbol of popular resistance against the Crusader-Zionist campaign on the Islamic community are nothing but lies.

3 – In the third chapter,<sup>4</sup> Sayyed Imam continues to pass judgment on Zawahiri for lying, immorality and depravity, saying that he cannot accept anything Zawahiri

---

2 Chapters are numbered as they appeared in the "Al-Masri Al-Yom" newspaper in Cairo, which published the "Exposure" in 13 chapters from November 18-December 2, 2008.

3 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 18, 2008, 14.

4 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 19, 2008, 11.

says about religious science or, especially, religious law. In Sayyed Imam's opinion, Zawahiri erred not only on certain issues of religious law, but also in having founded a corrupt and perverted ideology to legitimize excessive bloodshed. Sayyed Imam claims that this ideology was founded in the early 1990s and then expanded until the

---

**In Sayyed Imam's opinion, Zawahiri erred not only on certain issues of religious law, but also in having founded a corrupt and perverted ideology to legitimize excessive bloodshed.**

---

end of the decade, when bin Laden and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed cooperated in their desire to kill the largest number of Americans possible by carrying out the Sept. 11 attacks.<sup>5</sup> This operation was made possible by ignoring several legitimate religious principles and bundling together other illegitimate principles. The most crucial of these was changing America from a personal issue into a public issue for the Islamic community, as well as the

obtainment of the signatures of many sheikhs and religious scholars from Pakistan and Afghanistan to support the idea of fighting America.

Sayyed Imam defines al-Qaeda's ideological principles, which he describes as criminal, as follows:

- Fighting the far enemy (America) is more important than fighting the near enemy.
- It is permissible to declare one an infidel (takfir) and kill him on the basis of nationality, as this is a sign of his loyalty to and consent for the laws of the infidel country.
- It is permissible to kill one who pays taxes to the infidel, as he is a combatant with his money.
- It is completely permissible to kill infidel human shields or groups of infidel civilians who are protected by the infidel's military personnel.
- It is permissible to kill the infidel's Muslim human shields or groups of Muslim civilians who are protected by the infidel's military personnel.
- The application of the principle of reciprocity is allowed in order to widen the scope of indiscriminate killing.
- Fighting America is a defensive operation, and therefore it is permissible to

---

5 Notice that Sayyed Imam here acknowledges the responsibility of al-Qaeda, under the leadership of Osama bin Laden and his assistant Ayman al-Zawahiri, for the Sept. 11 attacks. There is still a group that rejects that al-Qaeda carried out the attacks.

travel there to fight without the permission of one's father or others in authority.

- An entrance visa granted to a Muslim to an infidel country is not a guarantee of safe passage, and therefore it is permissible for him to kill the inhabitants of that country. Even if the visa is a guarantee of safe passage, it is possible for him to invalidate it for reasons mentioned later.
- A tourist entrance visa granted for Muslim countries is not a guarantee of safe passage for the bearer, and therefore it is permissible to kill or kidnap him.

Sayyed Imam does not subscribe to al-Qaeda's view that America is the reason for the misfortunes of Muslims, but rather says that Muslims are responsible for their own suffering. In this context, Sayyed Imam asks the following questions:

- Who lost Palestine? The Arabs. They fought the Ottomans and threw them out of Palestine during World War I, then handed it over to Britain in 1916. The British then gave it to the Jews with the Balfour Declaration in 1917.
- Who kills the Palestinians today, especially their leaders? The Palestinian agents of Israel, whose betrayal enables Israel to kill whomever it wants.
- Who is today building the Jewish settlements in the West Bank to secure the Israeli occupation there? Palestinian workers.
- Who invited America to Afghanistan in 2001? Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri.
- What caused the opening of the American prison for Muslims in Guantanamo, Cuba? The stupidity of bin Laden.
- Who invited the Mongols to ancient Baghdad in 1258? Minister Bin al-Alqami.
- What invited America to Baghdad in 2003? The betrayal of the senior generals of the Iraqi army.
- Who killed the Lebanese for 15 years (1975-1990)? The Lebanese.
- Who occupied Kuwait and killed its people in 1990? The people of Iraq, not America nor Israel.
- Who is killing tens of thousands of Sudanese in Darfur today? The Sudanese themselves are killing each other, just as the Yemenis are.

Sayyed Imam further critiques al-Qaeda's complaint about the presence of U.S. soldiers in Islamic lands. Regardless of the legitimacy of their presence, the American forces in Saudi Arabia during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 did not kill any Muslims in Saudi Arabia, but al-Qaeda has killed Muslims there. The number of

Muslims who have been killed or displaced by al-Qaeda over many years in Kenya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Pakistan and other countries — in the words of Sayyed Imam — greatly surpasses the number who have been killed or displaced by Israel in Palestine and its neighbors over sixty years. The argument that al-Qaeda defends Muslims is a “fairy-tale,” Sayyed Imam declares, because they themselves kill and displace Muslims — yet Zawahiri and his sheikh bin Laden attach no importance to what other people think.

4 – In the fourth chapter,<sup>6</sup> Sayyed Imam appears to address all Muslims. He says that there are options for dealing with the enemy other than force, such as peace, truce, isolation, concealing belief and patience. Sayyed Imam says, “O Muslims, these are all legitimate options which can be chosen in accordance with [our] knowledge

---

**He accuses bin Laden and al-Zawahiri of disrespecting the Taliban state and its commander Mullah Mohammed Omar, and also accuses them of insisting on targeting Americans even though Mullah Omar was against it.**

---

and capability, and bin Laden and al-Zawahiri are not among the scholars or those who are authorized to issue fatwas, nor are they pious individuals.” He accuses bin Laden and al-Zawahiri of disrespecting the Taliban state and its commander Mullah Mohammed Omar, and of allying themselves with the Pakistani intelligence. He also accuses them of insisting on targeting Americans even though Mullah Omar was against it. Sayyed Imam also rejects

al-Qaeda’s use of an illegitimate innovation (*bid’a*) to get around Mullah Omar’s ruling. Al-Qaeda invented the concept of “localized authority,” to say that it was subject to the authority of Mullah Omar in Afghanistan but free to do as it wished outside of it.

5 – Sayyed Imam continues to criticize what he calls the “illegitimate innovation of fighting the far enemy,” or America, in the fourth chapter. He also continues his criticism of al-Qaeda’s ideology, whose principles he referred to in the second chapter. He claims that killing on the basis of nationality is an illegitimate innovation, as nationality is not a sign of loyalty or consent to the laws of the infidel. Millions of Muslims live in infidel countries such as India, China, Russia and the nations of Europe, but we cannot say with certainty that these Muslims agree with the laws of their countries. Thus, it is impermissible to declare people infidels on the basis of the mere possibility that they are collaborators with the infidel. Likewise, in a country whose people are

---

6 See “Al-Masri Al-Yom,” November 21, 2008, 4.

infidels, it is not permissible to fight against them collectively, because in Islam there is prohibition against fighting women, young children, hired laborers, employees and farmers - and these are the majority of the people living in any country. Sayyed Imam also considers as an illegitimate innovation the permission to kill those who pay taxes to the infidel, citing a saying of the Imam Amro bin al-Khitab to his Muslim armies: "Deal mercifully [out of fear of God] with the farmers who did not declare war on you," and who were also taxpayers. Sayyed Imam replies to al-Qaeda's principle of "the rule of unrestricted reciprocity" by saying that the correct principle is "reciprocity is proper within the bounds of shari'a legitimacy."

6 – In the fifth chapter,<sup>7</sup> Sayyed Imam refutes the pretexts upon which al-Qaeda's ideology was established, saying that an entrance visa to an infidel country is a "guarantee of safe passage" prohibiting anyone who obtains it from killing or stealing. The visa implies respect for the life and wealth of the traveler in the country he enters, and it is not permissible to invalidate it with the claim that the people of that country are fighting the Muslims. Therefore, it is not permissible, in any situation, for a Muslim to invalidate a guarantee of safe passage in any infidel country he enters.

7 – In the sixth and seventh chapters,<sup>8</sup> Sayyed Imam's argument can be summarized as: whosoever enters an infidel country with a visa is prohibited from betraying that country, even if it attacks other Muslims. His reasoning is that the visa is a personal contract between oneself and the infidels. He continues by refuting al-Qaeda's statement that a tourist who enters a Muslim country with a visa is not protected from killing and kidnapping, saying that crucial point is that the tourist is protected if the visa was understood by him to be a guarantee of safe passage. Sayyed Imam concludes by saying that it is not permissible to target tourists, workers or employees from foreign countries which fight against the Muslims, because that would lead to the killing of millions. Such an approach simply constitutes mass killing, and killing based on the mere possibility that one's victims may be legitimate targets.

8 – In the eighth and ninth chapters,<sup>9</sup> Sayyed Imam discusses al-Zawahiri and al-Qaeda's proclamation that they confronted the American attack on the region. Sayyed Imam declares that it was al-Qaeda who brought America to the region, viewing al-Zawahiri and bin Laden as the reason for the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. He

---

7 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 23, 2008, 10.

8 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 24 - 25, 2008.

9 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 27 - 28, 2008.

also says that their use of the Palestinian issue is merely to win over public opinion and not out of any true conviction on the issue. The true beneficiaries of al-Qaeda's policies are Iran and Syria. Al-Qaeda has not launched any operations against the Jews in Palestine because the jihad there is not among bin Laden's priorities. Sayyed Imam argues, however, that making the Palestinian issue among the first priorities of the Islamic world leads the Muslim mind astray, because the central issue should be the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate foretold by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Sayyed Imam says that al-Qaeda's use of the Palestinian issue is merely to win over public opinion and not out of any true conviction on the issue. The true beneficiaries of al-Qaeda's policies are Iran and Syria

9 – Sayyed Imam sees peace with Israel as in the interest of the Islamic world, saying that if al-Zawahiri and bin Laden offered to negotiate a truce with America, why would this not be permissible with Israel? Sayyed Imam states that there is nothing in the Shariah that prevents peace with any infidel or apostate as long as this is in the interest of Muslims, and that what is important is the legitimacy of who negotiate on behalf of the Muslim side. Noteworthy here is Sayyed Imam's boldness in declaring the permissibility of peace with and recognition of Israel. This diverges from the opinion of all Islamic movements in the Arab world, most prominent among them the Muslim Brotherhood, which refuses peace with or recognition of what it calls the "Zionist entity."

10 – In the tenth chapter,<sup>10</sup> Sayyed Imam accuses bin Laden of squandering the prospects for an Islamic state, initially represented by the Taliban, with his attack on America on Sept. 11. In Sayyed Imam's view, the Taliban held great promise for fulfilling the goals of Islamists because it hosted bin Laden and Zawahiri, despite them not recognizing the Mullah Omar's authority. Sayyed Imam also views al-Qaeda as a schismatic faction of Sheikh Abdallah Azzam's organization. Going against bin Laden's collective view of the state of political affairs in the Middle East, Sayyed Imam recognizes the Arab rulers as Muslims, opposes declaring them infidels, and deems parliamentary elections to be permissible.

11 – In the last chapter,<sup>11</sup> Sayyed Imam addresses what he calls "civil strife (fitna)

---

10 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," November 29, 2008.

11 See "Al-Masri Al-Yom," December 2, 2008.

and the shirts raised in its name.” He says that civil strife is a major concern for Muslims and the Islamic world, as it signals a threat to the unity of the community and its political stability, as well as a threat for the manipulation of religious texts and the exploitation religion for nonreligious aims. He says that during the first major civil strife in Islamic history, thousands of Muslims were killed when Muawiya raised the “banner of Othman bin Affan” to justify his opposition to Ali Ibn Talib (may Allah be pleased with him).<sup>12</sup> Other “shirts” followed in succession, as other pretexts were taken to demand property and seize it, or to pervert religion. Among these was the “shirt of zeal for the sanctity of religion,” as a pretext for the illegitimate innovation of the Kharijites. This was followed by the “shirt of love for the family of the Prophet,” as a pretext for the illegitimate innovation of Shiism and the “shirt of justice” for the Mu’tazilites. If one spoke against a Kharijite they would accuse him of lacking zeal for religion, if one spoke against a Shiite they would accuse him of lacking love for the family of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and if one spoke against a Mu’tazilite they would accuse him of discrediting the sublime justice of Allah.

In the modern age, those who wish to pervert religion have raised the banner of “renewal,” “interpretation (ijtihad)” and “the public interest.” The last “shirt” used to justify perversion of religion was raised by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri: The banners of “jihad” and “fighting America.” By raising these pretexts they violated many religious laws, yet if one disputed them, they raised these shirts in the person’s face and said: “He discredits the mujahidin, he serves the interests of America.” Sayyed Imam says that this illustration reveals “their falseness.”

## Conclusion

Despite the significant judgments and opinions in the second self-evaluation, especially concerning Sayyed Imam’s position on the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and his refutation of the principles and basic ideas upon which al-Qaeda was launched under the leadership of bin Laden and Zawahiri, this book appears less imperative than the first self-evaluation, particularly in terms of style and methodology. This is specifically attributable to the fact that the author shifted focus from the level of ideas in the first self-evaluation to the level of individuals in the second, using a vulgar language unheard of in debate among scholars and experts on religious law. At the end of the “Exposure,” the author warns of civil strife, but he arrives there by employing such harsh denunciation against Zawahiri and bin Laden that his own words could be the

---

12 Translator’s note: Muawiya accused Ali of complicity in the death of the third caliph, Uthman bin Affan, using the assassinated Uthman’s bloodstained shirt to propagandize against Ali, who was elected Uthman’s successor, as he vied with him for control of the Caliphate.

reason for this civil strife. It would have been both preferable and of stronger effect if the “Exposure” had been devoid of insults.

It appears that the second self-evaluation sets back the revisionist current of Islamic Jihad, contrary to the al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya, whose own revisionist process is making steady forward progress. The reason for this is the nature of Islamic Jihad as an organization that inclines toward divisiveness as well as severity in its internal debates and conflicts. Complicating matters even further for Islamic Jihad is the presence of al-Qaeda and its ideological current, which represents a challenge to the construction of a local current with realistic traditions. This suggests Islamic Jihad must take great care while managing its ongoing self-evaluation process to not to be pulled into a war of words and personal issues. Instead it must focus mainly on issues of religious law and ideology, in order to build a new revisionist school of religious law and a new jihadi ideology. Through this, Islamic Jihad’s revisionism can persevere in its struggle against the “international jihadi” current.

The second self-evaluation tells us that Islamic Jihad’s revisionist school is still in its infancy and requires time to secure its footing and be able to contend with and confront the international jihadi current represented by al-Qaeda. ■