

Saudi Grand Mufti Issues Fatwa Prohibiting Saudi Youth From Engaging In Jihad Abroad

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Yesterday, on October 1, 2007, Saudi Mufti Sheikh Abd Al-'Aziz bin Abdallah Aal Al-Sheikh issued a fatwa prohibiting Saudi youth from engaging in jihad abroad. In his fatwa, he stated that setting forth to wage jihad without authorization by the ruler is a serious transgression, and that young Saudis who do so are being misled by suspicious elements from both the East and the West who are exploiting them in order to accomplish their own aims, and who are actually causing serious damage to Saudi Arabia, Islam, and the Muslims.

This comes against the backdrop of a recent public debate in Saudi Arabia regarding the involvement of Saudi nationals in terrorist activities throughout the world. The debate was triggered by numerous news items indicating that Saudi nationals were participating in terrorist operations in Iraq and in the Nahr Al-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon. [1]

The following are excerpts from the mufti's fatwa, as published in the Saudi press in both Saudi Arabia and London: [2]
Suspicious Elements Are Transforming Our Youth into Walking Bombs - To Accomplish Their Own Political and Military Aims

"Out of concern for our youth, and in order to give advice to the Muslim imams and the Muslim public, I have resolved to issue [the following statement]. For several years now, we have been faced [with a phenomenon] of our youth going out from Saudi Arabia with the intention of engaging in jihad for the sake of Allah. These young people are full of enthusiasm and religious zeal, but lack sufficient religious knowledge to be able to discern between truth and falsehood - which is why they succumb to temptation and fall into traps set for them by suspicious elements. They have become a pawn in the hands of foreign apparatuses, which are toying with them in the name of jihad, and are using them to accomplish their own shameful aims and getting what they want by [perpetrating] foul operations that could not be further from the religion.

"This [phenomenon] has reached the point where our youth have become a commodity bought and sold by elements in both the East and the West, with the aim of fulfilling their own objectives and goals - and only Allah knows the extent of the damage that [these operations] are causing Islam and its people.

"In the past, we and others have warned against leaving the country [i.e. Saudi Arabia] for this purpose [i.e. jihad], since the situation was not apparent, the conditions were complicated, and [the sources of authority] were not clear. These young people's rebellion against their rulers and their 'ulama, as well as their leaving the country in order to engage in the so-called jihad outside Saudi Arabia, have caused great evil, including the following:

"1. Disobedience of their rulers and causing them harm, which is a grave sin, as the Prophet said: 'He who obeys an amir - it is as if he obeyed me, and he who does not obey an amir - it is as if he did not obey me'... The evidence for the prohibition on rebelling against a ruler is abundant.

"2. It has been found that many of the young people who left to engage in what they thought to be jihad violated their rightful oath of allegiance [bay'a] to the ruler of this pure country - an oath regarding which there is a consensus among all the figures of authority. [Violating this oath] is forbidden, and is a grave sin...

"3. [These young people] have been easy prey for anyone seeking to corrupt the country and to exploit their [religious] zeal - to the point where they have become walking bombs, killing themselves to accomplish the political and military aims of suspicious elements.

"4. [These young people] have been exploited by outside elements in order to shame this pure country, to inflict damage and suffering upon it, to let its enemies prevail over it, and to justify their greed regarding it. All this is extremely dangerous, because the actions of [these young people] harm the Muslim nation - this damage harms [our] peaceful and serene country [Saudi Arabia]. By their actions, [these young people] are weakening the country and its people."

Jihad Without the Ruler's Authorization is a Serious Transgression

The mufti continued: "It is well known that jihad is an issue that is the [exclusive] prerogative of the ruler, and that he is the one charged with the obligation to prepare for it and to train the military. The ruler also has the right to dispatch the forces, to declare jihad, and to determine its target and the proper time for battle. All this is in addition to other issues pertaining to jihad, all of which are the [sole] responsibility of the ruler... Among all the Muslim faithful, it is established

that jihad can only be waged by order of the imam, and under his banner...

"Thus, setting forth [to wage jihad] without authorization by the ruler contravenes the principles of shari'a and constitutes a grave transgression. Whoever incites these [young people to engage in jihad] is either an ignoramus... or one who is fully aware of the situation and who seeks to inflict damage on this country and its people."

Those With Means Must Spend With Discretion

The mufti ended his speech by saying: "I advise the youth to obey first of all Allah, and then their rulers, and to entrust their lot to the 'ulama, as they are obliged to do under shari'a. I order those with means to spend their money with discretion, so that it does not harm the Muslims. And I urge my brothers the 'ulama to clarify the truth to the public, to guide the youth, and to open their eyes to reality and to warn them of the consequences of being drawn to arbitrary opinions and [religious] zeal that is not based on religious knowledge." [3]

Editor of Al-Sharq Al-Awsat Praises Fatwa

In an article published today, October 2, 2007, the editor of the London daily Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, Tareq Al-Humaid, praised the fatwa, saying: "Saudi Mufti Sheikh Abd Al-'Aziz bin Abdallah Aal Al-Sheikh did well to issue a clear and unambiguous fatwa forbidding young Saudis from leaving the country in order to engage in jihad... The sheikh [is worthy of] the utmost gratitude and appreciation. His statement that our young people have become a commodity that is being bought and sold is a truth that unfortunately can be discerned wherever where we look. No matter who enticed or exploited them, there have always been those who incite [young people,] on any pretext. It is good that statements [condemning this phenomenon] are coming today from the Saudi mufti..."

"The fatwa by the mufti called a spade a spade. It was neither ambiguous nor confused. What is important is that it discerned one of the arteries of terrorist activity - that is, fund[raising]... especially seeing as how we are currently [in the month of Ramadan, which is] the time for giving charity, and some people are taken advantage of and [end up] giving their money to those who trade in death and destruction..."

"It is true that some of these [young people] have become enslaved by Al-Qaeda and its ideology, and are now beyond hope; however, the importance of the fatwa lies in the impact that it will have on most of the Saudi public, and in particular the fathers and mothers. Its value lies in the fact that it will wrest from the hands of the 'politicized sheikhs' the card that they have been using all this time.

"Thank you, Sheikh [Abd Al-Aziz]! This is an effective way to address [the problem of unauthorized jihad]. Other social institutions, especially the educational institutions, must [now] likewise fulfill their obligations." [4]

[1] See MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series No. 388, "Saudi Press Reactions to Involvement of Saudi Nationals in Terrorist Activity," September 12, 2007, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=saudiArabia&ID=IA38807>. It should be noted that on April 20, 2001, several months prior to the September 11 attacks, Mufti Abd Al-'Aziz bin Abdallah Aal Al-Sheikh issued a fatwa forbidding suicide attacks and airplane hijackings.

[2] The mufti's speech was published in Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), in Al-Watan (Saudi Arabia), and in Al-Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) on October 2, 2007.

[3] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), October 2, 2007.

[4] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), October 2, 2007.

<http://memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=SD173107>