





Abu Hamza Al-Masri

(1958 -)

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Mustafa Kamel, known as Abu Hamza Al-Masri [Abu Hamza the Egyptian], was born in Alexandria, Egypt. He currently resides in North London, where he heads an organization called Ansar Al-Shari'a ("Supporters of Shari'a"). Abu Hamza is also the imam of the Finsbury Park Mosque in North London. During the 1990s, Abu Hamza and his Supporters of Shari'a were considered the propagandists of the Algerian GIA (Groupe Islamic Arme) in Europe. Currently, both Yemen and Egypt are demanding his extradition.

Abu Hamza's Activities: A Partial Timeline

Late 1970s: In a rare interview in Yemen with the Al-Ayyam daily in August 1999, Abu Hamza admitted that in the late 1970s he had worked at a nightclub. "What you are talking about is the late 1970s, before I became committed to Islam... during my period of Jahilliyyah (Koranic term for the period of 'ignorance' that prevailed before the emergence of Islam)"... "You have to ask the [Muslim caliph] Omar Ibn Al-Khattab how many of his daughters he had killed (in the pre-Islamic period female infanticide was a common practice) and how much wine he had drunk and how much he had fornicated before Islam... Such questions can even be asked of Omar Ibn Al-Khattab"[1]

1980s: Abu Hamza came to London to pursue his studies and then gained employment as a civil engineer at Sandhurst. He received British citizenship after marrying a British woman, whom he later divorced.

Abu Hamza was introduced to radical Islam through the religious studies he diligently pursued following encounters with Arab Mujahideen from the battlefields of Afghanistan who had come to London for medical treatment. In an interview with the Christian Science Monitor, he spoke of the changes he experienced: "When you see how happy they are, how anxious to just have a new limb so they can run again and fight again, not thinking of retiring, their main ambition is to get killed in the cause of Allah... you see another dimension in the verses of the Koran." [2]

Early 1990s: Following his 'enlightenment,' Abu Hamza moved to Afghanistan with his family in 1990. He worked as a civil engineer and fought with the Mujahideen against the Soviet supported regime of Najibullah until he lost both hands and one eye in a landmine explosion.

During the war in Afghanistan, he met Zein Al-'Abidin "Abu Hassan" Al-Mihdar, who later established the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army. According to several reports, Abu Hamza lived as a refugee in Yemen after the war for a short period of time, but in the Al-Ayyam interview, he claimed, "I was never in Yemen." [3]

Living in London

In 1994, Abu Hamza established his organization "Supporters of Shari'a." In the Al-Ayyam interview, he explained what led him to attack the West: "I never lived off their money. I paid a lot of taxes to the infidels while I worked as an engineer. I take back from them the booty they plundered from the Muslim lands, in accordance with my needs. This is money that originally belonged to Muslims. What they invest of this money in Muslims here [in Britain] is leftovers and crumbs of bread in comparison with the meat and honey that they eat in our land."

Abu Hamza claimed that the British authorities were conspiring against him: "Many times, they tried to entrap me, and they are still trying. They bring people to testify against me, but I have nothing to hide. What I say is what I do. I am a cripple and I use their country in order to spread good, exactly like [the British authorities] use it to spread corruption." Despite the "plots" against him, Abu Hamza's activity went practically undisturbed in London. He was arrested in March 1999 for questioning, but was released on bail a few days later.

Focus on Yemen

Abu Hamza views Yemen as the best place from which to begin the world Islamic revolution. Through his friendship with Abu Hassan Al-Mihdar, Abu Hamza evidently concluded that Yemen was the most suitable Arab country for his activity. Abu Hamza placed the London mosque and community he headed at the disposal of the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army. The Yemeni authorities claimed that in September 1998, a man named Amin, who had come from Yemen, gave a talk at the mosque, and distributed recruiting leaflets for the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army. [4]

The Yemeni authorities claim that a month later, Abu Hamza was involved in an attempt to assassinate Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh. In an announcement early in 1999, the Yemeni president accused the Supporters of Shari'a organization of involvement in "planning and financing sabotage and bombings in Yemen." He specifically mentioned an incident on October 13, 1998, in which a bomb hidden under a donkey's saddle exploded, wounding a soldier and an officer who were escorting the president. The Supporters of Shari'a website boasted of the attack in November 1998, under the headline, "Yemeni Mujahideen send a donkey to kill a donkey officer." The article noted, "The [Yemeni] government claims they have caught someone in connection with the killing," adding, "We doubt very much that they caught anyone; the Mujahideen's donkey was too clever for them." [5]

The Yemeni authorities also accused Abu Hamza of involvement in the kidnapping of 16 foreign tourists, by his friend Abu Hassan Al-Mihdar and the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army on December 21, 1998. According to the Yemeni authorities, the kidnapping was connected to the arrest of five Britons and a French Algerian whom Abu Hamza had sent to train in

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Yemen. Among the arrested were Abu Hamza's son Muhammad Mustafa Kamel and his stepson Muhsin Ghali. An hour after the kidnapping, Al-Mihdar used his satellite phone to call Abu Hamza in London, telling him that he had kidnapped several "infidels." Three British citizens and one Australian citizen were killed during the operation to free the hostages. After his arrest, Al-Mihdar was executed by the Yemeni authorities.

But the death of his friend Al-Mihdar did not slow Abu Hamza down. At a London press conference in January 2000, he called for all foreign citizens to leave Yemen. He also called for the Yemeni regime to be overthrown and even signed a document on behalf of the Supporters of Shari'a, to that effect.[6] Two months later, he sent a letter to the London Arabic-language daily Al-Hayat, on behalf of Abu Muhsin, the new commander of the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army, in which he warned the American and British ambassadors to leave Yemen and said that if they stayed "the strike will be painful for the enemies of Islam." [7]

The 'Domino Effect' Will Begin in Yemen

Although it is clear that Abu Hamza is focusing on Yemen, his message is directed to all Islamic countries. Thus, for example, after the death of Jordan's King Hussein, Abu Hamza published a picture of the late king on the Supporters of Shari'a website under the heading, "Another One Bites the Dust." The king was depicted with horns on his head and surrounded by animated flames, apparently roasting in Hell.[8]

Abu Hamza was also active on behalf of Muslims in Chechnya. At a November 1999 conference to support the struggle, he incited his listeners to attack a group of Russian journalists covering the event. At the same conference, Abu Hamza expressed support for a chain of attacks in Moscow in August and September of 1999.[9]

Nevertheless, Abu Hamza sees Yemen as the cradle of the revolution, and is convinced that the "Islamic invasion" must set out from there, following the path of the Prophet Muhammad, to the entire Islamic world. Abu Hamza said, "Yemen is the [most] suitable country for training Mujahideen after Afghanistan," because the two countries are similar in nature. Yemen is the only country in the Arabian Peninsula that has not yet "surrendered" to what he terms the "United Snakes of America," but it is nevertheless on the verge of doing so. The remedy is for Muslims in Yemen to "explode in the faces of the snakes... this will hopefully trigger a domino effect in the [Arabian] peninsula." [10]

In the Al-Ayyam interview, he explains his focus on Yemen. (Editor Hisham Basharaheel promised Abu Hamza that his words would be published unedited, and was later tried by the Yemeni authorities for doing so.)

Abu Hamza denied in the interview that while appearing on Al-Jazeera television, he called upon his supporters to murder foreigners in Yemen: "The word I used was not 'foreigners.' Some of the foreigners there [in Yemen] are Muslims. I speak of infidels. Infidels are innocent according to Islamic norms [if they do one of the following]: They become Muslims, or they pay jizya [a poll tax paid by non-Muslims living under Islamic rule], or they enter into an agreement that guarantees their safety in a country that implements the Shari'a. Otherwise, their blood and wealth are not to be protected."

Abu Hamza claimed that his fatwa calling to revolution in Yemen is a "general" fatwa: "Before Yemen, I was involved in Algeria and Egypt, but I have found it difficult to promote reform from within many of these countries because they need [Islamic] invasions coming from outside once again. They do not contain the elements of reform [from within] due to their corrupt anti-Islam policies... I meant that the [invasion] should start from Yemen, and we are its servants..."

Abu Hamza explained to the interviewer that he thinks the revolution, to begin in Yemen, will be a revolution in the way of the Prophet Muhammad: "The invasion will start from Yemen and move outwards. As the Prophet [Muhammad] said: 'It comes out of Aden.' I did not say it comes out of London; I said that it comes out of Aden. If the army starts [out] from Aden, people should join wherever they can..."

Towards the end of the interview, Abu Hamza discussed the future of Yemen: "If Yemen [continues] in its secular path, it will suffer from disintegration, corrosion, destruction, and inner strife with no winner, because everyone becomes entrenched in his own opinion. However, when we restore matters to Allah's and the Prophet's hands, even if some are killed along the way, it will be regarded [just] as a mistake and it will be forgiven. And all tongues should be stilled, because when Allah and his Prophet speak all tongues should be stilled."

"We have no ambitions to govern. What use is it to the people if the president is replaced... the regime should be changed. What we want is for Yemen to become Islamic..." [11]

Involvement in Terrorist Activity

From his headquarters in London, Abu Hamza sends funds and volunteers to fundamentalist Muslim terror organizations across the world. While his sons and other supporters were under arrest in Yemen on suspicion of terror activity, Abu Hamza began a campaign to recruit and train British Muslims. According to the Christian Science Monitor, in December 1998 the Supporters of Shari'a website published an announcement for an "Islamic camp." This event, the fourth in number, was held in the mosque during December 24-26, 1998. The advertisement said that the camp would offer "military training for brothers, self-development skills, martial arts, map reading, etc." Abu Hamza said that the camp, which was attended by 30 young men, would "distract them from television and [from] the obscenity of Christmas." [12] The advertisement on the website was decorated with a picture of a hand grenade.

The Daily Telegraph reported that two young Britons who regularly attended Abu Hamza's mosque were killed by a shell in Kabul. The two had told their parents that they were going to study at a Madrasah in Pakistan. [13]

In an address to 500 supporters at the Second Conference of the Islamic Revival Movements in London in February 1999, Abu Hamza revealed a plan to blow up military and civilian aircraft, so as to challenge the "Western monopoly of the skies." Abu Hamza told the participants in the conference – which was, ironically, held in a Quakers' meeting house – about experiments with a new weapon, flying mines connected to balloons, currently being carried out in Afghanistan. "I don't know when this [invention] will get to America and Britain," he said. [14]

At least one report indicates that Abu Hamza was, at the very least, aware of plans to attack the U.S. Two days after the September 11 attacks, the Italian daily La Repubblica reported that the Italian secret service (S.I.S.D.E.) had discovered a plot to attack U.S. President George W. Bush during the G-8 summit in Genoa. The S.I.S.D.E. document speaks of a meeting at the Finsbury Park mosque on June 29, 2001, attended by Abu Hamza; a man known as Mustafa Melki, who has links to Abu Doha, a key Al-Qaida figure recently arrested in London; and a certain Omar. During the meeting, "Abu Hamza proposed an ambitious but unlikely plot which involved attacks carried out by planes," but the document dismissed

the plan as potentially 'unsuccessful' because of its complexity. The Italian document concluded: "The belief that Osama bin Laden is plotting an attack is spreading among the radical Islamic groups." [15]

On Violence to Advance Islam

Abu Hamza advocates violence aimed at toppling the "secular" regimes in Islamic countries and promoting Islam in the world. In February 1999, during a conference commemorating the 75th anniversary of the "destruction of the Ottoman Islamic Caliphate by Kemal Attaturk," Abu Hamza gave a talk to 400 supporters, and announced that "Islam needs the sword... Whoever has the sword – will have the earth." [16]

Nevertheless, Supporters of Shari'a political advisor Muhammad Youssef claimed "We do not believe in armed struggle to end man-made law. We're talking about fundraising to help fight against occupying forces in the Middle East and elsewhere." He then contradicted himself, saying that Muslims had to fight back against the West "and the battle front isn't just in the Balkans or in the Middle East... We believe in the establishment of a strong fifth column." [17]

In July 2001, Abu Hamza sought to rebut claims that he had abandoned violent means in advancing the cause. Such claims had been raised in an article in the London based Arabic daily Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper by Abd Al-Hakim Diyab, an Egyptian living in London, who called upon the Egyptian authorities "to avoid putting all London fundamentalists in one basket." Diyab presented Abu Hamza as an example of an Islamist who had relinquished violence, citing Abu Hamza's call in 1997 not to obey the fatwa issued by another London fundamentalist, the Palestinian-Jordanian Abu Qatada who had called upon Muslims to kill the wives and children of Egyptian police and army officers as part of the struggle in Arab countries.

In his rebuttal in the same paper, Abu Hamza stated that he did not recognize the term 'violence.' "The term 'violence' has become a media weapon against Islam and it now serves interested regimes against anyone who defends his faith, himself, and his honor in the face of [the attempt] to rule him by means of legislative and oppressive measures. From the Islamic and realistic point of view, this term [violence] is deceptive and incompatible with Islamic religious law in the struggle for the survival of Islam. The Mujahideen do not recognize this term in any way, because the clear goal of using [this term] is to eliminate the 'precept of doing good and the prohibition on doing evil,' at a time that the regimes have a monopoly on terrorism..."

Abu Hamza states that as a rule, Islam teaches that those with opinions different than one's own should be treated "gently and with flexibility," provided that they are willing to listen and comply, and provided that "your tolerant efforts do not lead to a blurring of rights and borders." However, Abu Hamza added that "[regarding] anyone who blocks his ears and forces perversion, heresy, abomination, and humiliation on the Muslims in their own countries by armed forces—treating him gently is a kind of idiocy and [means the] loss of rights and religious precepts ... [So] what can be said about [the Arab regimes] that have enacted abominable laws, and give license to carry them out, and use taxes to appoint military personnel to protect [the abomination] instead of [protecting] Jerusalem and its people!!... This is the mark of Cain, which is unprecedented in the history of Egypt."

Abu Hamza then replied to Diyab's claim that his position has changed, writing: "My position is clear as the sun, praised be Allah, and it has not changed and will not change... I do not recognize the term 'violence' and will not agree to abandon the

Jihad or to sign a truce with the regimes of the tyrants. As Allah said: 'Fight them so that there will be no internal strife (fitna) and so that their religion will be Allah's religion... The Muslim nation to which I belong cannot come to terms with anyone who does not come to terms with Allah and does not have mercy on or respect for the people.'"

Abu Hamza also refuted Abu Diyab's claim that he was about to complete a book in which he renounced violence: "If I have written to this end, even a single line, before the establishment of the just Islamic state ruled by Islamic religious law... they would say that I was crazy, stupid, or a traitor. God forbid, because [it would be an expression] of weakness... In addition, this would be similar to building bridges for the criminals."

At the end of his letter, Abu Hamza wishes to reiterate his denial of the claim that "it is possible to be reconciled with the Egyptian regime and with Egypt's ruler in their present form and legal status. Physical exile far from my homeland is much easier for me and for many like me than the exile of our souls, the slaughter of our faith and our values, and the amputation of our tongues as the price of returning to our homeland..." [18]

On the Causes of the War Against America

Abu Hamza, who fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets in support of the U.S., explained in an interview with the Christian Science Monitor why the U.S. had become a Jihad target: "It was when the Americans took the knife out of the Russians and stabbed it in our back... In the meantime, [the Americans] were bombarding Iraq and occupying the [Arabian] Peninsula, and then with the witch-hunt against the Mujahideen, everything cleared up: it was a full-scale war."

"The Americans wanted to fight the Russians with Muslim blood, and they could only justify that [to the Muslims] by triggering the word Jihad. Unfortunately for everyone except the Muslims, when the button of Jihad is pushed, it does not come back that easy. It keeps going on and on until the Muslim empire swallows every existing empire." [19]

Abu Hamza on the September 11 Attacks on America

In response to the attacks, Abu Hamza said: "I do not condone what happened and I won't condemn it because I don't know yet who has done it. If somebody has done this just for earthly gain and political advancement then obviously it is a cheap cause. But if it was done because people are desperate and their lives have been threatened, then that is a respectable cause... Then those people who carried out the attacks would be martyrs. Martyrdom is the highest form of Jihad. If you do things for the cause of Allah, losing your life for it is the highest form of faith. This is in the Koran. America thinks it comes first, but Muslims believe a believer comes first. When you damage a people, and they have no home and no hope, and their babies and children are killed, then they retaliate. America took decisions to give arms to certain people and take arms away from others. What happened yesterday would be self-defense."

Abu Hamza added that he had sympathy for the victims of the tragedy but also for bin Laden, who is "the victim of an American witch-hunt" but whom he believed "[not] capable of doing a thing like this. But he has probably got millions of sympathizers." [20]

*Yotam Feldner is MEMRI's Director of Media Analysis

[1] Al-Ayyam (Yemen), August 8, 1999.

[2] Christian Science Monitor, September 27, 2001.

[3] Al-Ayyam (Yemen), August 8, 1999.

[4] www.al-bab.com/yemen/hamza/hamza1.htm.

[5] Ibid. The organization’s website disappeared after the September 11 attacks on the U.S.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Online Journalism Review, November 15, 1999.

[10] www.a-bab.com/yemen/hamza/hamza1/htm.

[11] Al-Ayyam (Yemen), August 11, 1999.

[12] Christian Science Monitor, January 13, 1999.

[13] The Daily Telegraph, October 5, 2001.

[14] AFP (Agence France-Presse), February 28, 1999.

[15] <http://dsc.discovery.com/news/briefs/20010910/abroad.html>.

[16] Middle East Times, Issue 13, 1999.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Al-Quds Al-Arabi (London), July 21, 2001.

[19] Christian Science Monitor, September 27, 2001.

[20] The Radical, September 13, 2001.

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