

WORLD

Militants in Europe Openly Call For Jihad and the Rule of Islam

By PATRICK E. TYLER and DON VAN NATTA JR. APRIL 26, 2004

The call to jihad is rising in the streets of Europe, and is being answered, counterterrorism officials say.

In this former industrial town north of London, a small group of young Britons whose parents emigrated from Pakistan after World War II have turned against their families' new home. They say they would like to see Prime Minister Tony Blair dead or deposed and an Islamic flag hanging outside No. 10 Downing Street.

They swear allegiance to Osama bin Laden and his goal of toppling Western democracies to establish an Islamic superstate under Shariah law, like Afghanistan under the Taliban. They call the Sept. 11 hijackers the "Magnificent 19" and regard the Madrid train bombings as a clever way to drive a wedge into Europe.

On Thursday evening, at a tennis center community hall in Slough, west of London, their leader, Sheik Omar Bakri Mohammad, spoke of his adherence to Osama bin Laden. If Europe fails to heed Mr. bin Laden's offer of a truce -- provided that all foreign troops are withdrawn from Iraq in three months -- Muslims will no longer be restrained from attacking the Western countries that play host to them, the sheik said.

"All Muslims of the West will be obliged," he said, to "become his sword" in a new battle. Europeans take heed, he added, saying, "It is foolish to fight people who want death -- that is what they are looking for."

On working-class streets of old industrial towns like Crawley, Luton, Birmingham and Manchester, and in the Arab enclaves of Germany, France, Switzerland and other parts of Europe, intelligence officials say a fervor for militancy is intensifying and becoming more open.

In Hamburg, Dr. Mustafa Yoldas, the director of the Council of Islamic Communities, saw a correlation to the discord in Iraq. "This is a very dangerous situation at the moment," Dr. Yoldas said. "My impression is that Muslims have become more and more angry against the United States."

Hundreds of young Muslim men are answering the call of militant groups affiliated or aligned with Al Qaeda, intelligence and counterterrorism officials in the region say.

Even more worrying, said a senior counterterrorism official, is that the level of "chatter" -- communications among people suspected of terrorism and their supporters -- has markedly increased since Mr. bin Laden's warning to Europe this month. The spike in chatter has given rise to acute worries that planning for another strike in Europe is advanced.

"Iraq dramatically strengthened their recruitment efforts," one counterterrorism official said. He added that some mosques now display photos of American soldiers fighting in Iraq alongside bloody scenes of bombed out Iraqi neighborhoods. Detecting actual recruitments is almost impossible, he said, because it is typically done face to face.

And recruitment is paired with a compelling new strategy to bring the fight to Europe.

Members of Al Qaeda have "proven themselves to be extremely opportunistic, and they have decided to try to split the Western alliance," the official continued. "They are focusing their energies on attacking the big countries" -- the United States, Britain and Spain -- so as to "scare" the smaller

states.

Some Muslim recruits are going to Iraq, counterterrorism officials in Europe say, but more are remaining home, possibly joining cells that could help with terror logistics or begin operations like the one that came to notice when the British police seized 1,200 pounds of ammonium nitrate, a key bomb ingredient, in late March, and arrested nine Pakistani-Britons, five of whom have been charged with trying to build a terrorist bomb.

Stoking that anger are some of the same fiery Islamic clerics who preached violence and martyrdom before the Sept. 11 attacks.

On Friday, Abu Hamza, the cleric accused of tutoring Richard Reid before he tried to blow up a Paris-to-Miami jetliner with explosives hidden in his shoe, urged a crowd of 200 outside his former Finsbury Park mosque to embrace death and the "culture of martyrdom."

Though the British home secretary, David Blunkett, has sought to strip Abu Hamza of his British citizenship and deport him, the legal battle has dragged on for years while Abu Hamza keeps calling down the wrath of God.

Also this week, over Mr. Blunkett's vigorous objection, a 35-year-old Algerian held under emergency laws passed after Sept. 11 was released from Belmarsh Prison. The man, identified only as "G," suffered from severe mental illness, his lawyers told a special immigration appeals panel, which let him out of prison and put him under house arrest.

Mr. Blunkett insisted that that should not be the final judgment on a man already found by one court "to be a threat to life and liberty."

In an interview on the BBC over the weekend, Mr. Blunkett advocated a stronger deportation policy, initially focused on 12 foreign terror suspects held without charge since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Despite tougher antiterrorism laws, the police, prosecutors and intelligence chiefs across Europe say they are struggling to contain the openly seditious speech of Islamic extremists, some of whom, they say, have been inciting young men to suicidal violence since the 1990's.

One chapter in Sheik Omar's lectures these days is "The Psyche of Muslims for Suicide Bombing."

The authorities say that laws to protect religious expression and civil liberties have the result of limiting what they can do to stop hateful speech. In the case of foreigners, they say they are often left to seek deportation, a lengthy and uncertain process subject to legal appeals, when the suspect can keep inciting attacks.

That leaves the authorities to resort to less effective means, such as mouse-trapping Islamic radicals with immigration violations in hopes of making a deportation case stick. "In many countries, the laws are liberal and it's not easy," an official said.

At a mosque in Geneva, an imam recently exhorted his followers to "impose the will of Islam on the godless society of the West."

"It was quite virulent," said a senior official with knowledge of the sermon. "The imam was encouraging his followers to take over the godless society."

While such a sermon may be incitement, recruitment takes a more shadowy course, and is hard to detect, a senior antiterrorism official said. "Believers are appealed to in the mosques, but the real conversations take place in restaurants or cafes or private apartments," the official said.

While some clerics, like Abu Qatada -- said to be the spiritual counselor of Mohamed Atta, who led the Sept. 11 hijacking team -- remain in prison in Britain without charge, others like Sheik Omar, leader of a movement called Al Muhajiroun, carry on a robust ideological campaign.

"There is no case against me," Sheik Omar said in an interview. Referring to calls by members of Parliament that he be deported, he added, "but they are Jewish" and "they have been calling for that for years."

Among his ardent followers is Ishtiaq Alamgir, 24, who heads Al Muhajiroun in Luton and calls himself Sayful Islam, the sword of Islam. He says there are about 50 members here but exact numbers are secret.

Most days, he and a handful of his followers run a recruitment stand on Dunstable Road much to the chagrin of the Muslim elders of Luton.

Mainstream Muslims are outraged by the situation, saying the actions of a few are causing their communities to be singled out for surveillance and making the larger population distrustful of them.

Muhammad Sulaiman, a stalwart of the mainstream Central Mosque here, was penniless when he arrived from the Kashmiri frontier of Pakistan in 1956. He raised money to build the Central Mosque here and now leads a campaign to ban Al Muhajiroun radicals from the city's 10 mosques.

"This is show-off business," he says in accented English. "I don't want these kids in my mosque."

Other community leaders look to the government to do something, if only to help prevent the demonization of British Muslims, or "Islamophobia," as some here call it.

"I think these kids are being brainwashed by a few radical clerics," said Akhbar Dad Khan, another elder of the Central Mosque. He wants them prosecuted or deported. "We should be able to control this negativity," he said.

In Slough, Sheik Omar spent much of his time Thursday night regaling his young followers with the erotic delights of paradise -- sweet kisses and the pleasures of bathing with scores of women -- while he also preached the virtues of death in Islamic struggle as a ticket to paradise.

He spoke of terrorism as the new norm of cultural conflict, "the fashion of the 21st century," practiced as much by Tony Blair as by Al Qaeda.

"We may be caught up in the target as the people of Manhattan were," he told them.

And he warned Western leaders, "You may kill bin Laden, but the phenomenon, you cannot kill it -- you cannot destroy it."

"Our Muslim brothers from abroad will come one day and conquer here

and then we will live under Islam in dignity," he said.

Patrick E. Tyler reported from Luton, Slough and London and Don Van Natta Jr. from London. Souad Mekhennet contributed reporting from Germany.

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