

A Battle of Ideas: Freedom Under Fire II

As pointed out in the report on the future of terrorism by the New York City Police Department entitled: "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat" http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/files/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf, the battle we are engaged in is fundamentally one of ideas. It is imperative that we endeavor to become more familiar with this battle if we are to prevail. As the report makes clear, the radicalization process that potential jihadists undergo centers around an intense indoctrination in what is known as "jihadi-Salafi ideology". Any effort to combat the problem of homegrown terrorism and the process of radicalism should involve gaining a familiarity with this system of thought.

A good place to start with is by looking into the life and thoughts of Sayyid Qutb. Sayyid Qutb was one of the most important figures in the development of *jihadi Salafi* ideology. Despite coming from a slum area along the Nile Valley, Qutb enjoyed both a Western education and an Islamic education, a typical background for a *Salafi* intellectual. His most significant work is a piece entitled "Milestones" http://gemsofislamism.tripod.com/milestones_qutb.html. This work is the essential charter of the jihad movement -- its *Mein Kampf*. In this piece, Qutb deals with the reason for the impotence of global Islam. His conclusion is that there is no "Islamic community", in fact, there has not been one for several centuries. How can this be? Well, without the "laws of God," i.e. *Shari'ah* law, Islam does not exist, so today's Muslims, or people who call themselves Muslim, live in not in an Islamic world, but in *Jahiliyyah*, pre-Islamic ignorance.

The problem is that soon after Islam conquered the pre-Islamic Middle East, it became corrupted by non-Islamic culture or learning -- Greek, Roman, Persian, Christian or Jewish logic, art, poetry, etc., -- i.e. anything other than the Qur'an. In the 19th century Islam came into contact with the modern west and succumbed to its ideology of Democracy, individual rights and the equality of religions. These notions all were seen as contrary to the view of Islam as supreme and that all of human life, included politics should be under submission to the law of Allah, as revealed in the Koran. Qutb's solution to the problem was for Muslims to reject all foreign thinking and return to the pure teaching of early Islam as revealed in the Qur'an. At the same time, they were to engage in a two-fold jihad to spread Islam throughout the world until it became dominant. The two aspects of this jihad would be a jihad of the word, or the spreading of Islamic teaching through propaganda, and a jihad of the sword to spread Islam through violence.

Qutb is viewed by most jihadists as an Islamic Reformer who cut through all of the foreign influence that had corrupted Islam and returned to the original teaching of Mohammad. To the extent that such a view is true, and there is a strong case to be made that this is the case, understanding the modern jihadist movement involves understanding

the early teaching of Islam. While that is needed to fight the battle at hand, in itself, it is not enough.

There is another factor that is being largely ignored. Islam has been influenced by foreign thinking for centuries and traditionalist Muslims have always reacted by calling such influence corrupt and insisting on a return to the teaching of Mohammad and the Qur'an. The difference with modern jihadism is that its ideological leadership does not come from the ranks of the traditionalists, but from the western educated elite. Such members of the Islamic "intelligentsia" have embraced western thinking and influence in the past. In the early stages of the Islamic conquest of the Near East the influence came from Greek, Roman, Persian, Christian or Jewish philosophy, logic, art, poetry, etc. In the 19th Century, the western notions of individual liberty, although deemed heretical by the traditionalists, were embraced by the young western educated elites in the Muslim world. This influence resulted in an end to slavery in much of that part of the world and movement for national liberation among oppressed religious and national minorities, who once were in the majority in that part of the world. The process of influence culminated on March 3, 1924, when the first President of the Turkish Republic, Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as part of his reforms, constitutionally abolished the institution of the Caliphate (A single leader who was a political and religious leader over the whole Muslim world with the responsibility to implement Islamic law). Its powers within Turkey were transferred to the Turkish Grand National Assembly (parliament) of the newly formed Turkish Republic.

That was the high point of the influence of such western notions as individual liberty and self government in the Muslim world. Since then, such notions have been in rapid retreat among the Islamic elite. The rapid spread of "jihadi-Salafi ideology" in the Muslim world, and now even in the west, follows on the heels of the spread of Nazism, Communism and Nihilism.

In short, we are losing the battle of ideas to the jihadists because we have lost sight of the power of the ideas which gave birth to western civilization. These ideas once inspired a world wide movement to end slavery and the replacement of the rule of a single Caliphate with a Republic ruled by a parliament. Just when a near total ideological victory was in sight, the cultural elite in the west lost confidence in the principles that were once so proudly promoted. That lack of confidence in such principles gave way to contempt and finally to outright hostility.

The result of losing the war of ideas within western civilization is that young western educated Muslims become the vanguard of a movement dedicated to the destruction of western civilization. In a cultural environment that is seeped in the notion of moral relativism and sees no inherent value in its own cultural traditions, how are we to hold off an ideological assault on those values?

The report mentioned above by the New York City Police Department on homegrown terrorism mentions a phase in the radicalization process that it refers to as "Pre-Radicalization". The report claims that there are no signs which would signal that the

person in question was about to engage in a process that would end up with him becoming a jihadist. I would like to suggest that the key to the Pre-Radicalization part of the process is the ideological confusion we are experiencing as a civilization over our own value system. A regain of confidence in and a defense of, those values is another crucial factor in confronting the problem of jihadism.