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ANIMATED JIHAD Growing Sophistication of Jihadist Video

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RECENTLY an animation video detailing vivid images of the current situation of the Muslim Ummah (Community) was posted on a jihadist website. Its focus was on Muslim communities in countries undergoing conflict. The video called for jihad in order to change the fate of the Ummah. As jihadist propaganda, this short video is extremely powerful. The essence of the message is that the Ummah is being invaded and occupied by foreign infidel powers. The message is no different from those by other jihadist groups. However, the media technique is more astute.

The video begins with a scene down a narrow dark avenue, very much resembling an urban neighbourhood in the Arab heartland. The alley is tightly packed with continuous rows of doors. The landscape looks strangely like a prison with an endless corridor sandwiched between two rows of prison cells. The camera moves from house to house down the lane. Stopping to pause at a window, one sees armed foreign soldiers and tanks harming women, children and men. Quickly one realises that the doors of each house symbolise various countries in conflict. Next to each door is the name of the depicted country, spray painted in red. The video lens then moves to another door, down the same avenue, depicting another country with similar imagery. The video cites examples of Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq and Palestine in chronological order.

In the second part of the video, a voice booms: "Who is next?" This is followed by "Where are you the lions of tawheed (monotheism)...Where are you the lions of tawheed ... lands of Jihad are calling upon you...lands of jihad are calling upon you." The voice praises the Mujahideens and their sacrifices for Islam and Muslims. The video presents an admiring picture of Muslim countries as one united force. It reasons that once the enemy is one, the Mujahideens shall be one.

What is interesting is a scene of houses in darkness. Arranged in two rows, the top row has a range of buildings with churches amidst them, signifying Christianity or the Christian world. In the row below, one sees mosques, signifying Islam and Islamic cities. A probable reading of this image's latent message is that the Christians or the crusaders are dominating the world, while Islam and Muslims are oppressed, occupied and left behind. Thus, the message seems to suggest, jihad is the only legitimate solution to rescue the Ummah.

Same message, new tools

The use of the internet for jihadist propaganda is not new. There are scores of jihadist websites posting videos that contain bloody scenes of men, crying women, children and the aged suffering at the hands of a brutal enemy. Highly emotive, these videos are accompanied with verses from the Quran justifying jihad and usually end with nasyid (hymns) singing praises for the brave mujahideen fighters. This video uses a very similar narrative. Its purpose, like the others, is for recruitment, first as sympathisers to the movement and possibly later as active members.

What is new in this recently posted video is the use of animation, which rarely appears in jihadist propaganda videos. The skill required in creating this animated video is very similar to creating 3-Dimensional animation in video games. It is likely that this video was made using 3D-Max, a software programme commonly used in designing video games. However, unlike video games, this animation is not interactive and serves only to communicate a message. The use of sophisticated technology reflects that the designer of this video was highly trained in the use of multimedia software programmes. It is probable that the designer himself may not have been to the conflict zones, but has ardent admiration for jihad and possibly dreaming of participating in one. Could it be that he considers his involvement itself as heroic as participating in an armed jihad?

The involvement of media-savvy youth in violent extremist groups is increasing. It is a myth that violent Islamic movements are against modernity and modern technology. The websites propagating violent jihad are often colourful, snazzy and full of downloadable multimedia video, audio and colourful pictures. Their media campaign is a very active one. The Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), an Islamist organisation that is active in promoting jihad online, recently issued a statement calling all young Muslims, particularly those trained in information technology, to come forward to play a role against the Islamophobic media campaign led by Zionists and Crusaders. The leader of the front promised that each would be assigned a task that will match his interest and capability. In October, the same group made a similar call to recruit reporters to join their campaign and to put their journalistic skills to good use.

Conclusion

Al Qaeda have always appreciated the role of the media in spreading their message while reaching their audience of Muslims and non-Muslims. Hence, this video is reflective of a well-organised and directed process. It shows some success. Al Qaeda and other like-minded movements are disgruntled with the Western media for two reasons, firstly for hiding the truth about the developments of the war in Iraq and secondly, for conjuring negative imagery of the Mujahideen.

A month ago, the Voice of Khalifate broadcast a video interview of Sayf Eddine El Kenani, head of public relations in the GIMF. He pointed out: "It is time that the jihadist forums become a fire front for continued work. There will be no place here for fear in combating the media crusader media machinery."

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