

## ***Fatawa on Palestine***

by Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Al-Falah Foundation, 2007, 92 pp.

### **Mark Gardner and Dave Rich**

The arguments over Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi are well-trodden ground. Since his visit to London in 2004, his views on suicide bombing, women and gays – in soundbite form at least – have been committed to memory by those who oppose the alliance between parts of the left and radical Islamism. Ken Livingstone’s physical and political embrace of Qaradawi, and his wider strategy of courting Islamist groups from amongst London’s Muslim population, did him much damage in the eyes of many Londoners, particularly on the political left, and may well have played a role in his removal as London’s mayor. Despite the fact that Qaradawi is currently excluded from entering the United Kingdom, he still has the potential to influence attitudes via his writings, his website and other media. If only for this reason, it is important to fully understand the broader vision behind Qaradawi’s views.

A new book, published for the first time in English and distributed in Britain for British Muslim readers, allows us to do just this with Qaradawi’s views on Israel, Palestine, Jews and Zionism. It is a book that promises a battle ‘between the collective body of Muslims and the collective body of Jews i.e. all Muslims and all Jews’ (p. 77), which will hasten the end of days for mankind. This is no political analysis of the Israel/Palestine conflict, or even a faith-based lament for the Palestinian people; it is a passionate apocalyptic vision of division, war and final triumph. Originally published in Arabic as *Fatawa Min Ajl Falastin* (Wahba Library, Cairo 2003 [1]), and now translated into English, it is a compilation of fourteen rulings by Qaradawi on various aspects of the conflict, including ‘Peace with Israel,’ ‘The Legitimacy of Martyrdom Operations in Occupied Palestine,’ ‘Ruling on Accepting Compensation for the Land of Palestine,’ *Hadith*: “The Judgment Day Will Not Occur Unless You Fight Jews” and ‘Discussing the Verses on Banu Israel and Their Mischief.’ Some of the rulings are answers by Qaradawi to members of the public who have asked for his opinion on a particular question. Al-Falah Foundation has published many books by leading figures in the Muslim Brotherhood and this is intended to be a faithful and sympathetic translation. In the preface, the General Director of Al-Falah, Sheikh Muhammad ‘Abdu, summarises the central message of the book:

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In this book, the eminent contemporary scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi gives clear answers to the reasons and removes the ambiguities to whoever seeks the truth and justice concerning the Palestinian issue. These answers acquaint Muslims with the dimensions of the issue with the Zionists who usurped this pearl of ours. The battle between them and us is not a battle of borders but a battle of existence. It is the battle that will end and the Muslims that will be victorious. This victory will raise the Adhan [call to prayer] on the voiceless minaret and will return monotheism to the voiceless pulpit. (p. V)

Qaradawi makes it clear at the beginning of the book that Israel should be removed entirely from what he sees as Muslim land. He discusses his hypothetical reaction to any future peace accord that would leave Israel in control of its pre-1967 territory in the opening chapter:

[T]he so-called peace accords involved recognizing the Jews' right to the usurped lands which means that Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, al-Ladd, Ramallah, Beir Sheba and even Jerusalem will be considered as Israeli lands. Such cities that have been part of the Muslim world for more than thirteen hundred years will become part of the Zionist Jewish state. Hence, we will never be able to claim them back and, after being taken by force, such places will be legitimately given to the enemy.

Bearing this in mind, we can realize that what happened was not a peace accord being signed; rather, it is an utter recognition of Israel having rights and sovereignty in our Arab Muslim lands. Therefore, we sign a witnessed agreement to lose such lands forever. (pp. 3-4)

Nor, significantly, does Qaradawi feel that the Palestinians have the authority to make such a peace agreement with Israel:

I have always stressed that Palestine is a Muslim land belonging to all generations of the Muslim nation. Therefore, if any of these generations fail to defend and protect this land, it is for the following generations to stand up for this task. If Palestinians neglect their duty of defending this land, the whole Muslim nation is required to take this responsibility and defend the land either by force or word. (p. 5)

Hamas, as the Palestinian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, has for many years

looked to Qaradawi as a religious authority and relied upon his rulings. The idea that any peace deal made by the Palestinian leadership with Israel should be treated as null and void by successive generations of Palestinians, appears to be echoed in the refusal of the current Hamas government to recognise past agreements made with Israel by its predecessors. There are common principles and ideological positions that run through the policies of Hamas, the writings of Qaradawi and the wider vision of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Qaradawi underlines the need for Muslims all over the world to involve themselves in the Israel/Palestine conflict when he goes on to discuss the question of Jerusalem:

The Palestinians do not have the competence to decide on the fate of Jerusalem without resorting to the Muslims all over the world. This, consequently, makes it obligatory upon every Muslim wherever he is to defend Jerusalem, and al-Aqsa Mosque. This is an obligation upon all Muslims to participate in defending Jerusalem with their souls, money, and all that they possess, otherwise a punishment from Allah shall descend on the whole nation ... (p. 24)

Qaradawi compares this call for action with what he sees as the collective Jewish participation in the oppression of the Palestinians:

The conquerors [of Palestine] are those with the greatest enmity toward the believers, and they are supported by the strongest state on earth – the USA, and by the world Jewish community. (p. 38)

If every Jew in the world thinks himself a soldier, and supports Israel as much as he can, surely every Muslim should be a soldier using his very soul and wealth to liberate al-Aqsa. The least the Muslim can do is to boycott the enemies' goods. (p. 42)

The negative impact that overseas conflicts can have on community cohesion in Britain has been well documented. Sharp rises in physical, verbal and written antisemitic attacks on British Jews were reported during, for example, the war in Lebanon in 2006; after the assassination of Sheikh Yassin of Hamas in March 2004; in the run up to the war in Iraq in March 2003; and after the outbreak of the Second Intifada in October 2000. This dynamic has a damaging impact on the lives of ordinary British Jews and is something that any moderate religious leader ought to

deplorable. Yet Qaradawi's message, that ordinary Jews and Muslims all over the world are participants in the conflict, can only encourage suspicion and hostility between communities. This seems deliberate: Qaradawi warns that Muslims should not be friends with 'Jews, in general, and Israelis, in particular' (p. 51), because of the ongoing conflict in Israel/Palestine, and recognises that friendly relations would diminish the appetite for fighting:

Receiving enemies in our own countries and visiting them in the occupied lands would remove such a psychological barrier that keeps us away from them, and would bridge the gap that keeps the desire for *Jihad* against them kindled in the hearts of the *Ummah*. (p. 47)

Qaradawi's classification of 'every Jew in the world' (p. 42) as an enemy may refer to contemporary events for its justification, but it has a deep theological purpose. A chapter of the book is devoted to a discussion of the *hadith* [a record of a saying or deed of Muhammad] that reads:

"The last day will not come unless you fight Jews. A Jew will hide himself behind stones and trees and stones and trees will say, "O servant of Allah – or O Muslim – there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him."

This *hadith* is used by many radical Islamist groups to incite conflict between Muslims and Jews. It is quoted in article seven of the Hamas Covenant and its use in the literature of Hizb ut-Tahrir was one of the reasons why that organisation was banned by the National Union of Students. Qaradawi refers to the *hadith* as 'one of the miracles of our Prophet' (p. 76) and then goes on to describe how this battle between Muslims and Jews is one of the preconditions that needs to be fulfilled before the Day of Judgement can come. He carefully explains, though, that the current fighting between Israel and the Palestinians is a start, but is not sufficient to fulfil the requirements of the *hadith*:

[W]e believe that the battle between us and the Jews is coming ... Such a battle is not driven by nationalistic causes or patriotic belonging; it is rather driven by religious incentives. This battle is not going to happen between Arabs and Zionists, or between Jews and Palestinians, or between Jews or anybody else. It is between Muslims and Jews as is clearly stated in the *hadith*. This battle will occur between the collective body of Muslims and the collective body of Jews i.e. all Muslims and all Jews. (p. 77)

However, although Jews '[take] power from the teachings of the Torah and the rulings of the Talmud' (p. 77), Qaradawi bemoans Muslims for having 'kept Islam outside the battlefield.' (p. 78) The victory promised in the *hadith* cannot come about, he explains, until Muslims truly dispense with 'their own desires and inclinations' (p. 78) and instead fight 'under the banner of Islam' (p. 78).

This apocalyptic prophecy is the context for Qaradawi's fervour for *jihad* against Israel, his unshakeable belief in victory and his calls for all Muslims to join the effort. This is far from a local conflict over land, or even a religious struggle between Muslims and Jews; it is a messianic precursor that will foreshadow ultimate triumph on earth. Indeed, Qaradawi sees signs that victory is on its way:

The questioner might have thought that gaining victory over the Jews will be delayed till before the Day of Judgement, but there is no clear evidence to say this. We hope – Insha' Allah – that it shall happen soon. In fact, the introduction of such a victory has occurred and been embodied in the Islamic movement and the revolution of mosques against the oppressor and the occupier. It has also arisen in the activities of those children who carry stones in their hands to defend their lands, in the calls that are spreading everywhere telling Muslims that they have to return to Islam and apply it in every aspect of life. All this brings us nearer to victory and surely victory is near. (p. 79)

Other Islamists share Qaradawi's messianic interpretation of current events. The Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPACUK) advertised a recent meeting in Manchester with the call:

If the leadership is entrusted to those unfit for it, expect the Hour. By Allah the signs of the end of times are all around us, a hundred million Zionists desire with all their hearts to plunge this world into the final battle, and all around the Muslims are betrayed and bewitched. Muslim Leaders in the Mosque concern themselves with the minor points of *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence] while all around the Ummah cries in pain and *fitna* [division] and those with hatred in their hearts plan and plot. [2]

Qaradawi personifies the combination of theological anti-Judaism, modern European anti-Semitism and conflict-driven Judeophobia that make up

contemporary Islamist attitudes to Jews. Thus Jews are ‘devourers of Riba (usury) and ill-gotten money ... [T]he true examples of miserliness and stinginess’ (p. 53); ‘They have killed Prophet Zakariyya and Prophet Yahya and wove conspiracies against Jesus Christ’ (p. 81). Israel is ‘dreaming of a state that extends from the River Nile to the Euphrates and from the Cedar trees (i.e. southern Lebanon) to the Palm trees (i.e. the Arabian Peninsula).’ (p. 51). As for Israelis themselves:

Mixing with those people (i.e. Israelis) without placing any conditions or bonds has a lot of hazards and dangers since it threatens Arab and Muslim societies and spreads vice and moral corruption and deviation amongst Muslims. Such people have been weaned on vice and perversion and so many diseases including AIDS have become widespread amongst them. They plan for achieving such a goal of exporting these ailments to the Muslim society while Muslims are totally unaware. Therefore, blocking the door leading to such temptation is considered a religious obligation and necessity. (p. 47)

Israelis, Zionists and Jews are conflated and the terms freely mixed throughout the book. One chapter answers the question, ‘Is it permissible to buy items from Israeli sources, even though this money may be used to help the Jewish “war machine”?’ Qaradawi replies by ruling that ‘Every Muslim that buys “Israeli” or American goods, when there is an alternative from other countries is committing a prohibited act’ (p. 40), but then later writes that ‘[T]he consumer buying Jewish or American goods is committing a major sin’ (p. 43).

*Fatawa on Palestine* includes Qaradawi’s standard line on Palestinian suicide bombing, which is now well known. Suicide bombings are, in Qaradawi’s words, ‘[O]ne of the greatest types of *Jihad* ... valid heroic martyrdom operations and very different from suicide.’ (p. 6) The suicide bomber ‘[H]as sold his soul to Allah and placed his heart on gaining martyrdom and purchasing Paradise.’ (p. 7) Women suicide bombers ‘[A]re doing a remarkable deed that is blessed by Almighty Allah and considered an act of *Jihad* for the sake of Allah.’ (p. 21) Qaradawi condemned the suicide bombings in London on 7/7, but it does not appear that this was based on a principled objection to the methods or goals of the global *jihadi* movement. Qaradawi was one of the first and most consistent supporters of Hamas suicide bombings, when most other high-profile Sunni clerics refused to give the practice their consent. This alone should give pause for thought to those people who cite his condemnation of 9/11 and 7/7 as evidence of his moderation. His promotion of the theology and culture of martyrdom and his eschatological yearnings can only

feed the ideology of global *jihad*. Condemnation of suicide bombings that target civilians should not be contingent on who the victims and perpetrators are, nor on whether the terrorism takes place in one country or another. Qaradawi's way around this is to redefine what a civilian is, by claiming that Israeli society 'is a military society in its totality.' (p. 7) This is not an argument that should be given any serious consideration, and serves only to dehumanise his enemy.

The chapter on compensating Palestinian refugees hints at a supremacism that goes beyond his attitude to Jews. In a ruling that discusses all Muslim land, not just Palestinian, and addresses Muslims as individuals, rather than just Muslim countries or collective bodies, Qaradawi writes:

[A] Muslim may sell land that is owned by him to whom he wants at the price that he wants, if he is selling it to a citizen like himself. He may also concede it for a material or moral return, or for no return by granting it or giving it as charity or something of the sort, if he is conceding it to a citizen like himself. For in this case, while the land would be changing hands, it would remain generally within the circle of public property of the Ummah of Islam, i.e. within the house of Islam, and the deed to it would not be shifting to another nation and out of the house of Islam.

As to selling the land or conceding it for any compensation, however high it might be, to another nation, be it represented by a state or the nationals of that state, it would be wrong. The Muslim in this case would be giving the one compensating him the right to move the deed of the Muslim land to another nation. Such an action would be particularly wrong when the nation in question is the enemy...

The sin is compounded if it is committed in a collective way, for it would be like a people selling their homeland in auction, and homelands are not for sale, even if the price is all the gold on earth.

The situation is even more serious when the homeland in question is the land of sanctums and the place where the Messages were sent down to the Prophets, the land that Allah has blessed for mankind. (pp. 28-9)

As this ruling suggests, Qaradawi's attitudes towards all other faith groups are dependent on how their beliefs and their behaviour sit within his own theological

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interpretations. Part of Qaradawi's political strategy is to build his influence within European Muslim communities by developing a religious framework to guide the lives of Muslim minorities in the West. His visit to London in 2004 was to hold a meeting of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, of which he is President. His focus on Europe is one reason why, in 2004, he turned down the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood when it was offered to him. It is possible to understand why some in the West see him as a potential ally against extremism. He supports democratic elections, for instance, and advises western banks on Islamic finance. This reflects the Muslim Brotherhood's historic openness to Western ideas and Qaradawi's personal pragmatism. On too many issues, though, his views appear inimical to modern European values. Those who are trying to build alliances against violent extremism need to choose their partners carefully, and in an informed way. British and European society should be inclusive, cohesive and diverse; it has no place for the conflict, bigotry and division of *Fatawa on Palestine*.

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### References

Community Security Trust, Antisemitic Incidents Reports 2006 & 2007.

### Notes

[1] Approximate year of publication.

[2] <http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/4588/>, viewed on 2/5/08