

Adurchein,

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullah. I wound up writing a 32 page response to your letters and using every clock page of paper I had (thus the recycled paper I'm using for this). However, I'm writing a different letter to you because the first one is too bogged down in details, misses points I wanted to make, and is too contentious, which is something very difficult to avoid - namely, expressing the truth while trying to take care of the reader's feelings, because not doing so is an obstacle to arriving at the truth, while too much caution likewise is an obstacle to the truth. So this letter I hope will be much shorter because I wanted to write in terms of general principles rather than particulars, as much as possible.

While not wanting to offend you, because I have great respect for you, let me get straight to the point, and that is that the subject we are talking about is an extremist ideology that is heavily influenced by - in many ways, is a product of - modernity, ~~being~~ that is, it is a symptom of the thing it claims to be a cure for; and likewise it exhibits characteristics of the khawarij, which is not to say it is itself a khawarij sect, but that it falls into some of that sect's patterns and habits. Of course it is true that the various groups representing different strains of this ideology differ in certain ways, some emphasizing different aspects of this ideology, some being more or less extreme, some disagreeing

(2)

with these tactics or those; these are not essential differences. The common or essential characteristics I perceive ~~are~~ include (1) the belief that they are the most righteous (or only righteous) group in the ummah, and that the rest have nearly fallen into apostasy, ~~are~~ or are at risk of that (and this is the extreme view of the common-sense truth concerning the illness affecting the ummah - extremism. In general is not the invention of completely baseless beliefs but taking things with a base in reality to extremes); (2) flowing from this, is the tendency to be quick to declare Muslims as apostates ~~or~~ or munafiqeen; (3) also related, the tendency to withdraw from the ordinary people and society (which again has a basis in Islam - and all religion - but is taken to an extreme in its view of its superiority and level of contempt and hostility); (4) its tendency to seize upon certain bits of textual evidence from revelation & the Sunnah (or statements of past scholars) with specific application and context, and building from this an entire methodology, which affects ~~their~~ their tactics and beliefs and fight, and further causes imbalance in their affair, and likewise doing so with Fatwas of contemporary scholars, leading them to the incorrect perception that the resulting methodology is somehow in conformity with Ahlul-Sunnah, - and, moreover, misapplying such bits and pieces of evidence in extremely questionable ways; ~~conducting~~ (5) conducting all of the above in the relative

(2)

absence of guidance and support from qualified ulama or endorsement from them, but rather in the face of condemnation from them, which they explain by saying these are apostate or munafiq or at least insincere or corrupt ulama; and rather they rely on either (a.) what was mentioned before, namely, scattered fatawa they believe support certain of their beliefs or practices, and mistakenly extrapolate from this an endorsement of their entire methodology and project, or (b.) ~~people~~ individuals who may have some credentials but most of whom have not reached (and many have not even approached) the level that would allow them to make ijtihaad or give fatawa, and examples of such people are numerous; (c.) the habit of leaders and spokespersons dressing in the clothes of the ulama and speaking in their manner, which leads common people to think these are scholars; and (d.) it being acknowledged by this writer that there may very well be some actual qualified 'alin or two or three that has whole-heartedly endorsed this ideology and its project and helps guide it, although it is unknown to this writer who he or they are, given his limited circumstances, although if they exist their opinion is nearly unanimously regarded as error by the majority, with the possible exception of isolated opinions on specific issues, as noted; (e.) related to or flowing from all of the above, a tendency to engage in the murder of Muslims, justifying this by declaring them apostates or munafiqeen or deserving of this because they work for or support apostates and munafiqeen - even though it is admitted

(4)

that some Factions might support or engage in this to lesser degrees than others - and it is also acknowledged that there are circumstances where fighting Muslims is allowed, but misapplying this and generalizing it and overindulging in it is a mark of this ideology and part of its extremism.

Those are some characteristics which this ideology arguably shares with the Khawarij, and, as noted, it is likewise a symptom of the Muslims' encounter with Modernity, a condition that arose in the West and entered the Ummah principally through Egypt and North Africa. And such characteristics of modernity marking this ideology are (1) its emphasis on politics as the "solution" to the Muslims' condition, nearly to the exclusion of everything else; (2) its methodology of grass-roots activism and mobilization of the common people (and this is reflected in that, nearly through and through, its ranks are common people; and also by its structure of cells and underground networks, which is originally Masonic and was adopted by European revolutionaries and then in the Muslim world), and this is not merely a "tactic" but ideological, in that it reflects modernity's "Flattening" of society and equalization; and this involves the grave error of confusion as to what one's proper place in society is and what one should be concerning oneself with, in violation of the nature Allah created us with - see, eg., Zuhri 32, and many similar texts, and the hadith concerning the Rawaybi'ah; (3) related to this, its ideology of revolution by the people, with itself as the

(5)

Vanguard (or "jabha") which is a Leninist concept, by way of Arab communists; and this is distinguished from the traditional means by which power changed hands, i.e. the natural decay of the dynasty and its descent into decadence and weakness, and then seizure of power by some other branch of the dynasty, or by some tribe or invading army, or by noblemen or other prominent and capable and qualified people of status, which does not involve the upheaval and chaos and involvement by people confused about their capabilities and position that the sort of grassroots revolution advocated by the modern extremists does; (4) the emphasis on chaos and disorder as a tactic of this revolution (and, by extension, in its fight against non-Muslims), like randomly setting off bombs with the purpose of destabilizing society and creating a general feeling of fear and insecurity, which reflects the ideological aspect of seeking to crumble society to its foundations with the hope that something better will arise - even if half of the population needs to be slaughtered; (5) Many other aspects both general and specific (like the use of charters and constitutions, the veneration of technology & science, the obsession with news media, the use of mass propaganda). And of course not all of the foregoing is equally emphasized or applies to all factions, but it is relevant to the extent that these factions comprise a single phenomenon.

6

Aside from all of the above, I might also add the characteristic of absolute viciousness by this ideology's adherents in debates towards Muslims who disagree with them, and this usually involves insinuating that they are disbelievers, or Munafiqeen, or traitors, or corrupt, and so on, and of course this is a manifestation of the same tendency that allows the more unhinged to kill those who disagree with this ideology.

Now to some specific points raised in your letters. You argued that the excerpt I quoted from Ibn Khaldun doesn't apply today, namely, his criticism of reformers or revolutionaries who attempted to rebel without the means of doing so, namely, the backing of tribes or families ~~and so on~~ and so on, bringing destruction on themselves and their followers. Your main objection to this - and it's also your objection to my point above concerning this ideology's concept of grassroots revolution - is that when those who have the means of removing the apostate (or extremely sinning) ruler ~~don't~~ - like men of status and the Ulama - don't do so, the obligation falls onto the common people, and you quote a few lines from some prominent scholars to that effect. Let's set aside the question of to what extent these quotations actually apply to and support what ~~this~~ this ideology promotes - and even whether, if they do apply to it, such quotes are the final and definitive proof.

⑦

But this position of yours reflects one of the most serious and consequential errors of this ideology. The fact is that one is not obligated to act if one does not have the means of doing so, and this is a principle of our religion established by innumerable proofs. If you are paralyzed from the waist down you are excused from dragging yourself into a blazing house to save a child, even if the fire department neglects to come.

Moreover, as ibn Taymiyya pointed out, the one who commands the right and forbids the evil, when undertaking the commanded act would lead to a net increase in evil, is in reality commanding evil and forbidding right. So if some people agitate for revolution without the means of carrying it out (and I don't mention here the other errors I mentioned concerning this ideology's concept of revolution) ~~and~~ and this leads only to more oppression ~~and~~ from the rulers and chaos, then not only were you not obligated to attempt this, you were obligated not to attempt this, and this is probably one reason ibn Khaldoun referred to such people as perishing as sinners.

These same two concepts also apply to this extremist ideology's disastrous and — please forgive me — wildly foolish attacks on the United States. The idea seems to have been to try to lure the U.S. into invading the Muslim lands

⑧

and then bombing it down until it completely disintegrated, which would then solve the Muslim world's problems. There are many errors in this judgment. First, if they realized they didn't have the ability but thought they had the obligation anyway, that is the error I ~~the~~ referred to from your letter. Second, if they thought they had the ability, this was an error in correctly assessing their ability. Third, even if (big if) ~~the~~ the U.S. incurs significant damage in the final analysis, if they thought the net benefit would outweigh the damage to the Muslims, they were in serious error (two continuing invasions, the Taliban's loss of power, secularists installed in two countries — though it is arguably "better" secularists in Iraq, i.e., less bad — thousands of Muslims killed, if not millions, & the same for the homeless and refugees and orphans, and so on). Fourth, their idea that the U.S. is the source of all the Muslims' problems reveals a serious lack of insight into the Muslims' problems, which pre-date America's existence, and certainly its emergence as a real political or military power; and this also reflects that the actual benefit to be weighed in the scale versus harm to the Muslims is negligible, because it is hard to understand how this ideology's adherents believe the state of the Muslims will be more than marginally improved, if at all, without the existence of America. And of course, that's completely irrelevant to the fact that the Muslims do have legitimate grievances with America's foreign policy, but in typical fashion, these extremists have wildly exaggerated the significance of these in relation to the deeply-rooted malaise the Ummah is suffering from — which distracts from the ability to diagnose it, much less treat it. Indeed, for all of the resources I

9

describe in the preceding pages, this extremist ideology is much more properly seen as a manifestation and symptom of the Ummah's illness rather than its cure. It is, in fact, an obstacle, if only because it repels and disgusts the ordinary people as to religion and confuses them as to its noble and balanced and healthful nature; it distracts from attention to the real problems due to its disproportionate emphasis on political and violent action (I don't say military, because I reserve that for what is actually military); it further contributes to the hold modernity has on the Muslim world through emphasis on a methodology involving confusion of the people as to what they should actually concern and apply themselves to in their individual lives, and further takes us from a natural hierarchical social order, and moreover (unmentioned above) emphasizes activist ~~and~~ political organizations over traditional tribal structure and aristocracy; and it has caused untold disruption by instigating invasion and occupation, beyond what previously existed, by foreign powers, and increased oppression by domestic governments, resulting in death, destruction, and imprisonment.

I will just tie up a few loose ends concerning some thought-provoking points you made in your letter. As to individuals and groups working with certain governments, first, as you anticipated. I might say, it is far from clear to me that, for example, the governments of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are apostate, and your comparison of Pakistan with Egypt's ~~particular~~ is not valid, because whatever might be said of its secular civil government, the military wields a certain amount of influence (though not absolute) and acts in a sort of parallel fashion. I don't want to get

(10)

bagged down in details, for one thing because there are recent developments I have no first-hand information about. I agree the action in Mumbai, apparently by LET, was disgusting and shameful — not for the reason you do, because it was apparently intended to distract the people from fighting the Pakistani government in the tribal areas, because I think distracting them from doing so, in principle, is a good thing. Rather, it was shameful because it was in imitation of the people I discuss herein, and I've read statements, fatwas, etc. from Ahlul Hadith Ulama condemning such travesties, and even wrote such a statement at their direction ~~when~~ when I was (long ago) helping them. So they appear to have ~~also~~ abandoned this or violated their own beliefs and this is a very sad development. Anyway, whether a government is Muslim or non-Muslim or "apostate," I wonder whether cooperating in whatever good that it does is really the major sin you seem to believe it is, — and that does not imply that such governments do no wrong — and a point should be considered in light of the inability to change such governments.

Finally, I do indeed believe that brothers who get involved in such extremist revolutionary activity should in some situations and some circumstances be restrained or imprisoned — not as punishment, but to keep them from harming themselves and others, until they repent and change their views and intentions, and this is good for them and their families and everyone in their society. I don't believe in turning people over, no matter how far out they are, to those governments who will torture them or imprison them as punishment so I think if their brothers become aware of

(11)

them in such lands they should, to the extent that they are able, restrain them themselves, but should in any event do whatever they can to prevent them from their intended actions, like the Prophet (SWS) said concerning the people in the bottom of the boat poking holes in it because they want a drink of water, and the people on the top with sense, needing to stop them.

I want to make the final point that, even if the extremists were able to prevail, and even if they could do so without ~~causing~~ all the harm they've already brought, I think having such people in positions of authority would be a disaster, ~~because~~ because they have an inherent lack of insight into the Ummah's ailments, and a demonstrated lack of insight into the realities of the world we live in and corresponding lack of good judgement concerning the actions they've taken; ~~both~~ ^{and} also because their religious views are outside the mainstream of the Ahl-Sunnah, so these are, in my view, the wrong people to be entrusted with the Muslims' affairs.

Anyway, I hope I haven't angered you, and Allah is the source of all success and guidance. Peace & blessings be on our Prophet Muhammad.

Wassalaam
Ismail

P.S. Obviously much of what I've written needs to be seen in light of Islamic knowledge I don't have, so I ask Allah's forgiveness for any errors.