

# The Islamic States of America?

by Daniel Pipes

The hardest thing for Westerners to understand is not that a war with militant Islam is underway but the nature of the enemy's ultimate goal. That goal is to apply the Islamic law (the Shari'a) globally. In U.S. terms, it intends to replace the Constitution with the Qur'an.

This aspiration is so remote and far-fetched to many non-Muslims, it elicits more guffaws than apprehension. Of course, that used to be the same reaction in Europe, and now it's become widely accepted that, in Bernard Lewis' words, "Europe will be Islamic by the end of the century."

Because of the American skepticism about Islamist goals, I postponed publishing an article on this subject until immediately after 9/11, when I expected receptivity to the subject would be greater (it was published in November 2001 as "The Danger Within: Militant Islam in America"). I argued there that the Muslim population in this country is not like any other group, for it includes within it a substantial body of people – many times more numerous than the agents of

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Osama bin Ladin – who share with the suicide hijackers a hatred of the United States and the desire, ultimately, to transform it into a nation living under the strictures of militant Islam.

The receptivity indeed was greater, but still the idea of an Islamist takeover remains unrecognized in establishment circles – the U.S. government, the old media, the universities, the mainline churches.

Therefore, reading "A rare look at secretive Brotherhood in America," in the *Chicago Tribune* on September 19 [2004] startled me. It's a long analysis that draws on an exclusive interview with Ahmed Elkadi, the Muslim Brotherhood leader in the United States during 1984-94, plus other interviews and documentation. In it, the authors (Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah, Sam Roe, and Laurie Cohen) warily but emphatically acknowledge the Islamists' goal of turning the U.S. into an Islamic state.

Over the last 40 years, small groups of devout Muslim men have gathered in homes in U.S. cities to pray, memorize the Koran, and discuss events of the day. But they also addressed their ultimate goal, one so controversial that it is a key reason they have operated in secrecy: to create Muslim states overseas and, they hope, someday in America as well.

Brotherhood members emphasize that they follow the laws of the nations in which they operate. They stress that they do not believe in overthrowing the U.S. government, but rather that they want as many people as possible to convert to Islam so that one day – perhaps generations from now – a majority of Americans will support a society governed by Islamic law.

This Brotherhood approach is in keeping with my observation that the greater Islamist threat to the West is not violence – flattening buildings, bombing railroad stations and nightclubs, seizing theaters and schools – but the peaceful, legal growth of power through education, the law, the media, and the political system.

The *Tribune* article explains how, when recruiting new members, the organization does not reveal its identity but invites candidates to small prayer meetings where the prayer leaders focus on the primary goal of the Brotherhood, namely "setting up the rule of God upon the earth" (i.e., achieving Islamic hegemony). Elkadi describes the organization's strategic, long-term approach: "First you change the person, then the family, then the community, then the nation."

His wife Iman is no less explicit; all who are associated with the Brotherhood, she says, have the same goal, which is "to educate

everyone about Islam and to follow the teachings of Islam with the hope of establishing an Islamic state.”

In addition to Elkadi, the article features information from Mustafa Saied (about whose Muslim Brotherhood experiences the *Wall Street Journal* devoted a feature story in December 2003, without mentioning the organization’s Islamist goals). Saied, the *Tribune* informs us, says he found out that the U.S. Brotherhood had a plan for achieving Islamic rule in America: It would convert Americans to Islam and elect like-minded Muslims to political office. “They’re very smart. Everyone else is gullible,” Saied says. “If the Brotherhood puts up somebody for an election, Muslims would vote for him not knowing he was with the Brotherhood.”

Citing documents and interviews, the *Tribune* team notes that the secretive Brotherhood, in an effort to acquire more influence, went above ground in Illinois in 1993, incorporating itself as the Muslim American Society. The MAS, headquartered in Alexandria, Va. and claiming 53 chapters across the U.S., engages in a number of activities. These include summer camps, a large annual conference, websites, and the Islamic American University, a mainly correspondence school in suburban Detroit that trains teachers and imams.

Of course, the MAS denies any intent to take over the country. One

of its top officials, Shaker Elsayed, insists that MAS does not believe in creating an Islamic state in America but supports the establishment of Islamic governments in Muslim lands. The group’s goal in the United States, he says, “is to serve and develop the Muslim community and help Muslims to be the best citizens they can be of this country.” That includes preserving the Muslim identity, particularly among youths.

Notwithstanding this denial, the *Tribune* finds MAS goals to be clear enough:

Part of the Chicago chapter’s website is devoted to teens. It includes reading materials that say Muslims have a duty to help form Islamic governments worldwide and should be prepared to take up arms to do so. One passage states that “until the nations of the world have functionally Islamic governments, every individual who is careless or lazy in working for Islam is sinful.” Another one says that Western secularism and materialism are evil and that Muslims should “pursue this evil force to its own lands” and “invade its Western heartland.”

In suburban Rosemont, Ill., several thousand people attended MAS’ annual conference in 2002 at the village’s convention center. One speaker said, “We may all feel emotionally attached to the goal of an Islamic state” in America, but it would have to wait because of the modest Muslim population. “We mustn’t cross hurdles we can’t jump yet.”

These revelations are particularly striking, coming as they do just days after a *Washington Post* article titled “In Search Of Friends Among The Foes,” which reports how some U.S. diplomats and intelligence officials believe the Muslim Brotherhood’s influence “offers an opportunity for political engagement that could help isolate violent jihadists.” Graham Fuller is quoted as saying that “It is the preeminent movement in the Muslim world. It’s something we can work with.” Demonizing the Brotherhood, he warns, “would be foolhardy in the extreme.” Other analysts, such as Reuel Gerech, Edward Djerejian, and Leslie Campbell, are quoted as being in agreement with this outlook.

But it is a deeply wrong and dangerous approach. Even if the Muslim Brotherhood is not specifically associated with violence in the United States (as it has been in other countries, including Egypt and Syria), it is deeply hostile to the United States and must be treated as one vital component of the enemy’s assault force. •

[September 26, 2004 update: In a verbose and technical response to the Chicago Tribune article cited above, Esam Omeish, president of the Muslim American Society, acknowledges that MAS has been influenced by the “moderate school of thought prevalent in the Muslim Brotherhood” and makes no effort to refute the article’s premise that MAS has in mind “the goal of an Islamic state.” How odd.]