

Bidding violence farewell

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Jihad leader Sayed Emam's revised ideology throws down the gauntlet to Al-Qaeda, offering an alternative jurisprudence to that justifying violence, writes [Jailan Halawi](#)

The man who authored the blueprint for armed struggle adopted by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates this week renounced violence and called on his comrades to do the same so as to "put an end to the bloodbath around the world".

Sayed Emam, 57, aka Dr Fadl, was the ideologue, founder and first *emir* -- or commander -- of Egypt's Jihad group, many members of which joined Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan in the war against the Soviet occupation and later formed the nucleus of Al-Qaeda. He is the author of *Al-Omda fi E'dad Al-Odda* (Basic Principles in Making Preparations for Jihad) which was quickly adopted as a guide by theological Al-Qaeda and other radical Islamic groups.

Emam, a surgeon, once worked closely with Ayman El-Zawahri before breaking ranks with Al-Qaeda. He travelled to Yemen where he was kidnapped following the 9/11 attacks and interrogated by the CIA before being extradited to Egypt where he has been serving a life sentence since 2004.

Emam's Jihad was among Egypt's most feared terrorist groups, responsible for attacks against state officials, vital utilities and tourist sites. Following the 17 November 1997 Luxor massacre that left 58 tourists and four Egyptians dead, and when the government at last appeared to have stemmed the rising tide of violence, Jihad members remained reluctant to follow in the footsteps of Gamaa Islamiya, which launched a unilateral ceasefire in the late 1990s. Even when Jihad's jailed leaders attempted their own revisions in 2004 they failed to secure the support of many members of the group. Now, though, the group's first leader has personally called for a halt to all killings in a 100-page document.

"Rationalising Jihad in Egypt and the world", exclusively serialised in the daily independent *Al-Masry Al-Yom*, with the first instalment appearing on 18 November. The series has been accompanied by articles and interviews on the history of the movement along with biographies of its leaders.

While senior members of the group have attempted on several occasions to issue similar revisions to Emam's, Jihad's first leader alone wields the authority necessary to gain the support of the group's various factions, whether imprisoned or abroad.

Emam's opponents within Al-Qaeda have attempted to cast doubt on the sincerity of a publication composed behind bars, leading many of the group's domestic and expatriate members to defend their leader.

"A strong man like Dr Fadl could not be broken by imprisonment or torture and will only say and write what he believes is best for the Islamic nation. While people do say things to stop

being tortured, this is not the case here. His revisions are the outcome of long years of reflection and debate," argues Islamist lawyer Montasser El-Zayyat, who has been jailed many times for membership of the Jihad movement.

Emam, says El-Zayyat, always opposed launching armed operations in Egypt, a position that ultimately led to his split with El-Zawahri in 1992, when he left Afghanistan for Yemen.

Experts on political Islam concur. Amr Elshoubaky, of Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, insists " [Emam's revisions] reflect a sincere and logical shift".

"This is a group whose violent strategy to overthrow the regime and establish an Islamic state was defeated. It became imperative that it revise its stance and develop alternative strategies."

That an independent newspaper was selected to circulate the document lends yet more credibility to the sincerity of Emam's revisions, argues Elshoubaky, who says that the renunciation of violence should be viewed as a victory for the state.

But will Emam's revisions have any impact on his former followers in Al-Qaeda?

"I doubt it," says Elshoubaky, "at least not in Iraq. Nor is it likely to have much impact on the actions of the random violent cells that emerge here and there such as those responsible for the Sinai bombings."

A line must be drawn, believes Elshoubaky, between members or affiliates of Jihad whose aim is to establish an Islamic state and factions that carry out revenge attacks, whether against their own government or the US. "Attacks like those of 9/11 and embassy bombings are clearly acts of revenge rather than an attempt to establish an Islamic state."

Elshoubaky added that if Al-Qaeda leadership is to listen to such reviews, the US administration will have to also exert some efforts and show flexibility in containing the situation, a thing which does not seem likely to happen, "at least in the near future," he said.

El-Zayyat notes that it would be extremely difficult for El-Zawahri to renounce his current position.

The good news, according to Elshoubaky, is that revisions such as Emam's and those published by Gamaa Islamiya's leaders in the late 1990s constitute an alternative jurisprudence opposed to that of the late 1960s and 1970s according to which militant groups were established. Documents released by Emam and others and adopted by the cadres of various groups could, he says, act as a safety net preventing the formation of militant organisations.

Meanwhile, notes El-Zayyat, hundreds of detained Jihad members are due to be released and there is a possibility that Emam's case -- he was sentenced to life when tried in absentia -- could be reviewed. El-Zayyat has appealed that opportunities be made available to allow the released to reintegrate into mainstream society by providing them with jobs so they can earn a living.

Jihad leaders are reported to have raised some funds to help support long incarcerated cadres by selling the right to publish a number of documents to newspapers.