

Militants hurting the Muslims they claim to fight for

ST 17 Sep 2004

By MUHAMMAD HANIFF HASSAN
FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

IN ISLAM, decision-making takes into account who is involved and to what extent. Work carried out in the name of Islam may be grouped into three broad categories depending on their potential repercussions:

◆ Work by an individual, the repercussions of which clearly affects himself only and, hence, the individual is at liberty to make his own unilateral plans and decisions.

◆ Work which requires large-scale planning and implementation involving groups or organisations. Examples of such work are the development of Islamic financial institutions or the building of mosques. Any decision pertaining to such work must be made within the decision-making framework of the organisation. While decisions are made and responsibilities are shared by the group collectively, the repercussions of these decisions need not affect the whole community.

◆ Work which has widespread consequences for the Muslim community and the *ummah* at large. Work of such nature must receive a mandate from the community, and may not be decided by an individual or a group only.

It would be unfair for the group to make decisions for the entire community without any proper consultation and mandate. An example of such work is launching *jihad* in the name of defending the rights of the Muslim community.

Jihad is a task that may not be launched by an individual or a particular group. This grave responsibility requires the sanction of the *ummah* because its repercussions — such as social instability and the loss of lives and wealth — will severely impact the whole *ummah*.

No one particular group can make



The Muslim community did not give its mandate to militant groups to take actions in its name.

decisions in such matters without the consensus of other groups that represent the community, or indeed of the community itself.

In the history of the Prophet Muhammad, one would find that *jihad* was permitted towards the end of the Meccan period, but was not implemented by him until he was in Medina. Before launching his first expedition, Prophet Muhammad called for a meeting of the Muhajirin (Muslim migrants from Mecca) and the Ansar (Helpers, Muslims of Medina) in order to receive their mandate. He was especially careful to consult and consider the opinions of the Ansars, who were new to Islam.

Jihad was launched only after the leader of the Ansars made a speech declaring that they would march together with their fellow Muslims and the Prophet to protect Medina from the hostility of the Meccan people.

Therefore, Jemaah Islamiah activi-

ties in the name of *jihad* and Al-Qaeda's declaration of *jihad* in the name of the Muslim *ummah* are much to be regretted. These groups failed to consider the adverse outcomes of their actions, not only for the public but also for other Muslims and Muslim groups. Worse yet, the Muslim community neither approved of nor gave its mandate for such actions taken in its name.

Today, Muslim groups with totally no links to these militant groups have also come under suspicion. The good relations that they have meticulously fostered over decades with non-Muslims have been destroyed in months due to the reckless actions of a few.

Muslim activists with no connection to these groups have had to face public outrage and explain Islam all over again to non-Muslims, while those responsible for the reprehensible actions go into hiding.

The Sunni *ulama* have never reject-

ed *jihad* as one of the *syariah* of Islam. Nevertheless, they are wary of its repercussions, especially when it comes to raising arms against the authorities.

They have learnt from the histories of Abdullah Zubair, who revolted against the rule of the Umayyad, and of Hussein the son of Ali and grandson of the Prophet, who went against Yazid Muawiyah in the Battle of Karbala. These famous incidents indelibly demonstrate that victims of uprisings will not just be limited to the perpetrators and those they seek to bring down, but involved the loss of thousands of innocent lives.

When the Abbasid rulers adopted the Mutazilite school of thought in place of mainstream Sunni thought, there was a crackdown on Sunni leaders or imams. Yet, despite the imprisonment, torture and consequent death of Imam Ahmad Hanbal (founder of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence) and the flight of Imam Asy-Syafi'i (founder of Shafi'i school of jurisprudence) to Egypt, the other scholars neither gave up their reformation efforts, nor resorted to arms. Instead, they persisted in their efforts to correct the wrong through unrelentingly patient dialogue and good counsel. Were they all cowards? Obviously not.

Muslims should look to the Prophet as the best example for them to emulate. The Prophet established Medina without any use of arms or bloodshed.

Unfortunately, some Muslims' lack of patience in wanting immediate results for their actions lead them to act rashly, to the detriment of not only the public but also the Muslims and the Islamic cause that they claim to be fighting for.

[The writer is a research analyst at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies.]