

CONFRONTING ISLAMIST INTIMIDATION

By Fadi

Fadi and his wife Huda have served the Lord in the same region of the Middle East for twenty-four years. They share the story of recent attempts by Islamists in their city to shut down the school they run there. As you read this account, please pause and pray for them, as their battles continue.

Part One: Our Experience of Islamist Intimidation

It has been our privilege to serve the Lord in the Middle East for twenty-four years now. During those years we lived through three wars and two uprisings. However all of those trials pale in comparison with what we endured at the hands of Islamists during the last few years. For the past ten years we have been responsible for directing a Christian elementary school and orphanage in a totally Muslim city. So we are essentially a Christian school for Muslim students.

The city where we are located is not just any Muslim city. It is known to be conservative to the point of being fanatical. The evidence is plain to see. Everywhere you look you see veiled women and bearded men. And it doesn't take long for a visitor to discover that *Shari'a* law is strictly applied, especially during Ramadan. Despite its veneer of modernity, this city is actually very tribal and traditional. There may be a government, police and courts, but the people who actually administer justice and keep the peace are the tribal leaders.

In this Muslim context, this modest elementary school has been operating for fifty-five years in a rented facility. We are grateful for the Lord's provision, but at the same time it was becoming increasingly evident that the main building is reaching the end of its usefulness. With structural problems of our main building and an issue of space we were now at the point where we needed to expand or move if we wanted to accomplish our goals.

When we first began wrestling with these issues something happened that changed our perspective on things. The event I am referring to was an unexpected surplus in our budget. It wasn't a large amount of money, but it was enough help us believe that God could do even greater things than we had previously imagined. So with that encouragement we stepped out in faith and began to search for a property suitable for a new school campus.

Our search for land turned out to be even more difficult than we expected. In the first place there was very little undeveloped land available in our city. Secondly, the land that was available was usually very expensive. But the greatest difficulty was finding a landowner who was willing to sell to us. Apparently it is considered shameful for a Muslim to sell land to a

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Christian. So after three years of searching without success we came to conclusion that we needed a miracle.

As it turned out, God gave us not one but two miracles. The first one happened three years ago while we were in the States. We got the news when our realtor called us and told us with great excitement that he had found the perfect property for our new campus and that the Muslim landowner was willing to sell to us. He went on to say that this was the opportunity of a lifetime and that we should act quickly to buy the whole parcel. We were elated to hear the news, but at the same time we were wondering where we would find the necessary funds for such a large piece of land. We didn't have long to wait for the answer to this question. Within a week we got another phone call from our headmaster back at the school. He informed us that a delegation from a Korean-American church had visited the school and expressed an interest in helping us build a new school.

Naturally we were excited, but we weren't sure what it meant. However when we had the chance to meet the leaders of this church in person they confirmed to us that they would indeed help us with our new campus. So with the help of this church we were able to purchase the parcel that was being offered to us within a month of hearing the news. When we saw how dramatically the Lord intervened on our behalf we recognized it as a confirmation that we were on the right course and that the Lord was with us. In the months that followed we hired a contractor to build a wall around the property and we commissioned an architect to start draw up the plans for our new school. Everything was going smoothly and we were expecting to begin construction two summers ago. However at the same time we began to hear stories of an Islamist party putting pressure on the family who sold us the land to back out of the deal. We didn't recognize it then, but these were first storm clouds on the horizon.

Two and a half years ago a campaign of persecution was unleashed against us that was so severe that many doubted that our school would survive. At first we did not know who was behind this campaign, but within a few weeks it became clear that it was an extreme Islamist party.

It all began one night when we were sleeping in our apartment in the school. During the night an armed group of masked men broke into one our buildings and found our headmaster asleep in his bedroom. They quickly subdued him by force, bound him and led him to our building. With his help they were able to gain access to our building and enter our apartment. When we realized what was happening both my wife and I resisted vigorously. However they outnumbered us and they were armed. Eventually they were able to subdue me with pepper spray. While I was unconscious they told my wife that they were from some kind of security agency looking for documents. But when their search turned up some documents, some cash, and my wife's jewellery they took everything. It seems then that their real intention was to intimidate us and rob us.

Shortly thereafter students and staff members began to bring us leaflets that had been scattered around the school and some of the mosques in our city. The leaflets were written in the name of some security agency no one had ever heard of and they contained some disturbing allegations. To be specific, they alleged that the headmaster, my wife and I were all evangelists and enemies of Islam, that I personally was agent for the CIA and the Mossad, that we had opened a church in our school and were poisoning the minds of our students with teachings and songs from the Bible, and finally that we were planning on building a church on our new property. For all these reasons they argued that we should not be allowed to remain in the city and warned that if we chose to remain we would be killed. Finally they called on the municipality to confiscate the land that we had purchased so that it couldn't be sold to the Jews.

In the weeks that followed the imams in several local mosques picked up the same theme. They repeated the allegations in the leaflets and they added more details about the purchase of the land, details they could not have known if they had not seen the documents stolen from us in the robbery. So it was evident that this was a coordinated campaign that was connected to the robbery.

Meanwhile some of the local radio stations got wind of the story and decided to make our school the subject of a public debate. They repeated the allegations made against us and invited their listeners to call in and share their opinions. Although some called in to defend us, the majority of those who called in accepted the accusations and rumours at face value and thus were very critical of the school. Some of the callers were quoting from the documents stolen from us. This reinforced our belief that these attacks against were not isolated events but were in fact parts of a coordinated effort to discredit us and stir up opposition against us.

Up until then we weren't sure who it was that was organizing this campaign against us. However at this point they decided to come out of the shadows and accuse us openly. Their plan was to organize a tribal council, denounce us publicly and enlist the support of the tribal leaders against us. So invitations were sent and the leaders of the 75 largest families in the city came to large hall solely for the purpose of hearing the allegations against us and deciding what to do about us. The leaders of this Islamist party took full advantage of the opportunity to portray us in the worst possible light and then they put forward a number of options to stop us. In the discussion that followed some supported the Islamist party's call for violent opposition to the building project, but in the end cooler heads prevailed and it was decided to use all the legal avenues available to them to block our efforts.

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Despite the outcome of the tribal council there was a serious attempt to occupy our property. A date was set and a crowd of people gathered to begin the march down to our property. However the issues that divided the council also divided the crowd. Some argued in favour of occupying and confiscating the land while others argued in favour of trying to buy it back from us. In the end a group of people bent on reclaiming the land by force made its way down to our property. What they hadn't counted on was the presence of our contractor on the property. When they saw that he was blocking their way into the property they asked him to leave. Fortunately for us, he refused. When he saw that the situation might get ugly he called a few of his friends to back him up. As it turned out his friends were members of a well-known militia (he had been a member himself). And when they arrived the crowd quickly lost its appetite for violence and dispersed.

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Another tactic the Islamists used was putting pressure on the parents of our students. They reasoned that if they could empty our present school there would be no justification for building another. So over a period of weeks the leaders of this Islamist party visited every family in our school in the hope that by threatening them, embarrassing them and bribing them they could persuade the parents to pull their children out of our school. I am proud to say that not one family gave in to the pressure. In fact, the pressure seemed to strengthen their resolve not to give in. The parents' response to this campaign was to organize a rally in defence of our school. We were very encouraged by the stand they had taken and all of their kind words about the school. And we greatly appreciated their willingness to sign petitions supporting our school and to present them to the Ministry of Education, the mayor and the district governor.

The failure of the Islamist party leaders to influence the parents did not deter them from intensifying their campaign against us. They felt confident enough in fact to come out in the open and threaten us publicly. They sent a delegation of leaders to inform us that we were no longer welcome in the city and that if we chose to reopen the school in the fall 'heads would roll'.

Meanwhile we were forced to stop all construction work on the new campus by an injunction obtained by the Islamist party against us through fabricated allegations. Not long afterwards we received a notice informing us that the sheikh of the local *awqaf* was suing us for purchasing the land 'illegally'. This marked the beginning of a legal battle that has blocked the construction of our new campus and cost us tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

When we returned to school after the summer vacation with the intention of starting another school year as usual in spite of the death threats made against us

we were immediately bombarded with questions from concerned parents and members of the staff who had been hearing rumours to the effect that we would not reopen. We assured them that we would indeed be opening school, so the students and staff returned and school began normally. Apparently this took the Islamist party by surprise, but it didn't take them long to respond. Within week we got word that the Islamist party was gathering and preparing to come to the school in force. We quickly informed the district governor about what was happening and he in turn sent a force of fifty policemen under the leadership of the chief of police to surround the school and defend it against any attacks. Shortly thereafter an angry mob of approximately 500 Islamist supporters arrived at the gates of our school demanding entry. At first they were all insisting on being let in, but eventually the chief of police persuaded them to send in a small delegation of eight leaders to present their demands to the administration. When they came into the office they presented us with an ultimatum telling to leave or face the consequences. And they warned us that would be returning in a week to hear our answer to the ultimatum. With that the delegation departed and the mob followed.

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A week later, as expected, we got word that the supporters of the Islamist party were gathering and preparing to return to the school for the answer to their ultimatum. Once again the police were alerted and came in even greater numbers to protect the school. (They must have been expecting trouble, because they brought a truck for holding prisoners.) While we were waiting for the arrival of the mob we got a phone call from our friend the realtor who told us that the leader of the largest tribe in our city (a sort of 'Godfather' figure) was willing to come and speak to the Islamists on our behalf. We didn't know much about this man at the time, but on the recommendation of our friend we decided to accept his offer. It was clear that he commanded great respect and inspired even more fear. All it took was one phone call from the 'Godfather' and the mob evaporated.

After the intervention of the 'Godfather' the Islamist party seemed to focus its efforts on fighting us in court. The lawsuit filed on their behalf by the leader of the *awqaf* in our city alleged that land we had purchased was purchased illegally within his jurisdiction. However the property we purchased is actually outside of his jurisdiction.

When the other side recognized their mistake they must have realized that they had no case, so they proceeded to delay the process in every way possible in the hope that we would grow weary and give up. But if they imagined that we would give up, they were mistaken.

After nearly two years of delaying tactics the lawyers for the Islamist party began to run out of options, so they decided to resort to some dirty tricks. We were scheduled to have a court session at the end of January 2009, but on the day

of our session two remarkable things happened: 1) our case file disappeared from the courts records, and (2) all the electricity in the building went out, which meant that the judges could not retrieve the file from the court computers. Consequently our session was delayed once again.

Our lawyer immediately recognized what had happened and became very angry. As it happened the president of the court was a friend of his, so our lawyer presented the facts to him and asked for his help. Fortunately for us, the president of the court was a man of integrity and was suitably shocked when he heard the story. He was so outraged, in fact, that he swore that we would be given justice before the end of the month. So, in March this year, almost two years to the day after the robbery, we finally got the judgment we had been waiting for. As expected, the judges found that the case against us was baseless and therefore ruled in our favour.

Naturally we were elated by the news; however our joy was tempered somewhat by the knowledge that the Islamist party still had the option of appealing the ruling.

Given their long history of delaying tactics, none of us was surprised when we learned that the Islamist party had chosen to exercise its right of appeal before the deadline. It was hard to accept the thought of more delays, but our lawyer assured us that their appeal was futile and that in just a few more months their appeal would be rejected and we would win the final victory.

Since their setback in court the leaders of the Islamist party have not been idle. Apparently they decided to revert to their earlier tactic of slander in the hope that they could discourage the parents who still send their children to us and mobilize more opposition against us. This time the slander took the form of a video about us containing the testimonies of 'former students'. These testimonies make all sorts of shocking allegations about us.

we are insulting Islam and abusing the Quran, (2) we prevent our students from practicing their faith, (3) we promote indecency, and (4) we are indoctrinating our students with Christian teachings. Private showings of this video are being organized as I write.

One person who saw this video was the Muslim landowner who sold us the land. Afterwards they asked him for his reaction and he said, *'If this is true, we should turn this video over to the police as evidence against them.'* However they were unwilling to do this. The only conclusion you can draw from this is that they knew that the allegations in the video were false and they didn't want to incriminate themselves by turning it over to the police.

We are presently waiting for the court to make its ruling on the appeal. Without a favourable ruling on the appeal we cannot obtain a building permit

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for the new campus. As I said, we have every reason to believe that the ruling will come soon and that it will be favourable. However a victory in court does not guarantee us an easy path in the future. We know from experience that this Islamist party is prepared to lie, threaten and even resort to violence to get what it wants. The question remains then – Will the parents, political leaders, contractors and workers give in to this pressure? Only time will tell.

As for us, we have no intention of giving in to their threats. However we realize that if others do, our task will become much more difficult. We also realize that they are capable of doing even worse things than they have already done, especially if it appears that they are losing. We don't take this danger lightly. In fact, we have taken a number of steps improve our personal security. But ultimately our personal security is in the hands of the Lord. And we are trusting that he will continue to protect us in the future even as he has in the past.

Part Two: Personal Responses and Lessons Learned

Huda's response

As a woman this was a realization of my worst fears. I had two masked men restraining me and holding a gun to my head. I thought they might attack me and I thought they might kill my husband. What amazed me was that I was able to resist. Not only that, God gave me the courage to speak to them with authority. When I told them to release me, I was surprised when they actually let me go. And when I accused them of killing my husband, they lifted him into a chair and assured me that he would be all right. So when I look back I can see that the Lord gave the strength and courage I needed at the time I needed it.

Immediately after the robbery I felt angry with God because in my view he had failed to protect us. But in my heart I heard God asking me, 'Why are you angry? Aren't you all right? And isn't your husband all right?' Then I realized that he was right, we had come through the whole ordeal physically unscathed. That brief conversation was enough to change my whole attitude about what had happened. I suddenly felt very thankful for God amazing protection.

Then there was the matter of psychological trauma. Here again God managed to shield me. During the period after the robbery I was tempted to replay the whole ordeal in mind. And I was tempted ask myself, 'What if...?' this and 'What if...?' that. However every time I tried to revisit the dark places, a familiar praise song would flood my mind and the peace of God would dispel the darkness. As a result, I found that I was healed before the trauma had a chance to affect me.

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The overall effect of God's protection, encouragement and healing was noticeable to everyone around me. The police were amazed at how well I was holding up as I recounted the details of the nightmare I had just lived through. And the staff were amazed that I was able to carry on with my work normally while they themselves were trying to overcome the shock and the fear they were feeling.

When I heard all the outrageous accusations being made against us, I naturally felt that we were the targets of a malicious campaign of slander. However something I heard on radio talk show helped me to see things a bit differently. One caller who seemed very agitated complained, *'Islam is under attack all over the world, and now the attacks have reached us here'*. At that moment I realized that, as incredible as it might seem, this person was actually afraid of us! Apparently I had more power than I imagined!

I was glad for the insight the radio talk show had given me, but at the same time I began to realize that listening to the lies of the enemy was not a healthy thing to do. I say this because I recognized that the purpose of this campaign of lies was to intimidate us, and the more I listened to the lies the more intimidated I felt. So after listening a couple of times I resolved not to give the enemy any more power of over me by listening to his lies.

While I was home in the States for the summer, I had some time to reflect on what had happened to us. I found that being away helped me to regain my peace of mind and see things more clearly. Here are some of the conclusions I reached during that time:

1. Satan's most powerful weapon is fear. But fear is just an emotion that may not have any basis in reality. So the best thing I can do is to recognize fear for what it is and not allow it to have any control over me.
2. I am God's servant, but the ministry is the Lord's. And if that is the case, then I should not feel compelled to take on God's battles for him. Instead I should be still and wait for God to act on my behalf.

3. As leaders of the school we don't have the luxury of hiding or running away, because if we run away how can we ask the rest of our staff to stay? My attitude then needs to be the same as Nehemiah when he said, *'Should a man like me run away?'*

4. What is the worst that can happen to me after all? Death? But we all die sooner or later, so why not make your life and death count for something? As Jim Elliot said, *'He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.'*

5. In the end it all comes down to one question – What do I actually believe about God? Do I really believe he is alive and able to help me or not? If he is, why should I act as if he is powerless and indifferent to my plight?

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My response

The first time I was confronted by these men I wasn't sure what to do, so I kept quiet. But second time they came I was not intimidated by them and God gave me the courage to challenge them. Before they arrived I had no idea what to say, but at time I needed it God gave me the words to speak. What I actually said was, 'Put your demands in writing'. And this was the best thing I could have said, because they were confused and divided about how to respond to my challenge. So I experienced what Jesus promised when he said, *'Don't worry what to say ahead of time, for at the proper time the words will be given to you.'*

So I experienced what Jesus promised when he said, 'Don't worry what to say ahead of time, for at the proper time the words will be given to you.'

Going through these experiences made me ask myself some hard questions:

1. What am I doing here?

After spending so many years in the ministry I could have found a justification for our departure and no one would have blamed me. However I knew that the school was facing a crisis and I sensed the weight of responsibility for its survival and its success. On that basis then I concluded that we should stay and provide the leadership needed to get through the crisis.

2. Is the Lord really in this?

When we undertook this project many people told us that what we were trying to do was impossible. After all, no Christian had been able to buy land in our city for 200 years. So when the Lord answered our prayers by providing the land and the money to purchase it within a week, it spoke volumes to me and it confirmed to me that he was truly with us. And every divine intervention since then (esp. the Godfather and the president of the court) has strengthened that conviction.

3. Am I willing to lay down my life for this?

We would all like to believe that our courage will match our convictions, but you never know until you face a time of testing. After having my courage and my convictions tested I am still here, but I am not taking anything for granted. I just keep praying that the next time, when I face a more severe test, my faith and my courage will not waiver.

Practical Advice on Dealing with Persecution

In the process of dealing with the Islamist party we discovered some principles that served us well.

1. Walking in the light

From the beginning we had great difficulty in finding a Muslim landowner who was willing to sell land to us. In some cases a landowner would tell us, *'If only*

you could buy the land in the name of a Muslim you trust, then I wouldn't have a problem.' We actually considered doing this, but after thinking about it we realized that if it appeared that we were using deception to get what we wanted, it would provoke an even stronger reaction when our deception was exposed. So we turned things around and told ourselves that if God is really with us, he will lead us to a landowner who is willing to sell to us.

2. Doing things legally

In our city many buildings are built without a license and the owner simply pays a fine after the fact. But since our case is a sensitive one, we never considered this option. We knew that if it appeared that we were doing anything that was less than 100% legal the Islamist party would seize the opportunity and use it to gather support against us.

3. Presenting your case to the right people

As westerners we knew that we had some leverage available to us if we chose to use it. For example, we could have told our story to the western press or contacted representatives of our own governments. However we also realized that this would be a heavy-handed tactic that would probably embarrass and alienate the

very officials who were in the best position to help us. So we opted instead to present our case to the appropriate officials.

4. Resisting without fighting

Even though we were powerless on our own, we could have engaged a tribal leader or a militia to fight this Islamist party for us. However we were opposed in principle to using violence and we wanted the people of our city to see God act our behalf. So we resolved from the beginning to resist this Islamist party to the best of our ability without actually fighting them.

5. Using the threat of exposure

Since we were acting within the law and the Islamist party was not, this gave us the moral high ground. This turned out to be very useful, because when they threatened us we were able to remind them that we had the option of exposing what they were doing to the world.

However we also recognized that actually exposing them would be an escalation in the battle and that such a step should not be taken lightly.

6. Surrendering control to the Lord

After being attacked and oppressed the way we were, we longed for justice. But if we had been depending on the police or the courts for justice, we would have been disappointed. Instead we put our trust in God and we found that he was

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able to give us the justice we longed for. For example, since this campaign against us began the following things have happened: a) the man who organized the attack was arrested and humiliated, (b) the judge who granted the injunction was reprimanded and transferred, (c) the lawyer who filed the trumped up charges against us had his license suspended, (d) and the sheikh who threatened our lives died of a heart attack.

7. Coping one day at a time

There were days when the pressure was almost more than we could bear and there was no relief in sight. During those times we did not allow ourselves to think about the larger questions or the next challenge. Instead we focused on the immediate problems that we facing us that day. And in this way we found that we were able to cope and persevere.

Conclusion

I hope that what we have shared will be helpful to those of you who find yourselves in similar situations. However we would not expect everyone to make the same choices we made. But no matter what choices you make, you can be sure that God be there with you through all of it. His presence and his love is the one thing that we can count on, and that knowledge should be enough to carry us through.

THE FOUNDERS OF MODERN JIHAD

Summary by Dr. Andreas Maurer adapted from chapter 15, *Islam and Terrorism*, by

M.A. Gabriel

Events leading up to Islamic Fundamentalism:

- Events in Turkey propel Egypt towards Islamic fundamentalism: in 1924 Ataturk established a secular state in Turkey!
- By doing so, he overturned the Islamic succession system that had led the Islamic world for 600 years – he replaced the Muslim system with a Westernized system
- Muslims reacted negatively to this.
- Especially in Egypt, a spiritual leader *Sheikh Hassan al-Banna* started as a reaction the Muslim brotherhood movement in 1928 referred to as *El-Kharij*.
- His aim was to reapply Islamic law in Egypt.
- The Brotherhood was very militant, aggressive and full of hatred toward the leadership of the country and anyone who would not comply with Islamic law.
- They used terrorist methods to shake up society and pursue their agenda of bringing back the original glory of Islam.