

# Suleiman Shahbal: “I Deeply Resent How They Misinterpret My Religion”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



[An article](#) by Suleiman Shahbal, a Kenyan Muslim, about the terrorist attack in Nairobi carried out in mid-January 2019 by Al-Shebaab, is worth revisiting for its all-too-common blend

of laudable sentiments and a disturbing inability to recognize Jihad as essential to Islam.

*In the midst of pain and anguish, our security forces made us proud. Even as we mourned, we were proud to see the Recce squad storm DusitD2 Hotel and rescue over 700 people besieged by terrorists.*

*Make no mistake, we are at war with a terrorist organisation that exploits our religion (I am a Muslim, and like many Muslims, I deeply resent how they misinterpret my religion). It exploits local politics and conditions to propagate a world view that threatens Muslims who don't subscribe to their views, and has contempt for Non-Muslims. We must recognise unpleasant facts that require a change in strategy to support our men in uniform."*

He is a Muslim, and he may "deeply resent how they [the terrorists] misinterpret my religion," but others, such as you or I, might with considerably more justification "deeply resent" how Mr. Shahbal "misinterprets [his] religion." Are we expected to believe that Mr. Shahbal is unfamiliar with the more than 109 Qur'anic verses that command Muslims to wage Jihad against the Unbelievers, to "fight them" wherever they are to be found, to "smite at their necks," and to "strike terror" in the hearts of the Unbelievers? Are we further expected believe that Mr. Shahbal is unacquainted with that celebrated claim of Muhammad in the hadith that "I have been made victorious through terror?" Mr. Shahbal may "wish" that Islam were as he misleadingly describes, but that does not make it so. He has a duty to expose what is contained in the texts and teachings of Islam, not to protect Islam by practicing taqiyya. He denies, rather than deplores, aspects of Islam that explain not only Al-Shebaab's latest attack in Nairobi, but all the attacks by Al-Shebaab, Al-Qaeda, Islamic Jihad, Islamic State, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other groups that have been responsible for more than 33,000 terrorist attacks

since 9/11/2001. When Mr. Shabhal decides to recognize the magnitude of the terrorist threat, and its source in the Islamic texts, we will have less reason to distrust him.

*Let us learn from the Israelis. In the period between 1967 and 1970, Jordan was like Somalia- a failed state. Palestinian commandos controlled large areas of Jordan and used it as a launching pad for attacks on Israel. Israel responded with such vicious reprisal attacks that the Palestinians began to think twice before attacking.*

It's certainly to be welcomed when a Muslim writer urges emulating the Israelis – “Let us learn from the Israelis” – in the way they dealt with their own terrorist problem. Shabhal still can't quite refrain from mischaracterizing Israeli tactics. He claims Israel responded “with such vicious reprisal attacks” that caused the “Palestinians” to think twice, and ultimately to stop their own attacks. It would be more accurate to describe these reprisals as “hugely effective” rather than as “vicious.” The Israelis hit their human targets – taking great care not to hit civilians – and inflicted enormous damage on the war materiel stockpiled by the terrorists.

*We need to adapt a similar strategy. We need to equip our forces with the necessary fire power to respond rapidly and aggressively. Kenyan jets should be bombing Al Shabaab right now. Where are the drones? Kenya needs to invest in Special Forces that will be available on site within minutes – fully prepared and trained for door-to-door combat; ready for any eventuality.*

What country could be of great help to Kenya in punishing, and thereby discouraging, Al Shebaab? What country is a world leader in drone technology and also happens to monitor Muslim terrorist groups in that part of the world? Mr. Shabhal might have suggested that the Kenyans rely on Israel both for

intelligence on Al-Shebaab, and for the drone technology likely to be most useful to the Kenyans in reprisal raids.

*This is an investment we cannot afford not to make. We must also come to terms that Somalia has no government. Can you imagine a situation in Kenya where State House is attacked three times in six months? Is there really a government there? We must equip our forces sufficiently because I do not see a strong government in Somalia in the next five to 10 years.*

*Kenya and its allies have to force some changes in the thinking at the United Nations. Al Shabaab is still not classified as a terrorist organisation to date. The UN considers it a "spoiler of political peace."*

*UN Resolution 1267 rated Al Qaeda as a terrorist organisation and consequently all UN organisations were banned from talking, dealing or helping them in any way. Ayman Zawahiri (de facto leader of Al Qaeda after Bin Laden was killed) keeps referring to Al Shabaab as a partner. Al Shabaab keeps pledging support for Al Qaeda. Yet the UN has buried its head in the sand. UN humanitarian organisations in South and Central Somalia keep paying Al Shabaab protection money with the full knowledge of the UN. Thus the humanitarian needs of the poor Somali people are being balanced against our security needs.*

*The African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom) is considered a "peace keeping" force. What peace? You cannot keep the peace with a terrorist organisation. Amisom should be fighting terrorism aggressively rather than trying to fight with a confused mission and terms of reference.*

*Neither are they properly equipped to fight aggressively. Ethiopian troops, instead of Kenyan troops, are stationed on our borders. Who would be more determined to protect our country? Kenyans or Ethiopians? The only war to win is to*

*take the fight to the enemy at his doorstep – wherever he may be and not hide behind lofty ambitions of peace keeping.*

*Al Shabaab considers itself a Somali nationalist force as well as part of a greater international struggle for Islam. Thus it appeals to local Somali nationalists. But the Somalis from Norway, Chechens from Chechnya, Arabs from Yemen and Kikuyus from Kiambu subscribe to the idea of fighting for a greater cause. Muslim scholars, writers and thinkers must debunk this propaganda.*

How does Mr. Shahbal suppose that “Muslim scholars, writers, and thinkers” will be able to “debunk” that which is to be found in so many Qur’anic verses, and praised by Muhammad in the Hadith: the duty of violent Jihad, and of “striking terror” in the hearts of the Infidels?

*Al Shabaab claim to be defending Islam. Over 70 countries have suffered from terrorism that has nothing to do with persecution against Muslims. Since 1945, Germany has neither invaded nor attacked any country – yet it is attacked by terrorists claiming to be Muslims.*

Again, Suleiman Shabhal overlooks several facts about Muslim terrorism. First, that Muslim terrorists consider certain Muslims legitimate targets for attack because they are not “real” Muslims, either because of the moderation of their views, or because they belong to a sect deemed dangerously heterodox, like the Ahmadis. Second, not just Germany, but many other countries that have “neither invaded nor attacked any country” – e.g., Sweden, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria – have been the object of deadly Muslim terrorism. It is enough that a country be inhabited by Infidels, for it to be the object of attack by Muslim terrorists.

*Making excuses to justify the Nairobi attack, Al Shabaab claimed they were taking revenge on America for moving its*

*embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. What does that have to do with us? Do we have a Kenyan advising Trump to do that? Perhaps it is because Nairobi has over 70 multinational corporations that have headquarters here. CNN, Al Jazeera and BBC all have their African headquarters here – so an attack on Nairobi is big news. They kill our people to get attention.*

Al-Shebaab chose to attack in Nairobi for several reasons. First, because it was convenient – the largest non-Muslim city within striking distance of Al-Shebaab. Somalia is Kenya's immediate northern neighbor; the border between them is not just porous, but largely non-existent. Second, as Mr. Shahbal notes, Al-Shebaab wanted ideally to strike where the world's major media – BBC, CNN, Agence France Presse – have local bureaus. Nairobi fit the bill.

*I am proud to be Kenyan. I am proud to be a Muslim and I know millions of my fellow Muslims despise Al Shabaab. Kenya will never surrender. Kenyan Muslims will stand with their fellow Kenyans of all faiths. Terrorists do not speak for us. Terrorists and their distorted world view will not define us or mislead us. We are one Kenya, one people – indivisible under God. We will never surrender.*

Suleiman Shahbal ends with what he no doubt thinks is a stirring peroration, with hints of the American Pledge of Allegiance (“one nation under God indivisible”) and of Churchill (“we will never surrender”) at his wartime finest, but he is wrong to describe Muslim terrorists as having a “distorted world view.” They are true to the Qur'an, true to such verses as 2:191-194, 4:89, 8:12, 8:60, 9:5, 9:29, 47:4 – verses that Mr. Shahbal surely knows, but devoutly hopes you don't.

He might have offered a different, more truthful and courageous view. He might have written this:

*As a Muslim I am deeply disturbed that there exist Islamic texts – Qur’anic verses, as well as statements by Muhammad in the Hadith – that Al-Shebaab and other terrorist groups have relied on to justify their crimes. I deplore those texts. So do many other Muslims. We Muslims must stop pretending that those verses do not exist. Instead, we must challenge them head on. Can they be considered to have been abrogated? Or can we regard them as needing to be properly “contextualized,” so that we understand them to apply only to Muslims in western Arabia in the 7th century? How do we convince more than 1.5 billion Muslims to accept that view? And how do we deal with the many other troublesome verses, not just about Jihad or “striking terror,” such as those that describe Muslims as “the best of peoples” and Unbelievers as “the most vile of created beings”?*

*We Muslims have a lot of work to do. But what choice do we have?*

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