Euro-Islam

At-Tunisi’s Doctrine of an Interfaith Jihad in WWI

A Euro-Islam, a jihad “made in Germany,” grew into a new doctrine of an interfaith jihad in World War I, as called for by the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph. Following his November 14, 1914 fatwa, he claimed to be the ruler of all Muslims. In Islamist eyes they had to fight now with some infidels against other infidels and their Muslim troops. What made it legal?

Those troops had not only no right to fight back, but they had to turn against the foreign overlords too. Shaikh Salih ash-Sharif at-Tunisi (1869-1920), a Tunisian mufti (picture), was a confidant of the Ottoman war minister Enver Pasha. But the shaikh was an activist in Max von Oppenheim’s News Organization for the East of the Kaiser’s Foreign Office mobilizing brotherhoods. Salih spread this pan-Islamist jihad doctrine in his booklet for the German-Austrian Central Powers against the Allies: The British, French and Russians (later also colonials like the Italians and the Spanish in North Africa).

War minister Enver Pasha had asked shaikh Salih to travel to Berlin and popularize jihad among Germans. For this goal shaikh Salih wrote his commentary on jihad. In 1915 the German Society for the Study of Islam edited this Haqiqat al-Jihad, حقائق الجهاد, or The Truth of Jihad. In Berlin the Arabist Martin Hartmann of the Seminar of Oriental Languages wrote a friendly foreword and the dragoman, an official translator, Karl E. Schabinger an afterword. Both endorsed this Euro-Islam as a further development of jihad. The partial or coalitional jihad became possible “with allied infidels against certain enemy infidels” as an individual duty for all Muslims, though also detrimental to “infidel” minorities. A peace between areas of Islam and Europe would be in reach if there was no longer a foreign occupation of Islamic lands. The idea of a joint interfaith jihad came up again in World War II.

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