

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

Reuters

## Anti-Western Messages Grow among Afghanistan's Imams

09/14/2012

Enayatullah Balegh is a professor at Kabul University and preaches on Fridays in the largest mosque in central Kabul, where he advocates jihad, or holy war, against foreigners who desecrate Islam.

After a fundamentalist U.S. pastor presided over the burning of a copy of the Qur'an last month, there has been a growing perception among ordinary people that many of the foreigners in Afghanistan belong in just one category: the infidels.

"The international community and the American government is responsible for this gravest insult to Muslims," Balegh told Reuters in the blue-and-white tiled Hazrat Ali mosque.

"I tell my students to wage jihad against all foreigners who desecrate our religious values. We have had enough."

Protests in Kabul against the Qur'an-burning have not become violent but there are many other mullahs in the overcrowded capital whose sermons are filled with criticism of the foreigners fighting and working in Afghanistan.

In Kabul's northwest, firebrand Habibullah Asaam warns his congregation that all contact with non-Muslims is dangerous.

“The Jews and crusaders can never be friends of Muslims, they are the despoilers of our society and culture,” he said during Friday sermons. Worshippers cried “Allahu Akbar” — God is greatest — in response.

“Those who want them here are cowardly Muslims. Women avoid wearing veils, men chase fashion and show off, it’s all because of the foreigners,” he said.

With few Dari or Pashto-speaking foreigners in the country, the messages broadcast from mosques by loudspeakers often pass unnoticed by the people they are condemning.

But the extent and impact of anti-Western sentiment was brought into stark relief last week when a protest in normally peaceful Mazar-i-Sharif city in the north ended with the frenzied killing of seven foreign U.N. workers.

The demonstrators had spent hours listening to incendiary preaching from outspoken clerics like Abdul Rahoof Tawana, who told worshippers “we must avenge the burning of the Qur’an.”

After the attack, the provincial governor urged imams to avoid talking about politics and ordered police to round up audio tapes containing “hate” speeches.

## DEEP INFLUENCE

In a deeply religious country where most men go to Friday prayers every week, sermons are a critical part of efforts to battle insurgents who have emerged from religious schools and mosques, and usually claim the religious high ground.

While there is no formal hierarchy like Christian churches, the government does have some leverage over the imams.

It pays the salaries of many of them, President Hamid Karzai can count many powerful clerics among his senior officials and advisers — Tawana is a member of Afghanistan’s national ulema, or council of senior clerics — and the Religious Affairs Ministry gives speech notes to some imams.

“Sometimes mullahs preach beyond whatever we want but there is no resources to control all mosques in the country,” Israr-ul-Haq, a deputy for the department of Mosques and Other Holy Sites, told Reuters.

He said there are about 160,000 mosques in the country and only 3,000 of them are registered with the government. Others are built by the people and their imams are fed and supported by that neighborhood, he said.

“Mullahs have their own problems. If they speak against government policies, they are either harassed or detained by security forces,” Israr-ul-Haq said. “If they speak in favor of the government, then they are killed by insurgents.”

Karzai does not seem to have the appetite or influence to face down powerful clerics, and it is hard to follow the contents of sermons in thousands of smaller mosques scattered in remote towns and villages across the country.

In rural areas where the Taliban are most active, Friday sermons are often in favor of the insurgency.

Khan Mohammad, an influential elder in southern Helmand province, said insurgents order imams to condemn NATO troops as “foreign invaders” and the government as a puppet regime.

Among both those who were far away, and those who joined the Mazar riots but not the killing, there were many who did not condemn the violence. And although insurgents played a key role, it was ordinary protesters who overwhelmed security in the United Nations’ Mazar compound and helped hunt down the victims.

Billions of dollars and nearly 10 years into the war, where diplomats point to schools, clinics and an army rebuilt with Western help, the fury that can drive or condone that kind of killing is something many Westerners do not want to look into.

Anti-Western sentiment is strong in Afghanistan, which is traditionally conservative, deeply religious and suspicious of outsiders. The welcome foreign troops got from many parts of the country in 2001 has slowly soured.

“There is a lot of anger after years in which Western military operations have caused an accumulation of civilian casualty cases,” wrote Thomas Ruttig, co-director of the Afghanistan Analysts’ Network, in an article on the killing.

The affluent lives of many Westerners and officials perceived as corrupt does not help. Ordinary citizens see little benefit from the billions of aid dollars and suffer regular human rights abuses, adding to frustrations.

“As if air strikes on civilians, violence and bloodshed was not enough, now they have burned the Qur’an,” said Tawab Rustami, a 24-year-old university student.

“The conflict is because of the foreigners, it is better for them to leave before things get worse,” he said.