

Common Sense grows from Resonance on Common Ground

A Story from the East and its Inherent Liberating Message to the World

Oriental Lesson: Al Qaeda and the Wise Judges

compiled by Wolfgang Fischer

The story „**KORANIC DUELS EASE TERROR**“ told by James Brandon in ‚The Christian Science Monitor‘ [<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0204/p01s04-wome.html>] inspired to contributions to the online forum, discussion group „Religiously Motivated Violence“ at the Global Network of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions [<http://cpwrglobal.net>]

Dialogue: It is fine to talk. To share what is inner-most important. Resonance emerges between partners in dialogue who acknowledge each other as human beings. As people with identical and completely natural needs. Needs which beyond the separating prejudice of diverse religions and world-views are of equal validity for man-kind. Consonance empowers. Resonance helps to let go dearly held but all the same superficial identifications for the benefit of the identity of humanity. By doing so mind gets liberated from prejudice and fears which in history settled in or have been implanted for various reasons. Heads gets clear and hearts liberate. Common sense and sound sympathy emerge and create prerequisites for thinking and acting to really satisfy one's own needs without neglecting the needs of others.

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‚If you can convince us that your ideas are justified by the Koran, then we will join you in your struggle,‘ Judge Hamoud al-Hitar from Yemen told the imprisoned Al Qaeda militants. ‚But if we succeed in convincing you of our ideas, then you must agree to renounce violence.‘ The prisoners eagerly agreed. Western antiterrorism experts warned that this high-stakes gamble would end in disaster. Now, two years later, not only have those prisoners been released, but a relative peace reigns in Yemen. And the same Western experts who doubted this experiment are courting Hitar, eager to hear how his ‚theological dialogues‘ with captured Islamic militants have helped pacify this wild and mountainous country, previously seen by the US as a failed state, like Iraq and Afghanistan. US diplomats have approached the cleric to see if his methods can be applied in Iraq, says Hitar. ‚Before the dialogues began, there was only one way to fight terrorism, and that was through force,‘ he says. ‚Now there is another way: dialogue.‘

The story from the East is a message to the world of today and tomorrow. The story proofs that virtues of respect, dialogue and understanding are capable of solving even severe problems such as religiously motivated violence, including murder and mass-murder. Despite to the gravity of the crime there is no coercion between judges and delinquents, on the contrary, the prisoners are accepted as humans with the potentiality to learn. Initially, of course, they were captured. But then the strategy changes from coercion and imprisonment to equitable dialogue and chances are opened towards becoming humane, towards emancipation from false beliefs to being humane. The Islamic scholars know: *Emancipation to the humane is the prerequisite for peace*, not ever growing military power which is based on social and ecological destruction for the benefit of global players only. They provide a clear chance to the delinquents: either they convince the judges or they are being convinced by the judges. The judges are able to facilitate this process of re-integration by meeting the prisoners on the common ground of their reverence for the Koran. That's a great way to approach the problem. The lawful criterion is the Koran, something highly estimated by both sides. Both sides related to common ground.

«Mankind sleeps. It deals with futility, it lives in a false world. If you believe you can distinguish yourself with something in this world, it only is custom or habit - never religion. If you meet people walking on the path of insight, don't talk, eat up your ego. If you are related to reality upside down, then your understanding and your religion also are upside down. Man captures himself in his net. The lion, the man of the path, breaks up his cage.»

Sanai, 1131 AC, in ‚The Imprisoned Garden of Truth‘
Sufi master Sanai from Afghanistan was a paragon for the great Persian poet Mawlana Djilal-ud-din Rumi, 1207-1273.

*When Reality is upside down -
Normality turns into madness*

«*Mind is an Illusion of Truth*»

Hazrat Inayat Khan, 1882-1927

If we really want to overcome the world's *plagues and pests* we have to join the forces of greatness. If we want to find their *sources*, we have to dig deep down to the roots. We have to go back in history more than 5000 years. We have to find common ground with the principles of life. The Sufi poets distinguished between reality and appearances and they offer a way out of the net in which we are caught. They talk about dismantling the net on a global basis in order to reach common ground. *Seems impossible?* The self woven net of imprisonment only exists where mental frameworks represent upside down concepts of reality. People or societies who preserved their *Common Sense* do not know such nets, such limitations to life. *They do not need any emancipation.*

Emancipation from what? From false beliefs in force or domination. And from the lack of belief in *understanding or learning*. Just recall the above mentioned story: *the judge, the common ground, the dialogue - we only need genuineness!* Genuineness, honesty are the tools we need to make use of, definitely not force, not domination. Ancient traditions of Native Americans e.g. already made guilt understandable to the sinner. *They knew:* respect to the violator as a human being produces the chance to re-integrate him or her back into society - nothing else is being needed for this.

*Understanding is healing -We
have to understand or we will fail*

Retributive justice co-exists with love. Only at first glance it is hard to understand. It became difficult to understand because of the many falsities and cravings humankind superimposed on Truth, and by doing so Truth lies buried to the masses. For them it becomes difficult to get out of the multiple nets of reasoning and falsities which mankind produced during its patriarchal history. Under patriarchal, dominating and violent conditions that have ensued due to the mainstream thinking, it is understandable that individuals and society tend to be aggressive and defensive in their actions. This perverted perspective has made possible crime against common good common within the predominant patriarchal mental framework. We are confronted with the severe problem of violence and defence and their devastating consequences only within this mental framework which stands upside down in relation to true reality. Not only that we have different systems to relate on but even within one and the same system of Christian values. For example, we on the one hand relate on laws of state and on the other on laws of religion. That's a hoax with divisive effects and it was implemented by purpose. It was the idea of Emperor Constantine the Great: *'divide et impera!' = take apart and rule, destroy and dominate!*

Needless to say: We have to dig deeper and beyond the mental worlds of Koran or Bible, far deeper - down to the common ground of life - or we definitely will fail.

Facing the dichotomy of Matriarchy and Patriarchy (1)

We have to dig to the source of life. The problem is, most people have forgotten about that source. Although everybody is born out of this source we commonly do not estimate our origin and mother any longer, some even sell their identity and life, heading for illusions and by doing so they exchange reality for illusions. They produce illusions as they need a replacement for reality. Substituted reality results in delusion. Delusion starts with illusions like greed for money and craving for power. What a poor reality. Why is that so? Why do people behave like that? Come on, don't come forward now with the

supposed excuse of the *'original sin'*!

That is another hoax. It is a trap, it is kind of switch which came into existence by neurological development of free intention. Natural learning processes on the basis of general responsibility overcome that trap and lead to autonomy. Patriarchal societies, however, make use of that trap and manipulate people. If this happens by intention for the sake of secondary interests we have to deal with the conspiracy against life. Being kept from natural learning by doing we produce multiplying challenges that finally become threats to life. Since we produce the mess we cannot escape from it. We learn fast and authoritatively only if we are genuinely allowed to learn unhindered by dogmas which are to tell us what is supposed to be right or wrong. If we do not free ourselves from dogmas we fail inevitably.

*The concept of 'fallen nature or original sin'
is a dominant religious illusion*

There is no fallen nature. And there is nothing above nature. The idea of improving nature is the original blasphemy. There only is nature and its *replacement, its substitute*. There is nature, being with nature, or - being against nature, fighting against nature, war against life. We have to get the original sin clear of our minds. The concept of a *fallen nature* represents a patriarchal invention which is supposed to be normal or natural - *no chance to be overcome - ever*. Such a concept perpetuates destruction, war and hatred - because it teaches that evil is supposed to be a natural part of human existence. *Within this picture we can try to be better, but we never will be good, because we are essentially fallen. We can realize now the dichotomy of matriarchal path and patriarchal path with its religious tradition of 'the original fall by birth' which needs to be fought life long. Matriarchal Path serves Life. Patriarchal Path serves Replacement. You cannot serve both at the same time.* It becomes obvious that patriarchal systems cannot be improved. If we want to survive, we have to let them fall or re-write their programmes completely.

Acknowledging patriarchal aberration from matriarchal path offers a clear secular chance to make a decision to serve the common good instead of serving egocentric cravings. *Such a way of life is completely natural and physical - and is divine all the same; its learning process is always open to everybody, never exclusive and by nature it leads to social responsibility via individual autonomy - it leads to a global community in the service of Life.*

Let us courageously turn over traditional world views! It is our spiritual worlds we have to clean up! Who else would be able to do so if not those who still believe in the power of spirituality? We have to be clear and sound. We respect everybody on the path. We are compassionate. This is why we question the contents of certain beliefs, of mental concepts, of world views. From experience we do know how difficult, how really threatening it can be to give up dearly held beliefs even if their unreality is rationally and mentally clear and obvious. The tight grip of tradition can be deadly if we do not wake up from wrong mental settings which are nothing but mass media controlled mass hypnosis. *Let us terminate with the daily being conditioned to become compliant slaves of this system who are addicted to consumption and subservience! For the sake of their mental growth and autonomy let us definitely stop to hypnotize our children by alienating customs, concepts and imaginations!*

«*All children on Earth are born under the same Light.
Only their parents guide them towards the Darkness of Illusion.*»

Oriental Wisdom

Re-organizing our minds

For the sacred understanding of human existence we have to face human history as it was and as it is - and we have to make up our

minds. We have to set our minds, to re-evaluate our mindsets. A global reformation of the given mental frameworks has to be accomplished by courageous and loving people. There is no other way: «*The lion, the man of the path, breaks up his cage*» in order to stay on the common ground, in order to stay within the matrix of love. Who does not want to be there? What keeps us from re-integrating into that matrix? Only false or deficient mindsets and their destructive products which we placed on earth do not desire that. Nothing else.

If we want to overcome violence - independently from where we come or what we believe, religiously or culturally - we just have to return to original, ancient and life-saving traditions of individually, socially and jointly experienced truth. This can be achieved by just letting go unreal metaphysics and stopping to feed it with our life's energy.

Existential analysis fails unless it digs down deep enough in history to reach and understand the fundamental dichotomy of different quality in social development. This dichotomy is the setting of the course. It is decisive. It decides on life or substitute.

Are not Metaphysics and Mysticism the same Magic Nonsense?

Mysticism is regarded to be the realization of perennial and natural truth beyond beyond current understanding. It is the perception of reality beyond what we already have learned to understand. It is the awareness to accept a natural reality beyond what we momentarily understand and already know. It is acknowledging a matrix of cosmic law and order beyond understanding - which we call love: Interconnectedness of being, lawful and real - divine. By nature we tend to satisfy love and divine life and *never a substitute*.

Metaphysics is something quite different, although the difference is not yet aware to many people. Metaphysics says nothing else but 'beyond' physics, beyond physical law, beyond nature. But what is 'beyond' material, energetic, informational and spiritual physics, beyond the Law of Nature, what is to be found there? Beyond physics and natural law there is nothing but delusion, unreality - the counterpart to reality: Walking man on water, water turning into wine, wine into blood, virgins in a land of milk and honey, or a god, who is supposed to love certain people exclusively - are beyond the divine. Although in the centre of some religion those examples at the same time are in the centre of unreality, insanity, delusion. We do not want to hurt, but still, we have to focus as we want to touch, we are straight. As we want to see the source we have to fight the fogs. We have to be clear and sound. By ignoring natural and physical law metaphysical laws are being invented. Known as dogma they are created and pressed upon people, *without alternative*. Laws which do not exist in reality need to be imagined and then to be forced upon reality. This way delusion nearly suffocates truth. Such kind of systems are counter-projects to the matrix of love and emergence. By their nature they tend to violence and destruction. *Quantum physics, however, proofs since long that human responsibility is nothing but real physics. Neither is it magic nor is it incomprehensible. It is just natural.* The concept of a patriarchal god, however, who punishes those who are not obedient, is a metaphysical imagination, is an illusion, is a delusion which threatens global survival.

Do we realize the difference by now? What is natural and what is artificial?

People who at this stage of discussion feel obliged to point at nature's supposed cruelties should be aware that violence and defence in the animal kingdom never serve motivations like greed or even addiction. Every days needs are natural, cravings are artificially created.

Face it: Wasps that paralyse their victims, leaving internal organs

functioning, laying eggs on them, and with the young devouring them alive, eating in a pattern that saves the vital organs for last. Sounds a lot like capitalistic exploitation doesn't it? *Yes it does!* Capitalistic exploitation obviously is part of nature as the actors are part of nature. *But, shall that example be an excuse for such an alie-nated behaviour of people?* Can you see the difference now? Those wasps behave the way they do because of 'their' nature. Who, for him- or herself wants to claim the wasp's right, which is related to f their neurological and spiritual level in natural evolution? Are we human beings not supposed to use the mental tools 'we' are given? Don't you think we have a different kind of responsibility? A different kind of consciousness and awareness?

The consciousness and awareness we are talking about always existed and for ever will exist - we only need to let it develop within our brains by the learning processes of life. Actually, we have to eat the fruits from the tree of knowledge. We are to understand and to live in an understanding and responsible way.

In order to communicate this vision of reality we articulate a rationally compelling and emotionally inspiring truth, we make this truth accessible, being seen and being highly regarded as to be our warming, nourishing, comforting home, which humanity maintains.

6 billion people are companions on that path. Instant correction of the track toward the abyss is possible, however, not yet very likely. This is why we need to make joint use of all our abilities and possibilities: *visions of peace, love, abundance, solidarity, of our global family and natural community.* We need to integrate the study of comparative religion and philosophy into our public schools. Not as a way of proselytising for a particular faith, but as a way of emphasising our need, both individually and collectively, for a sacred understanding of human existence.

Can a majority of human beings be expected to walk the path of empathy and love?

Many people already walk on that path, never leave that path. However, civilisation displaced billions of people. Limited their mental horizon, replaced understanding by dogma, love finally by political and/or religious correctness. The path is original life. Information different to that is nothing but false. Every child, without exception will be brought up within this world-view and will flourish within their particular community. If there are conflicts, the individual will naturally submit to the consensus of the community, which in turn, will always be sensitive to the changing needs of each and every individual.

This can be accomplished if the required consensus on sacred values and universal teaching of those values is learned. That is not at all magic. Optimising the possibility of individuals coming into a right relationship with self, others, nature, and our common source or ground is the easy key to peace.

However, the god habitual religions are referring to cannot do nothing at all if we do not support our hands, our hearts, our brains. To continue in this language: it is we who represent divine spirit, it is up to us to decide: divine or delusion, common sense or madness. It is up to us to react to the threats and challenges we created, it is up to us to re-integrate, to build bridges, to compensate, to heal - only if we do so there will be reconciliation. Neither realistically nor morally can we wait for someone to help us out. As long as there is suffering due to human misbehaviour there is no excuse at all for not at least trying to hurry up in improving performance.

The essence

Originally there is no difference between mental world and spiritual world. The world of our ideas and visions lives in our brains and

we live in that world, we live that world, we create it. It is the very ideas and visions which make the difference. If the world within our brains is authentic the result will be a behaviour of caring empathy. If the inner world is differently focussed the results will be different too.

Spirituality seen from this perspective is nothing but the mental capacity to achieve awareness of interconnectedness of all being. Within this context religion is the expression of our continuous attempt to realize life from its origin. It is the human attempt to understand life within its overall relations and it is the attempt to give life a perspective. Religion is part of our continuous attempt to identify ourselves within overall existence.

Religion is part of our human nature - everywhere, all over the world, without exception - and: it is political too.

As we are born to ask questions we rely on authentic answers. During our up-bringing part of the answers we do learn by trial and error, by pain and joy. Those answers by nature are true. They are authentic. And normally this kind of natural learning does not hurt much. Just enough to keep us on the right track.

We can understand: The key to the solution of the problems of the world is the quality of the answers we deal with. Answers are ideas. And we know how powerful they are. And we know how much those answers depend on education. If the mental superstructure of societies continues to be rigid and dogmatic - be it spiritual or secular - *the natural learning process* unfortunately cannot take place smoothly and therefore cannot provide true answers. Under conditions of domination, restriction and subordination answers are provided by elitist others: *predominantly insufficient answers, false answers, strange answers, mostly for the sake of strange interests.* By time and history the trials of course get more complex, the pain worse, the errors get fatal - no wonder! Under patriarchal conditions people grow old without learning their lessons. Obsessively till the end they confuse readiness to make sacrifices with love for life. Never the less giving up the force to control and confidence in autonomous learning processes of life are on schedule.

We should understand by now that we have not learnt the lesson on a global scale. That is why today we are confronted with a growing range of man-made global threats. Nature still is willing to bring us back on the right track. Responsibility is ours! *We can realize our job to do:* To clean up our mental worlds, our spiritual settings, our ideal frameworks, our world views and religious beliefs. We have to clean up the whole mess of ideas and we have to sort out what is supportive to global survival and what is not. We have to sort out what is just, social and ecological and what is not. We have to sort out what serves the common good and what is to serve strange cravings.

We depend on trust in the wisdom of our hearts! The heart is situated in the centre between the two brains of head and bowels. The heart is able to detect the quality of ideas. Everybody is free to try out. Outer world represents nothing but the result of a mainstream media guided imagination of fear, of threats, of supposed enemies and more intimidating concepts. The inner world consequently follows the same patterns and that is why we fail in making a difference.

However, if - under meditative tranquil conditions - we start to experience guided imaginations of peace, love, warmth, of pulsing blood-flow and breath-flow, of being supported by something overwhelming great-hearted, just, light, caring, loving, we perceive the difference to what we have been made to believe first hand.

Encouraged and strengthened by such experiences within caring communities we can make a decision to quit from what we thought before. Understanding better, we can leave behind what we held dear

before. We gain anyway. We can emancipate from being ruled by insufficient ideas towards a satisfying realization of ideas which serve life and nothing else.

Consequently we will behave responsibly. By purpose we will act always having in mind common good also. And we will not stop until we liberated the world from false ideas to an existence in solidarity and joyful diversity.

«When a devotee serves eternal Truth - be it only for a few days - all his intelligence will focus on me. He proceeds on that path and, after giving up present miserable material worlds, he will be my companion in a transcendental world.»

Srimad Bhagavatam , Canto 1, 6th chapter, verse 23

No elitist exclusivity - but integrity, humanity and nature

Likewise to the Al Qaeda prisoners in Yemen all misled or blinded people, hypnotized for the sake of false interests, have the chance to re-integrate to the wisdom of common ground of life. Such action delivers resonant energy and clears the mind from false fears and ideas. Common sense is nothing but a result of nature's schooling.

"Conspiracy" of usurious slave-drivers, avaricious profiteers and „Economic Hit Men“ (2) is a result of patriarchal schooling. It is what others call a „conspiracy of maffiacs“ - of media, military, administrative financial, fundamentalist, industrial strategists of academic complexes - the think tanks of the corporates. It was US President Dwight D. Eisenhower who in his fare-well message to his fellow citizens already warned the public of military-industrial complexes which he considered to be a major threat to democracy and freedom.

Well, as the patriarchal aberration has grown up to a global counter- project against life we have to partly re-programme ourselves and vitalize a world-wide „counter conspiracy in the spirit of life“ in order to gain creative momentum. Obviously it is not that simple that we are just not good enough in being Christians, Moslems, Jews, Hindus, communists or disciples of any other world-view and we just would have to „improve our respective role-behaviour“ - not at all: to a large extent we are just too weak in being humane - independently from where we come. As soon as we primarily concentrate on our common being human in the centre of nature's abundance, we become immunized against deviant temptations.

Being united in spirit is far stronger than being united in states or corporations. United in the spirit of life we are unbeatable, stronger than any violent and counter-creative „alliances of replacement strategists“. Once we stand on common ground, there is nothing but identical common sense in love and wisdom.

Common Sense and sound sympathy are the central clues to peace - the purpose and destination of human life.

Footnotes

- 1) *Transparency & Transcendence - Golden Keys to Peace*, Wolfgang Fischer, 2005
[<http://emanzipationhumanum.de/english/human/switch.html>]
- 2) *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, John Perkins, Berret-Koehler Publ. Inc. 2004
[<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1576753018/103-3237495-2551010>]

Koranic Duels Ease Terror

By James Brandon,
Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor (FEB 4, 2005)
[<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0204/p01s04-wome.html>]

SANAA, YEMEN - When Judge Hamoud al-Hitar announced that he and four other Islamic scholars would challenge Yemen's Al Qaeda prisoners to a theological contest, Western antiterrorism experts warned that this high-stakes gamble would end in disaster.

Nervous as he faced five captured, yet defiant, Al Qaeda members in a Sanaa prison, Judge Hitar was inclined to agree. But banishing his doubts, the youthful cleric threw down the gauntlet, in the hope of bringing peace to his troubled homeland.

'If you can convince us that your ideas are justified by the Koran, then we will join you in your struggle,' Hitar told the militants. 'But if we succeed in convincing you of our ideas, then you must agree to renounce violence.' The prisoners eagerly agreed. Now, two years later, not only have those prisoners been released, but a relative peace reigns in Yemen. And the same Western experts who doubted this experiment are courting Hitar, eager to hear how his 'theological dialogues' with captured Islamic militants have helped pacify this wild and mountainous country, previously seen by the US as a failed state, like Iraq and Afghanistan. 'Since December 2002, when the first round of the dialogues ended, there have been no terrorist attacks here, even though many people thought that Yemen would become terror's capital,' says Hitar, eyes glinting shrewdly from beneath his emerald-green turban. 'Three hundred and sixty-four young men have been released after going through the dialogues and none of these have left Yemen to fight anywhere else.' 'Yemen's strategy has been unconventional certainly, but it has achieved results that we could never have hoped for,' says one European diplomat, who did not want to be named. 'Yemen has gone from being a potential enemy to becoming an indispensable ally in the war on terror.'

To be sure, the prisoner-release program is not solely responsible for the absence of attacks in Yemen. The government has undertaken a range of measures to combat terrorism from closing down extreme madrassahs, the Islamic schools sometimes accused of breeding hate, to deporting foreign militants.

Eager to spread the news of his success, Hitar welcomes foreigners into his home, fussing over them and pouring endless cups of tea. But beyond the otherwise nondescript house, a sense of menace lurks. Two military jeeps are parked outside, and soldiers peer through the gathering dark at passing cars. The evening wind sweeps through the unpaved streets, lifting clouds of dust and whipping up men's jackets to expose belts hung with daggers, pistols, and mobile telephones.

Seated amid stacks of Korans and religious texts, Hitar explains that his system is simple. He invites militants to use the Koran to justify attacks on innocent civilians and when they cannot, he shows them numerous passages commanding Muslims not to attack civilians, to respect other religions, and fight only in self-defense.

For example, he quotes: 'Whoever kills a soul, unless for a soul, or for corruption done in the land - it is as if he had slain all mankind entirely. And, whoever saves one, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.' He uses the passage to bolster his argument against bombing Western targets in Yemen - attacks he says defy the Koran. And, he says, the Koran says under no circumstances should women and children be killed.

If, after weeks of debate, the prisoners renounce violence they are released and offered vocational training courses and help to find jobs. Hitar's belief that hardened militants trained by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan could change their stripes was initially dismissed by US diplomats in Sanaa as dangerously naive, but the methods of the scholarly cleric have little in common with the other methods of fighting extremism. Instead of lecturing or threatening the battle-har-

dened militants, he listens to them. 'An important part of the dialogue is mutual respect,' says Hitar. 'Along with acknowledging freedom of expression, intellect and opinion, you must listen and show interest in what the other party is saying.'

Only after winning the militants' trust does Hitar gradually begin to correct their beliefs. He says that most militants are ordinary people who have been led astray. Just as they were taught Al Qaeda's doctrines, he says, so too can they be taught more moderate ideas. 'If you study terrorism in the world, you will see that it has an intellectual theory behind it,' says Hitar. 'And any kind of intellectual idea can be defeated by intellect.'

The program's success surprised even Hitar. For years Yemen was synonymous with violent Islamic extremism. The ancestral homeland of Mr. bin Laden, it provided two-thirds of recruits for his Afghan camps, and was notorious for kidnappings of foreigners and the bombing of the American warship USS Cole in 2000 that killed 17 sailors. Resisting US pressure, Yemen declined to meet violence with violence. 'It's only logical to tackle these people through their brains and heart,' says Faris Sanabani, a former adviser to President Abdullah Saleh and editor-in-chief of the Yemen Observer, a weekly English-language newspaper. 'If you beat these people up they become more stubborn. If you hit them, they will enjoy the pain and find something good in it - it is a part of their ideology. Instead, what we must do is erase what they have been taught and explain to them that terrorism will only harm Yemenis' jobs and prospects. Once they understand this they become fighters for freedom and democracy, and fighters for the true Islam,' he says.

Some freed militants were so transformed that they led the army to hidden weapons caches and offered the Yemeni security services advice on tackling Islamic militancy. A spectacular success came in 2002 when Abu Ali al Harithi, Al Qaeda's top commander in Yemen, was assassinated by a US air-strike following a tip-off from one of Hitar's reformed militants. Yet despite the apparent success in Yemen, some US diplomats have criticized it for apparently letting Islamic militants off the hook with little guarantee that they won't revert to their old ways once released from prison. Yemen, however, argues that holding and punishing all militants would create only further discontent, pointing out that the actual perpetrators of attacks have all been prosecuted, with the bombers of the USS Cole and the French oil tanker, the SS Limburg. All received death sentences. 'Yemeni goals are long-term political aims whereas the American agenda focuses on short-term prosecution of military or law enforcement objectives,' wrote Charles Schmitz, a specialist in Yemeni affairs, in 2004 report for the Jamestown Foundation, an influential US think tank. 'These goals are not necessarily contradictory, with each government recognizing that compromises and accommodations must be made, but their ambiguities create tense moments.'

Some members of the Yemeni government also hanker for a more iron-fisted approach, and Yemen remains on high alert for further attacks. Fighter planes regularly swoop low over the ancient mud-brick city of Sanaa to send a clear message to any would-be militants. An additional cause of friction with the US is that while Yemen successfully discourages attacks within its borders on the grounds that tourism and trade will suffer, it has done little to tackle anti-Western sentiment or the corruption, poverty, and lack of opportunity that fuels Islamic militancy. 'Yemen still faces serious challenges, but despite the odd hiccup, we sometimes have to admit that Yemenis know Yemen best,' says the European diplomat. 'And if their system works, who are we to complain?' As the relative success of Yemen's unusual approach becomes apparent, Hitar has been invited to speak to antiterrorism specialists at London's New Scotland Yard, as well as to French and German police, hoping to defuse growing militancy among Muslim immigrants.

US diplomats have also approached the cleric to see if his methods can be applied in Iraq, says Hitar. 'Before the dialogues began, there was only one way to fight terrorism, and that was through force,' he says. 'Now there is another way: dialogue.'