



Canadian Security Intelligence Service

Intelligence Assessment

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CSIS IA 2009-10/44
2009 12 01

Islamist Extremists and the Freemasons

Summary

The Freemasons are a secretive society believed by some to be very powerful and influential.

Islamist extremists see the Masons as part of a Western crusade against Islam.

Freemasonry is seen as a direct threat to Islam.

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Introduction

1. The Freemasons have been featured in parts of modern pop culture as an all-seeing, all-knowing organization bent on world domination. Several Web sites have painted them as participants in a Judeo-Christian cabal that seeks to maintain control over the Islamic world. Not surprisingly, some Islamist extremists see the Masons as enemies as part of the generic West. This intelligence assessment examines how extremists have developed this image of the Freemasons

Who Are the Freemasons?

2. Freemasonry is an international fraternal organization that appears to have originated in the West in the 16th or 17th century. The organization cites itself as a "system of morality veiled in allegory and symbology". Sometimes labelled a secret society, the Freemasons prefer to call themselves a "society with secrets". Freemasonry is highly ritualistic, and new members can only gain access via existing Masons. Freemasons believe in a Supreme Being, though this figure is generic enough to allow interpretation from many world religions. The generic nature of their religious belief is perhaps the reason why many organized religions have criticized the Freemasons over the centuries and accused the organization of having a hidden agenda.

3. Modern pop culture has painted the Freemasons as an all-powerful cabal of decision-makers, politicians and world leaders bent on ruling the globe. Movies such as National Treasure and books by authors such as Dan Brown (The Da Vinci Code and The Lost Code) portray an organization with global power and access to untold riches. Some Founding Fathers of the US were Masons, and recent fiction claims that Freemasonry provided much of the motivation and purpose in creating the United States. Tales of hidden treasures and links to symbols and talismans dating back to the Egyptian pharaohs pepper this current popular view of Freemasons. Often thrown together with powerful Christian and Jewish/Zionist elements, Freemasonry is seen as a player behind the curtain, wielding influence beyond its numbers.

Islamist Extremists and the Masons

4. Islamist extremists believe in what has been described as a "common narrative": Islam is under concerted attack by an entity vaguely called "the West" and all true Muslims have a religious obligation to defend their faith. The usual enemies cited on the Internet and in communiqués are the US, UK and Israel, but many other countries have been named on occasion, including Canada. While the general enemy consists of Christians (Crusaders) and Jews (Zionists), there have been references to Freemasons as well. In 2006 12, a group called the Islamic Iraqi Media Centre posted an article online entitled "Know Your Enemy- Freemasonry and Terrorist Organizations in Europe", in which the Masons were accused of conducting secret paramilitary operations in Europe and having close ties to Israel. In 2008 05, an Al Qaeda affiliate¹ posted a message urging Egyptians to carry out jihad against, in part, the Masons, whom the writer accused of desecrating mosques and turning Muslims away from Islam. In 2008 09, Al Qaeda in Yemen justified terrorist attacks on Western embassies in Yemen by claiming that they facilitated the spread of factions that run counter to Islam, including Freemasonry. Finally, a 2009 06 criticism of US President Obama's speech in Cairo accused the US leader of following in the footsteps of the Masons.

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¹ The affiliate was called the Al Qaeda Organization in the Land of Waqwaq: Waqwaq refers either to a group of islands off the east coast of Africa or to an imaginary place.

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Implications

12. It is easy to dismiss belief in an all-powerful Freemasonry movement as akin to conspiracy theories prevalent on the Internet, fed by popular films and literature. It is important to underscore, however, that these theories are consistent with the Islamist extremist common narrative: in this light, the Freemasons are believed to be taking part in attacks against Islam. This portrayal can serve as a useful contribution to the radicalization process. Video series such as “The Arrivals” can be exploited by charismatic radicalizers to convince impressionable youth of the urgency of the situation and the need to act. Freemasons are thus seen as another of “Islam’s enemies” and their actions, real or not, used as justifications to respond with violence.

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