

## FILM REVIEW

Obsession: Radical Islam's  
War against the West  
and  
Shi'ism: Waiting for the Hidden Imam

Steven K. Baum

There are two important films to see, and neither is coming to the Cineplex. The reason the films will not be coming is that documentaries on the ideological underpinnings of terror have never had the kind of box office draw of a Stephen King film, though the filmgoer is left with the same sensations of having witnessed horror in the making.

The first film, *Obsession: Radical Islam's War against the West* (2006, 77 minutes), is an expose from Honestreporting, the Israeli hate monitoring group. As the subtitle says, it is a film about radical Islam's threat to Western civilization. The documentary-style video features interviews with a variety of experts on the topic of terrorism, including MEMRI's Daniel Pipes, anti-Semitism expert Robert Wistrich, and historian Sir Martin Gilbert, in addition to talks with former PLO terrorists, children of jihadis and former Hitler youth, and pro-Western Islam experts such as Khaleel Mohammed. Those familiar with Daniel Pipe's writings and webpage will understand why he and similar monitoring groups have been trying to warn the West for decades.

The film begins with the horror of 9/11 and the destruction of the World Trade Center before swirling the viewer to Beslan's aftermath of Russian schoolchildren blown apart, and then on to the devastation of Spain's train explosions and the London subway bombings. The effect works. One no longer is simply being exposed to the seemingly random disconnected tales of terror, but understands the global jihad that has left misery in its wake.

Unique footage from Arab television documents interviews with clerics. It also reveals children being taught to hate Jews, Americans, and British citizens. The film draws legitimate parallels between Nazism and the fundamentalist version of Islam, and demonstrates the naiveté of democratic nations confronted by both ideologies.

*Obsession* is the most powerful film available on the subject of Islamic terrorism. It begins and ends with disclaimers explaining that the film is not

about the majority of law-abiding Muslims, but about only a handful that subscribe to an ideology of hate that has appropriated Islam. The disclaimer highlights the notion of the civil war within Islam between fundamentalists and reformers as much as it does a global war against the nonbeliever.

The civil war within Islam is also the focus of Said Bakhtaoui and Mohammed Ballout's *Shi'ism: Waiting for the Hidden Imam* (First Run/Icarus, 2005, 53 minutes), which is not a polished production like *Obsession*. The film has the feel of a PBS special, and provides the viewer with an overview of Shia history and politics. The Shias, who represent about ten percent of Islam devotees and are mostly located in Iran (95%) and Iraq (60%), and to a lesser extent in Lebanon (30%) and Syria (12%), are ideologically separate and miles apart from their Sunni brethren.

The split in Islam occurred quite early (AD 632) when the Prophet Mohammed died without an official successor, which created a political void. His cousin Ali claimed succession, to the dismay of Sunnis, who believed the new Imam should be put to a vote and replaced the Prophet with Abu Bakr. Ali waited twenty years to become leader and was murdered in 661 as the governor of Damascus seized power, an event that was followed by another coup as Ali's son Hussein seized power. When Hussein left for Iraq, he was killed by the competing Imam, Yamin, in a massacre at Karbala; he is buried there, making it Islam's second most holy site (after Mecca). Vengeance for three of the four successors to the Prophet is a key element contributing to the schism in Islam.

Since only blood relatives of the Prophet could succeed, the "partisans of Ali," or Shias, broke away with irreconcilable ideological splits. Shias emphasize moral victories, Sunnis material and political ones. Shias must be buried near an Imam, while Sunnis need not be. The Shias say the Koran must be interpreted; the Sunnis say it must be understood literally.

For the faithful of Islam, herein lies the rub. The Koran must be interpreted because of the hidden meanings regarding the Twelvers. The Twelvers refers to the film's subtitle of the twelve Imams, including Mohammed ibn Hasan, the Mahdi or hidden Imam who will return to earth and bring peace. (By contrast, Sunnis believe he has yet to be born.) Pictures of the Twelve Imams appear everywhere in Shia culture and often include the Prophet Mohammed, though as the Danish cartoon riots of 2006 reminded us, it is against the tenets of Islam to display images of the Prophet.

The film walks the viewer through history, rituals, and ideological beliefs and is shot in Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon. While it does explain Hezbollah's politics, the missing pieces, such as the current Iraq invasion, are conspicuous.

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Both *Obsession* and *Shi'ism* may appear at film festivals and art houses or go to video. Currently both can be ordered directly from the distributor. Both films deserve to be seen.

