

Jihad: Between War and Peace

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Introduction

The term *jihad* means striving, endeavouring, making an effort, exerting oneself or fighting. Yet *jihad* is associated in the popular mind with force, violence and conflict. The fact that several current Muslim resistance movements have proclaimed *jihad* against their occupiers (e.g. in Iraq) or their own governments (e.g. in Algeria), are using Islamic symbols to depict their cause and resorting to kidnapping, beheading and martyrdom operations (commonly known as 'suicide bombings') reinforces this perception.

The term *jihad* has been used by Muslim scholars to refer to peaceful activities, e.g. the intellectual effort by jurists to arrive at a judicial ruling, propagation of Islam through speech and writing, spiritual development through physical and moral discipline, etc. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the famous Indian Muslim scholar and leader of the Indian National Congress before independence, and later federal education minister in India offered the following explanation of *jihad*:

There are serious misconceptions regarding what is *jihad*. Many people think that *jihad* means only to fight. The critics of Islam too labour under this misunderstanding, whereas to think thus is to utterly narrow the practical scope of this sacred commandment. *Jihad* means to strive to the utmost. In the Quran and Sunna terminology, this utmost exertion, which is undertaken for the sake of truth rather than personal ends, is indicated by the word *jihad*. This effort could be with one's life, or property, or expenditure of

time, or by bearing labour and hardship, or fighting the enemy and shedding blood.

To cite the French writer, Marcel A. Boisard, Muslim scholars distinguished between four types of *jihad*: the 'war' waged by the heart (the internal moral and spiritual struggle), the tongue (the effort of calm preaching), the hand (the effort to correct error and enforce good conduct) and the sword (armed conflict with the enemy of Muslims) (see Kolocotronis 1990:109).

Despite this, the only dimension of *jihad* that is consistently highlighted by the media and has become entrenched in the public image is the one involving the use of force. This meaning of *jihad* is so widespread that even Muslims immediately associate the term with conflict and war. For many, the peaceful pursuit of intellectual, moral and spiritual development seems virtually incongruous with the term *jihad*. This reduction of the term has been criticised by contemporary scholars such as Mustansir Mir (1987:112) precisely because it detracts from its wider meaning, including private effort, social action, monetary expenditure, etc.

In this article, I will highlight the various dimensions of *jihad*, demonstrate that peace is the norm in Islam and assess the current prospect for global *jihad*. As a prelude, I will interrogate the causes of conflict in the Muslim World.

The Causes of Conflict in the Muslim World

Many scholars, analysts and observers charge that religion is a fundamental cause of conflict, citing as examples conflicts that have occurred between followers of different faiths or denominations, e.g. the Crusades (between Christians and Muslims), the war in Yugoslavia (between Bosnian Muslims and Serb Orthodox Christians and between the latter and Catholic Croats), and the India-Pakistani wars (between Muslims of Pakistan and Hindus of India). The current conflicts in the Gujarat state of India, northern Nigeria, and southern Sudan are all presumed to be motivated essentially by religious factors for the following reasons:

1. The conflicts are between two diverse faith groups, viz between Hindus and Muslims in India and between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and the Sudan.

2. The dispute in India is over a site which some Hindus claim was the birth-place of Ram and on which they are determined to rebuild a temple - supposedly on the ruins of the original temple - after having demolished the mosque that was built by the Mughal emperor Babur (Barbari mosque). In the case of Nigeria and Sudan, the conflict is attributed to the imposition of the *shari`ah* by the Muslim majority on the Christian minority.
3. Many Muslims globally support the Muslims of India, Nigeria and the Sudan; in a similar vein, many Hindus the world over support the Bharatiya Janata Party's ideology of 'Hindutva' and many Christians support the Christians of Nigeria and the Sudan.

It is my contention that it is not religion *per se*, but a variety of political and economic factors that either drive or intensify these conflicts and that religion provides a useful tool of mass mobilization and justification. It is well established that in India, for instance, the Bharatiya Janata Party carefully manipulated the Barbari mosque/Ram temple dispute to gain support at the polls (Platvoet 1995:209).

In Sudan, the Southern People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has for long been discouraged from reaching a settlement with the Sudanese government because it has been receiving funding from Britain, Israel and the United States as well as arms from the USA (Adar 1998). There is a growing perception that the US government has great interest in the oil deposits in the region, and will not be averse to the establishment of peace between the warring parties. Even in the case of Nigeria, it does appear that Muslim politicians have carefully appropriated the *shari`ah* issue for political gain.

The underlying cause of the conflict between the Chechens and Russians, Kashmiris and Indians and Palestinians and Israelis is generally understood to be essentially political. Nonetheless, the fact that Chechen, Kashmiri and Palestinian resistance movements depict their struggle not merely in political terms but as a *jihad*, reinforces the view of some political analysts that Islam's legalization of warfare (*jihad*) encourages Muslims to take up arms, provides justification for violence and confers legitimacy on their hostility towards the 'other'. Since September 11, the popular perception that Muslims are prone to violence by virtue of their faith has

been validated by the proclamations of Usama ibn Ladin, as well as of several resistance movements in the Muslim World. 'We are on the firm road to *jihad*' Usama is said to have told the Arab television channel, al-Jazeera (Daily News September 2001).

While the above-mentioned resistance groups are engaged in a bitter struggle (*jihad*) against occupation, others are occupied in a violent confrontation (also classified as *jihad* by supporters) against their own regimes. Depicting all resistance movements as anti-Western is, therefore, erroneous. Even al-Qa'idah which is now projected as the model of anti-Westernism had no objection to working closely with United States military advisers in their *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Furthermore, many regimes in the Middle East are currently being challenged by one or more resistance movements – some based inside the country and others based outside.

There is substantial evidence to suggest that much of the violence against governments and foreigners in the Muslim World is perpetrated by those who feel a deep sense of frustration, betrayal and helplessness. The causes of their disenchantment are not only socio-economic, but also political in nature. That explains why the leaders of militant groups and their followers are not all economically deprived or socially marginalized; in fact, some are extremely wealthy and belong to the elite families, such as Usama himself.

In the light of this, it will be naïve to assume that violence in the Muslim World will be eradicated simply through poverty alleviation measures or social upliftment projects. It is true that granting people civic rights such as voting, freedom of association, etc cannot substitute for a lack of basic necessities such as food and shelter. Hence Muslim governments cannot afford to ignore the economic and social aspirations of their people. However, while this may satisfy an immediate need (of the destitute sectors of society), the long-term political aspirations of the people – including greater freedom of expression, participation in governing and decision-making, recognition of human rights- will have to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Dimensions of Jihad

Both the Qur'an and Hadith – the primary sources of Islam – sanction *jihad*.

The Qur'an permits fighting against those who attack Muslims (Qur'an 9:13, 22:39) or oppress the weak (Qur'an 4:75). There are many traditions which describe the excellence of *jihad*.

In principle, *jihad* is considered a collective obligation (*fard kifayah*) on Muslims which could be transformed into an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) where circumstances warrant it. Some scholars described *jihad* as a pillar of faith in which case it would be regarded as an individual rather than a communal responsibility. For Mawdudi (1980:141) *jihad* is as much a primary duty as are the daily prayers or fasting. In the early centuries of Islam, there were two fundamental approaches to *jihad* among Muslim scholars: offensive and defensive. According to the former, Muslims are obliged to conduct *jihad* against non-Muslims until they accept Islam or submit to Muslim authority. Permanent peace between Muslims and non-Muslims is not possible; only a temporary truce is admissible (Tyan 1965).

Among those who admit *jihad* as a defensive measure, as a means of warding off aggression on Muslim life, property and honour (Hashmi 1998:425-426), there were two positions: those who support taking the initiative against the enemy and those who oppose it. In the case of the former, action to prevent oppression and persecution of Muslims outside the lands of Islam would be legitimate (Peters 1979:123-127). This means that Muslims would be obliged to intervene on behalf of their co-religionists who are persecuted and/or oppressed in foreign lands.

Another dimension of *jihad* was introduced by the Sufis. While they affirmed the significance of *jihad*, they focused on its inner dimension. In their view, the greater *jihad* (*al-jihad al-akbar*) is an inner war - primarily a struggle against the base instincts of the body - as a means of gaining spiritual insight. In support, they cite the Prophet's statement to the soldiers who had returned from a battle against the Romans that they had returned from a minor to a major *jihad* (Ashraf 1987:126).

In more recent times, the revolutionary and political nature of *jihad* assumed greater significance. The doctrine of *jihad* played a significant role in anti-colonial resistance movements in the Muslim World - particularly in India, Algeria, Libya, Sudan and the Caucasus (Lewis 1991:146). As a consequence of colonization and the formation of secular nation-states, *jihad* lost its momentum. The failure of the Ottomans to mobilize Muslim soldiers serving in the British, French and Russian armies against their colonizers

signaled the end of mass mobilization in the Muslim World.

Subsequently, however, revivalists – led by Abu'l A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979), Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1956) – who inherited the mantle of leadership from the resistance movements, emphasized the role of *jihad* in establishing an Islamic government. Mawdudi (1980:7) declared: 'To alter the old tyrannical social system and establish a just new order of life by the power of the sword is *jihad* ...'.

A point of departure is that revivalists justify *jihad* against fellow Muslims. Before directing *jihad* against external enemies, they argue, Muslims must first deal with their own rulers. Leaders who are not committed to Islam and governments that fail to enforce the *shari'ah* can be deposed (Hashmi 1998:425-426; Peters 1979:130-135). Significantly, Islamists consider *jihad* mandatory for all Muslims, making it an individual rather than a collective duty. They are highly critical of scholar like 'Abd al-Qadir al-Sufi who argues that Muslims must wait until attacked before embarking on *jihad* (1978:46).

The revivalists' position echoes Ibn Taymiyyah's notion of *jihad* as an indispensable feature of legitimate rule. Ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328) declared that a ruler who fails to enforce the *shari'ah* rigorously in all its aspects, including the performance of *jihad*, forfeits his right to rule. A strong advocate of *jihad*, he personally participated in the battles against the Crusaders and Mongols who occupied parts of the Muslim World (Sonn 1990:132-138).

Shi'ah revolutionaries have a similar perspective. Ayatollah Khomeini (1903-1989) contended that jurists, 'by means of *jihad*...must expose and overthrow tyrannical rulers and rouse the people so the universal movement of all alert Muslims can establish Islamic government in the place of tyrannical regimes' (Khomeini 1981:108,132). Ayatollah Muhammad Mutahhari, a top ideologue of the Iranian Revolution, considers *jihad* as an essential feature of Islam. Since Islam has political objectives, it must sanction the use of armed force to achieve these. Though Mutahhari accepts the importance of *jihad* for defensive purposes, his definition includes defence against oppression, which would require armed intervention beyond the boundaries of Islam (Mutahhari 1986:89).

As for the validity of *jihad* in the contemporary world, there are several crucial issues that need to be considered. While *jihad* as a legitimate

instrument for self-defence is not challenged by Muslim scholars in general, there are serious questions with regard to its application.

1. In what context should military *jihad* be applied?
2. In what context should peaceful *jihad* - viz negotiation, legislation and education - be applied?
3. Is *jihad* mandatory for every Muslim?
4. Can Muslims intervene in the affairs of other states in order to put an end to the oppression of their co-religionists?
5. What methods of *jihad* are permissible?
6. Is 'suicide bombing' a valid mode of operation in the *shari`ah*?
7. Can resistance movements overthrow existing rulers?

Esposito (2003) argues that radicalized groups 'combine militancy with messianic visions to inspire and mobilize an army of God' which through *jihad* will liberate Muslims from authoritarian regimes and western governments. Their leaders use Qur'anic verses selectively, not in their historical context, in order to engender an attitude of hate and intolerance toward these 'enemies' and reject the principles relating to *jihad*. They operate independently of any authority and ignore Islam's guidelines on the conduct of war such as the following:

- treating prisoners humanely (Qur'an 47:4)
- reciprocating the enemy's call for peace (Qur'an 8:61; 4:90)
- not killing civilians or non-combatants, especially women and children (Abu Dawud 1984:2:739).
- not using torture against enemy soldiers (Shaheen 1999:4-5)
- not mutilating the corpses of fallen soldiers (Abu Dawud 1984:2:738)

The taking of hostages and beheading of captives that we now witness in Iraq are measures that do not fall under the definition of *jihad*, according to the majority of reputed Islamic scholars. At the meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference in Malaysia in April 2002 attended by the Foreign Ministers of over 50 Muslim countries, the Prime Minister of Malaysia declared that while resistance to foreign occupation is legitimate,

all deliberate attacks on civilians should be classified as acts of terror.

This brings us to another phenomenon that is highly debated in Muslim circles, viz *istishhad* (martyrdom operation), more popularly known as 'suicide bombings'. There is dispute over the legitimacy of this method which started in the early 1980s, when Shiite resistance groups began to use this tactic. The leading Lebanese Shiite scholar, Shaykh Muhammad Husein Fadlallah, publicly declared his reservation about these operations during the 1980s. His followers among the *Hizbullah* then turned to Iran in order to legitimize these operations.

Subsequently, 'martyrdom operations' were adopted by the Palestinians in their struggle for independence. In 1989, Islamic Jihad published a *fatwa* that legitimated these types of operations (*istishhad*) and classified them as a form of *jihad*. Since April 1993, *Hamas* has also supported this position and in 1998 presented a book that granted legitimacy to suicide operations on its official website.

In 2000, the phenomenon of suicide bombings expanded to two other areas of Islamic struggle : Chechnya and Kashmir. In both cases, especially in regard to the Chechen fighters of Arab and Afghan origin and the Kashmiri Islamist organizations of *Lashkar-I-Taiba* and *Hizb-I-Mujahidin*, their operations received 'official' sanction from the religious scholars (Paz 2001).

Nonetheless, while some scholars such as Shaykh Uthaiman of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Tantawi of Egypt, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qardawi of Qatar, Shaykh Ahmad Qubeisi of Iraq and Shaykh Ahmad al-Zein of Lebanon view these operations as a legitimate strategy in *jihad* (Special Report 32,1:09:2004, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sr&ID=SR3204>), others reject them on the basis that they constitute a form of suicide (Suicide Bombing in Islam, <http://www.submission.org/jihad/suicide.html>). Another reason for rejecting 'martyrdom operations' is because, more often than not, they harm civilians, either through injury or death.

In direct contradiction to the revolutionary position, some contemporary scholars espouse a fundamentally peaceful vision of *jihad*, arguing that all the wars waged by the prophet and the first four caliphs were of a defensive nature. In contrast to the traditional division of the world by jurists into *dar al-harb* (abode of war) and *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam)(see

Hashmi 1998:425-426), they emphasise a third category: *dar al-sulh* (abode of peace) or *dar al-'ahd* (abode of contract) (Mir 1991:119-122)). While earlier scholars made allowances for temporary alliances, they argue that Muslims may enter into permanent peace treaties with non-Muslims. While they do not reject the notion of *jihad*, they perceive it as encompassing all forms of political and social action to establish justice.

Falur Rahman and Asghar Ali Engineer have called for a redefinition of *jihad* in the contemporary context. Rahman (1980:63-64) views *jihad* as an instrument for Muslims to establish an egalitarian and just socio-moral order.. For Engineer, *jihad* is using democracy and democratic institutions to realize the noble goals of Islam (On the multi-layered concept of *jihad*, <http://www.tehelka.com/channels/commentary/2001/dec/11/com121101jihad1.htm>).

Peace the Norm

The norm in Islam is peace and not violence. In the words of Sayyid Qutb (1977:9) : 'In Islam, peace is the rule, and war is a necessity'. The Qur'an (8:61-62) directs Muslims to respond positively to any overtures to peace by the enemy in the time of war. The Prophet of Islam is reported to have advised his followers '... never (to) desire aggression or war...' (Rahman 1981:1:507). He took to fighting only when his own life and faith were threatened, and he was left with no alternative.

However, as soon as hostilities between him and the Quraysh and then between him and the Jewish tribes ceased, he seized the opportunity for establishing peace treaties – leading to the Truce of al-Hudaybiyyah in the first instance and the Treaty of Khaybar in the second (Qasimi 1987:83-86). In fact, when he first arrived in Madinah, he had a Charter drawn up in which the Jews were accorded citizenship rights, with guarantee of their personal security, freedom of worship, etc. The relationship between Muslims and Jews was to be based on mutual advice, assistance and consultation (Kolocotronis 1990:144).

The Prophet entered into a treaty with the Christians of Najran and ordered that reverence should be shown for their place of worship. After the conquest of Makkah, he forgave all those who had persecuted him and his followers and who had exiled them from their mother city. This act of

forgiveness is unprecedented in ancient or modern history. This demonstrates that his primary objective was to stop his enemies from aggression and not to kill them.

It is on the basis of these precedents that jurists allowed the negotiation of truces and pacts, as well as other rights and privileges. Several caliphs made peace treaties with the Byzantine emperors. The 'Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid (r 786-809), is known to have established an excellent relationship with the Roman Emperor, Charlemagne. According to Adam Metz, Muslims showed great respect for synagogues and churches. Under Muslim rule in Spain Christians held conferences in Seville (AD 872) and Cordova (AD 852), and Jews and Christians were not forbidden to hold any post under the government or any other job.

Despite the fact that after their conquest of Jerusalem the Crusaders mercilessly put to the sword thousands of Muslims, the great Kurdish General Salah al-Din Ayyubi (popularly known as Saladin) who led the Muslim reconquest of the city in October AD 1187 proclaimed a public amnesty; and forbade the execution, the plundering, or the torture of Christians. Muslims and Christians generally lived amicably together throughout the Middle East. Even the conflict between Jews and Palestinians only emerged after World War I – when the Balfour Declaration paved the way for their immigration from Europe to Palestine.

The Qur'anic directive to respect the people of the Book has generally been honoured by Muslims throughout history. In Egypt the Copts have been on terms of close friendship with the Muslims since the first centuries of the Muslim conquest. Likewise, in Syria the various Christian communities have lived in peace. Jews fled from Christian persecution to Muslim countries for refuge, and were never persecuted. And it is noteworthy that the Arabic-speaking Jews of Palestine - the old immigrants from Spain and Poland – have always supported the Muslims and Christians who oppose the transformation of Palestine into a national home for the Jews.

The Prospect of Global Jihad

It is a truism that there are divergent views and perspectives among Muslim scholars on most contemporary issues. An interesting case is that of Salman

Rushdie who was condemned to death by an Iranian court but afforded an opportunity for repentance by the *shaykhs* of al-Azhar in Egypt. While Usama ibn Ladin may be very popular with the Muslim masses for political reasons, there are many *shuyukh* who do not support his call for *jihad* against the United States. Recently, many Muslim leaders and scholars have disassociated themselves from his pronouncements on *jihad*.

The concept of *jihad* as a moral struggle touches the daily lives of many Muslims, and not only Sufis. *Jihad* as warfare, though far better known, has had a narrower impact. In recent history, it has not mobilized Muslims en masse or transcended ethnic, geographic, sectarian or political divisions within the Muslim world. Though a sizeable number of Muslim individuals and groups have classified their resistance as *jihad*, few governments have done so. The conception of *jihad* as warfare in defense of the Dar al-Islam did not produce a Pan-Islamic resistance to colonialism. The many movements that arose to resist European expansion or occupation were regional or local, tied to a specific leader or regime. In most cases, *jihad* against colonialism formed a part of a program of religious reform and renewal. Such was the case of al-Ikhwan a-Muslimun of Egypt.

Just as the Ottoman call for *jihad* failed to mobilize Muslims against their colonizers, the call by popular leaders such as Usama is likely to have limited appeal. This is borne out by the fact that recent invocations of *jihad* against Israel have not overcome division among Israel's opponents or produced an effective mobilization of their capability against Israel. Saddam Husayn's call for a *jihad* against the United States, as a strategy to convince his critics of his commitment to Islam, did not gain much support. The same applies to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatullah 'Ali Khamanei's designation of war against U.S. forces as *jihad*.

In Afghanistan, though the idea of *jihad* did attract considerable support from the rest of the Islamic world, only three Islamic states (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran) actually allocated significant resources to the *mujahidin*. Furthermore, it did not unite the Afghan resistance, which remained divided by social, political, ethnic and ideological differences. The other outside participants in the Afghan resistance were individuals who represented a marginal element within the Islamic world. The involvement of *mujahidun* on the side of the resistance movements in Kashmir, Chechnia and now Iraq is limited – though there may be considerable moral support

for these movements in the Muslim World.

Given the above, there seems little prospect of a global *jihad* against the West, despite Samuel Huntington's prediction of a clash between Islamic and Western civilizations (1993). However, the one region where the prospect of a universally-supported *jihad* is very real is Palestine – not only because Palestinians are arguably the most traumatized of the Muslims involved in resistance, but also because of the presence there of *al-Masjid al-Aqsa*, the third most sacred shrine in Islam. If the Israelis demolish or seriously damage *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* with the intention of rebuilding the Temple of Solomon on its ruins, there is little doubt that this action will have global consequences. Muslims throughout the world will rally in defence of what they consider to be their sacred site – even at the cost of their lives.

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