Aneela Sultana[1]

DIGGING ISLAMIC ROOTS OF JIHAD TO UNVEIL THE TRUTH

Introduction

Islam is perhaps the most misunderstood religion to the West, and many stereotypes still hinder clarity about its tenets and practices. Western prejudice toward Islam is as old as Islam itself. Islam, as all religious civilizations, represents a complex system of values and ritual, theology and folklore, law and faith. Like all religions, it offers a variety of responses to the questions and perplexities of the human condition.

It took generations for Quranic studies, theology, and law to evolve from the days of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) into the disciplines of the classic period of the Abbasid Caliphate.[2] This article aims to examine a portion of the complex early history of nascent Islam in order to reconstruct the conceptual development of its views on war. It traces the origin and development of jihad through early Islamic history into the present day, and explains how the practice of jihad now a day violates its true spirit.

The Meaning of Holy War

In general terms, war may be defined as an organized, purposeful activity directed by one established group against a rival group that involves actual or potential application of lethal force.

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[2] Caliph for Sunni Muslims, successor of Muhammad as leader of the Islamic community.

ПОЛИТИКОЛОГИЈА РЕЛИГИЈЕ бр. 1/2008, год. II • POLITICS AND RELIGION Nº1/2008, vol. II

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Although holy war is defined most broadly as any religious justification for engaging in war, it does not necessarily presume a connection of military activity to religious purposes, though this is often the case. Some expression of holy war exists in virtually all religious traditions and is certainly the most common and persistent expression of ideological war. Its representation across religious and cultural strata has taken many different forms and produced many different results. All, however, can be said to represent divinely justified engagement in war. Such justification contrasts most starkly with material justification for warring, which among ecological materialists has been said to lie at the bottom of many if not most decisions to engage in war.

As might be expected given the variety of human religious experience, there are many different expressions of holy war. The divinity may gird its human warriors with extraordinary strength, determine the outcome before the beginning of the battle, or even fight on behalf of the people. Divine authority for warring is established directly by the divine word communicated through speech or writ or indirectly through a prophet, priest, or religious functionary who determines the divine sanction through oracular means. Such a broad spectrum of holy war paradigms reflects the varied cultural and religious settings in which they may be found. Yet the particular religious and cultural configurations of every individual tradition produce a unique expression of holy war that accurately reflects its history, theology, and anthropology. The particular expressions of holy war found in the Islamic world tend to be referred to in the West as *jihād*.

The Meaning of Jihād

Jihād is a verbal noun of the third Arabic form of the root *jahada,* which is defined classically as "exerting one's utmost power, efforts, endeavors, or ability in contending with an object of disapprobation." Such an object is often categorized in the literature as deriving from one of three sources: a visible enemy, the devil, and aspects of one's own self. There are, therefore, many kinds of *jihād,* and most have nothing to do with warfare. "*Jihād* of the heart," for example, denotes struggle against one's own sinful inclinations, while "*jihād* of the tongue" requires speaking on behalf of the good and forbidding evil.[3] Various activities subsumed under *jihād* are said by Muhammad to distinguish true believers who are loyal to God's Prophet:

Every prophet sent by God to a nation (*umma*) before me has had disciples and followers who followed his ways (*sunna*) and obeyed his commands. But after them came successors who preached what they did not practice and practiced what they

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[3]   *Al-amr bil-marūf wal-nahy an al-munkar.* This common phrase occurs repeatedly in the Quran(*sūra* 3:110, 114, 9:71, etc.).

were not commanded. Whoever strives (*jāhada*) against them with one's hand is a believer, whoever strives against them with one's tongue is a believer, whoever strives against them with one's heart is a believer. There is nothing greater than [the size of] a mustard seed beyond that in the way of faith.

Muhammad is also credited with saying: "The best *jihād* is [speaking] a word of justice to a tyrannical ruler."[4]

The qualifying phrase "in the path of God" (*fi sabīl Allah*) specifically distinguishes the activity of *jihād* as furthering or promoting God's kingdom on earth. It can be done, for example, by simply striving to behave ethically and by speaking without causing harm to others or by actively defending Islam and propagating the faith. *Jihād* as religiously grounded warfare, sometimes referred to as "*jihād* of the sword" (*jihād al-sayf*), is subsumed under the last two categories of defending Islam and propagating the faith, though these need not be accomplished only through war. When the term is used without qualifiers such as "of the heart" or "of the tongue," however, it is universally understood as war on behalf of Islam (equivalent to "*jihād* of the sword"), and the merits of engaging in such *jihād* are described plentifully in the most-respected religious works.[5] Nevertheless, Muslim thinkers, and particularly ascetics and mystics, often differentiate between the "greater *jihād*" (*al-jihād al-akbar*) and the "lesser *jihād*" (*al-jihād al-aşghar*), with the former representing the struggle against the self and only the "lesser *jihād*" referring to warring in the path of God.

Even within its range of meaning as war on behalf of Islam, the term is often used in relation to conflicts between Muslims. Such examples of *jihād* include wars fought against groups of apostates rebelling against proper Islamic authority (*murtaddūn*), dissenting groups denouncing legitimate Muslim leadership (*baghī*), highway robbers and other violent people, and deviant or un-Islamic leadership.

If jihad has so many meanings, how are they to be understood? Which interpretations are correct? Which of the meanings promote positive improvements and reforms, and which have been exploited to justify extremism and terrorism? These questions are not new—they have been debated by Muslims throughout the ages.

The history of the Muslim community from Muhammad to the present can be read within the framework of what the Quran teaches about jihad. The Quranic teachings have been of essential significance to Muslim self-understanding, piety, mobilization, expansion, and defense. Jihad as struggle pertains to the difficulty and complexity of living a good life: struggling against the evil in oneself in order to be

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[4]   Abū Dāwud, *Sunan Abā Dawud* (Cairo, 1408 1988), *K. al-Malāaim,* 4344 (4:122).

[5]   E. Tyan, „*Djihad,*" in *EI*2, vol. 2, pp. 538-540. On the merits for engaging in war "in the path of God,"

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POLITOLOGIE DES RELIGIONS №1/2008, vol. II

virtuous and moral, making a serious effort to do good works and to help to reform society. Depending on the circumstances in which one lives, it also can mean fighting injustice and oppression, spreading and defending Islam, and creating a just society through preaching, teaching and, if necessary, armed struggle or holy war.

The two broad meanings of jihad, nonviolent and violent, are contrasted in a well-known prophetic tradition. It is said that when Muhammad returned from battle he told his followers, "We return from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad." The greater jihad is the more difficult and more important struggle against one's ego, selfishness, greed, and evil.

Understanding the various ways in which jihad has been interpreted throughout Muslim history can enable us to distinguish between extremist organizations on the one hand and the majority of Muslims on the other. The struggle for the soul of Islam going on today is the product of a rich and complex history. From the very beginning, jihad was used both by those in power and by those who challenged that power, by insiders and by outsiders. Early Muslim history provides the clearest antecedents and paradigms for what is going on today. And so to understand jihad, we must begin with the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran.

Prophet Muhammad's Jihad

 The Quran and the Sunnah, or prophetic example, provides a theology for peace, for living in a world of diverse nations and peoples. They also provide guidelines on how to fight the enemy as well as how to fight against corruption and oppression. The world in which Islam emerged in the seventh century was a rough neighborhood where war was the natural state. Arabia and the city of Mecca, in which Muhammad lived and received God's revelation, were beset by tribal raids. Muhammad's reformist message posed an unwelcome challenge to the religious and political establishment, the priests, tribal leaders, and businessmen of the community. The new religious message that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) preached. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Quran condemned Arabian polytheism and put a spotlight on Meccan society's unbridled materialism, avarice, and corruption, a condition of ignorance and unbelief called *jahiliyyah*

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) prophetic call summoned the people to strive and struggle (jihad) to reform their communities and to live a good life based on religious belief and not loyalty to their tribe. His insistence that each person was personally accountable not to tribal customary law but to an overriding divine law shook the very foundations of Arabian society. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) newly claimed

status and authority as God's messenger and his entreaties to believers to take action against social corruption threatened the authority of powerful elites. The Quran rejected Arabian polytheism and insisted that there was only one true God. It denounced the corrupt practices of many merchants and the exploitation of orphans and their inheritance rights. It condemned infanticide, spoke of the religious equality of men and women, and expanded the marriage and inheritance rights of women. To uphold this deeply challenging message and mission, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers would have to fight, wage jihad, to stay alive.

From 622 C.E. until his death ten years later, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) very successfully consolidated his power in Medina and united the feuding tribes of Arabia. At critical points throughout these years Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received revelations from God that provided guidelines for the jihad. As the Muslim community grew, questions quickly emerged about who had religious and political authority, how to handle rebellion and civil war, what was proper behavior during times of war and peace, how to rationalize and legitimize expansion and conquest, violence and resistance. Answers to these questions were developed by referring to Quranic injunctions. The Quran provides detailed guidelines and regulations regarding the conduct of war: who is to fight and who is exempted (48:17, 9:91), when hostilities must cease (2:192), how prisoners should be treated (47:4). Verses such as Quran 2:294 emphasize proportionality in warfare: "whoever transgresses against you, respond in kind." Other verses provide a strong mandate for making peace: "If your enemy inclines toward peace then you too should seek peace and put your trust in God" (8:61), and "Had Allah wished, He would have made them dominate you and so if they leave you alone and do not fight you and offer you peace, then Allah allows you no way against them" (4:90). From the earliest times it was forbidden to kill noncombatants as well as women and children and monks and rabbis, who were given the promise of immunity unless they had taken part in the fighting. The Prophet's example (and Islamic law) also provide answers to questions about how the Muslim community should act. Stories about how the Prophet behaved are preserved in narrative traditions or *hadith*. They have been and continue to be used throughout the world to provide guidance for Muslim decisions and behavior.

The religious rationale (as distinct from the practical political and economic motives) for conquest and expansion was not to force conversion to Islam upon other faiths who had their own prophets and revelations—the Quran states clearly, "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256)—but rather to spread its righteous order so that ignorance and unbelief could be replaced by just societies throughout the world. The religious justification made for a jihad to propagate the faith is connected to Islam's universal mission to spread the word of God and the just reign of God's will for all

humanity: "So let there be a body among you who may call to the good, enjoin what is esteemed and forbid what is odious. They are those who will be successful" (3:104); and, "Of all the communities raised among men you are the best, enjoining the good, forbidding the wrong, and believing in God" (3:110).

Differences in Sunni and Shia[6] Interpretations of Jihad

Sunni and Shi'a Muslims agree, in terms of just cause, that *jihad* applies to the defense of territory, life, faith, and property; it is justified to repel invasion or its threat; it is necessary to guarantee freedom for the spread of Islam; and that difference of religion alone is not a sufficient cause. Some Islamic scholars have differentiated disbelief from persecution and injustice, and claimed that *jihad* is justified only to fight those unbelievers who have initiated aggression against the Muslim community. Others, however, have stated more militant views which were inspired by Islamic resistance to the European powers during the colonial period in this view, *jihad* as "aggressive war" is authorized against all non-Muslims, whether they are oppressing Muslims or not.

The question of right authority—no *jihad* can be waged unless it is directed by a legitimate ruler--also has been divisive among Muslims. The Sunnis saw all of the Muslim caliphs as legitimate callers of *jihad*, as long as they had the support of the realm's ulama[7]). The Shia see this power as having been meant for the Imams, but it was wrongly denied to them by the majority Sunnis. The lack of proper authority after the disappearance of the 12th ("Hidden") Imam in 874 A.D. also posed problems for the Shi'a; this was resolved by the ulama increasingly taking this authority for itself to the point where all legitimate forms of *jihad* may be considered defensive, and there is no restriction on the kind of war which may be waged in the Hidden Imam's absence so long as it is authorized by a just ruler (this idea reached its zenith under Iran's Ayatollah[8] Ruhollah Khomeini).

Both sects agree on the other prerequisites for *jihad*. Right intention (niyyah) is fundamentally important for engaging in *jihad*. Fighting for the sake of conquest, booty, or honor in the eyes of one's companions will earn no reward; the only valid purpose for *jihad* is to draw near to God.

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6   Shias adhere to the teachings of Islamic prophet Muhammad but differ from Sunni in following the religious guidance of his family (who are referred to as the Ahl al-Bayt) or his descendants known as Shi'a Imams, whom they consider the keeper and instructor of Qur'an and Sunnah.[2] Unlike Sunnis, Shias believe Ali ibn Abi Talib (Muhammad's cousin and husband of Fatimah) was the true successor to Muhammad who was appointed by God and his prophet and thus reject the legitimacy of the first three caliphs of Islamic history.

7   Islamic scholars

8   "Sign of God," title of a high-ranking Shii religious leader.

Religious incentives for Jihad

Martyrs who sacrifice their lives to establish Islamic ideals or to defend those ideals hold a special place in Islam. The Quran has many passages that support the notion of martyrdom and that comfort those left behind. For example, "Were you to be killed or to die in the way of God, forgiveness and mercy from God are far better than what they amass" (3:157); and, "Never think that those who are killed in the way of God are dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for. They rejoice in what Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty and rejoice for the sake of those who have not yet joined them, but are left behind [not yet martyred] that on them too no fear shall come, nor shall they grieve. They rejoice in a grace and a bounty from Allah, and that Allah will not waste the reward of the believers." (3:169)

- Hadith[9] literature also provides many affirmations of the rewards for those who die for Islam. Muslim tradition teaches that martyrs are distinguished from others in life after death in several ways: their self-sacrifice and meritorious act render them free of sin and therefore they are not subject to the post-mortem interrogation of the angels Nakir and Munkar; they bypass "purgatory" and proceed to one of the highest locations in heaven near the Throne of God; as a result of their purity, they are buried in the clothes in which they died and do not need to be washed before burial. Abu Hurayrah (rta) narrates from the Prophet (sws): "I swear by the Almighty that a person who is wounded in the way of Allah – and Allah knows full well who is actually wounded in His way – he would be raised on the Day of Judgement such that his colour be the colour of blood with the fragrance of musk around him". Sahih Bukhari 2803

- Ibn Jabr narrates from the Prophet (sws): "A person whose feet become dust ridden because of [striving] in the way of Allah will never be touched by the flames of Hell". Sahih Bukhari 2811

Sahal Ibn Sa'ad says that the Prophet (sws) once said: "To reside in a border area for a day to protect [people] against an enemy [invasion] is better than this world and everything it has". Sahih Bukhari 2892

Views and perception of West about Jihad

Although Islam is the second largest religion in the world, many in the West knew nothing about it until Iran's Islamic revolution catapulted Islam into the consciousness of the world. It is ironic that the West's contemporary encounter with Islam began

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[9]   Narrative report of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and actions.

with the actions of Islam's Shia minority, who make up only 15 percent of the Muslim community. Throughout the 1980s, the Western nations' primary experience of Islam was with the Ayatollah Khomeini's brand of radical Islamic fundamentalism[10] In the United States, Shii Islam is identified primarily with the militancy, anti-Americanism, and terrorism of the Iranian revolution and of Hizbollah in Lebanon

Islam is the second largest and fastest growing religion not only out there, but also in Europe and America. Improving understanding of teachings of Islam will require that west look at Muslims with new eyes and judge Islam by the totality and teachings of the faith, not just the beliefs and actions of a radical few. Unfortunately, not many Jews and Christians know that they join Muslims as "Children of Abraham," that Muslims believe that they are the religious descendants of Ismail, the first-born son of Abraham and his servant Hagar? How many know that the Quran acknowledges, "We believe what you believe, your God and our God is one" (29:46)?

Islamic law condemns all warfare that does not qualify as jihad, specifically any warfare among Muslims. Thus, military action against Muslims is justified only by denying them the status of Muslims (e.g., classifying them as apostates or rebels)[11]. The greater jihad as an inner struggle against the base instincts of the body but also against corruption of the soul, and believed that the greater jihad is a necessary part of the process of gaining spiritual insight.

Fadlallah does clarify that terrorism (hudna, or violence in Arabic) is not legitimate or justified in Islam, to include the destruction of life, kidnapping, or the hijacking of airliners or ships, and suggests that militants ha ve gone too far in the conduct of their struggle when they employ such means. Nevertheless, he concludes by informing the American people that it is up to them to improve the situation by pressing for reforms in the policies of their government.[12]

How should the West respond to Islamic militant groups? Shaykh Fadlallah suggests that the West should listen to the anger expressed by such groups. While stressing that the way to peace is through dialogue, Fadlallah said that the West must first recognize that Muslims who act in ways that are harmful to Western interests are responding to pain of their own. Islam, he added, should not be thought of as uncompromisingly hostile to the West, since militant groups do not speak for all of the community. Fadlallah adds that if the West does listen to these groups, however, it will

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[10] The term "fundamentalism" is also used incorrectly in conjunction with Islam to describe this phenomenon, but this concept is really more appropriate to American Christian thought, whence it originated.

[11] Fred M. Donner, "The Sources of Islamic Conceptions of War," in Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions, ed. John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 51-52

[12] Quoted in Kelsay, Islam and War, p. 109-110

understand that the concerns these groups have (for justice, human rights, and self-determination) are legitimate, even if their methods are excessive.[13]

Conclusion

Islamic scholars agree that *Jihad* should not be undertaken to gratify one's whims or to obtain wealth and riches. Many also consider that it must also not be undertaken to conquer territories and rule them or to acquire fame or to appease the emotions of communal support, partisanship and animosity. On the contrary, it should be undertaken only and only for the cause of Allah as is evident from the words.As in Quran:

Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah, and those who disbelieve, fight in the cause of Satan. So fight you against the friends of Satan. Ever feeble indeed is the plot of Satan.

Prophet Muhammad, at various instances, also explained very forcefully this purport of the Quran:

Abu Musa Ash'ari (rta) narrates that once a person came to the Prophet (sws) and said that some people fight for the spoils of war, some for fame and some to show off their valor; he then asked the Prophet (sws): "Which one of them fights in the way of Allah". The Prophet (sws) replied: "Only that person fights in the way of Allah who sets foot in the battlefield to raise high the name of Allah". Sahih Bukhari 2810

The word 'jihad' should not be misused by the religious fanatics. It is interesting to note that one does not find in the Quran the word 'jihad' in the sense in which it is being popularly used i.e. 'holy war'. The word in the Quran for war is 'qitaal' and not jihad. The word 'jihad' is used in its literal sense i.e. to strive, to assert or to make efforts. Thus jihad in the Quranic terminology means to assert oneself or to make efforts to promote what is right and to prohibit what is evil.

And in Quran qitaal is also permitted against persecution and to establish justice, not for territorial aggrandizement. Even if the word 'jihad' is used, it is also for defense of faith and not for annexation of territory or to solve territorial dispute. Also to kill innocent civilians as the extremists are doing to meet their political ends. The causes for this radicalism are religious, cultural, political, and socio-economic and have including issues of politics and social justice such as authoritarianism, lack of social services, and corruption, which all intertwine as catalysts. Many Islamic reform groups have blamed social ills on outside influences; for example, modernization (e.g., Westernization and secularization) has been perceived as a form of evil that re-

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13   Quoted in Kelsay, Islam and War, p. 108.

places Muslim religious and cultural identity and values with alien ideas and models of development. Western public media frequently never try to understand such groups. They are dismissed as religious fanatics, anti-Western hooligans, or mindless terrorists, without making an attempt to comprehend the deep discontents that have produced these Islamic groups' violent actions or the logic of their radical cause which compels them to behave as they do. One logical way to end this culture of violence is through initiating dialogues which can promote peace and help making this world a better place to live.

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Abstract

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DIGGING ISLAMIC ROOTS OF JIHAD TO UNVEIL THE TRUTH

Islam, like all the great world religions and their scriptures, offer a universal message, a discourse that can speak to all times and places. Believers of this religion, in every age and situation, find teachings, principles, and values that give them meaning and guidance. The Quran and the Sunnah, or prophetic example, provides a theology for peace, for living in a world of diverse nations and peoples. They also provide guidelines on how to fight the enemy as well as how to fight against corruption and oppression. This paper attempts to draw a careful line between Jihad, self-defense and aggression, resistance and rebellion, reform and terrorism.

Little has been done to study the formation and evolution of the notion of divinely sanctioned war in Islam or to critically examine the spectrum of Islamic views on the subject. Classical Islamic tradition has developed its own canonical view on the formation and evolution of holy war and, with some small variation among the legal schools, a more or less standard view on the meaning and application of divinely

sanctioned war in general. Scholarly studies of holy war in Islamic civilization have tended to accept uncritically, or at least not challenge, these standard views. The main theme of this writing is to critically examine the origin of the holy war phenomenon in Islam in order to describe and explain the early importance of holy war and its implications for contemporary Muslim societies.

Key words: Jihad and Holy War, Religious politics, Terrorism, Islamic law, Tradition.

Резиме

Анила Султана

ОТКРИВАЊЕ ИСЛАМСКИХ КОРЕНА ЏИХАДА РАДИ УТВРЂИВАЊА ИСТИНЕ

Као и све друге велике светске религије и њихове свете књиге, ислам нуди универзалну поруку, дискурс којим се може говорити у свим добима и на свим местима. У свакој епохи и у свакој ситуацији, веропоклоници ове религије налазе у њој учења, принципе и вредности које им дају смисао живота и упутства, смернице. Кур'ан и Суна, тј. пример посланика, основ су теологије окренуте миру, окренуте животу у свету различитих народа и људи. Кур'ан и Суна дају, такође, и упутства о томе како се борити против непријатеља, као и о томе како се супроставити корупцији и угњетавању. Овај чланак представља покушај да се повуче прецизна линија између џихада, самоодбране и агресије, отпора и побуне, реформе и тероризма.

Мало тога је учињено на проучавању настанка и еволуције појма божански санкционисаног рата у исламу или на критичком преиспитивању широког спектра исламских гледишта о тој теми. Класична исламска традиција је развила своја сопствена канонска гледишта о настанку и еволуцији идеје светог рата. Са неким мањим варијацијама које постоје између правних школа, општи ставови о смислу и примени божански санкционисаног рата су, мање или више, стандардни. У академским студијама о светом рату у исламској цивилизацији постоји тенденција да се поменута стандардна гледишта некритички прихватају или да се, макар, не доводе у питање. Најважнија тема којом се бави овај чланак је критичко испитивање настанка феномена светог рата у исламу, уз настојање да се објасни тај претходни значај светог рата и његове импликације за савремена исламска друштва.

Кључне речи: џихад и свети рат, политика утемељена на религији, тероризам, исламско право, традиција.