

Terrorism and Justice

Moral Argument in
a Threatened World

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Jihad and Violence: Changing Understandings of Jihad Among Muslims

Abdullah Saeed

In the post-September 11 period there was a concerted effort in certain sections of the Western media to present Islam as a religion of violence and terrorism. In this, the Islamic concept of jihad was particularly targeted and equated with a doctrine of terror against non-Muslims of the world, in particular against the West. In the minds of many, especially non-Muslims, jihad is now closely associated with terrorism. It evokes killing and maiming, bombing, suicide bombing, rage and a crusade against the West. The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington by people assumed to be Muslims provided the basis for the strengthening of the association of Islam and jihad with terrorism, despite the fact that those who participated in the attacks did not represent the views of the majority of Muslims.

Several conflicts of today's world, such as in Kashmir, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Maluku in Indonesia, the southern Philippines and Palestine, are all in some way Muslim-related, and hence associated with the idea of jihad. The United States and the European Union have recently labelled 'terrorist' a number of groups commonly referred to as 'jihad groups', such as Hizbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, al-Qaeda of Osama bin Laden, Lashkar Tayyiba in Pakistan, and Laskar Jihad in Indonesia. The FBI's most-wanted list includes mostly Muslim names. To a casual observer, therefore, there is no doubt that the main problem is not the causes for which these groups are fighting but Islam itself, or at least a certain brand of Islam: the Islam of militants and extremists, in particular, the doctrine of jihad in Islam,

which allegedly provides the religious justification for the activities of such groups.

This chapter attempts to survey the doctrine of jihad, its genesis in early Islam and development in classical Islamic law, its modern interpretations by key groups of Muslims, and also to highlight the diversity evident in its interpretations. The primary objective of this chapter is to demonstrate that the doctrine of jihad is more complex and differently interpreted by Muslims than is widely perceived. This diversity exists in the treatment of jihad in classical Islamic law and by scholars and thinkers in the modern period; there is no single understanding of jihad. While for some it can be used as a tool of terror, for others it is a doctrine of self-defence and has nothing to do with terror. Given the focus on the issue of jihad in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, substantial literature by Muslims and non-Muslims now exists on the issue.¹

Jihad: Its meaning in the Qur'an

The doctrine of jihad has its roots in the Qur'an, which is the Scripture of Muslims, and the primary foundation text of Islam. The Qur'an contains the textual and religious authority for jihad. *Jihad* is an Arabic term from the root *jhd*, which has the root meaning of 'using, or exerting, one's utmost power, efforts, endeavours, or ability, in contending with an object of disapprobation'.² Jihad thus means, variously, 'struggle', 'striving for', and 'exertion' or 'expenditure of effort'. The Qur'an uses the term *jihad* several times followed by the phrase '*fi sabil Allah*' (in the way of God).³ It is a struggle in which the believers (Muslims) are expected to strive with their wealth and 'person' for the sake of God.⁴

This 'struggle' can exist at several levels: to free oneself from sin, bad deeds, thoughts and words, or to purify oneself spiritually (*jihad al-nafs*). A person making such an effort is considered to be engaged in a jihad. Jihad can also mean using one's abilities or skills to support causes considered 'pleasing' in the eyes of God, such as helping one's parents or relatives, or the needy and the disadvantaged, or doing something beneficial for the community. In this, giving of one's wealth for worthy causes is highly valued. This form of jihad is referred to as jihad of wealth (*jihad al-mal*). Another form of jihad is 'jihad of the pen', which means writing to

defend one's faith against attacks by religious adversaries. Jihad also means a struggle against oppression and injustice perpetrated against individuals and the community. In this sense, jihad means engaging in activities that may include war. Even in this case, war is only one way to struggle against injustice, oppression and aggression; there are also non-violent means.

On a continuum, therefore, jihad can range from totally non-violent to violent actions. All of these meanings are found in the Qur'an and other authoritative Islamic literature. In different times and circumstances various groups or individuals have emphasised different meanings. For example, the Muslim mystics (sufis) argue that the most important jihad is the struggle against carnal desires and sin; they usually eschew jihad associated with violence. On the other hand, those engaged in national liberation struggles today argue that jihad associated with violence is the most important form of jihad.

Despite the existence of different meanings and understandings of jihad, classical Islamic legal texts often narrowed down the meaning of jihad to 'war'.⁵ The classical doctrine of jihad thus became closely associated with the Islamic doctrine of war and peace.

Classical doctrine of jihad

In discussing the doctrine of jihad, classical Islamic law assumes the existence of a unitary Muslim state (known as 'caliphate'), a state that is ruled by Muslims and is considered 'abode of Islam', where Islamic law is supreme. The primary responsibility of this state is defence of its borders, protection of individuals against outside aggression, implementation of Islamic law and norms in the society for its Muslim populace, protection of its non-Muslim citizens from inside or outside aggression, and maintaining essential and basic services as well as law and order. In this, the function of the Muslim state is little different from that of a modern nation-state, with jihad approaching closely the doctrine of self-defence of a modern nation-state.

In Islamic law, jihad as war is permitted mainly for the following: to defend one's homeland against invasion and aggression, for the propagation of religion (not conversion), and to punish those who violate peace treaties. Where there is no threat of invasion,

where there is freedom to propagate Islam, and where there is peace between the Muslim state and others, jihad cannot be used. There are differences of opinion in Islamic law as to whether jihad can be waged against non-Muslims merely because of difference in religion. While some argue that this can be justified against 'pagans' and 'idolaters' (but not against those who follow 'revealed religions', such as Jews and Christians), others strongly assert the opposite. For the latter, the Qur'an prohibits conversion to Islam by force, and therefore it prohibits jihad against non-Muslims simply because they belong to a different religion. It is only permitted in the face of threats or acts of war against the Muslim community.

From the point of the Qur'an, it is persecution and oppression that justify jihad, not difference of religion. In fact, one of the first texts in the Qur'an (c. 622 CE) to permit Muslims to engage in fighting reminded them that this permission was given because they were driven from their homelands and were persecuted:

Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged [Muslims]—and, verily, God has indeed the power to succour them: those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, 'Our Sustainer is God'. For if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled—would surely have been destroyed [ere now].⁶

In another text the Qur'an says:

Would you, perchance, fail to fight against people who have broken their solemn pledges, and have done all that they could to drive the Apostle [Muhammad] away, and have been first to attack you?⁷

The opponents of the Prophet Muhammad in his native Mecca, in Arabia, drove the nascent community of Muslims out of their homes, expelled them from Mecca, often confiscated their wealth and property, and also oppressed Muslims who remained behind. Permission for Muslims to engage in fighting was thus related to the oppression that Muslims suffered at the hands of their opponents at the time of the Prophet (610–32 CE). Once fighting became an instrument at the disposal of the Muslim community in Medina, where the Prophet and his followers fled, Muslims were

encouraged to participate in this collective activity in defence of their community and faith against outside aggression.⁸

It is important to stress in this context that the Qur'anic view of fighting is not to take the part of the aggressor. In one verse the Qur'an commands Muslims to fight those who fight Muslims, and immediately after it says 'but do not engage in aggressive behaviour'. In another text the Qur'an instructs that Muslims should not fight against any people with whom they have a peace that is observed:

[those non-Muslims] with whom you [O believers] have made a covenant and who thereafter have in no wise failed their obligations towards you, and neither have aided anyone against you: observe, then, your covenant with them until the end of the term agreed with them.⁹

However, there are verses in the Qur'an (from about 631 CE, just before the Prophet's death) that appear to command fighting against certain groups of non-Muslims. The tone is harsher because these texts were directly related to the continuous attacks against Muslims and to the violation of treaty terms by those opponents, which thus posed a serious political and religious threat to the Muslim community.¹⁰ The Qur'an commanded the Muslims to face these threats uncompromisingly.

Muslims and non-Muslims have looked at these few verses and argued that, towards the end of the Prophet's mission, the Qur'an was not simply referring to limited defensive fighting, but was instead adopting a more aggressive posture towards non-Muslims, at least certain groups of non-Muslims: 'polytheists' and 'People of the Book' who had no peace treaties with the Prophet *and* were at war with the Muslims.¹¹ While it is true that the texts related to war and fighting towards the end of the Prophet's mission became harsher in tone, it could be argued that these texts were related to specific political and military circumstances, and the Qur'anic guidelines on the ethics of war still applied.¹² Under no circumstances was jihad, in the sense of fighting, to be used to oppress others and create injustice and what the Qur'an calls *fitnah*, or, one might add, terror. Nor are Muslims to use jihad to advance self-interest or material advantage. The key function of jihad, from the Qur'anic point of view, is removing oppression and injustice from society, as well as defence of the community.

Classical doctrine of jihad as developed in Islamic law

The classical doctrine of jihad developed in the post-prophetic period (the first two centuries of Islam, that is, the seventh and eighth centuries CE). It was developed by Muslim jurists based on the Qur'an, the traditions of the Prophet and the events of early Islamic history in relation to war and peace. When Muslim jurists developed the doctrine, they were functioning in an environment in which Islam was triumphant and powerful—politically, militarily and economically. The Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, East Africa, and parts of India and Europe were under Muslim political hegemony at the time. People of various religions and faiths in these regions submitted to Muslim political power and were accorded a 'protected' status within the Islamic caliphate. The classical doctrine of jihad assumed the existence of a unified religio-political rule by a single caliph or imam over a unitary Muslim state (caliphate).¹³ Many non-Muslims had treaties of non-aggression with Muslim rulers. No other political power could challenge these rulers; all others had to accept this fact.

The Muslim jurists at the time could see only a powerful Islam, which seemed to affect their understanding and interpretation of a number of Qur'anic texts on jihad. Many jurists believed that the earliest texts of the Qur'an (610–22 CE) on non-violence and patience in the face of oppression had been superseded by the later, very few, verses that had a more belligerent tone, even though those same verses belonged to specific temporal circumstances. In discussing jihad they divided the world into three spheres: one of Islam triumphant, one of a peaceful non-Islam, and a third in which aggressive non-Islam remained dominant.¹⁴ This latter, for the jurists, was a legitimate territory of war in which there was the possibility of perpetual military conflict. Thus the classical doctrine envisaged jihad primarily as a doctrine of war between the Muslim state and belligerent non-Muslims, who were not at peace with the Muslim state. The classical jurists understood two different types of jihad: offensive jihad and a defensive jihad.

- Offensive jihad can be waged by the caliph or imam of the unitary Muslim state against the territory of belligerent non-Muslims to extend the borders of the state and to amplify its

resources (but not for conversion of non-Muslims to Islam). Without the authority of the caliph or imam, such an offensive jihad is not legitimate.

- Defensive jihad is used to protect the Muslim community from threats to its wellbeing.¹⁵ Defensive jihad does not require the existence of the caliph or imam. Each individual in the community is under obligation to defend the land or the community when they are attacked.

Given that the condition for offensive jihad was the existence of the caliph or imam of the unitary Muslim state, theoretically the authority for engaging in offensive jihad has not existed for several centuries in Islam, as since the ninth and tenth centuries CE, Muslims have not had the unitary Muslim state as a result of breaking down of the state into many smaller units.

In the classical doctrine there were differences of opinion on whether a jihad could be waged against a party simply on the basis of difference of religion. While some jurists argued that difference of religion was a justification for engaging in a jihad against non-Muslims,¹⁶ other jurists did not consider that mere difference of religion justified a jihad. For them, jihad could be waged primarily for the purpose of defending the territory of Islam, or to repel a potential or actual threat, or where there were obstacles to the propagation of Islam to remove such obstacles or in the case of offensive jihad to extend the borders of the Islamic state. As evidence for this view, they quoted the practice of the Prophet and the early Muslim community, according to which jihad was waged primarily against non-Muslims who were hostile to the Muslim community and posed actual or potential threats to the very existence of the community. Non-Muslims who were on peaceful terms with Muslims, or who were under the protection of the Muslim state, could not be a target for jihad, not least because this was strictly prohibited in the Qur'an.

Related to this was the debate among classical jurists as to whether a jihad could be waged against non-Muslims in order to convert them to Islam.¹⁷ While some jurists argued that certain groups of non-Muslims, such as the polytheists of Arabia at the time of the Prophet, could be 'forced' to convert, others countered strongly that conversion to Islam could not be a reason for a jihad. Conversion was a voluntary act only. This argument was based on

numerous Qur'anic texts that prohibited forced conversion to Islam.¹⁸

For the classical jurists, jihad was a collective duty (*fard kifaya*) on the part of citizens of the Muslim state. From their point of view, jihad was essential to a Muslim state, and there had to be at least some citizens ready to defend the state against those who posed an actual or potential threat. If war became inevitable, an important rule in this doctrine was that, before any combat took place, it was obligatory for the Muslim leader or the general who was in charge of Muslim forces to invite the non-Muslim opponents to convert to Islam. If they accepted, fighting should not occur. If they refused, they were invited to become protected citizens of the Islamic state. If they also objected to this, the third option was fighting.¹⁹

In the actual conduct of war, non-combatants—women, children, old men, and also priests, hermits, monks and others devoted entirely to religion—should be spared.²⁰ This was reflected in the first caliph Abu Bakr's (d. 634 CE) instruction to General Yazid b. Abu Sufyan who was sent to conquer Syria:

I advise you of ten things: Do not kill women or children or an aged, infirm person. Do not cut down fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy an inhabited place. Do not slaughter sheep or camels except for food. Do not burn bees and do not scatter them. Do not steal from the booty, and do not be cowardly.²¹

In battle, force was to be used only to the extent needed; mutilation of the dead and destruction of property were to be avoided.²² The ethics of jihad also addressed how to deal with prisoners of war,²³ when combat should take place, and rules of engagement. All of this indicate that jihad, for classical Muslims jurists, was essentially a state issue, largely equivalent to the modern doctrine of defence of the homeland.

Interpretations of jihad in the modern period

The classical doctrine of jihad remained influential up to the modern period. During the colonial period many Muslims under colonial rule felt that jihad was justified against colonial powers, such as the French in Algeria or the British in Sudan and elsewhere. Muslim opponents of colonial powers saw their lands and peoples

as occupied and oppressed, and believed that they had a duty to challenge this domination, by force if necessary.²⁴ The Mahdi of Sudan engaged in a jihad against the British. In Algeria the Algerians fought against the French for over a hundred years until they expelled the French from Algeria. In Indonesia the Dutch were finally expelled following a jihad. Much of this relied on the classical doctrine of jihad.

This classical doctrine, though still influential in the modern debate on jihad, has been reinterpreted by influential Muslim groups in the modern period. Today, unlike the classical period, there is a substantial degree of diversity among Muslims in understanding the notion of jihad. While some Muslims today hold a view of jihad that is purely 'defensive', others have taken up a more militant and 'offensive' understanding of the concept.

Modernist interpretation

The classical doctrine of jihad was strongly criticised by many Western scholars of Islam as well as Christian missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was alleged that Islam was a 'barbaric', warmongering and bloodthirsty religion, and that much of its success in the millennium 700–1700 CE had been a result of spreading Islam 'by force'. The Muslim conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries were seen to be to coerce others to accept the Islamic religion, and, indeed, the 'war spirit' was seen to be an essential characteristic of Islam as opposed to Christianity, which was portrayed as the religion of peace and love.

These attacks on Islam required defence on the part of Muslims. Some, whom we will refer to as 'modernists' and who were represented by figures such as Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) of India, attempted to reinterpret the doctrine of jihad in response to these attacks. He and others also of a modernist persuasion such as Moulavi Chiragh Ali²⁵ believed that Islam did not condone violence and aggression against others. In fact, in their attempt to demonstrate that jihad was merely a defensive tool in the hands of the Muslim state, they substantially limited the scope of jihad. Ahmad Khan rejected the notion of perpetual conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. He went back instead to the Qur'anic doctrine of jihad as a defensive instrument that can be utilised only if Muslims were banned from fulfilling essential religious obligations like the five daily prayers, fasting and pilgrimage. For him, as long as the colonial power (in the case of India,

the British) did not interfere with matters of Islamic faith and religious practice, there was no reason to advocate a jihad against them.²⁶

In a sense, Ahmad Khan was serving both Muslim and British interests in India by attempting to build a bridge between Muslims and the British. Especially after the 1857 mutiny, the British distrusted the Muslims as they blamed the Muslims for the uprising. They therefore sought not to give Muslims sensitive government posts, and also avoided recruiting them into the army.²⁷ Ahmad Khan, however, wanted to maintain the link between the British and the Muslims in order to enable the Muslims to progress *vis-à-vis* the Hindus, who were in the majority and with whom the British felt more comfortable.²⁸ Ahmad Khan also wanted to present Islam in the Indian sub-continent as a religion of peace, as opposed to the warlike image propagated by the critics. He argued that the Qur'an prohibited conversion by force, and that acceptance of Islam had followed only long after the political conquests, when the conquered peoples came to appreciate how Muslims treated others and to value and understand the faith itself.

Somewhat similar positions were adopted by Muslims elsewhere. In Egypt Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) also defended Islam against similar criticisms.²⁹ Like Ahmad Khan, Abduh believed that jihad was for defence only, and that, in obedience to the Qur'an, military campaigns in the name of jihad to convert people to Islam were forbidden, and that such conversions, if occurred, would be invalid. For Abduh, Islamic history itself demonstrated that Muslims did not convert others by force; Islam spread mainly because of its inherent simplicity and rationality. He differed from Ahmad Khan, however, in seeing jihad as justified if Islamic lands were attacked by a foreign power or were threatened by colonial encroachment.

What must be remembered is that Ahmad Khan and Abduh represented a purely defensive notion of jihad, and one that gained ground in the twentieth century. The classical notion of perpetual conflict between Islam and the 'abode of war' (*dar al-harb*) was, generally speaking, not advocated by figures like Khan and Abduh in the modern period.

Maududi-Qutb interpretation

In the twentieth century several thinkers who belonged to the two best-known movements of the period, Jama'at Islami of Pakistan

and the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, rejected the modernist interpretation of jihad as advocated by Khan and Abduh as being for defence only. Instead, they adopted a broader interpretation than either the classical or the modernist ones. While the classical doctrine of jihad envisioned a war waged by a state against another state, these thinkers believed that jihad implied a doctrine of 'revolution' against tyranny and oppression, as well as a means of establishing an Islamic socio-political order. Abul A'la Maududi explains this as follows:

In reality Islam is a revolutionary ideology and programme which seeks to alter the social order of the whole world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals. 'Muslim' is the title of that International Revolutionary Party organised by Islam to carry into effect [*sic*] its revolutionary programme. And 'Jihad' refers to that revolutionary struggle and utmost exertion which the Islamic Party brings into play to achieve this objective.³⁰

This social order was represented for Maududi by Shari'ah law or, in other words, the recognition of the sovereignty of God's will in the state. Maududi adopted the broader definition of jihad, which could range from non-violent to violent. Jihad could thus be waged (not necessarily in the form of war) against other Muslims, such as political authorities who were seen to be 'oppressing' Islam by failing to implement a socio-political order based on the Shari'ah.

Thinkers like Maududi severely criticised the modernists' idea of jihad as defeatist and as serving the imperial interests of the West. Maududi in particular took a negative view of the West and of Western civilisation, which he saw as decadent, morally corrupt and antipathetic towards Islam. For him the West posed a major threat to Islam and Muslims, and was the source of their social, political, economic and even intellectual problems. For Maududi it was imperative that Muslims both resist the lure of the West and engage in a revolutionary struggle to assert Islamic values, ideas, laws and social order in Muslim lands. To achieve this, jihad was an essential revolutionary tool.

Maududi therefore took the classical doctrine further, and envisaged a struggle not only against moral laxity in Muslim societies but also against a world that he saw as unjust and corrupt. To some extent he was borrowing on Marxist doctrine as a basis for his understanding of jihad as a revolutionary movement; for example, he refers to Muslims as the 'International Revolutionary

Party'. He rejected ethno-nationalism and argued that Muslims throughout the world constituted an *ummah*, a single world community. Maududi's notion of jihad was therefore tied to the establishment of an Islamic order in the world.

In Egypt Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) of the Muslim Brotherhood also believed that jihad was a powerful revolutionary instrument. He also attacked narrow ethno-nationalism, arguing, like Maududi, that it was the broader Muslim *ummah* that mattered. For Qutb, nation-states were really artificial creations of the West. Also, like Maududi, he believed in an Islamic socio-political order the objective of which was to establish God's sovereignty on earth.³¹ Thus, there is no significant difference between Maududi's and Qutb's concepts of a dynamic, rather than a defensive, jihad. This view of jihad as a revolutionary struggle was further reinforced by the Iranian Islamic revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Militants' interpretation

In the 1970s and 1980s several militant Muslim groups emerged in places such as Egypt and Syria, with some being offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood. These groups adopted a more militant interpretation of jihad. They adopted some aspects of the classical doctrine, particularly more extreme interpretations, as well as certain aspects of the Maududi-Qutb interpretation of jihad as a revolutionary struggle. The result was a more militant, extremist view. While jihad in the classical doctrine was essentially a doctrine of war between the Muslim state and its adversaries, in the understanding of these militant groups it became a doctrine of war between them and their adversaries, be they Muslims, a Muslim state, non-Muslims or the West. Osama bin Laden, for example, declared that perpetual war existed between Islam and the West, in particular the Americans. Muslims who support the West in this conflict are also lumped together with the West as enemies of Islam and thus a legitimate target of their jihad.

In the 1980s and 1990s certain factors played a significant role in further radicalising several Muslim groups such as the jihad in Afghanistan, the intifada in Palestine, other struggles for independence or self-determination, and several religion-based conflicts. The first was an international engagement. Muslims from all over the world participated in the jihad against the Soviets until their expulsion from Afghanistan. Those who participated returned to

their countries with not only practical experience of jihad but also with a belief that, if they could defeat a superpower, they could also defeat the Muslim states which were waging a war against political Islam, for instance, Egypt or Libya. The intifada also radicalised a large number of Palestinian youth, who decided that violence was the only approach that Israel would understand in their struggle for independence. In addition, the feeling of Muslims of being under siege was reinforced by the conflicts in places such as Kashmir, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Chechnya, especially where the Western powers were seen as providing tacit or open support for anti-Muslim actions.

Given the military power of what were viewed by the militant groups as Islam's opponents—that is, the governments of India, Serbia, Russia, Israel, the Philippines—it was believed that all possible means had to be found to defeat the enemy, including terror against non-combatants. Suicide bombing came to be a weapon of the weak in the face of unequal power, despite the Islamic ethics of war and prohibition on suicide. The concept of 'combatants' was redefined to include all who were citizens of a country and paid taxes that enabled the state to engage in 'oppressive' activities against Muslims.

However, this new militant interpretation of jihad, with its legitimisation of terror against non-combatants and suicide bombing, has been objected to by a large number of Muslims—scholars, thinkers and jurists alike. Muslim religious authorities in most Muslim states have rejected as un-Islamic the targeting of non-combatants, even in the case of an independence struggle. The Organisation of Islamic Conference, which represents all Muslim states, categorically rejected this militant interpretation and declared, for instance, the September 11 attacks to be Islamically unacceptable, indeed, prohibited. In contrast to the militant groups, Muslim scholars and leaders are opting for a new interpretation of jihad, which to a large extent ignores several key aspects of the classical doctrine of jihad and rejects the militant's interpretation of jihad.

Emerging new interpretation with a broad appeal

This new interpretation of jihad has emerged against the increasing militancy of a small number of Muslim extremist groups around the world who call for jihad against both Muslims whom they

consider to be apostates or 'not sufficiently Muslim' and Muslim states that, according to the militants, do not 'implement Islamic law'. Needless to say, these extremist groups also call for jihad against non-Muslims and Western countries that they consider to be 'oppressing' Muslims and supporting 'anti-Muslim' activities. The key aspects of this new interpretation appear to be as follows.

Jihad is essentially a doctrine of self-defence. It can be used only by a Muslim state against imminent and certain aggression by an enemy. In this, jihad is equivalent to the doctrine of self-defence in a modern nation-state. It can also be declared in a liberation struggle, as was the case in Afghanistan after the Soviet occupation. It cannot be declared against a Muslim or Muslims or a Muslim state, thus denying the legitimacy of militant-extremists' declaration of jihad against other Muslims or Muslim states. A jihad cannot be declared against a person or a community just because they belong to a different religion. Thus Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and others cannot be the target of a jihad simply because of difference of religion. Neither can a jihad be declared by a group of Muslims against a nation that has peaceful relations with Muslims. Thus calls for jihad against a state like the United States are considered illegitimate, as these states are part of an international order that submits to the Charter of the United Nations and generally speaking promotes peaceful relations with others. This interpretation also rejects the idea of an offensive jihad as not in line with the Qur'anic commands for non-aggression.

In this interpretation, certain tactics used by militants in what they consider to be a jihad have been rejected. Killing innocent civilians (be they Muslim or non-Muslim), suicide bombing, causing destruction, injury and loss of life of innocent civilians, as well as bombing and destroying public buildings and property, are all seen as against the Qur'anic and prophetic guidelines on jihad and therefore un-Islamic. This interpretation envisages a peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims in which life and property are sacred. The condemnation of September 11 attacks by Muslims worldwide largely relied on this interpretation of jihad.

This interpretation of jihad, although it has its roots in the Qur'an, actually began to evolve in the nineteenth century. It gradually acquired its current form in response to a new set of geopolitical as well as social and religious circumstances of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the emergence of a more liberal-minded Muslims who argued for rethinking a number of

classical doctrines in Islamic law, including the doctrine of jihad. Further stimuli have been the emergence of militant Muslim groups, particularly from the 1970s onwards, and, more recently, the September 11 attacks on the United States. It is important, however, to mention that there are Muslims who do not adopt this interpretation. However, such Muslims appear to be relatively small in number against a large majority that does not share the militants' interpretation.

Conclusion

The Qur'an is clear that war is justifiable in defeating oppression and injustice and in protecting one's homeland and faith; that is, war is largely defensive and precautionary, and is governed by a code of ethics. Classical doctrine of jihad by Muslim jurists chose to focus largely on verses that were more aggressive in tone, and built a doctrine based on their reading of the Qur'anic texts in the light of the socio-political context of the time. This classical doctrine was largely abandoned by the modernists, who were influential in the Muslim world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They favoured a defensive understanding of jihad. This, however, was challenged by some very influential Muslim groups, who again modified the doctrine in line with their idea of a revolutionary struggle to make God's sovereignty supreme in an otherwise evil world. But events from the 1970s to the 1990s in several parts of the Muslim world, in particular Palestine and Afghanistan, led to the emergence of a militant reinterpretation of jihad in a struggle against imperialism, neo-colonialism and authoritarianism, an interpretation that relies on more extreme and militant interpretations of jihad in both the classical and modern periods. Muslim scholars and thinkers around the world, however, have rejected the militant interpretation in favour of a non-militant one that gathers in some of the classical ideas, and moves towards that defensive doctrine under which jihad can only be used to defend Muslim homelands against direct aggression. The doctrine of jihad as part of the process of human thinking has changed in response to temporal circumstances and is expressed in disparate forms.



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