

The Misconceptions of Jihad

What is Jihad?

Jihad is an Arabic word that is derived from *Ja-ha-da*. It means to struggle or strive. In Islam, any act done for the sake of Allah that requires hardship, struggle and persistence can be called Jihad. This can be in physical capacity, intellectual ability, gift of speech or worldly riches.

One must be clear that not for a moment are we suggesting that Jihad is totally non-violent and never involves confronting a visible enemy. Rather what we are showing is that it is totally wrong to pinpoint the term for fighting alone. As Imam Raghīb explains, Jihad can be against:

1. Against the visible enemy.
2. Against the devil.
3. Against the *Nafs* (self) (*al-Janayat wa al-Hudud wa al-Jihad*, al-Azhar Publications, 1996)

The different uses of the term Jihad.

It is clear that the word Jihad has been used in many different contexts by our Messenger (peace be upon him). Here are just a few examples:

- a. Our Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

والمجاهد من جاهد نفسه في طاعة الله

‘The Mujahid is he who tries to struggle against himself [i.e. his evil self] in the obedience of Allah.’ (*Sahih ibn Hibban 4862 & Musnad Ibn Hanbal*, hadith No.24004, 6:21))

Here, the Prophet (peace be upon him) identified struggling against oneself as Jihad.

- b. Our Messenger (peace be upon him) stated that the best Jihad does not involve any fighting whatsoever. Rather, it simply involves uttering the truth. He said:

The highest kind of Jihad is to speak the truth in the face of a tyrannical Sultan (Leader) (*Sunan al-Nasa'i 4209*).

- c. On another occasion, the Prophet (peace be upon him) instructed a Companion to ‘perform Jihad’ in caring for his parents:

جاء رجل إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فاستأذنه في الجهاد فقال أحي والداك قال نعم قال ففيهما فجاهد رواه بخارى

A man came to the Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him) and asked his permission to go on Jihad. He asked him, 'Are your parents alive?' He replied 'Yes'. So he said 'So go and perform Jihad for them.' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith no. 2842)

d. A very significant and much quoted tradition of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is when he returned from a battle and informed his Companions:

رجعنا من الجهاد الأضعف الي الجهاد الأكبر

'We are returning from the lesser Jihad (the battle) to the greater Jihad (the struggle of the inner-self).' (*Tarikh Baghdad*, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi XIII, 493)

e. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told the female believers that 'your Jihad is performing Hajj.'

The history of Jihad.

Islam is not the first religion or civilization to permit fighting. One only needs to look at the history of the Romans and Greek to prove this point. They lived in a state of perpetual war with their neighbours. The Romans fought so much they had a God of war called Mars (*al-Jinayat*, 290). The Jews were so violent and bloodthirsty that they killed prophets and messengers, as mentioned in the Qur'an. Though Christianity was largely peaceful Jesus too showed that in times of oppression, he and his followers reserved the right to fight back. In the Bible we read that Jesus said:

'Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the Earth! No, rather, a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against his mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.' (Matthew: 10: 34-35, The Living Bible, British Edition, 1975).

But unlike all of these religions and civilizations however, Islam set down rules of conduct for warfare and did not allow a never-ending war to develop.

Jihad in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) endured fourteen years of hardship, oppression and terrorism during which he was told to adopt patience and refrain from physical responses. Even when he migrated the problems and oppression did not stop. When the Prophet (peace is upon him) fled Makka to escape from the pagans during the night with his loyal friend Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) to the cave they were not carrying any weapons, no metal or no potential instruments for combat. When they were asked about this action they replied that the order of Jihad was not ordained by Allah and the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said in a narration:

الدعاء سلاح المؤمن

‘The supplication is the weapon of a believer.’

So after more than seventy verses commanding the Prophet to adopt patience, the Muslims were finally allowed to respond through Jihad. Look at the first verse concerning Jihad, revealed in the second year of Hijra, as identified by Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him):

‘Permission to fight is given to those (believers) who are fought against, because they have been wronged. And surely Allah is Able to give them victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly only because they said ‘Our Lord is Allah.’ (22: 39-40)

The reason for permission is not looting and domination but because they were oppressed and were the on the receiving end of violence. Just because there are aspects of our lives today we are unhappy with does not give us the right to adopt violence. If this was the case, Jihad would have been permitted in Makka.

Tackling the misconceptions of Jihad

i. Jihad translate as ‘holy war’

Where does this translation of ‘holy war’ come from? Certainly not Islam. Were ‘holy war’ to be translated into Arabic, it would be الحرب المقدس. Such a term has never been used in Islam. The chances are therefore, this term could be a reflection of the Christian use of this term “holy war” to refer to the Crusades of the Middle Ages. It is typical of the enemies of Islam that they suggest Islam has suffered the same problems they have. Because the Jews and Christians failed to preserve their sacred texts, they are working endlessly (and fruitlessly) to try to prove Islam has had the same problem with their texts. And because they are somewhat embarrassed by their bloody past in the form of the Crusades, they are keen to suggest Islam has the same problems.

ii. Jihad is the sixth pillar of Islam

If this was the case, then certainly the Prophet (peace be upon him) would have said so. Instead, in the famous Hadith, he said that 'Islam is founded upon five.'

The Jurists (*Usul al-Fiqh*) experts have brilliantly explained why Jihad does not rank the same as Salah, Sawm and Hajj. They write that there are two types of good:

(i) Hasan li Nafsihi: Good per se, what is intended. Faith, justice, truthfulness and Salah are all desired directly in Islam.

(ii) Hasan li Ghayrihi: Good by other, because it leads to something better. It is a means to an end. For example, petrol and diesel is not desired per se, but rather what benefit it brings. An example in Islam is to march towards the mosque on the day of Friday, as mentioned in the Qur'an. Is marching good per se? No, the purpose is something else, which is getting to Jum'a. Also, ablution is good but it is not the purpose per se. It is what one can do with the ablution that is good per se, namely Salah, reciting the Qur'an and Tawaf.

The principle for this type is that if the goal is found, then the means must be done too. If the goal is not found, then there is no need for the means. Here is the difference between this and Hasan li Nafishi. This has to be done all the time whereas the second time does not. So for example, if you do not need to read Juma because you are a traveller, then you do not need to march to the mosque either. Does a Mu'takif have to leave the mosque and come back in marching? No.

Where does Jihad come in? Jihad is Hasan li Ghayrihi not Hasan li Nafsihi.

Fighting and bloodshed is not desired in our religion. Certainly it is not the sixth pillar of Islam, not least because the other five are good per se and desired per se. So the purpose of Jihad is a greater good, in the same way marching to the mosque leads to Jum'a and ablution leads to Salah. In *Usul al-Shashi* the author says the purpose of Jihad is to repel the harm of the infidels and to raise the word of Allah (the Truth).

The self-titled Jihadists have to ask themselves; have their acts stopped the evil of the infidels, or helped raise the banner and respect of Islam? No. Have people become Muslims after Woolwich? Who saw the machete attack on YouTube and reached the conclusion that Islam is the best religion? Who has been convinced that Muhammad was the mercy for all mankind?

iii. 'Every infidel is a legitimate target'

One of the baseless claims made by the fundamentalists today is that every infidel is a legitimate target. Therefore indiscriminate killing is not only permitted but encouraged.

This is totally against the teachings of Islam. To begin with, the same verse outlining permission to fight against the non-Muslims also warns Muslims not to 'transgress.' Allah states:

'And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you. But do not transgress the limits. Truly Allah loves not the transgressors.' (2:190)

Not transgressing the limits means not to kill women and children, for the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) "forbade the killing of women and children". The *Muwatta* of Imam Malik informs us:

وحدثني عن مالك عن نافع عن ابن عمر ان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم رأى في بعض مغازيه امرأة مقتولة فأنكر ذلك ونهى عن قتل النساء والصبيان

He (Yahya) informed me on the authority of Malik from Nafi', who heard from Ibn Umar that the Prophet of Allah (peace is upon him) saw the corpse of a woman slain in one of the raids, and he disapproved of it and so he forbade the killing of women and children. (*al-Muwatta* 964)

In fact, the *Muwatta* has a separate chapter entitled:

باب النهي عن قتل النساء والولدان في الغزو

Chapter of prohibition from killing women and children in war.

Not transgressing the limits means that the elderly, the sick, monks, worshippers and hired labourers are not attacked. Not transgressing the limits means not killing animals wantonly, burning crops and vegetation, polluting waters and destroying homes, monasteries, churches and synagogues. Mutilating bodies is forbidden in Islam. Some scholars have said that bombs are disliked because it leads to indiscriminate killing.

The above cited verse (2:190) also clearly indicates who Jihad must be waged against, namely 'those who fight you'. As for ordinary non-Muslims, they are not legitimate targets, as outlined explicitly in the Qur'an:

Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion, nor drove you out of your homes. Indeed, Allah loves those who deal with equity. (60:8)

iv. Jihad is always offensive and it cannot be defensive.

Some observers fail to see how Jihad can at all be defensive. Take this simple example to see why and how it can be.

Imagine if a man enters the hall and begins to attack and knife everyone in sight. Whilst everyone runs for cover, Zaid confronts the man and wrestles him to the ground with considerable force.

Has Zaid acted viciously or justly? Can it be said Zaid is a man of terror because he forcefully put him to the ground? Of course not.

This is exactly where Jihad is permitted against the visible enemy; to protect the poor and helpless against the tyranny of the cruel. The Qur'an states:

And what is the matter with you that you do not fight in the cause of Allah and for those weak, ill treated and oppressed among men, women and children whom merely weep is: Our Lord rescue us from these people who are oppressors and raise for us from you one who will protect and raise for us from you one who will help. (4:75)

In fact anyone who engaged themselves in the study of early Islam will know those nations and empires and people which came under the fold of Islam were indeed previously oppressed. The advent of Islam was such that it came as a saviour and to liberate these particular oppressed countries. When the beloved Companions of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) set out to invite nations and empires towards Islam, you will see that people did not resist against them at all. Rather, they accepted Islam on such a scale, that it would be beyond reason to suggest or think that Jihad was carried out as a holy war.

v. Islam spread by the sword

Many non-Muslim biographers of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) have tried to paint a sombre picture of him as a man with the sword in one hand and the Quran in the other. If we look at the ten years when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) undertook military leadership, we learn that the total loss of life incurred by the Muslims was only 255, as against 759 enemies of Islam. With this small number of casualties Islam spread over a million square miles. If these Jihad movements were at all inspired to convert people to Islam by force, they would have left behind a record of atrocities, just as we find in the case of other religious wars. It will be interesting to note that the total number of prisoners taken in all Jihads were 6524. From this number, only two were executed for definite crimes committed, while 6347 were released. The remaining 215 prisoners probably accepted Islam and became part of the Muslim Ummah.

Conclusion.

In essence, our purpose on earth is to act as the servants of Allah. How do we do this? The Qur'an informs us how:

And the servants of the Rahman are those who walk on the earth with humility, and when the foolish address them they [simply] reply 'peace'.
(25: 63)

What this verse indicates that the default position and natural reaction of a Muslim is one of peace and patience.

Moreover, one needs to ask how so much confusion has arisen over the term Jihad. To some extent at least, it is down to the illness of the heart currently felt by the Muslim Ummah. Rather than reflecting on our own shortcomings & defects, we are looking at others to vent our anger on. Our Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'Blessed is he who occupies himself with his own shortcomings rather than the shortcomings of the people.'

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