

Overcoming Misunderstandings: Understanding Jihad

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Overcoming Misunderstandings: Crusades, Jihad & Zionism

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This is the transcript of a lecture presentation given by Afroz Ali, at the 3rd International Interfaith Conference, organised by Affinity Intercultural Foundation, and in which al-Ghazzali Centre was a partner, discussing the meanings and clarification of terms like Crusades, Zionism and Jihad. It was clear at the conference that Jihad was not only most misunderstood, but that the objectives behind Crusades and Zionism was least known. The transcript below is on the topic of Jihad.

Language is MHT...a massive human tool, and probably more powerful than weapons, in both directions of the scale... benefit or harm. Today, more so than ever, words are a weapon of choice as WMD – words for mass delusion.

Jihad is on top of that list of delusions and misunderstandings. On the one hand, the de facto educators of the world, for example Daniel Pipes, and Robert Spencer, say this of Jihad:

The jihad that aims to increase the size of the dar al-islam at the expense of dar al-harb is not a conventional war that begins at a certain point and ends at another. Jihad is a permanent war that excludes the idea of peace but authorises temporary truces to the political situation (muhadana). [Islam Unveiled:Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith]

As opposed to what the original users of the word, Muslims, its scholars and practitioners tell us. It baffles me that people would not seek to understand truth from its sources, but will be happy to accept propaganda as truth.

Jihad comes from the root Arabic word of Juhd. Before explaining the root meaning, let me quickly provide a few words, other than Jihad itself, which is derived from this root word:

- Ijtihad: this refers to the process of understanding Knowledge, meaning exerting effort to comprehend. It is a significant scientific tool in Islamic Sciences to decipher data into useful knowledge;
- Tahajjud: this refers to a solitary period of worship to God, in the middle of a quiet night. It is an effort made by a human to face up to his/her Lord and reflect on the Lord's Mercy upon oneself, seeking the benefits God has to offer.

These meanings are a far cry from any form of a ruckus warfare, let alone terrorism. The root words in Arabic, establishes a context and tone of the derived words. So, juhd in its contextual form refers solely to a state of sincere consciousness for a benefit. So, one performing Ijtihad would make a sincere and conscious effort to derive meanings from God's Guidance to benefit from such knowledge. And, one prostrating in Tahajjud would make sincere and conscious effort to seek the Mercy of God to benefit one's soul.

And, Jihad is any action by which one makes sincere and conscious effort for a collective benefit. So, one doing Ijtihad, is in a state of Jihad, as is one in Tahajjud.

We will come to the application of War, in a minute, as I am sure that is the burning question. **But if you exercise patience in yourself as I speak to establish the foundations of my talk, you will be in a state of Jihad....** It is ok, you will not be arrested for being in a state of such Jihad...

I am quite often flabbergasted as to how this term got so twisted in its meaning. As part of my studies in Islamic Sciences, I have written a 20,000-word commentary on the word itself, as well as its concept, based on an immense library of Scholarly works dating back to 120 AH, or approximately 750CE. Never have I seen this word used to suggest perpetual war against the other. It has been referred to by a minority of traditional scholars to only refer to "war against oppressors, particularly those who oppress Muslims". At this juncture I want to remind you that Islam is regarded as a complete system of governance, like one would consider Western Democracy as one. Governments of today have the very acceptable office of Defence, namely Department of Defence or Ministry of Defence. For some countries, this department is always on the offensive, almost perpetually in war. It is quite sad that these very governments claim that in fact others are in such a pitiful state, when it is their own state of perpetual warfare that is causing the havoc on this planet we all share.

Islam also constitutes an ethical governance of Defence, but has not truly seen any action since the days of Andalusia of around 10th century. The modern era of Muslim populated nations is another story, and does not conform to the exegesis of Islam as a State. I do not wish to go into too much discussion into this aspect, and will be happy

to discuss it during Q&A if needed. What I do want to add here however, that it is the modern day commentators of Islam, and many Muslims themselves, from around 1900's, who have coined Jihad as Holy War, and to some extent, particularly non-Muslim commentators, that Jihad is perpetual war. This includes individuals like Mawdudi and Syed Qutb, and today by the likes of Daniel Pipes and Bin Laden.

I wanted to quickly explain the concept of Jihad, as mentioned in the Islamic Holy Book, the Qur'an. Firstly, I put forth to you as a strong assertion that nowhere in the Qur'an does God refer to Jihad as Holy War. Holy War, not referred to in the Qur'an at all, is Harb ul-Muqaddasa. Secondly, the Qur'an refers to Jihad as a concept, around 60% of the time, to a period when any form of fighting **was prohibited** during the Messengership of Muhammad, upon whom be peace. This is usually referred to as the Makkah Revelations. Thirdly, and which I would like to spend a little time on, is the use of the term Jihad in the Qur'an in connection with the use of force as a conditional permissibility. The Qur'an uses the term "Qitaal" to refer to the use of force, to fight. Not once has jihad been used to suggest this, and only in two places, in the same sentence with Qital or fighting. It is quite clear, therefore that in the use of force, Qital, is the struggle to get it right- Jihad.

These two verses are:

[9:41]

Go forth (to fight) whether it be easy or difficult for you;

AND do Jihad in God's Way with your possessions and yourselves..."

So, here both matters are mentioned as two separate concepts. It is referring to a time when the Messenger was being attacked by neighbouring tribes of Makkah upon his return, even though they were initially released and forgiven by Muhammad,. Upon whom be peace and blessings of Allah. Such mercy of forgiveness en mass, was unheard of in those days. It is even today, unprecedented and unheard of. They kept molesting Muslim travellers. So, the use of force was given permission with a clear direction to strive hard to get it right, that it was only for the cause of God, not for revenge, anger or nationalism. The verse was revealed to make it clear to the Muslims that there is no legality in the use of force if it was for personal retribution purposes.

And we are fully aware today, how so many wars by the advocates of “democracy” have been initiated as retribution against, for example USA. It is in fact criminal that the world is sitting and watching in such deafening silence, of the oppression unleashed by such dominating states.

So, the state of Jihad for the Muslims was to make a sincere and conscious effort to put personal issues aside and to use force to establish security and long-lasting, sustainable peace.

And,

The second is not entirely in one sentence, but more in a series of verses strongly interconnected with each other:

[9:12-16]

I am not going to through the whole set of verses, but let me highlight the key points:

- i) Verse 12 refers to those who are undermining Muslims in their daily lives and in their worship;
- ii) Fighting these people is given permission, with a clear directive- to fight the leaders of those who are suppressing, not the general public or to cause collateral damage;
- iii) But a very important move occurs from verse 14-16, that one must strive, **Jihad**, to uphold themselves with dignity and seek protection from God, in their daily endeavours.

Finally, I also wanted to highlight that Jihad is referred to in the Qur’an, more directly to other aspects of human existence, far more directly than to the conditional permissibility to use force. These aspects of Jihad include:

- striving of, the Jihad of parents as nurturer of their offsprings [31:14-15]
- striving for collective benefit of society, including refugees [8:72]
- striving against selfish desires [9:24]
- striving to learn and spread beneficial knowledge [9:122]

This may sound like a novel idea, but think for a moment. This is exactly what you and I expect in our daily lives as part of good governance of any nation. Australia has

these Departments of Jihad. The government departments of Social Security, Department of Family, Department of Education.... This is what the verses I have quoted above refer to!

Islam is a holistic system, and provides the basis by which human beings ought to progress as a collective family. The foundations of such aspects of good governance finds its roots in Islam, today widely accepted in the democratic world. The key difference is that Islam considers the laws and guidance to be divine, from God. Islam rejects human desire for bias, and appoints an independent arbiter for peace- God Almighty.

We all want to strive for a better life.... A better society.... A better self. This instinct to strive for the better is in all of us. It is intrinsically human, to aim for such goals of a higher and selfless betterment. It is that struggle in all humans, for liberty, justice and sustainable peace, that is the utmost Jihad referred to in Islam. Islam recognises that individuals make a society, but a corrupt society destroys individuals. We all have a safety valve in ourselves to sincerely and consciously strive to protect humanity from the corrupt few in any walk of life.

It is in all of us as human family, regardless of race, religion or gender- that safety valve of Jihad.