

The Doctrine of *Jihad* in Islam: Past and Present

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Islam has five pillars of faith or five religious obligations, which each Muslim must fulfill in his everyday activities. These Five Pillars of Islam are the essential postulates of Islamic way of life. They are *Shahadah* (The declaration "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet."), *Salat* (prayer), *Sawm* (fasting during the holy month of *Ramadan*), *Zakat* (free-will donation or almsgiving) and *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to Macca). In addition to these Five Pillars of Islam, *Jihad* is considered as a sixth pillar of Islam. It is a central and wide-ranging Islamic concept. In Islam, it is believed that it is the sacred duty of every true Muslim to wage a *Jihad* (Holy War) against the internal and external evil forces, oppression, persecution and enemies of Islam. Islam laid emphasizes on self-purification and elimination of ignorance, disbelief and heresy. Muslims are supposed to lay the supreme sacrifices in *Jihad* to eliminate the adversaries of Islam and to seek the heavenly bliss. However, in the gradual process, the narrow interpretations of *Jihad* has distorted the image of Islam and become a controversial, misinterpreted and misunderstood concept.

Unfortunately, in the recent times, it has become a synonym of global terrorism for the variety of reasons and it has created a lot of havoc, terror and apprehensions and evoked the sharp criticism and resentment in non-Muslim world. It has played a decisive role in radicalization of Islam. It has emerged as an ideological instrument in the hands of extremists, fundamentalists and international terrorist organizations in Islamic countries to rationalize their worldview and actions against Western powers. Religious fanatics in Islamic world often misinterpret Quranic verses, Islamic socio-spiritual and ethical values and give a conservative interpretation of the concept of *Jihad*. They frequently use this term to mobilize the masses to seek their support, financial assistance and to justify their struggle against secular and un-Islamic forces to lay the foundation of an ideal Islamic social, economic and political order in accordance with the teachings of Holy Quran.

Meaning and Nature of *Jihad*:

The concept of *Jihad* is the significant as an historical concept and process that might be understood in light of its historical memory, significance and context. This memory reveals the paradoxes of the difference between the doctrine and its application in real life. It also helps to

explain how the image of Islam and Muslims has been distorted, not only by Western understanding, but also by the Muslims themselves.ⁱ The *Jihad* (struggle) that has become a central concept in describing the process of self transformation and political activism, both against European colonialism and later against corrupt, un-Islamic Muslim states, was primarily one of the reform, not violent revolution. Yet it did include the defense of the Muslim community and of Islam against colonialism and injustice.ⁱⁱ

The term *Jihad* is an Arabic verbal noun derived from *jahada* meaning “to struggle”, that is, to struggle with something that is disagreeable or else against something that is wrong. While the frequently used expression “holy war” is not a literal translation, it does summarize the essential idea of *Jihad*. The Muslim jurists give the most general definition of *Jihad* as the Muslim believers’ exerting their abilities, talents and power in struggling in the path of God using their resources of life, property, speech and all available instruments to make the World of God prevail in this world.ⁱⁱⁱ In other words, *Jihad* implies “Striving.” an “effort in the way of God” was originally an obligation to wage war against unbelievers until they accepted Islam or submitted to Islamic rule. A Muslim who dies in *Jihad* is a martyr (*shahid*) and directly enters paradise. Monotheists with a sacred book, like Christians and Jews, are not forced to convert and enjoy the status of protected subjects. In battle, an enemy is given three choices: accept Islam and enjoy rights of equality with Muslims; submit and become a tribute-paying subject with religious freedom and protection of one’s property; or fight and leave the judgment to God, in which case a defeated enemy becomes part of the booty.^{iv}

The scholars outlined a number of different types of *Jihad*, all of which may be grouped into two basic categories, the spiritual *Jihad* and the physical *Jihad*. The objects of the first type included one’s own soul (*nafs*), whose evil inclinations had to be overcome, or *Satan* (*Shaitan*), whose attempts to sow doubt and confusion and to lead the believer astray had to be perpetually fought. The physical *Jihad* was aimed at unbelievers outside the Muslim community, as well as hypocrites and troublemakers within the Muslim ranks. Its goal was to establish the supremacy of divine law and thereby to promote justice and social welfare according to Islamic values. In this sense, *Jihad* was closely related to the Quranic injunction that Muslims “command the right and forbid the wrong” (*amr bi_l-ma_ruf wa nahy an al-munkar*).^v The physical *Jihad* is communal, pitting an Islamic culture in a crusade of sorts against non Islamic cultures or against Muslims seen to be in a state of apostasy. In some cases, *Jihad* of this sort involves activities that many Muslims would consider un-Islamic – activities such as suicide and the killing of

innocents. *Jihad* of this sort, known by different names, is common to all religions and cultures. The medieval crusades of European Christians were Jihadist in effect. Jews, Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists, as well as animistic peoples, have all waged war in the name of their religions. *Jihad* of this sort assumes a natural superiority of one religion over all others and can, of course, lead to unspeakable acts and immense destruction and pain.^{vi}

Jihad has dual meanings: its religious meaning and its historically determined political meaning. In its authentic religious meaning, *Jihad* is a strong effort or series of efforts against negative behavior or unjust conditions in order to keep one's faith strong and one's existence stable and open to progress; it is to inculcate justice and mercy in one's conscience and then to establish justice and mercy in the community through the individual and the collective conscience. In its historically determined political meaning, *Jihad* is self-defence and nothing more. It is not aggression, hostility or confrontation. It is unfortunate that the misunderstanding of *Jihad* has become so prevalent. *Jihad* is mercy, not a sword; and justice, not violence. And Islam is not a state for some people but a path of mercy for all.^{vii} On the intimate level, *Jihad* is working on one's self, mastering one's egoisms and one's own violence; on the social level, it is the struggle for greater justice and against various kinds of discrimination, unemployment, and racism; on the political level, it is the defense of civil responsibilities and rights and the promotion of pluralism, freedom of expression, and the democratic processes; on the economic level, it is action against speculation, monopolies, and neo colonialism; on the cultural level, it is the promotion of the arts and forms of expression that respect the dignity of conscience and human values. These are the *Jihads* to be carried out in the name of active and responsible citizenship—*Jihads* that are spiritual as well as social, economic, political, and ecological.^{viii}

The objective of the Islamic '*Jihad*' is to eliminate the rule of an un-Islamic system and establish in its stead an Islamic system of state rule. Islam does not intend to confine this revolution to a single state or a few countries; the aim of Islam is to bring about a universal revolution. Although in the initial stages it is incumbent upon members of the party of Islam to carry out a revolution in the State system of the countries to which they belong, but their ultimate objective is no other than to effect a world revolution. No revolutionary ideology, which champions the principles of the welfare of humanity as a whole instead of upholding national interests, can restrict its aims and objectives to the limits of a country or a nation. The goal of such an all-embracing doctrine is naturally bound to be world revolution.^{ix} The recognition of the modern state infuriated certain other thinkers who declared their own societies

to be Islamic in name only; in reality, they said, these societies lived in *jahiliyya*, coarse ignorance, the condition of ancient Arabia before the coming of Islam. They summoned all Muslims to the Jihad, calling this an individual (not a collective) obligation because of the gravity of the situation.^x Since the Islam comes into conflict with the *Jahiliyyahh* (ignorance) which prevails over ideas and beliefs, and which has a practical system of life and a political and material authority behind it, the Islamic movement had to produce parallel resources to confront this *Jahiliyyahh*. Islam uses the methods of preaching and persuasion for reforming ideas and beliefs, and it uses physical power and Jihad for abolishing the organizations and authorities of the *Jahili* system, which prevents people from reforming their ideas and beliefs, but forces them to obey their erroneous ways and make them serve human lords instead of the Almighty Lord. Islamic movement does not confine itself to mere preaching to confront physical power, as it also does not use compulsion for changing the ideas of people. These two principles are equally important in the method of this religion. Its purpose is to free those people who wish to be freed from enslavement to men so that they may serve Allah Almighty alone.^{xi}

It is believed that a devout Muslim must be prepared to embark upon *Jihad*, a struggle for self-improvement but also a prime duty to go out and defend the holiness of Islam. That can have a political as well as religious meaning-the land and the faith are sacred.^{xii} Muslims are continually obligated to spend their resources for good causes. But when a Muslim community is oppressed, occupied or subjugated, they are even more obligated to “fight with their goods and persons,” forging a fearless, non-submissive, militant resistance.^{xiii} It is the sacred duty of all Muslims to spread this true religion to the rest of the world. In this sense, Islam is undoubtedly expansionistic. Throughout history, it has expanded by conquest, peaceful conversion, and migration. In growing as a faith as well as geographically, Islam acquired the characteristics of a community, a nation, and eventually an empire. The community of Islam is known as the *umma*. It constitutes a borderless nation of believers and considers itself separate from the non-Islamic world. From a practical standpoint, the *umma* includes all the 1.3 billion Muslims throughout the world. Any place Muslims live and practice their faith freely is considered part of the Nation of Islam, or *dar-al-Islam*.^{xiv}

The participation of a Muslim in *Jihad* is considered a pious act that stands on the same level as asceticism and other good works. Numerous are the Quran-verses and Traditions in which Paradise is promised to those who fall in battle. Therefore, it is likely that many Muslim took part in a war on the ground of personal and religious motives. In this sense it might be

called a “Holy War” , but in the past as well as recently these religious sentiments have been exploited by rulers with a view to mobilize the people for wars.^{xv} The struggle for the protection of a society becomes justified by religion, the society becomes the faith, and warfare becomes transcendental. Death in battle becomes martyrdom. The struggle for goodness becomes a struggle for Paradise and the goodness as prescribed by God. The culmination is a fanatical holy war of mujahedeen fighting for themselves, for their faith, for their honour and that which is sacred. The West becomes evil, a representation of all that is offensive to God, all that is an affront to his power and absolute authority over humankind.^{xvi} Islamic scholars argue that the tradition makes clear that seventy-two virgins are the reward for every believer who is admitted to paradise, not only martyrs. However, terrorist organizations emphasize that the seventy-two virgins are a special reward for martyrdom.^{xvii}

Jihad is justified when only competent religious authorities declare it and only after taking into accounts not only the chances of victory, but also the risks to the integrity and the well-being of the Islamic community in general. It follows that *Jihad* is declared formally and legally only in few cases, and that it ought not to be considered as an automatic option in every case in which Muslims confront an enemy or an outside force that is able to threaten Islamic lands or resources. On the other hand, this set of qualifications and reservations is not always known and realised on the popular level. While these are intellectually important reservations, they are the property of the more educated élites. On the popular level, *Jihad* and its implications are invoked much more easily, and *Jihad* is in fact one of the most popular concepts among Muslims.^{xviii} *Sunni* and *Shii* communities differ with regard to who can declare a *Jihad*. For *Sunnis*, the Caliph, with the support of the *ulama* (religious) scholars, had the religious and political authority to declare a *Jihad*. *Shii* view this power as having been unjustly taken from the true successors to Muhammad, the Imams. However, in the absence of their Imam, only a defensive *Jihad* was considered permissible. This problem was resolved as some *ulama* claimed that all legitimate forms of *Jihad* were defensive and therefore able to be waged in the Imam's absence.^{xix}

Presently, in the Islamic world, the concept of *Jihad* is use to justify the unlawful use of coercive methods by the radicals and religious fundamentalist to overthrow the moderate, secular and liberal forces in order to establish the new social, political and economic order in accordance to the rigorous Islamic law. International terrorist organizations intentionally offer the distorted and vague interpretation of this religious doctrine. Today due to inhuman activities

and indiscriminate use of force by Islamic fundamentalists against common masses, the doctrine of Jihad has blemished the image of Islam at the international level. The

politicization of Islamic doctrine of *Jihad* has encouraged the religious violence, use of violent means to resolve the conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims and consequently shakes the faith of masses in Islam. In given scenario, it would be beneficial for the international community and Islamic world if the religious leaders and intelligentsia in the Islamic world make an attempt to eliminate the prevailing vagueness regarding the concept of Jihad, to improve the image of Islam among non-Muslims and to restrain the youth in Islamic world from getting involved in terrorist activities.

Islamic fundamentalists are also against those Westernized, liberal and secular Muslim socio-religious leaders and moderate intelligentsia in the Islamic world, which is playing in the hands of Western powers. They argue that secular Muslims rulers in various parts of world have betrayed and damaged the socio-religious, economic and political interests of Islamic world. They try to rationalize their outrageous violent acts on the ground that it is their divine duty to fight against the profane social and political order. They think that it is their religious obligation to declare a *Jihad* against such political regimes to pave the way for the establishment of Islamic rule. They believe that social, economic and spiritual development of Muslims is not possible in secular regimes. Members of international terrorist organizations claim themselves freedom fighter, *Jihadi* or mujahedeen. In the Islamic world, religious fundamentalist raises serious objections over Western hegemony, Western model of democracy and secularism. In the beginning, radical Islamist groups exposed the exploitative character of European colonial powers in Islamic countries. They unmask the hidden agenda of Western powers to exploit natural resources in Middle East. Religious fundamentalist criticize severely the deliberate efforts made by Western powers to penetrate in social and political systems of Islamic countries. They are unequivocally against the process of modernization of traditional and conservative Islamic societies and installation of puppet secular regimes in Muslim countries to damage Islamic socio-religious and cultural value system. They consider Western interference in the internal affairs of Islamic countries as an attack on Islam. They argue that instead of understanding the genuine social, economic and political grievances of Islamic world, Western powers under the leadership of United States of America have carried on their double-faced foreign and economic policies and have validated the doubts and apprehensions of

fundamentalist and terrorist groups. Subsequently, at present, USA has become the target of majority of international terrorist organizations. Anti-Americanism has become an ideological root of many fundamentalist organizations in Islamic countries.

To conclude, we can say that it is necessary for international community to understand the concept of *jihad* in the wider sense particularly in the context of teachings of Prophet Muhammad and holy Quran. We need to be aware of negative intensions of those divisive forces that pose threat to international peace, security, stability and harmony and also create terror, sectarianism and hatred by interpreting the sacred texts and misinterpreting the concept of *jihad* to secure their narrow and objectives

Endnotes:

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