

# Jihad

## Jihad in Islam

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Given the prominence that the term *jihad* has attained in western popular and academic literature it is important that we understand the Islamic pronouncements on this issue. The Qur'an uses the word *jihad* in a generic sense, denoting any form of struggle in the cause of God (29:69). We can talk of the spiritual *jihad* (to attain spiritual purity), the ethical-moral *jihad* (to attain moral excellence), a social *jihad* (to win the hearts and minds of others) and the rational *jihad* (exertion of mental faculties).

The Qur'anic world-view is to bring the world under the sway of God's guidance so as to establish a righteous order based on justice and equality. *Jihad* is envisioned as an important tool in the community's attempt to build a world order in which peace, justice, and equality prevail according to God's providence. The Qur'anic understanding of *jihad* as warfare is evident in verse 2:193, "Fight them until there is no persecution (*fitna*) and the religion be only for God." In another verse, the Qur'an states, "Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. God does not love those who transgress. And slay them wherever you find them, and drive them out of the places from where they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter (2:190-191)."

The Qur'an sanctions *jihad* to establish a moral order that will protect the welfare of the Muslim community against both internal and external enemies. The permission to engage in hostilities was evidently a response to the threat posed by powerful Meccan tribes. The Qur'an does not state that force was to be used against all unbelievers; only those unbelievers who demonstrate their hostility to Islam by trying to undermine the Islamic polity and by persecuting Muslims were to be targeted. It is Meccan hostility, rather than their disbelief, that is the target of the Qur'anic verses on *jihad*.

The Qur'an does not accept the idea of unlimited or aggressive warfare. By the assiduous usage of the term *la ta'tadu* (do not transgress) in the context of warfare, the Qur'an qualifies *jihad* with a moral condition of restraint. It also exhorts Muslims to seek avenues of peace. Thus it restricts rather than gives free license to recourse to war. The Qur'an also outlines the rules of engagement, who is to fight and who is exempted (48:17; 9:91), when hostilities should cease (2:192) and how prisoners should be treated (47:4). As there is no compulsion in religion (2:256), Muslims are not to use *jihad* as a means to impose their beliefs on others.

Other verses stipulate that the Prophet Muhammad should accept peace overtures (8:61) from the enemy. Verses 2:192-93 command the Prophet to cease hostilities if the enemy desists. In order not to transgress, Muslims are required to respond proportionally to the

injury done to them. Even here, the Qur'an urges restraint by accepting blood money and forgiveness.

The Qur'anic discourse with the people of the book indicates that, despite the polemics and differences with them, it allowed the Muslim community to seek means of peaceful coexistence with them. The recipients of earlier revelations were acknowledged to be autonomous religious communities, to be governed in their communal affairs according to their own laws. As long as they did not threaten the Muslim community and they paid the *jizya* (tax), the Islamic state was to assure their security and autonomy.

Being universal in its outlook, Islam had to contend not only with non-Muslims living in its dominion but also with those living outside its borders. The classical Muslim jurists divided the world into the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and the abode of war (*dar al-harb*). The territory of Islam signifies a political entity that acknowledges and upholds Islamic values and laws. *Dar al-harb*, on the other hand, was the land of infidels, the epitome of heedlessness and ignorance that posed a threat to the Islamic order. The absence of Islamic law (*shari'a*) in the abode of war was presumed to epitomize injustice and to foster lawlessness and insecurity. The jurists' concern was to universalize application of the *shari'a*, their ultimate goal being to propagate the Islamic faith.

Based on the jurists' bifurcation of the world, peace was possible only when everyone lived under the protection of an Islamic state. *Dar al-harb* was to be infused with Islamic ideals by extending the boundaries of *dar al-Islam*. Through this construction, the jurists were able to formulate rulings legitimizing Muslim expansion and ascendancy over the non-Muslim world.

It is important to note that these spheres in Islamic jurisprudence do not occur in the Qur'an. Unlike the jurists, the Qur'an does not suggest a perpetual state of war between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*. Rather than reflecting the Qur'anic pronouncement on interfaith relations, the legal construction of the world into *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* are indicative of the historical realities that Muslim jurists had to contend with.

Jurists linked the universal ideals of Islam with *jihad* so as to justify the extension of the boundaries of *dar al-Islam*. Paradoxically, the purpose of *jihad* was peace since this could only be achieved when the divine law that is imprinted on the human conscience was accessible to everyone, believers and unbelievers. At this point, there would be no confrontation between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*. According to the jurists, Muslims are obliged to propagate this divine law, through peaceful means if possible, through violent means if necessary.

The juristic discussions and disagreements are indicative of the tensions between the Qur'anic notion of peace and the juridical pronouncement on war. To justify their conception of *jihad* as an ongoing war that would incorporate *dar al-harb* into *dar al-Islam*, jurists held that 124 Qur'anic tolerant verses (called *ayat al-tasamuh*) were abrogated by verse 9:5 the sword verse, and other verses like it. The sword verses provided the rationale for formulating legal injunctions to regulate and perpetuate hostile

relations with non-Muslims. This rationale also had the effect of obliterating the distinction between offensive and defensive *jihad* since, henceforth, all *jihad* was seen as just.

In later juridical literature, *jihad* became an important instrument in making the political order an integral part of Islam. Jihad also symbolized the mobilization of religion for political and expansionist ends. This was in stark contrast to the Qur'anic vision which sanctioned *jihad* only in defense or to fight oppression. The limited justification of *jihad* in the Qur'an was broadened to include spreading the boundaries of Islam, which after all, was assumed to embody the Qur'anic principles of justice and equity. In reality, the motivation for *jihad*, in many cases, was territorial expansion, which required religious validation. This was sought in the very scripture that prohibited coercion in matters pertaining to faith (2:256-"Let there be no compulsion in religion.") and territorial transgression.