Jihad

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Jihâd. Carrying the basic connotation of an endeavor

toward a praiseworthy aim, the word jihâd bears many

shades of meaning in the Islamic context. It may express

a struggle against one’s evil inclinations or an exertion

The Ottomans, who inherited the city in 1517 from

the Mamlûks, continued their predecessors’ generous

support of the holy city. The walls that still set off the

“Old City” today were built by the Ottomans, some­

what uselessly, perhaps, since the greatest threat to the

city came from abroad, not in the form of armed war­

riors. The might of the Ottomans was tested and broken in

the Balkans during the seventeenth to nineteenth cen­

tury; consequently, their control of their own affairs in

their own dominions was progressively eroded. Even be­

fore the Crusades, the Christians of Jerusalem, the Lat­

ins, Greeks, and Armenians, had learned the benefit of

invoking the protection of the more powerful of their

coreligionists; somewhat later, the European powers

learned what benefits might accrue to them from manip­

ulating those invocations.

The disintegration of Ottoman sovereignty was no­

where more evident than in Palestine and Jerusalem in

the nineteenth century. The city began to fill up with

European consulates, European missionaries, and, fi­

nally, European archaeological missions, many of them

instruments of national policy and all of them far be­

yond the reach of the Ottoman authorities in what was

by then an exceedingly poor city. Even the Jews, always

the least considerable and most wretched of Jerusalem’s

medieval population, discovered that they too had pow­
erful friends and benefactors in Europe. With the aid of

those benefactors, the Montefiores and Rothschilds

chief among them, the lot of the Jews of Jerusalem im­

proved, and their numbers began to spiral upward. By

1900 there were 35,000 (Muslims and Christians each

10,000) out of a total population of 55,000.

Turkey joined Germany in its unsuccessful war against

the Allies in 1914; in December 1917 Jerusalem fell, without harm, to General Edmund Allenby and a British

Expeditionary Army. It rested under the uneasy control

of British governors during the entire Mandate period

(1922–1948). When the British withdrew in 1948, the

Jordanians hastened to occupy the Old City, despite the

United Nations’ recommendations for internationaliza­

tion. It remained a part of Jordan until the 1967 war,

when the Israelis took it after fierce fighting. The whole

city has since been integrated into the State of Israel, and

declared its capital, though in June 1967 the Israeli minis­
ter of defense, Moshe Dayan, acknowledged the entire

Haram al-Sharif to be the possession of the Muslims. The

policy has remained in force to this day.

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for the sake of Islam and the ummah, for example, trying to convert unbelievers or working for the moral betterment of Islamic society ("jihād of the tongue" and "jihād of the pen"). In the books on Islamic law, the word means an armed struggle against the unbelievers, which is also a common meaning in the Qurʾān. Sometimes the "jihād of the sword" is called "the greater jihād," in opposition to the peaceful forms named "the greater jihād." Today often used without any religious connotation, its meaning is more or less equivalent to the English word crusade ("a crusade against drugs"). If used in a religious context, the adjective "Islamic" or "holy" is currently added to it (al-jihād al-Islāmī or al-jihād al-muqaddas).

Origin. The concept of jihād goes back to the wars fought by the Prophet Muḥammad and their written reflection in the Qurʾān. It is clear that the concept was influenced by the ideas on war among the pre-Islamic northern Arabic tribes. Among these, war was the normal state, unless two or more tribes had concluded a truce. War between tribes was regarded as lawful and if the war was fought as a defense against aggression, the fighting had an additional justification. Ideas of chivalry forbade warriors to kill noncombatants like children, women, and old people. These rules were incorporated into the doctrine of jihād as fixed in the latter half of the second century AH.

The Qurʾān frequently mentions jihād and fighting (qiād) against the unbelievers. Surah 22.40 ("Leave is given to those who fight because they were wronged—surely God is able to help them—who were expelled from their habitations without right, except that they say ‘Our Lord is God.’"), revealed not long after the Hijrah, is traditionally considered to be the first verse dealing with the fighting of the unbelievers. Many verses exhort the believers to take part in the fighting "with their goods and lives" (bi-amṣūlihim wa-anfusihim), promise reward to those who are killed in the jihād (3.157–158, 169–172), and threaten those who do not fight with severe punishments in the hereafter (9.81–82, 48.16). Other verses deal with practical matters such as exemption from military service (9.91, 48.17), fighting during the holy months (2.217) and in the holy territory of Mecca (2.191), the fate of prisoners of war (47.4), safe conduct (9.6), and truce (8.61).

It is not clear whether the Qurʾān allows fighting the unbelievers only as a defense against aggression or under all circumstances. In support of the first view a number of verses can be quoted that expressly justify fighting on the strength of aggression or perfidy on the part of the unbelievers: "And fight in the way of God with those who fight you, but do not aggress: God loves not the aggressors" (2.190) and "But if they break their oaths after their covenant and thrust at your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief" (9.13). In those verses that seem to order the Muslims to fight the unbelievers unconditionally, the general condition that fighting is only allowed in defense could be said to be understood: "Then, when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush" (9.5) and "Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden—such men as practice not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book—until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled" (9.29). Classical Qurʾān interpretation, however, did not go into this direction. It regarded the Sword Verses, with the unconditional command to fight the unbelievers, as having abrogated all previous verses concerning the intercourse with non-Muslims. This idea is no doubt connected with the pre-Islamic concept that war between tribes was allowed, unless there existed a truce between them, the Islamic ummah taking the place of a tribe.

During the second half of the eighth century, the first comprehensive treatise on the law of jihād was written by 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Awzāʾī (d. 774) and Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d. 804). The legal doctrine of jihād was the result of debates and discussions that had been going on since the Prophet's death and through which the doctrine had been developed. This period in which the doctrine of jihād was gradually formulated coincided with the period of the great Muslim conquests, in which the conquerors were exposed to the cultures of the conquered peoples. The doctrine of jihād may have been influenced somewhat by the culture of the Byzantine Empire, where the idea of religious war and related notions were very much alive. It is, however, very difficult to identify these influences. If there are similarities, they are not necessarily the result of borrowing but may be due to parallel developments.

Classical Doctrine. The doctrine of jihād as written in the works on Islamic law developed out of the Qurʾānic prescriptions and the example of the Prophet and the first caliphs, as laid down in the hadith. The crux of the doctrine is the existence of one single Islamic state, ruling the entire ummah. It is the duty of the um-
mah to expand the territory of this state in order to bring as many people as possible under its rule. The ultimate aim is to bring the whole earth under the sway of Islam and to extirpate unbelief: "Fight them until there is no persecution [or "seduction"] and the religion is God’s entirely" (2.192 and 8.39). Expansionist jihad is a collective duty (fard al-kifayah), which is fulfilled if a sufficient number of people take part in it. If this is not the case, the whole ummah is sinning. Expansionist jihad presupposes the presence of a legitimate caliph to organize the struggle. After the conquests had come to an end, the legal specialists specified that the caliph had the option to conclude a truce with the enemy at least once a year in order to keep the idea of jihad alive.

Sometimes jihad becomes an individual duty as when the caliph appoints certain persons to participate in a raiding expedition or when someone takes an oath to fight the unbelievers. Moreover, jihad becomes obligatory for all free men capable of fighting in a certain region if this region is attacked by the enemy; in this case, jihad is defensive.

Sunni and Shi'i theories of jihad are very similar. However, there is one crucial difference. The Twelver Shi'is hold that jihad can only be waged under the leadership of the rightful imam. After the Occultation of the last one in 873, theoretically no lawful jihad can be fought. This is true for expansionist jihad. However, as defense against attacks remains obligatory and the 'ulama' are often regarded as the representatives of the Hidden Imam, several wars between Iran and Russia in the nineteenth century have been called jihad.

War against unbelievers may not be mounted without summoning them to Islam or submission before the attack. A hadith lays down the precise contents of the summons:

Whenever the Prophet appointed a commander to an army or an expedition, he would say: "... When you meet your heathen enemies, summon them to three things. Accept whatever they agree to and refrain then from fighting them. Summon them to become Muslims. If they agree, accept their submission. But if they refuse, then ask God for assistance and fight them. ..."  
(Šahih Muslim)

This hadith also neatly sums up the aims of fighting unbelievers: conversion or submission. In the latter case, the enemies are entitled to keep their religion and practice it, against payment of a poll-tax (jizyah) (see surah 9.29, quoted above). Although the Qur'an limits this option to the People of the Book, that is, Christians and Jews, it was in practice extended to other religions, such as the Zoroastrians (Majus).

Whenever the caliph deems it in the interest of the ummah, he may conclude a truce with the enemy, just as the Prophet did with the Meccans at al-Hudaibiyah. According to some schools of law, a truce must be concluded for a specified period of time, no longer than ten years. Others hold that this is not necessary, if the caliph stipulates that he may resume war whenever he wishes to do so. The underlying idea is that the notion of jihad must not fall into oblivion.

The books on law contain many practical rules concerning warfare, such as exemptions from the obligation to fight, the protection of the lives of noncombatants, lawful methods of warfare, treatment of prisoners of war, safe-conduct to enemy persons, and the division of the spoils.

Function. The most important function of the doctrine of jihad is that it mobilizes and motivates Muslims to take part in wars against unbelievers, as it is considered to be the fulfillment of a religious duty. This motivation is strongly fed by the idea that those who are killed on the battlefield, called martyrs (shahids), will go directly to Paradise. When wars were fought against unbelievers, religious texts would circulate, replete with Qur'anic verses and hadiths extolling the merits of fighting a jihad and vividly describing the reward waiting in the hereafter for those slain during the fighting.

Another function was to enhance the legitimation of a ruler. After the year 750, the political unity of the ummah was lost, never to be restored. Several rulers would govern different regions of the Muslim world. One of the ways to acquire greater legitimacy was to wage jihad against unbelievers, which is one of the main tasks of the lawful caliph.

A final function of the jihad doctrine was that it provided a set of rules governing the relationship with the unbelieving enemies and behavior during actual warfare. Muftis could invoke this set of rules and issue fatwaś showing that a ruler's foreign policy was in conformity with the rules of Islamic law. These rules could be molded to fit the circumstance. A case in point is when, after the collapse of Islamic political unity, two Muslim
states would be at war with one another. In such situations **muftis** would usually find cause to label the enemies either as rebels or as heretics, thus justifying the struggle against them.

During Islamic history, but especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, radical movements striving for a purification of Islam and the establishment of a purely Islamic society proclaimed **jihād** against their opponents, both Muslims and non-Muslims. To justify the struggle against their Muslim adversaries, they would brand them as unbelievers for their neglect in adhering to and enforcing the strict rules of Islam.

**Changing Modern Interpretations.** The colonial experience affected the outlook of some Muslim intellectuals on **jihād**. Some would argue that in view of the military superiority of the colonizer, **jihād** was not obligatory anymore on the strength of surah 2.195 ("... and cast not yourselves by your own hands into destruction, ... "). Others, however, elaborated new interpretations of the doctrine of **jihād**.

The first one to do so was the Indian Muslim thinker Sayyid Aḥmad Khan (1817–1898). After the Mutiny of 1857 the British, arguing that the Muslims wanted to restore Moghul rule and that the doctrine of **jihād** made them fight the British, began favoring the Hindus in the army and in government service. Sayyid Aḥmad Khan wanted to show that Islam did not forbid cooperation with the British colonial government; in this he was motivated by his desire to safeguard employment for the young Muslims from the middle and higher classes. In order to demonstrate that the Indian Muslims were not obliged to fight the British and could be loyal subjects, he gave a new interpretation of the **jihād** doctrine. On the basis of a new reading of the Qurʾān, he asserted that **jihād** was obligatory for Muslims only in the case of "positive oppression or obstruction in the exercise of their faith ... impair[ing] the foundation of some of the pillars of Islam." Since the British, in his opinion, did not interfere with the practice of Islam, **jihād** against them was not allowed. [See the biography of Aḥmad Khan.]

Middle Eastern Muslim reformers like Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905) and Muhammad Rashid Riḍā (1865–1935) did not go as far as Sayyid Aḥmad Khan. On the strength of those Qurʾānic verses that make fighting against the unbelievers conditional upon their aggression or perfidy, they argue that peaceful coexistence is the normal state between Islamic and non-Islamic territories and that **jihād** is only allowed as defensive warfare. This view, however, left the way open to proclaim **jihād** against colonial oppression, as the colonial enterprise was clearly an attack on the territory of Islam. A recent development in this line of thinking is the presentation of the **jihād** doctrine as a form of Muslim international law and the equation of **jihād** with the concept of *bēllum jūstum*. Those who have elaborated this theory proudly point out that Muḥammad al-Sayyabūnī (d. 804) had formulated a doctrine of international public law more than eight centuries before Hugo Grotius. [See the biographies of ʿAbduh and Rashid Riḍā.]

Contemporary thinking about **jihād**, however, offers a wider spectrum of views. Apart from the conservatives, who adhere to the interpretation given in the classical books on Islamic law, there are the ideologues of the radical Islamic opposition, who call for **jihād** as a means to spread their brand of Islam. Some of these radical groups call for the use of violence in order to defeat the established governments. They are faced, however, with a serious doctrinal problem as they preach an armed revolution against Muslim rulers; Islamic law allows revolt only in very rare circumstances. One of these is when a ruler abandons his belief; as the apostate deserves capital punishment, fighting against him is allowed. Throughout Islamic history, governments and opposition movements have declared their Muslim adversaries to be heretics or unbelievers (takfīr, declaring someone to be a kāfīr, unbeliever) in order to justify their struggle against them. It is this line of reasoning that is used by contemporary radical Islamic groups to give legitimacy to their use of arms against rulers who are to all appearances Muslims. In modern times these views were first propagated by fundamentalists like Sayyid Qūṭ (d. 1966) and Abū al-ʿĀla Mawdūdī (1903–1979). [See the biographies of Qūṭ and Mawdūdī.]

The most eloquent and elaborate statement of this view can be found in a pamphlet published by the ideologue of the Jihad Organization, whose members assassinated President Anwar Sadat of Egypt in 1981. The pamphlet is called Al-farādīh al-ghāʾībah (The Absent Duty), referring to the duty to wage **jihād**, which, according to the author, ʿAbd al-Salām Faraj, is not fulfilled anymore. The author borrows his arguments from two *fatwās* issued by the fundamentalist author Ibn Taymiyāth (1263–1328), when his opinion was sought regarding the legitimacy of Mongol rule in the Middle East. The prop of Ibn Taymiyāth's reasoning is the fact that the Mongol rulers apply their own law instead of the *shariʿah*. This, in his opinion, is sufficient cause to regard them as unbelievers, even if they pronounce the
profession of faith. Further, if this argument is not accepted, they still have forfeited their right to demand the obedience of their Muslim subjects, and they may be fought.

Faraj argues that the situation Ibn Taymiyeh describes is similar to the Egyptian situation, as Egyptian law, with the exception of family law and the law of succession, is based on codes of Western inspiration. Observing that, in spite of the vocal demands of the Islamic groups, the government has always refused to introduce the shari'ah, the author concludes that such a government cannot be regarded as Islamic and that it is an individual duty of each Muslim to rise in armed rebellion against this heathen regime in order to replace it with an Islamic one.

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JIHĀD ORGANIZATIONS

The number of jihad organizations has been increasing in the Arab world, and indeed in much of the Islamic world. This fact does not say as much about Islam, as is often assumed in the West, as it says about desperate attempts to exploit Islam politically. The word jihad is often translated in the Western press as "holy war," although the original Islamic concept, on the basis of a well-known hadith, does not have an exclusive military connotation. Jihad is Arabic simply means "struggle," and it came to denote in Islamic history and classical jurisprudence the struggle on behalf of the cause of Islam. In classical and modern times, Islamic governments, or more accurately governments that base their legitimacy on Islamic rationalization, have used the word to describe all combat efforts of their armies.

In the turbulent politics of the Arab world, the radical opposition groups are now fighting their own governments with the same weapons that have been used against them. Just as Arab governments have exploited Islam for purely political purposes, radical opposition groups that espouse Islam as an ideology now use the term to attribute their violent deeds to Islamic requirements. While many groups in the Middle East have used the phrase "Islamic Jihad" as the name for their organizations, it is important to note that those organizations are not necessarily in coordination with one another. There is very little, if any, coordination between those groups, and each should be analyzed within the context of the particular country in which it exists. There is no central jihad structure that conspiratorially creates and manipulates those groups in question.