

# JIHAD IN ISLAM

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**Abstract:** - The Arabic word "jihad" is often spoken as "holy war," but in a purely linguistic sense, the word "jihad" means struggling or striving. The Arabic word for war is: "al-harb". In a religious sense, as described in the Quran and by teachings the Prophet Muhammad (s), "jihad" has many meanings. It refers to internal and external efforts to be a good Muslims or believer, as well as working to inform the people about the faith of Islam. If military jihad is required to protect the faith against others, it can be performed using anything from legal, diplomatic or economic to political means. If there is no peaceful alternative, Islam also allows the use of force, but there are strict rules of these engagement. Innocents - such as women, children or handicaps must be unharmed, and any peaceful overtures from the enemy must be accepted.

**Keywords** - Al-harb, Jahada, Internal or Greater Jihad, Holy War, Surah al-Hujurat, Tahir-ul-Qadri, Surah al-Hajj, Surah al-Baqarah.

**Introduction;**-Islam distinguishes four ways by which the duty of jihad can be fulfilled: by the heart, by the tongue, by the hand, and by the sword. The first consists in a spiritual purification of one's own heart by having battle with the devil and overcoming his inducements to evil. The propagation of Islam through the tongue and hand is accomplished in large measure by supporting what is right and correcting what is wrong. The fourth way to fulfill one's duty is to wage war physically against unbelievers and enemies of the Islamic faith. Those who professed belief in a divine revelation (Christians and Jews in particular) were given special consideration. They could either embrace Islam or at least submit themselves to Islamic rule and pay a poll and land tax. If both options were rejected, jihad will be declared.

Modern Islam places special emphasis on waging war with one's inner self. It sanctions war with other nations only as a defensive measure when the faith is in danger.

Throughout Islamic history, wars against non-Muslims, even though with political overtones, were termed jihads to reflect their religious flavor. This was especially true in the 18th and 19th centuries for Muslim African South of Sahara, where religion political conquests were seen as jihads, most notably the jihad of "Usman dan Fodio", which established the "Sokoto" caliphate in the year 1804 which is now northern Nigeria. The Afghan War in the late 20th and early 21st centuries was also viewed by many of its participants as a jihad, first against the Soviet Union and Afghanistan's Marxist government and later, against the United States. During that time, Islamic extremists used the theory of jihad to justify violent attacks against Muslims whom the extremists accused of apostasy.

# Definition of Jihad

While Islam in general is misunderstood in the western world, perhaps no other Islamic term evokes such strong reactions as the word Jihad. The word Jihad is mistranslated as “Holy War”. The Arabic equivalent of “Holy War” is “harb-u-muqadasah”. This term is not found in any verse of the Qur’an. There is nothing in the Islamic sources that permit a Muslim to fight against non-Muslims solely on the basis that they are not Muslim.

The word Jihad comes from the root word “jahada”, which means to struggle. At the individual level, jihad primarily refers to the inner struggle of being a person of virtue and submission to God in all aspects of life.

At the collective level, jihad can take various forms, such as:

1. Intellectual Jihad, which comprises of the struggle to convey the message of God to humankind and to combat social evils through knowledge, wisdom and dignified discourse. As the Glorious Qur’an says:

*“Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, “I am of those who bow in Islam”?”*<sup>1</sup> [Al-Qur’an 41:33]

2. Economic Jihad, which comprises of economic measures, and spending from one’s means to improve the living conditions of the poor and the downtrodden.

3. Physical Jihad, which involves collective armed self-defense, as well as retribution against tyranny, exploitation, and oppression.

Thus the concept of Jihad is vast and comprehensive. Admittedly, it’s the last category of Jihad that is a cause for concern to many, and which we shall explore in detail.

## Physical Jihad

Jihad on the battlefield, in the Islamic perspective, is the last resort and is subject to stringent conditions. It can be waged only to defend freedom, which includes freedom of faith. The Glorious Qur’an says: *“To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid;- (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right,- (for no cause) except that they say, “our Lord is Allah”. Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure...”*<sup>2</sup> [Al-Qur’an 22:39-40]

Moreover, the Qur’an says:

*“And why should we not fight for the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? – Men, women and children, whose cry is: “Our Lord! Rescue us from this town,*

*whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from the one who will protect; and raise for us from the one who will help!”*<sup>3</sup> [Al-Qur’an 4:75]

Thus the conditions of physical Jihad are clearly defined in the Qur’an.

## Rules Of Engagement

Although Islam permits Jihad on the battlefield under the conditions mentioned above, the rules of engagement reflect Islam’s inherent inclination towards peace:

### *No aggression towards civilians*

Military conflict is to be directed only against fighting troops and not against civilians, as the Glorious Qur’an says:

*“Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah Lovett not transgressors”*<sup>4</sup> [Al-Qur’an 2:190]

As far as the non-combatant population is concerned such as women, children, the old and the infirm, etc., the instructions of the Prophet are as follows: “Do not kill any old person, any child or any woman”, “Do not kill the monks in monasteries” or “Do not kill the people who are sitting in places of worship.” During a war, the Prophet saw the corpse of a woman lying on the ground and observed: “She was not fighting. How then she came to be killed?” Thus non-combatants are guaranteed security of life even if their state is at war with an Islamic state.

### *Upholding justice*

The ravages of war are not an excuse for Muslims to engage in any form of cruelty or violation of human rights. As the Qur’an says:

*“O ye who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.”*<sup>5</sup> [Al-Qur’an 5:8]

It is forbidden under Islamic law, to ill-treat prisoners of war or to deny them the essentials of life, including medical treatment.

### *Respect for Religious freedom*

Physical Jihad cannot be waged with the objective of compelling people to embrace Islam. The Glorious Qur’an says:

*“Let there be no compulsion in religion”*<sup>6</sup> [Al-Qur’an 2:256]

“If it had been thy Lord’s will, they would all have believed,- all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!”<sup>7</sup> [Al-Qur’an 10:99]

## ***Accept peace***

If the enemy offers peace, it should be accepted even at the risk of possible deception. The Glorious Qur’an says:

“But if the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is One that heareth and knoweth (all things) ”<sup>8</sup> [Al-Qur’an 8:61]

## **Jihad and the Prophet**

The internal Jihad is the one that **Prophet Muhammad** called the *greater Jihad*.

But the quotation in which the Prophet says this is regarded as coming from an unreliable source by some scholars. They regard the use of Jihad to mean *holy war* as the more important.

### **The internal Jihad**

The phrase *internal Jihad* or *greater Jihad* refers to the efforts of a believer to live their Muslim faith as well as possible.

All religious people want to live their lives in the way that will please their God.

So Muslims make a great effort to live, as Allah has instructed them to follow the rules of the faith being devoted to Allah, doing everything they can to help other people.

For most people, living God's way is quite a struggle. God sets high standards, and believers have to fight with their own selfish desires to live up to them, no matter how much they love God.

### **The five Pillars of Islam as Jihad**

The **five Pillars of Islam** form an exercise of Jihad in this sense, since a Muslim gets closer to Allah by performing them.

Unlike the five pillars of Islam, jihad was to be enforced by the state unless the Muslim community is subjected to a sudden attack and therefore all believers, including women and children are under the obligation to fight—[jihad of the sword] is regarded by all jurists, with almost no exception, as a collective obligation of the whole Muslim community, meaning that if the duty is fulfilled by a part of the community it ceases to be obligatory on others.<sup>[9]</sup>

Other ways in which a Muslim engages in the 'greater Jihad' could include:

- Learning the **Qur'an** by heart, or engage in other religious study.
- Overcoming things such as anger, greed, hatred, pride, or malice.

- Giving up smoking.
- Cleaning the floor of the **mosque**.
- Taking part in Muslim community activities.
- Working for social justice.
- Forgiving someone who has hurt them.

### The Greater Jihad controversy

The Prophet called the internal Jihad the "greater Jihad".

On his return from a battle, the Prophet said: "We are finished with the lesser jihad; now we are starting the greater jihad." He explained to his followers that fighting against an outer enemy is the lesser jihad and fighting against one's self is the greater jihad (holy war).

This quotation is regarded as unreliable by some scholars. They regard the use of jihad as meaning 'holy war' as the more important.

However the quotation has been very influential among some Muslims, particularly Sufis.

**Holy war** – *“When Muslims, or their faith or territory are under attack, Islam permits (some say directs) the believer to wage military war to protect them.”*

However Islamic (sharia) law sets very strict rules for the conduct of such a war.

In recent years the most common meaning of Jihad has been Holy War.

And there is a long tradition of Jihad being used to mean a military struggle to benefit Islam.

### What can justify Jihad?

There are a number of reasons, but the Qur'an is clear that self-defense is always the underlying cause.

The importance of the jihad in Islam lay in shifting the focus of attention of the tribes from their intertribal warfare to the outside world. Islam outlawed all forms of war except the jihad that is the war in Allah's path. It would indeed, have been very difficult for the Islamic state to survive had it not been for the doctrine of the jihad, replacing tribal raids, and directing that enormous energy of the tribes from an inevitable internal conflict to unite and fight against the outside world in the name of the new faith. <sup>[9]</sup>

Permissible reasons for **military Jihad**:

- Self-defense
- Strengthening Islam
- Protecting the freedom of Muslims to practice their faith.

- Protecting Muslims against oppression, which could include overthrowing a tyrannical ruler.
- Punishing an enemy who breaks an oath.
- Putting right a wrong.

### **What a Jihad is not?**

A war is not a Jihad if the intention is to:

- Force people to convert to Islam.
- Conquer other nations to colonize them.
- Take territory for economic gain.
- Settle disputes.
- Demonstrate a leader's power.

Although the Prophet engaged in military action on a number of occasions, these were battles to survive, rather than conquest, and took place at a time when fighting between tribes was common.

## **Can Terrorism be compared to Jihad?**

Terrorism is usually defined as ideologically motivated indiscriminate violence that targets civilians, with the intention of inspiring terror in order to achieve political ends. Although this definition ignores the reality of state terrorism, it is clear that terrorism has no place in the noble concept of Jihad. Even Jihad that involves physical conflict is the very antithesis of terrorism, as is clear from the following differences:

1. Jihad can be launched only by an established authority as a policy in order to deter aggression. Terrorism on the other hand, is committed by individuals or groups that have no legitimacy to speak for the majority. When terrorism is committed by states, it usually depends on misleading the masses.
2. Jihad is limited to combatants while terrorism involves indiscriminate killing of civilians.
3. Jihad, when the need arises, is declared openly, while terrorism is committed secretly.
4. Jihad is bound by strict rules of engagement while terrorism is not bound by any rules.

## **Losing the Meaning of Jihad: Terrorism and the US Media**

During his trip to India, President Barack Obama visited St. Xavier's College in Mumbai, where he answered a student's question about jihad: "I think all of us recognize that this great religion in the hands of a few extremists has been distorted to justify violence toward innocent people

that is never justified." However, this distinction is not clear for many Americans, who still equate Islam with violence. Propagating that the United States is at war with Islam is of strategic interest for organizations like al Qaeda who frame their image as defenders of the Muslim world under attack from the West. To advance this scheme, terrorists deliberately use the word jihad to describe their extremist agenda. Through their use of the word jihad, U.S. media outlets have unwittingly abetted terrorists in this strategy.

The word jihad literally means "strive" or "struggle." Of the five dimensions of jihad discussed in the Quran, the most emphasized is an individual's internal struggle for self-restraint and piety. The Quran also uses the word jihad in connection with charity and, to a lesser extent, academic achievement, societal reform and defensive war. In verse 15 of "Surah al-Hujurat", the Quran reveals that true believers "strive hard in Allah's cause with their possessions and their lives."

Terrorists have exploited the word jihad to create the false impression that the text of the Quran supports their violent crimes. As with any religious text, a scholar can selectively extract and interpret verses from the Quran to support opposing arguments; yet according to Quranic scholar Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, of the 35 verses in which the Quran mentions jihad, 31 make no allusion to fighting either in the text or the context. The remaining four verses instruct Muslims to take up arms only to defend themselves against an aggressor. For example verse 39 of "Surah al-Hajj" grants permission to fight to those who have been attacked. Similarly in verse 190 of "Surah al-Baqarah", the Quran reveals, "fight in the cause of Allah those that fight you, but do not aggress because Allah does not love the aggressor."

Because terrorists depict violence against civilians as jihad, the majority of American media attention constricts its application of the term to descriptions of violence. Since 2001, the U.S. press has referenced jihad between approximately 6,000 and nearly 12,000 times per year; television and radio programs mention jihad an average of 6,000 times per year. In contrast to the way the U.S. media has publicized violent jihad, internal jihad has been largely ignored, with a mere 56 combined total references from 2001 to the present. The media referenced both internal and violent jihad a total of 55 times in the aggregation of those same years.

By focusing on the narrow concept of jihad used by terrorists, the U.S. media has inadvertently reinforced the link between terrorism and Islam within the American consciousness and contributed to the negative perception of Islam held by an increasing percentage of the American public. Thirty-eight percent of Americans polled by the Pew Research Center in August 2010 expressed an unfavorable opinion of Islam; thirty-five percent believed Islam encourages violence more than other religions. This adverse impression of Islam held by more than one-third of the American public undermines the ability of the United States to strengthen its partnerships with predominantly Muslim countries.

Terrorists have a strategic interest in propagating the belief that Islam and the West are at war. The degree, to which terrorists can succeed incredibly convincing Muslim populations that the United States is not really fighting a war on terrorism, but instead waging a war against Islam, is directly correlated to the prevalence of anti-Americanism within Muslim societies. The U.S. media could instead discredit al Qaeda and its affiliates by highlighting the differences between the Quran's injunctions on internal jihad and the terrorist perversion of

jihad as defensive war. This modification would prove especially significant at a time when the killing of innocent Muslims in Pakistan, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco, Jordan and elsewhere has caused a backlash within the Muslim community against these terrorist organizations.

## Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that Jihad is a vast concept that encompasses various spheres of activity, all directed towards the betterment of self and society. Regardless of how legitimate a cause may be, Islam does not condone the killing of innocent people. Terrorizing the civilian population, whether by individuals or states, can never be termed as jihad and can never be reconciled with the teachings of Islam.

## References

1. [Al-Qur'an 41:33]
2. [Al-Qur'an 22:39-40]
3. [Al-Qur'an 4:75]
4. [Al-Qur'an 2:190]
5. [Al-Qur'an 5:8]
6. [Al-Qur'an 2:256]
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