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Jihad: Peaceful Applications for Society and the Individual

Norman C. Rothman

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Abstract

This paper examines the historical and contemporary aspects of Jihad. It covers its various definitions and outside as well as inside perceptions of the concept. Emphasis is placed on the peaceful aspects of Jihad as well as its potential for use in peaceful dialogue.

Keywords –Sharia, Qur'an, Sufi, Hanafi, Wahhabi

Introduction

Jihad is a term often used as a catch phrase for a violent crusade against perceived enemies of Islam. Because it is now used by radical groups (some of which, such as Islamic Jihad) who seek a universal caliphate by various means including violence to justify actions, it has acquired a military connotation. In reality, the term is much more complex. Defined as "struggle" or "utmost effort," it can have peaceful uses.

Background

Although Jihad has been most identified with military violence, it can have (as will be shown later in this paper) a number of different versions. The military campaigns during the expansion of Islam were intended to emphasize defending the faith and then expanding it by the use of military means, both internally against apostasy and externally against enemies. Historically, as it evolved in the 8th century, Jihad came to be considered a collective responsibility of the emerging political-legal Muslim community or umma so that jihad has been called the sixth commandment or pillar of Islam.[1] It was an essential part of all major schools of Sunni judicial thought and interpretation of the Islamic law code or Sharia — Hanbali, Hanafi, Malaki, Shafi'i as well as the Shia version of Jafari. In his early writings, the Prophet advocated a peaceful rather than violent persuasion and counseled patience and pacific exchange while non-Muslims saw the light. This was the early attitude especially to people of the book (as the Prophet terms Christians and Jews who followed the Old and New Testaments of the Bible which he, Muhammad, recognized).[2]

About 90 of the 114 verses in the Qur'an are explicitly non-military, especially in regard to "people of the Book," such as "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book except with means better (than mere disputation) ... But say, We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you. Our God and your God is One, and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)…."[3] (Sura 29, passages 46-47).

However, the various struggles first against opponents within the Arabian Peninsula and then against external opponents such as the Sassanian Persians and Byzantine Greeks hardened the concept of Jihad so that its peaceful connotation receded as conciliation gave way to militancy.[4]

Branches of Jihad

Nonetheless, the theoretical aspects of jihad as a tool for people to come together continued as several major versions beside jihad of the sword remained even after the struggles in terms of expansion after the 8th century. Jihad of the heart, which advocated the advancement of Islam through the example of individual purity and in many aspects is analogous to the teachings of both Buddhism and Christianity (the main rivals to Islam in terms of global expansion during the post-8th century period), had many supporters. Jihad of the mouth, which supported the propagation of Islam by argumentation, rhetoric, and logic, was identified with the legal schools and could appeal to counselors of other faiths. A subset of this interpretation was propagation by poetry and literature. A branch of Islam, Sufism, became notable in this respect and in fact was instrumental in the mostly peaceful conversion of much of Central and Southeastern Asia. The Hanafi branch of Sharia, which relies on reason and logic, is most often identified with this approach. The final major jihad approach was jihad of the hand which has been interpreted as expanding Islam by exemplar, most notably by good deeds to inspire conversion. Together, these aspects of Jihad were very influential in expanding Islam especially in the Balkans and Caucasus well into the 18th century.[5]

Throughout the history of Islam, the emphasis on internal struggle or striving against one's self has also been important as is the related idea that striving to learn Islam is essential to both the here and now as well as the hereafter. The emphasis on striving in turn can be subdivided. It can refer to external and internal striving. Even in terms of opposition to others in defense of the faith in a militant way, external jihad can be carried out through economic, political, legal, and diplomatic means. If these fail, the military form of jihad is authorized (it should be noted in passing that the Arabic word for war is al-harb not al-jihad).[6] The military aspect of jihad is comparatively rare. It must be sanctioned or declared by the proper authority and people deemed to be innocent such as women, children, and the chronically ill must not be harmed. Even if military action occurs, peaceful proposals from the enemy must be considered. In general, until the rise of radical groups, a jihad was not always declared against other religions even if military action took place. Only when there were calls for a just war as in the Crusades or in campaigns against the Sassanians or the Byzantines was "jihad of the sword" invoked.[7] Many scholars stress the internal struggle for self-control and betterment as the predominant form of jihad. Within internal striving of jihad is the striving or struggle against one's self. This striving is known as al-nafs and is sub-divided into four kinds. For example, here is a complete verse or sura, Sura 29:69).

The striving begins with the Almighty. In general, fighting by the word with emphasis on the Almighty rather than the sword is epitomized by the following verse:

> And insult not those whom they worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge. Thus, "We have made fair-seeming to each people its own doings; then to their Lord is their return and He shall then inform them of all that they used to do" (Sura 06: 108).[9]

The first aspect of the struggle is to be accomplished by the study of holy texts. This is the primary aspects of al-nafs as happiness and success depend upon the acquisition of this knowledge. Without this attainment, an individual cannot find happiness in this world or the next. The second tenet is acting upon what is learned. Without putting to use holy knowledge, an individual is deprived of any benefit. The third tenet enjoins the learned to share knowledge learned with others. It is incumbent upon the learned not to conceal the wisdom acquired by the study of holy texts. Finally, those who wish to share knowledge to bring people to Allah must put up with any difficulties whether it be obduracy in learning or actual insults — the virtues of patience. If all four levels of this process are achieved by believers, — learning the truth, acting upon it, sharing knowledge and bringing non-believers to Islam despite difficulties, they will enter the kingdom of heaven. The following excerpts from various suras exemplify this aspect of inner or greater jihad: in the Quran (58:11), God raises in rank "... those who have been given knowledge." Muhammad also emphasized knowledge in a hadith, or saying of the Prophet, in which he said that "Seeking knowledge is a must for every Muslim, male or female, from cradle to grave in any part of the world." Muhammad also stated in another hadith that "the ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr." Therefore, good Muslims should act, whether it is in the Qur'an or within the meaning of "jihad" in terms of their obligation to seek out knowledge and apply that knowledge in good faith for the betterment of humanity.[10]

The stress on peace is also given when applied to jihad with obvious applications to relations on an individual, national, and international level. The Prophet makes direct reference to this end in the following citations with the word being called "most beautiful names" of God (Qur'an, 59:23-24). Peace in the world reflects higher realities. In the Qur'an, peace is affirmed as the greeting, language, and condition of Paradise (Qur'an, 10:10, 14:23, 19:61-63, 36:58). God calls believers unto the abode of peace (*dar al salam*) (Qur'an, 10:25)[11]

A related set of precepts defines jihad against the Devil or Tempter called the Shaytaan. The first division of this injunction is to resist any doubts caused by this tempter. Secondly, a learned and devout individual must ward any corrupt impulses caused by this entity. Overall, the al-nafs precepts lead to a certainty of faith while Shaytaan precepts lead to patience. In general patience can combat desire while certainty insulates a believer from doubt.[12]

The second set of jihad classifications combines internal and external aspects. They include jihads against kaafirs (non-believers) and hypocrites (apostates or those who mix Muslim and non-Muslim customs and consequently commit impure acts or shirk). These sub-categories include such tools as the heart, the tongue, individual wealth, and one's own self. The kaafir jihad can include physical fighting if not actual war while the second can be conducted through words and ideas.[13]

A related set of jihads can be waged against leaders of oppression and innovation — who threaten the practice of Islam both externally and internally. These jihads can take three forms. They can be of hand (which can include fighting or formal jihad) if one is able. If this is not possible, one can use one's tongue through speech. If this, in turn, is not possible, one should use one's heart through the hating of evil and feeling that is not right.[14] In general, the Prophet counseled patience for evil doers in Sura 20:129,130 (also 38:15-17) (be patient with evil things said by evil people): "Had it not been for a word that went forth before from thy Lord, (their punishment) must necessarily have come, but there is a term appointed (for respite). Therefore, be patient with what they say...." Also, Sura 19:83, 84 (which basically says don't fight evildoers as God allows them to destroy themselves). "Seest thou not that we have set the evil ones on against the unbelievers to incite them with fury? So make no haste against them, for we but count out to them a (limited) number (of days)."[15]

Overall, the invocation of jihad is for ordinary events and is an individual choice. External military jihad supported by the community is only invoked when a Muslim land is attacked, when there is no other option, and when a religious/secular leader has called for it. Only about the last fifth of jihad citations became militant after the flight of Muhammad to Medina.)[16]

Military Jihad

The predominance of military jihad against infidels and people considered backsliders is a relatively recent phenomenon. The new emphasis on jihad injunction by militants now came from the writings of the more militant legal codes such as the Shafi'i which supported the concept that there was always innate tension between the Dar-al-Islam (abode of Islam) and the non-Islamic world, the dar-al-harb (literally the abode of war) which it will suffer as the home of non-Muslims. Therefore, there would always be some conflict at any time although the actions of a few members relieve the obligations of the umma or Islamic community. As indicated in the preceding paragraph, the military action could be either defensive against hostility from non-Muslims or offensive in support of a Muslim ruler who sought action against non-Muslims. It should be noted in regard of the latter that the directive for jihad came from God and the Caliph was carrying out that command as the earthly representative. [17]

An elaborate set of rules was established for military action in the Middle Ages. First, it was only called by a caliph or religious ruler. Once battle lines are drawn, every able-bodied adult male must participate, especially if non-Muslims surround a Muslim land. However, individuals cannot conduct military jihad on their own unless commanded by their leader. Non-Muslim allies are not accepted unless Muslims are outnumbered and the allies show goodwill. Non-Muslims, defined in the middle ages as Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, could be protected from attack; others were not given this courtesy.[18]

Other rules pertained to the conduct of the jihad. Certain groups of people such as women, children, old people and monks are not to be harmed unless they are in actual combat against Muslims. The exemption toward women and children does not apply to capture during jihad in terms of slavery as they automatically become property of the captor. Property disposal is also covered among jihad rules. An enemy's trees and buildings can be destroyed. All adult males are entitled to the spoils of a defeated enemy. In addition to personal booty, they are entitled to one-fifth of overall spoils. The personal booty could include the horse of the defeated enemy, clothes, weapons, money, or anything else taken from the defeated or slain foe. The fate of a captured enemy depends upon the decision of the caliph.[19]

Before the Middle Ages Islamist organizations were termed fundamentalist when they placed the stress on the Islamic society instituted by Muhammad as it existed at the beginning. Organizations such as the various Salafist organizations which are named after the Salafi or companions of Muhammad and offshoots (most notably the Wahhabists of Saudi Arabia) stressed a return to the pure Islam of early idealized Muslim times as epitomized by the adherence to the Qur'an, Islamic law (Sharia), and the Haditha or sayings of the Prophet.[20] Later accretions are considered impure or "shirk" and therefore violations subject to severe punishment. Although the ultimate goal is a universal Caliphate, the means to achieve this result do not include "jihad of the Sword" as the major component.[21]

However, with organizations that came to prominence in the latter part of the 20th century and became known as "radical" groups the goals changed. The precursor of this change lay in the writings of Hassan al-Banna who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in Egypt, and in his follower, the author Sayyid Qutb. His best-known work, *Milestones,* advanced theories not heretofore as dominant in Islamist philosophy. He maintained that Muslims must fight non-Moslems in every possible way. He went beyond the position that military jihad should only be used to defend Islam. It was incumbent to use jihad against very society that preached or put any hindrance in the way of Islam. Islam had the obligation to oppose all nations, whether they were hostile or not, who did not accept a universal Islamic dominion. The West was a special target since he felt that it retained a "crusading spirit" toward Islam.[22]

Radical Groups

Since then jihad has become a prominent tool in the arsenal of weapons in radical organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS which aspire to a global order. Generally, the jihad has three targets in its drive toward the universal caliphate. The first two are divided in what is called lesser unbelief and greater unbelief. The latter includes areas that were formerly under Muslim control but are not any longer under Islamic rule. This category has two sub categories—the near enemy would include Israel under the Middle East, Andalusia (formerly Al-Andalus in Muslim Spain), and Muslims areas in the Caucasus such as Dagestan and Chechnya that are now under Russian control. The far enemy would emphasize countries like the United States which are purported to support anti-Islamic activities such as the struggle against the Taliban in Afghanistan.[23]

The second major target, lesser unbelief, is directed by orthodox Sunni Muslims (who compose approximately 85% of the global Muslim population) toward sections of the community viewed as heretical or schismatic such as the Shia, Alawite, Ismaili, or Ahmadiyya who are considered to have departed from pristine Islam. They are considered as a threat to the unity of the umma. Therefore, they are thought to be diluting the Islamic message.[24]

The third target is those who are considered to have lapsed, intermingled Muslim customs with other customs, or hold other heterodox beliefs. In this manner, the Sufi custom of worshipping saints or visiting tombs is condemned. Apostates or individuals who have fallen away from Islam (or considered as such) are treated with special scorn.[25]

Radical Islamic groups (as well as other groups) point to three forms of accommodation. The first is simple conversion. In theory, conversion is submission to God's will, which is a definition of Islam. Those who seek Islam find peace through adhesion to Islam and thus belong in the abode of peace, the dar-al-Islam. Otherwise, people will abide in the abode of war or dar-al-harb. The second route is through the payment of the non-believer or jizya tax defined as, usually, three percent of income. The third option is death. When Islamic groups pursue the third option to the exclusion of the first two and their pursuit involves violence and includes the killing of civilians and related forms of individual and mass terror, these groups are widely termed as terrorists.[26]

Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Nonetheless, there are essential ways that jihad can be used for peaceful resolution of disputes. There are three ways: Sufism, the legal tradition, and the varieties of jihad. In theory, the purpose of jihad is to end structural violence. Jihad stems from Allah. Muslim traditions based on the writings of Mohammad require personal re-examination in terms of one's potential for achieving peace and moral responsibility.

The concept is divided in respect to the direction (inner and outer) and method (violent and non-violent). There is greater Jihad defined as the individual's inner struggle against personal weaknesses and inner evil. On the other hand lesser Jihad is fought against external enemies. Its purpose is to eliminate evil within the umma or community. The greater Jihad directs the lesser Jihad in both its objectives and conduct. As such, Jihad places war and violence in the moral realm, indicating that fighting has its limits. [27]

The radical application of the concept Jihad has reversed the traditional priority of Jihad so that the basic purpose has been subordinated. An examination of Sufism, the legal heritage, and the classification of Jihad definitions demonstrate that in fact that Jihad can be used for peaceful conflict resolution. It will be shown that the popular identification of Jihad with militant force is misplaced.

Sufism

Sufism which is considered as the spiritual aspect of Islam has stressed personal connections with the almighty via mystical devotion. It has existed for a millennium, long before the rise of fundamentalist and radical organizations. It has a set of latitudinarian beliefs which includes the acceptance of non-Islamic beliefs and has often practiced syncretism with local customs.[28] It has a global reach through its networks of religious brotherhoods as well as religious foundations. They connect to both members of the umma and outsiders via its schools and hospitals. It professes that all religions carry out the word of God. Throughout its existence, it has proclaimed that all religions are the same and that God can be found in various menus and through assorted Muslim vehicles including non-vehicles.[29] Because of its emphasis on the universality of all beliefs, even non-Muslims have identified with Sufism. It has never advocated jihad of the sword which advocates the spread of Islam through the formal military means. It has always identified the use of Jihad of the Heart and Jihad of the Hand which support the advancement of Islam and via personal purity and good deeds. Disputes related to religion can be resolved in a peaceful manner through the above methods. More directly, the Sufis have gained world-wide recognition through their noteworthy production of poetry and philosophy. These works directly relate to the advancement of Islam through jihad of the mouth via logic and argument. Through its work in poetic literature, it contributes to peaceful dialogue via Jihad of the Pen. Overall, its writings in both philosophy and poetry have been a vital part of Jihad of the Pen and Jihad of the Mouth approach to the resolution of differences between Muslims and the non-Muslim world.[30]

Legal Approaches: The Hanafi School

The scholars of the various legal schools have also played a role in the peaceful resolution of disputes. Among the five major schools of law, Hanafi Islam has been considered the most liberal (also the oldest). All schools of law emphasize the use of reason and opinion which correspond to Jihad of the Mouth and Jihad of the Pen. Hanafi followers have been particularly tolerant of both differences within the Muslim legal/political community and its relationship between the Almighty and man. The main purpose of the state or indeed of any human institution, should basically be with human rights, as it relates to both human rights *per se* and human relationships. Even blasphemy, a major cause of the declaration of jihad against unbelievers and apostates or "hypocrites," a term for nominal Muslims who mix Muslim and non-Muslim practices, is not listed as a crime or sin by the Hanafis as this is matter beyond the scope of the state as a human institution. In general, the goal is for the better in this world. Even reason may be left as a product of individual judgment.[31] As this is a global school with strong support in parts of the Middle East as well as parts of central, south, and southeast Asia, its belief system carries tremendous weight within the Muslim world.[32]

Internal Definitions

Military Jihad is considered the lesser jihad by Muslim scholars since the time of Muhammad. It is first and foremost a community obligation not an individual one. If enough people within the community undertake it, the rest of the community members are relieved of responsibility. All members of the community should support it but can do so with advice, money, and weapons as needed. An individual will only be required to be active in four enumerated situations. First, when a Muslim finds himself in a jihad situation. Second, when the enemy attacks a Muslim area and therefore all individuals are obligated to fight in its defense. Third, when a ruler calls upon his people, everyone must respond. Finally, when a person is needed and there is no one else available to do the task.[33]

There are other obligations that may involve participation in a military sense. If there is a jihad in one country, neighboring countries should assist with the closest being the most involved. If the closest countries assist, more distant countries are freed from participation since it is not necessary. In general, an individual is only obligated to engage in a military way apart from communal obligations, if he is actually present in a situation in which fighting is occurring. Even in this instance, he can be excused if he is departing to bring reinforcements. He is also allowed to depart a battlefield if he is needed elsewhere to strengthen another group. Even this exemption is subject to the condition that there may not be any danger to the group where it is currently located. If there is, he is forbidden to leave.[34]

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Two other situations may require the rare circumstance of individual participation in a military capacity. When a Muslim city is besieged (usually the home city), he must defend the city as there is no alternative. It is imperative since people are prevented from entering or leaving the city. More importantly, provisions are being prevented from reaching the city so there is the possibility of starvation. The third situation is when he is called upon by the leader to mobilize. As the highest authority in the state, even if not the leader of all Muslims, his dictates must be obeyed.[35]

Nuance and interpretation

Outsiders often define organizations in relation to the positions of some members in regard to a number of issues especially jihad. This interpretation is often the case in reaction to fundamentalist organizations. For example, the Wahhabis are identified with a strict adherence to the Qur'an and Sharia. There is not much emphasis on Jihad of the Sword. Strictly speaking, a Wahhabi is someone who does not follow any particular imam of any of the four Sunni schools of thought. Rather, he is a person who learns his religious precepts with no individual teacher. [36] But non-Muslims often learn about organizations through the prism of alleged jihadism.

Practical applications to peaceful reconciliation

The popular version of jihad does not correspond to reality. The people who espouse jihad are those who belong to radical organizations. Historically and in contemporary times, though, jihad has been used rarely and more often than not for non-military purposes. Rather, it can be used as a method of peaceful persuasion in a number of cases. Originally, Islam's rationale was to bring people to the abode of peace (Dar-al-Salaam) (Qur'an, Sura 10.25). As individuals attain their surrender to the Divine (Taksim), they attain peace or inner harmony.[37] Consequently, the striving for this goal is inner or greater jihad. It is the obligation of every Muslim to undergo this process of inner struggle to achieve a sense of self. The goal is attained through non-violence. Therefore, forgiveness is the preferred method of conflict resolution. Jihad in this sense can be used to avoid increasing conflict.

In practice, conflict resolution can be either on an individual or group basis. Islamic societies have traditionally tried to work out disagreements on a communal basis. Negotiation, mediation, and conciliation are the preferred methods to work out the latter. Formal arbitration that results in a settlement or sukh is of often negotiated by a judge or qadi. However, mediation and conciliation in an informal way is stressed as conflict resolution efforts are directed toward the maintenance of communal or intercommunal harmony. The process of conflict resolution mechanisms is validated and often guaranteed by communal leaders and elders who facilitate a process of reconciliation.

The object is to apply the resolution process to the community and encourage all who strive toward order and harmony via inner/greater jihad to participate in a resolution process. This approach has obvious relevance in the international area for disputes.[38]

The Sufis have used the greater jihad as they emphasize the struggle to gain harmony through mystical devotion. It emphasizes the internal struggle to resist evil ideas within the self. The jihad is by the word rather than the sword. Although the Hanafi school (as well as the other schools of law) allow for military jihad, the emphasis is on spiritual warfare against the lower self (nafs). Whereas Sufis mention the jihad of the heart and pen, the Hanafi jurists stress jihad of the pen and mouth.[39]

Attitudes of Muslims around the globe reinforce the stress on harmony and spiritual matters. A recent survey of Muslims around the world indicated that the great majority condemned violent means and violent organizations that use jihad as a justification for violence and terrorism. In the United States, the figure was 86%.[40]

Even jihad as a military exercise can be interpreted so as not to constitute war against non-believers or the West. In Aceh in central and northern Sumatra, for example, which is the home of the most orthodox version of Islam in Indonesia, rebels and secessionists considered Javanese Islam (Java is the dominant part of Indonesia) as contaminated by Buddhist and Hindu influences and therefore not truly Islamic. They then felt justified in declaring a jihad against the central authorities. In this effort, they rejected Arab Muslim help as being ineffective since they had not upheld Palestinian rights. They felt justified in seeking the assistance of the United Nations, United States, and other Western nations in their external jihad and claimed that this alliance with non-Muslims was permitted if it saved the lives of Acehnese Muslims.[41]

Theoretical foundations

We can conclude that an external definition of Jihad as an exclusively military enterprise against non-believers and apostates is not totally accurate. It does not do justice to a complex concept. Implicit within this concept is the latitude it gives to peaceful reconciliation. It encompasses both negative and positive aspects of peace. The former can mean the absence of war while the latter means the search for justice through jihad or "struggle."[42]

The terms in this sense arise from the teachings of the Prophet or Haditha as well as the Qur'an. Peace within oneself identified earlier in the paper as the greater Jihad leads to peace with other human beings since the struggle within oneself is for the prevalence of reason over desires which can lead to violence. This end product is considered spiritual jihad. Therefore one who undertakes peace is called a Mujahid or one who whom undertakes the mission of peace or peacemaker. One who undertakes peace within one self is likely to seek external peace.[43]

In addition to spiritual jihad, other uses of jihad for peaceful conflict resolution include the advice jihad which involves preaching against evil and injustice without violence. Non-forceful jihad can mean non-violent collective action directed toward internal aspects of social discord and involves types of jihad listed earlier. In the end, non-peaceful conflict resolution can only occur if it is for a just cause, it is conducted under a legitimate authority, and all other means have been exhausted. Even in this case, force is minimized so that the lives of non-combatants are not risked. Military use is to be invoked only if all aspects of deterrence have failed.[44]

Conclusion

Greater Jihad requires patience and understanding. Self-improvement and oneness with God is the major goal of Greater Jihad. If individuals achieve inner peace within themselves through struggle, they are better able to peacefully reconcile with others. Finding peace within oneself enables an individual to seek social justice within a society so as to reduce discord, as well as in the reconciliation of various external disputes. If one strives to achieve this end, this goal can be achieved so that a full comprehension of the meaning of the term becomes clear.

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