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Research Report

JIHAD: ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

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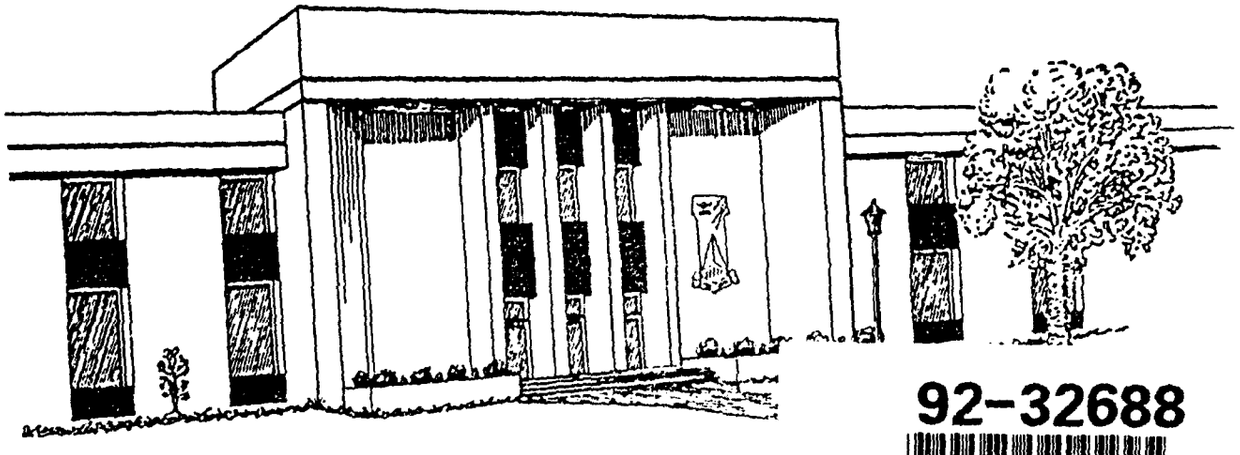

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JIHAD: ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

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A REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

REQUIREMENT

HERITAGE OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Advisor: Dr. M. E. Ahrari

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

7 October 1991

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JIHAD: ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

Jihad, commonly translated in Western publications as "holy war," has become a disturbingly familiar term. Saddam Hussein called for a jihad against the Western Coalition forces in late 1990; and at the same time, Saudia Arabia declared a jihad against Hussein's invading Iraqi forces. (1:51) Understanding the historical development and use of the concept of jihad is important to comprehand current events within the Islamic spheres of influence and their relations with the West. This paper traces the origin and development of the Islamic concept of jihad. It emphasizes the historical roots of the doctrine of jihad and its manifestations and justification as a means to understand the role of jihad in current Islamic thought and practice.

ORIGIN

Jihad comes from the Arabic verb, *jahada*, meaning "to endeavor, to strive, to struggle." It is generally used to denote an effort toward a commendable aim. (2:88) It can mean the struggle against one's own evil inclinations, efforts toward the moral uplift of society, or effort toward spreading Islam. The latter can be peaceful ("jihad of the tongue" or "jihad of the

pen"), in accordance with surah 16:125 of the Qur'an ("Call thou to the way of the Lord with wisdom and admonition, and dispute with them in the better way"), or involve the use of force ("jihad of the sword") as mentioned in surah 2:193 (Fight them until there is no persecution and the religion is God's; then if they give over, there shall be no enmity save for evildoers"). (2:88)

In pious and mystical circles, spiritual and moral jihad is emphasized. This they call "greater jihad" on the strength of the tradition (*hadith*) of the prophet Muhammad: "Once, having returned from one of his campaigns, the Prophet said: 'We have now returned from the lesser jihad [i.e., fighting] to the greater jihad.'" (2:89)

Because of the broad use of the term, it is not correct to totally equate jihad with the notion of "holy war." In instances where it does refer to armed struggle, it is important to recognize that Islam does not distinguish between holy and secular wars, just as it does not make a distinction between religion and politics. The religious aspect of participation in a war deemed a jihad is the assurance on the part of individuals killed in it that they will immediately enter paradise. (2:89)

JIHAD IN THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

In about two-thirds of the instances where the verb *jahada* or its derivatives occur in the Qur'an, it denotes warfare, although it does not contain the specific word, jihad. Its distribution as well as that of the verb *qatala* ("combat," or "fight") reflect the

history of the early Islamic community. Both words are hardly used in the Meccan parts of the Qur'an (while they were being encouraged to be patient under harsh treatment from unbelievers), but are plentiful in the Medinese chapters (after fighting between the Muslims and enemies in Mecca had begun).

According to some scholars, careful reading of the Qur'an suggests that Muhammed regarded the command to fight the unbelievers not as absolute, but as conditional upon provocation from them. In many places the command to fight is justified by aggression on the part of the non-Muslims ("And fight in the way of God with those who fight with you, but aggress not: God loves not the aggressors" (verse 2:190) and "If they break their oaths after their covenant and thrust at your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief" (verse 9:13)).

Authoritative Muslim opinion, however, went in a different direction. Muslim scholars argued that the culmination of Qur'anic teaching was an unconditional command to fight the unbelievers, as typified by verse 5:9 ("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.") These "sword verses" are considered to have repealed all other verses concerning the contact of unbelievers by Muslims and represent the historical practice of jihad.

The hadiths (historical Islamic writings) deal with the same topics as the Qur'an, but place an additional emphasis on the jihad as a pious act, the rewards of martyrdom, and on various practical

aspects of warfare. For example, the latter category included prohibitions against mutilating their enemies and killing children. (2:89)

JIHAD IN ISLAMIC LAW

Although the Islamic concept of peace (*salam*) is as central to Islam as *shalom* is to Judaism, under certain circumstances recourse to violence is permitted in Islamic law. Inside Islam, it is justified for punishment, and externally it is a tool to subdue an enemy of the faith. It is this latter concept that is *jihad*. This concept has been used to justify territorial expansion into non-Islamic territory, but Islamic law does not allow it to be used to justify forcible conversion to Islam, only considering conversions valid that occur through rational persuasion and change of heart. (3:467)

However, when the Islamic community became an imperium, further developments took place that had little to do with the Qur'an or the *sunnah* of the Prophet. These other directives were dictated by the logic of the empire itself. The law of apostasy, for example, which states that a Muslim apostate should be given three chances to repent and in the case of nonrepentance must be executed, has nothing to do with the more lenient provisions of the Qur'an. In this legal genre also falls the juristic doctrine that the world consists of three zones: the Abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), where Muslims rule; the Abode of Peace (*dar al-sulh*), those countries or powers with whom Muslims have peace pacts; and the

Abode of War (*dar al-harb*), the rest of the world. (4:321)

The prescriptions in the Qur'an and hadith, together with the practice of the early caliphs formed a legal doctrine on jihad, which appeared as a separate chapter in the handbooks on Islamic law. Its central tenant was that the collective duty of all Muslims is to expand the territory and rule of Islam. After the period of Muslim conquest, the jurists stipulated that the Muslim ruler, in order to keep the idea of jihad alive, should organize an expedition into enemy territory once a year. (2:89)

ISLAMIC SECT INFLUENCE ON JIHAD

Muslim mystics, known as *sufis*, have at times rejected the common notion of jihad and used it to refer primarily to an inner struggle. They have considered the inner conflict between truth and evil as "the greater jihad." (3:467)

The Kharijites were a fanatical and violent group of dissidents who struggled against orthodox Islam. They held that Islam was to be forced on non-believers, if necessary. For them, jihad was actually the Sixth Pillar of Islam. The Kharijites lost influence by the end of the seventh century A.D. and their call for jihad to be the sixth pillar ended. (5:60)

Another influence upon the Islamic concept of jihad was the long history of Shiite regard for martyrdom for the faith. The shiites have long commemorated the martyrs of their community. Many of their early leaders died violent deaths and were looked upon as heroes of their faith. This high regard for martyrdom

continues to be a factor in Shia Islam, today.

The Ismailis were another early sect in Islam. A fanatical faction of the Ismailis were known as the Assassins, based in Syria. Their goal was the overthrow of the Sunni order and murder was their trademark. Their name derived from their use of hashish (*hashishiyun*). (5:61)

HISTORICAL OCCURRENCE

HISTORIC COMMONALITY

Throughout Islamic history the doctrine of jihad has been invoked to justify wars between Muslim and non-Muslim states and even to legitimate wars between Muslims themselves. Movements all over the Muslim world arose that placed jihad so central in their teachings, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that they are referred to as jihad movements. Although dispersed from West Africa to Southeast Asia and arising from disparate social climates, they employed the same concepts from Islamic thought in their attempts to establish dominance of Islam in their societies. Although their main struggle was within their own societies, many developed into formidable opponents of the colonial powers. (2:90)

REACTION TO CRUSADES

The presence of Franks in the Holy Land beginning in the 12th century sent shock waves throughout the fundamentalist sector of

Islam. This renewal of the doctrine of jihad was attributable both to the presence of the Crusaders in territory considered holy by the Moslems and to economic factors. (6:511) The emergence of the jihad tracts and polemic was coincident with Nur al-Din successfully forging political unity of the Muslims of northern Syria and Upper Mesopotamia, and so providing sufficient military force to confront the Franks. While this jihad generated emotional support, it was muted when it was expedient, as in 1229 when the Ayyubid ruler al-Malik al-Kamil ceded Jerusalem to Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. The activities of European merchants in the eastern Mediterranean were also tolerated by the Muslims during this period, although recent Arabic historiography depicts the Crusaders as precursors of modern European infiltrations of the Arab world. (7:171-172)

ASIAN EXAMPLES OF JIHAD

European colonization in Asia was met with a Muslim declaration of jihad. As early as 1512, the great Portuguese viceroy, Affonso de Albuquerque, reported that a Calicut Muslim had come to be revered as a *shahid*, because he had died fighting against the Christians. The first century of the Atjehnese wars against the Portuguese for the control of the Malacca Straits was a jihad countercrusade, combining both Muslim and patriotic themes. In the Philippines, too, the Sultans of Sulu are known to have conducted their wars with the Spanish as jihads.

The power of jihad was most forcefully demonstrated in

suicidal attacks. These communities realized they were ultimately incapable of succeeding against the Europeans and attempted merely to terrorize European troops or settlements by carrying out jihad in a manner to intentionally martyr themselves. Muslims in Malabar were the first who are known to have carried out such attacks. Even though they fought a remarkably effective naval guerrilla war against the Portuguese during the hundred and fifty years following Da Gama's voyage, they could not sustain a full-scale war with the Europeans. Muslims in Atjeh and the Philippines found themselves in comparable circumstances in the late nineteenth century and responded similarly.

All of these Asian instances of jihad were intended to defend the integrity of the Islamic community and to intimidate the colonial rulers or their allies. The numerous suicidal attacks on Europeans or native Christians in the name of jihad were of little military significance. There was also a theme in these apparently irrational and indiscriminate acts of brutality to react against those who had, either as individuals or as representatives of a class, usurped trade and otherwise assaulted the Islamic communities. (8: 46-49)

There were also similarities in form of the jihad response and the approaches to institutionalize and inculcate it into the fabric of the local societies. In each instance, there appeared heroic literature that glorified martyrdom and memorialized individual sacrifices in the jihad. Specific religious rituals accompanied the practice of it. There was also in each case an elaborate

historical and theological justification for the jihad including songs and poems that encouraged individuals to carry out the jihad attacks. (8:51)

MID-EAST/NORTHERN AFRICAN EXAMPLES OF JIHAD

Numerous examples of jihad movements in the Middle East and North Africa exist. They include those led by the Wahhabiyah in Arabia (1703-1787), the Fulbe jihad in northern Nigeria (1754-1817), and the Padri movement in Sumatra (1803-1832). Others occurrences include the West African movement of 'Umar Tal (1794-1864), the "Muhammadan way" in northern India (1786-1831), the Algerian resistance against French colonization (1808-1883), the Sanusiyah in Libya and the Sahara and the Mahdist movement in the Sudan (1881-1898). (2:90)

ROLE OF JIHAD IN RELIGION AND POLITICS

MODERNIZATION

Since the last century, attempts have been made to reinterpret the prevailing doctrine of jihad. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) believed that the interests of the Indian Muslims would be served best by close cooperation with the British. He offered an interpretation to refute the view that jihad was a militant Islamic duty and to prove that Muslims could be loyal British subjects. He rejected the theory that the "sword verses" had repealed all other

verses concerning the relations with non-Muslims. He also asserted that jihad was obligatory only in the case of "positive oppression or obstruction in the exercise of their faith, impairing the foundation of some of the pillars of Islam." (2:91)

In India this limited version of jihad found some support, but in the Middle East it was not adopted. However, even there the opinions differed considerably from the classical doctrine. Jihad was understood to be defensive warfare, whether the conflict was directed against Islam or not. This condoned warfare against colonial rule in the Islamic world. A more recent development in jihad literature includes an adaptation of jihad as Islamic international law that equates it with the Christian concept of a "just war." (2:91)

Other changes in the view of jihad have accompanied the development of the modern nation-state. The Wahhabi doctrine of tauhid (the Unity of God) resulted in a central tenant of faith the abhorrence of a number of Shii practices, including saint worship, shrine and grave cults, and veneration of imams. Shi'is were perceived as unbelievers (*kuffar*), and were therefore liable to the severest sanctions, including that of jihad. (9:232) This fundamental difference between the Shi'is and the Wahhabi threatened the cohesion of Saudi Arabia in the late 1920's. As the result of a major Islamic conference at Riyadh in early January 1927, a fatwa (Islamic ruling) was issued that removed the duty of Wahhabi to convert Shi'is and removed the status of Shi'is as *mushrikun* and liable to jihad. The objective was to secure the

allegiance and loyalty of the Shi'is to the Saudi state. (9:236-237)

In the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, jihad lost much of its importance as a mobilizing ideology in the struggle against colonialism. Its place as the philosophical basis for anti-colonial or cultural fervor was taken at least temporarily by secular nationalism. (2:90)

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 began a new cycle of jihad in this century. Israel was greeted in its infancy by Islamic calls to jihad in order to eliminate it. As recently as February 1981 the Islamic Conference condemned the Egyptian Israeli peace treaty and called for a jihad "to redeem the occupied lands from Israel." (10:76)

Even more recent calls for jihad occurred against the Western Alliance during the Dessert Storm operations of early 1991. The increasingly frequent call to jihad raises the possibility for it to serve as a rallying point for modern Islamic communities. The cultural emotion of some of these earlier jihad poems and songs still characterizes much of the Middle Eastern feelings about the West. These current sentiments interpret the creation of the state of Israel and the large-scale US support for that country as merely continuation of colonial policies. (8:58)

FRAGMENTATION

Although diverse opinion exists today concerning the meaning of jihad in the modern Islamic world, there are forces pushing for

a return to the classical doctrine. The conservative trend repeats the classical legal texts regarding the motivation and sense of community responsibility for jihad and its unbounded scope. There is also the fundamentalist or revivalist movement whose goal is to change the world according to Islamic principles. They view their struggle as jihad, calling it "the permanent revolution of Islam." They follow the classical doctrine and reject the modernist interpretation of jihad as defensive warfare. The most radical of these groups advocate the use of violence against other Muslims who have been corrupted and must be considered heathens. The Tanzim al-Jihad ("jihad organization"), which was credited with the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, belongs in this later category. (8:91)

IRANIAN REVOLUTION - A Revivalist Movement

The views of Khomeini energized the Iranian revolution and reflect a turn toward classical jihad doctrine. Khomeini's views about government and international politics made it mandatory for Iran to export its Islamic revolution to the entire world. His idea of war followed the traditional Shi'i legal theory. Resorting to jihad is the sole prerogative of the infallible imam, and in his absence the faqih ("supreme jurisprudent") may only authorize defensive war. The issue is complicated, however, by Khomeini's concept that the "defense of Islam" transcends the boundaries of Iran. He used this logic to support the invasion of Iraq, in July 1982. (11:36)

Khomeini also saw other Muslim governments as valid targets of jihad. He saw their systems as illegitimate and their states as completely subservient to alien powers. Both conditions must be changed by the establishment of truly Islamic government and truly independent states. (11:39)

Additionally, Khomeini's jihad did not stop at territorial borders or traditional regions of Islam. "Islam is a sacred trust from God to ourselves, and the Iranian nation must grow in power and resolution until it has vouchsafed Islam to the entire world." (SSP:34) The liberation of mankind is a divine obligation.

IMPLICATIONS OF JIHAD

A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

The history and development of the concept of Islam make it certain that jihad will continue to be a major theme in Islam. The current resurgence of the jihad concept reflects the growing conflict within Islamic communities between traditional culture and outside influences. Since spiritual, political, economic, and cultural development are all a single concept in Islam, attempts to distinguish between jihad in one of these areas from the others may be impractical, if not impossible. (12:12)

Increased striving for Islamic purity is focusing increased attention on the legitimacy of institutions within large Muslim population centers. Those that are not in strict adherence with

traditional Islamic norms are coming under increasing pressure to change. This struggle will continue to be a major element in internal developments in Islamic countries.

Jihad will also effect relations between Islamic countries. Khomeini's doctrine that emphasized the applicability of jihad to countries that are only nominally Islamic in practice has raised the probability of conflict between nations with large Muslim populations. Future relations between Iran and other Middle East governments will likely be unstable, at best.

PROLIFERATION OF ISLAMIC ACTION GROUPS

The circumstances in which unofficial group activities bypass their own government structures is likely to increase. This will result from the Islamic revivalist movement continuing in parallel with secularist governments.

The results of having a larger number of these groups will be twofold. These Islamic groups will bring increased internal pressures on their secularist governments in the Islamic countries to conform to Islamic norms. Implementing democratic reforms to address real grievances in these countries may have the effect of making these groups more vocal and visible.

A second result will be to foster circumstances in which Western countries, for the sake of their own interests or those of their citizens in those countries, may end up dealing directly with non-government, unsponsored groups. The very nature of jihad defies complete control of its adherents by religious or secular

structures. The recent negotiations over release of Western hostages in the Middle East is illustrative of this trend.

CONFRONTATION WITH THE WEST

An increase in the number and magnitude of violence in Western countries justified on the basis of jihad may only await the partial resolution of tensions within the Islamic world. Conflicts within the greater Islamic community may be serving to delay more direct and increased confrontation with Western power structures. With over ten million Muslims living in the West, the global village will be increasingly susceptible to disruption and violence, once these disagreements are resolved or are overshadowed by other more pressing issues with the West. (13:19)

To the extent that Khomeini's thinking dominates within Muslim countries, their relations with non-Muslim governments will be marked by tension. He is responsible more than any other single person for reviving the Islamic concept of fighting to create a global Islamic state. The increasing influence of his teachings appear to bode ill for Muslim-Western relations. (12:15)

Attempts to bring Islamic salvation to the rest of mankind are likely, whether officially backed by the governments of predominantly Islamic countries, or not. The proliferation of Islamic action groups will make it very difficult for the governments of large Moslem populations to control anti-Western actions of these groups, even if they are so inclined. The kidnapping of westerners by various Islamic groups in the Mid East

over the past several years is illustrative of this phenomena.

TERRORISM

Terrorism may be the weapon of choice for the conduct of jihad at the close of the twentieth century. Terrorism in the name of jihad is the historical pattern when its supporters are faced with a modern army with which they cannot cope. (8:50) The current imbalance of conventional military power between the West and the Islamic countries was amply demonstrated in Desert Storm. The exhausting Iran-Iraq war may also underscore the futility of using Western conventional military means to resolve issues between Islamic states.

In addition to the historical pattern indicating terrorism is a likely mode of jihad in our time frame, terrorism also presents certain practical advantages. Terrorism and other unconventional means of war require fewer resources than the conventional military approach. It also has the advantage of freeing its practitioners from dependency on the West for the instruments of war.

PROTRACTED JIHAD

The depth of the emotional reservoir touched by Khomeini portends an extended period in which his thought will be a major factor shaping Islam. The extensive durations of previous jihad movements provide historical support for the contention that the current proliferation of jihad may be a recurring theme in Middle Eastern politics for some time to come. Thinking of jihad in terms

of multiple decades or even centuries would be consistent with the historic pattern.

MULTIPLE TARGETS OF JIHAD

Although it has been used to support recent political action in a number a circumstances, there appear to be four targets of jihad in our time. It is an instrument of anti-colonial protest. It is a spur to nominally Islamic communities toward more traditional religious practice. It attempts to curb foreign penetration and influence in Islamic cultural, economic, and political matters. Lastly, it is a highly visible propaganda tool regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. (14:107-108)

CONCLUSION

Jihad has developed into a flexible instrument to achieve a wide range of Islamic goals. Although it has been invoked in a wide range of interests, jihad has retained its traditional purpose of consolidating the non-Muslim world with the realm of Islam.

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