

## **JIHAD: A MISUNDERSTOOD ISLAMIC CONCEPT IN MODERN SOCIETIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Despite the fact that Islam seeks to establish peace, harmony and justice on earth, the commands of Jihad attract criticisms and condemnation. The non-Muslims misunderstand Islam as inherently a violent faith that inspires its followers towards aggression and terrorism toward non Muslims in the name of jihad. They believe that Islam was spread by the sword and is intolerant of other faiths, the idea which undermines peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non Muslims. This paper attempts to trace in depth meaning and objectives of the Sharia regarding the Islamic concept of Jihad. It concludes that, proper teaching arts applications of the Sharia laws promote peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims. It also admits that, the intolerant attitudes of very few deviant Muslims continue to destroy the true image of Islam in the eyes of non-Muslims. Unfortunately, the non Muslims further exhibit intolerance by judging Islam with the actions of ignorant Muslims. Islam should not be judged by the ignorance of its followers, but by the actual teachings of its scriptures.*

**Key Words:** Islam, Jihad, non Muslims, Peace, Intolerance

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Islam and the contemporary Muslims are being faced with proliferation of allegations, misrepresentations and misconceptions due to ignorance of its wisdom and rationale, especially in the western literature, thought media, and writings (Yero:1999:15). While some of the misconceptions are mere deliberate propaganda targeted at tarnishing the image of Islam and to frighten non Muslims from appreciating the true nature of the religion, others can be attributed to ignorance of the wisdom and intention of Islam. For instance, many non-Muslim writers have produced works which are full of misconceptions and mediocre campaign to distort, depict, discredit, belittle, portray and project Islam as barbaric, uncivilized and intolerant religion which promotes terrorism and shows no respect to the views and opinions of other faiths (Yero:1999:15). Such writers who study Islam through adulterated sources, half baked writers and biased historians, are bombarded with gross misinformation and exaggerated views about the religion and the Muslims.

Such people continue to show enmity toward Islam and the Muslims. They believe that Islam prescribes the relationship between Muslims and non Muslims to be one of hostility and repressiveness toward religious tolerance. They see Jihad as a religious command to press non Muslims under the sword toward forceful acceptance of Islam (Maududi:3). More others believe that Jihad in Islam means ‘holy war’, and that it is a requirement which all Muslims must engage in. Also that, adherence to the Sharia laws makes Muslims aggressive and unworldly. To them, the actions of misguided Muslims are not unconnected with the

Qur'anic command on Jihad. They argue on, how they could call Islam a religion of peace when it was spread by the sword in the name of Jihad?

In an attempt to please those who show much concern exclusively with the Islamic Jihad as a threat to world order in modern times, some Muslims produced moderate views that; Jihad is necessary but it must be directed toward the individual's struggle for piety, and society's struggle for justice. Also that, fighting is not incumbent but a voluntary act against those who attack Muslims (Khan: 2002:36,46).

This paper refutes the above allegations and misconceptions. It attempts to clear some of the misconceptions and condemnations attributed to the command of jihad in Islam, including the deviant interpretation by those Muslims who wish to soften the feelings of non Muslims toward the military Jihad. It provides an in depth clarification as to the meaning, objectives, wisdom and rationale behind the command of Jihad in Islam. It also justifies Islam as a religion of peace, against the claim that Jihad in Islam exclusively means holy war against non Muslims.

## 2. Concept of Peace in Islam

Islam is a perfect religion of peace, justice and a civilization prone to dialogue rather than violence (Q49:13). It is a religion that preaches the sanctity and sacredness of human life. That is why it advocates peaceful coexistence based on justice, mercy (Q21:107) and tolerance between Muslims and non Muslims (Q60:8), despite the differences between them [Q49:13]. Provided that they do not attack the Muslims (Q60:8), Islam commands Muslims to respect the rights of all human beings to practice their religion with tolerance (Q109:6). Islam preserves man's freedom of choice even in matters of faith (Q18:29). It neither commands Muslims to compel non Muslims to accept the religion (Q2:256), nor preach aggression or terror attack on them. In fact, Islam gives non-Muslims the right to live in peace with utmost security and protection in Muslim societies, provided that they do not place an obstacle in the ways of spreading the message of Islam and its practice (Q9:6).

To achieve the said objectives, the religion of Islam prohibits killing the innocent without a just cause. It warns that neither should a Muslim commit any act that will result to killing people without a just cause (Q6:151), nor should he/she use his hands to kill himself (Q2:195). Otherwise, it is as though he has killed the whole of humanity (Q5:32). In fact, it urges Muslims to repay any wrong with kindness in the hope that an enemy may become a friend (Q41:34). Otherwise, on no account should revenge transgress its limit, else it is another form of injustice (Q2:190-192).

In addition, the Sharia gives special protection not only to *Masajid* (mosques) for the Muslims, but also to churches, temples, monasteries and synagogues for the non Muslims. In other words, Islam commands Muslims to treat their non Muslim neighbors with kindness and fairness and also to respect their places of worship where the name of the Creator is abundantly praised (Q22:40). The non Muslims have held their services in peace and security in Muslim communities (Qardawy:13) because Islam prohibits reviling their deities or violating their honor, properties and right to life. For instance, the Prophet (SAW) was Very much concerned with peaceful coexistence than confrontation. At one time, he had to

postpone the pilgrimage-one of the five pillars of Islam to the following year, in order to arrive at a peaceful resolution with the pagans of Makkah.

### 3. Meaning and Concept of jihad in Islam

The word 'Jihad' in the Islamic context is derived from the Arabic root *Jhd-Jahd-Juhd* or *Jahada* (Doi:437), which literally means to strive, to struggle, or exert one's utmost efforts and endeavor in the cause of Allah the Creator (Maududi:5), toward fulfilling goals and ambitions (Gulen:202). In Islam, Jihad signifies physical, moral, spiritual and intellectual effort in the cause of Allah the Creator. It refers to an advocacy of social justice toward peace and prosperity for both Muslims and non Muslims. The aim must be to create a just and decent society (Khan:2002:37,39).

Unfortunately, the concept of Jihad has been distorted and misused due to ignorance, propaganda, deviance and misguidance to the extent that; it generates controversies and disagreements between Muslims and non Muslims in Modern societies. The latter continue to propagate mistaken ideas about Islam to the extent of equating Jihad with mass murder and rampant killings. While they preach that Islam requires only blind following faith, they believe that the command of Jihad instills bloodlust. They maliciously conceive that Islam has the desire to massacre, terrorize and convert people to its fold at the point of a sword. They erroneous assumptions of the non-Muslims are coupled with the deviant actions of misguided Muslims. Together they claim that Islam allows Muslims to kill if they are oppressed or if their religion is insulted (Kamali:153).

In Islam, the word Jihad has a wider and comprehensive concept. Jihad can be understood from the content of the universal message of Islam, and the practical application of such laws by the noble Prophet Muhammad (SAW), who was sent as a mercy to the creatures of the world. The Qur'an uses the term 'Jihad' in a variety of meanings and in different contexts. Generally, Jihad is a duty of Muslims to struggle for good deeds in the cause of Allah (SWT). It can be classified into:

- A. The Jihad of the soul which means striving to restrain self from evil, unlawful desires, ego and temptations on one hand, and to purity and refine the soul, to increase its faith toward attaining true humanity to path of the Creator (Q29:69), incline it toward good and improve its tendency toward all beneficial things(Gulen:203). This means that, any exerted effort of an individual towards struggle for self improvement and self- purification, restraint and control, discipline and hard work against lustful desires is Jihad. This is therefore; a great form of Jihad that is internal rather than external. It is otherwise called Jihad *al-Nafs*. A prominent companion Abu Dhar Al-Gifari reported the Prophet (SAW) to have said: The best Jihad is for one to emancipate his own self against his desires (Bukhari:1099).
- B. The Jihad through wealth means spending lawful wealth in the cause of Allah in various beneficial ways Such spending as on welfare projects as: building wells, schools, hospitals, *Masaajid* (Nuri;29) and charity to the deserved (Q9:60). Others spending includes striving with one's wealth and thought to protect Islam and the Ummah (Q61:10-13).

- C. The Jihad through the self comprises: practical exertion of effort through seeking religious knowledge and acting in accordance with the knowledge learnt; propagating Islam, teaching the belief and worship of Allah among Muslims, spreading good values, virtues and morality (Q29:69) such as striving for the pleasure of parents (Q17:23-24); and engaging in dialogue with those who deny the truth. It includes striving toward conquering and elimination of ignorance, and against all forms of corruption as injustice, tyranny, oppression, aggression, superstition and racial discrimination in the society. The striving of a nurse to save the life of patient is doing of Jihad. Speaking the words of truth to an unjust ruler is regarded as the best form of Jihad. In fact, the utmost physical endeavor and intellectual effort used in writing this paper to change the outlook of people toward correct understanding of Islam is also Jihad.
- D. There is also Military Jihad, a lawful armed struggle against injustice and oppression (Q22:39). It includes striving with hardship and forbearance against the aggression (Q4:75) of enemies (Doi:437). This kind of jihad is allowed when it is formally organized and declared by religious leadership or head of an Islamic state in defense of Islam and the Ummah. Where the Muslims are taken by surprise, the circumstance requires no permission for self defense (Kamali:157). In other words, only a Muslim leader or head of an Islamic state has the prerogative right and responsibility to command military jihad for defense against oppression and not individuals or groups (Sabiq:3:30,Fawzan:473). The aim must be to repel enemy's attack or assault [Q22:39], against aggression and oppression, and against foreign domination and dictatorship that usurp rights and freedom. Other Jihad conditions that necessitate armed struggle include: any attempt to abolish a just and moral rule, and any attempt to prevent people from the truth and justice. In fact, despite the permission to fight in self defense, the Muslims are warned not to go beyond defending themselves to the extent of transgression (Q2 :190).

It can be deduced from the above classification that Islam has interest in the welfare of mankind, and Jihad is a revolutionary struggle for mankind to benefit from Islamic social justice. The classification shows the importance and vastness of areas of devotions that constitute jihad to Muslims. That is why the Prophet (SAW) classified Jihad as next thing dearer to Allah (SWT) after the performance of Salat at its prescribed time and goodness to parents. Although, Islam has only five pillars, some scholars believe that if there would be a sixth pillar of Islam, Jihad would have been that pillar (Doi:442). So, Jihad is not exclusively restricted to mere fighting disbelievers. It comprised of any activities that involve any strive undertaken for the collective wellbeing of mankind for the sake of Allah (SWT) is Jihad (Maududi:7). This is why Ibn al-Qayyim said: Jihad is a task which is to be fulfilled by means of striving with the heart, tongue, money and hands in the cause of Allah the Creator (Fawzan:472).

#### **4. Maqasid (objectives) of Sharia on the Command of Jihad**

The Muslims generally believe that Allah (SWT) is the Creator of all mankind. He gave man the freewill to determine where to place his faith with sincere conviction [Q18:29]. He also sent messengers to various nations and tribes to convey the divine message to mankind [Q14:4]. Their main duty is to invite people to Islam with wisdom, fairness, beautiful and

Prophets of Allah (SWT) was given the authority to force people into conforming to the faith of Islam [Q10:99]. People of other religions should be free to practice their own faith in Muslim societies.

In Islam, Allah (SWT) commands justice and goodness in all affairs (Q16:90) because its main objective is mercy for all mankind (21:107). It seeks to alter the social order of the world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals (Maududi:5). Other objectives include protection of people against corruption and evil, against tyranny and the injustice of oppression (Q22:39-40) and against polytheism (Q8:39), to defend Islam and Muslims from external attack (Q9:14-14), to raise kind and thoughtful individuals with feeling of sympathy against one another (Nuri:1), and not enforcing the guidance of Islam to non Muslims (Q2:256). The wisdom is to ensure human rights and freedom, to prevent violence, rejection and hatred [Q6:108], to promote respect of human dignity for all people, which determines their affairs both in this world and the hereafter. This safeguards and preserves humanity with people of diverse faith. It will establish and spread peace and tolerance among people of diverse faiths, toward cooperation with each other for the general welfare of mankind.

While Islam acknowledged the use of force as a last resort in certain limited context when all peaceful means were exhausted, jihad is not limited to fighting in defense of the religion for safety to practice Islam without hindrance. But also, in rescuing the oppressed in order to maintain peace and justice, for self defense against external attack against enemies, for freedom of rights and against tyranny, to protect property and honor, and to strive with perseverance to any religious activity that involves difficulty. For instance, Aisha reported the Prophet (SAW) to have said; Hajj is the-most excellent Jihad of all Jihad for women (Bukhari: Kitab al-Hajj:2784).

If the above objectives can be fulfilled without fighting, Muslims are not allowed to fight others (Fawzan:474). As such, Islam is never the source of violence. Its teachings are geared toward establishing peace and harmony among people, between heaven and earth, and between Creator and the created (Kamali:217). The command of Jihad in Islam is neither to promote violence nor unnecessary killings, but to exert utmost effort toward good of the individual and the society.

## **5. The misconceptions**

Modern developments reveal that many non Muslims deliberately and ignorantly misunderstand Islam. Some of them are misguided because they study writings full of biased critics of Islam. Such literature misrepresents the Islamic principles and commands. They give deviant interpretations that depicts Islam as a religion spread by the sword (Yahya:14), and that Islam has abandoned true spirituality by sanctifying violence and intolerance, jihad is synonymous with warfare (Khan:2002:38), an exclusive command of violence against non Muslims (Mazahari:268) from a religion that claims to be divine (Jumuah:77). They further justify their claims with the action of few misguided Muslims that abuse the command of Jihad (Kamali:153).

The laws of Islam are geared toward peace, justice, fairness and tolerance among Muslims, and between Muslims and peace loving non-Muslims. Islamic laws provide an enabling environment where all people should practice their faith with utmost protection and freedom



in Muslim communities. This will enable Muslims to convey the message of Islam through peaceful dialogue and debate with non Muslims (Q16:125J. That is why the Muslims believe that none of the religions of the world subscribe so much goodwill and tolerance than how Islam teaches tolerance to followers of other religions.

The claim that Islam was spread by sword is unjust and unverified accusation. Its rapid spread was never the work of sword but the inherent force of truth, intellect (Q16:125), moral conviction and convincing arguments that conquered the heart and minds of non-Muslims to accept the religion. In most cases, members of the communities saw for themselves the conducts, morals and tolerant dealings of the Muslim accordingly, they embraced Islam of their own free will.

The claim that Islam is a religion which preaches aggression, extremism, fanaticism and terrorism are completely baseless accusations which have absolutely no foundation in Islam. History has justified that the Prophet (SAW) never had inclination for war, but was a reluctant warrior (Khan:2002;43). He treated non-Muslims with utmost tolerance. For instance, despite been subjected to severe torture, oppression and even insults at Makkah by non Muslims, he never instructed believers to terrorize, destroy or commit suicide against pagan leaders of Makkah. The permission of military jihad against oppressors was granted only after an Islamic state was established in Madina (Q2239). In addition, the Qur'an teaches that there is no compulsion in religion (Q2:256).

If Islam is a religion of violence, why did the Sharia forbid any war with the sole intention to acquire military glory or to capture prisoners of war? Why did it enjoin Muslims to treat prisoners of war with kindness and even gave them option of ransom to gain freedom? Why did the Sharia forbid harming of women, children, the aged, the blind, the insane, the monks and priests, and also command Muslims to refrain from acts of brutality, maiming and destruction of livestock, trees and crops in the battle field? In fact, it is neither allowed in Islam to attack non Muslims by surprise, nor permissible to use humans as a shield.

If Jihad in Islam exclusively means holy war, what about the sweeping massacre and barbaric annihilation of Muslims in Chechnya, Palestine and Kosovo in Bosnia? What about the genocides in Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma and recently central Africa by the coalition of non Muslims. Fortunately, the Muslims in Spain never used sword to convert people to Islam. It was the non Muslim crusaders that used the advantage of the tolerance of Muslims to kill, expelled and forced them to convert to Christianity. They wiped out Muslims from *Magrib* and converted their *Masajid* into churches (Yêro:2010:15). In fact, when Salahuddeen al-Ayyubi recaptured Jerusalem 1187C.E, no single non Muslim was killed. The Jews, Christians, Hindus and Zoroastrians practice their religion in peace, despite the atrocities committed to Muslims by the crusaders. Instead, he revived the tradition of Muhammad (SAW) to the extent that; Jerusalem became a place for people of all faiths, who lived in a shadow of peace and mercy of Islam. This is why many western historians and writers agree that Christians and Jews experienced the most prosperous and happiest period of their history under Muslim rule (Gulen:210).

## **6. Recommendation**

The Muslims believe that Islam is a universal religion meant for all humanity, and the Muslims are entrusted with the duty of conveying message of the religion to all mankind. Since one of the objectives of Islam is to safeguard human rights, it is not possible for the Sharia laws to advocate violence or any unlawful assault against non-Muslims and their property. The fact that few misguided Muslims attack non Muslims due to ignorance, it does not mean that Islam should be held responsible for their actions. There is a difference between tolerant and just principles of Islam and the deviant behavior of very few Muslims. It is unjust to restrict blame on Islam alone for the universal phenomenon of terrorism, which exists among followers of all faiths. While the non Muslims were fighting their holy war in their own way, they continue to accuse Islam of same.

Violence against the innocent has no basis in Islamic law. In order to overcome violence and hate between Muslims and non Muslims, the need to develop an atmosphere of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence and engage in dialogue is paramount. This is because, dialogue decreases disagreement (Karina:103). While the non Muslims are expected to respect Islamic Jihad as a legitimate right of Muslims, Islamic scholars have the responsibility to step up in educating and guiding Muslims to the true teachings of Islam with regard to non Muslims. There is the need for massive intellectual awareness campaign through dialogue to educate and understand the grudges of non Muslims against Islam. This will enable sincere non Muslims to distinguish between actions of misguided Muslims and the pristine teachings of Islam. Both sides should learn about each other's religion through dialogue and social interaction toward understanding, peace, respect, and cordial relationship (Q8:613.).

## **7. Conclusion**

Islam is a peace loving faith and mercy to all humanity (Q21:107J). The Sharia provisions deal with the relationship between Muslims and people of other faith in peace and tolerance. While Jihad is a duty incumbent upon all Muslims, religious persecution and forceful conversion is not the aim of Islamic jihad nor part of its teachings and methods. It may be called Jihad, when Muslims fight to defend Islam and the Ummah with formal declaration by a Muslim leader or head of an Islamic state. Also, Jihad is morally justifiable if it is for defense against any aggression or taking an offence in unavoidable circumstances when onslaught of enemies is imminent.

While the Muslims owe no apology for the command of jihad in Islam, it is an injustice and deliberate condemnation of Islamic principles to judge Islam with the attitude of very few deviant Muslims, including relating Islam with violence and aggression due to the action of few deviant Muslims. As such, accusing Islam of terrorism is an absolutely unfounded allegation that amounts to intellectual terrorism. In fact, if properly understood, Jihad has relevance in modern society. It is a tool of eradicating challenges of modern world. The terror attack we are witnessing today is devoid of any legitimacy in Sharia and morality. That is why some Muslims alleged that some of the recent attacks in the name of Jihad were stage managed to blackmail Islam and the Muslims. A sincere non-Muslim should employ holistic and not myopic and subjective analysis to issues pertaining to Islam. The Muslims therefore, respect those who respect Islam, and oppose those who oppose their religion and its Prophets.

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