

Concept of Jihâd: An Analysis of Early Selected Muslim Sources

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Abstract

Purpose- The purpose of this paper is to discuss the concept of jihâd. The discussion will include structures “of Jihad as evident in the “Holy Qur’ân”, “Prophetic tradition Hadîth”, and a collection of writings of the medieval jurists such as Imam al-Shafii and ibn Taymiyah. In this study, the early conceptualization of Jihâd, as a “lexeme, and generic term” will also be reviewed in order to come to a rudimentary understanding of the concept. This will be substantiated with examples from the Prophetic period, the era of the “Rightly Guided Caliphs”, “the Umayyad”, Abbasid and “Mongol empires”. The focus will be the Middle East and Asia.

Design/methodology/approach- The article will be qualitative, focusing on primary, secondary and related sources. An important aim would be to ascertain the function of jihâd as a lexical term and as a concept within the chosen literary contexts. On the other hand the research methodology would tend to be more detail orientated paying attention to micro aspects such as the semantic field of jihâd receives an attention. On the other hand, a macro- approach will be followed in order to ascertain the function of the concept of jihâd in the broader context. Literature consulted and a predetermined goal will determine research methodology.

Research limitations/implications- The article shows that the simplistic translation of jihâd into English as ‘holy war’, as is common in some scholarly and non-scholarly discourses, constitutes a severe twisting and misunderstanding of its Qur’ânic usage.

Practical implications- The basic problem to be addressed is to ascertain how a religious sanctioned concept is interpreted by classical scholars compared to modern trends of thought whereby the so so-called terrorism has prevalent.

Findings- The article finds that the hypothesis to be tested is, whether the variations in viewpoints pertaining to the word jihâd can be ascribed to selective use of texts Qur’ân, hadîth, Islamic jurisprudence and early Muslim history.

Originality/value- The article enhances us with an understanding of the concept of jihâd in Islam and its various forms.

Keywords- Jihâd, Holy war, Qitâl and Harb

Paper type- Research paper.

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1. Introduction

Jihâd is an Arabic word that has become part of the English vocabulary. A present understanding however, does not necessarily reflect ancient and original meaning. Cambridge International Dictionary of English, for example, defines jihâd as a “Holy war” that is fought by Muslims against people who are a threat to the Islamic religion or who oppose its teachings”. Chambers Dictionary of Etymology (1988:553) in the same way describes jihâd as a religious war or holy war of Muslims against unbelievers. At the semantic level, the simplistic translation of jihâd into English as holy war, as is common in some scholarly and non-scholarly discourses, constitutes a severe twisting and misunderstanding of its Qur’ânic usage (Afsaruddin, 2006:686-687). Nevertheless, jihâd is a concept much broader than warfare. Indubitably, the doctrine of warfare can be derived from the Qur’ân without resorting to the term jihâd. Arabic-English Lexicon (1863:473) literary characterizes jihâd as exerting one’s utmost power, efforts, endeavours, or ability in contending with an object of disapprobation: and this is of three kinds, namely, visible enemy, the devil and one’s self. Jihâd is commonly interpreted as ‘holy war’ however; some intellectuals tend to reject such approach emphasizing non- militant connotations of the word. In technical literature regarding the “concept of jihâd” the term ‘holy war’ is often used to describe it. In actual fact, specialists of Islamic studies often stress that both words are not synonymous. Nevertheless, in a broader usage and interpretation, jihâd has accrued both violent and non-violent meanings. The term ‘holy war’ is a concept derived from Christian dogma and relates especially to the crusades source. Moreover, the term “Holy war” as we know it today was in fact coined by a German scholar Friedrich Zacharias Schwally (1863-1919) in his monograph published 1901 by that name: Heilige Krieg, meaning “Holy war” in English language. Subsequent to Schwally’s monograph a substantial volume and a variety of scholarly works have been published on this topic. Some studies have been written on “Holy war” in the context of the medieval

Christian crusades, particularly as possible deviation from the Western concept of just war (Firestone, 1999:3).

However, there is a word in the Qur'ân which may be translated as warfare. The word is *qitâl* essentially refers to "fighting" or "armed combat" and it is a component of *jihâd* in specific situations. *Harb* is another word in Arabic language which also makes reference to "warfare". *Harb*, however, is a generic term and it refers generally to "wars" that are not legitimized by a religious authority. As for "*Qitâl*" with the full locution "*fi sabîl Allah*," (in the path of God) is far more specific in its narrower meaning of fighting (Firestone, 1999:18). *Qitâl* may be said to be synonymous with *jihâd* when it is understood as "warring" or "fighting" in the path of God. This usage of the term "*qitâl*" followed by a modifying phrase '*fi sabîl Allah*' is exemplified in Qur'anic surahs [Q 2:190], [Q 2:244] and [Q 2:246]. *Harb* is also used in the Qur'ân but it is not accompanied with '*fi sabîl Allah*' as a modifying phrase. In fact, the Qur'ân employs the word *harb* when referring to illegitimate wars fought by those who wish to spread corruption on earth, [Q5:65] as well as to the thick battle between believers and non-believers [Q8:57] and [Q47:4]. In another verse, *harb* refers to the possibility of war waged by God and his Prophet (Muhammad) against those who would continue to practice usury [Q2:279] (Firestone, 1999: 3). The activity of fighting, furthermore, probably refers to the use force, which is one sided characterization of *jihâd*. Those against whom *Jihâd* is directed are typified as the "enemy", but in a very vague and general way. What is clear is that the Qur'anic declaration of *jihâd* cannot be reduced to armed struggle. Virtually all instances of the root 'j-h-d' basically refer to the question of true intention and devotion: including, incidentally, those forms referring to oath-taking, for example "*jahada aymânihim*" [Qur'an 5:53]. The term *jihâd* in its various forms signifies a divine test: Qur'ân [47:31], to distinguish the lukewarm believers [Q4:95], [Q9:81], and [Q9:86] from those who desire God's satisfaction [Q60:1] and strive body and soul in his way [Q9:41], [Q9:88] *jihâd*, regardless of sphere of action, is a means of separating true belief from infidelity [Q22:52] and of ranking the intention and merit of those who believe [Q8:72] and [Q8:75]. It is the mark of those who take up the mission of God without fear for blame or doubt [Q5:54] and [Q49:15]. Primarily at stake in the Qur'anic significance of *jihâd* is not warfare per se but the degree of devotion to God's cause over concern for worldly affairs [Q9:19], [Q9:24], [Q60:2]. As much, *jihâd* merits divine favour and forgiveness [Q4:95], [Q4:96], [Q9:20], [Q29:6] and [Q29:7], denoting in effect the fundamental element in one's orientation to God [Q22:78], [Q29:69] and [Q61:11], which is, however, known only to God in the final analysis [Q9:16]. This orientation is summed up in [Q5:35] which says: "O believers, revere God, seek the way to him and strive "*jâhidû*" in his way that you might prosper." Nonetheless, *Jihâd* in the Qur'an implies a total devotion to God through a consecration, dedication and even oblation of oneself to his way. (Heck, 2004:97). It may also be an expression of the ancient and ubiquitous notion that the believers must prove to God their worthiness of divine reward. This proof is achieved by enduring various kinds of hardships and self- mortification (Tasseron, 2003:37). Fasting, pilgrimage, charity, striving to live a virtuous life, defending Islam, fighting injustice and oppression likewise belong to this classification.

2. Literature Review

Historical Sources providing information about the earliest Muslim community and the life of the Prophet are the Qur'ân (and accompanying "*tafsîr*", i.e. interpretative literature), and other genres of Arabic writing such as '*maghâzi*' (campaigns), '*sirâh*' (biography of the Prophet), In literary genres (*sirâh*, *maghâzi* and *hadîth*) that reveal the early history of Muhammad and his community, *Jihâd* and fighting constitute themes of high importance (Bonner 2006:37). Prophetic traditions refer to 19 military campaigns (Bukhari 5/59/285, cf. Khan, MM (ed.) 1984). There were battles which took place at Badr, Uhud, Hunayn and so forth. Raids (*ghazawât*) were also undertaken. In the portrayal of events in the *hadîth*, a central theme of *Jihâd* in the Prophetic era was the propagation of faith (Surah 5:289). Attention is also given in these sources to the conduct of warfare and leadership. The period of the "Rightly Guided Caliphs" was one of great territorial expansion. Military conquests were also characteristics of the Umayyad Empire (since 632). Bonner (2006:119) even refers to their *modus operandi* as "imperial *Jihâd*". Engaging in war (particularly against the forces of Byzantium) was a prominent feature of the Abbasid Empire as during this era (e.g. Harun Al-Rashid) there was a great tendency towards professional armies (Bonner 2006:129). In 1258 CE, the Abbasid armies were defeated by the Moguls, who eventually converted to Islam, but initially without embracing the Shariah (Islamic legal code).

Throughout this period reviewed above by the Qur'ân, *Hadîth* and manuals of jurists played a prominent role in the evolving of the concepts of *Jihâd*. The Qur'ân contain 41 verse with the root j-h-d. Five of these verses refer to the 'swearing of oaths', while the other thirty six that have a bearing upon the present discussion of *Jihâd*. According to Ella Landau-Tasseron (2003:35-43), only ten of these verses refer clearly and unambiguously to the conduct of war. Armed struggle of resistance cannot be ruled out. As a matter of fact, in popular exegesis (interpretation) the terms '*jihâd*,' '*fighting*' and '*war*' became synonymous. At times the term is associated with *ghazwa* and *ghazâ* ('raiding or to raid'), *qitâl* ('fighting') and *harb* ('war'). *Jihâd* thus has a lexical meaning and a general connotation. The Qur'ân which is accepted as indication of divine guidance by Muslims, first by calls for religious zeal. To a lesser extent (particularly Surahs 8 and 9) believers are instructed

to participate in armed conflict. The latter occasions are estimated to be as little as four (Kassis, HE, 1983. *A Concordance of the Qur'ân*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press). In particular these two verses call for fighting, which are the so-called 'sword' verses. For example states; "and fight (qâtîlû, root q-t-l) the polytheists (mushrikûn) all together as they fight you altogether; and know that Allah is with those who are pious "fulfill their religious duty". (Surah 9:36 and also cf 9:5). The objective of who was to secure and affirm the position of Allah, as the only supreme God. (Surah 2:193) for example commands Muslim believers: "And fight them (the unbelievers) until there is no more fitna". In literary text, fitna may refer to "temptation", "fascination" or "discord" (Cowan, JM (ed.) 1971). Traditional commentators such as Al-Tabarî (839923) emphasized it's religiously connotation. According to Al-Tabarî the temporal indication, "until there is no fitna," is interpreted as "until there is no polytheism (shirk) and the worships only for Allah", and there is no deities or equal rivals 'an-dâdi' set beside Allah as objects of worship, obedience, trust and love" (Bonney 2004:73). Nevertheless, forceful conversions to Islam were not advocated, Qur'anic verse unequivocally states: "There is no compulsion 'ikrah' in religion 'al-dîn'. (Q2:256) Verses relating to Jihâd (specifically or in general) lead to the question of the relative weight that has to be given to each of the different statements. One option is the "abrogation" approach, in the Qur'an). The so-called "sword" verses deemed to have been revealed, Medina verses would thus have priority over other verses. Chronology can also be used in another way, more explicative than prescriptive. Reuven identified various stages relating to Jihâd. They include consecutive injunctions by Prophet Muhammad (as revealed to him), exhorting his followers initially to self-restraint. Thereafter granting them permission to engage first in defensive war and then in offensive war, and in doing so, lifting some of the former restrictions but simultaneously asking for patience with the "People of the Book (Jews and Christians)". Finally issuing a call (Q 9:29) to subdue Jews and Christians through fighting, an order which created internal tension and regarding which there is evidence of reluctance to fight by some of his contemporaries (Q 2:216). In addition to the Qur'ân, an important source of the Prophetic age is the Hadith literature, which mostly contains reports by companions on the words, actions and attitudes of the Prophet Muhammad.

The compendia that contain authenticated Prophetic Traditions, such as Bukhari and Muslim, comprise a Book of Jihâd, or an equivalent compilation. In these collections the military aspect is prominent. Jihâd "in the way of Allah (fi sabîl Allah)" was, for instants, declared as the act, which gave a man in Paradise the highest possible distinction. The Prophet Muhammad also stated that Paradise lay "Under the shadow of sword (suyûf)" (Bukhari 4/52/73, cf. Muslim 19/4314). Martyrdom was, however, only meritorious if the person acted in Allah's cause and not for worldly advantage. Furthermore, this did not imply that other religious duties may be neglected. An authenticated tradition (reported by Muslim 1/151-3) claims that the Prophet stated that keeping to the prescribed prayers and being dutiful to one's parents came before Jihâd in Allah's cause. The comprehensive volumes of classical Islamic law usually include a section called "Book of Jihâd", with subsections as Book of Siyar (law of war) and Book of Jizya (poll tax). Medina was the base of the Malik School of Law, which produced the famous legal compendium, called the 'Muwatta' composed by Malik Ibn Anas (d 795 CE) and edited by Yahya ibn Yahya (d 848 CE). The book (cf. Malik ibn Anas. 'al-Muwatta', edited by M. F. Abd Al-Bhâgi 1951) contains a chapter on Jihâd (including warfare topics), the contents of which was reduced by the Iraqi scholar as-Shaybani (767 CE). One of the excluded portions was the reference to exhortation, reward and martyrdom with regard to Jihâd. It may be that the emerging Hanafî school of thought in Medina "disapproved of this concept and excised it from their version of the Muwattâ (Bonner 2006:103). In Iraq, the doctrine of fard al-kifayâ (obligation bearing on sufficient number) was formulated. The jurist Al-Shafii (d 820) played a key role, by contending that in participating in a war was obligatory upon some and not all (cf Khadduri, M. (ed.) 1984). A contrary point of view was propagated by al-Sulami (d 1106). In his book 'jihâd', he ascribed the successes of the Western Crusaders of Franks to Divine punishment due to the Muslims neglect of religious duties, particularly 'jihâd'. Al-Sulami argued that jihâd had now (in the light of the enemy's invasion) become 'fard ayn', a duty incumbent upon every individual (Bonner 2006:140). Prior to the crusaders, the medieval Islamic philosopher, al-Farabi (d. 950) considered "a range of situations in which wars may be considered as just or unjust" (Bonner 2006:5). He looked at wars from a juristic perspective, urging a rationale for their waging without exclusive reference to Jihâd though this duty was not denied (Rosenthal, Ell 1958). The views of al-Farabi, in turn, may be contrasted with those of Ibn Taymiyah (1268-1328), the medieval scholar, who is believed to have greatly influenced modern radical Islamist movements. Ibn Taymiyah was a very prolific writer and a modern compilation of his legal rulings is comprised of 37 printed volumes. During his life the Abbasid empire was defeated (1258) by the invading Mongol armies. Leaders of the latter power eventually became Muslims, but Ibn Taymiyah nevertheless called upon the inhabitants of Iraq to oppose them as they did not rule according to the Islamic Shariah.

According to this ruling, the legitimate rulers of a Muslim country may become the targets of a violent revolution if they were deemed to be religious apostates (murtaddûn), (cf. Sivan, E 1985). Ibn Taymiyah thus emphasizes the aspect of inner resistance and places the responsibility to practice jihâd in the hands of ordinary people. The above discussion of Jihâd focused on several aspects of Jihâd. The **Central Concepts** may be

highlighted by means of a summary. The study first of all, deals with Jihād both as lexeme and as a general term. In its specific and more comprehensive sense, Jihād however, has a double connotation namely that of striving and fighting respectively. The Object of ‘striving’ may be religious self-improvement, the so-called ‘greater Jihād’. This aspect will however, not be systematically securitized in the study. Emphasis will be on the ‘smaller Jihād’, that is Jihād (in various forms of intensity) directed towards other. The latter approach leads to problems of authority, defining the enemy and conditions of applying force (for example of military nature).

3. Views of Modern Scholars on Jihād

The colonial experience as a matter of fact affected the viewpoint of certain Muslim intellectuals on jihād. Some would argue that in view of the military superiority of the colonizer, jihād was not obligatory anymore. Others elaborated new interpretations of the concept of jihād. The first one to do so was an Indian Muslim intellectual Sayyid Ahmad Khān (1817-1898). Sayyid Ahmad Khān, to demonstrate, during the colonial epoch that the Indian Muslims were not obliged to fight the British and could be loyal subjects he contrived a new interpretation of jihād. He ascertained that, jihād was obligatory for Muslims only in conditions of positive oppression or obstruction in the exercise of their faith impairing the foundation of some of the pillars of Islam. Since the British did not interfere with the practice of Islam subsequently, jihād against them was not allowed” (Peters, R.1995:372) Middle Eastern reformers like Muhammad Abduh (1849-1902) and Muhammad Rashid Ridā (1865-1935) argued that peaceful coexistence is the normal state, between Islamic and non-Islamic territories and that jihād is only allowed in defensive conditions (Peters, R.1995:372). This view, however, left a bearing to proclaim jihād against colonial oppression, as the colonial enterprise was clearly an attack on the territory of Islam. Contemporary thinking about jihād offers a wide spectrum of views. The first view, from the ‘apologist’ perspective, emphasizes the spiritual aspect of jihād and denies the legitimacy of a war. The second view, a modernist theory, reiterates this view with a significant difference, jihād, as warfare, and is compared to the Western concept of a just war, that is, war permissible if the aim is to defend Muslim lives and society. A third view, of the ‘revivalist’, rejects both these notions and stress the idea that war is justified in order to establish a society on Islamic principles. According to Rina Kashyap (2006:198), third view has found wide acceptance among Islamic societies and that serves as inspiration for militant organization in modern times.

4. Conclusion

It is thus evident from the discussion thus far that, at the semantic level, the simplistic translation of jihād into English as holy war, as is common in some scholarly and non-scholarly discourses, constitutes a severe twisting and misunderstanding of its Qur’ānic usage. Nevertheless, jihād is a concept much broader than warfare. The doctrine of warfare can be derived from the Qur’ān without resorting to the term jihād. The term ‘holy war’ as discussed above is a concept derived from Christian dogma and relates especially to the crusades source. Moreover, the term “Holy war” as we know it today was in fact coined by a German scholar Friedrich Zacharias Schwally in his monograph published 1901 by that name: Heilige Krieg, meaning “Holy war” in English language. Subsequent to Schwally’s monograph a substantial volume and a variety of scholarly works have been published on this topic.

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Al-Qur’an	5:53	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	9:5	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	9:36	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	2:193	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	2:256	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	9:29	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	2:216	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	2:190	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	2:244	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	2:246	ibid.,
Al-Qur’ān	5:65	ibid.,

Al-Qur'ân	8:57	ibid.,
Al-Qur'ân	47:4	ibid.,
Al-Qur'ân	2:79	ibid.,
Al-Qur'ân	4:95	ibid.,
Al-Qur'ân	9:81	ibid.,
Al-Qur'ân	9:86	ibid.,
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Al-Qur'ân	5:54	ibid.,
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Al-Qur'ân	9:19	ibid.,
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Al-Qur'ân	60:2	ibid.,
Al-Qur'ân	4:95	ibid.,
Al-Qur'ân	4:96	ibid.,
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