JIHAD AND THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

An examination of contentions and misconceptions regarding the concept of jihad and the spread of Islam on the basis of Islamic textual analysis and historical evidence

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FOREWORD TO THE SERIES

Islam is considered by many observers to be the fastest growing religion in the world, yet it is the most misunderstood of the world's major faiths. Some misconceptions about Islam stem from calculated propaganda against Islam, but a good amount of it is attributable to the ignorance of many Muslims whose limited knowledge and practice of Islam perpetuates these misconceptions.

Due to the deficiencies of the common, restricted way of teaching Islam to children, many Muslims grow up believing that Islam requires only blind faith and invites no intellectual challenges. Often such Muslims manage with minimal knowledge of their faith until they interact with larger circles of people, in higher institutions or the work place, where they are confronted with many misconceptions about Islam, and face questions they cannot answer.

It is in response to the need for empowering Muslims to know their religion, and to share its beautiful message with the rest of humanity, that this work was begun.

This effort is part of a wider project of intellectual empowerment of the global Muslim world. Among the programs designed by the Islamic Education Trust over the past decade and a half is the Train the Trainers Course (TTC) in Islam and Dialogue. As its name indicates, the course is designed to train da'wah volunteers in clarifying misconceptions about Islam, handling differences of opinion among Muslim scholars, and extending personal leadership training to others. The contents of this series of books evolved from teaching manuals from the TTC. It is hoped that this publication will serve as intellectual resource material for Muslims of different backgrounds.

Justice Sheikh Ahmed Lemu, *OFR*
National President
Islamic Education Trust
January 2010/Muharram, 1431 AH

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All praise and gratitude is due to Allah Who has made this work possible. And may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon His last messenger, Prophet Muhammad.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Whoever does not show gratitude to people does not show gratitude to Allah". It is therefore with great pleasure that the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN) takes this opportunity to express its sincere gratitude to all the brothers and sisters from all over the world, who have in various ways contributed to the development of the Train the Trainers Course in Islam and Dialogue (TTC) and its study material of which this book is a part.

The material has evolved into its present form over a long period before and after the TTC became an organized course in 1994.

The contributions to the course and its material have come in many ways, through numerous channels, both formally and informally, and from all over the world. They have come from contributors of various backgrounds, age-groups, organizations, and specializations.

It has unfortunately become practically impossible to cite all who deserve mention - but Allah has counted them all, and we continue to pray Allah to bless them with the best in this life and the next. We will however mention at least the countries where the major contributors have come from, and may Allah forgive us for any omissions.

Contributions to the development of the course have come from Australia, Bahrain, Burundi, Cameroun, Egypt, the Gambia, Ghana, Jordan, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Niger, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, U.K., U.S.A., and most importantly, Nigeria.

In Nigeria, we would like to acknowledge the following organizations for their key support in the development of the TTC material. They include the Da'wah Coordination Council of Nigeria (DCCN), the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), the Movement for Islamic Culture and Awareness (MICA), the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), the Muslim Corpers Association of Nigeria (MCAN), and the Nasrul Lahi-l-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT). Others include numerous University departments, Colleges of Education, Colleges of Arts and Islamic Legal Studies, etc.

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Finally, and on behalf of all the research team and staff of the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN), I would like to pray for the Trustees and minds behind the Islamic Education Trust (IET), and the DIN in particular, Justice Shiekh Ahmed Lemu and B. Aisha Lemu, whose wisdom, support, encouragement and leadership have helped bring the DIN to where it is today *alhamdulillah* and *jazākum Allahu khair*.

As only the Qur'an is perfect, this material will by Allah's leave continue to evolve through revisions and improvements with better contributions from people like you, the reader, in-shā Allah.

May the reward of whatever benefit comes from this material go to those who have in any way contributed to it. The Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN) takes full responsibility for any imperfection in this work, and we pray that such will be forgiven by Allah and you the reader.

Alhaji Ibrahim Yahya
Director
Da'wah Institute of Nigeria
January, 2010
Muharram, 1431 A.H.

NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY AND TRANSLITERATION

Use of "ﷺ"

It is a time-honored and cherished tradition among Muslims that whenever the name of any of the numerous Prophets of God is mentioned, peace and blessings of God are invoked upon him. In line with this tradition and the injunction in Qur'an 33:56, wherever the title "the Prophet," "Messenger of Allah," "Apostle of Allah," or the Prophet's name, "Muhammad," appears in this text, the blessing in Arabic (ﷺ) appears next to it. It means "may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him." Contemporary writings on Islam by Muslims use many variations and abbreviations of this benediction in Arabic or English or other languages such as "S.A.W.", "s.a.s.", "s", "p", "pbuh" and others. In deciding which customary symbol to use, it is worth mentioning that in manuscripts belonging to the first two centuries of Islam's intellectual heritage the writers did not rigidly adhere to the custom of writing a benediction after the Prophet's name[1], and hence, there is no 'best' way of representing it.

References to ahadith[2] **and commentaries drawn from computer software**

Efforts have been made to ensure that all ahadith (narrations or reported actions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) in this material are drawn from reliable and well-respected collections. Reservations expressed by respected authorities about the authenticity of any hadith have been indicated in footnotes, even as its presence in this

1. Jeffrey Lang, Struggling to Surrender: Some Impressions of an American Convert to Islam (Beltsville, USA: Amana Publications, 1994), p. ix.
2. Plural of hadith (the narrations or reported actions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him).

text indicates that it is considered authentic by other scholars of repute. An abundance of Islamic classical texts and some of their translations now exist on CD-ROMs.[3] The present material has made use of some of these CD-ROMs for obtaining ahadith and their commentaries (tafasir). The most commonly utilized CD-ROM database of hadith in English has been the Alim Version 6.0 software. Hence, references to hadith collections that end with the phrase "in Alim 6.0" throughout this material refer to those obtained from the Alim Version 6.0 database (ISL Software Corporation, 1986-2000). References to collections of hadith commentaries which have been drawn from other CD-ROMs have been noted in footnotes throughout the text.

◈ Transliteration of Arabic words

Modern Islamic literature in English utilizes a number of transliteration systems for Arabic words. With a few exceptions, this material has followed the system used by the majority, the details of which may be found in the International Journal of Middle East Studies.[4] However, for our ease and simplicity, we have omitted the diacritical dots and dashes which facilitate exact pronunciations. It is expected that this should not render the words unreadable.

3. Database software for viewing information on computers.
4. With a few exceptions.

PREFACE

Some critics have associated violence with Islam, particularly in contemporary times. Attacks on Muslims are justified by such critics on the grounds that Islamic aggression and intolerance are threats that must be curtailed. Such aggression is erroneously attributed to the injunctions of Islam, specifically, the concept of *Jihad*. To most non-Muslims, the word *jihad* strongly connotes violence and intolerance towards them irrespective of their peaceful intent. The questions below originate from this misunderstanding.

This book attempts to clarify the broad meaning of *jihad* from the Qur'an, Sunnah and views of Muslim jurists. Also discussed are the conditions for engagement, conduct and disengagement of war in Islam. Special attention is given to the "verse of the sword"[5] and the claim by some scholars that it abrogates verses of the Qur'an and hadith that relate to peaceful coexistence with peaceful non-Muslims. A brief background is also given of some of the major battles fought by the Prophet for a better understanding of their purpose in protecting the nascent Muslim community, and the freedom of faith.

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5. This phrase has been used by some Muslim scholars to refer to Qur'an 9:5.

PART I: JIHAD AND WARFARE (*QITAL*)

Some people say that the involvement of Muslims in various forms of war, aggression, and terrorism shows that the concept of *Jihad,* and Islam, by its nature, undermines peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially in multi-religious societies.

Historically, all communities, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Nationalist, Liberal, Communist, as well as others have had shortcomings in following the valued ideals of their religions or philosophies. As with any other religion or way of life, therefore, Islam should not be judged by those of its followers who disobey or are ignorant of its teachings. Rather, it should be judged by the actual teachings of its scriptures. It is therefore more reasonable to assess Islam by the teachings of the Qur'an and the sayings and deeds (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

The Qur'an teaches: "*Let there be no compulsion in religion*" (Q.2:256), and "*Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching*" (Q.16:125). Islam, therefore, does not teach aggression, "*for God does not love the aggressors*" (Q.2:190).

Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Nationalist, Liberal, Communist, as well as others have had shortcomings in honestly following the valued ideals of their religions or philosophies.

Jihad in Islam

Firstly, let us understand the meaning of the Arabic word "*Jihad*" in the Islamic context. "*Jihad*" (from the verb "*jahada*") on its own simply means "to struggle", "to exert effort" or "exert oneself", "to toil" or "to strive". *Jihad* in Islam refers to the unceasing effort that an individual must make towards self-improvement and self-purification.

It also refers to the duty of Muslims, both at the individual and collective level, to struggle against all forms of evil, corruption, injustice, tyranny and oppression whether this injustice is

committed against Muslims or Non-Muslims, and whether by Muslims or Non-Muslims. In this context, *jihad* may include peaceful struggle or, if necessary, armed struggle.

The term "*Jihad*" according to the Qur'an, Hadith and Jurists:

Use of "*Jihad*" in the Qur'an

While the Qur'an generally uses the term "*jihad*" in the broader sense of struggle in God's cause (which could include fighting), it was first used in the Qur'an in verses revealed at Makkah (Q.29:6 and 69, and 25:52), long before the early Muslims were permitted to fight:

> *And those who engage in jihad (striving) in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to Our paths.* (Q.29:69)
>
> *And whoever engages in jihad (striving), he does so for his own soul…* (Q.29:6)
>
> *Therefore, listen not to the unbelievers, but engage in jihad (striving) against them (with the utmost endeavour),*[6] *with it (the Qur'an).* (Q.25:52)

The many meanings of "*Jihad*" in the Hadith

Abu Dharr said that the Messenger (ﷺ) said, "*The best jihad is for one to perform Jihad against his own self and against his desires.*"[7]

Another man asked, "What kind of *jihad* is best?" The Prophet (ﷺ) replied, "*A word of truth before an oppressive ruler.*"[8]

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6. Ibn Kathir states that this was the interpretation of Ibn Abbas (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged)*, vol.7, Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers).
7. Collected by ad-Daylami, Abu Nu'aim and Ibn an-Najjar, authenticated by Al-Albani in *Saheeh Jaami' as-Sagheer*, No.1099 (Beirut, Lebanon: al-Maktub al-Islami, 3rd edition, 1990).
8. *An-Nasa'i*, no.4209

'Aisha asked, "O Messenger of Allah, we see *jihad* as the best of deeds, so shouldn't we join it?" He replied, "*Hajj is the most excellent of all jihad (for women).*"[9]

The Messenger (ﷺ) also said, "*…the one who engages in jihad (mujāhid) is he who strives against himself for the sake of God, and the one who emigrates (muhājir) is he who abandons evil deeds and sinfulness.*"[10]

> "*The best jihad is for one to perform Jihad against his own self and against his desires.*"
> - Ad-Daylami, Abu Nu'aim

Ibn Umar reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*The best jihad is that of one who strives against his own self in the Cause of Allah, Most Great and Glorious.*"[11]

> *"…The (true) Mujāhid is he who performs Jihad bi an-Nafs (struggle with the self) in the obedience of Allah. …"*
> - Ahmad, al-Hakim, at-Tabarani

Ibn Umar reported, "A man came to the Prophet of Allah (ﷺ) and said, 'Allow me to fight.' The Prophet (ﷺ) asked him, 'Are your parents alive?' 'Yes,' replied the man. '*Then go back and exert your utmost (jihad) in their service*,' said the Prophet."[12]

The Messenger (ﷺ) said (during his farewell Hajj), "*Should I inform you of who the Mu'min (true believer) is? It is he from whom people are secure with regard to their wealth and their own selves. The (true) Muslim is he from whom people are safe from (being harmed by) his tongue and hand. The (true)*

---

9. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Hajj, no. 2784.
10. Sahih Ibn Hibban, no.4862, Tirmidhi, Ahmad, cited in Jalal Abualrub, *Holy Wars, Crusades and Jihad* (Madinah Publishers and Distributors, 2002), p.80.
11. Collected by al-Tabarani in al-Kabir, authenticated by Al-Albani, *Saheeh Jaami' as-Sagheer*, no.1129, and cited in *Mishkat al-Masābīh,* vol.1, pp.15-16.
12. Reported by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawood, An-Nasa'i, and Al-Tirmidhi.

Mujāhid is he who performs Jihad bil-Nafs (struggle with the self) in the obedience of Allah. And the (true) Muhājir (migrant in the Cause of Allah) is he who abandons error and sin."[13]

The usage of the term "*mujahid*" (a person involved in *jihad*) in the hadith above is evidence that the Prophet (ﷺ) did not restrict its meaning to warfare.

Use of the term "*Jihad*" by Jurists

Even though the Qur'an and hadith give a variety of meanings to the term "*jihad*" (as illustrated above), scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and law have usually been more concerned with the military form of *jihad* as this requires more jurisprudential elaboration and legal regulation (*fiqh*). Hence, the sections that deal with warfare in traditional Islamic law literature are usually under sections or books titled "*Jihad*". This has unfortunately led many students of Islam to conclude that "*jihad*" has the exclusive meaning of fighting or warfare. However, not once in the Qur'an is the word "*jihad*" used with the sole meaning of fighting. The most commonly used word for fighting, in the literal sense, in both the Qur'an and hadith literature is "*qitāl*".

13. Ahmad, al-Hakim and at-Tabarani

Concepts of "*Dar al-Harb* " and "*Dar al-Islam* " by Jurists[14]

Hanafi jurists stated that "*Dar al-Harb*" referred to anywhere Muslims did not feel safe, at peace and secure to practice Islam.

Juristic discussion on militancy and the obligation of *jihad* against unbelievers are based on the juristic concepts of "*Dar al-Harb*" ("Abode of War") and "*Dar al-Islam*" ("Abode of Islam/Peace"). These concepts are not found by name either in the Qur'an or the Hadith. Furthermore, there is no categorical statement by Allah or the Prophet (ﷺ) demarcating the world into two bipolar domains. Instead, the concepts arose from classical jurists who sought to classify the world in which they lived in order to deduce appropriate juridical rulings for political and strategic relations with others outside the Caliphate. By examining the geographical divisions and power alliances that existed in their times, they were able to theoretically carve out an Islamic space within which their customized rulings applied. These divisions also allowed them to derive rulings for Muslims who were living under Islamic rule, those that were travelers, or those living abroad, respectively.[15]

Muslims are sometimes safer to practice Islam in the West than they are in traditionally Islamic countries.

Most of the schools of thought classified *Dar al-Islam* as the territory predominantly populated by Muslims and over which an Islamic system of rule was applied, even if it was taken over by Non-Muslims. Jurists of the Hanafi school of thought, however, stated that the term referred to any

14. For a comprehensive discussion on the various views of classical scholars on the geo-political classification of different parts of the world into one domain (*Dar*) or the other, see El-Fadl, Khaled Abou, "Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities: The Juristic Discourses on Muslim Minorities from the 2nd/8th to the 11th/17th Centuries." *Journal of Islamic Law and Society* 2, (1994): 1.

15. Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), pp.123-124)

territory where Muslims had security to practice their faith. *Dar al-Harb* was categorized by most jurists as any territory which did not have an Islamic ruling system or government, even if its population was largely Muslim. Hanafi jurists stated that it referred to any place where Muslims did not feel safe, at peace, and secure to practice Islam. Interestingly, for most jurists, a nation being branded with the title of "Abode of War" did not necessitate that it was in a state of actual warfare with Muslims.[16]

> "If a Muslim is able to practice Islam openly in a Non-Muslim land, then that land becomes *Dar al-Islam* (the Abode of Islam) by virtue of his settling there, and living there is preferable to moving away from it as other people may be attracted to Islam merely by their interaction with him."
>
> - Al-Mawardi

The conditions associated with being an "Abode of War" are the source of much contemporary debate, since no country today truly or completely applies Islamic principles of governance. Some scholars argue that countries with majority Muslim populations should still be classified as *Dar al-Islam*, though imperfect but with hope of reform.[17]

Tariq Ramadan, however, argues that the Hanafi criteria of safety and security may result in countries that have traditionally fallen under *Dar al-Islam* to now become identified as part of *Dar al-Harb*,[18] because it is sometimes safer for Muslims to practice Islam in the West than in some parts of the so-called Muslim world.

Imam al-Shafi'i is credited with introducing the term "*Dar al-Ahd*" ("Abode of Treaty") to this juridical discussion, when he referred to nations that were not politically Islamic but held

16. *Ibid.*, p.126
17. This is the view of scholars such as of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and many others.
18. Tariq Ramadan, *op. cit.*, p.127

political alliances or were at peace with one or more Muslim states.

Several contemporary scholars have stated that, given the existence of international bodies such as the United Nations or the African Union, this classification is relevant for most nations today. However, others have noted that for this term to be applicable there needs to be a clearly defined *Dar al-Islam* and its opposing *Dar al-Harb*. Moreover, agreements between the governments of various nations do not reflect agreements between the populations of both countries or the real nature of modern power-struggles which usually occur not between nations but between various multinational forces that transcend geographical bounds.[19]

Applying such old concepts of *Dar al-Harb* and *Dar al-Islam*, therefore, could lead to methodological errors as the terms are simplistic and bipolar, not reflective of the world that has become a constantly-evolving village, with complex geo-political configurations, diverse cultural constituencies, and multi-polar domains of power and influence across nations.

The "Best Jihad" and its prerequisites

Jihad bil Nafs the struggle to purify one's intention, strengthen one's willpower and resolve, and ensure all deeds are in accordance with Allah's guidance *fee sabeelillah* is therefore the prerequisite of all other forms of *jihad*.

The methodology of *jihad* according to all Islamic sources therefore does not exclude non-violent resistance against oppression and tyranny, if the general conditions of the moment indicate that this approach is the most effective way to achieve the objective of lasting peace.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 128

Depending on the circumstances and those involved, the best type of jihad may take several different forms. Thus it may be any of the following:

- Being frank in advising a tyrannical ruler or engaging in *da'wah* (inviting to Islam);
- Exercising discipline or self-restraint;
- *Hajj* (pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Makkah);
- Taking care of one's parents;
- Studying meaningfully;
- Imparting beneficial knowledge[20];
- Taking up arms to defend oneself and others if it becomes a last resort.

This implies that Muslims would have to undertake *jihad* in many diverse ways in the course of their lives. What is most important is that one's intentions are pure and "*fee sabeelillah*" in Allah's cause. *Jihad bil Nafs,* the struggle to purify one's intention, strengthen one's willpower, and ensure all deeds are in accordance with Allah's guidance, is therefore the prerequisite of all other forms of *jihad.*

Ibn al-Qayyim summarizes this point very clearly:

"The jihad against the enemies of God with one's life is only a part of the struggle which a true servant of God carries on against his own self for the sake of the Lord ... This striving against the evil tendencies which have dominated his mind and heart is more important than fighting against the enemies in the outside world ... As long as (the servant of God) does not first strive against his own evil tendencies in obedience to God's commands it is not possible for him to succeed in striving against the enemies in the outside world."[21]

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20. Q.9:122
21. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zaad al-Ma'ad.* Vol 3, p.5

Qitāl or Warfare in Islam

All the verses of the Qur'an and hadith relating to warfare can be generally classified into three main groups: (1) verses which deal with the conditions for military engagement, or commencement of warfare, (2) verses to do with the conduct of war after it has commenced, and (3) verses to do with the conditions of military disengagement and termination of warfare.

The inability or failure of some Muslim scholars and many non-Muslims to appreciate which of these three main classifications a given text of the Qur'an or hadith belongs to has resulted in serious misinterpretations regarding *jihad* and *qital*.

1) Verses which deal with the conditions for commencement of warfare or military engagement; such as in: Qur'an 4:75; 4:89-91; 2:190-193; 22:39-40; 49:9; 9:4-6; 9:12-13; and 9:123, etc. For example:

> *Fight (qātilū, in Arabic) in the cause of God those who fight (yuqātilūna) you, but do not commit aggression, for God loves not the aggressor.*
> - Qur'an 2:190

> *Fight (qātilū, in Arabic) in the cause of God those who fight (yuqātilūna) you, but do not commit aggression, for God loves not the aggressor.* (Q.2:190)
>
> * * *
>
> *But if they violate their pledges after having concluded a treaty, and revile your religion, then fight against the leaders of disbelief who, behold, mean nothing by their pledges, so that they might desist. Will you not fight against people who have violated their pledges, conspired to expel the Prophet, and were the first to attack you? Do you hold them in awe? Nay, it is Allah who you ought to stand in awe of, if you truly are believers.* (Q.9:12-13)
>
> * * *
>
> *Permission is given to those who fight (yuqātilūna) because they have been oppressed…For had it not been for Allah's repelling some men by means of*

others,[all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft-mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down… (Q.22:39-40)

* * *

And what ails you that you should not fight (tuqātilūn) in the cause of Allah and of those helpless men, women and children whose cry is: 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Your grace one who will protect us; and raise for us from Your grace one who will bring us succor!' (Q.4:75)

* * *

If two parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make peace between them; but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other then fight (qātilū) against the one that transgresses until it (the transgressing party) complies with the command of Allah… (Q.49:9)

O you who believe! Fight (qātilū) the unbelievers who are near you (i.e. those whose aggression you are in imminent danger of) and let them find firmness in you; and know that Allah is with those who are conscious of Him. (Q.9:123)

Conditions under which it is permissible to resort to armed struggle in Islam include:

> *"Do not wish to meet the enemy, but when you meet (or face) the enemy, be patient and steadfast…"*
>
> *- Bukhari*

a) To prevent imminent attack. An example of this is when the Prophet (ﷺ) mobilized an army to fight against the Byzantines who were preparing to attack Arabia and subjugate the newly-formed Islamic state. The Prophet's expedition went to Tabuk in order to meet this imminent danger. However, when he found that the Romans had not yet taken an aggressive initiative, the Muslim army was led back without attacking Byzantine territory.[22]

22. Sa'id Ramadan, *Islamic Scope and Equity*, 1st edition (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp.120-121.

b) In defense of self or others, as in Qur'an 22:39, 2:190-193: "*Fight...those who fight you, but do not transgress limits...*"

c) Against oppression and tyranny, as in Qur'an 4:75: *"…for those weak, ill-treated and oppressed among men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from Yourself one who will protect, and raise for us from Yourself one who will help.'"*

d) To remove oppressive barriers to the freedom of conscience, the freedom of association, the freedom of expression, and the freedom to practice and share Islam with others.

> "It is permitted for the Imam (leader) to initiate peace talks with the enemy if he believes this is beneficial for Muslims. In this circumstance, it is not necessary to wait for the enemy to initiate peace talks first."
>
> - Ibn al-Qayyim

Permission to resort to armed struggle to remove these barriers (or "*fitnah*", as mentioned in Q.2:193) is also based on the qualification that all other means to remove them have already been attempted; e.g. letters of petition, protests, negotiations, non-violent resistance, defiance, etc.

e) When any of the above justifications for armed struggle exists, all attempts at reconciliation have been exhausted, and there are no realistic alternatives to fighting. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Do not wish to meet the enemy, but when you meet (or face) the enemy, be patient and steadfast...*"[23]

f) Declaration of war must be made only by the head of an Islamic state and commander of the armed forces (referred to as the "*Amīr* ", "Caliph", or "Sultan" in juridical sources).[24] This stipulation is necessary to ensure that the

23. *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol.4, no.266B, in *Alim 6.0*

24. See Ibn Qudamah, *al-Mughni*, vol.12, p.526, cited in Jalal Abualrub, *Holy Wars, Crusades, Jihad* (Florida, USA: Madinah Publishers, 2002), pp.110-111.

state responds to its threats in a policy-driven, tactical, and united[25] manner.

2) Verses which deal with the conduct of war after it has commenced; such as in Qur'an 2:256; 9:1-7, 9:14; 9:123; 2:191; 2:194; 47:4; 4:94; and 8:15-16, etc. For example:

> *"There is no coercion in religion; Truth stands distinct from error…"*
> - Qur'an 2:256

And slay them (wa 'qtulū hum), wherever you catch them, and turn them out of where they turned you out; for persecution is worse than slaughter (qatl). And fight not with them (wa lā tuqātilū hum) at the Inviolable House of Worship until they first attack you (yuqātilū kum) there, but if they attack you (qātalū kum) there then slay them (faqtulū hum). Such is the reward of disbelievers… (Q.2:191)

* * *

Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the (combatant) polytheists wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and wait for them in each place of ambush.[26] *But if they repent and establish worship and pay zakah (i.e. the purifying welfare dues), then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.* (Q.9:5)

* * *

There is no coercion in religion; Truth stands distinct from error... (Q.2:256)

* * *

…If anyone attacks you, attack him just as he has attacked you, but be conscious of Allah and know that Allah is with those who are conscious of Him... (Q.2:194)

* * *

25. If the decision to engage or disengage in warfare were to rest in the hands of anyone other than the Head of State, then anyone with selfish political ambitions could use times of fear or high security threat to usurp power, weaken the state, or create disunity.

26. Such as hiding places in the desert to await passing combatants or sabotaging trade through intercepting caravans as was attempted by the Muslims prior to the Battle of Badr. See Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *Al-Raheeq al-Makhtum* (The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet), Revised edition (Riyadh: Darussalam Publications, 2002), p.243; Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Fiqh-U-Seerah: Understanding the Life of Prophet Muhammad*. Revised edition with hadith authenticated by Nasiruddeen al-Albani (Riyadh: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1995), p.230, etc.

O you who have attained to faith, when you go forth (to fight) in the cause of Allah, take care to investigate, and do not say to anyone who offers you a greeting of peace, 'You are not a believer!' in order to seek worldly gains (through plundering him of the spoils of war)… (Q.4:94)

When war or armed struggle becomes inevitable, there are also conditions to be observed. Allah and the Prophet (ﷺ) forbade the killing of non-combatants, who were usually women, children, old people, monks, etc.[27] He also forbade the unnecessary destruction of properties, trees, animals, farms, etc.[28] Khaled Abou El-Fadl (2002) notes that nearly every reference to *qitāl* (fighting) in the Qur'an is qualified by some moral condition of restraint.[29] Furthermore, if the aggressors incline towards peace, the Qur'an instructs believers to also incline towards it.[30]

3) Verses which deal with the conditions of military disengagement and termination of warfare; such as in Qur'an 2:192; 2:193; 8:61; 4:90; 60:8; and 9:6-7, etc. For example:

But if they cease, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Q.2:192)

* * *

27. See below for specific references.

28. See Qur'an 60:8, and *ahadith* in Muslim, Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi, etc. In more recent years, the Islamic Research Council at Al-Azhar University, Egypt, issued the following statement against theological declarations which sometimes attempt to justify terrorist actions committed by Muslims: "Islam provides clear rules and ethical norms that forbid the killing of non-combatants, as well as women, children, and the elderly, and also forbids the pursuit of the enemy in defeat, the execution of those who surrender, the infliction of harm on prisoners of war, and the destruction of property that is not being used in the hostilities." (*Al-Hayat*, 5th November, 2001).

29. K. El-Fadl, "Reply", in *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), p.102. See, for instance, Q.2:190-194; 4:89-94; 8:39, 61; 9:36; 22:39; 60:8-9.

30. Qur'an 8:61. Furthermore, Ibn al-Qayyim writes in Zad al-Ma'ād fi Hadyi Khairi al-'Ibād, vol.3, p.237 that, "It is permitted for the Imam (leader) to initiate peace talks with the enemy if he believes this is beneficial for Muslims. In this circumstance, it is not necessary to wait for the enemy to initiate peace talks first." (Cited in Jalal Abualrub, *Holy Wars, Crusades, Jihad*, Florida, USA: Madinah Publishers, 2002, p.173).

And if they (your enemy) incline to peace, incline you also to it, and trust in Allah. (Q.8:61)

* * *

And fight them (qātilū hum) until there is no fitnah (oppression) and religion is for Allah, but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression. (Q.2:193)

* * *

(Fight them) except those who join a people with whom you have a treaty, or those who come to you because their hearts restrain them from fighting you or their own people. If Allah had willed, He would have given the unbelievers power over you, and they would have fought you. Therefore, if they withdraw from you and fight you not, and instead send you guarantees of peace, know that Allah has not given you a license (to fight them). (Q.4:90)

And if they (your enemy) incline to peace, incline you also to it, and trust in Allah.

- Qur'an 8:61

* * *

If one amongst the (combatant) polytheists asks you for asylum grant it to him so that he may hear the word of Allah and then escort him to where he can be secure: that is because they are men without knowledge. How can there be a league before Allah and His apostle with the polytheists except those with whom you made a treaty near the sacred mosque? As long as these stand true to you stand you true to them: For Allah loves the righteous. (Q.9:6-7)

Hence, Muslims are not allowed to commit aggression or to initiate violence "*for God does not love the aggressors*" (Q.2:190). If, however, they are attacked or are in imminent danger of being attacked, they have the right to resist and, if necessary, fight to overthrow tyranny and oppression so that people can live in freedom and with their basic human rights. Some of the verses above are, thus, quoted by critics in isolation and without reference to this general rule.

Fighting is against aggression, not other religions

The proof that combative *jihad* is only directed against aggression is the fact that when the enemy stops fighting Muslims,

or inclines to peace, Muslims are required to cease fighting and also incline to peace, and place their trust in Allah (Q.2:192 and 8:61), since "*Allah does not love aggressors*" (Q.2:190). If combat were directed against a people just because they are Non-Muslims, then Muslims would not stop fighting even if the Non-Muslims concerned stopped, since their stopping does not mean they have become Muslims. Moreover, the Companions demonstrated after the death of the Prophet (ﷺ), and the Jurists stipulated in their works, that such fighting is also permitted against other Muslims should they perpetrate aggression or injustice against fellow believers. This is most evident in the early battles against the Khawarij and other militant Muslim factions.

If combat were directed against a people just because they are non-Muslims, then Muslims would not stop fighting even if the non-Muslims concerned stopped, since their stopping does not mean they have become Muslims.

Additional evidence that combat is only against injustice and not due to religious difference is the prohibition by the Prophet (ﷺ) of killing non-Muslims who were non-combatants, such as women, children, etc. For example, he said, "*Never kill women, children, and the old weakened with age*"[31], "*Do not kill hermits*"[32], "*Do not slay the old and decrepit …*"[33], and "*Leave them (monks) and that to which they devote themselves.*"[34] To this list, scholars add other non-combatants such as the blind, chronically ill, the insane, peasants, serfs, etc.[35] If all these categories of non-Muslims are not to be killed, then fighting any non-Muslim is not because they are non-

31. Related by Malik
32. Related by Dawood ibn Al-Husayn
33. Related by Abu Dawood
34. Related by Malik
35. For more references and discussion, see Ibn Rushd's *Bidayat al-Mujtahid wa Nihayat al-Muqtasid* (The Distinguished Jurist's Primer), vol.1, 1994, pp.458-460

Muslims, but because they have committed acts of aggression against Muslims.

Allah also says in the Qur'an 5:48, "*If Allah had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but (he willed it otherwise) in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you…*" and "*Let there be no compulsion in religion*" (Q.2:256). Fighting other religious communities purely for their difference would thus be counter to Allah's will.

Claimed abrogation of peaceful relations by the "verse of the sword" (Q.9:5)[36]

Some jurists have claimed that the verse "*fight in the cause of God, those who fight you, but do not go beyond the limits (to instigate aggression)…*" (Q.2:190) as well as other verses such as "*Those who believe, and the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and act righteously shall have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve*" (Q.2:62 and 5:69 implying that such categories of people need not fear hostilities from Muslims[37]) are abrogated (*mansūkh*) by verses in Chapter 9 of the Qur'an, and that Muslims are now required to engage in a permanent state of warfare against unbelievers until they embrace Islam or agree to pay the *jizya*.[38] The "verse of the sword" says:

> Once the Sacred Months are past, (and they refuse to make peace) you may kill the polytheists when you encounter them, punish them, and resist every move they make. If they repent and observe the

36. This argument is the primary basis for the view that combat against Non-Muslims is permitted even if they are not combatants.

37. Discussion on the subject of the fate of Non-Muslims in the Hereafter is handled in the relevant sections of the *Train the Trainers Course in Islam and Dialogue* (produced by the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria), under the topic "Do all Non-Muslims go to Hell, and do all Muslims go to Paradise?"

38. For some discussion of this, see Sheikh Khalid Abdul-Qadir, *Fiqh al-Aqalliyat al-Muslimah* (Lebanon: Darul-Iman,1998), p.39

formal Prayers (*Salat*) and give the obligatory charity (*Zakat*), you shall let them go. Allah is The Forgiver, Most Merciful. **(Qur'an 9:5)**

In other words, it is claimed that after the revelation of Chapter 9, and verse 5 in particular, Muslims can never have peaceful relations with any non-Muslim.

Clarification of the concept of "*naskh*"

The word "*naskh*" as used by Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) and jurists of Islam has been often translated as "abrogation". Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi in his textbook, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan* (1999) explains that many Companions did not always mean abrogation (as understood in English) when they spoke of *naskh*.[39] For example, Ibn Abbas is reported to have said that the verse, "*The spoils of war are for Allah and His Messenger*" (Q.8:1) is "*mansūkh*" (i.e. *naskh* has taken place) by the verse, "*And know that (of) all war-booty that you obtain, one-fifth is for Allah and His Messenger…*" (Q.8:41). If the word "*naskh*" here is understood to mean "abrogation", then it implies that the two verses are contradictory. In reality, the two verses are complementary. This "*naskh*" is therefore actually a specification (or, in Arabic, a "*takhsis")*, since the second verse clarifies how much of the "*spoils of war*" are to be given to the government ("*for Allah and His Messenger*"). The term "*naskh*" may also mean supercession, or initiation (establishing a precedent or new ruling).[40]

"Many Companions did not always mean abrogation (as understood in English) when they spoke of *naskh."*
- Abu Ammaar Qadhi

39. Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan* (UK: Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1999), p.254
40. *Ibid.*, p.234 on how Imam al-Shafi'i was the first to limit the meaning of *naskh*

Qadhi (1999) states that

> Therefore, when coming across statements from the scholars of the first three generations that claim that a particular verse was 'abrogated' (*nasakha*) by another verse, this cannot be immediately taken as an example of *naskh*. It is this exact factor which has been one of the greatest causes of confusion with regards to the number of *nasikh/mansookh* verses in the Qur'an.[41]

The jurist al-Suyuti wrote that, "In reality, it (*naskh*) is rare, despite the fact that many have exaggerated the number of verses of it."[42] According to Qadhi (1999), other scholars who mention many dozens of abrogated verses list verses that are not necessarily the basis for any legal ruling, and hence, are not appropriate candidates for abrogation.[43] For example, many scholars have said that the verse "*And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wherever you turn (in prayer) you will find the Face of Allah*" (Q.2:115) is abrogated by the verse which commands believers to face the Ka'bah in Makkah for their prayers (Q.2:149). However, the first verse is not specifying a direction for prayer and hence has no legal implications. Thus, there is no ruling from it that may be replaced by the subsequent verse.

Claims of abrogation are only a last resort once all attempts to reconcile two opposing texts have been made. The two verses must oppose each other with no possibility of being valid at the same time.

Criteria for a verse to abrogate another verse

The criteria for such abrogation include that the abrogating verse must be revealed after the abrogated verse, the two verses must have legal applications, they are mutually irreconcilable, and

41. *Ibid.*
42. Jalal al-Din Abd al-Rahman al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Marifah, n.d.), vol.2, p.28, cited in Qadhi, *op. cit.*, p.256.
43. *Ibid.*

there is absolute abandonment of the previous ruling (derived from the earlier revealed verse), irrespective of the case. In other words, the abrogated verse is no longer applicable for a ruling on the subject matter. It is distinguished from a case of *takhsis* (specification) in that after a *takhsis*, a prior ruling is not totally invalid, but rather valid for more specific or narrowly defined cases.[44]

> "…if one of the rulings can apply to a specific case, and the other ruling to a different case, this cannot be considered an example of *naskh (abrogation)*."
> - Abu Ammaar Qadhi

Qadhi, in his source text (cited above), elucidates that claims of abrogation are only a last resort once all attempts to reconcile two opposing texts have been made. The two verses must oppose each other with no possibility of being valid at the same time.[45] "Therefore, if one of the rulings can apply to a specific case, and the other ruling to a different case, this cannot be considered an example of *naskh (abrogation)*."[46]

No consensus on abrogated verses

There is no consensus among scholars as to how many verses have been abrogated by others in the Qur'an. Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi (1999), for instance, tables the number of abrogated verses mentioned by different scholars, ranging from as many as 214 cases mentioned by Ibn Hazm to as few as 5 cases mentioned by Wali Allah al-Dehlawi.[47] Scholars who list high numbers of abrogated verses attribute it to the "Verse of the Sword" (9:5) having abrogated the majority of the verses.

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44. Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan* (UK: Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1999), p.250
45. *Ibid.,* p.237
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*, p.251

Examples of verses claimed to be abrogated by Q.9:5

Verse 5 of Chapter 9 is believed to be one of the last verses to be revealed, especially in relation to the handling of unbelievers. Some have argued that as many as 147 verses may have been abrogated by this single verse.[48] These verses include:

> "Qur'an 9, verse 5 does not in fact abrogate any other verse of the Qur'an, as all the verses said to be abrogated are still relevant for interpersonal relationships between Muslims and Non-Muslims."
>
> - az-Zarqani

1) many general injunctions such as: "*And utter good speech to mankind…*" (Q.2:83).
2) verses which enjoin peace and forgiveness such as: "*So leave (the disbelievers) to speak foolishly, and engage in vain play, until they meet their Day which they have been promised*" (Q.43:83), and "*Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the foolish*" (Q.7:199).
3) verses which enjoin believers to be patient with insolence and taunting from disbelievers such as: "*So bear patiently with what they say…*" (Q.20:130).
4) verses consoling the Prophet (ﷺ) that his duty is only to convey the Message such as: *"…'But if you turn away, he (i.e. Muhammad) is only responsible for the duty placed upon him, and you are (responsible) for that which is placed upon you. If you pay him heed, you shall be on the right guidance. The Messenger's duty is only to convey (the Message) clearly'"* (Q.24:54).
5) verses warning the disbelievers of the consequences they will face in the Hereafter such as: "*'Say: O my people…Surely, you will come to know for which of us will be the (happy) end in the Hereafter. Certainly, the wrong-doers will not be successful'*" (Q.6:135).

48. See reference to masters dissertation by Uthman Ali, cited in Qadhi, *op. cit.*, p.252

6) verses enjoining self-defence within limits such as "*And fight in the way of Allah those who fight against you, but do not transgress the limits…*" (Q.2:190).
7) verses enjoining believers to respect treaties made with disbelievers such as "*…but if they turn back, then take hold of them…except those who join a group between you and whom there is a treaty (of peace)…*" (Q.4:89-90).

It would be difficult to accept that all these verses are no longer legally applicable to Muslims. Rather, it may just be that the original context of their revelation no longer prevails and the original unbelievers being referred to (i.e. the treacherous Quraysh pagans) no longer exist. Yet almost all of the verses said to be abrogated are applicable to Muslims who may be in a similar situation today. Accordingly, Qadhi (1999) cites the scholar Muhammad Abd al-Azeem az-Zarqani[49] as concluding that verse 9:5 does not in fact abrogate any other verse of the Qur'an, as all the verses said to be abrogated are still relevant for interpersonal relationships between Muslims and Non-Muslims.

Qur'an 2:190 is not abrogated by any subsequent verse

The claim of abrogation of Q.2:190 in particular has been rejected by Ibn 'Abbas, 'Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz, Mujahid, and others who assert that it is a firm rule (*muhkam*)[50], meaning that those who Muslims should fight against are those who are in a state of fighting the community.[51]

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49. Muhammad Abd al-Azeem az-Zarqani, *Manaahil al-'Irfan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.); cited in Qadhi, *op. cit.*, P.254.
50. A legal ruling that is firmly established and that cannot be abrogated.
51. See Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Qurtubi, *Jami' Ahkam Al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Matba'ah Dar al Kutub al Masriyyah, 1354/1935), vol.2, p.348.

Imam al-Tabari also considers the claim of abrogation of Q.2:190[52] as not supported by any evidence from the Sunnah at the time Q.9:5 was revealed, and that Q.9:5 is in fact complementing (*takhsis*) not abrogating (*nasikh*) Q.2:190. Tabari cites the opinion of a group of scholars that says that the forbiddance of killing those that have not waged war against Muslims is still a rule that is permanently valid and that "*fa la shay'in*…" (there is nothing that abrogates) the ruling of Q.2:190. He mentions that Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz said those upon whom Muslims should not transgress the limits refers to women, children, and those who have not waged war on the Muslim community. This is furthermore the opinion that Tabari holds to be the best of all opinions. He cites Ibn Abbas' explanation of the verse as follows: "it means do not kill women nor children nor old people nor those that meet you with peace and abstain from fighting you, for if you do so, know that you have transgressed beyond the limits."[53]

Imam al-Tabari also considers the claim of abrogation of Q.2:190 as not supported by any evidence from the Sunnah at the time Q.9:5 was revealed, and that Q.9:5 is in fact complementing (and not an abrogating) Q.2:190.

Al-Razi states that Q.5:69 is not abrogated either[54], and Abu Muhammad Makki al-Qaysi states that most jurists agreed with this position.[55]

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52. "*And fight in the way of Allah those who fight against you, but do not transgress the limits*…" (Q.2:190).
53. Al-Tabari, tafsir of Q.2:190 from *Maktab al-Taalib al-Ilm* (Beirut: Ariss Computers Inc., 2002).
54. *Tafsir al-Kabir* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1990), vol.3, p.98.
55. *Al-Idah li-Nasikh al-Qur'an wa Mansukhuh* (Jeddah: Dar al-Manarah, 1986), p.123

Understanding the "verse of the sword" in its own context

The "verse of the sword" may now be examined in itself as to whether or not it means <u>all</u> unbelievers must be fought against. Verses 1-7 of Surah 9 read:

Freedom from obligation is herein issued from Allah and His Messenger to the polytheists with whom you have entered into a treaty. (Verse 1)

Therefore, roam the earth freely for four months, and know that you cannot escape from Allah, and that Allah will disgrace the disbelievers. (Verse 2)

A proclamation is herein issued from Allah and His Messenger to all the people on the great day of pilgrimage, that Allah is free from obligations to the polytheists, and so is His Messenger. Thus, if you repent, it would be better for you. But if you turn away, then know that you can never escape from Allah. And give tidings of a painful torment to those who disbelieve. (Verse 3)

Except those of the polytheists with whom you have a peace treaty and who have not violated it, nor banded together with others against you, you shall fulfill your treaty with them until the end of its term. Surely, Allah loves the righteous. (Verse 4)

Once the Sacred Months are past, (and they refuse to make peace) you may kill the polytheists when you encounter them, punish them, and resist every move they make. If they repent and observe the formal Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat), you shall let them go. Allah is The Forgiver, Most Merciful. (Verse 5)

And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection, so that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then escort him to where he can be

And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection, so that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then escort him to where he can be secure. (Verse 6)

Exempted are those who have signed a peace treaty with you at the Sacred Masjid.. If they honour and uphold such a treaty, you shall uphold it as well. Allah loves the righteous. (Verse 7)

Verse 8 specifies that the polytheists who Muslims are no longer to trust for peace accords are those who show no respect for treaties or peace agreements, while verse 13 elaborates, "*Will you not fight people who violated their oaths (repeatedly), plotted to expel the*

Messenger, and were the first to attack you?"

The context of the verses makes it clear that verse 5 is referring specifically to those pagan Arabs that violated the terms of their peace treaty and who were bent on exterminating the Muslim community (i.e. those other than the ones who are referred to in verse 4). The ending of Verse 5 and the whole of verse 6, also make it very clear that some of those who fought against the Muslims, may repent and themselves become Muslims ("observing the formal prayers and giving the compulsory zakat", etc.), while some may still remain polytheists but seek protection from Muslims (Verse 6), which must be granted. This is partly what justifies the interpolation *"(and they refuse to make peace)"*- in the translation or interpretation of the earlier part of Verse 5 above.[56]

The interpretation that Q.9:5 gives license to a permanent state of warfare between Muslims and Non-Muslims, and a death-sentence to all those who do not convert to Islam appear to most scholars to have contradicted its own context.

With specific reference to verses 9:12-13, Sheikh Abdul Rahman as-Sa'di explains that the context was when the Quraysh breached their peace treaty by collaborating with Banu Bakr to attack the pagan tribe of Khuza'ah, the Prophet's allies.[57]

As many historians have noted, "pre-Islamic Arabia was caught up in a vicious cycle of warfare, in which tribe fought tribe in a pattern of vendetta and counter vendetta."[58]

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56. See Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary of the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Islamic Book Trust, 2001), p.117-183; and Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), p.254-258, n.1-22 to Q.9:1-15.
57. *Tayseer al-Karim al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan*, p.291; cited by Jalal Abualrub in *Holy Wars, Crusades, Jihad* (Florida, USA: Madinah Publishers, 2002), p.161.
58. Karen Armstrong, "The True, Peaceful Face of Islam", *Time Magazine*, October 1, 2001.

> Because of the absence of any political union and organized government in the country, there had been perpetual conflict and warfare among the Arabs. Tribal feuds, raiding and plundering of one tribe by the other was the common phenomenon of Arab life at that time… There being no political unity and organized government in Arabia, the 'might is right' was the law in the country. Besides, the Persians had already annexed Yemen and Hira and the Romans had occupied the Ghassanid kingdom. The future of divided and distracted Arabia looked gloomy, if she could not be rescued from her malady.[59]

> "*Leave the Abyssinians alone, as long as they leave you alone, and do not engage the Turks, as long as they do not engage you.*"
>
> - Abu Dawood

Against this background, the verses in question urge the believers to crush all hostilities and vendettas once and for all, while upholding the morality to maintain peace with those who cease hostilities, irrespective of their past aggression. Thus, the interpretation that Q.9:5 gives license to a permanent state of warfare between Muslims and Non-Muslims (following the pre-Islamic tradition of cyclical warfare and ceaseless vendettas), and passes a death-sentence on all those who do not convert to Islam appear to most scholars to have contradicted its own context.

The interpretation also contradicts the actions of the Prophet (ﷺ) who till his death engaged in peaceful *da'wah* missions with Non-Muslims and had numerous treaties with Non-Muslim and even pagan Arab tribes. The Prophet (ﷺ) also instructed his Companions in an authenticated hadith to "*Leave the Abyssinians alone, as long as they leave you alone, and do not engage the Turks, as long as they do not engage you.*"[60] For further discussion on hadith considered to have prescribed perpetual warfare against unbelievers, see the

59. A. Rahim, *Islamic History* (Lagos, Nigeria: Islamic Publications Bureau, 2001), p.6.
60. Abu Dawood, No.3748; An-Nasa'i, No.3125; authenticated by Al-Albani in *Sahih Jaami' al-Sagheer*, no.3384. The hadith is also cited in Ibn Rushd's *Bidayat al-Mujtahid*, vol.1, p. 456.

topic on "The Spread of Islam" in Part II of this book.

Louay Safi (2001) argues that classical jurists whose stance was that military action should be undertaken against all Non-Muslim states because of their disbelief did not intend to position it as a holistic theory with universal application. Rather, the rulings relating to war and peace with Non-Muslims arose in a historical context - in particular, the armed struggle between the Abbasid Islamic Caliphate and the various European dynasties.[61]

"Why did Muhammad (ﷺ) engage in fighting battles if his mission was for peace? Should a Holy Prophet of God not be pacifist, or at least personally abstain from taking up arms?"

Part of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was to resist evil and defend truth and justice. Sometimes, this could be achieved by peaceful means; sometimes, the use of force would be necessary (Qur'an 4:75, 22:39-40). In such cases, it is only reasonable that he should lead by example. It would not befit him to ask people to do what he himself would not do.

If engaging in fighting or resisting evil by force in the cause of truth and justice is considered inappropriate for Muhammad (ﷺ) as a religious leader, what about other Prophets and religious leaders?

If fighting in the cause of truth and justice, or to resist evil, is considered inappropriate for Muhammad (ﷺ) as a religious leader, then would it be inappropriate for other Prophets and religious leaders?

61. Louay M. Safi, *Peace and the Limits of War: Transcending Classical Conception of Jihad* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 2001), p.2

According to the Bible, people like Abraham (Hebrews 7:1-3), Moses (Numbers 31:3), Joshua (Joshua 11:6-14), and David (I Samuel 17:48-51, 19:8), etc. engaged in fighting battles.[62] Even Jesus (عليه السلام) resisted evil by force when, according to John 2:13-15, he used a whip to drive the traders and moneychangers out of the temple.

Battles between the Muslims and the Quraysh

The early battles between the Muslims and the pagan Quraysh were clearly defensive, as the Makkans were determined to stamp out the young Muslim State in Madina.

The Conquest of Makkah was triggered by the Qurayshi attack on the pagan tribe of Banu Khuza'a who had a protection alliance with the Muslims.

In the first battle at Badr, near Madina in 2 A.H, the Muslims were faced with a pagan army 3 times their number.[63] A year later, the Quraysh launched a campaign to avenge their loss at Badr, which led to the Battle of Uhud, fought on the outskirts of Madina. At the Battle of the Trench, 2 years later, the Muslims were besieged by about ten thousand pagan fighters who surrounded the City of Madina. It is quite clear from these incidents that the pagans sent out their armies to attack the Muslims, not vice versa.

62. Christians who do not believe David (عليه السلام) was a Prophet are referred to Acts 2:30 where it says he was (a Prophet).

63. Some have noted that the Battle of Badr was prompted by Muslim aggression against a Qurayshi trade caravan. Intercepting caravans was a form of economic sabotage and a means to reclaim some compensation for what the Muslims were wrongfully dispossessed of by the Quraysh in Makkah. The caravan in question escaped before being intercepted, but an army from Makkah had already been mobilized to fight the Muslims and crush their community. Hence, to prevent an attack on the people of Madina and a massacre, the Muslims mobilized an army to defend the city, and they met the Qurayshi army at Badr.

Wherever possible, the Prophet (ﷺ) also made peace treaties, such as that of Hudaibiyyah. This treaty was made despite repeated provocations by the Quraysh when the Muslims were on their way to Makkah to perform Umrah (the lesser pilgrimage).[64] After each provocation, the Prophet (ﷺ) forgave the Quraysh and persevered in seeking negotiations for a truce.

The terms of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah heavily favoured the Quraysh. These included that the Quraysh and the Muslims would cease hostilities for ten years, but that the Muslims would not be permitted to enter Makkah for Umrah that year. In addition, if anyone from the Quraysh were to flee to Muslim territory, he or she would have to be returned. However, if anyone deserted the Muslim camps to return to the Quraysh, he would not be sent back. These terms did not seem fair to the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ). However, the terms also included the fact that all Arab tribes were free to form alliances with either the Quraysh or the Muslims. This new freedom of worship and dialogue favoured the peaceful spread of Islam among the tribes.

By the time of the Conquest of Makkah,[65] Islam had spread so widely by peaceful preaching and the Islamic State had become so strong that Makkah surrendered without a fight. During the Conquest, the Muslim army marched into Makkah, the Prophet's former enemies were spared and the Ka'bah was cleansed of its idols. Through this process, the original monotheistic purpose for which the Ka'bah was erected by Abraham and Ishmael was restored.

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64. *Sirah Ibn Hisham* (Beirut: Al-Majma' al-Ilmi al-Arabi al-Islami, n.d.), pp.256-260.

65. This conquest was provoked by the Qurayshi violation of their 10 year peace treaty with the Muslims. This Qurayshi aggression took place only 2 years after the Treaty was made at Hudaibiyyah. The violation took the form of a Qurayshi attack on the pagan tribe of Banu Khuza'a, who had a protection alliance with the Muslims. See Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Muslim Conduct of State* (Lahore: Hafeez Press, 1977), p.193

Battles between the Muslims and "People of the Book"

Concerning battles with some Jewish clans and other communities, Safi (2001) explains:

> The original position of Muslims concerning the Jews of Madina was also based on the principle of peaceful coexistence. A few months after the Prophet arrived in Madina, he concluded a covenant of friendship, alliance, and cooperation between the Muhajirun and the Ansar on one side, and the Jews on the other. The covenant not only recognized the freedom of religion of the Jews and assured their security, but also provided them with complete autonomy… The friendly relationship between the Jews of Madina and the Muslims continued until Abdullah ibn Salam, a rabbi and a prominent Jewish leader, embraced Islam. This incident, evidently, sparked grave panic among Jewish leaders, who became apprehensive about the Muslim presence in Madina and feared that Islam would penetrate their ranks. It was at this stage that Jews began their campaign against Muslims: first through a war of words, aimed at refuting the Qur'anic teaching and inducing a state of suspicion about the Prophet and his message, and later through conspiring with the enemies…
>
> The first confrontation between Jews and Muslims took place after the Battle of Badr when some Jews of **Banu Qaynuqa** violated the right of a Muslim woman by forcefully exposing her nakedness. This incident developed into fighting between a Muslim passer-by and the Jewish assailants in which a Jew and the passer-by were killed. Consequently, general fighting between the clan of the murdered Muslim and Banu Qaynuqa erupted. When the Prophet was informed of the confrontation, he sent word to Banu Qaynuqa, asking them to stop the attacks and keep the covenant of mutual peace and security. Banu Qaynuqa responded by ridiculing the Prophet's request, leaving the Muslims no option but to fight.
>
> Likewise, the campaign against **Banu al-Nadir** was triggered by their infidelity and misconduct, when they openly violated the provisions of their covenant with the Muslims by sending three of their leaders… together with two leaders of the tribe of **Banu Wa'il**, to Makkah in order to instigate the Quraysh and their allies to attack the Muslims in Madina, and to pledge their support… Their counsel led to the campaign of Al-Khandaq [the Trench]… In like manner, the fighting between the Islamic state and both Byzantium and Persia was commenced not because the Muslims wanted to extend the dominion of the Islamic state… but rather

because both the Byzantines and the Persians either assailed Muslim individuals and caravans or prevented the communication of the Islamic message.[66]

"In Islamic theology, war is never holy; it is either justified or not, and if it is justified, those killed in battle are considered martyrs."
- Khaled Abou El-Fadl

The campaign of Dawmah al-Jandal, the first campaign against the northern Christian tribes which were Byzantine protectorates, was a punitive expedition to avenge the attacks on the Muslim caravans to al-Sham by some of these tribes, such as **Qada'ah** and **Banu Kalb**. Likewise, the campaign of Mu'tah was also a punitive expedition to avenge several grave violations (and executions) against the Muslim ambassadors whom Muhammad had sent north to call people to Islam… The Prophet also sent 'five men to **Banu Sulayman** for the sole purpose of teaching them Islam, and he endured their cold-blooded murder by their hosts. Only their leader managed to escape, and he did so purely accidentally. He also sent fifteen men to **Dhat al-Talh** on the outskirts of al-Sham in order to call its people to Islam. There too, the messengers of Muhammad and the missionaries of faith were put to death in cold-blood' (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, 1976, p.387). It was also reported that the northern Christian tribes killed those among them who had professed Islam, leaving the Muslims therefore no choice but to fight them for their aggression and tyranny. These incidents, and others, triggered the campaigns of Mu'tah and al-Hudaybiyah, and led eventually to the conquest of al-Sham and al-Iraq.[67]

66. They also assisted the rebels during the Riddah Wars fought during the caliphate of Abu Bakr.

67. Louay M. Safi, *Peace and the Limits of War: Transcending Classical Conception of Jihad* (Herndon, USA: IIIT, 2001), pp.25-28

"Holy War" — A Misnomer[68]

"*Jihad*" is sometimes translated as "Holy War", but this is an incorrect translation that has been very misleading. The concept of "Holy War" was a medieval Christian doctrine that prescribed the killing, forced conversion, or expulsion of non-Christians. Holy wars were fought to gain dominance over a people not because of their hostility towards Christians but purely because of their adherence to a different ideology. Though there were "many varying theories and forms of holy war, a defining feature of its dominant expression was that it legitimized war as a means of coercing conversion to Christianity".[69] In contrast, "Holy War" does not exist in the Islamic tradition, nor can the term *jihad* "be reduced to a military matter".[70]

Jihad simply means to strive hard or struggle in pursuit of a just cause. According to the Prophet of Islam, the highest form of *jihad* is the struggle waged to cleanse oneself from the vices of the heart. "Holy war" (*al-harb al-muqaddasah*, in Arabic) is not an expression used in the Qur'anic text, the Sunnah, or the works of Muslim theologians. Indeed, close scrutiny of texts reveals that in Islamic theology, "war is never holy; it is either justified or not,"[71] and if it is a "just war", then those killed in battle are considered martyrs.

68. For an excellent discussion on the concepts of *jihad*, holy war and terrorism, see "The War on Jihad" in Waleed Aly, *People Like Us: How arrogance is dividing Islam and the West* (Sydney, Australia: Picador Pan Macmillan Australia, 2007), pp.147 177.

69. Waleed Aly, *People Like Us: How arrogance is dividing Islam and the West* (Sydney, Australia: Picador Pan Macmillan Australia, 2007), p.158

70. *Ibid*., p. 154

71. Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Place of Tolerance in Islam" title essay, in *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 2002), p.19

Are "Just Wars" and religion compatible?

Some Christians believe in pacifism, that is, non-resistance to aggression. Yet the mainstream of Christianity has always upheld the right of self-defense and the concept of a "just war." One of the earliest Christian philosophers who wrote on the subject was St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.), who listed four conditions for war to be just[72]. The Christian concept of "just war" was further elucidated by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 C.E.) and other medieval Christian thinkers, who dwelt primarily on the moral intentions of the authorities. The current Catechism of the Catholic Church maintains four conditions for war to be just.[73]

Christian thinkers over time have evolved what has come to be known as the "Just War Theory." This theory involves guidelines for when it is just to resort to war ((*jus ad bellum*, in Latin) and how to fight justly (*jus ad bello*, in Latin). This theory is the basis for the rules of war presently taught to recruits in most Western armies. Christian theological acceptance of warfare accounts for Christian churches all over the world training and posting Chaplains to the armed forces.[74]

There is, therefore, an agreement in principle between Christianity and Islam on the legitimacy of self-defense and just wars.

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72. These four conditions are: right authority, right cause, right intention and right means. See Douglas P. Lackey's *Moral Principles and Nuclear Weapons* (Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1986).
73. For more details on these conditions, see: http://catholicism.about.com/od/beliefsteachings/p/Just_War_Theory.htm
74. See also John 2:15 and Hebrews 11:32-34, on militancy and fighting respectively.

"Fundamentalists" and news-makers in the media

The media frequently employs sensational imagery in ways that subtly but strongly reinforce the association of Muslims with violence. It is common to view the carnage caused by a group whose members are Muslim alongside images of Muslim worshippers or the sounds of a Muslim call to prayer. Through regular media constructions such as these, the average viewer develops a mental connection between Muslim piety and violence. This has led to widespread fear of "Islamic fundamentalists" and their alleged religious zeal for intolerance.

Another cause of the fear of Islam is a double standard in the popular media's terminology about perpetrators of violence. Muslims who commit acts of violence are often labeled "Muslim fundamentalists", "Islamists", or "Islamic extremists" (as opposed to "moderates").[75] On the other hand, acts of violence committed by different faith groups, such as bombings of innocent people by Christian members of the IRA are portrayed simply as "IRA bombings" without the Christian tag.

Other groups of Christian militants such as the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda and the National Liberation Front of Tripura in India have committed numerous massacres without media attention on their faith. A notable case of Christian terrorism is even celebrated as a public holiday in some countries.[76] In 1605, Guy Fawkes and other Catholic revolutionaries attempted to overthrow the Protestant aristocracy of England by blowing up the British Houses of Parliament.[77]

75. For an insightful commentary on some of the terminologies used in stereotyping Muslims, see "Don't call me a moderate!" in Waleed Aly, *People Like Us: How arrogance is dividing Islam and the West* (Sydney, Australia: Picador Pan Macmillan Australia, 2007), pp. 54-70.

76. Guy Fawkes Day or Bonfire Night is celebrated in the UK and some other parts of the Commonwealth on November 5th.

77. Peter Steinfels "A Day to Think About a Case of Faith-Based Terrorism," *New York Times*, November 5th, 2005

None of these acts is characterized as "Christian fundamentalism" because news-makers usually consider the fact that Christianity does not condone terrorism. However, the same consideration is not usually applied to Islam.

Similarly, the racist Zionist policies of Israel are never identified as stemming from a "Jewish fundamentalist state," nor are the inflammatory remarks made by some Hindu Indian politicians identified as propagating "Hindu fundamentalism." The frequent occurrence of violence against minorities in countries with predominantly Buddhist populations such as Sri-Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand are likewise not labeled as related to "Buddhist fundamentalism" or "Buddhist extremists."

In recent history, we have witnessed an American-led "War on Terror", initiated by the administration of George W. Bush. The influence of the Christian evangelical movement on the Bush administration's imperialist foreign policies is given little coverage by the mainstream media.[78] This is not the case when it comes to media commentaries about Iran's foreign relations. Iran is portrayed as a nation whose antagonism towards others is derived primarily from its "Islamic fundamentalist agenda".

Making religion the scapegoat

Fair and objective principles should be used in evaluating any religion. Otherwise, associating only Islam with violence is historically inaccurate especially considering the record of some other faiths.

Christians, for example, fought each other for centuries in Europe, and in the **First World War** (where about 18 million

78. See Grace Halsell, *Forcing God's Hand: Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture and Destruction of the Planet Earth (Washington, D.C.: Crossroads, 2002)* for an interesting discussion on the influence of evangelical Christian thought and influence on American policy and Middle Eastern conflicts.

people were killed), and the **Second World War** (about 32 million killed). They also carried out the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (in Japan) killing thousands of innocent civilians. For centuries, pious Christians organized the **Crusades**, the massacres, isolation and forced detentions of the indigenous people of the Americas and Australia, the **Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade** from Africa to America, the **colonization** and exploitation of African and Asian countries, and the genocides of many indigenous tribes in the Caribbean and the Australian island of Tasmania.

In the last fifty years, we have witnessed bombings and killings between **Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland,** the bombings in Spain by **ETA**[79] (a militant separatist group with Catholic members[80]), the involvement of the Church in the massacres of the Hutu and Tutsi populations in Rwanda, the **Mafia** criminal organizations of Italy and America who openly espouse Catholicism, the **Colombia drug wars** dominated by Catholics, the **"ethnic cleansing",** murder and rape of the Bosnian Muslims by Serbian Orthodox armies, and the **Apartheid system of South Africa**, sanctioned by the Dutch Reformed Church. Christians are also involved in the ever-growing crime and violence in parts of the world with Christian majorities such as America, Europe and even Christian parts of West and Southern Africa (such as the Niger Delta and Johannesburg).

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79. ETA stands for "**Euskadi Ta Askatasuna," meaning "Basque Homeland and Freedom"**

80. Though ETA is a largely socialist organization and does not advocate a state religion, it utilizes Catholic doctrines for its social programs.

"Do not wish to meet the enemy, and ask Allah for safety; but when you face the enemy, be steadfast, and remember that Paradise is under the shade of swords."

Nonetheless, it would not be right to conclude that this violence by some Christians is a reflection of the teachings of Christianity. It would also not be fair to conclude that **Joseph Stalin** (who was an orthodox Christian), **Adolf Hitler** (who was Roman Catholic), **Joseph Kony** (the Christian rebel leader of the "Lord's Resistance Army" who was responsible for large-scale massacres in Uganda), or **Charles Taylor** (a Protestant Liberian dictator responsible for wide-scale atrocities during Sierra Leone's civil war) are each representative of their respective faiths, even if the perpetrators of some of these actions claimed to act in the name of Christ.

Likewise, **Hindus** perpetuating injustices against minority Muslims in India, **Israeli Jews** committing international human rights violations and war crimes against Palestinians, **Buddhist guerrillas** in countries like Myanmar and Cambodia, and **suicide bombers in Sri-Lanka** could not claim to be true representatives of the teachings of their faiths.

Furthermore, individual and state-sponsored violence is done not just in the name of religion or God, but also in the name of national security, national interest, communism, Marxism, freedom fighting, social order, ethnic purity, peace, "civilization", "purging out terrorists", etc. Nonetheless, the majority of terrorists are feared to be Muslim due to the perception of Western nations that those who hold the most volatile resentments towards them are Muslims.

Is the promise of martyrdom not proof of Islam's glorification of war?

Some people have questioned the promise of Allah in the Qur'an that those who are killed while engaged in military *jihad* (i.e. fighting in the cause of justice or resistance against evil and

aggression) will go to Paradise.

A martyr (*shaheed*, in Arabic) according to most religions and nations is a person slain in the pursuit of truth or justice. Martyrdom in Islam is not just attained through being killed in war, but includes having died through fire, drowning, lung infections, and childbirth.[81]

According to the Qur'an, every martyr is granted Paradise, and every one who is granted Paradise is promised their heart's content: "*We are close unto you in the life of this world and in the life to come; and in that [life to come] you shall have all that your souls may desire, and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for, as a ready welcome from Him who is Oft-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Grace*" (Q.41:31). Given the conditions discussed earlier above for a just war in Islam, such a reward does not seem unreasonable for someone who has sacrificed his/her life to protect the lives of others, truth and justice.

In conclusion, the Islamic concept of *Jihad* does not advocate aggression, nor is it opposed to peaceful relations with non-Muslims. It permits militant action in response to aggression, under certain conditions. The attitude expected of Muslims towards friend or foe is summarized in Qur'an 60:8-9 which says; *"As for such (of the unbelievers) as do not fight against you on account of (your) faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness (tabarrū*, in Arabic*) and to behave towards them with full equity: for verily, God loves those who act equitably. God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards such as fight against you because of (your) faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid*

81. See *Riyadh us-Salibeen*, no.1359 and 1361, pp.228-229. See also Abu Dawood, no.1367 in *Alim 6.0* on the seven types of martyrdom, six of which have nothing to do with combat.

(others) in driving you forth: and as for those (from among you) who turn towards them in friendship, it is they, they who are truly wrongdoers!"

Religious tolerance is sanctioned by the Qur'an itself, which states, "The truth is from your Lord, so whosoever wishes let him believe, and whosoever wishes let him deny", while Qur'an 109:1-6 ends with "…unto you (the unbelievers) your religion, and unto me, mine" (Q.18:29).

PART II: THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

One of the most widely spread misconceptions against Islam, resurfacing in recent times, and a major cause of fear of the Muslim world by Non-Muslims, is that Islam sanctions forced conversion and violence against non-Muslims purely on the basis of differences in belief. The result is fear of Islam or Muslim presence in the minds of those who value freedom of religion. This fear lends popular support to the policies of 'divide and conquer' by some non-Muslim governments throughout the Muslim world. The following discourse clarifies commonly misinterpreted verses of the Qur'an and hadith which some non-Muslims and misinformed Muslims use to justify the spread of Islam by force. This presentation argues that the idea that Islam was spread by the sword is both false and logically implausible in view of certain demographic and historical realities.

"Was Islam not spread by the sword? And does Islam not prescribe in some ways the forced conversion of non-Muslims?"

The Qur'an makes it clear how its message is to be spread. The Prophet (ﷺ) was told by Allah, *"Your duty is only to proclaim..."* (Q.36:17), "*Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching...*" (Q.16:125), "*Say: 'The truth has now come from your Sustainer. Let then he who wills believe in it, and let he who wills reject it"* (Q.18:29) and "*Let there be no compulsion in religion...*" (Q.2:256). In fact, the word "Islam" itself connotes *conscious and willing submission to Allah's will.* If someone is forced to become a "Muslim", he is submitting to the will of the one who forced him and not really to Allah.

The Qur'an condemns aggression in any form. See, for example, Q.21:107; 16:125-128; 33:21; 49:9-10; 2:190, etc. All these references admonish believers about peace. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was also a man of peace and he preached peaceful coexistence between the Muslims and non-Muslims throughout his life. Hadith and *Sirah* (Prophetic history) literature cite numerous examples of his kind and generous treatment of non-Muslim neighbors, and even tribes who had been defeated in battles against Muslims. The homage and tolerance demonstrated by early Caliphs towards non-Muslims is thus a direct result of their faithful adherence to such religious teachings.[82]

> *"Say: 'The truth has now come from your Sustainer. Let then he who wills, believe in it, and let he who wills, reject it"* (Q.18:29)

Commonly misinterpreted verses of the Qur'an

Reference has already been made in the previous topic of "Jihad" to some misinterpreted Qur'anic verses on fighting non-Muslims. The following quotes are also mentioned by critics as demonstrative of the Qur'an's inciting violence against non-Muslims who do not convert to Islam:[83]

1) "*And fight them until there is no fitnah and religion is for Allah.*" (Q.2:193)

This quote does not report the verse in full, which reads, "*And fight them (qātilū hum) until there is no fitnah (oppression) and religion is for Allah, but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.*" (Q.2:193) The explanation of

82. Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993).

83. These quotes are written here as they appear in the works of critics. Note that in some cases, the quote is actually a misquotation of the Qur'an or misrepresents the message in its context. These will be noted as we proceed.

Ibn Umar and Ibn Zubair on the meaning of this verse is that aggressors are to be fought until a Muslim is no longer threatened with killing and arrest on account of his faith.[84] The context of Q.2:190-193 makes it clear that those being fought against are those who are aggressive to Muslims. The phrase "*religion is for Allah*" means until Allah is worshipped without fear of persecution and none is compelled to bow down before another being.

Aggressors are to be fought until a Muslim is no longer threatened with killing and arrest on account of his faith.

2) "*Strike terror (into the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies.*" (Q.8:60)

This is an example of selective quoting out of context by some critics of Islam. The entire passage reads, *"Let not the disbelievers think that they can get the better (of the believers); they will never frustrate (them, with aggression). Against them, make ready your strength to your utmost power, including steeds of war, to strike terror (into the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies (too), and others besides whom you may not know but whom Allah does know…But if the enemy incline towards peace, do you (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah"* (Q.8:59-61).

Hence, the context explains that the "*enemies*" being referred to, and whom believers are to strengthen themselves against, are those already aggressive to them in one way or another and who are attempting to frustrate the community, until they incline towards peace. The verse enjoins sufficient preparation of resources so that enemies

84. Sheikh Khalid Abdul-Qadir (Fiqh al-Aqaliyyat al-Muslimah. Lebanon: Darul-Iman, 1998). See also *al-Isabah*, vol.2, p.347.

will be psychologically deterred from attacking Muslims, through fear of the consequences.[85]

3) "*I will instill terror into the hearts of the disbelievers. Smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them. It is not you who slew them, it was Allah.*" (Q.8:12-17)

This quote is not only out of context but it omits the full contents of the passage (verses 12-17).[86] The full context reads, "*(Remember) when your Lord inspired the angels, 'Verily, I am with you, so keep firm those who have believed. I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who have disbelieved, so strike them over their necks and smite over all their finger-tips.' This is because they defied and disbelieved Allah and His Messenger. And whoever defies and disobeys Allah and His Messenger, then verily, Allah is severe in punishment. This is the torment, so taste it, and surely for disbelievers is the torment of the Fire (in the Hereafter). O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve advancing on a battlefield, do not turn your backs to them. And whoever turns his back to them on such a day unless it be a stratagem of war or to retreat to a troop (of believers) he has indeed drawn upon himself wrath from Allah… You killed them not, but Allah caused them to be killed. And it was not you who cast when you did cast but it was Allah who cast, that He might test the believers by a fair trial from Him… This (is the truth), and surely, Allah weakens the deceitful plots of the disbelievers*" (Q.8:12-18). Even if it is interpreted that the angels physically engaged in combat, verses 15-17 make it clear that it took place in the context of the battlefield, with disbelievers who were present for combat.

85. The "terror" being referred to could, for instance, be through letting others know what weapons are being accumulated to strengthen one's military capacity.

86. The quote only includes portions of verse 12 and 17, making it seem as if they follow one another.

4) "*Fight them and Allah will punish them by your hands, cover them with shame.*" (Q.9:14)

Again, the context of the verse explains what is meant: "*Will you not fight people who violated their oaths, plotted to expel the Messenger, and were the first to attack you? Do you fear them? No, it is Allah who you should more justly fear if you believe. Fight them, and Allah will punish them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you (to victory) over them, heal the hearts of believers.*" (Q.9:13-14).

Here, Allah is consoling the fear of the believers who have been persecuted and oppressed on account of their faith for a long time, and encourages them to fight back, knowing that He will aid them to victory and security.

5) "*Fight the disbelievers… let them find harshness in you, and know that Allah is with those who fear Him.*" (Q.9:123)

This quote conveniently omits the portion of the verse which explains which disbelievers are to be fought against. The entire verse reads, "*O you who believe, fight the disbelievers who are surrounding you; let them find harshness (or firmness[87]) in you, and know that Allah is with those who are God-conscious (have taqwa).*" This verse, similar to the previous one, is meant to give courage to the believers against those who are preparing to attack them, with the reassurance that Allah is with those who are pious.

Fighting, in all such cases, was not on account of non-Islamic faith *per se*, but on account of the aggression and treachery initiated by certain groups. Muhammad Asad notes that "all

87. "…and let them find you adamant …" i.e. "Uncompromising with regard to ethical principles" (Muhammad Asad's translation and commentary, p.285, n.163 to Q9:123).

Islamic jurists, without any exception hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin".[88]

"All Islamic jurists, without any exception hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin"

- Muhammad Asad

Commonly misinterpreted Ahadith (sing. hadith)

The following *Ahadith* have also been misinterpreted to suggest that Islam should be spread by force:

1) "*I have been ordered to fight the people until they say, 'There is none worthy of worship but God.'*"[89]

The Arabic word in this hadith is not "*uqtul*" (from *qatl* - "fight" or "kill"). Rather, the verb used is "*uqaatil*,"(from *qaatal*) which means "to fight back", a meaning more ambiguous than *qatl* which implies taking the first initiative. The word "*qaatal*" implies reciprocity, and thus may not be used for a scenario where one initiates attack without provocation. This act of fighting with a people may also not contradict the injunctions of the Qur'an on the type of people to be fought, the specific exemptions mentioned in Q.2:193, 9:4-7, 4:90 and others like them, all

88. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), p.58, n.249 to Q.2:256.

89. **'Abridged' Sahih al-Bukhari**, vol.4, no.196; Zaki al-Din al-Mundhiri, *Mukhtasar Sahih Muslim*, ed. Nasiruddin al-Albani (Al-Maktab al-Islami wa Dar al-Arabiyyah, 1972), p.8

of which should be read in their contexts, as well as the example of the Prophet (ﷺ).[90]

The second aspect of this hadith conveys the sacredness of the declaration of faith in One God, since it is one of the means (and not the only means!) for terminating combat.[91] This understanding has also been demonstrated by the Prophet (ﷺ) in other hadith where he chastised a believer for killing an enemy in battle after the enemy uttered the declaration of faith on the brink of being defeated.

Like any other hadith or verse of the Qur'an, the hadith under consideration cannot be interpreted outside the context of the whole Qur'an and Sunnah, neglecting other explicit statements in the Qur'an and hadith on this issue, and disregarding the rules of interpretation (*tafisr*) of religious texts. Furthermore, it would be wrong to try and conclude that this hadith (or any other hadith) abrogates any of the verses of the Qur'an on this topic. "*There is no compulsion in religion*" (Q2:256)

2) "*A party of my community shall not cease fighting for truth and it shall be triumphant over its opponents.*"[92]

The commentary of An-Nawawi on this hadith states, "This

90. Even those who interpret the above hadith as permitting aggression towards polytheists restrict it to only the pagan Arabs who, at the time of the Prophet (), were notorious for breaking their treaties and continuously fighting and conspiring against the Muslim community. This is based on the understanding that the fighting enjoined in Q.9:5 was only in respect of aggressive polytheist Arabs, and thus not applicable to non-Arab polytheists, "People of the Book", Sabians, etc. (See Louay Safi, *Peace and the Limits of War: Transcending Classical Conception of Jihad,* Herndon, USA: IIIT, 2001, pp.12-15, citing authorities such as Abu Hanifa, al-Shafi'i, Malik, and Abu Yusuf).

91. Other means to cease fighting include: surrendering or seeking peace (Q8:61, 2:193), seeking Muslim protection (Q.5:6), becoming a citizen and paying the *jizyah* or military exemption tax (Q9:29), etc.

92. *Abu Dawood*

party consists of different classes of the faithful, of them being the brave fighters, and the jurists, and the collectors of hadith, and the *zuhad* (those who abstain from worldly lusts and devote themselves to the service of Allah), and those who command the doing of good and prohibit evil, and a variety of other people who do other good deeds."[93] This commentary elaborates that the fighting for truth mentioned by the hadith is not restricted to the battlefield but indeed refers to any form of benefit to Islam and humanity.

3) "*Paradise is under the shade of swords.*"[94]

The hadith in full assists in clarifying its meaning: "*Do not wish to meet the enemy, and ask Allah for safety; but when you face the enemy, be patient, and remember that Paradise is under the shade of swords.*" This hadith, rather than encouraging warfare, discourages believers from seeking it. However, it reassures them that if it becomes unavoidable and one gets killed by the sword, then Paradise is the reward of a martyr.

The battles fought during the lifetime of the Prophet were in defense of the young Islamic State against the pagan forces of Arabia who tried to destroy it, and the surrounding imperial powers. For twenty years, the fledgling Muslim community had patiently undergone torturous persecution. When the strategy of non-violence was no longer bearable (and the threat of physical extermination became imminent), the early Muslim community was granted the permission to fight to protect themselves and their freedom to maintain an Islamic state.

What about Muslim conquests?

Some have argued that Muslim conquests are an evidence of the spread of Islam by the sword. However, it must be mentioned

93. **Awn al-Ma'bud**
94. *'Abridged' Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol.4, no.73

that these events of history were never a means of converting others to Islam or of spreading the religion. They were only a means of securing political and societal security in potentially hostile environments. This was particularly so when "any significant power of their day was essentially in a conquer-or-be-conquered situation."[95]

"Military expeditions were political in nature and not undertaken for the purpose of forcing conversion to Islam as an alternative to the sword… Conversion was accepted, of course, but not encouraged, and for a number of centuries Christians remained the majority in much of what was nominally Muslim territory."

- Historian Jane Smith

Conquests were sometimes necessary as the only reasonable option when living in environments dominated by aggressive empires (such as Persia and Byzantium) that were hostile to one's group or community. In such situations, a state could establish treaties and covenants with others similar to the NATO alliance. It could alternatively join forces with its allies in conquering those who would otherwise refuse peace treaties and who, if they had the chance, would participate in conquering such a state. Records of such treaties, including those which allowed for neutrality on the part of non-Muslim territories, may be found in the accounts of renowned historians.[96]

"…any significant power of their day was essentially in a conquer-or-be-conquered situation."

- Jeffery Lang

At the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), the surrounding "Super-Powers", the Persian Sassanid and Byzantine Empires were ruled by brute force and competed with each other for control of

95. Jeffrey Lang, *Struggling to Surrender: Some Impressions of an American Convert to Islam* (Beltsville, USA: Amana Publications, 1994), p.190.

96. For example, Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqaat al-Kabir*, vol.1, p.2, 26-27, 48; vol.2, p.1 & 3; Ibn Hisham, *Seerah al-Nabi*, pp.341-344; Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaayah wal-Nihaayah*, vol.3, pp.224-226; and Al-Tabari, *Al-Tarikh*, vol.1, p.2659, 2826 & 3244.

populations and resources. With ambitious plans for expansion, the empires both competed in usurping ever more land for their own power and glory, oppressing their subjects including some of those belonging to the same religion. In such hostile territory, the only way for a community to survive was to form alliances and fight those who were planning to crush them. When the Persian King Khusraw Parvez died, for instance, the Muslim army was dispatched to quickly take advantage of the instability and secure themselves against further Persian might. Such preventive means against the threat of aggression were the basis for the battles of Banu al-Mustaliq, Khaibar and Hunain.[97]

"For many Christians the arrival of Islam was actually seen as a liberation from the tyranny of fellow Christians rather than as a menace or even a challenge to their own faith"

The conquests brought not subjugation but liberation of the conquered people. Orientalist historian, Jane Smith (1999), writes that:

> The Byzantine state ruled its eastern subjects with an authority that was often experienced as ruthless and oppressive. Thus it was that many Oriental Christians welcomed Muslim political authority as a relief from Byzantine oversight and cooperated with their new Muslim rulers. This was one of the most important factors in the remarkable ease with which Islam was able to spread across Christian lands… For many Christians the arrival of Islam was actually seen as a liberation from the tyranny of fellow Christians rather than as a menace or even a challenge to their own faith.[98]

Smith continues that:

> The grandfather of John of Damascus, for example, was instrumental in the capitulation of Damascus to the forces of the Muslim commander Khalid ibn al-Walid in 635 [C.E.], signalling the end of Byzantine rule in Syria. Tensions between Syria and Constantinople had been high because

97. Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Muslim Conduct of State* (Lahore: Hafeez Press, 1977), p.193
98. Jane I. Smith, "Islam and Christendom: Historical, Cultural, and Religious Interaction from the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries" in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), Ch.7, p.311.

> of theological disagreements between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians as well as for reasons of taxation and heavy-handed Byzantine rule. The arrival of the Muslims in Damascus was welcomed by a significant portion of the population, many of whom were only vaguely aware that their new rulers represented another religious faith.[99]

The very first conquest was the Conquest of Makkah, a bloodless takeover which the Prophet (ﷺ) undertook after the Pagan Quraysh violated the terms of their peace treaty.[100] Upon successfully securing Makkah, the Prophet (ﷺ) reminded the people of how for twenty years the Muslim community endured religious persecution, unjust confiscation of their property, continuous invasions and hostilities. He then proclaimed, "*May God pardon you. Go in peace there shall be no responsibility on you today. You are free!*" and, without leaving a single soldier in Makkah, he proceeded to appoint a Makkan chief as governor and returned to Madina.[101]

Charters issued by the Prophet (ﷺ) to conquered communities guaranteed plentiful rights to non-Muslims.[102] This example was followed by the Prophet's successors. The Caliph Umar's treaty with the non-Muslims of Jerusalem, for instance, states:

> This is the assurance of security (*amān*) which the servant of Allah, Umar, the Commander of the Faithful, has granted to the people of Jerusalem. He has given them an assurance of safety for themselves, for their property, their churches, their crosses, the sick and the healthy of the city, and for all the rituals that belong to their religion. Their churches will not be inhabited [by Muslims] and will not be destroyed. Neither they nor the land on which

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99. *Ibid.*, pp.311-312
100. Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Muslim Conduct of State* (Lahore: Hafeez Press, 1977), p.193.
101. *Ibid.*, P.13
102. An example of such a charter may be found at http://salam.muslimsonline.com/~azahoor/charter1.html. See also A. Thomson and M. Ata'ur-Rahim, *Islam in Andalus* (London, UK: Ta Ha Publishers, 1996) for mention of the rights and privileges given to the Non-Muslims of Spain under the Andalusian Caliphate.

they stand, nor their cross, nor their property will be damaged. They will not be forcibly converted.[103]

"It was not until the Western nations broke away from their religious law that they became more tolerant, and it was only when the Muslims fell away from their religious law that they declined in tolerance and other evidences of the highest culture…"

Of similar import is the assurance declared by Khalid ibn al-Walid with the people of Damascus:

> This is what Khalid b. Walid gives to the inhabitants of Damascus. He gives them security for their persons, property, churches, and the wall of their city. None of their houses shall be destroyed or confiscated. On these terms they have alliance with God, and the protection of His Prophet, the caliphs, and the believers. Nothing but good shall befall them if they pay tribute.[104]

Conquered non-Muslims are further given a year in which to decide whether they wish to be citizens of a Muslim state or leave for another territory, but never forced to become Muslims.[105]

These guarantees were extended to conquered non-Muslims long after the Prophet's time. For example, Jane Smith writes that "Records of the time indicate that Saladin's treatment of the Christian population was humane and reasonable, in notable contrast to the way in which Christians had earlier dealt with Muslims and Jews upon their arrival in Jerusalem."[106]

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103. Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol.12, "The Battle of al-Qadisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine", trans. from Arabic by Yohanan Friedmann (Albany, USA: State University of New York Press, 1992), p.191.
104. A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of Umar* (London: Frank Cass, 1970), p.9, quoting Ibn Athir.
105. Maawardee, *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, p.132, cited in Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Muslim Conduct of State* (Lahore: Hafeez Press, 1977), p.222
106. Jane I. Smith, "Islam and Christendom: Historical, Cultural, and Religious Interaction from the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries" in The Oxford History of Islam, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), Ch.7, pp.305-345, quote on p.339

Conquests therefore, where absolutely necessary, were only for state security, and not for forcing anyone to accept Islam.[107] Indeed, historical records show that conquests are not limited to non-Muslims. Past Muslim rulers in some territories have even conquered other Muslim lands. For example, the Ottoman Empire had a number of clashes with the Shi'a Safavid Empire of Persia, and succeeded in conquering the Sunni Mamluk Sultanate of Arabia in the early sixteenth century CE.[108]

> "When the Moors (Muslims) were driven out of Spain, the Christian conquerors held a terrific persecution of the Jews. Those who were fortunate enough to escape fled, some of them to Morocco and many hundreds to the Turkish Empire, where their descendants still live in separate communities, and still speak among themselves an antiquated form of Spanish."
>
> - Marmaduke Pickthall

The Ottomans embarked upon a great number of conquests which frequently clashed with the imperial powers of Europe. Like other expansionist empires of the time, Ottoman rulers were at times excessive in their show of might.

Yet for those who insist that Islam was spread by the sword[109], one could ask:

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107. This is echoed by Jane Smith, who writes, "Military expeditions were political in nature and not undertaken for the purpose of forcing conversion to Islam as an alternative to the sword… Conversion was accepted, of course, but not encouraged, and for a number of centuries Christians remained the majority in much of what was nominally Muslim territory." (*Ibid.*, P.312)

108. Bernard Lewis, *Istanbul and the Civilisation of the Ottoman Empire* (Oklahoma, USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp.28-31. The Muslim world was rarely ever a single polity which was ruled by one individual or party. Historically, its lands were ruled over by various dynasties, sultanates, empires, emirates etc., many of which existed within the same time period. At varying intervals, one would conquer many of the others within a particular territory and succeed in overall leadership of the conglomerate, though (like Non-Muslim subjects) each subjected Muslim sultanate would have a significant amount of autonomy in the governance of its own people. Notable autonomous sultanates included the Fatimid Sultanate in Egypt, the Mughal Empire in South Asia, and the Sokoto Caliphate in what is now Northern Nigeria.

109. i.e. by forced conversion

a) How is it that there are estimated to be up to 14 million indigenous non-Muslims (mainly Christians and Jews) in the Middle East within the predominantly Muslim countries?[110] If Islam was spread by the sword, such a number could not have still existed. By contrast, when the Christians conquered Spain after 8 centuries of Muslim rule, not a single Muslim or Jew was allowed to survive and live there with religious freedom.[111] Indeed, Jewish refugees fleeing from the Inquisition settled primarily in Muslim countries for care, protection, and the freedom to exist as Jews.[112]
b) What explains the fact that in Madina, the city-state of Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ), there were non-Muslim citizens living there with others sojourning there for visits, trade and treaties, etc.[113]?
c) What explains the historical fact that Islam spread faster during times of peace, such as after the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, than during times of war?

110. See http://phoenicia.org/christiansmea.html. Last accessed in April 2005.
111. "In 1474 Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, husband and wife, succeeded to conjoint but separate thrones. For the first time in nearly eight centuries the Iberian peninsula was governed by one united authority, the Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. The king and queen were remembered as 'the Catholic monarchs,' a measure of their dedication to the reuniting of all of Spain under Christendom… The takeover was followed by intense efforts at conversion, accompanied by translation of the Christian scripture and liturgy into Arabic. Soon baptisms were no longer optional but forced, and by the turn of the fifteenth century not only in Granada but throughout Castile Muslims had to choose between conversion, emigration, or death." (Smith, *op. cit.*, p.344).
112. "When the Moors were driven out of Spain, the Christian conquerors held a terrific persecution of the Jews. Those who were fortunate enough to escape fled, some of them to Morocco and many hundreds to the Turkish Empire, where their descendants still live in separate communities, and still speak among themselves an antiquated form of Spanish." (M. Pickthall, *Cultural Side of Islam*, Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1966, p.92.
113. Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Fiqh-u-Seerah: Understanding the Life of Prophet Muhammad.* Revised edition with hadith authenticated by Nasiruddeen al-Albani (Riyadh: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1995), pp.194-199.

d) What explains the instances that people who conquered Muslims' lands, such as the Mongols in Baghdad[114], themselves converted to Islam after coming to know it better?

e) How come the majority of Muslims live in places where not a single Muslim soldier went for conquest, such as Indonesia, which has the world's highest Muslim population of over 200 million[115]?

f) Which "sword" is it that has made Islam presently the fastest growing religion in the world, especially in the West where Muslims are a minority with no military strength[116]?

While there may be instances where Muslims failed to follow the teachings of Islam and attempted to convert others by force, historical records show that this failure is not expressed by Muslims alone. Marmaduke Pickthall remarks that:

> It was not until the Western nations broke away from their religious law that they became more tolerant, and it was only when the Muslims fell away from their religious law that they declined in tolerance and other evidences of the highest culture… Of old, tolerance had existed here and there in the world, among enlightened individuals; but those individuals had always been against the prevalent religion… Before the coming of Islam, it (tolerance) had never been preached as an essential part of religion.[117]

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114. Sir Thomas Arnold, *The Spread of Islam in the World: A History of Peaceful Preaching* (Goodword Books, 2002), Chapter 8.

115. See *Microsoft Encarta Premium 2009*. See also *Indonesia* in *Islam: A Challenge for Christianity* by Kng H. and Moltmann J. (Eds.), 1994, p.23 and http://www.theglobalist.com/nor/quiz/2001/08-07-01.shtml, 2001.

116. See: Jonah Blank, "The Muslim Mainstream", *US News*, July 20th, 1998; The Population Reference Bureau, *USA Today*, Feb. 17th, 1989, p.4A; Lucy Berrington, "Why British Women are Turning to Islam", *The Times*, Nov. 9th, 1993; Chris L. Jenkins, "Islam Luring More Latinos", *Washington Post*, Jan. 7th, 2001, p.C01; Tara Dooley, "Searching Americans Embrace the Logic Behind the Teachings of Islam", *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 8th, 1999.

117. Marmaduke Pickthall, *Tolerance*, (5th in a series of lectures on Islamic Civilisation given in Madras, India, 1927), published in *The Cultural Side of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1966), p.96

Non-Muslim scholars on the spread of Islam

Overcoming centuries of deep-rooted prejudice, renowned non-Muslim scholars on Islam and history have themselves now conceded that the idea of Islam spreading by force is no more than an illusory tale.

"…The legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated."

- De Lacy O'Leary

De Lacy O'Leary, for example, writes, "History makes it clear… that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated."[118]

Hindu Professor Ramakrishna Rao states, "The theory of Islam and the sword… is not heard now in any quarter worth the name. The principle of Islam that 'there is no compulsion in religion' is well-known."[119]

James A. Michener writes, "No other religion in history spread so rapidly as Islam… The West has widely believed that this surge of religion was made possible by the sword. But no modern scholar accepts that idea and the Qur'an is explicit in support of the freedom of conscience."[120]

Historian **Edward Gibbon** reports (1870), "The greatest success of Muhammad's life was effected by sheer moral force *without the stroke of a sword.*"[121]

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118. De Lacy O'Leary, in *Islam at the Crossroads*, by Muhammad Asad (London, 1923), p.8
119. K.S. Ramakrishna Rao, *Islam and Modern Age* (Hyderabad, 1978).
120. James A. Michener, *Islam: The Misunderstood Religion*, Reader's Digest (American edition), May 1955.
121. Edward Gibbon, *History of the Saracen Empire* (London, 1870), emphasis added.

"*Let there be no compulsion in religion...*" - Qur'an 2:256

Professor Emeritus Sir Thomas Arnold writes: "…of any organised attempt to force the acceptance of Islam on the non-Muslim population, or of any systematic persecution intended to stamp out the Christian religion, we hear nothing. Had the Caliphs chosen to adopt either course of action, they might have swept away Christianity as easily as Ferdinand and Isabelle drove Islam out of Spain; by the same method which Louis XIV followed to make Protestantism a creed whose followers were to be sentenced to death in France; or with the same ease of keeping the Jews away from England for a period of three hundred [and] fifty years. The Eastern Churches in Asia were entirely cut off from communion with the rest of Christendom throughout which no one would have been found to lift a finger on their behalf, as heretical communions. So that the very survival of these Churches to the present day is a strong proof of the generally tolerant attitude of the Mohammedan [sic] governments towards them."[122]

Thus, from what we now know of history, it is fair to say that the rapid spread of Islam may be more accurately attributed to the "sword of truth" and not the "sword of steel".

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122. Sir Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (London: Westminster A. Constable & Co., 1896), p.80.

PART III: JIHAD, RETALIATION AND FORGIVENESS

Because Islam permits retaliation, some have assumed that Islam prescribes it as preferable or as the ideal in line with fostering a sense of fear among its followers and domination over non-Muslims. Some have condemned Islam for even permitting retaliation rather than promoting unconditional forgiveness alone, irrespective of provocation by others. Christians, in particular, commonly quote the instance of Jesus (peace be upon him) not punishing the woman who committed adultery, arguing that only a sinless person has the moral right to enforce justice. The argument continues that the emphasis on loving and forgiving one's enemy demonstrates the spiritual superiority of Christianity (and some other faiths), while Muslims are over-concerned with killing and punishment. This forms the background for the question that follows.

"How can Islam claim to be a religion of peace and forgiveness when it clearly permits retaliation or vengeance?"

Islam upholds the value of virtues such as justice, love and mercy, and each plays a prominent role in the lives of individual Muslims as well as the functions of the Muslim State. Indeed, mercy is considered one of the highest virtues and is considered a gift from Allah for use by all Creation.

Equitable retribution is permissible in Islam (through the right legal channels), when one is wronged (Q.2:194), but Allah makes it clear in Qur'an 16:126: "*And if you have to respond to an attack, respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you; but to bear yourselves with patience is indeed far better for you, (since God is with) those who are patient in adversity.*" In other words, it is considered better in Islam to show patience and forgiveness under such a situation. Man thus has the free will to choose the most reasonable course of action in a particular situation and he is responsible for his choice.

> *"But (remember that an attempt at) requiting an evil may, too, become an evil: hence, whoever pardons (his foe) and makes peace, his reward rests with God…"*
>
> - Qur'an 42:40- 43

Unrestrained vengeance and vendetta (such as blood feuds between entire clans for the death of a single member) were features of pre-Islamic Arabia, and Islam was able to uproot such practices. Forgiveness was encouraged by the Prophet (ﷺ). It was reported in a hadith by Anas that the Prophet (ﷺ) never retaliated against any personal assault on him and never raised his hand to beat anybody.[123] Indeed, the Prophet's example was always mild and forgiving as taught by the Qur'an 42:40- 43:

"But (remember that an attempt at) requiting an evil may, too, become an evil: hence, whoever pardons (his foe) and makes peace, his reward rests with God for, verily, He does not love evildoers. Yet indeed, as for any who defend themselves after having been wronged no blame whatever attaches to them: blame attaches but to those who oppress (other) people and behave outrageously on earth, offending against all right: for them there is grievous suffering in store! But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon!"

123. Abu Dawood, Nasa'i

The ideal in Islam

The Islamic ideal is not only to forgive and be patient with harm done, but to respond to the bad with that which is better. In Qur'an 41:34, Allah says, "*since goodness and evil cannot be equal, repel (evil) with something that is better and lo! he between whom and you was hatred (may then become) as it were your friend and intimate.*" Qur'an 23:96 conveys the same message. In Qur'an 28:54, those who do this are promised a double reward.

> "*… since goodness and evil cannot be equal, repel (evil) with something that is better and lo! he between whom and you was hatred (may then become) as it were your friend and intimate.*"
>
> - Qur'an 41:34

Nevertheless, just retaliation is still permitted as a deterrent to would-be offenders. Otherwise, passive forgiveness in the face of all forms of oppression can lead to anarchy and destruction of the community.

Balancing forgiveness with the provision for justice

Some Christians often quote the instance of Jesus (peace be upon him) depicted in John 8:11, whose response to the Pharisees who brought a woman convicted of adultery to him for a verdict was "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." This statement is interpreted by many Christians to demonstrate Jesus' forgiveness of the woman's sin, and the superior mercy of Christianity in abrogating Jewish laws of punishment. The fact that Islam maintains punishment and retribution within its canons is presumed to demonstrate its lack of mercy.

> If only a sinless person may punish another, it would imply that no human should enforce law!

However, this argument bears some flaws. The incidence quoted of Jesus' words is not one of his abrogating Jewish law, as a full reading of the context of John 7:53 - 8:11 illustrates. Rather,

his reply was tailored to prevent falling into the trap his antagonists devised for him. Taking the statement to its full societal application would lead to serious chaos and injustice. If only a sinless person may punish another, it would imply that no human should enforce law, and no parent has the moral right to discipline their children. This would lead to the abolition of all courts, and a removal of the entire police force, under the assumption that anarchy is more spiritual. This is clearly not practical for any religion to espouse. A more realistic option is to open the doors for forgiveness but not to make it mutually exclusive to law enforcement, since this would be a precursor to opening the door to all kinds of crime, and permitting Satan to have his way. This realistic option is the one Islam maintains.

> *"…and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just; this is closest to being God-conscious…"*
>
> - Qur'an 5:8

Justice is a fundamental tenet of Islam, and is espoused by the Qur'an for all Muslims, even towards those they hate and even if it is against themselves or those they love.[124]

"O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just; this is closest to being God-conscious. And remain conscious of God; verily, God is aware of all that you do." (Qur'an 5:8)

"O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves, or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over (the claims of) either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice; for if you distort (the truth), behold, God is indeed aware of all that you do!" (Qur'an 4:135)

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124. See Qur'an 29:46; 6:108; 60:8; etc.

Hence, Islam does not prescribe punishment when it is not just. Moreover, Islam lays down very detailed procedures for giving and accepting evidence to ensure that there is minimum chance of punishing the wrong person. Also, there is a legal maxim in the Shari'ah that it is better to err in letting a guilty person go free than to err by letting an innocent person be punished.[125]

> "…it is better for a leader to make a mistake in forgiving than to make a mistake in punishing."
>
> - Tirmidhi

It is also useful to look into the authority of Jesus' statement in the incidence quoted. The entire episode of the adulteress is found in John 7:53 - 8:11, a passage about which the New International Version (and other modern Bibles) state: "the earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not have John 7:53 - 8:11." In other words, the episode of the woman caught in adultery was not part of the original gospel of John, but a later addition.[126] If its authenticity is indeed questionable, it is not appropriate to make it an authoritative basis for our understanding of God's will, or a religious principle.

125. Tirmidhi No.1011: Narrated Aisha: Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said, "Avert the infliction of prescribed penalties (*hudud*) on Muslims as much as you can, and if there is any way out, let a man go, for it is better for a leader to make a mistake in forgiving than to make a mistake in punishing." In another hadith (Abu Dawood, No. 2106): Abu Umamah ibn Sahl ibn Hunayf said that, "some companions of the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) said that one of their men suffered so much from some illness that he pined away until he was skin and bone (i.e. only a skeleton). A slave-girl of someone visited him, and he was cheered by her and had unlawful intercourse with her. When his people came to visit the patient, he told them about it. He said: Ask the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) about the legal verdict for me, for I have had unlawful intercourse with a slave-girl who visited me. So they mentioned it to the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) saying: We have never seen anyone (so weak) from illness as he is. If we bring him to you, his bones will disintegrate. He is only skin and bone. So the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) commanded them to take one hundred twigs and strike him once." Note that the normal punishment for this is a hundred stripes (Qur'an 24:2). See also Abu Dawood, no. 2079, 2085; and Muwatta vol.41, no.2 for other cases of leniency within the system of justice.

126. For more on the problems to do with the authenticity of this passage, see the footnotes to John 7:53-8:11 in the Revised Standard Version, the Living Bible, the New Jerusalem Bible, the New English Bible, the New World Translation, etc.

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RECOMMENDED WEBSITES[127]

www.altafsir.com
www.discoverislam.net
www.ietonline.org
www.irf.net
www.islam.about.com
www.islam-guide.com
www.islamic-awareness.org
www.islamicgarden.com
www.islamicity.com
www.islamicweb.com
www.islamonline.net
www.islamunveiled.com
www.jannah.com
www.jannah.org
www.masud.co.uk
www.muhaddith.com/index.html
www.muslimtube.blogspot.com
www.renaissance.com.pk
www.shamela.ws (Arabic)
www.soundvision.com/info
www.sunnipath.com
www.uga.edu/islam
www.witness-pioneer.org/
www.zaytuna.org

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127. These online resources have very useful information and products on Islam. This list is, however, far from being exhaustive, as new websites debut on the internet daily. Other Islamic websites may be even more informative than the above listed, and whereas these websites are recommended, not all the views and opinions expressed in them necessarily reflect those of DIN or the IET.