

THE CONCEPT OF JEHAD IN ISLAM

Safdar Hasan Siddiqi

(Presented at PN War College in Lahore on 24th September, 1998)

Prior to giving my views on the concept of Jihad in Islam, I would like to dwell briefly on certain premises of which a clear understanding is necessary. We must have a clear understanding of the philosophy of life i.e. purpose of creation of the universe and of the man by God. Unless we grasp these two aspects of our life we will not be able to understand the meaning of Jihad and Islam. This purpose is given in the Quran in the following surahs/verses:

surah 7 verses 54 to 55. surah 21 verses 16-19, surah 21 verses 30-33, surah 29 verse 44, surah 30 verses 7-8, surah 36 verses 81-83, surah 41 verses 9-12, surah 51 verses 47-51, surah 55 verses 1-8, and surah 45 verse 13

1. According to the Quran the universe was created in six phases (periods) while each phase is of one thousand years. The whole universe, right from the earth to the skies above, constitutes a complete system that is working under strict laws of Nature. This universe is based on reality and not on superstitions and imaginations. Only those who conform to realities and facts will meet with success here and secure roots in the soil. Man has progressed and constructed all things only after discovering the laws working behind all things in the world. All the forces of nature have been subdued by God and delivered for the service of man.
2. As regards the purpose behind the creation of man, God says in the Quran "We have not created the universe and the earth without a purpose" (*surah 27, verse 16*). It is evident from the whole divine scheme of the creation that the universe has been created to assist man in rising continuously from the depth of ignorance to the heights of learning and excellence which has been destined for him (of course as a result of his own efforts). This process, however, is subject to the universal law of struggle

between the true and untrue. This world is a seriously constituted and established system in which no evil can thrive, and must finally die away. The human being has been endowed with two basic qualities: those of love and creativity. It is on account of these qualities that through collective efforts man will succeed eventually in bringing about an exemplary society having a sound socio-economic structure that will enable human being to raise their standard of living and understanding and ensure prosperity and intellectual fulfilment for all human beings.

3. We must also understand before we go any further that human life is a continuing struggle (*jihad*) amidst two segments of human society: one, the oppressed and two, the oppressor. The nature of oppression may vary with the various tiers and levels of society but the class struggle will remain the main factor, which upsets the equilibrium of human existence and hinders human progress and prosperity.
4. Another thing to be understood well is that the removal of disparity and injustice between people has been the main responsibility given to the Prophets to discharge. All the Prophets played similar roles. They brought the human being out of the darkness of ignorance of the former ages, and prepared them for the coming ages by equipping them with relatively modern thoughts and behaviours. They relieved them of racial, religious and other prejudices and the spell of outdated and harmful customs and traditions that hamper the fostering of fraternal relationship and mutual co-operation. Retrogressive thoughts are a hurdle in the way of learning and understanding of the purpose of life, and derail efforts of well-meaning and talented people for making innovations and inventions in order to create better living conditions for the human society.
5. Another factor that needs to be remembered is that God will not descend Himself upon the earth to fulfil the objectives of His creation – the Universe and Man. These will be achieved by His best creation—man and his counterpart woman—in whom He has endowed with all the necessary qualities to make their worldly abode an abode of peace and plenty. Thus the Will of God will be fulfilled and his undeniable greatness proved beyond any

ambiguity. It is the wilful and sustained efforts of man (God's creation) that will bring this to happen.

6. It should also be understood that the main function of a human being is to be friendly and cheerful, to be helpful and fruitful to others, and to individually and collectively prepare for "*Jihad*" against the individual oppressors as well as the oppressive system, which has been constructed by the vested interests over the centuries. They are in the habit of usurping the rights and privileges of their fellow beings and subjecting them to insults and injuries, both economic and social. Such bad elements are able to have their own way because they do not face any organised resistance from the so-called noble, high born, gentle and pious persons of the middle and upper- middle classes of our society and the religious elite. These elements are in fact collaborators in the foul game of usurpation of the rights of the people.

Now, to come to the subject of today's discourse "Concept of Jihad in Islam", it cannot be honestly and truthfully dealt with, and justice cannot be done to it, unless we bring out the true meanings of the two basic words often used of "Islam" and "*Jihad*", and dwell deep into their import.

Islam: The word "Islam" was first used by God when he asked Prophet Abraham to accept Islam as his "*deen*" (*surah* 2 verse 131) as a way of life i.e. to submit to Him alone and to no one else, and to reject all false deities invented by the vested interests among men. The meaning of Islam was perfected during the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a way of life for the human beings (*surah* 5 verse 3). All the Prophets named in the Quran, and even those who have not been named therein, were Prophets of Islam. The authenticity of the word is contained in the Quran. God says: "This (Quran) is exhortation and counselling for all human beings" (*surah* 12 verse 104). Quran is a guidance and a blessing for those who believe" (*surah* 10 verse 58). Thus Islam has no other meaning than that given in the Quran. Islam is not a straightjacket of "*zabta-e-hayat*" (a strictly regulated code of life); it is "a way of life", a state of mind that makes a man either productive or unproductive, progressive or retrogressive, co-operative or non-co-operative, compassionate or aggressive. The two basic declarations one has to

make to become a Muslim are: one, to affirm the oneness of God as the Creator, Sovereign and Sustainer of the universe and what it contains, and to remember Him often; and two, to perform good deeds in the service of other human beings.

There is no place in Islam for religious elitism, or for a class of Ulema feeding on sectarianism. One may have a variety of opinion about various matters, because every person has an inherent right to interpret the Quran for himself / herself as they are answerable to God for their thoughts and deeds that impinge upon the interests of the society and the state.

Jihad: The word "*Jihad*" in its overall concept means hard and sustained struggle in one's lifetime, both individually and collectively, against injustice and exploitation, oppression and suppression, illiteracy and ignorance, economic strangulation and monopoly over the means of production, perpetrated by man on man. Jihad, in relation to the security of a country against foreign aggression, would mean taking up arms for personal or national defence. A soldier, who risks his life for the defence of a progressive and just society, is indeed engaged in a *jihad*, and one who offers his life in defence of such a fruitful social structure in the time of dire need is rightly called a martyr, and remembered as a notable and exalted person. The word "*jihad*" does not apply to waging a direct or proxy war on behalf of in order to secure the vested interests and the imperialist countries in the name of Islam. Fighting wars for others' interests and calling it a *jihad* is a false concept. A war indulged in to safeguard the existence of a rotten system cannot by any stretch of imagination be called *jihad*. *Jihad* is not a war of aggression. A case in point is the Afghan war (named as "Afghan Jihad" by the vested interests) which was fought to secure American interests in Afghanistan as against those of the Soviet Union. It is height of hypocrisy, and misuse of a religious connotation, to call it a *jihad*.

Keeping in view the above definition of "Islam" and "*Jihad*", and considering the purpose of *jihad* as defined by the Quranic verses, a new and fresh meaning of Islam and *jihad* has surfaced as against the prevailing traditional meanings. In this situation I will propose that we start an educational process by which we may come out of the mental grooves we have created for ourselves by defective

thinking and weak actions in life by just listening to others and not thinking by ourselves. Let us now apply our intellect and start thinking, on our own, on positive and analytical lines that would go to improve our personalities and our life-style. Let us open up our minds and have a broader view of things around us. Let us formulate our views in such words as could be understood equally well by all human beings. Let us concentrate on fulfilling '*Haqool-ul-Ibad*' and make Islam to mean, as it originally is, giving equal rights to all human beings, especially the downtrodden irrespective of castes, creed or gender. Let Islam mean promoting peace and human fraternity, establishing true democracy, banishing hunger and poverty, removing injustice and exploitation, destroying the vested interests, promoting love, beauty and creativity in all spheres of life and, through such endeavour, develop a vibrant culture and a responsive and humane civilisation worthy of conscientious human beings.

Finally, I will respond to three scopes of the subject under study:

1. The difference between Jihad and War:

The prerequisites for designating a war as "*jihad*" are:

- (a) The participants in a *jihad* should be satisfied that they are fighting in the way of God, that they join in this *jihad* along with their financial resources with a will to die for a cause and be prepared, when hard-pressed, to migrate to other lands, and give sacrifices in His way. Jihad presumes a total effort on the part of a *mujahid*. (references taken from Quran *surah 9* verses 19-23)
- (b) The society should be free from any compulsions imposed by the governments, the religious elite, and those said to be imposed by the "*faqih*s" (theologians). Jihad entails a persistent struggle to create, and to secure, a society based on the principles enunciated in the Quran.
- (c) One's fathers, sons, brothers, wives and other relatives should not be dearer to the *mujahids* than *jihad* in the way of God and His Prophet. (*surah 9* verse 23).

2. Concept of war as propounded by Quran and Sunnah:

The concept of war as given in the Quran has been circumscribed in explicit words:

- (a) War can be waged only in the way of God, not for national aggrandisement or for personal glorification.
- (b) During a war no excesses are to be committed.
- (c) Once you become engaged in a war in God's path you should conclude it successfully in such a way that persecution of the revolutionaries (who are struggling for establishing a better social system of life) by a government of the vested interests is obliterated, and the instructions and laws of God come to be followed fully. In other words the aggressive role of man over man ceases. This is the most important responsibility of a Muslim.

The command thus given is that firstly, war must not be initiated; secondly, no excesses should be committed and requirements of war should not be exceeded; and thirdly, human lives should not be taken unnecessarily. The Quran does not allow a war wherein these three conditions are not fulfilled. Aggressive wars carried out in Iraq and Bosnia, and now being engaged in Kosovo (Yugoslavia), are not allowed in Islam. (References taken from surah 2 verses 190-193).

- d) When a just social order in a country is sought to be replaced by an unjust order by any group or nation through aggression, it should be resisted with all the might at the disposal of a nation.

Thus only a defensive war fought, while remaining within the precincts prescribed by the Quran, comes under the definition of "*Jihad*".

3. Validity/applicability of concept of Jihad in the present-day world:

Wars, it seems, have become a necessary evil, in the modern world, and will continue to hold its sway till such time as capitalist imperialism remains a dominant force. But the true concept of *jihad*, as I have tried to explain, does not allow the present day wars at all,

which are based on aggression and necessitate extermination of millions of human beings for no valid purpose.

The only validity of "*Jehad*" for us in the present day world is that we, the people of Pakistan (the civilians and their brethren the army men) should exert together to become instrumental in setting up a just socio-economic order in Pakistan. While doing so, we should be fully prepared to face and defeat any aggression by unjust regimes and imperialist powers to put obstacles in the way of creating a just and responsive society. This joint effort by the civilians and the army has to be affected as a perpetual *jehad* with full alertness on the part of every member of the nation, be he a Muslim or a non-Muslim. For that we will have to form ourselves into a strong nation with a just and progressive social order, joined together in strong bonds of friendship and co-operation irrespective of caste, race and religion, and, ofcourse, wedded to the ideology of Islam (a universal concept for humanity) not for born Muslims alone but for all peoples. This ideology has been put forth by all the Prophets, and finally propounded in the most authentic way by the Quran and presented through Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), for all times to come. This message of the Quran and Sunnah in the form of "Jehad" and "Islam" is for all peoples and all nations of the world.

Let it be understood well that Islam bases Jihad on peace alone, and that ushering in peace and plenty in this world, through the strivings (*jehad*) by man, is the ultimate destiny of mankind!

Copy right: Farkhanda Begum