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CRITIQUE OF MISCONCEPTION AND MISINTERPRETATION ABOUT THE ISLAMIC JIHAD

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Abstract

The term Jihad has now become a household word all over the world. However, despite this widespread mention of the term, its real meaning, the conditions governing its occurrence and the code of its conduct and several other things related to it are grossly misunderstood. Consequently, things that are completely unrelated to Jihad are done and seen in its name, the misconception has generated panic and suspicion on the part of both non-Muslims as well as Muslims the world over. The need to investigate and clarify issues and matters that actually related to Jihad as well as those that are unrelated to it, is therefore paramount.

In this article an endeavor has been made to throw more light on what Jihad is all about with the hope of correcting current misconception about Jihad. In the course of this endeavour, discussions have been made regarding the conditions that must be fulfilled before Jihad can be carried out, the code of conduct and standard of behaviour of participants in a Jihad and the position of women, children, Christian clerics, old people, etc in relation to Jihad. Effort has also been made to distinguish, differentiate and dissociate Jihad from demonstrations, sectarian and political crises, which have hitherto been ignorantly regarded as one form of Jihad or the other.

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INTRODUCTION

All praise goes to Allah, the most high and the king of the Day of judgment. We seek refuge from the evils of our own sins and from the evils of others. Indeed anyone who has been made to go astray by Allah, no one can guide him and whosoever Allah has guided, no one can mislead. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger.

The concept of Jihad has been misconceived and misinterpreted by many Muslims and non-Muslims alike. There is therefore the need for every Muslim who is in a position to contribute his quota to endeavor to write and throw more light towards proper understanding of the concept. The need to properly understand the meaning of Jihad is paramount in the Muslim world today, in view of the situation Muslims all over the world find themselves. Muslims are generally indifferent to the issue of Jihad due to their wrong perception, misconception and ignorance about it.

Generally, the concept of Jihad has been narrowed to refer to only physical war by both Muslims and non-Muslims. However, Jihad involves other means of propagating Islam and is not restricted to only physical war. This paper intends to discuss the various means by which Muslims can participate in Jihad. It is therefore hoped that at the end of this article, the reader whether a Muslim or non-Muslim will be more enlightened about the real meaning, aims and objectives as well as means of executing Jihad in Islam.

The Meaning of Jihad In Islam

Linguistically, Al-jihad is derived from the word JA'HADA which is a synonym to the word KHASAMA meaning a quarrel, argument, conflict etc. between two opposing forces or groups.¹

The word al-Jihad is also derived from a similar word Jahada which has three alphabets while the first word mentioned above i.e. Ja'hada has four alphabets. The root word for jahada is al-Jahad which means the use of force or hard labour.² This meaning can be seen in the Holy Quran where Allah (SWT) says:

“And if any strive (with might and main), they do so for their own souls”³

However, in accordance with the shari'ah, the word al-Jihad has so many meanings which have been given by so many scholars. We shall present two definitions for the mere fact that they appear to be more comprehensive.

According to Abdurrahman Hassan, al-Jihad refers to a situation in which a pious Muslim uses his resource, whether material, intellectual, physical or moral in the cause of advancement of Islam.⁴

Wahabat Az-zuhaili in his book, Al-Fiqihu Al-Islami defines al- Jihad:

Fighting the unbelievers who have not entered into any peace treaty with the Muslims with the intention of propagating the religion of Islam or the creedal formula of : there is no god but Allah.⁵

Jihad Commandment by The Shari'ah

The commandment for Jihad in Islam is very clear. This commandment can be found in many verses of the holy Qur'an and the traditions of the holy Prophet (PBUH). A few examples of this commandment can be seen in the following verses of the Holy Qur'an where Allah(SWT) says:

“To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged, and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid”.⁶

And again Allah says:

Fighting is prescribed upon you and you dislike it, but it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you, but Allah knows, and you know not.⁷

On the side of Hadith, there are many ahadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that command and enjoin Muslims to engage in Jihad. In the following Hadith the prophet (PBUH) says:

“I have been command to fight until the people testify or bear witness that there is none worthy of being worshipped other than Allah”⁸

The Prophet (PBUH) also says:

“the feet of the servant of Allah which become dusty in the cause of the advancement of the word of Allah is protection him against hell fire”⁹

The Position of Jihad In Islam

The position of Jihad to Muslims depends upon situations on ground. In some situations, Jihad can be compulsory for all eligible Muslims, but in other word circumstances, Jihad may not be compulsory, but optional. In short the position of Jihad can be classified in accordance with the well known classification or grading of all other issues and matters in Islam. Thus, Jihad can be compulsory, optional, recommended, prohibited and detested (disliked) depending on the situation.¹⁰

a-The situation in which Jihad becomes compulsory (wajib) is when the enemies attack or occupy a Muslims town or territory. This situation fits the occupation of Muslims land by Israel in the middle east, the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by the United States. These three situations it is compulsory for the Muslims in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq to fight and drive Israel and the United States out of their territories. Similarly, if a khalif directs or commands that some specific individuals or groups go to war, then it becomes compulsory for such individuals and groups to participate.

b-where participation in Jihad stops at the level of recommendation (mandub) is when a non-Muslim state threatens to attack a Muslim state, (but has not actually attacked the Muslim state) then it is recommended that the Muslims organize and participate in Jihad in order to clear the threat.

c-where participation in Jihad optional (ja'iz) is a situation where there is no attack on a Muslim state and the khalif has not commanded any specific person for Jihad, but generally encourages the people to participate. Furthermore, this is a situation whereby Muslims participate basically because of their desire for reward from Allah and their hope some people would convert to Islam in the cause of their Jihad. This however should not create the impression that Islam spread through the use of force. It only takes care of a situation in which there are weak persons who want

embrace Islam willingly, but they have been disallowed by their wicked leaders such as the situation before the conquest of Makkah.

d-There is a situation where waging war is prohibited. Example of such wars revolve around selfish reasons such as ethnicity or ethnic superiority, expansion of territory etc.

The Benefits of Participation In Jihad

Enormous rewards awaits Muslims who participated in Jihad with sincere and good intention. So many verses of the holy Qur'an and the traditions of the holy Prophet (PBUH) conveyed the benefits of participating in Jihad. For example Allah says:

“And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to Our paths: for verily Allah is with those who do right”¹¹

In another verses Allah says:

“O ye believe, shall I lead you to a commerce that will deliver you from a grievous chastisement? That you believe in Allah and His messenger, and that you strive (your utmost) in the cause of Allah, with your wealth and person: that will be best for you, if you but knew.”¹²

As mentioned, there are numerous ahadith which speak of the benefits of participation in Jihad. Example :

"عن ابي ذر رضي الله عنه قال سألت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: اي العمل افضل؟ قال: ايمان بالله وجهاد في سبيله....."

“Abu tharri Al-gifari narrates that he asked the Prophet (PBUH) to tell him the best work in terms of reward. The Prophet (PBUH) replies that belief in Allah and participate in Jihad.”¹³

The Reward of Martyr (Shaheed) In Jihad

Whosoever dies in the cause of Allah, his reward is paradise on the Day of Judgment best on the sincerity and the good intention of the martyr. There are so many verses in the holy Qur'an and many traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) that mentioned the huge rewards of the martyr in Islam. Some of these verses and traditions are as follows:

Allah (SWT) says:

“Allah has purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for their (in return) is the garden, they fight in his cause, and slain, and are slain, a promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'an and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded, that is the achievements supreme.”¹⁴

As mentioned earlier, there are several ahadith that contain the numerous rewards of the martyr in Islam. Example :

The Prophet (PBUH) said:

“No one will die and enter paradise and wish to come back to the world except a martyr (shaheed). He wishes to come back and be killed up to ten times again because of what he has seen in the Paradise prepared for him”¹⁵

In another hadith narrated by Abdullahi bin Amru-as the Prophet (PBUH) said:

‘All the sin of martyr will be forgiven except debt.’¹⁶

Ways of Carrying Out Jihad in Islam

The ways of carrying out Jihad in Islam are not restricted only in carrying weapons or arms. There are a lot of ways in which Jihad can be carried out. Thus it has been mentioned earlier in the definition of Jihad in Islam that Jihad refers to any contribution that a Muslim makes towards propagating and promoting Islam. This contribution can be material, intellectual, moral, physical, and financial in the cause of Allah. All these are regarded as means of carrying out Jihad.

In regards to Jihad with might and wealth, Allah (SWT) says:

“You fight in the cause of Allah with your wealth and person, that will be best for you, if you but knew.”¹⁷

Regarding Jihad with knowledge (intellectual), Allah (swt) says

“It not for the believers to go forth: if a contingent from every expend. Go forth to devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they (may learn)to guard themselves”¹⁸

Regarding mental Jihad, Allah says

“ And consult them in affairs, Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah. For Allah loves those who put their trust in Him”¹⁹

Again Allah (swt) speaks of Jihad with weapons:

“Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power including steeds of war, to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others besides. Who you may not know but whom Allah does know.”²⁰

The Pre-Requisites of Jihad or the Conditions to Be Fulfilled Before the Commencement of Jihad

In Islam, before the decision to finally embark on a Jihad i.e. before the commencement of Jihad, certain conditions must be met and fulfilled. They are as follows:

- a) Propagation of Islam to the people who are to be fought and inviting them to Islam.
- b) If they turn down the invitation to Islam, they should be asked to enter into a peace accord with the Muslims where they will be required to be paying tax.
- c) If they refuse to accept the peace accord, then a war should be declared against them as the last resort.²¹

Persons Who Are Not To Be Touched During a Jihad

It should be understood that Islamic Jihad is founded on justice and fair play. Therefore, those who are not fighting against Islam are also exonerated during an Islamic Jihad. Women, children, the aged persons, and Christian clerics who take a shelter in their churches are not to be touched or killed in the course of Islamic Jihad. The reason in support of this statement is Contained in an authentic Hadith in sahihul Bukhari, "On the authority of Abdullahi bin Umar who narrated that a woman was found dead during one of the battles fought by the prophet (PBUH) and the Prophet ordered that women and children must not be killed during a Jihad."²²

Things That Should Not Be Destroyed During an Islamic Jihad

In Islam, there certain things that are banned from being destroyed in the course of executing a Jihad. These include burning or cutting down economic trees, water wells which are functioning should not be blocked, farm lands containing crops must not be destroyed and any other things that is considered useful to life must not be touched except in retaliation Any time the Prophet (PBUH) appoint a commanders for a battle, he would admonish him not to burn an economic tree or anything that is useful.²³

The Position of War Booty

War booty are been categorized into two stages:

1. The position of war booty to the previous Prophets and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Prior to the arrival of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) it was not allowed for all other Prophets before him to take and enjoy war booty as a result of successful battles of Jihad. The Prophet (pbuh) says:

"War booty was not lawful for any person before me"²⁴

2. The position of war booty to the non- Muslims before Islam

Among the principal factors for war before the coming of Islam is the desire to acquire war booty. If a nation or tribe discovered that another nation or tribe was rich, but weak it would just attack it for the sake of booty. There was no established procedure of sharing the booty. In fact there are reports of conflicts over the sharing of booty. This is contrary to what obtains in an Islamic state where there are laid down procedures of collecting and sharing any war booty. War booty before the coming of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was destroyed miraculously by fire i.e. Allah would cause fire to come and destroy the booty completely.²⁵

The Position of War Captives Before and After the Coming of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh)

War captives include women, children and all other people captured during a battle by two opposing forces. It is a well known fact that some people must be captured irrespective of whether the battle involved non-Muslims amongst themselves or between non-Muslims and Muslims nations. In Muslims societies war captives are treated very well and given all the respects and dignity that human beings deserve. However non-Muslims societies are non to have been maltreating war captives. The recent report of maltreatment of prisoners of war by the United states and Britain in Abu Graib prison in Iraq testifies to the attitude of non Muslims to war captives.

Also mention must be made of the reported case of abuse of the fundamental human rights of detainees at Guantanamo Camp by the United states. On the contrary Islam forbids maltreating war captives. This can be seen during the conquest of Makka when the Prophet (PBUH) released all the war prisoner free off charge. This can be seen in the Holy Qur'an where Allah says:

".....Build (the captives) firmly: therefore (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: until the war lays down its burdens."²⁶

The Position of Women In Participating Jihad

It needs to be clarified whether or not a woman can participate in Islamic Jihad and if it is allowed for her to participate, there is also the need to discuss how she goes about doing it. During the time of the Prophet (PBUH) occasionally women used to go to the battle field with the Prophet (PBUH). The participation of woman in Jihad is not mandatory as it is for men. The case of women is a voluntary one. The reason for this statement is that when ummi sulaimin requested for the permission of the Prophet to go out for Jihad, the prophet said " O you ummi sulaimin it is not compulsory for women to participate in Jihad."²⁷

Women therefore participate in Jihad on their own accord. When women attend a Jihad, they perform specific activities. Ummi sulaimin offered to serve as a nurse for those who wounded in the Jihad and to provide catering services to the participants generally. The Prophet then accepted her request by saying that if that was the case she was free to participate. Women therefore participate in Jihad voluntarily, but not compulsorily.

The Position of Children In Participating Jihad

In Islam, Jihad or war generally, is not compulsory upon children who are not yet matured biologically. The reason to support this statement is an authentic narrated by both Bukhari and Muslim as follows:

“On the authority of Abdullahi Bn Umar who said that the Prophet met him in the midst of soldiers’ durin the battle of Uhud and at that time he was only fourteen years old, and the prophet remove him and disallowed him from participating in the war. But on the day of battle of khandak when Abdullahi was fifteen years old, Prophet (PBUH) did not remove him from the battalion of the soldiers and allowed him to participate.²⁸ This hadith not only shows that a person who is not matured should not be allowed to take part in Jihad, but also shows that the age of maturity in Islam is fifteen years.²⁸

Wrong Perception on Islamic Jihad

Islamic Jihad has been perceived differently by various individuals and groups. Most of these perceptions are incorrect. We shall therefore state these various perceptions one after the other.

1. PERCEPTION OF ISLAMIC JIHAD BY SOME MUSLIM YOUTHS

Islamic Jihad is also perceived wrongly by some Muslims youths. This wrong perception is a product of ignorance and lack of consultation with learned Islamic scholars . Consequently, these Muslims regard some things that have nothing to do with Islamic Jihad, as part and parcel of Islamic jihad. For instance, such things as demonstrations, rioting, civil disturbances, inter tribal crisis, etc. are all considered as part and parcel of Jihad by this Muslim youths. However, Islam does not regard these forms of crisis as Jihad. Jihad is carried out in order to promote the word of Allah, but participants of these crises are not doing so in order to promote the word of Allah.

2. PERCEPTION OF JIHAD BY NON-MUSLIM SCHOLARS

Generally speaking, non-Muslim scholars viewed Islamic Jihad to be aimed at territorial expansion or for economic reasons or for the sake of forcing Islam on non-Muslims or for the purpose of self defense. This perception of Jihad is incorrect. The reasons stated above are not the reasons for Jihad. The main objective of Jihad is the promotion of the word of Allah on the earth, the eradication of idolatory and the eradication of injustice and subsequent establishment of justice and freedom of religion for Muslims.

3. PERCEPTION OF JIHAD BY WESTERNIZED EDUCATED MUSLIMS

Just as misconception of Jihad exist amongst Muslim writers so also does it exist amongst Muslim writers who have been seriously influenced by the western culture and thinking. According to these westernized Muslim writers, Islamic Jihad is aimed at self-defense only or the eradication of idolatry in the Arabian peninsula only or as a result of dispute or disagreement involving Muslims and non-Muslims over worldly materials. These groups of scholars are also of the opinion that Islamic Jihad is aimed at territorial expansion of the Islamic state. The totality of this perception of Jihad is also incorrect because Islamic Jihad is not aimed at these individual objectives only. Even if an Islamic Jihad is triggered in self-defense the fundamental and over-riding objective is the promotion of the word of Allah which is the overall target.²⁹

Other Types of Conflicts and the Position of Islam About Them

There are other types of conflicts that occur in our society that cannot be regarded as Jihad in accordance with the definitions of Jihad.

1) WAR INVOLVING TWO ISLAMIC SECTS OR ASSOCIATIONS

War between Muslim sects or associations is now a common features of Islamic world. There are so may factors responsible for these conflicts or disputes between the Muslim sects. The first cause of these conflicts is selfishness, followed by external factors involving the enemies of Islam who instigate the associations in to conflicts.

Whether the cause of the war is the first or the second factor, this type of war is forbidden in Islam, in the light of the following authentic Hadith. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

“ When two Muslims fight each other and one of them kills the other, both of them will go to hell.”³⁰

2) WAR INVOLVING POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Violent conflicts between political associations are now very rampant. Youths are usually the victims of these conflicts which occasionally involve the killing of political figures. This type of war is also forbidden in Islam.

Conclusion

The article has discussed various aspects of Islamic Jihad placing emphasis on issues of misconception and misunderstanding of the subject. The misunderstanding of Islamic Jihad is not only by non Muslim scholars, but also by westernized Muslim scholars as well as the Muslim youths. The areas of this misunderstanding each of these groups were discussed and their shortcomings identified.

For instance an issue discussed is distinguishing between Islamic Jihad and various other forms of crisis and disputes. Such issues like demonstrations, inter-tribal wars, etc were distinguished from Islamic Jihad It is important to make these distinctions in view of the fact that so many things are done today in the name of Jihad.

We also discussed the pre-requisites or the conditions to be fulfilled before the commencement of Islamic Jihad. Here, it was shown that certain conditions have to be met before an Islamic Jihad can take place. This means that Jihad is not carried out anyhow.

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