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# The Concept and Practice of Jihad in Islam

MICHAEL G. KNAPP

“All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his Messenger, and Muslims. . . . [T]he jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries. . . . As for the fighting to repulse [an enemy], it is aimed at defending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty. . . . On that basis, and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilian and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.”

— Osama bin Laden et al., in “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders,” 23 February 1998

The word “jihad” means “struggle” or “striving” (in the way of God) or to work for a noble cause with determination; it does not mean “holy war” (war in Arabic is *harb* and holy is *muqadassa*). Unlike its medieval Christian counterpart term, “crusade” (“war for the cross”), however, the term jihad for Muslims has retained its religious and military connotation into modern times. The word jihad has appeared widely in the Western news media following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but the true meaning of this term in the Islamic world (it is sometimes called the “sixth pillar” of the faith) is still not well understood by non-Muslims.

In war, the first essential is to know your adversary—how he thinks and why he thinks that way, and what his strategy and objectives are—so that you can attempt to frustrate his plans and protect the lives of your fellow citizens. Understanding how radical Muslims see jihad and are employing it asymmetrically against us can provide us with that kind of perspective.

This article will trace the development of jihad through early Islamic history into the present day, and will focus on how jihad in concept and practice has been appropriated and distorted by Muslim extremists as part of their violent

campaign against the West and their own governments. Jihad as a centerpiece of radical thought is illustrated by examining the doctrines of prominent extremist groups such as Hamas and Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Misuse of the term by prominent extremist leaders, such as by Osama bin Laden and others in the quote above, is also addressed.

### ***The Classical Concept of Jihad***

#### *Qur'anic and Early Legal Perspectives*

Muslims themselves have disagreed throughout their history about the meaning of the term jihad. In the Qur'an (or Koran), it is normally found in the sense of fighting in the path of God; this was used to describe warfare against the enemies of the early Muslim community (*ummah*). In the *hadith*, the second-most authoritative source of the *shari'a* (Islamic law), jihad is used to mean armed action, and most Islamic theologians and jurists in the classical period (the first three centuries) of Muslim history understood this obligation to be in a military sense.<sup>1</sup>

Islamic jurists saw jihad in the context of conflict in a world divided between the *Dar al-Islam* (territory under Islamic control) and the *Dar al-harb* (territory of war, which consisted of all lands not under Muslim rule). The inhabitants of the territory of war are divided between "People of the Book" (mainly Jews and Christians) and polytheists. This requirement to continue jihad until all of the world is included in the territory of Islam does not imply that Muslims must wage nonstop warfare, however. Although there was no mechanism for recognizing a non-Muslim government as legitimate, jurists allowed for the negotiation of truces and peace treaties of limited duration. Additionally, extending the territory of Islam does not mean the annihilation of all non-Muslims, nor even their necessary conversion: jihad cannot imply conversion by force, since the Qur'an (2:256) states that "There is no compulsion in religion." More than a religious aim, jihad really had a political one: the drive to establish a single, unified Muslim realm justified Islam's supersession of other faiths and allowed for the creation of a just political and social order.<sup>2</sup>

Jihad was generally understood not as an obligation of each individual Muslim (known as *fard 'ayn*) but as a general requirement of the Muslim community (*fard kifaya*). Only in emergencies, when the *Dar al-Islam* comes under unexpected attack, do all Muslims have to participate in jihad. Under normal

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circumstances, therefore, an individual Muslim need not take part so long as other Muslims carry the burden for all of defending the realm.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Other Philosophical Perspectives*

This consensus view of a restricted, defensive version of jihad was contested by Muslim legal philosopher Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328). He declared that a ruler who fails to enforce the shari'a rigorously in all aspects, including the conduct of jihad (and is therefore insufficiently Muslim), forfeits his right to rule. Ibn Taymiyya strongly advocated jihad as warfare against both the Crusaders and Mongols who then occupied parts of the Dar al-Islam, and most important, broke with the mainstream of Islam by asserting that a professing Muslim who does not live by the faith is an apostate (unbeliever). By going well beyond most jurists (who tolerated rulers who violated the shari'a for the sake of community stability), Ibn Taymiyya laid much of the groundwork for the intellectual arguments of contemporary radical Islamists.<sup>4</sup>

Islamic law condemns all warfare that does not qualify as jihad, specifically any warfare among Muslims. Thus, military action against Muslims is justified only by denying them the status of Muslims (e.g., classifying them as apostates or rebels).<sup>5</sup> Islamic juristic tradition is also very hostile toward terror as a means of political resistance. Classical Muslim jurists were remarkably tolerant toward political rebels by holding that they may not be executed nor their property confiscated. This tolerance vanished, however, for rebels who conducted attacks against unsuspecting and defenseless victims or who spread terror through abductions, rapes, the use of poisoned arrows and poisoning of wells (the chemical warfare of this period), arson, attacks against travelers, and night attacks. In these cases, jurists demanded harsh penalties (including death) and ruled that the punishment was the same whether the perpetrator or victim was Muslim or non-Muslim.<sup>6</sup>

Three main views of jihad thus coexisted in pre-modern times. In addition to the classical legal view of jihad as a compulsory, communal effort to defend and expand the Dar al-Islam, and Ibn Taymiyya's notion of active jihad as an indispensable feature of legitimate rule, there was also the *Sufi* movement's doctrine of *greater jihad*. The *Sufis* (a mystical sect of Islam) understood the greater jihad as an inner struggle against the base instincts of the body but also against corruption of the soul, and believed that the greater jihad is a necessary part of the process of gaining spiritual insight. To this day, most Muslims see jihad as a personal rather than a political struggle, while physical actions taken in defense of the realm are considered the *lesser jihad*. It is not surprising, then, that disagreement over the meaning of jihad has continued into the modern era.<sup>7</sup>

#### ***Origins of Radical Ideologies***

Muslim reform movements in the Middle East first acquired a sense of urgency with the arrival of European imperialism in the latter part of the 19th

century. The end of colonialism and acquisition of independence by most Muslim countries after World War II accelerated this drive. However, the massive social changes that accompanied these reforms and the simultaneous introduction of new ideas that were alien to classical Islamic tradition—such as nationalism, popular sovereignty, and women’s rights—disrupted traditional ways of life and caused traumatic dislocations in these societies.<sup>8</sup>

Disillusionment with the path Muslim societies have taken in the modern period reached its height in the 1970s. Increasingly widespread rejection of Western civilization as a model for Muslims to emulate has been accompanied by a search for indigenous values that reflect traditional Muslim culture, as well as a drive to restore power and dignity to the community. The last 30 years have seen the rise of militant, religiously-based political groups whose ideology focuses on demands for jihad (and the willingness to sacrifice one’s life) for the forceful creation of a society governed solely by the shari’a and a unified Islamic state, and to eliminate un-Islamic and unjust rulers. These groups are also reemphasizing individual conformity to the requirements of Islam.<sup>9</sup>

Militant Islam (also referred to as political or radical Islam) is rooted in a contemporary religious resurgence in private and public life.<sup>10</sup> The causes of Islamic radicalism have been religio-cultural, political, and socio-economic and have focused on issues of politics and social justice such as authoritarianism, lack of social services, and corruption, which all intertwine as catalysts. Many Islamic reform groups have blamed social ills on outside influences; for example, modernization (e.g., Westernization and secularization) has been perceived as a form of neocolonialism, an evil that replaces Muslim religious and cultural identity and values with alien ideas and models of development.<sup>11</sup>

Islamic militancy is still not well understood by Americans. This is partly due to the secrecy which radical Islamic groups practice to protect themselves from the authorities and from outsiders who do not share their views and aims, but also because Western public communications media frequently tend to marginalize such groups. They are dismissed as religious fanatics, anti-Western hooligans, or mindless terrorists, without making an attempt to comprehend the deep discontents that have produced these Islamic groups’ violent actions or the logic of their radical cause which compels them to behave as they do.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Differences in Sunni and Shi’a Interpretations of Jihad***

Sunni and Shi’a (Shi’ite) Muslims agree, in terms of just cause, that jihad applies to the defense of territory, life, faith, and property; it is justified to repel invasion or its threat; it is necessary to guarantee freedom for the spread of Islam; and that difference in religion alone is not a sufficient cause. Some Islamic scholars have differentiated disbelief from persecution and injustice, and claimed that jihad is justified only to fight those unbelievers who have initiated aggression against the Muslim community. Others, however, have stated more militant views which were inspired by Islamic resistance to the European powers

during the colonial period: in this view, jihad as “aggressive war” is authorized against all non-Muslims, whether they are oppressing Muslims or not.

The question of right authority—no jihad can be waged unless it is directed by a legitimate ruler—also has been divisive among Muslims. The Sunnis saw all of the Muslim caliphs (particularly the first four “rightly guided” caliphs to rule after the Prophet Muhammad’s death, who possessed combined religious and political authority) as legitimate callers of jihad, as long as they had the support of the realm’s *ulama* (Islamic scholars). The Shi’a see this power as having been meant for the Imams, but it was wrongly denied to them by the majority Sunnis. The lack of proper authority after the disappearance of the 12th (“Hidden”) Imam in 874 A.D. also posed problems for the Shi’a; this was resolved by the *ulama* increasingly taking this authority for itself to the point where all legitimate forms of jihad may be considered defensive, and there is no restriction on the kind of war which may be waged in the Hidden Imam’s absence so long as it is authorized by a just ruler (this idea reached its zenith under Iran’s Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini).

Both sects agree on the other prerequisites for jihad. Right intention (*niyyah*) is fundamentally important for engaging in jihad. Fighting for the sake of conquest, booty, or honor in the eyes of one’s companions will earn no reward; the only valid purpose for jihad is to draw near to God. In terms of last resort, jihad may be waged only if the enemy has first been offered the triple alternative: accept Islam, pay the *jizyah* (the poll tax required for non-Muslim “People of the Book” living under Muslim control), or fight.<sup>13</sup>

Conditions also are placed on the behavior of combatants in jihad: discrimination of noncombatants from warriors is required, along with the prohibition of harm to noncombatants such as women, children, the disabled, monks and rabbis (unless they are involved in the fighting), and those who have been given the promise of immunity; and proportionality, meaning that the least amount of force is used to obtain the desired ends in combat.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Ideas on Jihad in the Modern Era***

Sayyid Abu al-A’la Mawdudi (1903-1979) was the first Islamist writer to approach jihad systematically. Warfare, in his view, is conducted not just to expand Islamic political dominance, but also to establish just rule (one that includes freedom of religion). For Mawdudi (an Indo-Pakistani who agitated for Pakistan’s independence from India), jihad was akin to war of liberation, and is designed to establish politically independent Muslim states. Mawdudi’s view significantly changed the concept of jihad in Islam and began its association with anticolonialism and “national liberation movements.” His approach paved the way for Arab resistance to Zionism and the existence of the state of Israel to be referred to as jihad.<sup>15</sup>

Radical Egyptian Islamist thinkers (and members of the Muslim Brotherhood) Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) took hold of

Mawdudi's activist and nationalist conception of jihad and its role in establishing a truly Islamic government, and incorporated Ibn Taymiyya's earlier conception of jihad that includes the overthrow of governments that fail to enforce the shari'a. This idea of revolution focuses first on dealing with the radicals' own un-Islamic rulers (the "near enemy") before Muslims can direct jihad against external enemies. If leaders such as Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, for example, are not true Muslims, then they cannot lead jihad, not even against a legitimate target such as Israel. Significantly, radical Islamists consider jihad mandatory for all Muslims, making it an individual rather than a communal duty.<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Use of Jihad by Islamic Militants***

#### *Regional Islamic Militant Groups' Perceptions*

Classical Islamic criteria for jihad were based on the early unified Muslim empire. The imposition of the modern nation-state on Middle East societies, however, has made such ideas no longer applicable; this can be seen by examining contemporary Muslim militant groups' ideologies.

The Islamic Resistance Movement (commonly known as Hamas) sees its situation as similar to that of the Muslim ruler Saladin in his struggle against the Christian Crusaders, as can be seen by examining portions of its Charter. The goal of Hamas is to establish an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel, through both violent means (including terrorism) and peaceful political activity. Hamas argues that the current situation of the Palestinians, living under Israeli control or dispersed from their homeland, is part of an ongoing crusade by Christians to take the Holy Lands out of Palestinian hands. The loss of Palestine and the creation of Israel, the Charter continues, were brought about by the great powers of East and West, and taken together constitute a great tragedy not only for the Palestinians but for the entire Islamic community. This, Hamas proclaims, requires jihad not in the sense of expanding the territory of Islam, but of restoring it, and to recover land rather than conquer it. Nor is it a rebellion in the classical sense; rather, this is a struggle to regain a lost portion of the territory of Islam. The Hamas Charter thus provides a uniquely Islamic rationale for *al-intifada*, the "shaking off" of illegitimate rule.<sup>17</sup> This language thus seems to suggest defensive jihad, rather than an offensive struggle.

Since Hamas is not acting on behalf of an established government, it must find authorization elsewhere for its struggle against not only external enemies but also so-called "Muslim" governments that collaborate with the non-Muslim powers (by cooperating with Israel or allowing the basing of Western troops on their soil). The group considers Muslim governments that cooperate with the West as ignorant of the non-Muslim nations' true intentions, or corrupt. Hamas argues that it obtains its authority to declare jihad in another way: the Western powers' invasion of Islamic territory has created an emergency situation where Muslims cannot wait for authorization other than that given directly by

God, so jihad is a required duty for all conscientious Muslims.<sup>18</sup> This exceptional situation suspends the usual lines between parties in a relationship so that every Muslim can participate in the struggle. Hamas' Charter thus relates the current situation of Muslims to the classical period, but also marks a break with that classical past. This extraordinary situation also means a change in the nature of Muslim obligation under jihad, from a collective responsibility to extend the Dar al-Islam to a duty for each individual Muslim to restore that territory.<sup>19</sup>

The same pattern of thinking is present in "The Neglected Duty," a pamphlet produced by Egyptian Islamic Jihad (or EIJ, the group that assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981). This pamphlet, the group's announced "testament," is also a clear expression of the Sunni Islamist perspective on political violence as jihad. It argues that jihad as armed action is the heart of Islam, and that the neglect of this type of action by Muslims has caused the current depressed condition of Islam in the world. EIJ attempts to communicate a sense of urgency to Muslims, who are being victimized and whose territory is being divided and controlled by non-Muslim powers. The document also seeks to justify jihad against other Muslims who, because they are ignorant of this situation, actively cooperate with the unbelievers in the name of "modernization," and are worse than rebels—they are Muslim traitors and apostates. Furthermore, fighting such unbelievers without the limits imposed if they were rebellious Muslims is justified, since they are worse than other unbelievers.<sup>20</sup>

"The Neglected Duty" defines the current rulers of the Muslim world (as Sadat was defined) as the primary enemies of Islam and apostates, despite their profession of Islam and obedience to some of its laws, and advocates their execution. This document is explicitly messianic, asserting that Muslims must "exert every conceivable effort" to bring about the establishment of truly Islamic government, a restoration of the caliphate, and the expansion of the Dar al-Islam, and that the success of these endeavors is inevitable.<sup>21</sup> "The Neglected Duty" cites a different historical analogy for this struggle than does Hamas' Charter, however: more appropriate than the threat posed by the European Crusaders was the struggle of Muslims against the Mongol invaders.

EIJ is raising an important issue connected with irregular war: the group is advocating mass resistance against an established government, and such revolution can be justified in Islam only where the ruler becomes an unbeliever through public displays of unbelief. The most significant of such acts is introduction of an innovation (*bid'ah*), which is a policy, teaching, or action that violates precedents in the Qur'an or hadith. The leadership thus loses its divinely given authority when it commits apostasy, and Muslims not only must no longer obey such a ruler, but are required to revolt and depose him.

This reference to the obligation to God for the creation and maintenance of an Islamic state and the responsibilities of Muslims serves to answer the question of authorization for militant Islamic forces.<sup>22</sup> "The Neglected Duty" provides further justification for armed action by arguing that Egypt, like most of its



neighbors, is not an Islamic state because its constitution and laws are a mix of traditional Islamic judgments and European law codes. Imposition of such a mixed legal system (non-Islamic laws that are an “innovation”) by Egypt’s leaders on their subjects thus means that the nation is not part of the territory of Islam, but part of the territory of war or unbelief.<sup>23</sup>

Shi’a radicals have a similar perspective to their Sunni extremist “brothers in arms.” Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) contended that Islamic jurists, “by means of jihad and enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, must expose and overthrow tyrannical rulers and rouse the people so the universal movement of all alert Muslims can establish Islamic government in the place of tyrannical regimes.” The proper teaching of Islam will cause “the entire population to become *mujahids* [literally “strugglers for God].” Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari (1920-1979), a top ideologue of the Iranian Revolution, considered jihad a necessary consequence of Islam’s content: by having political aims, Islam must sanction armed force and provide laws for its use. Mutahhari deemed jihad to be defensive, but his definition includes defense against oppression and may require what international law would consider a war of aggression. For example, he endorses an attack on a country of polytheists (some Muslims see Christians as polytheists due to Christianity’s belief in a God who can exist in three manifestations) with the goal simply to eliminate polytheism’s evils, not to impose Islam.<sup>24</sup>

Another radical Shi’a perspective on the justification for jihad can be found in the words of Shaykh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, spiritual leader of Lebanese Hizballah. In a 1986 interview, he stated that although violence is justified only for defensive purposes and as a last resort, the contemporary situation of the people of the Middle East, in particular of Muslims, creates a scenario that breeds violence. The establishment of Israel, the dislocation of the Palestinians, and the interference of a great oppressive power (in other words, the United States) in Arab-Islamic political, economic, and social affairs leads some Muslims (e.g., militant groups) to consider themselves justified in using force to achieve their goals, and this can even sometimes lead to extreme behavior.<sup>25</sup> Fadlallah does clarify that terrorism (*hudna*, or violence in Arabic) is not legitimate or justified in Islam, to include the destruction of life, kidnapping, or the hijacking of airliners or ships, and suggests that militants have gone too far in the conduct of their struggle when they employ such means. Nevertheless, he concludes by informing the American people that it is up to them to improve the situation by pressing for reforms in the policies of their government.<sup>26</sup>

How should the West respond to Islamic militant groups? Shaykh Fadlallah suggests that the West should listen to the anger expressed by such groups. While stressing that the way to peace is through dialogue, Fadlallah said that the West must first recognize that Muslims who act in ways that are harmful to Western interests are responding to pain of their own. Islam, he added, should not be thought of as uncompromisingly hostile to the West, since militant groups

do not speak for all of the community. Fadlallah adds that if the West does listen to these groups, however, it will understand that the concerns these groups have (for justice, human rights, and self-determination) are legitimate, even if their methods are excessive.<sup>27</sup>

*Al Qaeda and Transnational Jihad:  
A New Twist on Old Complaints*

Before his emergence as the prime suspect in the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden had described his goals and grievances and the tactics of his transnational al Qaeda network in great detail in a series of statements and interviews. Taken together, these statements provide insight into an ideology that may seem abhorrent or crazy to Americans but has been carefully crafted to appeal to the disgruntled and dispossessed of the Islamic world.<sup>28</sup> Bin Laden's ideology, however, is really more political than religious.

At the heart of bin Laden's philosophy are two declarations of war—jihad—against the United States. The first, his *Bayan* (statement) issued on 26 August 1996, was directed specifically at “Americans occupying the land of the two holy places,” as bin Laden refers to the cities of Mecca and Medina that are located in his native Saudi Arabia. Here he calls upon Muslims all over the world to fight to “expel the infidels . . . from the Arab Peninsula.”<sup>29</sup> In his fatwa of 23 February 1998, titled “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders,” which he issued along with the leaders of extremist groups in Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, bin Laden broadened his earlier edict. In the fatwa, he specifies that the radicals' war is a defensive struggle against Americans and their allies who have declared war “on God, his Messenger, and Muslims.” The “crimes and sins” perpetrated by the United States are threefold: first, it “stormed” the Arabian peninsula during the Gulf War and has continued “occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places”; second, it continues a war of annihilation against Iraq; and third, the United States supports the state of Israel and its continued occupation of Jerusalem. The only appropriate Muslim response, according to the fatwa, is a defensive jihad to repulse the aggressor; therefore, borrowing from classical and modern Islamic scholars (because it is defensive), such a war is a moral obligation incumbent upon all true Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

Bin Laden's anger at the “American crusader forces” who are “occupying” his homeland stems from an injunction from the Prophet that there “not be two religions in Arabia”; the presence of foreign forces on holy soil is thus an intolerable affront to 1,400 years of Islamic tradition. In his 1996 statement of jihad, bin Laden blamed the serious economic crisis then gripping Saudi Arabia (due to falling oil prices and widespread corruption) on the presence of these Western “crusader forces.” Two years later, in his 1998 fatwa, bin Laden charged that the United States was not only occupying and plundering Arabia, but was “using its bases in the peninsula as a spearhead to fight against the neighboring Islamic peoples.” In bin Laden's war, the goal of expelling the “Judeo-Christian

enemy” from Islamic holy lands should occur first on the Arabian peninsula, then in Iraq (which for 500 years was the seat of the Islamic caliphate), and third in Palestine, site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (which is sacred to Muslims as the place from where Muhammad ascended to heaven).<sup>31</sup>

Although the initial attacks associated with bin Laden occurred in Saudi Arabia, Somalia, East Africa, and Yemen, he increasingly made clear that he would bring the war to the American homeland. Al Qaeda is believed to have aided the first attack against the World Trade Center in 1993, and bin Laden told an ABC News reporter in May 1998 that the battle will “inevitably move . . . to American soil.”<sup>32</sup> Although he appears to be fired by the religious zeal of Saudi Arabia’s puritanical Wahhabi movement, bin Laden’s targets have not been offending religious and cultural institutions, but political, military, and economic targets. Additionally, though he quotes selective (but incomplete) passages from the Qur’an to establish the basis for the jihad, bin Laden’s motivations are really not that different from the anti-imperialistic doctrines that sustain religious and nonreligious extremist groups all over the world.<sup>33</sup>

In return for joining the jihad against America, bin Laden has promised his followers an honored place in paradise, in accordance with a statement in the Qur’an that “a martyr’s privileges are guaranteed by Allah.” Bin Laden and many of the other Islamic militant groups in the Middle East are able to draw on large numbers of enthusiastic and waiting recruits for their war against the United States—impoverished youths who are ready to die simply for the idea of jihad.

#### *“Jihad Factories”: An Enduring Legacy of Hatred*

It is estimated that more than one million young men from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Muslim parts of China are attending *madrassas*, or private Islamic religious schools, every year in Pakistan. Madrassa students spend most of their day in rote memorization of the Qur’an in Arabic (this is not their native language, so few understand what they are reading) and interpreting the hadith. Only theology is taught; there is no math, science, computer training, or secular history.<sup>34</sup> The young men at these schools are drawn from the dire poor of the societies they come from, kept in self-contained worlds that are isolated from outside influences, and indoctrinated with a powerful, not-so-academic radical message: their highest honor and duty is to wage jihad to defend Islam from its attackers, and the United States is the chief enemy of Islam.<sup>35</sup>

Madrassas, which have a tradition in Pakistan that dates from colonial days of promoting political independence along with their religious teaching, fill a significant gap in the underfunded public school system by offering free tuition, room, and board. Madrassas received state funding during the Afghan War when they were used to groom the mujahedin who were being sent to fight the Soviet invaders.<sup>36</sup> Many of these schools were emptied in the 1990s when the Taliban needed assistance in military campaigns against its Northern Alliance foes, and many students sent to the front did not return. The graduates of these madrassas

have also turned up in places like Bosnia, Chechnya, and the Kashmir, and the survivors of those conflicts have taken their battlefield experience back to their home countries where it is being put to use in jihads against their own not-Islamic-enough governments and societies.

The readiness of millions of young men trained in these schools to sacrifice their lives for Islam—and their unquestioning acceptance of anti-American and pro-Islamic extremist propaganda—will continue to be a powerful and enduring weapon against the US-led global war on terrorism, and one that bin Laden and other militants who are bent on attacking the United States and its allies can call on in the years ahead.

### *Acceptance of Militants' Ideas and Methods Is Limited*

The thrust of the entire jihad tradition which Islamic radicals have “hijacked” makes it clear that not everything is permissible. Although the language in the Qur’an and hadith and in other classical Muslim sources is overwhelmingly militant in many places, this is a reflection of the Muslims’ world in the seventh century, which consisted initially of resistance to a variety of more powerful non-Islamic tribes and then successful military campaigns to spread the faith. Besides containing exhortations to fight, however, Islamic sacred texts have also laid out the rules of engagement for war, which (as mentioned earlier) included prohibitions against the killing of noncombatants such as women, children, the aged, and disabled. These texts also require notice to the adversary before an attack, require that a Muslim army must seek peace if its opponent does, and forbid committing aggression against others and suicide.<sup>37</sup> Those who are unfamiliar with the Qur’an and hadith can miss these points when confronted with the propagandistic calls to jihad of militant Islamic groups.

The actions of rebels in the classical period of Islam encountered widespread resentment and condemnation, and this strong sentiment against rebellion remains in modern Islamic thought. Most Muslims agree with the presumption in Islamic teachings on war that individuals are innocent and therefore not subject to harm unless they demonstrate by their actions that they are a threat to the safety or survival of Muslims. On this basis, the overwhelming majority of Islamic scholars have for centuries rejected indiscriminate killing and the terrorizing of civilian populations as a legitimate form of jihad.<sup>38</sup> Also, at no point do Islamic sacred texts even consider the horrific and random slaughter of uninvolved bystanders that is represented by the 9/11 airliner attacks; most Muslims throughout the world were as shocked by those attacks as Americans were.

The radical message in works such as Hamas’ Charter, “The Neglected Duty,” and the writings of Khomeini and his fellow revolutionary Iranian Shi’a clerics nevertheless finds a lot of acceptance with contemporary Muslims. The reason is simply because of the poor socioeconomic circumstances and lack of human dignity that many Muslim peoples find themselves subject to, brought about by secular failures to attend to their problems.<sup>39</sup> Militant Islamic groups, exempli-

fied by Hamas and the Palestinian branch of Islamic Jihad, have been able to use such poor conditions to their advantage. They provide social services (such as operating free or low-cost schools, medical clinics, sports clubs, and women's support groups), many of which the Palestinian Authority itself often cannot provide, to build public support and attract recruits in the occupied territories.<sup>40</sup>

Public statements over the last several months by some moderate Muslim religious authorities and commentators that Islamic extremists are corrupting a peaceful religious faith for their own twisted ends are encouraging. Equally positive is the growing recognition in the Muslim world both of bin Laden's lack of proper religious qualifications to issue any religious edicts that promote jihad, and his lack of success, on a strategic level, in forcing the United States to withdraw its military forces completely from Saudi Arabia or to give up its campaign against Islamic terrorism. A few prominent Muslim scholars have not only condemned the terrorist attacks upon the United States, but have declared the perpetrators of these attacks to be "suicides," not martyrs. This is significant, since Islam forbids suicide and teaches that its practitioners are sent not to paradise but to hell, where they are condemned to keep repeating their suicidal act for eternity.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

As described herein, jihad in Islamic thought and practice possesses a range of meanings, with Muslim radicals focusing on the physical, violent form of struggle to resist what they see as cultural, economic, military, and political assaults from outside the ummah and oppression and injustice within. So long as societal conditions within many Muslim states remain poor, with unrepresentative governments (which are seen to be propped up by the United States) that are unwilling or unable to undertake meaningful but difficult reforms, then militant Islamic groups will continue to attract recruits and financial support. In spite of logical fallacies and inconsistencies in the doctrine of jihad of radical Islamic groups, and the fact that most of the broad constituency they are attempting to appeal to does not buy into their ideology or methods, such groups nevertheless remain as significant threats to US interests everywhere in the world.

The challenge for the US government over the next several years will be to encourage and support lasting reform by Muslim states who are our allies in the Middle East, while maintaining a more balanced and fair-minded foreign policy toward all key regional players. We must also do a better job of countering the Islamic extremists' widely disseminated version of jihad, while being more persuasive that our own government—and our society—are truly not anti-Islamic. Such actions will do much to deny a supportive environment to our radical Muslim foes. For its part, the US military needs to better understand the religious and cultural aspects of our adversaries' asymmetric mindset—in this case, how Islamic militants conceive of and use jihad—to be successful and survivable in its global campaign against terrorism.

## NOTES

1. Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), p.72, as quoted in Douglas E. Streusand, "What Does Jihad Mean?" *Middle East Quarterly*, 4 (September 1997), 1.
2. Streusand, p. 2.
3. Ibid.
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6. Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Terrorism Is at Odds with Islamic Tradition," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 August 2001.
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8. Johannes J. G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. xi-xii.
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11. John L. Esposito, "Political Islam and the West," *Military Technology*, February 2001, pp. 89-90.
12. Jansen, pp. xiii-xiv.
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17. John Kelsay, *Islam and War: A Study in Comparative Ethics* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 95-97.
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19. Kelsay, *Islam and War*, p. 98.
20. Ibid., pp. 100-01.
21. Jansen, p.162, as quoted in Streusand, p. 5.
22. Kelsay, *Islam and War*, pp. 101-02.
23. Ibid., p. 102.
24. Abedi and Legenhausen, p. 89, as quoted in Streusand, p. 6.
25. Kelsay, *Islam and War*, p. 109.
26. Ibid., pp. 109-10.
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