

FUNDAMENTALISM AND JIHAD*

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Islam is one of the most popular and fastest growing religions in the modern world [Pipes, 3]. To date, it has over one billion followers and it continues to grow and spread across the globe [3]. It also goes without saying, given the situation in the Middle East and America's "War on Terrorism", that Islam is one of the most controversial and misunderstood religions of the age.

This paper seeks to explore the historical foundations of Islam and its militant standpoint against the Western world, with a particular focus on the Islamic concept of jihad. Once an understanding of the historical foundation has been established, one can then apply the knowledge to the present-day situation in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the roots of the problem. This paper seeks to eradicate the misconceptions about jihad held by people across the globe and stress that it is not jihad that is the problem, but the fact that it is being used in a militant standpoint against the West. This paper also seeks to differentiate fundamentalists from Muslims as a whole, as it is the Muslim fundamentalists who have twisted the Islamic tradition of jihad to suit their violent purposes and provide justification for a Holy War against the Western World.

Islam, although youngest of the monotheistic religions, dates back fourteen centuries to the Prophet Muhammad and provided the religious and political foundations for great civilizations throughout history [Lewis, 4]. There are five "pillars" of Islam that all Muslims deeply concern themselves with in order to live a good life and to better the Muslim community, called the *ummah*, as a whole [Armstrong 37]. These "essential practices" state Muslims must declare their faith [*shahadah*], pray five times a day [*salat*], pay a charity tax to benefit the poor community [*zakat*], fast during the month of Ramadan [*sawm*], and if circumstances allow it, make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca [*hajj*] [Armstrong, 37]. Compassion, therefore, is the key to the Muslim faith and the Koran. Although Muslims "believe that they alone are the fortunate recipients and custodians of God's final message to humanity, which it is their duty to bring to the rest of the world" [Lewis, 5], they are "intolerant of false ideas... [but are] tolerant of the people who hold those ideas" [Misconceptions about Islam]. In other words, although Muslims believe they are the one true faith, according to the Koran they are still to be compassionate to those who do not hold the same religious ideas but must condemn the ideas themselves as false. As such, Islam divides the world into the House of Islam, in which "Muslim governments rule and Muslim law prevails", and the House of War, which includes the rest of the global population who do not practice the Muslim religion [31]. Therefore, the act of jihad, which will be described in greater detail later, is a means of taking over the House of War to spread the one true faith: Islam [31].

Taking this into consideration, one can begin to understand the complexity of the Islamic faith as it is not just a religion; it is a political system and way of life. The Prophet Muhammad himself was not just a religious leader of the Islamic community, but the creator and political leader of the Islamic state as well [Lewis, 4]. In terms of structure, Islam is much like Judaism and Christianity. All three faiths have a holy book, sacred places of worship, and a clergy. However, there are deeper implications that establish a distinguishing line between Islam and the Jewish and Christian faiths. In particular, it is the role of the clergy, as instead of acting as mediators between the people and God, in the Muslim faith, the clergy [*ulema*] "uphold and interpret Holy Law" [9], thus deepening the connection between the religious and the secular state.

The Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran stated that “Islam is politics or it is nothing” [8], which exemplifies the point that to a certain extent, God is involved with politics as described in the Holy Law [8-9]. It is important to note again, however, that all practicing Muslims do not hold this view. The historical foundations of Islam established the interconnectedness between church and state, which can be seen in the modern day. This close relationship between church and state has a significant impact on foreign policy and relations with other nations, in particular the Western world.

Jihad is one of the most misunderstood concepts of the Islamic faith, especially given its deadly significance in the fundamentalist movement. Jihad was first revealed in the Koran in scriptures which described the Prophet Muhammad in his quest to create a “just egalitarian society, where poor and vulnerable people were treated with respect” [Armstrong, 37]. Jihad, in this sense, is interpreted as a “struggle” or “effort”, not as a “holy war” [37], which is an understandable misconception of the West, given present day Islamic fundamentalists is presenting as such. According to the *hadiths*, which are traditions in accordance to the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad, “Jihad is [Muslim’s] duty under any ruler, be he godly or wicked” [Lewis, 32], thus making it the religious obligation of every true Muslim. Jihad is mostly mentioned in the Koran in relation to “striving in the path of God” [30], and can be interpreted in two ways: moral striving and armed struggle [30], or the greater jihad and the lesser jihad, respectively [Nasr]. Jihad is described as a moral striving in the first part of the Koran where Muhammad is morally opposing the pagan rulers of the time with his faith during the Meccan period [Lewis 11]. In this sense, jihad becomes an internal struggle to live a good Muslim life, following in the path of God. This view of jihad is accepted by some modern Muslims, especially in terms of how they relate to the outside world [Lewis, 31]. It is clear that this form of jihad is non-threatening to outsiders of the Islamic faith, in particular, the Western world and focuses mainly on the betterment of the individual Muslim more so than the large-scale Muslim community.

The second description of jihad as an armed struggle is described in the later chapters of the Koran, which were written, in Medina when Muhammad was the political leader of the Muslims and fought with his army for the creation of an Islamic state [Lewis, 30]. In *hadiths*, it states, “a day and night of fighting on the frontier is better than a month of fasting and prayer” [32], thus implying the importance of jihad in the life of a true Muslim. Islamic Holy Law establishes essentially the “rules” of militant jihad according to the Koran. First and foremost, jihad can only be fought against infidels, which translates to those who disbelieve in the faith, and those who renounce faith, called apostates [31], hence the religious implications, which lead non-Muslims to the misconception of the translation of jihad to be a holy war. Apostates are considered by Muslim jihadists to be the ultimate enemy, as “the renegade is one who has known the true faith, however briefly, [and] abandoned it” [41]. Male apostates are immediately put to death upon capture, and females receive a lesser, yet still harsh, punishment for their actions [41]. Infidels have not “seen the light” of the Muslim faith, and are often awarded with tolerance and compassion as a means of enabling them to see the flaw in their own faith and convert to the one true religion, Islam [41].

The Holy Law also dictates that during jihad, women, children, and the elderly are to be spared, unless they initiate the attack and does not condone the murder of innocent bystanders [Lewis, 39]. Jihadists are also required “not to torture or mutilate prisoners, to give fair warning for the resumption of hostilities after a truce, and to honor agreements” [39]. Initially after Muslim victory, the captured people were considered slaves and could be used at the discretion of their Muslim captors [40]. However, that policy, in terms of jihad warfare only, was revised and a limit was placed on enslavement [40]. Instead, people in the newly conquered lands were to be treated with compassion and regarded with a policy of tolerance, much like the treatment of infidels, in order to guide them into the “light”

[42]. These people, however, are to be “distinguished” from the Muslim community, and during certain instances in Muslim history, “jurists recognized an intermediate status, the House of Truce... between the House of War and Islam” [42]. Members of the House of Truce, which more often than not were conquered Christian states, paid the Muslim community a series of taxes in order to maintain their faith [42].

Although jihad is a religious obligation and therefore is a selfless act, the Koran does describe rewards for faithful followers who take part in the armed struggle. On Earth, jihadists are rewarded with booty, which are essentially the spoils of war [40]. It is important to note, however, that material gain must not be the sole purpose of jihad or else the religious justification for war is nullified and the guilty individuals will be punished by Allah on judgment day for straying from the path of God [40]. In the next world, jihadists will be rewarded with eternal paradise. Muslims killed during jihad become martyrs for their cause, and again, are rewarded with a seat in eternal paradise [38]. As will be described later, fundamentalist groups are obscuring the line between martyrdom in jihad and suicide, which is “a mortal sin and earns eternal damnation” [38] as a means of encouraging suicide bombers to combat the West [39].

Jihad is also broken down into two types of armed struggle: offensive warfare and defensive warfare. Offensive jihad involves cases in which the Islamic government uses “military force against foreign states that engage in persecuting Muslims or, preventing the spread of Islam within their lands” [Zakaria]. It is the responsibility of the Muslim community as a whole to respond to offensive jihad, although it is volunteer and professional soldiers who take military action against the enemy [Lewis 31]. In defensive jihad, however, it is the duty of every able-bodied individual to stand up and fight for the Muslim community [31], as the Muslim community is under attack by an enemy and it has been forced to retaliate. In both offensive and defensive jihad, Muslims are not allowed to strike first, however, can use violence as a means of retaliation against an enemy threat [Zakaria].

The concept of jihad has an astounding spiritual significance in the Islamic faith and is deeply rooted in its everyday practices and beliefs. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a world renowned professor of Islamic studies, in order to understand this significance, “it is necessary to remember that Islam bases itself upon the idea of establishing equilibrium within the being of man as well as in the human society where he functions and fulfills the goals of his earthly life” [Nasr]. In order to establish this jihad, both internally and externally, Muslims must practice both the greater and lesser jihad. Nasr, in his essay, continues to describe the ways in which the greater, inner jihad is connected to each and every pillar of Islam in a spiritual way [Nasr].

The lesser or external jihad also plays a significant role in the Muslim faith, as it plays a significant role in the historical development of the Muslim world. Throughout history, Muslims have engaged in several wars in the name of jihad. The first jihad was led by the Prophet Muhammad against the rulers of Mecca. Muhammad was successful in conquering the Meccan people and continued on to conquer the Persian Empire, as well as the Central Asia and India. It would not be until centuries later when the Christians of Europe would finally put a stop to the first jihad, resulting in the Spanish *Reconquista*, in which Muslims were evicted from parts of their conquered territories due to their faith. The Christians continued the *Reconquista* into the Middle East but failed to regain control of the Holy Land from the Muslims, known as the Crusades [Lewis 33-38].

In the mid-fifteenth century, jihad was renewed, again against the Christians. This time however, it was the Turks and the Tatars, not the Arabs [Lewis 35]. The Turks and the Tatars began conquering the Christian territories of Anatolia and Constantinople [35]. This time, the Christians were able to better defend themselves against the Muslim attack and once again, stopped the jihad in its tracks [35].

Although the jihad under Prophet Muhammad began as an offensive jihad, it transitioned into a defensive action against the Spanish *Reconquista* as the Muslims were being expelled from their homes as a result of their religious faith [35-36]. In the late nineteenth century, the Muslims began an offensive jihad in the Hindu Kush Mountains of present-day Afghanistan and in Africa as a means of spreading the “light” the infidels residing there [35-36]. However, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that Islamic fundamentalists like Abul Ala Mawdudi and later Sayyid Qutb began transforming traditional jihad into the militant jihad plaguing the modern world [Armstrong, 238-239].

Today, in the twenty-first century, the situation in the Middle East has escalated to a high point of violence and destruction, as Islamic fundamentalists are calling for a radical militant stand against the Western world. The September 11, 2001 attack on the United States of America catapulted the country into what Osama Bin Laden declared as a “jihad against the United States and its allies, should they attack his country” [Kepel, 2]. Since this time, Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda have transformed from a fundamentalist group to a large-scale Islamic fundamentalist movement, and thus carrying on its destructive global jihad ideology [Gunaratna, 31-32]. Modern Islamic fundamentalists have taken several of these “essential” ideas about Islam and in a sense twisted them by taking them out of their original context to fit their violent needs. The idea of compassion and tolerance to those who practice other faiths was wiped away, and instead of condemning the false ideas of other religions, they condemn the people who hold these ideas, which was not the intent of the Koran. Muslim fundamentalists also continue the history of an interconnected religious Muslim state and through jihad, are working to establish a unified Muslim state in the heart of the Islamic world “to reinstate its fallen caliphate and regain its lost glory” [Laqueur, 433].

Fundamentalism is a complex concept that is not easily defined. One definition, as presented by Bruce Lawrence in his work entitled *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolve Against the Modern Age*, states that fundamentalism is “the affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting of neither criticism nor reduction; it is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced” [Jones]. Lawrence poses the argument that fundamentalist groups are “anti-modern, but not anti-modernist” [Jones], as they reject modernity with the exception of the technology and other modern conveniences which are essential in promoting their cause, like the media and the Internet.

The Fundamentalism Project directed and edited by Martin E. Marty and Scott Appleby described other characteristics of fundamentalist groups. The project argues there are five ideological characteristics and four organizational characteristics held by these groups. The ideological characteristics include the fact that “fundamentalists are concerned “first” with the erosion of religion and its proper role in society” and “fundamentalism is selective of their tradition and what part of modernity they accept or choose to react against” [Jones]. In terms of organization, fundamentalist groups exhibit “an elect or chosen membership, sharp group boundaries, charismatic authoritarian leaders, [and] mandated behavioral requirements” [Jones]. Modern Islamic fundamentalist groups epitomize these characteristics, as will be demonstrated in the following paragraphs.

As previously mentioned, modern Islamic fundamentalism essentially began developing first under Abul Ala Mawdudi in Egypt and later by his successor, Sayyid Qutb. In 1939, Mawdudi developed a new theory of jihad, modeled after the ideas of thirteenth century Muslim Ibn Taymiyyah, in which he defined it as “a revolutionary struggle to seize power for the good of all humanity” [Armstrong 238], which was similar to the goal of Leon Trotsky’s Marxist Revolution [238]. Mawdudi developed this newfound interpretation of jihad as a means of “saving” Islam from extinction and sought to gather support for the movement by “turning the whole complex mythos and spirituality of Islam into logos”

[237]. He was the first Muslim to declare “universal jihad” [238] and stated that “no revolutionary ideology which champions the principles of the welfare of humanity as a whole instead of upholding national interests can restrict its aims and objectives to the limits of a country or a nation” [Laqueur, 398]. In doing this, Mawdudi clearly crosses the over from traditional Islam to Fundamentalism, as he begins to select the rudimentary beliefs of the faith to focus on in order to achieve a means. However, Mawdudi does not intend that jihad take purely a military standpoint, nor is it the primary means of achieving an end. In this sense, Mawdudi continues to retain the foundation of the Islamic faith and although his understanding is beginning to turn towards fundamentalism, he has not completely lost sight of the spiritual and religious connotations described in the Koran regarding traditional jihad.

Although Mawdudi’s ideas were radical for the time, they were nothing compared to the ideas of his successor, Sayyid Qutb. At the age of forty-seven, Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization established by Hasan al-Banna as a means of expanding the message of Islam to the “outsiders” without using violence as a force for society’s transformation [Armstrong, 239 & 220]. In 1954, however, Qutb was imprisoned by President Nasser of Egypt, an experience which radicalized his views, as he came to believe “religious people and secularists could not live at peace in the same society” [239]. He became “convinced the so-called Muslim world was also riddled with the evil values and cruelty of *jahiliyyah*” [240], which to Qutb was “a society which has [in the view of fundamentalists] turned its back upon God and refused to submit to God’s sovereignty” [375].

Like Mawdudi, however, Qutb did not believe Islam needed to be initially forced on people, stating “there is no compulsion in religion: but when the above mentioned obstacles and practical difficulties [meaning material obstacles of the political system] are put in its way, it has no recourse but to remove them by force so that when it is addressed to people’s hearts and minds they are free to accept or reject it with an open mind” [Laqueur, 395]. Until his execution by the Egyptian government in 1966, Qutb continued the trend of twisting aspects of the Muslim faith to suit his purposes, specifically by bringing jihad to the foreground of the religion as a means of instituting action.

In the 1980’s, a new and more violent Muslim fundamentalist emerged. Abd al-Salam Faraj, author of the book *The Neglected Duty*, wrote:

“Is it not high time for Muslims to Act?’ God asks indigently. How much more impatient he must be after fourteen centuries! Muslims must, therefore, make ‘every conceivable effort’ to do God’s will. They must not be like the previous generations, who imagined that they could establish an Islamic state by peaceful, nonviolent means. The only way was by jihad, a holy war.” [Armstrong, 335]

Here, one can easily see the appearance of the modern, and violent, fundamentalism facing the global scene today. Faraj, of course, uses the Koran to justify his call for militant jihad and quotes the “Verses of the Sword”, which state “slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God wherever you may come upon them and take them captive, and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every conceivable place” [335]. Faraj believes that these verses were delivered the Prophet later in the Koran, after it speaks of peaceful interactions and therefore, takes precedence over it. Faraj even goes as far to claim that the infidels have taken over Egypt under the administration of President Anwar Sadat, hence why he was assassinated, and therefore it is the duty of every single Muslim to take up arms against this evil threat [336].

Faraj’s fundamentalism directly paved the way for Ayman Al Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden, the foremost Islamic fundamentalists of the day. These two men have taken jihad beyond anything that the

world has seen in the past and transformed it into something seemingly devoid of religious context. In Zawahiri's "Knights Under the Prophet's Banner", he calls to united jihad movements across the world into a universal global jihad against the infidels of the Western world [Laqueur, 428]. He calls the West "not only an infidel but also a hypocrite and a liar" and states that "the principles that it brags about are exclusive to, and the personal property of its people alone...they are not to be shared by the peoples of Islam, at least nothing more than what a master leaves his slave in terms of food crumbs" [428]. By this, he is referring to the Western, support of the creation of the state of Israel, which Arabs vehemently oppose, hence why he believes there can be "no solution without jihad" [429].

In his World Islamic Front Statement, Osama Bin Laden states for similar reasons that the "crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on Allah, his Messenger, and Muslims. And *ulema* have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries" [Laqueur, 411]. Furthermore, these modern fundamentalists sanction and encourage suicide bombers, promising them martyrdom and eternal paradise in the name of jihad. However, the Koran makes it clear that suicide is cause for eternal damnation. How is it then, that these fundamentalists claiming jihad in the name of Allah are using tactics for war that are not condoned by Allah in the Koran? The answer lies in the fact that modern fundamentalists are no longer fighting for Islam itself, but instead are fighting for political reasons and using religion as a means of justifying their actions and gaining public support and aid.

Islam is a complex religion, made even more complicated by the fact that it is facing global scrutiny as a result of the modern fundamentalists causing bloodshed and destruction in its name. Jihad, a practice traditionally sanctioned by the Koran, has been transformed into something so horrifying and grotesque it no longer holds true to its intended significance. Although the lines between traditional and militant jihad are blurred, it remains clear that jihad in the Koran was intended to be moral and internal, as well as armed and external. Those who claim jihad are peaceful "base their assertions almost entirely on the Koranic verses from the Meccan period" [Bukay], while those who claim it to be an armed struggle focus on the Prophet in during the Medina years. It is also clear, however, that those who claim jihad is external and violent recognize that violence is not the primary means and if it must occur, there are rules to be followed in order to show compassion.

Modern Muslim fundamentalists like Zawahiri and Bin Laden have taken the external, lesser jihad, and transformed it essentially into the sixth pillar of Islam—and a bloody pillar at that [Pipes]. To them, it is not about religion; it is simply about using religion to achieve an end. The Muslim faith, which historically has been generally tolerant and peaceful, has been exploited to suit the violent needs of the modern fundamentalists. It is essential for these individuals to do so in order to provide justification for their cause and therefore gain the support needed to be successful in such a feat. In other words, by misrepresenting the Islamic concept of jihad, fundamentalists are able to provide reason within the faith for the bloodshed and therefore provide empower followers with the idea that they are fighting to preserve Allah.

Although Qutb and Mawdudi were Islamic fundamentalists, they were not the extremists of today and still held religion in regard when developing their theories. Certainly these individuals were not outstanding humanitarians; however the Islamic faith was still present in their theory, regardless of how small. In conclusion, modern Muslim fundamentalists have twisted the Islamic tradition of jihad to suite their violent purposes and provide justification for a Holy War against the Western World by essentially tearing the religion from its roots and using violence to bring the "light" of the one true faith to the rest of the world, not compassion and tolerance as dictated by the Allah himself.

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