

## THE INTERPRETATION OF “JIHAD” IN ISLAM

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### Introduction

It is unfortunate that misconceptions have been given to the meaning and duty of *Jihad* by some European writers, by assuming that the word is supposed to be synonymous with war. This paper therefore focuses attention on the true meaning and duty of *Jihad*. It also aims at stating the different kinds of *Jihad* and the manner in which each of these kinds is carried out.

### Concept of Jihad

The word *Jihad* is derived from the Arabic word *Jahd* or *Juhd* meaning ability, exertion or power, and *Jihad* and *Mujahida* mean the exerting of one's power in repelling the enemy. *Jihad* also means exerting oneself to the limit of one's ability and power, whether it be by word or deed.<sup>1</sup>

The Qur'an and Hadith have repeatedly emphasized the need and importance of defence of Islam. *Jihad* is part of this overall defence of Islam. *Jihad* means struggle to the utmost of one's capacity. One who exerts himself physically and mentally or spends his wealth in the way of Allah is indeed engaged in *Jihad*. But in another sense the word is used for war that is waged solely in the name of Allah, according to the principle laid down for such war in the *Shari'ah*, with the object of bringing an end to oppression and aggression against Islam. Its object is not to “Propagate Islam”, but to remove those tyrannical forces which are inimical to Islam

and are not prepared to give all a fair deal.<sup>2</sup>

It is an undisputable fact that permission to fight was given to the Muslims when left Makkah of Madinah. But the injunction relating to *Jihad* is contained in the earlier as well as the later Makkah revelations. Chapter 29 of the Qur'an (*Suratul – Ankabut*) is one of the group which was revealed in the fifth and sixth years of the mission of the Prophet (*SAW*) (i.e. in Makkah), yet the word *Jihad* occurred in the chapter (*Surah*) in the sense of exerting one's power and ability without implying any sense of war. For example, verse 6 of the chapter reads:

*And whoever strives hard (Jahada) strives (Yujahidu) for himself' that is for his own benefit, "for Allah is self-sufficient, above the need of the word"*<sup>3</sup>

In another place in the chapter (verse 69) it is said:

*And those who strive for Us, we shall certainly guide them in our ways. And Allah is surely with the doer of good.*<sup>4</sup>

The *Jihad* as it is used here, is the spiritual striving to attain nearness to Allah and result of the *Jihad* is stated to be Allah's guidance of those who strive in His ways.

In Madinah, a struggle for national existence was forced on the Muslims and they had to take up the sword in self-defence. This struggle went under the name of *Jihad*; but even in the Madinah chapter the word is used in the wider sense of a struggle carried on by words or deeds of any kind. An example of this is verse 73 of chapter 9, it reads:

*O prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be firm against them. And their abode is hell, and evil is the destination*<sup>5</sup>

In this Qur'anic verse the Prophet (*SAW*) is bidden to carry

on a *Jihad* against both unbelievers and hypocrites. However, this injunction to carry on a *Jihad* against both unbelievers and hypocrites could not mean the waging of war against them. It was a *Jihad* 'carried on by means of the Qur'an, a strive hard to win them over to Islam by preaching.

Even in the *Hadith* (Prophetic tradition) the word *Jihad* is not exclusively used for fighting. Hajj (holy pilgrimage) is called *Jihad*. The prophet (SAW) is reported to have said. "The Hajj is the most excellent of all *Jihad*"<sup>6</sup>. The Prophet (SAW) has also termed simple invitation to Islam as *Jihad*, said he, "may the Muslim guide the followers of the Book to a right course, or may he teach them the Book"<sup>7</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the propagation of Islam is a religious duty for every true Muslim, who must follow the example of the prophet. But "The spread of Islam by force" is not only foreign to Islam but it is an activity not in consonance with the theory and practice of Islam. This is unambiguously stated by Allah in the Qur'an thus:

*There is no compulsion in religion, the right way is clearly distinct from the wrong.*<sup>8</sup>

This verse was revealed after the permission for war had been given and it is therefore certain that the permission of fight has not connection with the preaching of religion. Islam never preaches a doctrine of waging an all – out war for the spread of it. This is a fact which should be acknowledged by all and sundry. The Qur'an does not enjoin the waging of war against non-Muslims in other as to subdue them to Islam, and the idea was never present in the mind of the Prophet.

The actual words for war in Arabic are al – Harb and al-Qital. In the Qur'an therefore, the word *Jihad* as a holy war, is used in respect of waging it for defence against any aggression or taking an offence in unavoidable circumstances when the onslaught of enemies is imminent.<sup>9</sup> These circumstances alone can make a war morally

justifiable. The prophet (SAW) was asked in the Qur'an to preach and invite people to Islam "wise counsel and good Admonitions"<sup>10</sup> His main mission in Makkah was to invite people to Allah acting on Allah's command and undergoing persecution at the hands of the unbelievers. His early followers also tolerated untold hardships because of their profession and dedication to Islam. It was in Madinah that the permission to fight the unbelievers (the Quraysh of Makkah) was given and the reason for this is obvious. At Makkah there was individual persecution and the Muslims were taught to persevere.

If the conditions had remained the same at Madinah, the Muslims' attitude would have been same<sup>11</sup>. But the individual persecution could no more be resorted to by the Quraysh of Makkah, and the Muslims were living out of their reach. They now planned to wipe out the Muslims and the sword was taken up to annihilate the Muslim community or to compel it to return to unbelief. That was the challenge thrown at the Prophet (SAW) and the nascent Muslim community of Madinah, and they had to meet it. The Qur'an bears testimony to this. The earliest permission to repel attack is conveyed in words which show that the enemy had taken up the sword or decided to do so. Allah says in the Qur'an.

*Permission to fight is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed and Allah is well able to assist them.*<sup>12</sup>

The reason for given this permission is clearly stated in verse 40 of the same chapter, it says:

*These who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say Our Lord is Allah...*<sup>13</sup>

It will be recalled that the Muslims had been persecuted and

driven out of Makkah and while at Madinah they were also pursued by the enemies to wipe them out and to put an end to their faith. Therefore, the permission to fight was given to a people upon whom war was made by their enemies. It was not a permission to waged war against all non-Muslims in general but only against the people who waged war against Muslims, or resorted to persecution and aggression against the weaker people and established tyrannical regimes which stifled their liberty.

Another permission given to the Muslims to fight is seen in Qur'an 2:190 and runs thus:

*And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, and be not aggressive; surely Allah loves not the aggressors*<sup>14</sup>

Here again the condition is expressly laid down that the Muslims shall not be the first to attack any people. Aggression was totally prohibited. Fighting to defend oneself is a noble and just cause upheld by all and everywhere.

Thus it becomes clear that the Muslims were allowed to fight in self-defence, to preserve their existence, and to repel persecution and tyranny. Islam as a religion of peace teaches Muslims to accept peace even during the course of hostilities, if the enemies so desire, peace is also recommended even though the enemy's sincerity may be doubtful<sup>15</sup>.

### **Kinds of Jihad**

*Jihad* is of three kinds. These are the:

- (i) *Jihad* against visible enemy.
- (ii) *Jihad* against the devil and its agents and
- (iii) *Jihad* against self.<sup>16</sup>

(i) Jihad against a visible enemy is a struggle or a fight against someone who has taken up arms against one or has determined to

exterminate one for no just cause than that one professes belief in one Allah. This is a fight to defend oneself from being killed, persecuted or oppressed by an enemy. This kind of Jihad is the one sanctioned in the Qur'an 2:190, which has been referred to above. However, fighting against an enemy should be the last resort when all other avenues to stop the enemy from one's persecution or oppression have been taken and failed. Even when the Muslims have been provoked and forced to take up arms against the enemies, the Muslims forces are instructed not to enter into the fighting until the enemies proclaim the war and once the enemies incline toward peace, Muslim should at once agree to it as Allah enjoins in the Qur'an thus:

*And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it and trust in Allah; surely He is the Hearer, the knower.* <sup>17</sup>

(ii) *Jihad* against the devil is the struggle against the evil practices of someone or a group of people or even against the government which is making life difficult for the citizens or whose rule is characterized by corruption and tyranny. In other words, it is a Jihad against a wrong doer, be he an individual or an established authority. This kind of Jihad can be carried out either through speech or writing to correct people of their evil doings. In the following Hadith of the Prophet (SAW), it is mentioned that to speak up for truth in the face of a Sultan (government or other authority or any leader) who deviated from the right path". Wrong doings against which Jihad can be carried out in this manner includes bribery and corruption, fornication and adultery, stealing and armed-robbery, hooliganism and thuggery, arson and vandalis, examination mal-practice, persecution and oppression, laziness at work, fraud and embezzlement and tyrannical rule of an authority, etc. However, it should be bore in mind that once a revolutionary movement is launched to change a corrupt system or administration in a society it will definitely create an opposition from those who have some vested interest. They will try to resent the new order and use all the

means at their disposal to crush the new movement. This explains the reasons why the religion of Islam in those early days had to face great opposition from the place of its birth (Makkah). Similar situation can arise at all times since the battle between right and wrong is not merely confined to any particular time or geographical environment or any nation.

(iii) *Jihad* against self is a struggle against one's carnal desire. It is reported that once the Prophet (SAW) was returning from a battle to Madinah he said to his companions on the way: "we are returning from the smaller *Jihad* to the greater *Jihad*". The companions were surprised to hear this because they were in fact returning from active fighting and they were going back to Madinah, a peaceful place. The Prophet (SAW) here meant that actual fighting was a smaller *Jihad* but fighting against one's carnal desire is the greatest *Jihad*. This means in essence that each person should examine himself and identify areas where his desire runs counter to the will of Allah and struggle to surrender his own desire to the will of Allah. That is, all our actions and behaviours, which are not in line with the teaching of Islam, should be corrected and that we should try as much as possible to fashion our lives according to the dictates of the Divine Injunctions as contained in the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition (Hadith). This is the greatest Jihad.

## Conclusion

From the above, we have tried to show what *Jihad* stands for in Islam. It is not a tool for killing or fighting people unnecessarily, neither is it an instrument for oppression. *Jihad*, if it is to be carried out at, should be for self-defence. A man's determination to strive to succeed in life or man's striving to attain spiritual elevation and nearness to his creator is a kind of *Jihad*. The greatest *Jihad*, however, as explained by the Prophet (SAW) is man's determination to allow Allah's desires to over-ride his own. That is total submission to the will of Allah.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Ali Maulan Muhammad, *The Religion of Islam*, Lahore, The Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha' at Islam, 1973, P.450.
- <sup>2</sup> Begun Aisha Bawany (n.d), *Islam: An Introduction*, Karachi, Ashraf Publications, P. 70
- <sup>3</sup> Qur'an 26:6
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid 29:69
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid 9:73
- <sup>6</sup> Hadith Bukhari 25:4.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 56:99
- <sup>8</sup> Qur'an, 2:256.
- <sup>9</sup> Doi, A.R.I, (1984) *Shari'ah: The Islam Law*, London, Ta. Ha Publishers, p. 271
- <sup>10</sup> Qur'an, 16:125
- <sup>11</sup> Begun Aisha Bawany Wakf, op. cit p 73
- <sup>12</sup> Qur'an, 22:29
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid 22:40
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid 2:190
- <sup>15</sup> .Ali Maulana Muhammad, (1973), *The Religion of Islam*, Lahore, Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, p 450
- <sup>16</sup> Doi, A.R.I. (1984), op.cit.
- <sup>17</sup> Qur'an, 8:61.