

# THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONCEPT OF JIHAD IN ISLAM

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## 1. Introduction

I usually do not like to begin defensively. It is important that before I say anything at all about Jihad, we pause to reflect on the larger picture. I find it hugely helpful to think of Islam (as any other religion for that matter) in terms of a circle. The picture of Islam as a circle gives us some very useful hints about what it is that makes a certain way of life, a certain set of beliefs and practices, Islamic. I juxtapose the Islamic circle with a Christian circle and ask what are some of the things that define the one circle as Islamic and the other as Christian. I observe that the circles do not naturally come together. This means that the believers within either circle do not find it natural to associate with one another. The things that keep the circles apart have generally to do with theology, role models, scriptures, ethnicity, race, history, politics, economics and so on. It is obvious that there are multiple factors that keep the circles of religions apart.

Now let us briefly focus on the circle of Islam for a moment. Like all distant objects, this circle will seem solid and undifferentiated to the outsiders. Nothing is far from truth. Many of my colleagues still naively use the simplistic categories of the 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' to refer to a wide variety that exist with the Islamic circle. Often my colleagues brush aside the 'heterodox' aspect as if it were irrelevant. The truth is that the so-called 'heterodox' aspect of the circle forms a good part of the circle. Orthodoxy is associated normally with the doctors of religion, the 'Ulama'. These 'Ulama' appeal to the strict observance of a dated law, the *shari'a*. They adopt an unquestioning and uncritical stance towards the scriptures or towards the interpretations fixed by the past authorities. They possess a vastly exaggerated sense of righteousness, and a vision for the total transformation of the world [notwithstanding the incongruity of this vision in today's world]. Fortunately for Muslims and dare I say, for the rest of the world this may be the dominant aspect of the Islamic circle for

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now, it certainly is not the majority. The mystical and liberal impulses fill up the major part of the circle. I believe any issue to do with Islam must be viewed within this broad framework. I see no reason why the issue of Jihad should be an exception.

The sad episode of September the 11 is a pivot around which the seemingly rising-tide of terrorism moves today. It stands among a few, as an institution, a paradigm or an archetype of the triumph of those Muslims who self-righteously see themselves as the people of God. This minority sees itself as greatly disadvantaged vis-à-vis the powerful West and yet it sincerely believes their 'feat' on September the 11 and the other little 'successes' around the world, are a sign of God being on their side. The West fails to understand the power this simple belief (however 'misplaced') in one being an instrument of God, generates. The world holds it breadth in unbelief at the belligerence of the tiny minority and the incredulously mindless violence it wreck in the name of God. Many have written enough on this subject and in any case, I do not see this paper as a means to moralize. I have made my point and must move on.

The point I have made is simple: that Islam, like any other religion, is not one big whole; it has inner differentiations; a large part of it is innocuous, whereas a small portion of it is virulent. We can speak, in general, of two major divisions within the circle. The fundamentalists (who see themselves as the custodian of orthodoxy) and peace loving Muslims, a good majority of them are mystically oriented particularly in the Indian subcontinent, South-east Asia, central Asia, and north Africa. This means that what Jihad means to one group does not mean the same to the other. In this paper, I attempt to show that while to a small group of Muslims Jihad is a powerful means of conquest, to a larger group, it simply is a means of self-improvement and being individually right before God. Jihad is therefore, not merely a symbol of mindless violence and conquest (a misunderstanding perpetuated equally by Muslim 'Ulama' and Western Media), but a symbol of a people longing for peace with themselves and with God.

## **2. General Meaning**

According to most dictionaries, Jihad means, "a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty: a bitter strife or crusade undertaken in

the spirit of a holy war."<sup>1</sup> According to another dictionary Jihad is "a religious war of Mohammedans against unbelievers in Islam, inculcated as a duty by the Koran and traditions."<sup>2</sup> Another dictionary says that Jihad is "a fundamental tenet of traditional Islam obliging the believer to fight the unbeliever until the latter embraces either Islam or the protected status accorded only to those whose religions are based on written scriptures (i.e., Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans), the 'peoples of the Book'"<sup>3</sup>

*Encyclopedia Britannica* explains Jihad as a "religious duty imposed on Muslims to spread Islam by waging war." Since Jihad has come to denote any conflict waged for belief, it is translated frequently as the 'holy war.' *Encyclopedia Britannica* speaks further of the four different meanings of Jihad: by the heart, by the tongue, by the hand, and by the sword.<sup>4</sup> The first meaning concerns individual Muslims' struggle against their self and Satan, the second consists in believers verbally proclaiming Islam (comparable to the Christian idea of 'proclamation of the gospel'), the third concerns doing good deeds and the fourth refers to the actual conflict and war in the name of God. It is obvious that the good part of Jihad does not concern war with enemies!

The first three types of Jihad are adopted by the Muslim Mystics called the Sufis – they not only believe that Jihad is a means of struggle against evil within believers themselves, but also a means by which Islam is to be proclaimed among peoples.<sup>5</sup> It is in fact common knowledge that the spread of Islam within the Indian subcontinent did not take place through the sword, but by the peaceful manifestation of the charismatic gifts, the Mystics manifested through miracles and discourses.<sup>6</sup> The model for the fourth type of Jihad is rooted in the community of Muslims Muhammad led in Medina. Jihad was then principally directed against the 'people of the Book' (Jews and Christians) until they submitted to the political authority of Muhammad; Jihad was also directed against the so-

<sup>1</sup>*Webster's Third New International Dictionary* 1216

<sup>2</sup>*The Oxford Dictionary* (5) 583

<sup>3</sup>*The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought* 327

<sup>4</sup>*The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (6)

<sup>5</sup>*The Encyclopedia Americana International Edition* (16) 91-92

<sup>6</sup>*Academic American Encyclopedia* 418

called idolaters, until they accepted Islam. This fourth meaning of Jihad is also applied to situations where Muslims are called upon to defend Islam through actual warfare.<sup>7</sup> This warfare must however, end when the desired order is restored.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Jihad in the Traditional Textual Sources

The Arabic word *Jihad* simply means striving. In its non-technical sense, it applies to the efforts exerted by someone to say or do something right or good. It acquires a technical meaning of a religious or holy war against Jews, Christians, and Idolaters, early on in Islam.<sup>9</sup> The traditional sources stress both the aspects of Jihad – inner struggle, proclamation and good deeds on the one hand, and actual war in the name of God on the other hand.

#### 3.1. Inner Struggle and Proclamation

The Qur'an encourages believers to put God ahead of relatives, wealth, ambitions and life itself. This is by no means easy. Non-Muslim who embrace Islam are most likely to struggle because of the opposition they encounter from family and friends. Inward struggle to maintain a preference for God over the loved ones and things or ambitions dear to individuals, is the paramount objective for believers.

O you who believe! Choose not your fathers nor your brethren for protectors if they love disbelief over belief; whoever of you takes them for protectors, such are wrong-doers. Say: if your fathers, and your children, and your brethren, and your spouses, and your tribe, and the wealth you have acquired, and business for which you fear shrinkage, and houses you are pleased with are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way: then wait till Allah brings His command to pass. Allah does not guide disobedient folk.<sup>10</sup>

Obedience of God and those who follow His law is better than following those who reject Islam. This is a struggle that believers wage

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<sup>7</sup>*The Cambridge Encyclopedia*, p. 637

<sup>8</sup>*The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* p, 209

<sup>9</sup>*Arabic-English Dictionary* JM Cowan (ed.) 142

<sup>10</sup>Sura al-Tawba 23-24

within them. The Qur'an encourages these believers to strive against the unbelievers. The text however, clearly shows that this striving is to be dialogical or verbal rather than armed. The means of dialogue is the Qur'an, which the believers are expected to use to disarm the opposition rather than silencing the criticism by force or coercion: "So, do not obey the unbelievers and strive against them with it [the Qur'an] mightily."<sup>11</sup>

The following quotation removes all ambiguity when it connects the individual striving of believers with the practice of the religion through the performance of faithful prayers, almsgiving and fasting:

And strive for Allah as you ought to strive. He elected you, and did not impose on you any hardship in religion –the faith of your father Abraham. He called you Muslims before and in this, that the messenger may bear witness against you and you may be witnesses against mankind. So perform the prayer, give the alms and hold fast to Allah. He is your master; and what a blessed Master and a Blessed Supporter.<sup>12</sup>

This point about Jihad being the actual inward struggle of believers to perform their religious duties, is endorsed by an early tradition of Muhammad: "Aisha, wife of the Prophet asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, we see Jihad as the best of deeds, so should not we join it?' He replied, 'But the best of Jihad is a perfect Hajj [pilgrimage to Makkah].'"<sup>13</sup>

The fact that the believers are called principally to strive as individuals and not as a collective group is borne out by the following verse from the Qur'an: "He who strives only strives for himself. Allah is all sufficient, in need of no being."<sup>14</sup> Clearly, God does not need the help of human beings against those who oppose Islam. Muslims need not do anything on behalf of God, except to work constantly to better themselves before God. If however, Muslims are forced into conflict situation, they are encouraged by the Qur'an to migrate following the example of Muhammad. The verse from the Qur'an below suggests that the matter of

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<sup>11</sup>Sura al-Furqan 52

<sup>12</sup>Sura al-Hajj 78

<sup>13</sup>From the Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 2784

<sup>14</sup>Sura al-'Ankabut 6

the people taking the defense of God in their own hand is so serious that they will be asked to account for their behavior in the afterlife:

Those who the angels cause to die while they are unjust to themselves will be asked [by the angels]: 'what were you doing?' They will say, 'We were oppressed in the land.' They [the angels] will add saying, 'Was not Allah's Land spacious enough for you to emigrate to some other part?' Those people—their refuge is Hell, and what a wretched destiny!<sup>15</sup>

It is such believers who withdraw from opposition and concentrate rather on striving in the way of God [inwardly] that are promised the hope of God's mercy in the afterlife: "Those who believed and those who emigrated and strove for the cause of Allah are those who may surely hope for Allah's Mercy...."<sup>16</sup> If however, the believers do not really strive steadfastly in perfecting their religion and rather engage in conflict with the opposition, they will not enter Paradise: "Or did you suppose that you will enter Paradise, before Allah has known who were those of you who have struggles, and those who are steadfast."<sup>17</sup> In fact the believers are to expect all kinds of opposition and misfortune in order that their steadfastness in the striving for inward perfection is tested: "We will certainly test you with some fear and hunger and with some loss of property, lives and crops. Announce the good news to those who endure patiently."<sup>18</sup>

The striving is however, more than just performing the religious duties perfectly. It involves something positive that all believers can do. The believers' struggle in God manifests itself in the good deeds they perform: "And those who strive in Our Cause, We shall guide in Our Ways, and Allah is with the beneficent [the ones who do good]."<sup>19</sup>

An early tradition of Muhammad endorses the Qur'anic view that doing good is preferable to actual engagement in war. Thus, in response to

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<sup>15</sup>Sura al-Nisa' 97

<sup>16</sup>Sura al-Baqara 218

<sup>17</sup>Sura al-'Imran 142

<sup>18</sup>Sura al-Baqara 155

<sup>19</sup>Sura al-'Ankabut 69

a man's question about whether he should engage in war, Muhammad asked him: "'Do you have parents?' The man said, 'Yes!' The Prophet said, 'Then strive by serving them!'"<sup>20</sup>

The idea of the Jihad being a verbal proclamation of Islam is also widely supported by the traditional sources: "Who is fairer in speech than one who calls unto Allah and performs the righteous deed and says, 'I am one of those who submit.'"<sup>21</sup> An early Muslim tradition speaks of a man asking Muhammad: "'What kind of Jihad is better?' He replied, 'A word of truth in front of an oppressive ruler!'"<sup>22</sup>

### 3.2. Jihad as Actual Armed Struggle

The actual armed struggle is permitted by the traditional sources under the following conditions. Muslims may engage in armed struggles to defend Islam and Muslims, deposing tyrannical regimes, launching pre-emptive strike and freeing the oppressed.

I pointed out an example earlier where Muslims are encouraged to withdraw, rather than fight. In the following verse, Muslims are encouraged to fight in defense. The inconsistency between the two verses is simple to explain. Islam in its infancy was not up to actual armed struggle with anyone. The best option then was to avoid conflict to protect oneself. Once, Islam established itself in Medina and beyond, Muslims gained more and more power and support. With the increase in the number of Muslims and better organization under the leadership of Muhammad, it became viable for them to defend themselves rather than avoid conflict by repeating the exodus (*hijrat*) of Muhammad and his early companions.

Permission is given to those who fight because they are wronged. Surely, Allah is capable of giving them victory. Those who were driven out of their homes unjustly, merely for their saying, 'Our Lord is Allah.' Had Allah not repelled some people by others, surely

<sup>20</sup>From the Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 5972

<sup>21</sup>Sura al-Fussilat 33

<sup>22</sup>From the traditions of Al-Nasa'i, No. 4209



monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, wherein the Name of Allah is mentioned frequently, would have been demolished....<sup>23</sup>

Muhammad and his followers were often under attack in the city of Medina where Muslims had established their own state. The various coalitions of non-Muslim tribes continued to go to war with them. The command to fight actually refers to defensive war. The objective is not to annihilate, but to go as far as it takes to stop the aggression. Muslims are warned about not exceeding the limits of their defensive objectives. Their struggle is to be controlled, proportionate, and purposive:

And fight for the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not be aggressive. Surely Allah does not like the aggressors, Kill them whenever you find them and drive them out from wherever they drove you out. Sedition is worse than slaughter. Do not fight them at the sacred Mosque until they fight you at it. If they fight you there, kill them. Such is the reward of the unbelievers. But if they desist, Allah is truly All-forgiving, Merciful.<sup>24</sup>

Muslims are reminded that armed struggle is really not something that God desires Muslims to engage. Conscientious Muslims too dislike wars, but it is sometimes necessary to pre-empt strikes: "You are enjoined to fight, though it is something you dislike. For it may well be that, you dislike a thing, although it is good for you; or like something although it is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not."<sup>25</sup> In cases Muslims are prevented from exercising their religious duties and are oppressed, they are allowed to fight:

They ask you (Muhammad) concerning fighting in the Sacred Month. Say, 'Fighting therein is a grave (offense) but graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and drive out its inhabitants. Persecution is worse than killing. Nor will they cease fighting you until they turn you back from your faith, if they can....<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Sura al-Hajj 39-40

<sup>24</sup>Sura al-Baqara 190-192

<sup>25</sup>Sura al-Baqara 216

<sup>26</sup>Sura al-Baqara 217



"And those who, when an oppressive wrong is inflicted on them, [are not cowed but] fight back."<sup>27</sup>

The Qur'an also permits armed struggle when tyrannical rulers oppress Muslims. It is the duty of Muslims to seek to free their brethren from oppressive situations:

And why should you not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? - Men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from You, one who will protect; and raise for us from You, one who will help.'<sup>28</sup>

Muslims are allowed to disregard any treaty or covenant they might have with the tyrannical opponents, since the principle of freeing the oppressed is greater than any treaties they might have agreed on: "If you fear treachery from any group, throw back (their treaty) to them, (so as to be) on equal terms. Lo! Allah loves not the treacherous."<sup>29</sup>

#### **4. Jihad and Terrorism**

Jihad and terrorism are two terms frequently used by the Western press to refer to the acts of aggression by some Muslims in parts of the world. These Muslims naturally do not view their action as amounting to terrorism. While it is true that all sincere Muslims would like nothing better than witnessing the entire world becoming Muslim, this is not realistically, what many Muslims are hoping for. In the light section 3 above, many Muslims sincerely believe that there is genuine tyranny and oppression in the world. Muslims are suffering under the oppressive regimes whose influence exceed beyond the national boundaries. The threat of the expansion of this oppression looms over Muslims all over the world through the subtle diffusion of godless ideologies of democracy and humanism. These Muslims see it as their religious duty to engage the principle of Jihad and liberate or protect the interests of Muslims everywhere. In the process however, they also hope that they will get to proclaim the truth about Islam.

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<sup>27</sup>Sura al-Shura 39

<sup>28</sup>Sura al-Nisa' 75

<sup>29</sup>Sura al-Anfal 58

B Barber speaks of Jihad and globalization as the two dominant anti-democratic movements in the world today.<sup>30</sup> In terms of degrees, Barber thinks of the Jihad as something more dangerous than globalization. He is probably right within the framework he is operating. What he is wrong about is in thinking of the US as the single terror target. We know that this is far from true. The US typifies the West. The West is the enemy number one for many Muslims. They see the Western civilization as the single biggest threat to Islam. The terror attacks are indeed in some cases reactionary, but in most cases these attacks are meant to be pre-emptive. They are meant to create fear – a result they indeed generate well. These attacks are also a means of communicating to the West that the two civilizations cannot meet unless either one is decimated. The combined strength of the West is far superior to all the Islamic nations put together; leave alone the pathetic Jihadist organizations. The only means available to these ideologically motivated Muslims is to fight a terror battle.

One of this century's greatest Muslim thinkers, Mawlana Mawdudi (d.1979), typifies the difference in the way in which these civilizations view the world today.<sup>31</sup> Mawdudi was founder and chief ideologue of the Jam'at-e-Islami. His speeches and works are immensely influential in contributing to Islamist ideology and shaping Islamic politics in the Indian Subcontinent, Africa and the rest of the Islamic world.<sup>32</sup> His ideology was formulated against the backdrop of the West. Three simple principles summarize this ideology: Unity (*tawhid*), Prophethood (*risala*) and Vicegerency (*khilafa*).<sup>33</sup> Under the first principle, he makes two positive assertions about God: that God is one and that God is Sovereign. These principles mean that God alone has the right to command and forbid; people are under obligation to only obey Him.<sup>34</sup> The other two principles proceed from the belief in the Unity of God.

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<sup>30</sup>In March, 1992, *Atlantic Online*

<sup>31</sup>See W C Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (New York: 1957) 236

<sup>32</sup>Mawdudi's advice on the Islamization process in Libya has been noted by D H Khalid "Phenomenon of re-Islamization" in *Mainstream*, Delhi, 16 June 1979, 20

<sup>33</sup>Mawdudi, *Human Rights in Islam* (Aligarh: 1976) 7

<sup>34</sup>Mawdudi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad, (Lahore: 1960) 145

Mawdudi's Islamist ideology stands as an antithesis to secular humanist democracy, which regards people as sovereign. Democracy demands among other things that the determination of the right and the wrong, consequent law making and its execution lie in the hands of the people. Changing understandings of right and wrong necessitate change in the law. Secular democracy allows the same people who make laws also to change them when they become undesirable to the majority. People are sovereign and subject at the same time. They make laws and subject themselves to them or change them when they want to. This sort of popular sovereignty has no place in Mawdudi's vision of Islam.

The traditional belief that God intended man to be the vicegerent of God on earth is rooted in the traditional accounts of Adam's creation.<sup>35</sup> Vicegerency involves a certain exercise of authority and ruler-ship on behalf of God. But this sort of ruler-ship is a "collective right of all those who accept and admit God's absolute sovereignty over themselves and adopt the divine code, conveyed through the Prophet, as the law above all laws...."<sup>36</sup> All true Muslim believers are vicegerents if they submit to the Sovereign God and His laws received through Muhammad having repudiated all previous national, ethnic, cultural or religious norms. Thus, all believers possess the right to be vicegerents. Mawdudi calls the resulting polity Islamic democracy.<sup>37</sup>

A realm where the three principles of *tawhid*, *risala* and *khilafa* exist as described above, is the 'Kingdom of God or theo-democracy'.<sup>38</sup> This 'kingdom' is universal in scope because one God is Sovereign over all.<sup>39</sup> It does not recognize geographical, linguistic or colour differences. Anyone who submits automatically joins the community of vicegerents that runs

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<sup>35</sup>Sura al-Baqara 30-35; references to Adam and angels are found in Sura al-A'raf 11; Satan refusing to prostrate to Adam in Sura al-Hijr 26-33; see also *Sahih Bukhari* IV.341-347

<sup>36</sup>Mawdudi, *The First Principles of the Islamic State*, tr. K. Ahmad (Lahore: 1978) 25

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid* 26

<sup>38</sup>Mawdudi *Islamic Law* 147

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid* 154

the Islamic State.<sup>40</sup> Since the scope for Islamic polity is universal, there is space for its expansion through the vicegerents. They are God's agents establishing knowledge of One God and securing obedience to His laws even through force when necessary. Thus, Mawdudi says: "Administrators of the Islamic state must be those whose whole life is devoted to the observance and enforcement of this law...."<sup>41</sup>

The given laws of the Sovereign God do not automatically gain acceptance among all believers let alone those who are not Muslim. Although Mawdudi takes pains to maintain that vicegerency refers to the 'whole community of believers', this assertion is conceptual. The sovereign God is not personally involved in the execution and establishment of His law. There is therefore, a need for people to see that God is recognized and His laws are obeyed. The notion of vicegerency as applied to all the believers conceptually fills this gap: "The Caliphate granted by God to the faithful is the popular vicegerency and not limited one. There is no reservation in favour of any family, class or race. Every believer of God is a Caliph...."<sup>42</sup>

It seems apparent that a state where the entire population is said to govern itself based on the divine laws would be ungovernable. Recognizing the impossibility of this system Mawdudi qualifies his notion of vicegerency. The product of this qualification ultimately turns out to be elitist.<sup>43</sup> He speaks of the appointment of an *amir* as the head of an Islamic State chosen by Muslims.<sup>44</sup> To begin with, his list of qualifications for the rulers is discriminating. A person can be chosen as the vicegerent of vicegerents only if he is: Muslim, Male, A sane adult and an obedient (Muslim) citizen of an Islamic State. Women and non-Muslim citizens are excluded. Muslims who move into an Islamic State also cannot participate

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<sup>40</sup>*Ibid* 156

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid* 155

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid* 158

<sup>43</sup>Yasien Mohamed, "Knowledge and Purification of the Soul: An Annotated Translation with Introduction of Isfahani's *Kitab al-dhari'a ila maka'im al-shari'a* (58-76; 89-92)" in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 9 (1) 1998. 1-34; here the vicegerency is connected to the idea of inner purification of souls. Sufism in this sense was extremely democratizing

<sup>44</sup>Mawdudi *Human Rights* 11

in the governance of the State unless they renounce allegiance to the non-Islamic state they have left behind.<sup>45</sup> This sort of repudiation offered verbally and in public marks a new chapter in their life- a new life of unconditionally pure submission to the Sovereign God in the pure environment of an Islamic State.

The ideologies like this have the potential to breed different sorts of virulent movements within the world of Islam. The Iranian revolution in the late seventies and the Taliban seizing of Afghanistan, the lawless frontiers of Pakistan where religious fanaticism assumes rabidity through its intermixing with tribalism and ignorance are but a few examples. The Taliban emerged with an extremely inflexible vision of Islam in 1994; they seized control of Afghanistan and the regions bordering Pakistan dragging the entire region to isolation from even the rest of the Muslim world, leave alone the West. This became a fertile soil for the pan-Islamic vision of the powerful terrorist organization led by Osama bin Laden. The fact that the Muslim world endorsed the action of the US-led coalition in Afghanistan shows that the Taliban's militancy combined with the universal reach Bin Laden gave to them was perceived as a threat even by the Muslim nations.

The Bin Ladens must not depress us or instill in us irrational fears about international terrorism. I think the majority of the Muslims are neutral in their stance towards Jihad as actual war. A good part of Islam understands Jihad in an intensely personal and spiritual sense. I present below a simple review of this perspective. Not many of us hear about this side of Islam because the media blows up what sees as sellable. The dormant force of Muslims who struggle inwardly to attain to perfection before God does not appeal to the world. It is not worth the research. It appears that the world wants to believe that such Muslims do not exist. It is a fallacy that must be countered by both Muslims and people of other faiths.

## **5. Jihad in Islamic Mysticism**

According to Muslim Mystics, the essence of Jihad is "the expenditure of self for the pleasure of God Most High, emptying oneself of everything for His sake, and divesting oneself of reliance on the material

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<sup>45</sup>Mawdudi *First Principles* 64

world."<sup>46</sup> This means that Mystics' primary focus is on 'self' and not the other. The object of this focus on the self is to see God in dissonance from the world. Islamic Mysticism encourages Muslims to focus on themselves; subject themselves to the pain of separation from the friends, relatives, wealth and ambitions; and hope to see God when the self is indeed purged from the dross of the world. Instead of Jihad as war, the Mystics stress Jihad as inward struggle on the path to God. This inward struggle also involves controlling dominant desires of self – even the desire for political, cultural, and economic control of the others. Mystics believe it is harder to struggle against oneself than against the combined strength of the most powerful of the enemies in war. The struggle against self is of greater value than war against the enemies. The Mystics in Islam often refer to the tradition of Muhammad in which he is alleged to have stated: "I have returned from the lesser *jihad* to the greater *jihad*."<sup>47</sup> The greater Jihad is understood by Mystics to be a more difficult task, involving self-improvement through acts of piety, voluntary poverty, and mortification of oneself. It is true that many Mystics saw death in the battlefield as the ultimate denial of self through martyrdom, but that was not the norm.<sup>48</sup>

There is evidence from the very early period of Muslim history that a great number of people longed for a sort of personal and intimate relations with God. Many of these people traveled to distant centers where Mystics sought to see God through engagement in a severe regimen of communal practices.<sup>49</sup> Many such centers had sprung up in the military towns and fortresses along the Byzantine and Muslim frontiers in Syria and Mesopotamia. This area became home for two great representatives of the early Islamic asceticism: Ibrahim bin Adham (d. 160/777) and Ibn al-Mubarak (d. 181/797). The presence of these ascetics in the context of the fierce armed struggle between Christians and Muslims indicates an "intimate link between the nascent ascetic movement and what the sources describe as the *ribat* and *jihad*, that is, residence and voluntary military service on the borders of Islam."<sup>50</sup> The fact however is that soon ascetics

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<sup>46</sup>CJ Cornell *Realm of the Saint* (Austin: 1998) 82

<sup>47</sup>AF Buehler *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet* (Columbia: 1998) 9

<sup>48</sup>A Knysh *Islamic Mysticism* (Leiden: 2000) 6

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid* 18

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid* 19

organized themselves into communes, which they called *ribat* (after the military garrisons). These new *ribats* exclusively concentrated on ascetic practices, minus the military service. A Syrian ascetic Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d.215/830) and his circle of disciples did not discount Jihad as warfare against enemies, however, they treated the inward Jihad against the passions and desires of one's self as something far greater and more difficult a goal for Muslims than actual war.<sup>51</sup>

With the beginning of the systematization of the Mystical tradition in 10-11<sup>th</sup> century and later from the time of the rise of the Mystical brotherhoods in Islam in the 12-13<sup>th</sup> century, the fundamental preoccupation of Mystics turned out to be with the Jihad against the self. 'Abd al-Qadir (d. 561/1166), the founder of the Mystical brotherhood called the Qadiriyya from Persia called upon the Muslims to this 'greater Jihad'. This Jihad according to him, was to be waged against the enemy within every believer – that keeps them far from the grace and love of God.<sup>52</sup>

Hakim al-Tirmidhi (3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century - ca.261/874)<sup>53</sup> described God as the only true Reality and acknowledged the possibility of the Mystics being able to see God before death, if they followed the principles of the Mystic path involving the greater Jihad. Some of the principles he outlined were: repentance, abstinence, self-control, illumination, desperation, reprieve, bewilderment and finally the stage of seeing the manifestation of God.<sup>54</sup> Those who contributed to the systematization of the Mystic tradition in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century CE, engaged with al-Tirmidhi's ideas. 'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri (376/986-465/1072)<sup>55</sup> was one of them.<sup>56</sup> He wrote on a wide variety of subjects, but he became well known mainly

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<sup>51</sup>*Ibid* 37

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid* 181

<sup>53</sup>A mystic from Tirmidh, Iraq with whose ideas many well known Muslim mystics and philosophers engaged including Ibn 'Arab»

<sup>54</sup>Knysh *Islamic Mysticism* 107-8

<sup>55</sup>A great ¶-f» writer from Khurasan; his fame rests mainly on his 'Epistle on ¶-f»sm'

<sup>56</sup>For the names and details of a few other ¶-f»s who contributed to the systematization of ¶-f»sm see Knysh *Islamic Mysticism* 116-68



because of his mystical works of which, his 'Epistle on Mysticism' is especially significant. Completed in 438/1046, this source contains a "complete account of the theoretical structure of Mysticism."<sup>57</sup> It seeks to carve out a rightful place for Mysticism in Islam. The work gives biographies of the Mystics, explains terms, and gives the exposition of the Mystic path involving the principles of repentance, abstinence, renunciation, remembrance, poverty, patience, trust, contentment, witnessing, and nearness to God.<sup>58</sup> These principles became entrenched within Islamic Mysticism through the establishment of the brotherhoods in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries through out the Muslim world.

## 6. Conclusion

I am aware that this paper sounds rather defensive. I am not a Muslim. My motives in writing this paper stems from a genuine desire to put things in their right perspective, as I understand them. Jihad is a very misunderstood term, sadly even among Muslims. It is hard for most of us to deal with complexities. We tend to see things or interpret things in terms of solid 'black and white' categories. It is true that some Muslims, do think of Jihad as a legitimate means by which God will miraculously establish His Kingdom. Majority of the Muslims would however, favour the Mystical understanding of this concept. Mystics understanding of Jihad is dimension of Islam that the media must concentrate in order to counter the fears generated by the exaggerated image of Islam being Martial and militant. To a small group of Muslims, Jihad is indeed a powerful symbol and means of conquest; a vast majority of Muslims does not identify with this characterization of Islam; Jihad to these Muslims is a means of self-improvement – a passion for being right before God, a means of earning God's grace and His vision.

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<sup>57</sup>*Ibid* 131

<sup>58</sup>See al-Qushayri's *Principles of Sufism* (Berkeley: 1992)