

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT JIHAD

In the previous chapters we have provided an account of the clear and unequivocal stand point of Islam regarding the nature of war, when war can be considered legitimate, and when Muslims are able to take up arms. However, there are Muslims, including so called intellectuals and scholars, who still think that it is a religious duty for Muslims to fight non-Muslims until Islam prevails. This misconception is like a cloud that casts a shadow on the true meaning of "Jihad" in Islam. This misconception needs to be refuted. The most recent proponents of this view are Mawdudi (1977) and Qutb (1980)⁽¹⁾. The claim of the scholars who support this point of view is based on three arguments: their interpretation of a Quranic verse, their interpretation of a prophetic tradition, and their view of the state of the present day governments of the world.

The Quranic verse they refer to is verse 193 of chapter 2: "Fight them until there is no more persecution, and worship

(1) Abul A'la Mawdudi is a Pakistani Scholar, he died in 1979. Sayed Qutb is an Egyptian scholar. Mr. Qutb was executed by the government of Egypt in 1966.

is devoted to God.” They interpret the verse as a command to fight non Muslims until Islam prevails. To refute this claim we need to consider the context of the revelation. This verse was revealed as one of four verses: chapter 2, verses 190-193. These four verses were revealed when Muslims were heading to Mecca on the seventh year (H) to perform the rites of Umrah according to the Agreement of Hudiabiyah which stipulated that Muslims can perform Umrah provided they come unarmed. On their way to Mecca to perform the rites of Umrah, Muslims were apprehensive about their safety. They were travelling to the land of the enemy. The enemy that persecuted them, expelled them from their homes, and confiscated their wealth. They were travelling to Mecca unarmed and even if they were allowed to carry arms, would they have been able to justify fighting during the “scared months” and on the “scared grounds.” These verses were revealed to alleviate these concerns and to give the Muslims the permission to take up arms against their enemy, if the enemy reneged on their agreement and attacked the Muslims while they are performing the rites of Umrah. The verses emphasize that persecuting Muslims and forcing them to forsake their new religion which they adopted freely and voluntarily is more heinous in the sight of God than violating the sanctity of the sacred months and the sacred grounds. When these verses were revealed, the Prophet (pbuh) prepared a battalion of hundred horses and brought equipment and arms. The Prophet (pbuh) commanded Muhammad Bin Muslimah to take care of the horses and Bashir Bin Sa’d to oversee the equipment and the arms. He commanded the two to camp at a nearby

place and watch out for any sign of treachery by the pagans. This was his contingency plan in case the pagans of Mecca decided to renege on the agreement and attack the unarmed Muslims. Bin Muslimah and Bin Sa'd were commanded to camp in a place nearby where they can watch the situation closely. They were commanded to bring the horses and the arms to the Muslims if they see any sign of treachery on the part of the pagans of Mecca. As it turned out, the need to execute this plan did not arise since the pagans of Mecca decided against any breach of their agreement. Muslims completed the rites of Umrah and left to go back to Medina without any incident. Thus, the main objective of these verses was to establish the principle that Muslims can defend themselves against aggression even if this took place on the sacred grounds and during the sacred months.

The prophetic tradition that is used to support the claim that it is a religious duty for Muslims to fight non-Muslims until Islam prevails, is "I have been commanded to fight people until they declare that: 'There is no deity but God.' Their lives and their wealth become inviolable when they have made that declaration unless they commit a crime punishable under the divine law." [Narrated by Abo Hurrirah] A superficial reading of this tradition supports the false claim. However, we need to study the tradition in depth. The critical point is what Prophet (pbuh) meant by the word "people." The word "people" mentioned in the tradition did not mean "all people." In fact, the tradition is used to describe the reaction of Muslims to the aggression of the pagans of Mecca. The basis for this is the fact that

the word “people” was replaced by the word “pagans” in other authentic versions of the same tradition. Another fact that supports this argument, is that the Prophet (pbuh) has been reported to have recited the verse: *“So, [Prophet] warn them: your only task is to give warning, you are not there to control them.”* [88:21-22] The recitation of this verse after the tradition refutes that the Prophet (pbuh) was commanded to fight all non-Muslims to force them to convert into Islam. The tradition dealt only with the pagan Arabs who were persecuting and torturing Muslims.

Mawdudi and Qutb accuse the governments of the world of hypocrisy. They claim that Islam is a revolutionary movement whose purpose is to free all people from the tyranny and hypocrisy of their governments. Islam’s mission is to destroy the unlawful regimes which prevent their people from accessing the truth. Our response to this argument is that Islam brought about a revolutionary program to abolish injustice and establish justice. This program does not envision the control of the whole world by a single Islamic government. The Quran clearly indicates that diversity is God’s plan. Several verses support this argument. *“We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given*

you, so race to do good: you will return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about.” [5:48] *“If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community, but they continue to have their differences - except those on whom your Lord has mercy - for He created them to be this way.”* [11:118-119] The scholars agreed that although the belief in the oneness of God is the common foundation for all divine messages, but each community was given its own path to salvation so that they would be tested. Diversity of human life is God’s plan. Trying to unify the world under one regime is against the will of God, let alone doing it by force.

Several earlier scholars discussed this point before. Saeed Bin Gabeer’s⁽¹⁾ interpretation of the above verse is that if God had so willed, He would have made all people to believe in one faith: Islam (Alqurtobi 1272, 3434). Therefore, the verses indicate that it was not intended to force the Islamic way of life over all people. Megahid Bin Gabr Almacci⁽²⁾ and Katadah Bin Do’ama Alssadousi⁽³⁾ considered the statement “but they continue to have their differences” as a proof that people will continue to have different faiths and it is impossible to unite the whole human race under one faith (Alqurtobi 1272, 3434). Alhassan Albasri⁽⁴⁾ and A’taa Bin Dinar⁽⁵⁾ understand that the statement “for He created

(1) Died 714 C.E.

(2) Died 722 C.E.

(3) Died 736 C.E.

(4) Died 728 C.E.

(5) Died 744 C.E.

them to be this way” clearly indicates that diversity is a divine plan (Alqurtobi 1272, 3434).

The view advanced by Qutb and Mawdudi flies in the face of well established views of reputable and respected scholars. Sheikh Abdo (1972) stated that all the battles that the Prophet (pbuh) participated in were battles for self - defense and for the protection of Muslims. Sheikh Hassan Albanna (1992, 434) stated that “God ordained struggle for Muslims not as a tool of aggression nor to advance their own self interest, but as a means for the protection of Muslims and their way of life and as means to guarantee peace. Struggle is also necessary for the fulfillment of the mission of Islam: to provide guidance to the truth and justice. Islam mandated inclining to peace when the enemy inclines to peace:’But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it, and put your trust in God’”. Even Qutb (1980) asserts that the Islam forbids the imposition of belief by force. However, he believes that governments of the world today oppress their people and prevent them from practicing the freedom of conscious. He believes that people are in a state of servitude and that it is the duty of Muslims to liberate them. Islam is a revolutionary movement that came to annihilate all political and material powers which stand between people and Islam.

Even if we agree with Mawdudi and Qutb’s claim about the hypocrisy of the governments of the world, Islam does not condone using force against hypocrites. Read if you will: “*[Believers], why are you divided in two about the hypocrites, when God Himself has rejected them because of*

what they have done? Do you want to guide those whom God has left to stray? If God leaves anyone to stray, you [Prophet] will never find a way for him. They would dearly like you to reject faith, as they themselves have done, to be like them. So do not take them as allies until they migrate [to Medina] for God's cause. If they turn [on you], then seize and kill them wherever you encounter them. Take none of them as an ally or supporter. But as for those who seek refuge with people with whom you have treaty, or who come over to you because their hearts shrink from fighting against you or against their own people, God could have given them power over you, and they would have fought you. So, if they withdraw and do not fight you and offer you peace, then God gives you no way against them." [4:88-90]. These verses indicate unequivocally that Muslims cannot fight those who offer peace. The criterion set up in these verses for taking up arms against non-Muslims is whether or not they attack Muslims. Neither hypocrisy nor adopting different belief is a legitimate criterion for taking up arms against someone. These verses also indicate that Muslims should honor treaties concluded with non-Muslim countries.

The best way to call people to Islam is by showing the goodness and greatness of Islam. An Islamic civilization that benefits the whole world is the best way to win the hearts of people to Islam. The present condition of Muslims in the world does not make a case for Islam. There is a need to improve the lot of Muslims and to rebuild an Islamic civilization that helps the progress of the whole world. Such change is the true objective of Islamic faith: the creation of a good life on earth and in the hereafter.

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CONCLUSION

Struggle (Ar. Jihad) is a comprehensive concept that may involve taking up arms in self-defense or for the alleviation of human suffering and persecution. This kind of struggle can only be used as a last resort after all peaceful means for resolving a conflict have been exhausted. The Quran commands Muslims to incline to peace, even after a war has erupted, if the enemy chooses to incline to peace. Taking up arms is justified when Muslims are fighting those who attack Muslims or expel them from their homes. Those who espouse different faith but do not attack or persecute Muslims have to be treated kindly and fairly.

It is clear then that the wars that Muslims engaged in, whether against non-Muslims or between Muslim factions, were not "religious wars." The wars that erupted between Muslims and non-Muslims were born out of circumstance. They were wars to defend Muslims and their freedom of speech, patriotic wars to protect their homes, national wars to defend the unity of the Muslim state. Unfortunately, not all of these wars can be classified as just wars according to the Islamic principles.

Imam Abdo (1972) indicated that the pagans of Mecca

started the war against Muslims to force them to revert back to their original religion and to abandon Islam. Muslims had to defend themselves and to defend people's right to believe in whatever they wish to believe in. Muslims were commanded by the Quran not to propagate faith by the sword. The Quran says: "*There shall be no compulsion in matters of faith,*" [2:256] and admonished the prophet saying: "*are you going to compel people to become believers?*" [10:99]. Had there been no infringement on the right of Muslims to practice their religion, many of the wars that Muslims participated in would have been averted.

The wars against the Byzantine and Persian Empires were clearly defensive wars. The threat against the fledgling Muslim state posed by the two empires was real and eminent. Muslims in countries under the control of the two empires were persecuted and tortured. The wars of conquests that followed this era were a reflection of world state at that time and not all these were justifiable from the point of view of Islamic law.

"Believers! Do not take My enemies and yours as your ally, showing them friendship when they have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven you and the Messenger out simply because you believe in God, your Lord- not if you truly emigrated in order to strive for My cause and seek My good pleasure. You secretly show them friendship- I know all you conceal and all you reveal- but any of you who do this are straying from the right path. If they gain the upper hand over you, they will revert to being your enemies

and stretch out their hands and their tongues to harm you; it is their dearest wish that you may renounce your faith. Neither your kinfolk nor your children will be of any use to you on the Day of Resurrection: He will separate you out. God sees everything you do. You have a good example in Abraham and his companions, when they said to their people, 'We disown you and what you worship besides God! We renounce you ! Until you believe in God alone, the enmity and hatred that has arisen between us will endure!' - except when Abraham said to his father, 'I will pray for forgiveness for you though I cannot protect you from God' - [they prayed] Lord, we have put our trust in You; we turn to You; You are our final destination. Lord, do not expose us to mistreatment [at the hands of] the disbelievers. Forgive us, Lord, for You are the All Mighty, All Wise. Truly, they are a good example for you [believers] to follow, a good example for those who fear God and the Last Day. If anyone turns away, [remember] God is self-sufficing and worthy of praise. God may still bring affection between you and your present enemies-God is all powerful, God is most forgiving and merciful- and He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes. God loves the just. But God forbids you to take as allies those who fought against you for your faith, driven you out of your homes, and helped others to drive you out : any of you who take them as allies will truly be wrongdoer." [60:7-9].

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