



Original Article

The Concept of Jihad in Islamic Texts: An Analytical Study of Violence Between Mainstream Scholars and Extremists

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to analyze both the Islamic texts dealing with jihad and the relationship between them and its practice. The desire to promote peace and harmony is based on general Islamic religious purposes, or *Maqasid al-shari'a*, from the two interpretations of the extremists and mainstream scholars. Bearing in mind that these texts are believed to be divinely-inspired, the interpretations are, however, human. The said texts have been the subject of two broad interpretational approaches: the orthodox interpretation that is widely accepted by the mainstream and supported by Islamic principles in general, and the interpretations of certain minorities that are rejected by the mainstream. This paper seeks to examine the qualitative research methodology and theological analysis used by contemporary extremists group of what seems to be textual evidence of “violent jihad” in Islam. The significance of this study is to investigate the appropriate use of interpretation that could be acceptable to mainstream scholars and reflects the real nature of Islamic principles. Subsequently, it concludes that the violence that is manifested in extremist activities is the result of the misinterpretation of some Islamic texts regarding jihad, and that, in contrast, the best modern interpretation of jihad is *jihad al-nafs*, which, alongside many other meanings that promote peace, has been declared the correct path by mainstream scholars in their response to the extremists.

Keywords: *Jihad*, Extremist, Violence, Misconception, Mainstream, Peace.

Introduction

From time immemorial, there have been disagreements among pious predecessors on the Islamic texts dealing with jihad and on the relationship between the texts and how to perform jihad. These disagreements continue among the mainstream scholars and extremists, who perceive Qur’anic verses and various *hadith* in different lights. Given the fact that these texts are believed to be divine but must be interpreted by humans, they have been the subject of two broad interpretational approaches: the orthodox interpretation that is widely accepted by the mainstream and supported by Islamic principles in general, and the interpretations of certain minorities that are rejected by the mainstream. Authorities have deliberated intensely over this, as can be seen in the following statement: “The history of the Muslim community under the

Prophet is normally divided into two periods; the Meccan and the Medinan. Qur'anic chapters and verses are normally classified accordingly".¹ During the entire Meccan period, the Muslim community was not permitted to take up arms. However, the first revelation to change the attitude of patience (*sabr*) of the Meccan period to resistance came during the Medinan, as indicated in the following verse:

Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory.²

This verse has often been used to encourage jihad as a religious duty. From that time – the end of Meccan period³ until today, many violent acts have been carried out in the name of jihad, while many other forms of jihad have also been developed, such as jihad against *al-nafs* (selfish desires) and Shaytan, the common enemies of everyone, as well as military jihad. Conversely, some contemporary groups interpret jihad as only militant and violent activities. According to them, "this action should be the only solution for Islam to be revived in Muslim societies".⁴ Furthermore, these groups believe that "jihad is a neglected pillar that is forgotten nowadays in Islam."⁵ On the other hand, there another interpretation of jihad was developed, which suggests that: in the first place they were separated into two – lesser jihad and greater jihad: "It is also separated into minor jihad and greater jihad, self-jihad and common jihad."⁶

The literal meaning of the word jihad is "to struggle" or "to resist". This kind of struggle should be, first and foremost, against the enemies of your *nafs* – lust, desire and the devil. Military jihad is a secondary type and relate to self-defense against non-Muslims.

The objective of this study is to present the moderate approach in jihad, *wasatiya*, which is based on Islamic texts. This is widely-recognized by mainstream Muslim scholars, especially today. It will also highlight the views of mainstream scholars who represent a peaceful approach to Islam and who always preach against violence and fanaticism. Additionally, it will study the role played by mainstream scholars in the promotion and application of a jihad that encourages peace and harmony in Islamdom and the world at large.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology as being the most suitable approach, considering the nature of the phenomenon. It will, therefore, be useful to apply the theory of problem-solving approach as well. This study shall cross the boundaries of both theology and Arabic literature in order to conduct a textual analysis that will lead to a solution to this problem. It will study consider the misunderstanding of jihad as being an important factor in causes extremist groups to commit violent acts in the contemporary world.

The selected Qur'anic verses and *hadith* that discuss jihad in the Muslim tradition and that seem to serve to justify violent acts of the extremist groups in the name of the Islamic jihad form the basis of this research. There are many works that serve as intellectual sources for the extremists. This paper, however, will use some specific interpretations that seem to have

¹ Anonymous, *Jihad and the Islamic Law of War*, Amman, The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought Press, 2009, vol. i, p. 4. The author of this book was intentionally kept anonymous.

² Kor 22, 39.

³ The first year of the Hijra.

⁴ Mustafa Mash'ur, *al-Jihad huwa al-sabil*, Cairo, Dar al-da'awa, 1943, vol. i, p. 7.

⁵ Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, *Jihad: The absent obligation*, ed. Abu Umama, Birmingham UK, al-Ansar, 2000, p. 14.

⁶ Yasir Qadhi, "On Salafi Islam", in *Muslim Matters*, ed. Amad Shaykh and Haytham Soliman, available online at: <http://muslimmatters.org/2014/04/22/on-salafi-islam-dr-yasir-qadhi/#comments-51211>.

received particular attention and have often been cited by many extremists, and three in particular that are regarded as having suspicious interpretations, namely: *Jihad: The Absent Obligation (al-Jihad faridat al-ga'iba)*, *Jihad is the only way (al-Jihad huwa al-sabil)*, and lastly, *(Jihad: Its Aims and Objective)*. The responses of the mainstream scholars to these shall also be reviewed. The selected scholars in this paper who responded to the extremists' approach were taken from *The Muslim Five Hundred Most Influential (2015)*, which features moderate scholars of Islamdom, who represent Islam with regard to its principles, main values and general goals. On the other hand, the study will avoid some political issues in the Muslim world, such as Palestine-Israeli crisis, in order to maintain the research limitations.

The misinterpretations are purposively considered to form a theoretical framework for this study. The three variables of this research are the mainstream peace approach to the jihad texts, the extremist violence approach as an opposite and jihad as a central phenomenon in which to find the role of moderation (*al-Wasatiya*) in promoting peace and solidarity through interpreting these texts. This is because the extremists' misinterpretations of jihad have created philosophical, rational, practical and social challenges of conducting such action defined by them as jihad in Islamic theology.

Literature Review

Research into different aspects of jihad has been carried out by scholars writing from various perspectives and points of view. The issue of peace and jihad has drawn significant attention from intellectuals both within and without the realm of Islam. Some saw these issues as political, while some looked at the problems from a media perspective. Others looked at the theological issues, the approach that this study focuses on. Lastly, some looked from the angle of conspiracy theories.

The author of *Islam and Media* puts together some findings in his paper as follows:

The media is a powerful and indeed very influential one; moreover, media can be used to help differentiate between Islam and terrorism. In fact, violence against innocent people violates Islamic principles of jihad. The media must be able to show these differences and at the same time portray the image of Islam according to the true tenet of Islamic teachings.⁷

It is evident from the author's assertion that the problem of the misconception of the Islamic principles of jihad can be addressed through the mass media. Reflecting on this, the author discusses how the media links Islam with violence and terrorism. In the conclusion, the author challenges western media to desist from their regular causing and promoting of Islamophobia.

Furthermore, the author solved the problem from the narrow angle by articulating the issue of peace and violence in Islam, which he linked to the media and a western conspiracy. However, he failed to examine the issue from within Muslim society, focusing primarily instead on the external factor of the media, controlled by western powers, that is behind this conspiracy. Therefore, the obvious picture of the argument is that extremism is less responsible than western media. However, the radical Muslim minority need to take their own share in causing damages to Islam not just the media, as this research will show.

⁷ Mohammad Shuhaimi bin Hajj Ishak, "Islam and Media", *Asia Social Science. Canada Journal of Science and Education*, 7/8 (2012), 263-69.

Another work that was written on this matter was *Peace and Islam*, by Maulana Khan. He states that the Islamic treatment of peace and solidarity is unique in the history of humanity. He articulates the issue in the following way: "in the known history of human being, it was Islam that gave a workable ideology of peace to the world for the first time."⁸ He subsequently goes further and explains Islamic formulas that have practical relevance in the history, thus:

Because defeat of an opponent in the battleground does not solve the problem; he who is defeated never accepts defeat and seeks to avenge his loss. Because, war is therefore a vicious circle: Battle – Defeat – Revenge. In case of companions, God gave this demonstration through Battle of Badr and Battle of Uhud and then guided the believers through the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which opened all doors of peace!⁹

The author tried to reflect on the contemporary relevance of this issue, and concludes that:

Unfortunately, present-day Muslims are totally unaware of the Sulh Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. They do not know that while in the 7th century A.D., Prophet had to accept unilateral conditions of the opponents to bring the Treaty into effect; the scenario today has changed completely. That if the opponent loses, the apparent victors don't win for those who lost shall come back seeking revenge. The only way to win is to establish peace, which shall open opportunities, which may lead to success.¹⁰

This is how this study ends, challenging societies because of their abandonment of the Prophet's teaching to promote peace, with particular reference to the *Sira* of the Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him.

The next article, 'On Salafi Islam' by Yasir Qadhi, was not obviously linked to the current work, but the author gave some valuable solutions that can guide contemporary Salafis as his objectives. The author started by mentioning the positive contributions of Salafism which were then followed by criticism about the negative side of Salafism. In the second section, he discusses extremist Salafism, writing "some of them are questioning the legitimacy of all rulers of Muslim lands."¹¹ Furthermore, he added that "there are some Salafi groups who consider all the rulers of Muslim lands (or those who do not rule by the *shari'ah*), to be illegitimate and regard them as disbelievers, whose legitimacy should be contested, perhaps by force"¹²

They go even further, calling for the removal of secular rulers from Muslim lands. Qadhi puts it in the following terms: "those holding the harshest views on the legitimacy and belief of a ruler who judges by other than the law of God inevitably adopt the most radical position in pronouncing *takfir* and thus lay the foundations for necessitating military jihad".¹³

At this point, we come to highlight how Qadhi's work relates to this study, since the author singled out certain aspects of Salafism in order to suggest a transformation in their radical attitude, along with other possible solutions found in his work. Yet the nature of his paper is strictly aimed at solving the problem within the Salafi sect.

⁸ Wahiduddin Khan, *Islam and Peace*, Islamabad, International Center for Peace and Spirituality, 2013, p. 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

¹¹ Qadhi, "On Salafi Islam", p. 5.

¹² Ibid, p. 5.

¹³ Ibid. p. 6.

Having gone through previous studies, it seems that there is a problematic aspect in the issue of jihad and peace in Islam within the circle of interpreting jihad texts, one which is closely related to theology of extremism. The current study proposes how these texts have been understood and the misconceptions resulting from the misbehavior of extremists conducting jihad. Conversely, the problem exists in the theoretical ideas of the radical Muslim minorities that have used such suspicious interpretations of these texts, and which seem to prove the acceptability of committing such violent acts in the name of Islam. Overall, the theoretical framework of this research paper is these texts' interpretations by both extremist and the mainstream scholars.

Textual Analysis Of 'Jihad'

According to Arabic dictionaries, *jihad* derives from the word *jahada*, which has many meanings, such as: to make an effort, to struggle, to defend the faith, to protect yourself, family and innocents, to purify your own self to become better, and to fight those opposed to you. Furthermore, "Jihad is etymologically related to the words *Mujahada*, which also means struggle or contention, and *Ijtihad*, which is the effort exerted by jurists to arrive at correct judgments in Islamic law."¹⁴

It is clear from the above that the concept of jihad in Arabic is not simply one thing. To perform jihad is: to resist or to struggle against evil and the enemy. That enemy should be, first and foremost, yourself, as the closest one to you. According to a *hadith* in *Bayhaqi/Kitab al-zuhd hadith* no: 354, the holy prophet said: "your best enemy ever is *nafs* that stands as your closest enemy". The second enemy could be Shaytan, as Allah said: "indeed, Shaytan is an enemy to you (oh mankind) so treat him as an enemy".¹⁵

Furthermore, how one fights each of these enemies differs from one enemy to another. To illustrate, if you have different enemies you should prepare different arms. *Nafs*, selfish desire, is your nearest enemy, as shown by the *hadith*. The second enemy is Shaytan/the Devil, and fighting against him is with supplications, religious spirituality and other psycho-religious exercises. As such, Sufi scholars interpret this concept for the following verse: "oh you who believe! Fight such of the disbelievers as dwell near to you and let them find firmness",¹⁶ as the nearest disbeliever is, as stated in that verse describing the human soul, *nafs*, your nearest enemy. And in another verse, it is stated: "so take Allah as a shield and reconcile your mutual differences and obey Allah and his messenger if you are (true believer)".¹⁷ This quotation highlights the Sufi concept of *Jihad al-nafs* in *Tafsir al-Ithari*, indirectly "interpretation by indication". The final enemy you can fight is an unbeliever or anyone who wants to destroy you or your religion. All those listed above are types of jihad in the Islamic tradition, the meanings of which have been taken from the Qur'an, from the textual meaning of the word jihad itself. In addition, the verses quoted earlier and similar verses that discussed Jihad in the Qur'anic documentary, received *Ithari* interpretation which is to resist for self as the internal struggle for *Nafs* whims. However, this resistance is the purification of heart that perceived as the center of human actions.

¹⁴ Anonymous, *Jihad and the Islamic Law of War*, vol. i, p. 1.

¹⁵ Kor 35, 6.

¹⁶ Kor 9, 123.

¹⁷ Kor 8, 1.

The last form of jihad is the physical or military jihad, which the militants adopt. The Qur'an states "and fight them in the cause of Allah; those who fought and prosecute you, but commit no aggression. Surely Allah does not love the aggressors".¹⁸ This type of militant jihad is also divided into two categories. The first is the proactive jihad, that which takes place under the leadership of an Islamic government; such is hard to do under the requisite conditions in the contemporary world. The second is the defensive jihad, which is that if non-believers attack Muslims in the name of religion the latter have no other option but to fight back in the name of jihad. The verse quoted above discusses defensive jihad. The first type of militant, proactive jihad is not appropriate in light of the current Muslim situation, as this study will elaborate in the following pages.

The Interpretations of Jihad Texts According to Extremists

This section seeks to survey the verses and narrations of *hadith* that seem to be evidence for violence in Islam by extremist groups in the name of jihad. Below are some selected:

Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that - then those are the defiantly disobedient.¹⁹

This text inspires them and, because of it, they fight to establish the Islamic state as one of the "glad tidings". Another verse that is often cited and interpreted by the extremists as the basis for violence is: "And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, then it is they who are the disbelievers".²⁰ Extremists use the quoted verses along with some *hadith* as justification for their actions. *Jihad: The Missing Obligation* is, as stated above, one of the most important books to contemporary extremists. Just as the book preaches violent jihad, we can understand the significance of jihad, according to the author, from its title of *Jihad: The Missing Obligation*. The author blames the scholars of the Islamic world for their attitude in downplaying jihad. "Jihad has been neglected by present Islamic scholars. However, they know that it is the only way that Islam will come to the power again as it was before."²¹ A different inspiration from another book has also been emphasized by Mustafa Mathur, "indeed there is only one and single jihad, which is war."²² It is clear that the previous verses did not promote violence, but their interpretations do lead to the violent actions that the extremists refer to as jihad. This paper will discuss the interpretations and misconceptions of these verses as proclaimed by extremists. The following are other texts, in the form of narrations of *hadith*, with interpretations that seem to serve as evidence to justify the extremists' actions.

Faraj narrated some *hadith* and comments: "The Messenger of Allah said to the tyrants of Mecca when he was there: 'O people of *Qurayh*, listen to me! By the One in whose hand is my soul, indeed I have come to you with slaughter'".²³ Based on this historical incident, Faraj

¹⁸ Kor 1, 190.

¹⁹ Kor 24, 55.

²⁰ Kor 5, 45.

²¹ Faraj, *Jihad: The Absent Obligation*, vol. i, p. 1.

²² Mash'ur, *al-Jihad huwa al-sabil*, vol. i, p. 17.

²³ Faraj, *al-Jihad: the Absent Obligation*, vol. i, p. 15.

comments: "Jihad is level-headed since the first calling to Islam *Da'wa* in the early Makkah period. Significantly, it is considered as the most important activity in Islam. Moreover, it will be included among the five pillars of Islam, as number six".²⁴

Another *hadith* with this meaning, narrated by Ahmad on the authority of Ibn 'Umar, states that the Prophet S.A.W said: "I have been sent before the Hour with the sword until Allah is worshipped alone with no partner, and my sustenance has been placed underneath the shade of my spear, and the disgrace and the abasement have been inflicted on those that oppose my command, and whoever imitates a people is one of them".²⁵ Another significant interpretation on the same issue by the extremists that describes the importance of jihad is the following: "A nation does not abandon jihad in the way of Allah, except when it is humiliated by him".²⁶ The author, commenting on the following *hadith* from the two famous books of *hadith* by Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abdallah b. 'Umar (RA), states that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "I have been commanded to fight humankind, until they testify that there is no god except Allah, if they obey Allah they will become free",²⁷ and they also use this text to mean sending our prophet with a sword, as stated above. According to Abu Umamah the translator of Faraj he said "the prophet said: The most important matter is Islam, its pillar is the prayer, and the peak of the matter is jihad in the cause of Allah. Reported by Ahmad, Tirmidī and others".²⁸

These texts all played a positive role for extremists, giving them a unique "understanding" of the issue of jihad and its purposes. They often believe that jihad is the greatest form of worship, and the most important aspect of all religious activity. The above text suggested that extremists interpret these texts superficially, without paying due attention to the cause of the text's revelation, a situation that shaped the overall syntax of the texts, the goals of the Islamic *shari'a* (*Maqasid al-shari'a*), in these particular texts and other ideas found in collections of texts on the same issues; all these concepts must be used as tools to elaborate on the text in the Islamic tradition. The current study provides a section, below, for the response of mainstream scholars to the extremists' ideas. This paper, therefore, looks at some reasons that lead extremists to violent actions in the name of jihad.

The Position of Jihad in Islam According to Extremists

The importance of practicing militant jihad in Islam differs in the extremists' view from its importance according to other scholars. Extremists add jihad to the five pillars of Islam to make six of them.²⁹ Even though they use correct Qur'anic verses and sound prophetic *hadiths*, their interpretations are fanatical in the application of these texts. Usually, there are two main issues that led them to have a different approach of interpretations and signified the issue of jihad as follows: first, "eradicating any government that is ruling with secular law" other than the *shari'a* in Muslim societies. In addition they literally applied it and assassinate Sadat Ex-Egyptian president"³⁰ To them, Muslims need to abandon any constitutions, and secondly, establishing states.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 15.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 14.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 14.

²⁷ Bukhari, 24/25 and Muslim, 36/25.

²⁸ Faraj, *Jihad: The Absent Obligation*, vol. i, p. 39. The translator made a comment in the Book

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 12.

Generally, extremists present the importance of jihad through the way they claim that Allah stated it in the holy book. Nevertheless, there are many texts that discuss jihad in Islamic revelation. In the holy Qur'an there are more than 160 verses that discuss jihad and other matters in detail, directly and indirectly, although such is not the focus of this study. The issue is mainly the interpretation of these texts and their implementation. Nevertheless, the scope of this research cannot cover all those verses. However, the study will consider some texts that constitute the main evidence, as these are the ones most often quoted by extremists. Importantly, the study will examine some issues linked with jihad, such as the glad tidings for *Khilafa*, the Islamic caliph. Based on these texts, the extremists conclude that the only means of jihad is the militant variety.

Fighting Against "Inhiraf" Deviations in Muslim Societies

Extremist projected "*Inhiraf*" Deviations that leads to innovations in Islam in Islam as significant problem that need to be brushed in Islamic societies. This purpose of such is a short-term goal that helps achieve their main goals. They proclaim that they are bringing people back to the "right path" original path. This goal is a transitory one, which they say allows them to reach their main goals. For example, they say that such deviations touch every kind of activity in society, especially Islamic societies, and people instead need to be pious and practice Islam in a "perfect way", which they reinforce through special "understanding" that always backs their own concepts of such criteria regarding the way of life in Muslim societies. The adoption of many of the lifestyles of other cultures and ideologies is the reason why Muslims suffer in Muslim countries.³¹ It is also said that Muslims are not governed by the teachings and values of the Qur'an and Sunna: "The constitutions in these countries are western teachings and all the suspicious theories like Darwinism, communism, freedom of expression are forbidden, and you can decide to be gay and many other issues that contradict Islamic values. All these are normal in these societies, therefore they need to be cleaned".³² To them, such deviations are not based on the societies themselves but the rulers, whom they call "tyrants".

Fighting Against the So-Called "Tyrants"

Extremists have specific terms they use to refer to rulers or leaders in such circumstances, especially when those governing with democratic or traditional systems. To them, this concept is taken from the following verse: "For we assuredly sent amongst every nation a messenger, (with the Command), 'Serve Allah, and eschew Evil'".³³ These "tyrants" must be fought, as is seen in the example of what happened in Egypt through the jihadist group *Jama'at al-jihad*.³⁴ The first mission of this group was to eradicate the rulers whom they saw as tyrants in the Muslim communities. They started with the assassination of the President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat. "The symbol of this group is to assassinate any ruler that is ruling with constitutions other than the *shari'a*. In addition, after killing those 'tyrants', in their own view they will turn these societies to Islamic societies."³⁵ Yet they were simplifying issues. Qadhi stated what they meant in the following way: "The idea to them (the extremists) is simply when you kill a tyrant, then you will get into power easily because, tyrants must be executed for their ruling with secular

³¹ Mash'hur, *al-Jihad huwa al-sabil*, vol. i, p. 18.

³² Ibid.

³³ Kor 16, 36.

³⁴ Qadhi, "On Salafi Islam", p. 6.

³⁵ Shaikh Abdullah Faisal. "The 21 Aims and Objectives of Jihad." *Authentic Tauheed*. Edited by Anonymous Students. Anonymous. July 9, 2014. <http://www.authentictauheed.com> (accessed February 14, 2015). p.3.

constitutions rather than the book of Allah.”³⁶ Afterwards, they will go in to establish an Islamic state with implementation of the *shari'a* law in full. This leads to one of the main purpose of the jihad, according to the extremists.

To Establish Islamic State

One of the main goals for fighting is to govern and rule by “what Allah has revealed”. People must obey the government and must give *bay'a* to the caliph. This is the most significant purpose of jihad to the extremists. They cite verses that talk about glad tidings in order to justify their acts of jihad. Moreover, they claim to be the party that will execute Allah’s promise of having the land. After they establish the state, for them it is time for Islam to spread into the world with sword and “holy war”. Based on the jihad texts and the above categorization, it can be seen that jihad is one of the most important symbols within Islam and, to extremists, its most important aspect.³⁷ Also, jihad is an individual obligation placed on every Muslim in the world when unbelievers attack Muslims, according to the following argument:

As for the Muslim lands, the enemy resides in their countries. In fact the enemy is controlling everything. The enemies are these rulers who have snatched the leadership of the Muslims from them. Thence jihad against them is individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*). Besides, the Islamic jihad is now in need of the effort of every Muslim everywhere without regarding any border. In addition, it should be borne in mind that when jihad is an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*), it is not required to seek permission from one’s parents to march forth as scholars said: it becomes like praying and fasting.³⁸

This quotation highlights the common concept of the obligation of jihad being an individual obligation, which is often repeated. Another study by al-'Awaysah put more emphasis on the concept when asked by one scholar:

Is jihad an individual obligation? He replied: yes! Because, many Muslim lands were occupied in the past and remain occupied in the present [like Kashmir, Sinkiang in China, Southern Russian states, Mindanao in Southern Philippines, etc.] by some of the disbelievers and this type of occupation is not hidden from any Muslim who shows concern about the affairs of Muslims, not to mention Islamic organizations, parties or Islamic countries.³⁹

The basis of this is taken, according to them, from some *hadith* such as that *hadith* from *Bukhari*, narrated by Abu Hurayra (R.A.): “Allah’s Apostle (PBUH) said: ‘I have been ordered to fight with the people till they say, “None has the right to be worshipped but Allah”, and whoever says, “None has the right to be worshipped except Allah, is safe””.”⁴⁰

Based on these texts, no border between any countries should be taken into consideration, and no matter far Muslims are from each other they have to consider Islam as one country. This is the reason why the obligation of fighting in the name Jihad in any societies. Because, it became an individual obligation according to them, wherever Muslim they live. In addition to

³⁶ Qadhi, “On Salafi Islam”, p. 5.

³⁷ This is an Arabic idiom expression that means the top of something, such as a camel’s hump.

³⁸ Faraj, *Jihad: The Absent Obligation*, p. 62.

³⁹ Šaykh Husayn al-'Awaysah *et al.*, *Mujmal masa'il al-iman al-'Ilmiyya fi usul al-'aqida al-Salafiyya*, ed. Abu Amina Bilal Philips, cited from the tape *Silsila al-Huda wa al-Nur*, 720/1.

⁴⁰ Faraj, *Jihad: The Absent Obligation*, p. 52.

this proclamation, Mash'hur uses some texts to explain the border and boundary system based on his understanding:

Oh you Muslim youth! You should keep this in mind that the field of jihad for the sake of Allah is not restricted to one a country rather than another. Because Islam is one city, as you know, the flag of jihad has risen in some parts on the planet, it will remain arisen for the sake of Allah, until jihad will free completely Muslim places around the world, and then one Islamic state will be established. Furthermore, fellow youth, keep in mind that Palestinian Afghan, Syrian, Eritrean, Bosnian issues and so on, are not racial or borders issues, but are Islamic issues, and have no solution except war against the enemy of Islam, so jihad is the only way!⁴¹

He basis this argument on *hadith* and claimed it was the reason why they fight in certain situations. He states: "this concept was understood from the saying of the Prophet, that whoever does not worry about Muslims matters is not one of them".⁴²

This study directly links these theological concepts with some actions undertaken by extremists. Before proceeding to mainstream scholars' responses to these fanatics' ideas, this study will highlight a few examples of the implementation of the aforementioned concepts by some extremists.

Operationalization of the Aforementioned Concepts in the Field

Are the previous texts used to inspire violence in the name of jihad? Yes! According to extremists, these verses are not just theoretical. They have to be made manifest on the battlefield. In addition, the manifestations of extreme and fanatical understanding are seen all across history. This study will uses various examples from history regarding the operationalization of jihad. Three examples have been selected to show how misunderstandings flow from theory to practice. One of these examples is from the early history of Islam, and is the first radical misconception of jihad by the fanatical group known as the *Khawarij*. The second example is *al-Jama'at al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* of Juhayman al-'Utaybi, while the third example is ISIS and Boko Haram, both of whom are contemporary.

Kharijites and Sahaba

Modern extremist groups are not the first to break from the mainstream of the *umma*. This study now conducts a historical survey that begins with the first extremist groups to appear in the Islamic world. In Islamic history, the first theological disagreement was that of the kharijites,⁴³ in the first generation, at the time of 'Ali. This history links with the current research in terms of how they misunderstood some verses and what actions they took as a result. This was the first group in Islamic history to misunderstand verses theologically and break away from the mainstream of the *umma*.

The most important issue to here in the attitude of extremists is sending Muslims out from the religion deliberately, for minor issues in Islamic teachings⁴⁴. They charge that both 'Ali (R.A.)

⁴¹ Mash'hur, *al-Jihad huwa al-sabil*, p.8.

⁴² *Ibid*, 2.

⁴³ As a group rather than as an individual.

⁴⁴ While it is not directly linked to this research, it is indirectly linked because of the similarity of the attitude of *takfir*.

and Mu'awiyya (R.A.), as well as their followers, were infidels! As such, they do not judge – according to the kharijites – in accordance with what Allah revealed. This was a first in history, as it was the first time in Islam that minority groups appeared and tried to justify it by their misunderstandings of the Holy Book. This is the verse they used to justify their actions: “And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, then it is those who are the disbelievers”. Extremists use this as evidence to legitimate their fanatical acts. Based on this verse, they can fight 'Ali and Mu'awiyya. They employed superficial conceptions and mis-quotations to the text, and the same verses have been used by contemporary extremists, in their discourses on *takfir*. Furthermore, belief in *takfir* is the ideology that links the Ḥarijites with contemporaries, as will be discussed later. In other words, they declare others as infidels and then fight them because Allah said: “kill those who do not believe in Allah”.⁴⁵ How did the mainstream treat them? Significantly, 'Ali (R.A.) sent Ibn 'Abbas (R.A.) to have an intellectual debate with them, and he won the debate by convincing some of them. At the end, he returned home with two thousands of them out of six thousand.

This is the way that 'Ali (R.A.) treated these extremists and returned them to the moderate way: the *wasatiyya* track with dialogue and debate, even though many did not accept it. It is clear that such a superficial approach to the texts plays a key role in their idea, and flows down to their actions. In the next example of operational employment of such terms, the same superficial understandings blindly drove extremists to hijack the Ka'ba.

Ka'ba Hijacked (Under Siege)

This was carried out by *Jama'at al-Ikhwan*,⁴⁶ which broke away from *al-Jama'at al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* and was led by Juhayman b. Muhammad b. Sayf al-Utaybi, who had a serious clash with his master Shaykh al-Jaza'iri.⁴⁷ Juhayman rose to the fore as an Islamic leader in the mid-1970s, when he was in his forties. His followers believed that Juhayman was the renewer of that century, *Mujaddid al-Qarn*. Slowly this idea grew and received secret support from his followers, who included the Bedouins.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, “the movement was the product of foreign ideological influences, mainly from Egyptian groups such as Šukri Mustafa's *Jama'at al-Muslimin* (“Society of Muslims”), more commonly known as *al-Takfir wa al-Hijra* (“Excommunication and Emigration”).⁴⁹ Juhayman and his followers carried out one of the most spectacular operations in the history of militant Islamism: the seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca on November 20, 1979, which was the first day of Muharram 1400 AH, the very beginning of a new Islamic century. A group of people came into the holy mosque carrying a “coffin”,⁵⁰ pretending that there was a lifeless body in it. However, the coffin was full of firearms. They seized the microphone from the Imam, Muhammad al-Subayil, immediately after prayer, and he was shoved aside by men who took machine guns from beneath their robes and fired them into the air and at some nearby policemen before yelling to the crowd that and according to this study “Juhayman declared that it had been confirmed to him in a dream that his companion

⁴⁵ Kor 9, 32.

⁴⁶ Not the famous Egyptian Iḥwan.

⁴⁷ Thomas Hegghammer and Stephane Lacroix, “Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-Utaybi”, *IJMES* 39 (2007), p. 103-22.

⁴⁸ Qadhī, “Mahdi Between Fiction and Reality”, available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxLzHjt85oc>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ This is because it is usual for people bring their dead to the blessed mosque for *janazah*.

Muhammad al-Qahtani was the Mahdi” based on that the group planned for that crucial and fanatic incident

Their aim was to have al-Qahtani consecrated as the Mahdi between the black stone corner of the Kaba (al-rukhn al-aswad) and Ibrahim’s station of prayer (al-maqam) as tradition requires. The militants barricaded themselves in the compound, taking thousands of worshippers hostage and awaiting the approach of a hostile army from the north, as promised by the eschatological tradition. The situation developed into a two-week siege that left a hitherto unknown number of people dead and exposed serious gaps in the Saudi crisis-response capability.⁵¹

This claimed Mahdi has appeared at the stage, and one of them starts giving a harsh sermon insulting the Saudi royal family, meanwhile, “They force people to give a salute of bay’a to the Mahdi as a Muslim caliph.”⁵² Incidentally, there were about five hundred of them, all well-armed. They had gradually stashed weapons in small chambers beneath the mosque in the days and weeks leading up to the assault. Muslims were terribly upset at being held hostage at the mosque, and the *tawaf* was stopped. The five congregational daily prayers were also stopped, there was bloodshed in the holiest place, and innocent people died. In the end, the group was captured by government forces and executed at dawn on January 9, 1980 in the public squares of eight Saudi cities, including Mecca: 63 Great Mosque militants were beheaded by the sword on the order of the king. This example shows how misunderstanding of texts leads to such inhuman actions, all because of some verses and *hadiths* related to the coming of the Mahdi, as well as other misconceptions, which joined all these together with an ignorance of the *Maqasid al-shari’a*. It is commonly known in Islam that even criminals are considered safe when they got into the Ka’ba.

Two Self-Proclaimed Islamic States

There are two commonly publicized Islamic states in Middle East and Africa, and the leaders of the two groups are in the top five most influential extremists in Islam.⁵³ Number one terror in the Muslim world is Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi. He is the self-appointed caliph of the Muslims, a position denied and derided by virtually all other Muslims. His appearance as and the rapid gains of ISIS in Syria and Iraq were largely unexpected and his backers are still unknown. ISIS has been responsible for numerous massacres and atrocities. They have spared no-one who disagrees with them, but their attacks on religious minorities have received particular media attention. There are no confirmed reports of his background, but some reports say that he was born near Samarra, Iraq and holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of Islamic Sciences, in the Baghdad suburb of Ahmadiyya.

This group is also known as ISIL, The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant. It is estimated that their membership encompasses just under 10,000 members between Syria and Iraq. The particularly dangerous element to ISIS is the fact that an estimated 3,000 of its members are foreigners, with international visas and the ability to travel freely, including their presence in the US. this Group took over control large parts of Syria and Iraq and is threatening neighbouring countries. Additionally, IS, which announced itself a Muslim caliphate last June, currently has 25 provinces,

⁵¹ Lacroix, “Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia”, p. 112.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ S. Abdallah Schleifer, *The World’s 500 Most Influential Muslims*, 6th edition, ed. al-Mahdi al-Rawadieh et al, Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Press, 2014/2015, vol. i, p. 180.

best-known as “wilayats”, extended across Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁵⁴

The second person studied here took third position in the list of extremist Muslims; this was Abu Bakr Shekau, the head of Boko Haram, a terrorist group in Nigeria that has carried out many atrocities. He speaks Hausa, Arabic and English, and claims to have had a theological training. He has appeared in many videos posted online, most notably after the kidnapping of over 200 schoolgirls in April 2014.⁵⁵ Moreover, this group had displaced thousands of innocent civilians, burned hundreds of schools and thousands of markets, and taken over some villages. All these fanatics justified themselves through misinterpreting religious texts. Boko Haram also announced an alliance with ISIS in March 2015. This became a media headline of that day (March 7): “Boko Haram has officially announced an alliance with the Islamic State (ISIS), according to an audio message”, as the BBC reported that day.

These two groups did much damage in their efforts to achieve an Islamic state. Yet they failed. The verse they use most often to legitimize their acts, which they call “glad tidings” from Allah, and which they also see as his promise to Muslims that they will come to power, lead the world and eradicate those gone “astray”, is “Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds”. Allah also said: “For We assuredly sent amongst every People a messenger (with the Command), ‘Serve Allah, and eschew Evil’”.⁵⁶

On the basis of these verses, these two groups unleashed violence to establish a state. Moreover, they claim to understand certain concepts that the majority of people do not, without considering the Islamic principles and goals that preach the protection of human life and dignity. However, this study shows how such violent acts could be legitimized by these groups only by misinterpreting these texts.

Summary of Extremist Attitudes

All in all, what are the attributes that form the main concepts of the extremists, before giving the main response to them?

- 1) They declare others to be infidels and their own countries to be hypocrite states; therefore, every good believer must make a *hijra* to their state and join them, as this is seen as being a move from hypocrisy to sincerity.
- 2) They drew a line between themselves and anyone else. Whoever does not join them is regarded as an infidel.
- 3) The mass destruction of property, killing of hundreds of people, and displacement of many people, among many other inhuman and zealous acts, are justified by these verses and *hadith*, according to the extremists.
- 4) Denying the validity of any law in the world, included Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh al-waqi'*, an ignorance that has caused many problems.

⁵⁴ Jamine Buari, “Why Boko Haram announce alliance with ISIS”, Naija.com. <https://www.naij.com/399956-why-boko-haram-announced-allegiance-with-isis-experts.html>, accessed 12/02/2015.

⁵⁵ *The World's 500 Most Influential Muslim 2014/2015*

⁵⁶ Kor 16, 36.

- 5) A superficial understanding of the texts and simplifying the concept of the general goals of Islamic *shari'a* law.
- 6) Abducting women, enslaving them, forcing them to convert or selling them.

After giving these general attributes of the extremist, at this point, the current study share scholars' two messages to those fanatic groups' misconceptions about jihad and violence, which is the response of mainstream scholars.

Response to Extremists' Suspicious Interpretations

From the previous examples, the kharijites down to contemporary extremists proclaim that there were some minorities from the general Muslim *umma*. It is therefore understood that they all have misrepresented jihad in some way.

Noble scholars in the contemporary Islamic world have all condemned extremism and wrote letters to the extremists. The first letter, signed by 126 Islamic leading scholars and academics from around the world, was an open letter rebutting the religious arguments of the "Islamic State" by the most influential Muslims in 2014/2015.⁵⁷

Open Letter to al-Bagdadi

It is forbidden in Islam to ignore the reality of contemporary times when deriving legal rulings. It is forbidden in Islam to kill the innocent. It is also forbidden in Islam to kill emissaries, ambassadors and diplomats; hence, it is forbidden to kill journalists and aid workers. In the letter, the scholars condemned all these actions in detail and rebutted in full the misconceptions of the texts that the extremists used to justify their actions. For more details, see footnote 57. Furthermore, these letters showed that these groups were not representing Islam and Muslims. Hence, Muslims were totally against these violent acts that the extremists call jihad.

It is equally important to state that they have all been minorities that misconceive and misguide on the basis of their own desires. For own reason, jihad in Islam means defensive war. It is not permissible without right cause, right purpose and right rules of conduct. The mainstream scholars declared in their letter that it is forbidden in Islam to declare people non-Muslims unless he (or she) openly declares disbelief, as well as to fight innocent people based on false declarations.

Second Letter

On September 14, 2014, the Muslim Council of Elders known as *Majlis Hukama al-Muslimin*, under the leadership of the Grand Imam of al-Azhar and Shaykh Bin Bayyah, wrote a letter to ISIS and other Islamic extremists after being asked to do so by leading Muslim scholars from all over the globe who represent the mainstream. Furthermore, their approach was in line with Islamic principles that have a general overview of the Islamic goals of religion, *Maqasid al-shari'a*. At the end, they all signed the message to the extremists. Here is a summary of the letter:

This is addressed to the young men who bear arms against their own nations and destroy both country and countrymen. You have abandoned all values and made an enemy of the whole

⁵⁷ For more information see: <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/new-signatories/>

world. We call on you to pause, reflect and heed this counsel for the sake of all who want good for our community.

After giving the extremists all the necessary facts and evidence condemning their acts of violence, at the end scholars urged them as follows: "We ask you, out of concern, to reflect on these enlightening statements and to re-evaluate your positions, for turning to truth is better than persisting in falsehood. We are not ignorant of the injustices that exist, and we earnestly call for them to cease; yet we believe that the chances for justice are better when there is peace, not war. Everywhere the widespread wars must stop, and the mindless civil strife must halt so that we may gain life and not lose both this world and the hereafter. We ask God, most high, to guide everyone. Amen."

Analysis and Discussion

An important issue must be highlighted here. Some extremists do not take up arms but they do share the same ideologies as the armed extremists, as this study has shown that some misconceptions are revealed in some books spread in some schools that are teaching and quoting these suspicious interpretations of these jihad texts in a direct and superficial way. As the way to respond to the violent approach of extremists, this section discusses human nature, followed by the other types of jihad.

Man came to earth to struggle; from here we shall develop the idea being good person. To become good is carried out through *jihad al-nafs*, resisting bad things from oneself. The next enemy to fight is Satan. Allah said: "Surely Satan is your enemy, take him as an enemy".⁵⁸ Lastly, jihad, meaning war, is the final alternative. The middle path of jihad does not deny the existence of jihad in Islam referring to war. Moreover, Islam is the religion of peace and therefore deals with war. If the nature of humans is, as is stated in the religious text, not to be peaceful naturally, it is ideal to have a revelation relating to matters of peace and war, because religion is made for human beings who are not by nature peaceful. The most important issue to bear in mind is that war in Islam is the way to peace, against violence. Yet most of those groups who state that they represent Islam usually follow various superficial teachings because, as stated above, they withdraw from the *madhabs* and come up with new ideas and concepts acquired through their readings, regardless of whether or not these ideas and concepts agree with the facts of Islam and the goals of the *shari'a* that have been revealed through its sciences and authentic texts.

This study has linked their violent actions in the name of jihad with their main ideology, which is founded on fanatic groups' misunderstandings of Islamic teachings. Citing a portion of a verse from the Qur'an or part of a verse to derive a ruling without looking at everything that the Qur'an and *hadith* teach, and the general *Maqasid shari'a* related to the issue, is unacceptable. In addition, whenever, one "cherry-picks" Qur'anic verses for legal arguments without considering the entire Qur'an and *hadith*, it will fail. This is because, religion is a collective package that covers everything at the same time, without any overlooking on anything in those general goal or the *Maqasid shari'a*. However, this study proclaims the achievement of the objective as being the mainstream conception of these texts is the only way that harmony and peace can be created in Muslim societies and elsewhere around the globe by applying this

⁵⁸ Kor 35, 6.

approach. There will be no more violence in the name of Islam based on the interpretations of main stream scholars towards these texts.

Therefore, the present study has highlighted the following points:

- 1) Misunderstanding of the text has resulted in misbehavior, and this had been manifested in the of violence of jihad. After all, the very reason that should be considered as the main problem of these groups is the sense of avoiding the majority track of the *umma* as stated above, because the majority have been protected from been in astray by the Prophet authority “the majority of my *umma* shall not agree on going astray”. Additionally, Allah has said “And anyone who splits off from the Messenger after the guidance has become clear to him and follows a way other than the believers, We shall leave him in the path he has chosen and land him In hell - What an evil refuge”.⁵⁹ From this previous text it can be seen that the whole Muslim nation (*umma*) we was re protected from evil and prevented from going down the wrong path.
- 2) Next, this research has shown that all the fanatics’ actions can be found in some intellectual sources of extremism. One study has stated that:

Radical Islamism, although theologically and politically very different from neo-Wahhabism and neo-Salafism, shares the same objectives and executes the same methods to achieve those objectives and they have merged together creating the takfiri jihadist. Wahhabism alone has not lead to the spread of the global terrorism. It has contributed through its splintered sub-groups of neo-Wahhabism/neo-Salafism that melded with radical Islamist’s Ideologies creating global terrorism).⁶⁰

Therefore, this problem exists in the all sects or schools mentioned, which can be found almost everywhere in the Muslim world today.

- 3) Speaking of the history of Juhayman, he is well known, his scholars⁶¹ are well-known and the books that he read are also famous. It is clear that these fanatical and radical understandings exist in some books, schools and ideology of some minorities who promote violence and intolerance in the name of Islam. Furthermore, the books that contain these radical ideologies are still in circulation around the globe, and there are some extremists who believe in the ideologies but do not participate with the fanatics, instead contributing by translating books and teaching the ideologies, believing fully that whoever does not agree with them is an infidel. However, it is clear that the problem of misconception still exists by the continuation of such syllabuses and books of some Wahhabism and Salafism.
- 4) The most dangerous ideology of the extremists is that they have convinced societies that they represent the *kitab* and the Sunna. They claim that only they interpret these accurately. “Their logic was based on the belief that the *Qur’an* and *Sunna* are open to many interpretations, whereas the rulings by jurists from the *Madhhabs* were more constraining. They rejected *Taqlid* (blind imitation) and called for opening the gates of

⁵⁹ Kor 4, 115.

⁶⁰ Michael R. Dillon, *Wahhabism: Is it a Factor in the Spread of Global Terrorism?*, Monterey CA, Naval Post Graduate School Press, 2009, vol. i, p. 58.

⁶¹ Some names are given by Yasir Qadhi in his paper “On Salafi”, but I prefer to avoid giving names and countries.

Ijtihad (new interpretations)⁶² based on their misunderstanding of many issues, including jihad and their telling others to beware of what they call deviations in Muslim societies. They are very selective and only accept the meaning of concepts from scholars in their own camp. They have capitalized on conceptual activities in Islamic epistemology.

- 5) Their misconception of the texts is the result of the neglect of the general goals of the Islamic *Maqasid shari'a* and the result of breaking from the narrow self-understanding of the texts, which contradicts the general understanding of the whole Muslim nation and mainstream scholars in particular. This approach is made manifest in extremist declarations that any interpretation that contradicts their own is invalid. However, they are very selective in the basis of their ideas.
- 6) Finally, the mainstream approach to these texts that promote peace is appropriate at any time and in any place, as the Islamic religion has been applied suitably to any environment in history. In our contemporary with "Regarding the issue of the relationship between the Islamic tradition of jihad and the Western tradition of just war, I shall suggest that there is a growing convergence in conceptions of jihad and just war that permits a cross-cultural dialogue on the ethics of war and peace".⁶³ Therefore, this harmonization can only be found when the mainstream approach has been considered.

Conclusions

The nature of the Islamic environment is the main factor for establishing the Islamic state. Reviewing the *Sira*, as stated in the introduction, shows that the Prophet himself lived in two periods that were totally different, Meccan and Medinan. The first period was longer and was the period where Allah the most able and capable revealed all the *sabr* verses and commanded the holy Prophet to exercise patience. "The Muslim community was not permitted to take up arms in the Meccan period because they were weak and outnumbered".⁶⁴ In addition to this, when the context is not Islamic, fighting to establish the Islamic state is not the solution because this act can lead to contravention of the Islamic principle that says "No compulsion in religion"; it is absolutely forbidden.

This study considers the misunderstanding of jihad as the motivational factor for extremist groups to unleash violent actions in the contemporary world. Moreover, extremists misinterpret texts to justify these fanatic actions. Meanwhile, mainstream scholars are against extremism and all agreed that the application of jihad with variation and the whole picture of religious purpose of jihad was kept in mind and application that regards the *fiqh* of jihad and other type of jihad such as: lesser jihad and great jihad, also, internal jihad or *jihad al-nafs* and Jihad against Satan/the Devil. All these concepts are believed, in one way or another, to be the most influential ways of promoting the Islamic *da'awa*, peace and harmony in the world. Muslims, therefore, need to understand that it is their responsibility to make the fundamental values and principles of Islam clear to the world through a peaceful approach, because Allah has said: "God desires ease for you and desires not hardship for you".⁶⁵ Moreover, the Prophet said: "I have

⁶² Dillon, *Wahhabism: Is it a Factor in the Spread of Global Terrorism?* p. 33.

⁶³ Sohail H. Hashmi, "Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace", in *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict*, ed. Sohail H Hashmi, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, 195-215.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, *Jihad and the Islamic Law of War*, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Kor 2, 185.

been sent to you as teacher". Through this, Islam will be presented the way it is, as part of the global solution, rather than as part of the global problem. The more Muslims know that, the better they can present true Islam to the world.

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