

Holy Books and Terror Manuals

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During 2007, a criminal court in the UK returned the first ever convictions against three men accused of inciting terrorist murder using the Internet. The three were accused of distributing films of beheadings, martyrdom missions, and bomb-making instructions which could encourage and facilitate attacks on Western targets. They were also charged with the possession of "terrorist literature", much of it devoted to an insistence that devout Muslims adhering properly to their faith were compelled to answer the call to make war, seek martyrdom and with following a "twisted version of jihad".

The expression "twisted version of Jihad" was used by the Judge. His words and meaning have been echoed by British government spokespeople, by the Muslim Council of Britain, by Imams, and by mainstream media outlets.

The description may be an apt criticism of the major aspect of terrorists' belief systems, and in particular their equation of Jihad with the killing of non-Muslims. But is the terrorists' belief system, and the support they claim for killing "Kufar" a "twisted" and misconstrued version of the teachings of the Quran? The evidence, particularly from documents the accused were alleged to have received or circulated over the Internet, suggests otherwise.

The Jihadists' claims to be mainstream, historically authentic and accurate in their religious goals have placed "moderate" British Muslims in acute theological and political difficulty. There is, as yet, no evidence that they have found or can find an easy escape from the embarrassment caused by the obvious viciousness of the Jihadic verses in the Quran.

In the recent case, considerable importance was placed on a "Book of Jihad" which the defendants had newly prepared for circulation in English. In their ignorance, prosecutors initially accused the defendants of writing the book, known as "Mashari Al-Ashwaq". They were off the mark by more than 600 years.

"Mashari Al-Ashwaq" is an abbreviated reference to a medieval book called (in transliterated Arabic) "Mashari Al-Ashwaq ila Masari al-Ushaaq wa Muththeer Al-Gharaam Ila Daar As-Salaam". The title may be translated as "The guidance for those dedicated to striving to follow the sacred path to Peace/Paradise". The book was written in AD 1411 (or 814 Hijri in the Islamic calendar) by Abu Zakaryya al Dimashqi al Dumyati, more commonly known as "Ibn Nuhaas". Ibn Nuhaas was a Damascene who fought and died in Egypt during the later wars with the Crusaders. The book was resurrected from centuries of obscurity in the late 20th century by the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb (1906 - 1966).

Following the campaigning activities of Qutb in Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s, references to the book and copies of the book have often been found in possession of persons interested in contemporary Islamic fundamentalism and Jihadism. The book includes numerous invocations and passages quoted or drawn directly from the Quran calling for the destruction of non-believers, which may be summarised as defining Jihad as a duty to kill all who refuse to accept the rule of Islam.

Not only did the prosecutors and their security advisers fail to appreciate the historical nature of origin of the “Book of Jihad”, they failed to detect the original source of the frightening quotations from the book which they reported to the court. Many of the quotations were extreme in nature. They were plainly incriminating. They made up almost third of the contents of the Book of Jihad. They came directly from the Quran.

Quotations from the Quran have always been the major contributor to modern so-called “terror manuals” of this type. The language selected from scripture is plain and clear. The Jihadi interpretation of Quranic texts is not an extreme approach by ill minded people who twist and interpret the Quran to best serve their objectives. Jihadists can argue a better case than their opponents for their understanding of Jihad, by relying on the explicit views of the Quran on “Kufar” (unbelievers).

For this reason, the proponents of “moderate” Islam continue to find it hard to accuse advocates of Jihadism of being deceptive and selective in their reliance on the verses of Jihad contained in the Quran. History supports the Jihadists, flowing from the Quran through “Mashari al Ashwaq” in the middle ages to the revival begun in the mid twentieth century by Qutb.

The “Book of Jihad” that the UK prosecution sought to attack relies on parts of the Quran which have never been criticised at any time in Islamic history. The book is currently published (in Arabic) by a reputable publishing company and is easily obtained in every library and in bookstores throughout the Middle East.

The “Book of Jihad” cannot be criticised in the world of Islam, since to do so would be to attack the Holy Book of Islam. The paradox of whether possession and distribution of the Quran might be unlawful under the Terrorism Act 2000 has not been addressed by the British government or by prosecuting authorities.

The centrality of Jihad in Islam

Jihad in Islam is fighting in Allah's cause. All Islamic religious books, from school texts onwards, stress that Jihad is the essence of Islam and is the most important form of practice. Only those who practice Jihad are guaranteed entry to paradise (heaven):

Allah had made ready an immensely good reward that "cannot be imagined by a human soul" (*secondary school text book, Saudi Arabia*)

Important verses in the Quran and the Sunna (the Prophet's legal ways, orders etc.) have exhorted greatly for Jihad and have made quite clear its exceptional reward. They praise those who perform Jihad and list the various kinds of honours and pleasures which they will receive from their Lord (Allah). In my research, I have been unable to find any different outlook in the majority of Arabic school text books. All make the same claims, comprehensively supported by direct citations from the Quran.

Special regard in teaching is given to Mujahideen, because the Quran states clearly that they are Allah's warriors.

“Allah will establish His religion (Islam), with them and with their dedication he will repel the might of His enemies, and with them He will protect Islam and guard the religion safely to dominate the two worlds (earthly life and heavenly after life).”

The Jihadic Verses

There are 33 Jihadic verses in the Quran. Many would appear directly to contravene the UK Terrorism Act, 2000

“Kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush” (al Tawbah 5)

“Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth [i.e., Islam] from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled” (al Tawbah 29)

"Jihad is ordained for you (Muslims) though you dislike it, and it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know." (al Baqarah 216)

“And fight in the cause of Allah and know that Allah is Hearing and Knowing” (al Baqarah 244)

Fighting in the cause of Allah is not limited to situations where Muslim lands are under attack or occupation. Jihad, as ordained, is incumbent on Muslims to spread the word of God to other parts of the world. Jihad was first limited to self defence, as Muslims were outnumbered in the early stages of Islamic history. As Muslims grew in number and strength, more Quranic texts followed, in which Allah (speaking through his Messenger Mohammed) ordered Muslims to practice Jihad for the purpose of enforcing the religion on disbelievers.

In the 21st Century as in early Islamic history, and in a global situation which is represented as a coordinated attack on Muslims around the world, Jihadis are in a perfect position to reinforce what their Internet publications proclaim as “The Absent Obligation”. As far as terrorists are concerned, western states fit the description of the enemy of Islam, not merely because they are disbelievers but because it has become harder for young Muslims to believe that the “war on terror” is not a war on Islam and on them.

According to legal (Sharia) rulings by the former Chief Justice of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh 'Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Humaid:

"it is now obvious, at first "the fighting" was forbidden, then it was permitted and after that it was made obligatory-

(1) Against those who start "the fighting" against you (Muslims)...

(2) and against all those who worship others along with Allah... as mentioned in Surah Al Baqarah (II), Al Imran (III) and Tauba (IX)... and other Surah (Chapters of the Quran). Allah made "the fighting" (Jihad) obligatory for the Muslims and gave importance to the subject matter of Jihad in all the Surah which were revealed (at Al Madina) as in Allah's Statement"

The Quranic emphasis on Jihad is central to the express goal that Islam should become the unaccompanied world religion. From the very beginning of Islam in the Arabic peninsula at about 600 AD, politicizing Islam was central to and characteristic of the efforts made by Mohammed (the Messenger) to unify Arabic tribes under one belief system, one that gave its followers a leading role and a strong sense of superiority.

Islam did not only represent itself as a personal belief system, but as a way of life that expected to dominate all social and political aspects of peoples' lives, and to have its divine claims prevail on the global stage. In other words, Islam is a state religion in all means and it can only be so given its current context; consequently Muslims believe that it is their personal duty to be involved in the political affairs of the religious state (take Iran as an example). The prevailing belief among ordinary Muslims is that a single Caliphate state is the ultimate objective and the ultimate destiny in which the given laws of Allah will be implemented. Jihad is, the Quran makes clear, the means to that end.

The Quran framed Jihad as the armoire that would protect the religion on one hand and, on the other, allow it to expand and advance in other parts of the world. From a historic perspective, Islam has been introduced to other parts of the world by violence. Although Islam was not and is not the only power system to impose itself in this way (anticipating western colonialism by hundreds of years), Islam has been able to sustain its ideology and power base by requiring the destruction of rival systems of belief.

The Quran endorses this project in several ways:

First; making the verses of Jihad from Quran indigenous to the whole religion by making it applicable to all ages.

Second; the Quran made Jihad the single form of devotion that guarantees safety from hell while offering unparalleled treatment in heaven, a treatment that can never be matched because, according to the Quran, dying in the cause of Allah is the ultimate sacrifice and therefore receives the ultimate award.

The British Judge who railed against the "twisted version of Jihad" may not have been fully informed. Jihad, as described in the Quran, justifies and compels the activities for which he imposed lengthy jail sentences.

The modern experience of faith-based suicide bombing, however unwelcome and bizarre, flows logically and naturally from the general principle of martyrdom requiring self sacrifice for the ultimate cause of Islam. It is not a new concept, despite the claims of some moderate scholars. The vision promoted by 21st Century Salafist fundamentalists, of a world united under the Banner of Islam, is exactly the same vision that the Quran set out more than 1400 years ago.

Moderate scholars who claim that the Jihadic Verses are taken out of context find it difficult to explain the general consistency to be found in Islamic literature and scholarship, throughout Islamic history, concerning the Ummah (Islamic nation) and the ultimate destiny of Islam to rule generally according to Sharia law.

This old-new version of Jihad is been supported by Jihadists, interwoven with threads of Quranic verses, and sprinkled with Fatwas (rulings) by scholars. These fuse into easy and potentially compelling justifications for terrorism and indiscriminate attacks, because they aspire to fulfill the prophecy of the Quran.

Critically, the core teaching of Islam (in all versions, moderate or otherwise) places the goals prescribed in the Quran above any and all human life.

Rather than "twist" their religion, what the terrorists have done is to abandon glib gists and returned to the roots and origins. They have used spectacles of terror to promote their agenda in western media while exploiting the deficit of knowledge in western media concerning Islamic culture in order to recruit new members.

Historically, Islam has always been skeptical of western intentions. This has particularly been so in the 20th century, due to western colonial history in the Middle East. Moderate leaders who seek compromise face a general and apparently unshakeable belief in the Muslim community in a global conspiracy - a conspiracy in which a Masonic or Jewish leaning western leadership has deceived their own nations and sought the collapse of Islam into materialism. In this worldview, tolerance and acceptance of Islamic culture is a pretence which masks the real goals of the west.

Global Jihad now uses the Internet as the main method for communication and ideological advancement. Western media feeds on the events terrorists create. They understand that and have become more sophisticated in the way they carry out their recruiting activities and targeting. But “twisting” the ancient view of Jihad is not a charge that sticks.

Unless “moderates” and western opinion leaders acknowledge that the definitions that Jihadis proclaim for themselves are not perverse, but more authentic and closer to the Islam of 1400 years ago, neither group can hope to understand the roots of the identity crisis facing young Muslims.

Moderates who claim that they are the true representatives of their religion and that extremists are mutilating the image of Islam are seriously in error. They are not credible to the new generations of Muslim youth, and never were.

Unless western audiences realise that these voices are part of the problem and not part of the solution, the chances that Islam might ever move to a secular enlightenment will diminish, with dangerous consequences for all.

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