

## Chapter 3



# ISLAM: RELIGION OF WAR

**T**he Qur'an is clear enough about the warfare that Muslims must wage against unbelievers, but it lacks overall clarity. In its entirety, the Qur'an is a monologue: Allah is the only speaker (with a few notable exceptions), and with no particular concern for narrative continuity, he speaks with Muhammad about various events in the Prophet's life and about the earlier Muslim prophets (most notably, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus). That makes reading the Qur'an somewhat like walking in on a private conversation between two unknown people: It's confusing, disorienting, and ultimately incomprehensible.

That's where the Hadith, the traditions of Muhammad, enter. The Hadith are volumes upon volumes of stories of Muhammad in which he (and sometimes his followers) explains how and in what situations various verses of the Qur'an came to him, pronounces on disputed questions, and leads by example. In a very small number of ahadith (the plural of hadith), Muhammad quotes words of Allah that do not appear in the Qur'an; these are known as the *hadith qudsi*, or holy hadith, and Muslims consider them to be just as much the revealed Word of Allah as the Qur'an itself. Other ahadith that Muslims consider authentic are second in authority only to the Qur'an itself—and often the Qur'anic text is simply incomprehensible without them.

The focus of many ahadith, not surprisingly, is war.

## Guess what?

- Muhammad taught his followers that there was nothing better (or holier) than jihad warfare.
- Muhammad told his men to offer non-Muslims only three choices: conversion, subjugation, or death.
- These teachings are not marginal doctrines or historical relics—they are still taught in mainstream Islam.

***PC Myth: Islam's war teachings are only a tiny element of the religion***

Okay, even if the Qur'an does contain some verses about war, that doesn't mean Muslims agree with them, right? After all, there are a lot of Christians who don't take every aspect of Christian doctrine seriously, aren't there?

Of course; however, there is no mistaking the centrality of violent jihad in Islam. In fact, the Prophet of Islam repeatedly emphasized that there was nothing better his followers could do than engage in jihad warfare. When a Muslim asked him to name the "best deed" one could do, besides the act of becoming a Muslim, the Prophet responded, "To participate in Jihad (holy fighting) in Allah's Cause."<sup>1</sup> He explained that "to guard Muslims from infidels in Allah's Cause for one day is better than the world and whatever is on its surface."<sup>2</sup> For "a journey undertaken for jihad in the evening or morning merits a reward better than the world and all that is in it."<sup>3</sup>

Muhammad also warned that Muslims who did not engage in jihad would be punished: "Muhammad was firm about the necessity of jihad not only for himself personally, but for every Muslim. He warned believers that 'he who does not join the warlike expedition (jihad), or equip, or looks well after a warrior's family when he is away, will be smitten by Allah with a sudden calamity.'"<sup>4</sup>

Those who fought in jihads would enjoy a level of Paradise higher than that enjoyed by others:

It has been narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Khudri that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said (to him): Abu Sa'id, whoever cheerfully accepts Allah as his Lord, Islam as his religion and Muhammad as his Apostle is necessarily entitled to enter Paradise. He (Abu Sa'id) wondered at it and said: Messenger of Allah, repeat it for me. He (the Messenger

of Allah) did that and said: There is another act which elevates the position of a man in Paradise to a grade one hundred (higher), and the elevation between one grade and the other is equal to the height of the heaven from the earth. He (Abu Sa'id) said: What is that act? He replied: Jihad in the way of Allah! Jihad in the way of Allah!<sup>5</sup>

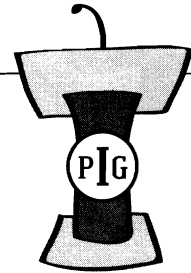
On another occasion "a man came to Allah's Apostle and said, 'Instruct me as to such a deed as equals Jihad (in reward).' He replied, 'I do not find such a deed.'"<sup>6</sup>

### Three choices

In one key hadith, Muhammad delineates three choices that Muslims are to offer to non-Muslims:

It has been reported from Sulaiman b. Buraid through his father that when the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) appointed anyone as leader of an army or detachment he would especially exhort him to fear Allah and to be good to the Muslims who were with him. He would say: Fight in the name of Allah and in the way of Allah. Fight against those who disbelieve in Allah. Make a holy war. . . . When you meet your enemies who are polytheists, invite them to three courses of action. If they respond to any one of these, you also accept it and withhold yourself from doing them any harm. Invite them to accept Islam; if they respond to you, accept it from them and

### Muhammad vs. Jesus



"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

**Jesus (Matthew 5:11)**

"And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter."

**Qur'an 2:191**

desist from fighting against them. . . . If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the Jizya. If they agree to pay, accept it from them and hold off your hands. If they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah's help and fight them.<sup>7</sup>



### **Just Like Today: Osama invites America to Islam**

**f**ollowing the example of the Prophet, Osama bin Laden called Americans to Islam in his November 2002 "letter to the American people":

**What are we calling you to, and what do we want from you?**

**(1) The first thing that we are calling you to is Islam. . . .**

**It is the religion of Jihad in the way of Allah so that Allah's Word and religion reign Supreme.<sup>8</sup>**

"Allah's Word and religion" may only "reign Supreme" in this view when the fullness of Islamic law is imposed and enforced in society. Jihadist theorists and groups have declared their intention to unify the Islamic nations of the world under a single ruler: the caliph. Historically, the caliph was the successor of the Prophet as the spiritual and political leader of the Muslims, or at least the Sunnis. The caliphate was abolished in 1924; many contemporary jihadists date the woes of the Islamic world from this event. They want to restore the caliphate, unite the Islamic world behind it, and reimpose Islamic law (the Sharia) on Islamic countries. Apart from Saudi Arabia and Iran, Sharia is today only partially enforced, if at all. Modern Islamic warriors seek to carry Sharia to non-Muslim states by force, under the banner of jihad.

The choices for unbelievers are:

1. Accept Islam.
2. Pay the jizya, the poll-tax on non-Muslims, which (as we shall see) is the cornerstone of an entire system of humiliating regulations that institutionalize inferior status for non-Muslims in Islamic law.
3. War with Muslims.

Always remember, “peaceful coexistence as equals in a pluralistic society” isn’t one of the choices.

In another hadith repeated several times in the collection of traditions that Muslims consider most reliable, Muhammad says that he has been “commanded to fight against people” until they become Muslim, and that those who resist risk forfeiting their lives and property: “The Prophet spoke clearly about his own responsibility to wage war for the religion he had founded: ‘I have been ordered (by Allah) to fight against the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and perform *As-Salat* (prayers) and give *Zakat*, so if they perform all that, then they save their lives and properties from me except for Islamic laws, and their reckoning (accounts) will be with (done by) Allah.’”<sup>9</sup>

### **It’s not just Muhammad’s opinion. It’s the law.**

Okay, so Muhammad was commanded to fight against people until they became Muslims or submitted to Islamic law. And the Qur’an teaches warfare. But that doesn’t mean Muslims have taught all this, right? Didn’t we see in chapter two that certain portions of the Bible aren’t taken literally by most Jews and Christians? Isn’t it the same with Islam? Aren’t you just cherry-picking embarrassing verses in an attempt to make Islam look bad?

In a word: no. The unpleasant fact is that violent jihad warfare against unbelievers is not a heretical doctrine held by a tiny minority of extremists, but a constant element of mainstream Islamic theology. Islam is preoccupied with legal questions; indeed, Islamic law contains instructions for the minutest details of individual behavior, as well as regulations on the structuring of government and relations between states. It also contains unmistakable affirmations of the centrality of jihad warfare against unbelievers. This is true of all four principal schools of Sunni Muslim jurisprudence, the Maliki, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Shafi'i, to which the great majority of Muslims worldwide belong. These schools formulated laws centuries ago regarding the importance of jihad and the ways in which it was to be practiced; however, that doesn't mean that these laws are ancient history and have been superseded by more recent rulings. It is a commonly accepted principle in the Islamic world that the "gates of ijtihad," or free inquiry into the Qur'an and Islamic tradition in order to discover Allah's rulings, have been closed for centuries. In other words, Islamic teaching on principal matters has long been settled and is not to be called into question. (To be sure, there are reform-minded Muslims today who have called for a reopening of the "gates of ijtihad" so that Islam can be reinterpreted, but so far these calls have gone unheeded by the most important and influential authorities in the Islamic world.)

Therefore, barring a general reopening of the "gates of ijtihad," which seems extremely unlikely, these rulings will remain normative for mainstream Muslims. All four principal Sunni schools agree on the importance of jihad. Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani (d. 996), a Maliki jurist, declared:

Jihad is a precept of Divine institution. Its performance by certain individuals may dispense others from it. We Malikis maintain that it is preferable not to begin hostilities with the enemy before having invited the latter to embrace the religion

of Allah except where the enemy attacks first. They have the alternative of either converting to Islam or paying the poll tax (*jizya*), short of which war will be declared against them.”<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), a Hanbali jurist who is a favorite of Osama bin Laden and other modern-day jihadists, proclaimed:

Since lawful warfare is essentially jihad and since its aim is that the religion is God’s entirely and God’s word is uppermost, therefore according to all Muslims, those who stand in the way of this aim must be fought. As for those who cannot offer resistance or cannot fight, such as women, children, monks, old people, the blind, handicapped and their likes, they shall not be killed unless they actually fight with words (e.g. by propaganda) and acts (e.g. by spying or otherwise assisting in the warfare).”<sup>11</sup>

The Hanafi school sounds the same notes:

It is not lawful to make war upon any people who have never before been called to the faith, without previously requiring them to embrace it, because the Prophet so instructed his commanders, directing them to call the infidels to the faith, and also because the people will hence perceive that they are attacked for the sake of religion, and not for the sake of taking their property, or making slaves of their children, and on this consideration it is possible that they may be induced to agree to the call, in order to save themselves from the troubles of war. . . If the infidels, upon receiving the call, neither consent to it nor agree to pay capitulation tax, it is then incumbent on the Muslims to call upon God for assistance, and to make war upon them, because God is the assistant of those who serve Him, and the destroyer of His enemies, the infidels, and it is

necessary to implore His aid upon every occasion; the Prophet, moreover, commands us so to do.”<sup>12</sup>

Shafi'i scholar Abu'l Hasan al-Mawardi (d. 1058), who echoes Muhammad's instructions to invite the unbelievers to accept Islam or fight them if they refuse, also agrees:

The mushrikun [infidels] of Dar al-Harb (the arena of battle) are of two types: First, those whom the call of Islam has reached, but they have refused it and have taken up arms. The amir of the army has the option of fighting them . . . in accordance with what he judges to be in the best interest of the Muslims and most harmful to the mushrikun . . . Second, those whom the invitation to Islam has not reached, although such persons are few nowadays since Allah has made manifest the call of his Messenger . . . it is forbidden to . . . begin an attack before explaining the invitation to Islam to them, informing them of the miracles of the Prophet and making plain the proofs so as to encourage acceptance on their part; if they still refuse to accept after this, war is waged against them and they are treated as those whom the call has reached.<sup>13</sup>

Proof that none of this is merely of historical interest is another Shafi'i manual of Islamic law that was certified in 1991 by the highest authority in Sunni Islam, Cairo's Al-Azhar University. The manual, *'Umdat al-Salik* (available in English as *Reliance of the Traveller*), was declared to conform “to the practice and faith of the orthodox Sunni community.”<sup>14</sup> After defining the “greater jihad” as “spiritual warfare against the lower self,” it devotes eleven pages to the “lesser jihad.” It defines this jihad as “war against non-Muslims,” noting that the word itself “is etymologically derived from the word *mujahada*, signifying warfare to establish the religion.”<sup>15</sup>

*Umdat al-Salik* spells out the nature of this warfare in quite specific terms: “The caliph makes war upon Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians . . . until they become Muslim or pay the non-Muslim poll tax.” There follows a comment by a Jordanian jurist that corresponds to Muhammad’s instructions to call the unbelievers to Islam before fighting them: The caliph wages this war only “provided that he has first invited [Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians] to enter Islam in faith and practice, and if they will not, then invited them to enter the social order of Islam by paying the non-Muslim poll tax (jizya) . . . while remaining in their ancestral religions.”<sup>16</sup> Also, if there is no caliph, Muslims must still wage jihad.<sup>17</sup>

These laws have been well known for centuries to those who suffered because of them. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), a Greek monk and theologian (today revered as a saint by the Orthodox Church) who was imprisoned for a time by the Turks, remarked trenchantly about Muslims: “These infamous people, hated by God and infamous, boast of having got the better of the Romans [i.e., Byzantines] by their love of God . . . They live by the bow, the sword, and debauchery, finding pleasure in taking slaves, devoting themselves to murder, pillage, spoil . . . and not only do they commit these crimes, but even—what an aberration—they believe that God approves of them.”<sup>18</sup>

***PC Myth: Islam is a religion of peace that has been hijacked by a tiny minority of extremists***

This, of course, is the mother of all PC myths about Islam. Yet its persistence and resilience in the face of mountains of evidence to the contrary, both from Islamic theology and today’s newspapers, is not simply due to naïve multiculturalism and cynical duplicity. Even the Muslim Brotherhood theorist Sayyid Qutb, one of the twentieth century’s foremost advocates of violent jihad, taught (without a trace of irony) that Islam is a religion of peace. However, he had a very specific kind of peace in mind: “When Islam strives for peace, its objective is not that superficial peace

which requires that only that part of the earth where the followers of Islam are residing remain secure. The peace which Islam desires is that the religion (i.e. the law of the society) be purified for God, that the obedience of all people be for God alone, and that some people should not be lords over others. After the period of the Prophet—peace be on him—only the final stages of the movement of Jihaad are to be followed; the initial or middle stages are not applicable.”<sup>20</sup>

In other words, Islam is a religion of the peace that will come when everyone is Muslim or at least subject to the Islamic state. And to establish that peace, Muslims must wage war.



### Just Like Today: Chechen jihadists cite Islamic law on jihad

**I**slamic legal treatises enjoining jihad do not gather dust on the shelf. Jihadists use them to convince recruits that they need to fulfill their responsibility as Muslims by waging war against unbelievers. One example of this came in late 2003 from the Shariah Council of the State Defense Council (Majlis al-Shura) of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. In its underground publication *Jihad Today*, the Sharia Council published an article titled “Jihad and Its Solution Today.” In it three of the four main schools of Sunni jurisprudence were cited to argue for jihad against the Russians in Chechnya:

First, what is Jihad?

Hanbali School defined it as spending power and energy in the war in the way of Allah by personal participation, property, word, etc.

Maliki School considers it a war (a battle) of a Muslim with a Kafir (an infidel) who has no treaty, to exalt the Word of Allah, or who trespassed on the territories of Muslims.

Hanbalis say that this is a war against Kafirs (the infidels), unlike an armed fight with the Muslims bordering on being rebels, or brigands or robbers for an example. (Mugni-Muhtaj, vol. 6, page 4).<sup>20</sup>

## **But what about moderate Muslims?**

As I have demonstrated in the first three chapters, Islam is unique among the religions of the world in having a developed doctrine, theology, and legal system that mandates warfare against unbelievers. However, many will claim that even by marshalling this evidence, I am trying to make people think that every Muslim is a terrorist, and that your Arab or Pakistani convenience store clerk is secretly plotting the violent downfall of the United States. Some will even say that I am trying to incite violence against that convenience store clerk and other innocents.

This is, of course, arrant nonsense, but it does indicate that some clarification is needed. In the first place, the fact that warfare against unbelievers is not a twisting of Islam, but is repeatedly affirmed in the Qur'an, the Hadith, the example of Muhammad, and the rulings of every school of Islamic jurisprudence, does not make every Muslim a terrorist.

There are several principal reasons for this. One is that because the Qur'an is in difficult, classical Arabic, and must be read and recited during Muslim prayers in that language only, a surprisingly large number of those who identify themselves as Muslims have scant acquaintance with what it actually says. Although the media establishment continues to interchange the words "Muslim" and "Arab," most Muslims worldwide today are not Arabs. Even modern Arabic, much less classical Qur'anic Arabic, is foreign to them. They often memorize the Qur'an by rote without any clear idea of what it actually says. A Pakistani Muslim once proudly told me that he had memorized large sections of the Qur'an, and planned to buy a translation one day so that he could find out exactly what it was saying. Such instances are common to a degree that may surprise most non-Muslims.

Up until recent times, other cultural factors have also prevented Muslims, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, from acting on or even knowing much about Islam's actual teachings on how to deal with



## A Book You're Not Supposed to Read

*An Introduction to Islamic Law* by Joseph Schacht; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982. This is a weighty book, as eye-opening as it is scholarly; Schacht is a serious scholar who is refreshingly free of the bias that dominates studies of Islam in universities today. A sampling: "The basis of the Islamic attitude towards unbelievers is the law of war; they must be either converted or subjugated or killed."

unbelievers. That is changing, however: In those areas and elsewhere around the world, Muslim hardliners, though not always financed by Saudi Arabia, have made deep inroads into peaceful Muslim communities by preaching violent Islam as the "pure Islam" and calling Muslims back to the full observance of their religion.<sup>21</sup>

This recruitment focuses on the Qur'an and other key Islamic texts. Take, for example, the case of Sahim Alwan, an American citizen and leader of the Yemeni community in Lackawanna, New York, and onetime president of the mosque there. He has the distinction of being the first American to attend an

al Qaeda training camp. Why did he go? He was convinced to do so by Kamal Derwish, an al Qaeda recruiter. Alwan explained that Derwish taught him that the Qur'an "says you have to learn how to prepare. Like, you gotta be prepared just in case you do have to go to war. If there is war, then you would have to be called for jihad. And that was the aspect of the camp itself, for going to learn how to use weapons, and stuff like that."<sup>22</sup>

Of course, there are some Muslims who are working to bring about change within Islam, but it is difficult to discern their motives. The prominent American Muslim spokesman Siraj Wahaj, for instance, is often presented as a moderate. In 1991, he even became the first Muslim to give an invocation to the U.S. Congress. And why not? Not long after the September 11 attacks, he said just what jittery Americans wanted to hear from Muslims: "I now feel responsible to preach, actually to go on a jihad against extremism."<sup>23</sup>

Whether his true thoughts are more extreme remains unclear; after all, he has also warned that the United States will fall unless it "accepts the

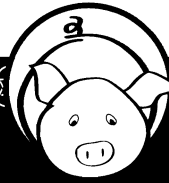
Islamic agenda.”<sup>24</sup> He has lamented that “if only Muslims were clever politically, they could take over the United States and replace its constitutional government with a caliphate.”<sup>25</sup> In the early 1990s, he sponsored talks by Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman in mosques in New York City and New Jersey. Rahman was later convicted for conspiring to blow up the World Trade Center in 1993, and Wahaj was designated a “potential unindicted co-conspirator.”<sup>26</sup>

The fact that someone who would like to see the Constitution replaced has led a prayer for those sworn to uphold it is just a symptom of a larger, ongoing problem: The government and media are eager to find moderate Muslims—and as their desperation has increased, their standards have declined. Unfortunately, it is not so easy to find Muslim leaders who have genuinely renounced violent jihad and any intention, now or in the future, to impose Sharia on non-Muslim countries.

Nonetheless, there are enormous numbers of Muslims in the United States and around the world who want nothing to do with today’s global jihad. While their theological foundation is weak, many are heroically laboring to create a viable moderate Islam that will allow Muslims to coexist peacefully with their non-Muslim neighbors. They are to be commended, but make no mistake: This moderate Islam does not exist to any significant extent in the world today. Where Muslims do coexist peacefully with non-Muslims, as in Central Asia and elsewhere, it is not because the teachings of jihad have been reformed or rejected; they have simply been ignored, and history teaches us that they can be remembered at any time.

"May Allah rip out his spine from his back and split his brains in two, and then put them both back, and then do it over and over again. Amen."

—"praise" for the author on [RevivingIslam.com](http://RevivingIslam.com)



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