An Assessment of the Phenomenon of Global Jihad

'The Qur'an makes clear that jihad is only envisaged as defensive warfare, and has to be engaged within strict limits: that is, no wholesale slaughter of innocent civilians and destruction of property.'

Introduction

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, the word jihad dominated Western media outlets and characterised Islam as an inherently violent religion. Figures and groups such as Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda were presented to Westerners as opponents to Western civilisation who made it their duty to carry out terrorist attacks all over the world in the name of Islam. The intent of this essay is to assess the phenomenon of global Jihad. In doing so, it will address different interpretations of the meaning of Jihad in Islamic culture, discuss the roots of global jihad and the rise of Salafi Jihadism during the 1980s and finally attempt to argue that global jihad doctrine has been constructed to resonate with disaffected Muslims throughout the world.

Definitions of Jihad

The generic meaning the word 'jihad' is 'struggle' – usually struggle of the soul to avert evil. When applied to religious war, it is only used in reference to battles where Islam is under attack or battling against a government that denies the practice of Islam (Barber, 1992, pp.53). After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, there was widespread discontent about the use of jihad and it wider implications, such as massive terrorist attacks in the West, the murder of non-Muslims and the conquest of the Islamic world through the use of violence (Bakircioglu, 2010, pp.413). However, as Knapp notes, "the true meaning of the term in the Islamic world is still not well understood by non-Muslims (2003, pp.82). Jihad is a verbal noun of the third Arabic form of the root *'jahada'*, which is "defined classically as exerting ones upmost efforts, endeavours, or ability in contending with an object of disapprobation" (Sultana, 2008, pp.32). Such objects may be a visible enemy (*jihad of the sword*) or an aspect of ones own self. A jihad as ones own self can be described as a *'jihad of the heart'* for example, meaning that it is a struggle against the sinful inclinations within ones soul (Sultana, 2008). It also important to note that according to various hadiths, the Prophet Muhammad described this as the *greater jihad* when contrasting it with a jihad against enemies, calling this the *lesser jihad*. Thus, it may be argued that more emphasis is placed upon the '*jihad of the heart'* within Islam instead of the more publicised '*jihad of the sword'.* That is not to say that *'jihad of the sword'* did not play a significant role in the early formation of Islam as well as in present times. However, most controversy lies within what constitutes as offensive or defensive jihad. Both sects, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims agree that defensive jihad "applies to the defense of territory, life, faith and property; it is justified to repel invasion or its threat" (Knapp, 2003, pp.85). Although, some Islamic scholars argue that jihad is only justified when non-Muslims initiate aggression against the Muslim community, in contrast, more militant scholars, inspired by Islamic resistance towards European powers during the period of colonisation, contend that aggressive/offensive warfare is justified against all non-Muslims whether they are oppressing Muslims or not (Knapp, 2003).

Jihad as Warfare

According to Bakircioglu (2010), during the formative years of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad used peaceful methods to maintain the security of the Muslim community, engaging in trade and making alliances with non-Muslims for

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example. It was only after the establishment of a stronger political entity in Medina, that the aim of warfare included the spread of Islamic influence; even then such wars had to be fought within strict rules and restrictions. Nonetheless, "Islam recognized warfare as a legitimate tool to defend the Muslim community and under certain conditions to expand the sphere of its public order" (Bakircioglu, 2010, pp.417). Further still, due to the Quran's rejection of Arab polytheism (belief of multiple deities) and its insistence that there was only one true God, its denouncement of corrupts practices of merchants and its promotion of religious equality of men and women amongst other challenging messages within Arabian society, the Prophet Muhammad and his followers had to engage in warfare in order to keep the Islamic faith alive (Sultana, 2008, pp.35). Therefore, when applying jihad to this context, it was widely used to describe the defence of Islam and the Umma, as it was met with resistance from other competing faiths. In this context, the Quran verses concerned with the Medina period discuss jihad as warding off aggression and sometimes permitting it (Moghadam, 2007). One may argue that the term jihad must always be applied to context therefore. The next section will highlight the use of jihad in the context of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and its importance in creating the 'global jihad' discourse.

The Importance of the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in creating 'Global Jihad'

In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in an attempt to prop up the ruling Communist regime in the face of growing resentment from various Islamist groups (Hafez, 2009). In response to this, Afghan insurgents called upon governments around the world, including neighbouring Pakistan, to provide military, financial and humanitarian assistance in their struggle against foreign enemies. According to Hafez (2009), due to the on-going conflict between the US and Soviet Union during this period the US and those Muslim countries aligned with the US did not hesitate in providing support for the Afghan rebels. Although the full Afghanistan conflict is not within the scope of this essay; an important development did take place during this period which is relevant when discussing the phenomenon of global jihad. Along with attempts to gain support from various states, leading scholars, such as the Palestinian born Abdullah Azzam, reignited the call to jihad to defend the Muslim community in Afghanistan which in turn attracted thousands of volunteers from all over the Middle East. For example, Procyshen notes that over the course of the war in Afghanistan, from 1979 to 1989, around 35,000 Muslim volunteers "from as diverse areas as Comoros, Indonesia, the Maghreb and Xinjiang answered the call to jihad" (2001, pp.47). Thus, it became clear that there was initial agreement from the Muslim community that violence in the defence of an occupied Muslim country was an "individual obligation, incumbent upon able Muslims through verbal, financial or physical support" (Wiktorowicz, 2004, pp.161). One may therefore note that in this context the term jihad was effectively used in order to promote the need for Muslims all over the world to come to the aid of their Muslim brothers in Afghanistan. However, during this period it may be argued that this definition of jihad came to be distorted due to the presence of extreme and radical views. Hafez notes that the important development in the period of the Afghanistan war lay within:

> "…the training, socialization, and networking conducted by the Arab Afghans. Away from their home governments and free to propagate their radical views, some Arab Afghans began to contemplate a larger role for themselves. They developed a culture of jihad and martyrdom, and a template for mobilizing Muslims in defense of Islamic causes." (2009, pp77)

Additionally, there was also the tendency to "merge military training with ideological socialization" (Hafez, 2009, pp.78). Afghan rebels not only learned how to fight in armed combat but were also taught Islamic history, theology and politics form an extremist point of view. Jihad as an ideology, *Jihadism*, began to emerge within such training camps which promoted the defence of Islam and Muslim causes. Nesser (2011) explains that Arab volunteers in Afghanistan, who became commonly known as Arab Afghans, mixed the ideas of Egyptian socio-revolutionary ideas with a Saudi brand of Salafism which later evolved into the self-proclaimed *'Salafi Jihadist'* movement (pp.175).

'Salafi Jihadism' & Global Jihad

Salafism is the belief that over centuries of Islamic practice various Muslims have introduced new practices and innovations that have distorted the pure message of Islam and the Prophet. Therefore, in order to remedy this, Salafi's promote a strict return to the fundamentals of Islam and reject any conduct or behaviour that was not specifically supported or carried out by the Prophet Muhammad (Wiktorowicz, 2001, pp.19). Although Salafi's share

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the same opinion that the US and the West is waging a war of aggression against Islam and is responsible for many of the problems within the Muslim world, differences emerge when attempting to agree on the appropriate response to this. 'Reformists' emphasise non-violent responses, whereas Salafi Jihad's support the use of violence against Western aggressors (Wiktorowicz 2001, 2004). It is the latter group that is of importance for this discussion.

Salafi jihad's use well known Salafi identity markers such as following the Hadith and the Sunna (practices and sayings of the Prophet), which in turn allows this group to locate their use of violence in religious evidence which is needed to legitimise their actions and decisions. For example, Bin-Laden's 'Declaration of War' (1996) against the US is carefully constructed through the use of Quranic verses, authentic hadiths, citing pieces of evidence according to the Salafi Manhaj and praising publications by other well-known Salafis (Wiktorowicz, 2001). Such a discourse, argues that Western influence over Arab governments through foreign assistance, IMF loans, military connections and political alignments in effect makes such governments 'puppets', controlled by West and its Israeli allies. Thus, such Arab governments are therefore considered to be the equivalent to a foreign occupier on Islamic territory. For instance, Islamist rebels attempted to frame the Algerian government as a French surrogate which was preventing society from discovering it Islamic potential. Further still, wherever Salafis identify an oppressed Muslim community, the jihad becomes an individual obligation. Therefore, in the aftermath of Afghanistan, Salafi Jihadis identified Bosnia and Chechnya as such places and responded to this by creating multiple radical groups who intended to defend Muslims through violence in multiple geographical locations. One can therefore see that Salafi Jihadis attempt to ground their promotion of violence within jihadi interpretations found in the Quran and various other Islamic practices, further still, by identifying Muslim territory as being under threat from foreign aggressors Salafi Jihadis are able to justify their use of violence. Additionally, Salafi Jihadists explicitly argue that Muslim territories have a long history of being under the influence of Western powers, especially during periods of colonialism, and thus are able to justify their defence of Muslims in such territories, according to Salafi Jihadi doctrine "an attack on one Muslim territory is an attack on the entire umma" (Moghadam, 2007, pp.129). Abdullah Azzam's original call to defend the Muslim community in Afghanistan was adopted by individuals such as Bin Laden, Emir Khaitab and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, to extend the jihad indefinitely "moving the nomadic jihad into new countries to face infidel oppression. This, in turn, created a vast international network of Salafi Jihadis…" (Wiktorowicz, 2001, pp.26).

'Global Jihad' after Afghanistan

After the end of the Afghan jihad in 1989, attentions shifted from local nationalist movements to what is today called global jihad, "a deterritorialized transnational movement, encompassing an Islamic ideology detached from local culture, tradition or teachings, with a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic leadership and cadres." (Al-Rasheed, 2009, pp.329). Global jihadists attribute their birth to the victory in Afghanistan and use such narratives to "empower potential recruits and give them a sense of inevitable triumph" (Hafez, 2009, pp.78). Although it may be argued that foreign volunteers, including Arabs, did not contribute significantly to the victory in Afghanistan, the experience that they went through transformed many. Many foreign volunteers viewed the Afghan jihad as a pan Islamic one as Muslims from all over the world participated in defeating one of the world's two superpowers, further still, the experience and the skills learnt by volunteers lead to several insurgencies and civil wars during the 1990s (Cook, 2009, pp.182). Although the many atrocities carried out by various Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda, are indefensible as they target civilian populations it is important to contextualise such incidences. For example, Sultana (2008) argues that radicalism occurs due to catalysts such as authoritarianism, social deprivation and corruption within some Muslim societies. Additionally, some Islamic reform groups have argued that social ills can be explained by outside forces, such as modernisation or Westernisation, and is "perceived as a form of evil that replaces Muslim religious and cultural identity and values with alien ideas and models of development" (Sultana, 2008, pp.40). Thus, one may be able to explain the increase in Islamic extremism as a reaction to forces such as Westernisation as many believe that it is an attempt to replace Muslim identity. Knapp qualifies this notion further by arguing that Muslim societies have increasingly rejected Western civilisation as a model whilst attempting to find values that reflect traditional Muslim culture as well as attempting to restore dignity to the Muslim community. The last 40 years have seen the rise of Islamic religiously based political groups "whose ideology focuses on demands for jihad (and the willingness to sacrifice one's life) for the forceful creation of a society governed solely by the sharia and a unified Islamic state, and to eliminate un-Islamic and unjust rulers" (2003, pp.85). It may therefore be argued that radical Islamic groups throughout the Muslim world draw on local grievances, such as the lack of social services, and place

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them within the broader Salafi- Jihadist ideology which attempts to defend Muslim interests all over the globe (Kilcullen 2005). Rasheed (2009) goes further and explains that this transnational Salafi Jihadist ideology attempts to inspire young Muslims by exploiting common grievances that are apparent within multiple localities, from Palestine, Philippines, Chechnya, Bosnia, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Morocco and Iraq. Thus, Salafi Jihadists have been able to alter traditional interpretations of jihad and promote the idea that Western nations, namely the US, are responsible for many of the grievances felt throughout the Muslim umma and inspire individuals to defend Muslim territory and identity wherever possible. In doing so, some Muslims who engage in terrorist activity are able to discover their identity, as part of the worldwide Muslim community, who are helping defend Islamic interests according to Salafi Jihadi doctrine. For instance, van der Krogt (2010) argues that membership of the international umma is more politically significant for many Muslims rather than their citizenship of contemporary states because they either view them as a legacy of European imperialism or are disaffected members of society (pp.139). Kilcullen suggests that there is no middle way for Muslims, "only a stark choice between jihad and acceptance of permanent second-class citizenship in a world order dominated by the West and apparently infused with anti-Islamic values" (2005, pp.612). Westerners may find al-Qaeda's message of jihad irrational or abhorrent, but as Knapp states it "has been carefully crafted to appeal to the disgruntled and dispossessed of the Islamic world" (2003, pp.90).

In conclusion, the phenomenon of the global jihad movement may be attributed to the rise of Salafi Jihadists throughout the years of the Afghanistan war (1979 – 1989). The call to defend Muslim territory in the face of foreign aggression can be found within traditional jihad doctrine in the Quran and amongst hadiths, however during the Afghani Jihad, the formation of the Salafi Jihadist hijacked this term and used to it to defend their terrorist actions against other nations across the globe. By arguing that Islam was under threat from Western aggressors, mainly the US, Salafi Jihadists were able to ground their action in traditional jihad meanings. Such exclamations have aroused support from some Muslims throughout the world as they concur that many of the social ills, governmental corruption and lack of Islamic identity is due to the encroaching West, who is attempting to control and impose Western culture on Muslim nations. Thus, one may be able to conclude that the rise of Islamic radicalism may be assigned to the fact that many Muslims feel disaffected by their socio-economic situation and attempt to rectify this by conducting terrorist acts in the name of re-establishing an Islamic identity and creating a society based on Islamic traditions.

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