Does a 'Global Jihad' Phenomena Exist?

On 13th November 2015, Paris suffered a number of coordinated deadly attacks which killed at least 130 people and left more than 300 injured. The so called 'Islamic State', or 'Isis' claimed responsibility for these atrocities. Senior politicians as well as the media around the world described the attackers consistently as 'jihadists', some sources went as far as to suggest these killings are part of a wider process of 'global jihad', which also included recent attacks in Sinai, Ankara and Beirut, between others, 'in the name of Islam' (BBC, 2015; Gaffney, 2015; Korwin, 2015; Penketh, 2015 Wright, 2015). This essay will discuss the concepts of jihad and terrorism as well as their complex relationship. In addition, this paper will explore the nature of political Islam, identify its historical roots, key theorists and link them with contemporary examples of 'jihad'. Finally, this paper will refer to a number of verses in the Qur'an related to the use of force as defence and the strict limits placed on the use of such force. Is Jihad a Muslim duty *only* related to warfare or is it a noble religious practice which has been distorted to pursue political aims? Under which circumstances and by whom can jihad be declared as defensive or even offensive warfare? Is there a religious justification in Islam for the wholesale slaughter of innocent civilians and destruction of property? Is there such a thing as a 'global jihad' at all? In answering all these questions, this paper will assess the phenomenon of global jihad. This short essay will argue that for 'global jihad' to exist specifically as a violent practice, the following three premises would have to hold true: first, 'jihad' would have to be a practice aimed primarily at warfare, second, there would have to be a unified global Muslim community or *Umma*, and third, this *Umma* would have to be inherently violent. This paper will show that on a close inspection, the three premises above are actually false and as long as jihad is defined as a violent practice with the purpose of expanding the Islamic world, there is not such a phenomenon that could be truthfully described as 'global jihad'.

Jihad has become a synonym of terrorism (Ahmad, 1996; Ahmed, 2004) but what is terrorism? It is important to acknowledge that one of the most difficult aspects of dealing with this slippery concept is actually defining it (Ruby, 2002). Laqueur famously claimed ''one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter''(1987:302). Nevertheless, Ganor (2002) argues that it is not only possible but also desirable to reach an objective definition of terrorism. For the purpose of this essay, terrorism will be defined as "the deliberate use or the threat to use violence against civilians in order to attain political, ideological and religious aims" (Ganor, 2002: 288). Having defined terrorism, what is jihad? Jihad means 'struggle' or 'striving' (Heywood, 2011; Ruthven, 2000; Shah, 2013). Therefore the common translation into English, especially by political commentators in the media, as 'holy war' is misleading (Ahmad, 1996; Knapp, 2003). Broadly speaking, there are two types of jihad: *greater jihad*, which is an internal, individual and spiritual struggle towards self-improvement, and *lesser jihad*, an external physical struggle against evil, when the faith is under assault (Barber, 1992; Knapp, 2003; Ruthven, 2000).

It has been argued that "one of the most dramatic forms of globalization has been what is often referred to as 'global jihad'" (Shepard, 2014:324). One questions whether there a phenomenon that can truly be called 'global jihad'? Turner argues that "contemporary factors do not explain the phenomenon [of global jihad] in totality" (Turner, 2014: 5). In order to evaluate this concept, it is essential to briefly explore who its key theorists were, as well as the contexts in which these thinkers developed their ideologies. It is essential to trace the historical roots of the so-called 'global jihad' and bode the question: Could today's use of 'jihad' by Islamist organizations be a result of an interaction of factors *external* to Islam? In current times, 'jihad', as a process of violent confrontation, is closely related to political Islam, defined by Heywood as a "militant and uncompromising form of Islam that sought political and spiritual regeneration though the construction of an Islamic state" (Heywood, 2011:48). Heywood (2011), Knapp (2003), and

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Ruthven (1997) trace the roots of political Islam back to the period of European colonialist domination suffered by Muslim regions in the 19th century, as well as the fall and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire towards the end of the First World War. This was followed by the establishment of British and French 'mandates' over Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and what later became Iraq. European colonialism "resulted in political borders that reflected the interests of western powers and showed no regard for the facts of history, culture and ethnicity; authoritarian and corrupt government was installed with pro-western 'puppet' rulers" (Heywood, 2011: 47).

It was during this period of intense Muslim humiliation that the Indo-Pakistani scholar Abul A'la Maududi (1903-1979) wrote *al-jihad fil-Islam* in 1926, at the time the Indian subcontinent was starting to slowly challenge the domination of the British Empire (Shah, 2013). According to Jacobsen (2008) and Turner (2014) it was during that period that two different interpretations of sovereignty developed in parallel, on the one hand there was the idea that "the government of a nation-state constitutes the final and absolute authority in a society, and that no outside power has the right to intervene in the exercise of this authority" (Castles and Miller, 2009:3). On the other hand, Maududi saw the sovereign state system as a direct threat to Islam and God's sovereignty, and argued that the absolute authority in any society can only rest on God, not on men (Benhenda, 2010).

Influenced by Maududi's beliefs, Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), founded The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, established as a non-violent movement (Heywood, 2011; Ruthven, 2000). This preceded yet another key political development that had an enormous impact on the rise of political Islam: the creation of the state of Israel on what used to be Palestine territories. As a result of the establishment of Israel in 1947, and the 1948 Israeli-Arab war, more than 700,000 thousand Palestinians were displaced and as of 2015, there are some 5 million Palestinian refugees worldwide (UNRWA, 2015). Heywood (2011) and Ruthven (2000) argue that it was precisely during the Palestinian crisis, that the Muslim Brotherhood became radicalized and it "increasingly advocated violence in order to resist all 'foreign' ideologies and construct a pure Islamic state" (Heywood, 2011:48). The case of 'jihad' in relation to Palestine can perfectly be described as a genuine case of defensive jihad since the main purpose of it is not to expand Muslim territory but to restore it (Knapp, 2003). It was at the beginning of the Palestinian crisis, described by some as "the Muslim grievance par excellence" (Ayoob, 2004: 11).

On the contrary, Ruthven (2000) argues that Maududi and Qutb became the two most important theorists of political Islam. These thinkers did not suggest Muslims should attempt to return to an ideal past, instead believed, Muslims should practice a defensive jihad in order to restore God's sovereignty (Ruthven, 2000). Shah (2013) suggests that for Maududi and Qutb there is a moral obligation for all Muslims to 'remove' from the Earth all that can be perceived as 'evil and mischief.' For both theorists an un-Islamic way of life can be described as 'evil and mischief.' Therefore this interpretation perceives 'jihad' as a moral duty; "Muslims have an obligation to propagate Islam to the rest of mankind" (Shah, 2013: 351). It is essential to highlight that this idea goes against the teachings of the Qur'an: "let there be no compulsory in religion" (verse 2:256, p.102).

If the end of the First World War marked the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and set the scene for the rise of Political Islam (Heywood, 2011), then the conclusion of the Second Wold War certainly triggered the next important chapter on this matter. During the Cold War, Camus (1946, cited in Tribune de Paris, 1946) argued there was a 'clash of civilizations' between America and the Soviet Union, ironically, it was during this period that the first signs of what is now referred to as 'global jihad' started appearing. In 1979, there were twin 'political eruptions' in the Muslim world: political Islam was substantially strengthened by the Iranian Revolution that gave birth of the first Islamic republic (Heywood, 2011) and in the same year, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and 'jihad' was redefined (Wright, 2015). A number of Afghan groups called Mujahidin, influenced by the ideologies of Maududi and Qutb, and with volunteers from outside Afghanistan, mounted a 'defensive jihad' against the invaders (Shah, 2013). Eventually, in 1989, the Soviets had to withdraw (Shepard, 2014). Between the Mujahidin, there were two particular 'freedom fighters' worth mentioning, Osama bin Laden (1957-2011), who eventually founded the Islamist group al-Qaeda and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966-2006), who left al-Qaeda to establish the radical group Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, eventually known as 'Isis'. It must be said that the ethnically diverse groups of Mujahidin received financial and military assistance from outside Afghanistan, including, Iran, Pakistan and the USA (Heywood, 2011; Shepard, 2014). After the end of the Cold War, Huntington (2003) borrowed Camus' (1946) thesis and in 1996 suggested there was a new 'clash of civilisations', this time "between Muslims and non-Muslims" (Huntington, 2003: 208). Just

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over a decade after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, events in America seemed to suggest that Huntington (2003) was correct: on September 11th 2001 Osama bin Laden declared 'jihad' against the USA in a number of coordinated attacks on American soil. Ayoob (2004: 11) argues that "by promoting terrorism under a perverted definition of 'jihad', extremists succeed in making political Islam appear monolithic and supremely dangerous in the eyes of the West". Bin Laden succeeded in this, America and its allies responded accordingly. This paper will briefly return to this particular armed response in due course.

What does the Qur'an specifically say about the use of force as defence? First of all, even though there are verses in the Qur'an that can be used to endorse force as self-defence, these verses are 'context specific' and were revealed to the 7th century Arab society, not to 21st century Muslims (Shah, 2013). The Qur'an states that "to those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged"(verse XXII: 39 p.861). However, while there is permission to fight in the name of God, there are also clear restrictions on war: "fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits: for God loveth not transgressors" (verse II:190, p.75), the Qur'an goes even further and it shows the mercy of God towards an enemy who ceases to be a threat: "if they cease (to fight you), God is forgiving and merciful"(verse II:192, p.76). Maududi, Qutb and bin Laden, between many others, consistently referred to the Qur'an in order to obtain popular support and establish their basis for 'jihad' but all of them were highly selective on the Qur'anic verses which seemed to support their arguments (Knapp, 2003; Ruthven, 2000; Shah, 2013). Neither of them had the appropriate authority to declare jihad since only legitimate Muslim rulers or Imams can legitimately do so (Shah, 2013).

It is essential to highlight the distinction between examples of *defensive jihad,* like in the case of Palestine or Afghanistan and *offensive jihad* as a practice used in the case of terrorist attacks in 2001 in America or 2015 in Paris. Yes, "Islamic fundamentalists wish to establish the primacy of religion over politics" (Heywood, 2011: 198) but it must be recognized that not all Islam is political and not all political Islam perceives the modern sovereign state as a threat to Islam. First of all, there is no single cohesive and monolithic global Muslim community or *Ummah* (Shepard, 2014). Second, there is no single Islamist ideology, with a "single creed or political manifestation" (Heywood, 2011:199). Additionally, from an individualistic point of view, there are large amounts of Muslims peacefully living in the so called West, around 2.75 million Muslims in America alone (Lipka, 2015) and 13 million in the European Union (Hackett, 2015). Furyhermore, there are precedents of peaceful Muslim political parties, although this is not usually mentioned in the Western media. Two clear examples are the PJD (Party of Justice and Development) in Morocco which "does not call for struggle to bring about the Islamization of the state and society" (Bouyahya, 2015:150) and the Turkish Justice and Development Party, also originally based on Islamic ideals and currently in government in Turkey (Duran, 2008). "Transnational extremist activities, including acts of terrorism, are the exception, not the rule, when it comes to political action undertaken in the name of Islam" (Ayoob, 2004:12). Perhaps the strongest example of the high potential for cooperation between Muslim majority countries and the West is the fact that Muslim nations are part of the United Nations (Shah, 2013).

Let us finally and briefly turn our attention to the West's response to so called 'jihadi' attacks. It is too early to assess the military response to the 2015 Paris shootings but there is plenty of data available in order to evaluate the response to the 9/11 'jihadi' attacks in America. In total, the 2001 terrorist attacks in America killed nearly 3.000 people, many of them were Muslims (Kobeisi, 2011; Prince, 2014). America and its allies responded with the 'war on terror' in the Middle East. A recent "conservative estimate" suggests that around 1.3 million people were killed between Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan (PSR, 2015: 15). It is important to note this figure does not account the numbers of people who were displaced. Any commentator suggesting that Islam is a violent religion should really clarify which exceptional criteria has been used to support this argument, asking he pertinent question; Does Islam appear violent, when compared against the West?

In conclusion, the phenomenon often referred to as 'global jihad' is not 'jihad' and it is not global either. First and foremost, jihad is a peaceful religious practice, an individual and internal struggle for self-improvement and that is the way most Muslims perceive it (Knapp, 2003). There is also a *lesser* jihad, which is external and confrontational but with clear restrictions set in the Qur'an. It cannot be simply declared by anyone who feels that Islam is under threat and it certainly cannot be used against non-combatants. "The overwhelming majority of Islamic scholars have for centuries rejected indiscriminate killing and the terrorizing of civilian populations as a legitimate form of jihad"

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(Knapp, 2003:92). Shah argues that the offensive theory of jihad has "no foundation in the primary sources of Islamic law" (Shah, 2013:357). Moreover, there is no single cohesive global *Umma*, Islamic traditions are "not monolithic and static but diverse" (Shepard, 2014:234).

This paper also demonstrates how the historical roots of political Islam as well as 'jihad' itself as offensive warfare are deeply related to political developments *external* to Islam. Even in circumstances when a minority but highly violent group of 'Muslims' conducted attacks against the West, jihad has not been declared following the traditional religious procedures of Islam and the purposes of these activities are always by far more political than religious. Any suggestions that there is an inevitable 'clash of civilizations' between Islam and the West ignores the "complex and fragmented nature of civilizations and the extent to which different cultures have coexisted peacefully and harmoniously" (Heywood, 2011:208). In assessment of the title question, is there a phenomenon that can truly be called 'global jihad'? Perhaps there is, but not in the perverted form hijacked by political Islam as a kind of collective aggression against the West. Instead, there may be a '*global greater jihad*' in which the vast majority of Muslims, individually struggle for self-improvement, following the teachings of the noble Qur'an: "Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Garden (paradise) whose width is that of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous. Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity or in adversity, who restrain (their) anger and pardon (all) men – for God loves those who do good" (The noble Qur'an, verse III: 133-134: p.157).

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