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Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought and History

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Summary and Keywords

In both popular and scholarly literature, *jihad* is primarily assumed to be a monovalent concept referring to "military/armed combat," and martyrdom (*shahada*) is inevitably understood to be of the military kind. This assumption facilitates the discussion of jihad and martyrdom as terms with fixed, universal meanings divorced from the varying sociopolitical contexts in which they have been deployed through time. Such a monovalent understanding of these two concepts emerges primarily through consultation of the juridical literature and official histories that were produced after the 2nd century CE (8th century AH) and that are unduly privileged in academic discussions of this subject.

In contradistinction to this approach, a more holistic and historical approach to the term *jihad* can be undertaken by focusing on the changing significations of jihad from the earliest formative period of Islam to the contemporary period, against the backdrop of specific social and political circumstances which have mediated the meanings of this critical term. This larger objective entails canvassing a more varied genre of texts to recreate a more multifaceted understanding of jihad and martyrdom as dynamic discursive terms through time. Such sources include Qur'an exegetical works (*tafsir*), early and late works of *hadith* which purport to contain the sayings of the prophet Muhammad, the excellences of jihad (*fada'il al-jihad*) and the excellences of patience (*fada'il al-sabr*) literatures, which are often not consulted on this topic. Furthermore, the comparison of early and late sources and texts from these genres allows one to chart both the constancies and changes in the spectrum of meanings and repertoire of activities included under the terms *jihad* and *shahada*. This recovery of a broader semantic landscape undermines exclusively martial conceptualizations of both these terms and has important implications for the contemporary period.

Keywords: jihad, martyrdom, shahada, sabr, tafsir, hadith

The Qur'anic Discourse

The specific Qur'anic terms that are associated with military activity are jihad, *qital*, and *harb*. Jihad, however, is a much broader term and its basic Qur'anic signification is "struggle," "striving," "exertion." The lexeme *jihad* is frequently conjoined to the phrase "*fi sabil Allah*" (lit. "in the path of God") in extra-Qur'anic literature. The full locution in Arabic, *al-jihad fi sabil Allah*, consequently means "struggling/striving for the sake of God." This translation points to the polysemy of the term *jihad* and the potentially different meanings that may be ascribed to it in different contexts, since the phrase "in the path of/for the sake of God" allows for human striving to be accomplished in multiple ways. *Qital* is the term which specifically refers to "fighting" or "armed combat" and is a component of jihad in specific situations. *Harb* is the Arabic word for war in general. The Qur'an employs this last term four times: to refer to illegitimate wars fought by those who wish to spread corruption on earth (5:64); to the thick of battle between believers and non-believers (8:57; 47:4); and, in one instance, to the possibility of war waged by God and His prophet against those who would continue to practice usury (2:279).[1] This term is never used with the phrase "in the path of God" and has no bearing on the concept of *jihad*.

According to the Qur'anic worldview, human beings should be constantly engaged in the basic moral endeavor of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (Qur'an 3:104, 110, 114; 7:157; 9:71, 112, etc.). The "struggle" implicit in the application of this precept is jihad, properly and plainly speaking, and the endeavor is both individual and collective. The means for carrying out this struggle vary according to circumstances, and the Qur'an often refers to those who "strive with their wealth and their selves" (*jahadu bi-amwalihim wa-anfusihim*; e.g., Qur'an 8:72).

The Meccan Period: *Sabr* as a Component of Jihad

During the Meccan period (*c.* 610–622 CE), that is, the period between the start of the Qur'anic revelation in roughly 610 CE until the emigration to Medina in 622 CE, the Muslims were not given permission by the Qur'an to physically retaliate against their persecutors, the pagan Meccans. Verses revealed in this period counsel the Muslims rather to steadfastly endure the hostility of the Meccans. While recognizing the right to self-defense for those who are wronged, the Qur'an maintains in this early period that to bear patiently the wrongdoing of others and to forgive those who cause them harm is the superior course of action in resisting evil. Three verses (42:40–43) reveal this highly

significant, nonmilitant dimension of struggling against wrongdoing (and, therefore, of jihad) in this early period. These verses state:

> The requital of evil is an evil similar to it: hence, whoever pardons and makes peace, his reward rests with God––for indeed, He does not love evil-doers. Yet surely, as for those who defend themselves after having been wronged no blame whatever attaches to them: blame attaches but to those who oppress people and behave outrageously on earth, offending against all right; for them is grievous suffering in store! But if one is patient in adversity and forgives, this is indeed the best resolution of affairs.

In Qur'anic discourse, patience is thus a component and a manifestation of the jihad of the righteous; quietist and activist resistance to wrong-doing are equally valorized. One Qur'anic verse thus (16:110) states, "As for those who after persecution fled their homes and strove actively (*jahadu*) and were patient (*sabaru*) to the last, your Lord will be forgiving and merciful to them on the day when every soul will come pleading for itself." Another (47:31) states, "We shall put you to the test until We know the active strivers (*al-mujahidin*) and the quietly forbearing (*al-sabirin*) among you." Quietist, nonviolent struggle is not the same as passivity, however, which when displayed in the face of grave oppression and injustice, is clearly marked as immoral in the Qur'anic view. "Those who are passive" (Ar. *al-qa'idun*) earn divine rebuke in the Qur'an (4:95).

Furthermore, generous posthumous rewards are promised for the conscious inculcation of patience. For instance, Qur'an 39:10 states that "those who are patient will be given their reward without measure;" and Qur'an 25:75 states, "They will be awarded the high place [in heaven] for what they bore in patience . . . abiding there forever."

In addition to *sabr*, the term *jihad* is also used in the Qur'an in the Meccan period in a noncombative sense. Two important verses may be cited in this context as examples. The first is Qur'an 22:78, which states, "Strive in regard to God a true striving as is His due" (*wa-jahidu fi 'llah haqqa jihadihi*), and the second is Qur'an 29:69, which states, "As for those who struggle in regard to Us (*jahadu fina*), we will surely guide them to Our paths; indeed God is with those who do good." In regard to these two verses, early exegetes like the famous Companion Ibn 'Abbas (d. *c.* 68/687), Muqatil b. Sulayman (d. 150/767), and the Shi'i commentator al-Qummi (d. after 307/919), understand the term *jihad* in these verses as referring to the general, nonviolent struggle of believers to obey God in their actions and to please Him. The commentary of the influential exegete al-Tabari' (d. 310/923), however, marks a signal transformation in the meanings assigned to the derivates of *jihad* in these verses. In clear contradistinction to earlier authorities whose views he conscientiously preserves, al-Tabari tellingly expresses a personal preference for assigning combative meanings to the Meccan locutions *jahidu fi 'llāh/*

jahadu fina because, he says, they had become the predominant understanding by his time. Al-Tabari's commentary is therefore exceptionally valuable to us in indicating how fraught and contested these locutions had become by his time and that the gradual privileging of the combative aspects of *jihad* had become almost inexorable by the late 3rd/9th century, at least in certain scholarly circles. In general, post-Tabari exegetes continue to record both combative and noncombative meanings of *jihad* in relation to these verses, as we note in the commentaries of the well-known exegetes al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210), and al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1273).[2]Another critical Meccan verse is Qur'an 25:52, which states: "Do not obey the unbelievers and strive against them mightily with it (*bihi)*." A majority of the exegetes, including al-Tabari, understood the enclitic pronoun in *bihi* to be a reference to the Qur'an primarily on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbas. The Successor Ibn Zayd (d. 182/798; from the second generation of Muslims) is the source of the alternate view that it referred to Islam. The minority view that it referred to "the sword" or fighting against the polytheists is recorded in the Qur'an commentary *Tanwir al-miqbas*, traditionally attributed to al-Kalbi (d. 146/763). But the two influential exegetes al-Razi and al-Qurtubi reject this interpretation as ahistorical since the verse is universally deemed to be Meccan and the command to fight was not given until the Medinan period.[3]

The Medinan Period (622–632 CE): Establishing Just Cause for Military Combat

Specific reasons for resorting to armed combat (*casus belli*) are mentioned in the Qur'an starting in the Medinan period. During this period which began with the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions to Medina in 622 CE, two Qur'anic verses (22:39–40) permitting fighting for the first time were revealed. These verses state:

> Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war has been wrongfully initiated, and indeed, God has the power to help them: those who have been driven from their homes unjustly for no other reason than their saying, "Our Provider is God!" For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques––in all of which God's name is abundantly glorified––would surely have been destroyed.

In the Meccan period, Qur'an 42:40–43 had allowed Muslims to defend themselves nonviolently against their Meccan persecutors but advocated patient forbearance in the face of wrongdoing as the better alternative. In the Medinan verses 22:39–40, wrongful aggression against people and their expulsion from their homes for no other reason than their affirmation of belief in one God is cited as the explicit reasons that make defensive

fighting permissible. Furthermore, the Qur'an asserts, if people were not allowed to defend themselves against violent wrongdoers, all the houses of worship—it is noteworthy that Jewish and Christian places of worship are included alongside Muslim ones—would be destroyed and thus the word of God extinguished. It is reasonable to infer from this verse that Muslims may resort to defensive combat even on behalf of non-Muslims who are persecuted for their religious beliefs by hostile elements. When both just cause and right intention exist, war in self-defense against an intractable enemy may become obligatory.

> Fighting (*al-qital*) is prescribed for you, while you dislike it. But it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you. God knows and you know not. (Qur'an 2:216)

The Qur'an states further that it is the duty of Muslims to defend those who are oppressed and who call out to them for help (4:75), except against a people with whom the Muslims have concluded a treaty (8:72).

The Qur'an also has specific injunctions with regard to initiation of hostilities. Qur'an 2:190 which reads, "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not commit aggression, for God loves not aggressors," forbids Muslims from commencing hostilities. Fighting must be in response to a prior act of aggression by the opposite side. The nonaggression position articulated in Qur'an 2:190 is stressed again in another verse, Qur'an 9:13, which asks: "Will you not fight a people who violated their oaths and had intended to expel the Messenger and commenced [hostilities] against you the first time?" Here once again the Qur'an makes clear that the faithful can resort to armed combat only against those people who are guilty of wrongdoing—in this case, people who broke their treaties with Muslims—and who had initiated fighting against them. Fighting is allowed not in order to combat the religious beliefs of adversaries, but only on account of their prior acts of aggression, and therefore to specifically defend oneself and others against physical harm. Some scholars were also of the opinion that the Qur'anic command to fight was only applicable to the first generation of Muslims––that is to say, the Companions––who were contemporaries of Muhammad, since the historical referent in the verses that deal with fighting are the hostile pagan Arabs of Mecca. The previously cited verse (Qur'an 2:216) is often mentioned in many sources as establishing the obligatory nature of fighting.

There is no doubt that according to this verse, when war is duly constituted for justified and legitimate reasons, fighting becomes a moral obligation which no adult male believer may shirk without extenuating reason. Among these legitimate reasons are the violation of treaties by the enemy and initiation of hostilities by them, as we noted. However the exegetes differed as to who exactly were intended in the second person plural object

pronominal suffix *kum* in the verse which states in Arabic: *kutiba ʿalaykum al-qital* (“fighting has been prescribed for you [plural]”).

According to al-Tabari, the early pious Medinan scholar ʿAta b. Abi Rabah (d. 115/733) was prominent among those who subscribed to the position that *kum* (plural you) in the verse as direct address referred only to the Muslims who were present with Muhammad. Al-Tabari quotes ʿAta’ b. Abi Rabah, who, when asked whether Qur’an 2:216 made fighting obligatory for people in general, replied that it did not and that “it was prescribed only for those [who were present] at that time (*hina’idhin*).”[4]

In the 11th century, another exegete al-Wahidi (d. 468/1076) continued to endorse this early position that fighting as a religiously prescribed duty was temporally limited. He too quotes ʿAta’ b. Abi Rabah who had understood Qur’an 2:216 to refer specifically to the Companions of the Prophet because only fighting with the Prophet was an obligatory duty.[5] In the following century, al-Razi also records these early views and documents the divergent opinions that have historically existed among the scholars regarding the interpretation of this verse. In addition to Ata’ b. Abi Rabah, al-Razi refers to another well-known Medinan scholar ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿUmar (d. 73/693), son of the second caliph ʿUmar b al-Khattab, who had similarly understood the duty of fighting to have been imposed on the Companions of the Prophet “at that time only” (*fi dhalika ’l-waqt faqat*); that is to say, solely during the lifetime of the Prophet against the pagan Arabs who had aggressed against the Muslims.[6]

Two more Medinan verses are often cited by many jurists as setting up a religious obligation to fight non-Muslims until they capitulate at least to Muslim rule. The first is Qur’an 9:5 which states:

> “When the sacred months have lapsed, then slay the polytheists (*al-mushrikin*) wherever you may encounter them. Seize them and encircle them and lie in wait for them. But if they repent and perform the prayer and give the *zakat*, then let them go on their way, for God is forgiving and merciful.”

The second is Qur’an 9:29, which states:

> “Fight those who do not believe in God nor in the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His messenger have forbidden and do not follow the religion of truth from among those who were given the Book until they proffer the *jizya* with [their] hands in humility.”

A survey of exegetical works reveals that until the Seljuk period (1037–1196), Qur’an 9:5 was not the subject of much attention among Qur’an commentators. Most exegetes understood the *mushrikin* mentioned in Qur’an 9:5 to refer specifically to those hostile

polytheists with whom the first generation of Muslims did not have pacts and therefore historically circumscribed in its application. Qur'an 9:29 was understood by the early exegete Mujahid b. Jabr (d. 104/722) as a specific reference to the military expedition of Tabuk in 630 CE,[7], during which Muhammad led an army of about thirty thousand troops to meet the large Byzantine army that was reported to be amassing there for an attack. The verse therefore implies that the scriptuaries referenced in this verse are specifically hostile factions from among them, in this case the Byzantine Christians. However, later exegetes understand this verse as referring broadly to Jews and Christians who are required to pay the *jizya* humbly as a marker of their inferior legal status vis-à-vis Muslims. The Andalusian exegete al-Qurtubi notably warns though against mistreating the *ahl al-kitāb*—a term, he stresses, that implies respect for them and for their knowledge of God and His messengers—on the basis of hadith and early Muslim praxis.[8]

Qur'anic Ethics of Refraining from Fighting and Peacemaking

In addition to being defensive, fighting in the Qur'an is limited in nature. The Qur'anic ethics of desisting from fighting and making peace are just as important as the rules it sets down for conducting a justified war. Thus Qur'an 60:7–8 states:

> "Perhaps God will place affection between you and those who are your enemies for God is powerful and God is forgiving and merciful. God does not forbid you from being kind and equitable to those who have neither made war on you on account of your religion nor driven you from your homes; indeed God loves those who are equitable."

Once again, the Qur'an makes very clear that Muslims may fight only those who have clearly aggressed against them and persecuted them for their faith. Non-Muslims who live peacefully with them and evince no hostility are to be treated kindly and equitably, regardless of what they choose to believe.

Another verse, Qur'an 8:61, is the quintessential "peacemaking" verse that creates a clear moral imperative for Muslims to abandon fighting when the adversary lays down his arms. The verse states, "And if they should incline to peace, then incline to it [yourself] and place your trust in God; for He is all-hearing and all-knowing." In his interpretation of this verse, al-Tabari says that God addressed the Prophet and counseled him to abandon warfare when the adversary inclines to peace either through entry into Islam, payment of the poll tax (*jizya*), or through the establishment of friendly relations.[9] Such reciprocity is mandated for the sake of peace and peacemaking.

Martyrdom in the Qurʾan and Hadith Literature

The understanding of *jihad* as *primarily* "armed combat" (*qital*) took perhaps about a century to develop. There are several reasons for suggesting this. The Qurʾan, as we noted, attests to multiple meanings of jihad that range from noncombative to combative. Furthermore, the Qurʾan does not have a single word for "martyr" or "martyrdom," concepts that became intrinsically linked to the concept of jihad as armed combat against the enemies of Islam. One of the Qurʾanic verses (3:169; cf. 47:4; 2:154) that has been construed to refer to the special status of the military martyr runs thus, "Do not think that those who were slain in the path of God are dead. They are alive and well provided for by their Lord." Some of the exegetical and hadith works, however, make clear that the phrase "slain in the path of God," was not understood to be restricted to those fallen in battle, but could be glossed in several ways.

The common Arabic word for martyr became *shahīd*. It is telling that nowhere in the Qurʾan is this word used for a martyr; rather it is only used, interchangeably with *shāhīd*, to refer to a legal or eye witness.[10] Only in later extra-Qurʾanic tradition does this word acquire the specific meaning of "one who bears witness for the faith," particularly by laying down his or her life. Extraneous, particularly Christian, influence may be suspected here.[11] Muslim encounters with Levantine Christians in the late 7th century very likely contributed to this development. The cognate Syriac word for martyr-witness *sahedo* may have influenced the Arabic *shahīd* and led to the latter's subsequent acquisition of the secondary and derivative meaning of "martyr."[12] The fact that we encounter the term *shahīd* in the sense of martyr-witness only in the hadith literature already implies the later development of this strand of meaning.

Competing Definitions of *Shahid*

Verbal jousts over which specific actions are to be considered the most morally excellent find reflection in the hadith and edifying literature and reflect the medieval Muslim's concern to identify and rank the moral valences of specific deeds. That there was a sizeable contingent of people who challenged the growing prevalence of the idea of jihad as primarily armed combat and the consequent romanticization of the concept of military martyrdom is often clear from the content of many of the early *akhbar* [13]or reports that are labeled in Arabic *mawquf* (roughly "arrested" or "truncated"). As a technical term it identifies these reports as being attributable to a Companion of Muhammad rather than directly to the Prophet himself (with a corresponding diminution in its probative value).

For instance, the *Musannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzaq (d. 211/827), which was compiled earlier than al-Bukhari's authoritative hadith collection, contains a number of Companion reports which relate competing definitions of shahid. A few examples will suffice. One report attributed to the Companion Abu Hurayra (d. 62/681) states that the *shahid* is one who, were he to die in his bed, would enter heaven.[14] The explanatory note that follows states that it refers to someone who dies in his bed and is without sin (*la dhanb lahu*). Another report also recorded by ʿAbd al-Razzaq and related by Masruq b. al-Ajdaʿ (d. 63/682) declares that there are four types of *shahada* or martyrdom for Muslims: the plague, parturition or delivery of a child, drowning, and a stomach ailment.[15] Significantly, there is no mention of martyrdom being earned on account of dying on the battlefield in this early report. An expanded version of this report, however, originating with the Companion Abu Hurayra, quotes the Prophet as adding to this list of those who achieve martyrdom, "one who is killed in the way of God (*man qutila fi sabil Allah*)."[16] It is this expanded version containing the full, five definitions of a *shahid* that is recorded later in the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari.[17]

Another early, 8th-century hadith work records multiple significations of the term *shahid*. The *Muwatta'* of Malik b. Anas (d. 179/795, the eponymous founder of the Sunni Maliki school of law) records that the Prophet identified seven kinds of martyrs, in addition to those who died from fighting in God's way. Thus, "He who dies as a victim of an epidemic is a martyr; he who dies from drowning is a martyr; he who dies from pleurisy is a martyr; he who dies from diarrhoea is a martyr; he who dies by [being burned in] fire is a martyr; he who dies by being struck by a dilapidated wall falling is a martyr; and the woman who dies in childbed is a martyr."[18] This report and the one cited above assigns martyrdom to the believer who suffers a painful death from a variety of debilitating illnesses, from a difficult labor in the case of women, or from falling victim to an unfortunate accident, such as being crushed to death by a falling wall, in addition to falling on the battlefield. These early, expansive definitions of a martyr are an important corrective to the later predominantly military significations attached to the term *shahid*.

Legal Perspectives

The literature from the first three centuries of Islam therefore clearly reveals that there were competing definitions of how best to strive in the path of God, engendered by the polyvalence of the term jihad as occurs in the Qur'an. Rigorous scholarship establishes that there was a clear divergence of opinion regarding the nature of jihad and its imposition as a religious duty on the believer through the 1st century of Islam and into the second half of the 2nd century. During the Umayyad period (661–750), there were

multiple and conflicting perspectives on this subject held by jurists from Syria, for example, who were close to ruling circles and jurists from the Hijaz, who were outside the orbit of such circles.[19] Early jurists not aligned with official circles, like Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161/778) and Hijazi scholars like ʿAta' b. Abi Rabah, Abu Salama b. ʿAbd al-Rahman (d. between 94–104/712–722) and ʿAbd Allah b. ʿUmar, were of the opinion that jihad was primarily defensive, and that only the defensive jihad may be considered obligatory on the individual. However, Syrian jurists like al-Awzaʿi (d. 157/773) and Makhul al-Shami (d. between 112/730–119/737) who were close to the Umayyads, held the view that even aggressive war may be considered obligatory. No doubt this last group was influenced by the fact that the Syrian Umayyads during his time were engaged in border warfare with the Byzantines and there was a perceived need to justify these hostilities on a theological and legal basis.[20] It would not be an exaggeration to state that expressing support for expansionist war at this time (the Umayyad period) was to proclaim one's support for the existing government and its policies.

By the early part of the Abbasid period (750–1258), roughly mid-late 2nd/8th century, the military aspect of jihad became foregrounded over other spiritual and nonmilitant significations of this term in juridical and official circles. Jihad from this period on would progressively be conflated with *qital* ("fighting"), collapsing the distinction that the Qur'an maintains between the two. As the jurists and religious scholars of all stripes became consolidated as a scholarly class and accrued to themselves commensurate religious authority by the 4th/10th century, they arrogated to themselves the right to authoritatively define jihad and circumscribe the range of activities prescribed by it. With the powerful hermeneutic tool of abrogation *(naskh)* at their disposal, some of the jurists effectively rendered null and void the irenic injunctions contained in the Qur'anic verses which explicitly permitted the conclusion of truces with foes and counseled peaceful coexistence with particularly the "People of the Book," and also in general with those who exhibited no hostility towards Muslims. According to the principle of *naskh*, a Qur'anic verse can be "abrogated" or "superseded" by a later verse on the same or related topic. One of the most important verses declared by a number (by no means all) of these scholars to have been abrogated or superseded is Qur'an 2:256, which forbids compulsion in religion, by verses that are later revelations which give the command to fight.[21]

This, however, does not mean that these scholars henceforth regarded coercion of nonbelievers to embrace Islam as valid.[22] But since Qur'an 2:256 had been adduced as one of a number of proof-texts by those who inveighed against the concept of an offensivejihad––for that might lead the way to coercive conversions—the opposite camp felt impelled to declare the injunction contained in this verse (and other verses which advocated peaceful, nonmilitant relations with non-Muslims) to be abrogated or at least

superseded by other verses, such as the so-called “sword verse” (Qur’an 9:5)[23] or Qur’an 9:73.[24] In the opinion of these jurists, such an act of abrogation or supersession would remove scripture-based objections to the waging of offensive battles in order to extend the political realm of Islam. Once conquered, non-Muslims could be given the choice of either embracing Islam or paying the *jizya*. Usually compliance with the second option (in the absence of any desire to convert) meant that the third option posited by this camp of jurists for nonbelievers in the event of non-compliance—“to be put to the sword”—was unlikely to be exercised; and the jurists in all probability envisioned that this is how matters would turn out. Thus even these jurists could not have conceived of jihad primarily as “holy war” to effect the conversion of non-Muslims. They could in fact be accused of doing just the opposite—that is, of politicizing and secularizing jihad so that it could be deployed as “expansionist war,” which could be launched to further the state’s imperial objectives to expand territorially and extend its political dominion.

A survey of legal literature furthermore reveals that the categorical and unambiguous Qur’anic principle of nonaggression in verse 2:190 underwent considerable modification and transformation at the hands of jurists in the context of international law (*siyar*). A diachronic survey of commentaries on the Qur’an reveals that early exegetes like Ibn ‘Abbas, ‘Ata’ b. Abi Rabah, Mujahid b. Jabr, and Muqatil b. Sulayman had firmly maintained that Qur’an 2:190 unambiguously forbade the initiation of military hostilities. Scholars and jurists from the 9th century onward like al-Tabari, al-Shafi‘i (d. 202/820), al-Mawardi (d. 450/1058), and others, however, went on to endorse the principle of offensive jihad by either one or both of the following strategies: by declaring Qur’an 2:190, which forbade such a concept, to be abrogated and/or by transferring the application of Qur’an 2:190 from the realm *of jus ad bellum* to that of *jus in bello*, that is to say from the realm of “just cause for initiating war” to “just conduct during warfare,” thereby making irrelevant adherence to a strict principle of nonaggression. This critical reinterpretation became reflected in the laws of war and peace formulated by the classical jurists, who typically came to understand the nonaggression clause in this verse as primarily setting up a prohibition against fighting noncombatants, and not as a categorical prohibition against initiating fighting under any circumstance, as was clearly the view of several early exegetes. Such a hermeneutic maneuver effectively allowed for a theory of offensive jihad to emerge in the legal realm which allowed Muslim rulers to launch preemptive wars against non-Muslim polities.

The jurist Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafi‘ i (d. 204/820) is said to have been the first to permit jihad to be launched against non-Muslims as offensive warfare, although he qualified non-Muslims as referring only to pagan Arabs and not to non-Arab non-Muslims. He further divided the world into *dar al-islam* (“the abode of Islam”) and *dar al-harb* (“the abode of war,” referring to non-Muslim territories), while allowing for a third possibility

dar al-ʿahd (“the abode of treaty”) or *dar al-sulh* (“the abode of reconciliation”), to which abode non-Islamic polities which had entered into a peace treaty with the Muslim ruler may be admitted.[25] These terms were coined by al-Shafiʿi himself and have no precedent either in the Qur’an or in the hadith literature. Rather they reflect the Realpolitik of his time; international law (*siyar*) was predicated on an existing state of “cold war” between realms inhabited by Muslims versus those inhabited by non-Muslims, which required constant vigilance on the part of the former against the latter.[26] In the premodern world, the default relationship among nations was war. Later jurists, like al-Mawardi (d. 450/1058), would acknowledge this historical reality and stipulate that one of the duties of the caliph was to carry out military campaigns against enemy territory at least once a year to expand Islamic realms and preempt potential attacks by enemy nations; although others were of the opinion that this duty could be fulfilled by simply being in an adequate state of military preparedness to forestall enemy attacks.[27]

The perspectives of al-Shafiʿi on jihad represented, in many ways, already a marked departure from earlier juristic thinking and reflect a certain hardening of attitudes toward non-Islamic polities by his time (late 8th and early 9th century). This is quite evident when his views are compared with those of jurists from the earlier Hanafi school of law, eponymously founded by Abu Hanifa (d. 150/767). Hanafi jurists, for example, did not subscribe to a third abode of treaty, as devised by al-Shafiʿi, but were of the opinion that the inhabitants of a territory which had concluded a truce with the Muslims and paid tribute to the latter became part of the abode of Islam and entitled to the protection of the Muslim ruler.[28] The early Hanafis also adhered to the position that nonbelievers could only be fought if they resorted to armed conflict, and not on account of their disbelief.[29] This remained a principle of contention between later Shafiʿ i and Hanafi jurists.

While many jurists from the classical period gradually and reductively conflated jihad with *qital* and allowed for offensive warfare, they continued to require the strict observance of the rules of conduct applicable during justified war (*jus in bello*). In this context, they frequently invoked the early directives of Abu Bakr, the first caliph, concerning restrained and upright conduct during combat. Al-Tabari in his universal history reports that Abu Bakr advised his military commander Usama b. Zayd (son of Zayd b. al-Haritha, the Prophet’s adopted son) before the expedition to Mu’ta in 11/632, “not to kill women, children, and the elderly;” nor to mutilate or commit treacherous actions. Usama was also advised not to cut down fruit trees nor burn houses and cornfields and to refrain from killing livestock. He was further advised that when he and his army encountered hermits in their monasteries, they were not to molest them nor destroy their monasteries.[30] These strictures have continued to be repeated in legal manuals and treatises on warfare, forming an essential basis for rules of humane conduct during armed combat.

Negotiating the Polyvalence of the Term *Jihad*

The largely monovalent, aggressive understanding of jihad promoted by influential jurists within the context of international relations undermined the rich diversity of meanings associated with the term in Qur'anic and early hadith discourse. Accordingly, martyrdom also came to be understood almost exclusively in a statist-military sense and a hortatory literary genre called *fada'il al-jihad* ("excellences of the combative *jihad*") developed around the often greatly exaggerated merits of falling on the battlefield in defending the realms of Islam. For example, in the *fada'il al-jihad* section of the *Sunan* of Ibn Maja (d. 273/886), a report is ascribed to the Prophet in which he describes the following posthumous characteristics exclusive to the martyr: (a) he will be forgiven his sins at the first drop of blood shed; (b) he will see his seat in heaven; (c) he will be protected from the torment of the grave; (d) and from the great fear [of Judgment Day]; and (e) he will be allowed to intercede for seventy relatives.[31] Such hyperbole concerning the merits of the military martyr are rarely encountered in earlier hadith compilations.

Contraposed to the *fada'il al-jihad* literature was the *fada'il al-sabr* genre which extolled the Qur'anic virtue of patient forbearance, often as a nonviolent trait. A 9th-century work, for instance, on the merits of patience by Ibn Abi al-Dunya (d. 281/894), called *al-Sabr wa-'l-thawab 'alayhi* ("Patience and the Rewards for It") records the following report on the authority of a certain 'Isma Abi Hukayma, who related,

> The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, wept and we asked him, "What has caused you to weep, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "I reflected on the last of my community and the tribulations they will face. But the patient from among them who arrives will be given the reward of two [military] martyrs (*shahidayn*)."[32]

This report categorically challenges other, better- known reports which assign the greatest merit to military martyrs and posits instead a different, nonmilitant understanding of virtuous self-sacrifice. These two literary genres—the excellences of fighting versus patience—taken together represent competing but also complementary articulations of how best to struggle for the sake of God.

Late Medieval Constructions of Jihad and Martyrdom

In the context of Crusader and Mongol attacks during the Seljuk and Mamluk periods, jihad as defensive military activity against external aggressors was promoted particularly

by certain jurists and scholar-warriors. It is in this period that Qur'an 9:5, which otherwise was understood by earlier exegetes to refer exclusively to the pagan Arabs during the Prophet's lifetime, became dubbed "the verse of the sword" (*ayat al-sayf*) by Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373) in his well-known *tafsir* work.[33] Ibn Kathir's characterization of this verse indicates to us that by the Mamluk period when Islamic realms were under continuous assault by the Crusaders and the Mongols, many scholars felt impelled to derive a general expansive mandate from Qur'an 9:5 and other such historically circumscribed verses to fight and punish all those who posed a threat to the well-being of Muslims.

Qur'an 9:5 was also declared by certain hawkish jurists and exegetes to have abrogated other conciliatory verses, such as Qur'an 60:7–8 and 8:61, which required Muslims to coexist peacefully with all those who showed no hostility toward them, regardless of their religious affiliation. This position had already been expressed by certain pre-Mamluk exegetes, which in turn was robustly opposed by others. Muqatil b. Sulayman (d. 150/767), ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Sanʿani, and Ibn Muhakkam (d. 290/903) are among the early exegetes who stated that Qur'an 9:5 had abrogated Qur'an 60:7–9; Qatada b. Diʿama (d. 118/736) and Ibn Zayd are also mentioned as advocates of this view. Al-Tabari, however, is forceful in affirming the unabrogated status of Qur'an 60:7–9; he invokes the early authorities Ibn ʿAbbas (d. 68/687), Mujahid b. Jabrxym (d. 104/722), Muqatil b. Hayyan (d. *c.* 150/767), and al-Kalbi in support of this position. Al-Tabari also defended the unabrogated status (*muhkam*) of Qur'an 8:61, the quintessential peacemaking verse, which was considered abrogated by Qur'an 9:5 by, once again, Qatada. [34]

The increased valorization of the defensive military jihad during the Mamluk period becomes evident in the *fada'il al-jihad* works composed at this time. One such work is the *Mashariʿ 'l-ashwaq ila masariʿ al-ʿushshaq fi 'l-jihad wa-fada'ilihi* ((“The Watering-Holes of Longing for the Battle-Grounds of Lovers”) composed by the anti-Crusader warrior Ahmad b. Ibrahim Ibn al-Nahhas (d. 814/1411). In the fraught circumstances in which Muslims found themselves at this historical juncture, Ibn al-Nahhas's tone in this treatise is urgent and hortatory, attempting to rouse the faithful to repel the invaders by recording reports which extol the benefits of fighting and promise exaggerated rewards in the hereafter to the military martyr. Thus there is an extensive section on the merits of jihad and those who undertake it (*fadl al-jihad wa-'l-mujahidin fi sabil allah*). In some reports recorded by the author, jihad is declared to be more meritorious than giving the call to prayer; or more meritorious than offering water to pilgrims during the hajj and undertaking the lesser pilgrimage.[35] Yet other reports maintain that the combative jihad was the best of all actions without exception (*ʿala 'l-itlaq*); that jihad was the most beloved of all actions to God; that the fighter (*mujahid*) was the best of all people, and that no one is able to carry out a deed that was the equivalent of *al-jihad fi sabil allah*.[36]

Away from the battlefront, noncombative significations of jihad and martyrdom continued to be written about in the later period. Literary works from the Seljuk and Mamluk periods that were written for the moral edification of the individual continue to emphasize the internal struggle of the individual against his/her carnal self (*nafs*) as the greater and more important aspect of jihad. This aspect had reportedly been famously advocated by Muhammad when he returned from a military campaign and remarked, "We have returned from the lesser *jihad* to the greater *jihad*,"[37] indicating a higher valorization of the spiritual human struggle over the physical.

The qualities of patience and forbearance, encompassed by the Arabic Qur'anic term *sabr* and its derivatives, in fact, became the counterfoil to martial swashbuckling virtues and emphasized by many as the most important component of the overall human striving on earth, that is to say, of jihad in the broadest sense. One of the best examples of such writings is a chapter written by the famous mystical theologian Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) extolling the virtue of patient forbearance contained in his magnum opus *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*. Al-Ghazali begins this chapter titled *Kitab al-sabr wa-'l-shukr* by asserting that faith (*al-iman*) is composed of two halves: patience and gratitude. Patience is specifically a human attribute (*khasssiyat al-ins*), denied to the animals on account of their deficient nature and to the angels on account of their perfection. The author states that at the onset of puberty, there ensues a fierce struggle in the human soul between the "army" (*jund*) championing base, carnal instincts on one side and the army fighting on behalf of religious piety on the other. Patience, our author asserts, is required in the successful waging of "war" by the "troops" of religiosity over those of base worldly desires.[38] The external military *jihad* of the jurists which theoretically has to be waged against the enemies of God until the end of time has become transmuted into a relentless spiritual struggle in al-Ghazali's exposition of the basic human duty to strive in the path of God.

Muhammad b. Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), a famous student of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the well-known Damascene Hanbali jurist, also wrote a treatise on the importance of cultivating patient forbearance as an important dimension of human striving on earth. He draws a specific comparison between the resoluteness displayed by the patiently-forbearing individual in the face of life's vicissitudes and the resoluteness displayed by the warrior patrolling the borders against enemy incursions. Both play an essential role in warding off internal and external enemies which cause havoc to the proper ordering of life. In this work, Ibn Qayyim essentially (re)configures jihad as the practice of and adherence to *sabr* and borrows the idiom of military *jihad* to express the intensity of the spiritual struggle within the human soul.[39] *Jihad al-nafs* is the specific name given in later devotional literature to this kind of internal striving already indicated in the Qur'an, hadith, and early edifying literature under the rubric of *sabr*. This allows us

to assert, against modern polemicists, that the earliest articulation of jihad was indeed internal and spiritual and predates its physical and combative aspects.

Modern Period

In the context of the height of European colonization during the 19th and early 20th centuries of a broad swath of the Muslim world starting in the 18th century, jihad as defensive war made a comeback among certain Muslim scholars and jurists. During this period, the emphasis was on jihad as a righteous and legitimate struggle against foreign aggressors; Qur'anic verses such as 9:38–40, 9:123, and 8:60 were often deployed to exhort Muslims to defend themselves against their Western Christian occupiers.[40]

At the same time, there was renewed critique by reformist scholars of some of the classical legal positions concerning the military jihad that were understood to represent deviations from Qur'anic ethics on warfare. The well-known reformer and scholar Muhammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) placed renewed stress on the defensive nature of the military jihad by going back to the Qur'an. Therefore he emphasized that Qur'an 2:190 allowed fighting only as "defense in the path of God" and was intended as a warning against those who break their oaths and who seek to entice Muslims away from their faith. The commandment in the verse "Do not aggress" (*wa-la taʿtadu*) is interpreted by him to contain both a proscription against initiation of hostilities by Muslims and attacking traditional noncombatants, such as women, children, the elderly, the infirm, and "those who proffer you peace;" additionally, it prohibits causing destruction to crops and property.[41] ʿAbduh further rejects the interpretation that the so-called sword verse (Qur'an 9:5; alternatively Qur'an 8:38) had abrogated the more numerous verses in the Qur'an which call for forgiveness and peaceful relations with non-Muslims. He argues that the command contained in Qur'an 9:5 was in response to a specific situation at a specific time in order to achieve a specific objective and has no effect on the injunction contained in, for example, Qur'an 2:109, which states, "Pardon and forgive until God brings about His command," which is in regard to a different set of circumstances and objectives.[42] He comments ruefully that if jurists had not read these verses and hadiths "from behind the veil of their juridical schools" then they would not have so egregiously missed the fundamental point made throughout the Qur'an and in sound reports that "the security to be obtained through fighting the Arab polytheists according to these verses is contingent upon their initiating attacks against Muslims and violating their treaties . . ."[43] ʿAbduh goes on to point out that the very next verse, Qur'an 9:6, offers protection and safe conduct to those among the polytheists who wish to listen to the Qur'an.[44] The implication is clear—polytheists and non-Muslims in general who do not wish Muslims

harm and display no animosity towards them are to be left alone and allowed to continue in their ways of life.

Several modern Muslim scholars have similarly undertaken a sustained critique of a number of positions adopted by the classical jurists, particularly on the issue of whether it is ever permissible to initiate an attack on an adversary, by resorting to a close reading of the Qur'an and other very early sources. Their main area of contention is with the later exegetical and juridical position which viewed lack of adherence to Islam, rather than aggression, as the *casus belli* for launching the military jihad. This perspective—which relies on the invocation of the principle of *naskh* (abrogation) for its validity––has been severely criticized by a variety of modern and contemporary Muslim scholars, including Sobhi Mahmassani, 'Ali Jum'a, Abu Zahra, Wahba al-Zuhayli, and others. These scholars have emphasized instead that the Qur'an should be read holistically and that the critical verses which forbid the initiation of war by Muslims and which uphold the principle of non-coercion in religion categorically militate against the conception of an offensive jihad to be waged against non-Muslims *qua* non-Muslims. Rather than representing "newfangled" conceptions of the military jihad, as some have assumed in a polemical vein,[45] our survey establishes that these modern views resurrect genuinely archaic positions that were held by a number of influential scholars in the formative period of Islam.

The Rise of Political Islam

After the peremptory end to the caliphate at the hands of the republican Turks in 1924, the rise of the secular nation-state in Muslim majority societies gave rise to a new phenomenon—political Islam or Islamism. In 1928, an Egyptian schoolteacher and preacher, Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), established the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization devoted to the education and reform of Egyptian, and more broadly, Muslim society. He wrote a treatise on jihad which contained an entreaty to fellow Muslims in the context of European colonial occupation to not be afraid to die an honorable death in defense of their lands and religion in return for eternal life in the next world. Although al-Banna clearly recognized that jihad broadly encompasses the ethical imperative of enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong, he emphasized that the greatest reward in the next world is reserved for the one who dies while fighting in the way of God. "Fighting in the way of God" is primarily redefined by al-Banna as fighting against the state (because it is not the proper Islamic state; here a reference to Egypt under British control) and martyrdom is earned by those who lay down their lives in such a cause, although, he maintained, such *mujahidun* must continue to observe the classical stipulations concerning humane conduct during combat.[46]

The South Asian Islamist Abu al-Aʿla Mawdudi (d. 1979) and the fiery Egyptian activist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), influenced by the former, developed some of these positions further, both being strongly influenced by Western revolutionary, totalitarian, and socialist movements of various kinds of their time. According to Mawdudi, Muslims in the modern world, besieged by hostile non-Muslims, such as the colonizing European Christians, must strive earnestly to spread the word of God and Muslim rule. The vehicle for doing this is the "Islamic State" and the means for achieving this goal isjihad.[47] In his militant tract *Maʿalim fi ʾl-tariq*, Qutb states that the unchanging objective of Islam is to win over all of humanity to the worship of the one God, and the Islamic revolutionary movement under the guidance of an enlightened vanguard must wage jihad to bring this about.[48] Neither Mawdudi nor Qutb, however, engage in exhortations to actively seek death through this kind of relentless military activity.

The deliberate courting of martyrdom through suicide bombings is an unprecedented 20th-century phenomenon that began in the 1990s, either in Lebanon or in Palestine/ Israel. Suicide is categorically forbidden in the Qurʾan (2:195; 4:29) and the hadith literature counsels against deliberately seeking death. Islamic law regards the preservation of human life, including one's own, as among the highest moral imperatives for a Muslim. While mainstream Muslim jurists condemn suicide bombing as morally and legally unacceptable, hard-line Islamists and radical ideologues today have a range of opinions on the legitimacy of suicide bombings. While a number of them acknowledge that such acts are legally acts of suicide and therefore unequivocally proscribed within Islamic law, others devise ingenious explanations to get around this proscription in an attempt to classify them as legitimate, even obligatory, acts of self-defense in specific circumstances. Suicide bombings in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, are often labeled "martyrdom operations" (*al-ʿamaliyyat al-istishhadiyya*) by these militant ideologues, like Nawwaf Takruri.[49] A new kind of "contingency ethics" predicated on the existence of extreme, anomalous circumstances is invoked to justify such contemporary radical interpretations. Perhaps the best-known exponent of such a view is the Qatar-based Egyptian cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who issued a *fatwa* permitting suicide bombings as justified self-defense in the Palestinian context as an emergency measure, but not in other contexts. It is pertinent to mention here that in an influential study, University of Chicago professor Robert Pape established that primarily political rather than religious motivations are to be ascribed to suicide bombers, especially under conditions of military occupation, as in the Palestinian occupied territories.[50]

Opposed to al-Takruri and al-Qaradawi, other jurists, such as the Syrian hadith scholar Nasir al-Din al-Albani and the Saudi jurist Ibn ʿUthaymin, have unequivaocally condemned these so-called martyrdom operations as morally and legally indefensible in

any and every situation. More recently, the Pakistani cleric Muhammad Tahir-ul Qadri has stated unambiguously, “Terrorism, in its very essence, is an act that symbolises infidelity and rejection of what Islam stands for. When the forbidden element of suicide is added to it, its severity and gravity becomes even greater.”[51] According to Qadri, today’s suicide bombers are clearly beyond the pale of Islam and can in no way be considered legitimate martyrs.

Another modern phenomenon that largely goes unnoticed is the resurgence in emphasis on the Qur’anic attribute of *sabr* among certain contemporary Muslim thinkers and activists as the most important dimension of jihad that conduces to nonviolence and peacemaking. Foremost among them are the Syrian intellectual Jawdat Sa’id, the Indian scholar Wahiduddin Khan, and the Turkish religious leader Fethullah Gulen. Such scholars draw upon specific Qur’anic verses, the prophetic sunna and biography to privilege nonviolence and peacemaking as the most important dimensions of jihad in the modern period.[52]

Intra-Muslim conversations about jihad as a multivalent term that encompasses all aspects of human struggle on earth continue today, and have acquired a sense of urgency that has only become heightened especially in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Jihad, in many ways, provides a discursive template for contemporary Muslims, as it has in the past, upon which a number of sociopolitical concerns can be creatively ventilated and configured in different historical circumstances. Its conceptual relevance to the contemporary shaping of Muslim self and communal identities and to their projects of reform and revival is assured for the foreseeable future.

Historiography

One of the purposes in this essay was to survey the multiple Qur’anic significations of the term jihad and contrapose to them juristic and other discourses that developed over time which circumscribe its range of meanings. Another was to trace the extra-Qur’anic development of the concepts of “martyr” and “martyrdom” in tandem with these changing conceptualizations ofjihad, especially in the hadith and *fada’il* literature.

Among the most important and integral sources for the project of reconstruction and analysis of construals of jihad through the centuries are Qur’an commentaries (*tafsir*). The well-known historian of Islam Roy Mottahedeh has pointed to the invaluable nature of *tafsir* works in reconstructing the major theological, intellectual, social, and political concerns of the premodern Islamic past.[53] As he rightly emphasizes, the continuous nature of this genre from the earliest centuries of Islam through some of the most

productive and tumultuous periods of Islamic history render it an unparalleled repository of formative ideas and perspectives, some of which were either attenuated or lost in later centuries. This is certainly borne out in this study of exegetical works in reference to key Qur'anic verses dealing with jihad and its derivatives.

The frequent, facile translation of jihad as "holy war" into English is therefore inaccurate, especially on the basis of the Qur'an. The term "holy war" generally implies a battle waged in the name of God usually to effect the forcible conversion of nonbelievers, and often a "total, no-holds barred war" intended to annihilate the enemy,[54] both of which objectives are doctrinally unacceptable in Islam. In addition to the verses already discussed which establish the military jihad as defensive and limited in nature, Qur'an 2:256 also states categorically that "There is no compulsion in religion;" while another verse (10:99) asks, "As for you, will you force men to become believers?" There is no scriptural warrant, therefore, for waging war (or employing other means) to compel non-Muslims to accept Islam. A number of medieval jurists may be considered to have come perilously close, however, to endorsing a form of holy war but stopped short of it because of the Qur'an's constraints on the forcible conversion of non-Muslims and the hadith literature's proscription against unethical conduct during the waging of war. But they did broaden the semantic and legal purview of jihad to sanction its launching as a preemptive and expansionist war that may be fought to extend the territorial realm of Islam and its political reach. These developments within the juridical realm also eventually led to the recognition of the special legal status of the military martyr (*shahid*).

Our scrutiny of diverse sources reveals the existence of a rich and variegated discourse in which these concepts were broadened and streamlined, sometimes underscoring Qur'anic perspectives and at other times undermining them. Contesting reports in the sources point to vibrant dialectical engagements in the early period on the semantic and exegetical parameters of these terms which yielded a broad spectrum of meanings in changing historical circumstances. By the 9th century, as noted, a more narrow understanding of jihad as primarily military activity (*qital*) emerges among certain religious scholars, often jurists aligned with the state, which superimposed itself on the earlier, multifaceted understanding of the concept. *Qital*, however, was heavily circumscribed by these jurists who viewed the taking of human life, however justified it might be, to be an enormous responsibility and thus they mandated that rules of just conduct and proportionality of violence be strictly observed during actual fighting. The reductive conflation of jihad with *qital* appears to have been highly disquieting to pietistic segments of the population. Reports which may be regarded as recording their dissenting views continued to circulate through the premodern period, ameliorating and challenging "establishment" militaristic perspectives on jihad and martyrdom. These dialectics may

be reconstructed to a certain extent from early and late hadith literature and from the specialized *fada'il al-jihad* and *fada'il al-sabr* literary genres.

A diachronic comparison and interrogation of a variety of sources—the Qur'an, early and later hadith compilations, exegetical, historical, juridical, and ethical/edifying literature—allow for the conclusion that the gradual formulation of fairly monolithic, classical juridical views of jihad and martyrdom owes considerable impetus to the rise and consolidation of the imperial Umayyad and ʿAbbasid states and the establishment of a strong military during these periods. This is reflected in the way that some jurists working in the heartlands of Syria and Iraq, such as Makhul al-Dimashqi (d. between 112/730–119/737) in the 2nd/8th century and al-Shafiʿi (d. 204/820) in the 3rd/9th century, were often willing to defer to Realpolitik and interpret the military purview of jihad in ways that were at times downright contradictory to Qur'anic injunctions—for example, in their endorsement of offensive military campaigns. Support for statist policies of territorial expansion provided the impetus, at least partially, for this interpretive proclivity. Other authorities, like Abu Salama b. ʿAbd al-Rahman (d. between 94–104/712–722) and Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161/777), not known to be close to ruling elite circles, would endorse only a defensive jihad in response to a prior act of aggression by enemy forces. The nexus between the rise of the Umayyad and ʿAbbasid states and their imperial objectives, the consolidation of juridical authority, and the classical narratives of jihad as military combat needs to be more deeply and thoroughly investigated which would allow for a proper contextualization of many of these narratives.

Without doubt, the historical reality was complex; master narratives woven together by official chroniclers and men of religion were contested and sometimes rewritten, usually on the fringes of society. Counterposed to the predominant and better-known juridical and statist narratives of jihad was also what may be called the "dissenting literature," produced often at the margins of society by groups which appear to have challenged the exclusively militarist interpretations of jihad and martyrdom. As some sources indicate, these alternative voices belonged to certain pietist individuals and groups in the early period, who appear to express their dismay in these narratives at the perceived self-aggrandizing, materialistic motivations for jihad on the part of the ruling elite. These alternate perspectives are embedded, not surprisingly, in early hadith works, such as the *Musannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Sanʿani, and ethical-edifying-hortatory works written in praise of patient forbearance as part of the prolific *fada'il* literary genre, such as the afore-mentioned work by Ibn Abi 'l-Dunya (d. 281/894) titled *al-Ṣabr wa-'l-thawab ʿalayhi.* A number of reports included in such works clearly contest reports in particularly later hadith collections which assign the highest merit to military martyrs. Taken together, the existence of these two parallel strands in the hadith and related literatures of edification testify to competing discourses on modalities of piety and on the construction of moral

excellence during the formative, classical, and late medieval periods of Islam. Close scrutiny of the chains of transmission of certain significant reports occurring in these literatures furthermore allows us to focus on the principal and recurrent narrators of such reports and to reflect on what that might tell us about the possible provenance of these statements, the probable time of their propagation, and the likely ideological motivations of the narrators.

For the modern period, Qur'an commentaries from particularly the 20th century and juridical works remain invaluable sources for surveying a range of views on the purview of jihad. To this we must add treatises written on the merits of the military jihad and martyrdom, as well as on the merits of cultivating patient forbearance as the best, nonviolent means of carrying out personal and social reform. The rise of the nation-state in postcolonial Muslim majority societies today has further allowed for the politicization of jihad at the hands of hard-line Islamists as a means of effecting political reform as well as to rid the Islamic world of foreign aggressors. In addition to published tracts by some of these ideologues, the Internet has also become a source for tracking their views and pronouncements on phenomenon such as suicide bombing for which there are no historical and legal precedents.

To conclude, through the diachronic study of the multiple sources identified above, one is able to retrieve early multivalent connotations of the terms jihad and *shahid* and to contextualize the competing discourses that developed around these terms through the centuries in variegated sociohistorical circumstances. In the past, scholars in their study of jihad and martyrdom have tended to focus mainly on legal works and official histories which present a monolithic and static perspective on these concepts as primarily military activities. The diachronic approach described here provides a more holistic understanding of *jihad* and related concepts from several wide-ranging perspectives: scriptural, hermeneutical, ethical, historical, legal, and literary.

Primary Sources

There are many Qur'an commentaries, particularly from after the 3rd/9th century. To arrive at a good diachronic sense of the development of nuances and changes in perspectives, one should consult earlier *tafsir* works that are now available as published works along with the classical and late medieval commentaries that tend to be more popular. The oldest published work of exegesis available to us is the *Tafsir* of the Umayyad commentator Mujahid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), available in several editions. Mujahid displays rationalist and anthropomorphist tendencies in his exegesis, often resorting to *ra'y* (personal opinion), and is said to have made use of Christian and Jewish

sources. Although questions have been raised as to whether existing recensions of Mujahid's commentary accurately reflect the author's own views, the high degree of congruence in the views attributed to Mujahid as recorded in multiple exegetical works after him permits us to invoke these perspectives as authentically representative of the early period (mid-1st/7th to early 2nd/8th century), against which later understandings of a number of critical issues can be juxtaposed for comparison and contrast.

The *Tafsir* of the slightly later Umayyad commentator Muqatil b. Sulayman (d. 150/767) is another important source from the very early period, especially since a larger fragment of his manuscript has survived.[55] Muqatil made generous use of earlier commentaries, frequently without attribution, providing us with a valuable window into exegetical currents from the 1st and 2nd centuries of Islam. As in the case of Mujahid, cross-referencing Muqatil's comments as recorded in his published *Tafsir* with those reported by later exegetes on select verses, once again, reveals an impressive degree of congruence, allowing us to credibly attribute these views to Muqatil himself in his early Umayyad milieu.

From the relatively early ʿAbbasid period we have the *Tafsir* of ʿAbd al-Razzaq b. Hammam b. Nafiʿ al-Ṣanʿani (d. 211/827),[56] which contains important perspectives on many significant issues pertaining to jihad and martyrdom that have not always been preserved in later works. Its author was an important Yemeni scholar, who studied with some of the most prominent scholars of his time, initially in Ṣanʿa and then later during trips to Syria and the Hijaz. ʿAbd al-Razzaq's *tafsir*, which is based on an earlier exegesis by his teacher Maʿmar, as well as his *Musannaf* work, are highly valuable repositories of information about particularly early 2nd/8th century scholarship in Mecca, Medina, and Basra.

The commentary of 3rd/9th century Ibadi commentator Hud b. Muhakkam al-Hawwari (d. *c.* 290/903), titled *Tafsir kitab allah al-ʿaziz* [57]and early Shiʿi commentaries of ʿAli b. Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. after 307/919);[58] al-ʿAyyashi (d. ca. 320/932);[59] and Furat b. Ibrahim (fl. second half of 3rd/9th century)[60] sometimes provide early valuable "alternate," sectarian-tinged perspectives, but also important corroboration of majoritarian views. Al-Qummi in particular frequently records the exegetical opinions of the 5th and the 6th Imams, Muhammad al-Baqir (d. ca. 114/732) and Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (d. 148/765), respectively, unlike later Shiʾi exegetes.

The voluminous commentary of the celebrated exegete, Abu Jaʿfar Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/923) is probably the most widely consulted work of Islamic exegesis, properly titled *Jamiʿ al-bayan fi tafsir al-qurʾan* but more simply known as *Tafsir al-Tabari*. Along with the magisterial work of history that he compiled, this work showcases al-

Tabari's encyclopedic knowledge of the various Islamic sciences. The *Tafsir* is notable for its emphasis on *ijtihad* or independent reasoning. After meticulously referring to earlier sources and their theological and legal perspectives, al-Tabari characteristically weighs in with his opinion, providing well-crafted arguments to support his position, which sometimes evidences pro-ʿAbbasid bias. Besides religious dogma and law, al-Tabari also plays close attention to grammar and lexicography in his *tafsir*. This work won immediate renown during the author's own lifetime and became the subject of a number of supercommentaries after it. Its popularity has remained undiminished in the contemporary period.

For the post-Tabari period, there is a profusion of exegetical works; among the most noteworthy and popular among them is the commentary of al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144),[61] whose Muʿtazili (rationalist) affiliation is quite evident in this work. The commentary has furthermore a strong linguistic focus and contains very little hadith in comparison with other exegetical works of a similar period. The *tafsir* of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210) is another popular and formidable work of scholarship which pays considerable attention to issues of *kalam* and philosophy and attempts to justify the author's own theological and philosophical reasoning on the basis of specific Qurʾanic verses.

Fadaʾil al-jihad reports are contained in early *hadith* works, including the early *Musannaf* works of ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827) and Ibn Abi Shayba (d. 235/849)[62] and the six authoritative Sunni hadith compilations of al-Bukhari (d. 256/870, Muslim b. al-Hajjaj (d. 261/875), Ibn Maja (d. 273/886), Abu Daʿud (d. 275/888), al-Tirmidhi (d. 279/892), and al-Nasaʾi (d. 303/915). Early *fadaʾil al-jihad* treatises, such as the *Kitab al-jihad* of Abd Allah b. al-Mubarak (d. 181/797)[63] may be usefully compared with later *fadaʾil al-jihad* works (roughly after the 4th/10th century), such as the *Ahkam al-jihad wa-fadaʾilih* by ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. ʿAbd al-Salam al-Sulami (d. 660/1262)[64] and the *Mashariʿ al-ashwaq ila masariʿ al-ushshaq* of Ibn al-Nahhas (d. 814/1411). An extensive comparison of these treatises enables us to map the semantic landscape forming around jihad and related terms from the 2nd/8th century on, as reflected in this primarily hadith-based discourse, and permits the establishment of a repertoire of meanings assigned to these terms and their socio-political-legal implications in different historical contexts.

For *fadaʾil al-sabr* reports, the 3rd/9th century treatise *al-Sabr wa-ʾl-thawab ʿalayhi* by the pious and abstemious scholar Ibn Abi ʾl-Dunya (d. 281/894) preserves important perspectives on jihad and martyrdom that are rarely encountered elsewhere. The chapter titled *Kitab al-sabr wa-ʾl-shukr* by Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) contained in his magnum opus *Ihyaʾ ʿulum al-din* and the treatise *ʿUddat al-sabirin wa-dhakhirat al-shakirin* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) similarly praise the

attribute of patient forbearance as the most important dimension of jihad understood as the quotidian human struggle on earth.

Most legal treatises belonging to all legal schools (*madhahib*) typically contain a section on *siyar* and deal with military jurisprudence. Among the earliest of such works is al-Shafi’s *Kitab al-umm* and the *Kitab al-Siyar al-Kabir* of the early Hanafi jurist Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Shaybani (d. 189/805), translated into English by Majid Khadduri.[65] The later Hanafi legal manual by ʿAli b. Abi Bakr al-Marghinani (d. 593/1197) titled *al-Hidaya sharh bidayat al-mubtadi* [66]is particularly popular in the majority of Muslim societies that follow the Hanafi *madhhab*.

For the modern period, the relevant sections in the *Tafsir al-Manar* of Muhammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Rashid Rida (d. 1935) are indispensable for understanding 20th-century reformist critiques of classical concepts of warfare on the basis of the rereading of critical Qur’anic verses. For Islamist views, the *Risalat al-jihad* of Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949) and the *Maʿalim fi ’l-tariq* of Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) are useful sources. For later, particularly post-September 11 perspectives, ʿAli Jumʿa’s *al-Jihad fi ʿl-islam* and the *Fiqh al-jihad* of Yusuf al-Qaradawi are important sources. For modern works which place renewed emphasis on *sabr* as nonviolent jihad and peacemaking, the Arabic works of Jawdat Saʿid are essential, some of which have been translated into English, as have been the Turkish writings of Fethullah Gülen, while Wahiduddin Khan’s works are originally in English.

Further Reading

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Notes:

(1.) These are the only instances when the specific word *harb* is employed in the Qur'an.

(2.) For the discussion of these two verses, see Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18–25.

(3.) Ibid., 16–18.

(4.) Al-Tabari, *Jami‘al-bayan ‘an ta’wil ay al-qur’an* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1995), 2:357.

(5.) Al-Wahidi, *Al-Wasit fi tafsir al-qur’an al-majid*, ed. ‘Adil Ahmad ‘Abd al-Mawjud et al. (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-‘ arabiyya, 1994), 1:319.

(6.) Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dar ihya’ al-turath al-‘arabi, 1999), 2:384.

(7.) Mujahid b. Jabr, *Tafsir Mujahid*, ed. ”Abu Muhammad al-Asyuti (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2005), 99.

(8.) Muhammad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami‘ li-ahkam al-qur’an* (Beirut: Dar al-kitab al-‘arabi, 2001), 8:101.

(9.) Al-Tabari, *Jami‘*, 6:278.

(10.) It should be pointed out that the Qur’an uses the term *shahīd* as an eye-witness for both God and humans; in relation to God, see Qur’an 3:98; 6:19; 41:53, etc.

(11.) Contra Michael Bonner who suggests that the direction of influence went the other way; see his *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1996), 10.

(12.) Arthur Jeffrey, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’an* (Baroda, India: Oriental Institute, 1938), 187; Keith Lewinstein, “The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam,” in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 78–79; A. J. Wensinck, “The Oriental Doctrine of the Martyrs,” in his *Semietische Studiën uit de nalatenschap* (Leiden, The Netherlands: A. W. Sitjhoff, 1941), 91–113; and the article by Etan Kohlberg “Shahid,” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 9:104.

(13.) As a technical term, *akhbar* includes hadiths but also reports with often historical content.

(14.) Abd al-Razzaq, *al-Musannaf*, ed. Ayman Nasr al-Din al-Azhari (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya 2000), 5:268.

(15.) Ibid., 5:271.

(16.) Ibid., 5:270–271.

(17.) Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, ed. Qasim al-Shammaʿi al-Rifaʿi (Beirut: Dar al-qalam, n.d.), 2:420–421.

(18.) Malik b. Anas, *Al-Muwatta',* ed. Bashshar ʿAwad Maʿruf and Mahmud Muhammad Khalil (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-risala, 1994), 1:366–367.

(19.) Roy Mottahedeh and Ridwan al-Sayyid, "The Idea of the *Jihad* in Islam before the Crusades," in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, eds. Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection., 2001), 23–29.

(20.) Ibid., 25–27.

(21.) For an extensive discussion of this controversial topic, see al-Tabari, *Jamiʿ al-bayan*, 3:15–19; also ʿAbd al-Rahman Ibn al-Jawzi, *Nawasikh al-Qurʾan* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, n.d.), 93–94.

(22.) Al-Tabari, *Jamiʿ al-bayan*, 3:18.

(23.) Cf. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Nawasikh*, 93.

(24.) This verse states: "Strive against the unbelievers and the hypocrites and be stern with them; their refuge is Gehenna, a wretched destiny"; see Ibn al-ʿArabi, *al-Nasikh waʾl-mansukh fi al-qurʾan al-karim* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1997), 61; and Ibn al-Jawzi, *Nawasikh*, 94.

(25.) Al-Shafiʿi, *Kitab al-umm* (Bulaq, Egypt: Maktaba al-kubra al-amiriyya, 1903), 4:103–104.

(26.) Al-Shafiʿ i, *al-Risala*, ed. Ahmad Shakir (n.p., 1891), 430–432.

(27.) Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955), 64–65.

(28.) See *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybani's Siyar*, tr. and ed. Majid Khadduri (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 12–13; and Khadduri, *War and Peace*, 145.

(29.) As did the Hanafi jurist Ahmad al-Tahawi (d. 933) in his *Kitab al-Mukhtasar*, ed. Abu al-Wafa al-Afghani (Cairo, Egypt: Matbaʿat dar al-kitab al-ʿarabi, 1950), 281; cited by Khadduri, *Islamic Law*, 58.

(30.) Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-umam wa ʿl-muluk* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1997), 2:246.

(31.) Ibn Maja, *al-Sunan*, ed. Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (Riyad, Saudi Arabia: Maktabat al-maʿarif li-ʾl-nashr wa al-tawziʿ, 1998), 3:138–139.

(32.) See Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Al-Sabr wa-ʾl-thawab ʿalayhi* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1997), 85.

(33.) Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* (Beirut: Dar al-jil, 1990), 2:322.

(34.) See the discussion of Qurʾan 9:5 and Qurʾan 8:61 respectively in Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God*, 71–75; 90–93.

(35.) Ibn al-Nahhas, *Mashariʿ ʾl-ashwaq ila masariʿ al-ʿushshaq fi ʾl-jihad wa-fadaʾilihi* (Beirut: Dar al-basha'ir al-islamiyya, 2002), 1:138–140.

(36.) Ibid., 1:141–151.

(37.) Cf. Jack Renard, "*al-Jihad al-akbar*: Notes on a Theme in Islamic Spirituality," *Muslim World* 78 (1988): 225–242.

(38.) Ibid.

(39.) Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *ʿUddat al-sabirin wa-dhakhirat al-shakirin,* ed. Muhammad ʿAli Quṭb (Beirut: Shirkat Dar al-Arqam b. Abi al-Arqam, n.d.), 14.

(40.) Cf. Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979).

(41.) Muḥammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Qurʾan al-karim al-mashhur bi-tafsir al-manar* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1999), 2:169–170. This work will henceforth be referred to in brief as *Tafsir al-manar*.

(42.) Rida, *Tafsir al-manar*, 10:161–162.

(43.) Ibid., 10:162–163.

(44.) Ibid., 10:171–175.

(45.) Cf., for example, David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 10 ff.

(46.) Hasan al-Banna, “Risalat al-jihad,” in *al-Jihad fi sabil allah* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-jihad, 1977), 63–90.

(47.) Mawdudi, *Jihad in Islam* (Damascus, Syria: The Holy Qurʾan Publishing House, 1977), 5.

(48.) Qutb, *Maʿalim fi ʾl-tariq* (Beirut: Dar al-shuruq, 1982), esp. 62–91.

(49.) Cf. Nawwaf Takruri, *al-ʿAmaliyyat al-istishhadiyya fi mizan al-fiqhi* (Damascus, Syria: al-Takruri, 1997).

(50.) *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

(51.) Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Fatwa on Suicide Bombings & Terrorism*, 2010, 35–36.

(52.) For a detailed discussion of their views, see Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God*, 256–264.

(53.) Roy Mottahedeh, “The Shuʿūbīyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7.2 (1976): 161–182.

(54.) For various definitions of holy war, see, for example, Ronald Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 158; the collection of essays in *The Holy War*, ed. T. P. Murphy (Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1976); and *Cross, Crescent, and Sword: The Justification and Limitation of War in Western and Islamic Tradition*, ed. James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay (New York: Greenwood, 1990).

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(58.) ʿAli b. Ibrahim, al-Qummi, *Tafsir Qummi* (Beirut: Dar al-surur, 1991).

(59.) Al-ʿAyyashi, *Tafsir*, ed. Qism al-dirasat al-islamiyya; muʾassasat al-baʿtha (Qum: 1320q).

(60.) Furat b. Ibrahim, *Tafsir Furat al-Kufi*, ed. Muhammad al-Kazim (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Nuʿman, 1992).

(61.) Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf ʿan haqaʾiq ghawamid al-tanzil wa-ʿ uyun al-aqawil fi wujuh al-taʾwil*, ed. ʿAdil Ahmad ʿAbd al-Mawjud and ʿAl Muhammad Muʿawwid (Riyad: Maktabat al-ʿubaykan, 1998).

(62.) Ibn Abi Shayba. *Al-Kitab al-musannaf fi ʾl-ahadith wa-ʾl-athar*. Ed. Muhammad ʿ Abd al-Salam Shahin (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1995).

(63.) Ibn al-Mubarak. *Kitab al-jihad* (Beirut: Sharikat Abnäʾ Sharif al-Ansari, 1988).

(64.) ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. ʿAbd al-Salam al-Sulami, *Ahkam al-jihad wa-fadaʾilih*, ed. ʿIyad Khalid al-Tabba (Beirut: Dar al-fikr al-muʾasir, 1996).

(65.) *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybani's Siyar*, tr. Majid Khadduri (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

(66.) ʿAli b. Abi Bakr al-Marghinani, *al-Hidaya sharh bidayat al-mubtadi* (Egypt: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1975). Translated into English as *Al-Hidayah: A Classical Manual of Hanafi Law* by Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee (Bristol: Amal Press, 2006).

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