

Jihad and Islamic Fundamentalism: One and the Same?

BY LT M. MALAKABDAL MUTA'ALI IBN NOEL, CHC, USNR

Contrary to popular belief, *Jihad* and *Islamic Fundamentalism* are not one in the same. In fact, the phrase “Islamic Fundamentalism” is a ‘western’ phrase, which has been haphazardly applied to series of circumstances and events whose origin probably began in the Southwest Asia.

In truth it is the residue of years of “Western expansionism and colonization” throughout those regions. Thus, what has resulted from these invasions of societal autonomy is bitterness brought on by the loss of the individual and, in many cases, cultural identity. In short, it is the loss of one’s sense of self. Through inculcation, value systems and beliefs that were centuries old were openly challenged and, in some cases, refuted. Entire generations engaged in a “cultural” civil war. The old, in an effort to hold on to the values of their fathers, fought hard against the young, whose heads were filled with the bright and shiny promise of the new ways; all in an exhausting effort to stave off their assimilation into western values, ideals and religion. In the end, freedom was achieved, but there remains today both a physical dependency and cultural uncertainty. Therefore, many of the internal conflicts and violent outbreaks we see today are those factors playing themselves out as entire peoples struggle now to regain a true sense of self: culturally, socially, politically and economically. In the midst of this is the intimately defining effects and dependency the aforementioned elements have in and to the religion, *al Islam*.

Thus, based on these factors, it must be pointed out that the word *fundamentalism* does not exist in the Arabic language nor is there any word within that language which is remotely comparable to it or its concept. Accepting this, it must be further accepted or at best considered, that the context of its meaning is not simply foreign but in fact, nonexistent as it applies to the Muslim psyche. Given this reality, the only thing that remains is *JIHAD*: 1) Jihad al Akbar .physically fighting against the enemies of Allah, and 2) Jihad al Nafs-- fighting against one’s own evil traits and trying one’s utmost to be a better person in the sight of Allah.

JIHAD IS THE WAY TO FIGHT TYRANNY AND INJUSTICES AND TO ESTABLISH A JUST PEACE.

Praise be to Allah, mans Lord, who bestowed the Qur’an on us, showing the ways of goodness and bestowing guidance, making it a constitution in which future happiness is latent in this kingdom as well as in the hereafter.

The word “Islam” is derived from a root which means “peace and submission,” that is the attainment of peace through submission to the will of Allah and Qur’anic teaching. The attainment of peace is not only for the inner soul, in which we must have spiritual peace, but also for the Islamic Ummah (Community) and the world at large. Among the attributes of Almighty Allah in the Holy Qur’an it is mentioned that He is “the source of peace and bestower of security.” (59:23) The establishment of spiritual as well as world peace and security must, therefore, be the daily objective of every man and woman on earth.

The Muslim greeting every morning begins with: “Peace be unto you, and the mercy and Blessing of Allah.” The Qur’an condemns all those who disturb peace on earth. It says: “Do not promote disorder on the earth after peace is established.” (7:56-57) “Do not go about committing iniquity and causing disorder, on the earth.” (7:75, 11:86,29:37) “They seek to create disorder, and Allah loves not those who create disorder.” (5:64) Therefore Islam is the religion of peace and Muslims are commanded to work for peace. (2:29)

Our Holy Prophet (may the peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him [SAAW]) was a shining example of peace and cooperation. From the first day of his mission to the people of Mecca, he preached with reason, kindness and persuasion and avoided compulsion. Because Islam is the religion of peace and reconciliation with the followers of all other faiths, it extends the hand of cooperation and friendship on the basis of a common attitude and faith:

Say, O people of the Book, come to an agreement on a principle common between us and you, in that we worship none but Allah and that we associate no partner with Him, and that some of us take not others for Lords beside Allah. (3:65)

The messages of our Holy Prophet to the Christian and Jewish leaders of his time, as shown in the following letter, were full of warmth and promised friendship and cooperation. It is his letter to the monks of the monastery of Saint Catherine in Mount Sinai, he wrote a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, far and near:

We are behind them. Verily, I defend them by myself the slaves, the helpers and my people because they are my subjects and my allies. I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be changed from their jobs, nor their monks from their Monarchism. No one is to destroy, damage, or carry away anything from their churches to the Muslims' houses. Anyone acting in such manner would break God's covenant and disobey His Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they abhor. No one is to force them to leave or oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. No female Christians are to be married to a Muslim against her wish. She is not to be prevented from going to her church to pray. Their churches are to be respected: they are not to be prevented from repairing them nor is their sanctity to be violated. No one of the Nation is to disobey this covenant until the Day of Judgment and the end of the world.

While Islam is the religion of peace and cooperation, it also draws the attention of mankind to the reprehensible causes and events that disturb or violate peace and security on earth. Aggression and the domination of one group of people over another are not acceptable in Islam. In this connection, the Qumran refers to Pharaoh and his treatment of the people of Israel. (28:5-7)

Pharaoh and that of his nobles and army became a terrible lesson for all succeeding generations. (10:91-93)

International law and treaty obligations that our Holy Prophet always respected constitute another important element of peace and international cooperation. Islam pays great attention to international obligations and recommends that treaties be drawn up in clear language in order to avoid misunderstanding.

The breach of treaty obligations with a view to securing a greater advantage is prohibited in the Qur'an. (16:96) Since Islam is the religion of peace and international cooperation, it strongly objects to aggression being enacted upon another through political, economic, and racial domination, or any form of compulsory dictate. Therefore, the Muslim, in defense of peace, must observe and embody the Islamic concept of *Jihadfi Sabal Allah* (to act in the way of Allah), beginning with *Jihad al Nafs* and extending its application in the further defense of Islam and Islamic interests as individual situations dictate (i.e. *Jihad al Akbar*).

Therefore, Islam has two important objectives: to live in peace and to preserve peace. For this purpose Jihad has become the cornerstone of Islamic behavior. We must make Jihad first against our "Nafs" and the "devil" and then against those who disturb peace and violate Muslim security.

The word Jihad is derived from Jahada, which means, "he exerted himself." Thus, literally, Jihad means exertion, striving, but in the juridical-religious sense. It signifies the exertion of one's power to the utmost of one's ability in following the path of Allah. This is why the word, Jihad, has been used as an antonym to the word (qu'ud) in Islam.

Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) and receive no hurt, and those who fight and strive in the cause of Allah with their goods and their persons. Allah has granted a grade higher to those who strive and fight with their goods and persons than to those who sit (at home). (4:95)

The above quoted verse speaks eloquently of the fact that Jihad (striving) is just the opposite of idleness.

It is necessary now to winnow out one mistaken notion that has taken hold of the minds of so many people. The Jihad is often confused with the word Qital (fighting) and these are used in one and the same sense, whereas the Holy Qur'an has made a clear distinction between them. *Jihadfi Sabil Allah* (fighting in the way of Allah) refers to an all-round struggle, (i.e. fighting for the sake of the Lord.) The above-mentioned verse (4:95) bears ample testimony to this fact. The Holy Qur'an has clearly pointed out that Jihad denotes two kinds of striving: striving with the help of Allah-given faculties, both mental and physical, and striving with the help of other resources which man has at his command.

There are many scholars within the Muslim faith who maintain that Jihad is an all-around struggle that makes it obligatory for Muslims to employ all their powers, whether in the form of intellectual or physical capacities or through their gift of speech, their moral strength, courage and steadfastness in the face of hardship or their worldly riches.

The Holy Qur'an has elucidated this point in various Surahs (chapters). I have reproduced one of them below in order to explain the true nature and significance of Jihad in Islam:

And strive hard for Allah as is due unto Him. He has chosen you, and has imposed no hardship on you in the matter of religion, the faith of your father Abraham. (22:78)

Finally, this verse from the Holy Qur'an sums up the spirit of Jihad in Islam. It is a striving in the way of Allah, and has a far wider scope than mere fighting. The Holy Prophet (may the Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon Him) explained the true qualities of a Mujahid in (one who strives in the path of Allah) as follows:

The Jihad against the enemies of Allah at the risk of one's life is only part of the struggle that a true servant of Allah wages against his own self for the sake of his Lord. This striving against the evil tendencies, which have dominated his mind and heart, is more important than fighting against enemies in the outside world. It is, in fact, the basis on which the struggle in the path of Allah can be successfully launched.

REPRINT JANUARY '99 "THE NAVY CHAPLAIN" Chaplain Noel is the first chaplain of the Muslim faith on active duty in the Navy.