

Understanding Warfare in Islam

ON THE BATTLEFIELD

The aim is not just victory, but a just victory

The once vibrant streets of Gaza now lie in ruins, covered in dust and debris from recent bombings. Buildings that once stood tall and proud are now reduced to rubble, with families scrambling to find shelter and safety. The distant sounds of explosions punctuate the eerie silence, a grim reminder of the relentless attacks.

Children, clutching their toys tightly, look up with fear-filled eyes, unable to comprehend the chaos around them. Mothers and fathers huddle together, praying for the safety of their loved ones and mourning those they've lost. Basic necessities such as food, water, and medicine are scarce, making the situation even more dire.

In this grim setting, one cannot help but question: What are the boundaries in warfare? Is it ethically permissible to target the defenceless? Who are the true terrorists? Can any reason justify inflicting pain and suffering upon innocent civilians, including women, children, the elderly, or the infirm? Recent events, such as the Israeli apartheid regime's genocide in Gaza, showcase a dark side of warfare, where boundaries are violated and the innocent are caught in the crossfire. But does that mean all ethics are abandoned once the battle horn is sounded?

The Landscape of Conflict

War is an inevitable outcome when civilizations with divergent ideologies collide, each believing their worldview to be correct with aims to propagate it and make it the dominant worldview. History is replete with instances of such clashes, and even today, virtually every nation wields a military force in some capacity. Naturally, Islam, representing the culminating divine guidance for humankind, should be well-equipped to ensure its longevity and the propagation of virtue.

If Jihad, as a concept, wasn't institutionalized, nefarious forces would have had an easy time in their attempts to obliterate this beacon of righteousness, even though these attempts may have ended in failure. Allah alludes to this in the Quran:

وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ
بِبَعْضٍ لَفَسَدَتِ الْأَرْضُ وَلَكِنَّ
اللَّهَ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

"Had Allah not repelled a group of people by the might of another, corruption would have dominated the earth, but Allah is Gracious to all." (2:251).

وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ
بِبَعْضٍ لَهْدَمَتْ صُومِعُ وَبِيعُ
وَصَلُوتُ وَمَسْجِدُ يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا
أَسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ
مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ

"If Allah did not keep people in check by repelling some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where Allah's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed." (22:40).

This represents a divinely ordained balance in our world.

It is part of the perfection of the Law of Allah and a sign of the truth of Islam that Allah has ordained, recognized and regulated warfare. Unregulated warfare on the other hand, is and has been the cause of an uncountable amount of inhumane atrocities like what is currently transpiring in Palestine.

What is Jihad?

Jihad primarily signifies a struggle to ensure the dominance of good over evil, irrespective of the domain, be it personal, familial, societal, national, or global.

Regrettably, contemporary discourse, even among some Muslims, has often reduced Jihad to a mere "personal battle against one's base desires for the sake of Allah."

While this interpretation is valid and is supported by Hadith, such as,

الْمُجَاهِدُ مَنْ جَاهَدَ نَفْسَهُ فِي
طَاعَةِ اللَّهِ

The Mujahid is one who strives against his own soul in the obedience of Allah

it is crucial to understand that Jihad is not restricted to this dimension. Jihad also encompasses resisting disbelief, as mandated by Quranic verses and Hadith that urge believers to strive against those who reject Allah's message in various capacities. The following verses illustrate this point.

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةً
وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ

"And fight them until there is no Fitnah (mischief), and total obedience becomes for Allah." (8:39)

قَاتِلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ
وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ
مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا
يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ
أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا
الْجِزْيَةَ عَنْ يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ

"Fight against those who do not believe in Allāh or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allāh and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth, from those who were given the Scripture, [fight] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled." (9:29).

The Multifaceted Nature of Jihad

Jihad encompasses a broad spectrum of endeavours. It spans from allocating funds to promote Islam and disseminating knowledge, to vocally defending the faith and physically fighting against disbelievers.

This comprehensive understanding of Jihad is underscored by the following Hadith:

جاهدوا المشركين بأموالكم،
وأنفسيكم، وألسنتكم

Strive against the polytheists with your wealth, yourselves, and your tongues.

A few core principles run through these diverse forms of Jihad: our unwavering focus on Allah, our endeavours being rooted in sincerity, with the aim of elevating the word of Allah.

Ibn al-Qayyim elaborated on this by categorizing Jihad into four distinct stages:

Jihād al-Nafs (striving against oneself): This involves personal growth by seeking true guidance, adhering to it once understood, advocating it to others, and patiently overcoming the challenges that come with such propagation.

Jihād al-Shayāṭīn (striving against devils): This pertains to resisting the temptations and doubts instilled by the devil, ensuring one's faith remains unshaken and avoiding succumbing to immoral desires.

Jihād al-Kuffār (striving against disbelievers): This form of Jihad primarily takes physical form, although it could be done in the heart or through words, by means of financial aid or physical endeavour.

Jihād al-Munāfiqīn (striving against hypocrites): This is predominantly a verbal form of Jihad, where one counters the subversive narratives of those who feign belief, although it could be done in the heart or through words, by means of financial aid or physical endeavour.

During the Meccan Period, Jihad took on only the first two forms. The latter two forms of Jihad emerged after Muslims established a sovereign state in Madinah. With this establishment came the inherent responsibility to safeguard their territory, uphold the well-being of their community, maintain the Islamic governance they had instituted, and propagate it. These pillars - territorial integrity, communal harmony, and righteous governance - were not just strategic objectives but responsibilities bestowed upon the Muslims. As a result, the imperative to defend and realize these objectives crystallized, giving rise to the aspect of physical Jihad.



The Dual Nature of Jihad: Defensive and Offensive

Is Jihad solely a defensive act? This question necessitates a deeper exploration of the concept within Islamic teachings.

Jihad in Islam can be divided into two primary categories: "defensive" and "offensive." Each form is guided by a strict code of ethics and a commitment to justice and righteousness.

The "defensive" form is quite straightforward. It pertains to Muslims taking action to protect their faith, personal well-being, families, territories, and assets from any external threats. Anyone who sacrifices their life in defence of these principles is honoured as a martyr as elucidated by the following Hadith, "Whoever is killed protecting his property is a martyr. Whoever is killed protecting his religion is a martyr. Whoever is killed protecting his life is a martyr. Whoever is killed protecting his family is a martyr."

The "offensive" form of Jihad can be divided into two sub-categories:

Pre-emptive Defense: This involves taking pre-emptive action against nations that, based on credible intelligence, are gearing up for an assault on a Muslim state or have breached a peace accord. Such actions, while termed offensive, are essentially a proactive form of defence.

Purely Offensive: This form aims to propagate justice and righteousness, ensuring they triumph over oppression and immorality. It targets nations that display overt animosity towards Islam or Muslims and lack a peace agreement with Muslim entities. Prior to initiating conflict, a structured procedure is adhered to.

The leadership of the Muslim state will extend an invitation to the opposing nation to embrace Islam. Should they consent, they are assimilated into the Islamic community, enjoying the same rights and duties as other believers.

If declined, an alternative proposition is made, which is the Jizyah. This allows them to reside securely under Islamic governance, preserving their assets and territories. Moreover, they retain the autonomy to adjudicate personal matters based on their religious tenets. Only if both offers are rebuffed does the declaration of Jihad by means of physical force become a consideration.

It should be understood that offensive Jihād is not to compel people to accept Islām. Rather, it is a struggle to establish Allāh's rule in His land. Islām does not only consist of beliefs and worship, but it is Allāh's rule in all affairs of life. The call of Islam is transformative, not only in beliefs, but also in the establishment of justice in the land. One of the goals of Islam is ridding the world of oppression, injustice and corruption, and establishing justice in the land which can only be achieved by making the Shari'ah of Allah the supreme law.

Understanding Jizyah

Ibn Kathir states in al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah, "If the disbelievers accept the establishment of Allāh's rule over people, and surrender to it by paying the Jizyah, the objective of Jihād would have been attained. They will not then be compelled to accept Islām at the tip of the sword. Rather, they will be left to their belief until they are certain about the truth of Islām and want to, of their own accord, embrace it with open eyes."

Choosing the Jizyah system signifies a commitment to justice and equality. Under this system, Muslims assume the role of protectors and just leaders. They eradicate oppressive laws and ensure rights for all, while the inhabitants retain ownership of their lands and assets. Remarkably, these individuals are granted the unique privilege of being judged by their own religious doctrines—a level of religious freedom and autonomy not guaranteed by most secular democracies.

Additionally, they are shielded from external threats, all in exchange for a tax akin to the Zakaat that every Muslim is obligated to contribute. Through such interactions and governance, they are exposed to the teachings of Islam. And if they resonate with these teachings and choose to embrace the faith, it's their personal choice. No compulsion, no force, just a genuine, heartfelt acceptance.

The Myth of Forced Conversion

Contrary to common misconceptions, forced conversions are antithetical to Islamic teachings. The Qur'an explicitly states,

لا إكراه في الدين

"There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256).



Under Islamic rule, the conquered nations always have the right to practice their faiths. For instance, Christians and Jews under Islamic reign, whether in Andalusia or the Levant, enjoyed religious freedom and lived harmoniously alongside Muslims. Places of worship will also be left intact for as long as they are serving their purpose. The primary objective of Islamic conquests was never coercion into Islam, but rather to establish just governance.

Rules of Engagement

Jihad operates within a set of divinely prescribed rules, ensuring humane conduct during conflicts. From the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) to the Khalīfahs' instructions, there is an emphasis on justice, even in warfare. These regulations stand in stark contrast to the atrocities witnessed in most instances of modern-day warfare worldwide. The following narrations serve as sufficient testament to the compassion that is found in Islam, even with regards to war.

Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (ra) wrote to one of his governors, "It has been passed down to us that when the Messenger of Allah (saw) sent out an army, he would say to them, 'Wage war in the name of Allah in the way of Allah. Fight whoever denies Allah. Do not steal from the booty, and do not act treacherously. Do not mutilate and do not kill children.' Say the same to your armies and battalions, Allah willing. Peace be upon you."

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (ra) was sending armies to the Levant. He went for a walk with Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan (ra) who was the commander of one of the battalions. Abu Bakr (ra) advised Yazid (ra) as follows, "You will find a people who claim to have totally given themselves to Allah. Leave them to what they claim to have given themselves."



He then continued, "I advise you ten things: Do not kill women or children or an aged, infirm person. Do not cut down fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy an inhabited place. Do not slaughter sheep or camels except for food. Do not burn bees and do not scatter them. Do not steal from the booty, and do not be cowardly."

These are some of the extremely compassionate and humane regulations regarding warfare that were given by the Prophet (saw) and his successors centuries ago. Unregulated warfare has been the cause of unspeakable atrocities in the past as well today as seen in countries such as Palestine, Iraq etc.

Analogies to Understand the Essence of Jihad

Defensive Jihad:

Imagine you're at home with your loved ones. Suddenly, intruders attempt to break in. Naturally, you rise to defend your family and your home against this immediate threat.

This self-defense, this instinct to protect what you hold dear, mirrors the essence of purely defensive Jihad.

Offensive Jihad:

In another scenario, while you're safely at home, night after night, you're tormented by harrowing sounds emanating from your neighbour's residence. The cries of despair, the unmistakable sounds of domestic abuse, the suffering of innocent children, and the debilitating effects of substance abuse. What's the moral course of action? You'd likely alert the authorities, urging them to intervene and put an end to this grave injustice. This proactive stance against oppression and wrongdoing parallels the philosophy of offensive Jihad. When neighbouring states are drowning in the darkness of injustice, polytheism, and oppressive governance, where the wealthy are unduly favoured, and minorities face relentless persecution, it becomes the duty of Muslims to act. In a world devoid of a higher authority to appeal to, the onus falls on the Muslim community to disseminate the guiding light of Islam.

Challenging A Warped Worldview

The principles of warfare, as detailed in Islamic teachings, are underpinned by justice, ethics, and compassion. Yet, a closer look at the global narrative reveals a paradox. Muslims, following a faith that promotes such a just framework for conflict, have been labelled as terrorists and made to feel apologetic, largely due to the liberal ideologies propagated by Western nations, notably America and Europe.

While on the other hand, the recurrent invasions and military interventions by countries like Britain and America in various parts of the world are seen as heroic. These actions, barbaric in their very nature, and with no noble intent, often justified and glorified under the banners of promoting democracy or advancing women's rights, have led to immense suffering, innumerable civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure, and overall destabilization.



Conversely, the Islamic model of military engagement, rooted in the highest ethical standards, often gets criticized. Muslims are subjected to scrutiny and prejudice even when the intentions behind such campaigns are to uphold justice, righteousness, and truth.

While the West's interventions have left a trail of devastation in the Islamic world, the Muslims, adhering to their divinely ordained guidelines, are expected to refrain from any military action, even if driven by the most righteous of intentions.

Nowhere is this dichotomy more evident than in the situation in Palestine. Despite the clear injustices faced by the Palestinian people, nations that often champion human rights and democratic values, including America and Europe, have consistently supported the oppressive actions of Israel. This support, whether political, financial, or military, directly contradicts the values these nations claim to uphold. Not only do they support the oppressor, they unashamedly criticize the oppressed Muslims for merely retaliating and defending themselves.

As readers reflect upon the landscape of warfare and the real-world implications of geopolitics, it's crucial to differentiate between the portrayal of Jihad and its true essence. The aim, as highlighted at the outset, is not merely victory, but a just and ethically-grounded victory. We need to ensure that we're always on the 'right' side of history, never wavering in the face of the ever-changing standards and 'morals' of the hypocritical West.

The following is an excerpt from a letter of Mufti Mohammed Taqi Usmani written in 1971 in response to a questioner who claimed that Jihad is only for the purpose of facilitating Da'wah activities, and if Da'wah activities are lawful in non-Muslim lands, Jihad is no longer applicable:



The following is an excerpt from a letter of Mufti Mohammed Taqi Usmani written in 1971 in response to a questioner who claimed that Jihad is only for the purpose of facilitating Da'wah activities, and if Da'wah activities are lawful in non-Muslim lands, Jihad is no longer applicable:

“Offensive Jihad is lawful even today for the purpose it was lawful in those days. Its justification cannot be veiled only because the ‘peace-loving’ inventors of the Atom Bomb label it as ‘expansionism’...With due apologies, I may point out that in my understanding, it (this view on Jihad) seems to be the result of being overpowered by the ‘grandeur’ of disbelief. As a result of this, people have fixed their standard of good and bad on the basis of the propaganda which portrays a lie as truth and truth as a lie. This causes it to work into the minds of people to the extent that, to say nothing of non-Muslims, the Muslims themselves are overawed and inclined to adopt an apologetic attitude. If breaking such ‘grandeur’ of falsehood and evil comes under the definition of ‘expansionism’, we should venerate this ‘expansionism’ with complete self-confidence, rather than stand humble before them as though saying, ‘when you thought offensive Jihad was good we practiced it, but since you have started condemning it in your books – and only in books, not in practice – we have also forbidden it upon ourselves.’ My humble self can never agree with this way of thinking”

STAY UPDATED!

MAKE SURE TO FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ALL THE LATEST UPDATES, ARTICLES, AND EVENTS



@markazmanaralfikr



@mrkzmanaralfikr



www.markazmanaralfikr.co.za

