

JIHAD AND MARTYRDOM IN ISLAM

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Since September 11, 2001, Americans have perceived, belatedly, a need to understand those who have declared the “Christian” West their enemy, that is, those who are professed adherents of Islam such as Osama bin Laden, who is widely believed to have masterminded the devastation of the World Trade Centers (hereafter “WTC”). While the events of September 11 comprise the worst attack of terrorism in American history, they are certainly not the first, nor will they likely be the last.¹

This article is not an attempt to analyze Islam as a whole or critique it from a Christian perspective. It is not an attempt to provide guidance to those who wish to share the Gospel of Christ with Muslims. It is not an attempt to analyze the life and mission of any terrorist leader or organization. Our question here is simply this: *Do those labeled “terrorists” properly represent the religion of Islam, the Qur’an as the foundational book of Islam, and Muslims worldwide as adherents of Islam?*

RELEVANT TERMS

There are several terms that must be defined at the outset. The first is the Arabic word *Islam*, which literally means “submission” and refers to the adherent’s submission to the commands of Allah (the Arabic name for God). A *Muslim* (sometimes spelled *Moslem*) is an adherent of Islam. The *Qur’an* is the holy book of Islam. Muslims believe that they worship the same God worshipped by the Jews and Christians, though more perfectly because the Qur’an provides later, more accurate revelation than Scripture does.² The teachings of the Qur’an are supplemented by the *hadith*, the early traditions, customs, and decisions of the leaders of Islam, and by *fatwahs*, decisions or pronouncements of respected Islamic scholars on issues of current significance.³

The term *jihad* literally means “striving” or “a struggle.” It does not mean “holy war,” though it is often translated this way and holy war does come under the umbrella of jihad. The term for “martyr” in Arabic is *shahadah*, which has a semantic field very similar to the Greek term μαρτυς: “a witness” or “one who dies for his faith.”

Islam holds to five “pillars”—five practices required of all Muslims:⁴

1. The recitation of the *kalima* (“creed”): “There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah.”

¹ The literature on terrorism (see footnotes below) lists numerous bombings and assassinations, some directed specifically at Americans. The people of America have been exceptionally slow to recognize the threat.

² See, for example, Ali Abdur Rasheed, preface to the M. H. Shakir translation of the Qur’an, 6th ed. (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, 1997): “Although many westerners view Islam as a departure from the teachings of the Prophets of the Torah and the Bible, in fact, Islam is a continuation of those Prophets [sic] teaching. The Qur’an came confirming the truths which had been taught by these great prophets and it also dispelled many of the falsehoods which had come to be associated with them.” This article is not the place to disprove these notions. This article will assume that Muslims do indeed intend to worship the same God as Christians do, but will refuse to acknowledge the Qur’an as superior in any way to the canon of sixty-six books which Christians recognize as Scripture. Quotations of the Qur’an will be designated as “Q” with the *Surah* (chapter) number and verse number separated by a colon (e.g. Q 9:5 = Qur’an, Surah 9, verse 5). All quotations of the Qur’an are from *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali in *The World of Islam: Resources for Understanding* [CD-ROM] (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping, 2000).

³ It is widely known that Osama bin Laden has pronounced several *fatwahs* against the United States. While these are serious calls-to-war among the radical Muslims and should not be taken too lightly, neither should one think that a *fatwah* speaks for all Islam: “A *fatwa* can be delivered by any religious leader on a variety of topics. It does not have the status of law and, indeed, must be ratified in a proper court if it is to carry legal status. Its authority is also generally restricted to the cultural or geographical boundaries within which the Muslim divine who delivers the *fatwa* functions” (Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam Today: A Short Introduction to the Muslim World* [New York: I. B. Taurus, 1999], 8).

⁴ This list is taken from Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today’s Religions* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 390-92. It does not vary significantly from the descriptions of the five pillars available in numerous other sources.

2. *Salat* (“prayer”), which is conducted five times per day at specific times.
3. *Zakat* (“charity”), which involves one-fortieth of one’s income and offerings from other things such as cattle.
4. *Ramadan* (“fasting”) during the entire month of Ramadan; no food is eaten during the daylight hours but a meal is eaten before sunrise and another after sunset.
5. The *hajj* (“pilgrimage”) to Mecca is required at least once.

Jihad is often listed as the “sixth pillar” of Islam. It is widely regarded as a central duty and obligation of all Muslims. Failure to understand jihad inevitably leads to failure to comprehend Islam.⁵ Failure to look at jihad in the context of Islam likewise leads to a failure to understand jihad.⁶

THE HISTORY OF ISLAM

The prophet Mohammed was born about A.D. 570 and received his first revelation at the age of 40. After encountering opposition at Mecca, Mohammed and his followers fled to Medina, on July 16, 622, an act which is now labeled the hijra (“flight”).⁷ The history of the first century of Islam is a bloody one in which the adherents attacked and subjugated many towns, slaughtering all who refused to convert to Islam.

Those who spoke out against Islam were murdered. One example should suffice:

Then (occurred) the sariyyah [“raid”] of Umayr ibn adi Ibn Kharashah al-Khatmi against Asma Bint Marwan, of Banu Umayyah Ibn Zayd, when five nights had remained from the month of Ramadan, in the beginning of the nineteenth month from the hijrah of the apostle of Allah. Asma was the wife of Yazid Ibn Zayd Ibn Hisn al-Khatmi. She used to revile Islam, offend the prophet and instigate the (people) against him. She composed verses. Umayr Ibn Adi came to her in the night and entered her house. Her children were sleeping around her. There was one whom she was suckling. He searched her with his hand because he was blind, and separated the child from her. He thrust his sword in her chest till it pierced up to her back. Then he offered the morning prayers with the prophet at al-Medina. The apostle of Allah said to him: “Have you slain the daughter of Marwan?” He said: “Yes. Is there something more for me to do?” He said: “No two goats will butt together about her.”⁸

In other words, Umayr murdered a woman who dissented. She was murdered in her bed in the middle of the night while nursing an infant. The prophet approved of the murder, suggesting that no one would really care (“no two goats will butt together about her”). The literature provides many other examples. The first century of Islam saw the spread of the religion by conquest and murder. The prophet and his immediate followers certainly did not limit jihad to defensive warfare or conventional military tactics. The westward spread of Islam by imperial conquest was halted at the Battle of Tours (France) in A.D. 732.⁹

THE PREVAILING VIEWS OF JIHAD AND MARTYRDOM

The prevailing opinions in Islam regarding jihad and martyrdom seem to fall along a continuum: at one extreme are those who feel that Islam should be spread by violence, including suicide bombings designed to kill civilians, women, and children. At the other extreme are those who insist that Islam should be spread only by peaceful means. Many hold a position somewhere in between. For example, many who hold to the spread of Islam by peaceful means would still allow for defensive warfare. Some who allow for the spread of Islam by military

⁵ Andrew Sullivan, “This Is a Religious War,” *The New York Times*, 7 October 2001, 44 (G); available from <http://www.nytimes.com>; Internet; accessed 8 October 2001 (requires registration). He argues convincingly that our country should not be so quick to dismiss the religious aspects of this war in which it is engaged. Unfortunately, he regards fundamentalist Christians as the same kind of narrow-minded bigots who desire to force their beliefs on the world as fundamentalist Muslims do.

⁶ A. Ezzati, “The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam,” *Al-Serat* 12 (1986); available from <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/Concept-Ezzati.htm>; Internet; accessed 27 September 2001.

⁷ Muslim calendars are all counted from this date and annotated “AH,” (“in the year of the Hijira”; e.g., “8 A.H.”).

⁸ From Ibn Sa’d’s “*Kitab Al-Kabir*,” vol. 2, p. 31; cited in “Muhammad, Islam, and Terrorism”; available from <http://www.answering-islam.org/Silas/terrorism.htm>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2001).

⁹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 4:172.

force would restrict this to conventional warfare and would exclude suicidal and terrorist acts. Those who hold a position in between the two extremes use some combination of arguments from the extremes.

Spreading Islam by Military Means

The most radical views are held by Shi'ite Muslims (a minority sect almost from the beginning) in countries such as Iran and Afghanistan and by scattered organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Jihad Is Required

Those who hold this view would argue that the tolerance suggested by Q 2:256, "Let there be no compulsion in religion," is replaced by an insistence on the exclusivity of Islam in Q 3:85, "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted of him."¹⁰ Fighting for Allah is not an option but a requirement: "Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not" (Q 2:216).

The Muslim warriors must offer the unbelievers the opportunity to convert (Q 8:38, "Say to the Unbelievers, if (now) they desist (from unbelief), their past would be forgiven them"), and if the unbelievers refuse, the Muslims must "fight them on until there is nor more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and Faith in Allah altogether and everywhere" (Q 8:39).¹¹

Jihad Requires Conquest

The Muslims must not take prisoners (Q 8:67-69) nor show mercy (Q 47:4) until the unbelievers are subdued.

It is not fitting for a Prophet that he should have prisoners of war until he hath thoroughly subdued the land. Ye look for the temporal goods of this world; but Allah looketh to the Hereafter: and Allah is Exalted in might, Wise. ^[68]Had it not been for a previous ordainment from Allah, a severe penalty would have reached you for the (ransom) that ye took. ^[69]But (now) enjoy what ye took in war, lawful and good: but fear Allah; for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Q 8:67-69)

Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight). Smite at their necks; at length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bon[d] firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are ye commanded): but if it had been Allah's Will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others. But those who are slain in the way of Allah, He will never let their deeds be lost. (Q 47:4)

The Qur'an urges tolerance of Jews and Christians—monotheists and "People of the Book" like Muslims. They must be subjected, but may be allowed to live under subjection and heavy taxation:

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. (Q 9:29)

This teaching is later replaced by the hadith which says, "The apostle said: If you gain victory over the men of the Jews, kill them."¹² That Mohammed did just that seems indisputable. Mohammed conquered several Christian and Jewish tribes during a campaign in A.D. 627 and slaughtered 600 or more Jewish prisoners in one day, selling their wives and children into slavery.¹³

¹⁰ See, for example, the quotation from the Muslim scholar al-Nahas quoted by Chuck Sligh, "The Bloody Legacy of Islam" (an unpublished paper distributed by e-mail [csligh2001@yahoo.com] and at this writing, awaiting publication in the *Biblical Evangelist*), 3.

¹¹ H. Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, trans. E. Denison Ross (London: Frank Cass, 1968), 62.

¹² From the Hadith of Abu Dawud, bk. 19, no. 2996; quoted in "Muhammad, Islam, and Terrorism."

¹³ Schaff, 165-66.

Muslims Fighting a Defensive War

To the argument of peaceful Muslims that jihad should be defensive only, the militaristic Muslims argue that the current struggles are defensive. Osama bin Laden, in an interview posted on the PBS website, says this:

The call to wage war against America was made because America has spear-headed the crusade against the Islamic nation, sending tens of thousands of troops to the land of the two Holy Mosques over and above its meddling in its affairs and its politics, and its support of the oppressive, corrupt and tyrannical regime in control there.¹⁴

Note that the land of the two Holy Mosques is Saudi Arabia and that bin Laden regards the leaders of that Muslim nation as enemies as well. Compare the situation in which Iraq and Iran were at war and both declared jihad on the other.¹⁵ The presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia is regarded as a “crusade against the Islamic nation.” The use of the term “crusade” is a deliberate reference to the Crusades of the Middle Ages in which some who claimed to be Christians invaded Palestine in an attempt to drive out the Muslims, committing many horrible atrocities in the process. This shameful episode is often mentioned by the Muslims as though it were typical and normative for Christianity, though Christians would argue that it is neither.¹⁶ The reference to “Islamic nation” is also quite deliberate. Those who intend to impose Islam on the world, by force if necessary, see no national boundaries.¹⁷ They are quite comfortable crossing from one country to another for terrorism and assassinations. Bin Laden goes on to argue:

America heads the list of aggressors against Muslims. The recurrence of aggression against Muslims everywhere is proof enough. For over half a century, Muslims in Palestine have been slaughtered and assaulted and robbed of their honor and of their property. Their houses have been blasted, their crops destroyed. And the strange thing is that any act on their part to avenge themselves or to lift the injustice befalling them causes great agitation in the United Nations which hastens to call for an emergency meeting only to convict the victim and to censure the wronged and the tyrannized whose children have been killed and whose crops have been destroyed and whose farms have been pulverized.¹⁸

The liberation of the oppressed—Muslim or not—provides additional justification for jihad. The Qur’an (4:75) suggests that it is appropriate to fight on behalf of those who are “weak, ill treated, and oppressed”:

And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill treated (and oppressed)? whose cry is: our Lord rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will protect; and raise for us from thee one who will help. (Q 4:75)

This justification is used to excuse the conquests of the early days of Islam:

Anyone who knows the early history of Islam, will know that all those nations and empires which came under the fold of Islam were indeed previously oppressed. When the companions of the Prophet Muhammed went out for the offensive jihad against the Egyptians, the Persians and the Romans, we find that the people did not resist against them at all. Rather they accepted Islam on such a scale, that it is inconceivable that the jihad of Islam could be anything other than [sic] a liberation for these people; a liberation from centuries of tyranny.¹⁹

¹⁴ “Interview Osama bin Laden,” May 1998; available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html>; Internet; accessed 2 October 2001.

¹⁵ Phil Parshall, “Jihad and Violence” in *Inside the Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) and George W. Braswell, “Islamic Devotion” in *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics, and Power* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996); both in *The World of Islam: Resources for Understanding* [CD-ROM] (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping, 2000). Also Martin Kramer, “Fundamentalist Islam at Large,” 1996 June 16; available from <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articlelet.cfm?articleid=82>; Internet; accessed 28 September 2001.

¹⁶ Parshall, *Inside*; Ahmed, *Islam Today*, 226.

¹⁷ Sullivan, “Religious War”; Kramer, “Fundamentalist Islam.”

¹⁸ “Interview Osama bin Laden.”

¹⁹ “Islam—A Religion of Terror?” in *Invitation to Islam*, 5 Oct. 1998; available from <http://www.thetrue-religion.org/terror.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 October 2001. This same writer argues that the Shi’ites are not Muslims!

No Innocent Bystanders in a Democracy

To the objection of the peaceful Muslims that warfare should spare civilians as much as possible, the militaristic Muslims argue that there are no innocents. According to the Hadith of Ibn-Umar, “A slain woman was found during one of the Prophet’s military campaigns, and following this the prophet forbade the killing of women and children.”²⁰ This would seem to prohibit attacks which target women and children, but the issue is not so simple. According to the traditions, the prophet is reported as saying, “She was not capable of fighting.”²¹ Some Muslim scholars take it, then, that women involved in the war effort are targets. In a democracy, both men and women vote to elect the “oppressive regimes” that are “massacring Muslims,” so women are fair targets. Further, women serve in support roles in the military or work in industries which supply the military. As such, they are considered combatants. Children, arguably, are future fighters, and thus also potential targets.²² This clever piece of sophistry allows the radical Muslims to attack anyone, anywhere, by any means. Osama bin Laden’s comments regarding the corruptness of the leadership of Saudi Arabia, discussed above, are significant: attacking the leadership of a “corrupt” Muslim nation is also permitted. It was radical Muslims who assassinated Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt, in 1981.

Suicide Attacks Guarantee Life and Reward

The concept of martyrdom in Islam is distinctly different from that in Christianity. In the early church Christians were executed by the state as criminals because they refused to worship Caesar. Christians were enjoined to submit to the government and when they could not obey the government, to submit to the punishment imposed by the government. Armed rebellion was out of the question.²³ In Islam, jihad includes active, offensive military operations of rebellion or conquest. Martyrs in Islam, then, are those who die in fighting Allah’s wars, not just those executed for their faith.

Since martyrdom guarantees eternal life (Q 3:157-58, 169-71), admission to the presence of Allah (Q 3:157-58), and great reward (Q 4:74, 95-96; 47:4), there is a tremendous motivation to die the death of a martyr.

And if ye are slain, or die in the way of Allah, forgiveness and mercy from Allah are far better than all they could amass.
^[158]And if ye die, or are slain, lo it is unto Allah that ye are brought together. (Q 3:157-58)

Think not of those who are slain in Allah’s way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord; ^[170]They rejoice in the Bounty provided by Allah: and with regard to those left behind, who have not yet joined them (in their bliss), the (martyrs) glory in the fact that on them is no fear, nor have they (cause to) grieve. ^[171]They glory in the Grace and the Bounty from Allah, and in the fact that Allah suffereth not the reward of the faithful to be lost (in the least). (Q 3:169-71)

Let those fight in the cause of Allah who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter. To him who fighteth in the cause of Allah, whether he is slain or gets victory soon shall we give him a reward of great (value). (Q 4:74)

Not equal are those Believers who sit (at home) and receive no hurt, and those who strive and fight in the cause of Allah with their goods and their persons. Allah hath granted a grade higher to those who strive and fight with their goods and persons than to those who sit (at home). Unto all (in Faith) hath Allah promised good: but those who strive and fight hath he distinguished above those who sit (at home) by a special reward, ^[96]Ranks specially bestowed by him and forgiveness and mercy. For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Q 4:95-96)

²⁰ Vol. 4, bk. 52, no. 257. Quoted in “Is Killing Jewish Women and Children Forbidden?” *Al-Watan* (Kuwait), 31 August 2001; trans. Shira Gutgold, *Jerusalem Post*, 9 September 2001; available from <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=379>; Internet; accessed 28 September 2001. Cf. the hadith of Bukhari 56:147, quoted in Muhammad Ali, *A Manual of Hadith* (Lahore: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, n.d.), 264.

²¹ “Is Killing Jewish Women and Children Forbidden?”

²² Yael Shahar, “The Islamic Justification for Killing Non-Combatants in War”; available from <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=379>; Internet; accessed 28 September 2001; “Is Killing Jewish Women and Children Forbidden?”

²³ “It is true that many atrocious, barbaric deeds have been committed in the name of Jesus. But here is the vital difference between these and those perpetuated under Islam: those committed in the name of Christianity were done DESPITE the clear teachings of its founder against such actions, whereas those done in the name of Islam are sanctioned by the teachings and history of Islam” (Sligh, “Bloody Legacy,” 7).

Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight). Smite at their necks; at length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bon[d] firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are ye commanded): but if it had been Allah's Will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others. But those who are slain in the way of Allah, He will never let their deeds be lost. (Q 47:4)

According to one Hadith,

No one who enters Paradise will ever want to return to this world, even could he possess the earth and all that is on it, save the martyrs who desire to return to this world and be killed ten times so great is the regard in which they find themselves held.

To be stationed on the frontier for one day during Holy War is better than to possess this world and all that is on it. A place in Paradise the size of one of your whip-lashes is better than this world and all that is on it. A night and a day that a man spends on Holy War is better than this world and all that is on it.²⁴

According to another Hadith, "Narrated Jabir bin Abdullah: On the day of the battle of Uhud, a man came to the Prophet and said, 'Can you tell me where I will be if I should get martyred?' The Prophet replied, 'In Paradise.' The man threw away some dates he was carrying in his hand, and fought till he was martyred."²⁵

Though the Qur'an forbids suicide (Q 2:195; cf. the hadith of Bukhari, 5778), attacking the enemy—even where one's death in "battle" is certain—is not regarded by many as suicide. Hence, suicide attacks are considered acceptable. The comparison to the Japanese kamikaze attacks in World War II seems inevitable. One writer comments, "When the fighter uses suicide as a military tactic, it is not a simple throwing away of life but rather a purposeful sacrifice."²⁶

At least one writer has suggested that "the martyrdom attacks that aim to kill the occupiers in order to strike terror in their hearts and force them to end their occupation and withdraw from the country of the Muslims" are an essential part of the process.²⁷ The very aim of suicide attacks is to create terror in the targets and a wrathful resolve in the attackers. Thus an unsigned article on the Bahai Library website argues: "The public aspect of martyrdom both serves to intimidate the enemy by demonstrating the fervor and commitment of the martyr, and to inspire and vitalize his follow [*sic*] fighters by serving as a role model."²⁸ A parallel could perhaps be drawn to the episode in 2 Kings 3:26-27 in which the King of Moab sacrificed his son to so enrage his people that the tide of the battle turned against Israel.

The unsigned article posted on the Bahai Library website argues the significance of the doctrine of martyrdom: "While it is not provable that Muhammad intentionally created the dialectic between jihad and the martyr's reward in paradise for the sake of encouraging his followers to battle on his behalf, there is no doubt that the dialectic was employed to that end in the early community."²⁹

The taking of prisoners and possessions was not an insignificant reward either. Qur'an 8:67-69 speaks of taking possessions after a place has been properly vanquished:

It is not fitting for a Prophet that he should have prisoners of war until he hath thoroughly subdued the land. Ye look for the temporal goods of this world; but Allah looketh to the Hereafter: and Allah is Exalted in might, Wise. ^[68]Had it not been for a previous ordainment from Allah, a severe penalty would have reached you for the (ransom) that ye took. ^[69]But (now) enjoy what ye took in war, lawful and good: but fear Allah; for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Q 8:67-69)

²⁴ *A Reader on Islam*, ed. Arthur Jeffery (Gravenhage: Mouton, 1962), 82.

²⁵ Quoted in Parshall, *Inside*.

²⁶ Jonah Winters, "Martyrdom in Jihad"; available from <http://bahai-library.org/personal/jw/my.papers/jihad.html>; Internet; accessed 12 October 2001.

²⁷ "Is Killing Jewish Women and Children Forbidden?"

²⁸ "Background to Shiism: Martyrdom and Suffering in Islam"; available from <http://bahai-library.org/theses/dying/dying4.islam.html>; Internet; accessed 27 September 2001.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Cf. Winters, "Martyrdom."

Nehls cites the *Mishkaat* (II:340), which says that “Jihad is one of the chief meritorious acts in the eye of Islam—and it is the best source of earnings, but it shall be undertaken with the intention of self-defence.”³⁰ Is there a conflict of interest here? If one’s religion says that the best source of income in a dry and sandy land is to rob someone else “in self-defense,” is he not going to work hard to justify a conflict?

America Using the Same Methods

Bin Laden and others refer to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan which ended World War II:

Through history, American [*sic*] has not been known to differentiate between the military and the civilians or between men and women or adults and children. Those who threw the atomic bombs and use the weapons of mass destruction against Nagasaki and Hiroshima were the Americans. Can the bombs differentiate between military and women and infants and children? America has no religion that can deter her from exterminating whole peoples. Your position against Muslims in Palestine is despicable and disgraceful. America has no shame.... We believe that the worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans. Nothing could stop you except perhaps retaliation in kind. We do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets.³¹

The American support—even qualified support—of Israel is regarded as a direct attack on the Palestinian peoples. The fact that America has been, in most cases, extremely careful to avoid civilian casualties is, to bin Laden, irrelevant. The fact that the use of the atomic bomb on Japan was an extraordinary case (and one in which the Japanese were warned in advance) is also irrelevant. Mistakes and exceptions on the part of the American military provide all the justification bin Laden feels necessary for a program of all-out war on civilians.

Spreading Islam by Peaceful Means

Numerous Muslims have condemned the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Here are a few examples:

The attackers and killers, whoever they are, whichever religion or nation they belong to are aggressors and the enemies of humankind. Christianity, Judaism or Islam!! Every religion condemns this horrible act and regards the attackers purely as cruel, anti-human, and tyrants.³²

I categorically go against a committed Muslim’s embarking on such attacks [as those on the WTC]. Islam never allows a Muslim to kill the innocent and the helpless.³³

From that which is known to everyone who has the slightest bit of common sense is that hijacking airplanes and kidnapping children and the like are extremely great crimes, the world over.³⁴

The Islamic Foundation of America condemns the apparent terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and offers condolences to the families of those who were killed or injured. American Muslims utterly condemn what are apparently vicious and cowardly acts of terrorism against innocent civilians. We join with all Americans in calling for the swift apprehension and punishment of the perpetrators. No political cause could ever be assisted by such immoral acts.³⁵

³⁰ Gerhard Nehls, *Christians Ask Muslims* (Bellville, South Africa: Evangelical Missions Press, 1987) in *The World of Islam: Resources for Understanding* [CD-ROM] (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping, 2000).

³¹ “Interview Osama bin Laden.”

³² Shaikh Muhammad Yusuf Islahi, “English Translation of Friday Sermon (Juma Khutbah)”; available from http://www.icna.com/wtc_islahi_9-21.pdf; Internet; accessed 17 October 2001.

³³ Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, “Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi Condemns Attacks Against Civilians: Forbidden in Islam”; available from <http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2001-01/12/article.25.shtml>; Internet; accessed 1 October 2001.

³⁴ Shaykh Ibn Baz, “The Islamic Verdict on Hijacking Planes and Kidnapping”; available from <http://www.thetrue religion.org/hijacking.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 October 2001.

³⁵ Islamic Foundation of America, official statement on site homepage; available from <http://www.ifa.ws/intro.htm>; Internet; accessed 28 September 2001.

Such condemnations of the attacks on the World Trade Centers frequently quote the long-standing tradition that suicide is unacceptable. They also quote the prohibition of slaying women and other innocents. They often quote Q 5:32 which suggests that slaying any person for reasons that are not legitimate (such as capital punishment or insurrection) is such a heinous crime that it is as if the perpetrator had committed genocide:

On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person—unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land—it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then although there came to them Our Messengers with Clear Signs, yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in the land. (Q 5:32)

Military Jihad For Defense

How can the Muslims who are, relatively speaking, pacifists, explain the Qur'anic passages which clearly enjoin jihad? First, they would suggest that those which are clearly military were meant to refer only to defensive wars: "Fight in the cause of Allah *those who fight you*" (Q 2:190, emphasis added). Even then, the means are limited to the enemy's surrender and subjection:

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors.^[191] And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith. (Q 2:190-91)

Say to the Unbelievers, if (now) they desist (from unbelief), their past would be forgiven them; but if they persist, the punishment of those before them is already (a matter of warning for them).^[39] And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and Faith in Allah altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily Allah doth see all that they do. (Q 8:38-39)

Jihad as Intellectual Battle

Second, pacifistic Muslims would argue that the primary (and ongoing, as opposed to *ad hoc*) form of jihad was meant to be intellectual and spiritual. Q 25:52 is commonly translated, "Therefore listen not to the Unbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost strenuousness, with the (Quran)." Thus, those who decry forced conversions would advocate peaceful evangelism similar to that which Christians promote.

Jihad as an Inner, Spiritual Battle

Further, these peaceful Muslims would point out that *jihad* does not mean "holy war" but "striving" and includes even one's own struggles against personal sin. Such an inward struggle is, in fact, regarded by many as "the greater jihad" while military action is regarded as "the lesser jihad." This distinction between greater and lesser jihads may owe its development to the Sufis (mystical Muslims) in the third century A.H. when wars of conquest were diminishing.³⁶ If there were no war in which to be martyred, how could one attain a martyr's reward? Jihad is then spiritualized.

CONCLUSIONS

Examples from hadith and history could be multiplied. What can one conclude then? *Do those labeled "terrorists" properly represent the religion of Islam, the Qur'an as the foundational book of Islam, and Muslims worldwide as adherents of Islam?* The answer, it seems, is a qualified "yes." The Qur'an is ambiguous enough at points to argue either way, and many if not most Muslims disagree with the terrorists. The Qur'an certainly says that it is necessary to strive against the "unbelievers" until the whole world accepts Islam. Such clear expressions as "slay" (Q 2:191) and "execution" (Q 5:33) demonstrate that jihad was to include military action. The call to arms is unmistakable. The Qur'an does not seem to draw a clear line between defensive war and offensive war or between conventional warfare and terrorism. It seems that even those passages which speak of limits in war (Q

³⁶ "Background to Shiism."

2:190) or of justice (Q 60:8-9) must be balanced against the need for the whole world to acknowledge Allah. Mercy is conditioned on conversion.

Mohammed approved the murder of prisoners and dissenters, including women. The history of the first century of Islam is one of violence and conquest and bloodshed. Even if the radical Muslims who advocate suicide attacks are not faithful to the Qur'an, it seems that they are faithful to the religion and practice of Mohammed.³⁷

Those who argue that Islam is a peaceful religion may be interpreting the Qur'an in the light of western values and constitutions rather than in the light of the teachings of Islam itself. The West should be grateful indeed that only a small minority of Muslims take the Qur'an as literally and seriously as the radical Muslim terrorists do.

³⁷ Cf. Sligh, "Bloody Legacy," 2.