

THE COMPLETE
IDIOT'S
GUIDE[®] TO

THE TRUTH ABOUT
**JIHAD, TERRORISM &
WARFARE IN ISLAM**

JIHAD



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**The Complete
Idiots Guide to
Understanding *Jihad***

By Yahya Emerick

Uncovering the Real Story About Jihad

Perhaps no other term from the world of Islam is as misunderstood in the West as *jihad*. It's very mention conjures up images of swarthy brown terrorists in ragged turbans and robes, Kalashnikov rifles slung over their shoulders, ready to mow down anyone who isn't a believer. It would be easy to believe that these pictures define the term *jihad*. Nightly news reports perhaps unwittingly deliver the wrong kind of message with almost daily stories of one Islamic group or another either named Something *Jihad* or calling for a *jihad* against America, the Great Satan. Chanting crowds of flag-burning Third Worlders are often queued to seal the impression that Muslims are a bunch of unruly fanatics.

Just what is a *jihad*, though, and are all the images associated with it a valid comparison with actual Islamic teachings? Is there any relationship between events throughout the world and the proper application of religious values?

No one would deny that we live in a world filled with injustice. Are Westerners giving a fair hearing to the grievances of the world's poor and downtrodden? These are the questions I will attempt to answer. Although some of the concepts may be controversial, it must be remembered that there are many sides to any issue and whenever conflict or injustice is perceived, passions will run very high.

So what Is Jihad?

The word *jihad* literally means to struggle or strive or to work for something with determination. Although English translations define it as holy war, that is not the Arabic meaning. The Arabic word for war is *harb*, and the word for fighting is *qital*. This is important to know because “making *jihad*” is any action done to further the cause of God. Providing missionary services in a tough place, going to a far land to study, or donating money when it’s a hardship can be a type of *jihad*. Even just trying to curb your desires for the life of this world is considered a type of *jihad*.

However, the word *jihad* is most often associated with the act of physically confronting evil and wrongdoing; hence, it can be applied to the act of fighting as well. But the goal of a physical *jihad* is not to have a big war, gain riches, or kill people; it is to further the cause of Allah and to create justice on Earth. Then, when the evil is removed, or the other side wants peace, Muslims are to make peace as well.

The Qur’an explains for us the reasons why fighting is sometimes a part of *jihad*:

﴿فَلْيُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يَشْرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ
وَمَنْ يُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيُقْتَلْ أَوْ يَغْلِبْ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا
عَظِيمًا ٧٤ وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ
مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ
هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَاجْعَل لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنكَ وَلِيًّا وَاجْعَل لَنَا
مِن لَدُنكَ نَصِيرًا ٧٥ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ الطَّاغُوتِ فَقَاتِلُوا أَوْلِيَاءَ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّ
كَيْدَ الشَّيْطَانِ كَانَ ضَعِيفًا ٧٦﴾

“Let those fight in the Cause of God who sell the life of this world for the next life. To the one who fights in the Cause of God, whether he is killed or achieves victory, We shall soon give him a great reward. And why shouldn’t you fight in the Cause of God and of those who, being weak, are mistreated; the men, women and children whose only cry is, ‘Our Lord! Save us from this land whose people are oppressors and bring to us from You someone who will protect us and bring to us from You someone who will help.’ Those who believe fight in the Cause of God, and those who reject faith fight in the cause of evil. So fight against the friends of Shaytan.”
(Qur’an 4:74–76)

Islam is not a society of vigilantes. It's not up to anyone who feels like it to declare a *jihad*. Although it seems everyone and their uncle is waving this word around, only an Islamic government or a worldwide leader of Islam has the authority to declare a *jihad*. Neither one exists in the Muslim world right now.

Jihad is one of the most misused words in the world today. It means to struggle in God's way. If someone does something in a way other than what God ordained, then it is a crime that the individual will have to answer for on the Day of Judgment.

Social Activism in Islam

There are many levels of *jihad*. An important part of our daily life as Muslims is to strive (or "make *jihad*") to improve society. Judaism has its concept of *Tikun Olam* or perfecting the world, and many other religions have a similar idea. The key phrase for us comes from the Qur'an, which says that Muslims must "encourage good while forbidding evil." Thus, Muslims must be active in the social affairs of any community they live in.

Examples of activities that a Muslim must oppose are ...

- ▶ The selling of alcohol, pornography, and drugs.
- ▶ Littering and pollution.

- Public disputes that turn chaotic.
- Gossip or slander in the media.
- Corruption in government.
- Pedophilia or spousal abuse.
- Cruelty to animals.

These and many other vices are mentioned in Islam as sources of discord and injustice that must be opposed. What are the ways allowed by Islam to change things? An important saying of the Prophet Muhammad, *sal Allahu 'alayhi wasallam*, with regard to stopping vice is that if you see an evil deed you should try to correct it with your hand or your tongue, or at least feel bad about it in your heart if you think you can do nothing about it.

Islam is a proactive way of life, meaning we are taught to get involved and take action in the defense and promotion of the truth. Why should Muslims try to get involved in the welfare of the society around them? Quite simply because God said,

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ
عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

“You are the best community brought out of humanity. You encourage what is right and forbid

what is wrong and you believe in Allah.” (Qur’an 3:110)

That is quite a defining statement! Prophet Muhammad, *sal Allahu ‘alayhi wasallam*, once told an interesting parable to explain the importance of our participation in keeping sin out of the city. He said:

“The example of a person who follows God’s orders and limits in comparison to the one who does wrong and violates God’s limits and orders is like the example of people drawing lots for seats in a boat. Some of them got seats in the upper deck while the others went to the lower part. Those in the lower part of the ship had to pass through the people in the upper decks to get water, and that bothered the people up there. So one of [the people from below] took an ax and started making a hole in the bottom of the boat. The people in the upper decks came and asked him, ‘What’s the matter with you?’ He answered, ‘You keep getting bothered by my [passing through your deck] and I really need to get some water.’ Now if they stop him from doing that, they will save him and themselves. But if they leave him alone, they will destroy him and themselves.”

In Arabic, the right or good way is called the *maroof*, and the evil or bad way is called the *munkar*. When we try to make our societies better and oppose evil, we make a safer and more orderly world to live in. Peace and security are the goals of civilization, and Islam gives us the definite prescription for achieving that condition and making it a reality.

What sorts of things should we try to encourage in our societies? Free medical care, aid to the poor and orphans, better schools, accountability in government, clean water and air, humane treatment of animals, and assistance for the elderly and handicapped are good things to start with. All of these have a good track record in classical Islamic civilization, where there was universal health care and free schools for all.

We will never have a perfect world. This life is not the place for perfection. But we can employ our hands, words, and feelings toward making it a better place than how we found it. This is the purpose of encouraging the right and forbidding the wrong in Islam. A person can't feel personally pious yet ignore the decline of morals in his or her own community.

The Prophet, Muhammad, *sal Allahu 'alayhi wasallam*, once told of an angel who was sent by God to destroy an iniquitous city. The angel was about to cause a natural disaster when he noticed

something strange and rushed back to God. “Why haven’t you carried out My order?” God asked. The angel reported, “I found one good man there who prays and fasts and praises You, though he keeps to himself and does nothing more.” God said, “Then start with that one (destroy him).” Social reform is our duty, and a failure to make things better is tantamount to condoning vice and sin. In the teachings of Islam, *jihad* against the evils of society is just as important as *jihad* on the battlefield.

The Myth of the Holy War

I turned on the evening news to see what was happening in the world. The first report was about a terrorist group named the Islamic *Jihad* Brigade, which was threatening to plant bombs on planes. The second report was about Muslim extremist groups declaring a *jihad* against America. The final report was about Islamic terrorism against Israel and the new wave of suicide bombers. Any reasonable person might conclude that with the demise of the Soviet Union the next great enemy of freedom loving people everywhere is Islam. This is an unfortunate conclusion because Islam is not the enemy of the West nor of the Judeo-Christian tradition. On the contrary, Islam is a cousin to the West, and its values have more in common with modern international norms than most people realize. Why is there such a horrible misperception, then?

A Historical Misunderstanding

As is the case with many ancient prejudices and misunderstandings, history and its many twists and turns is the primary culprit for this misunderstanding about Islam. For most of the Middle Ages, Europeans painted an image of Islam that was designed to provoke fear and loathing in the minds of the populace, especially when the rulers were attempting to drum up support for the Crusades. The Saracens and the Turks were viewed as minions of the Devil. In his book *The Life of Mohammed*, Emile Deir Mongem writes,

“When the war blazed up between Islam and Christianity ... each side misunderstood the other one. It should be admitted, however, that the basic misunderstanding was more on the part of westerners than the easterners. ... argumentative debaters overloaded Islam with vices, degradation and abasement without taking the trouble to study it ...”
(quoted in *The Spirit of Islam* by Afif Tabbarah, page 9, 1978)

The nineteenth-century orientalist, Count Henri de Castri goes even further when he comments on the practice of “mercenary poets” and paid storytellers who traveled Europe inciting hatred and misinformation against Islam. “Out of total ignorance of Islam, these songs were charged with

hatred against Moslems ... and inculcated such mistaken views in the minds of Christians, even to our present day. Every singer used to consider Moslems as polytheists, disbelievers, and disobedient idolaters.” The campaign of anti-Islamic slander was so successful that to this day some textbooks in European and American schools refer to Muhammad as having epilepsy, the Qur’an as being copied from the Bible, Muslim armies as forcing conversions on people (by the sword), and Islam as being against science and learning. All of these things are quite untrue, and enlightened Western authors from Arnold Toynbee and Bertrand Russell to Yvonne Haddad and John Esposito have been dispelling these myths in book after book for decades; nevertheless, the message hasn’t reached the masses, who still believe numerous false myths concerning Islam.

When Europeans succeeded in occupying virtually the entire Muslim world during the era of Colonialism, they considered their victory over Islam complete. Rudyard Kipling’s White Man’s Burden of civilizing the savages was the culmination of Europe’s guiding philosophy. The occupiers closed Islamic schools and colleges all over the Muslim world, arrested and killed religious leaders, disenfranchised the population, and installed as rulers Western-educated natives who were completely dependent on their European masters. But with the end of Colonialism in the mid-1950s, European fears about the return of Islamic

power have caused another round of hysteria to grip the Western world.

Virtually all Muslims now feel that the modern Western media have taken on the role of the mercenary poets of the past: presenting an overly negative view of Islam or unfairly connecting violent events with it. They feel that political or regional conflicts are seen only through the eyes of religion, and Islam is blamed for anything that happens. Even worse, sometimes people with Muslim-sounding names will be given an overwhelming amount of exposure when they talk about *jihad*, even when they don't fully adhere to Islamic principles to begin with. For example, the Palestinian National Authority which now governs part of Palestine recently opened a casino in Jericho. Even though most Palestinians are Muslims, their leaders disregard clear Islamic prohibitions.

On the flip side, Islam forbids dealing in interest money, yet even such Islamic Republics as Iran, Pakistan and the Sudan routinely engage in this type of activity in their annual budgets and purchases. Clearly many people reference religion only when it suits their interests.

Take the case of Osama bin Laden, whom the CIA considers the mastermind of a network of violent terrorists. After several high-profile terrorist attacks, most notably the bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa, Western media sources aired footage of the

one-time Saudi entrepreneur issuing Islamic religious decrees to justify what he had done. Even though Muslims in general were horrified at the brutality of the attack, the false link was made that terrorism equals Islam.

A False Alarm

After the United States Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was bombed in 1995, several mosques were burnt down, Muslim homes were vandalized, and the FBI and the news media were fingering Muslims as the responsible party. They even made all Muslims seem as if they were somehow guilty of some great conspiracy! Then, when the nation found out that it was a white Christian man who did the bombing, did the media apologize to Muslims? Of course not!

All Muslims are asking for is to be treated in a fair manner like the adherents of other religions are. If a deranged person commits a crime, it doesn't matter what the person's name is, where he or she was born, or what religion the person ascribes to; a crime is a crime and is condemned by all spiritual people, Muslims included. This is an issue that Muslims feel strongly about because it affects them inside as well as outside their community.

Islam on War

What is the position of Islam on war and conflict? Peace on Earth is the ideal that the world of Islam

works toward, and war is abhorred as the last, worst option. However, there are times when there is no alternative but to fight. Every society has its own views about a just war. What do Muslims believe is worth fighting for? According to Islamic Law, an armed struggle can be initiated only for the following reasons:

- ▶ To defend your community or nation from aggressors
- ▶ To liberate people living under oppressive regimes
- ▶ To remove any government that will not allow the free practice of Islam within its borders

The first two reasons are easy to understand. The third would be necessary if, for example, a country forbade the practice of Islam or its preaching. Obviously from the Qur'an's perspective, such a country is attempting to stop God's religion from being preached. Interestingly enough, Islam does not give people the right to declare a war vigilante style. A group of disgruntled people in country X, for example, does not have the sanction to start an armed struggle, even if they have legitimate grievances. The power to declare war rests only with the properly chosen authorities in an Islamic state (elected by the majority, confirmed and accountable). The leader of the entire Muslim community is the only one who can ask Muslims to

enlist in the army and fight in a just war, not someone with a big name or an inflated sense of importance.

At the same time, an individual Muslim religious figure is not authorized by Islamic Law to tell his followers to go and fight, because the main principle of Islamic governance is mutual consultation, known as Shura. Nobody can make a big decision without all of the governmental representatives discussing it first. This is sort of like the Islamic House of Representatives. Given that there is no worldwide Islamic government or forum where political issues can be discussed, rather than declaring *jihad* all over the world, the proper goal of activist Muslims must be the establishment of a political structure acceptable to all Muslims first. Looked at in this light, we can see that most of the Islamic groups in the world engaging in armed struggle have no more legitimacy in Islamic Law than the Crusaders had when they invaded and sacked the city of Constantinople, which was a Christian city!

Muslims are actually divided about supporting most of these armed groups for this very reason. They often support the objectives but feel queasy about the methods and the legitimacy of the participants. The worldwide Muslim community is in somewhat of an awkward position because there is currently no Islamic government functioning today. No, not even Afghanistan or Iran is considered to be

adhering to Islamic Law by most of the world's Muslims. So there is no official agency to police the activities of would be vigilantes.

What Makes a Terrorist?

The bitter Arab/Israeli conflict in the Middle East has caused four wars and countless strikes and counterstrikes by both sides. One action on the part of both sides that gets a lot of media attention is the frequent bombings of buses and other public places. Before I address the Islamic position on such actions, I will shed some light on the motivation of the people who do these things. After all, nobody gets out of bed one day and says, "I want to bomb a bus." Keep in mind, Islam does not justify the acts of terrorism committed by people who are driven by passion more than spiritual ideals. I just want to explain what drives some people to violence.

Imagine if one day a foreign army unit comes and forces your family out of your home at gunpoint and tells you to leave forever. With just the clothes on your back, you and your parents and siblings are thrown out with nowhere to go. You wind up in a makeshift shelter on some barren hills and have to scratch for your sustenance. Your mother is crying. Your father is frail and looks hopeless, and your siblings are cold and scared, every day. Many other people in similar circumstances join you. Their homes and farms were appropriated, as well. There is no running water, no sewers, no electricity, no

schools, and no doctors to help you. Imagine living in such conditions for decades and growing up in squalor. Then think of how you would feel if you were not allowed to leave your squalid camp without showing an identity card to the soldiers who surround your miserable tin-roof town. The humiliation would be overwhelming.

The only jobs you can find are working in lands that were seized from your parents years before. You labor in the fields and look at the shiny new houses built on the land that had been in your family for generations. The people who live there were born in Europe and have taken your land with no other excuse than, "God gave it to us." You are a second-class citizen with no citizenship rights. Perhaps you join with some of your friends and decide to fight back to regain your land. The soldiers, however, are equipped with tanks and machine guns while all you have are stones or small arms. You lob rocks at the checkpoints in frustration while the soldiers gun down your friends mercilessly. If you get arrested, you're sent to a prison where you are legally tortured and held without trial for years.

Meanwhile, your baby sister has died because of malnutrition, your uncle's land was recently seized, your cousin's house was bulldozed to the ground, the ramshackle schools are sealed shut, and chances for any kind of future look grim. The soldiers laugh at you, and you see on the side of supply boxes in the prison storeroom the words "Made in America."

Your anger at the soldiers and their people is so great that you begin to transfer some of it to those who are supporting them. You don't have an army to fight the invaders; you don't have any hope of organized resistance. Then you think about how to exact retribution, and individual acts of violence such as bombings come to mind. Thus, a terrorist is born. But in his eyes, the real terror was done against him and his people first. He is merely striking back.

From the southern Philippines to Chechnya in Russia, Muslims are taking up arms to right the wrongs that they perceive have been done to them. Given that there are no Islamic governments, it has been left largely up to people to defend themselves. They find sanction for their choice in the words of the Qur'an:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَهُمُ الْبَغْيُ هُمْ يَنْتَصِرُونَ ٣٩

“And those who, when they are oppressed wrongly, help and defend themselves.” (Qur'an 42:39)

But due to the lack of guidance in the proper conduct of war in Islam, excesses and misguided approaches are often the tools of choice for drawing attention to their cause.

Islam and Terrorism

What does Islam say about the kinds of actions such as angry young men carry out? Try to understand that,

first of all, no matter what they say, Islam is often not in the forefront of these people's minds. They feel that they have been wronged and they are looking for revenge. If they shout, "Allah is Great," or give their clandestine groups names that refer to Islam, it is oftentimes more of a veneer than a true orientation. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis sometimes used references to Christianity to justify hostility to the Jews. Slave owners in America repeatedly justified slavery with the excuse that they were Christianizing the blacks, and Hindu fundamentalists in India claim that their attacks on mosques are designed to bring Indian Muslims back to their true religion: Hinduism. People misuse religion quite often, and Islam is misused as much as any other faith.

The Rules of War

The rules for the conduct of war in Islam forbid the killing of non-combatants. The Prophet Muhammad, *sal Allahu 'alayhi wasallam*, never allowed any Muslim soldier to harm women, children, or the innocent. The trouble with bombing a bus or library is that soldiers are not the ones who are killed. Thus, the people who engage in this type of attack are going against the teachings of Islam. According to the Qur'an,

مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ
الْنَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

“Whoever kills a person, less it be (capital punishment) for murder or causing terrorism in the earth, it is as if they have killed the whole of humanity” (Qur’an 5:32)

Suicide bombers are also guilty of ignoring Islamic teachings, because suicide is forbidden in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad, *sal Allahu ‘alayhi wasallam*, said, *“Whoever kills himself with a weapon will have that weapon in his hand, and will kill himself forever in the fire of Hell,”* and yet this is exactly what these men do when they detonate bombs strapped to their bodies. Are there some religious leaders in that part of the world who condone these actions? Yes, there are, but remember that they, too, have been shaped by the same sense of injustice as the rest of the people there. Muslim scholars in other parts of the world condemn these actions as being against the letter and the spirit of the religion.

So we can say that there is no such thing as terrorism allowed in Islam. Harming innocents is forbidden in Islam, so those who engage in this type of activity cannot rightly call upon religion to justify their actions. Be that as it may, there are some misguided Muslims with legitimate grievances who seem to do everything in the world to make themselves, and Islam, look bad in their pursuit of redress. They say they are doing *jihad*; however, in reality they often break all the rules for carrying out one. Even as Christianity and Judaism have

sometimes been wrongfully used to justify the actions of extremists, a small minority of Muslims is doing the same with Islam. The overwhelming majority of Muslims do not support, condone, or engage in such reprehensible acts.



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