Jihad in Islam

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Jihad has played a significant role since from the rise of Islam and the creation of Muslim communities. Therefore, due to this extreme importance, it is sometimes referred to as the Sixth Pillar of Islam. Jihad in today world is being used in meanings of religious extremism. It is linked with fear and distrust after 11 September terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In 1980, journalist Djelloul Marbrouk pointed out that American television is using terrorism, hijack and white slavery words for Arab1 . However, this is not the correct meaning of jihad in the Islamic context. The literary meaning of jihad is to strive, labor and exhaustion. This term has been derived from the Arabic root “*and*”. It is essentially an effort to practice religion despite subjugation and harassment. The other meaning of this is to fight against the evil in your own heart. In the Holy Quran, it is also seen in the sense of fighting in the path of God. Early Muslim community used it to designate warfare against the enemies. In the hadith, it is found with harb and qital and is an obligation in a military sense and refers to armed action2. Inal-Bukhari’s and in all Muslim's collections, it is not described in terms of aggression. The Makah Surah describe it in terms of patience under attack while Medina surah describes it in terms of the right to repel attack as it is the duty of Muslims to contest against the unkindness. Nevertheless, there are two famous aspects of Jihad in hadith; one is spiritual such as struggling and the other is military such as fighting. This essay will discuss the concept of jihad in Islam and key differences and similarities in the interpretation and practices of this term by Sunni and Shi’a. Moreover, there is also discussion about the role of jihad in today world and its evolution in different sects; Sunni and Shi’a.

Sunni and Shi’a also interpret it in different meanings and usage. Shi’a had a concept of jihad linked with their insights of historic griefs and grumbles1. According to Shia, Jihad is referred to the resolute effort that is in conformity with divinity’s command and for Islam. This resolute effort can take two different forms; fight against one’s sinful dispositions and jihad of the sword. Jihad as self-control in order to follow the commands of Allah and evading His bans is an arduous struggle. This is required all through life by Muslims. “Those who strive (jaahada) for Us, We guide them in Our ways” (26:69). It is referring to the spiritual struggle for attaining proximity to Allah. Similarly, “Whoever strives (jaahada), he only strives for his own self” (29:6). This is referring to the struggle for self-purification.

In addition, the martyrdom of Hussain is an incident in the history that has shaped the meaning of jihad for this sect. Shia concept of jihad is manifested by grievances, and it is no surprise that it differs from the Sunni concept. However, the elements that make a difference between the concepts of two sects are the matter of ongoing debate3. The second meaning of jihad; jihad of the sword has got global attention. This concept was developed when early Muslims were forced to leave their lands by their enemies. In Islam, they were first given permission and later they were asked to fight against those enemies.

Thus, the Holy Quran commands Muslims to scrap in the trail of God and follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his early acquaintances. However, this context of jihad has changed in today society and it is now using it as a holy war. There are different violent contexts that are called as jihad by different extremists. Terrorist groups are using this term for framing their own cases and get benefits. The Afghan wars of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are also considered by extremists as jihads. However, these were killing many civilians also and were not according to the Islamic norms.

Jihad according to Sunni is linked with the right authority and cannot be conductedwithoutthe direction by a legitimate ruler. The Sunnis consider all Muslim caliphs as their legitimate callers of jihad. Moreover, different prerequisites for jihad are; right intention and drawing near to God. Conversely, different conditions are also placed on the behavior of fighters in jihad3. For example, there must be discrimination of civilians from fighters. Thus, most sects agree on the cause of jihad that it is related to the defense of territory, faith as well as property. It is no doubt the religious duty of every true Muslim to practice jihad. However, Islam does not compel anyone for its acceptance. Different historical events have also shaped their concept of jihad.

Thus, both Sunni and Shii Muslims are prohibited to go for sacrificial religious suicide that is common in today society. In the early 1980s, Hezbollah, a Shia organization founded the practice of using suicide violence as “self-sacrifice” tasks. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there were “Nizari Ismailis” who were famous for their concept of suicidal assassins against their enemies. In today world, Hamas and Al Qaeda in Iraq are still practicing this concept and augmented the practice of killing operations since the 1990s.Similarly, there were terrorists such as Osama bin Laden and others that were not following the classical Islam’s criteria for jihad and were going beyond this. They were setting their own limits and using different weapons for fighting for their personal causes. Islamic scholars have rejected their interpretation of jihad in this way. Jihad is not a ferocious notion and is not an assertion of war against other faiths or people. Government and other community organizations are working to correct the consideration of jihad according to Islam.

Jihad in Islamic belief and practice has numerous meanings. Holy Quran commands for the battles under certain conditions. For example, defensive wars are allowed in Islam. Every person in this world is responsible for his beliefs and actions to Allah. However, his kid of jihad also has some rules and codes of conduct. It is the duty of the head of state to sensibly assess the probable pros and cons of war. They should also make sure that they will not hurt the civilians. The holy prophet (PBUH) also prohibited all religious persecution when he let free prisoners of war. The concept of jihad in Islam is for mobilizing and motivating Muslim to strength themselves in all areas. They should focus on improving their inner and making according to Allah commands3. With this, they should also fight against all cruelties but within the limits of Islam. They must not go for suicide bombings under the influence of so-called religious scholars. Thus, society should also play its role in changing this extremist concept of jihad that has no link with the teachings of Islam. So long as Muslims have poor societal conditions such as unrepresentative governments militant Islamic groups will linger to entice people by offering them financial support. The US government in this regard can improve its foreign policy and take help from its allies in the Middle East. In this way, it can counter the Islamic extremists and bring peace in the society.

References

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