

Comparative Analysis:

Look at Historical and Modern Jihad

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PS615-T301 Political Islam & Terrorism (2233-1)

January 8, 2022

Introduction

In our modern society, a lot of focus has been placed on being politically correct to prevent offending anyone. When a hard subject comes up, like slavery, or Islam, or terrorism, some people will accuse the speaker of being an Islamophobic, a racist, or another negative insult. However, ignorance is not an excuse when difficult subjects need to be addressed. As George Santayana said, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (). Therefore, one must learn and study history, including hard subjects of history like Jihad. That is why this paper will attempt to construct a comparative analysis of both historical and modern jihad to show that they are just two sides of the same coin.

A Historical Look at Jihad

Origins

Some claim that Islam is a religion of Peace, while others argue that it is not. The truth of the matter is that both are, in fact, true. The Qur'an was written by a man named Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim, known simply as the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad was the first Muslim and created the Islamic faith. His words and actions are the reasons why the origin of Islam is a bloody and violent one. As Robert Spencer pointed this out in his book titled *The History of Jihad From Muhammad to ISIS* when he said,

The attentive reader will note that there is no period since the beginning of Islam that was characterized by large-scale peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims. There was no time when mainstream and dominant Islamic authorities taught the equality of non-Muslims with Muslims, or the obsolescence of jihad warfare. There was no Era of Good Feeling, no Golden Age of Tolerance, no Paradise of Proto-Multiculturalism. There has always been, with virtually no interruption, jihad (Spencer 2018, 11).

Spencer is, unfortunately, accurate in this assessment. From the very birth of Islam there was violence. When the new Prophet Muhammad started preaching his message of peace in Mecca, his own people the Quraysh were not welcoming to his new religion. They thrived on polytheism

and made their money in trade and worshiping multiple gods. Mecca had a diverse group of gods and did not take kindly to Muhammad preaching the worship of one god, Allah. His people rejected his claim of prophethood and dismissed his call to Islam. It was at this point his message of peaceful worship of the one true god Allah changed into a militant battle cry. He first warned of hellfire and damnation, then quickly moved to call for Jihad and threatened, “Will you listen to me, O Quraysh? By him who holds my life in His hand, I bring you slaughter” (Spencer 2018, 16)! That is exactly what he did. This led to him eventually being banned from his own place of birth with the few followers he had gathered. Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad took his followers and fled to the kingdom of Axum, which was led by a Christian king. However, this was only the beginning of the idea of jihad.

The Spread of Islam

The original religious map of the Middle East before the time of Muhammad was a diverse group of people. The region was populated by Jews, Christians, Hindus, and people of diverse gods. Egypt alone “was 99 percent Christian when it was invaded in the late 630s and conquered in the 640s” (Spencer, Robert Spencer: The History of Jihad 2018, 8:27). Now Egypt is approximately 10 percent Christian. As Spencer explains in the video, the Christians did not go anywhere, they are now the Muslim population. Which simply means they converted.

This spread of Islam started when Muhammad started to raid the Quraysh caravans traveling from place to place; then he moved on to pivotal battles and conquering people. Spencer talks about the 27 raids or battles that Muhammad organized and fought in personally. Then the crucial turning point for Islam was their victory during the Battle of Badr. It was what Muhammad said during this battle that gave the heart to the jihad movement of Islam. Those key words were, “By God in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, no man will be slain this day fighting against

them with steadfast courage advancing not retreating but God will cause him to enter Paradise" (Spencer 2018, 18). Plainly speaking, Muhammad was telling his people that those who die waging jihad against the enemies of Allah will receive a one-way ticket to paradise and will not have to have to face judgment in front of Allah on the last day like everyone else; there will be no risk of being found evil and being sent to hell. It was this belief that was created with those words that brought about the lust for battle within the political side of the Islamic faith and the creation of an army that does not fear death in battle.

Another aspect of ancient jihad is that when the Muslims conquered a people that were members of the group of people the prophet Muhammad called "the people of the book", they were given a choice of converting to Islam, becoming a protected people or Dhimmi by paying the jizya, a poll tax, or be slaughtered. The jizya was designed to be so outrageously hard to pay that the people would, in the words of Muhammad, "feel themselves subdued" (Gabriel 2002, 73). Often when they refused to convert, could not pay the jizya, they were taken as slaves, mostly sex slaves for the jihad warriors in the beginning. This jihad that started with Muhammad led to the Muslims conquering all the middle east, Egypt, a good chunk of India, brought down the Persian empire, converted the Mongals, parts of northern Africa, and even into southern Europe, like Spain and France. A good portion of these lands were populated by Jews, Christians, and Hindus. How many of these nations remain as they were? Very few, and we have the jihad movement to thank for that fact.

Modern Jihad

Extremist and Terrorism

The modern Jihadist is not so different from the historical jihadist. As I stated in my thesis statement, they are just two sides of the same coin. They both believed in conquering the world

and bring Islam to all the nations. This can clearly be seen in the words of a captured Isis soldier when he said,

Our goal is that it is possible for an Islamic Caliphate to rise. A state, I mean a superpower. I mean, establishing something for the future. Not a confined state, within a geographical framework like Iraq and so, not like that. It is bigger. Bigger than [Iraq]. [It's] on a world level. The world. Yes. We will rule the world (Smith 2015, 25:45).

That is a terrifying idea to comprehend. Those fighting jihad will not stop until they have subjugated, enslaved, or converted the entire world. The jihad being waged by these individuals is the exact same kind of jihad waged by those spreading Islam during its creation. Even to the point that we have given a name to those that follow the words of Muhammad about dying in jihad. They still exist today. We call them suicide bombers. This proves that the belief Muhammad instilled in his fighters during the Battle of Badr still lives alive and well today. The belief that if a Muslim fighter dies while fighting the enemies of Allah, they will make it into paradise. This is the same Jihad.

However, there are a few minor differences in the modern form of jihad, or I should say, a new branch of jihad. One of these subtleties is the fact some modern jihad is seen as a defensive jihad and is more of a slow covert action. I will get more in depth with that later. One of the ways that has remained the same is the different stages of jihad. Author Mark A. Gabriel, Ph.D. explains, in his book *Islam and Terrorism*, how Muslims exist in three stages of jihad: the weakened stage, the preparation stage, and the jihad stage. He explains that this was seen in the time of Muhammad as well, but to a smaller scale. The different states can be seen easiest when Muslims live in a non-Islamic society. The first stage is when they are in the weakened state due to their minority status. Meaning their population is few and far between. Gabriel, Ph.D. explains how according to the Quran, Muslims in this stage “submit to the law of the land, but they work to increase their numbers (Gabriel 2002, 85). Gabriel, Ph.D. then quotes a large section of the Quran and explains it as saying

that Muhammad was telling his followers to “be responsible for yourselves. Don’t worry about the infidels around you. You and they will all go before Allah one day and be judged by your works” (Gabriel 2002, 86). In essence, obey the laws of the land, and leave the unbelievers alone, because they will still face judgement. Then the next stage is the preparation stage starts “when the Muslims reasonable influential minority” (Gabriel 2002, 86). Gabriel, Ph.D. quotes several verses of the Quran, like Surah 8:59-60, to explain how Muhammad called his followers to prepare for war by making themselves ready in every possible area such as “financially, physical, military, mental and any other area” (Gabriel 2002, 86). Once this preparation stage is complete, Gabriel, Ph.D. explains the next stage of Jihad. In this stage, “Muslims are a minority with strength, influence and power. At this stage every Muslim’s duty is to actively fight the enemy, overturning the system of the non-Muslim Country and establishing Islamic authority” (Gabriel 2002, 87). This is exactly what Muhammad did in the beginning. He was weak with few followers, so he preached peace. He worked hard to gather followers and increase his ranks and power. This was him in his preparation stage. Then he moved to the final stage of battle and conquering. Gabriel, Ph.D. explains that the Quran calls Muslims to fight infidels “wherever you find them” which removes any geographical limit as seen in the interview with the ISIS soldier earlier.

A small difference between the historical jihad and the modern jihad is that we have labeled these kind of thinkers as “radicals” when they used to be seen as normal behavior to spread Islam. Given the fact their position can be directly supported by the Quran and the examples left by Muhammad, are their goals truly radical or is this just the same kind of jihad that was waged throughout their entire existence? Have the modern Muslims immigrated around the world to escape the hostility of the warring Middle East, or is their motivation a part of their global domination goals of spreading Islam around the world in a covert action form of jihad? As Muslims

have immigrated to the United States, they have started establishing Mosques and getting involved in our government elections. Then in 2022, the United States as seen their first all Muslim government elected in Hamtramck, Michigan (Parsley 2022). This is just one small town in Michigan, but from there it can grow as they progress in their growing their numbers in stage one. As a nation established on immigration and freedoms, we accept people from around the world which has established the United States as the great melting pot of cultures. This makes it incredibly easy for sleeper cells of covert jihadists to be established. Where the people quietly grow their ranks and gather their strength. A part of the modern jihad is not all war and obvious hostile takeover like it was in its time of birth, where people were forced to convert by the edge of the sword or financial slavery. It is also a slow and methodical jihad to convert followers peacefully with promises of peace and utopia under Islamic law where they can use the laws of the land in their favor. This form of modern jihad will place Muslims in higher and higher places of authority in the government allowing them to slowly make small changes from within. Infiltrating the democratic system first with small town governments and work your way up to placing Muslims inside the judicial system, then congress, then the presidency. This form of jihad preaches the beginning peacefully worship of Allah just like Muhammad did when he was in Mecca. Utilizing the democratic process of voting in laws to make small changes like inserting the teaching of Islamic law into the schools. Thereby allowing them to slowly indoctrinate the children. Then once enough of the government and future generations are converted, the final stage of jihad can be enacted by enact Sharia law and forcefully convert the government into an Islamic state and reinstating the jizya (Smith 2015). This covert jihad would be slow and take generations. However, as you can see, it is still jihad.

In conclusion, modern jihad and historical jihad are one and the same. Really the only difference is that modern jihad has taken on a more covert method in addition to the historical bloody one. You can clearly see both kinds of jihad existing in our modern world.

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