The Concept of Jihad in Islam

Sufia Khan

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In many countries across the world, Muslims are engaged in violent movements in the name of jihad. But the fact is that a movement does not become a jihad simply because it is given that name.

So then what is jihad? Let me begin by what the word jihad literally means? Jihad literally means to strive to one's utmost for a particular purpose.

According to Islam, jihad is a continuous process in the life of a true believer. It is the effort a believer makes to abide by God's will in every aspect of his life. In the Hadith, the Prophet is reported to have said: 'A *mujahid* (one who performs jihad) is one who strives against his own self for the sake of obeying God.' He fights against the evil promptings of one's soul and struggles to overcome all obstacles to leading a God-oriented life and doing good deeds. This is the real jihad, and the primary meaning of jihad in Islam.

Why is this jihad important to a believer's life? According to Islam, God created this world as a testing ground where human beings are constantly faced with challenges that are tests for us. A believer is required to overcome these challenges and remain firmly on the path of truth. It is such people who will be eligible for Paradise in the Hereafter. This is the reason why jihad against one's own self is important to a believer's life.

Jihad is mentioned in the Quran in various contexts, but nowhere in the Quran is the word jihad used as a synonym for war. Let me share some verses of the Quran to show in what contexts the Quran has used the word jihad. So, for example,

The Quran states: 'Do great jihad with the means of the Quran.' (25:52)

In this verse, the term jihad clearly means striving hard to spread the teachings of the Quran to all of humankind. There can be no other meaning of engaging in jihad through the Quran. According to the Quran, this is the most exalted form of jihad for which it uses the term 'jihad-e akbar' or 'great jihad'.

In another verse the Quran states: 'We will surely guide in Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause.' (29:69)

In this verse, the search for the truth has been called jihad—that is, making efforts to discover God, deepen one's realization of God and develop closeness with God.

Another verse of the Quran (49:15) describes true believers as those who strive with their wealth for the cause of God. So, to spend one's wealth for God's cause is also an act of jihad.

So, jihad is basically a peaceful struggle for a noble cause. However, the word jihad can be used in an extended sense to refer to war, because it is also a form of struggle or striving. But, it is important to know that Islam lays down certain conditions for waging war. Without the fulfillment of these conditions, war will not be legitimate, let alone qualify as jihad.

The first and foremost condition is that in Islam only defensive war is permissible. There is specific prohibition in the Quran against wars of aggression.

The Quran states: 'Fight in the cause of God against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression. God does not love aggressors.' (2:190)

Another verse states: 'Permission to fight is granted to those who are attacked because they have been wronged.' (22:39)

These verses clearly prohibit aggressive action. And, the Prophet Muhammad never violated this doctrine. During the Prophet's lifetime, Muslims fought only wars in defense. It was opponents of the Muslims who attacked them without any provocation. In comparison, the present violence by Muslims is entirely offensive in nature and therefore completely illegitimate from an Islamic point of view.

The second condition pertaining to war in Islam is that only an established state has the right to declare war. Individuals or groups do not have the right to declare war. Why does Islam give the state alone the right to declare war? This is because war is requires great resources and organization which only an established state can provide. This is why only states can engage in war.

It is a fact that none of the so-called jihads currently being waged by Muslims has been launched by an established government. All of them have been launched and are being carried out by non-governmental organisations. And so, they are again illegitimate from an Islamic point of view.

In the end, I would like to say that Muslims have taken to violence in the present age not because the Quran preaches violence but because they are completely ignorant of the spirit of the modern age. The modern age is completely different from the previous ages. In the past, the use of violence was a common practice. Moreover, there was no concept of freedom in the ancient age. Today, the situation has completely changed. In today's world, with weapons of mass destruction, violence is considered completely unacceptable and undesirable. Moreover, the concept of freedom in the modern age ensures that it is possible to achieve whatever we may desire through peaceful means. The present age is truly an age of peace. And those who still engage in violence show that they are completely unaware of the spirit of the age.