

Jihad and the Qur'an: Classical and Modern Interpretations

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter focuses on three conceptualizations of jihad endemic in the Western Academy and subjects them to a critical analysis. It references interpretations of key verses in the Qur'an by some of the most prominent commentators in the pre-modern and modern periods and provides an overview of the key debates concerning the treatment of jihad in the Qur'an. The chapter concludes by assessing whether these predominant conceptualizations can be supported on the basis of the Qur'an and its interpretations. Furthermore, such an assessment has implications for whether the military jihad described in the Qur'an can be regarded as 'holy war', as is the frequent translation in Western languages.

Keywords: jihad, ṣabr, qitāl, jihad al-nafs;, āyat al-sayf, fī sabīl allāh

THE lexeme jihad and related verbs occur in the Qur'an in different contexts and have various significations. The basic connotations of the Arabic root j-h-d have to do with struggle, exertion, making an effort. The frequently encountered phrase *al-jihād fī sabīl allāh* ('struggling/striving in the path of God') is quite common in the extra-Qur'anic literature in general but does not occur in the Qur'an in this exact formulation. Instead, the Qur'an uses verbal forms derived from j-h-d with the phrase *fī sabīl allāh* and less frequently with *fī 'llāh*. Two other Qur'anic terms—*ṣabr* (patient forbearance) and *qitāl* (fighting)—are to be regarded as key components of the broader term jihad, as discussed below. *Ḥarb*, the Arabic word for 'war' in general is never used in the Qur'an with the phrase 'in the path of God' and is not related to the concept of jihad.

Conceptualizations of Jihad in the Western Academy

A survey of key modern studies of jihad reveals that there are three primary conceptualizations of this term that are predominant in the Western academy. These are now discussed below.

The first such conceptualization is that the term jihad in general refers primarily, if not exclusively, to military activity against the non-Muslim enemy (Lewis 1988: 72; Lewis 1995: 233; Watt 1976: 143; Tyan 1998: 538; Morabia 1993: *passim*; Khadduri 1955: 51; Cook 2005: *passim*); according to this conceptualization, jihad essentially becomes conflated with *qitāl*. David Cook goes so far as to stridently maintain that only apologists, (p. 513) Western and Muslim, emphasize the notion of an internal or spiritual jihad in order 'to present Islam in the most innocuous manner possible' (2009: 166).

Recently, Asma Afsaruddin has argued that these perceptions have developed in the Western academy due to the absence of a recognition of the importance of *ṣabr* and its cultivation as a constant feature of jihad—understood broadly as human striving—in the Qur'an and by downplaying or ignoring the verses that refer to jihad in the non-combative sense, especially in the Meccan period (c.610–622 CE). This situation, she says, is compounded by the fact that disproportionate scholarly attention is paid to the juridical literature which understandably focuses on the combative jihad as a state-sanctioned duty within the context of military security and international relations (Khadduri 1955; Morabia 1993; Peters 1996, among others). Afsaruddin points to pre-modern Muslim exegetical and edifying literature which, in contradistinction to the legal corpus, extols *ṣabr* as an essential ingredient of human striving, taking its cue from the Qur'an. Apart from Morabia, who briefly recognized *ṣabr* as an aspect of jihad (1995: 175, 293ff.), Western scholars in general have not taken account of this attribute as constituting a part of the Qur'anic jihad.

Afsaruddin notes that one particular Meccan verse—Q. 3:200—is often invoked in the sources to establish the importance of *ṣabr* as a constant feature of human striving in the face of life's vicissitudes. This verse states: 'O those who believe, be patient and forbearing (*iṣbirū*), outdo others in forbearance (*ṣābirū*), be firm (*rābiṭū*), and revere God so that you may succeed.' A survey undertaken by Afsaruddin of early commentaries on this verse produced by exegetes (Sunnī and Shī'ī) from the first three centuries of Islam—such as Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104/722), Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), Hūd ibn Muḥakkam al-Hawwārī (d. c.290/903), Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm (fl. second half of third/ninth century), and Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (fl. late third/ninth century)—reveals a general uniform emphasis upon *ṣabr* and its derivatives as referring to patient forbearance in the carrying out of religious duties, such as prayer, particularly in the face of ill-treatment by others (see extensive discussion of their views in Afsaruddin 2013b: esp. 179–204). In the fourth/tenth century al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in his well-known commentary quotes the early pietistic scholar Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767) who remarked that this verse counselled believers to 'Remain steadfast in obedience and to be patient with the

enemies of God, and be firm in the path of God' (al-Ṭabarī, al-Jāmi', 3:562) In his commentary on this verse, the late sixth-/twelfth-century exegete al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) comments that the first imperative in the verse—*iṣbirū*—relates to the individual while the second imperative *ṣābirū* deals with interactions between the individual and others. He notes further that the verbal noun *muṣābara* (related to the command *ṣābirū* in Q. 3:200) has to do with commanding the good and preventing wrong, which could possibly lead to fighting (*jihad*) in order to defend oneself from the harm of others (al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr, 3:473).

The effort inherent in the inculcation of the Qur'anic virtue of *ṣabr* is renamed as *jihād al-naḥs* in later typologies of jihad while the Qur'anic *qitāl* is termed *jihād al-sayf*. The scholars al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), an Ash'arī theologian of a mystical bent, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), a Ḥanbalī jurist, for example, wrote treatises in their (p. 514) respective centuries praising the cultivation and practice of patient forbearance as the best expression of jihad, indispensable for resisting the incitements of the lower self (*al-naḥs al-ammāra*) (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 84–100; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Uddat al-ṣābirīn*). Afsaruddin subsequently maintains that a clear Qur'anic genealogy can thereby be established for the conception of internal, spiritual jihad under the rubric of *ṣabr*, which pre-dates the combative jihad in the Qur'an. She therefore takes issue with some modern scholars who have maintained the opposite in order to establish, often in a polemical vein, that the concept of the internal, non-combative jihad is a later construction and has no basis in the Qur'an (Cook 2005: 32–48; Morabia 1993: 330–44; Peters 1996: 187).

Some modern scholars have furthermore drawn attention to the occurrence of the term jihad in some Meccan verses with clearly non-combative connotations (Abdel Haleem 2010: 147–8; Bonner 2006: 21–2; Picken 2015: 127–8; Afsaruddin 2013b: 16–25). One such verse—Q. 22:78—states: 'Strive in regard to God a true striving as is His due' (*Wa-jāhidū fī 'llāh ḥaqqa jihādihi*). The Arabic locution *fī-'llāh* ('in regard to God') in this precise formulation occurs only once in the Qur'an and tends to be overlooked in most discussions of the term jihad. Another verse (Q. 29:69) uses *fīna* ('in regard to us') with similar significations. The variant formulation in Q. 22:78 of what became the more common locution *al-jihād fī sabīl allāh* is worthy of closer attention.

A survey of some key commentaries establishes the non-combative nature of jihad in Q. 22:78. The second/eighth-century exegete Muqātil ibn Sulaymān understands this verse to exhort believers to excel in the performance of good deeds in general so as to earn divine approbation. Al-Ṭabarī in his commentary refers to the early authority al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim (d. 105/723) who interpreted this verse as 'Perform a deed appropriately as is His due [God].' Al-Ṭabarī himself however prefers to understand this verse as containing the imperative to 'Struggle against the polytheists (*al-mushrikīn*) for the sake of God (*fī sabīl allāh*) as is rightly due Him.' In al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, therefore, the prepositional phrase *fī 'llāh* is now deemed to be the equivalent of *fī sabīl allāh* and therefore possibly connoting fighting in the context of struggling against the polytheists. After this decisive exegetical shift in al-Ṭabarī's commentary, both combative and non-combative meanings of jihad are included by later exegetes in relation to Q. 22:78. Al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), for example, refer to two types of exertion as fundamentally and equally con-

stitutive of jihad: (a) the spiritual exertion inherent in overcoming one's base desires in order to obey God; and (b) the general, physical exertion required to carry out one's religious obligations, including military activity (al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr, 8:254–5; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi', 12:91–2).

Another relevant Meccan verse (Q. 25:52) states 'Do not obey the unbelievers and strive against them mightily with it (*wa-jāhidhum bihi jihād^{an} kabīr^{an}*).' There is near-consensus among pre-modern and modern exegetes that 'it' refers to the Qur'an; jihad here is therefore an oral, discursive undertaking, in which the Qur'an is used as a *ḥujja* (proof) against those who opposed it (for some of these views, see Afsaruddin 2013b: 16–18).

A second pervasive assumption is that the military jihad is meant to be waged as expansionist war in order to aggressively promote and spread Islam. The opposite (p. 515) position—that the military jihad is primarily defensive—has been dismissed by some modern scholars, like Emile Tyan, as mere apologetics (1998: 539; cf. Peters 1996: 110, 148; Peters 1979: 163). Some have even gone as far as to state that in the Qur'an 'all war is assumed to involve religious issues' (Crone 2006: 5:456; cf. Bravmann 2009: 115; Firestone 1999: 88–90). As a consequence of this assumption, jihad is translated as 'holy war' in most Western works.

According to the classical exegetes, Q. 22:39–40 are widely regarded as the first revelation in the Medinan period (622–32 CE) that permitted Muslims to fight their Meccan enemies who had ruthlessly and violently persecuted them. These verses state:

Permission is given to those who are fought against (*yuqāṭalūna*) because they have been wronged/oppressed, and God is able to help them. These are they who have been wrongfully expelled from their homes merely for saying 'God is our Lord.' If God had not restrained some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which God's name is mentioned frequently would have been destroyed. Indeed God comes to the aid of those who come to His aid; verily He is powerful and mighty.

The defensive nature of fighting is underscored by the passive Arabic verb *yuqāṭalūna* ('those who are fought against') used in the verse, which however is erroneously translated in the active sense as 'those who fight' in a number of English translations, including those produced by George Sale, A. J. Arberry, and Muhammed Marmaduke Pickthall. The explicit reasons given in the verse for fighting are that the pagan Meccans had oppressed Muslims by driving the latter from their homes and subjecting them to physical torture and verbal abuse merely for asserting the oneness of God, as Muqātil ibn Sulaymān comments (Muqātil, Tafsīr, 3:130). The defensive nature of the fighting permitted in this verse is underscored by all subsequent major exegetes—al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and others (for their views, see Afsaruddin 2013b: 35–43).

Q. 22:40 also suggests that Muslims may fight to prevent the destruction of monasteries, churches, and synagogues at the hands of the polytheists, in addition to mosques. This was the understanding of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, who explicitly states that God defends

all these places of worship through Muslims (Muqātil, Tafsīr, 3:129–30). Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) understands this verse as referring to the polytheists during the time of Muḥammad, who would have triumphed over the Muslims and the People of the Book ‘in their protection’ (*fī dhimmatihim*) and whose houses of worship would have been destroyed if Muslims had not resorted to the military jihad (al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 4:199).

That fighting cannot be initiated by Muslims and can only be in response to a prior act of aggression is unambiguously stated in another Medinan verse, Q. 2:190. Together with the next four verses, this cluster (Q. 2:190–4) contains important injunctions for carrying out legitimate armed combat and form the nucleus for classical juridical discussions about the ethics of war and peace (e.g. al-Māwardī, al-Ḥawī, 14:102ff.). The exegetes are in general agreement that these verses refer to the events at al-Ḥudaybiyya in 8/628

(p. 516) in which year the Muslims were granted divine permission to defend themselves in the precincts of the Ka‘ba in the event of an attack upon them by the pagan Meccans during one of the pre-Islamic sacred months, something they were previously forbidden to do. Our earliest exegetes understand the interdiction in Q. 2:190 against committing aggression as a clear and general prohibition against initiating hostilities under any circumstance. The early exegete Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104/722) thus unequivocally subscribed to the view that Q. 2:190 explicitly forbids Muslims from ever initiating aggression against anyone, including obvious wrongdoers/oppressors (*al-ẓālimīn*), in any place, sacred or profane (Mujāhid, Tafsīr, 23). In the fourth/tenth century, al-Zamakhsharī similarly maintained that Muslims may not ever initiate fighting on the basis of Q. 2:190 (*Kashshāf*, 1:395–6) as did al-Rāzī in the early sixth/twelfth century (al-Tafsīr, 2:288).

So unambiguous is the Qur’anic proscription against initiating fighting in Q. 2:190 that some exegetes from the second/eighth century onward who wished to allow for expansionist military activity felt impelled to resort to “abrogation” (*naskh*) as a hermeneutic tool to nullify this explicit command. Al-Ṭabarī documents a lively debate among early exegetes concerning the implications of Q. 2:190. He notes that certain unnamed exegetes understood the verse as commanding the believers to fight the pagan Meccans only after the latter had initiated hostilities and to desist from combat when they (sc. the pagan Meccans) refrained from fighting. However, the Successors al-Rabī‘ ibn Anas (d. 139/756) and Ibn Zayd (d. 183/798) had been of the opinion that the ninth chapter (*al-Tawba* or *al-Barā’a*) of the Qur’an had abrogated this verse. In opposition to them, other exegetes (unnamed by al-Ṭabarī) had maintained that no part of this verse was abrogated and that the aggression forbidden in it, which was a categorical prohibition, applied specifically to non-combatants, especially women and children. Al-Ṭabarī himself accepts this latter exegesis as the most fitting—rather than being abrogated, he says the command ‘Do not commit aggression’ should be understood to mean that one should not kill children or women; additionally, those who pay the *jizya* from among the People of the Book and the Zoroastrians are similarly protected. Exceeding these limits constitutes aggression (al-Ṭabarī, al-Jāmi‘, 2:196–7). It should be noted that al-Ṭabarī’s reconstrual of the aggression clause in this manner became quite influential after him and became reflected in the classical laws of war and peace formulated by many jurists (cf. al-Sarakhsī, *Kitāb al-Mab-*

sūt, 10:6–8; Saḥnūn, *al-Mudawwana*, 2:587; al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī*, 14:192–4; Ibn Qudāma, al-Mughnī, 13:138ff.) Accordingly, these jurists also came to understand the non-aggression clause in this verse as primarily setting up a prohibition against fighting non-combatants, and not as a categorical prohibition against initiating fighting under any circumstance, as was clearly the view of several early exegetes.

Understood in this larger context, the next verse Q. 2:191 need not be understood to contain a general injunction to ‘slay the polytheists’ *qua* polytheists; it may instead be understood as calling for retaliation against the polytheists on account of their having resorted to persecution and prior aggression against Muslims, to which a proportional response is warranted according to Q. 2:194. Pre-modern exegeses actually record a range of views on the interpretation of this verse (for this discussion, see Afsaruddin 2013b: 43–58). The gradual understanding of the terms *fitna* and *ẓulm* occurring in this verse (p. 517) cluster as specifically referring to ‘associationism’ (*shirk*) and/or ‘unbelief’ (*kufr*) rather than broadly to ‘discord/trials’ and ‘wrongdoing’ respectively also allowed a significant number of pre-modern exegetes to make the case that the profession of polytheism in itself rather than the aggression of the polytheists was the *casus belli*. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, notes that the root meaning of *fitna* is ‘tribulation’ but goes on to express a preference for imputing the meaning of ‘polytheism’ to it (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, 2:197–8). This interpretation has been subjected to severe criticism by modern scholars (Riḍā 1999: 2:170–1; Abdel Haleem 2010: 151–4; al-Dawoody 2011: 60–3).

Similar reasons which legitimate an armed response to the adversary are contained in another important group of verses—Q. 9:12–13—which state:

If they break their pacts (*aymānāhum*) after having concluded them and revile your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief. Will you not fight a people who violated their oaths and had intended to expel the Messenger and commenced [hostilities] against you the first time?

The overwhelming majority of exegetes stress that the violation of pacts by the polytheists, their denigration of Islam, hostile intent toward Muḥammad, and their initial act of aggression towards Muslims had made fighting necessary against them (see an account of some of these views in Afsaruddin 2013b: 58–63). In his commentary on Q. 9:12, al-Ṭabarī says that it is a critique of those among the Quraysh who violated the terms of their pact with Muḥammad according to which they had agreed not to fight the Muslims nor provide aid to their enemies (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, 6:330).

Another verse Q. 4:75 exhorts Muslims to defend militarily those who are among ‘the feeble of men and of women and children who cry out, “Our Lord! Deliver us from this town in which the people are oppressors!”’ In the understanding of pre-modern jurists, this verse establishes humanitarian reasons for military intervention to aid those who are defenceless against their oppressors and who specifically call upon Muslims to provide them with help (e.g. al-Sulamī, *Aḥkām*, 610); a point stressed in modern juridical discourses (al-Qaraḍāwī 2009: 1:240–3; al-Zuḥaylī 1981: 93–4).

One verse that could be and has been understood by certain modern scholars (Peters 1996: 49; Firestone 1999: 88; Landau-Tasseron 2003: 3:39) as allowing fighting for the sake of religion is Q. 8:39 which states: 'And fight them until persecution/trials (*fitna*) is/are no more, and religion is entirely for God. But if they cease, then indeed God sees what they do' (cf. also Q. 2:193). Reading it with its preceding verse provides more context however: Q. 8:38 states: 'Tell those who disbelieve that if they cease [from persecution of believers] then that which is past will be forgiven them; but if they return [to it], then the example of the men of old has already gone before them as a warning.' As was the case with Q. 2:193, an overwhelming majority of exegetes from the second/eighth century onward understand *fitna* in Q. 8:39 to mean polytheism (*shirk*) which must be extirpated so that Islam may prevail. 'If they cease' is consequently understood to refer to the pagan Arabs who abandon polytheism. This is, for example, al-Ṭabarī's preferred understanding; in his comprehensive listing of various interpretations of this verse, he, (p. 518) however, indicates that some earlier commentators had held markedly different views. Thus, according to the Successor al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) *fitna* refers to tribulation (*balā'*) so that fighting is thereby understood to be undertaken to put an end to persecution and strife, not to uproot polytheism. Al-Ṭabarī also refers to a group of unnamed exegetes who were of the view that the phrase 'If they cease' refers to pagan Arabs who desist from fighting, not from polytheism, a position with which he disagrees (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2:245–7).

Al-Rāzī, like al-Ṭabarī, is of the opinion that the verse refers to pagan Arabs who abandon their polytheism. But he also goes on to cite the views of 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 93/711–2 or 94/712–3) who interpreted *fitna* in this verse to refer to the trials and persecution faced by the early Muslims in Mecca which aimed 'to lure them away from God's religion'. After the *hijra* (migration) to Medina, Muslims were given the divine command to fight the polytheists because they were persecuting Muslims and obstructing them from the free practice of their religion. According to 'Urwa, 'So that religion may be entirely for God' expresses the purpose of this sanctioned fighting which is to ensure the free and unfettered practice of religion in the absence of persecution (al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, 5: 483–4).

Modern Muslim scholars largely agree with al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's and 'Urwa's interpretations. Thus Muḥammad 'Abdūh in the late nineteenth century emphasizes that this verse specifically relates to the circumstances during the Prophet's time when he and his Companions were subjected to much hardship on account of their public profession of their faith. Fighting commanded in it was intended to put an end to this hardship and thus 'to ensure freedom of religion' (*wa-yakūn al-dīn ḥurran*) so that no one may be coerced into abandoning his or her religion and/or face persecution on account of it. This position, he comments, is in full conformity with Q. 2:256 which states, 'There is no compulsion in religion.' 'Abdūh, like 'Urwa and others in the first century of Islam, thus infers no broader mandate in this verse to continue to wage war so that Islam eventually supplants all other religions (Riḍā 1999: 9:554; cf. Sachedina 1990: 39–40).

The third widely-held assumption among Orientalist scholars is that, according to a final set of revelations which effectively 'abrogate' earlier conciliatory verses, the Qur'an calls for all-out aggressive war against non-Muslims until they see the error of their ways and convert to Islam or accept Muslim political domination. Thus Emile Tyan states, 'the fight (*djihād*) is obligatory even when they (the unbelievers) have not themselves started it' and that 'the *djihād* is nothing more than a means to effect conversion to Islam or submission to its authority' (Tyan 1998; cf. Khadduri 1955: 59). David Cook asserts that the Qur'an itself mandates expansionist military conquest (Cook 2005: 7ff.) while Reuven Firestone describes jihad in the Qur'an as 'a ruthless ideological war of religion against those labeled as unbelievers' (Firestone 1999: 90). Other modern scholars point out that although such perspectives can be encountered in the *kitāb al-jihād/siyar* sections of many legal manuals as a concession to Realpolitik, they cannot be justified on the basis of the Qur'an. Such views in fact countermand the overall tenor of relevant Qur'anic injunctions which sanction fighting only in limited circumstances and as defensive military activity (Mahmassani 1966: 321; Shaltūt, *Al-Islam wa'l-'Alāqāt al-Dawliyya*, 37–8; Abū Zahra 1964: 47–52, 89–94; Hamidullah 1977: 174–7; Esposito 2002: 26–46; Afsaruddin 2013a: 45–63).

The Qur'an does exhort able-bodied men to fight as an obligatory duty when legitimate cause exists and the acknowledged leader of the community proclaims the military jihad, as happened during the time of the Prophet. Q. 2:216 states: 'Fighting has been prescribed for you even though you find it displeasing. Perhaps you dislike something in which there is good for you and perhaps you find pleasing that which causes you harm. But God knows and you do not.' It is significant however that several exegetes were of the opinion that the plural 'you' (*kum*) in the phrase 'prescribed for you' (*kutiba alaykum*) occurring in the verse referred only to the Companions of the Prophet and that it did not constitute a normative command binding upon subsequent generations of Muslims. In his commentary, al-Ṭabarī notes that when 'Aṭā' [ibn Abī Rabāḥ; d. 115/733] was asked whether Q. 2:216 made fighting (*ghazw*) obligatory for people in general, he replied that it did not and that 'it was prescribed only for those [*ulā'ika*, sc. Companions] at that time (*ḥīna'idhin*)' (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2:357). In the fifth/eleventh century, al-Wāḥidī continues to endorse the early position that fighting as a religiously prescribed duty was restricted to the time of the Prophet, quoting 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ as his source (al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 1:319). Al-Rāzī acknowledges that widely divergent opinions have historically existed among the scholars. Thus the Syrian Umayyad jurist Makḥūl al-Shāmī (d. c.119/737) is said to have sworn at the Ka'ba that *ghazw* (military campaign) was a continuing religious obligation. According to the Medinan scholars 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Umar (d. 73/693) and 'Aṭā', however, this verse imposed the duty of fighting on the Companions of Muḥammad 'at that time only' (*fī dhālika 'l-waqt faqat*), that is, during the lifetime of the Prophet (al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, 2:384). We may deduce from al-Rāzī's exegesis that Syrian jurists like Makḥūl who supported Umayyad wars of expansion allowed for a general injunction to fight to be read into this verse in contradistinction to Medinan scholars not generally supportive of the Umayyads, such as 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ and Ibn 'Umar, who inferred no

such broad religious mandate and restricted the imposition of the duty of fighting on the Companions of the Prophet alone (cf. Mottahedeh and al-Sayyid 2001: 23–9).

Q. 9:5 and 9:29

In support of the position that the Qur'an mandates continuous warfare against non-Muslims *qua* non-Muslims, two verses in particular are often cited in the secondary literature on jihad: 9:5 which is understood to mandate fighting against all non-Abrahamic non-Muslims until they convert and 9:29 understood to require fighting against the People of the Book who refuse either to submit to Muslim (p. 520) rule, signified by their payment of the *jizya*, or embrace Islam (Firestone 1999: 88–90; Cook 2005: 10; Landau-Tasseron 2003: 3:39–40; Rubin 1984: 17ff.). These verses are also sometimes presented in modern scholarly literature (Peters 1996: 2–3; Rubin 1984: 18–20) and modern militant writings (e.g. Faraj 1986: 195–7) as having abrogated the more numerous irenic verses in the Qur'an. Other modern scholars have argued that these verses engaged in isolation from others that have much to say about the parameters of legitimate armed combat can be highly misleading and distorting of the ultimate purpose of *qitāl* in the Qur'an (al-Ghunnaimi 1968: 165–71; Abdel Haleem 2008: 307–40; Esposito 2002: 64–8; Afsaruddin 2013b: 65–94).

A survey of key exegetical works on these verses reveals in fact a broad spectrum of views on the meaning of these verses in the pre-modern period, as follows.

Q. 9:5 states: 'When the sacred months have lapsed, then kill the polytheists (*al-mushrikīn*) wherever you may encounter them. Seize them and encircle them and lie in wait for them. But if they repent and perform the prayer and give the *zakāt*, then let them go on their way, for God is forgiving and merciful.' Most pre-modern exegetes, particularly before the Mamluk period, restrict the applicability of this verse to the Arab polytheists (*mushrikūn*) of the first/seventh century with whom there is no pact (*'ahd*) and who may be fought wherever they are to be found and whenever, except for the three sacred months of Dhū'l-Qa'da, Dhū'l-Hijja, and al-Muḥarram when fighting was traditionally forbidden in the pre-Islamic period. It is significant that pre-Mamluk exegetes, like al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Wāhidī, tended not to pay much attention to this verse; they also do not maintain that Q. 9:5 had abrogated other verses in the Qur'an that counsel good relations with peaceful people, regardless of their religious affiliation. Al-Ṭabarī specifically states that it is not correct to assume that the verse commands the slaying of polytheists in every situation; he refers to Q. 47:4 which, in this context, unambiguously allows prisoners of war to be ransomed or released outright (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6:320). In his brief commentary, al-Zamakhsharī identifies the intended polytheists in the verse as 'those who betray you and rise up against you' who may be killed in holy and non-holy places and taken captive, and restricted in their movements (al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:13–14). Like his predecessors, al-Zamakhsharī does not consider this to be an abrogating verse. Worthy of note is al-Zamakhsharī's depiction of the polytheists who should be

fought against as specifically those who break their pledges and display *a priori* hostility to Muslims—not polytheists as a general collectivity.

With regard to the status and function of Q. 9:5, al-Qurṭubī in the seventh/thirteenth century, like al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī before him, considers it to be neither abrogated nor abrogating (al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 8:70). However, al-Qurṭubī spends more time explicating this verse than most of his predecessors, indicating that the need to justify military activity on the basis of scriptural warrants was more of a pressing issue in his time as Muslims in al-Andalus were confronted by advancing Christian armies from the north. It is also highly significant that none of the exegetes in this survey up to al-Qurṭubī had specifically dubbed this verse the *āyat al-sayf* ('sword verse'). Afsaruddin notes that (p. 521) although Muqātil ibn Sulaymān already uses the term *āyat al-sayf* in his commentary (Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 4:301–2; although not in the section where he discusses Q. 9:5), none of the later commentators she surveyed used this designation specifically for Q. 9:5 until Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2:322; cf. Afsaruddin 2013b: 75). Ibn Kathīr's commentary on this verse and his explicit designation of it as 'the sword verse' indicates to us that a partiality had developed by the eighth/fourteenth century during the Mamluk period for the derivation of an expansive general mandate from otherwise historically circumscribed Qur'anic verses—such as Q. 9:5—to fight or punish all those deemed enemies of Islam in the later period. In Ibn Kathīr's time, these enemies were the Crusaders as well as the Mongols.

The so-called *jizya* verse (Q. 9:29) was also understood by a number of influential exegetes as granting permission to Muslims to fight in general a different group of non-Muslims—the People of the Book—who refuse to accept Islam or submit to Muslim political rule. The verse states: 'Fight those who do not believe in God nor in the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His messenger have forbidden and do not follow the religion of truth from among those who were given the Book until they proffer the *jizya* with [their] hands in humility.' *Jizya* refers to a kind of poll-tax levied on financially solvent male scriptuaries (primarily Jews and Christians, but also extended in practice to Zoroastrians and others), usually in exchange for exemption from military service (cf. Cengiz Kallek, 'Jizya'). Mujāhid's extant brief comment on this verse merely identifies the occasion of revelation as the battle of Tabūk in 8/630 (Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, 99). Exegetes after him identify the referents in this verse as Jews and Christians in general who pay the *jizya* willingly and humbly in return for their protection by Muslim rulers (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6:349–50). Al-Ṭabarī says that the historical context for the revelation of this verse was war with Byzantium, and soon thereafter Muḥammad undertook the campaign of Tabūk, as briefly referenced by Mujāhid. But unlike Mujāhid who indicates the warring Byzantine Christians as the referent in this verse, al-Ṭabarī treats Jews and Christians as undifferentiated collectivities, making no distinction between hostile and peaceable factions within them. Furthermore, their legal subjugation and general doctrinal inferiority to Muslims are stressed (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6:349)—these views are consistently replicated by later exegetes, with the notable exception of al-Qurṭubī, who vigorously advocates for

compassionate treatment of the People of the Book under the protection of Muslims (al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'* 8:106; cf. Afsaruddin 2013b: 75–9 for a range of exegetical views).

Based on the historical context provided in some of the sources for Q. 9:29, modern scholars like Muḥammad Ṭal'at al-Ghunaimī have arrived at the conclusion that the verse contains a specific reference to the Byzantine Christians of the time hostile to Muslims and not to the People of the Book in general (al-Ghunaimī 1968: 170–1). Muhammad Abdel Haleem has pointed out that the Arabic partitive preposition *min* in the verse indicates that specific contingents from among the People of the Book who are wrongdoers are being referenced here and not Jews and Christians in their entirety (Abdel Haleem 2012: 75).

(p. 522) Cessation of Fighting and Peacemaking

Some pre-modern and modern scholars (discussed below) further make the case that the apparent harshness of the commandments contained in Q. 9:5 and 9:29 can be considerably ameliorated and their applicability limited to specific conditions by reading the Qur'an holistically and without invocation of the concept of abrogation. The Qur'an after all in addition to stating who can be fought against and for what reasons also unambiguously refers to those who cannot be fought against. Thus, in several verses, the Qur'an states that Muslims cannot fight non-Muslims who are peaceful and show no hostile intent towards them. One verse (Q. 4:90) states: 'If they hold themselves aloof from you and do not wage war against you and offer you peace, then God does not permit you any way against them.'

Two significant verses (Q. 60:8–9) mandate kind and just interactions with those who are peaceful, regardless of their religious beliefs, in contrast to those who willfully commit aggression:

God does not forbid you from being kind and equitable to those who have neither made war on you on account of your religion nor driven you from your homes; indeed God loves those who are equitable. God forbids you however from making common cause with those who fight you on account of your religion and evict you from your homes and who support [others] in driving you out.

Al-Ṭabarī in his exegesis dismisses the suggestion of others that Q. 60:8–9 are abrogated; instead he affirms that they clearly permit Muslims to be kind to all those who bear no ill-will towards them, regardless of their religion and creed. For God, he says, loves those who are equitable, who give people their due rights, are personally just to them, and do good to those who are good to them (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi'*, 12:62–3). These views were repeated by practically all the exegetes who came after him; among the later exegetes, al-Qurṭubī is the most adamant in maintaining that the exhortation in Q. 60:8 to be kind to those who had caused Muslims no harm was applicable to everyone who belonged in this category, regardless of their religious affiliation, and that the command was unambiguous

and valid (*muḥkama*) for all time (al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 18:54–5; cf. Afsaruddin 2013b: 82–7).

Another important verse—Q. 8:61—requires Muslims to cease fighting as soon as the other side desists from fighting and makes peaceful overtures. The verse states, 'And if they should incline to peace, then incline to it [yourself] and place your trust in God; for He is all-hearing and all-knowing.' This point is stressed by al-Ṭabarī who comments that when a people enters into Islam, or pays the *jizya*, or establishes friendly relations with Muslims, then the latter should do the same 'for the sake of peace and peacemaking' (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6:278). Al-Ṭabarī notes that the Successor Qatāda ibn (p. 523) Di'āma (d. 118/736) had maintained that this verse had been abrogated by Q. 9:5 and 9:36 but he himself dismisses this interpretation as insupportable on the basis of the Qur'an, the *Sunna*, or reason (al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6:278–9). The unabrogated status of the verse was similarly affirmed by a majority of exegetes after him (see this discussion in Afsaruddin 2013b: 90–3). Modern scholars in particular have emphasized the continuing applicability of these conciliatory verses and criticized the principle of abrogation that was applied to them by some pre-modern exegetes (Jamāl al-Banna 1984: 54–7; Jum'a 2005: 22–4; Zuḥaylī 1981: 106–20; al-Dawoody 2011: 63–9).

Conclusion

Despite the multivalence of the Qur'anic term *jihad* (and other derivatives from its root), academic (and popular) discussions of this term overwhelmingly emphasize its military dimensions, which are then projected onto the Qur'anic text itself. A detailed survey of relevant Qur'anic verses establishes the multiple inflections of *jihad*. The non-combative dimensions of *jihad* are encapsulated by the term *ṣabr* (patient forbearance) particularly in the Meccan period to connote internal, personal striving to fulfil God's commandments, such as prayer; this term is also invoked in the Medinan period, sometimes in conjunction with fighting. *Ṣabr* therefore may be regarded as the constant feature of *jihad* understood as human striving in general while *qitāl* is its conditional feature, restricted to certain circumstances outlined by the Qur'an. *Jihad* is then the broad umbrella term which encompasses these different modes of human striving on earth. A close study of these Qur'anic terms and the various contexts in which they are deployed allow us to identify a broader semantic landscape for *jihad* and to revise and correct certain construals of this term that invariably highlight its military component.

Two verses in particular—Q. 9:5 and 9:29—have received disproportionate attention in academic and non-academic circles as corroborating the view that the Qur'an itself requires adult Muslim men to fight the military *jihad* against non-Muslims *qua* non-Muslims until they convert to Islam or submit to Muslim rule. As demonstrated above, a much broader and contested spectrum of exegetical views on the purview of these verses and their abrogating status existed in the pre-modern period. This has led a significant number of modern scholars, mostly Muslim, to stress that the Qur'an read holistically—without considering any of its verses to be abrogated—can be understood to clearly advocate

peaceful relations among humans regardless of their religious beliefs. Fighting when undertaken for principled reasons—primarily in response to prior aggression by the enemy; its violation of treaties; and persecution of defenceless people—is defensive and limited in nature. The Qur'anic jihad is therefore most categorically not 'holy war;' it is rather a broad term that refers to human striving on earth in all its various dimensions.

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