

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Introduction*

### *What Is Jihad?*

In the debates over Islam taking place today, no principle is invoked more often than jihad. Jihad is often understood as the very heart of contemporary radical Islamist ideology.<sup>1</sup> By a sort of metonymy, it can refer to the radical Islamist groups themselves.<sup>2</sup> Some observers associate jihad with attachment to local values and resistance against the homogenizing trends of globalization.<sup>3</sup> For others, jihad represents a universalist, globalizing force of its own: among these there is a wide spectrum of views. At one end of this spectrum, anti-Islamic polemicists use jihad as proof of Islam's innate violence and its incompatibility with civilized norms.<sup>4</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, some writers insist that jihad has little or nothing to do with externally directed violence. Instead, they declare jihad to be a defensive principle,<sup>5</sup> or else to be utterly pacific, inward-directed, and the basis of the true meaning of Islam which, they say, is peace.

<sup>1</sup> Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*.

<sup>2</sup> Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*.

<sup>3</sup> Barber, *Jihad versus McWorld*.

<sup>4</sup> Pipes, "What Is Jihad?"

<sup>5</sup> For a nuanced argument along these lines, see Sachedina, "The Development of Jihad in Islamic Revelation and History," and "Justifications for Just War in Islam."

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Thus Islam, through jihad, equals violence and war; or else, through jihad, it equals peace. Now surely it is not desirable, or even possible, to reduce so many complex societies and polities, covering such broad extents of time and space, to any single governing principle. And in fact, not all contemporary writers view the matter in such stark terms. Many do share, however, an assumption of nearly total continuity, in Islam, between practice and norm and between history and doctrine. And it is still not uncommon to see Islam described as an unchanging essence or a historical cause. The jihad then conveniently provides a key to understanding that essence or cause, and so we are told that Islam is fundamentally “about” war, that it “accounts for” the otherwise inexplicable suicidal activity of certain individuals, that it “explains” the occurrence of wars in history, and so on.

None of this so far has told us what jihad actually is, beyond its tremendous resonance in present and past. Is it an ideology that favors violence? A political means of mass mobilization? A spiritual principle of motivation for individuals?

While we do not wish for this to be an argument over words alone, we cannot understand the doctrines or the historical phenomena without understanding the words as precisely as possible. The Arabic word *jihad* does not mean “holy war” or “just war.” It literally means “striving.” When followed by the modifying phrase *fi sabil Allah*, “in the path of God,” or when—as often—this phrase is absent but assumed to be in force, *jihad* has the specific sense of fighting for the sake of God (whatever we understand that to mean). In addition, several other Arabic words are closely related to *jihad* in meaning and usage. These include *ribat*, which denotes pious activity, often related to warfare, and in many contexts seems to constitute a defensive counterpart to a more activist, offensive *jihad*. *Ribat* also refers to a type of building where this sort of defensive warfare can take place: a fortified place where garrisons of volunteers reside for extended periods of time while holding Islamic territory against the enemy. *Ghazw*, *ghazwa*, and *ghaza*<sup>7</sup> have to do with raiding (from which comes the French word *razzia*). *Qital*, or “fighting,” at times conveys something similar to jihad/*ribat*, at times not. *Harb* means “war” or “fighting,” usually in a more neutral sense, carrying less ideological weight than the other terms. All these words, however, have wide semantic ranges and

frequently overlap with one other. They also change with distance and time.

Jihad refers, first of all, to a body of legal doctrine. The comprehensive manuals of classical Islamic law usually include a section called *Book of Jihad*. Sometimes these sections have different names, such as *Book of Siyar* (law of war) or *Book of Jizya* (poll tax), but their contents are broadly similar. Likewise, most of the great compendia of Tradition (*hadith*; see chapter 3) contain a *Book of Jihad*, or something like it. Some Islamic jurists also wrote monographic works on jihad and the law of war. Not surprisingly, these jurists sometimes disagreed with each other. Some, but not all, of these disagreements correlated to the division of the Sunni Muslim legal universe into four classical schools (*madhhabs*), and of Islam as a whole into the sectarian groupings of Sunnis, Shī'is, Kharijis, and others. Like Islamic law in general, this doctrine of jihad was neither the product nor the expression of the Islamic State: it developed apart from that State, or else in uneasy coexistence with it. (This point will receive nuance in chapter 8.)

These treatments of jihad in manuals and other works of Islamic law usually combine various elements. A typical *Book of Jihad* includes the law governing the conduct of war, which covers treatment of nonbelligerents, division of spoils among the victors, and such matters. Declaration and cessation of hostilities are discussed, raising the question of what constitutes proper authority. A *Book of Jihad* will also include discussion of how the jihad derives from Scripture (the Quran) and the Example of the Prophet (the Sunna), or in other words, how the jihad has been commanded by God. There are often—especially in the hadith collections—rhetorical passages urging the believers to participate in the wars against the enemies of God. There is usually an exposition of the doctrine of martyrdom (see chapter 5), which is thus part of jihad. The list of topics is much longer, but this much can begin to give an idea of what the jihad of the jurists includes.

Jihad is also more than a set of legal doctrines. Historians of Islam often encounter it and try to understand its meaning and especially when they think about such things as motivation, mobilization, and political authority. For instance, regarding the earliest period of Islam, why did the Muslims of the first generations fight so effectively? What was the basis of their solidarity? How did they form their armies? Why did they assume the attitudes that

they did toward their own commanders and rulers? For historians interested in such questions, it is impossible to study the historical manifestations of jihad apart from the legal doctrine, for several reasons. First, some—though far from all—of the historical narratives that are available to us regarding early Islam seem to have been formed by juridical perspectives, no doubt in part because many of the early Muslim historians were jurists themselves.<sup>6</sup> Second, the doctrine of jihad had a role of its own in events, a role that increased over time (see chapter 8). And not only the doctrine, but also its exponents and champions: the jurists and scholars known collectively as the “learned,” the *‘ulama*: many of these were protagonists in the ongoing drama of the jihad in several ways including, at critical junctures, their participation (both symbolic and physical) in the conduct of warfare (see chapter 7). Jihad, for the historian, is thus not only about clashes between religions, civilizations, and states but also about clashes among groups within Islamic societies. Equally important, jihad has never ceased changing, right down to our own day. If it ever had an original core, this has been experienced anew many times over.

### *Just War and Holy War*

The concept of just war, *bellum iustum*, has a long history in the West.<sup>7</sup> The medieval part of this history is particularly Christian, in part because of the emphasis on love (*agapē*, *caritas*) in Christian doctrine and the difficulties this created for Christian thinkers and political authorities in their conduct of war. Then, with the introduction of natural law theory into the law of war in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and with Europe’s increasing domination of the seas, Western doctrines of just war came to prevail over both Christian and non-Christian states—whether they liked it or not—and their interactions in war and peace.

<sup>6</sup> Brunschvig, “Ibn ‘Abdihakam et la conquête de l’Afrique du Nord par les Arabes.”

<sup>7</sup> A starting point is provided by the essays collected in Kelsay and Johnson, eds., *Just War and Jihad*. See especially Johnson’s “Historical Roots and Sources of the Just War Tradition in Western Culture,” 3–30; also his *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions*; and Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages*.

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Now, it is possible to draw meaningful parallels between these Western doctrines of just war and the classical doctrine of jihad expressed by the Muslim jurists. However, there are also differences. For the most part, the Muslim jurists do not make the “justice” of any instance of jihad the term of their discussion. Likewise, the concept of holy war, at least as we use it now, derives from Christian doctrine and experience, especially relating to the Crusades. Scholars of the ancient Near East and the Hebrew scriptures have broadened the concept, and so too have anthropologists. This anthropological literature on holy war may help us to ask about the links between the jihad, as it first emerged, with warfare in Arabia before Islam. It may also help us to see the role of jihad in the conversion to Islam of other nomadic and tribal peoples, such as the Berbers in North Africa and the Turks in Central Asia. At the same time, we must remember that the Muslim jurists did not usually discuss these matters in these terms; for them any authentic instance of jihad was necessarily both holy and just.

In the medieval Islamic world, there were philosophers who, unlike the jurists, were willing to foreground questions of justice and injustice in their discussions of warfare. They did this by adapting Islamic concepts into a Greek, mainly Platonic field of reference.<sup>8</sup> The most important of these philosophers was the great al-Farabi (d. 950). Al-Farabi considers a range of situations in which wars may be considered just or unjust. They are unjust if they serve a ruler’s narrow, selfish purposes or if they are devoted solely to conquest and bloodshed. Just wars may, of course, be defensive, but they may also, under some circumstances, be offensive: what makes them just is their role in achieving the well-being of the “virtuous city,” that association which we all need in order to attain happiness.<sup>9</sup> Here al-Farabi uses not only the Arabic word *harb* (war) but also, on occasion, the word *jihad*, though not quite in the technical sense assigned to it by Islamic legal doctrine. It seems likely, all the same, that al-Farabi was trying to find a philosophical place for the juridical doctrine of jihad within his teachings regarding the virtuous city and its ruler, the Islamic philosopher-king.

<sup>8</sup> Kraemer, “The Jihād of the Falāsifa”; Heck, “*Jihad* Revisited,” esp. 103–106.

<sup>9</sup> Butterworth, “Al-Fârâbî’s Statecraft,” 79–100.

We find a synthesis of juridical and philosophical views in the famous *Muqaddima*, or introduction to the study of history, of Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406).<sup>10</sup> Ibn Khaldun begins his discussion of wars by saying that these “have always occurred in the world since God created it,” naturally and unavoidably, because of men’s desire for revenge and their need for self-defense. Ibn Khaldun then identifies four types of war. The first of these “usually occurs between neighboring tribes and competing families.” The second is “war caused by hostility,” whereby “savage nations living in the desert” attack their neighbors, solely with a view to seizing their property. These two types are “wars of outrage and sedition” (*hurub baghy wa-fitna*). The third type is “what the divine law calls *jihad*.” The fourth consists of “dynastic wars against seceders and those who refuse obedience.” Of these four types, “the first two are unjust and lawless,” while the last two are “wars of jihad and justice” (*hurub jihad wa-ʿadl*). In this way, as Charles Butterworth remarked, Ibn Khaldun “distinguishes just war from jihad and allows neither to encompass the other.”<sup>11</sup>

The juridical discourse on jihad had incomparably more influence on intellectual life within premodern Muslim societies than did these philosophical discussions. The same applies to its influence over preaching, the popular imagination in general, and the running of the affairs of armies and states. Modern and contemporary Muslim thinkers, on the other hand, have had a great deal to say about justice and injustice in relation to the doctrine of jihad and war in general,<sup>12</sup> but this takes us farther than we can go here.

### *Warfare and Jihad*

We have seen that certain philosophical writers distinguished between, on the one hand, jihad, which they understood to be a part of the divine law of Islam, and, on the other hand, the phenomenon of warfare, which has occurred throughout history in all places inhabited by humans. In addition to this philosophical discourse, the premodern Islamic world was familiar with several other ways

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 2:73–74; Kraemer, “The Jihad of the Falāsifa,” 288–289.

<sup>11</sup> Butterworth, “Al-Fārābī’s Statecraft,” 96–97, n. 17.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Sachedina, “Justifications for Just War in Islam.”

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of speaking and writing about warfare, distinct from—though often related to—the practice and doctrine of jihad. Here we may briefly mention a few of these.<sup>13</sup>

Islam arose in an environment where warfare—or at any rate, armed violence with some degree of organization and planning—was a characteristic of everyday life. Even if it often amounted to little more than livestock-rustling, its threat was never far away, especially in those regions of the Arabian peninsula that lay beyond the control of rulers and states. We see this in the great corpus of pre-Islamic poetry, our most vivid and extensive source of information about Arabia on the eve of Islam. Some of this poetry was devoted entirely to the joys and travails of fighting, especially in the poems collected afterward under the rubric of *hamasa* (valor). War also loomed large in the countless dirges composed in honor of its victims. And in the songs of praise that the poets recited in honor of their patrons, their kin, and themselves, martial valor usually topped the list of virtues, followed closely by generosity. In all these poems, war typically appears as something ordained by fate, unwelcome but necessary, often imposed by the obligation to seek revenge for wrongs done to one's kin. Sometimes we find a willingness to be the first aggressor, together with a grim enthusiasm for the activity of fighting itself: "Yea a son of war am I—continually do I heighten her blaze, and stir her up to burn whenever she is not yet kindled."<sup>14</sup> Most often, however, this enthusiasm is tempered by patient endurance (*sabr*) in the face of the constant, lurking possibility of violent death, as well as the inevitability of death itself, which here is the extinguishing of the individual, the end of everything. Thus the old Arabic poems, together with the prose narratives that accompany them, express a heroic ideal, where the courage and endurance of a few individuals illuminate a dark, violent world.

Long after the arrival of Islam, this ancient heroic ethos continued to hold considerable power and attraction. So for instance, when our sources report the death of a commander in the Islamic armies, they sometimes give the text of a dirge that was recited

<sup>13</sup> For the following, see also Donner, "The Sources of Islamic Conceptions of War."

<sup>14</sup> Charles Lyall, *The Dirvans of 'Abid ibn al-Abras, of Asad, 'Amir ibn al-Tufail, and of 'Amir ibn Sa'sa'a*, 29, verse 10; cited by Donner, "The Sources of Islamic Conceptions of War," 36.

on the occasion. Here we still find the thematics of the pre-Islamic poetry, praising the deceased for his courage and generosity, and for his steadfast defense of his kin and all those who sought his protection. More often, however, and in a great variety of contexts, we find the old Arab heroism blended together with Islamic piety. We do not have to consider this a contradiction, for it is precisely this combination of self-denying monotheistic piety and swashbuckling derring-do that we find in many genres of Islamic literature relating to the jihad—for instance, in popular poems and romances and even in (apparently) sober biographical literature (see chapter 7). Nonetheless, the old heroic ethos was not, in the end, an Islamic virtue, and it constituted, for many people, a point of controversy.

Rulers in the Islamic world sometimes supported the activity of religious and legal scholars who produced, among other things, learned treatises on the jihad. However, within the royal courts, and in the concentric circles of influence and prestige that emanated outward from them, there was also a keen interest in viewing warfare from a broader perspective. We find an early example of this attitude in the lengthy chapter on war (*kitab al-barb*) written, in the mid-to-late ninth century, by the polymath man of letters Ibn Qutayba.<sup>15</sup> This chapter opens with citations from the sayings of the Prophet (the hadith) and the Quran, and some narratives from the early, heroic period of Islam. Soon, however, Ibn Qutayba begins to quote from the literature of “the Indians” and especially “the Persians” of the Sasanian dynasty, which had been defeated and destroyed during the early Islamic conquests some two centuries previously. Here we find counsel on many matters, including strategy, tactics, and the correct demeanor to observe in battles and on campaigns. The sources of this advice are utterly non-Islamic, which implies that any civilized belligerent, of any religion, may take advantage of it if he wishes. And at times the advice is indeed quite worldly, as when the “strategems of war” ascribed to an anonymous Persian king include “distracting people’s attention away from the war they are involved in by keeping them busy with other things.”<sup>16</sup> This material is mainly in the mode—highly fashionable in Ibn Qutayba’s day and

<sup>15</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Uyun al-akbbar*, 1:107–222.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:112.

long afterward—of advice for princes. At the same time, however, Ibn Qutayba returns repeatedly to narratives from the early Islamic campaigns and to religious norms regarding the conduct of warfare. He thus tries to integrate two different conceptions of war (Sasanian/imperial and Islamic/jihad), which nonetheless remain distinct.

Throughout the centuries there was a steady, if not enormous, production of manuals and treatises on technical matters such as tactics, siegecraft, armor, weapons, and horsemanship.<sup>17</sup> The audience for this literature must have consisted of military professionals—a group which, as we shall see, stood apart from the military amateurs who made up the units of “volunteers.” This technical literature tended to show less interest in the precedents of centuries past and more interest in the practices and activities of the enemy in the present time. For these and other reasons, it stands apart from the literature of jihad.

Finally, war is a central theme of the apocalyptic literature that flourished intermittently among medieval Muslims, as well as among their Christian and Jewish neighbors. Here war fills out the catastrophic scenarios that culminate in the end of this world as we know it—even though in these scenarios we do find, after a cataclysmic evil war, a just war led by the redeeming figure of the Mahdi. These apocalyptic wars are, of course, related to the Islamic notions of jihad and martyrdom,<sup>18</sup> but to a surprising extent, the relationship does not appear very close. It is noteworthy that at least from the second century of the Hijra/eighth century CE onward, Islamic tradition considered these matters under two different rubrics, *fitan* (wars of the Last Days) and *jihad*.<sup>19</sup>

Thus there were several ways available of thinking and arguing about warfare, its conduct, and its justifications. All the same, for most times and places in the premodern Islamic world, we must consider the religious discourse of jihad as the dominant one in this area, not only because of its prestige and its place in the central

<sup>17</sup> See Elgood, ed., *Islamic Arms and Armour*; and Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs*, with bibliography.

<sup>18</sup> Heck, “*Jihad* Revisited,” 102. Perhaps it is true, as Heck says, that “religious martyrdom . . . requires the addition of an eschatological climate.” However, the mature Islamic doctrine of martyrdom (see chapter 5, below) seems to have washed out this “eschatological climate” rather thoroughly.

<sup>19</sup> See Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihad,” and below, p. 131–132.

system of values but also because it comprehended so much. Jihad, at least as it emerged in its full articulation toward the end of the eighth century of the Common Era, included exhortations to the believers to attain religious merit through striving and warfare. It also gave an account of the will of God, as this had become known to mankind through God's Word and through the Example of His Prophet, and as it had then become realized, over and over again, through the martial activities of the community of believers. At the same time, the jihad included a large body of precise instructions regarding the conduct of warfare, very much in the here and now, answering to the technical requirements of recruitment, tactics, and strategy. This does not mean, however, that the jihad—as expressed in the first instance by jurists—was preeminently practical in nature: in fact it often tended to be backward-looking, seeking models of conduct in an idealized past. Now we may consider how these Islamic jurists, and others, have construed the jihad and how they have argued about it.

### *Fields of Debate*

Over the centuries, as Muslim jurists reiterated and refined the criteria for jihad, they referred constantly to several underlying questions. We may begin by singling out two of these.

#### *Who Is the Enemy?*

If we think of jihad first of all as a kind of organized warfare against external opponents, then who precisely are those opponents? How and under what conditions must war be waged against them? What is to be done with them once they have been defeated? Questions of this kind predominated in many of the juridical debates about the jihad, especially during the early, formative centuries of Islam.

Once some sort of consensus has been achieved regarding these enemies from outside, then what about internal adversaries? All agree that war may be waged, at least as a last resort, against Muslims who rebel against a constituted Muslim authority. Is such war then a kind of jihad? And must these internal Muslim rebels be treated in the same way as the external non-Muslim opponents just mentioned? Here we find that in actual historical experience,

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the contending parties in intra-Muslim conflicts did often have recourse to the doctrine and above all, the rhetoric of jihad. In juridical discourse, however, the matter is somewhat complicated. Organized armed action against the Muslim political rebel (*baghi*), as well as against two other types of malfeasant, the apostate (*mur-tadd*) who renounces his own religion of Islam, and the brigand (*muharib*) who threatens the established order while seeking only his own personal gain, is indeed often described as a form of jihad. Loyal Muslims who die in combat against these rebels, apostates, and brigands achieve the status of martyr (see chapter 5). On the other hand, the status of the adversaries in these conflicts is considered to be different from that of the non-Muslim adversaries in the “external” jihad. Here we see differences in approach between Sunni and Shi’i jurists.<sup>20</sup> For the most part, however, we find that these matters are actually dealt with under headings of Islamic law other than jihad. In fact, it is possible to provide a nuanced, theoretical discussion of political rebels and rebellion in Islam while referring to jihad only intermittently or even minimally.<sup>21</sup> Thus, while the discussion of rebels is part of the juridical discourse on jihad, it is not, at least in a consistent way, at the heart of that discourse. Here, as elsewhere, we encounter the temptation of allowing the notion of jihad to apply to almost everything—a temptation that is best for us to avoid.<sup>22</sup>

The Quran and Tradition often speak of oppressors. What happens if oppressors arise within the Muslim community itself? Must we carry out jihad against them? Here, of course, we are looking at the problem of rebellion from the point of view of the ruled, instead of the rulers: is there a right to resistance against an unjust ruler? From very early on in the history of Islam, some Muslims have deployed the ideology and vocabulary of jihad against what

<sup>20</sup> Kraemer, “Apostates, Rebels and Brigands,” esp. 58–59: “Whereas Sunnīs seldom characterized warfare against rebels as *ḡibād*, although one killed fighting them was considered a martyr, the Šī’īs regarded suppression of rebellion as *ḡibād* and the *bugāt* [rebels] as infidels.”

<sup>21</sup> As in Abou El Fadl, “Ahkām al-Bughāt”; idem, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*.

<sup>22</sup> We see this in Alfred Morabia’s masterful *Le Ḡibād dans l’Islam médiéval* (hereafter *Le Ḡibād*), which tends to make jihad into an all-embracing principle governing almost everything: so the discussion of “internal, coercive” jihad (against rebels, etc.), 298–309.

they have seen as oppressive and tyrannous (though Muslim) rulers. From a later perspective, these oppressors might be described as political rebels or religious heretics—though here we run the risk of using the terminology and conceptual patterns of Christianity. The point for now is simply that jihad has a long history as an ideology of internal resistance (discussed in chapter 8 below).

Finally, many have claimed that the authentic jihad, the “greater jihad,” is not warfare waged in the world against external adversaries but is rather an internal spiritualized war waged against the self and its base impulses. What does it mean to have such an adversary and to make war against it? This question will be taken up again very shortly.

### *Who Is in Charge?*

Early Muslim jurisprudence provided an answer to this question: the imam, which then meant much the same thing as the caliph, the supreme ruler and head (after God Himself) over the entire Muslim community and polity. The imam has ultimate responsibility for military operations, both offensive and defensive; in particular, offensive campaigns outside the Islamic lands, against external foes, require his permission and supervision. However, since the imam or caliph could not be everywhere at once, it was always necessary for him to delegate his authority in these matters. Meanwhile, over time, his power and authority diminished in the world, and rivals emerged. Furthermore, jihad was acknowledged to be not only a collective activity: it was also a matter of concern and choice for the individual, of great consequence for his or her personal salvation. Thus the jihad became the site of an argument over authority, and it has remained one right down to the present day.

We have already mentioned the insistence, in many writings of our own day on jihad and Islam, on continuity. First of all, continuity in time: today’s historical actors are often seen to be repeating or reenacting things that happened long ago. Second, continuity between doctrine and practice: so for instance, calls to warfare and martyrdom in Quran and Tradition are thought to provide explanations for today’s violent behavior. This claim to continuity requires critical examination. However, there is no doubt that Muslims have often expressed a strong desire for continuity with their own past. In this case, does performing jihad establish continuity with the Prophet Muhammad, through literal imitation of

the actions he took during his military campaigns in Arabia? Or does it involve immersion in the study of the divine law? Or does it mean identifying oneself with the organized authority, the Islamic state—which in the language of early Islam often means the caliph/imam himself? Or does performance of jihad establish continuity with that other great protagonist of early Islam, the community, which did, after all, forge its place in the world through warfare and campaigns?

Other themes of debate in this book can be expressed in the form of binary oppositions that recur in the writings of medieval and modern authors, jurists and nonjurists, Muslims and non-Muslims. These include the following.

*“Real” Jihad versus “Mere” Fighting*

In the Hadith or Tradition (see chapter 3), as well as in some other sources, a distinction is often made between, on the one side, militant activity (usually called *jihad*, or *ribat*, or both) that has authentic status and, on the other side, fighting undertaken with no concern for divine commandments, divine reward, and so on. It is often stated that some people act in accordance with jihad, while others fight only for the sake of worldly things such as glory, plunder, and power. The distinction is polemical, and perhaps applied arbitrarily or unfairly on some occasions.

*External and Internal Jihad*

Most accounts of the jihad agree that it has both an external and an internal aspect. The external jihad is an activity in the world, involving physical combat against real enemies in real time. The internal jihad, sometimes called the “greater jihad,” is a struggle against the self, in which we suppress our own base desires, purify ourselves, and then rise to contemplation of higher truth. Most modern Western writings on the jihad consider that the external jihad, the physical combat against real adversaries, was the first to arrive in history and has priority in most ways. In this view, the internal jihad, the spiritualized combat against the self, is secondary and derivative, despite all the importance it eventually acquired in Muslim thought and society.<sup>23</sup> However, much of contemporary Muslim opinion favors the opposite view. As a question of first

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 291–336 (chapter on “Le ġihād interne,” the internal jihad).

origins, we can argue that elements of the internal jihad were already present at the beginning, including in the Quran itself, and that jihad has often been, in equal measure, a struggle against both the enemy within and the enemy without.

### *Collective and Individual Jihad*

This is a central issue in the classical doctrine of jihad. As we shall see, it corresponded to real problems that confronted Islamic governments, rulers, and military commanders, together with a wide array of individuals who, in their quest for salvation and religious merit, became involved in the activities of the jihad. The most original modern treatment of this ancient problem came in the doctoral thesis of the late Albrecht Noth. In Noth's analysis, warfare against external enemies is a concern for the entire Muslim community, under the leadership of its imam/caliph. This warfare requires resources and organization on a scale that only the state can provide. At the same time, this warfare may be holy, as it fulfills religious objectives by protecting and, where possible, expanding the community and its territory. Then, on the other hand, we have the individuals who volunteer to participate in this activity. They too are carrying out divine commands. They receive a religious reward for their activity; their motivation (the sincerity of their intention) is often a source of concern. However, even if their intentions are pure, these individuals are likely to be less concerned with public goals (warding off enemy invasion, conquering new territory for Islam) and more interested in achieving religious merit for themselves. Noth identified these two elements as "holy war" and "holy struggle"—both of them components of what I am seeking to identify as the jihad, and at odds with each other much of the time.<sup>24</sup>

### *Historiography and Origins*

Presentations of the jihad, and indeed of Islam itself, most often have as their starting point a historical narrative that begins with

<sup>24</sup>Noth, *Heiliger Krieg und heiliger Kampf in Islam und Christentum*. I disagree with Noth where he states that the "private" heiliger Kampf is the dominant mode, and that true "holy war" almost never occurs in jihad (pp. 87–91). The distinction remains valuable nonetheless.

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Muhammad in Mecca at the beginning of the seventh century and reaches a culminating point when Muhammad establishes his community in Medina in 622 CE, year 1 of the Hijra. When questions such as “What emphasis does Islam place on fighting and conquest?” or “What is jihad?” are asked, the answer most often takes the form of this master narrative about the rise of Islam, continuing from Muhammad’s life through the great Islamic conquests that took place in the seventh-century Near East and beyond.<sup>25</sup> We are told how Muhammad first received divine Revelations and how a community gathered around him in Mecca; how then, in Medina, Muhammad and his community began to wage war; and then afterward, how Islam grew, in part through conquest, into a comprehensive system of belief and doctrine and, at the same time, into a major world power.

More than in any other major religious or even cultural tradition, the narrative thus contains the answer to the question. This approach is shared by those who are sympathetic to Islam and those who are hostile to it. The matter is complicated further by the fact that the Quran, the Islamic scripture, is not a connected narrative in the sense that, for instance, much of the Old Testament presents a sequential history of the world and of a people. Somewhat paradoxically, a fundamentalist attitude in Islam—which is to say, a radically decontextualized attitude—usually bases itself not only on the sacred text of the Quran but also on a narrative of origins, a narrative that is, strictly speaking, exterior to the sacred text.

The rise of Islam was indeed an astonishing event, with tremendous consequence for world history. Moreover, narratives of the first origin were vividly present to Muslims of all later generations, especially those who found themselves acting within the broad sphere of jihad. However, as we have already seen, this search for an origin immediately leads into complex arguments about the reliability of the sources for earliest Islam, arguments that are not about to be resolved any time soon. Above all, the focus on a single narrative of origin can lead us to forget that any act of founding becomes obscure in retrospect, because it necessarily includes an element of myth—even in cases where the course of events and

<sup>25</sup> For instance, Firestone’s *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*, which does not venture far beyond the Quran and the life of Muhammad.

the actors' identities and roles are not particularly in dispute, as for instance in the founding of the American republic.

In this book I speak of the origins of jihad, in the plural. There is no need to challenge the primacy of the first beginnings. However, speaking of origins allows us to look afresh at each historical instance, and at Islamic history as a whole. It also encourages us to look at how the jihad has been revived and reinterpreted in many historical contexts, right down to the present day. It may also help us to integrate the jihad into the history of "real" armies and warfare, from which it has largely been divorced in modern historical scholarship.

Much of this book, especially its early chapters, is devoted to modern debates over the sources for early Islam. Writing already existed in Arabia when Islam first arose, and many Muslims of the first generations wrote, most often in the Arabic language. However, for a number of reasons, writings from that earliest period of Islam have survived only sporadically and by accident. (Here, as so often, the Quran constitutes the great exception.) The compendious Arabic works on which we rely for most of our knowledge of the events, ideas and doctrines of the earliest Islam were written in later times (beginning around 750 CE, and in most cases considerably later than that). These works were based on earlier works, but those earlier works have since disappeared and it is difficult or impossible for us now to establish their texts. The matter grows even more complicated because of the intertwining, within the oldest Arabic sources, of oral and written techniques of transmission, itself very much a matter of dispute among modern scholars. The modern arguments over the old Islamic sources have raged mainly on two battlegrounds, one regarding the formation of Islamic law and the other regarding early Islamic historical writing. Both of these will be mentioned as we go along.

Many of these modern arguments over historiography, and over the rise of Islam and the origins of jihad more generally, began in the nineteenth and the earlier twentieth centuries among European academic specialists in the study of the East, often referred to as the orientalists. Their involvement in the colonial project has been much discussed.<sup>26</sup> What will come back over and again in the

<sup>26</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, followed by a large literature; see also Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*.

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present book is their relation to the classic Islamic narrative of origins. For origins were precisely what many of the orientalists liked best. Their approach was predominantly textual: finding the manuscripts, establishing the texts, understanding what the texts mean, and then sifting and combining all this information so as to produce a more “scientific” narrative than what the “native” sources had to offer. In many cases, the orientalists’ interest in origins had the further, and unfortunate, result of encouraging them to see the social practices of Muslim countries—in their own time and also for earlier periods—as outcomes or expressions of the text. In this view, the norms of doctrine and religion dictated everyday behavior; the texts, especially the texts concerned with origins, became all the more precious as a result.

At the same time, other scholars, some of them in the orientalist tradition and some not, have posed different kinds of questions and inserted different kinds of protagonists into their narratives. I have tried to put emphasis on at least some of these, and on the other options available to us today. It is noteworthy, in any case, that there have been few successful attempts to apply the methods of the modern social sciences to these questions. This is partly because of the burden that such an attempt imposes (a combination of textual and linguistic expertise together with profound knowledge of the social sciences) and partly, no doubt, because of the difficulties inherent in the primary evidence itself.

I portray the origins of jihad as a series of events, covering all of the broad extent of Islamic history. Of course, I only have room for a few representative instances. However, I hope to show that many people have used the notion of jihad creatively in the construction of new Islamic societies and states. For this they have employed a shared idiom, derived from the Quran, from the various narratives of origins, from the classical doctrine of jihad, and from their own shared experience. However, their ways of doing this, and the Islamic societies they have constructed, have been quite diverse: not mere repetitions or reenactments of the first founding moment but new foundations arising in a wide variety of circumstances.

Questions regarding the jihad and its origins resonate loudly in our world today, when jihad has become the ideological tool of a major, and substantially new, political actor. I see no choice but to ask whether today’s “jihadists” are in continuity with their

own tradition and past. They answer, not surprisingly, is that in some ways they are and in other ways, quite radically, they are not. But here the emphasis on origins, both among Muslim believers and among many non-Muslim observers, should not lead us to think that the same thing merely happens over and over, that Islam—and now, all of us—is doomed to repeated cycles of violence and destruction.

For as long as we deal with this subject matter, it is our destiny to speak “of war and battle,” as Socrates, arriving late, is informed by his host.<sup>27</sup> We must account for many debates over debating and fighting, and describe numerous intellectual, spiritual, and physical techniques of contention. All the more reason to leave room at the end of the book for the often-discredited claim that jihad and Islam are both really about peace. For peace is the true goal of all righteous contention and war, both in the *bellum iustum* of Augustine, Gratian, and Grotius and in the *jihad* of the Quran, al-Shafi‘i, and Saladin.

### *Readings*

The comprehensive survey by Alfred Morabia, *Le Ĝihād dans l’Islam médiéval: Le “combat sacré” des origines au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993), includes a thorough summary of the doctrine of the jihad and its role in Islamic history. Since this work was published after the author’s premature death in 1986, it does not include more recent developments. The recent article by Paul L. Heck, “*Jihad* Revisited” (*Journal of Religious Ethics* 32 [2004]: 95–128), covers much of the ground covered in this book from a somewhat different perspective. Important terrain is mapped out in “The Idea of *Jihad* in Islam before the Crusades,” by Roy Parviz Mottahedeh and Ridwan al-Sayyid, in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, 23–29, edited by Angeliki Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001). Another valuable contribution has just appeared, too late for me to incorporate into this book: *Understanding Jihad* by David Cook (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 447a.

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This book covers much of the same ground as the present one, but also from a different perspective. It includes a full and well-informed survey of the jihad as conceived and deployed by modern-day radical Islamist groups.

Just war and holy war are studied in comparative perspective in two volumes edited by John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson, *Cross, Crescent and Sword: The Justification and Limitation of War in Western and Islamic Traditions* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1990); and *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1991). Albrecht Noth's *Heiliger Krieg und beiliger Kampf in Islam und Christentum* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1966), already mentioned, provides a comparative synopsis of the notions and practice of holy war in Islam and Christendom. Noth began by remarking that until then (the 1960s), Western treatments of the jihad tended simply to recapitulate the Islamic juridical doctrines; history was seen as a mere application or outgrowth of these doctrines. With Noth's book, this situation began to change. However, historical treatments of armies and warfare in the Islamic world, such as Hugh Kennedy's excellent *The Armies of the Caliphs* (London: Routledge, 2001), still tend not to devote large amounts of attention to the jihad and its practitioners. A few of the many books on jihad in contemporary thought and society are mentioned in the notes to the beginning of this chapter. Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1996) provides a general introduction, essays, and translated texts.