Questions about Jihad in Islam

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And Fight those who have not faith in God, nor in the Hereafter, and (who) forbid not what» God and His Prophet have forbidden and (who) are not committed to the religion of truth, of those who have been brought the Book, until they pay tribute by hand, and they are the low.» (9:29) This Quranic verse concerns the People of the Book, meaning those non-Muslims followers of one of the holy books, namely the Jews, Christians and perhaps the Zoroastrians. The verse is one of war with the People of the Book, but at the same time, it does not tell us to fight them; it tells us to fight only those of them who have no faith in God, in the Hereafter, and who do not abide by the rule of God, allowing what He has forbidden - and who are not religious according to the religion of truth. It is these People of the Book whom we are to fight until they pay the Jezyah (tribute). That is, when they are ready to pay the Jezyah and are humble before us, we are to fight them no more.

This verse gives rise to many questions which remain to be answered through a study of those Quranic verses pertaining to jihad, which we will set apart and review.

The first question that arises is what exactly is meant by the words, «Fight those who have not faith in God» Do they mean that we are to drop everything and start fighting or is it meant that we must fight them the moment they go beyond their territory and violate ours? In the terms of the learned of Islam, the ulema, this is an unconditional verse which, if there are similar verses .that are conditional, must be interpreted as being onditional

A- Conditional Verses and Unconditional Verses

This term is a very important one, and I wish to explain it to you, for otherwise it will be difficult for you to grasp the full meaning of the verse under discussion. Any command (even a human command) can be given in one place with no conditions, and then again in another situation with a condition attached. In such a case, we immediately realize that whoever issued that command, introduced that law, meant the same thing in both instances. Now, having realized this, what are we to do? Are we to adhere to the unconditional command and assume that the conditional was given for that special instance? Or should we interpret the unconditional as the conditional which means adhering to the conditional?

Let me cite a simple example. On two separate occasions, for instance, we are given a command by someone having the authority to do so and whose commands we respect. On one

occasion, we are told that we must respect such and such person, which is an unconditional command. In another he commands us to do the same thing, saying that we must respect that person if he does such and such a thing, like taking part in our meeting. The second time the command contains an "if." The command is now conditional.

The person giving the command did not simply state that such and such a person is to be respected. The first command had no condition; we were simply told to respect him, and assuming we had ears and heard this command. it would have meant to us that we were to respect that person whether he came to the meeting or whether he was too lazy to bother. But when we hear the other command, we understand that we are to respect the person provided he comes to the meeting, and, if he refrains from doing so, we are not to respect him.

The ulema say that the rule requires us to interpret the unconditional as the conditional, meaning that we must assume the aim of the unconditional to be exactly that of the conditional.

Now, among the unconditional and conditional verses of the Quran pertaining to jihad, is one which we have seen: «Fight ye those who have not faith in God, nor in the hereafter and (who) forbid not what God and His Prophet have forbidden»

In another verse, we are told: «Fight in the way of God those who fight you» (2:190).

What are the meanings of these verses? Do they mean that we must fight these people regardless of whether they are about to attack us? Is the command unconditional so that we must fight them whether they intend or not to attack us, whether they are guilty of aggression or not?

There are two possible views. One is that the command remains unconditional. "The People of the Book are not Muslims, so we are allowed to fight them. We are allowed to fight the non-Muslims until we subdue them. If they are not Muslims and not People of the Book, we should fight them until either they become Muslims or we kill them. If they are People of the Book, we should fight them until they become Muslims or, if they do not become Muslims, until they pay us tribute - such is the opinion of those who say that the verse remains unconditional.

The other view, however; holds that the unconditional must be interpreted as the conditional. Someone with this view would say that the other Quranic verses bring us the conditions for the legitimacy of jihad, we realize that the true meaning of the verses is not unconditional at all. What, then, are the conditions for the legality of jihad? Amongst them, for example, are the following:

that the other side intends to attack us; or that it creates a barrier against the call of Islam, meaning that it negates the freedom of that call and becomes an obstacle to its diffusion,

while Islam says that those barriers are to be removed. Or, likewise, in the case of a people subject to the oppression and tyranny of a group from amongst themselves, Islam says that we must fight those tyrants so as to deliver the oppressed from the claws of tyranny. This has been expressed in the Quran thus: «Why is it that you do not fight in the way of God and the way of the deprived (mustazafin)?» (4:75)

Why is it that we do not fight for God and for the men, women and children who are subject to torture and tyranny?

B- Can We Fight All the People of the Book?

The second question is related to the fact that the verse does not explicitly state that we are to fight all the People of the Book, but tells us that we are to fight against those of them who believe neither in God nor in the Hereafter,... who count as permitted that which God has forbidden, and who are not at all religious in line with any religion of truth. Now what does this mean?

Does it mean that the People of the Book en masse - i.e. all the Jews, the Christians and the followers of the different sects - have no faith in God, no faith in the Hereafter, no faith in God's ordinances and no faith in any religion based on truth, so that if one of them claims that he believes in God, he is a liar and does not actually believe in God? Is the Quran actually saying that all the People of the Book, however much they claim to believe in God, in reality have no such belief?

Is it possible for us to argue that because the Christians claim Jesus is God or the 'son of God," they really have no belief in God? Or that, because the Jews say things about Jacob, the Jews have no more faith than the Christians? Or that those who say: «The hand of God is tied» (5:64)

cannot be believers in the true God and the same applies to the rest of the People of the Book? Thinking in these terms will mean that we believe that the Quran does not recognize any faith in God or in the resurrection other than the faith of the Muslims. If we are asked why, we will say that the Quran states the beliefs of the People of the Book to be confused and misconceived. A Christian, even if he is a learned Christian scholar, recognizes God and even recognizes the Oneness of God, but at the same time, he may have some idea about Jesus or the angel Gabriel that pollutes his belief in the Oneness of God (Tawhid.) This is the view of some of the Quranic commentators.

To them, when the Quran tells us we are to fight against the People of the Book, it means that we are to fight against all the People of the Book, that the faith in God of not one of them is a

valid faith; that the faith in the resurrection and in what God has forbidden and permitted of not one of them is valid. What these commentators believe is that the word " Prophet" in this verse means the last of the prophets, Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him and his household, and that "religion of truth" means the religion which mankind of today has the duty to accept, rather than a religion which was the duty of people to accept during some particular period in the past.

A different group of commentators, however, consider that with this statement, the Quran intended to show us that the People of the Book form two categories; that not all the People of the Book are the same; that some of them really do believe in God, and resurrection, really do believe in the laws of God, and these we are to leave alone. Those of them whom we are to fight are those who are People of the Book in name only, but who in reality, have no valid belief at all, and who do not consider forbidden that which God has forbidden, even what He has forbidden in their own religion. So it is not with all the People of the Book that we are to fight, (but a group from amongst them. This is another issue in itself.(1

C- Jezyah?

The third question relates to the word jezyah or tribute. We are told to fight them until they pay the jezyah, which means until they either accept Islam or pay the jezyah. In the Quran there is no doubt that a difference has been maintained between the People of the Book and the polytheists, or mushrikin, those who formally worship idols and do not follow any holy book. Nowhere in the Quran are we told to fight the mushrikin until they pay the jezyah, and to fight them no more once they have paid it. Concerning the People of the Book, however, we are told that once they are willing to pay the jezyah, we are to fight them no longer. This is a difference that clearly exists.

This brings us to this question, namely, what is jezyah? There is debate about the word itself. Some say it is not an Arabic word by origin; that it has no Arabic root, but is a derivative of the Persian word gaziyet, the name of a tax introduced by Anoushiravan, the Sassanian King of Persia. This tax, however, was a poll tax on the people of Persia themselves and not on anyone else and it was collected for war. They say that the use of the word then spread from Iran to Hira, a town situated roughly on the site of present-day Najaf (in Iraq) and from there it was adopted by the rest of the Arabian peninsula where it became widely used.

Others reject this. Though it is true that jezyah and gaziyeh are very close, jezyah is an Arabic word from the root "jaza" - and this is the view of most etymologists. The real interest is not in the nature of the word, however, for what we are looking for is the nature of the essence which

the word denotes. Is jezyah the extortion of "protection money" or "danegeld," a kind of blackmail? Does Islam tell us to fight so as to obtain blackmail and, when it has been paid, to fight no longer? A poet has even said: "We are such that from emperors we have taken taxes, then we even took their crowns and maces."

If the meaning of jezyah implies a kind of blackmail, the question arises as to what is the meaning of it all. What kind of instruction is it? Is it not a law of violence and brute force? What kind of basis in human rights and justice can it have, for Islam to give Muslims permission, even make it obligatory for them, to fight the people of other religions until they either accept Islam or buy the Muslims off? Both these alternatives present a problem,

for fighting them until they become Muslims will mean imposing Islam on them, and fighting them until they buy the Muslims off will mean exacting wealth from them. Both alternatives are the use of violence and force, for either it means imposing beliefs upon them or forcefully extracting money from them. So here too we must enter into details to find out just what jezyah is. Is it really "blackmail," "protection money," "danegeld?" Or is it something else?

Here, the Quran says "vahom sagheroon" meaning, "and they are the low," "while they are the low." Sagheroon comes from the word 'seghar" and 'seghar" means "low (small)." While they are the low. What is the meaning of "they are the low?" This is also the fourth question namely what is the meaning of they are the low? Does it mean that they must only humble themselves before your power or does Islam mean other matters besides humility (being humble)?

Here we must set aside the meaning of this verse and the questions that arise from it, and look at other issues that must be separately analyzed and discussed in preparation.

D- Philosophy and Goals of Jihad

The fifth issue concerns the reason for the law of jihad in Islam. Some believe that there should be no jihad in religion at all: that religion should contain no law of war: that since war is a bad thing, religion must oppose it and not itself establish war as a law. We, on the other hand, know that jihad is a basic principle in Islam. When we are asked how many are the subsidiary beliefs of Islam (furuedin) we say, "Ten - prayer, fasting, khoms, zakat, hajj, jihad, etc."(2)

Of the arguments that Christians propagate in an extraordinary fashion against Islam is this one. First, they ask why such a law exists in Islam and then they state that due to this legal permission, Muslims started wars with various peoples, forcibly imposing Islam on them. They claim that the Islamic jihads were all fought for the imposition of Islamic beliefs. It is due to this permission that Muslims imposed Islam by force, which is how, they say, up to now, Islam has always spread. They say that the principle of jihad in Islam and one of the basic rights of

man, viz. freedom of belief, are in eternal conflict. This is one of the issues to be discussed. A second issue is the difference that Islam has maintained in the laws of jihad between the mushrikin - the polytheists - and the non-polytheists. There is a provision for living in harmony with the People of the Book that is not applicable to the polytheists.

Another issue is the question of whether Islam differentiates between the Arabian peninsula and the rest of the world. Has Islam appointed for itself a place as its headquarters, its center, wherein no one from amongst the mushrikin or the People of the Book is admitted? And is that place the Arabian peninsula, while in other places Islam is not so severe, and, for example, lives in harmony with the mushrikin or the People of the Book? In short, is the Arabian peninsula any different in these terms or not?

The answer is that between Mecca and other places, there is without a doubt a difference, and in the verse preceding the one under discussion we are told: «The idolaters are filth, so they must not approach the Masjid ul-Haram (in Mecca).» (9:28)

The fourth issue concerns agreements with mushrikin. Is a Muslim allowed to make agreements with such people? Can he make promises to them? And if he does, is the promise or agreement to be honored or not?

The last issue concerns the conditions of war. When Islam has legalized warfare, what kind of warfare, in terms of the particular conditions of war, does Islam see as legal, and what kind of war does it see as forbidden? For example, does Islam consider the killing of a whole people to be lawful or forbidden? Does Islam view as permissible the killing of those who have not lifted the sword: old women, children, men who are peacefully engaged in their jobs and trades? Is the killing of all these in the view of Islam permissible or forbidden? These are all issues that have to be discussed. The verses pertaining to jihad occur in many places in the Quran. We shall try to compile all of them with the help of God so as to obtain the view of Islam on this matter.

E- The Legitimacy of Jihad

The first issue that we shall consider will relate to the legitimacy of jihad, whether or not it is correct for a law of war to exist within the context of religion and the text of its commands. Protesters say, "No, war is evil, and religion must always be opposed to evil, so religion must always be opposed to war. It must always support peace. And, since it intends to support peace, it must not have any laws about war, and it must never itself go to war." This is the kind of propaganda that Christians carry on; weak and limpid, with no ground to stand on.

War - is it always bad? If in defense of a right, against oppression, is it still bad? Obviously not.

We must regard the conditions and motives of war and consider for what motive and aim war is fought. There are times when war is aggression. When, for example, a group of people or a nation sets its greedy eyes on the rights of others, on the lands of others, or when it sets its sights on the common wealth of a people, or falls prey to over-ambition, to lust for pre-eminence or superiority, claiming that "of all races our race is the most outstanding, superior to other races, and thus we must rule over those races." Obviously, war for these reasons is not correct.

Whether a war is launched to take possession of land, to seize ownership of national wealth, or due to contempt of others and out of sentiment of racial superiority, i.e. "those people are inferior to us who are superior, and the superior must govern over the inferior," it is a war of aggression. These types of war are certainly evil, and there can be no doubt about it. We will later talk about another type of war, war for the imposition of belief.

But if a war of defense is undertaken in the face of aggression - others have occupied our land, or have cast their eyes on our wealth and property, or on our freedom and self-esteem, which they want to deprive us of, and intend to impose their rule over us - in these cases, what is religion to say? Is it to say, "War is absolutely evil, laying hands on a weapon is evil, picking up a sword is evil," and that it advocates peace? And we, when facing imminent attack and the risk of being destroyed, must we not go to war - If we do not, would it not mean failing to defend ourselves - on the pretext of peace? This would not be peace, this would be surrender.

F- Peace is not Submission

In such an event, we cannot say that because we are the advocates of peace, we are opposed to war. Such a thing would mean that we are advocates of misery; advocates of surrender. Make no mistake, peace and surrender are as different from each other as chalk and cheese. The meaning of peace is honorable coexistence with others, but surrender is not honorable coexistence; it is coexistence that on one side is absolutely dishonorable. In fact, it is a coexistence that is absolutely dishonorable on both sides. On one side, the dishonor is aggression, and on the other side, it is the dishonor of surrender in the face of zulm, in the face of injustice and oppression.

So this fallacy must be eradicated, and a person who declares himself opposed to war, saying that war is totally bad - be it injustice or be it defense and resistance in the face of injustice - has made a great mistake. War that means aggression must be fully condemned while war that means standing up (qiyam) in the face of transgression is to be commended and necessary for human existence.

The Quran also indicates this matter, in fact it illuminates it. It says: «And if God did not prevent mankind, some with others, the earth would be full of corruption.» (2:251) and elsewhere it tells us: «If God did not prevent people, some with some (others) then truly the cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques - in which is oft brought to mind the Name of God - would have been destroyed» (22 :40) So, if God did not prevent some people by means of other people, ruin and corruption would become the rule everywhere.

Furthermore, it is for this very reason that all the countries of the world deem it necessary, essential for themselves to maintain armed forces for their defense. The existence of armed forces, the duty of which is to prevent aggression, is an absolute necessity. Now, if there are two countries that both have armed forces - one for aggression and the other for defense - do not say that the one which has an army without the intention of aggression is weaker than the other and if it were stronger it would also intend to aggress. We are not concerned with this matter. The fact is that the existence of an army for defense is essential for every nation in order for that nation to be strong enough to check any aggression against itself.

Thus, the Quran tells us: «Prepare against them armies, of readied steeds: you frighten thereby God's enemies and your enemies.» (8:60) The statement means, "prepare forces as much as you can and centralize your forces in your frontiers." Rebat comes from the word Rabt. Rabt means to tie. Rebat-ol-Kheyl means tied horses (horses tethered). The statement about horses in readiness is made because in the past, the strength of armies consisted mostly in horses, but naturally each age has its own characteristics.

What the Quran is saying here is that for the fear of our strength to enter the hearts of our enemies and so as not to lay the idea of aggression in their mind, we are to build ourselves an .army and make ourselves strong

G- Difference between Islam and Christianity

It is said about Christianity that it has the distinction of not having any rule governing war. We, on the other hand, say that Islam has the distinction of having the law of jihad. If we look closely, we see that in Christianity there is no jihad because it has nothing at all. By which I mean that there is no Christian structure of society, no Christian legal system, and no Christian rules as to how a society is to be formed, for these to contain a law of jihad.

There is no substance in Christianity; it contains no more than a few moral teachings that form a set of advice such as "tell the truth", "do not tell lies", "do not gobble up the wealth of others", and so on. Such things do not call for jihad? Islam however is a religion that sees it its duty and commitment to form an Islamic state. Islam came to reform society and to form a nation and

government. Its mandate is the reform of the whole world.

Such a religion cannot be indifferent. It cannot be without a law of jihad. In the same way, its government cannot be without an army. While the scope of Christianity is extremely limited, that of Islam is extremely wide. While Christianity does not cross the frontiers of advice, Islam is a religion which covers all the activities of human life. It has laws which govern the society, economic laws, and political laws. It came to organize a state, to organize a government. Once this done, how can it remain without an army? How can it be without a law of jihad?

H- Islam and Peace

Thus, those groups which claim that religion. must always oppose war, and advocate peace, because peace is good and war is totally bad, are mistaken. Religion must of course advocate peace, and the Quran says: «Was-Solho khayron», «Peace is better», but it must also advocate war. If the opposing side is not ready to coexist honorably, for example, and being oppressive it intends to trample upon human dignity and honor, and we do submit, then we have welcomed misery: we have accepted dishonor. Islam says: "Peace if the other side is ready and willing to accept it. If not, and it turns to war: then war".

I- Conditions for warfare

The Second issue concerns the circumstances in which Islam says we must fight. The first verses of the Quran that come to us about jihad, in the accepted view of all the commentators, are those from Suratul-Hajj: «Truly God defends those who have faith. Truly God loves not the treacherous rejecter (kafir). Permission (for warfare) is given to those who are attacked and definitely wronged. And truly God is capable of helping without justice, for no reason except their saying:

"Our Nourisher is God" and if God did not prevent people, some with some (others) then truly cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the Name of God is oft brought to mind, would have been destroyed. And God will help whoever helps Him - for truly, God is Powerful, Prevailing - those who, if we settle them in the earth, establish prayer, pay the zakat and command to what is recognized and prohibit what is rejected. And with God is the result of all affairs.» (22:38-41)

These are amazing verses. They are the very first revealed Quranic verses concerning the legislation of jihad.

J- The Muslims in Mecca

Before an examination of them, however, we must turn our attention to something else first. As we know, the first revelation was brought down to the Prophet in Mecca, when he was forty years old. After that, the Prophet lived thirteen years in Mecca, during which time, either he himself or his companions were terribly tortured by the pagans of the Quraysh, the ruling houses of Mecca; so much so that a group of them were forced to seek permission from the Holy Prophet to migrate. They left Mecca and went to Ethiopia. Repeatedly the Muslims asked the Holy Prophet for permission to defend themselves, but during the whole of the thirteen years that he was in Mecca, he did not grant it, for which there was a good reason, until at last his holy mission took solid shape and Islam spread, amongst other places, to Medina. There, a small group of Medinans had become Muslims, had gone to Mecca, had paid their allegiance to the Prophet, and had made a covenant that if he were to go to Medina they would support him. So the Holy Prophet migrated to Medina and the Muslims also migrated and, in Medina for the first time, an independent Muslim base was brought into existence. During the first year, permission for defense was still not given. It was during the second year of the hijrah that the first verses an jihad, these same verses I have just recited, were revealed. The tone of the verse goes thus: «Truly God defends those who have faith... God loves not the treacherous rejecter.»

This indicates that the polytheists had been treacherous to the Muslims, had betrayed them, had transgressed against them, and had rejected God's blessing upon themselves. Then it declares: «Permission (for warfare) is given to those who have been attacked and definitely wronged.» Permission to fight has been given to those whom others have come to fight. Which means: "O Muslims, now that the polytheist rejecters have come to fight against you, fight them." In reality this is a state of defense. Why has this permission been given? Because the oppressed must defend themselves. Then comes a promise of help: «And truly God is capable of helping them; those who have been expelled from their homes for no reason except for their saying: "Our Nourisher is God"»

To those people who have been unjustly turned out of their homes and lands for no offense except that they said, "Our Rabb, our Lord, Master, Cherisher and Nourisher, is God," God gives permission for jihad. Their offense was that they said: "Rabbonallah", "God is our Rabb." To such people does God give permission to fight.

Notice to what extent the verse adopts a tone of defense. Then it states the whole reasoning behind jihad. The Quran is amazing in the way it discloses realities and brings to mind all their details. For here comes a particular verse just as if the Quran had been confronted with all the

questions and problems raised by the Christians of today, who say: "O Quran. You are supposed to be a divine book, you are supposed to be a religious book, how can you give permission to fight? War is a bad thing, always say "Peace!" Say "Purity!" Say "Worship!"

But the Quran tells us: No. If the other side becomes aggressive towards us and we do not defend ourselves, not a stone will be left upon a stone. All the houses of worship will be destroyed: «And if God did not prevent people, some with some (others) then truly cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques – in which the Name of God is oft brought to mind would have been destroyed.»

If God did not check the aggression of some people by means of others, all the houses of worship of all the different sects and religions would be destroyed. The churches of Christians, the synagogues of Jews, the monasteries, the masjids, places of prostration of Muslims, all would exist no longer. Some people would commit such aggression that no one would find the freedom in which to worship God.

The Quran then makes a promise of help: «And God will help whoever helps Him –Truly God is Powerful, Prevailing.»

Whoever helps God, meaning whoever helps the truth and justice of reality, will be helped by God, and God is Powerful and ever the Victor. Now notice how God describes those He helps. God helps the people who defend themselves, the people who, when they establish a government, form one on these lines: «Those who, if we settle them in the earth, ... »

The people who, when God gives them a place to inhabit and sets up a government for them, the people who, when God gives them power and authority, form a state on these lines. What lines?

«... establish prayer,... » They institute worship of God. «pay the zakat... »

They pay the purification tax. Prayer is the correct spiritual bond between man and God, and zakat is the correct spiritual bond of cooperation between individuals. The people who worship God in sincerity and help one another, «... and command to what is recognized and forbid what is rejected»

Who consider themselves as being under an obligation to promote what is good and to combat what is evil. «And with God is the result of all affairs.»

The result of all matters, all subjects, are in the "hands" of God.

What we have learnt so far is that the Quran has fundamentally defined jihad not as a war of aggression or of superiority or of authority, but of resistance against aggression.

Of course, the forms of aggression to be resisted are not always on the lines of one party invading the territory of another. Perhaps a form of aggression will be on the lines of the other

side in its own territory subjecting to torture and tyranny a group from amongst themselves, a group that is weak and powerless, who, in the terms of the Quran, are called mustazafin. In such conditions Muslims cannot remain indifferently aloof. Muslims have a mandate to free such afflicted people. Or perhaps the other side has created such a terrible state of repression that the call of haqq, the call of truth, love and justice is not allowed to flourish; has created a dam, an obstacle - which must be destroyed.

All these are types of transgressions. Muslims must free mankind from the chains of bondage of thought and the bondage of other than thought. In all these conditions jihad is an urgent necessity; and such a jihad is in defense, in resistance against zulm, against injustice and oppression, against transgression. The word "defense" in its general meaning means resistance against an existing zulm or injustice and oppression, but the types of zulm and the types of transgression against which jihad, in the view of Islam, is a necessity are still to be discussed.