Islam, Peacemaking and Terrorism

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The continuing threat from Islamist terrorists, now not just in Africa or the Middle East, but virtually anywhere their appeal may reach, has shocked the world. The atrocities involve mass killing not just of military prisoners but of innocent men, women and children belonging to different faiths, including Muslims opposed to their militant practices and beliefs.

Like extremist groups from other religions, some Muslims have cherry-picked sections from their scriptures to justify a virulent and violent ideology. They appeal to isolated passages from the Qur’an and other Muslim texts, often taken quite literally and out of context, to sanction their ‘Islamist’ ideology.

Islam itself must be clearly distinguished from such highly politicised movements, often termed ‘Islamist’, that look to an idealised version of the early practice of Islam as inspiration for a return to a purified society.

Islam from the start certainly included a strong social dimension, as Tamim Ansary has written: ‘Individuals earn their place in heaven by participating as members of that community and engaging in the Islamic social project, which is to build a world in which orphans won’t feel abandoned and in which widows won’t ever be homeless, hungry, or afraid’.1

Muhammad himself had been an orphan, and his concern for vulnerable groups is strongly reflected in the Qur’an. It gives primacy to the wellbeing of the Muslim community, and hence is concerned with details about good order, right relationships, and reconciliation and forgiveness in occasions of conflict or disputes.

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In contrast to the views of Islamists today, by the time of Omar, the second successor to Muhammad, the social vision included compulsory education for both Muslim boys and Muslim girls. Women took part in public life, went to lectures, gave sermons, composed poetry for public occasions, and sometimes went to fight in war. Moreover, no Muslim was to be a slave.²

By the end of the tenth century, the prescribed forms of Muslim life had been developed in great detail, covering many aspects of life from major issues in social and political affairs to the most personal details of hygiene and sexual activity. Known as the *shari’a*, meaning ‘path’ or ‘way’, it was more than ‘Islamic law’: it was a whole way of life.³

Islam is ‘not simply another ideology but a vibrant faith’ that can ‘motivate people to act politically while simultaneously transcending politics’.⁴ Islam offers hundreds of millions of people a framework of meaning in life, and direction about how to live a good life. It provides social norms and practices for family and business life, but most Muslims do not contend ‘as Islamists typically do, that Islam is the only and comprehensive source of law and decision making’.⁵ Islam has proved remarkably adaptable to a vast array of cultures and peoples, languages and economic systems over 1400 years. It has provided the spiritual core for great civilisations that once led the world in science, literature and the arts.

There is no single form of Muslim tradition any more than there is only one form of Christian tradition.⁶ Apart from the core beliefs in Muhammad as the Prophet of the one God, Allah, and submission to the will of God, there is great variety in how people understand and practise these beliefs. The Qur’an and the *sunna* (example) of the Prophet remain normative, but have to be interpreted for different circumstances.⁷

Nevertheless, from the 1860s many young people in Muslim countries considered Islam as part of an Ottoman Empire in decline, outdated and failing. In place of it, many turned to the secular West for direction and inspiration, including nationalism and forms of socialism. As Noah Feldman has written, ‘Islam seemed poised to go the way that Christianity did in twentieth century Western Europe – from a once-powerful organizing system to a mild, private form of worship, taken seriously by only a few. That did not happen, although for a few years in the middle of the twentieth century it once again looked as though

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2. Ibid., 51.
3. Ibid., 97.
5. Ibid., 22.
it might. Since then, and particularly since the revolution in Iran in 1979, Islam has been resurgent and taken on various competing political forms.

However, widespread alarm about Islamist terrorism is forcing the world community to consider carefully the relation between Islam as a faith and the terrorist activity of Muslim extremists.

Just as European thinkers gradually developed what we now recognise as the just war tradition, so also there exist similar moral constraints on warfare within Islamic traditions. But the contexts for the emergence of these traditions have been very different. Western thinking on just war resulted from melding the contributions from Roman and Christian thinkers, military codes, secular theories and political circumstances and developments, largely in Europe.

Islamic thinking developed along entirely different paths, as if in a parallel universe of customs and culture. Muhammad (AD 570–632) appeared as the Prophet inaugurating Islam in Arabia over 1400 years ago, and it spread rapidly, with Muslim rule expanding across North Africa and the Middle East. At times the Muslim armies were welcomed by local populations as liberating them from the taxation of the Byzantine and Sassanid (Persian) empires, which were both severely weakened by prolonged conflict against each other. The Muslim military in conquered territory lived in isolated garrisons and displaced the military elites, but did not enforce conversion to Islam. The special tax (jizya) on non-Muslims was often lighter than that of the Byzantine rulers. ‘The idea of lower taxes and greater religious freedom struck Christians as a pretty good deal, and so Muslims faced little or no local resistance in former Byzantine territory. In fact, Jews and Christians sometimes joined them in fighting the Byzantines’, who relied on mainly mercenaries or draftees.

Over a long period, many people did become Muslims, in part because of the influence of social and financial pressures. ‘Conquest led the surge [out of Arabia] but conquest was kept separate from conversion. There was no “conversion by the sword.” Muslims insisted on holding political power but not on their subjects being Muslims.’ For eight centuries Islamic forces intermittently confronted the rival empire of Byzantium until Constantinople finally fell in 1453, just as Muslims were finally pushed out of Spain, and Europe began its process of exploration and expansion in the New World.

John Esposito has seen a parallel between the long struggle in the West to establish toleration, modern freedoms and democracy, and the painful process in Muslim nations currently attempting to tread such a path, but he is hopeful that

9. Ansary, Destiny Disrupted, 47.
10. Ibid., 48.
Islam has the inner resources to do this, and instances leading Muslim scholars aiming to synthesise Islamic values with liberal democracy and human rights.12

**God and Violence in Religion**

Both Christian and Islamic traditions have sought to curtail violence.13 In the West, long and bitter warfare even among Christians finally resulted in a rejection of the crusade tradition,14 and of war fought at the command of the pope or of religious authority; and in conjunction with secular currents of thought, the modern just war tradition emerged.15

In recent years various popes have echoed Pope Paul VI’s plea at the United Nations in 1965 for an end to war. John Paul II appealed that all religions condemn violence in the name of God or religion. At the gathering of representatives of world religions at Assisi on 24 January 2002, he said: ‘Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again! In the name of God, may every religion bring upon earth justice and peace, forgiveness and life, love!’16 To the Vatican Diplomatic Corps John Paul declared that ‘killing in the name of God is an act of blasphemy and a perversion of religion’. He repeated this in his World Day of Peace Message: ‘It is a profanation of religion to declare oneself a terrorist in the name of God, to do violence to others in his name’.17

The Qur’an enjoins each Muslim to strive earnestly in the path of God as a good person, the fundamental meaning of jihad. It includes the effort to create a just and righteous social order, by teaching, preaching, and if necessary, armed conflict. But as John Esposito has pointed out, many Westerners quickly characterise Islam as a religion spread by the sword, or through holy war, whereas modern Muslim scholars point to the deeper meaning of jihad.18

According to the Indian scholar Moulavi Cheragh Ali, ‘All the fighting injunctions in the Qur’an are, in the first place, only in self-defense, and none of them has any reference to make warfare offensively’. The word ‘jihad’ meant

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‘energetic striving’, and was only later applied to religious war, ‘but it was never used in the Qur’an in such a sense’. 19

Mohammed Abu-Nimer has written that ‘attacking unbelievers or converting them by force is clearly not supported by the Qur’an. What is unambiguous is that only when the Muslim community is attacked will defense be appropriate and a duty of its members’. 20

The reformist scholar Abdul Aziz Sachedina in 2000 concurred: ‘More important, Jihad is divinely sanctioned only as a measure for enhancing the security and integrity of the Muslim polity. Hence any Jihad that leads to meaningless destruction of human life and ignores concerns for peace with justice is non-Koranic Jihad’. 21

Nevertheless, if warfare is needed to defend Islam or spread the realm of Islamic control, then ‘to die in battle is the highest form of witness to God and to one’s faith’. 22

John Kelsay has added: ‘Peace was not merely absence of strife but resulted from a just social order which humans bore the responsibility to construct within a secure political order’. 23 In Said’s view, ‘For many Muslims, peace signifies a presence of justice, self-determination, and social equilibrium or harmony’ rather than simply an absence of war; 24 but Johnson has written in The Holy War Idea: ‘While for the West war for religion is divisive and terrible, for Islam jihad as war for religion is not divisive but unifying, and what is terrible is the world of strife jihad seeks to bring to an end’. 25 Within Islam, war has not been seen simply as a cause of division but as a means to unity, to extend Islamic rule and hence bring peace.

**The Question of Violence and Islam**

On the one hand, 114 passages of the Qur’an are said to encourage tolerance and peace. 26 Hence the Qur’an says: 27 ‘The believers [Muslims], the Jews, the Christians and the Sabians – whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does what is good, shall receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve’ (Q. 2:62). Muhammad was told to say

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19. Quoted in ibid., 29.
20. Ibid., 30.
to the idol-worshippers at Mecca: ‘You have your religion and I have mine’ (Q. 109). Moreover the Qur’an stipulates: ‘There is no compulsion in religion’ (Q. 2:256).

Yet these verses have been thought by some authorities to be abrogated by later verses, particularly the so-called ‘sword verses’, which, in the view of Reuben Firestone, have assumed ‘the highest authority in all discussions of war’: 28

When the sacred months are past, kill the idolaters wherever you find them, and seize them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every place of ambush; but if they repent, pray regularly, and give the alms tax, then let them go their way, for God is forgiving, merciful. (Q. 9:5) 29

The most important ‘sword’ verse, Sura 9:29, is associated with a raid in AD 630 against the Byzantine Christians, expanding the scope of religiously motivated war. 30 It declares:

Fight those who do not believe in God or the Last Day, and who do not forbid what has been forbidden by God and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of truth from among the People of the Book, until they pay the poll tax (al-jizya) out of hand, having been brought low. 31

Since the fundamental goal of militant jihad was to extend the realm of Muslim rule, those who refused to accept Islamic rule could be killed. But as long as the People of the Book bowed to Islamic rule and paid the tax, they were to be left in peace and protected, as these all worshipped the same God and considered themselves children of Abraham. 32 At first only religious groups following a prophet (Jews and Christians) were granted the status of protected minorities, but it was extended to Zoroastrians and later to Hindus and Buddhists. 33

It is particularly to these passages that extremists appeal for legitimation of killing and terrorism. Yet other Qur’anic scholars explain Sura 9:29 in the context of the end of a truce between non-believers and Muhammad, and contend that it should not be extrapolated into a general duty of Muslims. 34

29. Ibid., 88.
30. Ibid., 64.
31. See ibid., 89.
Moreover, the Qur’an sets limits to conduct in war: ‘Fight in the path of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God does not like transgressors’ (Q. 2:189).  

The Qur’an is a complex and difficult book held in immense reverence by Muslims as the very words of God, but many problems of interpretation arise, resulting in diverging views about what it means in changing circumstances. Hence the practice of earlier periods is very important in indicating how Muslims can reappropriate the divine message in different social and cultural settings, and particularly in how to open interpretation anew to support peace and justice for the global community in the growing cosmopolitan mix of cultures, religions and races.

One of the major challenges facing Islam is that by the eighteenth century, *ijtihad*, meaning ‘diligence’ and ‘free and independent thinking based on reason’, particularly in understanding the Qur’an and Muslim traditions, was considered closed. Everything had been worked out in previous centuries, and all Muslims had to do, in the words of Ansary, was to follow the rules.  
But how could Muslims open the door to *ijtihad* without fragmenting the Islamic world?

**The Interpretation of Jihad: Dar al-Islam and Dar el-Harb**

A significant difficulty in Islamic thinking on war arises from the classic template that emerged out of its religious assumptions in warfare. Muslim common law, but not Muhammad or the Qur’an, had divided the world into the realm of Islam (*dar al-Islam*); the realm of safety (*dar al-Amn*), where Muslims could live safely among non-Muslim majority populations; the realm of treaty (*dar al-Sulh*), where Muslim and non-Muslim states had entered into treaty agreements; and finally the realm of war and disorder outside Islam (*dar al-Harb*) that had not made its submission to Islam and by definition could not know lasting peace.

Nevertheless, according to circumstances and the demands of statecraft and good order, Muslim states have often enjoyed long periods of good relations, trade and relative peace with non-Muslim neighbours. Sulayman Nyang and Douglas Johnston name many earlier instances of such arrangements. They are optimistic about the future: ‘Today Muslims and non-Muslims live together in many nation-states where they are treated as equal citizens. This is totally consistent with the Qur’anic teachings of some fourteen centuries ago to the effect that humanity was effectively one community (Qur’an 5:48)’.  

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Khaled Abou El Fadl writes that some jurists held that ‘regardless of the formal association of a territory, wherever safety (amn) and justice (‘adl) can be found, that territory is part of the abode of Islam’, even if predominantly non-Muslim and governed by non-Muslims. He considers the notion of the abode of Islam as ‘flexible and symbolic’ rather than as necessarily connected to space or territory.39

Muslim international law (siyar) developed especially during the eighth century and received its classic treatment in the work, Kitab al-Siyar, by the jurist Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani about AD 800.40 For al-Shaybani war was not to be fought simply because of difference in religious belief, but in defence of dar al-Islam. Even here, though, Muslims justified war on religious grounds, on the authority of the imam, the successor of the Prophet, under religious rules of conduct and with the enemy defined in religious terms.41 Since the aim of Muslim warfare was not to destroy an enemy but to extend the realm of Islam, and hence to maintain as much of a country intact as possible, al-Shaybani forbade unnecessary destruction of life, property and natural resources; genocide; and the killing of noncombatants or prisoners of war, historically predating similar developments in the West.42

There are some definite parallels between the Western just war tradition and the early rules of combat for Muslims. Johnson summarises:

The position is clear: there is no justification for warfare directed intentionally against noncombatants in jihad. Indeed, Islamic normative tradition on the conduct of war effectively converges with that of the Western just war tradition in that both cultures are able to accept the legal restraints imposed on the conduct of war in international law… jihad is war within limits, limits that trace ultimately to the Prophet of God.43

Kelsay has also identified similarities, as well as differences:

Just cause, right intent, competent authority, a reasonable hope of success, the aim of peace – all these criteria of the [Western] jus ad bellum are formally present in the rules governing jihad, as is the jus in bello for discrimination in targeting. At the same time, some criteria either do not appear or have a rather different content than just war

41. Ibid., 124–7.
42. Ibid., 117–19.
thinkers are wont to provide. The *jus ad bellum* proportionality, for example, is present mainly as a type of prudential reasoning on the part of the authorities concerning the strength of the Muslim forces over against their enemies.\textsuperscript{44}

However the Muslim requirement of an invitation or declaration of intentions is not the same as the Western just war’s principle of ‘last resort’. ‘And just cause appears to have a religious content that just war thinking, at least in its modern forms, desires to avoid.’\textsuperscript{45}

Terry Nardin also has written that there is much ‘that resembles European ideas of interstate aggression and self-defense’.

Fighting is conceived as taking place between loosely organized parties of believers and unbelievers, and its justification is invariably religious: war is justified to advance the faith against resistance, or to defend Muslim lands against conquest by unbelievers. In the modern West, a ‘just war’ is a finite response to a particular threat, but Islam retains a worldview within which war is an instrument (frowned on by some and celebrated by others) in the permanent struggle to establish the universal dominion of Islam.\textsuperscript{46}

Muslim traditions see the moral criteria governing war through a particular religious lens. In the view of Bassam Tibi, ‘The usual western interpretation of jihad as a “just war” in the Western sense is … a misunderstanding of this Islamic concept’.

The Western distinction between just and unjust wars linked to specific grounds for war is unknown in Islam. Any war against unbelievers, whatever its immediate ground, is morally justified … When Muslims wage war for the dissemination of Islam, it is a just war.

In this view, war is seen as opening the world to the call to Islam.\textsuperscript{47}

Drawing from this line of thought in Islamic tradition, in recent decades, a very literal interpretation of the Qur’an has spread throughout the Muslim world, insisting on a more assertive and restrictive view of Islam, and overriding long-established understandings about Muslim statecraft.

\textsuperscript{44} Kelsay, *Islam and War*, 36.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
The Wahhabi Movement

The eighteenth-century theologian, Muhammad ibn ‘abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), led a movement in central Arabia against the Ottoman Empire to recreate as nearly as possible the conditions of Muhammad’s time. He was strongly influenced by the Sunni jurist Sheikh ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), who rejected the authority of the four schools of jurisprudence that helped form the taqlid (‘imitation’, or blindly accepting a precedent or legal decisions). Taymiyya asserted a right to interpret Islam independently and with extremely belligerent views, claiming that religious leaders (ulema) had authority over political rulers (imams). His views were strongly condemned at the time; he was imprisoned several times and branded a heretic.48

Wahhab’s ideas were aggressively intolerant and uncompromising, demanding that his followers hate ‘all apostates, blasphemers and unbelievers’, and adopt militant jihad to conquer the world for Islam. He preached that those who died on jihad would immediately go to heaven.49 His daughter married into the family of a convert to his views, the military leader Muhammad al-Saud, who founded the later ruling dynasty in Saudi Arabia.50 Wahhab’s religious views were strictly enforced with the aid of religious police and used as legitimation for plundering and military expansion in the region. According to Wahhab’s text, The Book of Unity, ‘Any doubt or hesitation deprives a man of immunity of his property and his life’.51

According to Charles Allen, in God’s Terrorists, ‘by a selective reading and its focus on those passages which gave licence to anathemise, persecute, and kill without mercy, Al-Wahhab’s Islam effectively sidelined the Quran’s central message of charity, tolerance, forgiveness and mercy’.52 In the early 1800s, Wahhabi armies invaded Mecca, killed many Muslims who refused to convert to the Wahhabi beliefs and even robbed the grave of the Prophet Muhammad, to the intense shock of the Muslim world,53 which was appalled by Wahhabi extremism.

These Wahhabi movements survived in modified forms in Saudi Arabia and were supported by its governments for export through the Muslim world. This ideology emphasised a literal interpretation of the Qur’an and the sunna of the Prophet. The Wahhabi enthusiasts denounced other Muslims that they judged to be falling short of their ideals, and called for a militant jihad to establish a true Islamic state based on a literal interpretation of shari’a.54 Such ideas later had a major influence on three key activists, Hasan al-Banna, Mawlama Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb.

49. Ibid., 50–1.
50. Ibid., 52.
51. Ibid., 56.
52. Ibid., 57.
53. Ibid., 64.
54. Esposito, Unholy War, 6.
Al-Banna (1906–1949) established the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 and called on Muslims to resist Western imperialism, repel invaders and purify Islam. Insisting on the equality of all Muslims, he challenged the influence of traditional scholars by claiming a right to interpret shari’a himself, and attracted significant popular support. According to John Kelsay, ‘With the Brothers, we actually see something new in the history of Shari’a reasoning. The deference to the learned class as experts in religion is shown as a historical accident’, with other Muslims claiming the right to interpret the Qur’an themselves.

Mawlana Mawdudi (1903–1979) founded the Jamaat-I-Islami in India in 1941, fearing that Islam was being destroyed, and issued a call to arms. Unprecedentedly in modern times, he interpreted jihad to mean that the defence of Islam could mean armed struggle. When General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq came to power in Pakistan in 1977 he encouraged the Islamist parties in their effort to create an authoritarian Islamist state. Both al-Banna and Mawdudi ‘posited a struggle (jihad) between the forces of God and Satan, good and evil, darkness or ignorance (jahiliyyah) and light’. They called for a renewal of faith and social reform.

They profoundly influenced Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), who in 1953 founded the Islamic Brotherhood, an extreme anti-Western organisation that sparked the growth of other militant and terrorist groups. He practised a highly subjective and individualistic interpretation of Islam. Qutb wrote his book Milestones while in prison in Egypt, depicting the world in terms of a sharp polarity between dar al-Islam and dar al-Harb, with Islamic government a divine command and jihad the means to achieve it. Like the extremist Kharijites in the seventh century, Qutb taught that any Muslims who refused to participate in jihad could be killed. He denounced Muslim ‘governments and western secular-oriented elites as atheists against whom all true believers must wage holy war’. He taught that war was needed against secular governments, and their supporters in Muslim countries, to spread Islam. General Nasser had Qutb hanged, which made him a martyr in the eyes of his followers.

Since 1979 Wahhabi ideas have spread through the Muslim world, with the Saudi establishment providing, even before 2006, $70 billion for Islamist

55. Ibid., 51.
56. Kelsay, Arguing the Just War, 91.
57. Allen, God’s Terrorists, 272 ff.
60. Esposito, Unholy War, 61. The Kharijites were an extremist sect in the late seventh century that saw themselves as the instruments of God in killing even Muslims who did not accept their uncompromising standards. They believed the end justified the means of rebellion and of the assassination of Muslim rulers or leaders. See ibid., 42.
61. Ansary, Destiny Disrupted, 328.
missionary work, ‘including the funding of 10,000 madrassas [Islamic religious schools or seminaries] in Pakistan’ and ‘the construction of thousands of mosques and seminaries and community centres all over the Muslim and Western worlds’. 62

The extremists imagine they can appeal to an idealised view of the past, when Islam was the spiritual core of great civilisations, far superior to medieval Europe. They believe that a purified Islam requires a literal interpretation of the Qur’an and sunna, in which violence and terror are necessary, especially against Muslim leaders they consider to have betrayed Islam by adapting practices and governance to accord with modern systems. They justify intimidation and killing of other Muslims to force them to adopt Islamist beliefs and practices. Even innocent women and children may be killed by terrorist acts. A key factor here, according to Gilles Keppel, is that many of the jihadist preachers and disciples are ex-Marxist-Leninists who had studied in France. 63 These jihadists are acting like Lenin’s revolutionary vanguard party, and have grafted this concept into a traditionalist Islamist framework.

The call to strike directly at civilians is a brazen violation of Islamic norms. As John Kelsay writes: ‘Let there be no mistake about this; Islam is very clear on the matter. The Prophet said: “Do not cheat or commit treachery, do not mutilate or kill women, children, or old men.”’ 64 Bin Laden might think that ‘necessity makes the forbidden things permitted’, but this cannot be used as an excuse for murder. Kelsay ‘finds it most interesting’ that bin Laden did not cite any precedents in Islam to justify his attacks. 65

One of fifty-two children of a Yemeni contractor, Osama bin Laden was not a religious scholar but a charismatic leader deeply convinced of his Wahhabi views. In April 1997 he claimed it was the duty of all Muslims to ‘kill the Americans and their allies, civilians and military … in any country in which it is possible’. 66 Such threats were repeated in his declaration, ‘The World Islamic Front against Jews and Crusaders’, in February 1998.

According to John Esposito, bin Laden and his ilk reject the traditional Muslim strictures on jihad that violence be proportional and limited to repelling an enemy, that innocent civilians should not be targeted, that property be not needlessly destroyed, and that jihad may be declared only by a ruler or head of state. 67 Yet jihad that rejects traditional strictures might result in bringing more severe retaliation against the Muslim community or homeland, thus violating prudential considerations of proportionality.

62. Allen, God’s Terrorists, 277.
65. Ibid., 85.
66. Allen, God’s Terrorists, 293.
The Grievances

Westerners who depict the problem as a conflict between the civilised world and terrorists, or as a war between ‘freedom’ and fundamentalists who hate democracy, or as a war against evil, often overlook the real grievances felt by multitudes of Muslims and that the extremists exploit. Anti-Americanism is driven not by the democratic freedoms and prosperity of the West, but by the inconsistency in Western standards, and by what seems like hypocrisy over Israel and US support for oppressive regimes in many Muslim countries.68

Many Muslims have equated modernisation with Westernisation and secularisation, with their undermining of traditional social and cultural values and structures. ‘Islam [has] offered a sense of identity, fraternity, and cultural values that offset the psychological dislocation and cultural threat of their new environment.’ The Islamic revival has particularly appealed to those most vulnerable, offering a ‘sense of meaning and security’.69

The beliefs of individual jihadists can give them a new sense of purpose and self-sacrifice, since they consider they are serving a noble cause in jihad. It comes as no surprise that many of the individuals attracted to Islamist ideas come from disturbed and troubled backgrounds, though others are highly educated and come from wealthy families.

In Esposito’s view, ‘The cancer of global terrorism will continue to afflict the international body until we address its political and economic causes, causes that will otherwise continue to provide a breeding ground for hatred and radicalism, the rise of extremist movements, and recruits for the bin Ladens of the world’.70

Many Muslims have felt deeply humiliated at seeing their countries occupied and colonised by Western forces, and are ashamed of the failure to maintain the prestige of their cultures.71 Their grievances are many:

- the failure to keep pace with the technological and social progress of the West
- the inability to secure peace and stable governments
- disillusionment with various forms of nationalism, socialism, communism, and capitalism
- anger at the fate of Palestinians and at Western support for Israel
- resentment at intrusion by Western powers in Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.
- violation of traditional cultural norms in Western media, dress, music, materialism, and consumerism, and

70. Ibid., 160.
• loss of national or cultural identity.

Muhammad was primarily interested in the wellbeing of the Muslim community (ummah), and one of the major themes of the Qur’an is forgiveness. But a recovery of reconciliation and forgiveness as urged in the Qur’an can only occur in conjunction with a renewed commitment to social justice, which is traditionally critical in Islam as a sign of political legitimacy.\(^{72}\)

**The Role of the Wider Muslim community**

Ultimately the answer to Islamist terrorism and extremism has largely to come from the Muslim community itself, especially since such wanton violence will generate strong reactions from other groups, increasing the sense of marginalisation or worse for Muslims. Yet it is difficult for the Muslim community to respond:

- Islam has no central authorities, unlike the Catholic Church for instance. It has no-one like the pope, and cannot call an authoritative body like a general council to make key decisions.
- Islam lacks a clerical structure, and has no international group of scholars readily able to fulfil such a role. Religious scholars, the ulama, assume prestige and influence because of their knowledge of Islam, especially the Qur’an itself, but need to win community consensus.\(^{73}\)

The final authority derives from the consensus of the entire community. Military campaigns alone, while necessary to contain extremist groups and protect the innocent, will not defeat such groups. Rather, what would be decisive would be the Muslim community overwhelmingly rejecting such atrocities as violating Islamic morality and bringing dishonour on the name of Islam in the eyes of the world. Leading Muslim authorities such as Shaykh al-Azhar and Yusuf al-Qaradhawi insisted on this against bin Laden and al-Qaeda.\(^{74}\)

**Islam and Democratic Values**

Moreover, the bifurcation of the world into sharply divided Muslim and non-Muslim spheres does not reflect the reality that the world is becoming more cosmopolitan, with large numbers of Muslims choosing to live in religiously diverse communities, including those in countries with long democratic traditions. Muslim tradition needs to be reinterpreted in light of modern concepts of toleration and religious liberty. As John Kelsay has written:

> the project of Muslim democrats involves interpreting the sources of Shari‘a reasoning in ways that stress freedom of conscience and


\(^{73}\) Siddiqui, *Christian–Muslim Dialogue*, 52.

\(^{74}\) Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War*, 144–7.
religion, and which thus require political arrangements associated with the protection of human rights. Put negatively, the democrats’ argument is that the notion of a political order in which Islam is established leads inevitably to religious violence.\(^75\)

In the modern period, indeed, various scholars were rethinking the role of Islam in the changing political circumstances. A young scholar, Egyptian ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966) argued in a treatise, *Al-Islam wa usul al-hukm* (‘Islam and the Fundamentals of Government’), that while Muhammad was the Messenger of God and religious authority, his political authority rested on his skills as an effective military leader. Al-Raziq argued that Islam did not require its religious authority to extend over the political sphere of the state.

In Kelsay’s words, a ‘firestorm’ greeted al-Raziq’s writing, and the scholars at the al-Azhar University in 1931 declared his treatise a forbidden book.\(^76\) Al-Raziq contended that the wellbeing of the Muslim community demanded that the precedents of earlier generations were no longer appropriate to achieve the goals of justice.\(^77\) Kelsay has commented:

> At one fell swoop, a scholar of al-Azhar, steeped in the sources of Shari‘a reasoning, mitigated or did away with the priority of the classical model of political order. There need be no *khilafat*; no ruler dedicated to governance by the Shari‘a; no consultation between a religious establishment and political leaders; and no priority for Muslims as the first citizens of an Islamic state.\(^78\)

Ira Lapidus argues that ‘Islam was never the sole organizing principle’ of premodern Islamic societies, which maintained social and ‘political institutions defined in non-Islamic terms’. Even from the eighth and ninth centuries, ‘the early Caliphate was already evolving into an imperial and secular political regime … The separation on an institutional level of state institutions and religious associations became the norm’ for many later Muslim regimes, though the separation was never clear-cut or complete, since Muslims believed a Muslim state was necessary for a complete Muslim way of life.\(^79\)

Other liberal Muslim scholars have continued work to reconcile Islam with democratic freedoms. Farid Esack has written that ‘we are engaged in the task of finding common ground with other liberatory social movements spawned by modernity and recognizing the emancipatory potential of other religions. Ours is not so much an Islamic universe but a pluriverse of liberatory discourses (Islam

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75. Ibid., 166–7.
76. Ibid., 85.
77. Ibid., 86.
78. Ibid., 88.
being one of them) in cross-cultural conversation with each other, forming alliances that fight oppression anywhere’. 80

However, in the view of Antony Black, ‘the prospects for a non-sectarian view of citizenship in the Islamic world are not good’, since the more self-consciously Islamic a country becomes, the less it endows the state with moral authority. 81

Mohammed Arkoun argues that most Muslims remain cut off from modern Western scholarship even in Islamic studies, and what is needed is a ‘contemporary Islamic synthesis with a long chapter on the continuous regressive historical process’ in Islamic thought and culture since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, especially since scholars and teachers are caught up in the service of ‘official Islam and/or the new imaginary expressions of populist Islam’. 82

Richard Bonney contends that some Muslims have updated the dichotomous view of the dar al-Islam and the abode of war, the dar al-Harb, ‘on the grounds that it no longer conforms to the reality of the world in which we live. They have proposed instead the terminology of the abode of Covenant/Treaty (dār al-‘Ahd) or even the “abode of testimony”’. 83

Muslims in the West, argues Tāriq Ramaḍān, are not in ‘other societies’, desperately hoping for a return to the Dār al-Islām; they are, on the contrary, at home in the West; the old terminology thus appears ‘completely restrictive and out of context’. At the very least, Muslims in the West owe civic allegiance to their countries of residence, and in some cases asylum. 83

Indeed Muslims living in a world of nation-states ‘generally subscribe to a decidedly non-Islamic version of international law’. 84 Hashmi concurs that though ‘Muslim states have accommodated to the prevailing international norms, these norms have yet to be assimilated into Islamic political thought’. 85 But he does think that there is ‘a growing convergence in conceptions of jihad and just war that permits a cross-cultural dialogue’. 86

Khaled Abou El Fadl contends that Islam has the resources to redevelop its thinking about living harmoniously with and among non-Muslim peoples,
especially by distinguishing the religious teaching of the Qur’an from later juristic and historical practice. He notes how the Qur’an ‘commends sulh as the superior moral course of action to be taken by disputing parties. Sulh means conciliation or settlement’. As the Qur’an says: ‘Reconciliation is the best course, even though people are often swayed [from reaching an amicable resolution] by greed’.87

He continues, arguing that, though the Qur’an can seem at times both conciliatory and confrontational, ‘peace and neutrality agreements with non-Muslims are permissible’. He further suggests that the ‘Qur’an leaves open the possibility that some day hostility between Muslims and non-Muslims could be replaced with friendship’, and quotes the Qur’an:

> It may be that God will grant love and friendship between you and those whom you now hold as enemies, for God has power over all things; and God is most forgiving, most merciful. God forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them, for God loveth those who are just. God only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for your faith and drive you out of your homes, and support others in driving you out, from turning to them for friendship. (Qur’an: 60:7-9).

And again:

> Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power including steeds of war to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies of God and your enemies … But if the enemy inclines towards peace, you also should incline towards peace, and trust in God for God is the One that hears and knows all things (Qur’an 8:60–61).

The Qur’an is very clear on not fighting people who wish to remain neutral:

> Do not fight those who do not want to fight their own people and do not want to fight you either. If God had wished, He would have made them your enemies. Therefore, if they withdraw from you and do not fight you, and instead send you guarantees of peace, then God has not permitted you to war against them (Qur’an 4:90).88

By God’s command not to transgress, God ‘was instructing Muslims not to kill noncombatants, especially women, children, hermits, senior citizens, and, in the opinion of some, peasants’.89 Muslim jurists in the eleventh century insisted

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88. Ibid., 181–2.
89. Ibid., 183.
on asserting moral consideration above political expediency, ruling that even if
enemies tortured and murdered Muslims, Muslims were forbidden to do the
same.\footnote{Ibid., 192.}

Khaled Abou El Fadl concludes that the rules determining how Muslims
relate with non-Muslims are not set in stone. Rather ‘they are necessarily
weighed against other Islamic values, and conflict resolution is an Islamic value
that receives serious consideration in Islamic jurisprudence’.\footnote{Ibid., 191.} Concessions will
need to be made to non-Muslims in Muslim states.\footnote{Ibid., 198.} He finds it reassuring that
‘there is considerable support in the Islamic heritage for making conflict
resolution a prime and essential normative value’.\footnote{Ibid., 200.}

**Conclusion**

If the extremists were to have their way, the prospect facing Muslim
communities would not be universal peace under a strict interpretation of Islam,
but devastated war-torn countries overflowing with refugees and massive
destruction of cities and living standards, as ideological fanatics revert to
self-righteous savagery, dishonouring Islam as a great civilising influence that
nurtures the religious sensibility of some 1.6 billion people today. Bonney writes:

There must be a \textit{jihād} against militant \textit{jihād}, a struggle against
terrorism, the new fanaticism which shows no respect for human life
and therefore no respect for the values of civilization. Terrorism must be
indeed defeated, but there are more subtle, or better calibrated, ways of
doing so than are presently deployed by the West in the so-called ‘war
on terrorism.’\footnote{Bonney, \textit{Jihād}, 420.}

Interreligious relations are of course extremely important in helping resolve
conflict and misunderstandings about Islam and the violence of Islamist
militants. Pope Francis is well aware of this, and has repeatedly appealed for
peace and justice in the Middle East, and an end to atrocities and terrorist attacks.

Pope John Paul II said in the mosque in Damascus on 5 May 2001: ‘Better
mutual understanding will surely lead, at the practical level, to a new way of
presenting our two religions not in opposition, as has happened too often in the
past, but in partnership for the good of the human family’.\footnote{Quoted in Karl-Josef Kuschel, ‘Perspectives on Christian–Muslim Dialogue’, \textit{Theology Digest} 49, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 234.}

To deepen relations with Muslims, Pope Francis in September 2014 made
his first trip outside Italy as pope to Albania, the poorest country in Europe. He
praised Albania for the mutual trust among Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox believers as a ‘precious gift’ and powerful symbol. ‘This is especially the case in these times where an authentic religious spirit is being perverted by extremist groups and where religious differences are being distorted and instrumentalised.’

In his response to an address by the Albanian Muslim president, Bujar Nishami, Pope Francis said:

May no one use religion as a pretext for actions against human dignity and against the fundamental rights of every man and woman, above all, the right to life and the right of everyone to religious freedom.\(^\text{96}\)

To religious leaders he said: ‘Authentic religion is a source of peace and not of violence! No one must use the name of God to commit violence! To kill in the name of God is a grave sacrilege’.\(^\text{97}\)

Francis reiterated his message in Turkey in November 2014, when he called on all Muslim leaders to condemn violence committed in the name of Islam.

All religious leaders, scholars, clerics, intellectuals and politicians should do this. This way they would hear it from their leader’s mouth. There needs to be an international condemnation from Muslims across the world. It needs to say, ‘no, this is not what the Quran is about!’\(^\text{98}\)

The Pope believed most Muslims were angry at the Islamist terrorism and atrocities.\(^\text{99}\) He was naturally concerned about the killing of Christians and other minorities by Muslim extremists. The Pope’s voice might resonate more powerfully, particularly in Muslim countries, however, if he were to speak more directly in defence of Muslims as well, as many more Muslims are being killed than Christians.

Many Muslim leaders have been speaking out more strongly against extremist movements, especially as terrorist attacks are inflicting horrible casualties on innocent people in their own countries. When Pope Francis met in Turkey with the President of the Diyanet, Prof. Mehmet Görmez, of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the highest Islamic religious authority in that country, the Islamic leader declared: ‘Those who act against Islam’s message of peace, those who spread violence and brutality, following the wrong path, rebel against God no matter what name they identify themselves with’.\(^\text{100}\)

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98. ‘In the mosque I prayed to the Lord for these wars to stop!’, Vatican Insider, 30 November 2014, http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/francesco-turchia-37828/.
99. Ibid.
Yet the statements against violence by Muslim leaders overseas are often not reported in the Western media. This can give the unfortunate impression in Western countries that Islamic leaders are either silently complicit with the terrorists or afraid to speak.

This indicates a serious failure in the Western media to report adequately strenuous efforts made by mainstream Muslim leaders, religious and civil, to oppose and denounce such atrocities and violence. After all, much of the carnage is directed against their own communities and families.

It is undoubtedly important that people in Western countries become better informed about the conflict within Islamic movements, and learn to appreciate Islam itself not as a threat, but as a valuable civilising religion undergoing a painful transformation. Personal contacts and friendships in every country will be needed to promote understanding and collaboration in building a more just society and world.

The international community clearly has a duty to intervene when it can to protect minorities facing extermination or mass killing, as it also has a duty to prevent the killing of innocent Muslims, though such interventions are often much more difficult to effect.

Pope Francis is aware of these complexities, but has been critical of Western interventions that have considered the struggle against terrorism to be primarily a military one, so resulting in more innocent victims. In the plane when returning from Turkey, Pope Francis rejected ‘State terrorism’, when states take it upon themselves to decide and think ‘it is their right to slaughter terrorists. But many innocent people die alongside them … this is high-level anarchism and it is very dangerous’. However, when ‘an unjust aggressor needs to be stopped, this is done with the consensus of the international community. No country has the right to take it upon themselves to stop an unjust aggressor’.\footnote{101}

Establishing relations between Islam and other religions on a new basis of deeper mutual solidarity and respect will be vital for peacemaking in the Middle East and to resolve the terrorist upheaval. A critical part of this dialogue of religions and civilisations must focus on the promotion of social equity, and the eradication of poverty and social distress. As Hashmi has written: ‘Justice may be seen without oversimplification to be the core value of Islamic ethics, for it turns like a binding thread throughout the Qur’an and the Prophetic traditions’.\footnote{102}

Indeed there is a deep consonance in the core values of Islam, Judaism, Christianity and the West. One of the sayings \textit{(hadith)} of Muhammad appears on the multifaith commemorative website of the 9/11 disaster:

\begin{center}
\textbf{What actions are most excellent?}
\textit{To gladden the heart of a human being.}
\end{center}


\footnote{102. Hashmi, ‘Islamic Ethics’, 162.}
To feed the hungry.
To help the afflicted.
To lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful,
To remove the wrongs of the injured.

That person is the most beloved of God who does most good to God’s creatures. ¹⁰³

This quote from the Qur’an, Sura 5:48, might serve as a guide for the great religions rivalling each other in the service of human beings:

To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (his plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: So strive as in a race in all the virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³. Bonney, Jihād, 419.
¹⁰⁴. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., The Holy Qur’an (Ware, Herefordshire: Wordsworth, 2000); italics added to original.