

DEFINING ISLAMIC WAY OF WARFARE AND ITS COMPARISON WITH
AL QAEDA DOCTRINE

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Military History

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ABSTRACT

DEFINING ISLAMIC WAY OF WARFARE AND ITS COMPARISON WITH AL QAEDA DOCTRINE, by Major Intekhab Haider Khan, 85 pages.

With the rise of Al Qaeda and like-minded militant groups, there have been many discussions and misrepresentations of the term Islamic way of warfare. It is important to understand that anything, to be qualified as Islamic, has to have a reference from the core sources of Islam, i.e. the Quran, and the practices and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This research is focused to define an Islamic way of warfare based on these fundamental sources, with a view to identifying whether Al Qaeda is truly Islamic or not.

This thesis identifies that Islam does not dictate minor tactical matters of warfare, rather focuses its guidance on warfare in two broad categories: the just cause for waging war, and limited restrictions on conduct during the war. Using this two part test of “Cause” and “Conduct,” the thesis shows that though Al Qaeda deem to have an authentic Islamic cause to wage war against USA and Western countries, because of its violation of guidelines in conduct, it ceases to qualify as Islamic.

The research finally provides recommendations on how United States and Western countries can engage militant groups and the Muslim world more effectively.

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ACRONYMS

PBUH Peace Be Upon Him

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

With the declaration of “War on Terror” after September 11, 2001, on many occasions the words “Islamic” or “Islamist” have been used to define the ideology and tactics of extremist groups. Many politicians and academics openly defined terrorist tactics since 9/11 as an “Islamic way of warfare.” It is very strange that Islam, a religion that claims to promote peace, can provide guidelines to terrorists who seem to choose killing innocent civilians and destroying public property to prove their strength. This contradiction requires research to identify what is truly an Islamic way of warfare, and how much relevance it has with the ideology and tactics of today’s extremist groups.

The concept of defining a certain “way of warfare” is relatively recent. Historians like Geoffrey Parker and John Keegan, after detail study of the wars involving Western nations, defined a Western way of warfare with a distinct set of characteristics, which all or most Western nations have followed. This concept of defining a way of warfare raises the question: if there is a western way of warfare, are there other ways of warfare, too? Though much research has not been done to find the answer to this question, many academics and politicians have chosen to use the phrase way of warfare and used it indiscriminately to explain their views. The most current example in today’s world is the Islamic way of warfare. Unfortunately, many seem to have tied this term with whatever the extremists groups are doing today or did in the past, without trying to find its connection with the fundamentals of Islam.

Unlike the term Western, which denotes a geographical entity, Islam represents an ideology, which is much different in its context. As such, the word Islamic should mean whatever is supported by the fundamentals of Islam, and not necessarily represent the actions of every Muslims. Because Muslims are spread all over the world, their actions are not only guided by the fundamentals of their religion, but also by their local culture, history and influence of past rulers including the colonial powers. Thus, some Muslims, either states, groups, or individuals, may or may not be following the teachings of Islam. If they are not, their actions cannot be termed as Islamic.

Islam, as it is known in the present world, was preached by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him (PBUH)) in the early 7th century (610-633 AD). Muslims derive their divine guidelines from their holy book - the Quran, and from the teachings and lifestyle of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), known as *Sunnah*. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) clearly indicated the authenticity of these two sources in his last sermon to people during the last pilgrimage: “I have left with you something, which if you hold fast to it, will never fall into error—a plain indication, the Book of Allah (Quran), and the practice of His Prophet. So give good heed to what I say.”¹ While many Muslims strive to follow the fundamental rules of Islam, because of other external factors of influence, like colonial influence or long practiced local culture, many practices of Muslims are not fundamentally Islamic. For example, though Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, its Army does not necessarily draw its doctrine from Islamic teachings, as it does from the inherited teachings of the British colonial power, or from other modern armies. Similarly, the Persian culture always had great influence over the conduct of the present-day Iranians. However, because much care has been taken to preserve the

Quran in its original form, and to record the teachings and life style of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the true Islamic teachings have not faded away. In order to understand the true Islamic way of warfare, one must critically examine these authentic sources in their correct context.

Based on the discussions above, this research has been done based on two preliminary assumptions. First, if there is a Western way of warfare, there has to be other ways of warfare too. Second, Islam guides the Muslims in every facet of life. Therefore, there must be guidelines on warfare, which can be termed as Islamic way of warfare.

Research Methodology

In order to avoid interpreting actions of Muslims that might have external influences, only the Quran, life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his immediate companions in the 7th century have been in the subject of this research. Although Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received the first revelation from Allah in 610 AD, the first battle he led (at *Badr*) did not occur until 624 AD. Since then, until his demise in 633 AD, he fought eight major battles, led eighteen expeditions and planned thirty eight other military operations.² This research focused on these battles and expeditions. During this 10 year period when he was engaged in war with various groups opposing the spread of Islam, Allah revealed several verses to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to provide guidance on fighting. These verses, examined in their correct context, have been extremely important to deriving the basic fundamentals of Islamic war of warfare.

Because of contradictory explanations found about the term Islamic way of warfare, the primary research question for this research was “What is the Islamic way of

warfare?” In order to find a structured approach to reveal the answer of this question, the secondary research questions were:

1. What is a way of warfare (Characteristics that make a way of warfare)?
2. What are the guidelines on warfare given in the Quran, and practiced or ordered by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)?

Besides, it is important to understand how a war fought by Muslims can be compared to the concept of Islamic way of warfare. Since, the most discussed issue of present time is Al Qaeda’s claim of being an Islamic organization, this research also focused on identifying Al Qaeda’s way of war, and then compared it with the identified Islamic way of warfare. In order to achieve this, two other secondary research questions were investigated:

1. What are the characteristics of the Al Qaeda’s way of war?
2. To what extent does the Al Qaeda follow or contradict the Islamic way of warfare?

The chapters in this paper are laid out to answer each secondary research question respectively. Chapter 2 deals with finding a common understanding about the term way of warfare, so that the ultimate aim of defining Islamic way of warfare remains within the structure followed by established historians. This chapter initially discusses how four historians have conceptualized the term way of warfare, and explains the commonalities between their views. However, as they were found to have different perspectives on the concept of way of warfare, the dictionary meanings of the terms are also discussed. Analyzing all, it was found when attempting to define a way of warfare, the time period is flexible. However, it should be sufficient enough so that a pattern can be identified.

The war or battles to be focused on should have been fought by people that correctly represent the ideology or culture of the focus area. For example, to derive the Western way of warfare, one should focus on wars fought by the regular armies of Western countries, who follow a common Western culture. Similarly, for the Islamic way of warfare, the focus area should be the battles fought by Muslims who correctly represent Islam. On the question of what to look for, it was identified that it could be their method, perception or manner of fighting. However, unlike other ways of warfare, which are based on geographical entity, such as Western or German, the term Islamic warrants a special consideration of quoting the guidelines of the Quran. It is because the Quran is the core of all Islamic ideologies, any concept that is claimed to be Islamic is incomplete without having reference from the Quran.

Chapter 3 is the most important chapter that deals with the primary research question of defining an Islamic way of warfare. As identified in chapter 2, this chapter discusses the guidance from the Quran and *Sunnah* on warfare. Though initially the research was intended to identify some common pattern from the battles fought by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it was later found that he basically did not introduce any new way of fighting, rather mostly followed the way contemporary Arabs fought in his time. However, in certain occasions, he complied with the teachings of the Quran, and rejected or forbidden practices that were viewed un-Islamic. It was identified that Islam does not guide matters of minor tactics of war, but provides a broader framework within which Muslims can fight. It also provides a few restrictions and allowances for the conduct of the war. In essence, Islam guides Muslims about when they can fight (just

cause), what they should fight for (objectives), and offer limited guidance on the actual conduct of war.

Chapter 4 is solely focused on identifying the causes, objectives and conduct of Al Qaeda. Because of the reason that there is no guidance about minor tactics in Islam, discussion on Al Qaeda's doctrine is also kept limited to those three factors mentioned above: the cause, objective, and conducts that relates to the guidance of Islam.

Finally, chapter 5 brings out the comparison between the Al Qaeda's way of war and the Islamic way of warfare identified in chapter 3. It also provides a deeper understanding of the position of warfare in Islam. Finally it contains recommendations for US and other Western nations in general about engaging with Muslims and extremist militant groups.

Since the author is a Muslim, the name "Allah" is used throughout the paper to mean God. The concept of Allah's being is explained in brief in chapter 3, and that idea is carried throughout the paper whenever any reference is drawn from the Quran. Muslims believe that the Quran is the word of Allah, revealed over time through the angel *Jibrael* (Gabriel) to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who further conveyed it to his companions. That is why, phrases like "Allah commanded the Muslims . . .," "Allah confirmed . . .," or "This is mentioned in Quran . . ." are used interchangeably; but ultimately they carry the same message that it was a word from Allah that is written in Quran. In many occasions, non-Muslim academics referred to Quranic instructions as words of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which according to Muslim belief is highly erroneous. It is also customary for Muslims to say "*Sallallahu Alaihi Wa Sallam*," meaning "Peace be upon him," after mentioning Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s name.

So the abbreviated form “PBUH” has been used throughout the paper after the name of the Prophet. The word “Prophet” is used before his name as a gesture of honor, as well as to distinguish him from his companions, as Muhammad was a common name in contemporary Arab society.

The primary target reader for this thesis paper is layman non-Muslims and Muslims, who have some or no knowledge about Islam. Use of too many religious terms has been intentionally avoided to make it easily readable and understandable for the intended audience. However, scholars of Islam can also find important references in this thesis, which may help them to study similar concepts in further detail.

This thesis does not discuss all of the Islamic laws and guidance on warfare in detail. It is highly focused on the two most important sources of Islam – the Quran and *Hadith*. The references from the Quran and *Hadith* are further explained by Islamic scholars of past and present. One who is interested to know more about these religious sources should look for texts of renowned Muslim scholars. This thesis focuses on the core idea from those concepts and explains them in a basic form, just to give the readers an understanding about where to find references. Each of these laws or guidance can form a separate research, given the context of the revelations and the way these were applied had wide variations. This thesis also opens the doorway for further research on whether the Western presence and influence in Arabian Peninsula is truly detrimental to Islamic values and practices of the region or not. This is a very important question that has been identified in chapter 5, but remains unanswered because it was beyond the scope of this thesis. Western powers need to find an answer to this question, if not identified

already, in order to support their actions to their claim that their fight is not against Islam, but against terrorists or tyrants.

While discussing Al Qaeda, a generic view of the militant group is taken into consideration to identify their cause, objective and conduct. There are indications that different cells of Al Qaeda in different countries do not necessarily follow the same doctrine and causes. An enthusiastic reader must go into further details to ascertain the level of Islamic justification these different cells of Al Qaeda have. The aim of bringing Al Qaeda as a comparison to the Islamic way of warfare is solely to show the readers how a war fought by Muslims can be compared to the fundamental Islamic rulings. It does not aim to praise or blame Al Qaeda or similar militant groups for their rightness or wrongness. It is well understood that understanding the entire gamut of ideology of such desperate militant groups needs more research and communication with the members of these groups. Many books and journals provide a one sided view about these groups, which cannot portray the real picture completely. The model of Al Qaeda discussed in this thesis is solely based on books and journals written mostly by Western scholars; therefore it cannot be claimed as error free. However, due caution has been taken to focus on the translations of statements made by Al Qaeda leaders, like Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Abd Al-Aziz Al-Muqrin, with an effort towards presenting a view as close as possible to their views and ideology.

Finally, explaining religious subjects is not a layman's business. A deeper understanding about contemporary religion, language, human geography, history etc. is needed to explain religious topics in correct context. Even after achieving that understanding, scholars differ amongst themselves in their explanations. Islam is

considered the words and commandments of Allah, Who has the best knowledge of everything. With the limitation human beings have that they cannot perceive things beyond their knowledge, it is nearly impossible to be perfect in explaining religious subjects. Even Prophets like Muhammad (PBUH) in some occasions expressed the limit of his knowledge in comparison to Allah. It is stated in a *hadith* from *Sahih Muslim*, that once angel *Jibreel* (Gabriel) came to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and asked him about the “Hour.” The Prophet (PBUH) replied, “The one asked about it knows no more than the one asking,” indicating that the knowledge about the last hour (the doomsday) rests with Allah alone.³ Considering this human limitation, it cannot be claimed that this thesis provides the most correct view about the Islamic way of warfare. While effort has been made to get as close as possible to the fundamental authentic sources to derive the best knowledge, with the help of scholarly explanations, this thesis is not beyond individual perceptions. Therefore, it is best to consider the view formed in this thesis as “a way” to define Islamic way of warfare, instead of terming it as “the only way,” echoing the Islamic scholars, who always say that “Allah knows best.”

Literature Review

An inherent difficulty for researching subjects related to Islamic history is the limited availability of primary sources other than the Quran. Arabs during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not have a wide practice of keeping written records of historical events or biographies. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also forbade his companions to write his words during his lifetime considering that those might be mistaken by later generations as the words of Allah. His companions were only allowed to write the Quranic verses, for which the Quran can be considered a primary source.

However, the Quran is not a book of history that explains historical events in details. The primary focus of the Quran is to give humans an understanding of the greatness of Allah, and to provide them with basic guidance about how to lead the worldly life and simultaneously prepare for the life hereafter. The historical accounts are often used as examples to support the arguments. The second most authentic source is the *hadith* books compiled by eminent scholars like Imam Muhammad Ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (Imam Bukhari) and Imam Abu'l-Husain 'Asakir-ud-Din Muslim b. Hajjaj (Imam Muslim). Their works are considered authentic because of the extreme caution they maintained to separate *hadiths* from weak narrators to dependable narrators. To get a more or less comprehensive understanding about Islamic laws and guidance, one needs to read the Quran, the *hadiths*, and the biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) together.

To find the answer of the first secondary question, i.e. to ascertain what the term way of warfare means, books of four renowned historians were considered. They were carefully chosen to have a diverse view of the same term. All four books provide a distinct understanding of how to define a way of warfare. Geoffrey Parker perhaps is the most famous for coining the term Western way of warfare. He does a good job in his book “Cambridge History of Warfare” discussing the characteristics of Western way of warfare, and then to support his arguments from a wide margin of wars from 600 BC to 2007 AD. His concept of way of warfare comes from a much broader view than William P. Baxter, who focused more on contemporary Soviet Union militaries in his book “Soviet way of warfare.” Robert M. Citino, in his book “The German way of war” takes a similar approach to Parker, but he better explains the limitations of the term “German” when relating it to way of warfare. The books of John Keegan (A History of Warfare)

and Victor Davis Hanson (Carnage and Culture) do not explicitly discuss any particular way of warfare, but rather discuss the concept of Western way of warfare as part of their arguments. All of these books are well researched and provide a detailed understanding of their respective concepts.

The most crucial part of selecting reference books for identifying an Islamic way of warfare was to find the earliest history of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). As no primary source exists other than the Quran, Ibn Ishaq's "Sirat Rasul Allah" is found to be the earliest detail biography written on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). However, his original work has been modified by Ibn Hisham, which was later translated by A. Guillaume. Ibn Ishaq's book was very much based on the early accounts of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and recounts narrations of Prophet's companions, who transferred that knowledge to others they met. Though many Islamic scholars do not view Ibn Ishaq's work as a reliable source of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life, it provides a good understanding of the contemporary society and context of the Quranic verses. Martin Lings also did a commendable job of gathering the Prophet's (PBUH) life account from early sources like Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad Ibn Sa'd and Muhammad Ibn Umar Al-Waqidi. His writing is more fluent than the translated version of Ibn Ishaq, and is easier to follow. However, while historical narrations of these books are used to explain the context, verbatim reference of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) words are mostly taken from the two most authentic *hadith* books—*Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, named after the scholars who collected those hadiths. One needs to remember that these *hadith* books were originally written in Arabic, and there are several translations available in English. For easy search of reference, the online versions of the translation have been used. Similarly, the original

Quran is written in Arabic, and English translations of the Quran sometimes vary among translators in choice of words. It needs to be understood that literal translation of Arabic is not possible because many Arabic words have equivocal meanings in English. Of the noted translators, few are more acceptable to Islamic scholars. One of them, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, has been used as a reference for most verses from the Quran. His translations also include the background of each *surah* (chapter), and short explanations of important verses, which was helpful in explaining the verses in the correct context. Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's "The battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad" provides a good illustration of the major battles fought by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Particularly helpful was Brigadier S.K. Malik's "The Quranic Concept of War," which quite explicitly discusses the guidance on the causes and conduct of Islamic warfare. Professor Raj Bhala, a Rice distinguished professor of law at the University of Kansas, did an excellent job in his book "Understanding Islamic Law (*Sharia*)," explaining the Islamic laws that contain understanding of Islamic statehood. To explain how the Quran and *Sunnah* are laid out and to be followed, Abdur Rahman I.Doi's "*Shariah: The Islamic Law*" provided great assistance in finding the sources and detailed explanations of *Shariah* terms. Many other good historic accounts of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) military life were also consulted. However, western historians like Richard A. Gabriel (author of *Muhammad: Islam's First Great general*) or Hugh Kennedy (author of *The Great Arab Conquests*) often seem to have considered Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a military leader only, with little consideration for the diverse other roles he played as a Prophet and as a human being. It is not possible for one to understand Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) character without considering his overall goal as a Prophet, which was to guide mankind. His role

as a military leader did not free him from the other roles he played. And most importantly, as explained in chapter 3, war was not his tool to spread Islam. In his lifetime, Islam was not spread by the sword, but protected by sword. Because of this difference in mindset, facts and opinions are carefully sifted while using Western historians' texts on Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life, and only facts have been used.

Reference sources about Al Qaeda are in abundance. However, since this thesis attempts to identify Al Qaeda's motive and conduct for war, care has been taken to consult direct words from the Al Qaeda leadership. Norman Cigar's translation of Al Muqrin's "A Practical Course for Guerilla War" and Raymond Ibrahim's "The Al Qaeda Reader" have been particularly helpful to find the declarations and doctrines developed by Al Qaeda leadership in their own words. However, as stated earlier, translations can sometimes change meaning, so one should not focus on the selection of words found in these translated texts of Al Qaeda declarations, rather should try to comprehend the concept only.

¹A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1967), 651.

²Richard A. Gabriel, *Muhammad: Islam's First Great General* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press), xviii-xix.

³Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Number 0001, "The Book of Faith," http://www.iium.edu.my/deed/hadith/muslim/001_smt.html (accessed May 10, 2012).

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS A WAY OF WARFARE?

Before trying to define the Islamic way of warfare, it is important to ascertain what the term “way of warfare” actually means. Though it is difficult to identify who coined it first, in recent past the term has been widely used by historians and academics, where they discussed how some particular nations or cultures conducted and perceived warfare at some particular time in the history. Interestingly, the term way of warfare does not have a customary definition. Though there are similarities, every author seems to have used the term in his own way, and used examples to support his arguments that vary in both timeline and perceptions. This varied view of authors apparently leaves wider scope to set the parameters to define “Islamic way of warfare.” However, instead of making assumptions, it is important to examine past examples in order to create a common platform based on which a way of warfare can be framed. This chapter provides a critical analysis on how some historians used this term with a view to creating that common framework. Just because there are dissimilarities between the concepts of the authors, a critical examination of the dictionary meanings is also made in order to make it more authentic.

Dictionary Meaning

The term way of warfare is comprised of two important words, “way” and “warfare,” and it is important to critically look at both of these words. The meaning of warfare is easier to define. According to Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and Thesaurus, warfare in British English means: “the activity of fighting a war, often

including the weapons and methods that are used.”¹ The same word in American English means: “the activity of fighting a war or strongly competing, especially with reference to the type of weapons used or to the way the fighting is done.”² There are various forms of warfare mentioned in the dictionary, like germ warfare, chemical warfare, psychological warfare etc, which indicates that warfare may not include only fighting between two groups with weapons, otherwise known as combat. It can also mean a strong form of competition between two belligerents that may involve other than lethal means, like the use of chemicals or biological agents. The meaning of warfare in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary is similar to the one found in the Cambridge’s Dictionary, but is expanded to include another definition that says: “the activity of competing in an aggressive way with another group, company, etc.,” suggesting conflict between social classes or gangs.³ Considering all, it can be concluded that while the most common form of warfare means actively fighting combat, it may also mean strong competition between two rivals that may include lethal or nonlethal actions. Historical examples can be found from the Cold War, where no physical combat took place, but still it has a place in history as a long lasting war.

While warfare has a relatively simpler meaning, the word way is comparatively more complex as it has multiple meanings according to its usage. According to Cambridge dictionary, it has ten different connotations;⁴ but the ones that acceptably connect to warfare are possibility,⁵ manner,⁶ method,⁷ and want.⁸ Analyzing their explanations, it can be derived that way of warfare may mean either how belligerents physically fought the war (way as method), or how belligerents perceived war (way as manner), or how belligerents chose or wanted to fight war (way as possibility or want).

The concepts of historians that used the term way of warfare also support this conclusion. Geoffrey Parker, while discussing the Western way of war, meant both method and choice. While he focused on methods like discipline and the use of technology, he also included how military leaders chose to maintain continuity by learning from historical examples, and to finance the huge cost of war, especially to support the technological changes.⁹ Victor David Hanson and Robert M. Citino took an almost similar view about the Western and German way of warfare respectively.

Perspective from Usage

While dictionary meanings provide a basic understanding of what a way of warfare may mean, it would not be complete without examining how historians viewed this term, and what parameters they used to validate their arguments. It is important to understand the parameters because then it will be easier to know where and what to look at. The variables that set the parameters for this study are focus areas, timeline, and geographical and ethnical entity. Focus area means whether the authors focused on physical means like method of fighting and supporting the combat, or conceptual means like doctrine, perception and attitude. Timeline means the period in history looked at, and of the duration. Finally, geographical and ethnical entity means what geographical area the examples should encompass. Is it enough to discuss one nation, or should it involve multi-nations? Are all the wars within that geographical area relevant?

Perception and Focus Areas

Talking about how different authors perceived a way of warfare, there are significant differences in their focus areas. Parker took a very broad view about the

western way of warfare. He focused mostly on strategic and operational level concepts, and not much on the tactical details of how the belligerents actually fought battles. He argued how western countries continuously pursued to use and develop technology in fighting their wars, and how they imposed discipline; both of these can be categorized as methods. However, he also focused on manners like how the western countries chose to finance their wars even at the cost of risking their national economies, how they opted to maintain continuity by adopting lessons learned from previous wars, and how they repeatedly chose to use military means to dominate the world.¹⁰ In contrast to Parker, Citino not only switched between strategic and tactical levels, but also maintained similarity by focusing on both methods and manners. He concluded that the commonalities in the German way of warfare were massing overwhelming force at the decisive point, quicker offensive actions, and allowance of independence to subordinate commanders to make tactical decisions based on situation. Additionally, he highlighted how Germans repeatedly chose to act as aggressors, and how they always gave equal importance to military leaders, theoreticians and philosophers in developing their doctrine.¹¹

In contrast, Baxter looked towards the Soviet way of warfare from a more philosophical viewpoint. He did not talk directly about physical methods of fighting, but the philosophies that drove those methods. According to him, the Soviets accepted heavy casualties on their sides in order to cause enemy casualties, and gave priority to lethality over durability while manufacturing combat munitions. To make up their logistical shortfall, Soviet leaders did not find it ethically wrong to rely on captured or locals stocks. Describing how Soviets perceived warfare, Baxter highlighted their emphasis on

quantity over quality of soldiers, focus on destruction of the enemy force over possession of terrain, and always recognizing the influence of national policy and laws of war (*Sovetskaia Voennaia entsiklopediia*) on warfare.¹²

It is apparent that in order to draw evidences to determine a way of warfare, there is no limitation on the level of warfare; it can range all the way from strategic to tactical level. Examples show that definitions can focus on either choice, perception, method or a desire about how battles were fought. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the examples is that whatever examples are chosen, they have to indicate a pattern or consistency over a period in the history.

Timeline

Then next question to look at is: What length of time do the historical evidences have to encompass? In terms of timeline, the authors have a great amount of difference between them. Geoffrey Parker used examples ranging from Greek civilization (400 BC) to the modern days of twentieth and twenty first century.¹³ Victor David Hanson and John Keegan followed Parker closely in terms of timeline, though they used different wars as examples from within the same period.¹⁴ Robert M Citino used a much shorter time span in defining the German way of war. His examples stretched from 1656 to World War II, a time limit that he viewed as appropriately resembled the uniqueness of German culture and their way of fighting war. He argued that though Germans also fought wars before 1656, those did not have the similitude in pattern that he found in the later wars.¹⁵ William P Baxter, while defining Soviet way of warfare, focused on a much lesser time span than Citino, covering only the twentieth century, more precisely the post-World War II era. Interestingly, unlike other authors, Baxter did not try to find a pattern

in the Soviet's way of warfare over a long period of time, rather he focused on the methods and perceptions at one point in the historic timeline.

So, what should be an appropriate timeline to define a way of warfare? From the examples mentioned above, it is evident that there is no such time limit. It depends on the author's perception about the way of warfare. If pattern or consistency is the focus, it may include a longer time period, usually few decades or centuries. If method is the focus, like Baxter, it could be just a few years or decades. Should it include all the battles within that time frame? Surely, it does not have to. The authors did not select all the wars within their focused historical period, but chose a few that strongly reflected the characteristics they brought out.

Geographical and Ethnical Entity

The historians also varied in terms of geographical areas in which they focused their examples. Baxter used the most specific and simpler concept; he remained confined to the geographical boundary of the former Soviet Union. It was easy for him, as his approach was very focused and narrowed down to a specific period. Citino also maintained relatively narrow focus by concentrating on contemporary Germany. However, it can be argued that, because the map of Germany changed number of times over the time-period that he covered, it might be appropriate to exclude those other areas that used to be part of the German Empire or German confederation before. Citino accepted this as a weakness of his book, and argued that the way Prussians or later Germans conducted their warfare was much more dominant on the peripheral states, that they remained insignificant.¹⁶

Similar to the timeframe, Parker, Hanson and Keegan also covered a wider range of geographical areas from which to draw their examples. Their examples encompassed the European and North American continents, more precisely the dominant nations of these two continents like ancient Greece, medieval Rome, and modern France, Britain, Germany and USA. However, their examples did not include many other battles that were fought in these areas, like the American Indian war fought by the Native Americans, the Peninsular war fought by Spanish guerillas, or the IRA insurgency in Northern Ireland. Seemingly, they excluded those examples considering that these minority groups did not resemble the “Western” culture. This is an important finding, because it shows that the way of warfare, when symbolizing a cultural entity, cannot be bounded by geographical areas. Only the nation or people that correctly represent the culture or ideology can be used as examples in order to make it more relevant.

Parameters of Islamic Way of Warfare

Finding a wide range of varieties in how different authors perceived and focused their study on a particular way of warfare, it is now important to relate this study to set the parameters for the Islamic way of warfare. The word Islamic or Islam, neither represents a nation or state like the Soviets or Germans, nor is it a culture like Western. It is a religion, which has both fundamental laws, and common practices derived from those fundamental laws. An Islamic way of warfare should encompass both these facets in order to make a comprehensive and authentic meaning. The sources of laws in Islam are very specific; it is the Quran (words of Allah) and *hadith* (sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad PBUH). However, the problem lies with finding the best practices. Can all practices of Muslims (followers of Islam) be termed as Islamic? Following the

way Parker and other like-minded authors excluded the examples of Spanish guerillas, Native Americans or IRA, the logical deduction is that all actions of Muslims should not be termed as Islamic if they do not conform to the basic laws of Islam.

This deduction leads to the next question: Where to look to find proper Islamic practices of warfare? Relating to the findings of this chapter, this question can be redefined as, in which geographic area and at what time frame in the history can we find the proper Islamic practices of warfare? As discussed in the chapter 1, Islam was at its purest form during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the first four caliphates (*Khulafa-i-raashideen*), because they had the scope to supervise and guide all matters according to the firsthand knowledge of Quran and *hadith*. As Islam spread outside their influence, many practices of Muslims were influenced by factors like local cultures or the influence of colonial rulers. Thus, to answer the question of where to look, it can logically be derived that the timeframe of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the geographical boundary of the Islamic states of his time provide us the best context to find best practices for the Islamic way of warfare. This approach does not differ from the approach used by the historians as noted in this study, as all of them took similar approach of carefully sifting through the historical examples, and then focused on the ones that they perceived appropriate.

The next step is to select the appropriate level and focus areas. At the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the strategic and tactical levels of war were not separate concepts like today, as he himself performed the dual roles of state leader and military commander. Following historians' examples, focus areas can vary between how the Muslim armies physically fought their war (method), and how they perceived war

(manner). The method may vary between physical combat using lethal weapons to non-lethal means such as diplomacy or deception, as both can form part of warfare. In the point of perception, the early Muslims mostly drew their ideology from the teachings of the Quran, so a comprehensive study on Quranic laws and guidance on warfare is necessary. A study of Quran is not complete without considering how the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) practically applied those laws in his warfare. So, due care has to be given to understand the Quranic laws by combining them with the words and practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

¹Cambridge Dictionaries Online, “Warfare,” <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/warfare?q=warfare> (accessed December 5, 2011).

²Ibid.

³Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, “Warfare,” <http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/warfare> (accessed December 5, 2011).

⁴Cambridge Dictionaries Online, “Way,” <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/search/british/?q=way> (accessed December 5, 2011).

⁵Way (Possibility): A particular choice, opinion, belief or action, especially from among several possibilities.

⁶Way (Manner): The manner in which someone behaves or thinks, or in which something happens.

⁷Way (Method): An action that can produce the result you want; a method.

⁸Way (Want): If someone gets or has their way, what they want happens.

⁹Geoffrey Parker, *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2-9.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 306-312.

¹²William P. Baxter, *The Soviet Way of Warfare* (California: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1986), 1-37.

¹³Parker, *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare*.

¹⁴Victor Davis Hansen, *Carnage and Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001); John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*: (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

¹⁵Citino, *The German Way of War*, 1-2.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, Preface xiii.

CHAPTER 3

GUIDANCE ON WARFARE FROM QURAN AND SUNNAH

The Quran is the basic and divine book of guidance to all Muslims. Muslims believe that, through the Quran, Allah has provided His guidelines to mankind in all aspects of life. Therefore, no Islamic ideology can be considered complete or authentic without having direct reference from the Quran. However, one needs to be careful before deriving lessons from the Quran. According to Verse 7 of Surah Al-Imran,¹ Quranic verses are of two categories: The *Muhkamat* (clear, direct, fundamental) verses, and the *Mutashabihat* (figurative, metaphorical, allegorical) verses. While it may be relatively easy for a layman to understand the *Muhkamat* verses by reading the Quranic texts along with their translations or explanations (*tafseer*), understanding *Mutashabihat* verses is considered beyond the capability of human knowledge and is believed to be known by Allah only. *Muhkamat* verses are further divided into four subcategories: verses that teach mankind the remembrance of gifts of Allah; verses that teach mankind through the remembrance of various happenings, incidents etc; verses that teach mankind through the remembrance of death and eschatology; and verses that teach mankind the injunctions of the Quran. Verses that provide guideline on warfare are part of the fourth category (injunctions) of *Muhkamats*. These verses are considered as concise-cum-detailed injunctions, as the commandments are mentioned very briefly in the Quran, and details have to be derived from the *hadith*, the *Sunnah* and if necessary from the *Ijtihad*.² Verbatim meaning of these verses often does not make the concept clear and complete without understanding its context.

Quranic guidelines about warfare can be broadly categorized in to two types. The first type provides the reasons for which Muslims are allowed to wage war. In other words, these guidelines set the fundamental conditions based on which a war can be called a “Just war” according to Islamic standard. The second types of guidelines are focused on conduct during the war. These guidelines vary in magnitude from major issues like setting the objectives of war to other issues like disposal of the spoils of war. However, no specific guidelines exist on any tactical methods of fighting. The verses that contain guidance are not found in one chapter; rather they are spread throughout the Quran in different chapters. This is because the verses that contain guidance were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) according to the needs of time. For example, the verses on spoils of war came after the Battle of *Badr*, when distribution of spoils became an issue.³

The way the guidelines on warfare are laid out in the Quran is no different from the core concept of Islam, which says that an action qualifies to be a just action when both intent of the person committing that act and the method of doing it are just according to the Quran and the *Sunnah*. This can be well understood from the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as mentioned in *Sahih Bukhari*:

Narrated by Al-Ahnaf bin Qais, . . . I have heard Allah's Apostle saying, “When two Muslims fight (meet) each other with their swords, both the murderer as well as the murdered will go to the Hell-fire.” I said, “O Allah's Apostle! It is all right for the murderer but what about the murdered one?” Allah's Apostle replied, “He surely had the intention to kill his companion.”⁴

While this *hadith* clarifies the importance of intention, the importance of correct deed is emphasized in another *hadith* from *Sahih Muslim* and *Sahih Tirmidhi*:

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “A man travels far, unkempt and dust-stained (for hajj, umrah, or the like), raising his hands to the sky (and saying), “O

Lord! O Lord!” while eating what was haram (prohibited), drinking what was haram, wearing what was haram, and nourishing himself through haram means. How then could his prayers be accepted?”⁵

Both of these *hadiths* confirm the concept that if either the intent or the method fails to meet the Islamic standard according to those two sources, usually the act is not considered to be an authentic Islamic action.

The next primary authentic source of Islamic guidance after the Quran is the *Sunnah*, the words and practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is considered as the second best explanation of the Quranic verses. Allah confirms this authority of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in several verses of the Quran, as in verse 44 of *Surah An-Nahl*: “And we have sent down unto thee (also) the message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought.”⁶ Because all verses of the Quran do not explain injunctions in detail, Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) way of life provides a good scope to understand what those Quranic injunctions mean in practical life, and how they should be practiced. Therefore, the way he conducted battles and instructed others to follow in his last ten years of life (624-633 AD) remains an authentic source of deriving lessons to identify an Islamic way of warfare.

Causes for a Just Islamic War

The “cause” is the most significant factor that qualifies a war waged by Muslims as an Islamic or Just war. In the Quran, Allah specifically mentioned that Muslims should only fight for the “Cause of Allah.” This concept of relating the cause with Allah’s divine decrees is the same as with all other guidelines given in Islam. Intent behind committing an action is the foremost condition that determines whether an action is just or unjust in the eyes of Allah. An action loses its merit to be credited as a just action when the actor

does not place his belief in Allah, or has an intent other than satisfying Allah. Allah mentions it in verse 11 of *Surah Az-Zumar* in the Quran: “Say, (O Muhammad), verily I am commanded to worship Allah by obeying Him and doing religious deeds sincerely for His sake only.”⁷ Also from *Sahih Bukhari*,⁸ it is narrated on the authority of Umar ibn al-Khattab (The second Caliph of Islam), who said:

I heard Allah’s Apostle saying, “The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. (Speaking about migration of early Muslims from Mecca to Medina as an example) So whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for.”⁹

When applied to warfare, similar rules apply to qualify it as unjust or just. However, in warfare, the rule is more stringent. Allah has not left it to the Muslims to assume or interpret in their own terms about what could be the accepted as cause of Allah. Through several verses, Allah clearly indicated the criteria for authentic causes for war. Binding these verses along with the context of when these verses were revealed, one can understand the right causes for waging war.

According to Quranic guidelines and *Sunnah*, an Islamic war can be waged for three different reasons. These are: to defend against physical attack by an enemy force, to protect the right of practicing Islam, and to protect oppressed people elsewhere. First, Muslims can fight to defend themselves when they are attacked by an enemy force, irrespective of what the motive is. Allah authorizes Muslims to such action by stating in verses 12-14 of *Surah Taubah*:

Will you not fight a people who have violated their oaths, and intended to expel the Messenger while they did attack you first? Do you fear them? Allah has more right that you should fear Him if you are believers. Fight against them so that Allah will punish them by your hands and disgrace them and give you victory over them and heal the breasts of a believing people.¹⁰

This verse not only gives Muslims the right to retaliate, but also gives an important message to Muslims that their priority should always be with satisfying Allah. Muslims should never prioritize their own benefits on the top of what Allah orders them to do. So, when Muslims are fighting to protect themselves, they are in fact safeguarding the believing people (Muslims), who practice worshipping Allah in the best possible way.

In practice, the early Muslims during Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) time were attacked physically at numerous occasions. Bilal, a slave, expressed his faith on one Allah and His prophet, which was contrary to his pagan master's belief. For this, he was inhumanely tortured by his master B. Jumah who used to force Bilal to lie on heated sand under scorching sun and put a heavy rock on his chest. B. Makhzum, a pagan Quraysh, killed Sumayyah bint Khayyat for she refused to abandon Islam. The pagan believers of Quraysh tribe attacked every clan that contained Muslims, imprisoned them, beat them, deprived them of food and drink for days together, expelled them from their houses and exposed them to the burning heat of desert to seduce them from Islam.¹¹ The Quraysh even planned to kill Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) before he made his famous migration (*Hijrah*) to Medina.

It was after these extreme oppressions, that Allah gave permission to Muslims to fight back for the first time. The first verse where Allah authorized the Muslims to fight is found in verse 39 of *Surah Hajj*:

Permission to fight is given to those who are fought against, because they have been wronged; and surely, Allah is Able to give them victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly only because they said, "our Lord is Allah."¹²

This highlights the second just cause which is to protect the right of religious practice among the Muslims. The early Muslims were denied of their right to worship at the

K'aba, the holy place for all Muslims. They were barred from practicing their religion individually or in groups. The Quraysh viewed the open practice of monotheistic religion at the K'aba as a threat to their commercial businesses, for they used to earn huge revenue from the pilgrims that travelled to the K'aba every year. At one stage, Muslims were expelled from Mecca. Then Allah gave them permission to fight for reestablishing their right to worship Allah at the K'aba.

The third just cause is to help oppressed Muslims elsewhere who are being either oppressed or deprived of their religious rights. Allah commands the Muslims in the Quran to help the oppressed, which is found from the verse 75 of *Surah An-Nisa*:

And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah, and of those who, being weak, are ill treated- men, women and children, whose cry is: "Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Thee one who will protect; and raise for us from thee one who will help!"¹³

This verse was intended for the Muslims, who were left behind in Mecca after the bulk of Muslims migrated to Medina. Because they were still under the influence of non-Muslim Quraysh, they continually faced oppression and deprivation. Besides reestablishing the right of Islamic practice in Mecca, this provided motivation for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to reconquer Mecca.

From the text of the Quran and the *Sunnah*, the "Cause of Allah" includes these three causes only, as the fundamental texts do not indicate any other just cause for war. It is important to note that no guidelines exist to wage war to capture lands or resources, to annihilate enemy forces, or to force non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Nor can any others be found from the practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). From the texts of *Sahih Bukhari*, it is mentioned that a man came to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked, "A man fights for war booty; another fights for fame and a third fights for showing off; which of

them fights in Allah's Cause?" The Prophet said, "He who fights that Allah's Word (i.e. Islam) should be superior, fights in Allah's Cause."¹⁴

Capturing of lands can be only justified when it is the land from where Muslims have been evicted unjustly, and they are trying to recapture it, as it was the case with Muslims reconquering of Mecca. About capture of resources, the only allowance is about the spoils of war, which is the things enemy forces leave behind after retreating from the battlefield. However, capturing of spoils is considered to be an adventitious circumstance, and never be the primary goal of fighting.¹⁵ Capturing of spoils became such an issue after the first battle of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) time, that Allah issued number of verses to guide Muslims about the disposal of the spoils. However, the point has been made very clear in the Quran that Muslims should not fight for the greed of gaining spoils, but can only own them as a byproduct of war.

Annihilation of enemy forces has never been the aim of fighting war. Islam always focuses on human beings, human souls to be more specific, because ultimately it is the human soul that carries the religion. Islam considers that in most cases, human beings can repent and revert to the right path. Allah says this in verse 38 of *Surah Anfal*: "Say to the unbelievers, if they desist, their past would be forgiven them; but if they persist, the punishment of those before them is already (a matter of warning for them)."¹⁶ When an enemy force chooses to fight the Muslims, or forces them to fight, one of the prime goals of Muslims is to fight as long as the enemy gives up on their will. Killing them is only necessary because otherwise the Muslims would have the threat to be killed. But if some enemy soldiers are left alive, and they embrace Islam later, that would increase the number of believers. It would serve the noble responsibility of all Muslims –

to guide people who are misguided. During the war, the enemy forces always are given four options: to give up and submit to Islam (become a Muslim); to give up, remain in their religion, and accept protection from the Muslims by paying tax (*jizyyah*); to give up, go back and not interfere with Muslims or Islam anymore; or to continue fighting. If the enemy chooses to continue fighting, the Muslims are obliged to fight back. But if they choose any of the other three options, Muslims are supposed to accept the agreed upon term and stop fighting.

Allah never guided Muslims to fight for forcing non-believers to convert to Islam. In Quran, Allah advised: “Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance.”¹⁷ Allah categorically forbade forcing people to convert to Islam in verse 256 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*: “Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold, that never breaks; and Allah heareth and knoweth all things.”¹⁸ Numerous other verses can be found in Quran repeating this commandment. In verse 98 of *Surah Yusuf*, Allah said: “If it had been the Lord’s will, they would all have believed- all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!”¹⁹ No historical accounts from Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) life can be found where he forced anyone to convert to Islam. While some people converted for their own benefit, who are identified as “hypocrites” in Quran, most converted by being impressed with Islam’s divine qualities and good conduct of the Muslims. The perception that many non-Muslims have about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) spreading Islam with swords is thus found erroneous.

Guidance on Conduct in War

The Quran also provides guidance on conduct of war. However, it is important to note that the guidelines do not focus on tactical methods of fighting battles. No verse of the Quran guides the Muslims to fight either in conventional or in guerilla way. The guidance in the Quran is more focused on setting parameters and conditions by which the conduct of war can complement the overarching objective of the war. In some cases, people have associated the tactical methods followed by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his army to be Islamic. Caution must be taken against this approach because in many occasions, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) acted not according to any divine decrees, but according to his own ingenuity, and sometimes followed the existing practices of the coeval Arab society (which did not contradict with teachings of the Quran). Careful sifting is vital to distinguish between his actions where he followed an “Islamic” decree, and where he merely acted as an “Arab” (followed his contemporary society) or used his own judgment as a human being. In the battle of *Badr*, the Prophet (PBUH) initially decided to take position near the first well on their route. He was then asked by one of his men, who apparently had good knowledge of the area, whether the Prophet (PBUH) himself chose that place, or was it a divine order from Allah to fight there. The Prophet (PBUH) replied that it was absolutely his decision. Then the man advised him to move near a larger well which was closer to the enemy, in order to deny enemy access to any water source. The Prophet agreed and his advice was implemented. This incident not only shows that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was open to advice from his companions, but more importantly indicates that the Prophet (PBUH) sometimes acted on his own judgment when divine guidance was absent. This is also evident from the way he lined up

his army in the battle, the weapons his army used, the way he used the rival champions to duel each other before total combat was resorted—all very much existent in the contemporary Arab tribes of his time.²⁰ It would also be wrong to say that Islam prefers fighting with swords, bows and arrows, as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his army fought with those. The fact is that using the sword was the technology of his time; the Prophet (PBUH) neither introduced it, nor forbidden its use despite most of these weapons were imported from the non-Muslims of Syria and India.²¹

However, not everything that the Arab tribes followed was acceptable to Islam. For example, the Arab tribes hardly had any strategic objective to fight. Most of their battles, or engagements, were aimed at demonstrating honor and courage, or to revenge the killing of someone from their clan. The raids of the *Bedouin* nomads were aimed to capture flocks of animals or to steal goods.²² Islam does not accept fighting for such causes or objectives; so Allah guided the Prophet (PBUH) time to time through Quranic verses or through the angel *Jibreel* (Gabriel) to limit his actions as justified by Islam. The main aspects of these guidelines were transgression in fighting, use of deterrence, focus on ideological objective in war, emphasis on striving hard even at the face of numerical inferiority or temporary defeat, and most importantly, the unconditional belief in Allah and leadership.

The act of transgressing, which generally means to exceed limits in the conduct of fighting, has been generally forbidden. Allah says in the Quran, “And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly, Allah likes not the transgressors.”²³ What does this transgression mean? An explanation can be found from Ibn Kathir, “transgression includes mutilating the dead, theft (from the captured goods),

killing women, children and old people who do not participate in warfare, killing priests and residents of houses of worship, burning down trees and killing animals without real benefit.”²⁴ A number of Islamic scholars agreed to this view of Ibn Kathir because it is also supported by a *hadith* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In one of the most accepted *hadith* texts of Abu Dawood, it is narrated from Rabah ibn Rabi', one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

When we were with the Apostle of Allah (PBUH) on an expedition, he saw some people collected together over something and sent a man and said: See, what are these people collected around? He then came and said: They are round a woman who has been killed. He said: This is not one with whom fighting should have taken place. Khalid ibn al-Walid was in charge of the van; so he sent a man and said: Tell Khalid not to kill a woman or a hired servant.²⁵

Transgression also may mean fighting in the four sacred months when Allah forbade Muslims to fight. Allah orders Muslims in verse 2 of *Surah Ma'idah*: “O ye who believe! Violate not the sanctity of the symbols of Allah, nor of the sacred month.”²⁶ Prohibition of war in sacred months is confirmed in verse 217 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*:

“They ask you concerning fighting in the prohibited month. Say: fighting therein is a grave (offence).”²⁷ According to *Hijri* calendar, these four sacred months are *Dhu Al Qadah, Dhu al Hijjah, Muharram* and *Rajab*.²⁸

However, there are exceptions to this law. While Muslims should not seek to fight in these sacred months, they can break the rules if the enemy attacks them during this time. This is found in the verse 194 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*:

The prohibited month- for the prohibited month, and so for all things prohibited, there is the law of equality. If then anyone transgresses the prohibition against you, transgress ye likewise against him. But fear Allah, and know that Allah is with those who restrain themselves.²⁹

It is important to note the last part of this verse where Allah encourages the Muslims to show restraints. This implies that though under certain circumstances (when the enemy transgresses) Muslims have the permission to transgress, they should still seek to use self-restraint as much as possible in order to be dearer to Allah.³⁰ Allah further confirmed this in verses 191-193 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*:

But if they attack you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers. But if they cease, then Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. And fight them until there is no more *fitnah*, and worship is for Allah. But if they cease, let there be no transgression except against *Az-Zalimun*.³¹

This is very important to understand that this allowance of limited transgression is given to Muslims as a measure of deterrence. If non-Muslims are aware of this provision in Islam, they might become careful not to transgress with the fear of being treated equally by Muslims.

This brings the second guidance on conduct – use of deterrence. Muslims are advised to use deterrence as a means of winning over enemies’ will. In verse 60 of *Surah Anfal*, Allah instructed Muslims:

Against them make ready you strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly.³²

Understanding this verse is very important, for it has been misinterpreted in many occasions to support the argument that Islam authorizes terrorism. In different versions of translation of this verse, the word “terror” has been interchangeably used as “threaten”³³ or “overawe”³⁴ etc. However, the word terror used in this verse actually bears the same meaning what today’s militaries term as “deterrence.” The US Army’s concept of using deterrence is: deter the enemy by show-off force, and attack only if deterrence fails to

achieve its aim. It is the threat of force intended to convince a potential aggressor not to undertake a particular action because the costs will be unacceptable or the probability of success extremely low.³⁵ The above-mentioned Quranic verse indicates a similar concept of using deterrence, which is to prepare a strong force equipped with strong armaments that causes the enemy to reconsider his option of waging war. If the enemy gives up and opt for peace, Muslims are asked to accept that. This is mentioned in the following verse (verse 61 of *Surah Anfal*), “But if the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is the One that heareth and knoweth (All things).”³⁶ It means that the Muslims should make truce with their enemies keeping their confidence on Allah, that even if the enemy deceives them by breaking the truce, Allah will protect them (the Muslims). Allah provides this assurance in the next verse (verse 62 of *Surah Anfal*), “Should they intend to deceive thee- verily Allah sufficeth thee: He it is That hath strengthened thee with His aid and with (the company of) the believers.”³⁷ There is no commandment in the Quran, or from the examples of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that Muslims should kill civilians in order to terrorize them, or to force their support. Support of non-combatants is not viewed as a prime necessity in Islamic war. Muslims should draw their mandate from the causes given by Allah, not from people’s vote. Even if they need it for the sake of security and safety, it should come from people’s motivation and will. Allah never advocates using force to change people’s mind. It is also very clear from the above verses that the target of deterrence is the enemy, not civilians.

One of the very important Quranic guideline in conduct of war is the objective of fighting a war. From several verses, it is understood that in war the Muslims should focus

towards the human spirit, soul and faith.³⁸ It covers spirit of both own and the enemy. While Muslims should strengthen own spirits and beliefs, simultaneously they should try to destroy the spirit of the enemy. The objective of war is not targeted towards land, resources, or destruction of forces. When Allah gave permission to the Muslims to fight, He also gave a clear statement about the objective, or the intended end state in verse 39 of *Surah Al Anfal*: “And fight them on until there is no more tumult of oppression, and there prevails justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily Allah doth see all that they do.”³⁹ The end state is very clear – the enemy has given up, and Muslims have regained their rights. Importantly, this prescribed objective widens the means of fighting the war. It allows integrating means other than combat along with the physical fighting. From the examples of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it is found that he and his companions used different techniques to destroy the enemy’s will to fight. In the battle of Ditch, he used techniques of propaganda and diplomacy to wage mistrust and suspicion between the enemy groups, which prevented them from uniting, and ultimately they gave up.⁴⁰ But the most important non-lethal means the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions adopted was their modest character, forgiveness and deep belief in Allah. After reconquering Mecca in 630 AD, he forgave most Meccan non-Muslims, who had been fighting against them. This general amnesty caused most of the non-Muslim pagans to instantly pledge their allegiance to Islam, thus ending the decade long war between Muslims and Meccan non-Muslims.⁴¹ In the Quran, Allah repeatedly asked Muslims to end fighting or stop killing when the enemy has expressed desire to give up. It is mentioned in the verses 5-6 of *Surah At-Taubah*:

Then when the Sacred Months have passed, then kill the *mushrikun* (polytheists), wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in each and every ambush. But if they repent and perform *As-Salat* (prayer), and give *Zakat*, then leave their way free. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And if anyone of the *mushrikun* (polytheists) seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then escort him to where he can be secure, that is because they are man who know not.⁴²

Similar instruction is given in the verses 191-193 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*:

But if they attack you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers. But if they cease, then Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. And fight them until there is no more *fitnah*, and worship is for Allah. But if they cease, let there be no transgression except against *Az-Zalimun*.⁴³

There have been many misinterpretations of the verses 5-6 of *Surah Al-Baqarah* (mentioned above) that Muslims should kill non-Muslims and Allah commands Muslims to show hatred against non-Muslims. In fact, this verse categorically explains that these were the non-Muslims who were fighting against the Muslims, not any non-Muslims.

Allah made this point very clear in verses 7-9 of *Surah Al-Mumtahinah*:

It may be that Allah will grant love between you and those whom ye hold as enemies. For Allah has power; and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for faith, nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just. Allah only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) faith, and drive you out, of your homes, and support in driving you out, from turning to them. It is such as turn to them that do wrong.⁴⁴

The Prophet, after his migration to Medina, established a covenant of mutual obligation, where the Jewish tribes of Medina were also a part. He did not show any intent to out rightly kill or expel them. There is no example from his life that he himself killed or ordered anyone to kill a non-Muslim who was not fighting or acting actively against the Muslims.

Allah also ordered Muslims not to turn their back from the battlefield even on the face of temporary defeat or being inferior in strength in comparison to the enemies. In the

initial periods of Islam, Muslims were much inferior in number and often they had to face enemies almost three times greater in strength. At that crucial moment, Allah pledged the Muslims by saying:

O Prophet, urge the believers to fight. If there are twenty steadfast persons amongst you, they will overcome two hundred, and if there be a hundred steadfast persons, they will overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they are a people who do not understand. Now Allah has lightened your, for he knows that there is a weakness in you. So, if there are of you a hundred steadfast persons, they shall overcome two hundred, and if there are a thousand of you, they shall overcome two thousand with the Leave of Allah. And Allah is with *As-Sabiqun* (the patient).⁴⁵

In other words, when engaged in war, Muslims have two options: to fight, win and establish the righteous practice; or fight until death, for which Allah has promised high honor as martyrs. Allah forbade Muslims to turn back from the battle field in the verses 15-16 of *Surah Al-Anfal*:

O ye who believe! When ye meet the unbelievers in hostile array, never turn your backs to them. If any do turn his back to them on such a day- unless it be in a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own)- He draws on himself the wrath of Allah, and his abode is hell- an evil refuge (indeed)!⁴⁶

This verse confirms the two exceptions to this commandment. Muslims can turn their back in the battlefield only as a part of tactics to deceive the enemy, or to return to his own troops if he is isolated from them.

The most important feature of conduct in an Islamic war is the belief in Allah. This is not only the focal point of Islamic war, but also to all other aspects of Islam. It is the belief in Allah that marks the difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. Muslims' understanding of Allah is according to the narrations of Quran. In many parts of the Quran, Allah provides this understanding to the Muslims about His supreme being. The most succinct explanation is found in *Surah Al-Ikhlās*: "Say: He is Allah, the One

and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him.”⁴⁷ While Muslims should strive to strengthen this belief in themselves, they also have a sacred responsibility to protect this belief and ensure that proper worshipping of Allah is maintained without hindrance. When another group of people acts adversely to take away these belief and practices from Muslims, it is then that the Muslims wage war, and they fight until that protection is guaranteed. Therefore, logically, only Muslims can fight an Islamic war. By the word “Muslim,” it means anyone who believes in the concept of Allah as explained above, and believes Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last prophet of Allah. Anyone, whose belief contradicts with any of these two fundamental beliefs of Islam, cannot represent him as a Muslim, thereby is not eligible to fight an Islamic war. In *Sahih Bukhari*, it is mentioned that a man whose face was covered with an iron mask (i.e. clad in armor) came to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked, “O Allah’s Apostle! Shall I fight or embrace Islam first?” The Prophet said, “Embrace Islam first and then fight.” So he embraced Islam, and was martyred. Allah’s Apostle said, “A little work, but a great reward.” (i.e. He did very little after embracing Islam, but he will be rewarded in abundance).⁴⁸

The belief on Allah is not only limited to believing His existence. Muslims are assured of great rewards in exchange for their dedication of life to fight in Allah’s cause. The martyrs are assured of the best place in paradise after their death, which works as a substantial motivating factor for the Muslims to fight against all odds. They are also to keep strong trust on their leader, as it is the leader who brings the cause of fighting war to common Muslims.

From the discussion in the chapter, it is clearly identified that Muslims are allowed by Allah to fight in self-defense, to save their just rights of practicing Islam, and to save oppressed people elsewhere. Whatever the cause of the war, the focus is to change the will of enemy and not towards destroying them or to gain control of land or resources. Deterrence, or other forms of non-lethal means to change enemy's will is preferred, but if fighting is inevitable, then the Muslims should fight with vigor, without transgressing the limits, and should stop when the enemy has shown desire to give up or establish a truce. Muslims should depend on divine blessings of Allah for fighting to defend a just cause, and should not be afraid if numerically inferior to enemies.

¹The verse 7 of *Surah Al-Imran* says: "It is He Who has sent down to you the Book; in it the verses that are entirely clear (*Muhkamat*); they are the foundations of the book (*Ummul Kitab*); and others are not entirely clear (*Mutashabihat*). So as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation, they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking discord (*Al-Fitnah*), and seeking for its hidden meanings, but none knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in it, the whole of it are from our Lord (*Rab*)', and none receive admonition except men of understanding."

²Abdur Rahman I. Doi, *Shariah: The Islamic Law* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd, 1984), 33-38.

³Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran* (Maryland: Amana Publications), 413.

⁴Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 2, Number 30, http://sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_1_02.php (accessed May 10, 2012).

⁵Al Qaradawi, Yusuf, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, Translated by Kamal El Helbawy, M Moinuddin Siddiqui and Syed Shukry (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications), 32.

⁶Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 648.

⁷Dr. Muhammad Taqiud Al-Hilali and Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Quran* (Madinah, KSA: King Fahd Glorious Quran Printing Complex), 622.

⁸*Sahih Bukhari* is considered one of the most authentic sources of *Sunnah* and *hadith*.

⁹Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 1, Number 1, <http://sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/results.php5> (accessed April 24, 2012).

¹⁰Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Quran*, 245.

¹¹A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1967), 143-145.

¹²Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Quran*, 448.

¹³Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 207-208.

¹⁴Saheeh Bukhari, Volume 4, Book 52, Number 65, http://sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_4_52.php (accessed April 24, 2012).

¹⁵Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 413.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 423.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 669.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 106-107.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 505.

²⁰Richard A. Gabriel, *Muhammad: Islam's First Great General* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 24-27.

²¹*Ibid.*, 29.

²²*Ibid.*, 23-29.

²³Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Quran*, 39.

²⁴Tafsir Ibn Kathir, "Quran Tafsir," http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=234 (accessed February 5, 2012).

²⁵Professor Ahmad Hasan, "Partial Translation of Sunan Abu Dawud," <http://www.muslimaccess.com/sunnah/hadeeth/abudawud/014.html> (accessed May 17, 2012).

²⁶Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 243-244.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 86.

- ²⁸Ibid., 78.
- ²⁹Ibid.
- ³⁰Ibid.
- ³¹Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Quran*, 40.
- ³²Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 429.
- ³³Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Quran*, 239.
- ³⁴Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an, Vol III*, translated by Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2001), 164.
- ³⁵M. S. Gerson, "Conventional Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age," <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/Articles/09autumn/gerson.pdf> (accessed February 5, 2012).
- ³⁶Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 429.
- ³⁷Ibid.
- ³⁸S. K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War* (Delhi, India: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 1992), 58.
- ³⁹Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 423.
- ⁴⁰Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad* (New Delhi, India: Kitab Bhaban, 2007), 76-77.
- ⁴¹Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life based on the Earliest Sources* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2006), 310-316.
- ⁴²Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Quran*, 243-244.
- ⁴³Ibid., 40.
- ⁴⁴Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 1454-1455.
- ⁴⁵Al-Hilali and Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Quran*, 240.
- ⁴⁶Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, 417.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., 1714.
- ⁴⁸Sahih Bukhari, Volume 4, Book 52, Number 63, http://sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_4_52.php (accessed April 30, 2012).

CHAPTER 4

AL QAEDA'S WAY OF WARFARE

Al Qaeda is one of the most discussed militant groups in today's world. A group of Muslims, who initially formed to fight against the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1980s, later became known world-wide for its role in attacking the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. To many, Al Qaeda is almost synonymous with terrorism. The group's objective is to reestablish an Islamic caliphate ruling the combined Muslim countries in the Middle East region. Its ideology, apparently, stems from fundamental Islam, though many Muslim scholars disagree with their way of drawing Islamic references. In 1998, Al Qaeda declared war against non-Muslim Western countries, primarily the United States (US), in support of their claim of de-Westernizing the Muslim world of Middle East. They blamed the US led Western countries for supporting Israel in carrying out oppression against Palestinians and de-stabilizing the Middle East, which is predominantly a Muslim region. They also accused the governments of the Arab countries of siding with the Western states, and not protecting the religious rights of Muslims properly. In pursuing their goal, Al Qaeda resorted to a violent approach by attacking and killing both combatants and non-combatants, which has been denounced by most countries in the world. Al Qaeda gradually became a bigger organization by recruiting people from different countries, and associating many regional or national religious groups with their cause. These groups reportedly carried out violent attacks on military and civilian targets in many parts of the world, notably the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001, bombing the US Embassy in Nairobi in 1998, the USS Cole bombing in 2000, the Bali bombing in 2002, and many others. Al-Qaeda has been mostly

criticized for two of its activities: Suicide bombings and killing of civilians. Such activities raised the question of Al Qaeda's true adherence to the fundamental Islam.

This chapter highlights the way of warfare followed by Al Qaeda since its inception, focusing on areas where comparison can be drawn between its way of warfare with Islamic warfare described in the previous chapter. Though the leaders of Al Qaeda defend their actions by quoting from the Quran and *Sunnah*, one needs to examine if their explanation of the fundamental sources are acceptable and unbiased. As discussed in the chapter 3, a just Islamic war has to meet two different tests: intention or cause, and conduct. Accordingly, this chapter will initially focus on the causes that motivated Al Qaeda's actions, by analyzing the proclamations made by its leaders about their intent and objectives. Then the major characteristics of their conduct will be examined based on media reports and records found in books and periodicals. The comparison between Al Qaeda and the Islamic way of warfare will be completed in the next chapter.

Intent and Objectives of Al Qaeda

Since its inception in the 1980s, Al Qaeda's objectives can be divided in to two broad categories: the Anti-Soviet phase and the Anti-Western phase. The Anti-Soviet phase covers the period from 1988 until 1989 when Al Qaeda fought against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This phase ended after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, marking a clear victory to Al Qaeda and its allies. The second phase began shortly after the first one, when Al Qaeda, under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden, expanded its operations to East Africa and the Middle East to act against Israel and Western countries deployed in the Middle East to fight against Iraq. This phase, which ultimately brought Al Qaeda to the international attention, is still ongoing.

In the Anti-Soviet phase, Al Qaeda's objective was to assist the Afghan forces in defending their country from the Soviet invasion. Under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, they formed the organization by recruiting Muslims from different countries who felt responsible to help their brothers-in-faith in Afghanistan. So, the cause that ultimately brought these people together to establish a militant organization was the urge to help fellow Muslims against a non-Muslim invasion that they viewed as unjust. This cause was widely supported by Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries, and more importantly, by the US also.

After their success in Afghanistan, the focus of Al Qaeda shifted towards Western countries that had been operating in the Middle East to oppose the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Initially they approached the Saudi Arabian government to allow them to assist the Saudi forces against the Iraqi invasion.¹ After being rejected, Al Qaeda turned against the Saudi government, accusing it of being a supporter of Western interests in the region. Since then, their objectives have changed to removing the Saudi government from power and replacing it with an Islamic government that would primarily protect Islamic interests in the region; and forcing the Western countries to withdraw their forces from the Middle East region, something that Al-Qaeda views as detrimental to the Islamic society of the region.

A vivid account of Al Qaeda's views and objectives can be derived from the texts of Al-Muqrin's *A Practical course to Guerilla War*, and declarations made by Osama Bin Laden and other prominent leaders of Al Qaeda and its associated groups. In Osama Bin Laden's declaration of war against Americans, he repeatedly blamed the Saudi Arabian government of being supportive of US interests. He also made clear the facts that forced

him to fight against the US and other Western countries. In his words, the facts were: firstly, occupation of lands of Arabian Peninsula by US forces, who exerted influence on the Saudi government to use this land as a base to attack neighboring Muslims countries. Secondly, repeated massacres of Iraqi people by the Christian-Jewish alliance, even after imposing sanctions on them. Finally, US support to the Jewish state (Israel) by destroying the strongest Muslim nation in the region (Iraq), and forcing other Muslim nations to support US interests by making them ‘mini paper states’ through disuniting them. He then blamed the Saudi government for not protecting the Muslim people’s interests based on guidelines of *Shariah*, while supporting the US interests based on a moderate approach. This approach, according to him, was too lenient, and against the core values of Islam. In his view, Islam dictates a basic enmity against non-Muslims, and requires absolute loyalty towards Allah’s causes. He views that Muslims should always possess hatred against non-Muslims, and always strive to fight against them until they (non-Muslims) submit to Islam, or agree to pay tax (*Jizyyah*).² He supports his argument by quoting several verses from the Quran, *hadiths* and *fatwas*³ of Muslim scholars. By carefully choosing words from the Quran and other Islamic sources, Bin Laden described a very aggressive image of Islam that he views as the correct path that all Muslims should follow.⁴

Ayman Al-Zawahiri, a key associate of Al Qaeda, further expanded on the theory of “Enmity and Loyalty” in his declaration made in 2002. He reemphasized that every true Muslim should possess hatred against non-Muslims and should avoid making ties or befriending them. He then categorically denounced four groups of people for supporting Western interests rather than protecting Islamic interest in the region: Muslims rulers that

abandoned *Shariah* laws and befriended Christian and Jewish states; scholars, journalists, thinkers and other persons who supported these rulers and their allies, and voiced countering *Jihad* against them; supporters of the idea of reconciling with non-Muslims states; and finally militant groups like the Northern Alliance of Afghanistan who were fighting against fellow Muslims. He concluded by warning all Muslims of the dangers of taking sides with non-Muslim governments, and urged them to follow his way of Islam, a rather aggressive one, that he viewed was the best way.⁵

Abd Al-Aziz Al-Muqrin transferred these views and intents into a more formatted structure in his guidebook on guerilla warfare, a well-written doctrine for Al Qaeda and its associate groups. He defined the primary goal of Al Qaeda's war as a "call for a pure Islamic system free from defects and infidel elements, one based on the Book (Quran) and the *Sunnah*." He identified supplementary goals that include "liberating the oppressed Muslim peoples from the yoke and tyranny of oppressive and despotic infidel regimes, whether local or foreign ones," and to "call for a new social system that will draw its legitimacy from the light of the Book (Quran) and the *Sunnah*."⁶ He then divided these strategic goals into four operational goals, which are: protracted guerilla war to preserve forces, acquiring combat proficiency to raise morale, gradual transitioning to next phase with increased participation of *ummah*, and finally building a strong army based on modern innovative foundations.⁷

As a whole, the overall intent of Al Qaeda can be summarized as freeing the Middle East from the Western or non-Muslim influence, in order to protect the religious and social rights of Muslim people living in the region. To achieve that intent, objectives that they established are to force withdrawal of US and other Western militaries from the

Middle East and to replace the pro-western governments of the region with ones that derive their values from the core Islamic sources. The overarching cause, as Al Qaeda explains, that caused them to wage war was the influence of non-Muslim states over the Muslim states in pursuing the formers' economic and political goals. To be more specific, it is the physical presence of US and other Western forces in the region in order to use some of the Muslim state's land as a base to wage war against other Muslim states; and the Western support to Israel, which has caused oppression to Palestinian Muslims.

Conduct of Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda is mostly comprised of Muslims from different parts of world, with different levels of combat experience. With full understanding that militarily they were no match to the strong militaries of the US and other Western countries, Al Qaeda prudently resorted to fighting a guerilla war until they gain sufficient foothold and strength to build an army. Al-Muqrin's *A Practical Course for Guerilla War* basically justifies this course, and further established a clear doctrine on how the guerrilla war should be conducted. As Norman Cigar commented, Al Muqrin's text can be considered as the capstone doctrine within Al Qaeda's overall doctrinal structure.⁸ In his text, Al-Muqrin justified assassinations, hostage taking, kidnapping as legitimate actions, and provided guidelines on other aspects of guerrilla tactics. Though there have been contentions between Al Qaeda leaders about following some of his concepts, in most cases they adhered to it. Thus, an evaluation of Al Muqrin's texts along with the examples of Al Qaeda attacks can provide a good understanding of their conduct in light of their doctrine and its application.

According to Al-Muqrin, Al Qaeda would fight the guerrilla war in three phases: Attrition (Strategic defense), Relative strategic balance (Policy of a thousand cuts), and Military decision (final attack). In the Attrition phase, the Al Qaeda fighters, whom Al-Muqrin called *Mujahidins*, would promulgate their ideology through the media in order to denounce their enemy and to gather support from the *ummah* in favor of their cause. Militarily they would expand their attacks against the enemy throughout the country, and conduct “spectacular” operations to create positive media impact. The attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 was an example of such spectacular operations, which did not only announce Al Qaeda’s presence, but also was aimed at demoralizing their enemy and motivating young Muslims to take up arms for Al Qaeda’s cause. Negotiations in this phase would be prohibited, as Al Qaeda viewed that the differences between them and their enemies were irreconcilable.⁹

Once Al Qaeda would prove its capability in staying power, it would resort to the next phase -The Relative Strategic Balance. In this phase, *mujahidins* would expedite their attacks against their enemies, and would persuade other Muslim states to discontinue support to the existing pro-western regimes. The persuasion would be based on the agreement that if any state continued to support the regime, they would also make them legitimate targets for Al Qaeda to attack. Militarily, Al Qaeda would establish bases for conventional forces in the areas where the regime has limited or no control. Negotiations were allowed in this phase, but only on condition that Al Qaeda looked strong enough to continue military operations, and their enemy was ready to surrender their cause. In no case would power sharing with their enemy to be accepted.¹⁰

The Third phase is called the Decisive phase, when a final attack would be launched to finish off the enemy. Al Qaeda envisions that by then their enemy would be divided and become weaker, and Al Qaeda would strengthen their ties with other mujahidin groups operating outside their area of operations to extend their ideas everywhere. They will then launch the final *Jihad*, which in their words is called the preemptive *Jihad* (*Jihad al talab*). Militarily, Al Qaeda would by now have established a conventional-like force well conversant with modern technology and conventional doctrine. This conventional force would initially attack smaller cities in order to demonstrate their ability to achieve success on the battlefield. Ultimately, they would topple the government in the capital city. However, the *mujahidin* must retain their guerilla capabilities and remote bases to be able to react to contingency situations. The enemy would be intimidated to surrender and no negotiations would be accepted in this phase.¹¹

Within this broad outline, Al-Muqrin further provided guidelines on other factors and methods such as leadership, the use of force, intelligence activities, targeting, and covert operations. Of these factors, leadership and targeting has relevance to the fundamentals of Islamic guidance on warfare. The rest of the methods are usually tactical considerations, which can become significant only if they contradict with any basic law of Islam. Otherwise, as Islam does not contradict with tactical methods, discussion on those methods is irrelevant.

Al-Muqrin emphasizes that all leaders need to be homogenous in terms of their mind, spirit, thought, program and above all – belief. The role that the leaders have are: unifying all cadres under one cause; devising strategy for work and action, and

organizing material assets; and finally taking bold steps to put into action their ideas and plans. The leaders should possess experience, expertise, situational awareness, knowledge and most importantly—fear of Allah.¹²

The most significant part of Al Qaeda's doctrine is how they justified assassinations, kidnapping and hostage taking as just actions in pursuance of their objectives. It is with these aspects where most Muslim scholars disagree with the beliefs of Al Qaeda. To justify assassinations, Al-Muqrin quoted several *hadiths* where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) specifically ordered his companions to kill some individuals. He then described four motives for undertaking assassinations. The Ideological motive is to kill an apostate or infidel who attacks a Muslim sacred site, or who plots or aids to fight against Muslims. The political motive is to suppress an idea or sect that is contrary to the idea of the state. The economic motive is to gain money for reasons of competition between companies. Finally the Psychological motive involves an individual who kills others as a result of his hatred against them.¹³ Interestingly, Al-Muqrin does not draw any Islamic reference to justify these motives; rather he brings examples from "infidel" countries where psychological killings take place. It is therefore, unclear that, through explaining these motives, whether he wanted to justify assassinations or merely drew historical comparisons to assassinations of the past. The rest of his text deals with minor techniques and tactics associated with assassinations, with no reference from religious sources. Al Qaeda's efforts to conduct ideological assassinations can be traced from their reported effort to kill Pakistan's former President Parvez Musharraf and Prince Abdullah of Jordan.¹⁴

For Hostage-taking, no religious reference is offered for justification. Thus, it can be assumed that Al-Muqrin and other leaders devised this doctrine based completely on their knowledge of guerilla warfare from other non-religious sources. The motives for undertaking hostage-taking are significant and include forcing the government to accede to some demands, getting money as ransom, harassing the government, acquiring information from the one taken as hostage, and to draw attention to their causes.¹⁵

One of the most significant aspects of Al Qaeda's doctrine is the targeting portion. Al-Muqrin specifically emphasized that "we must target and kill Jewish and Christians. To anyone who is an enemy of God and Prophet, we say: We have come to slaughter you."¹⁶ He then emphasized that cells of Al Qaeda should turn all non-Muslim countries into a "living hell" in retaliation to their oppressions in Muslim countries. One of the examples of such attack is the targeting of an Israeli-owned Paradise hotel in Kenya on November 28, 2002, which killed ten Kenyans and three Israelis. Al Qaeda also attempted to shoot down an Israeli chartered passenger jet at Ben Gurion airport in Israel using a surface-to-surface missile. In November 2003, Al Qaeda attacked the British consulate and Jewish firms in Istanbul, Turkey and killed or wounded more than 800 people.¹⁷

Use of terror tactics has been emphasized by Osama Bin Laden in his *fatwa* of February 1998, where he addressed the Americans: "Terrorizing you while you are carrying arms on our land is a legitimate and morally demanded duty. It is a legitimate right well known to all humans and other creatures."¹⁸ It is not clear what he meant by the word "you." His words did not specify whether he meant the US government and the military, who were directly engaged in fighting in Middle East, or the entire American

people, which includes civilians, and more importantly American Muslims. However, from Al Qaeda's targeting pattern of attacking civilian targets like the World Trade Center, and from their other statements warning that so long as the US continues to kill women and children in Middle East, then American women and children are not safe from their (Al Qaeda's) hands, confirms the idea that by "you" he meant all Americans.

Al Qaeda, since its inception, has been quite consistent to follow its ideology and doctrine in practice. Their actions, whether just or unjust, are always directed towards their overall objective of establishing an Islamic Caliphate, and freeing the Muslim dominated Middle East region from non-Muslim Westerners' influence. In the process, they identified their enemies to be the Western countries led by US, the pro-Western governments of Middle East countries, and the organizations that have been enabling or supporting these countries and governments. Their blame on these enemy groups is that collectively they are degrading the Islamic practices in the Middle Eastern Muslim society, and creating conflicts and disasters for the common Muslim people to support their economic and political goals. Al Qaeda views the Muslims of Palestine, Iraq and other war torn Muslim countries as victims of Western oppressors, and feel obliged to eradicate this oppression by waging war against their enemies. However, they are practical enough to understand their limitations against such super powers; as such they opted for protracted guerilla warfare. They usually draw references from the Quran and *Sunnah* while explaining their ideology and doctrine. However, not all of their doctrine or actions (like hostage taking) are supported directly by Islamic sources. While this chapter identified the core points of Al Qaeda's ideology, doctrine and conduct, the next chapter

focuses on analyzing them to understand whether they can really be termed as Islamic or not.

¹World History Database, "Osama bin Laden: History of Saudi Arabia," <http://history.malc.eu/Laden-Osama-bin-Saudi-Arabia.biog.html> (accessed April 30, 2012).

²*Jizyyah*. *Jizyyah* is an annual tax levied on non-Muslim citizens living in the Islamic state. Just as the Muslims pay the compulsory *Zakat*, the non-Muslims pay the *Jizyyah*. In return, the Muslims are duty-bound to protect their lives and property like any Muslim citizen. Doi, Abdu Rahman I. *Shariah: The Islamic Law* (London: Deluxe Press, 1984), 389.

³*Fatwa*. A *fatwa* is an Islamic religious ruling, a scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic law. A *fatwa* is issued by a recognized religious authority in Islam. But since there is no hierarchical priesthood or anything of the sort in Islam, a *fatwa* is not necessarily "binding" on the faithful.

⁴Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al Qaeda Reader* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 11-62.

⁵*Ibid.*, 66-115.

⁶Norman Cigar, *Al-Qaida's Doctrine for Insurgency* (Virginia: Potomac Books, 2009), 92.

⁷*Ibid.*, 93-94.

⁸*Ibid.*, 13.

⁹*Ibid.*, 94-97.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 97-99.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 100-102.

¹²*Ibid.*, 103.

¹³*Ibid.*, 141-142.

¹⁴MSNBC, "Al-Qaida timeline: Plots and attacks," http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4677978/ns/world_news-hunt_for_al_qaida/t/al-qaida-timeline-plots-attacks/ (accessed May 1, 2012)

¹⁵Norman Cigar, *Al-Qaida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 156.

¹⁶Ibid., 129.

¹⁷Bruce Riedel, *The Search For Al Qaeda* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 109-113.

¹⁸Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003), 122.

CHAPTER 5

IS AL QAEDA ISLAMIC?

Ever since Al Qaeda began their operations, they have been claiming themselves to be an Islamic organization. To justify their actions, they have used several references from the Quran, *hadiths* and Islamic scholars in their declarations and doctrine. To a layman this might be sufficient to prove that they are a true Islamic organization. Many academicians and scholars concurred and termed them “Islamic Terrorists,” or “Islamic extremists.” However, caution must be taken to guard against such an approach, as the term Islamic terrorist indicates that someone can be both Islamic and terrorist at the same time. This is the point of contention for many Muslims who believe that a terrorist can never be Islamic, as Islam clearly denounces terrorism. Besides, there is no universally agreed upon definition of terrorism. Therefore, deducing whether Al Qaeda is a terrorist group or not is debatable, as in “one man's terrorist can be another man's freedom fighter.” However, using the two part test of “cause” and “conduct,”¹ it is relatively easy to deduce whether Al Qaeda qualifies themselves as Islamic or not. This test can also provide people a way to identify whether any other war fought by Muslims is Islamic or not. This chapter initially evaluates the Islamic way of warfare as identified in chapter 3, then compares Al Qaeda’s way of warfare with the Islamic way of warfare, and finally recommends how the US, or Western nations in general, should engage with Muslims and with the ideology of militant groups such as Al Qaeda.

Evaluation of Islamic Way of Warfare

Before making the comparison, it is important to understand the position of warfare in the overall concept of Islam. A study solely focused on the concept of Islamic warfare can easily mislead someone to think that Islam is a violent religion, since it guides its followers to fight. The verses that contain commandments from Allah urging Muslims to fight against non-believers can strengthen this perception further. However, if one does a thorough research on Islam, he/she will find that Islam's primary focus is not to guide Muslims to fight. In the Quran, there are more verses that guide Muslims towards peace, good conduct, justice and knowledge, than those related to war. While fighting in the way of Allah is highly honorable, it is not the primary means to pursue the overall objective of Islam, which is to establish order and justice in the world, and to ensure that believers can worship Allah in the best possible way. Fighting to attain these objectives is the last means, when all other means have been exhausted. Besides, it is important to understand that not everyone in the world behaves rationally, which made wars an inevitable part of human history. Consequently, while Muslims should strive to establish peace at all levels of life, they also need to have guidelines on war if circumstances lead them into a war.

In this context, it is important to discuss the concept of *Jihad*. Because of the militant groups' frequent use of this word, *Jihad* has almost become synonymous to "Holy war" in the non-Muslim world. In fact *Jihad* has a much broader meaning than only fighting. *Jihad* is derived from the Arabic word *al-Jahd*, meaning a struggle or striving. In practice, it includes any form of hardship, forbearing, or struggle to stand in the right path. This struggle can be both physical and psychological. The actual words for

war or fighting in Arabic are *al-Harb* and *al-Qital*.² Physical combat (*Qitaal*) is one of the means of *Jihad*, but certainly not the only way. In the Quran, the word *Jihad* (or its derivatives) has been used many times, and often the meaning is not indicated directly. For example, in the verse 218 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*, Allah says: “Those who *amanu* (believed), and those who *hajaru* (suffered exile), and *jahadu* (may mean fought, strived or struggled) in the path of Allah –they have the hope of the mercy of Allah; and Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.”³ Similarly in many occasions, the meaning of *Jihad* is not specific. Scholars debate on the issue that whether the word *Jihad* in such verses meant to fight or to struggle. After consulting examples of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his sayings, most agree that it primarily meant to struggle. It is narrated in the *hadith* collection of *Sahih Bukhari*, that Aisha, Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) wife, once asked the Prophet (PBUH), “O Allah’s Apostle! We consider Jihad as the best deed. Should we not fight in Allah’s cause?” He replied, “The best Jihad (for women) is *Hajj-Mabrur*.”⁴ The reason for which *Hajj* can be a *Jihad* is perhaps the physical activities involved in the *Hajj*, which is often stressful for the average women. This indicates that *Jihad* can also mean other forms of struggle or hardship. Another supporting evidence to this is the verse 8 of *Surah Al-Ankabut*, where Allah says: “We have enjoined on man kindness to parents; but if they strive (*jahadaka*) thee to join with Me (in worship) anything of which thou hast no knowledge, obey them not. Ye have to return to Me, and I will tell you of all that ye did.”⁵ Here the derivative form of *Jihad* clearly indicates to force or to strive, and not to fight. In fact, when Allah needed to mention about physical fighting, He has clearly used the word *Qital* (to fight) instead of *Jihad*, which eliminates the chances of confusion. It is evident from the verses 74-75 of *Surah An-Nisa* and most of the Quranic

verses mentioned in chapter 3.⁶ This confirms that *Jihad* has a versatile meaning than *Qital* (fighting).

The physical fighting, or *Qital*, is ordained to only those who are capable. From the history of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life, it is seen that it was mostly the able men who went to war. Women usually did not participate in physical fighting with few exceptions like Um Umara Nasiba Bint Kaab Al Ansaria, who fought in the battle of *Uhud*. However, women are reported to have accompanied the soldiers to take care of the wounded and provide food and drink to them.

In the overall Islamic concept, *Jihad* holds a very important position. There are repeated verses emphasizing the importance of *Jihad*, both in the sense of striving and fighting. But in no way, does Allah suggest that Muslims should seek fighting. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) confirmed this by saying: "Do not desire an encounter with the enemy; but when you encounter them, be firm."⁷ It is also mentioned in verse 8 of *Surah Mumtahinah*: "Allah 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 Allah loveth those who are just."⁸

Fighting is permissible to defend oneself, defend the right of Muslims to practice their religion freely, or to save people being oppressed elsewhere. When circumstances dictate that a war is inevitable, the able Muslims should not hesitate to participate, even if they do not like it. Allah confirms this in the verse 216 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*: "Fighting is enjoined on you, and it is an object of dislike to you; and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you, and Allah knows, while you do not know." It means that when fighting is inevitable,

there lies a greater good in fighting, because the ultimate motive is to establish the right of Muslims to live freely and practice their religion without fear of oppression. So, when forced upon, Muslims have the sacred responsibility to participate in the war, provided it meets all the tenets of a just or authentic Islamic war.

This brings the next question: who has the authority to declare Islamic war on behalf of the Muslims? Can every Muslim determine this himself when he/she faces oppression? Is a Muslim leader eligible to declare a war on behalf of a group, or does the authority rest only with the head of state? In the texts of the Quran and *hadith*, there is no straight answer to these questions. However, analyzing Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) examples, it can be derived that Muslims individually cannot determine to wage a war. Every battle during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was either led by him or ordered by him. There is no instance in which his companions acted by themselves to initiate a battle, unless in error,⁹ which was later identified and corrected by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself. On the question of whether a religious leader has the authority to declare a war or not, the test is more complex. Debates exist about Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) status as a state leader when he waged the first battle at *Badr*. While there is no doubt that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was accepted by both migrants from Mecca (*muhajirs*) and residents of Medina (*ansars*) as their leader, historical accounts are not very clear on whether the alliance between them could have formally formed a state or not. However, one also has to consider the concept of state at that time in Arabian Peninsula. Present day concepts of state did not exist in the 7th century Arabian Peninsula. People lived in small city states, often without any formal constitution or governmental establishment. In that sense, the alliance of Meccan migrants, Medinan

residents and the Jewish tribe of Medina could have created a state, as law scholars like Professor Raj Bhala acknowledge.¹⁰ Thus, it can be established that Islamic war requires a head of state to declare it. However, in that case the state has to be an Islamic state and ruled by a competent leader who has the knowledge and prudence to lead the state in the light of Islam, as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did in his time. So, what if Muslims are oppressed in a state which is not Islamic, or where the state leader is not Islamic? Can a competent leader of a group of Muslims wage war in such situations? Finding an answer to this question from the history is very difficult, as no such occasion arose since the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Until the fall of the Ottoman Empire, there always has been a Muslim Caliphate that could be referred to as a competent authority to decide on such critical issues. In the Quran, Allah does not mention anything about the authority to declare a war, but ordains *Jihad* (or *Qital*) as a duty for all capable Muslims in necessary circumstances. Therefore, it can be logically derived that even if no Islamic state or state leader exist, Muslims can wage war in necessary circumstances under the authority of a competent leader who is not only knowledgeable of Islam, but also conducts himself in the best possible manner prescribed by Islam. The other option could be to first establish an Islamic state, and then to wage war under a recognized authority, which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did after he migrated to Medina.

Since the question of authority to declare war is still debatable, for the purpose of this thesis, it may be kept aside as an analytical tool. The most convenient method is to judge a war against Islamic standard is through the two part test: “Cause” and “Conduct.” This can be compared to the US Army’s two question form for assessment of operations: “Are we doing the right things?” and “Are we doing things right?”¹¹ In the context of

Islamic warfare, the first question can be reframed as: “Are the Muslims fighting for the right cause?” and the second question can be: “Are the Muslims conducting themselves conforming to Islamic guidelines of warfare?” Finding an answer to the first question is relatively easy. While finding the answer to the second question, one needs to remember that Islam does not dictate minor tactical aspects of war. Any tactical method, conventional or guerilla, can be acceptable unless it conflicts with the guidelines provided by Allah or Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on warfare, or with any other basic rule of Islam.

In fact, the state of warfare is not viewed very differently from the other aspects of Islamic *Shariah*. Islam, as preached by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), did not have many conflicts with the previous Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism) or with the local culture of Arabs, unless something was abruptly against the greater good, or against the core concept of monotheistic religion. According to the Quran, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not bring a complete new religion to mankind; he perfected the same religion that was preached by the previous Prophets. It is stated in verse 13 of *Surah Ash-Shura*:

He has ordained for you the same religion which he ordained for Nuh (Noah), and that which We have revealed on you, and that which He ordained for Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), and I’sa (Jesus), saying you should establish religion and make no divisions in it.

The problem defined by the Quran is that some followers of the previous Prophets did not follow the exact path shown by their Prophets, for which Allah sent the next Prophet to bring them back to right path.¹² So when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was ordained the final revelation, he had the same mandate of correcting the people’s wrong practices and ideas. In his personal life, he was very much like a contemporary Arab, with the exception that he had superior character qualities and some supernatural capabilities to

interact with angels and other living beings. Similarly, in warfare, he mostly followed the contemporary Arab way of warfare, while making sure that the commandments from Allah about war were being followed.

In the question of comparing Al Qaeda against Islamic standards, evaluation of every aspect of Al Qaeda's doctrine and tactics would be redundant, as Islam does not dictate minor tactical techniques. Instead, a careful examination of their cause and intent can provide a firsthand impression about their adherence to Islamic rulings. If this "Cause" test fails, analysis of conduct becomes insignificant. If they pass the "Cause" test, careful examination of their conduct is necessary to determine whether they are fighting an Islamic war in all respect or not.

Al Qaeda's Cause

From the texts of Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Abd Al-Aziz Al-Muqrin, four circumstances brought Al Qaeda into their recent war: occupation of lands of Arabian Peninsula by US forces; repeated massacres of Iraqi people by the Christian-Jewish alliance; US support to Jewish state (Israel) by destroying the strongest Muslim nation in the region (Iraq); and turning other Muslim nations supportive to US interest by making them "mini paper states" through disuniting them. In essence, they blame the US and other Western powers for creating division among the Muslim nations of Middle East, and turning the Middle East into a battlefield to support their (Western powers') economic goals and to support Israel. They also blame the governments of Saudi Arabia and most other nations of the region for taking sides with the Western nations.

Comparing these causes with the authentic causes accepted by Islam can provide insights into the depth of religious base in Al Qaeda's doctrine. However, before making such

comparison, two questions need to be answered: Does such situation (as claimed by Al Qaeda) truly prevail in Middle East? If yes, then is it justified enough to wage war?

The questions of whether the US and Western nations, with support from Israel, are truly causing division and nuisance in the Muslim countries of Middle East or not, are a matter of debate. Separate research is needed to determine whether or not such conditions truly exist, and whether or not the Western powers are to be blamed. Nevertheless, overtly it can be seen that there is a strong US forces presence in the region, and there are conflicts between states of the region where US and Western nations play an important role. How detrimental this presence of US forces in the region is to the Islamic society, is another question that is beyond the scope of this research. Since these questions remain relatively unanswered, a way to deal with it is to judge assuming the situations are truly existing, does that make Al Qaeda's cause to wage war authentic?

Apparently, Al Qaeda's cause is authentic with respect to the just Islamic causes as identified in chapter 3. If one assumes that the Western powers are creating problems in the Muslim states of Middle East region in the form of dividing them, and inciting conflict between them, then they (Western nations) are causing *fitna*,¹³ which gives the Muslims of the region an authentic cause to fight. In the context of *fitna* created by the non-Muslims of Mecca on the early Muslims, Allah ordered Muslims to fight against stopping *fitna* through several verses of Quran:

Say to the unbelievers, if now they desist, their past would be forgiven them; but if they persist, the punishment of those before them is already (a matter of warning for them). And fight them on, until there is no more *fitna*, and there prevails justice and faith in Allah.¹⁴

While an acceptable cause may prevail, other options besides waging war must first be tried. As explained before, in Islam, physical fighting or waging war is not the

first option to alleviate problems. Peaceful measures such as diplomacy or persuasion are to be attempted, and if all measures fail, then the last option of waging war is considered acceptable. From historical accounts, Al Qaeda leadership has made no such attempt of diplomacy other than approaching the Saudi government once. Here they violate the Islamic guidance of opting to fight as the first option to pursue their goal.

The next question is: does Al Qaeda's leadership have authority to declare war? The Al Qaeda leadership neither represents any state, nor any particular group of Muslims from a particular geographical area. However, as the sitting governments themselves are blamed for taking side with the "oppressors" (as claimed by Al Qaeda), it gives authenticity to a Muslim leadership who can lead the oppressed Muslims following the correct Islamic way. Is the leadership of Al Qaeda under Osama Bin Laden or under Zawahiri acceptable to lead such group of Muslims? According to their background, words and ideology, they may have such authority; however, according to their conduct, they apparently lost that authority because they ordered their subordinates to commit forbidden acts, such as indiscriminate killing of non-Muslims, which is unacceptable in Islam.

Al Qaeda's conduct in warfare and Islamic guidance

While Al Qaeda might have an authentic cause to fight for, the biggest critique they have drawn from Muslims and non-Muslims alike is the way they conduct their war. In general, they opted for guerilla warfare, as evident from the texts of Al-Muqrin and from pattern of operations they have demonstrated so far. Though no significant account of guerilla warfare can be found from the examples of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it cannot be termed un-Islamic because Islam does not take a position on tactical methods

like fighting in conventional or unconventional way. However, some of the conducts of Al Qaeda go against Islamic rulings. These include suicide bombing, and targeting of non-combatant civilians.

Suicide is not a permissible act in Islam. Allah made it clear in verses 29-30 of *Surah An-Nisa*:

O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities; But let there be amongst you traffic and trade by mutual good will; Nor kill yourselves; for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful! If any do that in rancor and injustice- soon shall We cast them into the fire; and easy it is for Allah.¹⁵

There is no account of any suicidal actions from the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), even when he faced a numerical inferiority compared to his enemies. The *hadiths* quoted by Al Qaeda about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) permitting suicide are usually misinterpreted. The story of a young man quoted from a *hadith*¹⁶ does not say that the young man killed himself. Nor any other *hadith* that they quoted about Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) companions sacrificing their lives in battle say that they killed themselves. While all of them had the aspiration to become a martyr, every account clearly says that *they fought until they were killed, not that they killed themselves*.¹⁷ The motive that Al Qaeda emphasizes on aspiring to be a martyr is also misleading. While martyrs are assured of high honor in the life hereafter, and every Muslim may aspire to become a martyr, it does not mean that the primary goal for Muslims to fight is to become martyr. Allah has clearly described the objective of fighting: to alleviate oppression. While it is important to be above fear of being killed, none should aspire to get killed in order to become a martyr, because if everyone gets killed in battlefield, there would be none to implement the good order and righteous cause after the battle. Wishing to become a martyr should not be confused with acting directly to become a martyr.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself did not engage in fighting solely to become a martyr, nor did his companions. So the motivation used for suicide bombing is a clear violation of basic guidelines of Islam.

Targeting civilians, women, and children, who do not pose a threat to the Muslims, is categorically forbidden by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), so there cannot be any controversy to that. Besides, Al Qaeda's statement of treating all Jews and Christians as legitimate target is highly erroneous. Allah says in Quran: "Allah 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 Allah loveth those who are just."¹⁸ Al Qaeda defends their claim of attacking non-Muslims as a legitimate Islamic action by quoting several verses from the Quran. However, in doing so, they commit the same mistake which they blame on the moderate Muslim scholars, i.e. quoting Quranic verses out of context. Al Qaeda commonly refers that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) targeted infidels. This statement is not wrong, but not complete as well. During Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) time, every able man used to take part in battles, so during conflict any of them could be targeted as a legitimate target. In today's world, when states have standing armies, the context is different. Applying the instruction from the Quranic verse from *Surah Al-Mumtahinah* (mentioned above), it is evident that targeting non-combatants is not permissible in Islam. However, if any non-combatant is actively involved in supporting the combatants, such as a civilian military planner or a policy maker, who provide active guidance to the combatants (military forces), they may be considered as legitimate target, for they are part of the hierarchy of the force that acts against Muslims.

Based on this discussion, it is now evident that though Al Qaeda might have passed the first test of “Cause,” it has serious issues that caused it to fail the second test, the “Conduct.” Given all the claims of Al Qaeda leadership is true regarding the detrimental role of US and Western countries against Muslim nations of Middle East, Al Qaeda might have an authentic cause to fight for. In fact, because of this apparently legitimate cause, Al Qaeda could draw overt or covert support from many Muslim people around the world. However, Al Qaeda also received criticism from the Muslims for targeting civilians and employing suicide technique, which are not supported by Islam. So, according to the standard set in chapter 3, Al Qaeda fails to qualify itself as conducting an Islamic way of war.

Recommendations for US and Western Countries

While Al Qaeda members may not be conducting themselves as completely Islamic, it does not mean that the war on terror against them is conducted rightly. One has to clearly understand that though Al Qaeda may receive negative criticism for their un-Islamic conduct, yet they might have a worthy cause to fight for. Unless something is done to alleviate this cause, it will be very hard to completely defeat militant groups like Al Qaeda. They might become ineffective or dormant for time being, but they may resurge at any opportune moment later. It is also because of this apparently legitimate cause, many Muslims will continue to view the war on terror as a fight against Islam, no matter how much the US and other Western nations deny this accusation. The US and their allies should consider this point more seriously.

At the strategic level the USA should rethink their policy about engaging Al Qaeda and other militant groups militarily. Militarily actors can be destroyed or killed,

but if the cause is not taken out, possibility of rise of another group in future cannot be ruled out. Ideology should be fought with ideology, not by military force. In fact, use of military against Al Qaeda gives them a stronger authentic cause to fight for. When they are attacked, they can claim that their fight is to protect themselves, which qualifies to be a just Islamic cause. The best people to fight such ideology-based groups are the Islamic scholars who have strong educational background and a record of good conduct. These scholars need to engage the Muslim population and members of militant groups to make them understand the correct way of Islamic conduct, and wipe away the misinterpretations and wrong practices. But this is not possible unless these scholars have strong support from the affected governments. The governments of Muslim nations and Western nations that have interest in this war on terror should support these scholars for their security and wide circulation of their messages through media.

Most importantly, something has to be done to alleviate the cause given to these militant groups. All stakeholder nations related to this terrorism issue should reconsider their role in this campaign and guard against any action that might degrade Islamic values in Muslim societies. In recent years, actions of some governments on ruling against wearing Hijab have further fueled the belief that Western nations are anti-Islamic. Ensuring education for women is not un-Islamic, but encouraging Muslim women to leave their Islamic teachings and to follow Western style of life usually upsets the common Muslim people. Such actions do not help to stop terrorism, rather add fuel to it. In fact the best way to alleviate the causes is through promoting the Islam in its best form, not by trying to subdue it. Islam is a very strong religion that has deep-rooted position in most Muslims' mind. Therefore, trying to minimize its influence on Muslims by

imposing other ideology or concepts usually does not work well. One needs to understand that Islam, in its best practices, has all the characteristics that can stop terrorist acts and promote good order in the society. If the Western nations' main concern is the stability and security of the Middle East region, the best ideology that can make it happen is Islam itself. If proper Islamic authorities are in control of their state affairs and people, it will not promote violence, rather minimize it. An Islamic society, who draws their lessons from the core sources of Islam in its right context, will never be a threat to the non-Muslim states, unless they are physically threatened. If Western nations have economic interest in the Middle East region, the people that they can trust best are the Muslim traders who conduct themselves according to Islamic rulings. Because these traders will be morally bounded by their religion to conduct trade in the fairest way, they can be considered as the most reliable persons. In fact, it was the Muslim traders of 7th and 8th centuries, who attracted many non-Muslims in the South Asia and South East Asia towards Islam by their good conduct and fair trading. The best motivational tool that works for Muslims is their religion. All wrong practices that involve Muslims in today's world are not due to adherence to religion, but due to distancing away from fundamental Islam. When Western nations engage with the Muslim states and militant groups like Al Qaeda, they should try to promote the fundamental Islam in all levels of state and social affairs. This will not only carry the message that Western nations are not anti-Islamic, but also reduce the support and sympathy of common Muslims for the militant organizations. It will also promote a good order in the society, reduce violence, and ensure fair economic relations between nations.

For the same reason, all non-Muslim scholars, politicians, and media should be careful about using the word “Islamic” to describe terrorists or extremist movements. Phrases such as “Islamic terrorist” or “Islamic extremist” undermine the greatness of the religion of Islam, which has a clear stance against such violence. Such phrases make ordinary Muslims believe that non-Muslims are disrespectful to their religion, and accordingly withhold their (Muslims) support for them (non-Muslims). Alike Al Qaeda, there are many individuals and groups, who call themselves Islamic but do not conduct according to the Islamic rulings. If in doubt, non-Muslims should discuss with Muslim scholars to identify whether or not such people or groups can be called Islamic, before terming them as such. The non-Muslims can also educate on Islam to ascertain themselves what can be called Islamic. In essence, the best way to engage Muslims, whether violent militant groups or peaceful commoners, is through promoting the correct Islam, not by degrading or containing it.

¹As identified in chapter 3, any action or event, to qualify to be Islamic, has to have just “cause,” and just way of “conduct,” supported by fundamental sources of Islam.

²Abdur Rahman I. Doi, *Shariah: The Islamic Law* (London: Ta Ha Publishers, 1984), 437.

³Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran* (Maryland: Amana Publications), 87.

⁴*Hajj Mabruur: Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca from 8-12th day of the last month of Hijri Calendar), which is done according to the Prophet’s tradition and is accepted by Allah. This pilgrimage is considered one of the five pillars of Islam.

⁵Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, 988.

⁶See verses 5 and 12-14 of *Surah At-Taubah*, verse 39 of *Surah Al-Hajj*, verses 190-191 and 217 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*, and verse 8 of *Surah Al-Mumtahinah* (all mentioned in chapter 3) in the Arabic version of the Quran.

⁷Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, trans. "Translation of Saheeh Muslim, Book 19, Number 4313," http://www.iium.edu.my/deed/hadith/muslim/019_smt.html (accessed May 1, 2012).

⁸Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, 1454-1455.

⁹In the expedition to *Nakhla* (right before the Battle of *Badr*) led by Abdullah b. Jahsh, the Muslims killed a man from the Quraysh caravan, although they were ordered by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to only observe what the Quraysh were doing, not to attack them. The Prophet (PBUH) later admonished them for killing in the sacred month of *Rajab*. Though this incident did not initiate a battle, many people erroneously view it as a pro-active action by Muslims to provoke Meccan Quraysh to war.

¹⁰Raj Bhala, *Understanding Islamic Law (Sharia)* (LexisNexis, 2011), 42-43.

¹¹Department of the Army, FM 5-0, C-1, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March 2012), 6-2 to 6-3.

¹²Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, 42.

¹³The word *fitna* comes from an Arabic verb which means to "seduce, tempt, or lure." There are many shades of meaning, mostly referring to a feeling of disorder or unrest. Variations of the word *fitna* are found throughout the Qur'an to describe the trials and temptations that may face the believers. The term has also been used to describe divisions which occurred in the early years of the Muslim community. In modern usage, it is used to describe forces that cause controversy, fragmentation, scandal, chaos, or discord within the Muslim community, disturbing social peace and order.

¹⁴Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, 423.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 193-194.

¹⁶Raymond Ibrahim, ed. and trans, *The Al Qaeda Reader* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 146-149.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 153-154.

¹⁸Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, 1454-1455.

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