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Islam

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Before the year 2001, the word terrorism hardly gives anybody the chills they feel today. September 11, 2001 was the date the attack occurred, hence the name 9/11. On that day, lives were lost, damage was unbearable. As a result, terrorism emerged as the top threat to national security, and consequently Islam was severely blamed for the terrorists people presume it has created. But is Islam really the cause to blame? Islam, just like every other religion, teaches people to be good, both physically and spiritually. In Islam, there is a concept called 'Jihad', which, despite its humble nature is often misunderstood for terrorism. Jihad, very much like Islam itself, is falsely characterized by the version of both muslim and non-muslim's translation rather than by its true meaning--- altogether makes it an interesting concept to look into.

Islam is one of the branches of the world's many religions. In Arabic, the word Islam means submission. It is derived from the same root as the word for peace or 'Salam'.¹ Members of the Islamic religion are called Muslim or, literally, the ones who submit to God. Most aspects of Islamic beliefs are dedicated to their God, Allah. On the Last judgment, Allah is the one who weighs his believers' goodness against their evil deeds to decide their fate.² Thus, Muslims are highly motivated to fulfill God's commandments. Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam is used strictly as their guidance along with Prophet Muhammad's additional teachings or 'Sunnah'

¹ "Important.ca. Islam, Islamic Religion, History and Philosophy." *Important.ca. Religion and Spiritual Beliefs Resource*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2013. <http://www.important.ca/islam_world_re

² "Understanding Jihad | Hoover Institution." *Hoover Institution*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/6964>>.

found in Hadith.³ Comprised in the Qur'an are the five pillars of Islam which is the foundation of the religion. The five pillars of Islam demand Muslims to pray five times a day, testify their faith, help the needy, fast, and make pilgrimage to Mecca. Synonymous to the five pillars is the concept called Jihad. Though not one of the pillars of Islam, it in a sense related to all the other pillars.⁴ It is Jihad that stirs up misconceptions about the religion of which it comes from.

What people do not know is there are three levels of Jihad: spiritual Jihad, verbal Jihad, and combative Jihad. Jihad literally means to strive. Under these three categories, each one demands strive for dissimilar purposes. For spiritual Jihad, one is demanded to strive against one own self to purify one's soul of evil influences. It is to put God above one's lives, wealth, worldly ambitions, and even above the loved ones.⁵ This type of Jihad is the most significant one. Verbal Jihad moved from striving for one small unit of humanity to a wider circle, the society. In this verbal Jihad, one is demanded to strive for justice through words and non-violent actions. One is demanded to stand up for the truth even if one is risking one's life. Clearly, the first two forms of Jihad show no inclination towards violence. However, in the non-Muslim world, it is not these two forms of Jihad that occupy people's minds when the word Jihad is mentioned. Instead, it is the third form of Jihad called combative Jihad.

Combative Jihad is not all about violence; it is the act of regaining peace through reasonable means. It is only performed when Muslims are being oppressed by the oppressor. The oppressor in Islamic definition is not limited to non-Muslims, but

³ Clark, Malcolm. "Islamic Tradition and Law." *Islam for dummies*. New York, NY: Wiley Pub., 2003. 121. Print.

⁴ "The Spiritual Significance of Jihad." *Al-Islam.org by the Ahlul Bayt DILP - Home*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/jihad-nasr.htm>>.

⁵ Robinson, B.A.. "The concept of Jihad in Islam." *All about religious tolerance: the ReligiousTolerance.org web site*. Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 28 Mar. 2003.

also includes Muslims as well.⁶ However, before violent measure is used, few conditions must be achieved. First there must be aggressive schemes against Islam. Second, there are clear efforts of propelling Muslims from their legally acquired property. Third, military campaigns are being launched to terminate Muslims.⁷ Once these conditions are achieved, the ruler, usually an Imam, can declare and execute combative Jihad. No unqualified individual or group may declare a Jihad otherwise it will be a false Jihad. All Muslim nations and their leaders must agree upon the decision of war or peace.

During combative Jihad is performed, there are also certain rules one must follow. In the Islamic code of combat, it is stated that Muslims should only fight their combatants who took arms and starting hostility towards them. In other words, they should only fight legitimate target, not innocent civilians, even when their enemy did not do the same. Also, prisoners of war are not to be killed or tortured.⁸ Up to this point, there is no denial that combative Jihad does not involve violence. Nonetheless, violence is the last resort used only when all of the prerequisite conditions are fulfilled. Additionally, violence is directed towards the ones who is the cause of the problem, not any others. It is justice in its own right.

The big question still remains. Does Jihad equal terrorism? First terrorism must be clearly defined in order to further analyse this issue. Terrorism is a political act which involves physical violence and intention to create fear and insecurity. It targets

⁶ Clark, Malcolm. "Seeking Common Ground." *Islam for dummies*. New York, NY: Wiley Pub., 2003. 282. Print.

⁷ "Jihad: A Judicial Ruling ." *Jihad - A Misunderstood Concept from Islam*. Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, Shaykh Seraj Hendricks, Shaykh Ahmad Hendricks, n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2013.
<http://www.sunnah.org/fiqh/jihad_judicial

⁸ "Jihad on Terrorism - YouTube." *YouTube*. Bridges Foundation, n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfQsa0x86wE>>.

innocents.⁹ Recall that there are three types of Jihad as mentioned previously. The first two, spiritual and verbal Jihad does not fit into the definition, so they do not qualify as an act of terrorism. Combative jihad, however, is questionable. Terrorist groups commit violent acts simply because they claim they are performing Jihad, a religious obligation. Take Al-Qaeda for example. It is a global militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden to call for global Jihad.¹⁰ The attack they launched on September 11, 2001 on the American soil was definitely not Jihad. As mentioned previously, combative Jihad can only be performed under a qualified ruler's permission. The leader of Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden is neither an Imam nor legitimate ruler of the state. Their attack killed hundreds of American civilians when the Islamic code of combat clearly forbids them to. Moreover, suicide bombing is a grave sin in Islam. Jihad does not favour such actions, no matter sounding the reason may seem. Al-Qaeda's actions were the result of their distorted interpretation of Jihad. Yes, Al-Qaeda is qualified as terrorist--- according to the definition---but Jihad is not. Thus, the answer to the question 'Does Jihad equal terrorism?' is no. Jihad is merely an excuse to commit violent acts. Terrorism is not gender, nationality and surely not religion. Terrorists are Muslim by chance.

Religion is inherently pure. Only when men distort the true essence of religion does it turn into something even the men despise. Jihad, a controversial concept in Islam is one of the examples. Contrary to the popular belief, Jihad is simply a religious obligation to strive morally, politically, and socially to prevent the weak from being exploited. In fact, Jihad is peace and also war. It is war against terrorism.

⁹ Clark, Malcolm. "Seeking Common Ground." *Islam for dummies*. New York, NY: Wiley Pub., 2003. 282-283. Print.

¹⁰ al-Qaeda - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2013. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda>>.