



Jihad and Militant Islam

**Understanding Its Roots
and Responding with
the Gospel**

Fred Farrokh

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GLOBAL INITIATIVE
REACHING **MUSLIM** PEOPLES

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Introduction

In recent decades, the word *jihad* has appeared repeatedly in global headlines. From the Middle East to Africa and beyond, militant movements claiming Islamic justification have carried out acts of violence that affect millions of people.

For Christians who want to understand the world and faithfully share the gospel, it is important to understand where the concept of *jihad* comes from and how it developed. This booklet explores the roots of *jihad*, its historical development, and its influence today—particularly in Africa and other regions where militant movements are still active.

What is *Jihad*?

The Arabic word *jihad* means “struggle.” Muslims often describe two forms of *jihad*: an internal struggle against sin and an armed struggle carried out in the cause of Islam. The Arabic term for a “holy warrior” is *mujahid* (plural: *mujahideen*). These terms are widely used across the Muslim world. In modern global usage, however, the term most often refers to armed struggle. This booklet focuses on that militant form.

This study avoids expressions such as “Radical Islam” or “Extremist Islam.” Muslims themselves rarely use these labels, and they suggest a departure from the original teachings of Muhammad, his earliest followers, and the Quran. As we will see, many jihadists claim they are following Muhammad’s example rather than departing from it. The word *radical* can also create confusion because it refers to a mathematical root. Does *jihad* lie at the root of Islam? That question deserves careful consideration.

Comparing Jesus and Muhammad

Christians considering Islamic topics benefit from viewing them through the lens of comparative religion. That requires comparing Islam with Christianity—and especially comparing the founder of Islam, Muhammad, with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Islam teaches that Jesus was a human prophet. According to Islamic teaching, he delivered essentially the same message as earlier prophets. The Qur'an also says that Jesus foretold the coming of Muhammad (Sura 61:6).

In Islamic belief, Jesus never claimed to be divine. One traditional *Hadith* even teaches that Jesus will return at the end of the age as a Muslim leader who will preach Islam, break the Cross, kill pigs, lead *jihad*, marry, and eventually be buried beside Muhammad in Medina. This description differs greatly from the biblical account of Jesus's Second Coming.

For that reason, the biblical Jesus and the Islamic Jesus should not be understood as two perspectives on the same figure. They are fundamentally different identities. In Islam, Jesus is not divine. In the Bible, He truly is.

The Bible also presents a very different picture of Jesus' character and mission. During His earthly ministry, Jesus was neither violent nor militant. On two occasions He drove money changers and merchants from the Temple because they had corrupted its purpose—even then He did not injure or kill anyone! In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus declared that He could summon twelve legions of angels to rescue Him, yet He chose not to do so. His mission was to voluntarily die on the Cross for the sins of humanity.

When Peter tried to defend Him by cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant, Jesus rebuked him: "Put your sword back in its place... for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Later, standing before Pontius Pilate, Jesus explained the nature of His kingdom:

My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place. (John 18:36)

Here the difference between Islam and Christianity becomes clear. The kingdom associated with Muhammad is tied to the political and temporal realities of this world, and its followers have historically fought to establish and defend it. The Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus, however, is not of this world; it is a spiritual kingdom.

Christian Militancy

Muslims often argue that Christians have been militant, pointing to the Crusades as evidence. During those campaigns, soldiers bearing the sign of the cross fought in wars to reclaim lands held by Muslim rulers. Whatever the political motives of the time, such actions clearly departed from the teachings and example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who instructed His followers to love their enemies.

The Crusades also did not take place in a vacuum. For centuries before the first Crusade, Muslim armies had conquered large areas of the Christian world, including the Holy Land. By the eleventh century, reports of mistreatment of Christian pilgrims and restrictions on access to holy sites stirred strong reactions in Europe. The Crusades were largely a response to this earlier expansion and the desire to secure access to places sacred to Christians.

Even so, the Crusades should not be confused with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus never called His followers to spread faith by force. Instead, He taught them to love their enemies, pray for those who persecute them, and advance His Kingdom through repentance, faith, and sacrificial love.

Muslims sometimes point to the colonial period, when much of the Muslim world—and virtually all of Africa—came under the control of European powers whom they believed to be Christian. A full discussion of European colonialism is beyond the scope of this discussion. While the Crusades were conducted, at least in part, for religious reasons,

colonialism did not prominently feature a religious component. Some missionaries did serve in areas controlled by colonial governments, but the European colonial enterprise itself was not a Christian missionary effort.

Christians may also be called upon by their countries to serve in their respective militaries. Every nation maintains some form of national defense, and citizens are often asked to serve in that capacity. When Christians serve in the military, they do so as citizens of their country, not as representatives of the Christian faith or in the name of God.

Jihad, by contrast, is understood in Islamic teaching as struggle carried out in the way of Allah. The Qur'an reflects this concept in passages such as Sura 2:190: "Fight in the way of Allah ..." In this sense, the justification for fighting is framed explicitly in religious terms.

For Christians, the ultimate measure of the faith is not found in the political actions of nations or in the failures of those who claimed the Christian name, but in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus did not establish a political kingdom or command His followers to spread faith by the sword. Instead, He called them to repentance, faith, humility, and love—even toward their enemies. Throughout history, Christians have sometimes failed to live up to that calling, but those failures must always be measured against the clear example and instruction of Christ.

The Revision of Early Islamic History

Students of Islam may be aware that scholars are reconsidering the early Islamic history. Some research suggests that the Qur'an, the *Hadith* (sayings of Muhammad), and the *Sira* (biographies of Muhammad) were not compiled immediately after Muhammad's death but developed several hundred years later.

Arab armies expanded rapidly after Muhammad's death. Beginning with the second caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, in A.D. 634, Muslim

forces conquered large areas of the Middle East, North Africa, parts of Europe, and regions of Asia. This military expansion is historically well established.

Some Muslims claim that early Muslims carried the Quran in one hand and the sword in the other to persuade people to embrace Islam. However, no complete Quranic manuscripts survive from that early period. Most likely, later Islamic scholars, seeking to form a holy history, attributed holy sayings and scriptures to Muhammad. The early Arab conquests were clearly militaristic. Over time the concept of *jihad* as holy war developed within Islamic thought and continues to be refined and debated among Muslims today.

Understanding how Muslims themselves view this history is important. The traditional Islamic narrative teaches that Muhammad received revelations from Allah through the angel Gabriel between A.D. 610 and 632. His followers recorded these revelations, and they were later standardized during the rule of the third caliph, Uthman (A.D. 644–656). Muhammad’s sayings and actions—known as *Hadith*—serve as commentary on the Qur’an and uphold Muhammad’s life as the model for Muslim life. Even if this standard history is not verifiable, it is what Muslims, and especially Jihadists, believe.

The Life of Muhammad and Its Impact on *Jihad*

Nearly every challenge the world faces regarding Islamic *jihad* comes from the example and teachings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. The example and teachings attributed to him provide the model that modern jihadists claim to follow. If Muhammad had not existed, the doctrine of Islamic holy war would not exist. Muhammad’s life and actions dramatically shaped the framework that later generations of Muslims used to interpret *jihad*.

Muhammad in Mecca

According to traditional Islamic history, Muhammad was born in Mecca in western Arabia around A.D. 570. The people of Mecca practiced polytheism and worshiped many idols. Muhammad, however, believed in one god and rejected idol worship.

In A.D. 610, while meditating in a cave on Mount Hira outside Mecca, Muhammad experienced an encounter with a being who commanded him to recite. The experience left him confused and deeply troubled—even suicidal. His wife, Khadijah, encouraged him and convinced him that Allah had chosen him to be a prophet to the Arabs.

Muhammad continued receiving periodic revelations and began preaching publicly. Initially, he attracted a small following. This new faith came to be known as *Islam*, meaning “The Submission,” and its followers were called *Muslims*, meaning “The Submitted.”

In these early years, the small Muslim community was mocked or persecuted in Mecca. Abu Talib, Muhammad’s uncle, provided Muhammad with tribal protection, which meant the Meccans could not kill Muhammad without risking a blood feud. At one point, Muhammad sent a group of his followers to Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia). The reasons are not entirely clear, but the move may have provided a temporary refuge for Muslims facing persecution.

During this early period in Mecca, Muslims were non-militant. They lacked the numbers and political power to fight even if they had wished to do so. Some Muslims today point to this period of Islamic history as evidence that Islam is fundamentally peaceful. However, the events that followed in Medina present a different picture.

In A.D. 619, Muhammad’s uncle Abu Talib died. Without his protection, Muhammad’s position in Mecca became increasingly dangerous so he decided to leave Mecca and move to Yathrib, a city to the north that offered him refuge. Some pilgrims from Yathrib had previously heard Muhammad preach in Mecca and had accepted his message. In A.D. 622, Muhammad and his followers migrated to this

city. This migration, known as the *Hijra*, marks a turning point in Islamic history.

Muhammad in Medina: The Development of *Jihad*

Yathrib was later renamed Medinat an-Nabi, meaning “the City of the Prophet.” Today it is simply called Medina. This oasis community included twelve Arab tribes and three Jewish tribes. In Mecca, Muhammad did not encounter Christians or Jews. Furthermore, the Meccans were traders while the people in Medina were farmers who depended on agriculture around the oasis.

Unfortunately, the migrants from Mecca—known as the *Muhajirun*, meaning those who made the Hijra—did not know how to farm. This created an immediate challenge for the Muslim immigrants. At first, the Medinan Muslims provided hospitality and assistance, but Muhammad understood that this arrangement could not continue indefinitely.

To solve the economic problem, Muhammad adopted a common Arabian desert practice: raiding caravans. These raids, known in Arabic as *ghazwa* (or *razzia* in other languages) involved raiding the goods of another tribe by ambushing their caravans while traveling across desert trade routes. Traditionally, the goal was to seize goods rather than to kill people, since excessive bloodshed could trigger destructive tribal feuds. On occasion, they captured women, but they tried not to kill anyone.

Because the Meccans had rejected and mocked him, Mohammad believed that raiding the Meccan caravans was justified. Muhammad personally led several of these expeditions, which proved successful in obtaining supplies and wealth for the Muslim community. In doing so, Muhammad transformed the traditional tribal raid into something new. Instead of one tribe fighting against another tribe, the struggle now became believers against unbelievers. The familiar desert practice of the *razzia* took on a religious meaning. Due to the religious nature of this *jihad* struggle, and Allah’s instructions to fight the unbelievers, *jihad* became a sanctified practice.

Violence between the Muslims of Medina and the Meccans soon escalated. In A.D. 624, the two sides fought the Battle of Badr, one of the most significant early battles in Islamic history. In Muhammad's biography, we read the following description:

It is true throughout most of the battle Muhammad remained in the rear, in a hut which had been erected for him, praying with anxious fervor. At one point he emerged and flung a handful of pebbles in the enemy's direction, crying out: "Evil look on their faces!" He followed up this gesture with religious exhortations. (Rodinson 1971, 166–167)

The Meccans fought two other battles against Muhammad but were unable to defeat him. Eventually they made peace with him and later accepted Islam. Muhammad forgave many of his former opponents, unless they had openly mocked his prophetic credentials.

The traditional Islamic narrative, therefore, shows a clear contrast between the two phases of Muhammad's career. In Mecca, when Muslims had little power, they were non-militant. In Medina, where Muhammad gained political power, armed struggle became a central feature of the movement. Muhammad commanded all who followed Islam to fight.

This transition from peaceful to militant is also reflected in the interpretation of the Quran. Islamic scholarship recognizes a principle known as abrogation, or *naskh*. According to this principle, later revelations supersede earlier ones when contradictions appear. Because Muhammad gained power in Medina, the verses revealed during that later period are often understood to take precedence over earlier, more conciliatory passages.

Jihad* in the Quran and *Hadith

Anyone who claims that armed fighting against infidels is un-Islamic is either uninformed or dishonest. Over 100 passages of the Quran call for armed fighting against infidels. *Jihad* forms a major section of the *hadith* literature as well. Here are some passages from the Quran about *Jihad*:

Sura 8:39: “And fight them until there is no *fitnah* and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah. And if they cease—then indeed, Allah is Seeing of what they do.”

Sura 9:29: “Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture—[fight] until they give the *jizyah* willingly while they are humbled.”

Sura 8:12: “[Remember] when your Lord inspired to the angels, ‘I am with you, so strengthen those who have believed. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved, so strike [them] upon the necks and strike from them every fingertip.’”

Similar material is readily available in the *hadith*, or sayings of Muhammad:

“I have been commanded to fight against people till they testify that there is no god but Allah, that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and they establish prayer, and pay *Zakat* and if they do it, their blood and property are guaranteed protection on my behalf except when justified by law, and their affairs rest with Allah.” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 1, Book 2, *Hadith* 24)

“A single endeavor (of fighting) in Allah’s Cause in the forenoon or in the afternoon is better than the world and whatever is in it.” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Book 52, *Hadith* 50)

“The example of a *Mujahid* (holy warrior) in Allah’s Cause is like a person who fasts and prays continuously. Allah guarantees that He will admit the *Mujahid* in His Cause into Paradise if he is killed, otherwise He will return him to his home safely with rewards and war booty.” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Book 52, *Hadith* 46)

“I have been made victorious with terror (cast in the hearts of the enemy).” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Book 52, *Hadith* 220)

The Quran and *Hadith* confirm the *Jihad* concept developed by Muhammad. **The goal of Muhammad was domination of the world by Islam, which required the use of force.** Thus, the early Quranic sources clearly teach the doctrine of *jihad*. Some Muslims even add *jihad* as the “Sixth Pillar”—in addition to other five pillars of confession, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage.

Muhammad's Use of Jihadist Practices

The Quran states, in Sura 33:21, that Muhammad is an example for all Muslims. Jihadists tend to be literalists when it comes to the Quran and *Hadith*. So, it is important to study these materials and the life of Muhammad to understand *jihad*. Below are several practices of *jihad* used by Muhammad.

First, Muhammad practiced revenge killings. After the Battle of Badr, Umar wanted to kill all the prisoners of war. Muhammad knew these Meccans had wealthy relatives, so he overruled Umar and allowed ransoms. After all, the Muslims desperately needed money. However, if any prisoner of war had previously mocked Muhammad, he or she was not allowed to live. The prophet of Islam ordered Uqba, a prisoner who had previously mocked Muhammad, to be slain. Uqba asked Muhammad, "Who will look after my children?" Muhammad famously replied, "Hell!" (Allāh, 1987, 308). Upon the orders of Muhammad, the Meccan poetess, Asma bint Marwan, was assassinated for mocking the Islamic prophet. Muhammad would sanctify his own actions in Sura 33:57, which forbade any mocking of himself, the messenger of Allah. Similarly, Muhammad banished two of the three Jewish tribes of Medina for rejecting him as a prophet. He executed the males of the third tribe and forced a young Jewish widow, Safaya bint Huyay, to become his wife.

Second, Muhammad endorsed both slavery and the taking of sex slaves. Slavery was a common practice in human history and in the Arab world of antiquity. Muhammad also justified the practice of capturing unbelieving women in warfare and holding them as sex slaves. The Quranic expression for this is *Ma Malakat Aymanakum*, which is translated "those whom your right hands possess."

Here is a sampling of Muhammad's Quranic verses on this subject, with emphasis added:

Sura 33:50: "O Prophet, indeed We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have given their due compensation *and those your right hand possesses from what Allah has returned to you [of captives] ...*"

Sura 4:3: “If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, *or (a captive) that your right hands possess*, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.”

Sura 23:1-6: “The believers [Muslims] must eventually win, Those who humble themselves in prayer; Who avoid vain talk; Who are active in deeds of charity; Who abstain from sex, except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, *or (the captives) whom their right hands possess*, for (in their case) they are free from blame.”

The terrorist group, ISIS, immediately put these verses into practice when they captured non-Muslim women, such as Yazidis, and kept them as sex slaves. Even the Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, kept a captured American aid worker, Kayla Mueller, as a sex slave.

Muhammad’s Bullying Tactics

The concept of *jihad* is not limited to the battlefield. ***Jihad is an unending institution of conflict intended to bring about the global domination of Islam.*** A common way to describe intimidation, coercion, and manipulation is via the term *bullying*. We see in the life of Muhammad myriad bullying tactics.

Muhammad bullied the Jews of Medina who did not believe in him as a prophet or simply disagreed with him. In the poetic society of ancient Arabia, critical poetry served as a means of criticizing people. Muhammad refused to accept this, so he killed his critics when he gained power.

Muhammad also bullied women by allowing polygamy, which is cruelty to women. Though he allowed Muslim men to have four wives, they could also keep sex slaves captured in war. Muhammad himself had over ten wives.

Muhammad also bullied Muslims. He accomplished this primarily by requiring Muslims to fight for Islam. If they did not fight for Islam, they were considered apostates. If they left the faith of Islam or came to doubt his prophetic accuracy, they were likewise branded as

apostates. One of the most famous things Muhammad ever said about Muslims was, “Whoever discards his religion, kill him” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 4, Book 52, *Hadith* 260). This is the infamous Law of Apostasy in Islam. *This creates a spirit and environment of fear in the Muslim world.*

God, however, has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and discipline (2 Tim. 1:7). As it is written of the Lord Jesus Christ: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (Heb. 2:14–15). Jesus has truly freed us from fear, even the fear of death!

***Jihad* throughout Islamic History**

An Islamic leader can launch a specific *jihad* through a religious edict, known as a *fatwa*. Throughout Islamic history, Muslims have used *jihad* as a means of bringing the whole world under Islamic domination.

Christians and Jews who submit to Islamic rule become second-class citizens called *Dhimmis* and must pay the *jizya* tax. If a *Dhimmi* breaks the rules, such as sharing the gospel with Muslims, a state of *jihad* is launched against that *Dhimmi* group. This is regularly seen in Africa where current jihadist groups subjugate Christians under *dhimmitude* with the goal of obtaining the wealth of Christians through the *jizya* tax. Eventually, many Christians will convert to Islam simply for the economic benefit.

The Early Islamic Leaders

Jesus’ early disciples traveled the world preaching the gospel. All the disciples, except John, were martyrs. None were violent, as they followed the Prince of Peace. On the contrary, Muhammad’s disciples went about making war, *jihad*, and terrorizing populations.

Following Muhammad's death in A.D. 632, the early Muslim community split over who would be the next leader of the community. One party favored Abu Bakr, the father of Muhammad's child bride Aisha. The other party wanted Muhammad's cousin Ali to become the leader. They are known as the *Shi'at Ali*, or simply *Shi'ites*.

Abu Bakr, supported by Umar, became the first caliph of the Muslim community, but he died two years later, and Umar became the next caliph. Umar launched the great military campaigns that conquered the Holy Land, North Africa, and Persia. His great general, Khalid ibn al-Walid, is considered one of the greatest cavalry leaders in history. When Umar conquered Alexandria, Egypt, the question arose of what should be done with the great library located there—the most renowned library in the world at that time. Umar reportedly replied that they already possessed the Qur'an, which he considered the source of all wisdom. On that basis, the great African library—once the greatest treasure of knowledge the world had known—was burned to the ground.

Ali and his supporters migrated north into what is now modern-day Iraq. There they continued their struggle with rival Muslims who came to be known as Sunnis. Ali was widely regarded as a formidable military leader and warrior. He was closely associated with a famous sword called *Zulfikar*, often described in Islamic tradition as a distinctive double-edged or split-tipped blade. Even today, the Islamic Republic of Iran named one of its missiles *Zulfikar* in honor of this historic sword.

Ali sought to make peace with the rival Sunni caliph, Muawiya. However, Muawiya famously said, "Only the sword will decide between us." In the ensuing Battle of Siffin in A.D. 657, Ali's forces won, but there were 70,000 total casualties.

In summary, the early Islamic leaders were not peaceful rulers; they were militant leaders who exercised both religious and military authority. The caliph bore the title Emir al-Mu'amineen, meaning "Commander of the Faithful," reflecting this combined role. As a result,

the early caliphs functioned not only as spiritual figures but also as military commanders. The period was marked by intense internal conflict—three of the first four caliphs were killed by fellow Muslims. Within a century of Islam’s emergence, Arab armies had conquered North Africa, and their forces eventually crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to launch attacks into Europe.

Other Islamic Dynasties and Empires

Over the course of fourteen centuries, numerous Islamic dynasties, empires, and caliphates have risen and fallen. The early Umayyad Caliphate ruled from Damascus until A.D. 750, after which the Abbasids established their rule from Baghdad, where they governed for nearly 500 years. Not all these caliphates displayed the same level of aggression seen among some modern jihadist movements. It would be inaccurate to place them all in the same category, as their policies and character varied widely. Some periods were even regarded as relatively tolerant.

One such example is the Ottoman Empire, which ruled much of the Middle East and the Balkan Peninsula. The Ottoman Empire lasted from 1299 to 1922 and served as the seat of the last widely recognized Islamic caliphate prior to the brief ISIS declaration of a caliphate. Although the Ottomans are sometimes described as relatively tolerant compared to other periods, they also employed harsh practices associated with conquest and empire. For example, for centuries, the Ottomans kidnapped Christian boys from Europe, sent them to Turkey for military training, and then sent many back to fight against their own people. These elite Ottoman troops were known as the Janissaries. During this same period, they captured and sold hundreds of thousands of Christian girls and women as sex slaves.

By the 1880s, the region that is now modern-day Turkey was roughly 20 percent Christian. Today, Christians make up less than 1 percent of the population. What happened to those communities? Over a period of about thirty years, ending in the 1920s, massive campaigns

of violence were carried out against Greek, Armenian, and Assyrian Christians. These events resulted in the deaths and displacement of vast numbers of people and are widely regarded as genocidal in nature. In many cases, religious language—including the language of *jihad*—was used to rally forces against those considered infidels. Many of these Christians refused to renounce their faith, even though doing so might have spared their lives. In brief, Muslim leaders can rally the faithful to fight against non-Muslims using the rationale of *jihad*. Even if it is not always in use, *jihad* can become a threat at any time.

Unfortunately, jihadist movements today have developed a way to justify launching *jihad* against other professing Muslims. Because *jihad* is traditionally understood as being directed against infidels, these groups first declare their Muslim opponents to be infidels. This practice resembles the concept of excommunication. The Arabic term for this is *takfir*, meaning to impute infidel status on someone or on a group of people.

The doctrine of *takfir* is tearing apart the Muslim world, as jihadist groups use it to legitimize violence against those who disagree with them. In this way, they often operate with the belief that the ends justify the means in advancing their vision of Islam. When other Muslims oppose them, they may simply label those individuals or communities as infidels. Yet under traditional Islamic law, professing Muslims have certain legal protections and should not be declared infidels by other Muslims.

Muslim Enslavement of Africans

Slavery is a historical constant that was only abolished in some places in the past several centuries. Saint Patrick, who founded the church in Ireland, was a white slave. Some of the Moravian missionaries under Zinzendorf sold themselves as slaves to become missionaries. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the late famous bishop of Nigeria, was a former slave. Some wonder why Jesus did not outright abolish it because all people are created in God's image—including

people of all colors and races. So, no race or ethnicity is inherently better than any other. All people are sinners in need of God's grace. Through Jesus' redemption, people could harness that biblical worldview to one day abolish slavery.

The case of Islam is different, however. Muhammad endorsed taking slaves, "whom your right hands possess." There has been a high prevalence of Muslims enslaving other people, especially Africans. If African tribes converted to Islam, they could expect some mercy. If not, they could expect to be enslaved by Arab slave traders and sent to the Middle East, or later to Europe and the Americas. While America takes much blame for slavery—and deserves blame—it must be remembered that Arab Muslims began the intercontinental slave trade from Africa. No one is blameless

A tension exists in Islam about the degree to which racism is inherent in the teachings of Muhammad. On one hand, Islam proposes to be a universal brotherhood. Malcolm X, the African American Muslim, was impressed when he went to Mecca on the *hajj* and saw Muslims of all colors worshipping side by side. On the other hand, Muhammad provided this statement:

The Holy Prophet said: "Allah created Adam. Then He stroked his right shoulder and took out a white race as if they were seeds, and He stroked his left shoulder and took out a black race as if they were coals. Then He said to those who were in his right side: 'Towards paradise and I don't care.' He said to those who were on his left shoulder: 'Towards Hell and I don't care.'" (Darda, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, 119)

The Barbary Coast Pirates

The North African Muslims of Morocco and Mauritania were notorious for hijacking ships and taking everyone on board as slaves. They conducted these acts as a form of *jihad*. Former U.S. President Thomas Jefferson, after learning that this kidnapping, piracy, and slavery were religiously motivated, obtained a Quran to understand what teachings of Islam were used to justify slavery.

In 1817, the American sea captain James Riley wrote *Sufferings in Africa* after he and his crew were enslaved by Barbary pirates. He and a few survivors were eventually ransomed from slavery. His book had a great impact on Abraham Lincoln, who later led the United States during the Civil War to end slavery. Europe and the United States spent significant sums ransoming kidnapped sailors who had been enslaved by the Barbary pirates up until the nineteenth century.

The Modern Renaissance of Militant Islam and Jihad

With the end of World War II, nearly all nations under European colonial control gained their independence. The Colonial Era posed a challenge for Muslims worldwide. The Quran says that Islam is the final religion, blessed by Allah. Muhammad and the early Muslims experienced great victories over infidels. As a result, Muslim leaders were left to consider why they had been overcome militarily and economically by infidels.

Muslim leaders offered two basic responses: (1) some said Muslims should copy the West; (2) others said that Muslims had become backsliders and needed to return to the way of Muhammad, the Quran, and the early Muslims. The second option required a return to the way of *jihad*.

Sayyid Qutb

The leading Sunni jihadist thinker came from Africa—specifically, the Egyptian theologian Sayyid Qutb. Qutb and his jihadist colleagues sought to overthrow the Egyptian government, which ultimately executed him by hanging in 1966. During his imprisonment in Egypt, he and others developed much of the *takfiri* doctrine, which allowed *jihad* to be launched against other Muslims.

Although Qutb was a terrorist, he was also a serious thinker whose ideas must be addressed and considered. He argued that Muslim secular leaders—kings, princes, and presidents—were ignorant. The Arabic word for ignorant is *jahili*, a loaded term in Islamic history. Muslims refer to the period of Arabian history before the advent of Muhammad as *al-Jahiliyya*, the “Age of Ignorance.” By using this language, Qutb effectively sought to portray these leaders as infidels.

Qutb further argued that Muslim nations could only reverse domination by non-Muslims if Muslims returned to the way of Muhammad. He observed that the early Muslims “quenched their thirst” from the Quran and insisted that Muslims must return to Allah and the Quran in order to restore order to the world.

At the center of Qutb’s thought stood the claim that the world is fundamentally out of order. Without Muhammad, Allah, and the Quran, humanity lives in ignorance. From this perspective, he argued that Muslims are compelled to force others to obey if they refuse to do so voluntarily. Some Muslims cite the Quranic verse, “There is no compulsion in religion” (Sura 2:256). However, thinkers like Qutb contended that atheism itself functions as a religion and that secular atheists compel Muslims to follow it. For this reason, Qutb rejected the idea of religious tolerance.

While some people argue that Islam only justifies defensive warfare, Qutb laughed in the face of this argument. He pointed out that Arab Muslims attacked Byzantine and Persian territories, not the other way around. In his view, this historical reality showed that Muslims today must likewise engage in offensive warfare against infidels to bring the world back into proper order. Qutb believed this reflected the true Islamic understanding of submission—the very meaning of the religion’s name.

Current *Jihadi* Activities in Africa

Qutb did not work in isolation. His views closely resembled those of the medieval Islamic scholar ibn Taymiyyah, another Islamic

revivalist. Later, in the eighteenth century in Saudi Arabia, the reformer Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab also called for a return to early Islam. His followers became known as Wahhabis. These examples show that Qutb's thinking was not unique, nor was he leading a personality cult. Rather, he believed he was simply reading the Quran and obeying it.

The ideas of Qutb and others later ignited the thinking of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri of al-Qaeda. However, these leaders did not believe the time had yet come to restart the caliphate, which had ended eighty years earlier with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

In 2014, a group of jihadists announced that the Caliphate had begun again. The late Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made this announcement in Mosul, Iraq. His organization became known simply as "The Islamic State." Initially, it was called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but the group does not recognize national borders as legitimate. When ISIS gained control of large territories in Iraq and Syria, it removed—with great fanfare—the border marker between the two countries.

Groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS also introduced a controversial innovation that contradicts traditional Islamic law: suicide bombing and suicide killing. Islamic law forbids suicide. In earlier centuries, jihadists did not have the bombs and aircraft that modern jihadists use today. Nevertheless, jihadist leaders argued that advancing Islam justified these means, and they therefore allowed suicide attacks in *jihad*.

Other jihadist organizations then faced the question of whether to pledge allegiance to ISIS and join forces with it. One such African group was the Nigerian jihadist movement Boko Haram. The nickname Boko Haram means "books are forbidden," reflecting the group's rejection of Western education. They do not oppose reading the Quran, of course. The group's formal name translates into English as "Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and *Jihad*," clearly identifying it as a jihadist organization. Boko Haram carries out acts of terrorism and captures sex slaves.

Another major jihadist group in East Africa is al-Shabaab. The group's formal name is "Mujahideen Youth Movement," with *ash-*

Shabaab being the Arabic term for “young men.” Once again, the concept of *jihad* appears in the group’s identity. Al-Shabaab operates as an active terrorist organization. In some regions, its members seek to convert Christian boys to Islam and then quickly radicalize them to fight against infidels. This practice resembles the Ottoman Empire’s historical use of the Janissaries.

Many other jihadist groups operate throughout North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, and many of them fight against one another. ISIS attempted to unify as many of these organizations as possible. In the end, however, ISIS itself suffered defeat on the battlefield.

Jihadists Need the Liberating Gospel

The Lord Jesus Christ presents a striking contrast to Muhammad and his program of *jihad*. Jesus died for others, while Muhammad compelled others to die for him and for his earthly kingdom. Some fight in *jihad* because they are promised eternal life, yet Islam clearly teaches that no one can know their eternal destiny. Muhammad himself stated in Sura 46:9 that he did not know his own eternal destiny.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is truly good news for young Muslims caught up in *jihad*. Militant Islam is a dangerous deception. It is also a powerful spirit, promising riches, power, and sex in this world. Christians must oppose this spirit through the power of the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, the jihadist movement has produced an unexpected result: some Muslims have become disillusioned with Islam. A young man from West Africa named Rahim shared his testimony on the television program *Muslim Journey to Hope*. When he heard the 9/11 hijackers say they were following the Quran, he initially refused to believe them. As a devout Muslim, he decided to read the Quran for himself to figure out if those teachings on *jihad* were truly in

the Quran. To his surprise, he discovered that they were. Since then, he has left Islam and embraced Jesus Christ as Lord.

The Apostle Paul offers another powerful example of transformation. Once a persecutor and terrorist against the Church, he was captured by the love of God. If the Holy Spirit could transform the former Saul and make him an apostle of Christ, He can do the same with jihadists today. Those deceived by Islam need to experience the love of Jesus Christ through Christians, and they need to hear the truth about Jesus. Therefore, let us boldly proclaim the message of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit!

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**Every Muslim needs to know
the Truth about Jesus!**



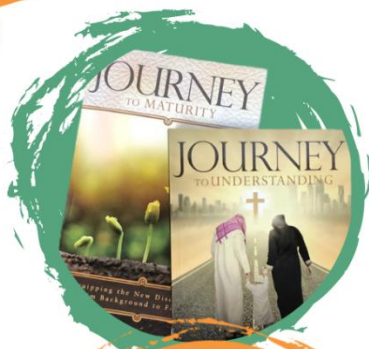
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To prepare you



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Global Initiative provides multiple booklets and full-length books to help you learn the keys to sharing your faith in Jesus with the Muslims God brings into your life. All booklets are available as free downloads.



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Say Hello has a 7-day devotional booklet that focuses on helping Christian women develop Christ-like friendships with Muslim women.



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Your Say Hello Journey is a free online, 5-unit video-based course that compellingly informs and equips Christian women for the privilege of sharing Jesus with Muslim women.



Forever Friends Curriculum

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