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**Jihad Against The Abuse Of Jihad
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In light of the rampant extremism and militarism around the world, nothing proves more dangerous than the manipulation of truth for political ends. This tactic facilitates the demonization process that blurs ideologies and beliefs in both the West and the Islamic world. And, no concept is more abused by both sides than the concept of Jihad.

To the Muslim extremists and their cronies, jihad is a narrowly defined license to fight their perceived enemies (including Muslims, as is the case in Somalia) even if that leads to atrocities against civilians. And to the Western extremists and their cronies, Jihad is a religiously sanctioned, perpetual holy war led by militant non-state actors sworn to destroy Western values and civilization.

However, Jihad is a complex concept deeply embedded in Islam. It is a principle that all Muslims who adhere to the teachings of their religion embrace. And, contrary to prevalent post-9/11 perception, the concept does not connote senseless violence against innocents or suicide bombings. While the concept carries different relevance for different people, the Arabic word means to strive or struggle toward achieving a higher aim, which includes the "struggle in the way of God." It can also mean to defend oneself, or to strive against injustices. Finally, Jihad means the attainment of the ultimate goal of Tazkiyatul Nafs, or purification of the soul - morally, spiritually and ethically. Indeed, it is this latter aspect, the jihad with oneself as one resists temptations and strives against his/her evil tendencies, which Prophet Muhammad referred to as "the Greater Jihad." The purification of the soul, or simply self-purification, is an around-the-clock process of deep introspection.

Despite the human being's great achievements in the fields of science and technology; in the compilation and standardization of knowledge; and, yes, in the art of its dissemination, humanity still remains in an embryonic if not an imbecilic stage when it comes to morality and ethics.

Human beings, though endowed by their Creator with a profound faculty that renders them superior to other known creatures, they are given by that same Creator the capacity or the free will to bring themselves to "the lowest of the low". This latter capacity inspires wickedness, extremism in all its forms (social, economic, political and religious) and the ever-increasing appetite to exploit others; to kill and destroy.

The human being remains a profound enigma and a paradox of clashing potentialities. As we surpass the animals in the realm of intellect and wisdom, we surpass them in savagery as well. There is no animal group that plays "war games" and makes deliberate plans to oppress or annihilate others while they are belly-full - all in the name of ideology, religion, economic exploitation, strategic opportunism or simply racism.

So when the Prophet was referring to a particular aspect of Jihad in such high regard, he was not merely offering an opinion. Rather, he was pointing to what the majority of the Muslim scholars consider the peak of piety; to a process that, according to the Qur'an, leads to the ultimate salvation.

As He does throughout the Qur'an for emphasis, in the Chapter Al-shams (The Sun), God swears multiple times; in fact, more than any other time: "(I swear) By the sun and its glorious splendor; and by the moon as it follows it; and by the day as it reveals it; and by the night as it conceals it; and by the sky and what built it; and by the earth and what smoothes it out all over; and by the soul and who gave it balance and order, and inspired it with the capacity to turn to disobedience and the capacity to fear God; Verily, whosoever purifies the soul attains the highest of success, and verily whosoever corrupts it descends into utter failure!" And the engine that drives this process is known as Taqwah (sincere fear and devotion to God). It is through Taqwah that one attains the profound God-consciousness which cultivates one's capacity to self-police against all evil. So how could such noble concept get so distorted? How come the robe-wearing extremists of the East and the suit-wearing extremists of the West are the ones who hold monopoly on the definition of Jihad?

In the past eight years of global political discontent, one persistent warning has been systematically ignored: When militant politics takes over the stage, reason makes a run for the exit. This was a period when people were generally herded toward one side of the argument or the other. Two nihilistic manifestos dominated the political discourse and brought the world closer to a self-fulfilling prophecy known as the "clash of civilizations": the global war on terror and the global Jihad.

The former was based on an erroneous premise that "political Islam" in all its manifestations is anti-democratic and anti-Western, and, as such, should never be afforded a space in the marketplace of ideas. Proponents of this view insisted that such movements were dangerous fronts for Muslim militants with sinister "Jihadist ambition," intent on destroying the West because of its freedom and economic success. Therefore, they were to be met at their incubation place: with "preemptive" force if they were based in foreign lands and by draconian policies if they were stationed in the West.

The proponents of this view work hard to conceal two particular facts that dismantle their claim by default: the success of the Turkish political system led by a democratically elected Islamist government, and the millions of Muslims who live peacefully in the US and various parts of Europe in spite of ever-growing Islamophobia.

The concept of "global Jihad," on the other hand, was based on an opposite yet equally erroneous premise - that the West is collectively bent on destroying Islam by occupying

the Islamic world: exploiting its natural resources, oppressing its peoples and Westernizing Islamic values. And as such Jihad against them is not only right, but the moral thing to do.

The proponents of this manifesto, such as Al Qaeda, selectively use the confrontational rhetoric often used by their counterparts in the West—secularist and evangelical Zionists—to lend credence to their claim. And they, too, work hard to conceal two particular realities: that Muslims are afforded more rights in the West than in most of the so-called Islamic countries when it comes to practicing their religion freely and establishing Islamic institutions; and that the Obama administration is adamant about its desire to improve relations with the Muslim world. Back to the abused concept: Until Jihad is openly discussed in both the Islamic and the Western worlds, and its true nature is unveiled, the abuse of the concept for self-serving political ends will continue - and so will its unjust violent expression.

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