

## On War to the Knife

Though his pronouncements were introduced as part of his *political* strategy to compel obedience – and could claim no religious authority to support them – these pronouncements became important *religious* beliefs as the years went by.

2. Jihad of the Mohametan conquests (632-732). After Abu Bakr finished with the Riddah, he turned the Arab armies against the Persians and the Byzantines. These conquests were successful, and though the motivation for the conquering was jihad for individuals, it seems that the primary motivation was to obtain new sources of loot, food, horses, land and taxes. In their new lands, the Arabs lived in *ribats* – fortified cities built to limit contact with non-Mahometans, lest the residents slide back into polytheism. Little or no attempt was made to convert the conquered. Voluntary conversion was successful, for various reasons such as the absurdities of polytheism – which could not stand against monotheism – and the heavy taxes on non-Mahometans resulting in their second-class citizenship.

3. Jihad of the Sunni-Shia-Sufi (656-present), within a decade of Abu Bakr's death his pronouncements on apostasy made it legitimate for Mohametans to kill Mohametans. His claim that only elected leaders were legitimate, laid the ground for Shia-Sunni antagonism, and contrary to Mahomet's practice, religion, state and army were now inseparable. It was inevitable that dynastic and civil conflicts would become religious conflicts. The result has been centuries of jihads among Shia, Sunni and Sufi factions of Islam.

The appointment of the third caliph, Uthman, in 644 made a division between those who believed rulers should be selected by the prophet's companions

(Sunni) and those who believed only Allah could appoint a ruler (Shia), a blood relative of Mohamet or his family. The Khawarij (Seceders), declared a jihad against the Sunni caliph, saying his improper election made him a kafir, and apostate who must be killed. Assassins killed him, and his successor Ali declared a jihad against the Khawarij. Then a Khawarij assassin killed Ali. One jihad followed another, and the Sufis soon joined in the killing with a mystical take on "jihad of the sword" that threatened everyone.

The 1744 rise of Wahhabism (originating in what is now Saudi Arabia) injected an even more violent strain into these conflicts. Along with massacring fellow Sunni's, the Wahhabis declared unrelenting war against the Shia. In 1802 Wahhabis slaughtered thousands of Shiites in Karbala, present-day Iraq. They formed an alliance with the house of Saud and the Saudi regime remains Wahhabist. The 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war was declared a jihad by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

4. Jihad in the Colonial period. Western encroachment on Mohametan territories (Russian annexation of Crimea, French capture of Egypt and Algeria), provoked calls for jihads. In 1915 the Ottoman Empire declared jihad against Armenia, which ended with the genocide of more than a million ethnic Christians. The colonial periods (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), also witnessed calls for jihads in China, Sudan, Egypt, Palestine, Morocco, Africa and India. During this period Mohametans massacred ethnic and racial minorities, Jews, Christians and Islamic sects alike as enemies of Islam. The jihad in Chechnya has lasted to this day. The notion that Mohametans learned jihad from the crusaders is false. Jihad predates the crusades by centuries.

(Abridged from an article in *Military History* magazine, by Richard Gabriel)

After the death of Mahomet in A.D. 632, jihad or holy war became his primary military legacy, and to this day it remains the primary characteristic of Islamic warfare. The idea of warfare as Allah's command – rewarded by martyrdom and swift transport to paradise – was an innovation by Mahomet with no precedent in Arab culture, custom or practice before him. Where did the idea come from?

Among the Jews he would have been exposed to the idea of *herem* – holy war against idolaters and non-believers – which has a prominent role in the Old Testament. The Roman Empire had persecuted believers for the first three centuries A.D., and the Byzantine Empire had persecuted followers of all heretical sects from about 380 to 620. Certainly religious zeal had a role in the early notion of jihad, with martyrs going directly to paradise without having to suffer the "torment of the grave," unlike other Mahometans who had to wait until Judgment day to be resurrected.

But politics played a huge role in this, as much as religion. If Mahomet did not force pagan tribes into the fold, then Islam would remain a small creed confined to the desert. So he had a "revelation" instructing him to impose a *zakat* (an obligatory annual tax) on all. Payment of the tax was the ancient Arab way of showing submission to the chief. It would become the test of loyalty, and those who remained disloyal would be killed.

This instruction is called the *al-Tawbah* (the Repentance) and is found in the Koran. Once this was promulgated, all "idolaters" were given four months, after which Ma-

homet declared himself free of any responsibility of them. Non-Mohametan tribes would either submit, or face "War to the knife."

The word "jihad" comes from the old Arabic word *jahada*, meaning "exerting one's utmost power, efforts, endeavors or ability in contending with an object of disapprobation." A few Islamic jurists contend that this means only an internal struggle against personal evil. But most subscribe to the classic position that jihad means that war against non-Mohametans could be waged virtually at any time, without pretext, and in any place. The history of jihad may be divided into four distinct but overlapping periods.

1. Jihad of the Riddah (A.D. 632-33) Soon after Mahomet's death in June 632 his coalition of tribes began to fall apart. The problem was the *zakat*; the tribes promised to remain Mohametan in exchange for the repeal of the tax. Abu Bakr (Mahomet's father-in-law and the one who succeeded him) refused, and this sparked the Riddah (apostasy) wars. He declared war on all who would not obey him, and introduced three new elements to Islam. First, he proclaimed that any withdrawal from the Mahomet's coalition would be a denial of Allah's will, and thus apostasy punishable by death. Mahometans would later use this concept to conduct jihads against other Mahometans who did not follow sharia law. Second, Abu declared that any leader must derive his legitimacy from Mahomet, which laid the groundwork for the Sunni-Shia jihads against one another over who were the legitimate leaders of Islam. Third, to forestall any other prophets, Abu declared Mahomet to be the last prophet Allah would send.