DEVOUTLY VIOLENT OR NOMINALLY PEACEFUL?
THE JUSTIFICATION FOR VIOLENCE IN ISLAM

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The views expressed in this thesis are those of the student and do not necessarily express any official positions of Regent University.
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ABSTRACT

DEVOUTLY VIOLENT OR NOMIMALLY PEACEFUL?
THE JUSTIFICATION FOR VIOLENCE IN ISLAM

This thesis seeks to address the question of whether the religion of Islam in its purest form is peaceful or violent. Current scholarship pertaining to this topic is often narrow in scope, as it fails to offer a coherent argument reconciling the historical context of the Muslim community and its corresponding revelation. In addition, many authors make assertions without examining them in their proper context. However, a text without context is a pretext. Thus, this thesis attempts to examine the nature of Islam within the historical framework in which the Qur’an was revealed. By doing so, this thesis links the historical context of the Muslim community with the corresponding Qur’anic revelation and its application to Muslim action or inaction. The connecting link, and the primary theme of this thesis, is the progressive nature of Islam. The methodology adopted in this thesis is primarily qualitative and consists of an in-depth analysis of the Holy Qur’an and its corresponding exegetical texts, such as Qur’anic commentary, the Hadith, Muhammad’s earliest biography, and a myriad of other secondary sources. The results of this analysis indicate the existence of an inherently violent religion. In each section of the thesis, the evidence of progressive violence manifests itself. This progression leads a peaceful person, a peaceful community, and a peaceful theological doctrine along the path of increasing violence. This thesis concludes that the theological doctrine of Islam is inherently violent. Such a conclusion suggests that “radical jihadists” or “extremists” take action as a result of an interpretation of the Qur’an in its proper context. Thus, they are not radicals, they are purist.
INTRODUCTION

Since the monumental terrorist attacks on 9/11, an international debate regarding the nature of Islam has ensued. The heart of this debate is centered upon the proposition of whether Islam is essentially violent or essentially peaceful. The news media and, sadly, academia have rushed to justify their claims regarding the nature of Islam by selecting a few verses within the Qur’an that best suit their ideological presuppositions. They then use these verses to explain why Islam is essentially violent or essentially peaceful. Not only are their conclusions—in most cases—inaccurate, they are also meaningless without sufficient evidence to justify their claim. In order for any non-Muslim to accurately assess the nature of Islam, he or she must become inundated in the readings of the Qur’an and its corresponding exegetical texts. This thesis seeks to do just that: become inundated in the readings of the Qur’an and its corresponding exegetical texts in order to demonstrate the inherently violent nature of Islam.

As a word of qualification, this thesis is written from a perspective outside of the Islamic ummah (community) looking inward. This does not, however, invalidate the assertions set forth in this thesis. Unlike the Bible, in which understanding requires the intervention of the Holy Spirit, understanding the Qur’an does not require any sort of special intervention. The only other potential barrier with respect to understanding the Qur’an is the language barrier, which is reconciled by the use of Arabic to English translations.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Current scholarship pertaining to the nature of Islam—as discovered through the rigors of research—is either narrow in scope or superficial. While some authors focus on narrow topics (which is not inherently wrong), others base their conclusions upon mere assumptions or even come to irrelevant conclusions. An example of this—which is further developed in the next section—is the 9/11 Commission Report. Though it answers questions pertaining to the logistics of the attacks, it fails to shed light upon the motivations required for the attack—the “why” question. This thesis attempts to answer “why.” That is, it attempts to provide insight into the justification for violence in Islam.

This task is accomplished by providing a thorough examination of the Qur’an and its corresponding exegetical texts. To ensure the utmost level of academic integrity, the exegetical sources consulted in this thesis are only those written by notable Muslim scholars. Undocumented assertions on behalf of authors—Muslim or non-Muslim—are omitted. The most authentic sources regarding the subject of Islam are those texts written in the original Arabic language. However, due to language barriers, this thesis relies upon the Arabic-to-English translations for its primary sources. The first and most significant of these primary sources is the Qur’an, as translated by renowned Muslim translator Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Ali was fluent in both Arabic and English and committed the entire Qur’an to memory at an early age. The second primary source used in this thesis is Muhammad al-Bukhari’s Hadith collection entitled Sahih Bukhari. Bukhari’s
Hadith is considered by Muslims to be second in authority only to the Qur’an. A more
detailed account of his legitimacy is noted in a subsequent section. The third primary
source is the earliest biography of Muhammad entitled The Life of Muhammad, written
by renowned Muslim historian Ibn Ishaq. Obviously, these primary sources do not
answer the “why” question, as they are intended to be objective accounts of scripture or
history. Nonetheless, this thesis relies upon these sources for factual evidences to support
its claim.

This thesis also relies upon a number of secondary sources. Only those of most
importance, however, are mentioned in this section. Perhaps the most important
secondary source is the Qur’anic commentary provided by Yusuf Ali, which provides
useful insight regarding the context in which the Qur’an was revealed. Although Ali’s
commentary provides useful insight regarding the context of Qur’anic revelations, it does
not single-handedly provide the necessary evidence for the justification of violence in
Islam.

Another secondary source of importance is the work entitled Answering Islam:
The Crescent In Light of the Cross by noted Christian apologist Norman Geisler and
former Muslim Abdul Saleeb. This work provides a useful account of Muhammad’s life
and a survey of the Qur’an—though treating each mutually exclusive. Though a useful
apology for Christianity, this work does not offer detailed information regarding the
justification for violence in Islam. Even though Geisler and Saleeb dedicate a section
regarding “Violence in Islam,” they fail to provide adequate justification for their claims.

Robert Spencer’s texts, entitled Onward Muslim Soldier: How Jihad Still
Threatens America and the West and Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam
Isn’t, argue that Islam is inherently violent. Spencer’s texts are useful despite their lack of an organized framework from which to operate. Though accurate, his claims lack grounding and are relatively sporadic throughout the texts. In addition, the author makes evident (perhaps too evident) his presuppositional bias, which detracts from the ostensible balance of his claims.

Another useful secondary source is Stephen Lambert’s work entitled *Y: The Sources of Islamic Revolutionary Conduct*. Lambert provides a convincing argument regarding the United States’ failure to confront Islam, which is adopted in this thesis. In addition, Lambert provides an analysis of the primary theological doctrines of Islam, which are used in this thesis to demonstrate a Muslim’s personal proclivity towards violence. However, the remainder of Lambert’s work is vague and relies upon an excessive number of quotes that quote other quotes. In other words, Lambert fails to consult for himself original sources.

Theodor Nöldeke, in his work entitled *Sketches from Eastern History*, provides a widely accepted chronological arrangement of Qur’anic revelations. Even though this thesis accepts Nöldeke’s general chronological framework, it only references Nöldeke’s chronology of specific Suras (chapters) when they are in corroboration with the chronology of Qur’anic translator Yusuf Ali and Qur’anic scholar Richard Bell to ensure the utmost accuracy.

The final secondary source of importance to this thesis is Abdullah Saeed’s work entitled *Interpreting the Qur’an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*. In this work, Saeed argues for a reinterpretation of the Qur’an to meet the needs of the contemporary Muslim community. He supports his position with a variety of arguments, but of most
relevance to this thesis is his argument pertaining to the doctrine of abrogation as one of many reasons to adopt a contemporary approach towards interpreting the Qur’an.

The purpose of this thesis is to connect these isolated strands into one coherent argument, demonstrating the justification for violence in Islam. The connecting link—and a concurrent theme throughout the thesis—is the progressive nature of Islam. Many of the aforementioned authors provide useful insight regarding violence in Islam. However, while some of these authors fail to adopt a firm stance regarding the nature of Islam, others adopt a firm stance without the necessary information to affirm their claim. Hence, it is the objective of this thesis to adopt a firm stance regarding the justification for violence in Islam and to affirm this stance with intelligible arguments steeped in the objective evidence provided by primary sources.

In sum, this thesis attempts to demonstrate that violence is not an aberration to the doctrine of Islam. Rather, the justification for violence is deeply rooted in the life of Muhammad and his corresponding Qur’anic revelations. This thesis refrains from the use of isolated verses—out of context—to explain the nature of Islam. Instead, it takes into consideration the Qur’an in its entirety and, most importantly, within its proper historical framework.

Chapter One of this thesis defines key operational terms, such as terrorism, Islam, and jihad. Chapter Two describes America’s intellectual pedigree and the reason for its failure to confront Islam in an intelligible manner. Chapter Three examines three basic claims regarding the Qur’an, describes the role of the Hadith, and defines key Islamic doctrines such as anthropology, theology, soteriology, and eschatology. Chapter Four evidences the justification for violence in Islam by examining the personal theological
progression from neutrality to supererogatory acts of jihad, Muhammad’s historical progression from peace to violence, and the corresponding progression in Qur’anic revelation from the prohibition of violence to the commandment for violence. This section of the thesis also describes the role of jihad within the contexts of the four major Sunni schools of theology, as well as Islam’s proclivity towards violence with respect to the Qur’anic doctrine of abrogation. Chapter Five introduces the concept of interpretation and illustrates the necessity for a contextualist interpretation of the Qur’an, rather than a textualist interpretation. In Chapter Six, some common objections to the accusation that Islam is inherently violent are confronted. Last, the conclusion provides final thoughts and highlights the momentous challenge for the future of Islam.
CHAPTER ONE

DEFINING KEY OPERATIONAL TERMS

Terrorism

In order to fully understand the implications set forth in this thesis, a qualification with respect to the term terrorism is necessary. The study of terrorism is neither objective nor static. Rather, the study of terrorism is highly subjective and dynamic, as over time the nature and severity of terrorism have evolved. Generally speaking, there are no universally accepted definitions of the term terrorism. In fact, “The U.S. government uses several definitions simultaneously.”¹ Prior to the 9/11 attacks, terrorism was primarily a negotiation tool used to accomplish political ends—such as the release of a jailed individual. Because the goal of terrorism was not to inflict mass alarm and fear, terrorism prior to 9/11 was viewed as a marginal problem. Incidents of terrorism were usually dealt with on the count of negotiation. Even in the case of failed negotiations, the death toll and/or financial burden was relatively minimal. In addition, the impact of terrorism usually did not affect multiple nation-states. Rather, incidents of terrorism were usually considered domestic.

However, today the term *terrorism* is usually associated with “violence or the threat of violence undertaken to create alarm and fear.”² Whereas terrorism prior to 9/11 was primarily used as a tool to negotiate a political settlement, today it is used to inflict mass alarm, fear, and destruction. In addition, single incidents of modern terrorism almost always impact multiple nation-states. “Today, almost all acts of terrorism have international consequences. The increasing global face of contemporary terrorism has blurred (if not totally erased) the distinction between national and international terrorism.”³ Traditional state actors are not the only beneficiaries of an increasingly interconnected world. Non-state terrorist organizations also benefit from the cobweb of economic interdependence and global supply chains of commerce and information. “It is exceedingly difficult to locate cases of terrorist activity—however defined and identified—that are not internationally supported, targeted abroad, fomented by prevailing global circumstances, global in their repercussions, or addressed to the global community in some manner.”⁴ Hence, when referencing the term *terrorism*, one must understand the modern context through which it is viewed in this thesis. Within the confines of this thesis, the term *terrorism* is used to suggest an international phenomenon with consequences and implications superseding traditional nation-state lines. It is also referring to one particular brand of terrorism, that is, Islamic Salafi terrorism, which is “a worldwide religious revivalist movement with the goal of reestablishing past Muslim

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³ Kegley, 9.

⁴ Ibid.
glory in a great Islamist state.”

According to Marc Sageman, this movement preaches “salafiyyah (from salaf, the Arabic word for ‘ancient one’ and referring to the companions of the Prophet Muhammad), the restoration of authentic Islam, and advocates a strategy of violent jihad, resulting in an explosion of terror to wipe out what it regards as local political heresy.”

Islam

“Islam, the third and youngest of the world’s three great monotheistic religions after Judaism and Christianity, means ‘submission’ or ‘surrender’ in Arabic, its basic language.” The term surrender or submission is in reference to Allah, the God of Islam. Those who surrender or submit to the will of Allah are called Muslims, which literally means submitted. The founder of Islam is the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad was born in 570 A.D., and his revelations began in 610 A.D. and lasted until his death in 632 A.D. The Qur’an, “As the word of God revealed to Muhammad, is the primary source, and as such it is considered divine, eternal, and immutable. Its Suras (chapters) were revealed to Muhammad over a 22-year period and were not set down in book form until long after his death.” The Qur’an consists of 114 Suras, in no particular chronological order. The longest verses (which were typically revealed later in Muhammad’s ministry) appear at the beginning of the Qur’an, and the shortest verses (which were typically

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6 Sageman, 1.


8 Ibid., 20.
revealed earlier in Muhammad’s ministry) appear at the end of the Qur’an. Thus, in theory, the chronology of the Qur’an is somewhat of an inversion with respect to the dates of revelation.

Other than the Qur’an, Muslims consider the Hadith as another source of Islam doctrine. “Although Muhammad is in no way regarded as divine by Muslims, his life is considered a model for their own lives. His Hadith (‘teachings’ or ‘sayings’) which were used to supplement Koranic revelations (or to deal with specific situations when no revelation was forthcoming) have served as guides to Muslim conduct since the early days of Islam.”9 The theological premises of Islam are analyzed in greater detail in subsequent sections of this thesis.

Jihad

Since 9/11, the status of the term jihad has become elevated within American society. While at one point considered a foreign term, jihad is now a commonly understood term. However, this supposed common understanding is commonly misunderstood. The term jihad in American society is often loosely, but incorrectly, interpreted as “holy war.” A more accurate interpretation of the term jihad is “struggle” or “striving” in a personal or physical battle to fulfill God’s will. On this, Marc Sageman comments, “Islam is full of contentious issues, especially about some of its core concepts, such as jihad, which translates roughly as ‘striving’ but denotes any form of activity, either personal or communal, undertaken by Muslims in attempting to follow the path of

9 Ibid., 21.
This common misrepresentation of the term *jihad* is partly due to a lack of cross-cultural awareness on the part of the United States. Compounding this lack of understanding is the fact that “there is no universally accepted way to translate Arabic words and names into English.”

The Qur’an speaks of two forms of jihad: the greater jihad and the lesser jihad. The greater jihad is a Muslim’s “individual striving to live a good Muslim life, following God’s will. It includes adhering to the five pillars of Islam: profession of faith (*shahada*); praying regularly; fasting during Ramadan; being charitable; and performing the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca.”

John Esposito affirms this by writing, “Jihad as struggle pertains to the difficulty and complexity of living a good life: struggling against the evil in oneself—to be virtuous and moral, making a serious effort to do good works and help to reform society.”

The lesser jihad is “the violent struggle for Islam.” On this, Esposito writes, “Depending on the circumstances in which one lives, it also can mean fighting injustice and oppression, spreading and defending Islam, and creating a just society through preaching, teaching, and if necessary, armed struggle or holy war.”

Despite its description as the lesser jihad, it is argued by scholars that it is not necessarily lesser in

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10 Sageman, 1.


12 Ibid., 2.


14 Sageman, 2.

15 Esposito, 117.
significance or in application than the greater jihad. For example, noted Muslim scholar Ahmed ibn Naqib al-Misri (1302-1367), in his work *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, “defines the greater jihad as ‘spiritual warfare against the lower self’ and then devotes eleven pages to various aspects of the ‘lesser jihad’ and its aftermath. It defines this jihad as ‘war against non-Muslims,’ noting that the word itself ‘is etymologically derived from the word *mujahada*, signifying warfare to establish the religion.” According to Robert Spencer, the goal of jihad is “the incorporation of non-Muslims into Muslim society, either by conversion or submission.”

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Asking the Wrong Questions

Subsequent to the 9/11 attacks, American citizens were in a state of shock. As they became aware of friends, colleagues, and loved ones who were murdered on that tragic day, they were deeply saddened. Over time, the pain turned to anger, especially as the American people were informed that the perpetrators of the attack were a group of 19 young Muslim men predominantly from Saudi Arabia. Even worse, these men pledged their allegiance not to the “flag,” but to Allah, the God of Islam.

As the smoke settled, the American public sought clarity with regard to the perpetrators of the attacks. News anchors, policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike began to ask questions such as “Who are these men?” “How did they get here?” “What is Islam?” “What is jihad?” And most importantly, “Why did these jihadists attack the United States of America?” On November 27, 2002, President Bush and Congress established the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (Public Law 107-306) in order to investigate the attacks and to provide answers to a plethora of unanswered questions posed of them. After reviewing over 2.5 million pages of documents and interviewing over 1,200 individuals in ten different nation-states, the Commission released The 9/11 Commission Report. The report examined in

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painstaking detail the logistics of the attacks (from the initial stages of planning to the execution), the foundations of the new type of terrorism as espoused by Osama bin Laden, the evolution of counterterrorism, the attacks leading up to 9/11 and the government response (or lack thereof), and the consequence management efforts performed by first-responders subsequent to the attacks. The 9/11 Commission Report also offered suggestions regarding how the United States should create a global strategy and reorganize the government in a manner that emphasized unity of effort. According to Fawaz Gerges—international affairs expert educated at the University of Oxford and the London School of Economics and a research fellow at Harvard and Princeton—the 9/11 Commission Report “presented a riveting account of the various phases of the menacing plot, the leading characters and villains who led it, the ups and downs of operational planning, and the last horrific moments of its execution.”

However, the Report failed to provide an explanation about why the attacks occurred. On this, Gerges asserts that the Report “stops short of illuminating the big, historical-sociological questions of how and why the jihadis decided to attack the United States.” The Report does, however, cover details concerning Osama bin Laden’s preoccupation with and subsequent shift of emphasis towards attacking the United States. The information provided, though, is primarily logistical and does not account for the motivations regarding Osama bin Laden’s shift of emphasis from the near enemy (combating secular Muslim regimes) to the far enemy (attacking the United States).

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20 Ibid., 21.
This underlying motivation—as espoused by all 19 of the 9/11 hijackers—was to defend Islam and glorify Allah by adhering to the injunctions of Islam. Considering the unanimity of their motivation, why did the Report fail to address the fundamental tenets of Islam? Why did the authors of the Report fail to present an argument regarding either the peaceful or violent nature of Islam? The answer to this question is twofold: (1) Americans are increasingly unable to confront religious concepts and (2) Islam, itself, is comprised of a system of seemingly conflicting injunctions. Perhaps it is unfair to expect an answer to a question that, upon a cursory examination, has no clear answer. Nevertheless, this should not deter scholars and policymakers in their pursuit of substantive knowledge.

America’s Intellectual Pedigree

George Kennan, in his famous 1947 work entitled *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, penetrates deeply into the issues of the Soviet Communist ideology during the Cold War. Kennan’s work, published in *Foreign Affairs*, confronts the issue of why the Soviets adopted the Communist ideology. Fifty-eight years later, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen P. Lambert of the United States Air Force attempted to replicate the efforts of Kennan. Instead of penetrating deep into the heart of Soviet Communism, Lambert sought to reveal the motivations behind the current jihadist movement and its defense of Islam. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of Lambert’s work, though, is his diagnosis of the American intellectual pedigree. Lambert diagnoses scholars and policymakers with an intellectual myopia stemming from two primary sources: the intellectual underpinnings of
Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment political philosophy and a hardening anti-Socratic mentality against open public discourse.  

The Enlightenment and its Influence on Policymaking

“The first component of the American intellectual pedigree is the Enlightenment, which centered on a struggle to deny man’s metaphysical or religious orientation and rebuild society based on reason and the pursuit of empiricism.” Because the core of these movements revolved around rationalism, science, and the limitless perfectibility of the human species, religion became unnecessary and was consequently replaced by rationale. On this, Mark Juergensmeyer writes, “The tradition of secular politics from the time of the Enlightenment has comfortably ignored religion, marginalized its role in public life, and frequently co-opted it for its own civil religion of public religiosity. No one in the secular world could have predicted that the first confrontations of the twenty-first century would involve, of all things, religion—secularism’s old, long-banished foe.”

The Enlightenment led to movements such as secular humanism, postmodernism, and eventually nihilism, which denies any and all notions of objective truth. It is these philosophies that now form the framework for scholarly literature and policymaking regarding international relations. This denial of human religious and spiritual needs

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22 Lambert, 8.

presents a problem. When this is done, most other cultural factors that shape the foreign policy of a state are also ignored, and international relations—traditionally a social science—becomes a science bent toward the measurement of quantitative facts, thereby ignoring the qualitative aspects of states’ behavior. Because qualitative characteristics of international relations such as religion are difficult to measure, they are disregarded. This is clearly dangerous. With respect to 9/11, Suzanne Rudolph writes, “Modern social science did not warn us that this would happen. Instead, it asserted that religion would fade, then disappear, with the triumph of science and rationalism.”

Ironically, the rejection of religion comes at a time when religious expansion is explosive. “Contrary to prevailing public philosophy and its expectations, the expansion of religion has been an answer to (and driven by) modernity.” The modern religious movement seeks to restore meaning to a modern life characterized by nihilistic denials of any and all notions of objective truth. This is the case for Christianity as well as Islam.

A Hardening Anti-Socratism: Episteme versus Doxa

Modern society is also blinded by a hardening anti-Socratism—opposition to rigorous public discourse regarding absolute values and ultimate meaning. Classical authors such as Plato and Aristotle were inclined towards discovering the ultimate truths about what was good and bad for the ancient city-state. The goal of these Ancients was the discovery of knowledge, or episteme. “Implicit in this is the assumption that there is in fact a concept of episteme—truth and knowledge—and that therefore there is also a

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25 Lambert, 8.
concept of error and falsehood.”26 Socratic questioning and skepticism also reveals the sense of humility that the corpus of knowledge is incomplete—that mankind acknowledges the known unknowns within the universe.

According to Lambert, this Socratic perspective stands in stark contrast to postmodern, relative, and nihilistic philosophies. “Modern relativism claims that truth—and even the pursuit of truth or knowledge—can only accurately be seen as one person or group’s belief relative to a particular frame of reference. In other words, truth is relative to one’s doxa, or opinion.”27 Lambert continues by asserting, “When this is the case, doxa (or opinion) becomes the leveling mechanism by which all is accepted, nothing is debated, and ideas are not exposed to the rigorous analysis that should show them to be beneficial, true, and good for society, or false, incorrect, and destructive to society.”28 As a result, academic elites and policymakers engage in confrontations of mutual ignorance about doxa rather than substantive deliberation about episteme.

26 Ibid., 19.
27 Ibid., 20.
28 Ibid.
CHAPTER THREE
THE BASIC DOCTRINES OF ORTHODOX ISLAM

Three Basic Claims of the Qur’an

Before delving into the theological doctrine of the Qur’an, it is necessary to outline its basic claims. Dr. Norman Geisler, president of Southern Evangelical Seminary and author of over fifty books, identifies three basic claims as espoused by the Qur’an: Its inspiration by God, its perfection, and its finality.\(^\text{29}\) The founder of the Sunni Hanafi Islamic school of jurisprudence, Abu Hanifa, explains the inspiration of the Qur’an by writing, “The Qur’an is the word of God, and is His inspired word and revelation. It is a necessary attribute of God. It is not God, but still is inseparable from God.”\(^\text{30}\) The Qur’an is not a book in the ordinary sense of the Bible. According to Muslim scholar Yusuf K. Ibish, “If you want to compare it with anything in Christianity, you must compare it with Christ himself.”\(^\text{31}\) Thus, as for Christianity the Word became flesh; for Islam, the Word became a book.\(^\text{32}\)

Second, if the Qur’an is the word of God, it must also exist without error. The Qur’an itself explicitly justifies this perfection in several Suras throughout the text.

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\(^{31}\) Geisler, 184.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
Third, and most importantly, the Qur’an is believed by Muslims to be the final series of revelation by God in contrast to earlier manifestations of monotheism. “Judaism and Christianity are both seen by Muslims to be descendants of the religion of Abraham, though both contained errors and flaws. Islam, while of the same origin, is the final, flawless, progressive, and divine revelation of that tradition.”

The Hadith

The Qur’an espouses an uncanny love of the Prophet Muhammad. This love is evidenced in the following injunction—among many others—found in Sura 33:21: “Ye have indeed In the Apostle of God A beautiful pattern (of conduct) For any one whose hope is In Allah and the Final Day, And who engages much In the praise of Allah.” As a result of this uncanny love and admiration of the Prophet, his sayings, known as the Hadith, were compiled to serve as a guidepost for subsequent Muslim generations. For Muslims, the Hadith ranks only second to the Qur’an. Though it is not a divine or holy work—as revealed by a prophet—it serves as a vital compliment (in an expository manner) to the Qur’an. Muslim author Badru Kateregga writes, “As Muslims, our knowledge of Islam would be incomplete and shaky if we did not study and follow the Hadith. Similarly an outsider cannot understand Islam if he ignores the Hadith.” With respect to imitating Muhammad, the great medieval theologian Al-Ghazzali writes,

Know that the key to happiness is the following of the Sunna (itiba’ l-Sunna) and the imitation of the Apostle of Allah (iqtida’ bi rasul Allah) in all his comings and

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33 Lambert, 67.

34 Qur’an 33:21.

goings, motions and rests, even in the aspect of this eating, rising, sleeping and speaking. I do not say this only in regard to his practice in the arts of worship (adab l-'Abadat), for there is no reason for the neglecting of the practices (al-Sunan) which appear therein, rather I say his in all the matters of customs. Thus there result the absolute following (of Muhammad). Allah said, “If you love God, follow me; God will love you.” And Allah also said, “Whatever the Prophet gave you, take it, and whatever he forbids you, desist from it.” It is incumbent upon you to put on full trousers (al-Sarawi'il) while sitting and to attire yourself with a turban while standing. It is also incumbent upon you that, when you put on your shoes, you begin with the right foot; that you eat with your right hand; that you cut your fingernails beginning with the forefinger of the right hand and ending with the thumb of the right hand; that you begin with the little toe with the right foot and finish with the little toe of the left foot.36

On this, Annemarie Schimmel writes, “It is this ideal of the imitatio Muhammadi that has provided Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia with such uniformity of action: wherever one may be, one knows how to behave when entering a house, which formulas of greeting to employ, what to avoid in good company, how to eat, and how to travel.”37

Anthropology

The basis of Islamic theology and a driving force behind the revolutionary imperatives of Islam is anthropology, or the study of man. Although Islam recognizes Adam and Hauwa (Eve) as the first humans living in a spiritual Garden of innocence and bliss, man is not made in the image or likeness of God, as is such with the Christian doctrine. Rather, Allah breathed into man his spirit, which consists of divine qualities such as the faculty of knowledge, will, and power of action.38 The Muslim perspective teaches that Adam and Hauwa’s original disobedience towards Allah does not have any


38 Geisler, 41.
further impact on the nature of man—they were forgiven after their repentance. Thus, “Man is not born a sinner and the doctrine of the sinfulness of man has no basis in Islam.”

According to the concept of *fitra*, man is born in a balanced or neutral state. Man is neither good nor evil; man has a proclivity towards sin, but not a sin nature. Man, therefore, is born in a natural state of purity or *fitra*. In this view, “Human beings were created innocent and free but chose to sin against God. Sin, however, is not an irradicable part of human nature.” On this, Dr. Isma’il Al-Faruqi, author of *Islam*, comments that “human beings are no more ‘fallen’ than they are ‘saved.’ Because they are not ‘fallen,’ they have no need of a savior. But because they are not ‘saved’ either, they need to do good works—and do them ethically—which alone will earn them desired ‘salvation.’” Accordingly, it is society that either corrupts or purifies man, beginning with the family and close associates. Islam—like the thought of French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau—tends to view the immediate family and other societal institutions as the inherent corrupters of man. Therefore, “The focus of Islam has always been to purge society of its wayward influences [Sayyid Qutb’s notion of *jahiliyyah*, or ignorance] and apply correctives so as to arrange society as a constructive religious milieu for mankind.”

The nature of man, as conceived by Islam, must be viewed through the lenses of Islam as an orthopractical religion, or a religion of works. Dr. Al-Faruqi writes, “In

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40 Geisler, 42.
42 Lambert, 42.
Islam, it is believed that God judges people by their deeds or works, not by rites or ceremonies such as baptism. Islam further denies that a human being can attain religious felicity on the basis of faith alone.\textsuperscript{43} Rather, only good works constitute justification in the eyes of Allah. “Islam, as an orthopractical belief, obliged all its followers to comply with a set of common ritualistic observances. This doctrine of works required a cultural and political infrastructure that would support these common observances.”\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, a group-oriented system of law, or Shari’ah, was instituted. Within the society of Shari’ah law, “Religion and the state were tightly fused and propelled by a determination to bring the rightly guided truth to the rest of mankind. It was Islam’s role to liberate the lost from their ignorance and to establish a sacred geography that permitted all followers to abide by its requirements.”\textsuperscript{45}

Theology

Theology is the study of God and his relationship with mankind. Muslims believe that there is no God but Allah, that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah, and that he is responsible for the revelation of the Qur’an. This is the doctrine of tawhid, or the oneness of God. Regarding tawhid, Abu Nasr Al-Farabi—one of Islam’s foremost philosophers writing during the tenth century—claims that Allah is the First Cause and of the highest excellence of perfection. He writes,

The First Existent is the First Cause of the existence of all other existents. It is free of every kind of deficiency, whereas there must be in everything else some

\textsuperscript{43} Isma’il R. Al-Faruqi, Islam, 5.

\textsuperscript{44} Lambert, 38.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 38-39.
kind of deficiency, either one or more than one; but the First is free of all their deficiencies. Thus its existence is the most excellent than or prior to, its existence. Thus it has the highest kind of excellent existence and the most elevated rank of perfect existence.  

Because of this uniqueness and supremacy, the worst sin that Muslims and non-Muslims alike could commit is the acknowledgement of other gods—_shirk_—thereby rejecting Allah. On this, Norman Geisler writes, “It is due to this uncompromising emphasis of God’s absolute unity that in Islam the greatest of all sins is the sin of _shirk_, or assigning partners to God.”  

Regarding _shirk_, The Qur’an sternly declares, “Allah forgiveth not (The sin of) joining other gods With Him; but He forgiveth Whom He pleaseth other sins Than this: one who joins Other gods with Allah, Hath strayed far, far away (from the Right).”

The relationship between man and Allah is that of master/slave, with Allah’s love contingent upon the degree of good works exercised by those in submission (Muslims) to him. It is inaccurate to suggest that a conception of love does not exist in Islam. However, the love that does exist is conditionally based upon man’s commission of good works in the service of Allah.

**Soteriology**

The Islamic doctrine of salvation, or soteriology, is based upon _iman_ (belief or faith) and _amal_ (action). Salvation for a Muslim, therefore, is not completely meritorious, as in addition to the performance of good works, it is based upon the belief

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47 Geisler, 20.

48 Qur’an 4:116.
or faith in the oneness of God, the prophecy of Muhammad, and the afterlife.\textsuperscript{49} The Qur’an affirms this in its declaration that “To those who believe And do deeds of righteousness Hath Allah promised forgiveness And a great reward.”\textsuperscript{50} Despite this emphasis on faith and action, the \textit{overwhelming} focus is on action, as demonstrated by a Muslim’s necessity to fulfill the system of Shari’ah law, whereas in Christianity, faith through grace alone justifies believers.

Because man’s natural condition is neutrality—\textit{fitra}—the goal is to overcome negative influences and achieve a life of good works. This is clearly manifested by the significance attributed to Shar’iah law and its respective religious obligations such as confession of faith, ritual prayer, fasting, alms giving, and the pilgrimage to Mecca—the five pillars of Islam. On soteriology, Lambert writes, “Islam’s orthopractical imperatives lead to a system of ritualistic obligations that compel the faithful along a never-ending quest for salvation. Muslims live under persistent uncertainty about the successful completion of this quest; ultimately, their afterworldy lives hang in the balance.”\textsuperscript{51} On the Day of Judgment, one’s good works will be balanced against one’s less-than-good works. Muslims who have committed more good works than evil deeds (a balance of good works that is heavy) will earn salvation. Conversely, Muslims who have committed more evil deeds than good works (a balance of good works that is light) will not earn salvation. The exception to this is the fulfillment of a jihad, which grants direct and immediate access to heaven.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[49] Geisler, 125.
\item[50] Qur’an 5:9.
\item[51] Lambert, 53.
\end{footnotes}
Eschatology

Eschatology is the study of the afterlife. Conceptions of eschatology in Islamic doctrine are similar to those of the Christian doctrine in that both accept a linear view of history in which mortal beings are subject to a beginning and an end to life. The Islamic doctrine of eschatology adopts the belief in a final day of judgment whereby Allah considers whether individual Muslims have earned either purgatory or paradise. As previously mentioned, this decision is based upon a favorable or unfavorable balance of good works as determined by Allah. According to Islamic tradition, the final hours of the world will be marked by three things: The death of Jesus Christ (who will be buried in the same vicinity as Muhammad and the first two Caliphs), the final devastation of the cosmic structure, and the resurrection by God of all the dead. After all of humankind is resurrected, they will stand before God.

On this, Muhammad Khouj writes, “When Allah assembles people in His presence, He will begin to judge them on the scale of absolute justice. Everything a person does… including intentions and desires, will be accounted for on this day.” Each individual will be assigned two angels. The angel on the right side will record good deeds, while the angel on the left side will record the bad deeds. The sum of an individual’s acts are then compiled into the Book of Deeds and placed before him or her—as indicated by Sura 18:49, which states, “And the Book (of Deeds) Will be placed (before you); And thou wilt see The sinful in great terror Because of what is (recorded)

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Therein.”⁵³ The final phase of the judgment process involves crossing the *sirat*, or the bridge over Hell. Those individuals who are condemned at the judgment will be unable to cross over the bridge without falling into the pit of Hell. “Those who cross the *sirat* successfully enter heaven and those who fall off of it are thrown into the abyss of Hell.⁵⁴

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⁵³ Qur’an 18:49.

⁵⁴ Geisler, 121.
The first argument regarding the inherently violent nature of Islam examined in this thesis is provided by Stephen Lambert. Though very basic and simplistic, his argument—pertaining to the inherently violent, core theological doctrines in Islam—is convincing. It serves as an introduction to assessing Islam from the standpoint of violence. Lambert argues that the theological progression of the core Islamic doctrines previously discussed (from anthropology to eschatology) lead to violent political imperatives. The most logical doctrine with which to begin is anthropology. From the standpoint of anthropology, man by nature is essentially neutral. As previously mentioned, the concept of fitra, or neutrality, remains unknown to individual Muslims—they are unaware of the status of their salvation. Thus, Muslims must work arduously throughout their lives to ensure that they perform more good works than evil deeds.

The master/servant nature of man’s relationship with God (theology) adds pressure to the conception of fitra, because Allah’s love is contingent upon the observance of faith and the performance of good works. Ordinary faith is unacceptable; Muslims must believe in the absolute unity and oneness of Allah. To do otherwise is to commit a sin that is unforgivable by Allah—shirk, or the association of other gods or god-like figures, symbols, or idols with Allah. Therefore, in order to attain salvation, one
must adhere to the obligatory religious duties of Islam—Shari’ah law and the five pillars of Islam—and believe in the oneness and unity of Allah. Lambert stresses the fact that “a Muslim can never have eternal assurance, because the weighing of deeds does not occur until the end.”55 Faced with intense pressure of fulfilling both the faith and works required by Allah can leave a Muslim feeling like there is no way out, as if they were cornered, especially since Muslims remain in the dark about their salvation their entire lives. However, according to Lambert, there is a way out: the commission of supererogatory measures such as jihad.

“The individual believer’s powerful desire to be preferred by Allah on the final judgment day can engender significant passions to secure future success in this endeavor.”56 Such passions include the exercise of jihad, which ensures instant access to paradise if one dies as a martyr in battle against infidels. “With an act of jihad, if a believer survives, he accumulates credits for following God’s commands, and if he dies a martyr, he gains access to paradise.”57 Thus, the act of jihad is a “win-win” situation. The eschatological reward of immediate entry into paradise, juxtaposed against the constant lack of assurance regarding salvation, makes jihad an alluring option. In sum, Lambert argues that the basic theological progression—from anthropology to eschatology—leads to violent political imperatives. This structure, according to Lambert, encourages Muslims to participate in acts of jihad in order to glorify Allah and thereby secure a position in heaven.

55 Lambert, 54.
56 Ibid., 57.
57 Ibid.
The Historicity of Muhammad’s Life

According to Geisler and Saleeb, “Islam cannot be understood without considering the role of the prophet Muhammad.” Even after an examination of the basic doctrines of Islam—anthropology, theology, soteriology, and eschatology—the study of Islam is incomplete without examining the life of Muhammad and the content in which the Qur’an was revealed. Commenting on the significance of Muhammad’s stature within Islam, Harvard scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith states, “Muslims will allow attacks on Allah; there are atheists and atheistic publications, and rationalistic societies; but to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most ‘liberal’ sections of the community a fanaticism of blazing vehemence.” According to Harvard scholar Annemarie Schimmel, Muhammad Iqbal, the greatest Muslim scholar in India, claims that “you can deny God, but you cannot deny the Prophet” and that “love of the Prophet runs like blood in the veins of his community.” Thus, Muhammad holds a place of utmost veneration in Islam.

Meccan Period

58 Geisler, 70.
59 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Modern Islam in India (Hesperides Press, 2006), 69.
60 Schimmel, 239.
61 Ibid., 256.
“Muhammad was born into the Hashim family of the powerful tribe of Quraysh around A.D. 570 in Mecca, a great city of commerce in the Arabian Peninsula.”

Though Arabia, in general, was considered a backwater of civilization—compared to the great Byzantine Empire to the West and the great Sassanid (Persian) Empire to the East—Mecca was the social, economic, and religious hub. It was the gathering place for a plethora of various polytheistic religions. While some Arabians adopted monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Judaism, most were devout polytheists. Believing in a host of different gods, every year religious pilgrims traveled to Mecca to worship at the Kaba—a shrine that developed into a pantheon of religious idols. These idols served as an intermediary between the individual worshippers and God.

The yearly religious pilgrimage to Mecca served as an enormous economic benefit for the ruling tribe in Mecca—the Quraysh. While the leaders of the tribe became rich, the majority of citizens remained poor. Muhammad, as an orphan living in a highly stratified society, felt a deep concern for this social injustice. At the age of twenty-five, Muhammad married Khadija, who gave birth to two sons (who died at birth) and four daughters. As a young man, he was well respected within the community of Mecca. Though eventually achieving financial success, Muhammad remained discontent with the social injustice and religious idolatry in Mecca. As the years passed, Muhammad began to question the prevailing Meccan way of life. From time to time, he would withdraw to a cave outside of Mecca to contemplate about these social injustices. “After years of meditation in solitude, finally in the year A.D. 610, when Muhammad was forty years of

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62 Geisler, 70.
age, he believed that he received his prophetic call from God through the angel Gabriel.”\textsuperscript{63}

Following this prophetic call, Muhammad began his Islamic ministry by primarily admonishing the Meccan people. These admonitions consisted of “calling men to moral reform in response to the fact that they are accountable before the Creator.”\textsuperscript{64} After the receipt of each revelation from Allah, Muhammad recited (the word Qur’an literally means “recitation”) the words of Allah to his immediate audience. During the Meccan period of Muhammad’s ministry, eighty-six Suras were revealed. Even though Muhammad gained a small following—largely comprised of close friends and family members—the majority of Meccans dismissed the self-proclaimed prophet, seeing him as a threat to Mecca.

Muhammad’s preaching was more a political and economic threat to the Quraysh tribe of Mecca than a theological threat. If Muhammad’s message of monotheism gained a substantial following, there was no need for worshipping idols. If there was no need for worshipping idols, then there was also no need for religious pilgrims to worship the Kaba in Mecca; hence, Mecca would suffer a tremendous economic loss. As Muhammad’s admonitions grew in intensity, he was increasingly subject to violence and persecution. During this time, the length and tone of the Suras gradually changed, as they became more drawn out and more confrontational. “As the tension between the believers [Muslims] and the Meccan aristocrats increased, it became obvious to Muhammad that

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 96.
his mission was not succeeding in Mecca; he needed to seek a new base of operation.”

Muhammad searched neighboring towns and villages with little success. Finally, though, he was welcomed by a group of visiting officials representing the city of Yathrib—later named Medina—where the final twenty-eight Suras of the Qur’an would eventually be revealed. These Medinan officials were searching for someone to settle disputes amongst feuding tribes. Muhammad, in their view, was a prime candidate for this.

*Medinan Period*

Muhammad and his followers completed the *hijra* (flight) to Medina—200 miles north of Mecca—on September 24, A.D. 622. Muhammad’s message of monotheism was initially well received amongst the people of Medina. Despite Medina’s agricultural wealth, it was inundated with tribal feuds. Thus, it was the hope of the people that Muhammad would act as an arbiter amongst the feuding tribes. As a result of Muhammad’s leadership, “Islam became institutionalized, and the contents of the Prophet’s later revelations, correspondingly, often concern civic problems and treat politically and socially relevant questions such as emerged from Muhammad’s activity as a leader of a political community.”

According to Geisler and Saleeb, “In the Medinan Suras, not only the literary style but also the content stands in great contrast to the Meccan period. In the person of Muhammad there is a striking transition from a preacher to a prince.”

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65 Ibid., 75.

66 Schimmel, 16.

67 Geisler, 97.
Muhammad was successful at consolidating these feuding tribes and providing them with a constitution—with the exception of three Jewish tribes who rejected his message of Islam. The Jewish tribes in Mecca were very successful in business and, thus, were very affluent. As a result, they were not dependent upon Muhammad. In an attempt to befriend these affluent Jewish tribes, Muhammad made several concessions, such as the instructions for all Muslims to pray towards Jerusalem—the home of the Jews—and to adopt the Jewish day of Atonement—Ashura, which means tenth, as in the tenth day of the Jewish month Tishri—as a festival and day of observance. “However, the Jews rejected Muhammad’s message and his claim to prophet-hood, mainly due to the discrepancies between the Qur’anic revelations and their own scriptures.”68 Eventually Muhammad came to realize that the Jews would remain faithful to their religion; in doing so, they were in rejection of Islam.

As a result of this rejection, Allah revealed to Muhammad new Qur’anic injunctions. Instead of praying towards Jerusalem, Muslims were now instructed by Muhammad to pray towards the shrine of Mecca—as mentioned in Sura 2:142, which states, “The Fools among the people Will say: ‘What hath turned Them from the Qiblah [the direction to which Muslims turn to pray] to which they were used?’ Say: ‘To Allah belong East and West: He guideth whom He will To a Way that is straight.’”69 Instead of fasting during the feast of Ashura, Muslims were now instructed to fast during the entire month of Ramadan—the ninth month in the Arabic calendar. In addition, Qur’anic pronouncements against the Jews became increasingly pejorative in nature. Abraham’s

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68 Ibid., 77.

69 Qur’an 2:142.
role as a central figure in Islam—a shift of emphasis towards a more Arabian character—became increasingly emphasized, as opposed to Judaism’s emphasis on Moses and Christianity’s emphasis on Jesus.\textsuperscript{70} The Medinan period marked a critical point in the prophetic life of Muhammad—a final break with the Jewish and Christian tradition. Sura 60:1 characterizes the position of the Muslim community after the \textit{hijrah} (flight) to Medina from Mecca. It states,

\begin{quote}
O ye who believe! Take not My enemies And yours as friends (or protectors)—offering them (Your) love, even though they have rejected the Truth That has come to you, And have (on the contrary) Driven out the Messenger And yourself (from your homes), (Simply) because ye believe In Allah your Lord! If ye have come out To strive [jihad] in My Way And to seek My Good Pleasure, (Take them not as friends), Holding secret converse Of love (and friendship) With them: for I know Full well all that ye Conceal and all that ye Reveal. And any of you That does this has strayed From the Straight Path.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

As Muhammad developed an establishment of believers in Medina, he began to authorize raids on Meccan caravans. These raids served two purposes. The first purpose was for Muhammad to provide a means of livelihood for his faithful believers who emigrated with him from Mecca. The second purpose was to impress the Meccan people—who rejected him—with the strength of the Muslim forces in Medina. During the first year, the prophet and his army raided three caravans. The Qur’an condoned this new policy, as the revelation in Sura 22:39 declares, “To those against whom War is made [referring to the pagans who, according to Muhammad, drove them out of their homes in Mecca], permission Is given (to fight), because They are wronged—and verily, Allah is Most Powerful For their aid.”\textsuperscript{72}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Geisler, 77.}
\footnote{Qur’an 60:1.}
\footnote{Qur’an 22:39.}
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Muhammad became concerned that his people would not feel obligated to wage war against an outside power that had not first attacked them. The earliest biographer of Muhammad, Ibn Ishaq, in his work entitled *The Life of Muhammad* (edited by Ibn Hashim and translated into English by A. Guillaume), writes that his people “would not feel obligated to help him unless he was attacked by a enemy in Medina, and that they would not feel it incumbent upon them to go with him against an enemy outside their territory.”73 When Muhammad proclaimed, “This is the Quraysh caravan containing their property. Go out to attack it, perhaps God will give it as a prey,” some responded eagerly, but “others reluctantly because they had not thought that the apostle would go to war.”74 In response to this reluctance to fight in the cause of Allah, the Qur’an began to offer incentives. On this, Geisler asserts, “It seems that because of the unwillingness of some believers to fight, the Qur’an introduced some new incentives to those who do (as opposed to ‘those who sit at home and receive no hurt’) such as ‘special rewards’ and entrance to Paradise (4:95; 3:194-95).”75 Sura 4:95 states, “Not equal are those Believers who sit (at home) And receive no hurt, And those who strive And fight in the cause Of Allah with their goods And their persons. Allah hath granted A higher grade to those Who strive and fight With their goods and persons Than to those who sit (at home). Unto all (in Faith).”76 The second half of Sura 3:195 states, “Those who have left their homes, And were driven out therefrom, And suffered harm in My Cause, And fought and were

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74 Ishaq, 289.

75 Geisler, 78.

76 Qur’an 4:95.
slain—Verily, I will blot out From them their iniquities, And admit them into Gardens With rivers flowing beneath—A reward from the Presence Of Allah, and from His Presence Is the best of rewards."  

_The Battle of Badr_

The first major battle between the Muslim and Meccan forces occurred at Badr in 624, as a result of Muslim raids on Meccan caravans. Muhammad learned of a caravan belonging to the Quraysh tribe of Mecca returning home with valuable merchandise. Ibn Ishaq recounts this by writing, “Then the apostle heard that Abu Sufyan b. Harb was coming from Syria with a large caravan of Quraysh, containing their money and merchandise, accompanied by some thirty or forty men.”  

Muhammad subsequently authorized an attack on the caravan in an attempt to retrieve its booty. Despite being greatly outnumbered, Muhammad—with approximately 300 men—defeated the Quraysh caravan of Meccans, led by Abu Sufyan—with approximately 1,000 men.  

This victory over the Meccans symbolized the beginning of Muslim expansion throughout the Middle East. Mecca, at the time, was one of the richest cities in Arabia—commensurate with the status of a modern superpower. Muslims were emboldened by the victory over Mecca in which they were greatly outnumbered. From the Muslim perspective, it was a clear indication of Allah’s will, as only God could enable such a military victory. The Qur’an explicitly mentions this battle in Sura 3:123, when referring to the battle of Uhud—the subsequent battle. It states, “Allah has helped you at Badr, when ye were A contemptible little force; Then fear Allah; thus May ye show your

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77 Qur’an 3:195.
78 Ishaq, 289.
gratitude.” 79 As a result, local tribes began to convert to Islam in droves. Shortly after returning home from the battle, in an effort to further consolidate his power, Muhammad expelled the first of three Jewish tribes from Medina: the Bani Qaynuqa. According to Ibn Ishaq, this was because the Bani Qaynuqa “were the first of the Jews to break their agreement with the apostle and go to war [against him],” and as a result, Muhammad “besieged them until they surrendered unconditionally.” 80

The Battle of Uhud

Subsequent to the defeat at Badr, the Meccans—led by Abu Sufyan—returned home to reorganize. Sufyan proclaimed to his people, “‘Men of Quraysh, Muhammad has wronged you and killed your best men, so help us with this money to fight him, so that we may hope to get our revenge for those we have lost.’” 81 As a result, a number of men from the Quraysh “gathered together to fight the apostle.” 82 In the year 625, the Meccans—with a force of three thousand men—marched forward until they came to the mountainside opposite of Medina, where they decided to halt in a valley. Muhammad’s men, upon learning of this, persuaded him to go out and fight the Meccans in the valley—a strategically disadvantageous location. In response to their request, Muhammad announced, “‘It is not fitting that a prophet who has put on his armour should lay it aside until he has fought,’ so he marched out with a thousand of his companions, until when they reached al-Shaut between Medina and [the mountain of] Uhud.” 83 After the

79 Qur’an 3:123.
80 Ishaq, 363.
81 Ibid., 370.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 372.
Meccans delivered a surprise attack from the rear, the Muslim armies retreated and eventually returned to Medina.

The Muslim loss was soon justified in the Qur’an as Allah’s punishment for disobedience. Towards the end of the war, the Muslim army—with a substantial lead—became distracted by the practice of looting Meccan booty. Distracted by the booty, the Muslims disobeyed Muhammad’s orders and subsequently lost the battle. On this, Sura 3:152 states, “Allah did indeed fulfill His promise to you When ye with His permission Were about to annihilate Your enemy—until ye flinched And fell to disputing about the order [the rules associated with the distribution of booty], And disobeyed it After he brought you in sight (Of the Booty) which ye covet.”

In addition, Sura 3:165 states, “What! When a single Disaster smites you [the loss at Uhud], Although ye smote (your enemies) With one twice as great [the victory at Badr], Do ye say?—‘Whence is this?’ Say (to them): ‘It is from yourselves: For Allah hath power Over all things.’” Hence, Allah willed the loss at Uhud as a message regarding disobedience and unbelief. Sura 3:167 states, “They were that day Nearer to Unbelief Than To Faith, Saying with their lips What was not in their hearts. But Allah hath full knowledge Of all they conceal.”

The military defeat at Uhud was also a psychological defeat for Muhammad and his followers. In an attempt to further consolidate his power in Medina, Muhammad continued to expel non-Muslims, who ostentatiously delighted in the defeat of the Muslim forces at Uhud. Convinced that the Jewish Banu Nadir tribe was plotting against

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84 Qur’an 3:152.
85 Qur’an 3:165.
86 Qur’an 3:167.
him, Muhammad directed a fifteen-day siege that expelled the Banu Nadir—the second of three Jewish tribes in Medina. According to the majority of historians, no credible evidence—only mere speculation—indicates the existence of a plot on behalf of the Banu Nadir tribe to kill Muhammad.

*The Battle of the Trench*

The Battle of the Trench marked the third major battle between the Meccan and Medinan forces. Emboldened by the victory at Uhud, the Meccans—led once again by Abu Sufyan—formed additional coalitions in attempt to defeat the Muslims—led by Muhammad—once and for all. The Meccans responded eagerly to Sufyan’s “invitation to fight the apostle, and they assembled and made their preparations.” In the spring of 627, Abu Sufyan led a coalition of approximately 10,000 men towards Medina. “When the apostle heard of their intention he drew a trench [around the unfortified locations of the city] about Medina and worked at it himself encouraging Muslims with the hope of reward in heaven.” Instead of fighting the enemy on foreign land, this time Muhammad—with only 3,000 men—decided to station his forces between the trench and the city. The battle ensued for over a month and resulted in a Muslim victory, even though the Meccans completely surrounded the city of Medina. Several factors contributed to the victory, including the trench, which rendered Meccan cavalry useless. Perhaps the most significant factor, though, was Muhammad’s use of deception in order to cause a rift among the Meccan tribes. Ibn Ishaq recounts Muhammad’s proclamation

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87 Ishaq, 450.
88 Geisler, 80.
89 Ishaq, 450.
that “you are only one man among us, so go and awake distrust among the enemy to draw them off us if you can, for war is deceit.”90

After leaving the trench and returning to Medina, Muhammad temporarily laid down his arms. However, subsequent to a revelation by Gabriel, Muhammad pointed south (towards the Jewish Banu Qurayza tribe) and gave the orders for what eventually became the execution of every man in the tribe—as corroborated by both the author of the most authentic Hadith, Sahih Bukhari and the earliest biographer of Muhammad, Ibn Ishaq. Muhammad justified his contempt of this tribe by proclaiming their alleged infidelity to a defense treaty with the Muslims. Yet, evidence supporting this claim is nonexistent in the Hadith, Ibn Ishaq’s biography of Muhammad, and the Qur’an. In reality, the tribe was a threat to the consolidation of Muhammad’s impending Islamic empire. The Banu Qurayza tribe aspired to remain neutral by incessantly refusing to support neither the Meccans nor the Muslims.

After laying siege to the tribe for twenty-five days, Banu Qurayza surrendered. Muhammad then dug a trench and “sent for them [the Jewish men of tribe] and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches…There were 600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900.”91 On this, Geisler writes, “Unlike the previous two Jewish tribes that had been simply expelled from the city, this time all the men of the tribe were put to death and the women and children were sold into slavery.”92

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90 Ibid., 458.

91 Ibid., 464.

92 Geisler, 81.
Three years later (630), Muhammad led a military campaign of over 10,000 men to Mecca. Met with little resistance, Muhammad easily conquered the place whereby his ministry began. The Meccans—including renowned military leader Abu Sufyan—quickly surrendered. With the Meccan defeat, Muhammad revealed Sura 17:81, which states, “And say: ‘Truth has (now) Arrived, and Falsehood perished: For Falsehood is (by its nature) Bound to perish.’”

Shortly thereafter, in 632, Muhammad died of natural causes. However, before his death, Muhammad proclaimed, “Paradise will be granted to the first batch of my followers who will undertake a naval expedition;” and he then said, “The first army amongst my followers who will invade Caesar’s City [Constantinople] will be forgiven their sins.” In 634, Muslim armies began to invade Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and finally the city of Constantinople.

The Chronological Progression of Revelation

The preceding section illustrated the progression of violence throughout Muhammad’s life. This section illustrates the corresponding progression of violence throughout Muhammad’s Qur’anic revelations. According to The Encyclopedia of Islam, the concept of violence is represented by divergent and even contradictory passages within the Qur’an. The Encyclopedia of Islam categorizes the progression of violence throughout Muhammad’s ministry in Mecca and Medina into four general, successive categories (not necessarily periods of revelation). They are “those which enjoin pardon

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93 Qur’an 17:81.

for offences and encourage the invitation to Islam by peaceful persuasion; those which enjoin fighting to ward off aggression; those which enjoin the initiative in attack, provided it is not within the four sacred months; and those which enjoin the initiative in attack absolutely, at all times and in all places.”

Accordingly, *The Encyclopedia of Islam* notes,

> these differences correspond to the stages in the development of Muhammad’s thought and to the modification of policy resulting from particular circumstances; the Meccan period during which Muhammad, in general, confines himself to moral and religious teaching, and the Medina period when, having become the leader of a political community, he is able to undertake, spontaneously, the struggle against those who do not wish to join this community or submit to his authority.

Unfortunately, most news networks (and even some scholars) justify violence or peace in Islam by randomly selecting verses that conform to their ideological stance. If a news report requires violent verses in order to bolster a particular story, oftentimes the reporter will “cherry pick” the most violent of verses in an attempt to persuade their audience that the selected verses are indicative of the Qur’an—and by extension, Islam—in its entirety. Similarly, if a particular author pontificates about the peaceful nature of Islam, oftentimes he or she will “cherry pick” the most peaceful of verses in an attempt to persuade his or her audience that the selected verses are indicative of the Qur’an. Doing such is nonacademic and meaningless. In order to determine the nature of Islam—be it peaceful or violent—one must juxtapose a historical analysis with the content of the corresponding revelations. What follows is an elucidation of the four stages of

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96 *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. “djihad.”
progression—as commonly referred by scholars of the Qur’an such as Theodor Nöldeke—associated with Qur’anic revelations.

Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) is perhaps one of the foremost Semitic scholars in the world. Nöldeke’s distinguished career included several award winning publications on the Qur’an, for one of which he was awarded the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. He also became the chair of the Oriental Language Department at the University of Strasbourg in France. Prominent Qur’anic scholar Montgomery Watts considers Nöldeke’s contribution to the study of the Qur’an the most important of the nineteenth century.97 Another prominent Qur’anic scholar and translator, Richard Bell, writes, “Several attempts to work out the chronological order of the Surahs have been made by Western scholars. The one which has found the most acceptance is that given by Nöldeke.”98 Because there are no original Islamic sources of Qur’anic chronology, chronological arrangements are based upon internal factors such as style, phraseology, and historical context.

Theodor Nöldeke’s basic position “assumes a sort of progressive deterioration of style beginning with exalted poetical passages, and gradually becoming more prosaic.”99 Mirroring this progressive deterioration of style is the progression of violence from the Meccan period of revelation to the Medinan period of revelation. Like most scholars, Nöldeke distinguishes two periods of revelation within the Qur’an—the Meccan period and the Medinan period. He writes, “Muhammad’s position in Medina was entirely


99 Ibid., 101.
different from that which he had occupied in his native town. In the former he was the leader of a powerful party and gradually became the autocratic ruler of Arabia; in the latter, he was only the despised preacher of a small congregation. This difference, as was to be expected, appears in the Qur’an." But within the Meccan period, Nöldeke makes a further distinction, that is, between three subperiods of revelation. Thus, the total periods of revelation distinguished by Nöldeke are four: three associated with Mecca and one associated with Medina. An elucidation of each follows.

First Meccan Period of Revelation

The first period in Mecca is characterized by Qur’anic revelations that emphasize peace and the prohibition of retaliation. Nöldeke writes that during this period, “the convulsive excitement of the Prophet often expresses itself with the utmost vehemence. He is so carried away by his emotions that he cannot choose his words; they seem rather to burst from him.” The Suras associated with this period are short sentences “with tolerably pure but rapidly changing rhymes.” During this period, messages of tolerance, such as Sura 73:10, were revealed. It states, “And have patience with what they say, and leave them With noble (dignity).” Regarding this verse, Yusuf Ali’s commentary suggests that “men who enjoy the good things of life have special cause for gratitude to Allah, who bestowed them. When they are in the ranks of Allah’s enemies,

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101 Ibid., 42.
102 Ibid.
103 Qur’an 73:10.
none but Allah can adequately deal with them.” Sura 109 further evidences the early teachings of tolerance. This Sura is but a few verses. In its entirety, it states, “Say: O ye That reject Faith! I worship not that Which ye worship, Nor will ye worship That which I worship. And I will not worship That which ye have been Wont to worship. Nor will ye worship That which I worship. To you be your Way, And to me mine.”

Believers were instructed not to concern themselves with the evils of the world. Instead, they were to focus their hearts upon Allah. On this, Sura 19:83-84 states, “Seest thou not that We have set the Evil Ones on Against the Unbelievers, To incite them with fury? So make no haste Against them, for We But count out to them A (limited) number (of days).” Yusuf Ali comments on this verse by noting, “The godly therefore should not worry themselves over the apparent worldly success of evil, but should get on with their own duties in a spirit of trust in Allah.”

On peace and its eternal implications, Sura 10:25-26 states, “But Allah doth call To the Home of Peace: He doth guide whom He pleaseth To a Way that is straight. To those who do right Is a goodly (reward)—Yea, more (than in measure)! No darkness nor shame Shall cover their faces! They are Companions of the Garden; They will abide therein (For aye)” On this verse, Ali writes, “In contrast with the ephemeral uncertain pleasures of this material life, there is a higher life to which Allah is always calling. It is

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106 Qur’an 19:83-84.

107 Ali, 761.

called the Home of Peace." Additional examples proclaiming peace and tolerance in this first Meccan period abound. The limitations of this thesis do not permit discussing the scores of examples.

**Second Meccan Period of Revelation**

The second period in Mecca is characterized by Qur’anic revelations that emphasize Muhammad’s religious dogmas with illustrations from nature and the historical significance of prophets. Nöldeke asserts, “in the Suras of the second period the imaginative glow perceptibly diminishes; there is still fire and animation, but the tone becomes gradually more prosaic. As the feverish restlessness subsides, the periods are drawn out, and the revelations as a whole become longer.” Nöldeke continues by writing, “The truth of the new doctrine is proved by accumulated instances of God’s working in nature and in history; the objections of opponents, whether advanced in good faith or in jest, are controverted by arguments; but the demonstration is often confused or even weak.” Accordingly, unlike the first Meccan period in which Muhammad’s revelations served as admonitions for moral reform, during the second Meccan period Muhammad’s revelations emphasized core Islamic doctrines such as the “oneness of God.” As a result, he was subject to increasing persecution. Richard Bell comments, “we see the transition from the sublime enthusiasm of the first [Meccan period] to the greater calmness of the third [Meccan period]. The Prophet seeks to explain his dogmas by numerous illustrations from nature and history.”

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109 Ali, 487.
110 Nöldeke, 43.
111 Ibid., 44.
112 Bell, 101.
Sura 21 depicts Muhammad’s frustrations with the pagans in Mecca who would not accept his preaching of Islam. Sura 21:12-13 states, “Yet when they felt Our Punishment (coming), Behold, they (tried to) flee From it. Flee not, but return to The good things of this life Which were given you, And your homes, In order that ye may Be called to account.” With respect to these verses, Yusuf Ali’s commentary notes that “when they had every chance of repentance and reform, they rejected Allah’s message, and perhaps even put up an open defiance. When they felt the Wrath coming, they began to flee, but it was too late!” Muhammad’s proclamations regarding monotheism during this period are evidenced by verses such as Sura 21:24, which admonishes people who worship gods other than Allah. It states, “Or have they taken for worship (other) gods Besides Him? Say, ‘Bring Your convincing proof: this Is the Message of those With me and the Message Of those before me.’ But most of them know not The Truth, and so turn away.”

Sura 26 further evidences the antagonistic relationship between Muhammad’s message of “Truth” and the pagan’s reliance on “Unbelief.” Sura 26:2-3 states, “These are the Verses of the Book That make (things) clear. It may be thou frettest Thy soul with grief, that they Do not become Believers.” On this verse, Ali’s commentary notes, “They are the Pagans of Makkah [Mecca]. From a human point of view it was a great disappointment to Allah’s Messenger in the middle period of his Makkan ministry.

114 Ali, 797.
116 Qur’an 26:2-3.
that the Makkans could not be brought to believe in the Truth.”117 In sum, the second Meccan period was marked by increasing Meccan resistance to Muhammad’s call to submit to Islam. As a result, the Qur’anic revelations become longer as Muhammad increasingly admonished the pagans with a pejorative tone.

*Third Meccan Period of Revelation*

The third Meccan period is characterized by a predominant sermonizing tone. “The Suras of the third Meccan period, which form a pretty large part of our present Koran, are almost entirely prosaic. Some of the revelations are of considerable extent, and the single verses also are much longer than in the older Suras.”118 The content of Qur’anic revelations that belong to the third Meccan period are similar to that of the second period, but its similarities are intensified and include numerous admonitions regarding the end times. Sura 28, which was revealed just prior to the hijra (flight) to Medina, indicates that the pagans of Mecca were thoroughly warned of their defiance of Allah and its eternal ramifications. According to Muhammad, they no longer have any excuse for their defiance. Sura 28: 47 states, “If (We had) not (sent thee To the Quraysh)—in case A calamity should seize them For (the deeds) that their hands Have sent forth, they might say: ‘Our Lord! Why didst Thou not send us a messenger? We Should then have followed The Signs and been amongst Those who believe!’”119 With respect to this verse, Ali writes, “Now that a warner has come among them with all the authority that previous Messengers possessed and with all the knowledge which can only

117 Ali, 908.
118 Nöldeke, 45.
119 Qur’an 28:47.
come by divine inspiration, they have no excuse left whatever. They cannot say, ‘No warner came to us.’ If any evil comes to them, as the inevitable results of their ill-deeds, they cannot blame Allah and say that they were not warned.”

Sura 14:2 states, “Of Allah, to Whom do belong All things in the heavens And on earth! But alas for the Unbelievers For a terrible Penalty (Their Unfaith will bring them)!”. Similarly, Sura 13:31 states, “But the Unbelievers—never Will disaster cease to seize Them for their (ill) deeds, Or to settle close to their homes, Until the promise of Allah Come to pass, for, verily, Allah will not fail In His promise.”

A few verses later—Sura 13:34—Muhammad, speaking about unbelievers, states, “For them is a Penalty In the life of this world, But harder, truly, is the Penalty Of the Hereafter; and defender Have they none against Allah.”

Sura 40:70-72 states, “Those who reject the Book And the (revelations) with which We sent Our messengers: But soon shall they know—When the yokes (shall be) Round their necks, And the chains; They shall be dragged along—in the boiling fetid fluid; Then in the Fire Shall they be burned.”

Medinan Period of Revelation

The Suras revealed during Muhammad’s ministry in Medina include two predominant themes: Muhammad as a statesman and Muhammad as a military leader. As the emergent leader of several consolidated tribes in Medina, Muhammad’s revelations were centered on civic leadership and the function of government. Of more relevance to

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120 Ali, 974.
121 Qur’an 14:2.
123 Qur’an 13:34.
124 Qur’an 40:70-72.
the crux of this thesis—and therefore the emphasis of this section—is his role as a military leader. During Muhammad’s ministry in Medina, there existed a progression from the permissibility of defensive warfare to the obligation of offensive warfare. Only months after the arrival in Medina, Muhammad sanctioned raids on Meccan caravans passing through the area. Reverend Richard P. Bailey, a contributor to the Answering Islam forum, writes, “It is very hard to understand how someone claiming to be a prophet could adopt the carnal, pagan Arab practice of robbing the caravans of other tribes, call it striving in the way of God.”\textsuperscript{125} The result of these raids, as previously indicated, was a succession of battles between Muhammad and the Meccans—Badr, Uhud, Trench, and Mecca.

The Meccan retaliation (in response to Muhammad raiding their caravans) is the context by which Muhammad began to emphasize the permissibility of defensive warfare. Sura 22:39, according to Yusuf Ali, is the “first occasion on which fighting—in self-defense—was permitted.”\textsuperscript{126} It states, “To those against whom War is made, permission Is given (to fight), because They are wronged—and verily, Allah is Most Powerful For their aid.”\textsuperscript{127} In this passage, the term \textit{wronged} refers to the Muslims who were driven from Mecca to Medina for proclaiming the unity and supremacy of Allah.

After an initial hesitance to raid the Meccan caravans, Muhammad began to preach on unbelief and the doubters of the faith. He also introduced incentives for fighting in the cause of jihad, such as an eternity with Allah in the afterlife. Sura 4:95

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\textsuperscript{126} Ali, 832.
\textsuperscript{127} Qur’an 22:39.
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illustrates this introduction of incentives. It states, “Not equal are those Believers who sit (at home) And receive no hurt, And those who strive And fight in the cause Of Allah with their goods And their persons. Allah hath granted A grade higher to those Who strive and fight With their goods and persons Than to those who sit (at home). Unto all (in Faith). Hath Allah promised good: But those who strive and fight Hath He distinguished Above those who sit (at home) By a special reward.”

Sura 9:20 states, “Those who believe, and suffer Exile and strive [jihad] with might And remain, in Allah’s cause, With their goods and their persons, Have the highest rank In the sight of Allah: They are people Who will achieve (salvation).”

Sura 3:157 states, “And if ye are slain, or die, in the way of Allah, Forgiveness and mercy From Allah are far better Than all they could amass.”

Similarly, Sura 22:58 states, “Those who leave their homes In the cause of Allah, And are slain or die—On them will Allah bestow verily A goodly Provision: Truly Allah is He Who Bestows the best Provision.”

Finally, Sura 3:195 states, “Those who have left their homes, And were driven out therefrom, And suffered harm in My Cause, And fought and were slain—Verily, I will blot out From them their iniquities, And admit them into Gardens With rivers flowing beneath—A reward from the Presence Of Allah, and from His Presence is the best of rewards.”

The permission to fight in self-defense soon became an obligation to fight in self-defense against the Meccans. Muhammad commanded all Muslims in Sura 2:190 to

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128 Qur’an 4:95.
131 Qur’an 22:58.
132 Qur’an 3:195.
“fight in the cause of Allah Those who fight you, But do not transgress limits; For Allah loveth not transgressors.”\(^\text{133}\) The very next verse, Sura 2:191 states, “And slay them Wherever ye catch them, And turn them out From where they have Turned you out; For tumult and oppression Are worse than slaughter; But fight them not At the Sacred Mosque, Unless they (first) Fight you there; But if they fight you, Slay them. Such is the reward Of those who suppress faith.”\(^\text{134}\) Two verses later, in Sura 2:193, Muhammad commands Muslims to “fight them on Until there is no more Tumult or oppression, And there prevail Justice and faith in Allah; But if they cease, Let there be no hostility Except to those Who practice oppression.”\(^\text{135}\) Along these same lines, Sura 2:216 states, “Fighting is prescribed Upon you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing Which is good for you. But Allah knoweth, And ye know not.”\(^\text{136}\) Sura 8:61 states, “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).”\(^\text{137}\) Finally, Sura 8:39 states, “And fight them on Until there is no more Tumult or oppression, And there prevails Justice and faith in Allah Altogether and everywhere; But if they cease, verily Allah Doth see all that they do.”\(^\text{138}\) On this verse, Ali writes, “If they cease from fighting and from the persecution of truth” [emphasis added], Allah judges them by their actions.

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\(^\text{133}\) Qur’an 2:190.  
\(^\text{134}\) Qur’an 2:191.  
\(^\text{135}\) Qur’an 2:193.  
\(^\text{136}\) Qur’an 2:216.  
\(^\text{137}\) Qur’an 8:61.  
\(^\text{138}\) Qur’an 8:39.
and their motives, and would not wish that they should be harassed with further hostility.”

The commandment to fight in self-defense then became a commandment to engage in offensive warfare against the “unbelievers” in Mecca. Offensive warfare ensued not only against the pagans in Mecca, but now against Jews and Christians—as they continued to reject Islam. Thus, the call to fight pagans now becomes the call to fight against all unbelievers. Perhaps the most quoted of these [regarding pagans] is Sura 9:5, which states, “But when the forbidden months Are past, then fight and slay The Pagans wherever ye find them, And seize them, beleaguer them, And lie in wait for them In every stratagem (of war); But if they repent, And establish regular prayers And practice regular charity, Then open the way for them: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving.”

With respect to fighting Jews and Christians (originally People of the Book), Sura 9:29 states, “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden Which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, Nor acknowledge the Religion Of Truth, from among the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], Until they pay the Jizyah [tax] With willing submission, And feel themselves subdued.” In other words, the Jews and Christians have three choices: die, convert to Islam, or pay the Jizyah tax and live in bondage as a second-class citizen.

Sura 9:39 states, “Unless ye go forth [“go forth” translates as Tanfiru, which literally means “march onward, be ready to strive and suffer”], He will punish you With a

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139 Ali, 423.
140 Qur’an 9:5.
141 Qur’an 9:29.
grievous penalty, And put others in your place; But Him ye would not harm In the least. For Allah hath power over all things.” 142 Two verses later, Muhammad calls all Muslims to “go ye forth (whether equipped) Lightly or heavily, and strive and struggle [jihad], with your goods And your persons, in the Cause Of Allah. That is best For you, if ye (but) knew.” 143 Sura 9:123 states, “O ye who believe! Fight The Unbelievers who gird about you, And let them find firmness In you: and know that Allah is with those who fear Him.” 144 Along the same lines, Sura 2:244 states, “Then fight in the cause of Allah, and know that Allah Heareth and knoweth all things.” 145 Sura 4:74 states, “Let those fight in the cause of Allah Who sell the life of this world For the Hereafter. To him who fighteth In the cause of Allah—Whether he is slain Or gets victory—Soon shall We give him A reward of great (value).” 146 Two verses later, Sura 4:76 states, “Those who believe Fight in the cause of Allah, And those who reject Faith Fight in the cause of Evil: So fight ye against the Friends of Satan: feeble indeed Is the cunning of Satan.” 147

The Qur’an makes it clear that those who wage war in the name of Allah rank highest in his sight. On this, Sura 9:20 states, “Those who believe, and suffer Exile and strive [jihad] with might And main, in Allah’s cause, With their goods and their persons, Have the highest rank In the sight of Allah: They are people Who will achieve

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142 Qur’an 9:39.
143 Qur’an 9:41.
144 Qur’an 9:123.
145 Qur’an 2:224.
146 Qur’an 4:74.
147 Qur’an 4:76.
Similarly, Sura 3:157 states, “And if ye are slain, or die, in the way of Allah, Forgiveness and mercy From Allah are far better Than all they could amass.”

The Hadith

The uncontested source for authenticity regarding the collections of the Hadith is Muhammad al-Bukhari. He collected over 300,000 sayings of the prophet over a sixteen-year period, but in the pursuit of utmost accuracy, he only chose to include approximately 2,600 in his Hadith. About Bukhari, Douglass Pratt writes, “Undoubtedly the most important is the Musannaf work known as al-Jami al-Sahih of al-Bukhari. For many Muslims al-Bukhari is second only to the Qur’an in authority.” Robert Spencer adds that Muslims who study the Hadith offer a seal of authenticity to statements that appear in one of Bukhari’s volumes. Norman Geisler calls Bukhari’s Hadith “the most authoritative book in Sunni Islam, second only to the Qur’an.” The following paragraph provides examples from the Hadith—quoted solely from Bukhari—illustrating the inspiration of violence as taught by Muhammad. “It would add considerable weight to claims that ‘the Qur’an teaches nonviolence’ if Muhammad himself confronted his enemies in a nonviolent manner.” However, this is not the case.

151 Spencer, Onward, 149.
152 Geisler, 326.
153 Spencer, Onward, 147.
On the responsibility of waging war, the Prophet Muhammad stated, “I have been ordered (by Allah) to fight against the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped by Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and perform As-Salat (prayers) and give Zakat [obligatory charity], so if they perform all that, then they save their lives and properties from me except for Islamic laws, and their reckoning (accounts) will be with (done by) Allah.” In other words, it is obligatory for all Muslims to fight unbelievers until they submit to Allah.

Regarding the primacy of jihad, “Allah’s Messenger was asked, ‘What is the best deed?’ He replied, ‘To believe in Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad).’ The questioner then asked, ‘What is the next (in goodness)?’ He replied, ‘To participate in Jihad (holy fighting) in Allah’s Cause.’” In another instance, Bukhari’s Hadith states, “A man came to the Prophet and asked, ‘O Allah’s Messenger! What kind of fighting is in Allah’s cause? (I ask this), for some of us fight because of being enraged and angry and some for the sake of his pride and haughtiness.’ The Prophet raised his head (as the questioner was standing) and said, ‘He who fights so that Allah’s Word (i.e. Allah’s Religion of Islamic Monotheism) should be superior, fights in Allah’s Cause.’”

Another man came to the Prophet and said, “‘Guide me to such a deed as equals Jihad (in reward).’ He replied, ‘I do not find such a deed.’” Speaking about the Mujahideen, Muhammad states, “The example of a Mujahid in Allah’s cause—and Allah knows better who really strives in His Cause—is like a person who observes Saum (fast) and offers

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154 Al-Bukhari, 1:66.
155 Ibid., 1:67.
156 Ibid., 1:128.
157 Ibid., 4:45.
Salat (prayer) 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 booty.\textsuperscript{158}

With respect to the rewards of jihad, Bukhari’s Hadith states, “Our Prophet told us about the message of our Lord that ‘whoever amongst us is killed (in Jihad in Allah’s Cause), will go to Paradise.’ Umar asked the Prophet, ‘Is it not true that our men who are killed will go to Paradise and their’s (i.e., those of Al-Mushrik) [pagans] will go to the (Hell) fire?’ The Prophet said, ‘Yes.’\textsuperscript{159} The very next Hadith states, “Allah’s Apostle said, ‘Know that Paradise is under the shades of swords.’”\textsuperscript{160}

Regarding the killing of noncombatants, Bukhari’s Hadith states, “The Prophet passed by me at a place called Al-Abwa or Waddan, and was asked whether it was permissible to attack the Al-Mushrik [pagan] warriors at night with the probability of exposing their women and children to danger. The Prophet replied, ‘They (i.e., women and children) are from them (i.e., pagans).’\textsuperscript{161} With respect to the killing of prisoners, Bukhari records an instance whereby Muhammad sanctions the death of a Meccan prisoner named Ibn Khatal. When the prophet became aware of Ibn Khatal’s whereabouts, he remarked, “Kill him.”\textsuperscript{162} These are but a few of the numerous examples from the teachings of Muhammad that suggest the permissibility of violence in Islam.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 4:47.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 4:63.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 4:64.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 4:157-158.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 4:174.
Sunni Islam and Jihad

As previously indicated, the term *jihad* is literally translated as to strive or struggle and consists of the greater jihad—personal striving towards godliness—and the lesser jihad—striving in warfare against non-Muslims. Not only is the call to strive, struggle, or fight in the cause of Allah prevalent throughout the text of the Qur’an and Bukhari’s Hadith, as previously illustrated, it is also a prevalent theme throughout the main schools of Sunni theology. Within the four schools (Shafi’i, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Maliki) of Sunni Islam, which comprise approximately eighty-five percent of all Muslims, the imperatives associated with jihad all demonstrate support for violence. The Shafi’i school is the most conservative in its approach, taking literally the tenets of the Qur’an and eschewing any subsequent re-interpretation. According to Robert Spencer, a common Hanafi legal manual emphasizes that “jihad must not be waged for economic reasons, but solely for religious reasons: from the call to Islam the people will hence perceive that they are attacked for the sake of the religion, and not for the sake of taking their property.”\(^{163}\) Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), a Maliki historian and philosopher indicates in his famous work entitled *Maqaddimah*, that “in the Muslim community, the holy war [jihad] is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and (the obligation to) convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force.”\(^{164}\) The renowned Hanbali jurist, Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), states, “Since lawful warfare is essentially jihad and since its aim is that the religion is God’s entirely and God’s word is


uppermost, therefore, according to all Muslims, those who stand in the way of this aim must be fought.”  

Robert Spencer, speaking about these four schools, succinctly asserts, “The idea that non-Muslims must be fought, and that the ideal state of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims is predicated upon the subjugation of non-Muslims, affects the overall prospects for peaceful coexistence between the Muslim world and non-Muslims.” In agreement with Spencer is The Encyclopedia of Islam, which notes that jihad “consists of military action with the object of the expansion of Islam and if need be, of its defense. This notion stems from the fundamental principle of the universality of Islam: this religion, along with the temporal power which it implies, ought to embrace the whole universe, if necessary by force.”

The Doctrine of Abrogation

The Definition of Abrogation

The doctrine of abrogation further evidences the justification for violence in Islam. Abdullah Saeed writes, “The literal meaning of naskh [abrogation] is to annul, supersede, obliterate, efface, or cancel. Technically it means abrogation of one ruling by a subsequent ruling.” Robert Spencer defines abrogation as the “Islamic doctrine that

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166 Spencer, Onward, 11.

167 The Encyclopedia of Islam, s.v. “djihad.”

Allah modifies and even cancels certain directives, replacing them with others.”\textsuperscript{169} Khaled Abou El Fadl, distinguished fellow in Islamic Law at UCLA, writes, “According to the doctrine of abrogation, some rulings or determinations set out in the Qur’an can be annulled by subsequent Qur’anic rulings. The doctrine of abrogation thus expresses the idea of an incremental evolution of Qur’anic and Prophetic laws.”\textsuperscript{170} Arthur Jeffery comments, “The Qur’an is unique among sacred scriptures in teaching a doctrine of abrogation according to which later pronouncements of the Prophet abrogate, i.e., declare null and void, his earlier pronouncements.”\textsuperscript{171} Finally, Douglas Pratt notes that “the doctrine of abrogation that emerged to cope with the implications of these verses [abrogated verses] holds that some of the Quranic utterances were of a temporary nature and were replaced as circumstance warranted.”\textsuperscript{172}

\textit{The Evidence for Abrogation}

The following Qur’anic verses form the basis for the doctrine of abrogation. The first—and perhaps most quoted—example is Sura 2:106, which states, “None of Our revelations Do we abrogate Or cause to be forgotten, But we substitute Something better or similar: Knowest thou not that Allah Hath power over all things?”\textsuperscript{173} On this verse, Yusuf Ali’s commentary suggests that “if we take it in a general sense, it means that Allah’s Message from age to age is always the same, but that its form may differ

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\textsuperscript{169} Spencer, \textit{Onward}, 135.

\textsuperscript{170} Khaled Abou El Fadl, \textit{The Place of Tolerance in Islam} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 100.


\textsuperscript{172} Pratt, 39.

\textsuperscript{173} Qur’an 2:106.
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according to the needs and exigencies of the time.”\textsuperscript{174} The second example indicating the existence of the doctrine of abrogation is Sura 13:39, which states, “Allah doth blot out Or confirm what He pleaseth: With Him is The Mother of the Book.”\textsuperscript{175} The third example is Sura 16:101, which states, “When We substitute one revelation For another—and Allah knows best What He reveals (in stages)—They say, ‘Thou art but a forger’: But most of them understand not.”\textsuperscript{176} On this verse, Ali’s commentary indicates that “the doctrine of progressive revelation from age to age and time to time does not mean that Allah’s fundamental Law changes. It is not fair to charge a Prophet of Allah with forgery because the Message, as revealed to him, is in a different form from that revealed before, when the core of Truth is the same, for it comes from Allah.”\textsuperscript{177}

The evidence for abrogation also manifests itself within the style of the Qur’an. An examination of the Qur’an reveals instances where abrogation is evident due to inconsistencies in style. Reuven Firestone, professor of Islamic Studies at Hebrew Union College, asserts, “there are not only hidden rhymes and rhyme-phrases not woven into the texture of the passage, but there are abrupt changes of rhyme, and repetition of same rhyme-word or phrase in adjoining verses. Abrupt changes in subject are natural to the paragraph-style of the Qur’an, but often we find a quite extraneous subject intruding into passages apparently meant to be homogenous.”\textsuperscript{178} Reuven Firestone continues by

\textsuperscript{174} Ali, 46.

\textsuperscript{175} Qur’an 13:39.

\textsuperscript{176} Qur’an 16:101.

\textsuperscript{177} Ali, 664.

asserting, “There are abrupt changes in the length of verses, and sudden changes of
dramatic situation involving change of pronoun from singular to plural, or from second to
third person and vice versa.”179

Further evidence for the existence of abrogated verses in the Qur’an is manifested
by the innumerable inconsistencies amongst its revelations. According to Robert
Spencer, the doctrine of abrogation is used to “explain away difficulties in the Qur’an.”180
For example, on the one hand, Sura 2:256 states, “Let there be no compulsion In religion:
Truth stand out Clear from Error: whoever Rejects Evil and believes In Allah hath
grasped The most trustworthy Handhold, that never breaks.”181 Yusuf Ali’s commentary
indicates that “compulsion is incompatible with religion: because religion depends upon
faith and will, and these would be meaningless if induced by force.”182 On the other hand,
Sura 9:29 states, “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that
forbidden Which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, Nor acknowledge the
Religion Of Truth, from among the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], Until they
pay the Jizyah [tax] With willing submission, And feel themselves subdued.”183 In other
words, Jews and Christians could die, convert to Islam, or pay the Jizyah tax. The
elements of faith and will are obviously devoid in Sura 9:29, which leads one to logically
presume that the injunctions in verses such as Sura 9:29 abrogate the injunctions in verses
such as Sura 2:256.

179 Firestone, 85.
180 Spencer, Onward, 135.
181 Qur’an 2:256.
182 Ali, 106.
183 Qur’an 9:29.
Another (of many) example of inconsistencies within the Qur’an is the difference between Sura 49:13 which states, “O mankind! We created You from a single (pair) Of a male and female, And made you into Nations and tribes, that Ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise Each others),”\textsuperscript{184} and Sura 3:28, which states, “Let not the Believers Take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than Believers: if any do that, In nothing will there be help From Allah.”\textsuperscript{185} A final example deals with the consumption of wine. Sura 2:219 states, “They ask Thee Concerning wine and gambling. Say: ‘In them is great sin, And some benefit [emphasis added], for men; but the sin is greater than the benefit,”\textsuperscript{186} while Sura 5:90 states “O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (Dedication of) stones, And (divination by) arrows, are an abomination [emphasis added]—Of Satan’s handiwork; Eschew such (abomination), That ye may prosper.”\textsuperscript{187}

Categories of Abrogation

There are three categories of abrogated verses. The first category is where the text and the prescription of a verse are abrogated. In this form of abrogation, the text is removed from the Qur’an and the prescription is no longer valid. The second category is where the text is abrogated but the prescription remains. “This means that, although the verse is no longer part of the Qur’anic text, its ruling remains applicable.”\textsuperscript{188} The third category is where the prescription is abrogated but the text remains. “This means that the

\textsuperscript{184} Qur’an 49:13.
\textsuperscript{185} Qur’an 3:28.
\textsuperscript{186} Qur’an 2:219.
\textsuperscript{187} Qur’an 5:90.
\textsuperscript{188} Saeed, 80.
verse remains part of the Qur’anic text and is recited. However, the ruling it conveys is no longer in operation.”

*The Application of Abrogation to Violence*

Arthur Jeffery characterizes abrogation well. He writes, “The signification is that a thing may have been lawful for a while, but then He made it unlawful, or it may have been forbidden and He made it permissible, or permissible and He made it forbidden.” This characterization reveals the evolutionary or progressive nature of revelations throughout the Qur’an. Abdullah Saeed explains that the relevance of abrogation “lies in the fact that, within a very short period of 22 years, at least some of the initial rulings in the Qur’an changed a number of times to meet the evolving needs of the community.”

Thus, the doctrine of abrogation is plausible when viewed in conjunction with the historical evolution of Islam from harsh persecution in Mecca to complete dominance in Medina. Reuven Firestone summarizes this point with great precision. He asserts,

> At the beginning of his prophetic career in Mecca when he was weak and his followers few, the divine revelations encouraged avoidance of physical conflict. Only after the intense physical persecution that resulted in the Emigration (Hijra) of the Muslim community to Medina in 622 were Muhammad and the believers given divine authority to engage in war and only in defense. As the Muslim community continued to grow in number and strength in Medina, further revelations widened the conditions and narrowed the restriction under which war could be waged, until it was concluded that war against non-Muslims could be waged virtually at any time, without pretext, and in any place.

Abdullah Saeed echoes Firestone by writing, “When the Muslim community was weak, the Qur’an urged them to be patient and tolerate the hostility of the Meccans. However,

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189 Ibid., 79.
190 Jeffery, 67.
191 Saeed, 77.
192 Firestone, 50.
when the Muslims became relatively powerful and able to resist the Meccans, the Qur’an said that the Muslims might fight in self-defense.”¹⁹³

The general rule of thumb when attempting to reconcile contradictory Qur’anic passages is that the later Medinan verses abrogate the earlier Meccan verses. “As a rule, therefore, the later the revelation, the more authoritative and more likely it was to abrogate other revelations; the earlier, the less decisive and more likely to be abrogated.”¹⁹⁴ On this, Farug Sherif notes, “By far the greatest number of verses held to have been abrogated are those which counsel the Prophet to be patient with the unbelievers and to remember that he is no more than a warner, leaving the punishment of recalcitrants to God. The abrogating verses, on the other hand, are those which command the Prophet and the faithful to fight and kill.”¹⁹⁵

The most controversial—and most relative to the crux of this thesis—inconsistency within the Qur’an is between Muhammad’s emphasis on peace while in Mecca and his emphasis on war while in Medina. According to the doctrine of abrogation—rooted in Qur’anic verses—the reconciliation of this contradiction can be accomplished by examining the most recent Qur’anic revelation on the subject in question. The most recent revelation pertaining to the contradiction between peace and war is Sura 9. According to Muhammad al-Bukhari, Sura 9 was “the last complete Surah which was revealed (to the Prophet).”¹⁹⁶ Robert Spencer confirms this by asserting, “Most Muslim authorities agree that the ninth Sura was the very last section of the

¹⁹³ Saeed, 83.
¹⁹⁴ Firestone, 50.
¹⁹⁶ Al-Bukhari, 5:397.
Thus, in accordance with the doctrine of abrogation, Sura 9—Muhammad’s last revelation pertaining to the subject of jihad—abrogates all other revelations pertaining to violence. Sura 9:5 states, “But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay The Pagans wherever ye find them, And seize them, beleaguer them, And lie in wait for them In every stratagem (of war); But if they repent, And establish regular prayers And practice regular charity, Then open the way for them: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving.” The very last word on jihad is Sura 9:29 (revealed subsequent to 9.5), which states, “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden Which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, Nor acknowledge the Religion Of Truth, from among the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], Until they pay the Jizyah [tax] With willing submission, And feel themselves subdued.”

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198 Qur’an 9:5.

199 Qur’an 9:29.
CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETING THE QUR’AN

The Necessity of a Contextualist Interpretation

Abdullah Saeed, the Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies and Director of the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Islam at the University of Melbourne, Australia, in his work entitled Interpreting the Qur’an: Towards a Contemporary Approach, argues for the use of historical context when interpreting the Qur’an. He writes, “Historically, Muslim exegetes and jurists often relied on linguistic criteria only to interpret the ethico-legal content and to determine whether a particular ruling in the Qur’an is to be universally applicable or not. In this, the question of social and historical context in which the ruling was given at the time of the revelation of the Qur’an was seen as irrelevant or unimportant, except in rare cases.”

Saeed maintains that the social and historical context, coupled with the linguistic criteria, provides a more complete understanding of the Qur’an as it is applied to modern times. He further suggests that a contextualist interpretation is necessary due to the vast societal changes since the inception of Islam. “These changes are enormous: globalization, migration, scientific and technological revolutions, space exploration, archeological discoveries, evolution and genetics, public education and literacy, to name

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200 Saeed, 1.
a few.” In sum, while the Qur’an was revealed and then written for all Muslims, it was not revealed and then written to all (modern) Muslims.

Saeed categorizes three interpretive approaches based on the degree to which they rely on linguistic criteria or sociohistorical context in determining the meaning of the text. They are textualist, semitexutalist, and contextualist. “Textualists argue for a strict following of the text and adopt a literalistic approach to the text. For Textualists, it is the Qur’an that should guide Muslims, rather than any so-called modern ‘needs.’ They consider the meaning of the Qur’an to be fixed and universal in its application.”

Semitextualists, like textualists, rely on linguistic criteria to determine the meaning of the text, but “package the ethico-legal content in a somewhat ‘modern’ idiom, often within an apologetic discourse.” Finally, contextualists emphasize the sociohistorical context in which the Qur’an was revealed. Hence, they “argue for a high degree of freedom for the modern Muslim scholar in determining what is mutable (changeable) and immutable (unchangeable) in the area of ethico-legal content.”

According to Saeed, in order to sustain a close relationship between the meaning of the Qur’an—as revealed in the seventh century—and Muslims today, a contextualist interpretation must be adopted. Approximately 100 years subsequent to the death of Muhammad, the Qur’an was compiled into written form—as opposed to oral tradition or recitation. Along with the need to compile the Qur’an in a written form was the need to interpret the meaning of the Qur’an. This was especially true seeing as the Prophet

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201 Ibid., 2.
202 Ibid., 3.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
contributed little to the explanations of the Qur’an, and what little Muhammad did contribute was scarcely recorded. Thus, the companions of the Prophet, who shared a personal knowledge of Muhammad, were the first to provide *tasfir* (exegesis) on the Qur’an. These companions, including the first four caliphs, were familiar with “the language of the Qur’an, the overall social context of the revelation, the Prophet’s ways of thinking, and the norms, values and customs of the Arabs, all of which provided them with a unique basis for making sense of Qur’anic text within the overall framework of the emerging ‘established practice’ of the Muslim community.”

As successive generations emerged, the necessity for exegeses increased. By the end of the ninth century, exegetical works accounted for the entirety of the Qur’an. However, “Despite the existence of a range of approaches to *tasfir* [exegesis], it is noticeable that Muslims exegetes, on the whole, did not consider the changing needs of Muslims in their interpretation of the ethico-legal material in the Qur’an.” This was due to the view that since the text was “fixed,” so too was the “meaning.” The tendency was to uphold consistency with respect to the text and recitation of the Qur’an. All efforts of rational interpretation, or *ijtihad*, finally ended with the “closing of the doors of *ijtihad*.”

Radwan Masmoudi, President of the Center for Islam and Democracy, in a speech delivered in Algeria, stated that *ijtihad* enables Muslims to “come up with innovative answers according to the ever-changing conditions of the society.” He continued by stating, “This *Ijtihad*, which is necessary to develop strong and flexible

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205 Ibid., 9.

206 Ibid., 10.

institutions to serve the Ummah, was quickly stopped and banned by rulers who wanted to hijack political freedoms and take advantage of a growing and powerful nation. The result was that, in political matters, Muslims did not develop strong traditions of consultation, nor did they develop strong institutions capable of performing ‘check and balance’ on the rulers.”

Hence, as a result of *ijtihad*, the interpretation of the Holy Qur’an was reduced to reliance upon linguistic criteria (textualist approach) instead of reliance upon its historical context (contextualist approach).

However, according to Saeed, in order to link the historical with the contemporary, a contextualist interpretation is obligatory. “Interpretation—unlike revelation—is a human endeavor. Thus, one could argue that there is nothing sacred about the personal interpretation given to a verse even by a Companion of the Prophet, a Successor, or by early imams. Their understandings, like ours, are limited by context and culture and may or may not be relevant outside their culture, their context.”

This view is not simply a rejection of the heritage of exegesis. Rather, it is a recognition of the fact that ninth-century Muslims had not reached an intellectual zenith and that Muslim societies should continue to evolve intellectually, politically, economically, and scientifically—which is contingent, of course, on a contextualist interpretation of the Qur’an commensurate with modern geopolitical realities.

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208 Masmoudi,.

209 Saeed, 4.
The Justification for a Contextualist Interpretation

According to Saeed, the doctrine of abrogation provides justification for the reinterpretation of Qur’anic texts based upon the context of modern society. As previously indicated, the doctrine of abrogation—as evidenced by Qur’anic verses—allows for flexibility in interpreting the text. As Muhammad was faced with changing circumstances, he altered the imperatives associated with Qur’anic revelations accordingly. The relevance of abrogation lay in the fact that “within a very short period of 22 years, at least some of the initial rulings in the Qur’an changed a number of times to meet the evolving needs of the community.”\textsuperscript{210} Therefore, if the direction of Qur’anic revelations changed substantially in only twenty-two years, how much more necessary is change over the next 1,400 years? Contextualist interpretations enable modern Muslims to apply the Qur’an of yesterday to their lives today. It provides the link between the historical and the contemporary. If such a link does not exist, the Islamic faith, as a result of the forces of modernity, will continue to distance itself from the meanings of the Qur’an as revealed in the seventh century.

According to Saeed, the doctrine of abrogation provides the means by which a contextualist interpretation can be accomplished. Muslims who adhere to a textualist interpretation of the Qur’an fail to distinguish between the moral objective of a Qur’anic ruling and the outward form of the same ruling. Conversely, a contextualist interpretation enables Muslims to understand both the moral objective and outward form of Qur’anic rulings. In other words, an examination of abrogated verses “often reveals

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 78.
that the Qur’an does not abrogate the objective of a ruling, but rather reinforces that objective by amending the ruling itself.”

Abdullah Saeeb gives several examples as evidence to this claim. One example involves fahishah, or unlawful sexual intercourse. Originally, a woman guilty of fahishah was detained in her home until death. The abrogated ruling replaced house detention until death with flogging. In this example, the moral objective—to prevent women from further participation in fahishah—in both instances remained the same, but the outward form of the ruling changed—from detention to flogging. Saeeb concludes, “a Qur’anic ruling should be looked at first in order to ascertain its underlying objective. If that objective is understood, then the next stage would be to see how the Qur’an wanted to achieve that objective. At this point, temporal, cultural, and circumstantial differences of contexts may be taken into account.”

The Failure of Saeed’s Contextualist Approach

The critical flaw in Saeed’s argument is the narrow scope of his thesis. Interpreting Qur’anic revelations in a contextual manner is feasible only as it pertains to moral law. If one takes into consideration the context of the proverbial Qur’anic injunctions to fight, then he or she must come to the conclusion that such an injunction was an appropriate, necessary, and well-aligned response to the conditions in which they were revealed. In other words, a contextual interpretation of Sura 9 can only suggest the necessity to fight. Even though it is possible to interpret abrogated moral rulings (sexual

211 Ibid., 86.
212 Ibid.
punishment of house detention until death abrogated by flogging until death) in light of their context, the problem is that the Qur’anic injunction to fight all unbelievers in the cause of Allah (as espoused by Sura 9) has yet to be abrogated because it was the very last Sura to be revealed by Muhammad. Hence, how is one to adopt a contextualist interpretation on a Qur’anic injunction that has yet to be abrogated? The fatal shortcoming of the Qur’an is twofold: (1) There are only two contexts in which the Qur’an was revealed. The first context was a heavily persecuted community in Mecca and the second context was a dominant and aggressive military society in Medina. Hence, there is no context of peaceful coexistence. (2) The violent context of the Medinan period abrogated the nonviolent Meccan period, and thus the final word pertaining to the use of force is Sura 9.

The Lack of Consistency and Specificity in Qur’anic Interpretation

A major inconsistency regarding Qur’anic interpretation exists between the doctrine of abrogation and the eternality of Muhammad’s revelation. On the one hand, the Qur’an informs Muslims in Sura 10:64, “For them are Glad Tidings, In the life of the Present And in the Hereafter: No change can there be in the Words of Allah. This is indeed The supreme Felicity.”213 On the other hand, Muslims are informed by the Qur’an that Allah causes certain verses to be forgotten, or blotted out—only to be replaced by better or more suitable verses. Those who subscribe to the former view allow no hope for change, while those who subscribe to the latter view acknowledge the fact that “God intentionally gave rulings for different circumstances because He knows that human

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213 Qur’an 10:64.
community’s change should not be overlooked.” On this, Muslim scholar Abdullah Saeeb writes, “This theological position [the eternality of Allah’s word] is fraught with problems in light of the debate on naskh [abrogation]. A satisfactory explanation has to be given for the obvious presence of naskh in the Qur’an, and for the notion that God changed the very rulings He gave to the community.”

A lack of specificity also plagues Qur’anic interpretations. Muslim apologists often point towards the Bible when attempting to condone or justify violent passages in the Qur’an. The argument is that all religions, including Christianity, are violent or obtain passages in their respective scriptures condoning violence. Muslim apologist John Esposito writes, “It is not surprising that the Quran, like the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament, has verses that address fighting and the conduct of war. The world in which the Islamic community emerged was a rough neighborhood.” Apologists such as Esposito argue that because Muhammad was persecuted in Mecca for years, he was justified to engage in defensive warfare against all unbelievers.

The problem with this reasoning, according to Norman Geisler, is that “nowhere in the Qur’an itself are the above commands to fight restricted to a special time period or against a special people group. Unlike the divine commandments found in the Book of Joshua in the Old Testament, that were specific to a time, place, and people group, orthodox Muslims believe that Qur’anic commands are universal and thus applicable for all times and places.” On this, Robert Spencer affirms that commandments such as in

214 Saeeed, 83.
215 Ibid.
216 Esposito, 119.
217 Geisler, 322.
the Book of Joshua “are not commands for all generations to follow, and if they have any applicability, it is only in a spiritualized, parabolic sense.” These passages are descriptive, as opposed to prescriptive. In sum, biblical commandments concerning violence are restricted to a specific time, place, and people, whereas Qur’anic commandments are written without regard to specificity of context. From this, one can understand how Muslims who subscribe to a textualist interpretation of the Qur’an are able to justify violence in any context.

\(^{218}\) Spencer, *Religion of Peace*, 64.
CHAPTER SIX

CONFRONTING OBJECTIONS TO VIOLENCE

Muslims in Moderation

Perhaps the best objection to the accusation that Islam is essentially violent is the fact that the vast majority of Muslims do not participate in—nor do they wish to participate in—acts of global terrorism. These Muslims are often referred to as “moderate.” From this, one can infer that amongst the majority of Muslims there is a natural inclination towards peace and a corresponding abhorrence towards violence. But why? Is this because Muslims have lost a certain degree of religious conviction as initially demonstrated by the companions of the Prophet Muhammad during the Golden Age of Islam in Mecca? Or is it because these “moderate” Muslims only subscribe to the Qur’anic injunctions as espoused in Mecca, as opposed to Medina? If so, is this heresy? Are notions of “moderate” or “nominal” Muslims a contradiction to the unity required by Allah?

Because the “moderate” Muslim movement is a relatively silent one, there are no specific explanations (other than a general claim desirous of peace) regarding their proclivity towards the level of tolerance manifested by the Meccan Suras. Aasma Khan, a member of “Muslims Against Terrorism,” instructs American Muslims to not only speak out against acts of terrorism, but to do something about it. She writes, “We are committed to mobilizing the silent majority of Muslims, a majority of which is in favor of
peace, tolerance, and mutual respect.”

Is it not highly unusual, though, for a majority in any scenario to be silent? Some observers remark that this silence is a result of fear. They claim that speaking out against the “radicals” represents a danger to their lives. Could it also be true, though, that this majority is silent because there is no other plausible course of action (as stipulated by the Qur’an) to achieve Allah’s commandment regarding worldwide submission? If peaceful proselytizing fails to gain a following, what other options do these “moderates” have?

A Narrow Interpretation of Islam

A common catch-phrase amongst Muslims and non-Muslims alike is that Islam has been “hijacked by radical jihadists” who subscribe to a narrow interpretation of Islam. Shaykh Rashid, a prominent Sufi teacher and peace advocate, claims, “That which has come to be called ‘fundamentalism’ is unrealistic and blatantly wrong in imposing such demands. Its misguided proponents see situations only in black and white.”

Muslim and non-Muslim scholars attribute this “radical” movement, in part, to a small group of ideologues operating under the auspices of the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1950s and 1960s. Most notably is Sayyid Qutb, a Muslim revolutionary hanged in 1966 for attempting to undermine the Nasser government in Egypt. About Qutb, Fawaz Gerges writes, “More than anyone else, Sayyid Qutb, hanged by Egyptian authorities in 1966 for his alleged subversive preaching and plotting against the nationalist regime of

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Gamal Abdel Nasser, inspired generations of jihadis, including Al Qaeda’s senior leaders, Osama bin Laden and his deputies.”^221

Qutb took issue with the secular Arab regimes throughout the Middle East and their unmitigated failure to build a viable society. He insisted that such a society was in a state of utter *jahiliyyah* (ignorance) and that an authentic Islamic society had yet to exist since the days of the Prophet Muhammad and his Rightly Guided Companions. On this, Islamic scholar Farid Esack notes that Muslim resentment “stems from ancient memories of the first Medina, the so-called Golden Age of Islam, and the desire to return to this state of near mythical perfection. Medina is seen as the perfect paradise on Earth, as a time when Muslims ruled the world and everything about it is glorified and mythologized.”^222 Qutb, in his work entitled, *Social Justice in Islam*, states, “Our mission is to call for a renewal of Islamic life, a life governed by the spirit and the law of Islam, which alone can produce that form of Islam that we need today, and which is in conformity with the genuine Islamic tradition.”^223 To accomplish this mission, Qutb employed *takfir* (the practice of declaring one a *kufir*, or unbeliever) to distinguish between those in support of secular Muslim regimes and those who oppose them. Qutb proclaimed that it is not only laudable but mandatory to enact armed resistance against secular Muslim rulers. Those who followed suit were deemed Muslims, and those who did not were deemed *kufirs*.

^221 Gerges, 21.


Accusations that Sayyid Qutb radicalized Islam by employing *takfir* are inaccurate. It is incorrect to associate Qutb’s *lack of authority* to declare one a *kufir* with the accusation of promulgating a *narrow interpretation* of Islam (declaring *takfir* is usually reserved to the likes of religious authorities). Qutb was only following in the footsteps of the Prophet—a duty of all Muslims. Muhammad made the same distinction when confronted with Meccan hostility. After sanctioning raids on Meccan caravans, an initial hesitance became apparent on behalf of the Muslim community in Medina. Muhammad became greatly concerned with the unwillingness of his fellow comrades to fight in the cause of Allah. Thus, he began to preach on unbelief and the doubters of the faith. He also introduced incentives for fighting in the cause of jihad, such as an eternity with Allah in the afterlife. In doing so, Muhammad made a distinction between those who “fight in the cause of Allah” and those who “choose to stay at home.” Numerous Qur’anic revelations criticized those who stayed at home, referring to them as hypocrites. However, those who fought ranked highest in the sight of Allah. In sum, it is inaccurate to associate Qutb’s utilization of *takfir* with promulgating a narrow interpretation of Islam. Qutb’s use of *takfir* (though illicit) closely followed the example of the Prophet in Medina. Qutb’s alleged “black and white” conceptions of Islam are no more “black and white” than the Prophet Muhammad’s in Medina.

**Defensive Jihad**

Perhaps the most common explanation amongst apologists of Islam regarding jihad is that it was only employed as a defensive measure. Muslim scholar Amir Hussain argues that the attacks on Meccan caravans authorized by Muhammad were a defensive
maneuver. His reasoning suggests that Muhammad and his followers were forced to leave Mecca without their belongings. Therefore, Muhammad and his followers felt justified in “raiding Meccan caravans that were selling the goods that Muslims had left behind during their emigration.”

In other words, Muhammad and his followers were simply regaining what they had lost subsequent to the emigration (hijra) from Mecca to Medina. Accordingly, the Qur’anic revelation addressing this situation (22:39) permits defensive jihad to those who were “wronged” and “driven from their homes.” It was these defensive skirmishes, according to Amir Hussain, that instigated the Battle of Badr. Therefore, the Battle of Badr was—by extension—a defensive effort.

Islamic apologists also argue that the Battle of Uhud and the removal of the second Jewish tribe were defensive efforts. Amir Hussain writes, “it was in the wake of this battle that Muhammad was forced to deal with one of the Jewish groups in Medina. According to tradition, one of the Jewish clans, sensing the weakness of the Muslims after the defeat at Uhud, attempted to kill the Prophet. As a result, this clan was banished from Medina.”

Hussain continues to assert that “a similar situation had taken place following the Battle of Badr, when a different Jewish clan was accused of breaking a pact with the Muslims.” Hence, the first Jewish clan was expelled in a defensive maneuver as well.

Finally, the Battle of the Trench—according to this view—was also an effort to defend the city of Medina. Regarding the last Jewish tribe, Hussain writes, “During the

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225 Hussain, 122.

226 Ibid.
sieve, another of the Jewish groups in Medina was accused of breaking their treaty with Muhammad and aiding the Meccans. As a result, the men of that tribe were ordered to be executed on the judgment of one of the Arab tribes in Medina. Again, the execution of this tribe is viewed as defensive.

In reality, it is impossible to determine the full extent to which each of these early battles was either offensive or defensive. The historicity of the Meccan period is somewhat incomplete. One view holds Muhammad as culpable for instigating tensions in Mecca. This view suggests that but for the fact that Muhammad instigated tensions with the Meccans in the first place, there would not have been enmity between the two sides and, thus, no need to emigrate to Medina and resort to raiding Meccan caravans. The opposing view suggests that the Muslims were persecuted to the extent that they were driven from their homes without their property. As a result, the caravan raids were a defensive measure aimed at regaining lost property. Thus far, the determination of culpability has relied on incomplete historical accounts. Were these historical accounts left intentionally vague in order to distort historical recordings? This question has yet to be addressed. Further reconciliation is doubtful, due to the fact that the primary actors involved are not present to fill the gaps in the historical record.

However, the inability to determine whether these early battles and the corresponding Qur’anic revelations were offensive or defense is irrelevant to the scope of this thesis for two reasons. The first reason is the fact that later revelations clearly prescribe offensively waging jihad against all unbelievers. As previously mentioned, the “sword verses” located in Sura 9 are prescriptive, not merely descriptive. They enjoin

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227 Ibid., 123
Muslims to wage jihad against *all unbelievers* in an *unrestricted manner*. There is no mention of defense. There is no mention of constraints. And there is no mention of distinguishing between Jew, Christian, or pagan.

Second, even though jihadists often use the “sword verses” to justify instances of terrorism, it is not necessary. They can justify instances of terrorism equally well by claiming that terrorist attacks are employed in defense of the Islamic *ummah* (community). In this case, the jihadists and moderate Muslims alike often point towards Western imperialism. They justify contempt towards the West for several reasons. First, there are thousands of United States troops stationed in present-day Saudi Arabia, which encompasses Mecca and Medina. Second, Western colonialism split the once powerful Ottoman Empire into several Middle Eastern nation-states. As a result, these small states became economically and governmentally inept. Third, Western culture—especially American culture—is negatively influencing the once puritanical Islamic culture. And last, but certainly not least, jihadists and moderate Muslims are enraged by the existence of Israel and its primary ally—the United States—amongst a sea of Middle Eastern states. Thus, in the eyes of every jihadist and frustrated Muslim, jihad is being waged as a defensive effort in an attempt to rid the Islamic *ummah* of *jahiliyyah* (ignorance or nonbelief), just as Muhammad once defended the *ummah* against the Meccan *jahiliyyah*. Muslims are not going to justify incidents of terrorism by suggesting that the Qur’an espouses offensive warfare. This is unnecessary. Instead, they will, by default, justify the commission of terrorist activities as *striving in defense* of the Islamic community. In sum, it even it was true that Islam espouses defensive violence, it is irrelevant.
Tolerance in Islam

Islamic apologists also promulgate the notion that Muslims are of the most tolerant believers in God. First of all, meaningful scholarship regarding religious tolerance, in general, should be concerned with the doctrine (or the philosophical system) of religion, and not the people who adhere to it. This thesis is concerned with the objective merits of religious doctrine and not subjective claims that are both irrelevant and subject to conflicting interpretation. Christians, Jews, and Muslims can all be equally tolerant or intolerant, benevolent or malevolent. However, a Muslim’s actions are not necessarily the best litmus for testing theological truths. Thus, the most accurate method by which tolerance can be measured is the theological doctrine of the Qur’an.

An argument can be made for religious tolerance on behalf of Qur’anic doctrine, but only half of it—namely, the Qur’anic passages revealed in Mecca. Notable apologists such as John Esposito selectively use Sura such as Sura 2:256 to justify tolerance in Islam. It states, “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.”228 Yusuf Ali’s commentary indicates that “compulsion is incompatible with religion: because religion depends upon faith and will, and these would be meaningless if induced by force.”229

However, Sura 9:29 states, “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden Which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, Nor acknowledge the Religion Of Truth, from among the People of the Book [Jews and

228 Qur’an 2:256.
229 Ali, 106.
Christians], Until they pay the Jizyah [tax] With willing submission, And feel themselves subdued.”230 The ability to exercise faith and free will are devoid in Sura 9:29—Muhammad’s final instructions on tolerance. *This is not tolerance.*

Islamic apologists continue to selectively quote or prioritize verses that suit their ideological bias, while ignoring or subordinating those that do not. This issue of tolerance is a case in point. One way in which this is manifested is through the use of “slippery” language—that is, wording that only the careful reader will recognize. For instance, Esposito writes, “Islam, like all world religions, neither supports nor requires illegitimate violence. The Quran does not advocate or condone terrorism [emphasis mine].”231 First of all, Esposito attempts to assuage tension by putting all world religions in one category. Thus, they are all on the “same page,” or on the “same playing field.” Making the claim that a religion does not advocate or support illegitimate violence is a nonstatement. After all, what apologists would concede support for illegitimate violence in association with the religion in defense? Even further, this statement is not presuppositionally neutral because it presupposes the nature of Islam as inherently peaceful. Therefore, violence employed in the name of Islam can only be illegitimate.

Blatant intellectual fallacies are also common amongst apologists, even amongst those as prominent as Esposito. For example, he writes, “The God of the Quran is consistently portrayed as a God of mercy and compassion as well as a just judge. Every chapter of the Quran begins with a reference to God’s mercy and compassion.”232 This is

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230 Qur’an 9:29.
231 Esposito, 119.
232 Ibid.
blatantly fallacious, but convenient for Esposito. This is because there is one Sura within the Qur’an that does not commence with the proverbial invocation regarding Allah’s mercy: the infamous Sura 9—the derivative of numerous sword verses that prescribe unrestrained violence upon all unbelievers.
Islamic apologists often use the argument that the Qur’an is misunderstood. They argue that scholars who deem Islam as violent have taken the Qur’an out of context. The same accusation is applied to the jihadists, for it is they who supposedly select the most violent of verses in order to justify supererogatory acts of jihad. But at the same time, are not these accusers guilty of the same trespass with which they accuse others? When attempting to justify Islam’s inherently peaceful nature, do they not rely exclusively on the peaceful verses first revealed in Mecca, while subordinating the violent verses later revealed in Medina?

Robert Spencer writes about a controversy pertaining to this very issue. In 2002, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill required all incoming freshmen to read a book addressing only the early Meccan revelations. The book is entitled Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations; as its title suggests, it only emphasizes themes such as tolerance and the prohibition of war. Regarding this, Spencer writes, “The ‘early revelations’ of the subtitle are the Meccan Suras examined above, which preach tolerance and mutual coexistence without a hint of the doctrines of jihad and dhimmitude that unfold in later Qur’anic revelations.”233 One must question the intentions of such a misleading assignment. Are not the recent events of 9/11 the reason for Islam’s recent elevated status in academia? Academic assignments such as these misrepresent the

233 Spencer, Onward, 145.
intentions of the very people (i.e., jihadists) “who have made Islam such a ‘hot topic’ for students.” Unfortunately, this example is not journalistic exclusivity or sensationalism. Rather, this is commonplace in academia as well as in the news media.

Islamic apologists often claim that the Qur’an is taken out of context. Despite this accusation, the reality is that the Qur’an contains very little context at all. “For a book that provokes so many charges that readers are taking it out of context, the Qur’an is remarkably decontextualized. Although it retells many biblical stories (usually in slightly altered form), in its overall form it lacks the chronological arrangement of the Old Testament historical books or even the rough temporal movement of the Gospels.” The Qur’an is arranged in order from the longest Suras to the shortest Suras with biblical stories haphazardly dispersed throughout the text. In addition, unlike the Bible, which is the word of God inspired through numerous individuals, the Qur’an is the word of God, dictated by Allah through the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad. Thus, Muhammad is the only speaker involved in dictating the words of Allah. “Consequently, reading the Qur’an is often like walking in on a conversation between two people with whom one is only slightly acquainted. Frequently they make references to people and events without bothering to explain what’s going on. In other words, the context is often not supplied.” Therefore, exegetical texts such as Muhammad’s biography, Bukhari’s Hadith, and Qur’anic commentary gain their expediency by filling in the contextual gaps.

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234 Ibid.
235 Ibid., 127.
236 Ibid.
The inherent limitation, however, of these exegetical texts is the notion that they are not the eternal words of God (as is the claim of Qur’anic injunctions).

The lack of context manifests itself not only in the form of the Qur’an, but also in the limited physical settings in which it was revealed. Of major concern is the fact that the Qur’an never experienced a theological paradigm (during the twenty-two-year period of revelation) conducive for coexistence and equality. Rather, it was exposed to conditions of extreme persecution in Mecca and unchallenged superiority in Medina. On this, Islamic scholar Farad Esack notes, “it is a problem for us Muslims that we have only two theological paradigms and precedents on which to base our lives, and that limitation is in part responsible for the mess that we are in. The one is the paradigm of a community of oppressed people in Mecca, and the other is of a Muslim community that is in control in Medina. What we don’t have is a model for coexisting with other people in equality.”

Thus, when confronted with this lack of context, one must question which paradigm (Meccan or Medinan) is more representative of the proverbial catchphrase “true Islam”? Even further, according to which interpretation—contextualist or texutalist—should Muslims subscribe? The answer is true Islam was revealed in Medina as evidenced by the progressive nature of Islam and the doctrine of abrogation. The most fitting interpretation in light of the progressive nature of Islam, and also the interpretation advocated by this thesis, is a contextualist interpretation. A textualist interpretation is limited by a fixed and universal conception of the Qur’an, which stands in direct contrast with its progressive nature, as evidenced by the drastic evolution in Qur’anic revelations.

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237 Esack, 16.
in only a twenty-two-year period. Conversely, a contextualist interpretation recognizes the significance of the context in which the Qur’an was revealed. In addition, contextualists recognize a high degree of freedom when determining the applicability of Qur’anic statutes to modern realities. The problem with this, though, is the fact that it is impossible to glean from the Medinan period a peaceful interpretation of the Qur’an. In other words, a contextualist interpretation of Medinan verses indicates the inherently violent nature of the Qur’an, as these verses represent the final word on the use or disuse of force.

This thesis demonstrates four instances of progression in Islam: personal progression, historical progression, the corresponding progression in Qur’anic revelation, and the doctrine of abrogation. Pious Muslims experience a personal progression in their spiritual lives from the uncertainties of their salvation (fitrah, the natural state without moral deficit) to the participation in supererogatory acts such as jihad, which guarantee a favorable eschatological outcome. Muhammad’s ministry evolved from a weak, persecuted group of religious believers emphasizing a prohibition on violence to a dominant force in Medina with a proclivity towards unrestrained and open-ended prescriptions of violence. The Qur’anic revelations corresponding with this historical paradigm evolved, as the early Meccan Suras emphasized tolerance while the later Medinan Suras emphasized intolerance. These three instances of progression bolster the claim for the fourth: the doctrine of abrogation—the utter epitome of progressive Islam. It is through this doctrine (grounded in the Qur’an) that earlier verses emphasizing peace were abrogated by later verses emphasizing violence. This doctrine recognizes the need for revelation to adapt to changing circumstances. In order for an expanding Muslim
empire in Medina to survive, the abrogation of earlier Meccan revelations was necessary, as injunctions associated with the prohibition of violence (early Meccan Suras) would not enable the simultaneous expansion and protection guaranteed by the injunctions associated with violence (late Medinan Suras).

Taking into consideration the progressive nature of Islam and the doctrine of abrogation, the logical conclusion is that Islam is inherently violent. This is because the Medinan Suras abrogated the Meccan Suras, which means that the last word on jihad in the Qur’an is Sura 9:5 and 9:29. This holds true for both textualist and contextualist interpretations, as they both must adhere to the doctrine of abrogation and progressive revelation. Contextualists must accept that the context from which Muhammad’s final revelations were recited was one enveloped in war and expansion. The justification for violence in Islam is, therefore, present within the text of the Qur’an. Accordingly, Osama bin Laden is not taking the Qur’an out of context when he devised and executed his plans for 9/11. From his perspective, Islam was under attack and facing severe persecution in the same way that Muhammad experienced persecution in Mecca. Just as Muhammad permitted (and later commanded) defensive jihad, Osama bin Laden also commanded jihad in defense against Western cultural imperialism.

The problem associated with bin Laden’s jihad is the discrepancy between Islam’s political and economic status today and in the seventh century. Unlike the powerful Muslim empire in the seventh century, the Middle East today is embattled by a struggle for the soul of Islam. Not only are tensions between and among Muslim nation-states extremely high, but the majority of Middle Eastern nation-states are socially, politically, economically, and militarily inept. Thus, fighting—as commanded in Sura 9:29—is
utterly futile for modern Muslims. What, then, is the answer if fighting (as commanded by the Qur’an) is futile in the modern context?

Contextualists, in an attempt to answer this, might suggest a reinterpretation of the Qur’an. They recognize that if the Qur’an espoused diametrically opposing ethico-legal injunctions (from peace to violence) in a period of only twenty-two years, how much more should these injunctions evolve over the next 1,400 years? Despite its logic, this conclusion presents a few ostensible challenges. The first of such is the fact that Muhammad no longer attains the capacity to usher in new revelations for an evolving Muslim society. In other words, Muhammad is no longer present in the flesh to introduce revelations suitable for the evolving realities of the modern world. According to Qur’anic doctrine, this should not be a problem because Allah’s words are eternal and, therefore, applicable to all generations. But as previously mentioned, is the adherence to the sword verses in Sura 9 a viable option in light of the current state of the Middle East?

The contextualists might suggest that the answer, therefore, is not a new Qur’an, but a new interpretation of the Qur’an. Whereas revelation is a godly endeavor, interpretation is a human endeavor. Pakistani-born professor Ali Minai writes, “All Muslims believe that the words of the Qur’an are eternal, but that is no excuse to freeze the process of their interpretation. If the words are to provide guidance in an ever-changing world, they must speak in ever-changing ways.” According to this view, the renowned closed doors of rational interpretation (ijtihad) must be reopened. According to Abdullah Saeeb, “There is nothing sacred about the personal interpretation given to a verse even by a Companion of the Prophet, or by a Successor or by early imams. Their

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understandings, like ours, are limited by context and culture and may or may not be relevant outside their culture, their context.”  

This is precisely the case for the applicability of jihad in modern circumstances. Shortly after the death of Muhammad (632), the Muslim empire expanded tremendously by employing measures of offensive jihad. Islamic expansion did not occur at this tremendous rate simply because the religion was especially alluring. In fact, the Islamic doctrine shares many commonalities with the Jewish and Christian doctrine, as it claims to be the perfect product of the two (evidence of progression). Islamic expansion during this time came as a result of military dominance. When conquering new lands, subjected people groups had three choices: convert to Islam, live as a second-class citizen, or be slaughtered. Consequently, the doctrine of jihad in the Qur’an remained unchallenged. This, however, is not the case for Muslims today. Muslims are no longer living in the “Golden Age of Islam.” As a result, feelings of frustration and despair leave only one viable option: terrorism. On this, Ali Minai argues,

a rather regressive, static, and parochial version of Islam has become prevalent among the intelligentsia of the Muslim world. While this does not, in itself, generate militancy, it does provide sanction to exclusivist—and sometimes even bigoted—attitudes adopted by a small militant minority. In combination with the socioeconomic failure of almost all Muslim nations, this vision of Islam (which is partly responsible for the failure) has created a pervasive culture of grievance in the Muslim world. It is a culture that sees all problems afflicting Muslims as the result of a vast conspiracy—variously orchestrated by the “usual suspects”: Jews, Christians, Hindus, ethnic Chinese, even Muslims of other sects.

The best hope for Islamic legitimacy is in a revival movement centered on religious tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and human rights. This movement, however,

239 Saeed, 4.

240 Minai, 9.
cannot be based upon the violent verses of the Qur’an as revealed by Muhammad in Medina. Therefore, Muslims must somehow elude or subordinate these vital passages. But is this heresy? Given the theme of progression demonstrated throughout this thesis, can modern Muslims justify the practice of ignoring Muhammad’s most crucial marching orders? Is this a violation of Allah’s call to unity?

Some Muslims claim that this difficulty can be reconciled by the practice of peaceful proselytizing. However, seeing as the foremost goal of Islam (which literally means “submission”) is to subject the entire world to Shari’a law and Allah’s guidance, can a devout Muslim who witnesses to a Christian (who rejects his invitation to Islam) really not become violent? As previously mentioned, this rejection of Allah (or association of other gods with Allah—in this case the triune Christian God) is the worst possible sin one could commit. In fact, it is an unforgivable sin in the eyes of Allah. With this in mind, how can a devout Muslim peacefully part ways with a Christian who rejects Allah? Is it realistic for a Muslim to believe that peaceful proselytizing will accomplish the worldwide submission demanded by Allah?

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates the inherently violent nature of Islam. The Qur’an progressed dramatically during its twenty-two-year period of revelation from an emphasis on the prohibition of violence to the commandment of violence. Unfortunately, the period of Qur’anic revelation ended with Muhammad’s death in 632, whereby Muhammad’s final marching orders were to wage jihad against all unbelievers until all the inhabitants of the world are in submission to Islam. Muhammad left no instructions regarding the codification and subsequent interpretation of the Qur’an. As a result, the Qur’an has remained a highly static document. It is unfortunate that a man who initially
taught peace and tolerance failed to ensure that this would be his legacy. Instead of being perceived as a peacemaker, Muhammad is perceived as a brutal warrior, by most historical accounts.

Whereas Jesus Christ proclaimed, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” Muhammad proclaimed that those who participate in armed jihad rank highest in the sight of Allah. Whereas Jesus Christ’s final marching orders were, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded,”241 Muhammad’s final marching orders were, “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden Which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, Nor acknowledge the Religion Of Truth, from among the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], Until they pay the Jizyah [tax] With willing submission, And feel themselves subdued.”242 Finally, “Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, accompanied by his 12 disciples. He was welcomed and greeted by people waving palm fronds—a traditional sign of peace,”243 whereas “Muhammad rode into Mecca on a warhorse, surrounded by 400 mounted men and 10,000 foot soldiers. Those who greeted him were absorbed into his movement; those who resisted him were vanquished, killed, or enslaved.”244

242 Qur’an 9:29.
243 Lambert, 80.
244 Ibid., 79.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

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