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SUBJECTIVISM AND INTERPRETIVE FLEXIBILITY OF JIHAD IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

This study examines the concept of jihad in Islamic thought as a framework for war and violence, arguing that it is inherently shaped by interpretive flexibility and ethical ambiguity. While rooted in Qur'anic texts, jihad has developed dynamically across historical, political, and theological contexts – shifting between spiritual struggle and militaristic duty and oscillating between offensive expansion and defensive preservation. The analysis explores Qur'anic passages, tafsir traditions, jurisprudential debates, and key historical turning points, demonstrating how changing circumstances have continually reshaped the meaning and application of jihad. The coexistence of spiritual and physical dimensions, coupled with divergent interpretations among Islamic legal schools, highlights its pragmatic adaptability but also its susceptibility to inconsistency and misuse. Ultimately, the paper concludes that jihad functions less as a coherent and universal ethical framework and more as a versatile instrument, continuously redefined to meet the evolving needs of Muslim communities. This study further argues that the elasticity of jihad is produced not only by later political appropriation but by the layered structure of the sources themselves: polyvalent Qur'anic rhetoric, competing exegetical trajectories in tafsir, and legal reasoning that must translate broad imperatives into actionable norms. Because the ethical status of violence is repeatedly negotiated through context (power/weakness, threat/persecution, territorial expansion, colonial pressure), the same textual repertoire can yield incompatible conclusions while remaining internally "legitimate" within established interpretive methods. The article therefore treats jihad as an evolving discourse in which normativity is mediated by authority, genre, and historical circumstance, rather than as a stable doctrine with fixed criteria. This helps explain both its enduring relevance within Muslim moral reasoning and its recurring vulnerability to instrumentalization when juridical argument, communal fear, or state interests dominate ethical deliberation.

Key words: *jihad, Islamic ethics, Qur'an, tafsir, fiqh, interpretive authority, war and violence, moral ambiguity, just war reasoning, subjectivism.*

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СУБ'ЄКТИВІЗМ ТА ІНТЕРПРЕТАЦІЙНА ГНУЧКІСТЬ ДЖИХАДУ З ПОГЛЯДУ ІСЛАМУ

Це дослідження розглядає концепцію джихаду в ісламській думці як основу для війни та насильства, стверджуючи, що вона за своєю суттю формується інтерпретаційною гнучкістю та етичною неоднозначністю. Хоча джихад ґрунтується на коранічних текстах, він динамічно розвивався в історичному, політичному та богословському контекстах – переходячи між духовною боротьбою та мілітаристським обов'язком і коливаючись між наступальною експансією та оборонним збереженням. Аналіз досліджує уривки Корану, традиції тафсіру, юридичні дебати та ключові історичні поворотні моменти, демонструючи, як зміна обставин постійно змінювала значення та застосування джихаду. Співіснування духовного та фізичного вимірів у поєднанні з різними інтерпретаціями серед ісламських правових шкіл підкреслює його прагматичну адаптивність, але також його схильність до непослідовності та неправильного використання. Зрештою, у статті робиться висновок, що джихад функціонує не стільки як узгоджена та універсальна етична основа, скільки як універсальний інструмент, який постійно переосмислюється для задоволення потреб мусульманських громад, що змінюються. У цьому дослідженні також стверджується, що еластичність джихаду зумовлена не лише пізнішим політичним привласненням, а й багатошаровою структурою самих джерел: полівалентною коранічною риторикою, конкуруючими екзегетичними траєкторіями в тафсірі та юридичними міркуваннями, які повинні перетворювати широкі імперативи на дієві норми. Оскільки етичний статус насильства неодноразово обговорюється через контекст (сила/слабкість, загроза/переслідування, територіальна експансія, колоніальний тиск), той самий текстовий репертуар може призвести до несумісних висновків, залишаючись внутрішньо «легітимним» у межах усталених методів інтерпретації. Тому стаття розглядає джихад як дискурс, що розвивається, в якому нормативність опосередковується авторитетом, жанром та історичними обставинами, а не як стабільну доктрину з фіксова-

ними критеріями. Це допомагає пояснити як його незмінну актуальність у мусульманських моральних міркуваннях, так і його постійну вразливість до інструменталізації, коли юридичні аргументи, громадський страх або державні інтереси домінують в етичних обговореннях.

Ключові слова: джихад, ісламська етика, Коран, тафсір, фікх, інтерпретаційний авторитет, війна та насильство, моральна неоднозначність, міркування про справедливу війну, суб'єктивізм.

Introduction. Just war theory presents complicated issues for scholars. An enormous amount of material has been written regarding this theory over the course of the last 2000 years, yet its disputed issues have still not been resolved. Contemporary proponents of the just war theory struggle with issues discussed and proposed by Augustine. One of the most prevalent concerns about how Christian's approach" just war theory lies in the problem of subjectivity. This is an overarching issue for every principle that constitutes the foundation of the theory. In present research, we argued that Islamic ideas of just war theory are similarly affected by interpretive flexibility, which can lead to inconsistencies and potential misuse. We therefore aim to focus our discussion on Islam and its dealings with violence and war specifically to avoid artificial comparisons or attempts to align two separate paradigms. In our approach, we do not use a comparative methodology between the Christian and Islamic perspectives on Just War. Rather, we examine how the concept of Just War is established in Islamic literature and how it has developed within Islamic paradigms of thought in order to determine whether it has also been affected by subjectivity and interpretative flexibility. Rather than directly comparing Islamic and Christian traditions, this study focuses solely on Islamic sources within their own theological and jurisprudential context.

Our research employs an ethical-critical and historical-hermeneutical methodology to analyze the development and application of jihad within Islamic thought. It analyzes Qur'anic passages, classical tafsir, jurisprudential traditions, and major historical turning points to understand how the concept of jihad has evolved and been shaped by circumstantial and contextual needs and challenges, theological priorities, and shifts in interpretation. The study specifically focuses on the interpretive flexibility and ethical ambiguities that have emerged as a result of its development. It also raises concerns about whether jihad can function as a consistent normative framework in regard to issues of violence and war.

In the following sections, we will explore these themes by analyzing Quranic texts considering the foundations of jihad in Islam, along with its physical and spiritual dimensions and jurisprudential variations throughout Islamic history.

Qur'anic Perspectives on War and Violence. It is evident that war is prevalent in Quranic texts. The Qur'an consistently reminds believers of their duty to participate in war for the sake of God and the rewards that will follow as a result. According to G. Tamer, the Qur'an contains three types of verses related to war and violence: "verses that speak of war caused by God as a punishment, verses that speak of war as a tool to convert others to Islam, and verses that speak of war as a test to demonstrate one's belief and reliance on God" (Tamer, 2021). Surah Al-Anfal that had been written shortly after the Battle of Badr, it addresses variety of different issues, such as the distribution of spoils, assistance of Angels, and believers' participation in the battles and wars (Nasr et al., 2015: 482). In terms of waging war, it seems to imply advocation for continuous fighting until Islam achieves universal dominion. Verse 12 states: *"…make those who believe stand firm. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Then strike the necks and strike their fingertips."* (Surah Al-Anfal, verse 12). Additionally, the overall tone of the Surah conveys the idea that Muslim battles transcend earthly conflicts as "Allah is the best of schemers (Surah Al-Anfal, verse 30) and the battles are merely His instruments. According to multiple Islamic traditions, the purpose of the fight is total destruction of the opposition in that fighting must continue until submission to Allah is established. As Tafsir al-Jalalayn explains, fighting must continue until "only He is worshiped" (Tafsir al-Jalalayn, n.d.: 385). This Surah unequivocally paves the way for embracing war and violence as a means of dealing with unbelievers and destroying them or subduing to the will of Allah.

Being cognizant of the settings and context of Surah Al-Anfal is vital to understanding its ideas and teachings. The central theme of Surah Al-Anfal distinctly reflects the aftermath of the Muslim victory at Badr. It heavily emphasizes divine guidance and intervention, projecting a sense of triumph over the disbelievers. Verses 38–39 present the possibility of conditional forgiveness if the unfaithful repent and submit to Allah. The Surah states: *"say to those who have disbelieved, if they cease their past will be forgiven"* (Surah Al-Anfal, verse 38). However, those who return to it or persist in disbelief and stand in opposition to Him might receive imminent punishment. It is stipulated that *"if they return (to it), then the examples of those (punished) before them have already preceded and fight them until there is no fitnah*

(persecution) and the religion, all of it, is for Allah." (Surah Al-Anfal, verse 39). As previously mentioned, the Surah depicts the specific historical moment of the Battle of Badr and implies divine intervention and God's triumph over the evil forces providing a framework for addressing challenges faced by the early Muslim community. It generally encapsulates the idea of preserving the young Muslim community through the means of war, and since victory is warranted, it extends conditional forgiveness to the defeated if they choose to submit to Allah. Although it appears simple within its immediate context, complexities arise when its interpretation is viewed through the lens of time and alternate perspectives.

The concept of dealing firmly with unbelievers is prevalent throughout the Qur'an. In Surah Al-Qamar, a narrative is recounted regarding the miracle of the splitting of the moon performed by the Prophet Muhammad as a testament to Allah's greatness. This event emphasizes Allah's divine power and rebukes the unbelievers, reminding them of the imminent Day of judgment.

This Surah serves as a reminder of past generations who lived in apostasy from Allah and were severely punished for their disbelief. It also is a warning for the contemporary generation to take heed and deviate from their wicked ways. The language used is very harsh, such as dragging the guilty *"into the fire upon their faces"* (Surah Al-Qamar, verse 48) or sending the storm of stones on unbelievers and into hell (Surah Al-Qamar, verse 48). The continuity from transgression and disbelief to severe punishment through the means of violence, warfare, and other divine interventions, is a recurring theme in the Qur'an and a vast variety of different interpretations have been introduced over the centuries.

However, the basis for alternative interpretations is very present in other parts of this Muslim Holy Book. In particular, when one views the text without referring to commentaries or interpretations, a change of tone is noticeable in Surah Al-Baqarah. Contrasting our discussion above, there is also a directive to continuous fighting against unbelievers which is alluded here: *"kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and fitnah (persecution) is worse than killing."* (Surah Al-Baqarah, verses 190-193). The Surah introduces stipulations which were not as clear in other texts but allow room for other possibilities. For example, one verse states: *"Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress"* (Surah Al-Baqarah, verses 190-193). While the phrase "do not transgress" is not clearly defined, it could be an attempt to impose a limitation on the use of violence in a certain context. Various interpretations

have been offered to deal with this question. Louay M. Safi, for instance, claims that the verse imposes a requirement that Muslims may fight only those who initiate war against Islam, stating that the Muslim community must never assume the role of the aggressor (Safi, 2003: 9). Additionally, Muhammad Abduh claims that "fighting has been made obligatory in Islam only for the sake of defending the truth and its followers." (Asad, 1980). The clauses *"if they cease, then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful,'* and *'if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors"* (Asad, 1980) have been interpreted in quite contradictory ways by different Islamic philosophers. For example, the 20th-century Islamic thinker Ashiq Bulandshahri and the 14th-century scholar Ibn Kathir both interpreted these verses as a requirement to wage war until infidelity is nonexistent in the world (Bulandshahri, 2005: 205). In addition, a great deal of the Muslim community considers it a necessity to defend the faith against oppression and under the oppression unbelief is assumed. In contrast, other contemporary thinkers like Syed Abul 'Ala Maudoodi, argues in his commentary that: "it does not mean that Islam incites the believers to go to war to force unbelievers at the point of sword to give up disbelief and polytheism and adopt the Way of Allah instead… As a matter of fact, Islam allows freedom of belief to all non-Muslims" (Maudoodi, 2016: 205). Similarly, Irene Oh commenting on Surah Al-Baqarah 2:256, states that: "there is no compulsion in religion" (Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 256). This indicates a shift toward religious tolerance within Islamic thought. In her view, the acceptance of "no compulsion" sets Islam apart from other religions that attempt to evangelize to others rather than tolerating beliefs in different faith traditions" (Oh, 2007: 75). However, Irene Oh recognizes that historically, the Muslim community often deviated drastically from the ideals of religious tolerance (Oh, 2007: 75). Accounting for the variety of opposing interpretations, a noticeable shift in tone occurs in Surah Al-Baqarah, where direct commands evolve into more flexible and conditional guidelines concerning waging military actions against unbelievers. Finally, Surah Al-Baqarah introduces various options regarding the use of violence. Alongside directions for prolonged fighting, other alternatives are possible such as those of peace, the call to "not transgress," and Allah's mercy. These stipulations not only widen the scope of the Islamic framework but also create space for diverse interpretations, insinuating the development of a more nuanced approach to violence and war.

Jihad: Foundations of Just War in Islam. Naturally, these and many other texts were not interpreted by everyone in the same way. This is the reason Islamic

views are so diverse and their understanding on when war and violence are justifiable is continually evolving. Traditionally, it has not been an easy task for the scholars to deduce precise principles regarding war from the Quran. The writings are often interpreted to have multiple meanings related to the questions of war. This is why, historically, different traditions emerged, each attempting to find support in the Qur'an to deal with the interpretive flexibility regarding the principles and laws of war represented in the Qur'an (Tamer, 2021). This indicates that Islamic discussions on war and violence did not solely originate from the basis of Holy Writings but rather developed over time and resulted from issues within the texts.

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, no other words have undergone as much misuse and distortion as the word "jihad" (Nasr, 2002: 267). This term has often been misunderstood and vilified by many people, especially in the western scholarship and has prescribed a meaning of holy war. As argued by many Muslim scholars, this is completely beside the point. Generally, this term is considered as a religious duty of Muslim people. This word appears around 41 times in the Quran, depending on transliteration, and conveys the idea of a struggle, commonly used in the idiomatic expression *"al-jihad fi sabil Allah"* meaning *"striving in the way of Allah."* (Knapp, 2003: 84–93). Historically, the meaning of the term "jihad" has fluctuated significantly, with a wide range of often contradictory opinions regarding its original and precise meaning. Even if we look at the word jihad from its inception, we will attest a fast-paced shift and its adaptation to the political, social, and religious needs of the community. In Islam's early phase, while Mohammad resided in Mecca with limited political power, jihad was understood mainly as a struggle against pagan religions. As Yusuf Ali commented on the Qur'an, jihad is required as fighting for both the cause of God and as a form of self-sacrifice (Ali, 1937, note 1270). In Medina, once a political base had been established, the concept of jihad underwent a shift. It came to encompass the defensive struggle against oppressive forces. Texts from this period, such as the verse "there is no hostility except against those who commit oppression," emphasize resistance to injustice – especially when that oppression sought to interfere with the worship of Allah. As the Muslim community grew, the nature and perception of jihad continued to develop (Noor, 1985). It eventually expanded beyond a defensive paradigm and embraced the offensive nature that aimed to install the Islamic rule and fight polytheists and pagans, whose beliefs directly contradicted the message of Allah.

In the post-prophetic period, jihad evolved to include dealing with apostasy and rebellion. Following the formation of the Islamic state and the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the role of the first Caliph was assumed by Abu Bakr. Since some of the tribes considered their allegiance to Islamic faith, solely based on personal loyalty to Mohammad but with his passing, they considered being free from the bound and from being a part of the Muslim community. Consequently, some had begun to renounce Islam while others stopped paying their obligatory alms tax. M. Noor explains these actions as being considered equal to treason, since they relinquish Islam but remain in the realm of Islam dominion and are considered traitors (Noor, 1985). All of this resulted in Abu Bakr's decision to declare a war against this rebellion to maintain the unity of state. This military endeavor was known as the war of apostasy (Donner, 1981). This additionally demonstrates how the concept of jihad broadened to include the option of fighting against apostasy and suppressing rebellion.

Therefore, the shift is evident where adapting to changing social, religious, and political contexts of the community require moving from mainly spiritual connotations to defensive and eventually offensive applications. In the post-Prophetic era, the scope of the application of jihad was expanded even further allowing the ruling Imam to fight apostasy and submit rebellion to maintain the wholeness of the newly established Muslim State. The evolution of jihad reflects its responsiveness and adaptability to the historical and sociological shifts within Muslim communities. While this shift was crucial for addressing the immediate needs of the early Muslim community, it ended up facilitating the birth of diverse and multifaceted concepts of jihad, the interpretation of which depended on the specific needs of a specific community or a particular ruler. Consequently, the internal ambiguity within the Qur'anic texts on jihad continued to be amplified, allowing the concept to be reinterpreted whenever it suited the needs of a particular community, group, or ruler. Inevitably, this led to conflicting applications of the jihad across different eras and circumstances.

Spiritual and Physical Dimensions of Jihad. The concept of jihad is often misunderstood and equated with the concept of holy war. This overlooks the multifaceted nature of jihad. Previously, we've discussed the approximate development of jihad, and we will now delve into its dimensions. Historically, this concept is embodied in both physical and spiritual realms and is primarily rooted in primary sources such as the Qu'ran and the Hadith. Eventually, both concepts were developed further by Islamic philosophers and scholars. Jihad in the physical realm is often invoked in situations where there is a need to fight external

enemies and defend Islam, its people, or its territories. In addition to that, any other physical endeavor such as sharing resources, protecting and defending faith, or engaging in warfare allowed by Islamic law in order to achieve the right cause of Allah, falls into the category of this dimension of jihad. This jihad often is called "lesser jihad" (Mirbagheri, 2012: 128). There are many verses in the Qur'an which require the invocation of physical jihad. The phrase *"fight for the cause of Allah"indicates that the use of force is compulsory for faith and the community, as both are irrevocably connected within the Islamic paradigm.* Protecting the Muslim community is rather a religious responsibility. In Surah An-Nisa, similar requirements are laid out to fight for those "oppressed among men, women, and children" (Surah An-Nisa, verse 75) reinforcing the duty to protect the community. The Quran presents the lesser jihad as multi-dimensional striving that goes beyond mere warfare. In Surah Al-Anfal (Surah Al-Anfal, verse 72), this idea is explicitly emphasized and encompasses not only actual physical fighting and war, but also other means of physical jihad such as striving with wealth" and providing "shelter" with the obligation of helping those who seek help "against persecution in faith".

The concept of greater jihad has been primarily shaped by and developed through Hadith literature and later writings of Islamic scholars rather than those originated and expressed in the Quran. The spiritual dimension of jihad encompasses all internal and non-violent struggles aimed at overcoming personal shortcomings, resisting sinful desires, and reaching for moral perfection in accordance with the teachings of Islam. This jihad is often called "greater jihad" (Marranci, 2020: 19). It is believed that the greater jihad must prepare the soul before any engagement in war or violence. The phrase, which historically was attributed to the Prophet Mohammad, says: *"we have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad." It is* widely quoted in Islamic literature to uplift the preeminence of internal struggle over external fighting. Although its origin remains debated due to its absence from the most reliable Hadith collections, it has been embraced by Islamic thinkers as one that aligns with Qur'anic themes of inner struggle, self-purification, and striving in the path of Allah (Mirbagheri, 2012: 128). Interestingly enough, the concept of "greater jihad" appeared much later in the 9th century, as many scholars argue, in the teachings of Islamic mystics, such as Sufi. Sufi texts describe the dangers posed by the lower self and explain how one can overcome it through rigorous self-abnegation through fasting, sleep deprivation, exposure to elements, engagement in prayer, and the chanting of Allah's name (Neale, 2016: 59). Key

concepts developed within Sufi philosophy include *"mujahada"* which means "struggle". Sufi practice is depicted in Al-Sulami's treatise as persevering in mujahaba so that "the dispositions of the lower self and nature diminish." (Sulami, 1999: 16, 45–46, 98). Another term is *"Riyada" which means "exercise" and is often used to describe the disciplined practices undertaken to refine the believer's character and draw them closer to Allah.* However, it is hard to argue that Sufi abstained completely from military involvement as they declared martial jihad to be a communal duty (Ibn 'Uthman, 1943: 197–200), Muslims were thereby required to go forth and engage in battle against unbelievers.

This is why some of the scholars attribute the beginning of the "greater jihad" to as late as the XI century. D. Cook argues: "for the true beginnings of the 'greater jihad' we must go to the great theologian and Sufi al-Ghazali." (Cook, 2015: 52). He bridged the gap between Sufi philosophy and the mainstream of Islamic thought. He insisted that moral improvement and self-purifications are necessary prerequisites for all forms of worship to Allah, including physical jihad. He presents the passions and desires as armies trying to penetrate the soul and deviate it from following the right path. As D. Cook indicates, this is the sophisticated interpretation of Surah Al-Nisa verse 95, where the idea of physical battle is originally inferred, to reinterpret it as a focus on the inner struggle against the passions and desires of the soul (Cook, 2015: 52). However, himself and other Sufi successors failed to produce the "greater jihad" in a pure sense and distance themselves from the warfare and violence completely. Different stipulations were made such as one by Ibn al-Arabi, using a well-known tradition, saying "I was ordered to fight people until they bear witness that there is only one God…" (Bashar, 1993). This left the door open to different interpretations and possibilities of using violence. Also, W. Chittick argues the types of Al-Arabi's mujahidin are drawn from Quranic jihad passages (Chittick, 1990), which in turn shows that both jihad conceptions had not been completely divorced in Islamic philosophy even three centuries after its inception and exposed to a variety of interpretations. For instance, G. Marranci discusses an example of the "jihad of the heart." It is a multi-layered representation of the soul's struggle against the temptations of the world to achieve spiritual purity. He indicates the different levels of the jihad, when consequently, preaching of Islam takes place, which is called "the jihad of the tongue." Alongside the "jihad of the hand," which represents the power of Islam depicted through good deeds, the jihad of the sword may be initiated as a last

resort (Marranci, 2020: 23). This is a good example of the dynamic nature of the jihad and its revolutions through different communities and Islamic philosophical systems. This is why, naturally, these views have been undergoing a great deal of critique for their inconsistency, specifically for failing to establish a clear-cut difference between the 'lesser' and 'greater' jihad leaving it open to a variety of interpretations.

In the light of its historical and philosophical development, the distinction between the "greater jihad" and "lesser jihad" has been significantly debated. A. Morabia argues that false differentiation exists between these two levels of jihad and notes it as being constructed to make the concept of jihad more acceptable to different communities. In addition to that, he argues that, historically, we see little or no proof at all for the existence of the "greater jihad," so it remains a purely theoretical concept (Cook, 2015: 55). Since figures such as al-Ghazali interpreted the "greater jihad" as an inner struggle and emphasized moral purifications as a requirement for engaging in physical jihad, he was not able to separate these efforts from the contextual realities where warfare occurred. Similar issues reappeared in the discussions of consecutive thinkers and philosophers, where both dimensions overlapped and the application of concepts remained open to interpretations. How far from the truth is Morabia's critique since inconsistencies remain and the application of the specific concept of jihad heavily depends on the context and on the specific views of the individual or the community that is at play? N. Darwish has also critiqued the idea of "greater jihad" in a much harsher manner and dooms it as non-existent. In his view, the only meaning for jihad that exists in the Arab world is the holy war against infidels. He states: "Ask anyone on the Arab street what 'jihad for the sake of Allah's cause' means, and they will say it means dying as a shahid [martyr] for the sake of spreading Islam. In my thirty years living in the Middle East, I have never heard of any discussion about inner struggle. Such claims are merely a PR ploy for Western consumption" (Darwish, 2006: 201). These might be debatable critiques, but they effectively demonstrate the absence of solid perception of jihad even within the Muslim community.

The mere coexistence of both concepts of jihad illustrates the rich discussion and variations within the Islamic thought. The distinction between the two is rather unclear. The interplay between them remains a key issue, and in the final analysis, jihad is positioned as a concept without a defined purpose. What is it? Is it a personal spiritual struggle at all times or the personal duty to engage in war? Maybe it is a communal spiritual struggle or a communal duty to fight? The concept creates more questions than answers. It is difficult to formulate any consistent and cohesive ethical framework emerging from these developments.

Contextual and Jurisprudential Flexibility in Jihad. As Islam spread and developed, its understanding and perception of jihad evolved. It has been shaped by different historical circumstances and newly emerging and competing frameworks of Islamic jurisprudence. Its adaptability has allowed Islam to address a wide range of arising issues Muslim societies faced across different times, but such flexibility also inevitably led to contradictions and inconsistencies in its application. While the relevance of the jihad has been assured due to the course of adapting to its changes and challenges, its understanding and perception have never been universal or monolithic and have always been debatable in terms of its scope and meaning. B. Shmuel effectively emphasizes the problem, when he elaborates, explaining, "much of the debate between radicals and non-radicals centers not on the religious principles themselves but on their implications for actual behavior, as determined by the detailed legal interpretation of those principles" (Bar, 2008). This pattern is very problematic because it shifts the focus of the debate from written principles to its application. If, as we have seen, the principles are subject to interpretive flexibility, could the debate over them ever be objective and result in arriving at a universal meaning? The answer is likely no, as it vividly resembles the postmodern takes on the death of the author, where everyone's meaning is possible.

Historical Context: Offensive and Defensive Jihad. Interpretive flexibility is easily detected in the different stages and developments of the concept of jihad. Its interpretation has often depended on the current circumstances of Muslim communities and their strengths or vulnerabilities. For instance, when Muslim communities were strong and powerful, the expansion of militaristic campaigns were held on a regular basis. The state had been annually embarking on the raids against other territories and if enough people joined voluntarily, no one else was forced to fight. However, in the case of defensive necessity, everyone who was available in the communities had an obligation to volunteer (Bonner, 2006). In this vein, D. Cook explains the framework established by the readings of Surah At-Tawbah as being of quite an aggressive nature. The Surah exhorts to fight until those who do not believe "profess the true religion" (Surah At-Tawbah, verse 29). In addition, D. Cook is right when emphasizing that it is "a very martial" nature (Cook, 2015: 25) due to the explicit exhortations which are expressed in the Surah to fight until people of the Book, which are Christians and Jews, submit and willingly pay alms and taxes. These calls

for fighting were taken literally and shortly after the Prophet died, Muslims engaged in the expansionists campaigns and successfully conquered new territories. The territories that were conquered, constitute today's Syria and Iraq. Soon after the conquering of Egypt, followed the Iranian plateau and the Arabian Peninsula, which had fallen under the rule of the Islamic state (Noth, 1966). If we consider later events, when other representatives of Islam came to power, we find a similar use and justification of the lesser jihad in the expansion and conquest of new territories. The Selijuks' Empire is not in direct continuity with the Islamic state, but it represents one of the most significant powers within the fragmented Islamic world and operates under the broad framework and principles of Islamic governance. Its nominal governor Zengi, who was described as a ruthless and cruel ruler and who eventually regained the city of Edessa, was captured by Crusaders after the first Crusade in 1098. It is important to note "the fall of Edessa represented a pivotal turning point in Muslim fortunes, as it marked the first Crusader state to be reclaimed for Islam" (Hillenbrand, 1999: 169). Prior to this, most of Islamic world had experienced significant setbacks during the early Crusades. Many see this event as a sign of the recovery of jihad. It is hard to establish whether the word jihad was applied to those events, but as many commentators indicate, the language of jihad was certainly present (Hillenbrand, 1999: 169). For example, the depiction of Zengi and his achievements were written in the language of Jihad. The inscription on Aleppo Zengi writes "conqueror of the infidels and polytheists, champion of the Holy War, supporter of the armies, and guardian of Muslim territories" (Combe et al., 1937: 229–230). To further support this claim, C. Hillenbrand indicates the "initial use of jihad titles on public buildings aligns with the earliest modest military successes of the Muslims against the Crusaders" (Hillenbrand, 1999). In light of this, it is evident the use of jihad and its interpretation depends not on universal and consistent norms and principles, but is rather subjected to interpretive flexibility. Its application significantly depends on the current circumstances of the Muslim community and the views of its leaders. If they are continually strong and powerful, they tend to lean to interpret the concept of jihad as they must go and engage in military warfare for the cause of Allah.

On the contrary, the interpretation and application of the jihad were conducted with the intent of emphasizing the defense and preservation of Islam during times of weakness. Ibn Taymiyyah, who witnessed the havoc and destruction that Mongols brought upon the Muslim world, interpreted jihad as only possible in times like this, when Muslim communities need protection. He did not oppose fighting completely, but the shift that took place, the expansion of jihad was not possible nor feasible considering the historical realities, to jihad as the defensive means for the Islamic community to survive. He totally rejected engaging in any unprovoked fight that was intended to convert people to Islamic faith. He states that such actions would break the Quranic principles because there is no compulsion in religion (Khadduri, 1966: 59). For him, jihad is among the most important duties of Muslims, encompassing both inner and outer forms of worship. When defensive fighting becomes necessary, it is regarded as one of these acts of worship that a faithful Muslim is obliged to undertake (Peters, 1979:. 47–49). This shift in jihad perception and interpretation is discussed by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah who argues in a similar manner. He believes engaging in fight is only permissible for the sake of responding to military aggression and not for converting unbelievers to Islam (Ibn Qayyim, 1983: 17). Similarly, in several other contexts, the interpretation of jihad had often retreated to adapting a defensive concept. Defensive jihad was paramount as Muslim communities fought against European imperialism, for example. As I. Ibrahim elaborates, "the struggle in self-defense can also be observed in the anti-colonialist resistance movements of the modern period. In the 18th and 19th centuries, calls for jihad were issued across the Islamic world to combat colonialism" (Kalin, 2005). However, if we look closer at the factual application of this calling, we notice that it had not been carried out in its totality which aimed at eradication of all non-Muslim agents from the Muslim areas. For instance, according to R. Peters, when the call was made by Sanusi to perform jihad against all unbelievers, many Muslim philosophers and theologians stated that it came down to performing defensive jihad to repel the Italian invading forces while other Christians and Westerners resided in those areas long before and long after the calling. Again, the jihad was reinterpreted as a means of defending and protecting Islam and Muslim communities assuring their survival. Similar ideas are expressed even more vividly in the writings of Muhammad Rashid Rida, a 19th and 20th-century scholar, and Islamic reformist, who attempted to reconcile and fit the principles of Islam to the realities of the present and to develop a framework for dealing with colonialism in the context of the decline of Islamic political power and influence. He believed in resorting to force only once all other sources had been depleted (Şimşirgil, 2019), and he mainly championed the internal fundamental changes for Islam. He had seen true jihad as an aim

to reform Muslim societies, to bring education to the entire population. By using these means along with other non-violent ones, colonialism and oppression would be resisted. His idea of jihad was an attempt to see it as a broader struggle that is both personal and communal to bring change and improvement to the Muslim world instead of mere warfare (Amir, 2020).

In light of what we discussed above, we observe a certain level of dichotomy between retreating to either offensive or defensive jihad to suit advantageously to a current context. It is a matter of when the application of certain concepts heavily depended on the circumstances and the immediate context in which Muslim community operates. In the good and prosperous times when Islamic states were militarily and politically powerful, they tended to propagate and lean towards the lesser or offensive jihad, whereas in the times of decline, the reconsiderations and shift to the defensive jihad were taking place. This change and contextual adaptation reflect the wide interpretive flexibility for the concept of jihad with its blurred boundaries and multifaceted nature. This makes it difficult to argue that it is the universal principle for dealing with war and violence. Therefore, the shift and interchange between the offensive and defensive jihad reflects its adaptivity to serve the immediate political challenges. This flexibility and adaptability indicate jihad being a rather pragmatic tool that has been formed and adapted by authorities to navigate in different contexts, than being a universal and established framework in relation to dealing with violence and wars. Its flexible application across different historical periods and circumstances emphasizes its contextual dependence as its application ranged from self-defense and self-preservation to offensive wars and imperial conquests.

Jurisprudential Diversity and Legal Flexibility. Another important aspect of the subjective nature of jihad and its interpretive flexibility, is the development of the Islamic jurisprudential schools of thought. Their interpretations of the concept of jihad emphasize its inherently subjective nature and openness to interpretive flexibility. In a similar manner, the ideas of each jurisprudential school reflect challenges and contexts of its time and tailor its principles and rulings to the specific needs of its community. For instance, the Salafi movement bases its philosophy on the Hanbali school of thought which is "often depicted as a legal and theological tradition characterized by its rigorous, strict, and zealous adherence to the Prophetic Sunna and often described as 'fanatical zealots' and 'literalists,'" (Duderija, 2015: 189). It also professes a literal interpretation and fulfilment of the Quranic prescriptions and is replete with "militant and radical

Islamists." Nowadays, the followers of this ideology comprise one of the most recognized terrorist groups called "holy warriors" or jihadists, who prioritize and adhere to jihad as military engagement and interpret jihad as the enduring imperative that is personal and communal, and are part of the Salafi movement (Drinkwine, 2009). In contrast to this school of interpretation, philosophers of the Hanafi school of thought are known for their cautionary stance on militaristic jihad. Instead of following the literal interpretation of the Quran, they prefer to take a course of pragmatism (Jalal, 2009: 56). For example, they exercised moderation in dealing with non-Muslims. If one from the community were to grant peace to a non-Muslim, it was binding for the entire community, and if a Muslim were to kill a non-Muslim, he would consequently face the same punishment as for slaying another Muslim (Jalal, 2009). Additionally, the approach to the interpretation of booty was open and less strict. If peace was offered to a man, everything he brought with him that he asked for protection, was excluded from the spoils of war concept (Kitab Adab-i-Qazi, 1672: 353–356). The considerations of this question took place as Muslims wanted to receive their due share of booty. Various approaches took place such as allowing them to take some of it, if it is determined that the one who is asking for peace was overladen with goods. Excess, however, would not be covered under the peace principle. This is a significant deviation from the original concept of acquiring the spoils of war, when everything was taken and considered as belongings of the Muslim community.

Other schools of thought like Malikis have developed their own interpretations of the concept of jihad, emphasizing different aspects of it. For Malikis, the concept of jihad is primarily a defensive action and an obligation for the community in cases when it is necessary for safeguarding Muslim lands and communities. The offensive violence could be acceptable in specific conditions like protecting the trade routes or dealing with preempt threats. However, the conception of the jihad within this school was often aimed to bring about socio-economic change, although that was not the end goal. This sort of reform was "as the necessary precondition for jihad against the Christian 'unbelievers.'" (Bennison, 2016: 257). Again, the concept of jihad is being adapted to the context and circumstances. This is a good example of interplay between a greater and lesser jihad: when one is not ready to go out and perform an offensive action, one retreats to the spiritual jihad, and when implementing the reformed and strong physical jihad, and one turns to violence for the sake of advancing their own agenda. In conclusion, this variety of interpretations of jihad across different schools of

thought reflect the subjective nature, adaptability, and inherent flexibility of the concept of jihad. It is clear that each school has modified and accommodated their concept of jihad to address the specific challenges and needs of their time and context. In their interpretation of the texts, they come to conclusions and develop principles based on pragmatic needs of their communities within their socio-political realities. It makes the jurisprudential discussion broad and versatile while also showing the dichotomy between its pragmatic relevance and the attempt to arrive at a consistent and universally ethical framework. This diversity of meanings and approaches reveals potential dangers in the application of jihad. As it is being constantly reinterpreted, it becomes susceptible to misuse and manipulation when it suits the context and it results in often conflicting conclusions, principles, and applications.

Conclusions. In this research, we looked at the Islamic approach to war and violence through the lens of jihad. We have determined its dynamic, subjective, and multifaceted nature. Additionally, we have seen that the concept of jihad is rooted in the Sacred Islamic Texts and over the course of history has adapted to the social, political, and cultural circumstances of Muslim communities. This adaptability has led to interpretive flexibility that resulted in conflicting and contradictory interpretations and applications. Historically, the concept of jihad has been fluctuating between offensive and defensive frameworks and has depended heavily on the current situation of the Muslim community along with its strength or weaknesses. In the periods of power and strength, the expansionists' campaigns were being justified, and jihad tended to be aimed outwardly against unbelievers. In contrast, in the times of decline, it shifted toward defensive actions, and the preservation of Islam and community along with its spiritual and reformative nature, was emphasized. This reflects its inherent duality and subjectivity, as it is often interpreted and tailored to the immediate needs and contexts of the community.

Beyond its historical developments, the coexistence of spiritual and physical jihad creates additional complications. It enriches discussion and Islamic thought but simultaneously blurs the purpose of jihad. Is it mostly an individual spiritual struggle, is it a communal duty to participate in military conflicts, or is it both? Such ambiguity indicates some vulnerabilities of the concept of jihad and poses questions about its consistency as an ethical framework.

Furthermore, the variety of Islamic jurisprudential schools of thought double down and amplify the subjective nature of jihad and directly contribute to its interpretive flexibility as they often produce different concepts and versions of jihad based on their views of the same Sacred Texts. Each of the schools approached the concept of jihad mostly via the lens of their sociopolitical contexts and often their conclusions reflected not an attempt to arrive at a universal principle, but at an alignment with immediate circumstances. This approach helped them to keep Islam relevant to changing times while simultaneously allowing inconsistencies, controversies, and openness to any potential misuse and manipulation of jihad.

Finally, our findings indicate a critical tension within the Islamic discussion on jihad. Ultimately, it is a pragmatic and versatile tool suitable to be adapted to changing realities while also holding the potential to serve as a consistent and universal framework for dealing with violence and war. Additionally, its duality poses another challenge as the balance between immediate contextual relevance and aspiration to find ethical coherence remains unclear.

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