

A Rebuttal of Al-Qaeda and IS' Theological Justification of Suicide Bombing

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*This article reviews and rebuts the theological justification of suicide bombing by terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State (IS). It argues that the justification forwarded by these extremist groups is erroneous by exposing the discrepancy in the analogy between acts of *inghimas* (self-immersion into enemy ranks), the key argument used in the justification, and contemporary forms of suicide attacks.*

Introduction

Suicide attacks have emerged as a key tactic of contemporary terrorism worldwide.¹ Militant groups such as Al-Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State (IS) and the Taliban have extensively employed these tactics against their adversaries. Suicide attacks came into prominence following the 9/11 attacks which killed nearly 3,000 people, injured over 6,000 and involved the use of hijacked passenger planes.² The determination of 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists who were willing to kill themselves to accomplish their mission became the key factor that made the attacks possible.

Although Muslims around the world view suicide as immoral, abhorrent and clearly prohibited (*haram*) in Islam, the so-called jihadists have attempted to circumvent the prohibition by falsely claiming that their suicide attacks are actually 'martyrdom (*istishhadi*) operations' that are grounded in Islamic tradition and therefore legitimate and permissible. This article attempts to debunk the ideological justification of suicide bombings as misleading and flawed. It

focuses on suicide attacks conducted by Al-Qaeda and IS, and employs the definition of the concept as provided by the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST) Suicide Attack Database (CPOST-SAD):

"[A suicide attack is one] in which an attacker kills himself or herself in a deliberate attempt to kill others. CPOST includes only suicide attacks perpetrated by non-state actors; attacks authorized by national governments are not included. The classic example is a suicide bomber detonating an explosive vest (a 'belt bomb') or explosives in a vehicle the bomber is driving (a 'suicide car bomb'). The critical criteria [sic.] is suicide: the attacker must kill him or herself, even if no one but the attacker dies in the attack. The CPOST-SAD does not include (1) failed suicide attacks where explosives do not detonate or are detonated by someone other than the attacker (e.g. the explosives were set off by a gunshot from police); or (2) 'suicide missions', where the attacker expects to be killed while killing others, but does not directly kill himself or herself."³

A search on the CPOST-SAD database revealed that there has been a significant increase in suicide attacks post-9/11 across the globe, as well as a steady rise in lethality for military and civilian targets.⁴ The table

¹ Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman (2010), *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 45-7; Christoph Reuter (2004), *My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 18

² Pape and Feldman (2010), pp. 3-4; Reuter (2004), pp. 142-6.

³ See Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism's suicide attack database:

<http://cpost.uchicago.edu/database/methodology/>.

⁴ See Ibid:

http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_new.php; see also Pape and Feldman (2010), p. 2-4 and Mia Bloom (2005), *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. ix-x.

below presents comparative data of suicide attacks before and after 9/11.⁵

Item	1982-2001	2002-2015
Total attacks	220	4,594
Total deaths	5,927	42,570
Total wounded	18,344	104,262
Ave. deaths per attack	26.9	9.3
Ave. wounded per attack	83.4	22.7
No. of countries involved	18	46
Percentage of car and belt bombs	79.4%	91%

Note: Although suicide attacks may take forms other than bombings, the data shows that bombings constitute the bulk of attacks before and after 9/11.

According to Robert Pape, there were only 350 suicide attacks from 1980 to 2003. The number increased significantly to 1,833 (from 2004 to 2009) after the US invasion of Iraq, an increase of 80.9%. The frequency of attacks increased from three attacks per year in the 1980s to 300 attacks per year from 2004 to 2009,⁶ with civilians forming the bulk of casualties in non-conflict zones.⁷ By 2015, suicide bombings had become a significant threat, with 248 attacks and 9,109 killings.⁸ The year was called 'The Year of Suicide Bomber'⁹ and the attacks described as an "epidemic".¹⁰ The situation was also grim in 2016; there were 362 attacks with 4,611 killed and 9,085 wounded.¹¹

Both Al-Qaeda and IS have carried out suicide bombings in several countries, raising the terrorist threat globally.¹² The globalisation of suicide attacks has been

⁵ Data from search at Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism's suicide attack database: http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_new.php.

⁶ Pape and Feldman (2010), p. 2 and 5.

⁷ Ibid, p. 2, 5; Bloom (2005), pp. x and 137.

⁸ Iain Overton, *What can be done to stop the rising cult of the suicide bomber?* AOAV, 22 January 2016.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ AOAV (2015), *2015: an epidemic of suicide bombs*, AOAV, 10 August 2015.

¹¹ See Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism's suicide attack database:

http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_results_new.php.

¹² Reuter (2004), p. 17-8 and 142-6.

fuelled by extremists' ability to attract aspiring suicide bombers to their cause regardless of ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status or gender. They were able to incite them to attack their enemies, primarily framed as countries and governments involved in the US-led coalition forces in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere. In short, suicide terrorism has emerged as the most important form of terrorism to be deterred.¹³

Among scholars and experts of terrorism, the motivations and justifications of suicide bombings are of great interest and debate. For Al-Qaeda and IS, religion plays an important role; it is central to their actions, their decision-making processes and the rationalisation of their actions to their targeted audiences.¹⁴ These groups are aware of the strong abhorrence of suicide in Islam, and have taken great pains to address this issue through theological arguments to avoid losing their credibility. For instance, hundreds of pages are devoted to this issue in Al-Maqdese's website (available through archive.org),¹⁵ the largest repository of intellectual materials produced by various 'jihadist' ideologues and groups.

Theological debate on justification of suicide bombing

In this author's view, refuting the ideological justification of suicide bombing is important for the mitigation of the threat. This article seeks to analyse Al-Qaeda and IS' religious rationale of suicide bombing, arguing that the two groups are mistaken in applying the argument found in classical works to justify contemporary suicide bombing. It will also highlight the widespread condemnation of suicide bombing by contemporary scholars as strongly repugnant in Islam.

Al-Qaeda, IS and Suicide Bombing

Suicide bombings form a key component of Al-Qaeda and IS's military tactics in conflict zones. They are the preferred tactic because

¹³ Pape and Feldman (2010), p. 6.

¹⁴ See Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2015), "The Centrality of Counterideology in Countering Jihadist Terrorism", *Resilience and Resolve: Communities Against Terrorism*, edited by J. Jerard and S. M. Nasir, London: Imperial College Press.

¹⁵ See *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150514060110/https://www.tawhed.ws/>.

they offer an operational and economical advantage, and cause optimal casualties with minimal manpower and financial costs. The attacks usually comprise a motor vehicle laden with explosives driven by a fighter targeting the enemy's positions, convoys, checkpoints or bases.¹⁶ The availability of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and vehicles, along with the devastating impact on the enemy at the cost of only a single fighter, makes it a more viable economic option.¹⁷ All major military operations conducted by IS in Iraq and Syria have included suicide bombings.¹⁸

The use of suicide bombers with explosive vests is resorted to in countries where it is difficult to deploy a vehicular bomb. Examples of such attacks include those in Paris in November 2015, Jakarta in January 2016, Brussels in March 2016 and Manchester in May 2017. The strategic objective of these attacks is to terrorise the public and pressurise targeted countries to change their hostile policies towards the extremist groups.

The fact that Al-Qaeda and IS value suicide bombings can be seen in their claims of responsibility following such attacks in official publications and public statements.¹⁹ They glorify suicide attacks or their perpetrators as

a form of 'jihad', and praise major suicide attacks such as 9/11, the attacks on the USS Cole (2000), and the American embassy bombing in Tanzania (1998).²⁰

More significantly, they seek to legitimise suicide attacks by portraying them as 'istishhadi (martyrdom) operations'. This choice of terminology is preferred by 'jihadists' over 'suicide attack' as the latter is regarded as derogatory, demeaning and more importantly, un-Islamic. Framing it as an act of martyrdom elevates the attack to a noble status in Islam (as opposed to the heinous crime of killing oneself out of despair). Below is an example of IS presentation of martyrdom operations:

"Sell your lives to Allah, the Mighty and Sublime. Strike with istishhadi operations and explosive belts! These istishhadi operations have proven their benefit and have produced their fruits. Their benefit has become widespread, and they have become a source of calamity and destruction for the crusaders and their corrupt supporters, and they are more harmful than rifles and machine guns. They have planted terror in their hearts, so much so that the enemies of Allah are now afraid of everything and wait for death to come to them from every direction. In addition to that, they result in the least amount of loss out of all the shar'i methods of fighting, while at the same time being the most effective. This is the advice that I [Abu Sinan Al-Najdi, an IS suicide bomber] wished to convey to my brothers in the Peninsula of Muhammad."²¹

¹⁶ Reuter (2004), pp. ix-x; Pape and Feldman (2010), p. 2; Dabiq, no. 1, pp. 36-8.

¹⁷ Yusuf Al-'Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? – Fasl fi ta'rif al-'amaliyat al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha 'ala al-'aduw", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20110216181824/http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=hqkfgsb2](https://web.archive.org/web/20110216181824/http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=hqkfgsb2;); 'Abd Al-Hakim

Hassan (no date), "Hukm Al-'Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130423224835/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=7wng2uc7>; Abu Qatadah Al-Filistini,

"Jawaz Al-'Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah Wa Annaha Laysat Bi Qatl Li Al-Nafs – Bab haqiqah al-'amal al-istishhadiyah al-mu'asirah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110211103615/http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=d3dgishf>.

¹⁸ *Al-Naba'*, no. 10, pp. 2-4; *Al-Naba'*, no. 11, pp. 5-13; *Al-Naba'*, no. 12, p. 8-10; *Al-Naba'*, no. 13, pp. 4-11; *Al-Naba'*, no. 15, pp. 5-9; *Al-Naba'*, no. 23, p. 2.

¹⁹ For Al-Qaeda, see *Inspire*, no. 1, p. 5, 13-17 and 20; *Inspire*, no. 3, pp. 7 and 10; *Inspire*, no. 4, pp. 5-7 and 19; For ISIS, see *Dabiq*, no. 2, pp. 3 and 42; *Dabiq*, no. 5. Pp. 11, 15 and 26; *Dabiq*, no. 7, pp. 31 and 41; *Dabiq*, no. 8, p. 18; *Dabiq*, no. 9, pp. 28-31; *Dabiq*, no. 11, pp. 28, 30 and 34; *Dabiq*, no. 12, pp. 25-8; *Dabiq*, no. 13, pp. 15-9.

²⁰ *Dabiq*, no. 6, p. 41; *Dabiq*, no. 7, p. 23; *Inspire*, no. 1, pp. 13-17, 20 and 33; *Inspire*, no. 5, p. 28; *Inspire*, no. 6, p. 7; *Inspire*, no. 9, pp. 28 and 53; *Inspire*, no. 10, p. 12; *Inspire*, no. 11, pp. 15 and 28-31; *Inspire*, no. 13, pp. 62-3; *Inspire*, no. 14, pp. 4 and 23;

Muhammad Haniff Hassan (2006), *Unlicensed to Kill: Countering Imam Samudra's Justification For the Bali Bombing*, Singapore: Peace Matters, pp. 101-15; Al-'Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi ta'rif al-'amaliyat al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha 'ala al-'aduw", Online.

²¹ *Dabiq*, no. 11, p. 35; see also Al-'Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi ta'rif al-'amaliyat al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha 'ala al-'aduw", Online; Muhammad Salim 'Abd Al-Halim (1427H), "Al-'Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah Wa

A comparison of the respective theological arguments of Al-Qaeda and IS on the permissibility of suicide bombings reveals the shortcomings of IS' theological arguments. IS seeks to legitimise itself on Islamic principles as exemplified by its theological arguments on the so-called obligation of jihad in Syria and Iraq,²² *hijrah* (migration) to the so-called caliphate,²³ pledging of allegiance to Al-Baghdadi,²⁴ and the permissibility of slavery.²⁵

However, a survey of IS publications has not turned up a single theological article on the issue of suicide attacks. This is in sharp contrast to the copious theological materials on suicide attacks produced by non-IS 'jihadists' and groups. Some of these materials are books of more than a hundred pages.²⁶ This suggests that IS does not have its own religious basis for advocating suicide attacks and relies on arguments of other 'jihadists'.

***Inghimas* (self-immersion into enemy ranks) Argument**

Al-Qaeda and others such as Hamas employ many complex theological arguments to justify suicide bombings in Islam. One of them, often referred to as the *inghimas* argument, stands out from the rest.²⁷

Other arguments tend to be supplementary to *inghimas*. These include the *tatarrus* (human shield) argument, which allows the killing of Muslims who are used as human shields by the enemy. Another argument is *nikayah* (infliction of harm), which permits suicide attacks in order to weaken the enemy. *Bayat* is yet another secondary argument, allowing for enemy non-combatants to be killed alongside

Mu`adalah Mizan Al-Quwa", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130613234457/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=re54xzjh>.

²² *Dabiq*, no 1, 3, 4, 7 and 9.

²³ *Dabiq* no. 13.

²⁴ *Dabiq*, no. 1.

²⁵ *Dabiq*, no. 4.

²⁶ See *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*, *Al-'Amaliyah Al-Fida'iyyah*:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130429015954/http://tawhed.ws/c?i=50>.

²⁷ Al-Filistini (1431H), p. 7; Al-Filistini (1415H), Online.

combatants during night attacks when distinguishing the two is difficult. Such arguments are used to justify civilian collateral damage as a result of suicide attacks, as well as deliberate attacks on civilian populations.²⁸

The primacy of the *inghimas* argument as the basis for suicide attacks by 'jihadists' can be discerned from Sh. G. F. Haddad's work on the subject entitled "Inghimas In 'Suicide' Warfare".²⁹

Inghimas refers to an act of 'self-immersion into enemy ranks' or attacking the enemy in such a manner where the likelihood of survival is low. This is done with three primary motivations: (a) to inflict maximum losses on the enemy; (b) to motivate Muslim fighters to fight and (c) to attain martyrdom.³⁰ Describing *inghimas*, Ibn Taimiyah, the scholar whom extremist and 'jihadist' groups revere and often refer to in theological matters, provided three scenarios:

1. "Like [in the case of] a man who storms the ranks of the infidels and penetrates them. Scholars call this 'plunging into the enemy,' since [the man] is swallowed up in them like a thing that gets submersed in

²⁸ Turki bin Mubarak Al-Bin`ali (1433H), *Al-Aqwal Al-Mahdiyah Ila Al-'Amaliyah Al-Istishhadiyah*, No place: Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad, pp. 27-9:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130429015954/http://tawhed.ws/c?i=50>; Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 64-5; Al-'Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi ta`rif al-'amaliyah al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha `ala al-'aduw", Online; Ayman Al-Zawahiri (1996), "Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu`minin – Jawaz itlaf al-nafs li maslahat al-din", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110216210330/http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=ysysgng0>; `Abd Al-Halim (1427H), Online; Sulayman bin Nasir Al-'Ulwan (1422a), "Hukm Qatl Atfal Wa Nisa' Al-Kuffar Fi Al-'Amaliyah Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130518215522/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=enpuzc42>; Hamud bin `Uqla Al-Shu`aybi (1422H), "Hukm Al-'Amaliyah Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130613223749/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=dqokvsc5>.

²⁹ Sh. G. F Haddad, "Inghimas In 'Suicide' Warfare: Inghimas Or Self-Immersion Into Enemy Ranks", *Living Islam*:

https://www.abc.se/~m9783/k/ighm_e.html.

³⁰ Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 7-9; Al-'Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi ta`rif al-'amaliyah al-istishhadiyah wa atharuha `ala al-'aduw", Online; Al-Filistini (1415H), Online.

something that engulfs it.”

2. “And like a man who kills an infidel officer among his friends, for instance, by pouncing on him publicly, if he [can] get him by deceit, thinking he can kill him and take him unaware like that.”
3. “And [like] a man whose comrades have fled and so he is fighting the enemy alone or with a few others, and yet this is inflicting harm on the enemy, despite the fact they know they are likely to be killed.”³¹

There is no verse in the Qur’an that provides explicit approval for *inghimas*. Muslim scholars who permit *inghimas* during armed jihad defend their views by drawing inferences from certain verses such as:³²

- “But there is [also] a kind of man who would willingly sell his own self in order to please God: and God is most compassionate towards His servants.” (The Qur’an, 2:207)
- “Hence, let them fight in God's cause - all who are willing to barter the life of this world for the life to come: for unto him who fights in God's cause, whether he be slain or be victorious, We shall in time grant a mighty reward.” (The Qur’an, 4:74)

³¹ Rebecca Molley [Deconstructing Ibn Taymiyah's View on Suicidal Mission](#). *CTC Sentinel*, 15 March 2009.; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), *Qa'idah Al-Inghimas Fi Al-'Aduw: Hal Yubah?*, No place: Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad, pp. 2-3: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130429015954/http://tawhid.ws/c?i=50>; Al-Zawahiri (1996), “Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu'minin – Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir min al-`aduw”, Online.

³² Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 40-6; Al-Bin`ali (1433H), pp. 12-3; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), pp. 3-6; Al-`Uyairi (no date), “Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? – Fasl fi adillah al-mas'alah”, Online; Hassan (no date), “Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Jawaz ihlak al-nafs wa itlafaha li maslahat i`zaz al-din wa izharah”, Online; Al-Amin Al-Haj Muhammad Ahmad (no date), “Al-`Amaliyat Al-Jihadiyah Al-Istishhadiyah: Hukmuha, Syurutuha, Fadhlaha, Thawabuha”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130614010733/http://tawhid.ws/r?i=dfmgjtida>; Ali bin Khudayr Al-Khudayr (1422H), “Hukm Al-`Amaliyah Al-Istishhadiyah”, *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130520195958/http://tawhid.ws/r?i=wwkmg8u3>; Al-Shu'aybi (1422H), Online.

Classical Muslim scholars such as Ibn Taimiyah, Al-Ghazali and Al-Shaibini who permit *inghimas* argue that these verses imply that seeking death or acting in a daring manner and endangering one's life during armed jihad like *inghimas* is a virtue commended by God.³³

Direct scriptural support for *inghimas* comes from the *hadiths*, in the form of reports from battles where Muslim fighters committed *inghimas* and consequently received affirmation from Prophet Muhammad. Other reports concern the Prophet's companions committing *inghimas*; these are taken as confirmation of the Prophet's approval, since his companions would never have committed an act - such as suicide - clearly forbidden by the Prophet. Some of the famous *hadiths* on the matter during the Prophet's time are as follows:³⁴

- *Hadith* reports on several companions who, during the Battle of Uhud (3 hijrah calendar), used their bodies to shield the Prophet from the enemy's spears and arrows which caused death to some of them.³⁵
- “Al Shafi'i said: One of the Ansar [a resident of Medina who along with other residents took the Prophet and his companions into the city after migration from Mecca] was late behind when the killing of the Sahabah [the Prophet's companions] next to the well of Ma'unah took place. By the time he arrived,

³³ Haddad, “Inghimas In 'Suicide' Warfare: Inghimas Or Self-Immersion Into Enemy Ranks”, Online.

³⁴ Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 47-58; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), pp. 6-12; Al-`Uyairi (no date), “Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi adillah al-mas'alah”, Online; Hassan (no date), “Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir fi al-jihad wa in tayaqqan aw ghalab `ala zannah al-halakah”, Online; Al-Zawahiri (1996), “Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu'minin – Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir min al-`aduw”, Online; Al-Shu'aybi (1422H), Online. See Ahmad Al-Jad' (1404), *Al-Fida'iyun Fi `Asr Al-Rasul*, No place: Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130429015954/http://tawhid.ws/c?i=50> (28 June 2017).

³⁵ Narrated by Muslim in *Kitab Al-Jihad Wa Al-Siyar*; Nawaf Hayil Takruri (2003), *Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah Fi Al-Mizan Al-Fiqhi*, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, p. 65-7; Safiy Al-Rahman Al-Mubarakfuri (1995), *Al-Rahiq Al-Makhtum*, Riyadh: Maktabah Dar-us-Salam, Riyadh, pp. 269-74.

vultures were already devouring his companions. He told `Amr bin Umayyah: I am going to go alone and face the enemy so they can kill me. I don't want to be left behind when our companions have been killed. So he did, and he was killed. When `Amr bin Umayyah (the only survivor of the incident) told the Messenger of Allah what happened, the Messenger of Allah spoke well of the man...³⁶

Further reports pertaining to such acts by the companions and by others during the companions' time are as follows:³⁷

- It was reported that during the Battle of Yamamah (11 hijrah calendar) during the rule of Abu Bakr, the first caliph after the Prophet, the Muslim fighters could not penetrate an enemy fortress. A companion, Al-Barra' bin Malik, instructed the fighters to catapult him into the fort so that he could open the fort's gate from within. The fortress was conquered by his daring act.³⁸
- It was reported that some Muslim fighters rushed their horses to battle elephants of the Persian army during the Battle of Al-Jisr (13 hijrah calendar), despite being warned of the danger of death. The battle was won by the Muslim army.³⁹

Based on such *hadiths*, classical Muslim scholars concluded that such acts do not constitute suicide and are exempted from all scriptural verses that prohibit suicide. These scholars also argued that *inghimas* is excluded from the generality of the verse that say, "...and let not your own hands throw you into destruction..." (The Qur'an, 2:195) and

³⁶ *Inspire*, no. 13, p. 43.

³⁷ Al-Bin`ali (1433H), pp. 19-23; Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 60-3; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), p. 12; Al-Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi adillah al-mas`alah", Online; Hassan (no date), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir fi al-jihad wa in tayaqqan aw ghalab `ala zannah al-halakah", Online; Al-Zawahiri (1996), "Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu'minin – Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-k athir min al-`aduw", Online; Ahmad (no date), Online; Al-Amin Al-Haj Muhammad Ahmad (no date), "Al-`Amaliyat Al-Jihadiyah Al-Istishhadiyah: Bayn Al-Mujizin Wa Al-Mani'in", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130614035014/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=rtwnwykd>.

³⁸ Takruri (2003), p. 66,

³⁹ *Ibid*.

"...And do not kill yourselves [or one another]..." (The Qur'an, 4:29); these verses form the basis for the impermissibility of endangering one's own life or harming one's own body in Islam.⁴⁰

Classical scholars have highlighted the differences between *inghimas* and forbidden suicide (see table below).⁴¹ According to them, since *inghimas* and suicide are not the same, the ruling on the latter cannot be applied on the former.

Suicide	<i>Inghimas</i>
Out of desperation and loss of hope	Act of devotion and sacrifice; to uplift God's religion, not out of desperation and loss of hope
To end one's misery	To attain martyrdom and gain God's best rewards in heaven
The main intention is to kill oneself	The main intention is to inflict as much harm as possible on

⁴⁰ Al-Bin`ali (1433H), pp. 18 and 23-4; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), pp. 11-20; Al-Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi adillah al-mas`alah", Online; Hassan (no date), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Aqwal ahl al-`ilm fi jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir wa in tayaqqan al-qatl", Online; Al-Zawahiri (1996), "Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu'minin – Khuruj man `aradha nafsah li al-qatl fi sabil Allah min al-nahy fi qawlih 'Wala tulqu biaydikum ila al-tahlukah", Online.

⁴¹ Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 25-38 and 83-7; Al-Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi aqwal al-`ulama' fi man hajama `ala al-`aduw wahdah; Fasl fi ta`rif al-muntahir", Online; Hassan (no date), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", Online; Muslim Muhammad Jawdat Al-Yusuf (no date), "Ishkaliyat Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130614010420/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=e48oijm>; Ahmad (no date), Online; Al-Filistini (1415H), Online; Hamid bin `Abd Allah Al-Ali (no date), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130603035450/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=kyq0jppp>; Sulayman bin Nasir Al-Ulwan (1422b), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – 1", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130518204402/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=ome7vuue>; Sulayman bin Nasir Al-Ulwan (1421), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – 2", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130518202109/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=58geq47a>.

	the enemy; death is incidental
Killed by one's own hand / weapon	Killed by enemy's hand / weapon

Contemporary 'jihadist' groups use the abovementioned distinctions to justify suicide bombings. They frame such attacks as '*amaliyah ishtishhadiyah* (martyrdom operation)' by drawing a direct analogy between the two. They claim that a 'martyrdom operation' is the contemporary form of the *inghimas* permitted by past scholars. Since this is not a new formulation of theirs, they argue that any condemnation of them is unwarranted. They see opposing views as attempts by those who are on the side of the enemy to delegitimise their 'jihad', and by defeatist Muslims who seek to cover up their own cowardice and negative mindset.⁴²

Background to *Inghimas* Argument

Four salient points are worth pointing out in this discussion on the *inghimas* argument.

First, the *inghimas* argument is not constructed by contemporary 'jihadist' groups, but classical scholars. It is an issue that had been discussed since the classical period by *fuqaha'* (Muslim scholars of Islamic jurisprudence) and found in classical works where interpretation of the afore-mentioned *hadiths* was required. Thus, the attempt by 'jihadists' to justify their suicide bombings by drawing parallels with *inghimas* need to be addressed since *inghimas* is found in Islamic jurisprudential tradition.

Second, *inghimas* is a contentious issue among classical Muslim scholars. There were disagreements among them such as Al-Tabari and Al-Shaukani on its permissibility, with those who allowed it doing so only under certain conditions. They also disagreed over how strictly the conditions should be adhered to. This fact is recognised by 'jihadist' groups themselves, as well as by academics who

⁴² Ibid, pp. 8-9, 64-5 and 88-95; Hassan (no date), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Syubhah: Ghayah ma tadul `alayhi hazih al-adillah huwa jawaz al-taghrir bi al-nafs", Online.

study the theological basis of contemporary suicide bombings.⁴³

Third, the application of the *inghimas* argument by contemporary Muslim scholars and 'jihadist' groups is highly contentious. Beyond disagreeing with 'jihadists', the scholars also have disagreements among themselves. Al-Takruri who wrote a study on the subject from Islamic jurisprudence recorded these disagreements in his book, *Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah Fi Al-Mizan Al-Fiqhi* (Martyrdom Operations in Islamic Jurisprudence). Some of the opinions of Muslim scholars who reject the permissibility of this practice are discussed in the following section.⁴⁴

Fourth, the response to the *inghimas* argument in this article focuses on its application by Al-Qaeda and IS and not by classical scholars. The discussion proceeds on the premise that there are significant differences between classical *inghimas* and contemporary suicide bombing, differences that will soon be evident. This paper has also contended that the application of the *inghimas* argument to contemporary suicide bombing is erroneous.

Response to *Inghimas* Argument

First response – the dissimilarity of suicide bombing and classical inghimas (al-qiyas ma`a al-fariq):

⁴³ Takruri (2003), pp. 102-225; Hassan (2006), pp. 107-11; Hassan (no date), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Syubhah: Ghayah ma tadul `alayhi hazih al-adillah huwa jawaz al-taghrir bi al-nafs", Online; Al-Filistini (1431H), pp. 69-73; Al-Bin`ali (1433H), pp. 31-6; Ibn Taymiyah (1422H), pp. 3 and 11-3; Al-`Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? - Fasl fi aqwal al-`ulama' fi man hajama `ala al-`aduw wahdah; Fasl fi ta`rif al-muntahir", Online; Al-Zawahiri (1996), "Shifa' Sudur Al-Mu`minin – Jawaz itlaf al-nafs li maslahat al-din; Jawaz haml al-wahid `ala al-`adad al-kathir min al-`aduw", Online; Yahya Hashim Hasan Farghal (no date), "Kashf Al-Tawiyah Fi Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130614012046/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=z2agk0jz>.

⁴⁴ Ibid; Ibid, p. 101; Ibid, pp. 4-5, 9 and 11; Al-`Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? – Al-Muqaddimah", Online; Ahmad (no date), Online; Abu Basir Al-Turtusi (1426H), "Mahadzir Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah", *Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130520090319/http://tawhed.ws/r?i=sqavbv2>.

Contemporary 'jihadist' groups' claim that the permissibility of suicide bombing is based on the opinion of classical Muslim scholars that permitted *inghimas*. However, the analogy made between suicide bombing and *inghimas* is considered *al-qiyas ma'a al-fariq* in Islamic jurisprudence or an analogy between two dissimilar things. Consequentially, the *inghimas* argument in this case is theologically erroneous.

The illustration below shows the differences between the two concepts:

Classical <i>Inghimas</i>	Contemporary Suicide Bombing
Killed by enemy's weapon.	Killed by own weapon deliberately.
Committed during battle or in actual battlefield.	Committed not necessarily during battle or in actual battlefield. There are many cases where a suicide bombing is deliberately executed outside the conflict zone. These include the 9/11 attacks, the 7/7 attacks on the London underground train network (2005) and the Brussels airport attacks (2016).
High risk; there is a chance of survival, albeit low.	Chance of survival is zero. There is no record of a suicide bomber surviving. All surviving suicide bombers are those who were captured before the bomb was detonated or who aborted the mission.

A closer look at classical *inghimas* cases reveals that they are comparable to contemporary commando-type operations, which are high risk, but not necessarily suicidal. This view is also held by Abu Basir Al-Turtusi, a prominent religious ideologue among jihadists closely linked with Al-Qaeda.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Al-Turtusi (1426H), Online.

Some proponents of suicide bombings offer *hadiths* where the Prophet praised Muslim fighters found dead by their own hand in battlefields.⁴⁶ However, these *hadiths* show that these were Muslim fighters who **accidentally** killed themselves with their own weapons - quite unlike the deliberate act of killing oneself by detonating a bomb or driving an explosive-rigged vehicle. Thus, these so-called counterargument *hadiths* do not support suicide bombing.⁴⁷

Second Response - impermissibility already has a definitive legal status (al-qat`iy):

The 'jihadist' claim on the permissibility of suicide bombing is built on a contentious *inghimas* argument and scriptural evidence that is not definitive (*al-dalil al-zanniy*). Any ruling made on such a basis is at best speculative in nature since it is a product of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) of individual scholars. Such a ruling has serious implications as it either goes against the prohibition of suicide in Islam or seeks to limit this proscription which already has a definitive legal status (*al-qat`iy*).

⁴⁶ Hassan (no date), "Hukm Al-`Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiyah – Syubhah: Ghayah ma tadul `layhi hazih al-adillah huwa jawaz al-taghrir bi al-nafs", Online.

⁴⁷ See for examples (a) "...So when the army files were arranged in rows (for the clash), `Amir's sword was short and he aimed at the leg of a Jew to strike it, but the sharp blade of the sword returned to him and injured his own knee, and that caused him to die. When they returned from the battle, Allah's Messenger saw me (in a sad mood). He took my hand and said, 'What is bothering you?' I replied, 'Let my father and mother be sacrificed for you! The people say that the deeds of `Amir are lost.' The Prophet said, 'Whoever says so, is mistaken, for `Amir has got a double reward.' The Prophet raised two fingers and added, 'He (i.e. Amir) was a persevering struggler in the Cause of Allah and there are few Arabs who achieved the like of (good deeds) `Amir had done.'" (Narrated by Al-Bukhari); (b) Abu Salam reported on the authority of a man among the companion of the Prophet. He said, 'We attacked a tribe of Juhaynah. A man from the Muslims pursued a man of the tribe, and struck him but missed. Instead, he struck himself with the sword.' The Messenger of Allah said, 'Your brother, O group of Muslims.' The people hastened towards him, but found him dead. The Messenger of Allah wrapped him with his clothes and his blood, and offered (funeral) prayer for him and buried him. They said: Messenger of Allah, is he a martyr? He said, 'Yes, and I am witness to him.'" (Narrated by Abu Dawud)

Some argue, however, that the Qur'an's stand on suicide is not as definitive as it is claimed. The clearest Quranic verse cited as the basis for the impermissibility of suicide (the Qur'an, 4:29) is said to carry several meanings other than suicide -- such as:

- "...and do not destroy one another..."⁴⁸
- "...And do not kill yourselves [or one another]..."⁴⁹
- "...and do not kill your people..."⁵⁰

However, the different meanings alone cannot invalidate the conclusive ruling on the impermissibility of suicide in Islam.⁵¹ A measure of a definitive ruling in Islam is not determined solely by the Qur'an. There are numerous *hadiths* that articulate Islam's clear prohibition against suicide. Furthermore, there is no indication in any Islamic intellectual tradition of a Muslim scholar ever holding an alternative view on the impermissibility of suicide. On the contrary, there is, in fact, *ijma`* (consensus) among scholars on the prohibition of suicide and this reinforces the definitive status on this issue.

It should be noted that *ijma`* among Muslim scholars is not something that is easily achieved. However, on the issue of suicide, there is no evidence of any disagreement. They may have disagreed on whether or not certain acts -- such as *inghimas* -- constituted suicide but not on the ruling of suicide itself.

'Jihadists' seeking to oppose or work around the prohibition on suicide (which has a definitive legal status) tend to highlight the ruling by classical Muslim scholars on the permissibility of *inghimas*. But such a ruling has a non-definitive legal status, and therefore remains a contentious issue from the standpoint of Islamic jurisprudence. This stratagem amounts to trying to use a non-definitive ruling on an issue to supersede a definitive one.

Jurisprudentially, such a move is wrong as this is not a case of an original ruling of something permissible (*mubah*) being changed to obligatory (*fard*) due to

⁴⁸ Meaning by Muhammad Asad, see <http://www.islamicity.org/quransearch/>.

⁴⁹ Meaning by Sahih International, see <http://quran.com>.

⁵⁰ Meaning by Shakir, see <http://quran.com>.

⁵¹ Reuter (2004), pp. 118-9.

circumstances nor a ruling of something discouraged (*makruh*) being changed to prohibited (*haram*) or permissible (*mubah*). The consequences of such a move are not serious if it is discovered that such a ruling is incorrect. However, in the case of suicide bombings, there is a fundamental shift of ruling from *haram* to permissible where there is a great risk of committing a grave and serious sin in Islam.⁵²

Overall, there are clear dissimilarities between *inghimas* and suicide bombing, as well as uncertainty on the permissibility of *inghimas*. As such, the *inghimas* argument cannot be used to nullify the certainty regarding the impermissibility of suicide. It can be concluded that the 'jihadists' standpoint with regard to contemporary suicide bombing is methodologically flawed and should be ruled as incompatible with the principles of Islam.⁵³

Condemnation for the deliberate targeting of civilians

Contemporary suicide bombings by 'jihadist' groups involve the deliberate targeting of civilians. This is admitted by 'jihadists' in many of their statements claiming responsibility for suicide attacks in Paris, Brussels, London and elsewhere. These statements are verified through the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism's suicide attack database where the data identifies groups (e.g. Al-Qaeda and IS) and their targets - military, civilian or both.

Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), a research and advocacy group that seeks to mitigate the impact of armed violence, reports that over 5,000 civilians were killed by suicide bombings from January to June 2015 alone. This is an increase of 45 per cent from the previous year. 56 per cent of 8,990 civilian casualties from all improvised explosive device attacks in the first seven months of 2015 were from suicide attacks.

With regards to IS specifically, AOAV writes,

"However while ISIS have [sic.] used suicide bombings to its tactical advantage against state forces, their

⁵² See Al-Turtusi (1426H), Online.

⁵³ See Al-'Uyairi (no date), "Hal Intaharat Hawa' Am Istashhadat? – Al-Muqaddimah", Online.

impact has been most profoundly felt by civilians. Globally, ISIS is reported as being the group responsible for the most civilian casualties from suicide attacks in the first seven months of 2015, with nearly 2,000 (1,977) killed or wounded. An average of 60 civilians were killed and injured in each ISIS suicide attack.⁵⁴

In this regard, the impermissibility of suicide bombing arises not only from the immorality of the act itself, but also from the wickedness of killing civilians. This is in line with established legal maxims in Islamic jurisprudence that “*al-wasail laha ahkam al-maqasid* (a means takes the same ruling of its objective [if the objective is impermissible, the means used to achieve it becomes impermissible too])” and “*al-ghayah la tubarrir al-wasilah* (an end does not justify the means)”⁵⁵.

The vast majority of Muslim scholars have issued unequivocal condemnation of attacks that have caused civilian casualties.⁵⁶ More than a hundred Muslim scholars have signed *The Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi* denouncing IS and suicide attacks. The letter states:

“...The slaying of a soul - any soul - is haram (forbidden and inviolable under Islamic Law), it is also one of the most abominable sins (mubiqaat). God says in the Qur’an: ‘Because of that, We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever slays a soul for other than a soul, or for corruption in the land, it shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether; and whoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind.

Our messengers have already come to them with clear proofs, but after that many of them still commit excesses in the land.’ (Al-Ma’idah, 5: 32). You have killed many innocents who were neither combatants nor armed, just because they disagree with your opinions.”⁵⁷

Contemporary Muslim Scholars Against Suicide Bombing⁵⁸

Numerous prominent Muslim scholars have ruled out the permissibility of suicide bombings. Shaykh `Abd Al-`Aziz Al Shaykh, the current Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia said in 2001:

“[Suicide attacks] are not part of the jihad, and I fear that they are just suicides plain and simple. Although the Qur’an permits, indeed demands, that the enemy be killed, this has to happen in such a way that it doesn’t run contrary to the religious law.”⁵⁹

The Council of Senior Scholars that the Grand Mufti headed had unanimously condemned the bombing incidents in Riyadh in 2004.⁶⁰ They argued that such attacks were prohibited and had no validity in Islam. This could be seen from numerous perspectives:

- suicide bombing is a transgression of the sanctity of the land of the Muslims, and frightening those who are guaranteed security and safety therein;
- it involves the killing of lives that the *shari`ah* protects;
- it causes destruction; and
- it involves destruction of wealth and belongings that are protected.

Blowing oneself up is similar to killing oneself, and thus, falls into the general prohibition mentioned in a *hadith* - “Whoever killed himself in the world with anything, then God will punish him by the same thing on the

⁵⁴ AOAV (2015), Online.

⁵⁵ Al-Turtusi (1426H), Online; “Sharh Qa`idah: “Al-Wasa’il Laha Ahkam Al-Maqasid” (2004), *islamweb.net*, fatwa no. 50387, 24 June: <http://fatwa.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=Fatwald&Id=50387>.

⁵⁶ Charles Kurzman (2015), *Islamic Statements Against Terrorism*, 15 March: <http://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism/> (28 June 2017); Sheila Musaji (2015), *Muslim Voices - Part I - Fatwas & Statements by Muslim Scholars & Organizations*, 13 May: http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/muslim_voices_against_extremism_and_terrorism_part_i_fatwas/.

⁵⁷ See Point 6, *Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi*, available at <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/>.

⁵⁸ See Fatawa Al-`Ulama’ Al-Kibar Fi “Al-`Amaliyat Al-Intihariyah”, *sahab.net*, available at <http://www.sahab.net/forums/index.php?showtopic=114416>.

⁵⁹ Reuter (2004), p. 123.

⁶⁰ Hassan (2006), p. 110.

day of judgement.” (Reported by Abu `Uwanah in his *Mustakhraj* from Thabit bin Al-Dhahhak)

The action is also forbidden because it goes against one of the five fundamental objectives of the *shari`ah*, which is the protection of life.⁶¹ In his book *Al-Jihad Wa Al-Fida'iyah Fi Al-Islam*, Shaykh Hasan Ayub, a respected scholar of the Muslim Brothers - while admitting the permissibility of classical *inghimas* - forbids the act of a person wearing an explosive vest and detonating it against an enemy. He makes a distinction similar to what is mentioned above - in classical *inghimas*, there may be a chance of survival and death is incidental to the mission of killing the enemy. In contrast, a suicide bomber has to kill himself/herself in order to kill the enemy.⁶²

Shaykh Nasir Al-Din Al-Albaniy, an eminent scholar among contemporary Salafis, forbids *inghimas*, unless it is done under the banner and with the permission of a legitimate Muslim authority. He forbids it if it is carried out by an individual or a Muslim group (which applies to suicide attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda and IS).⁶³

Zaid Shakir, a Muslim scholar in the United States and co-founder of Zaytuna College in Berkeley, condemned the suicide bombings in Brussels in 2016, stating:

“In the case of the attacks in Brussels, and similar atrocities in the Muslim world that are too numerous to mention, the criminals multiplied the gravity of their murderous crimes by committing suicide. **Suicide is strictly forbidden in Islam**, and one who commits suicide will not only be dispatched to Hell, he will continue to repeat the actions which led to his death over and over for eternity in the

⁶¹ The five fundamental objectives of the *syariah* known as *maqasid asy-syariah* are to safeguard 1) religion; 2) life; 3) the mind; 4) lineage; and 5) property. See Abu Ishaq Al-Shatibi (1997), *Al-Muwafaqat*, Beirut: Dar Al-Ma`rifah, vol. 2, p. 324-7; Mohammad Hashim Kamali (1989), *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, pp. 397-9.

⁶² Hasan Ayyub (1983), *Al-Jihad Wa Al-Fida'iyah Fi Al-Islam*, Beirut: Dar Al-Nadwah Al-Jadidah, pp. 243-4.

⁶³ Takturi (2003), pp. 105-6.

midst of the Inferno. In other words, the suicide bomber will suffer the torment of Hell in addition to the pain of blowing himself up, continuously, for eternity..... The ‘fatwas’ and ‘commanders’ who justify the suicidal murder committed by their dupes have no weight in this regard. **As for the ‘fatwas’, they are all flawed in that they are based on a false analogy.** Namely, they mention the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah upon him) who launched themselves into a battle knowing they faced certain death. While the incidents being referenced by these ‘fatwas’ are certainly true, in every instance the Companion was killed by the actions of others. None of them killed themselves.”⁶⁴

Shaykh Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, a prominent Islamic scholar and former law professor in Pakistan, categorically condemns contemporary suicide bombings in his 500-page book entitled *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombing* published in 2010.⁶⁵

A similar work entitled *The Hijacked Caravan: Refuting Suicide Bombing as Martyrdom Operation in Contemporary Jihad Strategy*, compiles the views of notable Muslim scholars and thinkers who condemn suicide bombing. The compilation provides detailed theological arguments on suicide bombings that contradict jihadists’ claims and arguments.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Al-Qaeda and IS seek to justify contemporary suicide bombings by tapping into the classical tradition of Islamic jurisprudence,

⁶⁴ Zaid Shakir (2016), “Not in Our Names: Islam’s Total Rejection of Suicidal Terrorism”, *ummahwide.com*, 31 March:

<https://ummahwide.com/not-in-our-names-islam-s-total-rejection-of-suicidal-terrorism-by-imam-zaid-shakir-b02e59c9ac99#.7qv58osv4>.

⁶⁵ See Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri (2010), *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombing*, London: Minhaj-ul-Quran.

⁶⁶ See Ihsanic Intelligence (no date), *The Hijacked Caravan: Refuting Suicide Bombing as Martyrdom Operation in Contemporary Jihad Strategy*; Ihsanic Intelligence (no date), *Condemnation of Suicide Bombings By Muslims*.

contending that they are analogous to *inghimas* which was permitted by the majority of classical Muslim scholars. However, as shown above, this analogy is flawed because the two are dissimilar – ‘jihadist’ suicide bombings involve certain death while *inghimas* does not; *inghimas* is more accurately comparable to a daring commando operation that is risky but does not necessarily mean certain death. On this basis, the ‘jihadists’ justification for contemporary suicide bombing is erroneous, more so when these bombings deliberately target civilians – an abhorrent act in Islam.

In addition, from a theological perspective, the impermissibility of suicide in Islam is definitive, whereas the permissibility of *inghimas* is non-definitive. Jurisprudentially, it is neither right nor prudent to allow a definitive ruling to be on par with a non-definitive ruling.

The argument that contemporary suicide bombing is disallowed can be further strengthened on the basis of prudence (*wara'*), which is to leave what is theologically contentious and choose what is clearly permissible. ‘Jihadists’ who argue that suicide bombing is permissible are wrong on all grounds: theological, moral and humanitarian. With the availability of many other legitimate means of attaining a political or religious objective, it is imprudent in Islam to resort to prohibited means such as suicide attacks.

Finally and specifically with regards to IS, the group’s endorsement of suicide attacks is incompatible with Islam. IS itself has been thoroughly denounced by the majority of contemporary Muslim scholars in *The Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi*. These extremists go against the Prophet’s saying as narrated by Ibn Majah, “My people/followers will not be in agreement over misguidance. When you differ in opinions, be with the *Al-Sawad Al-A`zham* (the majority).” And the majority have made their stand clear by condemning IS and its acts of terrorism and suicide bombings.

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Abrogation and the Verse of the Sword: Countering Extremists' Justification for Violence

Mahfuh Halimi

Muslim extremist groups and ideologues have distorted the original discussion among scholars on the concept of abrogation and the Qur'anic verse of the sword to legitimise hostile relations with people of other faiths. Their misrepresentation has to be countered by reaffirming that the verses of the Qur'an advocating peace, tolerance, compassion and forgiveness are never abrogated and are in fact, the basis for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Introduction

Muslim extremists such as Muhammad 'Abdus Salam Faraj and the terrorist group, the so-called Islamic State (IS), have distorted the concept of abrogation, and the verse of the sword (hostilities towards polytheists) into a purportedly divinely-mandated call for offensive global 'jihad' (warfare).

A 2012 study on 'How Islamist Extremists Quote the Qur'an' showed that there "is the near absence of the well-known 'Verse of the Sword' from the extremist texts".¹ However, in instances when Muslim extremists used the verse of the sword, they have argued that the verse abrogates more than one hundred other verses of the Qur'an that advise or advocate peace, co-existence, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness as the basis for relations between Muslims and other faiths.

This study examines how Muslim extremists have misapplied the theory of abrogation and the verse of the sword when the Qur'an does

not even specify the verses that have been abrogated. Their claim that the verse of the sword abrogates numerous Qur'anic verses cannot be taken as conclusive, especially when the abrogated verses are those that direct Muslims to seek peace, exercise tolerance, and show compassion and forgiveness. This study posits that Muslim extremists have made erroneous claims on the issue of abrogation by omitting the rich discussion on the subject among Islamic scholars and falsely presenting it as something consensual among the scholars when that is not the case.

There is an extensive body of literature on the issue of abrogation. Many scholars of the Sciences of the Qur'an (*'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*), Sciences of the Prophetic Tradition (*'Ulūm al-Hadith*) and Sciences of Islamic Jurisprudence (*'Ulūm al-Fiqh*) have written to explain and define abrogation (*Naskh*). There have also been numerous attempts to specify the abrogating (*Nāsikh*) and abrogated (*Mansūkh*) Qur'anic verses. Sometimes, abrogation has been discussed in the literature as a methodology in resolving apparent contradictions between religious texts (*Al Ta'arūf bayna al adillah*). There are, however, several requirements that must be satisfied before abrogation can be applied. Although the literature has explained abrogation in the Qur'an, the Prophetic Traditions and Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), there has been no attempt to relate these to violence and terrorism in the name of religion. Concerns about the opinions expressed by Muslim extremists on abrogation and 'The Verse of the Sword' or '*Āyat al sayf*'² came to the fore following the September 2001 attacks.

¹ Jeffrey R. Halverson, R. Bennett Furlow, and Steven R. Corman, "How Islamist Extremists Quote the Qur'an," *Centre for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, Report No. 1202*, 09 July 2012.

² Al Qur'an, Al Tawbah 9:5.

To date, there has been no analysis of extremists' application of abrogation and the verse of the sword. Given the paucity of what has been written on the subject, this study offers arguments that could be used to counter their misapplication of the concept and verse. By exposing their false claim that the verse of the sword abrogates more than one hundred Qur'ānic verses, this study refutes the extremists' justification for violence and advocates peaceful co-existence with non-Muslims as a well-established teaching of Islam. For the purpose of this study, 'Muslim extremists' refer to Sunni extremist groups or individuals who have used abrogation and the verse of the sword "to justify perpetual war against non-Muslims".³ While the theory of abrogation also applies to the *Sunnah*, this study will only focus on its application to the Qur'ān.

This study starts by providing a brief foundational understanding of the abrogation conception that is extracted from discourses on the topic in the Sunni Islamic religious sciences. It will then discuss the verse of the sword, analyse the misuse of the verse by extremists, and highlight the views of contemporary scholars before drawing conclusions.

Foundational Understanding of Abrogation

The subject of abrogation has been studied extensively in the Sciences of the Qur'ān (*'Ulūm al Qur'ān*), the Sciences of the Prophetic Tradition (*'Ulūm al Ḥadīth*) and the Sciences of Islamic Jurisprudence (*'Ulūm al Fiqh*).

Abrogation is one of the methods to resolve a conflict between two Qur'ānic verses of equal strength, which contain opposing instructions. The application of abrogation is not exclusive to the issue of idolaters or *Jihād* as abrogation also occurs in other Islamic rulings, such as the waiting period of widows (*'iddah*), slanderous accusations (*Qaḏaf*) and the direction of the *Qiblah* (the

direction that Muslims should face in prayers).

A case in point is the change in the direction of the *Qiblah* from the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem to the *Ka'bah* in Mecca. The Qur'ān explains the abrogation in the following verse:

"We have seen the turning of thy face unto Heaven, and indeed We will turn thee toward a *qiblah* well pleasing to thee. So turn thy face toward the Sacred Mosque, and wheresoever you are, turn your faces toward it. Truly those who have been given the Book know that it is the truth from their Lord. And God is not heedless of what they do." (Al-Qur'ān, Al-Baqarah 2: 144)

This Quranic verse shows that the earlier ruling on the direction of the *Qiblah* (the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem) has been abrogated by the new ruling, "So turn thy face toward the Sacred Mosque," which requires Muslims to face in the direction of the *Ka'bah* (in Mecca) in their prayers. Since the ruling is clear, there is no disagreement among scholars with regards to abrogation in this instance.

However, this is not always the case as there are cases where one verse of the Qur'ān affirms something while another verse negates it. In such cases, the scholars will first attempt to reconcile the two conflicting verses. If this is possible and successful, abrogation becomes unnecessary. Abrogation is exercised only as a last resort when an attempt at reconciliation and preference fails. In this case, the *Mujtahid* (someone qualified to carry out *Ijtihād* or Personal Reasoning) after concluding that the two Qur'ānic verses cannot be reconciled, prefers one verse to the other. However, when the chronological order of the two texts cannot be determined, abrogation cannot be applied, and action based on the two conflicting texts must be suspended altogether.⁴

In fact, the inability of scholars to reconcile some of these conflicting verses accounts for their disagreement on the actual number of

³ Muhammad Haniff Hassan, "Jihad Not a War between Muslims and Non-Muslims," *The International Relations and Security Network*, 6 October 2006.

⁴ 'Abd al Wahhab Khallaf, *'Ilm Uṣūl al Fiqh*, 12th edition, Kuwait: Dār al Qalam, 1978, p 229.

abrogated verses (*Mansūkh*) in the Qur'ān. Al Naḥḥās (d. 949), an Egyptian scholar of grammar and Qur'ānic exegete during the Abbasid period, mentioned that the verse of the sword alone had abrogated 113 verses of the Qur'ān.⁵ Later, Al Suyūṭī (d. 1505) a religious scholar and jurist expert, concluded that there were only twenty-one abrogated verses in the entire Qur'ān. Al Suyūṭī made the conclusion after taking into consideration that “*Idhā qulnā inna āyat al sayf lam tansakhhā*” – “if we said the verse of the sword indeed did not abrogate the verses on forgiveness and patience.”⁶ Twelve of these verses were then successfully reconciled by Al Shawkānī (d. 1834), a Yemeni Islamic scholar,⁷ leaving nine verses which he considered irreconcilable and therefore, abrogated.⁸ After scrutinising the twenty-one abrogated verses, according to Al Suyūṭī, Shāh Walī Allāh Al Dihlawī (d. 1762), an Islamic scholar, *Muḥaddith*⁹ and reformer, concluded that there were only five abrogated verses in the Qur'ān.¹⁰

In contrast, Al Khudari (d. 1927), a *Sharia* scholar demonstrated that all the verses that Al Suyūṭī considered as abrogated could be reconciled.¹¹ The verses cover a broad range of topics, and only three were related to *Jihād*.

Even with the differences of opinions among these scholars on the number of abrogated verses, the majority of scholars agree that there are abrogated verses in the Qur'ān.

⁵ Abū Ja'far Al Naḥḥās, *Kitāb al-Nāsikh wa al Mansūkh fi al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, (n.p.): Al Maktabah Al'Ālamiyyah, 1938, pp. 264-266.

⁶ Jalāl al Dīn Al Suyūṭī, *Al Itqān fi 'Ulūm al Qur'ān*. Vol. 3. Saudi Arabia: Wizārah al Shu'ūn al Islāmiyyah wa al Awqāf wa al Da'wah wa al Irshād, (n.d.), p 65.

⁷ Al Shawkānī was born into a Zaydi Shi'a Muslim family, but his books such as *Irshād al Fuhūl ila Tahqīq al Haq min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* were often referred to by Sunni scholars.

⁸ M. Hasbi Ash Shiddieqy, *Sejarah Dan Pengantar Ilmu Al-Quran/Tafsir*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1987, p 109.

⁹ The term refers to one who transmits and studies the *aḥādīth* or all that is narrated from the Prophet, his acts, his sayings and whatever he has tacitly approved.

¹⁰ Aḥmad Ibn 'Abd Al-Rahīm Al-Ma'rūf bi Waliy Allāh Al-Dihlawiy, *Al Fawz al Kabīr fi Uṣūl al Tafsīr*, Damascus: Dār al Ghawthānī li al Dirāsāt al Qur'āniyyah, 2008, p 67.

¹¹ Shaykh Muḥammad Al Khudari, *Uṣūl al Fiqh*, 7th ed., Cairo: Dār al Fikr, 1981, pp. 250-256.

Nevertheless, Abū Muslim Al Iṣfahānī (d. 934) rejected the notion of abrogation in the Qur'ān. He argued that Qur'ānic rulings would never be annulled and interpreted verses on abrogation as *Takhṣiṣ* or a case where one verse specifies the generality of another.¹²

There is little doubt, looking at the discourse on abrogation in the Islamic religious sciences, that the application of abrogation is determined more by the *Ijtihād* (Personal Reasoning) of the scholars than by the religious texts of the Qur'ān. It explains the absence of a consensus among the scholars (*Ijmā' al-Ulāma'*) on what are the abrogating (*Nāsikh*) and the abrogated (*Mansūkh*) Qur'ānic verses. Therefore, any attempt to pass those verses as having attained a consensus is not only inconsistent with the religious sciences, but must also be rejected.

It should also be noted that the definition and meaning of abrogation given by the majority of scholars are almost similar. Abrogation (*Naskh*) refers to “the suspension or replacement of one *Sharia* ruling by another, provided that the latter is of a subsequent origin, and that the two rulings are enacted separately from one another.”¹³ Abrogation can only take place during the lifetime of Prophet Muḥammad. In other words, no abrogation can take place after his death because the revelation of the Qur'ān ceased upon his death.¹⁴ Principally, only a Qur'ānic verse can abrogate another Qur'ānic verse. The Prophetic Traditions or any other sources of Islamic law such as *Ijmā'* (Consensus of Opinion), *Qiyās* (Analogical Deduction) and other forms of *Ijtihād* (Personal Reasoning) cannot abrogate a Qur'ānic verse. The scholars considered these sources to be weaker in comparison to the strength of the textual rulings of the Qur'ān and so, the Qur'ānic ruling prevails. Likewise, the rulings that the Qur'ān has established cannot be abrogated even by

¹² Mannā'Al Qattān, *Mabāhith fi 'Ulūm al Qur'ān*, Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1985, pp. 227-228.

¹³ Wahbah Al Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl Al-Fiqh Al-Islāmī*, Vol. 2, Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986, pp. 933-934 and Muḥammad 'Alī Al Shawkānī, *Irshād al Fuhūl ila Tahqīq al Haq min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, Vol. 2, Beirut: Dār al Kutub Al 'Ilmiyyah, 1999, pp. 71-74.

¹⁴ Mohammad Hashim Kamali. 1998. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Second Revised Edition, Malaysia: Ilmiah Publishers. p. 151.

opinions of scholars of the highest eminence and authority.¹⁵

An analysis of abrogation in the religious sciences indicates that the *Ulamā'* are unanimous on the occurrence of abrogation (*Naskh*) in the the Prophetic Traditions. However, disagreements exist both in principle and the instances in which abrogation has occurred in the the Qur'ān. Even in cases of conflict between two Qur'ānic texts, after scrutiny, there is a possibility that the conflict is, in fact, more of form than of substance. In such cases, it may be possible to reconcile the two verses and eliminate the conflict.¹⁶

In the Qur'ān, there are also verses classified as *Muḥkamāt* that are perspicuous verses containing words or texts conveying a firm and unequivocal meaning. As a rule, abrogation is not applicable to such verses of the Qur'ān. These verses are often phrased in such a manner as to preclude the possibility of repeal. Likewise, verses on the attributes of God, belief in the principles of the faith, and the doctrine of *Tawḥīd* (The Doctrine of Divine Unity) as well as on the hereafter, cannot be abrogated.

The *Ulamā'* agree that moral truths such as acting justly or treating one's parents well are not open to abrogation. The same also applies to vices such as the enormity of telling lies. A situation is inconceivable where a vice becomes a virtue, or a virtue becomes a vice by the application of abrogation.

Similarly, the historical events narrated in the Qur'ān cannot be abrogated because that would imply that the Qur'ān is mistaken and therefore cannot be entertained.¹⁷

In short, the concept of abrogation can only occur when the following conditions are satisfied. First, the possibility of abrogation has not been precluded by the Qur'ānic text. Second, the subject is open to the possibility of repeal. Third, the abrogating verse is

revealed after the abrogated verse. Fourth, the two verses are genuinely in conflict and cannot be reconciled with one another. Finally, the two texts are separate and are not related to one another and thereby ruling out the possibility of one of the two verses being the *Sharḥ* (condition), *Waṣf* (qualification) or *Istithnā'* (exception) to the other. If this is indeed the case, then *Takhṣīṣ* (specification) or *Taqyīd* (qualification) takes precedence over abrogation.¹⁸

Interpretation of Surah *Al-Tawbah*, Abrogation and the Verse of the Sword by various Extremists

The earlier section illustrates that the majority of the Sunni scholars accept abrogation (*Naskh*) as one of the fundamental concepts in Islamic religious sciences. However, these scholars had applied abrogation only after attempts to reconcile the conflicting verses by using other methodologies had failed.

These scholars followed a defined sequence while addressing the conflict and this has been an accepted practice among the scholars. While this might be the case, scholar Gasser Auda observes that jurists have used abrogation liberally and this has sometimes resulted in the issuance of some controversial decrees. For instance, "The Verse of the Sword" (*Āyat al Sayf*) was said to have abrogated more than two hundred Qur'ānic verses, which preach "dialogue, freedom of belief, forgiveness, peace and even patience!"¹⁹ These include verses such as:

"There is no coercion in religion..." (Al Qur'ān, Al Baqarah 2:256)

"...So leave them [disbelievers?] and that which they fabricate" (Al-Qur'ān, Al An'ām 6:112)

"And if they incline towards peace, incline thou toward it, and trust in God..." (Al Qur'ān, Al Anfāl 8:61)

"Repel evil by that which is better..." (Al Qur'ān, Al Mu'minūn 23:96)

¹⁵ Khallaf, *ʿIlm Uṣūl al Fiqh*, p 227.

¹⁶ Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Uṣūl al Fiqh*, Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1958, pp.192-195.

¹⁷ Abu al-'Aynayn Badran, *Uṣūl al Fiqh al Islāmī*, Alexandria: Mu'assasah Shabāb al Jāmi'ah, 1984, p 454 and Muhammad Hasan Hitu, *Al Wajiz fi Uṣūl al Tashrī' al Islāmī*, 2nd edn., Beirut: Mu'assasah al Risālah, 1984, p 244.

¹⁸ Kamali. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. pp. 153-154.

¹⁹ Gasser Auda, "Abrogation of Rulings" Methodology: A Critique." *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 12, No. 2, p 196.

“So be patient. God’s Promise is indeed true. And let not those without certainty disquiet thee.” (Al Qur’ān, Al Rūm 30:60)

“Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.” (Al Qur’ān, Al Kāfirūn 109:6)

i. Abdus Salam Faraj

A staunch advocate of liberal abrogation was Muhammad ‘Abdus Salam Faraj, leader of the Egyptian terrorist group al Jihād (*Jamā’ah Al Jihād*), who was executed in 1982 for his involvement in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. An engineer by training and not a scholar of Islamic Religious Sciences, Faraj wrote a political treatise: *Al Jihād Al Farīdah Al Ghāibah* in Arabic.²⁰ Later, Maktabah Al Ansaar Publication published its English translation entitled *The Absent Obligation*.²¹ In the treatise, Faraj quoted several classical scholars who held that the verse of the sword “abrogated every treaty, every contract, and term made between the Prophet and any of the Mushrikīn.”²² He subscribed to the opinion that there is “no treaty or covenant of protection left for any of the Mushrikīn after the Sūrat al-Barā’a [i.e. Sūrah *Al-Tawbah*] was revealed.”²³ He argued that the verse of the sword:

abrogated every verse of the Qur’ān in which turning away from the enemies and being patient with the harm they cause is mentioned. It is strange to find someone still using these abrogated verses as evidence for abandoning fighting and jihād.²⁴

Faraj was obsessed with fighting and his conception of ‘*Jihād*’ that he merely quoted the earlier scholars verbatim and out of context to support his view on the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, including

²⁰ Muhammad ‘Abdus Salam Faraj, *Al Jihād al Farīdah al Ghāibah*, Egypt: Jamā’ah Al Jihād, 1981.

²¹ Muhammad ‘Abdus Salam Faraj, *The Absent Obligation*, Maktabah Al Ansaar Publication, 2000.

²² Faraj, *Al Jihād al Farīdah al Ghāibah*, pp. 16-17.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

apostates. A closer examination of the treatise reveals that Faraj did not follow the foundational understanding that was discussed in the earlier section of this article. Resultantly, he linearly concluded that Muslims should wage war against non-Muslims and apostate rulers. He did not attempt to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the verse of the sword and verses on dialogue, freedom of belief, forgiveness, peace, and patience. His distorted argument also ignored the context of the time when the verse was revealed.

ii. Sayyid Qutb

In contrast to Faraj, Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian Islamic theorist and a member of the Islamic Brotherhood, held a different view when he reviewed the rulings in Surah *Al Tawbah* concerning the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Qutb insisted that the provisional rulings were still applicable under certain conditions as spelt out in earlier Quranic Surahs (chapters). Qutb was executed in 1966 after his conviction for involvement in the plot to assassinate President Gamal Abdel Nasser. He concluded that the Islamic method of action is both flexible and firm.²⁵ He explained that those provisional rulings on dialogue, freedom of belief, forgiveness, peace and even patience had not been abrogated. Moreover, these verses can still be implemented in any situation that the Muslim community finds itself in.

Qutb acknowledged different circumstances, places and times which the Muslim community face while applying these rulings. As such, through comprehensive intellectual effort and discretion, the Muslim community is allowed to apply the ruling that is most suited to a particular situation, time and place. However, he insisted that the Muslim community must implement the final decrees that are contained in Surah *Al Tawbah*, whenever that is possible. He maintained that implementing the final rulings is not restricted to the time of the Prophet when Surah *Al Tawbah* was revealed. According to Qutb, these same rulings were applied during the Islamic conquests after the Prophet’s demise, in the treatment of both non-

²⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilāl al Qur’ān*, Vol. 3, Beirut: Dār al Syurūq, 1985, p. 1564.

believers and the people of earlier revelations.²⁶

Although Qutb's thoughts provide the ideological direction for most Sunni militant groups, in his commentary on the verse of the sword, he did not consider it as having abrogated more than one hundred other verses of the Qur'ān. However, he remained critical of Muslims who use Qur'ānic texts which promote unconditional peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims. Qutb advocated conditional implementation of these when Muslims do not have political power. When such a condition recurs, there is nothing to prevent the Muslim community from applying the rulings in these verses. However, he emphasised that these verses do not contain the final rulings on Muslim and non-Muslim relations.

iii. Al-Baghdadi's 'Islamic State'

When the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group occupied the Iraqi region of Sinjar in the so-called Wilāyat Nīnawā in 2014, it justified its action against the members of the Yazidi community by using the verse of the sword. IS described the Yazidis as "a pagan minority existent for ages in regions of Iraq and Shām." The group argued that the continued existence of Yazidis goes against the ruling on idolaters in the "Āyat as-Sayf (the verse of the sword) over 1,400 years ago."²⁷ While there is no evidence to suggest that IS was following Qutb, the striking similarity of its action and that demanded by Qutb in his explanation of the final ruling in the verse of the sword is irrefutable.

iv. Abdullah Azzām

Abdullah Azzām, a founding member of Al Qaeda who was deeply involved in the Soviet-Afghan War, reads Surah *Al Tawbah* and the verse of the sword differently. He argued that people could be classified into three categories: the Muslim fighter (*Muqātil*), the non-Muslim who makes a treaty and pays an exempt tax (*Jizyah*) with a willing hand after having been humbled in war, and the idolater who must be fought. Azzām only recognises these three categories of people based on Surah *Al Tawbah*. To Azzām, if one

is not a Muslim then one is a *Dhimmi* – a non-Muslim living under the protection of Muslim rule on payment of the *Jizyah* (a protection tax paid as a tribute to a Muslim ruler) or an idolater who must be fought.²⁸ Although Azzām did not mention abrogation in his explanation of the verse of the sword, his classification of people is controversial and goes against the concept of citizenship. Today, Muslims do not reside in one contiguous territory, but are citizens of different nation-states.²⁹ Muslims who are minorities in many countries are constitutionally recognised and treated as citizens of the state having equal rights as the majority.

Although the militants differ in their use and application of Surah *Al-Tawbah*, abrogation and more specifically, the verse of the sword, there is a common (mis)understanding among them. From the preceding discussion, it is clear that these militants use Surah *Al Tawbah*, abrogation and the verse of the sword, to argue that the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are one of perpetual war. Very often, no attempt is made to reconcile conflicting verses using the standard methodology as discussed in the religious sciences. Also, they fail to incorporate the contemporary developments where peaceful co-existence of Muslims and non-Muslims is the rule, not an exception. Qutb seems to be the only one who had given a detailed commentary of Surah *Al Tawbah* and the verse of the sword. Although he did not use abrogation to delineate the hostile relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, nonetheless, by advocating the implementation of the final rulings in Surah *Al Tawbah*, and the verse of the sword, Qutb concurs with the others.

Contemporary Scholars' Stand on Abrogation and the Verse of the Sword

The militants are wrong in their application of abrogation and interpretation of Surah *Al Tawbah*. First, their position is at odds with peace, one of the most basic tenets of Islam.

²⁸ Abdullah Azzam, *Tarbiyah Jihādiyyah*, Trans., Al-Qudsi, Abdurrahman, Ed., Tim Editor Jazera, Vol. 2, Solo: Jazera, 2013, p 177.

²⁹ Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. [Demographics of Islam](http://www.berkleycenter.org/publications/demographics-of-islam), Georgetown University. 20 January 2016. Accessed 20 June 2016.

²⁶ Ibid, p 1580.

²⁷ *Dabiq Magazine*, Issue 4, 1435 Dhul-Hijjah (September-October 2014), p 13.

In the Qur'ān, God commanded the Prophet and his followers towards peace in the verse, "And if they incline towards peace, then incline thou towards it, and trust in God. Truly He is All-Hearing and All-Knowing."³⁰

Second, a substantial majority of the Qur'ānic verses are on matters of belief and morality, the six pillars of the faith and verses extolling tolerance, forgiveness, conciliation, inclusiveness, and peace. In fact, less than one-tenth of the 6,235 verses of the Qur'an relate to law and jurisprudence. There is, therefore, no dispute that these messages are the main focus of the Qur'ānic message. The fact that all 114 Surahs (chapters) in the Qur'ān begin with "*Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*" (In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful) except for one (Surah *Al Tawbah*) supports that in essence, mercy and peace are integral to the Qur'ān. The fourth caliph, 'Ali ibn Abī Tālib, explained that Surah *Al Tawbah* does not begin with "*Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*" because the chapter starts with the severance of a covenant and a declaration of conflict.

Third, accepting abrogation of more than one hundred verses of the Qur'ān by just one verse (the verse of the sword) will diminish the universal message of the Qur'ān on peace, dialogue, forgiveness, patience, and freedom of belief. The Qur'ānic message, instead of being inclusive will become exclusive, and this is at variance with God's description of the Qur'an as "guidance for mankind."³¹

Fourth, proper guidance from the Qur'ān could not be attained by reading individual verses in isolation and ignoring other parts of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān must be studied in its entirety to grasp the full spectrum of the message of the Qur'ān. For this reason, contemporary authorities on the Qur'ān insist on a re-evaluation of what scholars have written during the war-filled medieval period. They do not believe that the 'warlike' verses in the Qur'ān or those that were revealed very late in Prophet Muhammad's time had annulled the Qur'ānic teachings which praise tolerance, reconciliation, inclusiveness, and peace.³² If this were the case, then the

twenty-three years during which the Prophet spent delivering the message of Islam becomes meaningless when only the 'warlike' verses in the Qur'ān are allowed to define Islam.³³

Scholars like Dr Zakaria Bashier, an Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, consider the Qur'ānic verses that instruct Muslims to be peaceful, tolerant and non-aggressive as *Muḥkamāt*. These are perspicuous verses containing words or texts conveying a firm and unequivocal meaning and therefore, cannot be abrogated. In Bashier's assessment, the verse of the sword should be understood within a specific time, place and set of circumstances. Understanding the *Asbāb al-nuzūl* (the historical conditions leading up to a revelation or in which particular verses were revealed or situational exegesis) is crucial to arrive at a proper understanding of the verse in question. Claiming that it prevails over the established policy of tolerance is, in Bashier's words, "not borne out by the facts of history."³⁴

Al Zuḥaylī, a Syrian professor and Islamic scholar specialising in Islamic law and legal philosophy, wrote that most jurists of the second *Hijri* century (eighth century AC) considered war as a rule rather than the exception, in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. This is a result of excesses in using abrogation (*Naskh*). The underlying reason for the jurists' adoption of such a stand was the pressing need for Muslims living in those times to remain in a constant state of battle readiness to protect Islam. The political circumstances of those times also contributed to the technique of abrogation being adopted to reinforce the morale of the Muslims when facing their enemies.³⁵

Abu Sulayman, an internationally renowned Islamic scholar and thinker, also expressed

³⁰ Al Qur'ān, Al Anfāl 8:61.

³¹ Al Qur'ān, Al Baqarah 2:185 and Al 'Imrān 3:4.

³² Joel Hayward, "Warfare in the Qur'an," *MABDA English Monograph Series*, 2012, p 18.

³³ Abdul Hamid Ahmad Abu Sulayman, *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations*, USA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993, p 45.

³⁴ Zakaria Bashier, *War and Peace in the Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 2006 and Hayward, "Warfare in the Qur'an," p 18.

³⁵ Wahbah Al Zuḥaylī, *Athār al Ḥarb fī al Fiqh al Islāmī: Dirāsah Muqāranah*, Damascus: Dār al Fikr, 1998, pp. 130-131.

the same view.³⁶ He argues that classical jurists used abrogation not only to gain legitimacy but also to rally moral support against the hostile, neighbouring non-Muslim powers. Their preoccupation with the issue of the day had prevented them from looking beyond their immediate circumstances. As such, the interpretation of the verse of the sword was deeply influenced by the hostile attitudes of non-Muslims during the early Muslim era. Continuing this interpretation today would reduce the appeal of the Qur'ān's universal message. Sulayman argues that it is wrong to confine the meaning of Islam within the perimeters of events which occurred during the time of hostilities and near the very end of the Prophet's era. A fundamental change to this mindset is only possible when the meaning of the Qur'ānic experience and the place of abrogation within it are re-examined.³⁷

Qaradhāwī, an Egyptian Islamic theologian based in Qatar, and chairman of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, disagrees with the view that the verse of the sword had abrogated about 140 to 200 verses of the Qur'ān when these verses still exist in the Qur'ān and continue to be read. Such an opinion, according to Qaradhāwī, is not supported by any definitive evidence that has been authentically transmitted or by clear logic. The mere assumption is insufficient to rule that a written verse of the Qur'ān is no longer applicable. There must be definitive evidence supporting the opinion. In his study, Qaradhāwī finds it possible to reconcile the conflicting verses when they are carefully read, scrutinised and linked by looking at their context and connection with other verses in the Qur'ān.³⁸

The former Grand Imam of Al Azhar, Jādd al-Haq had also arrived at the same conclusion that peaceful cooperation with non-Muslims is lawful and in fact, an essential principle in Islam. In his rebuttal of Faraj's interpretation of the verse of the sword, al-Haq sees it as a radical distortion of the actual nature of the Qur'ān. Al-Haq argues that a contextual interpretation is one that matches the spirit of the Qur'ān, and considers it absurd that Faraj

insists that the verse of the sword also applies to killing a Muslim ruler who prays, gives to charity and recites the Qur'ān.³⁹

Conclusion

In Islamic religious sciences, abrogation is one of the methods of overcoming conflicts between verses of the Qur'ān. The success in reconciling these conflicts by some scholars had caused several revisions in the number of abrogated verses, thus indicating the absence of a consensus among scholars on the number of verses that have been abrogated as well as the abrogating verses. It is also a fact that the interpretation of Surah *Al Tawbah* was coloured by the hostile environment of the early Muslim era.

As such, insisting that relations between Muslims and non-Muslims should be one of perpetual war is devoid of any sense when developments in the contemporary world that accept plurality and diversity in religious beliefs are taken into consideration. The extremists' misapplication of abrogation and the verse of the sword must be shown as erroneous. The conclusion made by many contemporary Muslim scholars that verses advocating peace, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness are perspicuous verses that cannot be abrogated, can act as a counterweight to the extremists' claims. These are the verses that Muslims should insist as the basis for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Ample evidence exists to show that the extremists' arguments are specious, without merit and cannot be allowed to take root in a society where the collective interest is better served by promoting moderation and countering violent extremism. In view of the enormity of the current situation, more academic works and scholarly efforts are required to expose the extremists' manipulation of Qur'ānic verses. The operational strategies for the dissemination of such public awareness campaigns can be done through various means such as Friday

³⁶ Sulayman, *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations*, pp. 43-44.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p 45.

³⁸ Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, *Fiqh Al-Jihad*, Cairo, Maktabah Wahbah, 2009, p 13.

³⁹ Al Misri Al Yawm, "[Al-Syeikh Jad Al-Haq Syeikh Al-Azhar Al-Sabiq Yaruddu 'ala Al-Faridah Al-Ghaibah: Al-Islam La Yatawaggafu 'Ala Al-Khilafah Wa Al-Jihad Mustamir Ila Yawm Al-Qiyamah](#)". *Al Misri Al Yawm*. 18 November 2007, accessed on 20 June 2016.

sermons, religious classes, madrasahs and mass publications.

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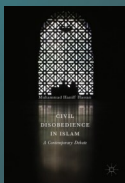
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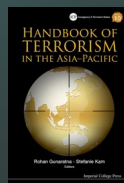
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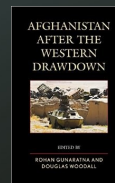


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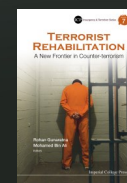
Muhammad Haniff Hassan (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)



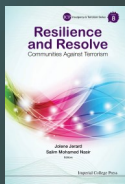
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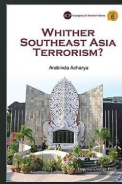
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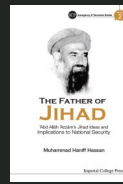
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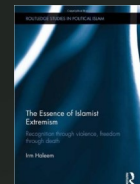
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