

The Father of Jihad: Abd Allah Azzam's Jihad Ideas and Implications for National Security, Muhammad Haniff Hassan, New Jersey: Imperial College Press, 2014, 350 pp., Hardcover, \$115.00, ISBN 978-1783262878

John C. Zimmerman Reviewed by

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BOOK REVIEW

The Father of Jihad: Abd Allah Azzam's Jihad Ideas and Implications for National Security, Muhammad Haniff Hassan, New Jersey: Imperial College Press, 2014, 350 pp., Hardcover, \$115.00, ISBN 978-1783262878.

This is a long overdue comprehensive analysis of the ideas of one of the twentieth century's most important theoreticians of jihad. Abdullah Azzam (1941–1989) was a Palestinian who received a Ph.D in Islamic Studies from al-Azhar University in Cairo, the world's most important institution for Islamic learning. He and two of his sons were killed in a car bombing in Pakistan. The assassins remain unknown.

Azzam was important because, unlike many theoreticians, he was actually involved in warfare. Hassan notes that Azzam “was not a passive supporter but an activist who sought to mobilize his target audience for jihad” (p. 37). He is most well-known for going to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets after the 1979 invasion. While there, he began to actively travel the globe recruiting Muslims to join the fight. He also travelled to the United States, where he was involved in recruitment and fund raising. His best-known work was a monograph entitled *In Defense of Muslim Lands* (available in translation on the web), where he argued that it was the individual duty (*fard ayn*), also known as defensive jihad, of able-bodied Muslims to defend a Muslim country that was under attack. Hassan has located an impressive number of Azzam's writings and recordings.

Before discussing Azzam's ideas on jihad, Hassan gives a good overview of how jihad has been interpreted by Muslim scholars. Thus in describing what is known as offensive jihad (though he doesn't use that term)—as opposed to defensive jihad when Muslims are under attack—he notes that “jihad has been defined as fighting non-Muslims so as to make the word of God supreme, even without any hostility on the part of non-Muslims” (p. 61). With the exception of People of the Book (i.e., Jews and Christians), classical and reformist scholars believe that non-Muslims conquered by Muslims “have to choose between Islam and the sword” (p. 67). However, Hindus were eventually added to those who did not have to accept Islam but instead were required—like Jews and Christians—to pay a special tax known as the *jizyah*. Hassan's overall good discussion of jihad is marred by his claim that the Quran “clearly points out that the greater jihad [the spiritual struggle] is the first concept of jihad” (p. 96). This is opposed to the lesser jihad which is armed struggle. In fact, the Quran says nothing about a greater or lesser jihad, and many scholars (e.g., the medieval Muslim exegete Ibn Taymimiya who informs much current Islamic thinking; Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al Banna; and even Azzam himself) have noted that the so-called “greater jihad” doesn't exist.

Azzam cited a hadith (a statement attributed to Islam's founding prophet Muhammad or his earliest followers) that “the pinnacle of Islam is jihad.” Hence, “Azzam saw jihad as the pinnacle of Islamic devotion” (p. 104). Some critical points of Azzam's worldview were that a) “Islam is supreme over other religions. It is the only true religion recognized by God.” b) “Muslims are obliged to ensure that Islam eventually rules the world . . . and that all infidels submit to Islamic rule.” c) “Armed jihad for the supremacy of Islam [also known as offensive jihad] is not only inevitable but also a constant feature of this life” (pp. 100, 102). Azzam cited Chapter 9 of the Quran—the last chapter to be revealed to Muhammad, according to Islamic teaching—to support his view that “[t]he final revelation on jihad . . . prescribes the basis of Muslim-infidel relations as war, not peace” (p. 119).

A contentious point arises as to whether Azzam supported what today would be known as terrorism, deliberately targeting civilians. Azzam's primary focus throughout the 1980s until

his death was the struggle in Afghanistan. However, his extensive writings cited by Hassan, discussed above, show that his ideas extended well beyond Afghanistan to the whole earth. Azzam was a founder of al-Qaida, before it became a terrorist organization, and served as a mentor to Osama Bin Laden, who was also in Afghanistan.

Hassan cites Azzam's statement that "Islam does not allow the killing of children and the kidnapping of women for the sake of inducing pressure on the enemy" (p. 141). He also notes that Azzam was opposed to assassinating leaders of Muslim countries (p. 127). On the other hand, Azzam supported the assassination of any Jew who supported Israel and anyone who stood by Israel (pp. 123, 126). Presumably, this would make synagogues legitimate targets. Hassan notes that "Azzam made no apologies that Islam makes *irhab* (contemporary Arab word used for terrorism) an obligation upon Muslims based on the Qu'ran and hadith . . . Azzam even claimed that the Prophet [Muhammad] was the first Muslim who struck fear and terror into the hearts of the infidels" (pp. 131-32). The Quranic justification is Sura 8:60: "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies [of Allah]..." (p. 132). Considering the fact, as Hassan notes, that Azzam advocated all-out warfare against non-Muslim countries and saw jihad as "a perpetual war between Muslims and infidels" (p. 138) in order to bring about their subjugation to an Islamic social order, it is difficult to see how such an objective could be achieved without terrorism. As Hassan observes, Azzam's "Islamist worldview dictates the establishment of the supreme political power of Islam, where Muslims and non-Muslims submit to its [Islam's] rule" (p. 157). Since Azzam had travelled to the United States for recruiting and fund raising for the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, he had to know that non-Muslim countries would not willingly submit to Islamic rule.

Hassan points to an important contradiction in Azzam's views. Azzam believed that Muslim countries must honor their international agreements. On the other hand, "he considered the obligation of waging jihad as a greater priority. Thus, Muslim states would have to nullify their agreements in the name of jihad. In fact, he believed it obligatory for a Muslim ruler to launch military expeditions against these [non-Muslim] territories at least once a year" (pp. 192, 195).

Azzam is highly influential in Islamist circles today and his ideas continue to inspire a new generation of would-be jihadists. Hassan has performed a valuable task by thoroughly examining his ideas, and indeed the overall concepts informing jihadist thinking in general. This important book should be readily available to all those interested and specializing in this topic. Unfortunately, its prohibitive cost (\$115) almost guarantees that this will not be the case.

Reviewed by John C. Zimmerman
University of Nevada Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV, USA
 john.zimmerman@unlv.edu

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