

# Critique of Orientalists' Perspective on the Significance of Jihad in the Expansion of Islam (at the Time of the prophet of Islam)

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## Abstract

The rapid spread of Islam at the time of the Prophet has attracted scholarly attention, in particular that of orientalists. They maintain that different factors were of significance in the spread of Islam at the time of the Prophet, but emphasis is laid on the importance of war and jihad. This study commences with a brief survey and classification of views held by orientalists on the mechanics of expansion of Islam and proceeds to present an assessment and a critique of views on the profound ties between spread of Islam and jihad and their discrepancies with Islamic theoretical foundations and historical evidence. The article comes to an end by explication and clarification of two issues: the poll tax (*jizyah*) levied on 'the people of the Book'<sup>1</sup> and 'basic jihad',<sup>2</sup> both misrepresented as imposition of beliefs and resorting to exercising force in spreading Islam. It is said in the final section that the poll tax in question is levied by the Islamic state for rendering certain services to the people of the Book and basic jihad is a kind of defending the 'rights of God'<sup>3</sup> and human rights and elimination of impediments to people's choice of belief.

**Key Words:** Jihad; Islam, the Prophet of Islam; orientalists

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1. That is, Jews and Christians, later extended to Sabeans and Zoroastrians.

2. *Jihad al-ibtida'i*, also translated as 'initiative jahad'.

3. *Huqūq Allāh*, also translated as 'claims of God', in contrast to *huqūq al-'ibād*, viz. rights of the servants.

## **Problem Statement**

The interrelation between spread of Islam and the law of jihad is one of the topics in history of Islam that have been of interest to orientalists, some of whom hold that such interrelation is quite profound in that Islam has spread by the sword and jihad; though some emphasize the noble qualities of the Prophet of Islam and his companions and maintain that jihad played a minor role in such expansion. In contrast, Muslim thinkers believe that expansion of Islam sprang from the Prophet's moral and spiritual character and the logical teachings of Islam, teachings that are in conformity with the innate nature of the Islamic faith. The role played by jihad has been restricted to defending and protecting Islam and Muslims and elimination of impediments to expansion of Islam.

The view held by orientalists on the role played by jihad in spreading Islam has been reviewed and critiqued in the present study. Orientalists' views concerning the mechanics of expansion of Islam have been particularly classified and the common denominator of such views, i.e. spreading Islam through waging war and jihad, has been treated in further detail. The present study proceeds to consider the view in question from the perspective of the Qur'an - as a body of instructions addressing Muslims - and historical evidence and presents the statements made by impartial orientalists – substantiating the view held by Muslims thinkers – and finally two topics of significance relevant to the subject of the article - viz. levying poll tax on the people of the Book and basic jihad – will be discussed.

## **Orientalists' View on the Role of Jihad in Spreading Islam**

Different views have been held by orientalists about the factors leading to expansion of Islam and its triumph over disbelievers, but their common denominator lies in the profound interrelation between expansion of Islam

through the sword and jihad. Let us take a glance at some prominent orientalist's claims classified below.

### **1. Fighting Spirit of Arabs of Hijaz and Sanctity of Jihad**

William Montgomery Watt maintains that jihad and Bedouin spirit of plundering the possessions of sedentary people were among the fundamental dynamics that brought about expansion of Islam. He holds that there were three factors affecting spread of Islam:

1. The Islamic faith according to which jihad with followers of other religions was a holy war and Muslims were encouraged to wage jihad;
2. The innate nature of offensive Bedouins and nomads of Arabia who were in the offing to attack other lands and plunder the possessions of their inhabitants arose from their nomadism.<sup>1</sup>
3. Powerful and co-ethnic Arab groups who had emigrated to lands adjacent to the Arabian peninsula and welcomed, owing to certain reasons, the Muslim Arab domination.

Ira M. Lapidus also maintains that the main factor leading to Muslim conquest was their strong propensity for war aiming at expanding Islam and gaining booties:

Arab (Muslim) victories generally stemmed from their strong propensity to gain booties, achieve victory, and spread Islam worldwide. Those victories also arose, to some extent, from deliberate state policies.<sup>2</sup>

### **2. Religious Incentive and Waging War to Gain Booties**

In discussing the dynamics of Islamic expansion Phillip Khuri Hitti does not

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1. Ghulāmī, Y. et al (2005). *Tārīkh-i Islam* (pp. 103-104).

2. *A History of Islamic Societies*, p. 76.

accept religion as the only factor – as held by Muslims – and rejects the Christian claim as to the spread of Islam by resorting to force and the sword. He believes in the roles played by religious and economic dynamics in the expansion of Islam and the triumphs achieved by Muslims. Not only their unwavering faith and belief in paradise and its blessings urged them to move forward but also their aspirations to deliver themselves from extreme poverty and arid lands and gain access to fertile and beautiful lands of north Arabia contributed to such expansion.<sup>1</sup>

Albert Hourani (1915-1993) also held that dynamics of spread of Islam in lands adjacent to Arabia and other lands lay in gaining access to war booties and belief in waging jihad in that cause.<sup>2</sup>

Henry Stephen Lucas (1889-1961) considered economic incentive and conquest as the main factors leading to Muslims' success and their expansion in other regions of the world:

... The economic incentive was indubitably very strong and the common denominator of Islamic conquests and the attacks of the Semites in olden times lay in a background tracing back to ancient times and the age of Babylonians and Assyrians. Nonetheless, religion was a strong factor in that it had brought spiritual unity to Muslims, without which they could never bring their victories to fruition.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Arabs' Excellent Management and Martial Skills**

Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914) maintained that the most significant factor of Islamic expansion, next to Muslims' faith and solidarity, lay in Arabs' fortitude and martial power. He thus enumerates the dynamics of Islamic expansion:

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1. *History of the Arabs*, pp. 184-185; Shawqī, *Islām dar Zindān-i Ittāhām*, pp. 396-397.

2. *History of the Arab Peoples*, pp. 47-48.

3. Steven Lucas, *A Short History of Civilization*, pp. 429-430.

1. Arabs' agility and facility of movement due to their nomadic lifestyle;
2. Dexterity in archery and equestrian skills;
3. Selection of competent commanders and leaders;
4. Fortitude and steadfastness;
5. Appropriate military tactics adopted by Muslims in establishing communication with the seat of the Islamic state from the regions and lands where they settled;<sup>1</sup>
6. Belief in predestination, in that Muslims firmly believed that one never lost one's life by swords and arrows before the time of divinely predestined death.

#### **4. Violence and Imposition of Beliefs**

Muslims' strictness with other nations and shedding their blood were, according to David Hume, the most significant reasons for their expansion. In Section IX of his *The Natural History of Religion* (1757) titled Comparison of these Religions with regard to Persecution and Toleration he writes:

Mahometanism set out with still more bloody principles; and even to this day, deals out damnation, though not fire and faggot, to all other sects.

Hume goes on to say that the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of the Islamic faith, ordered his followers to conquer the world, eradicate all religions, and substitute them with Islam... Muslims impose, by resorting to force, their religion on people and say to people: "Convert to Islam or

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1. *History of Islamic Civilization*, pp. 45-55.

lose your lives.”<sup>1</sup>

### **War and Violence, the Common Denominator of All Such Views**

Despite their differences the views held by the said orientalists as to the dynamics of the spread of Islam have a common denominator: laying emphasis on material issues and the major role played by war and jihad in the expansion of Islam. In their analysis and interpretation of the facts about the Prophet of Islam, e.g. the expansion of Islam, they concentrate on material and mechanical dynamics and ignore the spiritual factors, e.g. conformity of Islamic laws to human needs and their harmony with human innate disposition and nature, the divine leadership of the Prophet of Islam, divine will and blessings, Muslims’ spiritual incentives, historical development of the expansion of Islam in the fabric of society, and the strategy adopted by the Prophet in spreading Islam.

### **Main Flaws in Orientalists’ Views**

It could be said, in a general review and assessment, that the orientalists’ views are too farfetched and removed from reality and suffer from essential flaws: first, they are not in conformity with the Islamic theoretical principles; second, they are in disharmony with historical evidence. These two flaws will be treated below.

#### **1. Incompatibility of Orientalists’ Views with Islamic Theoretical Principles**

Expansion of Islam, as a religion,<sup>2</sup> could not have been spread by

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1. Naza’rī, *Barrasī-yi Shīvah-hā-yi Tablīghāt-i Masīhiyyat ‘alayhi Islām*, p. 203.

2. The word *dīn* (religion) is said by some scholars to have entered Arabic from Aramaic (Dehkhudā, *Lughatnāmah*, vol. 2, p. 10042 and it originally denotes submission and obedience (Ibn Fāris, *Mu’jam Maqāyyīs al-Lughah*, vol. 2, p. 32). As a term, several meanings have been mentioned for it (Karīmī, *Qur’ān wa Qalamruwshināsī-yi Dīn*, pp. 31-33). Inspired by the Qur’an and Sunnah, Muslim thinkers

resorting to force and the sword, since the spread of Islam aimed at imparting the Islamic message in different contexts to people and they believed in it as a religion through believing in divine creation, resurrection, and laws. There are two principles in believing in something: belief should be based on firstly knowledge and human reason and secondly on human feelings in that it must be heart-felt. None of the two falls within the domain of resorting to force and violence.

The Islamic way of spreading religion and urging people to believe in religion is to explain religious teachings in logical terms, provide opponents with responses based on 'disputing in the best manner', (16: 25) resist detrimental factors, and create a worshipful environment. Accordingly, it would be undesirable, as reflected in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, to impose one's beliefs on others.

It is explicitly said in the Qur'an that urging people to convert requires its particular tools and it will be in vain to resort to force and compulsion in urging people to convert to a religion:

*There is no compulsion in religion (2: 256).<sup>1</sup>*

The Prophet of Islam was divinely called to urge people to embrace

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say that the term connotes "way of life, a body of beliefs, moral principles, laws, and instructions divinely revealed for the administration of human society (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 8, p. 134, vol. 2, p. 130; Jawādī Āmulī, *Tasnīm*, p. 93; Sayyid ibn Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, pp. 11-19). In the present study the term implies a body of beliefs, moral principles, laws, and instructions divinely revealed to the Prophet of Islam who imparted them to people and that body is known as 'Islam'.

1. It is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Jarīr on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that this verse was divinely revealed about a Muslim man from Medina by the name of Ḥaṣīn who was from the tribe of Banī Sālim ibn 'Awf and had two Christian sons. He asked the Messenger of God, "Am I allowed to compel them to convert to Islam as they are not willing to embrace any religion other than Christianity?" and that occasioned the divine revelation of the verse in question, see Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 2, p. 343.

Islam by reasoning and providing sound arguments:

*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best* (16: 125).

From the Islamic perspective it would be unwarranted and impossible to impose one's beliefs on others. Humans enjoy the privilege that they have been created beings capable of making free choices; as a result, they are supposed to fulfil obligations and be rewarded for such fulfilment. In this respect 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī writes:

Compulsory belief in a religion is rejected in *There is no compulsion in religion* (2: 256), since religion is a series of teachings that bring about actions and deeds and they may be boiled down into one single word – beliefs. Belief and faith are matters of the heart and they are not subject to compulsion. The term *ikrāh* denotes compulsion in outward actions like physical (mechanical) and material movements, but heart-felt faith arises from other causes like beliefs and understanding. Ignorance may never give birth to knowledge nor may unfounded preliminaries eliminate scientifically proved evidence... *There is no compulsion in religion* is negative imperative in mood, suggesting that compelling beliefs based on a creative reality.<sup>2</sup>

Such reality is expressed in a different wording in the Holy Qur'an:

*... shall we force it upon you while you are averse to it?* (11: 28)

It is to be noted that God Almighty has asked mankind to embrace Islam by their nature and He has said that the only religion acceptable to Him is Islam,<sup>3</sup> but mankind has the free choice to select the path they

2. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 2, p. 343.

3. *Indeed, with Allah religion is Islam* (3: 19); *Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him* (3: 85).



intend to tread:

*Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful (76: 3).*

The divine will is to leave mankind free to choose their religion and the Prophet of Islam is but obedient to God Almighty:

*They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command (21: 27).*

Therefore, it would be un-Islamic, and essentially impossible, to force people to convert to a religion. Orientalists' claims as to expansion of Islam stemming from jihad and waging war or their significant impact on such expansion is contrary to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet of Islam, and human nature that does not warrant forced belief.

## 2. Irreconcilability of Orientalists' View with Historical Evidence

Orientalists' view is also irreconcilable with historical evidence, since it is recorded in historical sources that the Prophet of Islam commenced his divine mission in Mecca by calling people to turn towards divine oneness and worshipping God and the first Muslims converted to Islam through his call and their gaining familiarity with Qur'anic teachings. The Prophet emigrated to Medina and Islam expanded there through the conversion of a number of people from that town and their pledging allegiance with the Prophet in the First and Second Pledges of al-'Aqabah and inviting the Prophet to visit that town and live there.

Mention will be made below of the historical development of expansion of Islam.

### 1. Expansion of Islam in Mecca

Muhammad, a man of forty, while worshipping God in the cave of

Hirā', thus received his prophetic call: <sup>1</sup>

*Read in the Name of your Lord who created, created man from a clinging mass. Read, and your Lord is the most generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know (96: 1-5).*

The Prophet secretly called individuals to embrace Islam for three years and a group of the oppressed and a number of the youth from Medina answered his call.<sup>2</sup> He was divinely assigned to call overtly his relatives to Islam:

*Warn the nearest of your kinsfolk (26: 214).*

The Prophet of Islam then made his open call in Mecca, organized sessions for Muslims and those interested in Islam, and also called the tribes inhabiting the vicinity of Mecca to embrace Islam.<sup>3</sup>

A limited number of people converted to Islam until the thirteenth year following Prophet Muhammad's Prophetic call and Muslims suffered quite severe boycotts and persecutions as a consequence of which a number of Muslims had to emigrate to Abyssinia. Muslims were not allowed to defend their rights in Mecca<sup>4</sup> until they were divinely allowed in the fourteenth year following Prophet Muhammad's divine call to do likewise: <sup>5</sup>

*Those who are fought against are permitted [to fight] because they have been wronged, and Allah is indeed able to help them. Those who*

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1. al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 276.

2. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, vol. 1, p. 229.

3. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 2, p. 233; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, pp. 65 – 67.

4. Ibid, p. 218; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, p. 199.

5. Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr-i Nimūnah*, vol. 14, p. 115.

*were expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, "Allah is our Lord" (22: 39 – 40).*

## **2. Expansion of Islam in Medina**

The situation so deteriorated in Mecca that the Prophet sought a new place to live for himself and Muslims and gave birth to the First and Second Pledges of al-‘Aqabah made with some people from Medina.

The Prophet emigrated to Yathrib<sup>1</sup> in the fourteenth year following his Prophetic call and was esteemed by the people of that town. Introduced to the life-giving messages of the Holy Qur’an, the town opened its gates to the Prophet who is narrated as saying: “Medina was opened by the Qur’an.”<sup>2</sup>

The Prophet’s pledges made with the people of the Book and the polytheists of Medina paved the path to Muslims’ peaceful coexistence with the followers of other religions and denominations. It was in Medina that the Prophet found the opportunity to build mosques for the propagation and expansion of Islam and dispatch delegates and missionaries to other regions.

It was in that cause that Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal was dispatched to the tribe of Ḥimyar, ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm to the house of Banū al-Ḥārith, Muṣ‘ab ibn ‘Umayr to Medina, and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to Yemen.<sup>3</sup> The delegates succeeded in their missions in many regions; Yemenis, in particular, converted to Islam in answering ‘Alī’s call and later played a significant

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1. It was later called al-Madinah al-Nabī, “Town of the Prophet”, and was shortened to al-Madīnah.

2. al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 21.

3. Aḥmadī Miyānjī, *Makātīb al-Rasūl*, vol. 1, p. 187.

role in spreading Islam.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Dispatching Epistles to Emperors, Kings, and Rulers

Aiming at providing the world with guidance the Prophet of Islam dispatched epistles in the sixth year following Hijrah (AD 628) to kings and rulers of the time and called them to embrace the Islamic faith. He dispatched epistles to Negus (al-Najāshī), the Caesar of Rome, Khusraw Parvīz (Persia), Muqawqis (Alexandria), the Ghassanid al-Ḥārith ibn Jabalah, and Ḥūdḥah ibn ‘Alī (Yamāmah). Recipients exhibited different reactions but they succeeded in their missions and it is reflected in historical sources that the epistles served as invitations addressed to kings and rulers in different regions to embrace the Islamic faith and cast fear into the hearts of polytheist. The Seal of the Prophets dispatched other epistles to chiefs and rulers until the tenth year following Hijrah (AD 631).<sup>2</sup>

For instance, in his epistle to Heraclius (Ḥirqil),<sup>3</sup> Emperor of Rome, he thus addressed him:

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

I call you to embrace Islam. Convert to Islam and be safe and secure and God will reward you twice, but if you turn away from Islam, you will have committed two sins. *O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah. “But if they turn away, say, ‘Be witnesses that we*

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1. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 4, p. 70; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, p. 159.

2. Aḥmadī Miyānjī, *Makātib al-Rasūl*, vols. 1-3.

3. Flavius Heraclius Augustus, Emperor of Rome (r. 610 – 641).

*are Muslims'' (3: 64).*<sup>1</sup>

The Prophet's epistle to the king of Abyssinia, Negus, sharing the same theme,<sup>2</sup> encouraged him to convert to Islam. The ruler of Yemen, Bāzān, was called in an epistle dispatched to him by the Prophet to convert to Islam. The death of the Sassanid king had been prophesied in that epistle and Bāzān converted when the prophecy came true.<sup>3</sup> Conversion of many people of the Book is indicative of the Prophet's calling them to embrace the Islamic faith.

Accordingly, those who converted to Islam prior to the Prophet's emigration from Mecca and those who embraced Islam in Yemen, Medina, and regions in the vicinity of Medina were quite free in making their choice. It is to be noted that their conversion had not been the consequence of jihad and the sword and the claims made by orientalist are quite unfounded and contrary to historical evidence.

When Muslims gained power in Medina their wars were rather defensive and in instances of basic jihad were motivated by divine and human motives,<sup>4</sup> but no one was ever forced to convert to the Islamic faith. The Prophet asked inhabitants of conquered lands to choose between converting to Islam or keeping their religion and recognizing the political authority of Muslim rulers. As reflected in historical sources the Prophet never forced anyone to convert to Islam. His companions at times asked him to exercise force in calling people to embrace Islam but he rejected such suggestion.

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1. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 390.

2. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 449.

3. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 316.

4. For further details, see below.

Imam al-Riḍā narrates from his predecessors in the family line that a group of Muslims said to the Prophet, “Had you forced inhabitants of conquered lands to convert to Islam our number and might would have increased.” He replied, “I do not wish to meet God Almighty, the Most Glorious, with such unwarranted innovation nor am I among those who take irrelevant steps.” Then, this blessed verse was divinely revealed:

*And had your Lord wished, all those who are on earth would have believed. Would you then force people until they become faithful? (10: 99).*

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq says:

If you force them to believe, as they will in the hereafter by seeing the realities and hardships and severity of punishments, they will not deserve divine rewards and praise, but it is His will that they must have their own choice rather than believe out of compulsion and in making their choice deserve the exalted ranks to be bestowed on them by Him and find honor and perpetuity in eternal paradise.”<sup>1</sup>

Attestations abound in historical sources about freedom of thought at the time of the Prophet of Islam, but it is in the interest of brevity that no further instances of a similar nature will follow.<sup>2</sup>

### **Acknowledgements Made by Some Orientalists of the Real Mechanics of Expansion of Islam**

A number of orientalist have made realistic studies of the factors that brought about the spread of the Islamic faith and have accorded a very

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1. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 329.

2. For further details, see al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 87; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, p. 346; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 2, p. 184; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 2, p. 546.

minor role to jihad. Mention will be made of some of those statements below.

Gustav Le Bon writes:

The spread of the Qur'an was not brought about by the strike of the sword, since it was the Arabs' custom to allow the peoples of conquered lands to keep their religion. Christians converted to Islam and chose Arabic over their mother tongue because they had not seen the justice of Arab conquerors in their own past rulers. They had not seen ease and facility of Islamic practices in their former religion.<sup>1</sup>

In his *Rapid Expansion of Islam* Laura Veccia Vaglieri writes:

If we take a glance at Muhammad's prophecies (and words) or Muslim conquests in the early history of Islam, we clearly see that the claims made as to imposing Islam on others by the strike of the sword is so groundless. The Qur'an says: *There is no compulsion in religion* (2: 256); and say, "[This is] the truth from your Lord: let anyone who wishes believe it, and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it" (18: 29). Muhammad was in the habit of putting to good use that heavenly principle. He was very tolerant, in particular, he knew to what extent he could be tolerant about monotheistic religions.<sup>2</sup>

A French scholar, M. Deson, rejects the unfounded claim of expansion of Islam by force and the sword and maintains that when people accept something by force they will not pursue it for long. However, Muslims have not, in the last twelve hundred years (the life time of the author), been willing to exchange Islam for anything else.

Further, had Muslims conquered lands by resorting to force,

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1. *La civilization des arabes*, p. 145.

2. Vaglieri, *Pīshraft-i Sarī'-i Islām (Rapid Expansion of Islam)*, p. 17.

they would have to station a large number of Muslim troops and chiefs there to maintain their domination, but they lacked such force to protect conquered cities and towns.<sup>1</sup>

Will Durant writes:

Although Muhammad denounces Christians, after all he is optimistic about them and wishes friendly ties between them and his followers. Even after his encounter with Jews, he showed tolerance to the people of the Book, viz. Jews and Christians.<sup>2</sup>

Comte de Gobineau writes:

If religious belief were separated from political necessity, there would be no religion more tolerant and perhaps more impartial than Islam. It was in fact the same toleration and impartiality that gave birth to collaboration and cooperation among different peoples and nations in the Islamic territory as the prerequisite for the advancement of Islamic civilization and realization of peaceful coexistence among incongruous elements. Nonetheless, what paved the path to such peaceful coexistence in science and culture was Muslims' interest in knowledge that stemmed from the emphasis laid by Islam on the significance and value of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

In *The Cambridge History of Islam* William Montgomery Watt emphasizes the role of material factors and waging war in the expansion of Islam. In *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* he writes:

I do not consider Muslims to be uninvited rivals in Europe, but I

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1. Deson, *Muhammad wa Islām*, apud Āl Ishāq Khu'iyīnī, *Islām az Dīdgāh-i Dānishmandān-i Jahān*, pp. 578 – 579.

2. Durant, *Tārīkh-i Tamaddun, Aṣr-i Īmān*, pt. 2, vol. 4, p. 339.

3. Apud Zarrīnkūb, *Kānāmāh-yi Islām*, p. 25.



believe that they represent a great civilization with great achievements, those who dominated a vast part of the globe owing to their prestige and high rank and their interest in adjacent lands developed.<sup>1</sup>

### **Rationale for Basic Jihad and the Poll Tax Levied on Non-Muslims in Muslim States**

It was mentioned above that there exists no connection between jihad and expansion of Islam. Two questions may arise here: If imposition of belief were not possible and Muslims did not resort to it in the expansion of Islam, how would basic jihad and levying poll tax on non-Muslims in Muslim lands be justified and how could they stand in harmony with freedom of belief?

This question addresses two issues: 1. poll tax levied on people of the Book living in Muslim states; 2. basic jihad. The poll tax and its relation to freedom of belief will be first dealt with and the second issue, basic jihad, will be treated later.

#### **1. Rationale for Levying Poll Tax on the People of the Book in Islam**

In this respect the Holy Qur'an says:

*Fight those who do not have faith in Allah nor [believe] in the Last Day, nor forbid what Allah and His Apostle have forbidden, nor practise the true religion, from among those who were given the Book, until they pay the tribute out of hand, degraded (9: 29).*

The people of the Book with the said three qualifications - viz. not believing in God and the Day of Resurrection, not forbidding what God and the Prophet have forbidden, and being averse to the true religion –

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1. Montgomery Watt, William, *Ta'thīr-i Islām bar Urūpā-yi Qurūn-i Wustā (The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe)*, p. 16.

are supposed to honor the laws of the Islamic state and poll tax should be levied on them for the services rendered to them if Islam is to be propagated, impediments be eliminated, and human goals be achieved.

In other words, *jizyah* is the poll tax levied by the Islamic state for the services rendered to people of the Book. It is not, in fact, a means of imposing a religion on others.<sup>1</sup> This issue is quite scholarly explicated by Murtaḍā Muṭahharī:

*Jizyah* is tax and it goes without saying that paying tax is different from submitting to blackmail. Muslims have to pay different kinds of tax. However, the forms of taxes levied on Muslims and people of the Book are different... *jizyah* is levied on those people of the Book who are protected by and are the subjects of the Islamic state. Subjects and the state have certain obligations and commitments towards each other. Subjects are firstly supposed to pay taxes to provide the Islamic state with funds... Secondly, people have certain obligations towards the state in terms of conscription and sacrificing their lives. Perils may come up and people from among the subjects of the state are supposed to defend their territories. When the people of the Book live under the protection of the Islamic state they will be exempt from paying the taxes levied on Muslims (e.g. *khums*<sup>2</sup> and *zakāh*<sup>3</sup>) and taking part in jihad even though the benefits of jihad will fall into their share too.

Therefore, the Islamic state provides certain people (Muslims and non-Muslims) with security and protection in exchange for financial or non-financial remuneration. The people of the Book are expected to pay

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1. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 18, p. 75.

2. One-fifth share of the spoils of war and other income specified in jurisprudential sources.

3. Obligatory payment by Muslims of a determinate portion of specified categories of their lawful property for the benefit of the needy and other enumerated classes, one of the five pillars of Islam.

*jizyah* instead of conscription and payment of *zakāh* .... In volume 11 of his *Story of Civilization* Will Durant, in discussing the question of *jizyah*, says that the amount of such poll tax was less than the taxes levied on Muslims and there was no unfair practice involved in levying it.<sup>1</sup>

In his commentary on the Holy Qur'an, Sayyid Quṭb explains *jizyah* in different wording.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, *jizyah* is a tax levied on the people of the Book in exchange for the services rendered by the Islamic state and it neither implies imposing one's beliefs on others nor is it incompatible with freedom of belief and religion.

## 2. Basic Jihad and Freedom of Belief

Basic jihad has been explained by Muslim thinkers in two ways:

1. The only genuine and essential right in the world is that of God, in that other rights realize by virtue of this right. God is the true owner of all beings, including mankind, and all His creatures are indebted to Him. Such relation of ownership between God and other beings necessitates that existence in its entirety move according to divine will.<sup>3</sup>

With respect to human society the right in question necessitates that only God be worshipped in all human societies and His religion be predominant and His Word be dominant: *The word of Allah is the highest* (9: 40).

It is to be noted that elimination of disbelief and polytheism does

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1. Muṭahharī, *Jahād*, pp. 66 – 70.

2. Sayyid ibn Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 1633.

3. Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, *Naẓariyyah-yi Huqūqī-yi Islām, Jalasah-yi Haftum: Huqūq wa Siyāsāt dar Qur'ān*, Chapter 2.

not imply that all mankind become Muslims and monotheists, since one may not penetrate the hearts through resorting to force: *There is no compulsion in religion* (2: 256), but it is intended to say that the order predominating the world should be divine and based on monotheism; sovereignty belongs to God and impediments to expansion of obedience to God should be eliminated.

2. There are Muslim thinkers who maintain that basic jihad is defending human rights. In other words, Islam considers monotheism and true religion to be in divine and innate disposition (*fitrah*),<sup>1</sup> mankind was created for obedience to God,<sup>2</sup> worshipping God is the straight path to humanity,<sup>3</sup> embracing a divinely revealed religion brings about good life,<sup>4</sup> ignoring monotheistic and heavenly commands downgrades mankind to bestiality,<sup>5</sup> and monotheism and belief in a perfect religion constitute a human right and defending it is not less significant than other human rights. Therefore, jihad in the cause of beliefs is in fact defending human rights and it is warranted and legitimate like any other instance of defense.

Islam encourages believers to strive against any manifestation of polytheism, irreligiousness, and anything or anyone that plays a role in turning people away from the true religion and entices them to proceed towards polytheism and falsehood. It is in this line that iconoclasm of the Prophet of Islam and Abraham and also the former's battle with chief polytheists of Mecca are justifiable. Neglecting such obligation would be

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1. The Holy Qur'an, 30: 11.

2. 51: 56.

3. 3: 51.

4. 16: 97; 8: 24.

5. 7: 179; 8: 22.

turning away from defending the most significant right.<sup>1</sup>

When we consider basic jihad against polytheists to be essentially defending the right of God and mankind it will not imply imposing beliefs, rather it will denote to impede polytheists and disbelievers from hatching plot and causing sedition and impediment to dissemination of monotheism and thus paving the path to worshipping God Almighty. In this respect Murtaḍā Muṭahharī writes:

Even if we consider monotheism as a human right we cannot fight other nations for imposing monotheism, since imposition will not be tolerated per se. In other words, faith implies belief, becoming absorbed in some thought, and such absorption is based on two principles: the scientific aspect of the belief to make it acceptable to human reason; the emotional aspect such that it is supposed to be heart-felt.

None of the two falls within the domain of force, in that thinking is subject to logic and the emotional aspect is also likewise. The point is that if we consider monotheism to be a human right, we may, when the interest of mankind requires, fight a polytheist nation aiming at eradicating corruption, rather than imposing monotheism on them. We are supposed to draw a distinction between eradicating polytheism by exercising force and imposing monotheism on polytheists.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

The claim as to expansion of Islam through resorting to force and the sword is incompatible with the theoretical foundations of Islam, since, firstly, religion, as a reality to be acknowledged by heart, may not be disseminated through compulsion, secondly, converting to the Islamic

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1. Muṭahharī, *Jahād*, pp. 41 – 64; Sayyid ibn Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 186 – 187.

2. *Ibid*, pp. 50 – 55.

faith will be of significance when it is embraced as a choice, rather than through compulsion.

The claim made by some orientalist as to expansion of Islam by resorting to force is incompatible with historical evidence according to which the Prophet of Islam commenced his prophetic call by introducing people to Islam and did not allow Muslims to defend themselves, but jihad was first discussed in Medina where the Prophet said that embracing Islam was a choice to be made by individuals and groups.

Therefore, expansion of Islam is not intertwined with jihad, the role of which is but to protect Islam and Muslims from conspiracies. It is to be noted that the formation of the Islamic religion and its expansion have been treated in detail in scholarly sources devoted to the history of Islam.

Finally, levying *jizyah* on the people of the Book and basic jihad were explicated by saying that the former does not imply imposition of belief but it is levied on the people of the Book for the services rendered to them in the Islamic state and the latter does not aim at material achievements or imposition of belief but it is pursued for defending the rights of God and mankind.

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