

Pflicht zur Solidarität innerhalb der „umma“, der Gemeinschaft aller Muslime zu verstehen, die verbietet, gegenüber Muslimen offen Kritik zu äußern und sich damit mit Nichtmuslimen zu solidarisieren. Manche Muslime könnten vielleicht auch den im Selbstmordattentat gefundenen Tod eines Menschen als „vorherbestimmt“ (arab. maktub) auffassen und eine Kritik am Attentat als unerlaubten Zweifel am Ratschluss Gottes verstehen. Und schließlich muss auch beachtet werden, dass Äußerungen für die westliche Welt auf Englisch, für die muslimische Welt dagegen auf Arabisch ergehen und sich zwischen beiden Sprachen allein von der Begrifflichkeit manche Bedeutungsunterschiede ergeben.

Der Islam kann also von demjenigen als friedliche Religion aufgefaßt werden, der die Meinung vertritt, dass die Werbung und Einladung zum Islam aus der Frühzeit Muhammads Leitlinie für den heutigen „Einsatz für die Sache Gottes“ ist. Für denjenigen, der die entsprechenden Koranverse vom Kampf gegen die Ungläubigen aus den späteren Lebensjahren Muhammads dagegen eins zu eins auf die Ereignisse in Palästina oder die westliche Unterdrückung muslimischer Länder übertragen möchte, kann sich der Islam durchaus als Religion mit Gewaltpotential erweisen.

Suicide, Martyrdom and Jihad in the Koran, Islamic theology and society

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“Whosoever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind” (Surah 5:32).

Does Islam condone violence?

The foregoing verse from the 5th Sure, echoing almost verbatim passages referring to Israel in Mishna and Talmud¹, has been frequently cited in recent discussion about Islamic suicide attacks. Should it be taken to mean Islam prohibits such attacks? The

almost daily occurrence in recent years of suicide attacks perpetrated by extremists who appeal to Islam to justify their actions has raised the question whether Islam is inherently militant or a religion of peace, a question to which Muslims themselves give differing answers.

While some insist on the fundamental incompatibility of violence with Islam on the grounds that “*terror has nothing to do with our religion*”², others maintain that attacks resulting in “innocent” victims are

¹ 4th Book (Nezikin), chap. Sanhedrin, par. 4, V. 5. Herbert Danby. Mishna. London 1993.

² According to the Chairman of the “Central council of Muslims in Germany” (ZMD), Nadeem Elyas, in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 3 April 2004: “Manchen passt es nicht, dass wir den Terror verurteilen” (Our condemnation of terrorism does not suit everyone).

wrong and not to be countenanced by Islam. There are also those who consider that in a war such as the one currently opposing Israel and Palestine, casualties are inevitable and justifiable: “*We are at war, as we have never been before throughout history. If civilians are killed in the course of Palestinian operations, this is not a crime*”³.

In connection with the 11 September attacks there were Muslims who concluded the attackers could not possibly be Muslims but terrorists whose religious affiliation had no relevance for their deeds. This somewhat facile solution to the problem fails to do justice to the fact that many extremists claim, orally or in writing, that Islam is the mainspring and motive of their attacks.

The simple answer to the question whether Islam is a militant religion or a peaceful one that is being misappropriated for political ends is probably “both”.

It is important to define the terms of the discussion. There can be no doubt that the Koran unequivocally condemns killing innocent people. In Islamic jurisprudence murder, manslaughter, terror and attacks against innocent victims, including bodily injury, are serious crimes punishable in a court of law. The Sharia reserves execution as a punishment for capital offences such as adultery, sedition, apostasy or in martial law.

However not all Muslims would class a suicide bomb attack as murder or manslaughter. This results from the differing conclusions Muslims draw from Muhammad’s example. In the early part of his career from around 610 to 622 AD, Muham-

³ ‘Abd as-Sabur Shahin, lecturer of Dar al-Ulum in Kairo, in: al-Ahram al-‘Arabi, 15. Dec 2001, cited by Haim Malka. Must Innocents Die? The Islamic Debate over Suicide Attacks. in: Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2003, p. 5 (see also www.meforum.org/article/530).

mad was a preacher calling his compatriots to faith in Allah as sole creator and judge and pronouncing ethical principles such as appeals for fair trading or solicitude for ageing parents.

In the last ten years of his life subsequent to his emigration (*hijra*) to Medina in 622 AD, Muhammad acted as military commander, politician and legislator and was able to gather many more followers round him, whom he led in a number of military campaigns against those who resisted his message and rule, principally three large Jewish and a number of Arabic tribes. The Koran condemns these “infidels” and their opposition to Islam, which in numerous verses is equated with opposition to God and his Prophet. Muhammad’s enemies are denoted “friends of Satan”: “*Those who do believe battle for the cause of Allah; and those who disbelieve battle for the cause of idols. So fight the friends of satan (the devil). The devil’s strategy is ever weak*” (4:76).

Muhammad preached and lived out ethical principles and military combat, and following his example is one of the immutable duties of every pious Muslim. Theologians differ as to whether every individual Muslim is bound to participate in the struggle to defend and propagate Islam.

The Koran calls upon Muslim believers to take up the struggle against the enemy and the adversary and the following passages show Muhammed appealed more than once to his followers to fight: “*Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that you hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that you love a thing what is bad for you. Allah knows, you know not*” (2:216). And: “*So fight in the way of Allah – you are not taxed (with the responsibility for anyone) ex-*

cept for yourself – and urge on the believers.” (4:84)

“Infidels” and “hypocrites” are the target of the struggle: “O prophet! Strive against the infidels and the hypocrites! Be harsh with them. Their ultimate abode is hell, a hapless journey’s-end.” (9:73)

Extremists who apply the early Muslim community’s struggle against “infidels” to present-day conflicts can hardly be accused of misinterpreting the Koran, for people who resist the spread of Islam can scarcely be considered as “innocent victims”, particularly in Israel, where there is not a family without someone serving in the armed forces. From the extremists’ perspective it is easy to see how even those not involved in the war can be considered enemies of Islam. According to this view, it is legitimate to take the life of Islam’s enemies, who resist its spread, as Israel does by its very existence, as this ultimately counts as defending Islam.

For Shiite Muslims suffering plays a particular role in the struggle against the oppressor. In 680 AD al-Husain, Muhammad’s grandson and last direct descendant, was defeated by a superior Sunnite army, sealing the end of hopes of Shiite accession to power. The annual passion plays in the month of Muharram recall al-Husain’s suffering as an example of the suffering and unjust death of all oppressed in Islam, whose heirs the Shiites consider themselves to be. Last but not least, defending and affirming Palestinian rights is seen against the background of Islamic Middle-eastern culture as defending the honour of the Arab nation and/or Muslim community against an overweening “Christian” West.

Martyrdom

A word must be said in this context about the Koran’s view of martyrdom and

its place in Muslim theology. In the mind of most Muslims to die in *Jihad*, i.e. in God’s cause or striving for God’s purposes, promoting the way of God, is rewarded by immediate access to Paradise. Several passages in the Koran assert that those killed in battle do not really die but simply exchange life on earth for life in the hereafter: “*Let those fight in the way of Allah who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoso fights in the way of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, on him we shall bestow a vast reward*” (4:74). Or: “*Think not of those, who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. No, they are living ... jubilant because of that which Allah has bestowed upon them of his bounty, rejoicing for the sake of those who have not joined them but are left behind: that there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve*” (3:169-170).

According to Muslim tradition those who die a natural death undergo interrogation as to their faith by the two angels of the grave and may for a time have to endure suffering for their sins, from which they can be released by Muhammad’s intercession and enter Paradise. Martyrs, on the other hand, whose faith is not in question, enter Paradise immediately after death without the need for awkward questions or any kind of purgatorial suffering. Martyrs are also buried in their own blood-stained clothes without the need for ritual ablution of the body.

There are a number of Koran verses which associate Paradise with sacrificial involvement for God’s cause possibly resulting in death: “*Now when you meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks until, when you have routed them, then making fast of bonds ... and those who are slain in the way of Allah, he renders not their actions vain. He*

will guide them and improve their state, and bring them into the Garden which he has made known to them”(47:4-6).

This concept of a martyr as one who actively lays down his life for God differs from that of the New Testament and the Early Church of a martyr as a person whose life is taken because they refuse to deny their faith when faced with the alternative: renounce or die.

The prohibition of suicide and the duty of Jihad

Both the Koran (4:29) and Muslim tradition forbid suicide in the sense of persons taking their own life in despair at their circumstances, overwhelmed by need or from fear of torture and thereby deny God’s providential care.

An attack which is likely to prove lethal for its perpetrator is according to this logic thus not classed as suicide but as *Jihad*, striking a legitimate blow in God’s cause as a last resort against the illegitimate oppression of the Muslim community. *Jihad* may also be seen as defending the human rights of Muslims in Palestine who are deprived of them and as a check on tyranny and injustice. From a Muslim point of view such action may take peaceful forms such as the propagation of Islam on the internet, distributing copies of the Koran or donating grants for students at Muslim Universities.

On the other hand *Jihad* may also find militant expression, especially when it involves defending Islam against its “enemies”, and the Koran promises such militants forgiveness: “*And what though you be slain in Allah’s way or die therein? Surely pardon from Allah and mercy are better than all that they amass*” (3:157). Indeed, anyone laying down their life in *Jihad* is not even to be regarded as dead: “*And call*

not those who are slain in the way of Allah ‘dead’. No, they are living, only you perceive not” (2:154).

The Koran promises the great reward of Paradise to all who die in the path of divine duty: “*I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost ... and those who fled and were driven force from their homes and suffered damage for my cause, and fought and were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow – a reward from Allah. And with Allah is the fairest of rewards*”(3:195).

Palestinian or Indonesian suicide bombers do not see themselves as suicides who face divine retribution in the after-life but as militants who lay down their lives in defence of Islam to end the (Western) aggressors’ oppression of the Muslim community (*umma*). While it is still true that Islam forbids the murder of innocent people and appeals for peace, but a peace which in the traditional view which will come when all humanity is governed by the Sharia and Islam has received universal recognition. Muslim opinion differs widely on the question of which means are legitimate to enforce the Sharia, whether Muslim propaganda, legal pressure in the courts or terrorism and war.

Because of this, Muslim academics generally find it difficult to condemn suicide attacks outright. They tend to be condemned in pronouncements aimed at Western countries but condoned in statements destined for the Muslim community. The grand sheikh of al-Azhar, the grand mufti of Egypt, Sayyid Mohammed Tantawi, recently denied their legitimacy in pronouncements to the West and commented on the attack on the US embassy in Kenya in 1998 in the following terms: “*Any explo-*

sion that leads to the death of innocent women and children is a criminal act, carried out only by people who are base, cowards and traitors"⁴. He made a similar pronouncement subsequent to the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York 2001. The Sharia "rejects all attempts on human life, and in the name of shari'a we condemn all attacks on civilians, whatever their community or state responsible for such an attack"⁵.

But as early as 1998 Tantawi declared publicly to Arab audiences that Palestinian attacks were legitimate: "It is every Muslim, Palestinian and Arab's right to blow himself up in the heart of Israel"⁶, and: "Suicide operations are of self-defense and a kind of martyrdom, as long as the intention behind them is to kill the enemy's soldiers and not women and children"⁷.

The well-known Egyptian-born Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the highest Sunni authority in Qatar and acknowledged legal expert (Mufti), makes a distinction between "terrorism" and "martyrdom", regarding Palestinian suicide attacks as legitimate but not the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center: "*The Palestinian who blows himself up is a person who is defending his homeland. When he attacks an occupier enemy, he is attacking a legitimate target. This is different from someone who leaves*

*his country and goes to strike a target with which he has no dispute"*⁸.

The failure of Muslims to condemn suicide attacks needs to be understood in the context of the duty of solidarity within the Umma, the community of all Muslims which forbids public criticism of other Muslims and thus taking the part of non-Muslims. Some Muslims may perhaps regard death in a suicide attack as predestined (*maktub*) and criticism of it as an unlawful querying of a decree of divine providence. Finally account must be taken of possible linguistic differences in the semantic value of terms used in English pronouncements for the West and their Arabic equivalent.

Those who take Muhammad's early life as their guide and regard the propagation of and invitation to Islam as legitimate means in God's cause today can see Islam as a religion of peace. For those who apply the Koranic texts dealing with the struggle against infidels one-to-one to the contemporary events in Palestine or the Western "oppression" of Muslim countries, Islam can prove to be a religion with potential for violence.

⁴ Yotam Feldner. Debating the Religious, Political and Moral Legitimacy of Suicide Bombings (I), MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis, 2. 5. 2001.

⁵ Grand Sheikh condemns suicide bombings. BBC NEWS 4 Dec 2001.

⁶ Feldner. Ibid.

⁷ Sut El-Ama (Ägypten), 26. 4. 2001, cited in: Al-Hayat London-Beirut, 27. 4. 2001 and in: „Debating the Religious, Political and Moral Legitimacy of Suicide Bombings (I), MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis Series, No. 53, 2 May 2001.

⁸ Ar-Raya, Doha, 26. Oct 2002, cited from Haim Malka. Must Innocents Die? The Islamic Debate over Suicide Attacks. in: Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2003, p. 4.