

Princeton Readings in
Islamist Thought

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS FROM
AL-BANNA TO BIN LADEN

Edited and Introduced by
Roxanne L. Euben
and Muhammad Qasim Zaman

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

Chapter 5

SAYYID QUTB

1906–1966

SAYYID QUTB is one of the most influential architects of contemporary Sunni Islamist political thought, a stature that has prompted one journalist to dub him “The Philosopher of Islamic Terror” (Berman 2003a). Yet Qutb’s work and legacy are far more complex, polyvalent, and susceptible to multiple readings than such labels suggest. While some of the most brutal Islamists call themselves his acolytes, there are many others for whom Qutb has inspired nonviolent mobilization and gradualist political reform. In place of such sensationalist characterizations, then, it is more accurate to say that Qutb has provided several generations of Sunni Islamists with a moral map of history and politics in which Muslim experiences of impotence and suffering are simultaneously explained and offered redress.

In wide-ranging articles, books, letters, and an extensive *tafsir* (Qur’anic commentary) composed between 1948 and his execution in 1966, Qutb weds an increasingly strident indictment of Western culture, Euro-American power, and the corruption of Middle Eastern regimes to an ambitious project of social transformation, one aimed at bringing into existence a cadre of righteous Muslims dedicated to remaking the foundations of collective life through sustained political action. Both critical and revolutionary dimensions of Qutb’s thought have proved remarkably flexible and mobile, traveling well beyond the specific context of mid-twentieth-century Egypt to inflect the practice and discourse of twenty-first-century Islamists from Syria to Pakistan, Sudan to the United States, Algeria to France. Qutb’s influence does not derive solely from the substance of his arguments, however; his appeal is bound up with the ways in which the events of his later life and the circumstances of his death have become an extension and symbol of his life’s work, investing his writing with an unusual power and political purchase.

Born in 1906 in a village in Upper Egypt, Qutb began his career in the 1930s as an elementary school teacher, and went on to serve as an inspector of public schools for the Egyptian Ministry of Education. A frequent participant in the literary debates among Egypt’s leading intellectuals, Qutb’s contributions at this time were often less than original, and his politics tended toward the “liberal” nationalism of his early mentors.¹

¹The quotation marks here signal the fact that what is called “liberalism” in this context is not an uncomplicated embrace of the ideas and processes associated with Anglo-American liberalism, but rather reflects a complex and eclectic amalgamation of liberal political theory and reinterpreted Islamic traditions.

His religious and political commitments would undergo a radical transformation in the years that followed, precipitated by a series of personal crises as well as growing dismay with the Egyptian constitutional experiment; British manipulation of domestic politics; the impoverishment of a growing number of his compatriots; and the opening of Palestine to Jewish immigration following World War II.

By 1948 the Ministry of Education found it prudent to ship the forty-two-year-old off to the United States to study the American system of education. The assignment was largely a pretext; the trip was designed to quell the increasingly strident moralism of Qutb's writing by exposing him to the attractions of a world he hated but had never directly experienced. The effort backfired. Qutb viewed his almost two-year stay in America through the lens of a stark division between an embattled Islam and a West he characterized as anti-Muslim, racist, sexually promiscuous, reflexively pro-Israeli, and morally and spiritually impoverished despite its material prosperity. To Qutb, even Americans' propensity to attend church in droves was not what it seemed. Americans do not seek spiritual reflection in their religion, Qutb wrote in one of a series of articles later published under the title *Amrika min al-dakhil bi minzar Sayyid Qutb* (America from Within as Seen by Sayyid Qutb), but rather social intercourse of the basest kind. In one instance, a church social was nothing more than an excuse for men and women to dance closely, their bodies undulating to the tune of "Baby It's Cold Outside" under lights dimmed by the Pastor himself (Qutb 1986).

Soon after his return home, Qutb joined al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun (the Muslim Brotherhood), the organization Hasan al-Banna had founded in Egypt in 1928. Deeply opposed to British power in Egypt, Qutb and many other members of the Brotherhood initially supported the 1952 coup that brought Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser to power and abolished the official vestiges of colonial control. Yet Nasser had no intention of acceding to the demands and concerns of the Brotherhood, and the brief period of comity ended in a break that rapidly turned rancorous. Many of the Brothers were subsequently imprisoned and brutalized. Qutb himself was arrested several times and reportedly endured torture so severe that he suffered three heart attacks while incarcerated. After the publication of his final book, *Ma'alim fi'l-tariq* (Signposts along the Road) in 1964, Qutb was arrested for the third and final time, accused of participating in a conspiracy against the Nasser regime; the book was used as evidence against him.² After a quick trial in 1966, the ailing sixty-year-old was

²Historians, leftists, and Brotherhood members disagree about the existence and significance of the alleged 1965 conspiracy to overthrow the Egyptian regime. Some have speculated that what has been called a "plot" was only unrealized and unattainable aspirations. Others have argued that the supposed conspiracy was the pretext Nasser sought to renew his flagging popularity. Still others are convinced that the plot was an invention of a "Zionist conspiracy" (Kepel 1985, 31-35).

hanged on the gallows, martyr to a movement that would radically reshape Muslim politics in the decades that followed.

The conceptual framework articulated in Qutb's most influential work is organized around a systematic indictment of the visible political and social world as well as its underlying logic and epistemological premises.³ Much as some Western thinkers claim that modernity augurs not the triumph of human achievement but the decay of institutions and certainties that had previously given meaning to political life, Qutb argues that the contemporary world is plagued by jahiliyya (age of pagan ignorance). Jahiliyya, a term taken directly from the Qur'an, originally referred to the period of time in Arabia before divine truth had been revealed by the Prophet. As used by Qutb, jahiliyya becomes an epithet rather than a historical condition, a way to simultaneously characterize and condemn what he viewed as the pervasive moral bankruptcy produced by human usurpation of God's authority (R. Euben 1999). According to Qutb, a society is jahili when it has repudiated Allah's hakimiyya (sovereignty) in favor of a philosophy and epistemology that claims for human beings the right to legislate rules for collective behavior and the authority to define how life is to be lived. By this definition, all regimes that explicitly ratify human sovereignty are jahili, whether they call themselves communist, liberal, democratic, socialist, or nationalist. Beneath any surface differences, he avers, such regimes "all share one common truth: their way of life is not established on complete submission to Allah alone. In this respect, they share the same characteristic of other societies, the characteristic of jahiliyya" (Qutb 1991, 93).

For Qutb, the West bears a particular responsibility for unleashing this pathology on the world. The legacies of Greek philosophy, Judaism, Christianity, the scientific revolution, and the European Enlightenment have produced and sustained a worldview that is simultaneously unable to apprehend the broad scope of divine authority and hostile to all those who can (Qutb 1962; 1991). Yet crucial to Qutb's continuing influence among contemporary Islamists is his insistence that what began as a foreign pathology has ceased to be so exclusively. No less than the "unbelieving" West, Qutb argues, Arab nationalists and socialists, Muslim monarchs and theocrats are all jahili. By claiming for themselves the legislative authority that belongs only to Allah, such so-called Muslims represent a metastasizing cancer within the umma, inaugurating an internal crisis of unprecedented scope and scale.

Given such a diagnosis, the antidote is clear and its implementation urgent: divine sovereignty must be acknowledged throughout the earth by establishing Islamic law as the sole source of legislation. Yet, as jahiliyya

³ *Ma'alim fi'l-tariq*, the book that sealed Qutb's fate, is perhaps best known among Europeans and Americans, but several chapters of it are taken from Qutb's even more influential Qur'anic commentary, *Fi zilal al-Qur'an [In the Shade of the Qur'an]*, which he had begun years before. Selections from both are reproduced below.

has penetrated deeply into society, poisoning the very fount of human perception and imagination, it cannot simply be reasoned into remission; rather, it must be cut out with surgical precision to preserve the health of the body politic. This requires human action, for while shari'a is an expression of divine will, it is realized on earth only by *jihad fi sabil Allah*, struggle in the path of God (Qutb 1967a; 1991). Actualization of God's sovereignty thus necessitates a vanguard of Muslims, believers who, like Qutb himself, have penetrated the miasma of jahiliyya and its false gods of materialism, science, and rationalism. Overcoming the alienation intrinsic to jahiliyya requires, however, that an individual first fight "the greater battle [*al-jihad al-akbar*] within himself against Satan, against his appetites, desires, and ambitions, against the interests of his family and of his nation—against anything that is not from Islam" (Qutb 1991, 75–76). Those who emerge victorious—the chosen few who can clearly see the "signposts along the road"—are thus capable not only of recognizing the scope of Islam as a way of life but also of cultivating the discipline, faith, and courage to reshape the world in its image (Qutb 1962; 1991).

Unlike several nineteenth-century Muslim reformists, Qutb repudiates the liberal shibboleth that in a world where diverse visions of the good compete, religion must be a private affair, and the state must remain neutral on matters of religious truth. On the contrary, he rejects the claim that there is a meaningful political distinction between practices of *'ibadat* (worship) and those pertaining to *mu'amalat* (social relations). All facets of life express a unity (tawhid) subject to the authority of Islamic law, from prayer to rules of inheritance to ritual washing to criminal punishments. Acknowledging the Qur'anic admonition that "there is no compulsion in religion" (Q 2:256), Qutb contends that "after [people] are liberated from the lordship of men and the sole authority of Allah is established, *then* there is no compulsion to adopt the faith" (Qutb 1991, 74; emphasis added).

Qutb's arguments here are animated by the conviction that there is but one authentic, unified Islam constituted by self-evident imperatives that require immediate enactment in all domains of life rather than endless debate, analysis, and study. In an echo of the Marxist understanding of praxis as both a "tool for changing the course of history and a criterion for historical evaluation" (Avineri 1968, 138), Qutb argues that Islam is beyond intellectualism, beyond the theory and practice divide:

Islam is intended to penetrate into the veins and arteries of a society and to form a concrete organized movement designed to transform it into a vibrant dynamic community. We should be aware therefore that any attempt to change the living faith of Islam into purely theoretical teachings and academic discussions is an attempt to show the superiority of the "Islamic theory" over the valueless and useless theories formulated by man. Such an attempt would be not only erroneous but also dangerous. (Qutb 1990, 32)

This emphasis on praxis enables Qutb to eschew, as a matter of principle, any attempt to detail the institutions of a legitimate Islamic state as inappropriately theoretical and speculative. For Qutb, a system of rules and regulations becomes necessary—indeed, even possible—only under specific historical conditions: Islam “does not posit hypothetical problems in order to prescribe solutions to them; rather it considers the reality at the time when an existent Muslim society has submitted to God’s law” (Qutb 1991, 34). Such historicism, in turn, allows him to sidestep the interpretive challenges of specifying how, why, and under what circumstances particular provisions of Islamic law must be applied.

Qutb’s claim that there is an authentic Islam, the essence of which is praxis rather than theory, also provides the terms in which he discredits religious scholars and secular intellectuals as jahili pawns who traffic in abstractions and technicalities that blind them to what really matters in the world. Such arguments take aim at what Qutb sees as the epistemological hubris at the heart of the modern philosophical enterprise: the transgression of divine authority evinced equally in Enlightenment rationalism and European colonialism, Marxism and positivism, materialism and Darwinism, Zionism and Arab socialism. At the same time, Qutb’s antipathy to “scholars and intellectuals” is part and parcel of a particular strain of anticlericalism that recurs throughout his later work, much as it does in the writing of several other Egyptian Islamists. Just as Hasan al-Banna and ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj accuse religious scholars of selling their integrity to ungodly regimes, Qutb characterizes “establishment” ‘ulama as “opportunists” who transform religion into a profession, manipulate religious texts to serve their own material interests, and, in so doing, paralyze and deceive Muslims “in the name of religion” (Qutb 1975, 106; 1999–2004, 2:128).⁴

While Sunni Islam has never had a central clerical hierarchy akin to that of the Roman Catholic Church, it is nevertheless the case that the ‘ulama have historically served as custodians of the Islamic tradition. Qutb takes direct aim at this legacy: he suggests that religious scholars have a greater stake in stability than truth and then sets out to demonstrate by example and argument that Muslims without specialized training have the right and obligation to engage the sacred texts without the mediation of the religious elite. As Qutb writes in the opening reflections to his multivolume tafsir, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*:

I have listened to God the exalted conversing with me through this Qur’an—with me, a small little slave. What a sublime and heavenly honor this is for the human being! To what a high rank one is raised by this revelation! What a noble station the human being is granted by his generous Creator! I have lived, in the shade of the Qur’an,

⁴For an analysis of the complex relationship between ‘ulama and Islamists, see discussion in chapter 1.

looking from an elevation at the pagan ignorance [jahiliyya] raging in the land and the petty concerns of its people. [From this vantage point], I have seen the pride the people of this jahiliyya take in their childish knowledge, their childish ideas, their childish preoccupations. [I have looked upon them] like an elder looks upon the frivolities of children, upon their efforts, and upon their lips. And I have wondered: what's wrong with these people! Why is it that they are stuck in this infested mire, and why can they not hear the sublime and heavenly call—the call that elevates life and blesses and purifies it? (Qutb 1967a, 1: 3; for another translation of this passage, cf. Qutb 1999–2004, 1: xxii).

Here and elsewhere, Qutb deftly conflates his own claim to the special knowledge usually reserved for the 'ulama with a championing of the common wisdom of ordinary believers. Islam speaks to all mortals, Qutb avers, but it speaks particularly clearly to true believers of humble origin; they are the “only ones who understand the Qur'an” in part because, unlike scholars and intellectuals, they do not waste time and effort on codifying abstract principles of Islamic jurisprudence (Qutb 1999–2004, 9:334, 10: 96). The truest believers are thus those for whom Islam is praxis rather than theory, Muslims who “face up to jahiliyya with the message of Islam, and who endeavor to return erring humanity to the faith based on submission to God alone, and who strive against tyranny in order to liberate mankind from servitude to others” (Qutb 1999–2004, 9: 334; also 1: 316–17). As we argued in chapter 1, Qutb's tendency to ground his own special authority and insight in the “unsullied” wisdom of ordinary believers makes it possible to read his work as either a brief against democracy or as an enactment of it. While his insistence that the foundation of legitimate authority must be divine rather than human suggests that he is clearly and unambiguously opposed to popular sovereignty, his challenge to religious and political authority in the name of ordinary Muslims can also be seen as an attempt to “democratize” access to the sacred texts and the authority such access confers.

In these respects and in many others, Qutb owes much to other twentieth-century Islamist thinkers. Crucial components of his analysis, particularly his formulation of hakimiyya and jahiliyya, were purloined from the work of Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi as well as from Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali Nadwi, who was largely responsible for introducing Qutb to Mawdudi's thought. In addition, Qutb stepped into a political arena that had already been significantly reshaped by Banna. When Qutb was still a bureaucrat at the Egyptian Ministry of Education, Banna was advancing a regimen of Islamic activism and renewed Qur'anic commitment as an antidote to British domination and Egyptian political paralysis. After Banna was assassinated in 1949, Qutb helped forge his legacy into a system of ideas that simultaneously proffered an indictment of Egyptian politics and transcended its particulars.

While Qutb's particular worldview is in many ways defined in opposition to the modern corruption it excoriates, his work is also embedded in a long and complex tradition of religious reform, revivalism, and even insurrectionism in the history of Muslim societies. For instance, Qutb's attempt to explain and transfigure the problems plaguing the umma by selectively excavating Islamic sources and precedents simultaneously builds on and challenges similar efforts by such nineteenth-century Muslim thinkers as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Rashid Rida. In addition, Qutb may be understood as recuperating the specific "exaltation of action as a criterion of faith" and the "uncompromising attachment to the Qur'an" (Enayat 1982, 6-7) characteristic of the seventh-century Khariji rebels (a comparison Qutb rejects). Still others argue he owes a debt to Ibn Taymiyya's fourteenth-century formulation of a right to revolt against rulers who violated the terms of Islamic law, an argument that would prove crucial not only for those who assassinated Anwar al-Sadat but also for Islamists now living thousands of miles from Cairo (Sivan 1983; 1985, 94-96).

Qutb's work must be understood in relation to these diverse intellectual figures and historical transformations, but the continuing political purchase of his worldview cannot be entirely reduced to them. Forged in the crucible of one man's life, the perspective he articulates is a prism that both reflects and reinforces the grievances of all those who would see themselves as engaging in a permanent jihad on behalf of Islam and against a corrosive human arrogance inaugurated by Western power that is abetted a corrupt Muslim leaders who no longer know what Islam really is. Like Qutb's life, the appeal of his worldview is also tied to its pathos, to its sense of loss and suffering, and to its conviction that a world defined by overwhelming confidence in human knowledge and laws has lost the capacity to answer the most profound questions of the human condition: why we are born, how we ought to live, and why we all die. For Qutb, only a return to Islam enables a human being to realize that

his existence on earth is neither unplanned nor transitory; rather, it is foreordained and destined, his path planned, his existence designed with purpose. He has come into being in this world in order to act and work for his own sake and for the sake of others around him . . . and he cannot show his gratitude to God for the blessing of his existence and his true faith, nor can he hope for redemption from God's appraisal and punishment, unless he fulfills his positive role as God's vice-regent on earth. (Qutb 1962, 188-89)

SIGNPOSTS ALONG THE ROAD

HUMANITY today is standing at the brink of an abyss, not because of the threat of annihilation hanging over its head—for this is just a symptom of the disease and not the disease itself—but because humanity is bankrupt in the realm of “values,” those values which foster true human progress and development. This is abundantly clear to the Western world, which realizes that it cannot provide values for humanity and cannot even persuade itself of the justification for its own existence. “Democracy” in the Western world has resulted in bankruptcy, to the point where it must obviously borrow—incrementally—from the systems of the Eastern bloc, particularly from its economic methods under the name of socialism.

The condition of the Eastern bloc is much the same. Its primary social theory is Marxism, and at first Marxism appealed to a large number of people in the East—and in the West as well—as an ideology that bears the imprint of faith. But now it is so diminished in the realm of “thought” that it would not be far from the truth to say that there is no country left that follows its system. It is, in general, antithetical to the nature of human instincts and its needs; it thrives only in a destructive environment or in an environment long habituated to a dictatorial system. Even under these conditions, the failure of its economic system—although this is just a part of the foundation upon which it is built—has become abundantly clear. Russia, which is at the forefront of the communist systems, is being destroyed by rising prices. Russia used to have a surplus in the era of the tsars, but now it must import wheat and foodstuffs and is in a situation where it must sell its gold to procure food. The reason for this is the failure of collective farming, and ultimately the failure of any system that is antithetical to human nature.

Humanity must have new leadership!

The leadership of humanity by Western man is close to an end, not because Western civilization is materially impoverished or because its economic and military power has diminished. Rather, the epoch of the West is ending because it no longer has any of the “values” that make such leadership possible.

Such new leadership must possess and continually cultivate the material fruits of civilization associated with European ingenuity and unique

material achievements. But it must also enrich humanity with new values entirely—those unlike anything humanity has ever known—by way of an original method that is practical and realistic at the same time.

Islam alone possesses such values and this approach.

The era dominated by scientific progress—an epoch that first arose at the time of the Renaissance in the sixteenth-century and reached its heyday in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries—has also come to an end, as it does not possess this spirit of renewal. Moreover, the “patriotism” and “nationalism” that appeared at this time have withered, as have the territorial movements associated with them. There are no other ideologies capable of providing this spirit of renewal. Both individualist and collective theories have ended in failure; neither these nor any others have this revivalist spirit.

At this critical moment of confusion and disorder, the time of “Islam” and the “umma” has arrived. Islam does not stand in the way of material innovation; on the contrary, Islam has regarded such creativity to be man’s duty from the very start, when Allah gave the *khilafa* (vice-regency) over the earth to man, and deems it—under appropriate conditions—worship of God and fulfillment of the purpose of human existence. “[Prophet], when your Lord told the angels, ‘I am putting a successor [*khalifa*] on earth’” (Q 2:30); “I created jinn [invisible spirits] and mankind only to worship me” (Q 51:56). The Muslim community has come to fulfill what God’s will has enjoined upon humankind: “[Believers], you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God” (Q 3:110); “We have made you [believers] into a just community, so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you” (Q 2:143).

Islam is unable to perform this role, however, unless it is actualized in society or in a community. Humankind does not listen—especially at this time—to abstract theory that never materializes in real life. The Muslim community has not existed for many centuries, for it is not a “land” in which Islam has been located, nor is it a “people” whose forebears lived under an Islamic system at one time in history. Rather “the Muslim community” is a group of human beings whose customs, ideas, practices, laws, statutes, values, and guidelines all emanate from the *manhaj* (Islamic way). The community with these characteristics ceased to exist the moment that rule of God’s law vanished from the earth entirely.

This umma must be restored to its original form so that Islam can once again perform its appointed role as leader of humankind. It is essential to excavate this umma buried beneath the rubble accumulated from generations of ideas, practices, and systems entirely unrelated to Islam and the Islamic way. This is so despite the fact that the “umma” of today claims for itself the name of “the Islamic World”!

I know that there is a vast distance between attempting such "revival" and assuming this leadership, for the real Muslim community vanished from existence and awareness long ago, and the leadership of humankind has long since passed to other ideas, other communities, other concepts and customs. This was the point at which European ingenuity had created a remarkable and vast fund of achievements in science, culture, organization, and material production and, in this respect, brought human progress to its zenith. It is not easy to disregard such achievements and blame those who invented them, especially as the so-called Islamic world is almost devoid of such accomplishments.

Yet in spite of all these considerations, it is still essential to "revive" Islam. Whatever vast distance there may be between the attempt at revival and the attainment of leadership, the effort at Islamic revival is the necessary first step.

So that we do not make any mistakes in our first attempt at Islamic revival, we must clearly understand—in exact terms—this umma's qualifications for the leadership of humankind. The Muslim community now is not capable—nor required—to present evidence of extraordinary material achievements in order for humankind to bow before its supremacy and appoint it to world leadership. In this domain, European genius has already overtaken it; there is no contesting its material supremacy, at least for the next few centuries.

We must thus possess another quality, one that this civilization does not have. This does not mean that we should neglect material creativity. On the contrary, it is incumbent upon us to pursue it as much as is possible, not because such creativity is required to assume the leadership of humankind at this stage but, rather, because it is a characteristic essential to our very existence. Moreover, the "Islamic conception"—which entrusts to humankind vice-regency on earth and deems such material creativity to be, under appropriate conditions, tantamount to the worship of God and a fulfillment of man's purpose—has made it obligatory.

To assume the leadership of humankind, then, it is essential to have a quality other than material creativity. This is none other than the "faith" and "way of life," which both enable humanity to preserve the fruits of material progress and fulfill the needs of human nature. This faith and program must then be actualized in a human collectivity—that is, a Muslim society.

When considering the sources from which the values of human life and its structure currently emanate, it is clear that the entire world today exists in a state of "jahiliyya." Tremendous material success and extraordinary material creativity do not diminish this jahiliyya in the slightest. The foundation upon which this jahiliyya rests is transgression of God's authority on earth and of the most specific of divine attributes, namely, sovereignty. It ascribes to men Allah's hakimiyya (sovereignty)

and makes some men masters of others. It does not do so in the original, simple form of the first jahiliyya but rather by way of arrogating to humankind the right to establish ideas and values, laws and statutes, systems and conventions that are entirely detached from and heedless of the way of life prescribed by God. From this transgression against Allah's authority ensues the abuse of His creatures. The humiliation of the "common man" in collectivist systems, and the oppression of "the individual" and peoples dominated by capitalism and its colonialist ventures, are among the symptoms of this transgression against God's authority and disavowal of the dignity with which He has endowed humankind.

In this respect, Islam's way of life is unique. Where some people worship others in one form or another in all systems that are not Islamic, the Islamic way of life alone liberates all humans from the servitude of some to others, freeing them to worship God alone, be guided by God alone, and obey God alone. Here is the parting of the ways—the new worldview that we can offer to humanity. This worldview and way of life attend to the deepest dimensions of human practical life. This is the resource humankind does not now possess, because it is not among the "products" of Western civilization and European ingenuity, Eastern or Western.

Without a doubt, we have something new that is absolutely perfect, something that humanity does not recognize and is unable to "produce." But this renewal must—as we've said—be actualized in the real world. It is thus essential that a community live in accordance with it. This requires a process of revival in some segment of Islamic land. Sooner or later, this revival will succeed in assuming the leadership of humanity.

How should the process of reviving Islam begin?

There must be a vanguard committed to this undertaking, a vanguard resolved to stay the course and navigate a vast sea of jahiliyya that has taken root in every region on earth. As it proceeds, this vanguard must, on the one hand, remain detached from the surrounding jahiliyya and, on the other hand, keep in contact with it. The vanguard committed to such an undertaking must recognize the "signposts along the road" to know the nature of its role, the essence of its task, the purpose of its commitment, and the point of its departure on this long journey. It must also recognize its position in relation to the jahiliyya that is firmly entrenched throughout the globe.

When should this vanguard join forces with other people, and when should it remain apart? What are the attributes of this vanguard, and what are the characteristics of the jahiliyya surrounding it? How can it communicate with the followers of this jahiliyya in the language of Islam, and what should be discussed? From where and how can guidance for all this be obtained? Such signposts must be derived from the

primary source of this faith—the Qur’an—from its basic prescriptions, from the worldview it created in the souls of the chosen best [the first generations], those whom Allah created to do His will on earth, those who once changed the contours and course of history in the direction willed by Allah. . . .

The primary spring from which the first generation [of Muslims] drank was the Qur’an and the Qur’an alone, for the hadith of the Messenger of Allah—peace be upon him—was just one of the fruits of this spring. When ‘Aisha [Muhammad’s wife] was asked about the character of the Prophet—peace be upon him—she said: “His character is the Qur’an.”

Thus, the Qur’an was the only spring from which this generation drank, the only source that shaped, molded, and educated it. This was not due to a lack of human civilization, culture, knowledge, books, and schools at the time. On the contrary, there was Roman civilization and its culture, books, and laws, which still live on in or alongside European culture. Then there were the legacies of Greek civilization, its logic, its philosophy, its art, which remain a source of Western thought to this day. There was Persian civilization, its art, its poetry, its myths, its beliefs as well as its system of government. There were other civilizations, both near and far: Indian civilization, the civilization of China, and so forth. Roman and Persian cultures had settled to the north and south of the Arabian Peninsula, while the Jews and Christians were living in the heart of it. Hence, it was not for lack of cosmopolitan civilizations and cultures that this generation was restricted solely to the Book of God at that formative time; rather, it was a “decision,” planned and pursued deliberately.

This intent was evident in the anger of the Prophet—peace be upon him—when he saw in the hand of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab⁵—may God be pleased with him—pages of the Torah. He said: “By God, even if Moses had been alive among you today, he would have no recourse but to follow me.” The intent of the Messenger of God here was to restrict the sources that would shape this generation—in this period of initial development—solely to the Book of God, so that their souls and lives would develop in accordance with its method alone. This is why he was angered at seeing ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab—may God be pleased with him—drawing from another source. The Messenger of God—peace be upon him—wanted to build a generation that was pure of heart and mind, pure in imagination and consciousness. Their training was to be free of any influence other than God’s way, which is comprised of the holy Qur’an.

This generation drew solely from this source and attained something unparalleled in history. However, it subsequently came to pass that

⁵The Prophet’s son-in-law and the second caliph (r. 634–44).

other influences intermingled with this source. Successive generations thus drew from sources such as Greek philosophy and logic, Persian myths and their ideas, the Jewish scriptures and Christian theology, along with the residue of other civilizations and cultures. All of this came to be mixed with Qur'anic commentaries, Islamic theology, and principles of jurisprudence. As a result, subsequent generations were educated by a corrupted source, and so a generation like the first has never again appeared.

There is thus no doubt that the dilution of this primary source was the principal determinant of the clear difference between these later generations and the unique and distinctive first generation.

The nature of this source was not the only crucial difference, however; another critical factor was the method by which the members of this unique first generation were trained. They did not study the Qur'an for the purpose of obtaining information or refinement, or for taste or pleasure. Not one of them studied the Qur'an to increase knowledge for its own sake or to address outstanding scientific or legal issues. Instead, he studied the Qur'an to learn what God commands, particularly in regard to the community in which he lived and the life he lived in his community. He studied it to immediately put such instruction into practice, much as a soldier studies "The Daily Command" to act immediately upon what he learns in the battlefield. Consequently, he did not try to read very much of the Qur'an in a single sitting; he recognized that doing so would put too heavy a burden of duties and obligations upon his shoulders. He was content with reading ten verses at a time, memorizing them, and then putting them into practice, as is reported in the hadith of 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud.

This understanding—that knowledge is for action—opened vistas of delight and perception that would not have been available to them if they had approached the Qur'an for the sake of debate, academic study, and information. This way of understanding the Qur'an facilitated action and lifted the burden entailed in the fulfillment of obligations. The Qur'an merged with their very souls, transforming their personalities and lives into concrete embodiments of the [Islamic] way of life, converting instruction usually confined within minds and books into a movement that changed the components, events, and course of life.

Indeed, the Qur'an does not open its treasures to any but those who have accepted this spirit—the spirit that comes from awareness that knowledge is for action. The Qur'an was not revealed to be a book of intellectual enjoyment, or a book of literature or art, fables or history, although it contains all of these elements. Rather, it was revealed to be a way of life, a pure mode of being from Allah. God Almighty disclosed this path to them incrementally, to be read little by little: "[It] is a recitation that We have revealed in parts, so that you can recite it to people at intervals; We have sent it down little by little" (Q 17:106).

The Qur'an was not revealed as a totality; instead, it was revealed in stages according to evolving needs, the constant development of ideas and concepts, the growth of society and human life, and the practical problems facing the Muslim community in real life. One verse or several verses would be revealed for a particular situation or a specific event, addressing what was in the people's minds, showing them the truth of a matter, prescribing for them an appropriate action, correcting errors in understanding and conduct. All of this would bring them closer to the Lord God and illuminate a universe suffused with His attributes. They would thus realize that they lived every moment with the heavenly host (*al-mala al-a'la* [cf. Q 38:69]) under the eye of Allah, subject to the guidance of His boundless power. As a result, their lives actually came to be molded according to the way of life ordained by God Himself.

Learning for the sake of taking action was the method of this first generation [of Muslims], whereas instruction for the sake of study and pleasure was the method of education of successive generations. There is no doubt that this is the second critical factor distinguishing all of these generations from this remarkable and unique first generation.

There is a third cause that deserves careful attention. When a man embraced Islam at that time, he would immediately sever all contact with jahiliyya. He was aware that the moment he committed to Islam, he began anew, separate from everything in his life that had existed in jahiliyya. He came to view all that was jahili in his past with suspicion, doubt, wariness, and fear, realizing that these were corrupt and impermissible in Islam. Whenever he lost control, whenever old habits tempted him anew, whenever he felt too weak to fulfill the Islamic obligations, he immediately became aware of his sinfulness and of the need to cleanse his soul of what he had fallen into, renewing the effort to transform himself in accordance with guidance from the Qur'an.

Thus, there was a completely conscious break between a Muslim's jahili past and his Islamic present, followed by a complete separation from the jahili society surrounding him, a radical detachment from the jahili environment and his social ties to it. When he finally withdrew from the jahili environment, he decisively joined the Islamic one, even if the world of trade and daily interaction involved some exchange with the polytheists. Conscious detachment is one thing, daily commerce is another.

This repudiation of the jahili environment, its customs and ideas, practices and ties, is the result of replacing polytheism with belief in tawhid, that is, replacing the jahili worldview with the worldview of Islam. As a result, [Muslims] could join the new Islamic community under new leadership and pledge to this community and leadership all their loyalty, allegiance, obedience, and deference.

This was the crossroads, the beginning of a journey on a new road, a journey free from the burden of all the pressures to imitate jahili

society, from the concepts and values prevailing in it. A Muslim endured nothing there but abuse and strife, but in his soul he had already resolved that the demands of the jahili worldview, and the pressure to imitate jahili society, would not deflect him from this path.

We are today immersed in jahiliyya, a jahiliyya like that of early Islam or darker (*azlam*). Everything around us is jahiliyya: people's ideas, their beliefs, their habits, their traditions, the sources of their culture, their art, their literature, rules, and laws. Even all that we have come to consider Islamic culture, Islamic sources, philosophy, and thought—these are all products of jahiliyya. This is why the values of Islam have not taken root in our souls, why the Islamic worldview (*tasawwur*) remains obscured in our minds, why no generation has arisen from among the people equal to the caliber of the first Islamic generation.

In the course of the Islamic movement—and in the period of initial training and preparation in particular—we must divest ourselves of all the jahili influences in which we live and from which we draw. We must return to the beginning, to the unadulterated source from which these men [of the first generations] derived guidance, the content of which was unalloyed and free of defect. We must return to it to derive our conception of the nature of the universe, the nature of human existence, and all the connections between these two dimensions of existence and the Perfect, true Being, God Almighty. From this we derive our concepts of life, our values, our ethics, our approach to government, politics, economics, and all the other components of life.

When we return, we must do so with the recognition that instruction is for the sake of action rather than for study or pleasure. We must return to it to find out what it wants us to be and then become it. Along the way, we will find what academics and acolytes of pleasure generally find in the Qur'an—artistic beauty, marvelous tales, scenes of the Day of Judgment, intuitive logic. We will find all of this in the Qur'an but this is not our primary purpose. Our primary aim is to discover: What does the Qur'an want us to do? What is the comprehensive worldview that it intends us to have? How does the Qur'an develop our understanding of God? What are the ethics, principles, and systems we must actualize in life?

Then we must rid ourselves of the oppression of jahili society, jahili ideas, jahili traditions, and jahili leadership. Our mission is not to accommodate the fact of jahili society and not to profess allegiance to it; because of the characteristics of jahiliyya, it is not possible to negotiate with it. Therefore our task is first to change ourselves so that we may change this society and then to transform the reality of this society by changing the very foundations of jahiliyya.

There is a fundamental clash between jahiliyya and the Islamic way of life and the Islamic worldview; indeed, jahili coercion and oppression prohibit us from living in the way ordained by God. Therefore, our

first step along the road must be to rise above this jahili society and its values and ideas. We must not change our own values and ideas in the least, nor should we meet it halfway. Oh no! We and it [jahiliyya] are on different paths and if we happen to accompany it for one step, we will lose our way entirely and miss this path!

We will encounter pain and hardship along this road, and enormous sacrifices will be required of us. But we cannot be masters of our own wills if we wish to follow the path of the first generations [of Muslims] through whom God established His way by helping it triumph over jahiliyya. To emerge from jahiliyya as the distinguished and unique first generation did, then, it is best that we be alert at all times to the nature of our path and the road we must follow.

IN THE SHADE OF THE QUR'AN

THE DIFFERENT stages of the development of jihad, or striving for God's cause [reveal] a number of profound features of the Islamic approach that merit discussion; but we can only present them here very briefly.

The first of these features is the serious realism of the Islamic approach. **Islam is a movement confronting a human situation with appropriate means. What it confronts is a state of ignorance, or jahiliyya, that prevails over ideas and beliefs, giving rise to practical systems that are supported by political and material authority. Thus, the Islamic approach is to confront all this with vigorous means and suitable resources.** It presents its arguments and proofs to correct concepts and beliefs; and it strives with power to remove the systems and authorities that prevent people from adopting the right beliefs, forcing them to follow their errant ways and worship deities other than God Almighty. The Islamic approach does not resort to the use of verbal argument when confronting material power. Nor does it ever resort to compulsion and coercion in order to force its beliefs on people. Both are equally alien to the Islamic approach, as it seeks to liberate people from subjugation so that they may serve God alone.

Second, Islam is a practical movement that progresses from one stage to the next, utilizing for each stage practically effective and competent means, while preparing the ground for the next stage. It does not confront practical realities with abstract theories, nor does it use the same old means to face changing realities. Some people ignore this essential feature of the Islamic approach and overlook the nature of the different stages of development of this approach. They cite Qur'anic statements stating that they represent the Islamic approach, without relating these statements to the stages they addressed. When they do so, they betray their utter confusion and give the Islamic approach a deceptive appearance. They assign to Qur'anic verses insupportable rules and principles, treating each verse or statement as outlining final Islamic rules. Themselves a product of the sorry and desperate state of contemporary generations who have nothing of Islam other than its label, and defeated both rationally and spiritually, they claim that Islamic jihad is always defensive. They imagine that they are doing Islam a service when they cast away its objective of removing all

tyrannical powers from the face of the earth, so that people are freed from serving anyone other than God. Islam does not force people to accept its beliefs; rather, it aims to provide an environment where people enjoy full freedom of belief. It abolishes oppressive political systems depriving people of this freedom, or forces them into submission so that they allow their peoples complete freedom to choose to believe in Islam if they so wish. Third, such continuous movement and progressive ways and means do not divert Islam from its definitive principles and well-defined objectives. Right from the very first day, when it made its initial address to the Prophet's immediate clan, then to the Quraysh, and then to the Arabs, and finally putting its message to all mankind, its basic theme remained the same, making the same requirement. It wants people to achieve the same objective of worshipping God alone, submitting themselves to none other than Him. There can be no compromise over this essential rule. It then moves toward this single goal according to a well-thought-out plan, with progressive stages and fitting means.

Finally, we have a clear legal framework governing relations between the Muslim community and other societies, as is evident in the excellent summary quoted from *Zad al-Ma'ad* [by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya; see note 6]. This legal framework is based on the main principle that submission to God alone is a universal message which all mankind must either accept or be at peace with. It must not place any impediment to this message, in the form of a political system or material power. Every individual must remain free to make his or her absolutely free choice to accept or reject it, feeling no pressure or opposition. Anyone who puts such impediments in the face of the message of complete submission to God must be resisted and fought by Islam.

Writers with a defeatist and apologetic mentality who try to defend Islamic jihad often confuse two clearly different principles. The first is that Islam comes out clearly against forcing people to accept any particular belief, while the second is its approach that seeks to remove political and material forces that try to prevent it from addressing people, so that they may not submit themselves to God. These are clearly distinct principles that should never be confused. Yet it is because of their defeatism that such writers try to limit jihad to what is called today "a defensive war." But Islamic jihad is a totally different matter that has nothing to do with the wars people fight today or their motives and presentation. The motives of Islamic jihad can be found within the nature of Islam, its role in human life, the objectives God has set for it and for the achievement of which He has sent His final Messenger with His perfect message.

We may describe the Islamic faith as a declaration of the liberation of mankind from servitude to creatures, including man's own desires. It also declares that all Godhead and Lordship throughout the universe belong to God alone. This represents a challenge to all systems that

assign sovereignty to human beings in any shape or form. It is, in effect, a revolt against any human situation where sovereignty, or indeed Godhead, is given to human beings. A situation that gives ultimate authority to human beings actually elevates those humans to the status of deities, usurping God's own authority. As a declaration of human liberation, Islam means returning God's authority to Him, rejecting the usurpers who rule over human communities according to man-made laws. In this way, no human being is placed in a position of Lordship over other people. To proclaim God's authority and sovereignty means the elimination of all human kingships and to establish the rule of God, the Lord of the universe. In the words of the Qur'an: "He alone is God in the heavens and God on earth" (Q 43:84); "All judgment rests with God alone. He has ordered that you should worship none but Him. That is the true faith, but most people do not know it" (Q 12:40); "Say: 'People of earlier revelations! Let us come to an agreement which is equitable between you and us: that we shall worship none but God, that we shall associate no partners with Him, and that we shall not take one another for lords beside God.' And if they turn away, then say: 'Bear witness that we have surrendered ourselves to God'" (Q 3:64).

Establishing the rule of God on earth does not mean that sovereignty is assigned to a particular group of people, as was the case when the church wielded power in Christian Europe, or that certain men become spokesmen for the gods, as was the case under theocratic rule. God's rule is established when His law is enforced and all matters are judged according to His revealed law.

Nothing of all this is achieved through verbal advocacy of Islam. The problem is that the people in power who have usurped God's authority on earth will not relinquish their power at the mere explanation and advocacy of the true faith. Otherwise, it would have been very simple for God's messengers to establish the divine faith. History, however, tells us that the reverse was true throughout human life.

This universal declaration of the liberation of man on earth from every authority other than that of God and the declaration that all sovereignty belongs to God alone as does Lordship over the universe are not theoretical, philosophical, and passive proclamations. They constitute a positive, practical, and dynamic message that seeks to bring about the implementation of God's law in human life, freeing people from servitude to anyone other than God alone. This cannot be achieved unless advocacy is complemented with a movement that confronts the existing human situation with adequate and competent means.

In actual life, Islam is always confronted with a host of obstacles placed in its way: some belong to the realm of beliefs and concepts; others are physical, in addition to political, social, economic, and racial obstacles. Deviant beliefs and superstitions add further obstacles trying to impede Islam. All these interact to form a very complex mixture working against Islam and the liberation of man.

Verbal argument and advocacy face up to beliefs and ideas, while the movement confronts material obstacles, particularly political authority that rests on complex yet interrelated ideological, racial, class, social, and economic systems. Thus, employing both verbal advocacy and its practical movement, Islam confronts the existing human situation in its totality with appropriate, effective methods. Both are necessary for the achievement of the liberation of all mankind throughout the world. This very important point merits strong emphasis.

This religion of Islam is not a declaration for the liberation of the Arabs, nor is its message addressed to the Arabs in particular. It addresses itself to all humanity, considering the entire earth its field of work. God is not the Lord of the Arabs alone, nor is His Lordship limited to Muslims only. God is the Lord of all worlds. Hence, Islam wants to bring all mankind back to their true Lord, liberating them from servitude to anyone else. From the Islamic point of view, true servitude or worship takes the form of people's submission to laws enacted by other human beings. It is such submission, or servitude, that is due to God alone, as Islam emphasizes. Anyone that serves anyone other than God in this sense takes himself out of Islam, no matter how strongly he declares himself to be a Muslim. The Prophet clearly states that such adherence to laws and authorities was the type of worship that classified the Jews and Christians as unbelievers, disobeying God's orders to worship Him alone.

Al-Tirmidhi relates on the authority of 'Adi ibn Hatim that when the Prophet's message reached him, he fled to Syria. [He had earlier accepted Christianity.] However, his sister and a number of people from his tribe were taken prisoner by the Muslims. The Prophet [peace be upon him] treated his sister kindly and gave her gifts. She went back to her brother and encouraged him to adopt Islam and to visit the Prophet. People were speaking about his expected arrival. When he came into the Prophet's presence, he was wearing a silver cross. As he entered, the Prophet was reciting the verse which says: "They [i.e., the people of earlier revelations] have taken their rabbis and their monks, as well as the Christ, son of Mary, for their lords beside God" (Q 9:31). 'Adi reports: "I said, 'They did not worship their priests.' God's Messenger replied, 'Yes they did. Their priests and rabbis forbade them what is lawful, and declared permissible what is unlawful, and they accepted that. This is how they worshiped them.'"

The explanation given by the Prophet is a clear statement that obedience to man-made laws and judgments constitutes worship that takes people out of Islam. It is indeed how some people take others for their lords. This is the very situation Islam aims to eradicate in order to ensure man's liberation.

When the realities of human life run contrary to the declaration of general human liberation, it becomes incumbent on Islam to take appropriate action, on both the advocacy and the movement fronts. It strikes hard against political regimes that rule over people according to

laws other than that of God, or in other words, that force people to serve beings other than God, and prevent them from listening to the message of Islam and accepting it freely if they so desire. Islam will also remove existing powers, whether they take a purely political or racial form or operate as class distinctions within the same race. It then moves to establish a social, economic, and political system that allows the liberation of man and man's unhindered movement.

It is never the intention of Islam to force its beliefs on people, but Islam is not merely a set of beliefs. Islam aims to make mankind free from servitude to other people. Hence, it strives to abolish all systems and regimes that are based on the servitude of one person to another. When Islam has thus freed people from all political pressure and enlightened their minds with its message, it gives them complete freedom to choose the faith they wish. However, this freedom does not mean that they can make their desires their gods, or that they can choose to remain in servitude to people like them, or that some of them are elevated to the status of lordship over the rest. The system to be established in the world should be based on complete servitude to God alone, deriving all its laws from Him only. Within this system, every person is free to adopt whatever beliefs he or she wants. This is the practical meaning of the principle that "all religion must be to God alone." Religion means submission, obedience, servitude, and worship, and all these must be to God. According to Islam, the term "religion" is much wider in scope than belief. Religion is actually a way of life, and in Islam this is based on belief. But in an Islamic system, it is possible that different groups live under it even though they may choose not to adopt Islamic beliefs. They will, however, abide by its laws on the basis of the central principle of submission to God alone.

When we understand the nature of Islam, as it has already been explained, we realize the inevitability of jihad, or striving for God's cause, taking a military form in addition to its advocacy form. We will further recognize that jihad was never defensive, in the narrow sense that the term "defensive war" generally denotes today. This narrow sense is emphasized by the defeatists who succumb to the pressure of the present circumstances and to the Orientalists' wily attacks. Indeed, the concept of striving, or jihad, for God's cause represents a positive movement that aims to liberate man throughout the world, employing appropriate means to face every situation at every stage.

If we must describe Islamic jihad as defensive, then we need to amend the meaning of the term "defense" so that it means defending mankind against all factors that hinder their liberation and restrict their freedom. These may take the form of concepts and beliefs, as well as of political regimes that create economic, class, and racial distinctions. When Islam first came into existence, this world was full of such hindrances, some forms of which persist in present-day jahiliyya. When we give the term defense such a broader meaning, we can appreciate the motives for

Islamic jihad all over the world, and we can understand the nature of Islam. Otherwise, any attempt to find defensive justification for jihad, within the contemporary narrow sense of defense, betrays a lack of understanding of the nature of Islam and its role in this world. Such attempts try to find any evidence to prove that early Muslims went on jihad to repel aggression by their neighbors against Muslim land, which to some people is confined to the Arabian Peninsula. All this betrays a stark defeatism.

Had Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman, the first-three caliphs, felt secure against any attack on Arabia by the Byzantine or the Persian empires, would they have refrained from carrying the message of Islam to the rest of the world? How could they present Islam to the world when they had all types of material obstacles to contend with: political regimes, social, racial, and class systems, as well as economic systems based on such social discrimination, all of which are guaranteed protection by the state?

Jihad is essential for the Islamic message if it is to be taken seriously as a declaration of the liberation of man, because it cannot confine itself to theoretical and philosophical arguments. It must confront existing situations with effective means, whether the land of Islam is secure or under threat from neighboring powers. As Islam works for peace, it is not satisfied with a cheap peace that applies only to the area where people of the Muslim faith happen to live. Islam aims to achieve the sort of peace that ensures that all submission is made to God alone. This means that all people submit themselves to God, and none of them take others for their lord. We must form our view on the basis of the ultimate stage of the jihad movement, not on the early or middle stages of the Prophet's mission. All these stages led to the situation described by Imam Ibn Qayyim⁶ as follows:

Thus, after the revelation of Sura 9 [Repentance], the unbelievers were in three different categories with regard to the Prophet's relations with them: combatants, or bound by a specified-term treaty, or loyal. The second category embraced Islam shortly thereafter, leaving the other two groups: combatants who feared him, and those who were loyal. Thus, all mankind was divided into three classes: Muslims who believed in the Prophet's message; those at peace with him who enjoyed security; and those who were hostile and feared him.

Such is the attitude that is consistent with the nature of Islam and its objectives. When Islam was still confined to Mecca, and in the early period of the Prophet's settlement in Medina, God restrained the

⁶Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) was a Muslim scholar, adherent of the Hanbali school of Islamic law, and one of the best-known pupils of Ibn Taymiyya.

Muslims from fighting. They were told: "Hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your zakat" (Q 4:77). They were later permitted to fight, when they were told: "Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged—God has the power to help them—those who have been driven unjustly from their homes for saying, 'Our Lord is God.' If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. God is sure to help those who help His cause—God is strong and mighty—those who, when We establish them in the land, keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, command what is right, and forbid what is wrong: God controls the outcome of all events" (Q 22:39–41). They were then required to fight those who fight them but not other people: "Fight for the cause of God those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression" (Q 2:190). But then they were ordered to fight against all idolaters: "Fight against the idolaters all together as they fight against you all together" (Q 9:36). They were also told: "Fight against those among the people of the scriptures who do not believe in God or the Last Day, and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of truth until they pay the submission tax with a willing hand and are utterly subdued" (Q 9:29) This means, as Ibn Qayyim puts it, that "fighting was first forbidden, then permitted, then ordered against those who fight Muslims, and finally against all unbelievers who associate partners with God."

The seriousness that is characteristic of the Qur'anic texts and the Prophetic Traditions on jihad, and the positive approach that is very dear in all events of jihad in the early Islamic periods and over many centuries, make it impossible to accept the explanation concocted by defeatist writers. They have come up with such an explanation under pressure from the present weakness of the Muslim community and the unsavory attacks on the concept of jihad by Orientalists.

When we listen to God's words and the Prophetic Traditions on jihad and follow the events of early Islamic jihad, we cannot imagine how anyone can consider it a temporary measure, subject to circumstances that may or may not come into play, or having the limited objective of securing national borders.

In the very first Qur'anic verse that gives Muslims permission to fight for His cause, God makes it clear to believers that the normal situation in this present life is that one group of people is checked by another so as to prevent the spread of corruption on earth: "Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged—God has the power to help them—those who have been driven unjustly from their homes for saying, 'Our Lord is God.' If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries,

churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed" (Q 22:39-40). We thus see that it is the permanent state of affairs for truth to be unable to coexist with falsehood on earth. Hence, when Islam makes its declaration for the liberation of mankind on earth, so that they may serve only God alone, those who usurp God's authority try to silence it. They will never tolerate it or leave it in peace. Islam will not sit idle, either. It will move to deprive them of their power so that people can be freed of their shackles. This is the permanent state of affairs that necessitates the continuity of jihad until all submission is made to God alone.

[Thus,] holding back from fighting in Mecca, by divine order, was only a stage in a long-term strategy. The same was the case in the early days after the Prophet's migration to Medina. However, what made the Muslim community in Medina take its stance was not merely the need to defend Medina and make it secure against attack. This was certainly a primary objective, but it was by no means the ultimate one. Achieving this objective provided the means and the secure base from which to remove the obstacles that fettered man and deprived him of his freedom.