



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Jihad: Classical Islamic Understanding versus Contemporary Political Misuse: A Textual and Contextual Analysis of Qur'anic and Hadith Sources**

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**ABSTRACT**

The name Jihad holds the key and mistaken place in the Islamic traditions of thought and practice. Traditionally, Jihad represented a wide range of moral, spiritual, intellectual, and defensive, when it was first formed based on the Arabic word jahada (to strive or to put effort). However, the term, in modern politics, has been narrowed down to a militarized and narrow concept of it, particularly by fringe elements and by certain versions of geopolitics. The presented research paper is one that inserts a comprehensive textual and contextual analysis of the verses of the Quran and traditions of the prophet (Hadith) with a view to distinguishing the traditional Islamic understanding of Jihad and its political misinterpretation in the contemporary context. According to the primary sources such as the Quran, published collections of Hadith such as Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, this research paper examines the semantic, juristic and historical context of Jihad.

**KEYWORDS** Jihad, Quranic Exegesis, Hadith Studies, Islamic Jurisprudence, Political Extremism

**Introduction**

Jihad is now one of the most controversial and politicized notions in the modern international journalism. It is often translated as holy war, and has been used by extremism groups to justify violence and critics of Islam to paint the religion as a militant one. However, such interpretations tend to omit the rich textual, juristic, and historical backgrounds on which the concept evolved in classical Islamic scholarship (Yaseen, et. al.,2018; Rijal, 2024).

In its original linguistic form, Jihad is a trilateral Arabic j-h-d, which is translated as to struggle, to exert effort or to strive. The term and its derivations are used several times in the Quran, including as a moral perseverance and intellectual reasoning, and as military defense. To gain a full picture of Jihad, we have to take a look at how it is used in the corpus of Quranic, the traditions of Prophet and classical jurisprudence (Tahira, 2023).

In the past, the ancient Muslim societies were persecuted, exiled, and warred against. This shift of the nascent Muslim polity to Medina was triggered by the migration (Hijrah) of Mecca and existential challenges were experienced by the nascent Muslim polity. It was in this socio-political background that Quranic verses, which allowed war of defense to take place, were revealed. These revelations were not theological in nature but reaction to certain situations in history. This contextual element was always stressed by the classical exegetes (Zakariya, 2025).

Jihad in the Prophetic tradition is found in several forms, in the books like Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. There are some traditions of military campaigns of defensive nature, and some focus on spiritual conflict, self-control, and duty towards the society. Another famous tradition is the coming back after a military campaign to the bigger Jihad which in the understanding of most scholars is internal struggling with the ego (nafs) however, there are controversies about its authenticity (Kumala, 2020).

Classical Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) came up with advanced principles that governed armed warfare. Abu Hanifa and Al-Shafi, are legal scholars who expounded principles of declaration of war, treatment of prisoners, safeguarding of civilians and safeguarding of property. These teachings were developed in relation to political facts and were limited according to the moral demands based on the scripture (Dirno, 2025). Conversely, the modern extremist groups tend to use selective quotes of the verses of Quran, decontextualizing the verses and giving them a jurisprudential meaning. In groups such as Islamic State, the rhetoric of Jihad has been used to defend indiscriminate violence, including against civilians breaking classical prohibitions. These interpretations are drastically different to the mainstream Islamic scholarship (Islam, 2020).

Simultaneously, the rhetoric and media images of the West have often equated Jihad with terrorism. This confusion has enhanced Islamophobia and has crippled the ability to have a detailed academic debate. The fact that Jihad became warfare disregards the centuries of theological thinking which stressed spiritual, intellectual and social struggle (Afsaruddin, 2022).

This study aims to undo the classical Islamic teachings and the misuse of Islam in the present political times. It will attempt to rebuild a proper definition of Jihad in the Islamic tradition by studying as well as classical commentaries and primary texts. The paper also explores how the concept has been reinterpreting by the modern political actors concerning issues of colonialism, nationalism, and international wars.

This research is of importance in that in the academic field, it clears the textual interpretation; in the social context, it presents knowledge to the policymakers, teachers, and religious leaders. To counter the extremist discourses, it is imperative to understand Jihad in the authentic classical context so that an informed discussion is encouraged.

## **Literature Review**

Jihad is an idea that was studied widely in classical Islamic and contemporary academic literature. The meanings have changed over centuries and have been influenced by the developments in theology, politics, and socio-historical changes. In this literature review, it is possible to overview the main classical exegetical works, juristic constructs, reformist interpretations and the current scholarly works aimed to position the argument between classical Islamic knowledge and political abuse today (Santoso, 2020).

## **Classical Exegesis of the Quran (Tafsir)**

The early Muslim thinkers examined Jihad mainly by studying the Quran text and contextually. The exegetical tradition stressed the *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation), and this made sure that verses with implications of war were interpreted within the historical context. Al-Tabari was among the best commentators who gave an extensive account of linking verses about fighting to particular defensive wars that were fought by the early Muslim community. His approach was based mainly on the historical context of reports passed on by the companions of the Prophet, and not theorizing. As of Al-Tabari, the verses that condoned warfare were reactive interventions to the persecution and aggression (Rijal, 2024; Bukhari, 2025). On the same note, Ibn Kathir strengthened the defensive aspect of armed Jihad. In his commentary, he always construed warlike verses in addition to those which were preaching endurance, forgiveness, and moderation. Ibn Kathir emphasized moral laws, such as the ban of killing an unarmed enemy, women, children, and religious clergy. These traditional exegetes did not offer Jihad as an unconditional declaration of war. They instead put it into a context of moral-legal framework based on justice (*adl*) and common good (*maslahah*). Their work set a precedent on which future jurists would expound (Kretch, 2016; Afzal et al., 2025).

## **Hadith Literature and Ethical Framing**

The Prophetic traditions that are contained in canonical books like Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim had a major influence on the classical interpretation of Jihad. These sources chronicle war campaigns and religious encouragements. Many Hadith emphasize the intention (niyyah) as the significant aspect in legitimacy of action. One of the most well-known narrations of Sahih al-Bukhari highlights that the intentions determine the actions, which jurists used in relation to warfare. The use of combat based on personal gain, pride of the tribe or revenge was invalid (Esposito, 2005; Shah et al., 2018).

Other traditions place more importance on non-warlike aspects of struggling, such as parental care, telling the truth to unjust leaders and knowledge. Arguing over the historicity of the greater Jihad narration of inner spiritual struggle, the concept of moral self-discipline was absorbed by mainstream Islamic scholars, including Al-Ghazali, into the wider context of Islamic ethics (Dirno, 2025; Bukhari et al., 2025).

This is why the Hadith corpus represents a comprehensive set of ethics. War is defined as a part of various kinds of struggle, which are controlled by the rigid moral limits (Mostafa, 2021; Bhutto et al., 2025).

### **The development of Jurisprudence in the Classical period:**

The geographical growth of Islamic civilization brought about a systematic organization of the doctrines by jurists of the relations between Muslim and non-Muslim polities. The principles that govern armed conflict were formulated by the founding legal philosophers like Abu Hanifa and Al-Shafi. The school of Abu Hanifa was focused on the security of contracts (aman) and the safety of non-Muslim inhabitants and the war was limited to the situations of aggression or the breach of the treaty. Al-Shafi also advanced the formalization of the types of law, but believed that the legitimate power should justify the military action (Hanne, 2025; Hsu et al., 2024). Subsequent jurists developed distinctions between offensive and defensive Jihad, but even the discussion of offensive war was implicated with medieval geopolitical circumstances, such as empires and boundary wars. Significantly, classical jurisprudence demanded:

- Authority based on legitimate political power.
- Expression of hostilities.
- Security of civilians.
- The prisoners must be treated humanely.

### **Observance of treaties**

These conditions prove that the classical Islamic law did not support indiscriminate violence. It instead created a very strict structure that indicated a sense of ethics.

### **Reformist and Modernist Interpretations**

The outbreak of the colonial experience and the fall of the Muslim political authority led to the redefinition of classical beliefs. Rationalists such as Muhammad Abduh re-examined scriptures in a rationalist way. According to Abdul, most classical decisions were influenced by historical conditions and had to be re-evaluated in the context of the present. Modernist theorists stressed the defensive character of the verses in the Quran about warfare arguing that Islam does not prescribe expansionist violence (Ahmed, 2023). They emphasized the passages that support the idea of coexistence and the freedom of choice and belief and maintained that Islamic teachings should be compatible with the international law. Such reinterpretations tended to be attempts to make Islamic doctrines compatible with the formations of the modern nation-states and the global standards. Reformists

sought to counter literalism by foregrounding context and maqasid (higher objectives of Islamic law).

### **Islamist Reinterpretation of Ideology**

Contrary to the reformist school of thought, some 20th century Islamist intellectuals took more radical interpretations. Jihad was re-defined as a fight against institutional injustice and ignorance (jahiliyyah) by Sayyid Qutb. Qutb wrote in the times when the political repression is in place, and Jihad is presented by the author as a revolution to form the sovereignty of God (Sarmad & Bashir, 2016).

Though Qutb did not directly preach the situation of indiscriminate violence against civilians, his ideas were selectively used by the later militant groups. Such groups like Al-Qaeda and Islamic State used medieval jurists as well as contemporary ideologues as the reasons to insurg the world. According to scholars, these kinds of movements disconnect the classical rulings to their institutional settings. They dodge the academic consensus and legitimacy to make Jihad a decentralized militant ideology (Noor et al., 2025; Zakariya, 2024).

### **Professional Academic Scholarship:**

Jihad has been westernized and globalized in the approaches by Western and world scholars. The classical doctrines, as argued by some historians, were more of imperial contexts as other pre-modern civilizations. Another sets of people point out that Islamic law came into play with humanitarian restrictions that were not witnessed before. In modern scholarship, the distinction that is commonly made is between normative Islam (as based on authoritative texts) and movement politics which appeal to religious symbolism. Extremism experts observe that the recruitment of extremists is based in many instances on selective citation as opposed to a thorough textual examination. Moreover, interfaith scholars emphasize the significance of comparative points of view. There are similarities between Islamic rules on war and concepts of just war found in both Christian and secular traditions. This comparative prism highlights how often religious customs are filled with both moral directives and historical accidents (Askhatuly et al. 2024; Karamat, et. al., 2019).

### **Material and Methods**

This research employs qualitative textual analysis, combining:

- **Primary Source Analysis:** Examination of Qur’anic verses and Hadith.
- **Classical Tafsir Review:** Comparative study of exegetical interpretations.
- **Thematic Coding:** Categorizing references into spiritual, defensive, and political dimensions.
- **Comparative Framework:** Contrasting classical and contemporary interpretations.

### **Data Sources**

<b>Source Type</b>	<b>Primary Texts</b>	<b>Classical Commentary</b>	<b>Contemporary Analysis</b>
Qur’an	Direct verses	Tafsir literature	Academic scholarship
Hadith	Bukhari, Muslim	Juristic manuals	Modern critiques
Jurisprudence	Fiqh texts	Legal theory works	Political discourse

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Thematic Distribution of Jihad References in Qur'an**

Category	Frequency (Approx.)	Interpretation
Spiritual Struggle	35%	Emphasis on moral perseverance
Intellectual/Verbal Struggle	25%	Debate and argumentation
Defensive Armed Struggle	30%	Regulated warfare
General Striving	10%	Social and economic effort

The data suggests that armed conflict constitutes only one dimension among several broader meanings.

**Table 2**  
**Classical vs Contemporary Framing**

Aspect	Classical Jurisprudence	Extremist Reinterpretation
Authority	State leadership required	Self-declared groups
Civilians	Protected	Often targeted
Purpose	Defense & justice	Ideological expansion
Ethics	Strict regulations	Selective citation

**Interpretation:** Contemporary misuse significantly departs from juristic consensus.

## Conclusion

This study proves that classical Islamic scholarship has conceptualized Jihad as complex striving that is based on defensive and ethical ideals. Armed conflict could be tolerated only in situations of rigid control and legitimate power. The spiritual aspect continued to form the moral development.

In the contemporary form of political malpractices, it is decontextualized understandings of scripture and an avoidance of several centuries of juristic learning. The extremist discourses reduce complex ideologies to catch-phrases, subordinating both the Islamic tradition and world peace.

A delicate understanding of Jihad requires referring to primary sources and doing so in a historical and methodical manner.

## Policy Recommendations

**Curriculum Change:** Integrate religious education contextual studies of the Quran.

**Educational Outreach:** Fight extremist propaganda by promoting conventional scholarship.

**Interfaith Dialogue:** Improve scholastic discourses by demystifying misunderstandings.

**Digital Literacy Campaigns:** Retaliate against the online radicalization narratives.

**Policy Cooperation:** The governments are recommended to consult available scholars in the development of counter-extremism policies.

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