



The Mind of Jihad

Laurent Murawiec About the Jihadization of Islam

Reviewed by

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz*

As the beautiful hotel in Mumbai was set ablaze, his children asked him who those terrorists are and why they would do this.

That moment Aijaz Zaka Syed had nothing to say. This well-known journalist of the *Dubai Gulf Times* admitted that this speechlessness happened to him often. He could not answer his friend, as he remarked that Muslims and Islam had a problem that they alone are able to solve. If they do not, the whole world would turn against them. Aijaz, a Muslim from Hyderabad, asks himself: How many innocents have still to die before the leaders of the Muslim regions will take decisive actions so that Islam does not sink into an extreme cult? It is senseless to hide or to delude oneself by saying that Islam has nothing to do with terrorism. A majority of Muslims should actively defend their religion.



Thriving Moghul empires displayed beauty and knowledge: Indian miniature about 1800

Readers find help in this timely book. It contains a proper diagnosis, without which there will not be a proper healing. According to Murawiec, jihad — fateful and shrouded in darkness — like a Sphinx transfixes us. The common analysis of jihadism in Washington, the author laments, suffers from being mono-causal and ahistorical. The expressions “war on terror” and “terrorism” merely focus on the tool, but fail to capture the essence of terror as continuation of politics and a system of power.

The author, a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute, deals in three chapters with the cult of death, elites, and the Mahdi. There follow chapters on tribalism, jihad, Islamic revolution, and jihad as terror. The author confronts the reader with two striking features: the way he links some seemingly unconnected phenomena and how, often in a profoundly challenging manner, he presents his new synthesis. Through the course of his study, he defines jihad not simply as “irregular” warfare directed solely against the West, but rather as regular, systematic warfare directed also against democracies in the East — as the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai illustrate — aimed at killing as many infidels as possible and thus terrifying people through the media.

Before picking up on some of these ideas, it may be useful to discuss briefly the doctrine of jihad. Generally, the Arabic verb *jahada* means "to strive", and in the original Islamic sense "to strive for God." This includes moral endeavors and waging of a holy war (mostly against infidels). The Qur'an contains both, although as Muhammad grew from the rebel in Mekka to the founder of a state in Medina, jihad came to describe more the military than the spiritual activity. But jihad did not count as one of the five pillars of Islam. Some Muslim leaders, such as the Mahdi of Sudan, sought, ultimately unsuccessfully, to change this. However, even in the military sense of the term, there was a distinction between jihad of defense and jihad of attack.

Murawiec illuminates how the doctrine of jihad was employed in Islamic regions. Interestingly, he also shows how Europeans "adopted" jihad. In the years leading up to the First World War, Berlin and Istanbul, in a concerted fashion, altered the doctrine of jihad in an effort to kindle Islamic revolts in the colonial hinterland of British India and Arabia, French North Africa, and Russian Central Asia. As the Ottomans sided with the Germans in late 1914, the Sultan-Caliph's fatwa pushed to oblige all Muslims to wage jihad on the side of favored infidels (the Central Powers) against other (the Allied Powers) and their Muslim allies (the latter had no right to fight back against Ottomans). Accordingly, Istanbul, with authority over all Muslims, stoked the fire of many native Islamist revolts. Thus, one might add, Euro-Islam was born.

Murawiec also describes how "red" jihad was invented. After World War I, the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin tried to incite all "colonized people" to world revolution. In pursuit of this aim, Lenin convened the Congress of the Suppressed People in Baku in 1920. Soon his agitators organized subversively a jihad against foreign masters in neighboring Islamic lands. As Murawiec observes, this went on until World War II.

Then, in late 1941, Adolf Hitler concluded a deal with the Grand Mufti of Palestine Amin al-Husaini whereby Hitler would support al-Husaini's quest for a Great Arabian Empire and propagate Nazi ideology (blending the Islamic hatred of Jews with the Nazi's racist hatred of Jews into a new ideology). However, this was not the only reason for the "black" jihad. Many Muslim prisoners of war had to be turned around in 1941 against their former Soviet masters. Thus Hitler agreed to this jihad.



Muslims as German soldiers with the Mufti in Berlin 1942

The author confronts us with profound insights, although the technique of long quotations gives the book the character of an encyclopedia. Amin al-Husaini, it should be added, continued to spread a hateful ideology long after the war as he established also bases in Iran, India, and Pakistan.

During the war he met with Indians such as Subhas Chandra Bose who tried to combine the ideology of the Nazis with that of the Soviets (the one inciting hatred against races, the others against classes). A "flexible anti-imperial concept" grew out of this, as Murawiec explores in his discussions of Palestine and Algeria: strains of green, black and red jihad intermixed — a totalitarian mosaic with colorful regional and local particularities.

It is this complex and deeply rooted problem — the *jihadization* of Islam — that Murawiec so deftly explores in *The Mind of Jihad*. It is this very problem that, as the horrific attacks in Mumbai make clear, requires urgent attention lest there be even more innocent victims and lest, as Aijaz Zaka Syed warns, Islam itself become the target of much of the world's contempt. And it is a problem that Muslims themselves must untangle, confront, and overcome.

Laurent Murawiec: *The Mind of Jihad*. Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 352 pages. \$24.99.

*Dr. Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, Gloria Center, Herzliya, Israel