**Concepts that Matter in Countering Extremism**

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***Introduction***

On June 29, 2014, Daesh officially announced the creation of an Islamic Caliphate (Islamic State) in the Levant (Iraq and Syria) and named its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Caliph. In this announcement Daesh underlined its aim to expand territorially through hijra (migration of Muslims from all over the world to the Levant) and jihad (warfare). To mark its self-proclaimed caliphate, Daesh resorted to the mass abduction, murder, rape, and enslavement of women, especially among the minority of Yazidis. By so doing it wanted to stage a spectacle that the world would be unable to ignore. Daesh’s brutality against its female captives was intended to humiliate the enemy and send a warning to anyone who did not adhere to its extremist, radical interpretation of Islam.

Ever since, the terms “hijra,” “jihad,” and “caliphate,” (Islamic government) have been used amongst journalists, policy-makers, and academics all over the world in relation to Daesh and terrorism. However, the semantic complexity, historical legacy, political usage, and cultural symbolism of these terms are seldom acknowledged, let alone understood.[[1]](#endnote-2) This paper sets out to contextualize and shed light on these terms with regards to earlier Islam (classical and pre-modern eras) where they originate. Rooted in the Islamic sacred tradition: the Qur’an and the Hadith,[[2]](#endnote-3) the three terms became central not only to the Islamic political and legal thought, but also in the believers’ personal and social lives, and have been transmitted through centuries as strong symbols of a cherished legacy and a cement of a common identity, communal belonging, and ideal. While the root meanings of hijra, jihad, and caliphate are found in the classical period, the terms underwent a semantic transformation in the pre-modern period to accommodate new culturally-heterogeneous comers to Islam and regulate their social behavior within an overarching Islamic Umma (nation). The paper aims to underline the importance of understanding the historical and religious aspects of the three terms and their place in the Muslims’ belief system.

***The Origin and Development of the Word “hijra”: Early Islam***

Hijra[[3]](#endnote-4) (emigration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina) coincides with the birth of a collective religious unity of a Muslim community, a new polity, as well as the victories and exigencies of empire-building. In 622 CE, Prophet Muhammad migrated from [Mecca](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mecca) to [Medina](https://www.britannica.com/place/Medina-Saudi-Arabia) to escape persecution by Meccans who refused to believe his prophecy. The date represents the starting point of the Muslim era and the Muslim calendar. [Muhammad](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Muhammad) himself dated his correspondence, treaties, and proclamations after other events of his life. It was Umar Ibn Affan, the second [caliph](https://www.britannica.com/topic/caliph), who in the year 639 ce introduced the Hijrah era (now distinguished by the initials AH, for Latin anno Hegirae, “in the year of the Hijra”). Umar started the first year AH with the first day of the lunar month of Muharram, which corresponds to July 16, 622, on the [Julian calendar](https://www.britannica.com/science/Julian-calendar). In 1677–78 (ah 1088) the [Ottoman](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire) government, still keeping the Hijrah era, began to use the solar (Julian) year, eventually creating two different Hijrah era dates, resulting from the differences between a solar and a lunar year.

The term hijra has also been applied to the emigrations of the faithful to Ethiopia and of Muhammad’s followers to [Medina](https://www.britannica.com/place/Medina-Saudi-Arabia) before the capture of [Mecca](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mecca). Muslims who later quitted lands under Christian rule were also called “[muhajirun](https://www.britannica.com/topic/muhajirun)” (emigrants). The [Khawarij](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kharijite) ([Kharijites](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kharijite)), those Muslims who withdrew their support from the arbitration talks that called into question the right of the fourth caliph, Ali, to the [caliphate](https://www.britannica.com/place/Caliphate) in 657 ce, used the term to describe those who joined them. The most-honoured muhajirun considered among those known as the [Companions of the Prophet](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Companions-of-the-Prophet), are those who emigrated with Muhammad to Medina. Muhammad praised them highly for having forsaken their native city and following him and promised that God would favour them. They remained a separate and greatly esteemed group in the Muslim community, both in Mecca and in Medina, and assumed leadership of the Muslim state, through the caliphate, after Muhammad’s death.

As a result of the Hijra, another distinct body of Muslims came into being, the Ansar (helpers); they were Medinese who aided Muhammad and the muhajrun. The Ansar were members of the two major Medinese tribes, the feuding al-[Khazraj](https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Khazraj) and al-[Aws](https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Aws), whom Muhammad had been asked to reconcile when he was still a rising figure in Mecca. They came to be his devoted supporters, constituting three-fourths of the Muslim army at the [Battle of Badr](https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Badr) (624 ce). When no one of their number was chosen to the caliphate to succeed Muhammad, they declined in influence as a group and eventually merged with other Muslims who had settled in Medina.

As more and more Meccans embraced Islam and in the face of the harsh persecution they were subject to, Muhammad and his followers emigrated to Medina which welcomed them with open arms. The hijra (emigration) marks the formal beginning of Islam and entailed a change from the more peaceful to the more war-associated meaning of jihad.

These early Islam events associate the concept of hijra with both war to preserve and spread Islam and struggle to achieve peace. But beyond these basic meanings of hijra, Muslims have since early Islam bestowed divine qualities and deep respect for the term. Hijra has been associated with the sacred texts (Qur’an and Hadith), religious identity, and sacrifice for self-peace and peace in the community. The fact that the Islamic calendar coincides with hijra brought the concept to Muslims’ daily lives: it punctuates meaningful events in their lives which they celebrate and see as occasions for family gatherings: the birthday of the Prophet, Ramadan, haj (pilgrimage), the end of Ramadan feast (small feast), the sacrifice feast (great feast), etc. Hijra is also associated with individual spiritual retreat and reflection, a sort of emigration to an inner world that brings the individual closer to God.

***The Origin and Development of the Word “jihad”: The Classical Era***

Kelsay (2015: 86) states:

“Literally meaning “struggle,” jihad may be associated with almost any activity by which Muslims attempt to bring personal and social life into a pattern of conformity with the guidance of God. Nevertheless, early in the development of Islam, jihad came to be associated particularly with fighting or making war “in the path of God.” In thinking about jihad then we may learn a great deal through a focus on war/women.”

The linguistic journey of the term “jihad” is an interesting one. In the foundational period of Islam, this term was infused by both the concept of “accountability before God” and the elevated meaning of hijra. The word did not disappear with the advent of Islamic fraternal wars, the accommodation of new converts and new tribes, or even the wars between sects and tribes. None of these big crises in the history of Islam could remove the symbolically positive meaning of jihad.

Etymologically, the Arabic verbal noun “jihad” is a derived from the trilitiral root {j h d} which means “strive, exert a considerable physical or moral effort to resist something.” This word and its derivatives appeared first in the Qur’an;[[4]](#endnote-5) here are two samples:[[5]](#endnote-6)

“Those who believe, and emigrate, and strive (jahadu) in the cause of God with their money and their lives, are far greater in rank in the sight of God. These are the winners.” (9:20)

“The true believers are those who believe in God and His messenger, then attain the status of having no doubt whatsoever, and strive (jahadu) with their money and their lives in the cause of God. These are the truthful ones.” (49:15)

The two samples refer to two different meanings of jihad. The first one is war-associated and denotes war action for the Islamic faith against unbelievers, a struggle in defense of an Islamic value deemed worthwhile by a believer, and an endeavor to build a good Muslim society. This meaning needs to understood against the wider context in which Prophet Muhammad did not leave a “state” but a community of believers that should struggle to remain so. It is telling that other Arabic words are used to denote war action in an unambiguous way: qitaal and harb. Further, the Qur’an is a book of spiritual revelation, not a systematic legal treatise.

The second Qur’anic meaning of jihad is associated with an individual’s internal struggle against baser instincts, often understood as an elevation of the spirit away from instinct and closer to God. This meaning of jihad is predominant in the surats that descended in the first decade of the seventh century while the Prophet was in Mecca, his home town. It was used by Prophet Muhammad as a strategy to gain more willing adherents This meaning is corroborated by the fact that the beginning of Islam was not associated with violence. The Prophet was instructed to proclaim Islam as complete unity with God in a peaceful way first to his closest kin and friends, then gradually to the members of his bigger family and community.

The Qur’anic use of the word jihad is often followed by the expression “fi sabilillah” (in the path of God), a way of “sacralizing” warfare against the enemies of Muslims which otherwise would not be different from pre-Islamic tribal warfare (Streusand, 1997: 17).

“It important to note that while the religious justification for waging jihad is clearly stated and developed in the Qur’an, Prophet Muhammad never formally called for jihad or used the term.”

The transition from the more peaceful to the more war-associated meaning of jihad coincided with hijra which marks the formal beginning of Islam. Hence, in Medina, jihad meant warfare and was used to gain more followers and territory. The first surats that descended in Medina address the causes of jihad and underline the justice aspect of military activity. The purpose of jihad then wasto correct what is wrong and believers who engaged in this action received the highest rewards upon death:

“Our Lord is Allah. Had Allah not repelled some people by others, surely monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is mentioned frequently, would have been demolished.Indeed, Allah will support whoever supports Him. Allah is surely Strong and Mighty. (22:39–40)

In the second source of Islamic shari’a, Hadith, jihad means “armed action” as no less than one hundred and ninety-nine references to this meaning are recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, widely considered the most standard collection of the Prophet’s Sayings (Streusand 1997).  However, jihad is not treated in an exhaustive manner in Hadith. Several Hadiths served only to annotate or explain specific topics that were only alluded to or foreshadowed in the Qur’an.

“Muhammad, upon him be peace, was closer to them (believers) than their own selves. The (pagan) Arabs and Jews had formed a united front against them - Muhammad pbuh and his followers) and had put up all their efforts of enmity, standing and fighting against them... and (in fact) they shouted against them from every corner. Then, at that time Allah permitted them (Muhammad pbuh and his followers) the (Jihad) fighting but He did not make it obligatory. He said: “Permission to fight is given to those (i.e. believers against disbelievers) who are fighting them (and) because they (believers) have been wronged, and surely Allah is able to give them (believers) victory.” (Hadith)[[6]](#endnote-7)

The primary meaning of jihad in Hadith, namely military action to either expand Islam to other lands or defend Muslim lands against foreign aggression, prevailed after the death of the Prophet and along the history of pre-modern and modern Islamic political thought. Classical Muslim jurists and legal scholars reinforced this meaning (Lewis 1988). The Ulama’s (religious leaders) duty was to see to it that jihad was practiced. Notwithstanding this meaning, Muslim communities were never instructed to indulge in continuous collective jihad (and certainly not against other Muslims) and individual Muslims were never instructed to carry out jihad as an individual duty. Jihad was first and foremost an integral part of devotion as a community’s strategy to ensure Muslim’s attachment to their religion for survival and reward in the afterlife.

In parallel, the non-warfare meaning of jihad never died out as the vibrant history of, for example, Sufi Islam attests to. The two aspects of jihad have always co-existed and have at times positioned Islam at the heart of debates and polemics between those who see this religion as a source of violence and those who present “apologetic” counter-arguments. This is well explained in Streusand (1997: 10):

“For the jurists, jihad fits a context of the world divided into Muslim and non- Muslim zones, *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam) and *Dar al-Harb* (Abode of War) respectively. This model implies perpetual warfare between Muslims and non- Muslims until the territory under Muslim control absorbs what is not, an attitude that perhaps reflects the optimism that resulted from the quick and far-reaching Arab conquests. Extending Dar al-Islam does not mean the annihilation of all non-Muslims, however, nor even their necessary conversion. Indeed, jihad cannot imply conversion by force, for the Qur’an (2:256) specifically states “there is no compulsion in religion.” Jihad has an explicitly political aim: the establishment of Muslim rule, which in turn has two benefits: it articulates Islam’s supersession of other faiths and creates the opportunity for Muslims to create a just political and social order.”

In addition to dar al-Islam and dar al-harb, a third status began to be recognized by some scholars after the ninth century: sra al-‘adl (abode of truce, meaning territories that established a contract with a specific duration to live in peace with the Muslim community[[7]](#endnote-8). Whether meaning “warfare” or “non-warfare,” jihad is intertwined with some type of political and religious authority.

**The Concept of Jihad in the First Islamic Civil Wars (Fitnas)**

The term “fitna” (fraternal war, chaos) is used in the Qur’an with the primary sense of “insurrection, ” “revolt,” or “civil war” between Muslims and within an Islamic state that breeds schism and in which the believers’ purity of faith is in grave danger. As such fitna is different from jihad, which is supposed to take place between believers and non-believers. Five fitnas took place in the history of classical and pre-modern Islamic political thought. The first fitna (656–661 CE), also called “the fitna of the killing of Uthman,” is the first Islamic civil war between Ali Ibn Abi Taleb (Muhammad’s son-in-law, fourth caliph, and first Shi’a caliph) and Aisha (the Prophet’s youngest widow) and in which Uthman Ibn Affan, the third caliph was assassinated by rebels from Egypt. This war continued through the four-year rule of Ali Ibn Abi Taleb and marked the end of the Rashidun caliphate and the beginning of the Umayyad dynasty.[[8]](#endnote-9)

The s[econd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Fitna) fitna is divided by historians into two part: 680/683 and 685/692. The first part followed the death of the first Umayyad caliph Mu’awiyya I and his succession by his son Yazid I in 680. Opposition to this succession took the form of a rebellion headed by the supporters of former caliph Ali. Yazid I sent troops to kill Ali’s son Hussein in what came to be known as the Battle of Karbala. The second part of the fitna was ignited by Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr (son of one of the prophet’s Companions: al-Zunayt Ibn al-‘Awwam and one of the Prophet’s widow and daughter of the second Rashidun caliph: Asma Bint Abu Bakr) in 685.

While the first part of the fitna was caused by a desire for a return of the Shi’a rule, the second one expressed a revolt against Umayyad rule and a desire for a return to the pristine values of earlier Islamic community, exemplified by the first Rashidun caliph Abou Bakr al-Siddiq, father of Asma Bint Abu Bakr. The second fitna plunged the Umayyad in a complex turmoil of events after the sudden death of Yazid I and his son Mu’awiya II in 683. Ibn al-Zubayr became more popular and took over as caliph. He was however seriously challenged by both Shi’a opposition to his rule and the proclaiming of Marwan ibn Hakim, a cousin of Mu’awiya I, as caliph in Syria. Although Marwan had a short reign dying in 685 he was succeeded by his powerful son [Abd al-Malik](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd_al-Malik_ibn_Marwan) who was able to defeat various rivals, including the [Kharijite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kharijites)[[9]](#endnote-10) in [Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq) and [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran) (who established an independent state in central Arabia in 684), the [Shi’a](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shias) in [Kufa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kufa) who sought to avenge the death of Hussein and promote another of Ali's sons as a candidate for caliph. Ibn al-Zubayr, for his part, was isolated in the [Tihamah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tihamah) and the Hejaz, but was eventually killed by Abdel Malik’s troops in a [siege of Mecca](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Mecca_(692)) in 692. This brought a period of exceptional turbulence to an end.

The third fitna (744–750/752 CE) includes the Umayyad civil wars and the [Abbasid revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbasid_Revolution). [Al-Walid II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Walid_II) (743–44), son of Yazid II (son of Abdel Malik) was more interested in earthly pleasures than in religion and was quick to execute or persecute his opponents, especially the [Qadariyya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qadariyya) sect. This led to the proclamation of Yazid III, the pious son of al-Walid II, caliph in Damascus, and the tracking down and killing of al-Walid II. The reign Yazid III lasted only six months before his brother, [Ibrahim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibrahim_of_Umayyad), was proclaimed caliph. However, [Marwan II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marwan_II) (744–50), the grandson of Marwan I, was proclaimed caliph in 744 when he entered Damascus from the northern frontier leading an army. Marwan II moved the capital to [Harran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harran) in the north (present-day [Turkey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey)). This led to a revolt in Damascus and Homs in 746, which Marwan II crushed in retaliation. Other rebels, the Kharijites in Iraq and Iran, staged a fierce opposition to the caliph and proclaimed [Dahhak ibn Qays](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Dahhak_ibn_Qays_al-Shaybani) and then Abu Dulaf as rival caliphs. Marwan II managed to resume control of Iraq in 747, but a more serious threat was by then looming in [Khorasan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Khorasan): the Abbasid revolution.

The Abbasid revolution has roots in the [Hashimiyya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashimiyya) movement (established by the Hashim clan, a sub-sect of the [Kaysanites Shi’a](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaysanites_Shia)), led by the [Abbasid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbasid) family, a rival of the Umayyad family.[[10]](#endnote-11) It is this movement that overthrew the Umayyad caliphate and started the Abbasid caliphate. The movement started to make efficient use of da’wa (proselytism) to gather adherents in Khurasan since 719 and found support for a “member of the family” of Muhammad, without explicitly mentioning the Abbasids. Both Arabs and non-Arabs ([mawali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawali)) welcomed this initiative.

In about 746, [Abu Muslim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Muslim) was proclaimed leader of the Hashimiyya movement and in 747 he launched a successful open revolt against Umayyad rule. This revolt was carried out under the sign of the [black flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Standard). The success of the revolt led first to control over Khurasan and the expulsion of the Umayyad governor [Nasr ibn Sayyar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasr_ibn_Sayyar). [Abu Muslim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Muslim) then sent an army westward which led to the fall of Kufa in 749 and the last stronghold of the Umayyad in Iraq, [Wasit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wasit). In November of the same year, [Abu al-Abbas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As-Saffah) was proclaimed the new caliph in the mosque at Kufa. Marwan II dispatched an army from Harran toward Iraq and in January 750 the two armies confronted each other in the [Battle of the Zab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Zab), the result of which was the defeat of the Umayyad and the fall of Damascus to the Abbasids in April of that year. In the following August, Marwan II was killed in Egypt. The Abbasids declared amnesty for members of the Umayyad family providing they came forward. When the remaining eighty gathered to receive pardons, they were all massacred. However, [Abd al-Rahman I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd_al-Rahman_I), a grandson of Hisham, survived and established a kingdom in [Al-Andalus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Andalus) ([Moorish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moors) [Iberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iberian_Peninsula)), proclaiming his family to be the [Umayyad Caliphate revived](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliph_of_C%C3%B3rdoba).

The fourth fitna (809–827 CE), including the Abbasid civil wars and other regional conflicts, is also referred to as the “great Abbasid civil war.” This fitna involved a strong conflict over succession between the sons of the powerful Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid: [al-Amin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Amin) and [al-Ma’mun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Ma%27mun). Al-Rashid named al-Amin as the first successor and al-Ma’mun as the second one, granting the latter Khurasan as “compensation.” Al-Rashid designated his other son, [al-Qasim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qasim_ibn_Harun_al-Rashid), as third successor. When al-Rashid died in 809, the Baghdad court helped to enthrone al-Amin. The latter started to subvert the independent status of Khurasan and Qasim was quickly sidelined. In retaliation, al-Ma’mun worked towards ensuring the help of the provincial elites of Khurasan and asserting his own autonomy. With the widening conflict between the brothers and their respective camps, al-Amin proclaimed his own son Musa heir and dispatched a large army towards Khurasan, but al-Ma’mun’s general [Tahir ibn Hussein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahir_ibn_Husayn) defeated them in the [Battle of Rayy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Rayy). He then invaded [Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia) and [besieged](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Baghdad_(812%E2%80%93813)) Baghdad which fell after one year of fighting. Al-Amin was executed and al-Ma’mun was proclaimed Caliph, but he remained in Khurasan and did not move to Baghdad.

The fourth civil war fostered a power vacuum which pushed provinces to expand and local rulers to emerge in [Jazira](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Jazira,_Mesopotamia), [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilad_al-Sham) and [Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt_in_the_Middle_Ages). Furthermore, the established Baghdad elites were alienated and felt sidelined by al-Ma’mun’s pro-Khurasani policies implemented by al-Ma’mun’s powerful chief minister, [al-Fadl ibn Sahl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Fadl_ibn_Sahl), and al-Ma’mun’s declaration of an [Alid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alids) succession. To force al-Ma’mun to intervene personally, his uncle [Ibrahim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibrahim_ibn_al-Mahdi) was proclaimed rival caliph in Baghdad in 817, following which Fadl ibn Sahl was assassinated and al-Ma’mun retruned to Baghdad in 819. Al-Ma’mun’s authority was gradually consolidated and a number of western provinces were re-incorporated in the caliphate by 827 although rebellions, notably that of the [Khurramites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khurramites), went on for many more years.[[11]](#endnote-12)

The fifth fitna, also called “f[itna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fitna_of_al-Andalus)t of al-Andalus” (1009–1031 CE), took place at a time of political crisis and civil instability which preceded the ultimate fall of the caliphate of Cordoba. A coup d’état in 1009 led to the assassination of [Abd al-Rahman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd_al-Rahman_Sanchuelo), son of al-Mansour, the deposition of the Caliph [Hisham II al-Hakam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hisham_II_al-Hakam), and the rise to power of [Muhammad II of Córdoba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_II_of_C%C3%B3rdoba), great-grandson of [Abd-ar-Rahman III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd-ar-Rahman_III). This chaos resulted in the division all of al-Andalus into a small ([Taifa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taifa)) Kingdoms.

In parallel to the political turmoil, al-Mansour carried out massive purges across his territories. The need for money to finance war pushed him to put more pressure on people to provide tax. Amidst the chaos, some Christian kingdoms gave aid to various [Muslim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim) kingdoms in the north, mostly in the form of mercenary Christian soldiers. This led to regular looting of Cordoba and its suburbs and the destruction of several iconic monuments such as the [Alcazar de los Reyes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alc%C3%A1zar_de_los_Reyes_Cristianos) and the [Medina Azahara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medina_Azahara). The capital was moved to [Malaga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A1laga) temporarily an in twenty years or so, no less than ten different caliphates appeared claiming to be successor states to the Caliphate of Cordoba.

It is important to note that although the first two fitnas are clearly disassociated from jihad as warfare, the last three ones are so although the term was carefully avoided by contemporary historians. Hence although severe divisions between Muslims occurred in the fitnas, Islamic law never addressed the reality of political division within the Islamic world (Streusand 1997). Moreover, the fitnas are not highlighted in textbooks or popular debates. It is as if their recording was couched in shame and guilt. The absence of political division from law, textbooks, and popular culture enhanced ambiguity and distance between ordinary Muslims and the historical reality of Islamic political thought. More than that the word “fitna” is nowadays associated with the chaos that women sow when they transgress the hudud (frontiers) that the patriarchal systems designs for them.[[12]](#endnote-13)

**Jihad as Warfare**

The religious legitimization of jihad as warfare was a gradual process that relied mostly on annotated hadith compilations. The earliest such compilations, mostly written in the eighth century, aimed at reconstructing the beliefs of the first Muslim conquerors and sanctioning their actions. Whole collections were devoted entirely to jihad as a means to achieve this aim and jihad was often positioned immediately after the sections dealing with five pillars of Islam[[13]](#endnote-14) and was presented as follows:

“The slain [in jihad] are three [types of] men: a believer, who struggles with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights them until he is killed. This martyr (shahid) is tested, [and is] in the camp of God under His throne; the prophets do not exceed him [in merit] except by the level of prophecy. [Then] a believer, committing offenses and sins against himself, who struggles with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights until he is killed. This cleansing wipes away his offenses and his sins—behold the sword wipes [away] sins!—and he will be let into heaven from whatever gate he wishes. . . . [Then] a hypocrite, who struggles with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights until he is killed. This [man] is in hell since the sword does not wipe away hypocrisy.

Jihad was thus closely associated with redemption; its association with Hadith gave it a powerful nature because whatever is sanctioned by the Qur’an and Hadith is part and parcel of a mighty belief system of Muslims. It is this religious sanctioning that allowed the development of jihad and legitimized the great Islam wars and the acquisition of the vast territories, as well as the formidable spread of Islam in its earlier periods.

*Jihad as Law-Making*

During the first several centuries of Islam the interpretation of jihad was dictated by a strong desire to expand the faith and was, hence, unabashedly aggressive. In this interpretation, the source of the conviction that leads believers to assume that God is on the side of the Muslims, leading them to victory over the enemies is located in the Qur’an. It is the strength of this conviction that instigated the great Muslim conquests. However, the success of these conquests was, in turn, instrumental in the expansion of the Hadith literature. The chapters allocated to the topic of jihad expanded and led to additional books and pamphlets on jihad. The goal of this literature is to further expand on Qur’anic messages and find practical solutions to the many problems that fighting in distant locations raised. In other words, the success of these conquests is attributed to miraculous Jihad ideology and has have generally been interpreted as confirmation of Islam’s power and strength in Arab-Muslim cultures. Jihad assumed a special elevated and respected value of these cultures.

**Jihad as Non-Warfare**

Jihad as non-warfare is a cluster of two meanings: jihad as inner struggle against evil in oneself and jihad as outer struggle against injustice. Both of these meaning carry the notion of “struggle” and “effort” against some bigger “enemy.” While warfare jihad is also referred to as “al-jihad al-asghar” (smaller jihad), non-warfare jihad is referred to as “al-jihad al-akbar” (greater jihad). What the two jihads share is their Hadith origin, which fact endows them with a powerful nature in the belief system of Muslims. In one of Hadiths, Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said after a battle: “We have returned from the lesser jihad (*al-jihad al-asghar*) to the greater jihad (*al-jihad al-akbar*).” When asked, “What is the greater jihad?,” he replied, “It is the struggle against oneself.”

The non-warfare jihad greatly influenced Sufism in Islam. Sufism is generally seen as “inner war,” a sustained struggle against the base instincts of the body and a building of resistance to the temptation of polytheism. Some Sufi writers assert that Satan (the personification of the inner evil) organizes the temptation of the body and the world to corrupt the soul. The Sufi Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1059-1111), a very prominent figure in the development of Islamic thought, describes the soul as the “governor” of the body, which he qualifies a city besieged by the lower instinctive self. Mysticism (zuhd) or withdrawal from the world is a path to the greater jihad for al-Ghazali as it allows the necessary spiritual insight that reduces the distance between individuals and God. By the eleventh century, Sufism had become an extremely influential, and perhaps even the dominant, form of Islamic spirituality. To this day, many Muslims conceive of jihad as a personal rather than a political struggle. This struggle against oneself is referred to in popular Sufi terminology as “moujahada.”

But as mentioned above, Sufism was opposed by authoritative and influential purists like Ibn Taymiyya, as a trend that contradicted shari’a law. Ibn Taymiyya’s disciple, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziya (1292-1350), explicitly condemned the doctrine of greater jihad, discarding it as a deliberate fabrication the Hadiththat originates this concept.

Overall three main views of jihad characterized the earlier periods of Islam: the classical legal view of jihad as a compulsory, communal effort to defend and expand Dar al-Islam; Ibn Taymiya’s notion of active jihad as an indispensable feature of legitimate rule; and the Sufi doctrine of greater jihad. The three views were carried out to the pre-modern times.

***The Term “Caliphate” in the Classical and Pre-Modern Eras***

The caliphate (al-khilaafa) is an Islamic political religious state system which embodies both temporal and spiritual authority. This form of government came into existence after the death of Prophet Muhammad and continued to survive until 1924. Initially it was conceived as a “successor form of government”: the root from which the word is derived, {kh, l, f} means “to succeed” (the Prophet). The caliphate designates the office, its length and its dominion (the geographical and demographics that come under the authority of the caliphate). The caliph (khalifa: Successor/Deputy of the Prophet)[[14]](#endnote-15) is a Muslim sovereign who claims authority over ALL Muslims and whose mission is to unite the Muslim world politically.

When the Prophet died in the seventh century he left a community of believers with the task of spreading Islam. This task was possible only within a state structure and that was the caliphate. Hence, the term “caliphate” carries a sanctioned authority in the history of the Islamic political thought through its association with the first four Caliphs - successors of Prophet Muhammad, as well as with the typical Islamic form of state.

The Sunni and Shi’a have different views of the caliphate. For the former, the caliphate is the core political concept by consensus of Muslim majority in the early centuries. Their ideal caliph should be traced to the Quraysh tribe and should be elected by Muslims or their representatives. As for the Shi’a, the ideal caliph is an Imam descended from ahl al-bayt (Owners of the house - Prophet Muhammad’s house, family), hence the tendency of the Shi’a to use the term “Imamat” instead of “caliphate.” However, the caliphate is the only form of governance that has full approval in Islamic theology. Whether hereditary or not, it evolved throughout the centuries and has resulted in the establishment of a solid Islamic political thought and political authority. In this chapter, I deal only with the Sunni understanding of the caliphate given its relation to the topic of this book. Four major Sunni caliphates are known in Islam: the Rashidun, the Umayyad, the Abassid, and the Ottoman. This first caliphate was followed by two others in the classical period of Islam (the Umayyad and the Abassid) and one more in the pre-modern period (the Ottoman). These caliphates differed greatly in the number of years they ruled, as well as their political, economic, and social lifestyles.[[15]](#endnote-16)

**Conclusion**

In today’s troubled days, these complex nuances of the three concepts “hijra”, “jihad” and “caliphated” are being conflated by the media and in the minds of the media consumers. More than that they are complicating the relations between the Eastern and Western cultures, worldviews, and values.

**Notes**

1. For a perspective on the complexity of the term and concept of jihad in Moorish Spain (711 – 997) and today’s Spain, see Magdalena Martinez Almira (2011). “Women in Jihad: a Question of Honour, Pride and Self-Defence” in *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization*, 1 (1): 27-36, 2011

   IDOSI Publications, 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. *hadith*, also referred to as *sunnah* is Prophet Muhammad’s sayings, actions, and behavior. The Qur’an and *hadith* constitute the two major sources of political rule and law-making in Islam. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Also spelled “Hegira”. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. The Qur’an symbolically came down from God to Prophet Mohammad on *laylat al-qadr* (the night of power), a prophetic-revelatory event, and ever since it is the backbone of political authority in Islam. Muhammad was a religious, political, and military leader who founded a new form of community an *umma*, a combination of spiritual and worldly symbolism and the new community, has always defined itself in terms of faith rather national or tribal boundaries in its development. The Muslim community used jihad to mark a transition from polytheism to monotheism. Abd al-Baqi (1278: 182-83) and Kassis (1983: 587-88) listed all appearances of the word “jihad” and its derivatives in the Qur’an; according to them, no less than thirty-five ayas (verses) cite jihad or one of its derivatives. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. See <http://www.noblequran.com/translation/> for an English translation of the Qur’an. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. See Sheikh Abdullah Bin Muhammad Bin Humaidh. *Jihad in the Qur’an and Sunnah*. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. See Majid Khaddur, *The Law of War and Peace in Islam*, London. 1940. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. See for details on the Islamic caliphates. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. The Arabic term Kharijites or Khawarij refers to one of the earliest Islamic sects, which originated in a religio-political controversy over the [Caliphate](https://www.britannica.com/place/Caliphate). Pursuant to the assassination of Uthman Ibn Affan, the third [caliph](https://www.britannica.com/topic/caliph), and his succession by Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Muʿawiya I, then governor of Syria, embarked on avenging the assassination of Uthman. Ali and Mu’awiya fought the indecisive battle of Siffin in July 657, after which Ali was forced to agree to arbitration by umpires. A group of Ali’s followers did not accept Ali’s concession on the basis of two Qurʾanic dictums: “judgment belongs to God alone” ([Qurʾān](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Quran) 6:57) and “If one party rebels against the other, fight against that which rebels” (49:9). A small group of these protestors, led by Ibn Wahb, withdrew (kharaju) to the village of Harura and were joined near Nahrawan by a larger group and were hence named “Kahrijites” or “Khawarij.” The Kahrijites opposed both caliphal candidates Ali and Mu’awiya, as well as all the Muslims who did not adhere to their views. They engaged in campaigns of harassment and terror and although most of them were killed the movement persisted in a series of uprisings that plagued both Ali (whom they assassinated) and Mu’awiya (who succeeded Ali as caliph). The Kharijites held a democratic theory of the caliphate in which they opposed the legitimist claims of the Sunni Quraysh and the Shi’a followers of Ali, opting rather for the community of believers as the sole source of appointing or deposing a caliph. According to them, a black slave can become caliph if he possessed the necessary qualifications, chiefly religious piety and moral purity. A caliph may be deposed upon the commission of any major sin. For them, the judgment of God could only be expressed through the free choice of the entire Muslim community. As such, they basically aimed at the practical exercise of their religious beliefs These views drew them many of the dissatisfied with the existing political and religious authorities. Besides their democratic theory of the Caliphate, the Kharijites were known for their puritanism and fanaticism. Any Muslim who committed a major sin was considered an apostate. Luxury, music, games, and concubinage without the consent of wives were forbidden. Intermarriage and relations with other Muslims were strongly discouraged. The doctrine of justification by faith without works was rejected, and literal interpretation of the Qur’an. Within the Kharijite movement the Azariqah of Basra were the most extreme subsect, separating themselves from the Muslim community and declaring death to all sinners and their families. The more moderate subsect of the [Ibaḍiya](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ibadiyyah), however, survived into the 20th century in [North Africa](https://www.britannica.com/place/North-Africa), [Oman](https://www.britannica.com/place/Oman), and [Zanzibar](https://www.britannica.com/place/Zanzibar-island-Tanzania), with about 500,000 members. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. But the word “Hashimiyya” refers specifically to Abu Hashim, a grandson of Ali and son of Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, according to some historians. “Abu Hashim died in 717 in Humeima in the house of Muhammad ibn Ali, the head of the Abbasid family, and before dying named Muhammad ibn Ali as his successor. This tradition allowed the Abbasids to rally the supporters of the failed revolt of [Mukhtar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mukhtar), who had represented themselves as the supporters of Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya.” [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Historians interpreted the fourth fitna in different ways: some saw it as a conflict between the incompetent al-Amin and the shrew al-M’amun; others as the result of [harem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harem) intrigues; yet others as an extension of the personal rivalry between the ministers [al-Fadl b. Rabi'](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Fadl_ibn_al-Rabi%27)and [al-Fadl b. Sahl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Fadl_ibn_Sahl), or event a struggle between Arabs and Persians for power and control. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. See Chapter Four for more details on the relationship between women and the concept of fitna in the history of the Islamic political thought. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. The five pillars of Islam are: shahada (acknowledging Allah and Prophet Muhammad), prayer (five times a day), fasting (in Ramadan), zakat (alimony) and pilgrimage for adults who could afford it financially speaking. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Initially, khilafa meant “Deputy of the Prophet”, then it became “Deputy of Allah” and “Deputy of a ruler,” according to the might and goals of each khilafa. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Their major differences so far as jihad is concerned, was dealt with in the previous section. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)