The History Of Salafism II



It is imperative to acknowledge the prevalence of Salafism in Islam's history if a program for Reform is to be viable. In order to formulate what, exactly, Reform might entail, one must first have an accurate diagnosis of the current condition of that which it–ostensibly–to be reformed. Solutions can't be build on illusions. And one can't solve a problem one refuses to admit exists.

So in order to inaugurate genuine Reformation in Dar al-Islam, it is incumbent upon Progressively-inclined Muslims to disabuse themselves of self-ingratiating myths about their religion's past. More stringently adhering to the Sunnah will not enable the Ummah to MOVE BEYOND what has been holding them back in the first place.

In the previous survey (part one of this two-part essay), we saw how the history of Islamic thought is suffused with a certain kind of ideology–an ideology that translated to a long-standing precedent which, I showed, accounted for the Ummah's many travails. While the record of Islam was rather mixed, there was clearly a prevailing trend over the centuries–from the Salaf in the 7th century to the Islamic State in the 21st century.

Since the earliest days of the Mohammedan movement, Salafism has been a common thread. Invariably, actions undertaken within Dar al-Islam occurred in a memetic ecosystem infused with hyper-dogmatism. That the Salafi creed has been a palpable strain of Islamic thought does not mean it has been the ONLY strain, mind you. Indeed, it has subsisted alongside various other creeds–some of which have been quite liberal; and even quite salubrious. But that is not our concern here. (When adumbrating a misfit's roster of Tom-foolery in order to make the case for a pattern of misbehavior, all the occasions where he / she was well-behaved are not salient.)

We can now turn from THOUGHTS to DEEDS. That is: Our focus will shift to how those theological underpinnings played themselves out (as actions) over time. We'll do this by adumbrating the ways in which doctrinal fealty translated to events–especially as it pertained to militaristic / theocratic designs. Thus we will survey what was ACTUALLY DONE; and show how it was done in the name of the (reprobate) worldview that has dominated the Ummah for so long. {17}

Beliefs matter; which is why we reviewed them first. At the end of the day, what is the point of a strong conviction if it does not–in some consequential way–have a bearing on how one conducts oneself? A deep-seated belief only makes sense insofar as it informs one's choices (that is: guides one's actions in scenarios where meaning is ascribed to what one does). {31} Once we cultivate a thorough understanding of the legacy of Salafi thinking (explicated in the first part of this essay), the rational–nay, the impetus–for the things that were actually done BY SALAFIS over the course of history (adumbrated in this, the second part) is glaringly obvious.

Rosy caricatures of Islam's history are based on the fiction that "jihad" used to primarily mean an inner "spiritual" struggle, not a military enterprise. This is a fiction–demonstrated BOTH by actual history AND by the prevailing themes of Islam's scripture. One does not become a martyr on a battlefield–nor does one accumulate spoils–as a result of a spiritual endeavor. (Recall the Koran's 8th Surah is entitled "The Spoils of War" ["Al-Anfal"]; not exactly the sort of thing one acquires by reading Thoreau.) Suffice to say, the discussion of divvying up booty would not be warranted were "jihad" simply an exercise in self-improvement.

I explore this matter at length in Appendix 1. (Spoiler alert: It is crystal clear that "jihad" has always been thought of as–above all–an exercise in geo-political hegemony, not personal enlightenment.) Throughout the course of Islam's history,

quiet contemplation is not what expositors OR leaders had in mind when they invoked the term. Nor would it have made any sense to them to say that–in baking cookies in the kitchen–one is engaging in a “jihad” to make a tasty snack.

On the contrary, the early Mohammedans were desert pirates–concerned with looting as much as with evangelizing. Max Weber aptly described early Islam as “the religion of the warrior class”. He noted that “military booty is important in the ordinances, in the promises, and above all in the expectations characterizing even the most ancient period of the religion.” He further observed that material acquisition was a prime motivating factor: “Even the ultimate elements of its economic ethic were purely feudal. The most pious adherents of the religion in its first generation became the wealthiest, or more correctly, enriched themselves with military boots–in the widest sense–more than did other members of the Faith” (“The Sociology of Religion; p. 162-63).

In assaying the developments that ensued from the theology outlined in the previous section, we might start with the precedent set by MoM himself. According to several Hadith, the self-proclaimed prophet declared: “Let there be no two religions in Arabia.” According to Muslim’s “sahih” Hadith (no. 4366), he announced: “I will expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula and will not leave any but Muslims.”

Mission accomplished.

We also read in Bukhari’s Hadith: “The Hour will not be established until you fight with the Jews. And the stone behind which the Jew will be hiding will say, ‘Oh Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me; so kill him’”(4/52/176-177; alt. no. 2925-26). This exhortation is also found in Muslim’s Hadith (no. 2921). Suffice to say: A clarion-call for pluralism this was not.

Clearly, the original vision for Dar al-Islam was not a cosmopolitan utopia in which religious freedom rung throughout the land; and deliberative democracy was championed. It was a recipe for totalitarian theocracy, pure and simple.

As I show in Appendix 1, the attacks conducted by the Sahabah–and subsequent Salaf–were almost never in self-defense; they were about spreading Islamic dominion. In other words: They were impelled not merely by a hunger for territory and political power; they were impelled by religious fervor. The record is clear on this. In Muslim’s Hadith, MoM proclaimed: “If you come to a township [which has

surrendered], and stay therein, you have a share in [the spoils seized from within it]. If a township does not recognize god and his messenger, one fifth of the booty seized therefrom is for god and his apostle, and the rest is for you" (no. 4346).

In Muslim's Hadith, we also read that MoM said to Ali: "Proceed on; and do not look about until god grants you victory." When Ali inquired, "On what issue should I fight with the people?" MoM replied in the third person: "Fight with them until they bear testimony to the fact that there is no god but god and Muhammad is his Messenger" (no. 5917).

In discussing the massacre of the Jews at Khaybar, accounts are even more troubling: "We met the workers of Khaybar coming out in the morning with their spades and baskets. When they saw the apostle and the army, they cried: 'Muhammad with his force!' and turned and fled… The apostle seized the property piece by piece." The people of Khaybar were not attacking the Muslims; they were simply farming their land.

That the motives involved in MoM's aggression were primarily religious is made clear in the following passage: "When the apostle raided a people, he waited until the morning. If he heard the 'adhan' [call to prayer], he would hold back; if he did not hear it, he attacked. We came to Khaybar by night, and the apostle passed the night there. When morning came, he did not hear the 'adhan', so he rode and we rode with him." To repeat: MoM proclaimed that "two religions shall not exist on the Arabian peninsula." This explains why he massacred the Jews at Khaybar.

There is no mystery here. The protocol was loud and clear.

Even after MoM's death, Abu Bakr undertook aggressive campaigns into Ghassanid, Sassanid, and Byzantine lands–raping and pillaging every step of the way. NONE of it was "defensive" in nature. (See Appendix 1.)

And what of slavery? Far from impeding slavery in the region, Islamic hegemony put it into overdrive. All Islam did was change the TERMS OF enslavement. To wit: It was no longer along racial lines or in terms of socio-economic status, as the new protocols erased such divisions. The salient distinction was henceforth Muslim vs. non-Muslim. (Note that enslavement on such terms was nothing new–as slavery amongst the Greeks, Romans, and Vikings was often not along racial lines.)

Accordingly, no Muslim male could be enslaved. Pursuant to pillaging sprees, only captured women and non-Muslims could be taken as slaves. And so by offering amnesty to men within Dar al-Islam, slavery was bolstered EVERYWHERE ELSE. It had the added bonus of creating extremely strong incentives for men to convert.

The proposition that the Mohammedan movement–and MoM personally–helped to end slavery is risible. The opposite was, in fact, the case. (For more on this point, see my essay on "The Universality Of Morality".)

And what of theocracy-by-force? Recall that it was not Islamic FAITH that was spread by the sword (as there was no compulsory conversion). Rather, Islamic LAW was spread by the sword (which entailed compulsory submission to sharia). During its first centuries, the majority of those within the dominion of Islamic rule were not Muslims, making them fair game (read: eligible for enslavement).

The slave-trade would persist through the Ottoman era…and even remains to the present day in thoroughly Islamicized countries like Western Sahara, Mauritania, Mali, and Somalia. In fact, the largest slave-trade in world history was within Dar al-Islam: the Barbary corsairs enjoyed a booming business that endured through the Middle Ages and into the 19th century.

Since the religion's inception, hegemony was the primary feature of Islamic dominion: from the earliest conquests through Arabia…across the Maghreb, onto the Iberian Peninsula, all the way to Algeciras (at Gibraltar)…and eventually to the gates of Vienna. Having read part 1 of this essay, nothing you are about to read in part 2 should come as much of a surprise.

A CLEAR PATTERN EMERGES:

Before proceeding, let's be reminded that the following events did not occur in an ideological vacuum. There was an indubitable link between the "takfiri" fervor outlined in part 1 of this essay and the actions adumbrated here, in part 2. Put another way: The zealotry undergirding such activities didn't emerge from the aether. Rather, it was the result of a clearly-articulated worldview that can be traced back to the Salaf.

Under General Khalid ibn al-Walid, Abu Bakr's forces slaughtered untold numbers of people **in the years following MoM's death**. Note, for instance, the atrocities perpetrated in the Battles of Chains, of the River, of Walaja, of Ullais, of Hira, of Ein-

ul-Tamr, of Firaz, of al-Qadisiyyah, as well as the Siege of Al-Anbar, and myriad other militant offensives that are recorded in Islamic sources. (Under General Abu Ubaid, there were the Battles of Namaraq and of Kaskar–before he was killed in the failed "Battle of the Bridge".) Not one of these clashes could possibly be caricatured as some kind of defensive measure. They were, one and all, examples of a rapacious offensive on "Dar al-Kufr" (domain of the non-Muslims), alternately dubbed "Dar al-Harb" (domain of War).

We might take note of the overriding modus operandi of the early Mohammedan movement. There was a primary enterprise–characterized by the relentless waging of war, relentless pillaging sprees, and the systematic enslavement of captives. Bringing aid to the impoverished, helping the sick and weak, providing education to the masses, and anything that could be even remotely characterized as humanitarian outreach: such things had nothing whatsoever to do with it. (For an in-depth exploration of "jihad", see Appendix 1.)

Shortly after MoM's passing, Umayyad "amir" [military general], Uqba ibn Nafi (a.k.a. "Akbah") is supposed to have declared: "Great God! If my course were not stopped by this sea, I would still go on, to the unknown kingdoms of the West, preaching the one-ness of god, and putting to the sword the rebellious nations who worship any gods other than the one true god." This is a statement that could just as well have been made by the leaders of Daesh (the Islamic State; a.k.a. "ISIS"). Bear in mind that "Akbah" was a Salaf. Such ideological parity is precisely what makes Daesh SALAFI.

As it turns out, "Akbah" was merely following precedent–namely the one established by (Rashidun caliph) Umar ibn al-Khattab. An anecdote about Umar's rampage is worth mentioning. When ordering the great Library at Alexandria (in Egypt) to be burned to the ground, he declared: "If the books agree with the Koran, then they are superfluous. If they disagree with the Koran, then they are heretical." Either way, they ALL had to be destroyed. {1} Boko Haram could not have put it any better themselves. {2} The same goes for–well–virtually any of the other fundamentalist Islamic organizations / regimes that exist today. {28}

There's more. Another of the Sahabah set a precedent that would endure for fourteen centuries. Military leader ["amir"], Khalid ibn al-Walid of the Banu Makhzum (who's sobriquet was "Drawn Sword of God"; "Saif-ullah al-Maslul") did what he did

on behalf of the self-proclaimed “Seal of the Prophets”. MoM himself gushingly referred to the general as “The Sword Among the Swords of God”. This was not an allusion to his spiritual prowess.

Both Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham relay accounts of MoM sending Al-Walid to the Banu al-Harith with the message: “If you accept Islam, you will be safe.” If they declined, they would be attacked. It’s not for nothing that Al-Walid is famous for proclaiming: “I bring the men who desire death as ardently as you desire life,” a declaration ostensibly addressed to the non-Muslims of the world. Suffice to say: His “jihad” was not an inner “spiritual” struggle (“jihad al-daf’a” in Islamic parlance). In making this proclamation, he was not enjoining edification; he was proclaiming a desire for conquest.

Clearly HEGEMONY, not self-defense, was the prime directive. For the Salaf, “jihad” was nothing short of all-out holy war against anyone in the world that was not yet within the ambit of Dar al-Islam. The Seal of the Prophets was not handing out awards for, say, alleviating the most suffering or emancipating the most slaves or making the most scientific discoveries. Violent conquest was at the top of his priority list. {3}

So we might ask: What did Al-Walid do to earn such notoriety? Did he help the highest number of impoverished people? No. Did he end misogyny? No. Did he seek to liberate oppressed people? No. His accomplishment was singular: He spread Mohammedan dominion by the sword more than did anyone else.

The Salaf’s legacy had no hiatus.

The battles enumerated above were just the beginning of a long pattern that would endure to the present day. Soon came the sacking of Alexandria **in 646**. The Egyptian Copt, John of Nikiou, chronicled the ferocious invasion by the Arab armies–recounting that “the Ishmaelites came and slew without mercy the commander of the army and all his companions.They then compelled the city to open its gates, and put to the sword all who surrendered.They spared none–whether old men, infants, or women.”Of the Battle of Nikiou (the sacking of his home town), we wrote that “the Ishmaelites entered Nikiou and took possession.Finding no soldiers, they proceeded to put to the sword all whom they found in the streets and in the churches–men, women, and infants.They showed mercy to none.”So much for self-defense.

In 652, when Umayyad commander, Abd al-Rahman ibn Rabiah, pushed northward past the Caucuses Mountains into [k]Hazaria, and tried to sack Balanjar, we might ask: Was he “defending” Dar al-Islam?The [k]Hazars were not threatening anything below the mountain range.Clearly, this was a hegemonic campaign–the sine qua non of which was the subjugation of Dar al-Kafr (qua Dar al-Harb).Liberation had nothing to do with it.

For a sense of the mentality at the time, we might look to Ziyad of Ta’if–who was the governor of Basra from **665 to 670**, then governor of all Mesopotamia until his passing in 673.He decried: “You [heretics] allow fellowship to prevail, putting religion second.You excuse and hide your [fellow heretics], and tear down the orders which Islam has sanctified for you.Take care to not creep about in the night; for I will kill every man found on the streets after dark.Take care not to appeal to your kin; for I will cut off the tongue of every man who makes such an appeal.I rule with the omnipotence of god, and maintain you with god’s wealth.I demand obedience from you; and you can expect piety [“ibadah”] from me…Do not get carried away by your hatred against me; as it will go badly for you.I foresee many heads rolling.Let each man see to it that his own head stays upon his shoulders.” {32}

The point is worth emphasizing: Islamic FAITH was not spread / enforced by the sword.It was Islamic RULE that was spread / enforced by the sword.In other words: There was no forced CONVERSION, just forced SUBMISSION.As long as you kept your head down and did as you were told, it was left between you and god what you happened to believe.(For obvious reasons, Islamic rulers did not want to encourage false displays of fidelity.)

In 698, on behalf of Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik, “amir” Hasan ibn al-Nu’uman of Ghasan razed the great Mediterranean port-city of Carthage. This included the destruction of all infrastructure (water supplies, harbors, etc.) AFTER the city had been defeated. Why did he do this? Clearly, more than mere military strategy was at play. Indeed, such gratuitous decimation was a strange way to bolster the commonweal.

So what could possibly have motivated such malicious deeds? Might they be characterized as a way of “defending” the Ummah?

Al-Nu’uman was notorious for his tyrannical rule. After conquering the Maghreb (a.k.a. “Ifriqiya”), he brooked no toleration of indigenous Berber traditions. He was not “protecting” the Berbers from anything; he was subjugating them.

Al-Nu'uman's successor, Musa ibn Nusayr made incursions across the Mediterranean Sea into Andalusia (along with famed military commander, Tariq ibn Ziyad) on behalf of Umayyad caliph: Al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik (not to be confused with the military general mentioned earlier: Khalid ibn al-Walid). At the time, the Iberian peninsula was held by the Visigoths, and was in somewhat of a state of disarray. Consequently, it was soon overwhelmed by the highly-disciplined Mohammedan armies. **Between 711 and 714**, the "Saracens" seized territory from Gibraltar…up through Seville, Toledo, and Zaragoza (Aragon)…to Castile and Leon…and westward all the way to the coast of Lusitania. Was this done to bring wisdom to the peoples of Iberia? Hardly. The primary concern was plunder. The aim was to collect spoils to bring back to Caliph Al-Walid in Damascus; and–of course–to increase Dar al-Islam's inventory of slaves.

To reiterate: Such hegemony had nothing to do with humanitarian outreach; and was entirely offensive in nature. (For more on mischaracterizing rapacious conquest as "defensive jihad" or rescuing Dar al-Kufr from "oppression", see Appendix 1.)

In an odd twist, caliph Musa ended up dying in disgrace. Like so many other Muslim potentates, he perished during the Hajj. Why such ignominy after all his accomplishments? Because he refused to hand over ALL the booty that he had seized (to the subsequent caliph, Al-Walid's younger brother, Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik…who was known for his draconian enforcement of daily prayers amongst the polity).

And so it went: The priorities of Islamic hegemony were quite clear: SPOILS. And dominion, and enslavement of non-Muslims, and more "jizya" [poll taxes on non-Muslims] to collect. The modus operandi was loud and clear: strict conformity by supplicants; and complete submission by the "dhimmi" who managed to survive.

It is interesting to note that the son of caliph Musa (Abd al-Aziz) ended up converting to Christianity. As a result, he was beheaded. His head was then sent to the presiding caliph–as tribute.

That was on the Western frontier of Dar al-Islam. But what about incursions into the Far East? The story is roughly the same.

The great medical academy at Gundishapur in Persia eventually fell into ruins–though some Sassanian knowledge would later be resurrected at the (Mu'tazili) "House of Wisdom" in Baghdad under the quasi-theocratic Caliph Al-Mamun (**in the 9th century**). Alas, even Al-Mamun became infamous for his draconian inquisitions ("Mihna"). {4}

In 711, "amir" Muhammed ibn Qasim Saqafi (nephew of the notorious governor of Iraq, Hajjaj ibn Yusuf; a.k.a. "Hajjaj the Cruel") swept into the Sindh with his army. He too did so on behalf of caliph Al-Walid. Along the way, he demolished EVERY temple that he found; and engaged in the relentless plunder that had characterized the Mohammedan hegemony since the 630's. The amir's rampage included–per usual–the enslavement of all women (those who weren't massacred, that is). Virtually everyone was slaughtered in the port city of Debal. Conquest of the cities of Sistan (in Sakastan) and then Multan (in Punjab) soon followed.

As it happened, the civilians of Multan eventually became Isma'ili…which would put its polity in a rather awkward position thereafter. As we shall see, they would have to contend with the so-called "the Sword of Islam" soon; as the Isma'ili denomination were considered heretics / apostates ("takfirs") by the Salafists. {5}

This thinking continued into the Abbasid era. In keeping with MoM's precedent for intolerance, the first Abbasid caliph, Abu al-Abbas "as-Saffah" stated that "tolerance is laudable except in matters dangerous to religious belief." In other words, you are free to do / say whatever you wish…so long as it brooks nothing prohibited by religious law. Orwell's (fictional) INGSOC would have been envious of such a proud declaration of strictly-circumscribed "tolerance". (In this sense, there is all the freedom one could ever want in North Korean. After all , one is free to do whatever one wishes…so long as it doesn't cross the powers-that-be.)

The black flags that came to be emblematic of Salafi militancy were first adopted by the followers of "Abu al-Abbas" **in the 740's**: namesake of the Abbasid dynasty. (This appellation was adopted because he identified with the Hashim-ite bloodline, affiliated with MoM.)After establishing his caliphate, Abu al-Abbas came to be known by the sobriquet "Al-Saffah".In other words, the founder of the Abbasid dynasty was primarily known for being "the Slaughterer".(Clearly, massacring civilians was his claim to fame.)To contend that this was about liberating people from persecution is absurd.

In 783, the third Abbasid caliph (known as “Al-Mahdi”) instituted an Inquisition: imperial henchmen charged with punishing / executing any “zindiq” (heretic). Every last one. This was a precursor to more recent incarnations–as with the Saudi “Mutawa” in Arabia, the Khomeinist “Basij” (alt. “Quds force”) in Iran, and the “JAWI” in Malaysia. The overall concept of State-enforced compliance with religious rules (i.e. a religious police) is known as “hisbah” in the Arab tradition; and harkens back to the “Haras” of the Umayyad-Abbasid era.

Al-Mahdi was ruthless in his demand for compliance (read: religious orthodoxy); and adopted the approach of the hard-line “Shi’i” (not to be confused with the Ali’d branch of the Faith, later referred to as “Shia”). The “Shi’i” were purists who pushed for draconian punishments for heresy. In other words, they championed the “takfiri” tradition. They also mandated the outright extermination of all freethinkers. Al-Mahdi aggressively carried out this policy…until he was poisoned by one of his concubines **in 785**. His successor (“Al-Hadi”) continued the pogroms with augmented intensity.

In 833, Abbasid caliph, Al-Ma’mun instituted the “Mihnah” policy of imprisoning / executing anyone who did not adhere to the appropriate (Mu’tazila) interpretation of the Koran. It was the 9th century, and the “takfiri” precedent was alive and well in Dar al-Islam.

In the 10th century, the Mamluk proselyte, Ibn Nubata earned renown for preaching the duty of of all Muslims to wage “jihad” against Dar al-Kufr. Later in the 10th century, Egyptian “wazir” [vizier], Ridwan al-Walakhshi, persecuted non-Muslims–notably Coptic and Armenian Christians. Meanwhile, (Nizari / Shia) Fatimid caliph, Abu Ali Mansur (a.k.a. “Al-Hakim bi-Amir Allah”) was notorious for persecuting “dhimmis” within his realm.

During the late 10th and early 11th centuries, Ghaznavid (Turkic) military leader (“emir”, then “sultan”), Mahmud ibn Sebukteg[in] of Ghazna (that is “Mahmud Ghazni”; a.k.a. “the Sword of Islam”) earned renown for destroying Hindu temples across the Punjab, Kashmir, and Gujarat. Each year, he renewed his pledge for “jihad” against the non-Muslims of the region. (As you might have guessed, no concern for an inner “spiritual” struggle was involved.) His most infamous massacre was of the Isma’ilis of Multan **c. 1005**. He then swept through Sistan, razed Hindu temples throughout Gujarat (notably, the great temple at Somnath) and throughout Uttar Pradesh (notably, the great temple at Mathura). In both Somnath and Mathura,

he massacred ALL inhabitants (tens of thousands in each location). Needless to say, his “jihad” was not some person striving (for self-betterment); it was a holy war. (Again: See Appendix 1 for more on this topic.)

It’s also worth noting: When Mahmud Ghazi did all this, he was not doing so as a military strategy. He was destroying all that was deemed blasphemous. (In keeping with his worldview, he purportedly equated the Temple of Somnath with the Hijazi pagan goddess, Manat.) It is clear that the motivation in perpetrating these atrocities was entirely religious.

The sultan was hardly worried about liberating “oppressed” people. For thirty years (**997 to 1027**), he devoted his time to annual plundering expeditions into Rajput territory. A special target of his were the aforementioned Isma’ilis of Multan. The pillaging was not born of logistical necessity; it was sheer, unadulterated religious zealotry that drove him. {6}

The destruction wrought by Mahmud Ghazi was extensive. But the Isma’ilis of Multan were resilient; and somehow managed to subsist…until, that is, Ghurid sultan Mu’izz ad-Din Muhammad of Ghor (ironically, anti-Ghaznavid) undertook a ransacking of Multan **in 1175**, thus eliminating the city’s Isma’ilis once and for all. He then proceeded with a rampage through Gujarat (against the indigenous Hindus)…before being defeated by Indian warrior-queen, Naiki-devi. We might note that Mu’izz’s brother (Ghurid sultan Ghiyath ad-Din Muhammad) was also a major player in the conquest of the region.)

And so it went: Long after the Salaf were gone, their legacy continued. At no point did it occur to anyone to mention that any of these odious acts betrayed the teachings of MoM.In every account available, such incidents are seen as perfectly in keeping with the Mohammedan vision.

To sum up: These events were anything but anomalies.In fact, throughout the Islamic record, they are portrayed as PAR FOR THE COURSE.Not once was any disapproval expressed.

Let’s continue our survey. **Early in the 12th century**, Seljuk ruler, Abu al-Fadl of the Banu al-Khash-shab (a.k.a. “Ibn al-Khasshab”) preached militant jihad during his rule in Aleppo. Inner “spiritual” struggle had nothing to do with it. His animus was not just directed at the despised Christian Crusaders; for he massacred most of

Aleppo's Ishma'ilis (that is: the wrong kind of Muslims) during his tenure. So far as he was concerned, if one was not a died-in-the-wool Salafi, one was an apostate (per "takfiri" doctrine).

Meanwhile, the founder of the eponymous Zengid / Seljuk Dynasty (Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn Imad al-Din Zengi) fashioned himself a "mu-jahid". Aptly known as "Nur al-Din" ["Light of the Religion"], he was a tyrannical theocrat. Was he some anomaly? Alas, no. **Over the course of the 12th century**, there was an alluvion of texts extolling "jihad". Note the Hadith compiled by Ibn Asakir, who was the chief advisor to Nur al-Din…who then mandated that Ibn Akakir's agit-prop be read in all public squares. Aspiring jihadis rallied to the call–galvanized by the incursion of the despised Frankish Crusaders.

Within the volatile environs of Crusader-era Al-Sham (Syria), Nur al-Din restricted the freedom of Aleppo's Shiites to practice their religion–violently suppressing a Shiite rebellion there **in 1157**. Subsequently, a large part of the community was massacred…in keeping with the "takfiri" mania / hysteria drummed up by Salafi proselytism.

It was soon thereafter (**in the late 12th century**) that the Salafi theologian, Al-Ghazali proclaimed that–unless they repented–Isma'ilis were to be regarded as "takfirs"; and that therefore they deserved whatever punishment they had coming to them. His vituperative perorations had predictable consequences: Isma'ilis were systematically massacred…with the endorsement of the presiding "ulema". As discussed in the previous piece (part 1 of this essay), Al-Ghazali's invidious preachments have reverberations to the present day.

It was also **in the late 12th century** that Mamluk "amir", Ikhtiyar ad-Din Muhammad ibn Bakhtiyar of the Khilji (who proudly fashioned himself a "ghazi") destroyed the world's two greatest educational institutions: the "maha-viharas" at Nalanda and at Vikram[a]-shila…along with the renown "maha-vihara" at Odanta-puri, where all the monks were gratuitously massacred. (Hint: The monks were not combatants; there only crime was not being Muslim.) All of that occurred in Bihar, India. He ALSO razed the great "Navya Navya" school at Nadadwip in Bengal.

The brutal amir did not need to do ANY of this in order to seize control of the territory. He did so because he deemed the institutions to be sacrilegious. (Only religious fanatics feel threatened by books.) Bakhtiyar Khilji thus has the distinction of being the man who virtually wiped out all Buddhist culture in India. (Note that this

is attested in ISLAMIC sources–notably: the “Tabaqat-i Nasiri” [chronicles of sultan Nasir ud-Din] by the Mamluk / Ghurid historian, Abu Osman Minhaj “ud-Din” al-Siraj Juzjani of Firuz-kuh, Ghor.)

It is worth unpacking this particular string of travesties. Pace the school of ancient Athens in Classical Antiquity and the school at Alexandria in Late Antiquity, the “maha-vihara” at Nalanda was arguably the greatest university the world had ever seen. Established around the time that MoM was born (c. 570) by the Buddhists of the Pala Kingdom, it had been a major center of learning for over six centuries. Pupils and scholars from all over the world had come to study there. Consequently, it was renown for its thriving cosmopolitanism. Nalanda was widely hailed for the spirit of free inquiry it encouraged. With the library of Alexandria having been destroyed, it housed the largest library in the world. And its residents boasted major advances in logic, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and even metallurgy.

When he stumbled across the site **in 1193**, Bakhtiyar Khilji inquired as to whether the Koran was being used on the premises. Upon being notified that it was not, he promptly destroyed the entire complex of structures, including its innumerable manuscripts…all while ensuring that everyone inside–students and teachers alike–was slaughtered. (!)

As it turned out, Bakhtiyar Khilji was unable to eradicate ALL knowledge in India, though. Fortuitously, many of the advances in algebra, medical treatments, and iron-smelting made by the Indians were co-opted by some of the (more discerning) Muslim colonialists. This was a blessing for mankind; as some of the medical writing dated back to the “Charaka Samhita” in India during Classical Antiquity. (Charaka of Gandhara was known as the Father of Medicine.) Such knowledge would serve as a basis for much of the headway that would later be made by Muslim luminaries. (I address this topic in my essay on the so-called “Golden Age” of Islam.)

We might note that Bakhtiyar Khilji did not limit his purges to Buddhists. The Hindus of Nabadwip (Bengal) were also exterminated. And remember, NOBODY liked those pesky (liberal) Isma’ilis. The Seljuks were slaughtering them in the Middle East. The Arabians (Banu Hilal) were slaughtering them in Egypt. And by the time the Magna Carta was being drafted **in 1215** (granting rights to all citizens of England), Ghurid sultan Ala ad-Din Ali was slaughtering the (Nizari) Isma’ilis of Koh-i-stan (alt. “Ghohestan” / “Quhistan”)–a major cultural center in Khorasan renown for its Persian science and literature.

In 1303, 30,000 Hindus were killed at Chittor by forces led by Ala ad-Din Khilji.

Pursuant to all this violent Islamic conquest, education in the major centers of learning of the Orient CEASED–notably the great philosophical institutions at Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh and at Takshashila [a.k.a. “Taxila”] in the Punjab (which had been in operation for well over a thousand years). Why were all these places destroyed? The primary reason: They did not teach the Sunnah; so did nothing to abet “dawah”. And they obviously did nothing to serve the Abrahamic deity.

In other words: These world-renown institutions of higher learning were useless insofar as promulgating Islam was concerned; so they were deemed useless. Lord knows what would have happened to Oxford and Cambridge had the aforesaid generals pushed into Britannia instead of into India. (Hint: The two locations would not NOW be known for education.)

It was finally the (Tengri-ist) Mongols–who respected other cultures and ALL intellectual traditions–who put a stop to Mohammedan hegemony.

That brings us to the Turkic-Mongol cynosure of the Barlas clan: Timur of Kesh, the ruler (often inaccurately associated with “the Mongols”) who OVERTHREW the traditional Mongolian (Chagatai and Kipchak) Khanates. He proudly referred to himself as–you guessed it–“The Sword of Islam”.



Tamerlane:

Timur is better known today as “Tamerlane”, which is based on the moniker “Timur-i Leng” (meaning “Timur the Lame”). Tamerlane was not of the Borjigin clan of the anointed Mongolian line, and so did not consider himself a proper Mongol. It was for this reason that he refrained from adopting the moniker, “Khan” for his honorific; using the Islamic “Amir” instead. He even eschewed the Uyghur script espoused by all Mongolian regimes since Ghengis Khan (which had been a script associated with Manichaeans and Buddhists); opting instead to use Turkic and Middle Persian as his empire’s lingua franca. Moreover, he made his capital not Qara Qorum or Balkh (the traditional Mongolian capitals), but instead the Gök-türk city of Samar-kand[a].

Regrettably, Timur is often conflated with “Ghenghis Khan” [Universal King] by those who harbor biases against the Mongols. In fact, the two men could not have been more different. Other than both being monotheist, Tengri-ism and Islam are diametrically opposed in virtually every way. (For more on this point, see my essay, “The Long History Of Legal Codes”.)

In the late 1300’s, Tamerlane converted from the traditional Mongol Faith (Tengri-ism) to Islam. Subsequently, he fashioned himself a “Ghazi” (warrior for Islam); and soon proved himself to be the quintessential Salafist (see Appendix 2 for more on this point).

Over the course of his reign, Tamerlane massacred entire societies. Total deaths due to his rampages amounted to over **17 MILLION** people: roughly 5% of the world’s population at the time. {7} He did not do this because it was (logistically) necessary for the expansion of his empire. That is to say: His vicious, unrelenting onslaughts were not undertaken in order to secure his sovereignty over newly-conquered territory. Conquerers don’t commit genocide AFTER they’ve already triumphed… unless, that is, there is something other than sheer conquest motivating them. {8}

Tamerlane’s genocidal rampage was not just ANY genocidal rampage. His reign of terror was driven by religious zealotry (that is, above and beyond his insatiable avarice). Thus he was not MERELY a megalomaniac; he was a SALAFI megalomaniac. To recapitulate: Salafism is based on the goal of bringing things back to the ways of the “Salaf”. That is exactly what Tamerlane had in mind. {13}

Tamerlane completely razed the Zoroastrian holy city of Beyhagh (site of the Azarbarzin temple; later known as “Sabzevar”), slaughtering its entire population (over 90,000) for good measure. He also completely razed the [k]Hazar city of Xacitarxan (later rebuilt as “As[h]trakhan”).

In 1398, Tamerlane massacred 100,000 civilians in Delhi. (!) Why, in heaven’s name, would he have done such a thing? There’re no need to speculate; he TOLD us why. He stated–in no uncertain terms–that his motivation for the invasion of Hindustan was to purify a land from the defilement of the infidels, thereby bringing it to the true Faith of “the prophet”.

Salafism, we should remember, is about ideological PURITY. Thus “dua” (acts of supplication) are a matter of PURIFICATION [“tazkiah”] rather than of edification. The concern, then, is piety; not probity. Tamerlane was not concerned about “enlightening” anyone; he was focussed solely on effecting absolute Islamic dominion.

To make sure this was loud and clear, when explaining why he was driven to wage war against the non-Muslims of Hindustan in his memoirs, Tamerlane quoted 66:9 of the Koran. In citing that particular passage, he reveled in the fact that he was able to put to the sword a hundred thousand residents. He even boasted about how all the women were made sex-slaves for his soldiers. (Delhi was under a sultanate at the time; though it was primarily populated by Hindus. So far as he was concerned, the Muslims in the region were insufficiently devout; so were not REALLY Muslims.) Tamerlane explicitly stated that he could not let the prisoners of war go free, as they were idolaters (read: infidels). Therefore they ALL needed to be executed. {9}

The “takfiri” legacy was thus taken to new heights. As we’ve seen, the theological territory on which Tamerlane was treading had already been well-trodden for over seven and a half centuries, starting with Mohammedan military generals like Uqba ibn Nafi (“Akbah”) and Khalid ibn al-Walid.

In committing those incredible atrocities, Tamerlane was following a long-established precedent. And so it went. When some people in the city of Isfahan (central Persia) rebelled against the “jizya” (a sometimes onerous tax levied on non-Muslims due to their “dhimmi” status), Tamerlane slaughtered the entire population of the city (estimated at approximately 200,000), including women and children. He virtually exterminated the Nestorians…for being Nestorian. Other Christians were

slaughtered with impunity…simply because they were Christian. Hindus were slaughtered with impunity because they were Hindu. And so it went with Buddhists and Tengri-ists and Zoroastrians and Manicheans, et. al.

Tamerlane killed (non-Muslim) civilians gratuitously for no other reason than that they were denizens of Dar al-Kufr (and thus within the ambit of Dar al-Harb). He justified all that he did–stating over and over and over that he was doing god's work. This should ring some bells. The trope has been used ubiquitously–from the rallying cry of Frankish Crusaders to the Nazi credo, "Gott mit Uns".

Tamerlane even slaughtered peaceable (Buddhist) monks wherever he went. Suffice to say, he did not do so because they were fighting back. He did so SOLELY because they were committing "shirk". They weren't combatants; they were blasphemers. More than anything else, Tamerlane aspired to be an exalted "ghazi"–like so many celebrated cynosures before him.

The countless libraries and churches that Tamerlane razed were not posing a danger to his army; or in any way undermining his sovereignty. He eliminated all systems of thought that stood in his path; and did so for purely theological reasons. His genocidal rampage covered massive swaths of the globe; impelled–more than anything else–by religious zealotry.

Once he finished with Hindustan, Tamerlane turned his sights to the West. Eventually, the once-flourishing center of learning at Rhesaina in Syria was sacked as well. Then on to Baghdad, where the residents were the WRONG KIND of Muslims…so were summarily deemed heretics. (There we go with that preoccupation with "takfir" again.) When Tamerlane had close to 100,000 people beheaded in THAT city, he likely had Koranic passages like the following in mind:

- verses 190-193, 216, and 244-246 in Surah 2
- verses 28, 55, 118, and 151 in Surah 3
- verses 74-76, 89, 95, and 101 in Surah 4
- verses 33, 51-57, and 80 in Surah 5
- verse 13 in Surah 6
- verses 12, 39, 60, and 65 in Surah 8
- verses 5, 12-15, 19, 23, 27-30, 36-39, 44, 73, 81, 111, and 122-123 in Surah 9

…as well as 22:39-40/78, 33:60-62, 47:3-4, 48:16/29, 60:1-13, 61:4, 71:26, and 98:6…to mention forty possible examples.

This was, of course, in addition to Tamerlane's favorite passage: 66:7-9. Those who insist that militant Salafism has nothing to do with what is written in Islamic scripture are advised to read the Koran. The ulama adumbrated in part I of this essay were not conjuring their ideology from whole-cloth.

It didn't help that the famed Mamluk exegete, Ibn Kathir of Damascus (a student of Ibn Taymiyyah, it might be noted) had just proclaimed–in his landmark "tafsir"–that all the above (more belligerent) verses superseded the more conciliatory verses (e.g. 2:256, 4:114, 25:63, 41:34, 60:8, and 109:6). Many heeded this infelicitous exegetical approach, per the precedent known as "naskh" [abrogation]. (For more on this point, see Appendix 3.)

Soon thereafter, Tamerlane slaughtered the entire population of Ardabil in the Azeri region of northern Persia. Do Islamic apologists really mean to suggest that such rapacious conquest had nothing whatsoever to do with Koranic injunction?

Tellingly, the majority of those massacred in Baghdad by Tamerlane's forces were non-Muslims. In his "takfiri" fervor, this self-proclaimed "sword of Islam" was merciless when it came to "kuffar". And, to rationalize his fanaticism, he had recourse to a plenitude of scriptural backing.

The myth that Baghdad was razed by Genghis Khan is as erroneous as it is perverse. It was a MUSLIM (the "Sword of Islam") who destroyed the city; not a Tengri-ist. Tamerlane's massacres in the region occurred c. 1400. The first Mongols had arrived in Baghdad 142 years earlier. Genghis died in 1227…over 5,500 kilometers away, in Western Xia. {10}

And so it went: Tamerlane devastated the Levant that fateful year. Then it was on to Anatolia the next year (c. 1400-1401), where–after promising "no bloodshed" in Sivas–he had 3,000 prisoners buried alive, thus technically keeping his promise.

To reiterate: Tamerlane's agenda was loud and clear. The promulgation of Islam was his sine qua non. There was no other reason to destroy such invaluable stores of knowledge than to facilitate totalitarian theocracy–an enterprise that entailed eradicating all other forms of thought. And so we see that the noxious effects of Al-Ghazali's seething contempt for intellectual activity (of ANY kind) continued to reverberate. Critical inquiry was the work of Satan. End of discussion.

There can be no denying the fact that Tamerlane was simply following in the footsteps of Islamic conquers before him. {10} Other than generals like Khalid ibn al-Walid and Uqba ibn Nafi (a.k.a. “Akbah”), who might he have had in mind? The celebrated Umar ibn al-Khattab…as well as Muhammed ibn Qasim Saqafi…and Mahmud Ghazni…and Bakhtiyar Khilji. Indeed, the odious precedent had been established by MoM HIMSELF with the notorious massacre of the (Jewish) Qurayza tribe.

Tamerlane may have ALSO been thinking of an oft-cited quotation of MoM, found in Bukhari’s Hadith: “I have been ordered to fight the people until they say, ‘None has the right to be worshipped but god.’ And if they say so, and pray as we pray, and face our qibla, and slay those we slay, then their blood and property shall be protected, and we will not interfere with their affairs except according to our laws” (Book 8; no. 387).

It seems an inner “spiritual” struggle was not part of this game-plan. As if this weren’t clear enough already, Koranic passages like those listed above reveal that waging war against non-Muslims (“Dar al-Harb”) was entirely about religious doctrine…even after we take into account quasi-concessions like:

- 4:89-90 (one is not OBLIGATED to fight those who haven’t attacked one first)
- 5:32 (a reference to the tale of Cain and Abel, which pertained exclusively to the Hebrews, so did not apply to Muslims)
- 8:61 (you’re enjoined to fight non-Muslims; BUT…if they incline toward peace, then you are not forbidden to follow suit if you so choose)

In any case, such salutary excerpts were over-ridden by the more militant passages, per the trump-card (“naskh”) propounded by Ibn Kathir. The message was quite clear. So we should not be surprised by the fact that so many Islamic potentates have honored it throughout the course of history. {16}

It’s also worth noting that Tamerlan’s construction projects primarily involved the building of mosques; not of (vital) public infrastructure.This showed where his priorities were.He was–moreover–a glutton for decadence.

At this point, the questions arises: Is all this some cherry-picking expedition?No. It is simply highlighting auspicious events that are indicative of an overwhelming trend. The few happy exceptions prove the rule. {29}

If we scour the volumes of Islamic sources that recount the events adumbrated thus far, we find something quite remarkable: In not a single case was there any indication that such events were seen as regrettable aberrations in an otherwise pristine record of civility.Quite the contrary.Such incidents were recounted with pride.

This point is worth reiterating: At no point was a comment made that such deeds contravened the Sunnah.Why not?Because such deeds did NOT, in fact, contravene the Sunnah. The “it was another time, in another place” rationalization doesn’t hold water, as our survey has shown such atrocities occurring across epochs and across geographies.

There is a clear pattern throughout Islamic history, throughout the Muslim world. Tamerlane had done across the Eurasian Steppes during the Middle Ages what MoM had done in Arabia in the 7th century…and what Daesh would do in al-Sham at the onset of the 21st century. He was one of many to pass the Salafi baton. And so it continued to pass.

The High Middle Ages:

In India, there was a thriving slave market during the Tughlaq dynasty (**1320-1413**) of the (Sunni) Delhi Sultanate–especially under sultans Ghiyas ud-Din, Muhammad, and Firuz. Who were enslaved? Non-Muslims. This was in keeping with the Koran (ref. 4:24-25/36, 16:71, 23:6, 24:31-33/58, 33:50-55, 70:30, etc.)

In 1360, during an incursion into the region, the Tughlaq sultan, Firuz destroyed much of the (Bengal) Jagganath Temple at Kataka in Orissa [“Odisha”]. As we have seen, this was part of a long tradition of destroying thousands of Hindu temples across India. Firuz–who enforced strict sharia–also led raids into Gujarat and the Sindh. This was done in the name of stifling infidel activity. **In 1387**, he put down a slave rebellion.

Back in the Middle East, the Levant ended up changing hands numerous times (prior to Ottoman rule). The (Ishma’ili / Shia) Fatimids controlled Jerusalem from **c. 1000 until 1071**, whereupon the (Turko-Persian Sunni) Seljuks overtook the city. **In 1098**, the Fatimids re-took the city. It was their subsequent expulsion–and slaughter–of Christians that triggered the Crusades the following year; and subsequently led to the establishment of the so-called (Frankish / Christian) “Kingdom of Jerusalem”… which would be intermittent and short-lived.

After seizing Jerusalem **in 1187**, the (Sunni) Ayyubid dynasty allowed fellow "People of the Book" (Jews; as well as Christians) to live as "dhimmis" in the region–per the Treaty of Ramla **c. 1192**. This was done under the Kurdish leader, Salah ad-Din (a.k.a. "Saladin"), who had defected from the (Zengid) Fatimids, the rulers of which were Oghuz Turks.

In 1244, Jerusalem was sacked by the (Sunni) Khwarezmian Tatars, who–once again–started purging the Levant of non-Muslims. These Tatars were soon driven out by the Ayyubids, who returned to power **in 1247**…yet were then ousted by the (Sunni) Mamluks **in 1260**. Some–though not all–Mamluk leaders also sought to drive out non-Muslims; and–as we've seen–had plenty of scriptural backing (as well as historical precedent) to rationalize their pogroms.

To summarize: Each successive Islamic regime continued (intermittently) purging the Levant of non-Muslims…even in the midst of the faltering (Christian) Kingdom of Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the Christians in the region were JUST AS MUCH religious fanatics; and–accordingly–sought to purge the region of infidels from their own point of view. The bigotry went in both directions; which, of course, does not justify it in EITHER direction. It might also be noted that the Frankish Crusaders were FAR MORE anti-Semitic than the Islamic leaders; and more aggressively persecuted / slaughtered Palestinian Jews. (During the Crusades, Jews often sought refuge with Levantine MUSLIMS.)

The Mamluks would remain in Jerusalem until they were driven out by the (Hanafi) Ottoman Turks **in 1517**. That pivotal shift occurred under the storied sultan, Selim. (The Mamluks had managed to persist even after Tamerlane's hegemony in the late 14th century.) It was the next sultan, Suleyman "the Magnificent", who endorsed a moderated version of pluralism. Consequently, he opted to accord unprecedented (though limited) rights to fellow "People of the Book" (i.e. Jews and Christians) under his reign. This was done via the new "Kanun-i Osmani" legal order.

It was clear that such a novel policy (referred to specifically as "Kanun-i Raya") was a departure from–not a continuation of–Islamic tradition. (For more on the history of political systems, see my essay: "The History of Legal Codes".)

Be that as it may, Suleyman committed genocide against the Yazidis, as they were deemed to be something far worse than mere infidels; they were considered DELIBERATE "mu-kafir-un" [apostates]…an appraisal that put "takfiri" mania / hysteria into overdrive.

Suleyman would continue Ottoman hegemony into Persia, where he ousted the (Shia) Safavids–who were also deemed apostates, as they had recently converted the Persians to Imamiyyah ("Twelver" Shiism). {27}

It was during the Safavid era (**beginning c. 1500**) that the (Shia) "Akhbari" school was ascendent in Persia and Mesopotamia. The school's hallmark feature was the adamant repudiation of "ijtihad" (independent thinking). Its governance was characterized by a disdain for anything not based on the Koran / Sunnah. Sadly, this set a precedent that would endure for the Safavid dynasty's duration…in the form of Shia fundamentalism (a precursor to Khomeinism.) As we saw in the previous piece (part 1 of this essay), such pathological contempt for Reason was nothing new; and had been fortified across the region by the Salafi icon: Al-Ghazali. Even Shiites took their queue from him. This is a reminder that Sunni fundamentalism (i.e. Salafism) is not the only form of Islamic fundamentalism. Shiites are just as susceptible to religious pathology–though on their own terms.

Any prospects for a resurgence of an Islamic "Golden Age" in Persia were eliminated once a Messianic figure (known as "Ismail") became Shah. A Shiite fanatic, Ismail anointed himself as the "Mahdi" (the last imam). (He even considered himself to be the reincarnation of Ali.) His regime inaugurated the clerical aristocracy now known as the Ulema–a cadre of self-proclaimed "experts" on all religious matters (which effectively meant: on ALL matters).

The Ayatollahs of Iran's CURRENT Shia theocracy harken back to the Safavid heyday. Indeed, there was nothing "revolutionary" about the Islamic "Revolution" of 1979 (other than the political overthrow itself). The retrograde transition to Khomeinism simply re-instituted a regime that had been lost to secularity. (Ironically, today's Ayatollahs fashion themselves as Usuli Shiites–thereby purporting to CHAMPION what they refer to as "ijtihad"…when, of course, they forbid anything that remotely resembles independent thought. Go figure.)

As we saw with the Safavids, the fanaticism was not always Sunni. Note the (Persian) Shiite fanatic, Hasan as-Sabbah of Rayy, who founded the infamous fedayeen group: the "Hashashiyan" ["hashish-eaters"; etymological basis for "assassin"] in the **late 11th / early 12th century**. Hasan as-Sabbah was a cultic figure affiliated with the "Nizari" sect of Isma'ili Shiism; and operated out of the "Alamut" [Eagle's Nest] castle in the Alborz mountains of northern Persia. He identified with the Fatimids of Egypt rather than the Seljuk rulers of his own land; and "da'i" (alt. "dawa"; missionary work) defined his life. His sect was

characterized–above all else–by obsessive devotion. So far as adherents were concerned, piety was the sine qua non of human life; and anyone who strayed from that was, well, assassinated.

In the Far East, it is worth noting the oft-celebrated sultan of Delhi, Sikandar of the (Pashtun) Lodi dynasty–who reigned **in the late 15th / early 16th century**. This self-proclaimed "ghazi" was renown for his rigid intolerance of other Faiths. Those who dared advocate for tolerance of Hinduism and Buddhism were prosecuted as heretics. His proto-fascistic regime was effectively a totalitarian Salafi theocracy–in the vein of, say, the Taliban in the Hindu Kush or the House of Saud in Arabia.

Alas, that wasn't the end of Islamic theocracy in India. **During the late 17th century**, Mughal Emperor Abul Muzaffar Muhi ud-Din Muhammad (a.k.a. "Aurangzeb"; alt. "Alamgir") ensured the Salafi tradition remained alive. Like Tamerlane, Aurangzeb was a Hanafi zealot. Alas, the notably-liberal Mughal crown-prince, Dara Shukoh never made it to the throne because he was assassinated by his younger, more pious brother. Aurangzeb promptly instituted "Fatawa-i Alamgiri" (a draconian version of sharia law named after himself) across the Sindh, Punjab, Baloch, India, Kashmir, and Bengal. This included a policy of "rajm" (stoning to death of transgressors), the enslavement of non-Muslims, and the routine beheading of apostates.

Predictably, Aurangzeb–as with all Salafi tyrants before him–destroyed countless Hindu / Buddhist temples–including the three most sacred:

- at Varanasi: Vish-vanath[a]
- at Mathura: Keshav[a] Dev[a]
- at Saurashtra in Gujarat / Sorath: Somnath

Aurangzeb erected giant mosques in their place. Eventually, there would also be rampant destruction of countless temples at Chittorgarh, Amer, Khandela, Jodhpur, Bijapur, Udaipur, etc. Such an enterprise was entirely theocratic in nature; not–as some apologists might now say–geo-political in nature. {18}

Aurangzeb became notorious for routinely executing subversives and heretics–including Hindus (notably: the Maratha ruler, Sambhaji), Sikhs (notably: Guru Tegh Bahadur), and Sufis (notably: Sarmad Kashani). He was determined to destroy the great Buddha statues at Bamiyan (constructed a generation before MoM was born)… yet lacked the technology to do so efficiently. So the project was deferred…until those of the same mind eventually got around to it.

Sure enough, three centuries later, the Taliban carried out this execrable task. (They also had the technology to capture the demolition on video, for the world to witness.)

Aurangzeb lives on in infamy, as his name is synonymous with religious intolerance, brutal oppression, and even (in spite of 2:256 and 109:6; both abrogated) coerced conversion. Needless to say, blasphemy laws in the Punjab are not a recent Pakistani invention. (The Salaf would have banned YouTube as well!)

When we look at the Hindu Kush today, we should bear in mind that the region has been subjected to a long history of brutal Islamic theocracy. {12}

The tyrants enumerated here were not anomalies. They were ALL doing what they did for the same reasons; and they all–taken together–constitute an undeniable trend. When we see their equivalents in the modern era (e.g. Zia ul-Haq in Pakistan or Mullah Mohammed Omar in Afghanistan), we should understand that this Salafi mindset is nothing new. The Haqqani network of madrasahs across Waziristan is precisely what MoM himself would have prescribed. {11}

During the Middle Ages, it was only within certain pockets that the impresarios of Islam exhibited prodigious tolerance–most notably in cosmopolitan centers like Cordoba, Toledo, and Granada in Andalusia (as well as in Damascus and Baghdad in the Middle East) during the so-called “Golden Age” of Islam. Note that during that epoch, Cordoba and Baghdad were the two largest cities in the world (between 1 and 2 million residents each); so it would have been strange had some sort of quasi-intellectual activity NOT occurred in these places. While there was intermittent “convivencia” (inter-cultural amicability) in Andalusia during this Islamic “Pyrite Age”, it is important not to confuse the (very notable) exceptions to the rule.

Invariably, there were lulls in the malignant illiberalism throughout Dar al-Islam; and–in some regions–there were periods of relative peace.Even as geo-political exigencies varied, the core doctrine (the Sunnah) remained the same as it ever was (with minor adjustments at the fringes, as the religion ramified into different factions).Such felicitous eventualities cannot be attributed to changes in the creed as originally conceived; they were due to changing circumstances “on the ground”. (Note that the same can be said of the Roman Catholic Church when surveying the occurrence of atrocities in the Holy Roman Empire.That some Jewish communities

dwelled peaceably in the Rhineland during the Middle Ages does not mean that anti-Semitism was not hardwired into the Nicene creed.The doctrinal machinery was always there; it just happened to lay dormant at different times and places.)

In the midst of sporadic cosmopolitan headway in the Muslim world, the fact remains: Once Muslims conquered Iberia (in the 8th century), they governed it in accordance with Islamic law. Blasphemy and apostasy were both capital offenses; and anyone found guilty of either was promptly executed. This was consistent throughout the reigns of the emirs of Cordoba: from Abd ar-Rahman I–through Hisham I and Al-Hakam I–to Abd ar-Rahman II and his son, Muhammad I (and then HIS son, Al-Mundhir).

Islamic Apologists rhapsodize about this reputed “heyday” of Islam. This “Golden Age” was–apologists like to aver–a resplendent epoch of ubiquitous amity and bounteous good will. Yet…while we can be certain that MoM would have enthusiastically applauded the razing of Jewish / Christian / Hindu / Buddhist temples, we cannot be so sure he would have so eagerly endorsed such bouts of cosmopolitanism–transient as they may have been. {11}

Barring isolated cases during this halcyon era (primarily in Baghdad, Mesopotamia, and in the urban centers of Andalusia), the Muslim world was anti-pluralistic much of the time…in keeping with MoM’s approach. Recall that MoM had proclaimed: “Let there not be two religions in Arabia.”

Fast-forward to **the 16th century**. In the Far East, the Mughal Empire under Akbar the Great was a notable divergence from the odious Mohammedan legacy. Akbar, it turns out, was a cosmopolitan who (mostly) eschewed the notion of “sharia” (law based explicitly on sacred doctrine) in favor of civil rights. Tellingly, his favorite wife was HINDU; and he bequeathed his throne to his HINDU son. To say that the Sahabah would not have approved of this is an understatement.

In the Mughal court, serious discourse was conducted in PERSIAN–that is: in the native language of most of the great thinkers of the “Golden Age”. As it turned out, “Akbar the Great” was “great” insofar as he DEPARTED FROM Mohammedan precedent. We can celebrate him because he WASN’T a Salafi. {20}

During the 16th and 17th centuries in India, the Qutb Shahi dynasty (especially the last: Abul Hasan, a.k.a. “Tana Shah”) was notably tolerant. The Qutb Shahis–who were Shiites–embraced non-Muslim equality; and so abolished the onerous “jizya” levied on non-Muslims (as a mafia-style “protection” tax). They embraced Hindu pedagogy, and even adopted Telugu as the court language. {21}

As for the Middle East, the region has never been so united as it was in the Ottoman Era. Yet it was during that era that the so-called “Golden Age” is Islam DETERIORATED. Al-Azhar University in Cairo (now Sunni Islam’s flagship institution, even though it was founded by Shiites) fell into intellectual destitution, reflecting the state of the rest of the Muslim world. To this day, the institution remains a breeding-ground for Salafist academics.

There were ephemeral bouts of intellectual activity after the “Golden Age”. Tellingly, it was in LIBERALIZED (read: secularized) realms that such glimmerings occurred. In all the times / places in which Muslims lived peaceably side-by-side with people of other Faiths, we mustn’t attribute it to doctrinal fidelity (lest we conflate “in spite of” with “because of”). There were over-riding geo-political reasons (at the macro level) and social reasons (at the local level) for why people of alternate Faiths–intermittently–opted to get along with each other. This was more-so than ever under the Ottoman Empire, where places like Damascus, Beirut, Smyrna, and Jerusalem were relatively pluralistic. As is often the case, humanity trumped piety in these salutary instances.

Such felicitous eventualities cannot be traced to strict adherence to the Sunnah. It was insofar as the Sunnah was DISREGARDED that such harmony was viable. In the event that Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Kufr lived side by side without conflict, we find that there was a kind of “holding pattern” in place. That is to say: A provisional domain of homeostasis (sometimes referred to as “Dar al-Ahd”) was maintained until such time that “harab” (waging war against non-Muslims) was deemed appropriate…at which time “Dar al-Ahd” was promptly rendered “Dar al-Harb” [domain of war]; and religious zealotry once again spurred antagonisms.

There are parallels to this outside of the Ummah. The same was the case with the instances of inter-Faith comity in Christendom (i.e. within the dominion of the Roman Catholic Church): sporadic and provisional. Torquemada was not an aberration within this context; his draconian program was EMBLEMATIC. During the (patently theocratic) “Holy Roman Empire”, tolerance and diplomacy was the exception to

Vatican policy. The same is the case with the Judeo-fascist regime that presides over the modern-day nation-State of “Israel”: effectively a theocratic ethno-State with colonialist designs.

In the event that religionists wax cosmopolitan, stringent parochialism is no more to thank than strict vegetarianism is to thank when pescetarians opt to eat the meat of fish.

The verging-eradication of Zoroastrianism throughout Persia / Bactria attests to the fact that tolerance was not the default position for Islamic regimes over the centuries. In the Far East (in regions where Islamic dominion was established), Hinduism and Buddhism fared poorly for the same reason: Islamic hegemony. The consequences of such hegemony were dire EVERYWHERE. The tragic eventualities we’ve surveyed were not indicative of burgeoning altruism. Throughout the Middle Ages, cosmopolitanism within Dar al-Islam was a rather “hit and miss” affair. Any salubrious instances were enabled by a few extraordinary people.

Rights accorded to “dhimmis” were touch and go, to put it mildly. There was never a mandate for pluralism that emerged from within “sharia”; so when it DID occur, it was tentative…and only because someone with authority (e.g. Ottoman Sultan Suleyman; Mughal Emperor Akbar) took the initiative of his own accord–usually at the protestations of the ulema. Such desultory Progressivism can be attributed to the audacity of the occasional heterodox figurehead…who did not feel obliged to stringently hew to the Sunnah. {7}

Reviewing the above figures, a continuum is hard not to notice. Amidst all the historical developments in the Muslim world, a palpable Salafi strain persisted over the centuries. There was a baton that began with MoM, and continued to be passed from one generation to the next–with sporadic (fortuitous) interruptions. Salafism’s beginnings coincide with the earliest days of the Faith. To only pay attention to the intermittent bouts of harmony, then, is to gloss over MoM’s primary legacy.

And so now we see: The claim that Saudi-style “Wahhabism” or Taliban-style “Deobandism” or Daesh-style tyranny were the first occurrence of Islamic theocracy in the Muslim world betrays an egregious ignorance of the history of Islam…which, to reiterate, is not the same as “Islamic history”. Far from contortions of the original version of the creed, they were reiterations.



SALAFISM IN THE WORLD TODAY:

As history has shown time and time again, the elimination of secular learning is a signature trait of religious fanaticism–irrespective of the religion at hand. The eradication of blasphemous holy sites is another hallmark. When the Taliban destroyed the great Buddha statues at Bamiyan **in 2001**, they were simply finishing the job that Muhammed ibn Qasim Saqafi, Mahmud Ghazni, Bakhtiyar Khilji, Tamerlane, Aurangzeb, et. al. had started. Indeed, "mullah" Mohammed Omar did what his Salafi predecessors could not do, as they were not equipped with modern explosives. (Thankfully, instructions for making dynamite couldn't be found anywhere in the voluminous Hadith collections.)

That demolition in the Hindu Kush was one of the most significant archeological travesties of the modern era, as the caves at Bamiyan were one of the greatest wonders of the ancient world; and a cherished part of Buddhist history. (Alas. Fourteen years later, Daesh would surpass the Taliban's watermark of destruction–razing countless ancient structures across Syria and northern Mesopotamia.)

To pretend that the Taliban's heinous actions at Bamiyan–or anywhere else–were somehow unprecedented is to ignore the long, violent history of Salafi hegemony in the region–replete with RAMPANT temple-razing. Alas, the destruction of those grand Buddha statues was par for the course; as was Daesh's demolition of the ancient Nabataean temples at Palmyra and the Assyrian temples in Nineveh **in 2015**. {14}

After considering the theological history of Salafism outlined in part 1 of this essay, it is not difficult to connect the dots. The symbiosis between the prevailing theology (outlined in the first part) and the litany of crimes against humanity (outlined in this second part) is as clear as day. From the 7th century to the present, the common thread is impossible to miss…if, that is, one cares to look. The key is to not just look at the actions; it is necessary to look at the accompanying theology as well.

In the 18th century, just as the (Western) Enlightenment was gathering steam, a new movement emerged in Arabia. When Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab of the Najd articulated his vision for Islam, he was not concocting it out of the blue; he was standing on the shoulders of giants–which is simply to say: he was not a pioneer; he was a staunch ideological re-constructionist. It was one of the most tragic developments in modern history when the House of Saud entered into its Faustian pact with Abd al-Wahhab in order to leverage that preacher's clout for its own political purposes.

In light of the preceding survey, it should be clear that Wahhabism was the opposite of Reformism; it was revanchist through and through. Indeed, Abd al-Wahhab was perfectly frank about what he was trying to do in Arabia. This was made especially clear when the House of Saud made its cynical bargain with him (and, by implication, his insidious cabal of religious fanatics). The powerful cleric's singular mission was to bring Islam BACK TO THE WAY IT USED TO BE. He was not a trailblazer, he was a retrograde ideologue. At no point was he inclined to say that he was attempting to do something NEW. Why not? Because it had all been done before; and he merely sought to do it again.

To reiterate the point made in part 1 of this essay, genuine reform is progressive in nature. It is oxymoronic to suppose that Reformist versions of an institution can be regressive. Reform is–by definition–about moving forward, not backward. There is a term for bringing things back to the way they used to be: REVERSION. When Salafis / Wahhabis urge Dar al-Islam to bring things back into alignment with the original Mohammedan vision, they are deigning to re-construct what once was. They are proposing a ROLL-BACK.

This is the opposite of Reform.

By contending that Reform can somehow be a matter of regression rather than of progression, one deprives the term of all meaning. Going back to “square one” is hardly the basis of a Reformation. (Note that similar confusion might arise from the dual meaning of “revolution”–which can mean either “coming full circle” or “moving into new territory”. Exploring uncharted waters is not the same as bringing things back around to the point of departure. Alas, the same word is used for a planet’s orbital path around a star as is used for the “American Revolution”.)

The Wahhabi enterprise was a matter of revanchism, not of innovation.

As Robert Dreyfuss explained in “Devil’s Game”: “Spreading the Islamic version of fire and brimstone, Abd al-Wahhab thundered that the Muslims needed to purge themselves of everything that had been learned since the days of [MoM] a thousand years before. It was a revivalist movement in the classic sense.” Dreyfuss added: “To reinforce their message, Abdul Wahhab, Ibn Saud, and their followers had the unfortunate habit of slaughtering anyone who disagreed with them–demolishing their cities, their mosques, and their shrines… The slaughter never ended. **In the 1700’s**, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance began a campaign of killing and plunder all across Arabia, first in central Arabia [the Najd], then in Asir in southern Arabia and parts of Yemen, and finally in Riyadh and the Hijaz. **In 1802** they raided the Shiite holy city of Karbala in what is now Iraq, killing most of the city’s population, destroying the dome over the grave of a founder of Shiism, and looting property…” (p. 36, 37).

During the early 19th century, similar things occurred in West Africa. **In 1809**, Fula (Nigerian) “sheik” Usman dan Fodio founded the Sokoto caliphate, anointing himself sultan. (His son, Mohammed Bello, took over **in 1815**; and was seen as exceptional for having allowed some females to have an education.) Fodio inspired the Fula warlord, “Modibo” Adama bii Ardo Hassana, who undertook a jihad that spread Salafism throughout the region. (The tyrannical Sokoto regime would be abolished in 1903, when the British took control of the region.)

In 1818, Fula (Malian) religious leader, Seeku Aamadu of Timbuktu founded the theocratic Massina Empire (“Hamdu’llahi”), anointing himself “almami”–the Fula equivalent of “Amir al-Mumineen” [leader of the Faithful]. He ruled for 27 grueling years, instituting strict sharia law in the Salafi tradition. So when Mohammed Yusuf founded “Boko Haram” in the region **in 2002**, he was doing nothing new. He even

noted that his biggest influence was none other than Ibn Taymiyyah. How did that come to pass? He studied at the University of Medina, where he was indoctrinated into the Salafi ideology–specifically via the teachings of Egyptian cleric, Shukri Mustafa–founder of the Takfiri organization "Jamaat al-Muslimeen" [alt. "Takfir wal-Hijra"] **c. 1960**. Thus: Boko Haram did not arise ex nihilo; it was the culmination of a long legacy of African Salafism going back to Seeku Aamadu of Timbuktu in the early 19th century.

As mentioned, the Ottoman Empire was quasi-pluralistic and–one might even say–intermittently secular during its four centuries of prominence (**1516 thru 1916**). Pursuant to the dissolution of the Empire, the way was opened for fundamentalist Islam to re-emerge in full force. That resurgence can be attributed, in part, to anti-colonial fervor (push-back against what was seen as Occidental imperialism); and hence the sort of geo-political grievances spur fanatical movements. But not ALL of it can be attributed as such. Religiosity was also clearly at play. {18} {22}

As I pointed out in part 1 of this essay, religion provides the framework within which people make sense of–and subsequently address–their grievances, many of which exist for reasons that are not themselves religious. (I dubbed such geo-political exigencies the "alpha" factor; and such framing as the "beta" factor.) Religion furnishes a cause with a rationalization and an aegis. It is a way of mobilizing–nay, galvanizing–people (to ameliorate insecurities; allay fears; engender false hope). It is a way of justifying–nay, mandating–a certain agenda: the magical cure to perceived ills. Alpha is the SOURCE OF grievances; Beta is furnishes a means by which those grievances can be addressed. Neither the circumstances (alpha) or the ideology brought to bear (beta) alone is sufficient to explain WHY religion operates as it does.

Recall that the primary grievance of Sayyid Qutb's "Stars of Guidance" ["Ma'alim fi al-Tariq"; typically translated as "Milestones"] was not Western imperialism / colonialism; it was a lack of sharia in governance; and a lack of (hyper-puritanical) Islamic "din" in daily life. In other words, while oriented TOWARD the political and social, the BASIS FOR his grievance was explicitly religious. Moreover, his primary focus–one might even say, his TARGET–was the MUSLIM world (spec. the Arab world), not California and Colorado.

What, then, is the mindset with which we are dealing when assaying the atrocities adumbrated in this essay? Certain incidents are telling. **In the early 19th century**, when the Egyptian chronicler, Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti investigated the advances

that had been made by the Europeans, he was left dumbstruck by Enlightenment values. After the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, he was beguiled by a culture in which people prized Reason, sans religious dogmas. And he was dumfounded by the fact that a secularist society had become markedly superior to Dar al-Islam. Such a vexing realization surely undermined his impression that Islam was the key to prosperity.

At the beginning of the 19th century, when Thomas Jefferson asked the Moroccan ambassador why he was supporting the Barbary pirates in their attacks on European merchant vessels, the ambassador candidly replied that the enterprise was legitimized by the laws of the prophet of Islam. That is: It was perfectly in keeping with the Sunnah; so OF COURSE he was obliged to endorse the practice. Jefferson's Muslim interlocutor stated that it was written in their holy book that all nations that had not answered the call were sinners; and that it was the duty of all Muslims to make war upon non-Muslims wherever they could be found–to seize their booty, and to enslave all that could be taken as prisoners.

In other words, it was the creed AS ORIGINALLY FORMULATED that was used to justify piracy; as piracy was perfectly in keeping with the example of MoM. Since Islam's first days, followers were marauders as much as they were missionaries. The Moroccan ambassador simply answered Jefferson's query in precisely the manner the Salaf would have.

During the 1920's, Nazism was not the only militant, fascistic movement on the rise. In the Middle East, the bloodthirsty "Ikhwan" ["Brethren"; not to be confused with what came to be called the "Muslim Brotherhood" out of Egypt] wreaked havoc across the countryside, persecuting anyone suspected of engaging in "innovation". (Note: "bid'ah" means divergence from orthodoxy.) In their "takfiri" fervor, they slaughtered as many "kuffar" as they possibly could. This included non-fundamentalist Muslims, who were deemed to be "takfirs" for their inadequate doctrinal zeal. {27} The "Ikhwan" echoed MoM's fondness for decapitations and civilian massacres, hewing to a precedent for pogroms going back to their Salafi forebears. (Recall that the Koran exhorts jihadis to "strike [non-Muslims] at their necks!") Unsurprisingly, this particular Salafi band of "ghazi" / "mujahid" was initially abetted by none other than the Arabian monarch: Abd al-Rahman al-Faysal of the House of Saud (a.k.a. "Ibn Saud"). {23}

Such figures engaged in “dawa” (evangelism) in order to perpetuate an insidious illusion. More to the point: They abandoned their humanity in order to maintain (what they saw as) piety. As it happened, this was generally more due to religious explanations (beta) than geo-political explanations (alpha). That’s why it is important to understand things in terms of these two distinct factors. {18}

The virulently anti-Semitic Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad al-Husayn threw in his lot with the Nazis **in the 1930’s**. His execrable political position was based entirely on religiosity (and personal opportunism). Meanwhile, in Germany, gushing encomia were written in praise of the House of Saud as “the Third Reich Wahhabi style” (ref. H. Lindemann’s “Der Islam im Aufruch, in Abwehr und Angriff”; 1941). Such overt affinity demonstrated the symbiosis between fascisms. Behold the shared (deranged) mentality of mutually-exclusive ethno-centricities.

During the post-War era, the Salafi legacy continued apace. Saudi King Faisal (not to be confused with the Hashemite King of Iraq) undertook avid Wahhabi policies, which paved the way for the emergence of virulent trans-national organizations in the 60’s–notably the Islamic Center of Geneva, the Muslim World League, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (all promulgators of the degenerate Wahhabi creed).

Throughout the 1950’s and 60’s, the Grand Mufti of Arabia, Muhammad ibn Ibrahim “Al ash-Sheikh” (the designation for progeny of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab) ensured that Saudi policy strictly adhered to the most draconian elements of Wahhabi doctrine. So it would go with his successors: Abd al-Aziz ibn Baaz (a.k.a. “Bin Baz”) and Abd al-Aziz ibn Muhammad ibn Abdul Rahman (a.k.a. “Abdul Aziz”).

And when Abboud al-Zumar of Giza issued the fatwa against (Egyptian) Nobel laureate Anwar Sadat **in 1981**, he was following the example of MoM, as well as many of the most prominent Islamic icons since the religion’s inception. Sadat was assassinated for being a reformer. Revealingly, after Khalid al-Islambuli pulled the trigger, he announced that he had just killed PHARAOH–indicating he was thinking of his act in primarily Koranic terms. Hence an illustrative case of alpha vis a vis beta.

As I discuss elsewhere, the most religious elements of the Palestinian resistance (e.g. Hamas) sullies an otherwise estimable movement. It does so by casting the Palestinians’ tragic plight in explicitly religious terms–ironically, reflecting the derangement of the Revisionist Zionists that they see as their adversaries. Making their resistance a matter of Muslims pitted against Zionists undermines what is (in

purely secular terms) a noble cause: the fight for the liberation–and self-determination–of the Palestinian people. Tellingly, “Hamas” is an acronym for an ISLAMIC resistance movement, not PALESTINIAN resistance movement. As historian Eugene Rogan put it, “The novelty of Hamas was to articulate Palestinian aspirations in strictly Islamist terms. From its first communique, Hamas set out an intransigent message that combined confrontation with the Jewish state and a rejection of secular Arab nationalism.” To say that this was shooting a worthy cause in the foot would be an understatement.

The grievances were perfectly legitimate given the geo-political circumstances (alpha); it was the IDEOLOGY (beta) that was the problem.

Likewise, Hizb-ullah means “Party of God” (its progenitor was not coincidentally named the “Islamic Resistance”). That opprobrious organization was formed in reaction to the Israeli government’s massacres in Lebanon **in 1982**–a problem that could have been addressed in strictly secular terms (i.e. as a human rights violation). Alas, Hizb-ullah’s ultimate goal was to create an Islamic State in Lebanon, thereby mirroring the very crime (theocracy) underlying their ideological adversaries (the Judeo-fascists who were dictating Israeli policy). The party’s **1985** charter stated: “We stress that we are convinced of Islam as a Faith, system of thought and of jurisprudence; and we urge all to recognize it and to resort to its law.” Such hidebound religiosity helps nobody.

Insofar as oppressed Lebanese and Palestinian Arabs make their plight about religiosity instead of about justice, they undermine their own aspirations.

The short-lived “Jabhat al-Islamiyyah lil-Inqadh” [“Islamic Salvation Front”] in Algeria **c. 1989** is yet another illustration of this counterproductive approach to resistance. By contrast, next door in Tunisia, genuine Reformation was enabled in 2011 largely because it was undertaken in SECULAR terms (pace the abiding popularity of the “Hizb En-Nahda”).

Tragically, instances of Islamic fundamentalism in the modern world are not outliers. The Salafi icons enumerated in this essay (both parts 1 and 2) were not errant crackpots operating in obscurity on the fringe–bereft of scriptural support and with no claim to ancient legacies. Quite the contrary. There has been a clear precedent for resurrecting Islam in its un-reconstructed (i.e. original) form.

Al-Qaeda's spiritual leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, followed precisely that precedent in his crusade against Dar al-Kufr. He was not departing from the norms of Dar al-Islam; he was partaking in a tradition that went back almost 14 centuries.

The supposition that Salafism is some modern perversion of the Faith (not the "real" Islam) is entirely spurious; as it rests on a basic misunderstanding what constitutes religious fundamentalism. Want to understand a movement's tenets? Then look at the FUNDAMENTALS of the creed that it espouses; and then ascertain the degree to which those fundamentals are in keeping with the professed religion as originally conceived.

Today, when we look at the only nations in the world that are still almost entirely Muslim (Somalia, [North] Sudan, Mali, Mauritania, Western Sahara, and Saudi Arabia), we see the only places on the planet where slavery is still openly practiced. This should come as no surprise, as that too is a tradition that goes back fourteen centuries. {24} It should go without saying that such impoverished countries are not helped in any way by sharia–or by ANY theocratic regime, for that matter.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

The point is worth repeating: Insofar as civility occurred in the Muslim world, it was largely in spite of–not because of–any ambient religiosity that may have existed. The Sunnah was not the source of such pluralism; it was–in every case–an obstacle to overcome. The fact that Muslims and non-Muslims happened to get along with one another (living peaceably side-by-side) at various times in various places should not be attributed to the predominance of "sharia"; it should be attributed to over-riding socio-economic exigencies that TRUMPED doctrinal obsessions. Such felicitous developments had little if anything to do with directives found in Islam's holy book and throughout the Hadith.

The evidence is overwhelming and conclusive: A society is civil in direct proportion to how secular it has managed to become. A regime based on cult activity–like Nazism, Stalinism, or Maoism–does not qualify as secular. In its adherence to "Juche", North Korea is as secular as Vatican City. These insidious regimes are a reminder that totalitarian theocracy does not require a traditional religion to exist.

And what of the happy exceptions to the overwhelming trend–luminaries like Rumi, Avicenna, and Averroës? In noting such estimable historic figures, Islamic apologists are pointing to what is POSSIBLE. Meanwhile, in acknowledging all the OTHER

figures we've adumbrated, they will be disabused of consoling misconceptions about Islam's marvelously irenic past. For they will see that Islam–as with Judaism and Christianity–has had a virulently Reactionary strain since its very inception. Over the centuries, the (notable) exceptions have only further proven the rule.

Let's be clear: Moving forward, the focus needs to be on what Islam CAN BE, not what it HAS BEEN. One does not need to obfuscate the past in order to forge a way forward. True progress is not built on illusion.

The lesson here is not that Islam has always been fundamentalist–in all places at all times. The lesson here is simple: The claim that "fundamentalism has never been a significant part of Islam" is patently false. For almost fourteen centuries, it has been the rule, not the exception. When Muslims HAVE made progress, it is rarely–if ever–attributable to more stringently hewing to the Sunnah.

Islam can be many different things; as it HAS BEEN many different things throughout its long, checkered history. On the spectrum of Progressive Islam to fundamentalist Islam, there has existed the full range of religiosity throughout what is an amazingly diverse Ummah. But a Reactionary instantiation of Islam has consistently predominated. It is dishonest to pretend that this has not been the case.

Genuine reform is possible. But for a Reform Islam to be viable, Progressive Muslims must come to terms with their religion's regrettable history. The question is not whether Islam has historically been more good or more bad; the question is WHAT MADE it more good when it was good and WHAT MADE it more bad when it was bad. In what ways was it good? In what ways was it bad?

Such questions must be answered honestly. Only then can work begin on making the Faith become the best that it can be.

It does not help to assume that–by blithely ignoring the prevalence of fundamentalism in Islam's past–it is easier to promote Reform today. Only by RECOGNIZING the prominence of fundamentalist Islam over the past fourteen centuries can the prerequisites for fundamentalist Islam–and, by counterpoise, the conditions under which Progressive Islam continues to fester–be fully understood. It does nobody any good in the present to ignore the incidences of Salafism in the past, least of all Muslims who are striving to rise above it.

The checkered history of Islam outlined here should not occasion in us the urge to gainsay the religion wholesale. Rather, it should spur us to ask: How is it that this widely-variegated Faith can so easily be made into such a heinous thing? On the other hand: What is it about Progressive Muslims that enables them to be PROGRESSIVE? The two questions are related. We can't answer one without answering the other.

To effect structural reform in Dar al-Islam, a major paradigm shift is required. This would involve a re-conceptualization of key tenets. All Progressive Muslims advocate for this benign interpretation of "jihad"; yet this is not accomplished by pretending that this is what it has traditionally meant…and what it STILL MEANS in the major "madahib" [schools] of Islamic thought. Rather, it requires one to recognize that this is NOT what it has traditionally meant…and that, consequently, a change is required. The REVISED notion of "jihad" is that it pertains exclusively to one's own "iman" [Faith], not to "harb" [war]. This entails that all the world must be Dar al-Hudna; and that "dawa" (the promulgation of the Sunnah) only involves promotion of good will toward one's fellow man. Here, "iman" is ENTIRELY a personal affair.

Until all of "nas" [mankind] dwells within Dar al-Hudna (which is not necessarily concomitant with Dar al-Islam), this mission will remain unfulfilled.

Islam is no more destined to be fundamentalist than any other religion. Muslims needn't be Reactionary to be devout any more than do the votaries of any other Faith tradition are obliged to do so. There is no reason why Islam needs to remain mired in the odious legacy of Umar, Muhammed ibn Qasim Saqafi, Mahmud Ghazni, Bakhtiyar Khilji, Tamerlane, Aurangzeb, Ibn al-Wahhab, et. al. Those men were Reactionaries, not Reformers. As unabashed re-constructionists, they sought to REVIVE something from the past rather than forge a new path into the future. {26}

Fundamentalism is nothing new in Dar al-Islam; it is merely the creed abiding in its original, un-reconstructed form. Salafism has been baked into the Islamic cake since the 7th century. It is up to Progressive Muslims to now change the recipe.



FOOTNOTES:

{1 **In 642**, Caliph Umar instructed his general, Amr ibn al-As, who asked what should be done with the books of the Library of Alexandria: “As for the books you mention, here is my reply: If their content is in accordance with the revelations of god, then we may do without them. For in that case the revelations will more than suffice. If, on the other hand, they contain matters not in accordance with the revelations, there is no need to preserve them. Proceed, then, and destroy them.” (Also ref. the “Tarikh al-Hukama” of Ali ibn Yusuf al-Qifti.) This was nothing new. Five years earlier, Caliph Umar had ordered the great library at Ctesiphon to be razed (by his general, Sa’ad ibn Abi Waqqas). This infamous quotation may be apocryphal; yet it is recorded in the Syriac Chronicle of Bar Hebraeus. Regardless, the quote made it into Islamic lore; and so likely served as inspiration for later Islamic cynosures–Muhammed ibn Qasim Saqafi, Mahmud Ghazni, Bakhtiyar Khilji, Tamerlane, and Aurangzeb being the most obvious. (See footnote 17 below.)}

{2 We can contrast this with the reaction of Alexander the Great (no slouch when it came to rapacious conquest). Upon coming across the great Library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, Alexander was INSPIRED by it, not threatened by it. Said inspiration seems to have led to the later construction of the great Library of Alexandria–initiated by his friend: Egyptian “diadochi”, Ptolemaios Soter. What accounts for this drastically contradistinctive approach? The key difference is that Alexander’s

(Macedonian) hegemony did not involve a religious agenda. He was not a religious zealot, so he welcomed the chance to learn. Only fanatical religionists are threatened by books.}

{3 Apparently, they couldn't count on the purported brilliance of the "Recitations" to speak for itself. The primary directive was crystal clear: People of the world needed to be brought to their knees. Other examples of force: In the Middle East, once-thriving cities like Ctesiphon and Caesarea were gratuitously razed. In Ethiopia, Aksum was razed. In Makouria (Nubia), Dongola was razed. This makes no sense… until religious zealotry is taken into account. Sacrilege warranted annihilation. Secular conquest, on the other hand, would have worked to maintain extant infrastructure is new territory–as demonstrated by the Persian Empires (Achaemenid, Parthian, then Sassanid), the Macedonian Empire, and the Roman Empire.}

{4 And so it went: Even the purportedly rationalism-embracing Mu'tazili couldn't help but be theocratic. The so-called "Bayt al-Hikma" ["House of Wisdom"] in Baghdad is worth mentioning, as it illustrates the present thesis. The institution first burgeoned under Abbasid caliph Abu Ja'far Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Mansur **during the 8th century**. (Like caliph Umar before him, Al-Mansur died in Mecca during his participation in the Hajj.) One of its first superstars was the Persian polymath, Mohammad ibn Musa of Khwarezm (a.k.a. "Al-Khwarizmi") credited with the development of algebra–though he did not invent it wholesale. "Bayt al-Hikma" was primarily a place in which works of Classical Antiquity (mostly Greek and Persian) were transcribed into CA (using paper-making techniques appropriated from the Chinese). Ergo the venue is more accurately described as "Khizanat Kutub al-Hikma" (storage place for books of wisdom), as it was a venue where the manuscripts of OTHERS' wisdom were stored and curated. It was largely a poaching operation, in which extant knowledge was co-opted as the need arose. Also note the so-called (Sunni) "Nizamiyya" network of pedagogic institutions founded during the 11th century (named after the Seljuk vizier, Nizam al-Mulk). That network was established primarily as a theological enterprise to stave off the growing Isma'ili (Shia) influence in Persia. Its most famous instructor: Salafi icon, Al-Ghazali.}

{5 When I seem to fast-forward from one cynosure to another, I am not (strategically) omitting contrary facts in the intervening period. Rather, I am focusing exclusively on the most salient events / people–none of which arose in isolation. Everything is a touchstone even in what is a common thread. Salafism existed along a continuum, even when it occurs at the nodes of punctuated

equilibria. (Dare I say, ESPECIALLY when it occurs at the nodes of punctuated equilibria.) It is through the HIGHLIGHTS that we can start to see the general shape of things, and discern a pattern over the long-term. For elaboration on this point, see footnote 29 below.}

{6 Actually, there was another motivation at play: material gain. Mahmud Ghazni was obsessed with plunder. He regularly orchestrated pillaging sprees into India in order to increase his vast stores of treasure. By some estimates, he eventually became the wealthiest ruler in history. Suffice to say, this was NOT a philanthropic venture. As with MoM before him, Ghazni was obsessed with accumulating loot. As the uber-decadent House of Saud reminds us today, it is possible to be both incredibly greedy and incredibly devout at the same time. Such schemes demonstrate that "zakat" can go both ways. That is: It can be invoked as a reason to give OR as an excuse to take. Ghazni's hoarding complex was effectively zakat-in-reverse (masquerading as zakat, of course). The rational is simple: If a ruler fashions himself to be working on god's behalf, then he–and he alone–does not need to give to charity; YOU need to give to HIM…in the service of "the cause". Following MoM's example (20% of the booty goes to the leader), Ghazni's gargantuan stash was accumulated in the name of god. (Unlike MoM, he didn't just take a cut; he seized almost everything for his own coffers.) So far as he saw it, his pathological materialism was an expression of his piety. (See footnote 19 below.)}

{7 Tamerlane certainly would have caused even more devastation had he lived longer. He fell ill and died on his way to exterminate yet more people in (Ming) China. Tamerlane was a prime example of Muslims fighting Muslims. Indeed, many of those he slaughtered were other Muslims (whom he did consider proper Muslims). His hoards slaughtered countless Ottomans (e.g. at Aleppo) as well as the residents of cosmopolitan centers like (Mamluk) Damascus, (Kartid) Herat, and (Tughlaq) Delhi. He even massacred his fellow Turkic-Mongols in Jalayir-ruled Baghdad (a.k.a. the "Jalair"). The Jalayirid regime was deemed errant (and so not REALLY Muslims, so far as he saw it). In fact, Tamerlane's sacking of Baghdad shows that his genocides had nothing to do with racism; they were all about RELIGION. For he sought to resurrect the proper sultanate of the city (the Islamic "Il-khanate" of the House of Hulagu) even if it meant eradicating fellow Turkic-Mongols (those of the Jalayirid dynasty). But why the House of Hulagu if Hulagu himself had not been Muslim? Because the first Mongol to convert to Islam was Mahmud Ghazan "the Great" of the Hulagu (i.e. "Il-khanate") line, in the 13th century. Recall that it was Ghazan who fought the heretical (Tengri) Chagatai Khanate. It is important to bear in mind that,

per the doctrine of “taqfir”, Muslim-on-Muslim violence is not seen as such by the perpetrators. The targets have been deemed apostates, and so are not considered fellow believers. (See footnote 27 below.)}

{8 This was demonstrated by both the Persian and Roman Empires–with their (measured) tolerance of alternate Faiths within their respective dominions. As far as the Persian and Roman rulers were concerned, so long as civilians’ religious activity did not undermine their authority (i.e. interfere with the operation of the State; or sully its name), such activity was permissible. Their only concern was political disruption (i.e. sedition). This is because the sine qua non of those regimes was political power, not evangelism. (The same an be said of the pre-Islamic Mongols, whose Tengri-ism was inherently pluralistic.) That is to say: Imperialism, not theocracy, impelled their hegemony (and defined their imperium). Once such regimes WON any given conflict, they had no reason to slaughter civilians. They were only fighting to effect territorial sovereignty (i.e. to secure political dominion), and to suppress political dissidence. This was the case in Christendom up until Emperor Theodosius, who–via the Edict of Thessalonika in 380–made the Roman Empire a theocracy, in which heresy finally DID become a concern (see my essay, “Genesis Of A Church”). Said tolerance continued to be the case in Persia until the fall of the Sassanids at the hands of the Mohammedans. Such a precedent can be juxtaposed against Islamic imperialism, which was categorically theocratic. Unlike Roman Catholic theocrats, though, Islamic rulers did not force their subjects to convert; only to submit to sharia law. (Islamic LAW, not Islamic FAITH, was spread by the sword. Sharia does not require people to be Muslim; only to submit to Islamic authority.) In this sense, during the Middle Ages, there was more religious freedom in the Muslim world than there was within the oppressive orbit of Roman Catholicism.}

{9 Note that this can be contrasted with cases in which Muslim leaders have perpetrated atrocities for reasons other than religious ones. Indeed, when a leader who happens to be Muslim does horrible things, we cannot necessarily attribute it to fealty to the Sunnah (or adherence to Mohammedan precedent). For example, when Ottoman cynosure, Mehmed Talaat “Pasha” committed the Armenian genocide during the first World War, it was for primarily nationalistic reasons. That is to say, his ethnic cleansing of Armenians was probably due to their non-Turkish-ness more than to their non-Muslim-ness. In the 1970’s, Ugandan president Idi Amin Dada engaged in ethnic cleansing and the elimination of subversives. His purges had little to do with grievances against the targets’ (lack of) Faith. He was not attempting to be pious; he was just a psychopath who was intolerant of even the slightest dissent.

(See footnote 11.) Meanwhile, the ruler of [north] Sudan, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, is BOTH a racist AND a religious fanatic–ergo his ethnic cleansing of Darfur. Other despots are only incidentally Muslim–as with Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, Iraq's Sadaam Hussein, Syria's Bashir Assad, Turkmenistan's Saparmurat Atayevich Niyazov, etc. Their despotism cannot be PRIMARILY attributed to an obsession with the Sunnah. Other despots PRETEND that what they're doing is NOT for religious reasons, even though it clearly is–as with Jordan's Hussein bin Talal and Pakistan's Pervez Musharraf. In sum: Some people are iniquitous without needing to use religion as an excuse.}

{10 The primary motive for Tamerlane's deeds was religious zealotry. To corroborate this, let's take as a point of reference the hegemony of the most ravenous conqueror in history, Genghis Khan. At no point was Genghis inclined to impose Tengri-ism on anyone. Why not? He was avaricious, but his motivations were never religious. Generally speaking: destroying universities and libraries has nothing whatsoever to do with imperialism; it has everything to do with theocracy. So, though he fucked as many women as possible and killed anyone who stood in his way MILITARILY, Genghis Khan was not known for razing schools or burning books. He was a pragmatist, not a religious nut. In fact, he undertook his rapacious conquest while championing religious freedom. (Such was the nature of Tengri-ism.) By stark contrast, Tamerlane fashioned himself a "mujahid" (a.k.a. "jihadist"; holy warrior). For Tamerlane, the discrepancy between being a Khan who adopted Islam as an adult and a caliph / sultan / emir / mullah who had been born into the Faith was beside the point. After all, fundamentalism is fundamentalism. The only reason Tamerlane did not proclaim himself "Khalifah" is that–being Turkic-Mongol–he was not from the appropriate blood-line (Qurayshi Arabian). This did not prevent him from claiming to be doing the work of the Koran's protagonist…and being adamant about that fact at every turn. He felt he had the imprimatur of the Creator of the Universe–a conviction that effectively gives one license to do anything one wishes. When one is a megalomaniac, the consequences of such zealotry are dire, as the full extent of one's megalomania can be realized with impunity. In sum: The juxtaposition between these two infamous Khans is very telling. WHY was one in the business of book-burning while the other was not? The answer couldn't be clearer: Because one was threatened by knowledge while the other was eager to assimilate it. Such a gross discrepancy between conquerers reflects one of the fundamental differences between Tengri-ism and traditional Islam. For more on the influence of the Mongols, see my essay on the long history of legal codes; as well as my essay on Islam's so-called "Golden Age": "Islam's Pyrite Age".}

{11 Notable “mujahideen” in Afghanistan included Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Gulb ud-Din Hekmatyar, Burhan ud-Din Rabbani, and–as already discussed–the notorious Sayyid Abul A’la Maududi. There are some cases in which it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which religious zealotry accounts for atrocities when other factors are at play. For example, when Yahya “Khan” and Ghulam Azam orchestrated the genocide of three million Bengalis (with special emphasis on the elimination of intellectuals) **in 1971**, it may not have been entirely attributable to religiosity (i.e. to his Salafism). Though a religious fanatic, they were driven by (Pakistani) nationalism in conjunction with a virulent (anti-Bengali) racism. (Also note the role of such figures as Inam ul-Haq Khan, Tikka Khan, and Gul Hassan Khan.) Suffice to say: They would not have approved of this had he been a Quaker. In any case, an Islamic fundamentalist slaughtering intellectuals was nothing new.}

{12 Pakistan is an Islamic (Deobandi) theocracy just about as ridiculous as that of either Iran (Usuli) or Saudi Arabia (Wahhabi). The Taliban are effectively Deobandi theocrats, who’s dominion is located across the Hindu Kush. (Waziristan straddles the boarder between Afghanistan and Pakistan.) Both Afghanistan’s and Pakistan’s blasphemy laws ensure that those accused of “insulting the prophet” (read: saying anything unpalatable about MoM, no matter how accurate) are punished or killed. Who else punished / killed people for insulting the Seal of the Prophets? The Seal of the Prophets himself.}

{13 Note that Tamerlane (**Timur of Kesh**), who was of the Barlas tribe, mustn’t be confused with the earlier Khan, **Taghlugh Timur**, who was leader of the (adversarial) Chagatai tribe. (Taghlugh Timur converted to Islam later in life, and reigned until his death in 1363.) The first Khan to convert to Islam was actually Berke in c. 1240; who would go on to support the (Egyptian) Mamluks of the Kipchak line against the (Persian) Ilkhanate of the (Mongol) Hulagu line. (HIS brother was named **Tukh-Timur**.) Tamerlane also mustn’t be confused with **Temür Öljeyitü Khan** of Yuan / Cheng-zong (grandson and successor to Kublai), who ruled ALMOST a century before Tamerlane…nor with **Möngke Temür** of the Golden Horde, who ruled OVER a century before Tamerlane…nor with the contemporary of Tamerlane: Jurchen chief, **Möngke Temür** of the Odoli (rendered “Dudu Meng[e]-timu[r]” in Manchu), who ruled in Jian-zhou. It bears worth repeating: Those inclined to apologize for Islam’s checkered history tend to elide Tamerlane’s extensive atrocities–which are often misattributed to Genghis Khan (who was Tengri-ist), or the Mongols-in-general. A flagrant case of this elision is Peter Frankopan’s (otherwise estimable) “The Silk

Roads", which devotes only a SINGLE PAGE to Tamerlane in a book of over 500 pages–referring to him simply as a famed warlord. One may has well write a history of medieval France and gloss over Charlemagne.}

{14 It is instructive to note that the Deobandi movement (of which the Taliban is the paragon) was inspired by an **18th-century**, Hanafi theologian who served under Aurangzeb: Shah Wali-ullah Dehlawi–an ultra-orthodox "muhadith" from Delhi. In essence, Deobandism emerged from the compilation of the "Fatawa-e Alamgiri", a process of which Shah Wali-ullah Dehlawi played a prominent role. (See footnote 12 above.) Today, the Haqqani network of madrasahs in the Hindu Kush (named after their patriarch, Jalal ud-Din Haqqani of "Hezb-e Islami" fame) owes its ideology to this execrable legacy. "Hezb-e Islami" was founded **in 1975** by Gulb ud-Din Hekmatyar, a Salafi mullah.}

{15 Things were not so rosy, however. Abd al-Rahman III of Cordoba was known for keeping a male harem. It was not just his sexuality that is now verboten in Islamic circles. He orchestrated a massacre of a hundred prominent Christian civilians **c. 939**; and is said to have done so MERELY FOR SHOW (that is: to send a message to anyone considering infidelity). All were marched to an orchard by one of his residences, then decapitated. This was primarily done as a warning to non-Muslims in his realm; though it certainly included a general caution against subversion. Such persecution of Jews was not an anomaly. Other Salafi leaders would become notorious for pogroms–as with the Algerian "alim", Muhammad al-Maghili of Tuat, who viewed "dhimmis" as inferior and undertook campaigns against the Jews of the Maghreb **in the 15th century**.}

{16 It should be noted that there is a chance MoM did not actually say this, as it directly contradicts two verses in the Koran: 2:256 and 109:6 (though either may have been composed more than a century after his ministry). Be that as it may, the passage occurs in the MOST vaunted Hadith; and it is paraphrased in vol. 1 of "Muslim" (no. 33), the SECOND-most vaunted Hadith. So it is safe to assume that–veritable or not–this derisive exhortation was heeded by many a devout Muslim over the centuries. Several other infamous passages in "Bukhari" did not exactly help the matter–notably: 1/35, 11/626, 52/177, and 52/256. (And let's not forget no. 4294 in vol. 19 of "Muslim".) The Sunnah is–after all–based upon the Hadith record. And though EVERYTHING in the Hadith must be taken with a hefty grain of salt (in terms of historical accuracy), the fact of the matter remains that what is in the "sahih" Hadith is there to be invoked by any Muslim deigning to rationalize his deeds by

recourse to scripture. Such recourse is given sanction by a Reactionary mindset. Within a Reform-minded paradigm, such a maneuver would be recognized as entirely spurious.}

{17 In mentioning these figures, I am not cherry-picking obscure crackpots; these are some of the most celebrated rulers in the history of Dar al-Islam. Not only are they representative of Islam for much of its history, they epitomize its most traditional form TO THIS DAY. Note that Umar was assassinated–of all times–as he was performing the Hajj. (Not exactly a ringing endorsement from the Creator of the Universe.) Indeed, such an ignominious end to such a prominent confessor was an odd way for the Koran's protagonist to show approval for Mohammedan supplication. God's plan seems not to have included protecting the leaders of the Muslim world. In any case, Umar's worldview did not die with him. It persists to the present. We now call it "fundamentalism", as it is based on the fundamentals that Umar–like the rest of the Salaf–espoused. The only thing that is "extreme" about Salafism is its unreconstructed ideological purity.}

{18 It is necessary to adduce the interplay between Alpha and Beta if one is to procure a full explanation of the deeds of religious zealots in a geo-political context. Thus Daesh may well have had (areligious) geo-political reasons for trying to establish a caliphate in Syria-Iraq; but it did not raze the ancient structures of Palmyra for any reasons that could be explicated in terms of Alpha (e.g. socio-economic grievances, resentments against the West, military strategy, propaganda, etc.) Such destruction can ONLY be explained by recourse to Beta (i.e. fanatical religiosity). Only BETA can explain why Wahhabis lock innocent schoolgirls in burning buildings to burn to death rather then allow them to escape unveiled. It's why Deobandis throw battery acid into the faces of schoolgirls for trying to get an education. It's why Shiite fundamentalists stone alleged adulterers to death. It's why Salafis murder magazine illustrators. Alpha has nil relevance when it comes to such behavior; as such heinous deeds are prompted explicitly by doctrinal mindsets. The Alpha-Beta dichotomy is crucial in making the distinction between predicaments (and the grievances to which they give rise) and the manner in which those predicaments / grievances are addressed. Another illustration of this were the Pashtun military leaders, "Ghazi" Mirzali "Khan" of Waziristan (a.k.a. the "Faqir of Ipi"), "Mullah" Powindah, and Sartor Faqir (a.k.a. "Mullah Mastan"), who resisted the British "Raj" in the 1930's…a half-century before the "mujahideen" resisted the Russians in the Hindu Kush. This is why questions like "Was it due to colonialism or

Islam?" are based on a false dichotomy. It's like wondering whether to blame a drunk-driving accident on the motion of the colliding cars or on the driver's intoxication.}

{19 …just as with Saudi oil billionaires who fashion themselves Wahhabis. (Their obscene affluence is a sign of god's good graces, doncha know!) Indeed, Arabian plutocrats have become somewhat of a cliche in the past few generations. Case in point: Qatari "sheikh", Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr al-Thani. (One might ask: Where is HIS zakat?) The most recent example of Salafi hypocrisy was uber-corrupt Afghan president, Hamid Karzai–who funneled hundreds of millions of dollars into his own pockets during his baleful rule.}

{20 The celebrated Mughal emperor, Akbar the Great was far from ideal. Even though he was significantly better than most of the world's Muslim rulers during the Middle Ages, persecution of ethnic minorities during his tenure was not unheard of. While Roman Catholicism was generally theocratic / reactionary throughout the Middle Ages (vestiges of which remain to this day), there was no equivalent in the Muslim world to Russian reformer Catherine II, Habsburg reformer Joseph II, or Prussian reformer Frederick II (all of the 18th century). To the degree that Akbar failed to be more liberal than he was, it was because of his abiding religiosity. To the degree that said European reformers managed to be as liberal as they were, it was because of their secular tendencies. Put another way: Insofar as Akbar was Progressive, it is because he managed to DEPART FROM his fealty to the Sunnah; while said European reformers would have been even more estimable had they embraced secularity more than they did. In lauding Akbar, we mustn't gloss over his flaws.}

{21 This is, of course, relatively-speaking. In the 17th century, these semi-liberal rulers might be compared to the significantly MORE liberal (Hindu) king, Shivaji Bhonsle of Raigad (a.k.a. "Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj"), founder of the Maratha Empire. Other quasi-tolerant Muslim potentates in the Far East included Kashmiri sultan, Ghiyas-ud-Din Zain-ul-Abedin in the 15th century; as well as "Badshah" Fateh Ali Khan Shahab (a.k.a. "Tipu Sultan") and Hyder Ali Khan, sultans of Mysore (southern India) during the 18th century. In the West, quasi-tolerant Muslim potentates included the 10th-century Andalusian emirs, Abd ar-Rahman III and his son, Al-Hakam II of Cordoba: both scholars AND patrons of the arts. (See footnote 15 above.) Both of THOSE emirs can be contrasted with the ensuing Islamic fundamentalism **of the late 10th thru 12th centuries**, starting with the vehemently anti-intellectual tyrant, Al-Hajib al-Mansur (who's specialty was book-

burning), then under the Almoravids and Almohads. Tellingly, Al-Mansur's first act was the destruction of the libraries that flourished under his predecessors: the aforementioned Abd ar-Rahman III and Al-Hakam II. (**In 976**, within months of the death of Al-Hakam II, he razed the Great Library of Cordoba, burning all the books of science and philosophy inside.) Such juxtapositions help us understand what separates fundamentalist Islam (libraries bad) from Reformist Islam (libraries good). (See footnote 25 below.) This is a distinction that cannot be fully explained within a conventional framework.}

{22 We should bear in mind that Western imperialism set the stage for much of the Islamic fundamentalism that eventually metastasized across central Asia. In Afghanistan, funding of the mujahideen (conducted primarily to spite the "communist" Russians) paved the way for the Taliban's takeover. The U.S.-backed overthrow of the democratically-elected Mosaddegh in Iran put into power an autocrat (read: western lackey; obnoxiously dubbed the "Shah"), who's despotic rule eventually led to the Khomeini-ist revolution **in 1979**. And the Israeli government all but created Hamas by supporting the only viable alternative (the "Mujama al-Islamiya"; precursor to Hamas) to the secular-socialist P.L.O. For there is nothing Revisionist Zionists despise more than socialism (read: secularism). And nobody has supported the House of Saud (and thereby helped to facilitate the spread of Wahhabism around the world) than the United States…although the United Kingdom has engaged in its fair share of patronage of the execrable Arabian monarchy. This includes not only military and political support for the theocratic regime in Arabia, but allowing Saudi princes to annex academic departments in both the U.S. and England.}

{23 The Saudi "Ikhwan" was founded **c. 1913**; and armed by the British, who adopted the House of Saud as clients. This mustn't be confused with the Egyptian "Ikhwan al-Muslimeen" [Muslim Brotherhood] founded **in 1928**. The former eventually got out-of-hand. The British and Saudis eventually put their foot down, and eradicated them **by 1930**. Nevertheless, the point holds: This fanatical movement was not an aberration. In assaying execrable movements based on religious fundamentalism, we should bear in mind that NON-religion-based pogroms are also common–as anyone knows who has studied Lenin and Mao. Stalin's genocide of the Kulaks in Ukraine was based on socio-political antipathy; his genocide of Khazaks, Kyrgyz, and Mongols was based on racism. The genocide

conducted by the Ottoman triumvirate (a.k.a. the “three pashas”) against the Armenians in Anatolia–as well as the subsequent persecution / oppression of the Kurds–was based largely on racial animus (read: Turkish supremacy).}

{24 Other Islamic theocracies (like north Sudan, Mali, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Brunei) allow some non-Muslims to reside in certain parts of the country…even if in the midst of legalized slavery and draconian blasphemy laws. If only the Koran had said even just a SKOSH about civil rights or political freedom or social democracy, tremendous amounts of pointless suffering / death would surely have been avoided in such countries…over the course of the past millennium-plus. Humanitarian atrocities and Salafism INVARIABLY go hand in hand. This is no coincidence. Indeed, an abiding adherence to the Sunnah has done worse-than-nothing to help such closed societies.}

{25 It is no coincidence that the first institution of higher learning in the Muslim world, the madrasah of Al-Qarawiyyn at Fes (Morocco), was founded in the 10th century by a Tunisian women (Fatima al-Fihri of Kairouan) on behalf of the Idrisids. The Idrisids were Zaidiyyah (Shiites). Comically, Sunni apologists will brag that the first university (now simply known as “Al-Qarawiyyn”) was founded by Muslims in one breath; then in the next breath deny that Shiites are true Muslims…failing to realize the contradiction. (Note that Zaidi and Mutazili Shiism are similar in many respects.) Today, the most esteemed institution of higher learning in the Muslim world, Al-Azhar University, was first established as a madrasah by the Fatimids…who were Isma’ili (Shiites). In other words, BOTH acclaimed institutions were established by those would have been persecuted and/or killed by EVERY ONE of the fundamentalist rulers enumerated in this essay. The existence of such institutions is not an argument for Islam per se; it is an argument for a CERTAIN KIND of Islam–a Reformed Islam (which–in theory–can be found in either Shia or Sunni versions). It might also be noted that, to this day, Al-Azhar University (ironically, now a Sunni bastion) serves, in large part, as an indoctrination facility–analogous to Bar-Ilan University in Israel (which is little more than a base for promulgating Revisionist Zionist ideology). Any genuine education that DOES occur at Al-Azhar is that which has nothing whatsoever to do with religion. In other words, the institution is a place of learning IN SPITE OF, not because of, Islam.}

{26 These men were not aberrations in an otherwise immaculate theological record. (See footnote 29 below.) Due to the persistence of a prevailing Reactionary mindset, they remain some of the most highly-esteemed theologians-of-yore…throughout the Ummah…to this day. They were not anomalies; they were indicative of a clear

pattern. The question becomes: What were the traditions / teachings these figures were striving to uphold? To wit: When it comes to religious fundamentalism PER SE, it boils down to what the FUNDAMENTALS happen to be. (Obsessions only make sense once we've identified what's being obsessed over.) Fundamentalism qua fundamentalism is dysfunctional by its very nature; as it is invariably dogmatic and reactionary. Be that as it may, the CONTENT matters. This is why fundamentalist Jains are the religionists the world is least worried about. (The more fanatical they become, the LESS malign they become.) Replace "ahimsa" with "jihad" (or vice versa), and suddenly fundamentalism–and thus proselytization–has entirely different ramifications. Accordingly, we're not frightened of die-hard Quakers. The iconic figures enumerated in this essay operated according to certain FUNDAMENTALS–that is: the foundational tenets on which Islamic fundamental-ISM is based. As we've seen, those tenets have been operative since the religion's inception.}

{27 We should bear in mind that, to this day, when Muslims persecute / attack fellow Muslims, they do not think of it as such. As far as they are concerned, they are simply fighting "murtadd" (apostates)–an act deemed to be pious according to Koranic passages like 3:85-91 and 4:89. And so it went: There was no STRATEGIC benefit to razing the Isma'ili villages at Mazandaran and Anjudan. Nevertheless, as a self-styled executor of god's will, Tamerlane attacked them because of their BELIEFS; eradicating every last woman and child. It wasn't bad enough that he was hell-bent on violent conquest; he was a religious fanatic to boot. (Hegemony and zealotry often go hand in hand.) That was over six centuries ago, in central Asia; so it can't be blamed on "Western" colonialism / imperialism. Tamerlane was not an isolated case, nor was he doing something new. Note, for example, the innumerable fellow Muslims (notably, Khwarezmis) slaughtered by Ghurid Sultan, Mu'izz ad-Din Muhammad of Ghor **in the 12th century**. He had no compunctions about killing them. Why not? Because they weren't the right KIND of Muslims (i.e. HIS kind). Hence, in his eyes, he was simply killing apostates, just as MoM would have wanted.}

{28 Here are FORTY examples, accounting for two dozen countries: Hezb-i Islami (Afghanistan), the Taliban (Pakistan / Afghanistan), Jamat-ul-Ahrar / Lashkar-i Taiba / Tehreek-i Islami (Pakistan), Jamaat-i Islami / Ansar-ullah Bangla / Hefazat-i Islam / Harakat al-Jihad-i Islami [alt. "Islami Dawat-i Kafela"] (Bangladesh), Abu Sayyaf / Ansar al-Khalifa (Philippines), Jamaah Anshurut Daulah (Indonesia), National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mali), Boko Haram (Nigeria), Jabhat al-Islamiyyah lil-Inqadh [Islamic Salvation Front; alt. "Front Islamic du Salut"] (Algeria),

Jama’a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah bi-Libya (Libya), Katiba al-Multhamun [Battalion of Masked Men] (Maghreb), Jemaah Islamiyyah (Egypt / Indonesia), Al-Shabaab (Somalia / Kenya), Sudan People’s Liberation Army / Janjaweed (Sudan), Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (Iraq), Ansar al-Islam (Kurdistan), Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Jordan / Iraq), Muntada al-Ansar / Daesh (Syria / Iraq), Jabhat al-Nusra / Jaysh al-Islam / Nour al-Din al-Zenki (Syria), Abu Nidal / Hamas (Palestine), Osbat al-Ansar / Hizb-ullah / Islamic Jihad (Lebanon), the (anti-Khomeinist) Mujahideen-i Khalq / the (pro-Khomeinist) Fedaiyan-i Islam / the [k]Homeinist regime itself [viz. the IRGC] (Iran), Ansar al-Sharia (Arabia / Tunisia / Libya), and the Highest Military Majlis-ul Shura of the United Forces of the Mujahideen of the Caucasus / Riyad-us Saliheen / Shariat Jamaat (Chechnya). We might also note pan-national Salafi organizations like “Hizb ut-Tahrir” [Party of Liberty] and the “Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami” [Islamic World League]–both of which have affiliates in many other countries besides.}

{29 The thing with using countervailing evidence to refute a proposition is that one needs to provide ONLY countervailing evidence to do so. This all seems elementary; yet religious apologists (of ALL stripes) often fail to grasp the most basic principles of falsification; and level accusations of “cherry-picking” when selectivity is THE WHOLE POINT. If one aims to refute the proposition, “Bob has rarely–if ever–been to Nebraska”, the task is relatively straight-forward. Rather than focus on all the times that Bob has spent in California, one can simply enumerate the occasions he visited Omaha. If it turns out that Bob ROUTINELY went to–and remained at length in–Omaha throughout his life (and did so for reasons he made loud and clear), then the long days he spent at his Malibu beach house are not relevant. Thus “Over the course of his life, Bob has made it a point to stay away from Nebraska” is a false statement, irrespective of the prodigious time he spent on the Gold Coast. Moreover, “He went on vacation to Paris numerous times” is completely irrelevant. It is no secret that “usually” and “rarely” are relativistic terms; but there are clear cases where they do not apply. Hence the plea, “Nebraska?! But what about all those summers that Bob spent in France!” just doesn’t cut it; especially after we discover Bob was born and raised in Omaha, and returns there on a regular basis. The fact that he often spends time in places outside of Nebraska–and now resides in California, proclaiming Paris his favorite destination–is entirely beside the point. (See footnote 30 below.)}

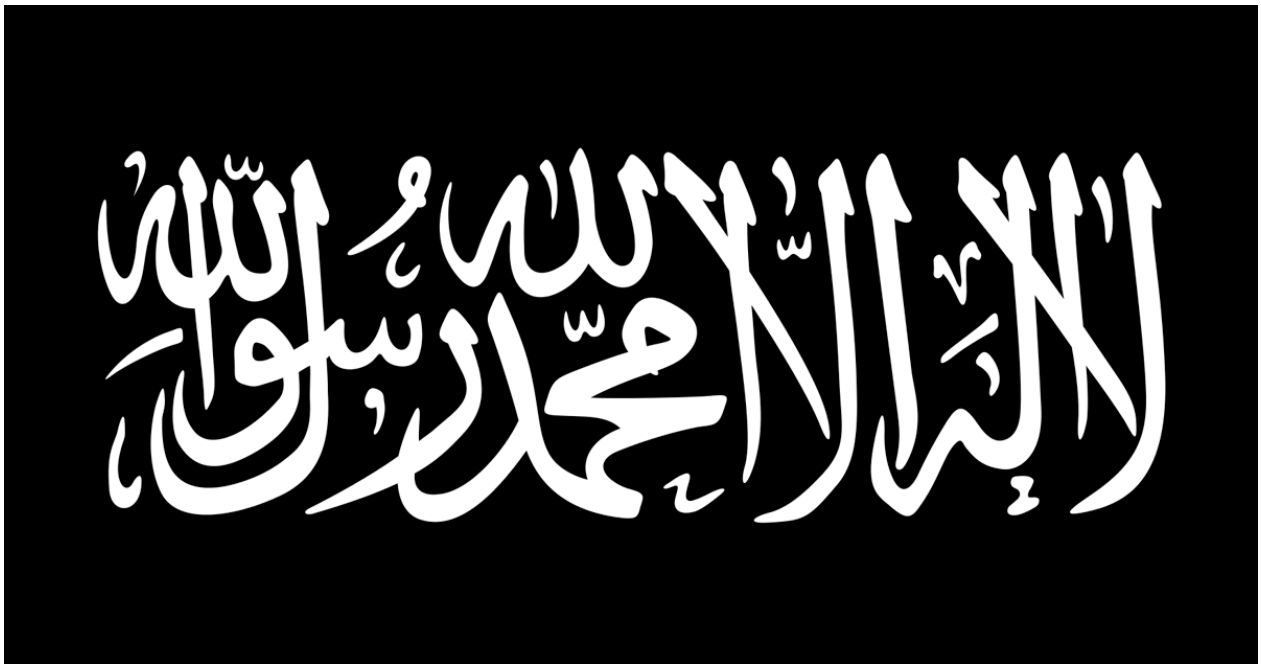
{30 After all: Abusive husbands might hug their wives as much as they beat them (incidents of the former do not absolve them of responsibility for the latter; nor does it nullify the characterization of “abusive”). A final point: We can advise Bob to never

return to Nebraska, of course; but this doesn't require us to pretend that he's never been there. In fact, DISREGARDING all the reasons he tends to go back to Nebraska might make it more difficult to persuade him to stay away in the future.}

{31 This is not to say that a desire to do something cannot precede the belief that one finds oneself embracing (in order to legitimize that desire). Indeed, one's decision to act sometimes occurs before the belief associated with the action. In such cases, the will to do X is prior to procuring the framework by which one rationalizes X. Indeed, it is possible to have settled upon doing X, then adopt (and deploy) a belief that justifies X post hoc. When this happens, one often misattributes one's will–such as it is–to an ANTECEDENT belief. Even in such cases, the belief is operative (and is often a clinching factor; a nudge) vis a vis the latent proclivity for X. For either way, one ends up justifying one's actions by recourse to the belief. Thus one avers: "I believe this, and that's WHY I did X" even when the will to do X preceded one's adoption of the belief. (In other words: One was looking to do X ALL ALONG, and professing the belief NOW simply enables one to feel justified in doing it.) Such a scenario does not nullify the relevance of the belief; as a pattern of behavior cannot subsist without a compelling narrative vehicle. This post hoc justification is more self-serving than it is the result of serious deliberation (that is: a conclusion reached after having engaged in a meticulous process of sound reasoning). As delusive as it is, this "post hoc ergo proctor hoc" approach to belief has tremendous allure; and often occurs unwittingly. For when seeking a mode of validation, it is tempting to seize onto a tenet that happens to suit one's purposes, and thereafter suppose that one had subscribed to the tenet from the get-go. (As it turns out, many beliefs are beliefs-of-convenience.) Subsequently, one is inclined to pretend the action originally proceeded from the belief…when, in reality, it's the action one wanted to take IN THE FIRST PLACE (for reasons that were independent of the adopted belief). This is where the distinction between Alpha and Beta is especially salient (ref. footnote 18 above). To further complicated matters, there is a difference between merely PROFESSING a belief (as a sheerly pragmatic measure) and genuinely having the belief. Put another way: There is difference between a first-order belief (actually believing such-and-such) and a second-order belief (BELIEVING IN believing such-and-such). Typically, the believer does not discern the difference, and–for all intents and purposes–treats the latter as though it were the former. Proceeding AS IF one believed something often suffices for the purposes of rationalizing / validating a desired action. Few are diligent in scrutinizing their own epistemic integrity, so retain the IMPRESSION OF a conviction without having to actually go to the trouble of sincerely harboring that conviction. (That's why there

are no theists in foxholes; at least none that are likely to do what's necessary to survive.) It's ardent BELIEF IN the belief in god that usually passes for devoutness in religious circles. At the end of the day, piety is more performative than cognitive. After all, we homo sapiens are eminently pragmatic creatures. Shorn of the dogmatic scaffolding that gives dubious actions a veneer of credence, people might feel obliged to critically scrutinize what they have conventionally seen as righteous deeds.}

{32This is taken from "Classical Islam" by G.E. von Grunebaum, p. 70.Zayid was appointed by the first Umayyad caliph, Muawiyah.He clearly thought of his governance as a function of "ibadah" (piety); so would have couched his policies in terms of "rashid" (being guided by god).}



APPENDIX 1: "Jihad"?

The exegetical elasticity of "struggle" is demonstrated most starkly by the juxtaposition of two works: Adolph Hitler's "Mein Kampf" from 1925 and Karl Knausgard's "Min Kamp" from 2009-11. While the titles have semantic parity, they do not have hermeneutic parity. The former is best translated as "My Holy Crusade" while the latter is best translated as "My Existential Plight". What's going on here?

The Torah tells us that one of Jacob's sons (sired via Laban's handmaiden, Bilhah) was named "Napthtali", Hebrew for "My Struggle". (Napthtali begat the Galilean tribe that supported the ascension of the House of David.) Meanwhile, the alternate name for Jacob was "Yisra-El"–conventionally translated as "struggle with god". This indicates that the "struggle" in question was a spiritual one. {L}

The dual hermeneutic of "jihad" has been cause for vexation. Other than the German "kampf" (ref. Bismarck's antagonistic use of "kulturkampf"), we encounter such two-fold meaning with the Hebrew "ma'avak"–a lexeme that dates back to Judaism's earliest era. This Hebraic lexeme was (and remains) a loaded term that, while it is typically translated "struggle", has connotations of conquest ["kibbush"]–as when it is used by Revisionist Zionists vis a vis dominion over Canaan. And while Hitler's use of "kampf" in his magnum opus has different connotations, the title is effectively the same as "My Jihad".

So what are we to make of references to a distinctly SPIRITUAL struggle? The dying words of Siddhartha Gautam[a] of Lumbini (a.k.a. the "Buddha") were said to have been: "Strive onward with vigilance / diligence." In Pali: "appamad[en]a sampadetha" effectively means: "It is through vigilantly / diligently striving onward that one obtains liberation." This spiritual striving ["sampadetha"] contains within it the notion of vigilance ["sati" / "avippavasa"]. It's ultimate aim is liberation ["appamada"]. Meanwhile, "sadhana" refers to an endeavor to transcend one's egoistic impulses: also integral to this vigilant / diligent striving.

Given that non-violence / non-aggression were Buddha's central tenets, his exhortation to engage in "sampadetha" did not connote outward aggression (and certainly did not involve any kind of militancy). Thus "sampadetha" is taken to mean a spiritual undertaking–one animated by empathy and self-discipline. Ideally, such a striving leads to LIBERATION. The goal, then, is the opposite of submission (viz. to some external authority).

All edification–as well as spiritual development–is invariably a matter of striving (grappling with various psychical exigencies). For it requires a prodigious amount of will-power.

We should bear in mind, though, that self-discipline can be either salutary (when prudent) or deleterious (when pathological):

The former is based on autonomy–as with Kant's clarion call: "Sapere Aude!" [Dare to know!] (an exhortation to have the courage to use one's own understanding; to think for oneself).

The latter is often mandated by insidious actors–as with the so-called "struggle sessions" in Mao's China (nothing more than a regimen of INGSOC-style conditioning).

In a genuinely Reformist Islam (which, to be clear, would require a major paradigm shift), the notion of "jihad" would pertain exclusively to a spiritual undertaking: "jihad al-daf'a". This is all well and good; but it is incumbent upon Reformers to recognize that this is NOT the Koranic meaning of the term.

In this sense, Mahatma Gandhi could be characterized as a "jihadi". After all, he was undertaking a spiritual struggle…in order to better himself (even as he was engaging in a CIVIL struggle to end colonialism and foster social justice). The revamped conception of "jihad" would be more in keeping with the Sanskrit notion of "sampadetha" / "sadhana"–which has no militant connotations whatsoever. Such a semiotic adjustment would entail a COMPLETE re-conceptualization of "iman".

The kind of "jihad" enjoined by the likes of, say, Martin Luther King Jr. is not about subservience; it is about initiative. It's not about supplication; it's about edification. It is a noble endeavor requiring effort; but one in which the cause is categorically CIVIL. In this context, the struggle-in-question pertains to mental discipline…which is a vehicle for emancipation (from anxiety, from oppression, from despair) rather than subjugation (that is: being hamstrung by the "slings and arrows" of this mortal coil). Defined in this way, "jihadi" (in the broader sense: submission to the divine) could apply to Tibetan Buddhist monks and Quakers as much as to the most ardent freedom-fighter.

However, in doing so, we CANNOT then say of the Sunnah: "And THAT is what was meant all along!"

In the Eastern tradition, such "striving" is undertaken in order to discern the true nature of things–a state of mindfulness that the Hindus variously refer to as "vipasyana", "abhyasa", "vairagya", and "saha-jayana". Here, the ultimate goal is insight (viz. into the true nature of things). This spiritual enterprise involves what the Classical Greek philosophers referred to as "epieikeia" (a spirituality informed by

reason, moderated by temperance) and “enkrateia” (mental discipline based on autonomy; what Kant called “maturity”). In this sense, the struggle is not about SUBMISSION (“Islam”); it’s about LIBERATION (“moksha”).

The goal, then, is to achieve a state of enlightenment–variously conceptualized as “prajna” / “jina” (“panna” in Pali) or “nirvana” in the Eastern tradition. It yields what the ancient Greeks referred to as “eudaimonia” (spiritual–as opposed to material–flourishing). {A}

But is this the sense of “jihad” propounded by Salafists? Clearly not.
In Bukhari’s Hadith (no. 2787), Abu Hurayrah reports that MoM proclaimed that god “will admit the ‘mu-jahid’ into Paradise if he is killed [i.e. martyred in battle].” Otherwise (if the “mu-jahid” survives during this striving in the Cause), god “will return him to his home safely with ‘anfal’ [war booty].” Clearly, to partake in “jihad” was to engage in a potentially fatal martial activity, in which the reward would be material SPOILS…that one could take home.

Are we to take Mohammedan exhortations to “jihad”, then, as an invitation to engage in self re-invention? Or are we to take it as an enjoinder to fight on behalf of the Faith? The former pertains explicitly to a spiritual endeavor. The latter, though, could mean, well…ANYTHING. Fighting (in the MILITANT sense) is clearly what it meant in the Koran; which means that is what it meant for Salafis.

We might note that the notion of militant struggle was nothing new in the ancient Middle East–as with the aforementioned (Hebrew) “ma’avak”. And so it went with the original usage of “jihad”. Throughout Islam’s sordid history, any mention of “jihad” by prominent expositors was a matter of “ghazawat” [engaging in raids; waging war for Islam]; not of some lofty endeavor to achieve what Aristotle referred to as “eudaimonia”.

Defensive Jihad?

Since the days of the Salaf, the decidedly militant enterprise to confront “Dar al-Kufr” has hardly been a matter of “jihad al-daf’a” (a personal, spiritual aspiration). Rather, it has been exclusively a matter of “jihad at-talab” (a.k.a. “jihad bis-saif”; i.e. a rapacious military enterprise)…against what is surmised as “Dar al-Harb”.

In other words, the new religion was not propagated via evangelization (i.e. persuasion); it was spread by brute force–replete with brutal massacres and systematic enslavement. Violence wasn’t the exception; it was routine. {C}

MoM's companion, Khalid ibn al-Walid was not a peace-loving missionary who's sine qua non was "jihad al-daf'a"; he was a pathologically avaricious military commander who was fond of decapitating prisoners, EXACTLY as the "Recitations" instructed him to do.

Throughout the entire epoch of aggressive Mohammedan expansion, nobody was being "rescued" from the clutches of some tyrant–finally to be delivered into the hands of benevolent emancipators. Are we really expected to believe that the merciless Mohammedan invaders were–in reality–just guardians impelled by strictly humanitarian motives? What are the chances that every key player in the long saga of invasion outlined in the present essay was operating from a guidebook that encouraged agape above all else?

This strains credulity to the breaking point.

But what of instances of militant struggle that are (ostensibly) justified–as with "jihad al-daf'a" (ref. 22:39-40)? Insofar as so-called "DEFENSIVE jihad" is concerned, it is important to bear in mind that to "wage war on" and to be "oppressed by" (as the Koranic wording is roughly translated) can each be construed to mean many different things. This depends one which language games one deigns to play. As history has shown time after time, offensive measures are regularly undertaken in the name of "defense" (see the Roman Empire, Germany's Third Reich, the Judean Settler movement, and U.S. foreign policy during Cold War…and then again in the advent of September 11, 2001).

So what constitutes an assault on (or "threat to") Islam? Would such a thing not warrant reprisal under the aegis of "defensive" jihad? One of the most esteemed Islamic theologians in history, Ibn Taymiyyah, addressed this matter as follows: "It is allowed to fight people for [not observing] unambiguous and generally recognized obligations and prohibitions, until they undertake to perform the explicitly prescribed prayers, to pay zakat, to fast during the month of Ramadan, to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and to avoid what is prohibited, such as marrying women in spite of legal impediments, eating impure things, acting unlawfully against the lives and properties of Muslims and the like. It is obligatory to take the initiative in fighting those people, as soon as the Prophet's summons with the reasons for which they are fought has reached them."

This has echoes of political correctness: a puritanical doctrine (based on an authoritarian mindset) in which one feeling “offended” / “insulted” (or in any way off-put) by anything another says or does constitutes being a victim of BATTERY. Thus: To experience discomfiture is to be ASSAULTED. The culprit is therefore guilty of an intolerable transgression.

And so it goes: To be “offensive” / “insulting” is to be an assailant. One’s culpability is dictated by another’s subjective (psychical) state. And so we might ask: Is the present essay “waging war” on the Ummah? Objectively-speaking: Of course not. Yet, according to the Salafi (p.c.) mindset, a critical analysis such as this is tantamount to “waging war” on their religion–that is: causing “fitna” (introducing a disruption into what’s supposed to be an eternal homeostasis).

According to this standard: Any scholarship that reveals unwanted truths can be caricatured as an intolerable “assault” on the Faith. According to whom? Well, according to the whim of any bystander who is bothered by the unsolicited critique.

The Koran is explicit that those who simply deny its contents are–by dint of being “deniers”–to be deemed a THREAT (2:217), and thus considered an ENEMY.

Bear in mind: The vilification of ANYONE (as failing to submit) is all that is needed to contend that hostile reprisal is warranted. Don’t forget, any disruption [“fitna”] is seen as invidious. To challenge “sharia” (however defined) is to sew discord / dissent. That is sacrilege.

Taken to its extreme, this line of logic entails that anything short of complete submission is a tantamount to “oppression”…which warrants reprisal. Thus, anyone living under anything but an Islamic theocracy is–effectively–deemed “oppressed”…and thus in need of rescuing…per 42:40-43 and 60:7-9.) Those being “disruptive” are thereby qualified as “oppressors”…in need of fighting. For by bringing into question the credence of sacrosanct “truths” (and of Salafism in general), I am indubitably “causing mischief in the land” [“mofsid fi al-ard”]: a didactic salvo against which bystanders must be “defended”!

This is what George Orwell dubbed “Doublespeak”.

So we might ask: Would Salafis be “oppressed” should the insights of the present piece come to be widely known? Well, according to such Doublespeak: Yes. Ergo the prompt to wage “defensive” war is made relevant via entirely specious criteria. Such criteria are then used as license to retaliate.

Once critical analysis is equated with “oppression”, we’ve gone through the looking glass; and our terminology becomes downright Orwellian. According to such contorted logic, criticism is blasphemy; and any subversive expression (i.e. dissent) constitutes an assault on the sanctified dogmatic system.

After all, critical analysis an offense against god’s word. (!)

And so it goes: Those whose dogmas are being brought into question are being “oppressed”; as they depend on those dogmas being upheld (presumably, until the end of time) in order to subsist AS SUCH.

Human behavior has demonstrated over and over again, the siege mentality is easily used to rationalize offensive measures…even when one is the superior power…and EVEN WHEN ONE IS THE AGGRESSOR. In modern history, this stunt has been pulled off by cult movements of many stripes–from Nazism to Revisionist Zionism, from Maoism to the Khmer Rouge, from American Neocons to militant Islamic mu-jahideen. In each case, we hear some variation of: “We’re under siege from the nefarious OTHER; so we must attack them in self-defense…wherever they may happen to be…lest their very existence ends up undermining our agenda.”

Such a skittish “enemy at the gates” disposition (effectively a kind of collective neurosis) was leveraged for–among other things–the American Cold Warriors’ cockamamie “domino theory” of communism (employed to legitimize genocide in Vietnam, Lao, and Cambodia) along with active support for the vicious persecution of civilians by tyrants in throughout Latin America. All in the name of “national defense”, of course. {P}
Such is the nature of so-called “defensive” jihad.

A prime example of the phenomenon today is the Judean Settler Movement’s brutal occupation of Palestine–all in the name of “defending” what they deem to be their divinely ordained piece of real estate: “Eratz Israel”. The supposition–taken seriously by surprisingly many–is that the Creator of the Universe is a real-estate agent. This is used to justify the Judaic version of “lebensraum” in the Levant. {R} The upshot of the entire project is: “It was wrong when others did it to us; but when we do it to others, it’s perfectly justified. Why? Because of what it says in our holy book!”

Might we list the other empires that tried to conquer the world in order to “protect” it? Hint: Ask about what happened to Poland in 1939. Nazi propagandists SWORE that they were merely defending the blessed Reich from nefarious Polskies.

Undertaking pre-emptive strikes in the name of “national security” is a common ruse. Empires have rationalized their hegemony as a means of self-preservation since time immemorial.

Other questions present themselves. Generally speaking, can a program of protracted ransacking be rationalized via appeals to self-preservation? For case-studies helpful for making this query, see: U.S. slaughtering of native Americans during its territorial expansion; the imperial Japanese in China; the U.S. military’s genocide in Vietnam; Serbians’ assault on the Bosniaks; the Sudanese Janjaweed’s slaughter of non-Muslim residents of Darfur; etc.
Oftentimes, “national security” is a pretense for fascistic impulses–an excuse to creat a police-State or to be the aggressor against some designated bogeyman. And sometimes the “we’re just defending ourselves” rational is employed in BOTH sides of a conflict, as with the Iraq-Iran war during the 1980’s.

And so it goes: As far as a caliphate is concerned, each incursion into Dar al-Harb is merely protecting the world from the kuffar. (This strategy is not completely insane. As they say in team sports, “The best defense is a good offense.”) By smugly using such pretense, every rampage can be legitimized via a marvelously inverted logic.

When designs on hegemony is presented as some kind of defensive maneuver, we have entered a Kafka-esque wonderland–a universe governed by Orwellian Doublespeak.

Such an invidious ruse was no different during the first caliphates in the Middle East during the Dark Ages.

If, on the other hand, all the Koranic verses about “fighting” are–indeed–only about (genuine) “defense”, as many Islamic apologists contend, then they need to explain one thing: How is it that the Mohammedans conquered territory from the Barbary Coast all the way to the Hindu Kush WITHIN SEVEN DECADES of MoM’s death…in “self-defense”? Pray tell: Who were they “defending”?

And so when we consider the theme of “jihad al-daf’a”, we must bear in mind that domination does not constitute some exalted form of deliverance. Subjugation is not a form of emancipation. {F}

If this was all an endeavor to effect “jihad al-daf’a”, what in heaven’s name was going on? The explanation is quite straight-forward: The spread of Islam was almost entirely a matter of ravenous hegemonic ambitions (read: “jihad at-talab” / “jihad

bis-saif"). The entire process was characterized primarily by mass slaughter and systematic enslavement (rather than by some exalted enterprise to enlighten mankind).

Let's pose the question this way: How is it that a relentless, hegemonic imperium radiated out from Arabia and seized almost 15 million square kilometers of land… including the Maghreb, Egypt, Abyssinia, Palestine, Syria, Eastern Anatolia, Kurdistan, Mesopotamia, and Jazira…and eastward into Persia, Khorasan / Transoxiana, Margiana / Bactria / Sogdiana, Gandhara / Arachosia, and Punjab / Sistan / Baloch / Sindh…with such ferocious expediency; and all by the end of the 7th century? {D}

Another question: Did the people of all these regions need to be DEFENDED? If yes, from whom? Such rapacious conquest–replete with looting and enslavement of the conquered–seems NOT to have been a humanitarian intervention; or an endeavor to RESCUE "oppressed" peoples.
Did the Islamic forces press into the Iberian peninsula because they sought to "defend" Western Europe? From whom? (The Visigoths? The Franks? Themselves?) Of Dar al-Islam–which, by that time, encompassed the Maghreb, the Levant, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Persia–we might ask: Was Andalusia threatening its existence?

It should go without saying that conquest and defense are not synonyms–though the imposition of authority is often spun as "protection". Rapacious hegemony is NEVER driven by an endeavor to promulgate liberty.

Conflating conquering others with defending oneself is an old trick (especially when one passes off the former AS the latter). It would seem that there is a reason that non-Islamic parts of the world ("Dar al-Kufr") have traditionally been referred to as the domain of WAR ("Dar al-Harb") rather than, say, the realm in which others need to be protected from oppression. {O}

When the Turkic conquerer, Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji razed the world's greatest institutions of learning at Nalanda and Vikramshila in the 12th century, was he somehow "saving" people from something? From what? Scholarship? What else might have compelled him to slaughter thousands of Buddhist monks and destroy the vast libraries in these places? {B} When he tried to attack Tibet, was he seeking to defend the world against an imaginary scourge of Tibetan monks?

Was all this part of some massive humanitarian outreach program?

So what WAS thought of (so-called) “defensive” jihad by the Salaf? We might ask: When, in 630, MoM sent his top general, Khalid ibn al-Walid (a.k.a. the Sword of God) to Dumat al-Jandal to extract the city’s wealth by force, was this somehow a defensive measure?

Answer: No. The (Christian) prince of the city, Ukaydir ibn Abd al-Malik of Kindah, was kidnapped and–upon threat of death–secured ransom for the Mohammedan forces (including two thousand camels, eight hundred heads of cattle, four hundred coats of mail, and four hundred spears). Ukaydir had done nothing to threaten the Mohammedans. The Islamic dominion in the Hijaz was not in any jeopardy by the presence of Dumat al-Jandal, which was over a fortnight’s camel-ride north of Medina. In this case, “jihad” clearly involved an interest in PLUNDER, not in defense.

Dumat al-Jandal posed no more threat to Dar al-Islam than did, say, the peaceable Berber tribes in northern Africa (far to the west)…or the Rajputs of India (far to the east).

So when Byzantine-held Tabuk was attacked by the Ishmaelites that same year (630), it was clearly not a defensive measure; it was a purely hegemonic enterprise.

In 711, when Tariq ibn Ziyad crossed the Mediterranean Sea (at Gibraltar) and attacked the Iberian peninsula, was he deigning to “protect” the Berbers of the Maghreb from the Visigoths of Andalusia?

And when general Muhammad ibn Qasim of Ta’if [of the Banu Thaqif] (minion of the notorious Umayyad tyrant, Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf of Ta’if) made incursions into Sindh, Balochistan, and the Punjab, was his rapacious conquest a defensive measure? Clearly, when sweeping through the Hindu Kush, he was not “defending” Muslims; he was broadening Islamic dominion–replete with vicious persecutions and pogroms. (Ref. the “Chach Nama”.)

One wonders if, perhaps, Tamerlane might be able to shed light on this quandary. Alas, he seemed not to be working from an instruction manual that enjoined good will toward one’s fellow man. (Perhaps his copy of the Koran was missing a few pages.) Which verses was he not reading?
As Amir, the (explicitly Islamic) Tamerlane wreaked havoc across Asia during the late 14th century. It is estimated that his ferocious military campaigns caused the deaths of at least 17 million people: over 5% of the world’s population at the time. Given

the contents of the Koran, should we be completely flabbergasted by his conduct? More to the point: Was he “defending” mankind by slaughtering such a large portion of it?

Later (under the Ottoman Empire), Armenia, Caucasia, all of Anatolia, Thrace, Volga Bulgaria, Romania, the Balkans (Dalmatia, Illyria, Slavonia, Moesia, Macedonia, Pannonia, etc.), Dacia, Hungary, Scythia / Sarmatia, the Crimea, the Peloponnese (a.k.a. Morea), Crete, Attica and upper Greece, Sicily, and Abyssinia would be conquered as well. There was also acquisition in the Far East under the aegis of the Mughal Empire (Bengal, India, Kashmir, and the remaining parts of what we now call “Pakistan”. NONE of it had anything to do with edifying people on spiritual matters. NONE of it had anything to do with protecting people from oppression.
The world was not being saved by being overrun. {E}

In 1453, were the Ottomans “protecting” Constantinople from “oppression” when they pillaged the city? Or, might it instead have had something to do with the fact that the Koran clearly endorses pillaging? In their vicious campaign of aggression, is the Islamic State (ISIS / ISIL) DEFENDING something? What are they deigning to “protect” with their violent blitzkrieg through Syria and Mesopotamia?

During the 18th and 19th centuries–throughout western Africa–the “Fula[ni] jihads” were HOLY WARS–waged to establish sharia law across the region. (They went from Futa Toro and Futa Jallon to as far east as the Sokoto Caliphate.) It should come as little surprise that all of the ensuing imamates were active in the slave trade; and were governed as Islamic theocracies.

Contrast this with the existential struggle known as the “agon” in Classical Greek lore.This referred to overcoming adversity in order to achieve some estimable goal–especially in a way that imbued one’s life with meaning.Here, the one who strives is the “agonist” (hence the literary terms “protagonist” and “antagonist”).Such striving is not militant (that is: focused against another); it is aspirational (that is: focused on self-improvement).In other words, it is characterized by perseverance rather than by hostility.This makes sense, as when we hear about noble struggles, we rarely hear about anything that is imperious or pernicious.

We might also contrast Islamic “jihad” with the Buddhist notion of “samyak-vyayama” [alt. “samma-vayama”]: a process of “samadhi” (contemplation in the spiritual sense) to achieve “dhyana” [alt. “jhana”] (enlightenment).This spiritual endeavor is markedly different from “dawa” (an endeavor to promulgate the Sunnah).The distinction here is between edification and evangelism.

It is telling that even the least objectionable versions of “jihad” involve hegemonic designs; as “dawa” is–after all–an (often aggressive) campaign directed toward others.This is why, in Islamic lore, we never hear about a struggle for, say, sexual equality or universal emancipation.A “jihad” for human rights would not make any sense.After all, human rights have no place in the Sunnah; and so would be anathema to a mujahid / ghazi.

Only the most elementary content analysis is required to debunk much of the hermeneutic chicanery that currently passes for honest commentary.But a basic historical analysis is also informative.Looking to the Judaic tradition, it is instructive to note that “Yisra-El” (“Israel”) means “struggle with god”.This was the moniker assigned to Abraham’s grandson, Jacob (son of Isaac); and subsequently used to refer to Jacob’s progeny (putatively: the progenitors of the Jewish people).It is the exhortation to submit to–and GLORIFY–god that sets both Christians and Muslims (who’s charge is to struggle FOR god) apart from most Jews (who’s charge is to struggle WITH god).The distinction here is acting on behalf of (a communal enterprise) vs. grappling with the reality of (a personal enterprise).

Struggle has always been part of the Abrahamic tradition.But there’s a catch.“Islam” means “submission to god”.Consequently, “struggle” must play a different role in Mohammedan theology than it does in creeds for which the sine qua non is something other than, well, unconditional SUBMISSION.A Muslim’s charge is not to struggle with GOD; it is to struggle against non-Muslims in service to god.

What characterizes this kind of struggle is sycophancy (that is: unwavering piety, not critical inquiry).Thus “jihad” was seen as an alternative to “bidah” [innovations that undermined that which had been sacralized], which entailed disrupting the established order (“fitna”).The key, then, was to demonize anything having to do with “bidah”.As Jonathan Berkey put it in his “The Formation of Islam”: “Among the most important [developments in the 11th century] was a sharpening of the Islamic doctrine of ‘bidah’ (innovation) according to which ‘every innovation is an error, and every error leads to hell’ in the words attributed to [MoM by Ibn al-Hajj].Such is the

logical extenuation of the doctrine of Sunnah, the opposite of ‘bidah’, whereby the practice of [MoM] and his companions established a permanent normative framework” (p. 202).

In this way, “jihad” was simply a way of enforcing conformity; and staving off innovative thinking.Berkey: “[What is dubbed] ‘jihad’ became an instrument, not only of resistance to infidels, but of the enforcement of standards of proper belief and behavior, particularly in the ulema’s struggle against various elements of popular religion… So, for example, when Ali ibn Maymun al-Idrisi [a Maghrebi Sufi who settled in Damascus in the late 15th / early 16th century] wrote a treatise condemning practices of Syrian Muslims of which he disapproved, he drew naturally on the language of holy war.According to him, waging jihad against these miscreant Muslims… ‘is preferable to doing so against the infidels of the House of War, as the damage [which they inflicted on Islam] is more severe and more significant than that of the infidels’…” (ibid; p. 202).And so it went: The “takfiri” fervor of the Salaf remained alive and well.

Were these violent offensives somehow antithetical to Koranic directives? The answer to this is obvious to anyone who has read Islam’s holy book.

Textual Clues:

But how can we be sure that the term “jihad”–as originally used–primarily pertained to a militant enterprise? Well, common sense gives us an incontrovertible answer: One does not accumulate “spoils of war” and become martyred from an internal “spiritual” struggle. But what of the term’s use IN SCRIPTURE? In Bukhari’s Hadith (no. 2787), we read that MoM declared: “God guarantees he will admit the mu-jahid into Paradise if he is killed. Otherwise, he will return him home safely with rewards and war booty.” “Mu-jahid” [one who struggles; alt. “jihadi”] refers to someone who is fighting non-Muslims in the Cause. What cause? Propagating Islam by the sword: “jihad bil-saif”. This is the sense of the term found in the Koran–as with 61:11 (note 61:4 for context) and 66:9 (note 66:7 for context).

In Surah 9 alone, the use of “jihad” is consistent with this theme–as in verses 41, 73, and 88. Want context? Verses 5, 12-14, 19, 27-29, 36, 44, 81, 111, and 122-123 are all about FIGHTING. There is no mention of a internal “spiritual” struggle anywhere in this Surah.

Those who want to engage in Hadith-sifting escapades may wish to view Bihar al-Anwar's oft-quoted passage in light of salient passages in far more respected Hadith collections. {I} Bukhari is considered the most authentic ["sahih"] hadith. It is prudent, then, to see what HE had to write on the matter:

[Following a battle], a man came to god's messenger and said, "Guide me to such a deed as equals jihad." [The messenger] replied, "I have not found such a deed." (no. 2785)

God guarantees that he will admit the "mu-jahid" [literally, one who engages in 'jihad'; i.e. fighter in his Cause] into Paradise if he is killed; otherwise he will return him safely to his home with rewards and war booty. (no. 2787) One does not need to "return safely" from contemplative activity.

The Prophet said, "Nobody who dies [in battle] and finds reward from god [in the afterlife] would wish to come back to this world, even if he were given the whole world and whatever is in it; except for the martyr, who–upon seeing the superiority of martyrdom–would like to come back to the world and get killed again [in god's Cause]." (no. 2795)

I would certainly never remain behind any "sariya" [army unit] going out for "jihad" in god's Cause. I would love to be martyred in god's Cause and then come back to life and get martyred, and then come back to life again and get martyred, and then come back to life again and get martyred. (no. 2797)

Bukhari's record of MoM's teachings on jihad is loud and clear. One might also consult 2/24, 8/387, 59/643, 60/40, and 60/80. {J} Indeed, we find in the Koran a stipulation that those who engage in "jihad" (strive in the way of god) with their possessions and their lives, rather than merely staying at home, will be rewarded. This makes no sense if "jihad" was meant as an inner, spiritual struggle–as one does not need to sacrifice all one's possessions nor one's own life to engage in such activity; and one can certainly do so while at home.

In the Koran, 4:102 notifies us that one is permitted to NOT strive for the Cause if it rains or if one is sick. Yet surely one can engage in an inner spiritual struggle on rainy days or while one is ailing. It should go without saying: spiritual struggle does not involve rampant depredation; and Islamic theology does NOT make this clear.Hence tyrannical theocracies like contemporary Iran and Saudi Arabia, which have scripture on their side.

22:39 is often cited as an example of DEFENSIVE jihad. It says, “fight back when you are attacked.” Yet well-meaning Islamic apologists treat it as if it said, “fight ONLY as a defensive measure, and NEVER at any other time”. (Of course, that is not what it actually says. But they don’t let that fact stand in the way of them PRETENDING that that is what it says.)

Moreover, 22:39 is cited as if this is the ONLY way in which the Koran discusses fighting. Thus, apologists make a practice of taking strategically-selected segments of text completely out of context. In other words, they wantonly ignore the rest of the book in order to make carefully-selected statements mean what they want them to mean. Such cherry-picking is denounced when anyone else does it; but it is entirely permissible when THEY THEMSELVES do it.

Islamic apologists must realize that no Koranic passage exists in isolation.
Other than 22:39, the closest we get to a message that discourages militancy is 4:90, 8:61, 41:34-35, and 42:38-43. But these five (eminently laudable) passages hardly make up for the dozens of passages that beseech followers to do the contrary. And NONE of these five passages say anything about limiting hostility to a specific group at a specific time.

Suffice to say: The “fighting pertained only to specific enemies that no longer exist” interpretation of the Koran’s strident “call to arms” is tremendously disingenuous. Why? Because that is not what the Koran ACTUALLY SAYS.

Commonly heard: “I know this ayah makes little sense in the modern context, but at the time of Mohammed…” Such demurrals are little other than evasions when referring to a book that claims to be ETERNAL (and perfectly clear about what it means).

When the term (“jihad” / “jahada”) is actually used in the Koran, it clearly pertains to armed attack against non-Muslims. 9:73 says to “strive hard against” non-Muslims; not against “oppressors”.

Remember, the Koran is supposedly articulated for followers EVERYWHERE, FOR ALL TIME. That is to say: the wording is PERFECT. PERIOD. Presumably, when god issued his directives (contained within an allegedly eternal book), he foresaw their potential applications in later centuries…in places other than Arabia…given very different circumstances. Therefore, the “it only pertains to situations unique to 7th century Arabia” excuse is a non-starter.

Alas, the “It was only meant to apply to a certain time and place, and is thus no longer applicable” defense is particularly popular for ALL militant passages. For example, the command to fight non-Muslims in 2:190-192 is often held to be obsolete. The problem with this is the existence of the following verse. 2:193 explicitly stipulates a two-part condition for obsolescence: Until there is no more “fitnah” (discord / dissension) AND until all people worship the Abrahamic deity (according to the conditions stipulated in the Koran). {G}

Incidentally, unscrupulous exegetes are required to take the relevant verse out of context in order to make their (fraudulent) case that OTHERS are taking it out of context. The irony here is unfortunate. If we follow the Koran to the letter, this disturbing command still applies to Nebraska in the 21st century.

Ergo “jihad” as striving to become a better person (or as a struggle against injustice) should be wholeheartedly encouraged; but, in doing so, it must be acknowledged that such enterprises do not derive from the Koran.
But, some apologists protest, the exhortations to engage in “jihad” in the MILITANT sense no longer attain! Though they come from an eternal book (the final revelation for all mankind, to be honored forevermore), they are–as it were–obsolete.

Engage in “jihad”, we are instructed, “until there is no more corruption in the land.” Suffice to say, this condition has (yet) been met. Obviously, there is still “fitna”. And–last I checked–not all of mankind are Muslims. Therefore the command is clearly still in effect.

If a statute-of-limitations for fighting non-Muslims (a phantom proviso that contemporary Islamic apologists deign to smuggle into Koranic text) DOES exist (as if hidden somewhere in the subtext), the most revered Koranic commentators throughout history–along with a panoply of major Islamic rulers over the centuries–somehow did not manage to see it. How strange. (Where, for example, is the crucial sunset clause for “fighting the non-Muslims wherever you find them”?)

For virtually every Muslim icon not to have gotten the memo on such a crucial matter, might it be surmised that the Koran was insufficiently clear on that point? The only alternative is that all these figures knew EXACTLY what the Koran said–and THAT was the problem. (As it turns out, rather than reading BETWEEN the lines, as some eisegetes insist we should, most people simply read the lines themselves.)

Alas. According the romanticized narrative we hear today from Islamic apologists, in their aggressive campaigns of military conquest, the caliphs (and other early Muslim leaders) must have been BETRAYING everything the Koran stood for. ("If only those Islamic conquerers had understood the Koran better, they would not have undertaken a millennium-long blitzkrieg!") Are we to suppose, then, that for over a thousand years, all of the world's Muslims–including the most esteemed early commentators–were completely misreading their holy book; and that it is only today's Islamic apologists that finally got it right?

Goodness gracious.

What, then, of the "greater" vs. "lesser" jihad?

A liberalized conception of "jihad" would be explicit and unequivocal. It must pertain exclusively to an INNER striving (that is: a spiritual struggle carried out within oneself). This would be in accordance with the Hadith, "Bihar al-Anwar"–compiled in the late 17th-century by a Safavid (Shiite) mullah named Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi of Isfahan (a.k.a. "Alama" Majlisi). {H} In that text, MoM is alleged to have said that his soldiers "have returned from the minor jihad, [and come back] to the major jihad" (19/182/31). This meant that they have returned from armed battle (a military affair) to the battle waged within oneself (a spiritual affair). The insinuation in this passage is that the PRIMARY meaning of "jihad" is a personal one "within oneself" rather than a campaign in which one fights others with force. Thus, the SPIRITUAL "jihad" is the more important one.
This pithy anecdote is one of the most oft-cited passages by well-meaning Islamic apologists whenever the question of the "true" meaning of "jihad" arises. It is extracted from a Hadith written over a thousand years after MoM's death (by an Imamiyyah, nevertheless); so it is almost certainly apocryphal. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized by Progressive Muslims today. That is to say: It should be extolled whilst kept in its proper context: as NOT derived from either the Koran or from the "sahih" (most dependable) Hadith record.

To reiterate: The anecdote is from a dubious Hadith collection that is promptly dismissed the moment an UN-savory passaged is cited from its 110 volumes. (Yes, this is THE BEST passage that can be culled from the entire 110-volume collection.) To make the case that THIS is what MoM "really meant all long" is to engage in farce. The mere suggestion is completely spurious.

Bottom line: In order to propound this salubrious conception of “jihad”, we mustn’t pretend that this sense of “jihad” is consonant with the sense of “jihad” promoted throughout Islamic scripture. Indeed, the teachings of MoM (i.e. the REST of the Hadith) paint a decidedly different picture of “struggle” in the cause of god. Talk of a “jihad al-akbar” [greater struggle] and of a “jihad al-asghar” [lesser struggle] notwithstanding, the Koranic sense of the term clearly pertains to “yuqatil” / “uqtul[u]” / “[y]aqtul[u]” (that is: fighting / killing non-Muslims). {H}

In considering the exhortations to massacre “kuffar”, we should take note of MoM’s express reasons for conquest. In a letter to “Muqawqis”, the viceroy of Alexandria (Egypt) at the time, a scrivener (purportedly conveying a message from the self-proclaimed prophet) is alleged to have written: “If you become a Muslim you will be safe.” In other words, if you refuse to become Muslim, you will NOT be safe. To ensure that this point was clear, the letter elaborated: “If you reject this invitation to Islam, you will be committing a sin by misguiding your subjects.” This phrasing is very revealing. It states that to not convert is tantamount to what is (elsewhere) called “fitna” (“disruption”; “causing mischief in the land”). And THAT is an affront warranting reprisal; as such “fasad” (mischief) stands in the way of “dawa” (the promulgation of Islam). {Q}

Therefore, when we hear that MoM only endorsed attacks on those who were doing “injustice” (“adaala”, as narrowly defined in the Koran), this includes those who declined the invitation to convert; or were in any way seen to be engaged in “fitna” (i.e. disruption of the the established order). Refusing to sign up for the program was equated with committing sin; which might thereby warrant aggression. When we read that “god does not love aggressors” (2:190), this merely means that god disapproves of attacking people out of the blue, without first checking to see if they are willing to be assimilated.

It is apparent from letters like this that rulers were not allowed to be non-Muslim, as being “kuffar” was tantamount to misleading (read: HARMING) their subjects. (To rule by anything other than the Sunnah was thus considered a kind of oppression.) Insofar as being non-Muslim qualifies as “sin”, the injunction against not fighting against those who aren’t sinning is rendered meaningless. In other words: Equating a refusal to become Muslim with GUILT vitiates any admonishment to not attack innocents. (If you don’t play along, you’re ipso facto guilty.)

A question worth posing: If an inner (spiritual) struggle were the “greater jihad”, would not copious amounts of ink and pulp have been devoted to this explication? One might sift through the over 7,300 ahadith in Bukhari’s collection in search of clarification on this crucial point. In the end, one will find oneself empty-handed. There is no such clarification. One must wonder how Bukhari missed this vital teaching; yet, eight centuries later, Bihar al-Anwar was suddenly aware of it. {K}

Regarding the matter of a “akbar” vs. “asghar” struggle, then, it is helpful to note that one must first win people’s hearts and minds before one can persuade them to risk their lives fighting for one’s cause. Surely MoM understood this. {H} Ergo the dichotomy of greater and lesser instantiations of “jihad”. Naturally, as leader of a cult movement that demanding unwavering dedication, he didn’t want his followers to be just going through the motions. If it was to be iron-clad (and it DID need to be iron-clad if they were going to routinely risk their lives for the cause), their fealty–as “fedayeen” had to come from within.

This was actually a pressing concern at the time; as a big deal was made of so-called “takfirs”: ostensive followers who outwardly professed fealty yet secretly harbored doubts inside. {O} It was important to enforce thorough indoctrination (the greater struggle) to ensure mu-jahideen were going to be dependable in carrying out the “jihad bil-saif”. This was not unique to the Salaf. Such a concern also attained for every leader thereafter. So this oft-touted ahadith makes perfect sense.

Also telling is that there is no chapter in the Koran devoted to an internal / spiritual struggle; yet there IS a chapter devoted to pillaging. Not only is “spoils of war” [“anfal”] the title of one of the chapters of the Koran (Surah 8), the first administrative center of the Islamic dominion was the “diwan”: an office commissioned to oversee the distribution of war booty.Priorities.

Such an emphasis on LOOT (accumulated during pillaging sprees) would not make sense were the emphasis of “jihad” on some personal (spiritual) endeavor… characterized by contemplation.

When 25:52 exhorts the audience to engage in a “greater jihad”, it means to work more diligently in one’s fealty to the cause. To what end? So that one will more dependably serve the cause. When one is engaged in an enterprise as important as a holy crusade, simply “going along just to get along” is not enough.

Concluding Remarks:

The quandary surrounding this loaded term primarily stems from a proliferation of Orwellian Doublespeak. Here, perfidious interlocutors contend that their preferred meaning of the term is the traditional meaning: “We fancy THIS to be the meaning; so we will pretend that this has ALWAYS BEEN the meaning.”

A similar semantic swindle could just as well be conducted with the Arabic term for conquest: “ghazw” / “qahr”. (This is salient, as struggling for something often requires overcoming something else.) To exhort “conquest” can be to encourage people to do various sorts of things. After all, one can conquer one’s fears just as one can conquer new territory. But therein lies the rub. (The conquests of, say, a seducer are different from the conquests of, say, an imperial army.)

So are we to say that environmental activists are engaging in a “jihad” to preserve our ecosystem? Can we engage in a “jihad” against pollution? How about against socio-economic injustice? Against bigotry? Against disease? Well, yes. Of course. But is any of that in keeping with the Koranic sense of “jihad”? No. Do such struggles have anything to do with the Sunnah? No.
As is well-known in Islamic vernacular, when the first Muslims spoke of “ghazw” / “qahr”, they were not thinking of a climber “conquering” a mountain. One doesn’t need to be a whiz in philology to come to this conclusion.

And so it goes: When it comes to a generalizable term like “struggle”, it is easy to elide the original textual meaning by using a bit of hermeneutic chicanery.

It is, of course, admirable to insist that “jihad” should NOW mean a struggle for overall well-being; but to insist that that’s what it has meant ALL ALONG is disingenuous. This (well-meaning) semantic swindle does more harm than good; as it dissuades people from addressing what is an abiding problem…and even from acknowledging that certain things need to be changed in order to effect this salubrious reconceptualization of “jihad”.
In sum: To propound “jihad” as a spiritual endeavor, one is required to disavow its meaning in the Koran and Haddith.

Over the course of Islam’s long history, if “jihad” pertained PRIMARILY to an inner “spiritual” struggle, there would be bookshelves upon bookshelves of material on said activity. Yet NOT ONE such book exists. Outside of the extensive corpus of Sufi

mysticism, at no point did it occur to a single (nominal) Islamic “mu-fassir” to expound upon this all-important “jihad al-daf’a”. {M} Instead, all we get is endless disquisition on holy war; and a history that follows suit.

It makes sense, then, that the interpretation of “jihad” as a militant enterprise was validated by arguably the most influential commentator of the Middle Ages: Ibn Kathir of Damascus (ref. his work “Ijtihad fi Talab al-Jihad”). It was not considered at all peculiar that he opted to use the loaded term, “jihad” in the title of this landmark work. {N}

In the late 1920’s, Sayyid Abul A’la Maududi penned “Jihad fil Islam”, which propounded jihadist–effectively declaring war between Islam and the rest of the world. His understanding of “jihad” was clearly holy war; not an inner “spiritual” struggle. In the end, we find that the liturgical meaning of “jihad” is loud and clear.

Abd-ullah Yusuf Azzam, one of the most infamous militant Salafis of the 20th century, was an avid reader of Sayyid Qutb, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the founder of “Lashkar-e Taiba”. Imagine the world’s surprise when he came to be known as the “Father Of Jihad” throughout Dar al-Islam. Suffice to say, Azzam was not known for quiet contemplation. As it turns out, he would eventually become the mentor to an Arabian millionaire named Osama bin Laden.

Incidentally, Bin Laden’s other mentor was the notorious Ayaman al-Zawahiri, who had founded the organization, “Tanzim al-Jihad” in Egypt: also not a meditation group. Nor was “Jama’at al-Tawhid w’al-Jihad” in Jordan. Nor was “Mu-jahideen-e Khalq” in Iran / Iraq. Nor was “Harakat al-Jihad-i Islami” in Bangladesh. It seems that clerics across the Muslim world did not get the memo that “jihad” was–first and foremost–a peaceably, private activity involving introspection / reflection.

Today, it makes perfect sense for one to claim that, in studying hard for an exam, one is engaging in a “jihad” to earn a better grade in class. But to then pretend that this is what was traditionally meant by “jihad” is to be ridiculous. A scholarly enterprise does not involve pillaging. And one does not martyr oneself to do well in school. In the end, it is the striving HOW and FOR WHAT that is the key. Let’s be honest about what we’re talking about TODAY vis a vis what was talked about in bygone eras.

{A In the argot of Islamic apologists, this novel sense of “jihad” (that is: as a personal, spiritual enterprise) is referred to as “jihad al-daf’a”. Presumably, one engages in such an INNER STRIVING with the aim of achieving some exalted state–a

state in which one has achieved communion with the divine. Yet if THAT had been what was at issue, there were other Arabic terms available–notably “wasilah” / “qurbah”. The Ancient Greeks referred to this as “henosis”. Japanese Buddhists refer to it as “ken-sho” or “satori”: seeing the true nature of things (alt. being in touch with the divine, which pervades the world). There are various takes on mental-discipline (alt. mindfulness) in the Eastern tradition, such as “kriya” in Kundalini meditation. Generally speaking, this undertaking takes the form of a contemplative practice (“dhyana” in Sanskrit; “jhana” in Pali), where the aim is to emancipate oneself from illusion / misapprehension and anxiety / confusion. This is done, it is believed, by attaining a kind of lucidity–referred to as “samadhi” in Sanskrit [“samapatti” in Pali; “sanmei” in Chinese]. The idea is to be fully in tune with Reality. It is through patient reflection–not militancy–that one achieves enlightenment. Here’s the key: Such struggle is about LIBERATION, not submission. Meanwhile, “wasilah” / “qurbah” does not yield “anfal” [war booty].}

{B The great library at Nalanda was the largest library in the world at the time, housing manuscripts from all over the world. In true Mohammedan fashion, it was burned to the ground. In fact, during Bakhtiyar Khilji’s rampage across India and into Bengala, ALL of Nalanda was destroyed, its inhabitants completely massacred. Untold numbers of valuable documents were lost forever. Higher learning there–as with everywhere else annexed by Dar al-Islam–ceased.}

{C Note that Islam PER SE was not forced upon kuffar; it was ISLAMIC LAW that was forced upon them. In other words: People were not forced to convert, they were forced to submit. They didn’t need to personally SUBSCRIBE TO Islam; they simply needed to abide by all its laws. Such is the nature of theocracy. Stoking militarism as a means of promulgating an ideology might be contrasted to Ashoka’s policy of “Dharma” [Pali: “Dhamma”]. The Mauryan Emperor renounced violence in his enterprise to promote Buddhist ideals across the region. In doing so, he denounced warfare as a legitimate means of hegemony (ref. Edict VIII). “Jihad” and “Dhamma” / “Dharma” are two very different conceptions of ideological struggle: one militant, the other peaceable. It should come as no surprise, then, that the divvying up of booty [“anfal”] was not a point of contention when it came to the latter. Indeed, the Buddha never discussed the “spoils of war” as part of Dharma.}

{D Other attempts were made–including onslaughts on Cyprus, Crete, Sardinia, and southern Gaul. These attempts at expansion failed (most famously, at the battle of Tours). Nevertheless, the violent conquest would eventually bring the imperium through Anatolia / Byzantium, through Thrace and Dacia and Bulgaria, up through

the Caucuses…and all the way to the gates of Vienna (in 1683, just as the Enlightenment was revving up). In northern Africa, the hegemony would continue across the Maghreb into the Sahel…all the way to Morocco. It should go without saying: The ferocious incursion into, say, the Austrian countryside was not motivated by some endeavor to "defend" anyone or anything. An elementary truism: When raping and pillaging is routinely involved, an intervention is not being conducted as a rescue mission. Rapacious plunder is not the hallmark of humanitarian crusade.}

{E Imperialism is not a vehicle for emancipation. Being subsumed into a regime's dominion does not entail being protected by it. However, this is the manner in which "emancipation" and "protection" were used in the Mohammedan lingo. The "jizya" was known as the protection tax: the same model the mafia uses with local businesses. One pays the mob not merely to be protected BY the mob, but to be protected FROM the mob–who are little interested in civic service, let alone humanitarian outreach.}

{F Prior to the modern era, the only instance of Islam metastasizing via quasi-peaceable evangelism is Java / Sumatra (a.k.a. Indonesia) during the High and Late Middle Ages–and possibly the Malay peninsula during the 14th century. Pace pockets of sub-Saharan Africa in the modern era, the rest of its metastasization was via violent conquest.}

{G Note that "fitnah" (disruption in the established order) is also sometimes translated as "persecution" (against Muslims) and/or "sedition" (on the part of the non-Muslims). Such Orwellian double-speak is extremely misleading, as the term can refer to any disruption in the designated agenda; not "persecution" in the modern sense of the term (viz. persecution of ANYONE, for ANY REASON). That is to say: Whenever expressing a grievance about persecution / oppression, "fitnah" pertained exclusively to the persecution / oppression OF MUSLIMS.}

{H Note that the passage in full reads: "The Prophet of God dispatched a contingent of the army (to the battlefront). Upon their return he said, 'Blessed are those who have performed the minor jihad and have yet to perform the major jihad.' When asked, 'What is the major jihad?' the Prophet replied, 'The jihad of the self" (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 19, chapt. 182, no. 31). As explicated by well-meaning Islamic apologists, the idea here is as follows: The battle waged within oneself is against the "nafs" (ego / ID). It involves the on-going struggle for self-betterment. In this "greater" (inner) struggle ("jihad al-akbar"), the primal self ("nafs-e ammarah")

must be brought under the control of the conscience (“nafs-e lawwamah”). In other words, only when what Freud considered the primal drives (represented by the “nafs”) are subordinate to higher reasoning faculties (represented by the “ruh”) can one attain a self that is at peace with itself (“nafs-e mutmainnah”)…and thereby get “in touch with” the divine (a state known as “wasilah”).}

{I Such quixotic cherry-picking expeditions are analogous to starry-eyed gold prospectors sifting through mountains of rubble in the hopes that their diligent efforts might turn up a small, shiny nugget now and then. Bihar al-Anwar’s 19/182/31 seems to be such a golden nugget when held up in isolation. The question becomes: What else winds up in such prospectors’ monumental harvest?}

{J Rather than find passages in the Hadith that are consummate with the “greater jihad as inner / spiritual struggle” trope, one will come across derisive passages like 2/24, 8/387, 59/643, 60/40, and 60/80 (also in Bukhari). Clearly, when the term “jihad” was used, it did NOT refer to a personal endeavor to achieve “wasilah”.}

{K Mohammed al-Bukhari lived in the 9th century; but the records of his Hadith are not even from him personally; they are from others whose documentation is from the 10th century. So even the vaunted Hadith collection named after him is not directly from his pen. In any case, according to the universally-accepted hierarchy of authenticity, all “sahih” Hadith (like Bukhari’s) must take precedence over “da’if” Hadith. This is a moot point anyway, as the ultimate arbiter of every doctrinal issue in traditional Islam is the Koran; and the Koran says absolutely nothing about “jihad” being an inner “spiritual” struggle [“jihad al-daf’a”].}

{L In Judaic lore, Jacob ben Isaac ben Abraham was anointed “Yisra-El”: One who struggles with god. That moniker is typically interpreted in symbolic ways. That is: It is a matter of “wrestling” with one’s own Faith; and even with one’s own destiny. To wit: It refers to a SPIRITUAL struggle; a struggle WITHIN ONESELF. It is a call to Faith rather than a call to arms. It is what would be dubbed in Arabic the “jihad al-nafs” [struggle of the soul]. Is it prudent to construe the Koranic sense of “struggle” in the same manner? The answer is: No. Clearly, Islam’s holy book AND the Sunnah speak of “jihad bil-saif” [struggle by the sword] rather than “jihad al-daf’a”.}

{M Sufi mysticism was a clear departure from the Sunnah. There were no whirling dervishes amongst the Sahabah.}

{N For more on this topic, a decent–though marginally flawed–disquisition is provided by Michael Bonner in his “Jihad In Islamic History”. Bonner engages in an ample dose of white-wishing, glossing over a slew of inconvenient facts. Nevertheless, his work is worthwhile insofar as it is relatively informative regarding general history.}

{O Martial imperialism is not a way to effect social justice. And indoctrination is not the same as edification. It is important to note, though, that Islamic hegemony did not necessary involve forced conversion (i.e. convert or die). Islam PER SE (i.e. Islam qua personal Faith) was not spread by the sword; Islamic LAW (i.e. Islam qua dominion) was spread by the sword. Surah 109 (and later: 2:256) ensured that there would be no compulsion in any given person’s choice of Faith; and so that there would only be laws that took into account which Faith any given person happened to be (namely: inferior status for those who opted to not be Muslim). Opting out of Islam would have significant consequences (namely: subjugation–as with imposition of the “jizya”). Thus: stringent coercion was not out of the question; but the choice ultimately had to be left to each person (per 2:256). Outward professions of fealty were insufficient; as rulers did not want people just going through the motions: a recipe for insolence down the road.}

{P I’m reminded here of the title of one of Noam Chomsky’s (many) books on U.S. foreign policy: “Hegemony or Survival”. It is an implicit question about the conduct of the U.S. during the post-war era. The dichotomy regards the rationalization propounded for the American Imperium’s “defensive” measures in foreign lands–which, though not for territorial acquisition (colonialism), was a matter of economic imperialism. It should be reiterated that imperialism is ALWAYS done in the name of “defense”. Pretense is how one sells the idea that WE–the chosen few–are charged with saving the world. From whom? From THEM. (!) Indeed, we must fear the enemy is at the gates; so if we don’t attack first, we’re doomed. It’s why the U.S. War Department was kept fully in tact–nay GROWN–pursuant to the end of the second World War; and simply rebranded the “Department of Defense” (where “Defense” was Newspeak for “Offense”). The new moniker did not make the Pentagon any less of a department for war. It merely added a more conciliatory veneer of noble intentions–in other words: pretense.}

{Q A hint that “dawa” is often considered far more than just a matter of peaceable evangelism: The Berber “Ansar Din”, the Iraqi “Ansar al-Islam”, and the numerous “Ansar al-Sharia” groups purport to be merely “helping” a noble cause; as “ansar” means “helper”.}

{R The comparison to Revisionist Zionist “lebensraum” is apt. The Judean Settler movement rationalizes its brutal occupation of Palestinian land–and its forced eviction of indigenous inhabitants–by invoking Biblical decrees (read: divine ordinance). Meanwhile, the ethno-nationalist regime deigns to justify its expansion via specious appeals to “security”…even as said expansion COMPROMISES security. Hence the Judeo-Supremacist “jihad” is excused, we are told, because the perpetrators are merely “defending” themselves. This is yet another illustration that the siege mentality is a kind of collective neurosis. We find, then, a pernicious delusion off of which ideologues feed in order to sustain their odious agenda.}



APPENDIX 2: Tamerlane A Salafist?

There is debate about whether to categorize Timur of Kesh as a Sunni or a Shiite.* The available evidence indicates that he was personally ambivalent to this binary taxonomy. Indeed, such clear-cut categories may not have even been fully articulated in the way with which we are now familiar.

Be that as it may, Tamerlane can be most accurately described as a tacit Salafi. Though he seems to have been quite interested in Ali (a fixation on Ali is a hallmark of Shiism), Tamerlane did not conduct himself as an inveterate Shiite. While he was clearly incensed by the murder of Rashidun caliph, Ali’s sons, Hasan and Husayn; it does not follow that he identified with an explicitly Ali’d creed.

A few elementary points are worth making. Here are ten of the most notable:

First: It is well-attested that Tamerlane's chief advisor was a Hanafi theologian from Khwarezm. The Hanafi madhhab is the most prominent Sunni school of jurisprudence; it has never been a "fiqh" associated with Shiism (though the Zaydi fiqh has some resemblances). Note, for instance, that Deobandism (arguably the most fanatical Salafi sect, as demonstrated by the Taliban) uses the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. So did Daesh.

Second: When Tamerlane overtook Anatolia in 1402 (ousting Ottoman sultan Bayezid), he sought to re-install the Seljuks to power. The Seljuks were Sunni. This would have been a bizarre goal had Tamerlane's primary concern been stymying Shia hegemony. He could have easily declared Shia dominion had he so desired.

Third: Tamerlane never made any declarations about Shiism per se (that is: explicit professions of Ali'd fealty); nor did he express any grievance with Sunnism. In fact, he never even broached the topic; and so seemed unconcerned with the distinction. When establishing his regimes, he spoke only of Islam. Indeed, it was a zeal to do god's work that led him to do much of what he did.

Moreover, he never mentioned the "Ahl al-Bayt" [People of the House; spec. Ali and MoM's daughter, Fatimah] in his rhetoric–something that an explicitly Shiite leader would have been inclined to do, as it was integral to Shiite vernacular.

Fourth: Tamerlane never discussed the "mahdi"–a topic that a world-conquerer would surely have addressed had he thought of himself as a Shiite. The pending "mahdi" is a focal point of all Shiite leaders; as it is a key element in conceptions of Providence when undertaking enterprises in the present. Consequently, it plays a pivotal role in Shia eschatology. At no point did Tamerlane invoke this eschaton when rationalizing his aggressive agenda.

Fifth: Tamerlane seemed unconcerned with the issue of the imamate–a matter he would have been behooved to address had his aim been to establish Shia dominion, with himself as undisputed ruler. The proper imamate is the lynchpin of Shiism's contradistinction with Sunnism.* In refraining from anointing himself imam, he seemed to be exhibiting a concern for bloodlines (i.e. his own lack of qualification, being as he was Turkic-Mongol). Such a concern is germane an Ali'd point of view. However, a fixation on bloodlines is not unique to Shiites; as Sunnis have been equally obsessed with lineage back to MoM. The difference is that Sunnis did not necessarily let this issue get in the way of designating caliphs. Tamerlane's concern

about NOT being a descendent of MoM–and therefore not being qualified to adopt the vaunted mantle, “imam”–is compatible with Shiism; but, in itself, it merely attests that he valued bloodlines.

Sixth: Tamerlane is not recorded as ever having invoked the Shia addendum to the Shahada, “Ali-un wali-u-llah”–something about which he would have been adamant had the promotion of Shiism been part of his agenda. As noted, he may have had a fixation on Ali for personal reasons–about which we can only speculate. Yet this did not seem to translate to an explicit sectarian identity.

Seventh: The only notable Shiite regime in the Far East was the Bahmani sultanate in the Deccan of India, ruled at the time by Taj ud-Din Firuz “Shah”. The Shah was best known for his (inordinate) TOLERANCE of Hindus, as well as his promotion of a multi-cultural, intellectually-vibrant society. Moreover, the Shah never sought territorial conquest. In other words: the most noteworthy Shiite in the region was the sort of Muslim with which Tamerlane had the LEAST in common.

Eighth: Tamerlane slaughtered plenty of Shiites–notably, the Oghuz “Kara Koyunlu” (a.k.a. “Black Sheep Turkmen”) of Armenia. The Kara Koyunlu were vassals of the Jalayirids. In fact, that was the tribe that probably caused Tamerlane the most headaches. In undertaking his campaign in Anatolia, Tamerlane opted to ally himself with the “Ak Koyunlu” (a.k.a. “White Sheep Turkmen”), who were SUNNI. Tamerlane is not known to have ever spared anyone simply because they were Shiite. Meanwhile, he IS known to have spared Sunnis on numerous occasions; and so clearly did not see their Sunnism as problematic. So far as any Shia / Sunni distinction may have gone, there were overriding factors governing his decisions.

Ninth: Pursuant to gaining control of the Middle East, Tamerlane did not see fit to consecrate any of the holiest sites of Shiism: neither at Najaf nor at Rey, nor at Kufa. Most notably, at no point was he inclined to devote special attention to Karbala, the holy city that has a special place in the Ali’d tradition (that is: within Shi’ism).If he were a tried and true Shi’ite, Tamerlane would have certainly made Karbala a focal point when orchestrating his conquests of that region.He did not.

Tenth: Tamerlane’s successor–his grandson, Khalil Sultan–was Sunni. The Timurids were all Sunni. His most celebrated descendent (Babur) founded the Mughal Empire, which was Sunni. None of them felt as though they were in any way betraying Tamerlane’s legacy.

Yet Tamerlane is rarely associated with Salafism. So what's going on here? There seems to have been an effort by Islamic hagiographers (who happen to be overwhelmingly Sunni) to distance themselves from the most horrific genocidal maniac in history. Since he was obviously Muslim, their only recourse is to paint him as not SUNNI (and thus as a pesky, meddling Shiite). Unsurprisingly, Shiites are also reluctant to claim him as one of their own.
What we do know is that all that Tamerlane did, he did in the name of Islam. To rationalize his deeds, he simply proclaimed that he was doing god's will. It is plain to see that religiosity was not only operative, it was the primary animating force behind Tamerlane's megalomania–as is usually the case when a megalomaniac is prone to cultic thinking.

Meanwhile, unscrupulous historiographers are inclined to conflate Tamerlane of the (Turkic) Barlas clan with Genghis Khan of the (Mongol) Borjigin clan. They blame most of the atrocities perpetrated by the former (who waged a holy war against kuffar) on the latter (who, even in the midst of his voracious conquest, actively promoted religious tolerance). In the eagerness to paint the dastardly Mongol hordes as mindless, blood-thirsty savages, all Mongolic conquerers are lumped together across the centuries…even when they may have had almost nothing to do with each another. Consequently, the (Tengri-ist) Genghis is often blamed for the humanitarian atrocities perpetrated a century and a half later by the (Salafi) Tamerlane.

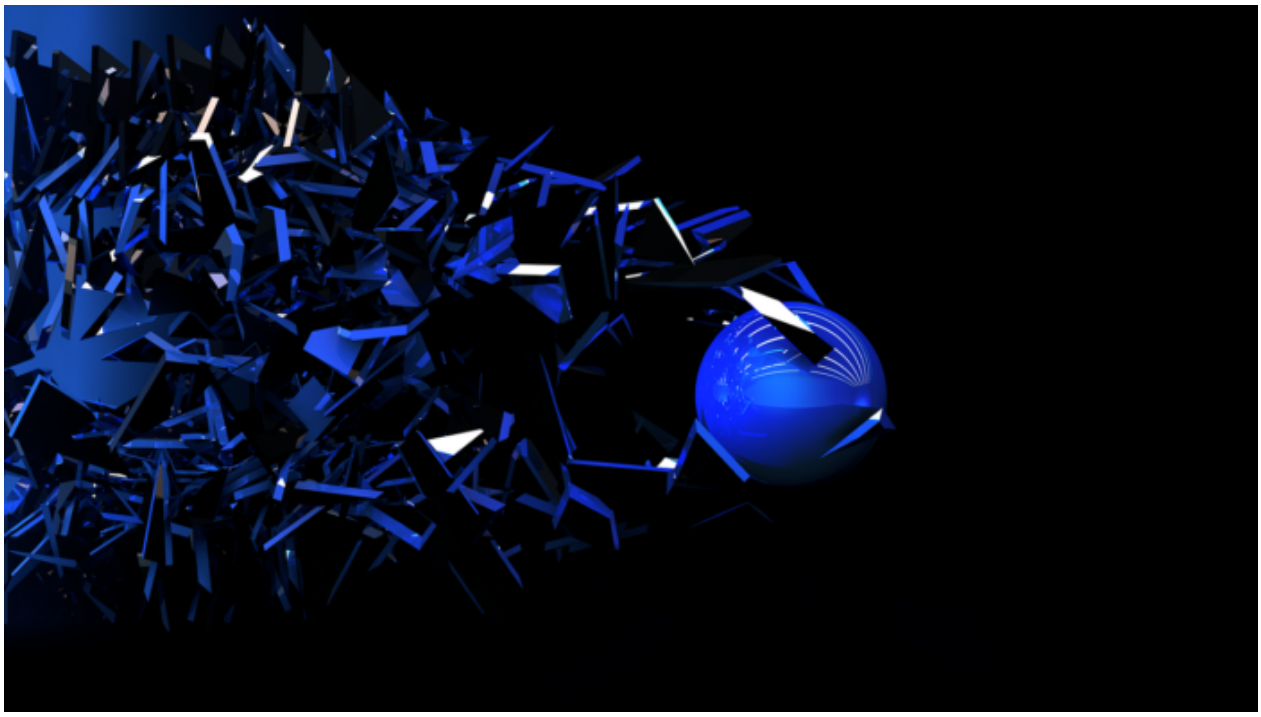
(I explore this matter in footnote 10 above.)

The Sunni-Shia dichotomy was not salient when it came to Tamerlane's religiosity; though he certainly saw himself as carrying out the vision of the Sahabah…and, presumably, the Salaf. Perhaps the best we can say of this infamous conquerer (vis a vis his creed) is that he was a non-denominational Islamic fundamentalist. As is clearly outlined here, all his campaigns were explicitly undertaken as a holy war; and were primarily animated by religious zealotry.

Tamerlane's tomb is found in the mausoleum of Gur-i Mir–replete with inscriptions of Islamic tribute.

{* Ancillary note: The schism between the two denominations initially pertained more to the proper succession of leaders (caliphs). This disputation boiled down to the manner in which MoM's cousin, Rashidun caliph Ali [ibn Abi Talib] should be viewed. Would the succession proceed according to bloodlines (in which case the Ali'd lineage would prevail, in the form of the divinely ordained imamate) OR would

it proceed through MoM's deputy, Abu Bakr…in which case the caliphate would be recognized based on other criteria (demonstrated fidelity)? There were, of course, a few doctrinal discrepancies as well–such as the number of daily prayers: 3 vs. 5, the preferred school of jurisprudence, which parts of the Sunnah to emphasize, etc.}



APPENDIX 3:

Some of the more unscrupulous Islamic apologists are inclined to embark on cherry-picking expeditions to cull a few isolated Koranic passages that seem to enjoin comity—as if those excerpts somehow trumped the 41 passages enumerated earlier; and thus countermanded the overall (prevailing) theme of Islam's holy book. Let's look the most notable of these gems.

ONE: 4:90, 8:61, and 60:8 tell us: "If [your adversaries] leave you alone, and do not wage war against you, and offer you peace, then god does not oblige you to fight them." These two passages are not as magnanimous as they might seem at first blush. Their message: You are not OBLIGATED to fight non-Muslims; thus leaving open the permissibility of fighting. In other words, the prerogative to fight—even when one has not been attacked—remains fully in tact.

The most charitable way to interpret this admonishment is to assume that the phrase “does not obligate you to fight” means “does not give you cause to fight”. This involves construing “you are not required to X” as “X is not warranted”. While such a salutary reading should be encouraged, it is likely not what was originally intended. After all, there is a difference between a lack of obligation and a prohibition.

These passages allow for Muslims to desist from warfare if they are not being actively attacked. Hence, armistice is permissible, but not required. This is hardly a mandate for universal peace. 25:63 states of “those who walk the land in humility” that when they encounter anyone who is ignorant, they simply say “salaman” [the equivalent of the Hebrew “shalom”]. Are we to conclude from such isolated passages that the overarching theme of the Koran is pacifism?

Let’s explore further. 41:34 intimates a somewhat conciliatory posture when it comes to “dawa”, urging patience regarding someone with whom you do not get along (thereby eventually turning enmity into amity). We thus are adjured to return an iniquitous deed with kindness. 42:40-43 and 60:7-9 have a similar message. They state that “the requital of an evil deed is an evil one like it; but whoever forgives, and seeks conciliation / amends, his reward is with god.” They go on: “One has cause to act only against those who oppress people and cause mischief in the land, violating the ordained laws.” (We find a comparable statement in 5:45: “Whoever forgoes [an eye for an eye] as an act of charity, it will be an atonement for him.”)

It is worth looking into the meaning of these locutions. Here, “causing mischief in the land” is generally equated with causing “fitna”—that is: disrupting the Islamic order. This is a not so much a matter of being immoral as it is a matter of subversion—that is: sowing discord in Dar al-Islam. Meanwhile, “those who oppress” is taken to mean any ruler who governs according to anything other than sharia. According to this standard, liberal democracy would be seen as a kind of “oppression”…from which people need to be liberated.

So the question arises: When assaying the Koran in its entirety, are we simply dealing with inconsistent messaging?

In addressing this exegetical conundrum, we might note that an abusive husband doesn’t beat his wife EVERY day. Indeed, he may actually be rather nice to her from time to time. How, then, shall his character be assessed?

TWO: Verse 256 of Surah 2 tells us that "there is no compulsion in religion." This may be read as: "If people don't believe, then don't try to coerce them; let them be damned if that's the path they choose." The message here is clear once we read the subsequent verse (257). 6:66 and 42:48 confirm this (less estimable) position. Obviously, FORCING everyone to believe would sabotage the grand trial that is "dunya". After all, life here on Earth is seen as a "test" in which people are condemned on the Day Of Judgement because they CHOSE not to believe.

This attitude may be expressed as follows: "Don't lose any sleep at night over the fact that certain people—nay, the majority of the human race—will be condemned to eternal hellfire. Interceding in the fates of others (in the hereafter) is not your prerogative; it is god's province alone. Attend to your own salvation, and don't spend too much time trying to sway those who deny the Koran."

The best one can do, then, is let non-believers know about the Sunnah. The rest is in god's hands. If others end up bringing about their own damnation, then so be it. The upshot of 2:256 is: Trying to save others' souls is not within your jurisdiction. (This interpretation is in keeping with 109:6.)

There is actually some credence to this thinking. One cannot fake what is in one's heart; and others cannot control what is truly within one's heart. In this sense, it is not so much that compulsion in religion is PROHIBITED; it's that it CAN'T EXIST. 2:256 is a claim about the human condition, not a normative statement. In other words: it is descriptive, not prescriptive.

As far as the protagonist of the Koran is concerned, there is no compulsion in religion in the same way that nobody is OBLIGATED to partake in Juche in North Korea. "It's up to you; just know that there will be consequences for your choice." That's not religious freedom; that's tyranny.

The Koran is adamant about the fact that, whatever one decides for oneself (insofar as one even pretends to have a say in one's own fate), there shall be repercussions…both in this world and in the hereafter. As far as the consequences DURING life go, non-Muslims clearly have inferior status (which is, at best, "Dhimmi"). For they are THE OTHER ("zalim"). Notably, non-Muslim "People of the Book" must pay an extra tax ("jizya") for their lack of (proper) Faith. According to this linguistic scheme, such a relegation to inferior status does not count as "compulsion". Within the Islamic dominion, everyone was subject to sharia; and THAT was the only compulsion that mattered.

The Koran essentially says: Don't fuss over others' Faith; for we are each going to get what's coming to us in the end anyway. Let god sort it out. In the meantime, believers should be wary of those not in the Ummah. 19:48 confirms this, when Abraham tells his own father (who refused to honor his god) that he will leave him (that is: not try to sway him).

And so it goes: 2:256 is not an entreaty for religious tolerance; it is an observation of man's powerlessness in the face of Providence. This is confirmed by 10:99-100, which tells us not to bother pressuring anyone into conversion, because god has already selected who will and won't believe. (Per the doctrine of "qadar", it has been pre-ordained who shall be saved and who shall be damned.) So we'd best leave well enough alone, and–pace dawa–focus on the state of our own soul.

There was an undeniable practicality to this approach to dawa. For the early Mohammedans, **forced** conversion would have created the problem of posers. Subsequently, everyone's fealty would have been in question; and it would have been difficult to identify (covert) infidels in the ranks.

We might also note a related passage (verse 6 of Surah 109), which states: "Unto you your 'din'; unto me my 'din'" (where "din" is variously interpreted as "way of life" or "religion"). This would seem to be an endorsement of freedom of religion; even of secularism. But not so fast. It does not follow from this that non-Muslims should not be treated as inferiors.

Taking the theme of "qadar" (pre-destination) into account, the message of 2:256 becomes: Some of us are divinely ordained to be guided; others are not. It's not up to us to decide who the saved and who the damned might be. So when we are told "unto you your religion; unto me mine", it is simply a recognition of the divergent fates of the saved and the damned; NOT some sort of clarion call for global human solidarity (let alone an entreaty for toleration, pluralism, and inclusivity). This myopic sense of "religious freedom" had some serious strings attached…just as in, say, North Korea.

In a sense, NO Faith is compulsory. For the entire point of "Faith" is that it's a choice one makes for oneself. Thus 2:256 is perfectly in keeping with the rest of the Koran, which clearly states that one does not HAVE TO be Muslim. Indeed, it would defeat

the entire purpose of the Koran's salvation-damnation scheme if everyone were required to be in Dar al-Islam. There would be nothing "special" about those who were in it. And god wouldn't get to fill up hell–as he so eagerly wants to do.

In any case, 109:6 is—like 2:256—more DE-scriptive than PRE-scriptive. The point is that there, in fact, IS NO compulsion when it comes to Faith; not that there SHOULD NOT be. This means that all of us must ultimately make up our own minds about the fate of our eternal souls. It's not MY problem if YOU make the wrong choice; nor is it YOUR problem if I make the wrong choice.

So is 109:6 to be taken as an adjuration to simply live and let live? Shall we all just shrug our shoulders and–with resignation–say, "To each his own"? Not really. The message is clear once we consider the message conveyed in the rest of the Koran: Don't take judgement (esp. regarding matters of Faith) into your own hands because god will take care of it. This is based not merely on 2:256; it is made clear in passages like 9:66, 18:29, 10:99, 16:106, and 88:21-22 as well.

Be that as it may, squaring all this with passages like 4:89 might be rather difficult. There, the supplicant IS urged to take matters into his own hands whenever there is "mischief in the land"; thereby giving license that is somewhat open-ended. For "mischief" is a vague reference to "fitna" (disruption of the Islamic order), which can entail any perceived dissent from the Sunnah.

Recall that, historically, it is not Islamic FAITH that was spread by the sword, it was Islamic LAW. It was not religiosity ("iman") PER SE that was forced upon conquered populations; it was a political dominion ("sharia") that was geographically expanded. When enlarging the realm of sovereignty, coerced conversion is un-necessary, as SUBJUGATION is the point. So long as everyone is beholden to the diktats of those enforcing the creed, the rest is a moot point. Even "Daesh" often allowed for "Dhimmi" in its midst.

Max Weber put it accurately when he noted: "[Islam] makes obligatory the violent propagandizing of a true prophecy that consciously eschews universal conversion and enjoins the subjugation of unbelievers under the dominion of a ruling class dedicated to the religious war as one of the basic postulates of its faith, without however recognizing the salvation of the subjugated. The practice of coercion poses no problem, since god is pleased by the forcible dominion of the Faithful over the infidels, who are tolerated once they have been subjugated" ("Sociology of Religion"; p. 227).

In the midst of even the most charitable readings of 2:256 and 109:6, we should bear in mind that non-Muslims are summarily demeaned throughout Islam's holy book. They are liars; they are deniers; they are deaf, dumb, and blind; they are the worst of all creatures; etc. They are constantly vilified. And in many cases, the reader is instructed, the "kafir" should be slaughtered BECAUSE OF his disbelief. NONE of this is tantamount to compulsory supplication. Hence 2:256 and 109:6 make perfect sense…even in a totalitarian theocracy.

In sum: 2:256 and 109:6 both amount to a call to let the damned be damned. "Don't try to intervene. If someone is misled, it is god's will. Who are YOU to question it?" To reiterate: This attitude is based on the (accurate) observation that COERCED Faith is not GENUINE Faith.

The practical implication of this is relatively straight-forward: "Notify non-Muslims of Islam, introduce them to the Koran, and the rest is out of your hands. If they choose not to convert, then so be it." That is the extent of "dawa".

Other religions serve to illustrate this point. In a certain sense, Haredim do not believe that there is compulsion in religion either. That doesn't make their cult any less deranged; nor does it make them paragons of religious freedom. In a sense, religious fanatics are not focused on evangelism so much as they are with demarcating OTHER-ness. They don't lose sleep at night knowing that THE OTHER is doomed to perdition.

"Dawa" is often taken to mean a campaign to enlighten (read: indoctrinate) the un-initiated; yet it is best translated as "spreading the word". Such an endeavor—no matter how assiduously it is undertaken—does not involve "compulsion". Dawa, then, is not so much about some grand soul-saving mission (as it is with, say, Christian missionaries); it is simply about making people aware of the "din", and letting the chips fall where they may…all the while, doing so with the understanding that "If you don't play along, you'll be sorry."

This attitude does not require compulsion…unless, that is, we consider the imposition of draconian incentives a form of compulsion. But the Koran does not count its carrots and sticks (promise of Paradise vs. threat of hellfire) as a form of "compulsion". It's just an articulation of cosmogony.

As if to make things confusing, 13:15 indicates that compulsion in religion may be permissible after all!

It does not follow from any of this that the Koran is advocating for what we would now consider “religious freedom”. If someone is threatened with dire punishment if they do not toe the line, they are still—in a rather obtuse sense—FREE TO CHOOSE. (In this sense, North Korea is as free as any other nation.)

The bottom line: As long as heresy is posited as a moral transgression, as is done throughout the Koran, genuine religious freedom is an untenable prospect.

THREE: Verse 32 of Surah 5 states: “Whoever kills a person, UNLESS for another person OR for causing mischief in the land [undermining the ability of Muslims to promulgate the Sunnah], it is as if he had killed all mankind… And whoever saves [the life of a non-transgressing person], it shall be as though he had saved all mankind.” This is perhaps the most commonly cited passage by those who insist the Koran obliquely enjoins some variation on humanism.

The catch here is that the passage is citing an enjoinder that was found in the Torah. As it turns out, the enjoinder was addressed explicitly to Hebrews (in reference to Cain’s murder of his brother, Able). Thus 5:32 is merely harking back to the Abrahamic deity’s admonishment to the children of Israel; and it pertains exclusively to the killing of fellow Hebrews. Killing those OUTSIDE the tribe was deemed unproblematic. So the invocation is not nearly as magnanimous as it might seem. *

Moreover, the stipulated EXCEPTIONS (which are often omitted from charitable quotations) are significant: UNLESS for another person OR for disrupting the Islamic order. Such caveats alter what is an otherwise splendid-sounding admonition against killing.

As it happens, the true spirit of the passage is revealed IN THE VERY NEXT VERSE (5:33). The passage is actually a CALL TO ARMS, not a plea for peace. The full message is: “Anyone who causes “fitna” is to be killed; but you should refrain from killing people otherwise.” This is a far cry from a clarion call for universal human rights. Quite the contrary, it is indistinguishable from the conditions stipulated by, say, the Roman Catholic Inquisition…or the Nazi Gestapo…or the Soviet Stasi: So long has you aren’t seen as subversive, you have nothing to worry about.

Let’s look at the passage in its entirety: “From the time that we [the Abrahamic deity] ordained for the people of Israel that he who slays [“qatala”] a soul other than one who does so for another soul or for spreading mischief / corruption in the land, it is as if he had slain ‘al-nas[a]’; and anyone who spares [“ahya”] a soul, it is as if he has spared the lives of ‘al-nas[a]’.”

Here, “al-nas[a]” means “the people”. The locution used is actually “al-nasa jami’an” meaning “the whole people”. More charitably, “nas” can be interpreted as “mankind”. Hence the lexeme can refer either to just the “ummah” (the community of believers) or to humanity itself. Such a charitable interpretation can also be used for, say, 4:114, which states that there is no good in “najwahum” [“their secret talk”] except for those who “enjoin charity, kindness, or conciliation” amongst “al-nas[i]”. Does this encourage amity solely within Dar al-Islam, or does it extend to Dar al-Kafr? It’s unclear.

And so it goes: We might treat this verse as though it were touting the following maxim: To take the life of one person is to—essentially—perpetrate murder against all of humanity; and to save a life is to–essentially–save all of humanity. However the Koran does not put it quite this way. It does not put it that way because it CANNOT put it this way; as doing so would directly contradict the slew of verses that urge followers to be hostile to outsiders. 5:32 clearly meant something other than what many apologists profess.

We should note that it is a harkening back to an exhortation the Abrahamic deity made to the Hebrews (that which he “ordained for Israel”). It is not, then, a direct exhortation to the Mohammedans.

Let’s explore the caveat: OTHER THAN those who are spreading mischief [“fasadin”] (where “mischief” means sowing discord). Hence: Killing others is fine if they are being subversive. Who “makes mischief”? Those who stand in the way of the promulgation of Islam or in any way undermine the Sunnah. (Thus: Not being Muslim is fine, so long as one does not disrupt the Islamic order; as explicated in 4:89.) Note that the key term in this caveat, “fasadin”, can also be translated as “spreading corruption” (undermining the Sunnah; disrupting the the Islamic order). Corruption of what? Of god’s word, of the Faith, of MoM’s teachings. Hence anyone who fetters “dawa” or flouts sharia is not to be considered innocent…and is thus “fair game”.

Such a proviso undermines any interpretation that takes “nas” to mean all mankind, irrespective of their Faith. For it explicitly provides an exception to the stricture. Therefore an accurate reading of the ubiquitously touted exhortation must include the rider: “…EXCEPT if they go against Islam.” Taking this into account, 5:32 suddenly doesn’t sound so noble after all. Indeed, when putting it in context, the injunction against killing “innocent” people suddenly takes on a more devious tenor.

Bear in mind that the perpetrators of every pogrom in history have claimed that their targets were “guilty” of, well, SOMETHING (typically, subversive / heretical activity). Indeed, EVERYONE claims to never do bad things to those they’ve deemed to be “innocent”. Those who are persecuted are ALWAYS held to deserve it (to have brought it upon themselves). The question, then, is: How do the authors define “innocent”?

To answer this, it is prudent to consider the (inter-textual) context of the touted statement. As it turns out, we need only read the verse DIRECTLY FOLLOWING the verse-in-question (5:33), which specifies the punishment for those who go against the Abrahamic deity and his appointed messenger (i.e. by “making mischief”). Such transgressors “should be murdered or crucified or their hands and feet cut off on opposite sides or should be imprisoned.” There is a notable juxtaposition between 5:32 and 5:33. The former is addressed to the Jews; the latter is addressed to the Muslims.

Thus the passage in toto is of the form: “Recall that, in days of yore, god said **A** to those other people (Jews); but now, he is saying **B** to you (Muslims).”

A: Regarding he who takes the life of anyone (any Hebrew, that is) other than those who have blasphemed, it is as if he has taken the life of all mankind; and he who saves the life of someone (any Hebrew) who has not blasphemed, it is as if he has saved all mankind.

B: As for those who HAVE blasphemed (or who are arrayed against the anointed tribe, now understood to be Mohammedans), you shall slay them, or crucify them, or cut off their hands and feet on opposite sides, or imprison them.

The protected group thus went from Beth Israel to Dar al-Islam. This amounts to a mandate to value the lives of those who submit to Islam (and a reminder of how grave a transgression it is to kill them)…followed by a directive to go ahead and kill / torture those who refuse to submit to Islam. This is in keeping with the exhortation to kill non-Muslims wherever you find them (found in 2:191, 4:89, and 9:5). 5:32 is merely citing an admonishment given by the Abrahamic deity TO the Hebrews solely REGARDING the Hebrews; and then proceeds to provide an altogether different message to its intended audience: the Mohammedans.

Hence: If people are “innocent”, do not kill them. HOWEVER, if they are “guilty”, then you are obligated to kill / torture / imprison them (where innocence and guilt are functions of concordance with the Sunnah). This accords with the rest of Islam’s holy book—as with 8:12, 9:73, 47:3-4, and 66:9.

Taken within the context of the verse following it, 5:32 ends up meaning something markedly different from what Progressively-inclined Muslims would very much like it to mean (and what it SEEMS to mean when quoted out of context). **

But what are we to do of the (more familiar) adage that taking one life—ANY life—is like killing all humanity (and that saving one life is like saving all humanity)? Is this not a maxim that Muslims and non-Muslims alike should espouse? Could we not at least PRETEND that this is what the authors of 5:32 meant? Well, then, perhaps the Koran’s protagonist could take his own advise.

Are we to suppose, then, that the Koran is sending mixed messages? Let’s grant, for a moment, the primacy of the passages adumbrated in this Appendix. If one were to espouse the most charitable interpretation of these (10) felicitous-seeming passages, one would still find oneself in somewhat of an exegetical pickle; as one would be forced to ignore—nay, REJECT—the (41) problematic passages enumerated earlier.

{* It’s worth noting the antecedent Abrahamic lore on which this oft-quoted “ayah” was based. While it is an allusion to the tale of Cain and Abel (in which the Abrahamic deity admonishes the people of Israel against murder), the Koranic verse seems to have been an adaptation of a passage not from the Torah, but from the Mishnah; as compiled by Judah ha-Nasi at the end of the 2nd century A.D. (The specific wording was lifted from Sanhedrin 37a.) The Talmudic passage, which was explicitly addressed to Jews, was probably written in Syriac, as was most Talmudic literature during Late Antiquity. It reads as follows: “Whosoever destroys a single soul of Israel, scripture imputes [guilt] to him as though he had destroyed a complete world; and whosoever preserves a single soul of Israel, scripture ascribes [merit] to him as though he had preserved a complete world.” Thus 5:32 was lifted from Judaic sources. Interpreted charitably, we are asked to suppose that taking a single human life is tantamount to an affront to humanity itself. However, the meaning of the Talmudic passage involves a narrowly circumscribed prohibition. That is: The proscription pertains exclusively to fellow Hebrews. After Cain slayed his brother, the Abrahamic deity decreed “to the Children of Israel” (that is: to the sons of Jacob) that to do as Cain did was—effectively—to impugn (i.e. commit a

crime against) all god's creation. Cain's crime, then, was not that he killed another person; it's that he killed another HEBREW—namely: his brother, Abel, who was righteous. Not only was it permissible to slaughter non-Hebrews; committing genocide against others was often MANDATED.}

{** Another interpretation of this admonishment (against illicit killing) is that it pertains to the severity of the punishment in the hereafter. Taken this way, the message is: The murder of even a single person warrants the same punishment as would the (hypothetical) murder of everyone. Hence the threshold for maximal opprobrium (that is: the standard for transgressions warranting maximum punishment) is its commission against a single soul. Hence god will make no distinction between murdering one person and xenocide. If this is what the authors had in mind, it is likely they were using hyperbole to make a point. For it was clearly the killing of fellow Muslims that was seen as problematic, not the killing of "kuffar".}