



Jihadism and the Qur'an

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[Last week in New York](#), Oriana Fallaci stated that the Qur'an was the *Mein Kampf* of the Jihadi movement. She pointed out that Islam's holy book demands the annihilation or subjugation of the other, and that it wants to substitute totalitarianism for democracy.

Her statement, as you may imagine, has caused considerable controversy. A few of the statements I have seen:

"Calling the Koran *Mein Kampf* is muddle headed and hysterical.....deserves a rebuttal."

"There are moderate Moslems.....I lived among them in Turkey while my Bulgarian relatives went to concentration camps..."

"Tarring the whole religion is counterproductive.....Arab Moslems are terrorists in training but many non Arab Moslems are not jihadists....."

"If there are no moderate muslims, as Fallaci says, then we are doomed.....Is it not better to call them Islamofascists or Jihadists?"

"The Koran is '*Mein Kampf*'.....oh come on...."

"In order to be a moderate Moslem does one have to renounce the Koran? I think that as usual, Oriana goes too far."

There is a muddle in these comments that needs sorting out. Fallaci said that there was no moderate Islam; she did not say that there were no moderate Muslims. This is a crucial distinction.

As [Ibn Warrag](#) has said, "There may be moderate Muslims, but Islam itself is not moderate." In other words, there are manifestly peaceful people who have no intention of working by violent or subversive means to impose Sharia on the

West, and who identify themselves as Muslims. This simple fact does not mitigate the other fact, that some high-profile moderates, such as Cleveland Imam Fawaz Damra, who signed the recent Fiqh Council of North America's fatwa against terrorism, turned out to be deceivers.

No one can claim that *all* peaceful Muslims are deceivers without being able to look into the soul of each one -- although I know that some ignorant and intemperate writers on Islam have made just such a claim. And to say that the Qur'an is the *Mein Kampf* of the jihad movement is not to deny the reality that many, if not most, people who identify themselves as Muslims are primarily interested in living ordinary lives, making a living, providing for their families, etc.

How could it be that the Qur'an could be the *Mein Kampf* -- that is, the inspiration and guidebook, the motivating force -- of the jihad movement, and yet there could be peaceful Muslims? In the first place, because jihadists themselves routinely invoke it as the justification for their acts of violence, and as a means to recruit other Muslims into their movement. Hundreds of photos are available online of jihad terrorists brandishing the Qur'an, often along with rifles or other weapons. And any cursory glance at the statements of jihadists shows them to be [filled with Qur'an quotes and appeals to other Muslims](#) that they represent "[pure Islam](#)."

Nor are these jihadists misrepresenting, twisting, or hijacking what the Qur'an says. Indeed, they are fiercely literalistic, taking the book's many martial verses at face value. There are over a hundred verses in the Qur'an that exhort believers to wage jihad against unbelievers. "O Prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell, an evil refuge indeed" (Sura 9:73). "Strive hard" in Arabic is *jahidi*, a verbal form of the noun *jihad*. This striving was to be on the battlefield: "When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield, strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly" (Qur'an 47:4). This is emphasized repeatedly: "O ye who believe! Fight the unbelievers who gird you about, and let them find firmness in you: and know that Allah is with those who fear Him" (Qur'an 9:123).

This warfare was to be directed against both those who rejected Islam and those who professed to be Muslims but did not hold to the fullness of the faith: "Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate" (Qur'an 9:73). This warfare was only part of the larger spiritual conflict between Allah and Satan: "Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah, and those who reject faith fight in the cause of evil: so fight ye against the friends of Satan" (Qur'an 4:76). "Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them captive, and besiege

them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is forgiving, merciful" (Qur'an 9:5). The "poor-due" in this verse is zakat, which is a central obligation for Muslims. Thus the verse is saying that if the "idolaters" become Muslims, leave them alone.

Jews and Christians were to be fought along with "idolaters": "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (Qur'an 9:29).

Jihad is the highest duty of Muslims: "Do ye make the giving of drink to pilgrims, or the maintenance of the Sacred Mosque, equal to the pious service of those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and strive with might and main in the cause of Allah [*jihad fi sabil Allah*]? They are not comparable in the sight of Allah: and Allah guides not those who do wrong. Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might and main, in Allah's cause [*jihad fi sabil Allah*], with their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah: they are the people who will achieve salvation" (Qur'an 9:19-20). In Islamic theology, *jihad fi sabil Allah* refers specifically to taking up arms for Islam.

Paradise is guaranteed to those who "slay and are slain" for Allah: "Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth" (Qur'an 9:111).

One may attempt to spiritualize such verses, but there is no doubt from the historical record that Muhammad meant them literally. They are also backed up by numerous passages of Islamic tradition and law. Nonetheless, the fact that warfare against unbelievers is not a twisting of Islam, but the Islamic mainstream, and is repeatedly affirmed in the Qur'an, Hadith, example of Muhammad, and rulings of every school of Islamic jurisprudence, still does not make every Muslim a terrorist.

There are several principal reasons for this. One is that because the Qur'an is in difficult, classical Arabic, and must be read and recited during Muslim prayers in that language only, a surprisingly large number of those who identify themselves as Muslims actually have scant acquaintance with what it actually says. Although the media establishment continues to use the words "Muslim" and "Arab" as if they were synonymous, most Muslims worldwide today are not Arabs. Even modern Arabic, much less classical Qur'anic Arabic, is foreign to them. They often memorize the Qur'an by rote without any clear idea of what it actually says. A Pakistani Muslim once proudly told me

that he had memorized large sections of the Qur'an, and planned one day to buy a translation so that he could find out exactly what it was saying. Such instances are common to a degree that may surprise most non-Muslims.

Other cultural factors have up until recent times also militated against Muslims, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, acting on or even knowing much about Islam's actual teachings on how to deal with unbelievers. However, that is changing: in those areas and elsewhere around the world, Muslim hardliners, though not always financed by Saudi Arabia, have made deep inroads into peaceful Muslim communities by preaching violent Islam as the "pure Islam" and calling Muslims back to the full observance of their religion. And they are doing it by means of the Qur'an.

So is the Qur'an the *Mein Kampf* of the totalitarian, supremacist move-

ment that is the global Islamic jihad? If we take seriously the words of the book itself and how they are used by jihadists, then it clearly is their inspiration and justification. Are we to ignore the jihadists' clear statements on this because they offend contemporary sensibilities? The challenge for genuinely peaceful Muslims today is to confront this fact, rather than deny it as Islamic apologists in the West so often do, and try to formulate strategies for a large-scale rejection of literalism in the Islamic community in America and worldwide, so that Muslims can coexist peacefully as equals with non-Muslims without the continuing recrudescence of this supremacist impulse.

Can it be done? The odds against it are prohibitive. But we do not do genuine Muslim reformers any favor whatsoever by denying that there is any work they need do with the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, or by pretending that the source of the problem is other than what it is.