

FOOTNOTES ON ISLAM AND WARFARE

Fight in the path of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress, for God does not love transgressors Quran. 2:186

Discussions have a tendency to become heated when conversation turns to the subject of Islam. At the heart of most debates are these questions: “what is it compelling them to do these things? Is this (act) representative of true and authentic Islam?”¹ In light of curious explanations normally posited which disregard Muslim behavior as un-Islamic it would be best for us to cast our eyes backwards to history for a few answers.² I suppose we should quickly assert that Islamic history forms the backdrop of any typical Mohammadan suicide bombing and/or attack of terror.³ This is not an easy picture to paint for people who know little Islamic history, are unable to read Arabic literature and simply are ambivalent to basic facts.

Usually attacks instigated by radical Muslims find their impetus in some engagement of battle within Islam’s past. For the adherent to a sect of Islam bent on confronting ‘other than Islamic ideas’, whether someone binds a bomb vest to their person or takes up a sword, gun or launches a missile, a historical precedent grounds his or her ideology in place. If this were not the case then what would be the point of the attack?⁴ There is ample proof from international

¹ An abundance of notation could be placed here to illustrate the occasions where suicide bombings have left throngs of people maimed, crippled, disfigured or dead. Moreover the numerous times where non-Muslim (and from time to time, Muslim) persons are attacked is well known and popular.

² Within the first decades of the history of Islam bloodshed is recorded as a distinct feature in the precincts of Islam. The political waves following the death of Muhammad left in its wake significant turmoil. The consequent division of Sunni and Shiite into separate factions who, more often than not, contrast themselves against the “other” as the true representatives of Islam is indisputable.

³ Whether one cites the literature or speeches of Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Muslim Brotherhood, Algeria’s Islamic Front, Osama Bin Laden, AlGamaa Al-Islamiyya or a host of others from Indonesia to Pakistan, their beliefs are popularly supported by masses of people. This invariably explains why they are mass movements—within their own nations—with relatives and friends deeply connected who not only live to support its causes and purposes but also maintain various branches that are willing to offer themselves as martyrs for the cause—of Allah.

⁴ For the latecomer to Semitic studies the study of Islamic history can be discomfiting. There are graphic scenes in Arabic—often sanitized in modern English translations—which project characters in the religion of Islam in an unwholesome way. And these were written by the earliest biographers of Muhammad. The total corpus of literature available today for our study is vast. Islam, unlike other religions, does not lack for material evidence or culture. There is ample archaeological artifact and the written correspondence is detailed and exact. What is often overlooked in oriental studies in Islam is the fact that the nations Muhammad and his later “Caliphs” conquered wrote extensively on the Islamic threat. When read critically these letters, royal documents, and other items paint a picture extremely different from the one portrayed in media outlets presently.

newspaper clippings of attacks taking place from day to day around the globe.

Islam's formation

Islam is a religion based upon the revelations given to their prophet Muhammad. He is credited with (re)establishing genuine monotheism in the earth. As the supposed heir to Judaism and Christianity, Islam is an amalgamated system of beliefs drawn from the contours of the peoples of the Middle East.⁵ The Jewish battles of the Old Testament are believed to be canonical in the same manner in which the peaceful Christ of Israel was believed to be the “anointed” one. So the Quran takes the dual position that warfare is lawful so long as an irenic leader like Muhammad⁶ adds legitimacy to the endeavor.

Revelations in the Quran are linked to specific episodes in the life and career of the prophet, depending on a Muslim sect's particular philosophy, there may be times where certain verses are abrogated or superseded by later revelations received in Muhammad's life.

⁵ Typically Islam is presented as the latest of the monotheistic religions, with Jews and Christians written up as “people of the book” in the Quran. There are a number of theological problems connected with this notion: (1) Jewish persons do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah nor do they affirm the Prophet-ship of Muhammad, believing both to be false spokesmen. This may be argued in various debates but the Talmudic literature is very clear on this point. Jesus is always spoken of in disparaging terms and Muhammad is not mentioned in Talmudic contents as the advent of Islam arrived later in time. (2) Christians read the New Testament in ways which are quite defiant. First John (2: 22-23) is clear that if you do not accept Jesus as the Messiah or the Sonship of Jesus, a spirit of anti-Christ is behind this reasoning. All the above views have created sizable tensions where they co-existed in times past. There are yet sparks today in Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Nigeria, Lebanon, Iran, among other places.

⁶ Ironically Muhammad has been recast as a model religious citizen in nearly all academic literature utilized on College campuses these days. Unique is the way the American Academy of Religion has produced a volume, “*Teaching Islam*” edited by Brannon Wheeler, pub. 2003. It is a remarkable document to read. Reading it one wonders if Muhammad and Jesus have ever been properly contrasted. The book suggests multiple ways in which undergraduate departments might give instruction on the religion of Islam to students. It is extremely apologetic. It is not scholarly, critical or academic, although it is well written and free of any jargon that might be offensive to a Muslim; it does not present anything that implies unseemly adventures of any type ever occurred in Islam's formative state. It really is a scandal that literary theories—in this mold—are shaping the minds of the young. The Bible has been critically studied for centuries now. We can also refer to the Society of Biblical Literature's 2005 volume, *Teaching the Bible: practical strategies for classroom instruction*. At least it is upfront about its designs: it is a ‘how to’ guide for scholars which ensures that students do not depart from a religion class believing Holy Scripture to be credible; and the Quran has rarely been studied so: and this because of the threats of death likely to ensue in the Middle East if one of their own scholars attempts it. In the West there is no excuse and still, engagement with the Quran exists more on a popular level than on a critical level. One exception might be a recent monograph by Christoph Luxemburg, which investigates the Quran from a philological vantage point and offers a variety of new hypotheses and readings.

The difficulty raised by these historic events is realized only when one attempts to untie the knots that entangle the truths behind why some Muslims find themselves “enjoined” to attack other humans.

Upon Muhammad’s ascendancy to power in the city of Medina in Saudi Arabia he created a legal system that, in many ways, was unlike any religious based juridical document ever brought into being. The constitution written by Muhammad stipulated the rights and responsibilities of those involved in his covenant community.⁷ Law breakers were treated as such and, for the most part, in the way natural to ancient times—often severely punished. The surrounding peoples of Arabia were not so welcoming to the prophet and so there was much bitterness and wounded pride. Muhammad, early on, campaigned all over Arabia, and his wars brought in a substantial amount of booty. The spoils taken from defeated Arabs, Jews and other lesser noted peoples were quickly assimilated, dispersed and used for future raids.

Going to war for spoil should not be seen as new. The historical lines of the strong going forth to conquer are long indeed. Some seven centuries before Julius Caesar (100BC-44BC)⁸ invaded Britain for their rumored pearls. His chronicles of war carefully scripted in his *Commentaries*⁹ contribute to the continual manipulations of his image. He was the *imperator*/emperor, the dictator-high priest-god, whose legacy has been heralded through the ages. The deceased poet Jorge Luis Borges has immortalized Caesar’s memory with a few short verses:

*Here lies that thing the daggers left behind,
that poor wretched thing, a dead man,
who was known as Caesar”.*

⁷ The Medina constitution is the cornerstone of Islamic Jurisprudence in Saudi Arabia today. Still too, the legal systems of Islam are varied. Multiple schools (madhabs) do exist, with each country interpreting various traditions differently.

⁸ Julius Caesar’s reception through time has been anything but usual. He is often thought to have exhibited genius and at other times is cited as one notorious individual. His legacy was secured in his adopted son Augustus, who went on to reign for four decades, occupying the Roman throne at the birth of Christ.

⁹ Caesar’s *Commentaries on the Gallic War and the Civil War* are still popular and were first readers for youth in the early period of American history. There are other works attributed to him but scholars are in doubt as to the verity of ancient traditions concerning their authorship. Caesar’s Latin writing is puristic and clean. He was the last of those writers whose style is direct and engaging and altogether unlike the style of his contemporary Cicero, the ancient barrister whose literary remains are many in number.

But Borges finishes his thoughts on Caesar by reflecting on the emergence of another Caesar, a future Caesar “*whose great shadow will be the whole world.*” Caesar’s goal of the Romanization of the world of his day—like Muhammad’s Islamic project—was spurred on a vision. The historian Suetonius (7) tells us Caesar had come across a statue of Alexander the Great and lamented the fact that Alexander had conquered the world by this time in his life. Later Caesar dreamed that he had raped his own mother. He found it so repugnant until soothsayers helped him with the interpretation: he was led to believe that the gods would give him power to overcome the whole earth, the universal mother.

It is in the context of these self inflicted visions and historic skirmishes that Quranic verses are given and heroic ‘worthies’ noted; these ambushes against supposed stronger armies are footnoted by all the noble deaths of Islamic warriors who will later find their names attached to generations of Muslim children.¹⁰ Also their deaths will be catalogued and referenced in generations to come (from the medieval times forward unto today) as the inspiration behind extremist attacks on infidels who are allegedly forcing followers of Muhammad to renounce Islam.

The whole point of jihad is “to struggle against the manly nature that serves as an obstacle to Islamic reform.” it may be the reform of the person and/or society. The internal war is waged as each Muslim seeks to overcome the passions of his or her own life and become a better Muslim, submitted to Allah (God). More popular and publicized is the “jihad”¹¹ which takes its form in subversive

¹⁰ It is not so clear in the Western world why names like ‘Osama’ and ‘Ali’ are important. History is of prime importance to Muslims and the naming of children is an important assignment too. One’s name reveals a family’s devotion to Allah, their knowledge of Islamic history, their patrilineage, their hopeful aspirations for son or daughter, and it binds to that child a conscious connection to the family heritage, namely Islam.

¹¹ The term ‘jihad’ is a highly inflated word and its currency is presently undergoing radical transformation. It has been removed from the ‘five pillars’ category in Islam: which are prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage and the profession. Georgetown professor, John Esposito has published many writings that have renewed popular interest in viewing Islam in a way that presents it as non-threatening. All polarizing perspectives are undercut in Esposito’s writings as he labors to construct an Islamic theory through which he can clarify historically, saying, “suicide” bombing is un-islamic and is not supported by the corpus of Islamic literature. One unspoken blot on his academic achievements is, as the founder of ‘The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding’ he has cleansed the image of Islam in America of many of its radical blemishes, and the Center has received multiple millions of dollars from the leaders of Saudi Arabia, a country whose Wahhabi Islamic views are known to be highly puritanical and oppressive to women. *Among the handwritten notes left behind in the belongings of the 9/11 attackers, was found inscriptions on Surah Al-Anam 6:162. This was their jihadi theme.*

or coercive actions of change. Yes, in times past when Muhammad sounded the alarm against his enemies accusing them of hindering the spread of Allah's will, these historic occasions have too, become the ground zero for present Muslim frustration with the West specifically, whose values—so Christian based—are impeding the progress of the Islamicization of European nations.

The reverse of this scenario may be read in the life of Alexander the Great whose biography is dominated by his love of Homer and his links to the Greek gods. It is believed that he offered animal sacrifices in order to curry favor with the gods during the period he marched his army onward and made war across Asia then further into the Far Eastern parts of the known world. His role in indirectly spreading Hellenism is comparable to the Islamists in this one way: both were/are under the impression that god was helping them as they defeated barbarian inhabitants and their ungodly cultural dogmas.¹²

Western oriented Muslims would oppose the above on the grounds that jihad is not to be used in this manner, that Muhammad never actually legitimized any deviant behavior and that any support for terrorist acts is not founded on any verse in the Quran. When it is supposed that the Quran states such then there must obviously be a misreading.

This cry is heard on Western television nightly! Amazingly when one sits and listens to Al-Jazeera, the Arab television network broadcasting out of the Middle East, legal verifications are profusely offered by clerics. However, this can only be pointed out on the Arabic network version.¹³ The English version although politically correct can be useful for ascertaining information which would never appear in other media formats.

Unfortunately, viewers, journalists and most generally Christian preachers have little training in Islamic source literature and would

¹² Religious figures that wage war on others are known to believe they are guided, in some measure, by a divine influence. Even Constantine (272AD-337AD) had the idea that God helped him, and the cross on his soldiers shields provided all the evidence he needed for the conversion of his empire to a state run Christian enterprise.

¹³ In the West, news broadcast begin with a simple 'welcome' and then the headlines are dealt with. In Middle Eastern contexts the programs begin with "Bismillah irahman irahem", which is "in the name of God the compassionate and merciful". This is hard to define in terms of cultural effectiveness but it demonstrates nightly the influence of Islam in the culture. One may dismiss it as an unintended consequence of the fifteen hundred year reign of Islam but one cannot ignore its daily occurrence or the fact of its presence.

not know where to begin to discover the roots of our modern extremist problems. So as a small sampling let us begin with the Great Islamic War “The Battle of Badr.”¹⁴ This war was fought around 624AD (2 A.H. on the Muslim Calendar). The Muhammadan raids were going well by then and the tribes of Quraysh (from Mecca) were sending goods back and forth and the prophet dared not continue to allow these transporters free access along the roads. The Qurayshi people had become fed up with the constant attacks, as well as losses suffered, and decided to fight back, which they did modestly attempt.

In short order there was a fight between a Muslim man, Hamzah abd al Muttalib and the pagan Qurayshi Abd al Asad. Asad was quickly killed with the sword and the masses of both armies rushed forward to battle one another. But here is where the scene is interrupted by an unusual act of piety. Sensing a possible defeat—they were fighting an army three times larger than them, Muhammad petitions Allah for success. After the prayer, in which our sources declare he bore his whole soul before God, he came to himself and Muhammad stated that he had seen a vision: one where Allah’s victory over the forces of (Qurayshi) evil were sure. He encouraged his soldiers of Allah by telling them “*by him who controls Muhammad’s soul, not one of you today fights and falls but God will enter him into paradise.*”¹⁵

A statement born out of troubled times like the one noted above is sure to be a safe and secure reference point for readers of the Quran and of readers of Islamic history. It is senseless today to follow the exegetical fallacies of scaremongers who perpetuate terror in the name of God but it is also incredible that so many Muslims are ignorant of their own histories and refuse to

¹⁴ The formative period of Islam is shot through with successive battles. The overspreading of the religion into surrounding areas happened at the instigation of Muhammad who believed this to be the will of God. As often stated in the Quran, “it (Islam) is the religion sent down (in Arabic) from above. It is impossible, I believe, for anyone to thoroughly interpret, exegete or exposit the Quran without facility in the history of these wars. It was during these conflicts (in Mecca) and wars (during Muhammad’s time residing in Medina) that each of the revelations concerning family, theology, life, civil virtues, neighbors and warfare were issued.

¹⁵ The specific interpretation of this saying may ‘seem’ obscure to non-Muslims but it is clear that Muhammad is declaring to his warrior league that all those who die on the battlefield today will enter paradise. The Quran is full of passages on paradise; the difficulty in the above passage is that entry to this blissful state is not predicated on one dying naturally only. Here the Muslim is enthusiastically invited to sacrifice himself for the cause of Islam, knowing that Allah is behind the scenes pulling the strings.

acknowledge its use as a foundational stone for so many modern day attacks. Sheikh Osama Bin Laden's¹⁶ Arabic sermons, from the one's I have listened to, are more contextually accurate than the one's published by Muslim propagandists who dot the lands of the West today. He was raised in Saudi Arabia and has a pretty good idea of the kind of utopian Islamic ideal he reads in history, and of the kind he desires to see governing the world today. A good place to begin one's quest along this line would be with *The Al-Qaeda Reader*, edited and translated by Raymond Ibrahim, published in 2007 by Broadway Books. Mr. Ibrahim is a Coptic Egyptian and he provides the reader with a potpourri of material for understanding Al-Qaeda and radical Islamist thought.

Mr. Ahmadenijad, President of Iran, may be a Shiite but he is an active Shiite in a nation that takes great pains to export its "Twelver" sectarian beliefs across the nation; and for good and ill mullah after mullah propagates this theology. The seminaries there are full of youth studying for the clergy; in contrast to Western claims of the young people's disdain for Islam and their cravings for Western democratic values.¹⁷

¹⁶ Osama Bin Laden received a strict and rigorous Wahhabi styled upbringing in the nation of Saudi Arabia. Originally his family was from the Yemen area, then they transplanted to the Kingdom where his father's business increased substantially. Osama was trained as an engineer and is a capable spokesperson for Islam. Each of his speeches are full of allusion to and citation of sources from the Golden Age of Islam. He, along with his comrades, desire to revive the foundations of Islam in much the same way Muhammad Abd Al-Wahhab (1703-1792) was able to capture all of Arabia, and put in place the religious sectarian view now currently endorsed by the government. What is not well known is that Abd Al-Wahhab's writings on "Tawheed" are exemplic of his views of how Allah is to be worshipped. It is for this reason that Shiites were murdered and still today are deemed heretics and un-islamic by Wahhabists. This strand of Islam also was and is foundational to the Taliban movement. Osama's goal of expanding Islamdom (daar Al-Islam) around the world is becoming more and more of a reality. Few publicly endorse Osama's objectives but the pictures which invaded the homes of the world on 9/11 and the subsequent cheerful rallies seen in various countries are proof of the esteem afforded him and his Al-Qaeda network.

¹⁷ For the most useful introduction to the radical theology of the Twelver Shiites see *Islam and Revolution: writings and declarations of Imam Khomeini*, translated and annotated by Hamid Algar published in 1981 by Mizan Press. Shiite theology assumes certain nuances are visible in the origins of their movement and Khomeini treats these perspectives in his lectures on Islam and Government, which are included in the volume. The lectures were given originally in Farsi while Khomeini was in exile in Iraq, Saddam Hussein being in power. This was also a period of unrest in Iran, for the Shah's popularity was in constant descent mode and Khomeini's disciples were multiplying his taped messages and dispersing them throughout the country. In Iraq Khomeini's star was eclipsed by the Marja Al-Taqlid Al Kho'I, a senior Islamic cleric. Al-Kho'I was apolitical in his stance on Islam's intrusion into government spheres. This policy caused minor frustrations for Khomeini while he was in Iraq. Later Khomeini's rage boiled over into vitriolic attacks on Al Kho'I was Khomeini assumed power years later after the shah's departure.

Understanding Islam and War is difficult at best because of the muddied waters involved in the vast sea of extant Islamic literature. One man says that Muslims only attacked when under threat of attack. Another says that Muslims fought only when physically harmed. Then too, another says that Mohammadan ideology no longer--if it ever did--subscribes to a jihadi mechanism which permits the killing of infidels in order to further the spread of the religion of Islam. To all the above it is best to say that the insurmountable evidence in Arabic, Turkish and Farsi stands counter to all these claims.

SOME SAYINGS ATTRIBUTED TO MUHAMMAD

- (1) Paradise is under the shadow of swords.
- (2) Wherever the believer's heart trembles on the path of God, his sins fall away from him as the fruit falls off a date palm.
- (3) He who draws his sword in the path of God has pledged his allegiance to God.
- (4) The one who fights so that the word of God may prevail is on the path of God.
- (5) The one who dies fighting in the path of God, God protects him from the testing of the tomb.
- (6) The unbeliever and the one who murders him will never meet in Hell.
- (7) A day and night of fighting on the frontier is better than a month of prayer and fasting.
- (8) Swords are the keys of paradise.
- (9) Every prophet has his monasticism, and the monasticism of this community is the Holy War in the path of God.
- (10) Expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian peninsula.

*The above sayings are taken from Al-Muttaqi Al-hindi (b.1472AD) who wrote an eight volume collection of hadith entitled "*Treasure of the doer of good deeds.*"

The Ottoman Empire ruled for nearly 600 years. Their rule was perpetuated by their tight and fierce embrace of Sunni ideology. Certainly, it was not permeated by the fanatical Ismaili sect of Islam who believed in targeted assassinations in the name of Allah, but both Jew and Christian can testify historically to the biased yet strict jihadi treatment leveled against them. As a dhimmi class¹⁸ (non-Muslim minority member) both Jewish and Christian groups were forced to pay a special tax--*jizya*, and wear certain clothing as markers of their infidelity (non-Islamic belief).

¹⁸ Class status is outlined in the articles and stipulations of Muhammad's Constitution of Medina. Clearly all who did not convert to Islam were required to pay fees and also enlist their services in Muhammad's armies as they conducted raids in surrounding districts.

A jihad waged in this way is more mental than anything because the majority religion superimposes itself—through Government legislation—upon the minority with a view to weakening their beliefs through forced humiliations. No wonder so many Jews and Christians converted in medieval times. Indeed it is no surprise, look at the historical record with respect to the kinds of deaths inflicted upon infidels at the time.

Viewing things accurately, there is little room for the manipulation of facts here. The Roman Catholic inquisitions were no better and the prejudices against Christians (and non-Jews) in Israel today are many. Thus a historical vantage point allows for a reconsideration of the data involved in the “Islam and War” case. I have mentioned little in regard to the Quran’s verses on war only because historical ground must first be covered. All too often a verse is lifted from here another from a surah farther down the line and there is little information added to contextualize the reading.

The Quran is a book that stitches threads together in ways which cause the reader to pull many strands, if he pulls on one at all. The historical theology of the texts is not Lutheran, nor Calvinistic. Though they may appear to read that way on a first reading, the ‘revelations’ therein are part of a broader Near Eastern scheme;¹⁹ a narrowing focus could be made on the impact of Hellenism upon specific features of early Islam.

Few tend to piece together the puzzling big picture: the “Quran” and the “Islamic annals” are viewed essentially, by all radicals, to be one and the same. Since each surah²⁰ emerged from a greater context the larger picture should be reconstituted if one is to understand a surah’s meaning. There are plenty of books purchasable today; few of them contain any information worthy of delicate study; nearly all of them are shot through with political correctness and that only exacerbates the ever growing problem of Western islamicization.²¹

¹⁹ Cf. *Islam and the religions of the Ancient Orient* by W.F. Albright.

²⁰ A surah refers to a chapter division in the Quran. As an Arabic word it is believed that each surah represents a set of ascending steps, taking the believer higher and higher in spiritual insight and revelation.

²¹ Several academics have gone in together and have created ASMEA, the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa. Publications authored by scholars of this group generally contribute balanced pictures of the histories of ancient peoples, along with new methodologies explaining the way forward amid the current global conflicts.

Some years ago, in classical language fields like that of Greek and Latin, there was a problematic issue of expurgated texts.²² Some of the old ancient authors wrote things that the Victorians thought would be counter-productive to the mind of the reader and so they purged the texts of those readings they deemed unsuitable for reader consumption. The reinstatement of all ancient textual readings began around fifty years ago and it is doubtful that expurgated texts are even published en masse now.

The expurgated construct, which once was preferred among old school classicists yet now disdained, is currently en vogue in multi-culturally based ideologies. Relativistic truth is happily received by most university professors but moral judgments are not welcome. The whole issue of Islam and War is a case in point: when an Islamic terrorist incident happens there is a ground swell of reporting, and articles, to ensure that listeners and readers are presented “expurgated” material for their mental sifting. For the one who feels victimized by the actions of a co-religionist this seems acceptable but for those who are interested in all the facts this is deplorable.

On another note the reason the cry “*Allahu Akhbar*” is shouted so often before, during and after hostile situations is because of its connotations. From a military standpoint it was associated with the warriors of Muhammad’s day. The men of the sword battled onward crying a slogan that sparked a fire for vengeance and retribution as they stood shoulder to shoulder with their Prophet.

²² The Loeb Classical volume of Books numbers over 500 volumes presently. They contain Greek (Green volumes) and Latin (Red volumes) books and are at the top of the line in quality. Scholarly opinions have shifted in the last fifty or so years. Early on in their history, although they were ‘cutting edge’ for their day, the fact that many lines were simply omitted led academics to avoid them as reference tools. The case has changed dramatically and now every ancient witness is able to speak clearly and completely without being censored. The current volumes are of higher quality than the old ones but this may derive from changes in production. I am not in agreement with the consensus opinion today that the scholars of that time were academically weaker than the editors of the day. There were notable people in the illustrious “Loeb” club of editors and translators. Where they lacked the broad inter-disciplinarian theories promulgated nowadays they made up for it through their clear but literal translations. For the linguist, few things reveal an understanding of a text as a literal formal equivalent statement. The ‘round-the-barn’ paraphrases today shift so often that we can rarely hang our hats--with confidence--on any peg of translation. So their alleged lack of ‘general scholarship’ is sidelined by their careful and transparently accurate verse and prose renditions.

The ‘Battle of Uhud’²³ is the one war in which the soldiers of Allah suffered a major military defeat. Muhammad was disrespected, rocks were hurled at him, and in the end one of his front teeth was dislodged. As the fight turned against the Muslims, it was recognized that in the midst of the death of so many Muslim soldiers that Muhammad lay exposed. The men surrounded him and tried to make their way back to camp. Each of the men guarding Muhammad was one by one being struck down until finally he was safely stationed and secure from danger.

It was at this moment that Muhammad spoke to Abu Sufwan and instructed him to ‘rise up and defend his religion.’ Upon standing Abu Sufwan cried out “Allah is Most Great and Glorious!” This terse reconstruction should be helpful as an aid for understanding the meanings of the Islamic battle cry. This cry was born during a situation in which it looked like all was lost. So now whenever it appears that Islam has been placed in the precarious position of defeat or in a circumstance where it appears that Muhammad is being dishonored or where Islam is attacked by pagans, this piercing cry is heard—aside from the daily calls to prayer.

Theologically “Allahu Akbar” embodied the essence of Islam: *Allah* (God), being the only true deity in existence, is *Greater* than all others! This shout of acclamation and affirmation would send shivers through the ranks as they fought their way to victory. In many ways it brought—and brings—the encouragement also noted in First Samuel (4:5-7) in the Holy Bible where the ark is brought into the camp of the Israelites as they prepared for war against the Philistines. The affirming presence of one’s God is most useful in times of despair.

‘*Allahu Akhbar*’ will always be the trigger and signal informing the nations that the speaker possesses a heart submitted to Allah, the God of the Muslims. If some of these opinions in this essay appear to be unfounded upon one’s first reading it should be read again, and then followed up with a thorough study of epochal literature from the first three hundred years of Islam. This period is considered by all informed Muslims to be the Golden Age of Al-

²³ The successive battles fought during Muhammad’s time and throughout the following centuries have been recorded by many notable Muslim historians. The Quran, the Hadith (traditional sayings) and the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq contribute useful information for the researcher and analyst of early Islam.

Islam. For it was the timeframe of the Prophet's companions and rightly guided descendants and the establishment of Islamic Law.²⁴

Nebraska

Moshe Hanna

²⁴ Islamic Law is commonly called the Sharia Law. It is a reference to a verse in the Quran and can safely be defined as “a higher way”. When Muhammad died there was a scramble to find a successor. Upon the assumption of the Caliphate by each successive leader there was a supposed resumption of divine governance. It is believed that as Islam developed, the traditions of the prophet came to be regarded as canonical, and this, alongside the Quran. For quite a number of Muslims—millions, in fact—the traditions of Muhammad and the Quran are the two documents which must always be united in order to come to some resolution of conflict. Where the Quran is silent the traditions speak, and vice versa. With such widespread Islamic mission fanned out across the face of the earth, as traditional sayings were passed down they morphed, multiplied and then were compiled. This is why there are so many ‘different sets of traditions’: some for Sunni, others for Shia and within these two are hundreds of sub groups and smaller sects who recognize one leader in opposition to another group’s leader. The Sunni and Shia do not constitute all the differing factions of Muslims, they only manifest the largest groups of the many million members of this constituent society. So Islamic Law is not a monolithic entity. It is based upon diverse views, all of which are hard to reconcile with the republican principles and values embedded in a democratic society.