



**Doctoral School  
of Social  
Communication**

## **THESIS SUMMARY**

**Peter Tibor Banai**

**Jihad**  
**Terrorism or Fight for Freedom?**  
**Multidisciplinary study of the concept**

Ph.D. Dissertation

**Supervisor:**  
**Zsolt Rostoványi, DSc.**  
Professor

Budapest, 2019



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**THESIS BOOK**

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# **1. Background of the research, its importance and structure of the dissertation**

Jihad. A word encountered almost daily in the media, however, the vast majority of Western journalists and the members of the public are not aware of its real meaning. It is lost somewhere between “holy war” and terrorism, although not too long ago, near the end of the Cold War, the same press (Western press) termed the struggle of Afghan mujahedeen against the Soviet Red Army jihad, that is freedom fight. Since September 11, 2001, several wars have broken out with this word but with an opposite meaning. What is terrorism for one side, is a fight for freedom for the other. (This may sound as a commonplace now but that doesn’t mean it is not true.) This asymmetrical dual concept forms the basis of the question: What is it in reality, freedom fight or terrorism? Who is right, which concept is adequate, is any of the two accurate?

As it currently stands, the press has harshly done away with this concept when it equated it with terrorism and brutality. Following 9/11 the Bush administration declared a global war on terrorism announcing that terrorism is dominantly driven by radicalized Islamic groups. After almost two decades the situation has become worse. Further armed conflicts, local wars, civil wars, proxy wars have broken out in the name of the global war against terrorism around the globe. The Arab Spring swept through the Middle-East and rapidly turned into “winter”; three years on DAESH/ISIS declared the Caliphate; in 2015 a wave of refugees a million and a half strong set off towards Europe, primarily from the locations of the war against terrorism.

As an observer (local correspondent, documentarist, researcher) I witnessed some of the process outlined above and therefore I had the chance to analyse the events from different points of views. This experience greatly helped me to familiarize myself with and understand the other side’s entirely opposing (but nevertheless in their realm *expressis verbis* adequate) opinion, interpretation of the same phenomenon.

The topic of this dissertation is jihad, the multidisciplinary analysis and conceptualization thereof. It sets out to prove the hypothesis that real jihad does not equal terrorism. What is the original, real meaning of jihad? Is there more than one type of jihad, and if yes, how do these relate to each other? What concepts have been associated with it

throughout its history and added connotations to its meaning? How does Islam relate to suicide attacks? What is terrorism?

The thesis metaphorically follows Islamic terminology in its content structure and is therefore comprised of two main parts, *usul* and *furu* (roots or base and branches), with the latter being made up of two further parts. Thus the work is made up of three parts essentially. The first part attempts to provide adequate answers to the questions above, as it is an essential objective of the thesis to clarify concepts related to the topic. The second part describes the structure of Islam and focuses on the question why the two constantly interacting and neighbouring civilizations of Islam and the West see the same things differently. The third is the central part of the thesis and discusses the type of Jihad carried out with weapons. This part contains subjectively selected case studies in chronological order, from Muhammad's time to the present, and searches for the answer to the question how an initially positive religious concept was filled with negative content in Western communication through Islam's 1400-year history. This is referred to as the metamorphosis of Jihad in the thesis. In this section Jihad is always placed in historic context of the given age, shedding light on factors, events and the backgrounds thereof forming and activating the concept. Beyond historical analysis it introduces the ideologists whose works have become significant in interpreting Jihad.



## 2. Methodology

Due to the complex handling of the topic, the dissertation applied methods of different scientific fields, often carrying out research on the boundary of these (multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach). Beyond relying on scientific fields of Islamic studies, history, communication, military science, foreign and security policy, civilization, cultural studies, sociology, psychology and philosophy it also applies a narrative approach and interviews, participant observation, taking advantage of the author's local experiences.

It was a criterion of the research to present the topic from the point of view of Muslims and frame their narrative with the methods of Western social sciences, in a Kuhnian approach, translating their language, lexicon. The thesis primarily investigates Sunni Islam, because what is currently defined as Jihad by the West and en bloc the world belongs to Sunni Islam *expressis verbis*. Nevertheless, it did not avoid researching the Jihad of the Shia and Khawarij branches as well thus providing a more complete picture of the topic but even more importantly it shows that the radical Sunni Jihad concept and practice of today is reflected in every aspect of the historic Khawarij ideology and methods of anathema.

### 3. The main findings of the dissertation

The concept of Jihad originates from the prophet Muhammad and it represents the striving, struggle on the path of the one God/Allah. The expression, as figura etymologica, appears in several places in the first and foremost source, the holy book of Muslims, the Quran. You can find it in both the Mecca and Medina chapters, with its spiritual aspect dominating in the former and its practical in the latter. In parallel the relevant categories are the lesser and greater Jihad. Greater Jihad is an internally directed struggle, it takes part in the soul of the believer, fought against temptations, to become a better man. This is something everyone is equally required to perform, a fard al-ayn. Lesser Jihad is directed outward, against injustice, and it is characterized by its nature by the protection of faith believed uniquely just by Muslims. Jihad carried out with weapons forms a part of this, which is defensive, announced by a legitim leader, follows strict rules and is a communal obligation, fard al-kifayah. Jihad in its general sense is not armed conflict, war. There are different expressions for that in Arabic. It is an important part of Islam but it is not a religious obligation, arkan al-din. This is the original meaning of Jihad. The study contains a separate chapter explaining that Jihad is not dawah by force, as the view is widely held that Islam was spread with force and Jihad was the vehicle or institution for this. In Islam, as in other religions, spreading and teaching the faith plays an important role, however, according to the original Islam teachings this can only be done with peaceful methods: „There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion.” (Quran 2:256).

The dissertation treats the question of martyrdom and suicide as prominent topics. Martyr death, as a possible consequence of Jihad, has an important role in Muslim culture and their whole society. It is also present in the Quran, as a recognized sacrifice brought for the community, and it is governed by strict rules, just as Jihad. Important original characteristics included not allowing people to end their own lives and to know the time of their death. It is extremely significant for Shias but has also been growing in significance among Sunnis. The thesis mentions that the first suicide attack in recent times was committed by Shias, however, it became a widely used „weapon” for Sunni radicals. On the other hand, suicide is considered haram by Islam, therefore suicide attacks are

never called that, instead they are referred to solely as acts of martyrdom. It even divides moderate Muslim scholars, while it is generally rejected, Palestine suicide attacks are accepted (with certain conditions) due to the asymmetry of the conflict in question.

The dissertation also discusses concepts that have added connotations to the original meaning of the topic or have essentially reinterpreted it, such as fundamentalism, Salafism, Islamism or Salafi Jihadism.

Terrorism is analysed in a separate chapter. The thesis discusses its history, describes it as an asymmetrical war and pointed out the anomaly of different legal definitions. The paper defines terrorism as the politically motivated use of force or threatening, the use of force against civilians.

The asymmetrical anticoncepts part examines enemy construction, as the cornerstone of exclusive thinking from the point of view of Muslims in a Koselleckian way.

The theoretical section on the structure, civilization and culture of Islam does not strictly belong to the topic, nevertheless forms an integral part of the dissertation. The central line of thought in this section is why we don't understand Muslims and why they don't understand us. This part also focuses on the structural changes in the two societies and discusses the different leadership and laws.

The metamorphosis of Jihad in the dissertation refers to the constant reinterpretation of the lesser armed Jihad. In classical Jihad studies the greater Jihad has an essential role. The modern interpretation of Jihad is almost exclusively limited to lesser Jihad and the armed variant thereof. The significance of greater Jihad has faded from our collective consciousness, while the interpretation of Jihad al-Asghar is considerably different from that of the original doctrine. This is equally true of both the communication of the Western world and radical Muslims. The original meaning of Jihad and its structure that was created throughout the ages does not matter anymore today. Armed Jihad is no longer fard al-kifayah, but something everyone is equally required to perform, a fard al-ayn. There is no more call to Islam or declaration of war and everyone has to be destroyed (Muslims or non-Muslims, children, women, elderly) who does not agree with the given radical group's or organization's understanding of Islam by any brutal means they choose.

Examining the historical movement of the concept from the birth of Islam to today, from Muhammad to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, we have to conclude that Jihad does not belong to the retraditionalizing process of Islam. It is dichotomous, because although it is already present in the fundamentals of Islam, it undergoes constant change on the time line and particularly recently it is activated more intensely and negatively through series of interpretations, as a process of independent opinion formation (ijtihad), that belongs to Islamic innovation and not a return to fundamentals.

Jihad always becomes significant when Islam is in crisis and the solution is sought in ancient, original teachings. An early example is the Khawarij movement and the radical Jihad interpretation that it brought about. This group was the first to secede from the Islamic community during the first fitna as a result of a disagreement on leading the community, in which they represented the notion that the consensus of the whole community is not required, one group's is enough. Because of their strict, radical principles, this minority group was constantly fighting the rest of the Muslim community and they perceived this as Jihad. This is already an example of the departure from the original teachings, since Muslims were fighting Muslims. The Khawarijs resolved this anomaly by designating the majority non-Muslims, infidels (takfir), and proclaimed that these people should be abandoned, ejected from the community, moreover their family members can be slain as well (istirad). The Khawarijs considered themselves the only Islamic community, at the same time this intransigent, excluding ideology made their community unsuitable for becoming a mass movement and therefore an important factor in Islam. Their principles have survived the movement, however, and can be seen in the modern interpretations of Jihad, in the ideology of the terror groups of global Jihad (see al-Qaeda, "Islamic State"). This is why the thesis argues that neo-Khawarij would be a more fitting description of these radical groups than Salafi Jihadists.

From the point of view of Islam, the crusades on the Holy Land and the armed Jihad that came about as the reaction to it, do not belong to the great crises of Islam. It has gained significance in today's crisis, because Muslims and so the current radical groups as well often refer to this age as the glorious moment kept in the collective memory of Muslims, the classical Jihad.

The relevant crisis of Islam is the invasion of the Mongols that resulted in the fall of the Caliphate for the first time. Ibn Taymiyyah, a prominent ideologist of his age, was an acclaimed theologian. Both lesser and greater Jihad was equally important to him, and he was the one to first advocate returning to the practice of the Salafi generation, purity in faith, as a solution to the crisis of Islam. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, if the military campaign is a preventive strike then the Jihad is fard al-kifayah, responsibility of the community, therefore not everyone has to take part. On the other hand, if there is a direct attack on Muslims, in fatal danger Jihad will be fard al-ayn and will be mandatory for all Muslims. The current radical terror organisations primarily refer to Ibn Taymiyyah in three points: the division of the world to Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb; the application of takfir; and defying the leader of the community, as a last resort killing them if they do not govern according to the principles of Sharia. Ibn Taymiyyah was the one who proclaimed takfir on the quasi-Muslim Mongols and their Shia allies. However, Ibn Taymiyyah applied these principles in the given age and given situation, on which the radical ideologists of today base general conclusions. Additionally, there are for and against arguments in Ibn Taymiyyah's works on these essential questions, therefore what is relevant is how later Jihad movements (see Wahhabism) and the current radical terror organizations refer to him.

Muslims regard European colonization as a defining collective trauma and consider it as an interference up until today. The crisis of Islam is more complicated than this, however, as in reality it is about a lengthy, internal crisis of Islam that was exacerbated by the external influence of the West. A type of reaction to this is the reform movements of the 18th and 19th centuries that carried out Jihad wars against the conquerors on one side and the subduing Muslim authority on the other. These did not introduce new elements to the metamorphosis of the Jihad doctrine.

Unlike the works of Maududi, written in the other end of the Islamic world. Maududi started his career when Atatürk's Turkey abolished the institution of the Caliphate, causing a trauma to the Ummah lasting until today. He was the first Muslim thinker to introduce the concept of Jahiliyyah, which is relevant to this topic, and raised the necessity of an Islamic revolutionary party.

This was adopted and refined by the intellectual leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb, who can be considered to be the ideological founder of modern-day Jihad. He was the first in a line of laymen ideologists, who determined the concept of Jihad going forward. He did not add anything original to the concept, but collected the items that today determine the radical interpretation of Jihad in his political action plan, the Milestones, a book widely popular in the Islamic world: the importance of greater Jihad disappears; highlighting lesser Jihad, fard al-ayn; the admiration of Salafism; applying takfir and executing the oppressor Muslim leadership; the Jahiliyyah society; and emphasizing the Islamic vanguard that starts the whole process. This is further radicalized with the followers and the given Muslim narrative starts to talk about “forgotten duty” (Faraj) with relation to Jihad. However, these movements came about as reactions to local problems. Opening out is part of their manifesto in theory only, if it is at all. For this Jihad interpretation to become international more was required. The ideology was lacking practical application. This was ultimately provided by the Afghani Jihad against the Soviet Union, which was again characterized by intervention from the West, albeit with a different premise.

Afghanistan became the birth place of global Jihad and the successfully waged war the dress rehearsal. A Muslim vanguard was formed, a base, al-Qaeda (Azzam) that exactly followed the ideological path laid by the predecessors and follows it to this day. This organization, as a foreign legion that can be deployed anywhere, reacted to the given local crisis of Islam, made use of the advantages of advanced technology and communication and globalized Jihad step by step in front of the eyes of the world (bin Laden). Islam’s existing crisis and the revolution in communication technology formed a dangerously combustible compound. Even though ideologists (for example Qutb, Azzam) marked the next stage of Jihad as a world-wide fight, this could not have happened without the evolution of technology that – stressing again – was very quickly adopted by the radical groups. In fact, global terror is the “bastard child” of globalization.

This tendency was further evolved by IS/DAESH (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), the organization formed from al-Qaeda and its rival at the same time. It gained its own territory, elevated the terror organization to a next, “state” level and proclaimed the

Caliphate. The “Islamic State” (just as al-Qaeda) innovatively used the possibilities offered by social media as well and this further catalyzed terror, as it provided boundless, direct and most importantly uncensored propaganda for them. In a way that is characteristic of radical organizations, it proclaimed that every bida'a is harmful that is not in the practice of Muhammad and the Salafis, but at the same time applies ijihad with regards to innovations that are advantageous for the organization and this is specifically significant relating to military and communication technologies, be it devices or systems. This ambivalence is generally true of the organizations' ideology: from the teachings, different sources, the Quran, the Hadiths they select what is suitable for them and legitimize them through their actions. This technique can be found elsewhere as well, it is not unknown in Islam, however, the extreme, ruthless methods they use to legitimize their own interpretation of Islam are. The essence is in the methods. You cannot put an equal sign between the Muslims following the practice of the “moral ancestors” and the suicide attackers, the neo-Khawarijs fighting with brutal methods based on the common ideological set, as real Jihad is does not equal terrorism.

#### **4. Possible use of the dissertation**

Modern global Jihad exported the crisis of Islam and made it global. Be it internal or external factors, currently there is no chance for a quick resolution, this process will drag on for a long time. With a sensitive topic such as this one, there is always the question asked, what is the solution (the causes of the crisis have to be eliminated)? Instead of this, the dissertation discusses what we can do.

The two worlds, Islam and the West still does not understand each other despite coexisting for centuries and continuous interaction. To get a clear idea of where we stand it is enough to read through a school thesis on Muhammad's age or look up the Jihad entry in a lexicon. The situation is the same on the other side, if not worse. Therefore, we have to learn about the other, from the other. Get to know the other's lexicon, communication, language, thoughts, etc. communicate and make decisions with these in mind.

The author hopes that this work will help us achieve this.



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## 6. My own publications on the topic

### Study

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- BANAI Tibor Péter (2001): Highway to Heaven (English version). Ismeretterjesztő dokumentumfilm. (Rendező, szerkesztő, operatőr, társsproducer.) Tivoli Filmprodukción. 87 perc.
- BANAI Tibor Péter (2006): Cross in the Crescent. Dahab outrage 2006. Documentary. (Director, editor, DoP, producer.) 17 min.
- BANAI Tibor Péter (2006): Hot summer of 2006 - Lebanon. Documentary. (Director, editor, DoP, producer.) 15 min.
- BANAI Tibor Péter (2007): TOLA - Transatlantic Opinion Leaders in Afghanistan. Documentary. (Director, editor, DoP, producer.) 25 min.