DISPUTED CONTOURS OF MUSLIM WARFARE

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Abstract - The justificatory bases of Muslim warfare (jihad)have long been subject to various interpretive analyses which have taken customary, literalist, revivalist or reformist modalities of interpretations. None the less, it is possible to identify two major streams, namely the 'moderate' and 'radical' schools of thought. Though these schools do not have a unified or homogenous voice, one may readily discern some central themes that they commonly address. The principal bone of contention between the moderate and radical schools appertains to the question whether a legitimate Muslim war fare is confined self-defence alone, or whether it may well go beyond defensive wars and be fought in furtherance of such political ambitions as expanding Muslim sphere of influence, and/or taking punitive measures against idolatry, immorality or apostasy. Moderate scholars, in brief, envision that militant jihad is merely an instrument of self-defence to be invoked when all feasible efforts to peacefully resolve a conflict have come to naught. Radicals, on the other side, generally view jihad both as an instrument of self-defence and of effectuating socio-political change. Over the past decades, the latter view has gained notable traction, which is evinced by the growing scale of politico-religiously motivated violence. In their quests to thwart all Western influence in the Muslim world, and to replace 'un-Islamic' regimes with theocracies with a view to eradicating immoral or sinful practices, fundamentalists lay heavy stress on warlike jihad. The aim of this paper is to subject these main intellectual stands on Islamic *jus ad bellum* to critical scrutiny. It will in essence expose that the mainstream depiction of the doctrine of jihad is generally mono-dimensional, which highlights either peaceful or warlike aspects thereof, thus failing to capture the overall Islamic just war tradition within its relativistic and historically contingent framework. The paper will further unravel that contemporary discourse on jihad, in principle, concentrates only on selective portions of Muslim sources and patchy manifestations of Muslim State practice—a method which generates mutually incompatible verdicts as to whether jihad comprehends offensive wars. It will, in this vein, be elucidated that partisan references to Muslim sources has contributed little to the emergence of a convincing meta narrative on the defining features of jihad. The paper will first subject the central ideas advanced by these two schools to critical scrutiny, and it will then proceed with the presentation of a more nuanced depiction of warlike jihad.