

# TAWARIKH

International Journal for Historical Studies

KAMALDEEN OLAWALE SULAIMAN

## The Concept of *Jihad* in Islam: An Historical Perspective

**ABSTRACT:** *Islam, the youngest of the three Semitic religions in the world today, is the fastest growing religion on earth. As a result, it faces a lot of criticism and blackmail directed at its adherents as well as renowned Muslims. The Islamic view on "shariah" (divine law), "hijab" (headscarf), polygamy, and, above all, "jihad", are erroneously and mischievously translated by some non-Muslims historians. "Jihad" to them is nothing but war, terrorism, assassination, and using the sword's edge to convert non-Muslims to Islam. This paper intends to analyze the historical perspectives of "jihad", the concept, justifications, and the methods of recruitment of soldiers in "jihad". It also analyses the Islamic instructions for Muslims in war front and the treatment of Islamic prisoners of war. The method of approach is purely from written sources, which comprise of documents, monographs, manuscripts, books, journals as well as magazines. The study reveals that those wars fought by the Muslims were for their own protection and that of the faith. Likewise, the issue of forceful conversion to Islam, either by the edge of the sword or barrel of a gun, as often ranted by some non-Muslim historians, holds no ground in Islam. The paper, therefore, recommended that one should look into the early history of Islam and see that it was the Muslims that were cheated, humiliated, banished, and their properties were confiscated. The paper concluded that the assertion of some non-Muslims that Islam spread through violence, and people were forced to either accept Islam or die by sword is not only untrue but also baseless.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Islam, concept of "jihad", faith, Islamic instruction, non-Muslims historian, fundamentalists, conversion, terrorism, and misperceptions on Islam.*

### INTRODUCTION

Islam, the youngest of the three Semitic religions in the world today, is the fastest growing religion on earth. Within the last half of this century (1934-1984 and since), the global population of Muslims has increased by 234% (WI, 1990; and Sulaiman, 2013b). As a result, it faces a lot of criticism and blackmail etc directed at its adherents as well

as renowned Muslims. The Islamic view on *shariah* (divine law), *hijab* (female headgear that exposes face but not ears, neck, or hair), polygamy and, above all, *jihad* are erroneously and mischievously translated by some non-Muslims historians. *Jihad*, to them, is nothing but WAR, terrorism, assassination, and using the sword's edge to convert non-Muslims to Islam.

**About the Author:** Kamaldeen Olawale Sulaiman, Ph.D. is a Lecturer at the Department of Religious Studies ESU (Ekiti State University) in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. For academic interests, the author is able to be contacted via phone at: +2348068298472 or via e-mail at: [drsulaimanko@yahoo.com](mailto:drsulaimanko@yahoo.com)

**How to cite this article?** Sulaiman, Kamaldeen Olawale. (2015). "The Concept of *Jihad* in Islam: An Historical Perspective" in *TAWARIKH: International Journal for Historical Studies*, Vol.7(1) October, pp.111-120. Bandung, Indonesia: Minda Masagi Press, ISSN 2085-0980.

**Chronicle of the article:** Accepted (February 23, 2015); Revised (June 1, 2015); and Published (October 28, 2015).

This paper, therefore, would indeed expose the answers to questions lurking in the corners of non-Muslims minds. It also looks at the definition of *jihad*, the reasons and types of *jihad* in Islam. Likewise, it examines the methods of recruitment of Islamic soldiers when the need for physical war arises against persecution by pagans, especially at the early stage of Islam; the instructions for Muslims in war front; and the conditions for treatment of Islamic prisoners of war.

### ON THE JIHAD IN ISLAM

**Definition.** *Jihad* is an Arabic word, which has a wide meaning. The nearest English translation is “struggle” or “striving” i.e. “to exert utmost endeavour in promoting a cause” (Cowan, 2004). Therefore, a man striving in promoting literacy is on a *jihad* against illiteracy. Also, a man striving with his material resources, feeding the poor and the needy, is on a *jihad* for promotion of human welfare. Any social welfare worker is on *jihadist*. A man who engages in lawful business to feed his family is similarly a *jihadist*. Likewise, a man who is calling people from lust of immorality and materialism to a perfect divine spiritual guidance is also a *jihadist*. In the same vain, groups of people or community that engages in armed struggle, war, to defend the weak and oppressed people from the hands of tyrannical leader, or an oppressive system, are making *jihad*.

This means that the word *jihad* is like a sword or knife with two sharp edges. It can be used positively as a term in qualifying a cause for divine guidance, social, and ideological goals, beneficial to all segments of the community. Conclusively, it has now seen that the word *jihad* has a broad meaning. Therefore, the non-Muslims historians who narrowed the meaning of the word *jihad* to only violence, war, and using force to covert non-Muslims to Islam are wrong. In fact, it is sheer blackmail and an attempt to discourage people from accepting Islam.

**Reasons for Jihad in Islam.** Since *jihad* has a broad meaning, the reasons and types of *jihad* in Islam could be summarized as follows: (1) *jihad* in search of knowledge; (2) *jihad* in spread of knowledge; (3) *jihad* in seeking

one’s *halal* or allowed daily need; (4) *jihad* in defending one’s honour against any enemy, as cited in the *Al-Qur’an*, verse 22:39; (5) *jihad* against an oppressive and tyrannical leader, as cited in the *Al-Qur’an*, verses 4:74 and 75:2; (6) *jihad* in providing social welfare services to the less privileged in the community; and (7) *jihad* in protecting one’s soul against evil desires of unbelief is the greatest of all *jihads*, as stated by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu ‘Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him). These are the types of *jihad* we have in Islam.

In fact, Christianity and Judaism agree with Islam on *jihad* against aggressive enemies and oppressive leadership (Maududi, 1955:99; and Ashafa, 1999:12). The reason is that Islam recognises the human nature. Hence, when one’s honour, integrity, and property are attacked or invaded by enemies with weapons, Islam gives authority for Muslim victims to rise and wage a *jihad* to defend their honour. But, Islam warns us not to exceed limits or attack innocent people. The appropriate Qur’anic verse reads as follows:

God forbids you not with regard to those who fight you not for (your) faith, nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them; for God loveth those who are just (*Al-Qur’an*, 60:8, as cited in Asad, 1980).

Also, Islam in its preaching of the sanctity of human life says, as follows:

[...] take not life, which God hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law: thus doth He command you, that ye may learn wisdom (*Al-Qur’an*, 6:151, as cited in Asad, 1980).

Islam considers all forms life as sacred. However, the sanctity of human life is accorded a special place. The first and the foremost basic right of a human being is the right to live. The *Al-Qur’an* says, as follows:

[...] if any one slew a person unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people (*Al-Qur’an*, 5:32, as cited in Asad, 1980).

Such is the value of a single human life, that the *Al-Qur’an* equates the taking of even one human life unjustly, with killing all

of humanity. Thus, the *Al-Qur'an* prohibits homicide in clear terms.

Unfortunately, Islam in general is misunderstood in the Western world; perhaps no other Islamic term evokes such strong reactions as the word of *jihad*. The term *jihad* has been much abused, to conjure up bizarre images of violent Muslims, forcing people to submit at the point of the sword. This myth, according to ABF (Al-Balag Foundation) in 1999 and K.O. Sulaiman in 2011, was perpetuated throughout the centuries of mistrust during and after the Crusades (ABF, 1999:3; and Sulaiman, 2011:45-47). Unfortunately, it survives to this day.

Thus, Islam enjoins its believers to strive utmost, in purifying themselves, as well as in establishing peace and justice in the society. A Muslim can never be at rest, when she sees injustice and oppression around her. However, regardless of how legitimate the cause may be, the *Al-Qur'an* never condones the killing of innocent people. Terrorizing the civilian population can never be termed as *jihad* and can never be reconciled with the teachings of Islam. Even, according to A.A. Moududi (1979) and K.O. Sulaiman (2014c), Western scholars have repudiated the myth of Muslims coercing others to convert (Moududi, 1979; and Sulaiman, 2014c:368-387).

History makes it clear, however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims, sweeping through the world, and forcing Islam at the point of sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated. Muslims ruled Spain for roughly 800 years. During this time, and up until they were finally forced out, the non-Muslims there were alive and flourishing (Raji, 2001:10; and Sulaiman, 2010).

Additionally, Christian and Jewish minorities have survived in the Muslim lands of the Middle East for centuries in the countries, such as Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (Akbar, n.y.:54; and Sulaiman, 2010). Even, a popular *Hadith* relates that:

An unbeliever met the Prophet under a tree sleeping, he quickly removed the Prophet's sword and then woke him up and asked, "Who will save you from not being killed now?". The Prophet

answered, "Allah!"; and the sword suddenly fell from the enemy! The Prophet got hold of it, but only asked the man to go! (cited in Dauda, 1993; and WAMY, 1993:32).

For this reason, the man later accepted Islam. In four places in the *Al-Qur'an*, Allah asked Muslims to forgive those who wrong them and return the evil with good deeds. Only once He calls for retaliation. He still concluded that verse that to forgive is better and more rewarding. *Al-Qur'an*, verse 42:40-43, stated "*And the recompense of an injury is an injury the like thereof; but whoso forgives and his act brings about reformation, his reward is with Allah, surely He loves not the wrong doers*" (cited in Asad, 1980). Also the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 23:96, verse 41:34, and verse 45:14, stated "*Repel evil with that which is best [...]*" (cited in Asad, 1980).

Even, disgracing or reviling others' beliefs is forbidden in Islam, as Allah SWT (*Subhanahu Wa-Ta'ala* or God Almighty) says in the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 6:108, "*Do not revile those whom others invoke instead of God, lest they in retaliation revile Allah out of ignorance*" (cited in Asad, 1980). The Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) exemplified this in his response, when it was said to him, "*Pray to Allah against the polytheists and curse them!*". The Messenger SAW replied, "*I have not been sent as the invoker of curses; I have only been sent as a mercy*" (cited in Muslim, 1393 AH, No.1192).

In another *Hadith*, he is also reported to have said, "*I have been sent to join ties of relationship*" (cited in Muslim, 1393 AH, No.410); and when Aisha wanted to retort to some Jews who had insulted the Prophet, he said to her, "*O Aisha, be gentle and beware of being harsh and of saying evil things*" (cited in al-Bukhari, n.y., No.410; and Khan, 1981).

This considerate relationship is extended to the permission for Muslim men to marry upright or chaste Christian or Jewish women (*People of the Book*), as cited in the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 5:5 (Asad, 1980). According to the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 5:5, Muslims are also allowed to eat meat slaughtered by Jews or Christians (cited in Asad, 1980; and IET, 1430/2009:50).

**The Methods of Recruitment of Soldiers in Islam.** The manner of recruitment of Islamic soldiers when the need for physical war arises, either against an oppressive leader or enemy invasion, are as follows:

Firstly, in Islam, a section of *ummah* (Islamic society) is not trained as soldiers, while others are civilians. Every man, youth and even women that were physically strong and healthy were prospective soldiers of Islam (Ramadan, 1961:108). Secondly, the right of defending the territory lies in the hands of every Muslim member of that community, as cited in the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 9:123 (Asad, 1980). Thirdly, they must be full of compassion, to every old man, woman, and child that has not taken arms against them (al-Bahnasawy, 2004:67).

Therefore, those who have the belief that their God is worth its name of protection and need not be defended by his believers, have some questions to answer. In whose cause were the 2 million trained soldiers of Moses fighting? Were the wars fought by Prophet Moses AS (*Alaihi Salam* or peace be upon him) and Prophet David AS different in consequence (as per victims) from those fought by Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him)?

Although Allah demonstrated before and during the life of the Prophet Muhammad SAW that He can protect His interest by Himself, e.g. *Suratul Fill* in the *Al-Qur'an*, where Allah sent birds over King Abram who intended destroying the *Ka'aba* about 570 AC (After Christ); and the episode of Prophets Ibrahim, Daniel, Yusuf, etc., He at the same time wanted man to protect himself as a test of faith. His fighting to protect his faith was what is seen as fighting in the cause of God and not for Allah's interest. For whoever believes in God would certainly be tested in one way or the other (cf IET, 1992:10; and Ahmad, 2001:57).

Those wars fought by the Muslims were for their own protection and that of the faith. It is, therefore, part and parcel of the Islamic belief system. It is part of the fundamental human rights of any man to practice any religion he believes. There is no compulsion in religion, as the Holy *Al-Qur'an* stated. An attempt to prevent a Muslim from observing his beliefs to the fullest is tantamount to aggression, which

he must resist if he has to keep his faith. And this is the reason behind the wars fought by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Asad, 1980:61; and Abdalati, 1994:25).

According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2003) and K.O. Sulaiman (2014a), Allah creates man and grants him power of free will to differentiate between good and bad. For anyone who associates himself with, Allah shall be duly rewarded. Everyone is the architect of his own destination in the life to come, and no one should force a Muslim to prefer hell to paradise. Hence, he has to fight the bullish aggressor if he cannot run from him (al-Qaradawi, 2003:49; and Sulaiman, 2014a:63-78).

### THE ISLAMIC INSTRUCTIONS FOR MUSLIMS IN WAR FRONT

In Islam, when *jihad* is applied in physical war, instruction is given as follows to its soldiers:

Firstly, go in the name of Allah and in the religion of the Prophet of Allah! Do not kill the very old, the infant, the child, or the woman. Do not cut down trees, bring all the booty, holding back no part of it, maintain order, and do good, for Allah loves those who do good (cited in Ramadan, 1961:108; and al-Bahnasawy, 2004:67).

Secondly, this quotation of Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) was even used by G.J.O. Moshay (1990). Whenever situation arises for war, for self-defence and to protect the oppressed from the hands of oppressors, it gave the above marvellous instruction to its soldiers (Moshay, 1990:22). That is, in simplicity, the innocent, weak old men, women, children, and infants should not be humiliated or killed.

Thirdly, furthermore, under *Hazrat* Abubakar Siddiq RA (*Radiallahu Anhu* or may God bless him), the first Caliph after the death of Prophet Muhammad SAW, the following instruction was issued to the Muslim Army led by Usamah:

Do not mutilate and disfigure your enemies after you have killed them. Do not kill the children and old men who cannot fight. Have nothing to do with women (do not kill them). Do not destroy the groves (date, palm, and others). Do not

resort to arson. Do not cut down a tree yielding fruit. And slaughter only as many animals as you actually need for your food. You will come upon people who have devoted themselves to churches and monasteries. Leave them alone and let them pursue the mission for which they have renounced the world. Do not kill animals and waste their meat that can serve as food for others later on (cited in WI, 1992:43; and Sulaiman, 2012:17-35).

This is the statement of the Commander in Chief of the Muslims. So, then, the word of Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) does not contradict the Almighty Allah as contained the *Al-Qur'an* but rather, correspond to each other, another e.g. the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 2:193, said as follows:

And fight on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility, except to those who practice oppression (cited in Asad, 1980).

In proving that the purpose of war is not for slavery or conversion, precepts were laid down by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) when some Emperors, who massacred Muslim emissaries sent to Byzantium, were subdued. In his celebrated correspondence with the then Emperor Heracu of Byzantium, the Prophet Muhammad SAW gave three proposed alternatives for the King, i.e. "embrace Islam if not pay the *jizyah* tribute if not, do not divide between thy subjects and Islam, if the former desire to embrace Islam is not, pay the *jizah* (cited in Hamidullah, 1987:32; and Malik, 1998b:35-38).

**On Animals.** In Islam, animals are creatures of Allah Almighty, including those living in the water: fishes, reptiles, and other amphibians. Insects as well as four footed beasts, birds, including all animals that fly, all have a life to live. They all form communities like ours, as stated in the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 6:38. They are created to serve various purposes for man, according to the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 16:5-8 (cited in Asad, 1980).

Therefore, Islam forbids cruelty to the animal kingdom. The final Prophet of Islam, Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam*

or peace be upon him), narrates two types of people. The first is a woman who tied up her cat and refused it food till it died. The Prophet Muhammad SAW called her a woman who would go to hell, because of her cruelty to this cat. The second is the man, who saw a thirsty dog, got water from the well, gave it to the dog by helping the dog drink to quench its thirst. For this kindness to the animal, the Prophet Muhammad SAW said the man has got his ticket to enter Paradise. In the battle-front, the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companion forbid Muslims from killing women, children, and animals, cutting economic trees, and damaging crops (cited in Asad, 1980:76; and WAMY, 1993:32).

The *Al-Qur'an*, verse 76:7-9, in the same vein, enjoined Muslims to treat animals kindly and feed them for the sake of Almighty Allah, not only the captive, but domestic animals, orphans and the needy (cited in Asad, 1980).

**The Treatment of Islamic Prisoners of War.** In Islam, war always came as the last resort after all peace negotiations have failed. When the armies are all drawn up ready for battle, Muslim army must call their opponents for the last time to see if they would accept a just and peaceful solution. Then, the final order would be given by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) to his companion, whenever there is a failure to broker a truce, the Commander of the Muslim Armies was saying, as follows:

Go in the name of Allah, and the Prophet of Allah and the deen (religion) of Allah, don't kill old men, women, and children, don't kill animals, don't destroy crops (cited in Ramadan, 1961:108; al-Mubarakpuri, 2002:118-123; and al-Bahnasawy, 2004:67).

Then came the command, YOU MUST NOT INJURE A PRISONER OF WAR, they are to be treated kindly without humiliation (cited in IET, 1992).

On treatment of prisoners of war, it reads as follows:

Actually, in one recorded case, some prisoners of war became Muslim, because they observed that their Muslim captors were giving them better food than themselves were eating. It softened their hearts and brought them to Islam [...].

Prophet Muhammad SAW, when he entered Makkah victoriously, did not go about

ostentatiously like big leaders who walk on the earth proudly. He was lowering his head in Sajda until it touched his camel. When he gathered the unbelievers, who had earlier persecuted him and tortured Muslims around the Ka'aba, he said to them: "What do you think I am going to do to you?". They said: "You are our honoured Brother, son of an honoured Brother". He said: "YOU MAY GO, YOU ARE ALL FREE". Such was and still is the treatment of prisoners of war under Islam (cited in Ismaeel, 2000:59; Ahmad, 2001:57; and al-Bahnasawy, 2004:67).

**No Compulsion in Islam.** Many people think that Islam was spread by the sword. The *Al-Qur'an* itself makes it clear how its message is to be spread. The Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) was told by Allah that "*your duty is only to proclaim*", according to the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 36:17; "*Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching*", according to the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 16:125; and "*let there be no compulsion in religion*", according to the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 2:256 (cited in Asad, 1980).

Infact, Islam itself (besides preaching peace) means "conscious and total submission to the will of Allah". If someone is forced to become a "Muslim", he is submitting to the will of the one who forced him and not Allah. The Prophet Muhammad SAW was a man of peace and preached peaceful co-existence between the Muslims and non-Muslims throughout his life. The *Al-Qur'an*, verses 21:107, 16:125-128, 33:21, 68:4, 49:9, 57:16, etc., condemned violence and aggression in any form, all these references admonish believers to be peaceful in deeds and conducts (cited in Asad, 1980).

Though, Islam recognizes the fundamental human rights of man of the freedom of religion. Its teachings are against injustices which should not be meted to animals and even crops, much more to a human being even a captive on the war front, who is the vicegerent of Allah on earth, and the most honoured among His creatures. Allah commands Muslims to repel evil with goodness (*cf* Asad, 1980:61; WAMY, 1993:32; and Raji, 2001:10). The command, according to the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 22:39-40, is as follows:

Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed, and most surely Allah is well able to assist them.

Those who have been expelled from their homes, without a just cause except that they say: "Our Lord is Allah and had there not been Allah's repelling some people by others, certainly they could have pulled down cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered; and surely Allah will help him who helps His cause, most surely, Allah is strong, mighty" (cited in Asad, 1980).

The issue of forceful conversion to Islam, either by the edge of the sword or barrel of a gun, as often ranted by some non-Muslim historians, holds no ground in the Muslim Scripture, *Al-Qur'an*, verse 2:256, which categorically states: "*Let there be no compulsion in religion*" (cited in Asad, 1980).

If one looks into the early history of Islam, one would see that it was the Muslims that were cheated, humiliated, banished, and their properties confiscated. On many occasions, they were tortured and beaten to a state of coma, throughout the 13 years early stage of Islam in Makkah. Muslims were tolerant as Allah commanded them not to fight back, but continue to establish regular prayer and give charity, according to the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 4:77 (cited in Asad, 1980). They rather migrated to Madinah.

Then, the Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu 'Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) continued, through persuasion and peaceful means, preaching Islam to the unbelieving Arabs and Jews likewise Christians around him. He sent emissaries to the rulers of the Byzantine and Persian empires, etc. inviting them to Islam. Some of the envoys were killed in the course. It is also on record that some of the emperors amassed troops, in preparation to attack the Muslims (ABF, 1999:3; and Sulaiman, 2014c:368-387).

At long last some pagans marched forward on the Muslim state of Madina to eliminate it. The Muslims, therefore, prepared themselves to defend their honour, after being banished from their houses and still pursued them to Madina. Allah, according to the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 2:190-193, commanded the Muslims to fight back in defence of their honour; and consequently gave them victory (cited in Asad, 1980). The entire Arabian Peninsular came under the banner of Islam, likewise, the Persian and much of the Byzantine empire.

To confirm the spread of Islam by peaceful means is to discover in reality that on the world map till date, the largest concentration of Muslims is in the continent of Asia where there is no war. There are about now 1 billion in the world today to be found in more than 70 countries. This is to count countries where the Muslim population is indigenous. Islam is now the second largest religion in Europe. Islam is a world-wide faith as Christianity. Adherents are everywhere, Christianity has Europe and the Americas; and for Islam is Asia and Africa (Hitti, 1937; Trimmingham, 1962; and Clark, 1982).

What is striking is that Islam's strength in Africa is rapidly growing. Perhaps one in three Africans is Muslims. This increase is in the area south of the Sahara (Black Africa), which arose the argument of some fanciful geographers that Islam is intrinsically a religion of the nomads of the desert and the pastoral people of its fringes (*cf* Egharevba, 1934; Ayilara, 1967; Balogun, 1971; al-Illory, 1978:18; Doi, 1985; Balogun, 2001:220; and Sulaiman, 2013a).

The fact is that the four largest Muslim countries in the world today are Indonesia in Southeast Asia; and Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India in South Asia, where the adherents are farmers of rice, wheat, jute and cotton, fishermen and artisans, educated townsmen and illiterate country folk; proof that the total, all-encompassing dictates of this faith have a universal appeal, that is still very much alive (Hamidullah, 1987; and Abdalati, 1994). Therefore, the question now is that did Islam reach these far Asian countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India by the sword of the Arab nomad of the desert? The answer is absolute NO! They accepted Islam through the examination of the truth and beauty of the religion.

Let's read what a British civil engineer, *who* traveled extensively in search of the Divine truth having spent much in research and comparative study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; and who finally embraced Islam in 1975, by name Ahmad Holt, said as follows:

The sword of Islam is not the sword of steel. I know this by experience, because the sword of Islam struck deep into my own heart, it didn't bring death, but it brought a new life; it brought

an awareness and it brought an awakening as to whom I am and what I am and for what I am here? (cited in Sulaiman, 2014b:121).

In addition, the glorious *Al-Qur'an* itself makes it clear how its message is to be spread. The Prophet Muhammad SAW (*Salallahu Alaihi Wassalam* or peace be upon him) was told by Allah that: "*Your duty is only to proclaim*" as cited in the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 36:17; "*Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching*" as cited in the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 16:125; and "*Let there be no compulsion in religion*" as cited in the *Al-Qur'an*, verse 2:256 (cited in Asad, 1980).

In fact, Islam itself (besides preaching peace) means "conscious and total submission to the will of Allah". If someone is forced to become a "Muslim", he is submitting to the will of the one who forced him and not Allah. The Prophet Muhammad SAW was a man of peace and preached peaceful co-existence between the Muslims and non-Muslims throughout his life. The *Al-Qur'an* in verses 21:107, 16:125-128, 33:21, 68:4, 49:9, and 57:16, etc., condemned violence and aggression in any form, all these references admonish believers to be peaceful in deeds and conducts (cited in Asad, 1980).

However, the battles fought during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad SAW were in defence of the young Islamic State against the pagan forces of Arabia, who tried to destroy it. But, for those who insist that Islam was spread by the sword, i.e. by forced conversion. This paper would like to ask:

*First*, how comes we have an estimated 14 million indigenous non-Muslims, mainly Christians and Jews in the Middle East, living in predominantly Muslim countries? If Islam was spread by the sword, such a number could not have still existed. By contrast, when the Christians conquered Spain after Eight centuries of Muslim rule, not a single Muslim or Jew was allowed to survive and live there (*cf* Muslim, n.y.; Johnson, 1921:26; Jane, 1999; and Bayyah, 2005).

*Second*, what explains the historical fact that Islam spread faster during times of peace than periods of war, e.g. after the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah? (*cf* Hitti, 1937; and Haykal, 1976).

*Third*, what explains the fact that people who conquered Muslims lands themselves

converted to Islam after coming to know it, e.g. the Mongols? (cf Lacy, 1923; Trimmingham, 1962:50; Ibrahim, 1986; and Malik, 1998a).

*Fourth*, what explain the fact that the majority of Muslims live in places where not a single soldier went, e.g. Indonesia which has the highest Muslim population in the world, more than 120 million? (cf Gbadamosi, 1978:32-84; Clark, 1982; and Sibai, 1984).

*Fifth*, which “sword” is it that has made Islam presently the fastest growing religion in the world, especially in the West where Muslims are a minority with no military strength? While there may be instances where Muslims failed to follow the teachings of Islam and attempted to convert people by force. Islam spread mainly through the “sword of truth” and not “sword of steel” (cf Sulaiman, 2014b:98-121; and Sulaiman, 2014c:63-78).

Islam also calls for the quest for peace, tolerance, and kindness which is a state of physical, mental, spiritual, and social harmony. Other virtues of Islam are that Muslims are urged to be imbuing the spirit of kindness and forgiveness, attested to this; and Muslims are further urged to live in harmony and peace with all fellow human beings. Repel evil with that which is better. “*We are best knower with the thing the utter*”, according to the *Al-Qur’an*, verse 23:96 (cited in Asad, 1980).

These values and virtues were practically demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. He used non-violent methods to resist those who persecuted him. He never resorted to violence or force unless for defensive mechanism. Peace making, negotiation, and dialogue are considered more effective than aggression and violence confrontation (Haykal, 1976; Jansen, 1979; IET, 1992:26; Wael, 1997; and Sulaiman & Ojo, 2013).

For instance, the virtue of tolerance and forgiveness as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad SAW can be seen vividly when there was famine in Mecca and he helped them despite the fact that they had driven him out of his home. Similarly, after the conquest of Mecca, the people of Mecca expected the Prophet Muhammad SAW to kill them all in retaliation, or take them slaves or at least confiscate their property and belongings. They were extremely worried and wondered

what declaration he was going to make at his historic address. However, he begins his address by saying to the pagans of Mecca: “*Today there will be no blame on you for anything and no one will harm you anyway*” (cited in Malik, 1998b:35-36; and Balogun, 2001:220).

According to M. Sibai (1984) and K.O. Sulaiman & M.A. Ojo (2012), there is no other such example in the history of mankind to show this excellent behaviour towards the enemies. These are the type of behaviours expected from a good practicing Muslims (Sibai, 1984:5; and Sulaiman & Ojo, 2012:60-80). Finally, it is Allah’s promise that Islam would supersede any religion even if the unbelievers detest it.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed the historical perspectives of *jihad* in Islam: the concept, justifications, and the methods of recruitment of soldiers in *jihad*. It also related the Islamic instructions for Muslims in war front and the treatment of Islamic prisoners of war. The paper, therefore, revealed that the nearest English translation of *jihad* is “struggle” or “striving”, i.e. to exert utmost endeavour in promoting a cause. It also showed that those wars fought by the Muslims were for their own protection and that of the faith. It is, therefore, part and parcel of the Islamic belief system. It is part of the fundamental human rights of any man to practice any religion he believes. Likewise, the issue of forceful conversion to Islam, either by the edge of the sword or barrel of a gun, as often ranted by some non-Muslim historians, holds no ground in the Muslim Scripture, the *Al-Qur’an*.

The paper, therefore, recommended that one should look into the early history of Islam and see that it was the Muslims that were cheated, humiliated, banished, and their properties confiscated. On many occasions, they were tortured and beaten to a state of coma, throughout 13 years of the early stage of Islam in Makkah. They did not retaliate as Allah commanded them not to fight back, but continue to establish regular prayer and give charity, as cited in the *Al-Qur’an*, verse 4:77. They rather migrated to Madinah.

It is also concluded that the four largest Muslim countries in the world today are Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, where the adherents are farmers of rice, wheat, jute and cotton, fishermen and artisans, educated townsmen and illiterate country folk; proof that the total, all-encompassing dictates of this faith have a universal appeal, that is still very much alive.

Therefore, the question is that did Islam reach these far Asian countries, like Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India by the sword of the Arab nomad of the desert? The answer is absolute NO! They accepted Islam through the examination of the truth and beauty of the religion. The paper, therefore, concluded that the assertion of some non-Muslims that Islam spread through violence and people were forced to either accept Islam or die by sword is not only untrue but baseless.<sup>1</sup>

## References

- Abdalati, Hammudah. (1994). *Islam in Focus*. Riyadh: WAMY [World Assembly of Muslim Youth].
- ABF [Al-Balag Foundation]. (1999). *The Meaning of Islam*. Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran: Al-Balag Foundation.
- Ahmad, Imtiaz. (2001). "Friendship with Non-Muslims" in *Speeches for an Inquiring Mind*. Madinah: Al-Rasheed Printers.
- Akbar, Ali. (n.y.). *Israel and the Prophecy of Holy Qur'an*. Iran: Ansariyan Publication.
- al-Bahnasawy, Salim. (2004). *Non-Muslims in the Shari'ah of Islam*. Egypt: Dar an-Nashr lil-Jami'at.
- al-Bukhari, A.A.M.I. (n.y.). *Al-Jami al-Sahih: Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 8*. Cairo: n.p. [no publisher].
- al-Illory, Adam. (1978). *Al-Islam fi Najiriya*. Agege: Maqtaba Thaqafah al-Islamiyyah.
- al-Mubarakpuri, Safiur-Rahman. (2002). *Al-Raheeq al-Makhtum: The Sealed Nectar, Biography of the Noble Prophet*. Riyadh: Darussalam Publications.
- al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. (2003). *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. London: Al-Birr Foundation.
- Asad, Muhammad. (1980). *The Message of the Qur'an*. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus.
- Ashafa, M.N. (1999). *Jihad in the Bible: A Comparative Analysis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Lagos: Ibrash Islamic Publication Centre Ltd.
- Ayilara, S.A. (1967). *Historical Events in Ekiti West, 1960-1961*. Aramoko, Ekiti: Owodunni Printing.
- Balogun, I.A.B. (1971). "The Penetration of Islam to Nigeria" in *Nigeria Journal of Islam*, Vol.1, No.2.
- Balogun, S.A. (2001). *History of Islam up to 1800: Historical Society of Nigeria, Groundwork of Nigeria History*. Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Bayyah, Abdullah. (2005). "Muslims Living in Non-Muslim Lands". Available online also at: <http://sunnah.org/articles/mushms.in.nonmushm-lands.htm> [accessed in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria: October 10, 2014].
- Clark, P.B. (1982). *West Africa and Islam*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers Group.
- Cowan, J.M. (2004). *Arabic-English Dictionary*. New Delhi, India: n.p. [no publisher].
- Dauda, G.O. (1993). "Islam and Religious Tolerance: A Case Study of Nigeria's Public Uprisings, 1980-1992" in *Journal of Arabic and Religious Studies*, Vol.10. Ilorin: Department of Religions, University of Ilorin.
- Doi, A.R. (1985). *Islam in Nigeria*. Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation.
- Egharevba, J.V. (1934). *A Short History of Benin*. Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshop.
- Gbadamosi, T.G.O. (1978). *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Hamidullah, M. (1987). *Introduction to Islam*. Safat, Kuwait: IIFSO [International Islamic Federation of Students Organization] Series.
- Haykal, Muhammad Husayn. (1976). *The Life of Muhammad*. USA [United States of America]: American Trust Publications.
- Hitti, P.K. (1937). *History of the Arabs*. London: Macmillan.
- Ibrahim, M.Z. (1986). "Islam in China: The Internal Dimension" in *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol.7, No.2.
- IET [Islamic Education Trust]. (1992). *Misconceptions about Islam*. Minna, Nigeria: Islamic Education Trust.
- IET [Islamic Education Trust]. (1430/2009). *Trust Relations with Non-Muslims*. Nigeria: Islamic Education Trust.
- Ismaeel, Saeed. (2000). *The Relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims*. Lagos: Al-Attique International Islamic Publishing, Sawtul Haqq.
- Jane, L.S. (1999). "Islam and Christendom: Historical, Cultural, and Religious Interaction from the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries" in John L. Esposito [ed]. *The Oxford History of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jansen, G.H. (1979). *The Militant Islam*. UK [United Kingdom]: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, Samuel. (1921). *The History of Yorubas*. Thetford, Norfolk, Lowe, and Brydone: Printers Limited.
- Khan, M.M. (1981). *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhar: Arabic-English*. Riyadh: Maktabah al-Riyad Hadithan.
- Lacy, De O. (1923). *Islam at the Cross-Road*. Leavy: London.
- Malik, Sayid A.A. (1998a). *West Africa and Islam*. Ilesha: Ilesanmi Press.
- Malik, Sayid A.A. (1998b). *Yasin wal-Qur'an*. Ilesha: Ilesanmi Press.
- Maududi, Abul-'Ala. (1955). *Islamic Law and Constitution*. Karachi, Pakistan: Jamaat-e-Islamic Publications.
- Moshay, G.J.O. (1990). *Who is this Allah*. Ibadan: Fireliners.

<sup>1</sup>**Statement:** I, hereby, declare that this article is my own writing work; so, it is not a product of plagiarism due to all sources that are cited in this article, I show in the References. This article is also not submitted, reviewed, or published in other scholarly journals yet.

- Moududi, A.A. (1979). *Jihad in Islam*. Kuwait: IIFSO [International Islamic Federation of Students Organization].
- Muslim, H.M.A.Q. (1393 AH). *Sahih Muslim*. Cairo: n.p. [no publisher].
- Muslim, L.S.M. (n.y.). *Introduction to Islam*. Islamic Republic of Iran: Ansariyan Publication.
- Raji, A.F. (2001). *A Manual of Da'wah: A Guide to the Propagation of Islam Throughout the World*. Lagos: Al-Mustagfirun Foundation.
- Ramadan, Sa'id. (1961). *Islamic Law: Its Scope and Equity*. London: Macmillan.
- Sibai, M. (1984). *Islamic Civilization*. Germany: IIFSO [...???] Series No.24.
- Sulaiman, K.O. (2010). "Management Techniques of Muslim/Traditionalist Conflicts in Ancient Ekiti Communities" in *ORISUN: Journal of Religion and Human Values*, Vol.9, No.9. Ago-Iwoye: Olabisi Onabanjo University.
- Sulaiman, K.O. (2011). "A Study of Da'wah Activities of Selected Islamic Clerics and Their Contributions to the Development of Islam in Ekitiland, 1947-2000 CE". Unpublished *Ph.D. Thesis*. Ojo, Lagos: The Department of Religions, Lagos State University.
- Sulaiman, K.O. (2012). "Religious Education as Panacea to Youth Militancy in the Niger Delta of Southern Nigeria" in *Journal of Intellectual Archive*, Vol.1, No.8. Ontario, Canada: Shiny World Corp. Available online also at: <http://www.intellectualarchive.com/?link=iaj201212>
- Sulaiman, K.O. & M.A. Ojo. (2012). "The Roles of Religious Education to Peace, Security, and Sustainable Development in Nigeria" in *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.3, Iss.6. New Delhi, India: International Organization of Scientific Research.
- Sulaiman, K.O. (2013a). "A History of Islam and the Emergence of a Muslim Minority in Ado-Ekiti Kingdom, Southwestern Nigeria" in *AJISS: American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol.30, No.2. USA [United States of America]: AMSS [Association of Muslim Social Scientists] of North America and IIIT [International Institute of Islamic Thought].
- Sulaiman, K.O. (2013b). "The Impacts of Neo-Colonialism on the Muslim Population in Nigeria" in *AJIS: Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol.5, No.8. Sydney, Australia: Australian Islamic Centre and Development.
- Sulaiman, K.O. & M.A. Ojo. (2013). "Imperatives Need for Socio-Religious Measures in Solving the Crisis in Nigeria" in *IJAH: International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol.2(2). Ethiopia: International Association of African Researchers and Reviewers.
- Sulaiman, K.O. (2014a). "Implications of Scriptural Teachings for Interreligious Dialogue in Nigeria" in *Dialogue and Alliance Interfaith Journal*, Vol.28, Iss.1. Tarrytown, New York: UPF [Universal Peace Federation].
- Sulaiman, K.O. (2014b). "Jerusalem as a Uniting Factor for Muslims and Christians: Historical and Scriptural Grounds" in *The IAFOR: Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol.II, Iss.I. Japan: The International Academic Forum.
- Sulaiman, K.O. (2014c). "Sustaining the Mutual Co-Existence between Muslims and Christians through Interreligious Dialogue in Yoruba South Western Nigeria" in *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, Vol.1, Iss.3. Tunisia: University of Mannouba.
- Trimingham, J.S. (1962). *History of Islam in West Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Wael, B.H. (1997). *A History of Islamic Legal Theories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WAMY [World Assembly of Muslim Youth]. (1993). *The Sword of Islam*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: World Assembly of Muslim Youth, Series No.13.
- WI [Waqf Ikhlas]. (1990). *Could Not Answer*. Turkey: Waqf-Ikhlas.
- WI [Waqf Ikhlas]. (1992). *Confession of a British Spy*. Turkey: Waqf Ikhlas.