



The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council  
**JIHAD AGAINST VIOLENCE: WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR PEACE**

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The first campaign of the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council  
(July, 2009)

The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council is a program of  
the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA), in collaboration with Cordoba Initiative.

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## About the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council

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The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council is a global and inclusive council of Muslim women scholars, activists, and specialists. The Shura Council connects Islamic principles to society's most pressing issues and develops holistic strategies for positive social change. To find out more about the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council, and to see a list of its current members, please visit

<http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/about/shuracouncil/>.

## Special Acknowledgements

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The following women are members of the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council: Afra Jalabi, Asma Afsaruddin, Daisy Khan, Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Gonca Aydin, Hedieh Mirahmadi, Irfana Hashmi, Laleh Bakhtiar, Margot Badran, Necva Solak, Nevin Reda, Sabeeha Rehman, Sumbul Ali-Karamali, Tayyibah Taylor and Ziba Mir-Hosseini.

In addition, a number of women were active in establishing the Shura Council vision, mission, and structure, but were not involved in the *Jihad Against Violence* project. They include Alia Hogben, Asma Sayeed, Durre S. Ahmed, Fatma Hyder, Hava G. Guney-Ruebenacker, Indre Monjezi-Brown, Laila al-Zwaini, Lena Alhusseini, Nafis Sadik, and Robina Niaz.

The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council would like to thank the following women in particular for their contributions to the *Jihad Against Violence* Digest: Afra Jalabi, Asma Afsaruddin, Hedieh Mirahmadi, Irfana Hashmi, Nevin Reda, and Sumbul Ali-Karamali. Aisha Rafea and Ayesha Chaudhry contributed a number of important suggestions to the Digest. Sumbul Ali-Karamali and James King helped with editing.

*Jihad Against Violence Digest*  
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## I. Preamble

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### A. Declaration

Violence is a human phenomenon that exists across diverse cultures and faith communities. It remains an ever-present reality in the lives of millions of Muslims, preventing entire societies from flourishing in religious, cultural, political, and economic spheres. Throughout the world, violence destroys the ability of Muslim women to thrive within their families, communities, and nations. Violent extremism and domestic violence, in particular, continue to devastate individual lives, families, and societies. This is a clear injustice to those who suffer such indignities, as well as a violation of the teachings of Islam, whose mantle is wrongly used to justify such violence.

Therefore, we the members of the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) and the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council, in keeping with our belief that justice, fairness, and equality are core values of Islam, assert the following:

- (1) as vicegerents of God, we must struggle to make life on earth safe and peaceful, resisting violence in all its manifestations;
- (2) violent extremism and domestic violence are absolute corruptions of Islamic doctrine, as represented in the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH);
- (3) violent extremism and domestic violence violate the right of human dignity – one of the six principle objectives (*maqasid*) of the Shari'ah – of their victims, women and others;
- (4) violent extremism and domestic violence infringe upon the fundamental right of every human being to enjoy peace and security in society, as well as tranquility in the home;
- (5) while violent extremism and domestic violence result from a diverse set of factors, it is important for Muslims to reclaim the discourses of non-violence and peace from within the Islamic traditions;
- (6) Muslim families and communities must be made peaceful, secure and thriving, as Islam means *wholeness-making, peace-making, safety-making, and well-being-making*; and
- (7) the troubling link between family and societal violence, as well as between private and public violence, must be explored further.

This is our *Jihad Against Violence*.

## **B. Why We Must Reject Violent Extremism**

*“The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better, and then one between you and whom there was enmity (will become) as a friend” Surah 41, v 34.*

Islamic teachings seek to unify people in order to engender harmony, cooperation, collective achievement and prosperity. Violent extremism, on the other hand, fractures individuals, families, and communities, preventing people from reaching their full potential as social and spiritual beings. It cripples societies, causing them to implode; across societies, it generates relationships based on mistrust and intolerance. Violent extremism mars the name and reputation of Islam globally, spreading gross distortions of the Qur’an and example of the Prophet Muhammad.

## **C. Why We Must Reject Domestic Violence**

*“None but a noble man treats women in an honorable manner. And none but a dishonorable man treats women disgracefully” The Prophet Muhammad (Sunan Tirmidhi).*

The Prophet’s life, a model of excellence, dignity, and justice, never included violent behavior towards women or toward members of his household. Rather, he treated women and children with the utmost kindness and respect. Violence cannot be compartmentalized into public and private spheres, because even though a seemingly private offense like domestic violence first involves individuals and families, it poisons the next generation and percolates throughout society. A household is a miniature community and if we foster safe families, we will foster safe communities. Similarly, dysfunctional families in which women are stripped of their dignity lead to dysfunctional communities.

## **D. Why We Have Chosen to Address Violent Extremism and Domestic Violence in Tandem**

*“For that cause We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all humankind, and whoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all humankind” Surah 5, v 32a.*

Through critical engagement with dominant interpretations, the Global Muslim Women’s Shura Council endeavors to connect Islamic principles to society’s most pressing issues and develop holistic strategies for creating positive social change. Violent extremism and domestic violence have widespread effects and are of tremendous importance to women and society at large. The prominence of violence in the public discourse surrounding Islam is unmatched. Therefore, as Muslim women, we hereby affirm our authority on these vital issues and declare our *Jihad Against Violence*.

In addition, while many would assume domestic violence and violent extremism to be separate, we see connections between both forms of violence. Consequently, *Jihad Against Violence* examines violent extremism and domestic violence in tandem, taking a stand against all manifestations of violence.

## **E. Why Muslim Women in Particular Must Speak Out**

*“The male believers and the female believers are allies of each other; they enjoin good and forbid harm; they establish prayers, practice charity and obey God and His messenger. On them God will have mercy, for God is exalted in power, wise.”* Surah 9, v 71.

The Shura Council, in keeping with its mission to discuss pressing issues of Muslim women’s rights, roles and responsibilities, claims a space of peace and non-violent resistance to injustice and to violence in all its forms, all from the unique and strong perspective of *Muslim women*.

While many have spoken out against domestic violence and violent extremism, those most affected by the violence often remain unheard. They are frequently muted, whether due to unsympathetic institutions silencing them or a disinterested media failing to tell their stories. In response, we draw upon our rich legacy as peacemakers, leaders, caregivers, and teachers and scholars of sacred text and law. Working with our colleagues and constituents, we are reclaiming this space of authority in order to promote the principles of gender equality, as well as social, economic, and political justice in Muslim communities.

## **F. Why We Have Chosen the Path of Shura**

*“Those who respond to their Lord, and establish regular Prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation [shura]; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance;”* Surah 42, v 38.

*Shura* is the process by which we confer and collaborate to reach important decisions for collective action. In order to further our vision for broad, open dialogue with diverse groups, we draw upon this “classical” tradition of consultation.

In accordance with Islam, the Qur’an and Sunnah, and the Islamic traditions – and as citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – we employ extensive expertise in Islam, the humanities and social sciences, and specific grassroots contexts. We have adopted a “conversational framework” which seeks to work with *all* people – including men and non-Muslims – committed to reducing violence and promoting peace.

## **G. Why a Jihad Against Violence**

*“O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) God and seek means of nearness to Him and strive hard [jahidu] in His way, that you may be successful.”* Surah 5, v 35.

*Jihad* means “striving or endeavoring in the way of God.” We are dedicated to combating all forms of violence – especially violence carried out in the name of Islam – across the spectrum of violent extremism to domestic violence. We, Muslim women, must reclaim the mantle of cultural, intellectual, and religious authority, declaring our opposition to violence with a powerful and unified voice.

We must announce our commitment to resisting injustice generally and violence specifically through peaceful means and from the unique perspective of women. We must speak comprehensively and holistically to a diversity of discourses to effectively oppose violence.

We must act upon our positions by preventing our children and members of our communities from subscribing to a deviant understanding of our faith and by creating institutions, mechanisms, and systems able to successfully combat violence. Already, thousands of organizations led by Muslim women courageously and effectively tackle violence on a daily basis. We must support these efforts, unifying our individual efforts to ‘command the good and forbid the evil,’ as decreed in the Qur’an.

Most importantly, we must affirm peace. We must think, speak, and act, both wisely and courageously, overflowing with a powerful spirit of mercy, justice, and peace.

This is our *Jihad Against Violence*.

## II. Domestic Violence and Refutations

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Some Muslims excuse domestic violence<sup>1</sup> on the basis of Surah 4, verse 34 of the Qur'an. Likewise, some non-Muslims point to 4:34 to condemn Islam as sexist and violent towards women. Both of these groups assume that this verse specifically gives husbands the right to beat, or at least physically chastise, their wives.

In most English translations, the second half of this verse is translated as follows:

*As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty [nushuz], first admonish them, then abandon their sleeping places, then beat them [lightly] [udribuhuna].*

While at first glance the meaning of this verse may seem apparent, in order to properly apply it, several factors must be taken into account. Together, these provide a compelling refutation of the view that domestic violence is sanctioned by Islam. These factors are:

- A. A linguistic analysis of the word *daraba*;
- B. Confusion over the meaning of *nushuz*;
- C. Intertextual analysis of the Qur'an;
- D. The general message of the Qur'an;
- E. The Prophet's example;
- F. The *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*;
- G. Historical Context and the Qur'anic Approach of Gradual Elimination

We recognize that jurists of the pre-modern tradition largely understood *daraba* in 4:34 to mean "beat". Although their methodology was sound, it was informed by the context of their patriarchal societies. We consider our understanding to be more relevant, constructive, and just for contemporary Muslim families and societies. This conscious departure is similarly backed by sound methodology, especially as jurists have always been comfortable developing different meanings of words or interpretations of verses in light of new evidence and changing circumstances.

### A. A Linguistic Analysis of the word *Daraba*

1. In classical Arabic, the word *daraba* has 25 different meanings. "Beat" or "chastise" are two of them, but another is "go away from." Therefore, the verse could be rendered:

*As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty, first admonish them, then abandon their sleeping places, then go away from them.*

In fact, in her *The Sublime Quran*, Laleh Bakhtiar translates 4:34 in a similar manner:

*But those whose resistance you fear, then admonish and abandon them in their sleeping place, then go away from them.*

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<sup>1</sup> While domestic violence can be defined more broadly to include child abuse, emotional abuse, or any form of violence in the home, this project considers it in a more limited sense to include only physical violence carried out against the wife or female domestic partner.



## B. Confusion over the meaning of the word *Nushuz*

1. However *daraba* is defined, the Qur'an clearly makes its application conditional upon the fear of *nushuz*. In other words, without *nushuz*, which in many translations and interpretations is rendered "disobedience," "disharmony," or even "disloyalty," the subsequent steps outlined in the verse cannot be applied.
2. Linguistically, the word *nushuz* means "to stand up," as from a seated or sleeping position with the intent to leave that specific location. This is how it is consistently used in other parts of the Qur'an (for example, 58:11 and 2:259). In the context of 4:34, therefore, *nushuz* must mean to get up and leave the marriage. In contemporary usage, a "*nashiz* wife" has left her marital home and is living elsewhere, but is not yet divorced.
3. *Nushuz* can also be associated with the husband. Thus, if a wife fears it from her husband, steps may be taken to remedy this situation as well (4:128). Yet interestingly, *nushuz* is never understood as "disobedience" on the part of the husband; instead, interpretations often change when applied to a man versus a woman. This discrepancy indicates that the cultural norms of the interpreters significantly affected their interpretations. The understanding of *nushuz* as "disobedience" seems to reflect gender roles within the medieval mindset more than the actual semantic range of the word. Thus, although later jurists may not have considered it acceptable for a wife to disobey or leave her, the early hadith literature contains instances of wives doing so. Similarly, these jurists could not imagine that husbands should be required to obey their wives.

## C. Intertextual Analysis of the Qur'an

1. It is generally acknowledged among both classical and modern scholars that the preferred method for interpreting the Qur'an is by means of other Qur'anic passages, known as "interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an" (*tafsir al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an*). Significantly, while no other passages support the "beating" interpretation of 4:34, there are other passages that support the "distancing" or "going away from" meaning. For example, in 2:226-227, "separating from the wife" (*iyta'*) is a prelude to either reconciliation or divorce. It gives the husband the opportunity to decide in private whether he wishes to continue with the marriage or choose divorce. This period of separation cannot go on indefinitely, but is limited to a maximum of four months, upon which the husband must make up his mind. In polygamous marriages, *iyta'* is not preformed against one wife and not the others, but is undertaken against all wives simultaneously.
2. Translating *daraba* as "beat" also produces a contradiction between Qur'anic verses if 4:34 is compared to those verses on divorce, which offer a picture of non-coercion in marriage, even in ending it. For example, Surah 2, verse 231 says:

*When you divorce wives and they are about to reach their term, then hold them back honorably or set them free honorably; but do not hold them back by injuring them so that you commit aggression.*

In other words, husbands are urged to divorce their wives if they desire, but to not inflict injury on them. But if the Qur'an also tells husbands to beat their wives while married, this gives women more incentive to be divorced than married. This contradicts the Qur'an's clear preference for marriage over divorce. This contradiction do not arise if 4:34 is translated as "go away from."

3. In addition, the Qur'an uses three words other than *daraba* to mean "strike" or "beat," in verses 28:15, 38:41, and 51:29. Furthermore, the *d-r-b* root carries at least seventeen distinct connotations in the Qur'an, including "hold up as an example" (43:57), "travel through" (4:101), and "cover" (3:112), just to name a few. Often, this root suggests a figurative meaning: moving away, separating, distancing from, or setting up a barrier (including in the home). Within the context of marital conflict, this is the most likely meaning, as a husband separates from his wife before ending the marriage. This is consistent with the Prophet Muhammad's practice with respect to his wives (see below).

#### **D. The General Message of the Qur'an**

1. The broader message of the Qur'an is the promotion of harmony and affection between husband and wife. Marriage is depicted as a sacred bond of love and mercy. Surah 30, verse 21 says:

*And among His Signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may live in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily there are Signs in that for those who reflect.*

Interpreting *daraba* in 4:34 to mean "to beat" would seem to contradict with this message of tranquility, love, and mercy in the home.

2. The earliest Muslims, including such figures as Ali ibn Abi Talib and Umar ibn al-Khattab, followed a holistic methodology of interpreting the Qur'an. They did not read a single verse in isolation and assume it covers an entire issue. Instead, they examined all possible factors, including the *entire* Qur'an, traditions of the Prophet, reason, common sense, and the interests of their particular society.

#### **E. The Prophet's Example**

1. The Sunnah, which is taken as a reflection of how the Prophet understood the Qur'an, contradicts an interpretation of *daraba* as "beat." We do not have a single report of the Prophet striking his wives. Instead, we read from Anas ibn Malik, a Companion of the Prophet: "I have never seen anyone more kind to one's family than (the Prophet Muhammad)" (Sahih Muslim).
2. He ordered, "Never beat God's handmaidens" (Sunan Abu Dawud), and he commended those who treated their wives with kindness: "The most perfect of the believers in faith are the best of them in moral excellence, and the best of you are the kindest to their wives" (Sunan Tirmidhi). He encouraged harmony and mutual respect in the home: "The believer should not harbor hatred towards his wife. If he dislikes something in her, then surely he will be pleased with another quality in her" (Sahih Muslim). These reports clearly went against prevailing norms, and some of the Prophet's followers even viewed him as too soft-hearted for taking this position. Yet he never wavered from it in his actions.

3. When the Prophet experienced conflict with his wives (especially during the strained period when they requested a higher living standard, which he could not afford), he simply left his marital home and stayed away from them. If he had understood 4:34 to demand physical discipline, he would have done so. Instead, based on his actions, the Prophet interpreted 4:34 to mean “go away from,” not “beat.”

#### **F. The Maqasid al-Shari’ah**

1. The “principle objectives” (*maqasid*) of the Shari’ah demand the protection and promotion of religion (*din*), life (*nafs*), mind (*‘aql*), family (*nasl*), dignity (*‘ird*), and wealth (*mal*) in society. Inflicting injury on one’s spouse is a violation of at least three of these fundamental principles – the objectives of Life, Dignity, and Family – which the Shari’ah aims to protect and which undergird Islamic law.

Under Shari’ah, the objective of Life upholds the sanctity of human life according to the dignity God bestowed on humankind, and it protects against bodily harm of any kind. Furthermore, the objective of Dignity maintains the dignity of each human being, which he or she is given by God. It protects against slander, the breach of privacy, everyday fear, and disrespect; it also promotes basic human freedoms. Thirdly, domestic violence violates the objective of Family, which makes the family a safe refuge for all of its members.

#### **G. Historical Context and the Qur’anic Approach of Gradual Elimination**

1. In pre-Islamic Arabia, a wife was considered property and could be treated however her husband wished. This was not exceptional; well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European law allowed a man to beat his wife as long as he did not endanger her life. Even today, wife abuse has not been eradicated. In the United States for example, on average, three women are killed each day by their husbands or partners. In the seventh century, when the Prophet enjoined his followers to refrain from beating their wives, he did so from compassion and the desire to protect the dignity of women; yet, his position, as well as the concept behind it, was alien to seventh-century norms and was considered to be weak and unassertive.
2. In addressing spousal abuse, the Qur’an takes a familiar approach: it introduces a concept and applies a method of gradual elimination. It qualifies existing norms through safeguards and limitations. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, men did not need permission to abuse their wives. Therefore, the Qur’an was not giving permission for abuse in verse 4:34; rather, it was restricting it. Consequently, there is no reason to assume that the existence of 4:34 meant that the Qur’an intended the practice of wife-beating to be allowed indefinitely.
3. Even the early jurists restricted the application of the verse. Most regarded beating as barely permissible or symbolic, and some said that beating should be carried out with a toothbrush or folded handkerchief. Ibn Rushd, for example, insisted that even a man who caught his wife in bed with another man could either forgive or divorce her, but nothing beyond that. The fact that these jurists, products of their time and place, restricted the scope of spousal violence to this degree is remarkable. These restrictions were quite progressive for their time.

### III. Violence Extremism and Refutations

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The religious justification used by Muslim extremists to commit societal violence is usually jihad. Derived from the root *j-h-d*, which implies the exertion of energy, “jihad” has layered, varying, and contested meanings, though all relate to a “struggle towards excellence in the way of God.” Although sometimes translated as “holy war,” jihad does not mean warfare. Rather, the Arabic word for warfare is *harb*; “armed combat” is *qital*. Warfare and armed combat are not holy in Islam; they are simply justified or unjustified.

Nevertheless, extremists have evoked the language of jihad – and its Qur’anic references – to justify violence. Consequently, any challenge to violence committed in the name of Islam must examine these particular passages and clarify their meanings. In doing so, several factors must be taken into account:

- A. a holistic analysis of Qur’anic verses;
- B. the literary context of sword verses;
- C. the Prophet’s example;
- D. the historical context of the verses’ interpretation;
- E. jurists’ limitations on military jihad;
- F. the principle of *fada’il al-sabr*;
- G. contemporary understandings of jihad; and
- H. the *maqasid al-Shari’ah*

Utilizing these widely-accepted interpretive techniques, legal and literary traditions and discourses, and our contemporary contexts, we demonstrate that violent extremism cannot be carried out in the name of Islam and that the Qur’an sanctions only defensive warfare.

#### A. A Holistic Analysis of Qur’anic Verses

When read singly, various passages of the Qur’an seem to treat warfare differently. However, when the Qur’an is read as a whole and against the historical circumstances within which verses were revealed, we find a consistent pattern.

#### **Meccan Jihad**

1. While the Prophet and his followers were in Mecca for twelve years, the Qur’anic verses revealed during this period recognized the right of self-defense in cases of wrongdoing. Yet these verses did not give permission to the Muslims to use force. Instead, the Qur’an commanded them to endure patiently and forgive the wrongdoers. For example, Surah 16, verse 125 says:  
*Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in the best and most gracious ways; for the Lord knows best who have strayed from His Path and who receive guidance.*
2. Jihad in the Meccan period, which was longer than in the Medinan period, entailed *non-violent resistance to persecution*. This took the form of: a) first secret and then public preaching of their faith; b) freeing slaves who had converted to Islam; and c) emigrating to Abyssinia and later to Medina. It is interesting to note that the Prophet sent the early Muslims west towards the Christian empire of

Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and told them they would find safety there. He did not send them with a message of war or conquest.

### **Permission to Use Force in Self-Defense**

1. After the Prophet and his followers emigrated to Medina, the Qur'anic message often responded to the Muslims' particular historical and political situation. In Medina, the Prophet held together a coalition of political allies representing inhabitants of diverse religions, whose rights were recognized as full members of the community, according to the Constitution of Medina. As the Meccan Arabs continued to attack the Muslims and their property, the Qur'an gave permission to use force in defending themselves and their right to practice religion freely.
2. The first verses (22:39-40) which allow fighting ("qital," which is one aspect of jihad under specific conditions), state:  
*Permission is given to those who fight because they have been oppressed, and God is able to help them. These are those who have been wrongfully expelled from their homes merely for saying 'God is our Lord.' If God had not restrained some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which God's name is mentioned frequently would have been destroyed.*

It is noteworthy that these verses clearly state that apart from resisting oppression, Muslims may only resort to fighting to defend the basic religious freedom of all righteous people (not just Muslims) to worship the one God.

### **Medinan Jihad**

1. After war broke out between the Muslims and the Meccans, who never ceased to persecute the Prophet and his followers, the "sword verses" (below) were revealed. These verses have been frequently taken in isolation and out of their literary and historical context, both by those trying to prove Islam to be a violent religion and by Muslims to justify violence. Yet these passages must be read in the holistic context of the entire Qur'an and in light of the historical context they were addressing.

Surah 9, verse 5:

*And when the sacred months are over, slay the polytheists wherever you find them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place.*

Surah 9, verse 29:

*Fight those who—even if they are People of the Book— do not believe in God or the Last Day and do not consider forbidden that which God and His messenger have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of the truth, until they pay the poll tax willingly, as subjects.*

2. These verses must be read with the earlier passages that prohibit Muslims from initiating warfare, as well as the many verses that urge Muslims to incline to peace if their enemies incline to peace. When read this way, they allow battle only in defense. Qur'anic verses should always be taken together – to ignore one verse and rely upon another is to ignore part of God's word. So although fighting in the defense to practice religion was permitted, 2:190 specifically prohibits Muslims from initiating hostilities.

## **B. The Literary Context of the Sword Verses**

1. When 9:5 and 9:29 are read within the literary context of the entire passage (9:1-29), verses 1-4 clearly show that this passage is addressing a particular group, the polytheistic Meccan Arabs at the time of the Prophet. A segment of this group repeatedly broke their treaty with the young Muslim community. In fact, the historical sources indicate that they had attacked and killed allies of the Prophet. Thus, the sword verses instruct Muslims on how to deal with this unprecedented situation involving *those who have broken their treaty obligations*. According to the Qur'an, the cancellation of the treaty is to be announced at the tribes' annual gathering during the pilgrimage, treaty-breakers are given four months clemency, and war should be resumed when these months have passed. Verse 9:4 makes it very clear that these actions do not apply to those who have not broken the treaty, as the Muslims are instructed to honor their engagements with them.
2. The eminent early jurists understood the sword verses in this manner, stressing both the Meccan Arabs' aggression against the Muslims and their violation of treaties. The command to wage war against these particular people resulted from these two factors, in addition to the threat they posed. While 9:5 and 9:29 refer to this special case of treaty-breakers, the general Qur'anic rules of warfare are established in 2:190-195.
3. To summarize, when the divine command permitting jihad was revealed, it was only after:
  - The persistent refusal of the Meccan leadership to allow the peaceful propagation of Islam in Mecca;
  - Continuous persecution of the Muslims remaining in Mecca;
  - Meccan military campaigns against the Muslims at Medina with the sole objective of eliminating Islam;
  - Key security pledges being rejected unilaterally by a number of tribes allied to the Prophet, forcing him into a vulnerable position.

## **C. The Prophet's Example**

1. The Prophet Muhammad, the ultimate model of Qur'anic behavior, never waged a war except in self-defense, and he never initiated warfare against unbelievers during his lifetime.
2. The Prophet demanded gentleness. He is recorded to have said, "God is gentle and loves gentleness. He rewards for gentleness what he does not give for violence" (Sahih Muslim). He also declared, "He who is deprived of forbearance and gentleness is, in fact, deprived of all good" (Sahih Muslim).

#### **D. The Historical Context of the Verses' Interpretation**

1. After the Prophet's death, the young Muslim community found itself with a new religion to defend, persecution to resist, radical social reforms to implement, and novel laws to develop. Predominant international law at the time was to conquer or be conquered. This was simply how states and empires operated. Muslims generally did not convert the conquered peoples to Islam, but let them pay a tax in return for keeping their religion and obtaining exemption from military duty.

In order to justify the expansion of the territory of Islam, the early Muslims interpreted jihad to allow for the spread of Islamic rule. To accomplish this, many of the early jurists (though not all) claimed that the sword verses superseded or abrogated those verses prohibiting violence or allowing it in self-defense. "Abrogation" (*naskh*) became a standard technique for interpreting the Qur'an at that time.

2. Even this notion of expansionist jihad was a limitation on the violence of the time, since it outlawed all forms of warfare except jihad. Nevertheless, although the Muslim community may not have survived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century Near East without an effective strategy of expansion, this doctrine no longer applies to the current geopolitical world.

#### **E. Jurists' Limitations on Military Jihad**

1. In situations when military jihad was allowed by the jurists, they developed an entire body of law that outlined specific rules and limitations. For example, they required that a call to war could only come from a publicly recognized caliph or imam. An individual may not legitimately issue a call to war. This requirement is especially relevant today, as there is no such recognized leader of the worldwide Muslim community (*ummah*).
2. Moreover, jurists developed very clear prohibitions on warfare. Those waging jihad were not allowed to do the following (below), among other things. These prohibited actions are, nevertheless, among the hallmarks of many of those who engage in violent extremism in the name of Islam today:
  - attack noncombatants and civilians of any kind;
  - arbitrarily destroy property;
  - commit suicide;
  - engage in the secret and clandestine use of force (as opposed to a declared and formal war);
  - engage in cheating and treachery;
  - commit rape;
  - terrorize populations;
  - wage war against other Muslims.

#### **F. The Principle of *Fada'il al-Sabr***

1. While some Muslim scholars developed the military doctrine of jihad, others were developing alternative views on jihad. In particular, they developed the doctrine of the “jihad of active forbearance,” based on the holistic understanding of jihad in the Qur’an. This is reflected in the literature which praises the “excellences of armed struggle” (*fada'il al-jihad*) and the competing literature which describes the “excellences of patience” (*fada'il al-sabr*).  
The doctrine of patient forbearance (*sabr*) as part of jihad was brought into the mainstream by the 12<sup>th</sup> century jurist, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali asserted that patience and gratitude were the two halves of faith, and he noted that over 70 Qur’anic verses refer to patient forbearance. He specifically contended that patient forbearance is part of jihad.
2. This is the non-violent resistance to persecution that the Qur’an urged the Prophet and his followers to adopt in the Meccan period. It has always been a part of Islam’s divine message, and throughout the centuries, a number of prominent jurists elaborated this doctrine.

#### **G. Contemporary Understandings of Jihad**

1. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when many Muslim lands were under colonial rule, Muslim scholars began to revisit the doctrine of jihad and Qur’anic interpretation in general. The principle of abrogation was rejected by many of these scholars, including Muhammad ‘Abduh, the famous rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo. They insisted that abrogation was merely a temporal technique to understand the Qur’an.
2. Numerous contemporary jurists argue that any verse must be understood in relation to the Qur’an’s larger message. In other words, all Qur’anic verses on a subject must be studied in relation to one another. These scholars interpret the sword verses only within the context of other verses on warfare and conclude that this permission was given to the Prophet in a specific situation. The larger message of the Qur’an restricts violence and permits only defensive warfare.
3. Thus, jihad was reaffirmed as the use of force *only* in self-defense. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, for example, insisted (controversially) that even colonization by a foreign power was an insufficient condition for jihad unless there was active suppression of the practice of Islam. Abduh agreed that jihad was defensive war only, though he asserted that invading a country and colonizing its people justified self-defense. During India’s fight for independence, Badshah Khan, a pacifist and devout Muslim, led his fierce Pushtun army in an unarmed, peaceful protest march against the British. Acting from his religious convictions, Khan waged a remarkable jihad of active, patient resistance.

#### **H. The Maqasid al-Shari’ah**

1. Because violent extremism entails the unjust taking away of human life and destruction of property, it absolutely violates at least two of the principle objectives of the Shari’ah: Life and Wealth. Inflicting injury on a person, taking away life, and destroying property violate these objectives of the Shari’ah and cannot be justified in any way as fulfilling Islamic values.



## IV. Connections between All Forms of Violence

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Although domestic violence, military jihad, and other types of violence may spring from different jurisprudential sources, they are linked in other ways: societal, sociological, psychological, and textual (Qur'anic), among others.

Muslims cannot legitimately rely on Islamic texts to engage in domestic violence or to wage violent extremism. A fundamental principle of the Qur'an is peace, harmony, and the elimination of *all* forms of violence, and Islam restricted cultural norms regarding both domestic violence and violent extremism. The 7<sup>th</sup> century right of men to beat their wives was taken for granted, and the Qur'an restricted, even abolished, the right. Similarly, it decreed "a life for a life" in certain circumstances, and this was a vast improvement over ten – or even a hundred – lives for a life. These were limitations on existing violence. Therefore, to take these passages ultimately sought to eliminate violence and use them to legitimize *more* violence than our current norms accept, is to greatly violate the spirit of the Qur'an.

Furthermore, the principle objectives of the Shari'ah, which provide the Shari'ah's foundation, ensure the protection of life, religion, mind, wealth, family, and human dignity. All interpretations of Islamic law must conform to these *maqasid*, and clearly, both domestic violence and violent extremism violate these protections. Muslim jurists understood that violence begets more violence, contravening the *maqasid*. In the domestic sphere, boys whose fathers abuse their mothers have a greater probability of growing up to be abusive husbands. Similarly, in the public sphere, violent acts provoke retaliatory violence, which results in escalating conflict. In this way, modern political conflicts perpetuate violence in a vicious cycle similar to the pre-Islamic blood feuds of the Hijaz. This is precisely what the Qur'an and the Prophet sought to eliminate.

Finally, the Qur'an extols patience (*sabr*), which can be applied to both domestic violence and violent extremism. In fact, jihad as patient forbearance is equal in value to jihad as force. This does not, however, mean passive indifference; but rather, it is an active, patient, and *non-violent* resistance to injustice. According to the Prophet, jihad is both the *greater* struggle to rid oneself of sin and the *lesser* effort to defend against oppression. It can be considered an internal jihad of the soul *and* an external jihad of correcting injustice in society. This external jihad is of many types: for example, jihad by the word (using verbal persuasion to correct an injustice); jihad by the hands (doing good works to correct an injustice); and jihad by the sword (using force to get rid of an oppressor). It is important to recognize that jihad by the sword is merely a last resort, only after all other forms of jihad have been attempted, and even then, it may only be used in self-defense.

The greater jihad is an attempt to control one's self in ways that serve God. The Prophet is reported to have said during the Farewell Pilgrimage: "... The fighter in the way of God is he who makes jihad against himself (*jahada nafsah*) for the sake of obeying God." Taming their tendency to transgress, these *mujahidin* exert energy to overcome the selfish promptings of their egos. For this reason, the Qur'an equates them with "the patient ones" (*saberin*): "We shall put you on trial so that We know those among you who strive in the cause of God (*mujahidin*) and are the patient (*saberin*)" (47:31). These *mujahidin* are promised guidance: "Those who do jihad for Our sake, We will certainly guide them to our Paths" (29:69).

We can apply the *sabr* doctrine to verse 4:34 and conclude that patient forbearance, self-control, and taming of ego in the matter of marital strife is preferred, just as these qualities are preferred in the matter of societal strife. Any act of physical violence in the home greatly violates this principle. Spouses must be patient with one another in a context of love, mercy, and patience. If the marriage continues to deteriorate, according to the Qur'an, spouses should separate from one another, to consult with others and reflect on the health and viability of the marriage. While reconciliation is preferred, if impossible, then divorce is permitted. However, *at no point is violence or physical force recommended* as an effective or appropriate step in resolving such marital problems. Added to the historical evidence of Muslim jurists minimizing domestic violence, this clearly demonstrates that the Qur'an did not authorize the practice but sought to curtail and even eliminate it.

Violence can be imagined like a wheel with a center and numerous spokes. The center of the wheel is the home. The circumference of wheel, the outer circle, represents the community and society. The spokes represent the many factors that keep this "circle of violence" turning. These factors include: androcentric interpretations of the primary sources of Islam, ineffective leadership, continual reliance on militaristic solutions, and the disempowerment of women. Violence moves back and forth between the center (home) and the circumference (community) through these spokes. For example, domestic violence in the home travels through the spoke of non-egalitarian interpretation to the community, where it sets a model for a misogynistic community. In reverse, a misogynistic societal model travels back from the circumference to the home center and inspires domestic violence.

As the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council, we are committed to stopping such violence – in our homes, our communities, and in our world. We are committed to replacing the destructive spokes of the wheel of violence with those representing non-violent solutions, equitable and representative leadership, and interpretations of Islam that are not constrained by patriarchal culture. We must all work together to find such alternative solutions and redraw the circle.

## V. Conclusions

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"Jihad Against Violence: A Non-Violent Call for Building a Gentler World and Overcoming the Models of Tyranny and Victimhood"

For thousands of years, people on our planet have decried the ugliness of violence. We have strived to stop aggression. We have sought an end to war. Yet what have we continued to do? We use aggression to stop aggression. We use violence to stop violence. We share one generic universal belief: *You kill, and therefore, we will kill you and create a better world without you.* We are still caught in the perpetual cycle of this ancient thinking. Though we have walked on the moon and achieved virtual connectivity across all corners of the globe, when it comes to human relationships, societal interaction and global politics, our families and communities remain mired in this old paradigm: the belief in the power of force to destroy evil.

### A. Incorrect Thinking Leads to Tyranny

According to the Qur'an, physical and material conditions are created by our thoughts and ego. This is a central theme: conditions do not change unless people change themselves. *"Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change that which is in themselves"* (13:11). In other words, a given behavior results from certain thought patterns and attitudes.

The Qur'an describes the malaise of humanity in the first passage revealed to the Prophet Muhammad: *"A human being leans towards tyranny"* (96:6). Some translate this verse as "a human being transgresses all bounds" since the Qur'an uses the word *tagha*, which comes from the verb "to overflow and transgress." It presents this tendency to dictatorship as a negative universal human trait afflicting us all, and we can trace it over the landscape of different contexts and different characters, which represent archetypes of human leadership.

People, according to the Qur'an, have a tendency to dictate. Instead of questioning our own ideas about the world, we want the world to change according to our ideas and comply with our wishes. The "change" verse (13:11) turns all this upside down. Instead of changing the world, dictating and acting like disillusioned gods, we are invited to surrender to the All-Supreme Sovereign God and examine our own ways of thinking. This is how the Qur'an presents the Prophets: Yusuf (Joseph), for example, while unjustly detained, enjoins his cell-mates, *"What you are worshipping other than Him are merely names which you and your forefathers have named, and which God has not endowed with authority. Sovereignty belongs only but to God"* (12:40). Such false names, which lack any authority, limit our perception of reality and cause us to transgress peace. The Qur'an links false thinking to aggression and violence, because those who think they can dictate reality will use different means to control such reality. They will coerce others and enforce change.

The “change” verse creates an important paradigm shift. Instead of changing the world, the Qur’an tells us to first change our own attitudes, thinking and ultimately, ourselves. Only then will the world around us change. Change yourself and others will change. In Surah 11, all the prophets are presented as coming to their societies to invite them to repentance as a way to prosperity, not just for the hereafter, but the here and now. Instead of dictating to the world, we are asked to observe, to marvel at the grand design of the universe around us. The Qur’an repeatedly tells us to look at the stars, the way day and night fold into each other, the sun and moon, and the beauty of animals moving together in flocks. It speaks of the signs of the Creation, both within and outside ourselves: *“We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves”* (41:53).

If this is the prescription, the Qur’an also gives us the diagnosis of our malaise. It explains why we resort to violence and coercion. In scenes throughout, we come across different models of behavior in which some characters dictate reality and resort to coercion, while others – those at peace and willing to change themselves– achieve change gently.

## **B. The Nimrod Paradigm: Violating the Principles of Nature**

The contrast between these two models is shown in the dialogue which takes place between Ibrahim (Abraham), the father of the prophets, and Nimrod. Ibrahim uses moral persuasion to convince people to peacefully accept and surrender to Supreme Intelligence, which is in charge of the universe. Nimrod, on the other hand, thinks he controls reality. He mocks Ibrahim and flaunts his controlling power, using his ability to kill as proof. *“He said: I endow life or death”* (2:258). Ibrahim then asks him, *“But it is God that brings the sun from the East: Do then bring it from the West?”* (2:258) While Nimrod is left speechless, to Ibrahim the matter is clear. If he thinks he can dictate and transgress the principles of nature, then he is living in a state of disillusionment.

Ibrahim shows Nimrod that even if he killed and tortured people, reality does not conform to his wishes, for he cannot control the movement of planets and stars. One such principle of nature is human dignity, which according to the Qur’an, is endowed by God: *“We have dignified (honored) the children of Adam”* (17:70). Hence, we have no choice in this matter, just as we do not control the eternal immutable laws which govern the universe. For example, when God established the principle of two particles of hydrogen and one particle of oxygen making water, we were not consulted. *“I called them not to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor the creation of their own selves”* (18:51). Similarly, just as we can interact with water but cannot change H<sub>2</sub>O, we cannot undermine this principle of “human dignity,” for we were not consulted on it by God.

Yet for thousands of years we have been disillusioned. We still believe we can control others by threatening their lives or undermining their dignity. We remain tangled in the Nimrod paradigm, dictating reality and attempting to coerce the world around us. This paradigm extends to our attempts to subdue nature, rather than living in harmony with it. It permeates all levels of our thinking, from the way we complain about the weather to our building weapons to destroy nations. And just like Nimrod, we can actually do the latter. We can take life away (and of course, we do), though in complete delusion and violation of gentleness, mercy and human dignity, all principles of nature for which we cannot rightfully challenge.

In this coercive paradigm, a person is in a state of war – with nature, with others, but most importantly, with one's self. Confusion is the real problem in human thinking according to the Qur'an, where the phrase "eloquent confusion" is repeated throughout. We find ourselves in perpetual resistance to reality. Yet when we dictate reality, we become one of two archetypes, according to the Qur'an: the Tyrant or the Victim. Both are violent. When I am not in harmony with reality as it unfolds, I will either use coercion to change it and become the tyrant, or I will feel helpless and victimized and begin overturning my situation whenever given the chance. I become the victim. Thus, the "tyrant" and "victim" are interlocked in a powerful cycle: the oppressors and the oppressed. These two sides simply exchange positions during times of victory – the victim becomes a tyrant, the tyrant a victim – instead of breaking down the cycle.

The Qur'an presents a third alternative: the Prophetic model, neither tyrant, nor victim. These actions are not in resistance to reality, but in peaceful alignment with it, in active and loving surrender to reality in a true state of "Islam." Those following the prophetic model work from a place of gratitude and love, when they are threatened with death or exile. As we read in the Qur'an: *"We have none other than to put our trust in God. Indeed, He has guided us to our Ways. We shall certainly withstand with patience all the hurt you may cause us. For those who put their trust, should put their trust in God"* (14:12).

Their sense of empowerment in this non-violent prophetic discourse does not emanate from a belief in their physical ability to use force, nor does it reflect the resignation of victims. Rather, their power comes from standing in truth and firmly standing being its power in gentleness and without the need to coerce it upon others. The ability to speak with such power is a testament to their lack of faith in the power of evil, and as a consequence, the complete lack of fear in the face of threat. This is beautifully illustrated in the encounter between these three categories of people in the story of Pharaoh, Moses and the Oppressed in the Land.

### **C. The Pharaoh Model: Coercive, Violent, and Rash**

The Pharaoh represents the archetype of the tyrant in the Qur'an. In discourse, attitude and actions, he is intoxicated with his own power and force, mired in "eloquent confusion." It is worth noting how the wrath of Pharaoh is directed towards women and children in particular, as he and his men say: *"Slay the sons of those who believe with him [Moses] and keep their women alive but in humiliation (or violate their women)"* (40:25). The Qur'an specifically demonstrates the dynamics of the model of tyranny, not just as warfare or injustice in the public sphere, but also as a form of abuse and violence against children and women within the confines of their homes. This link between the domestic and the public is a repetitive theme in the Qur'an, and we see it in many of the narratives and prayers.

For example, in Surah 25, we are given the qualities of the true worshippers of God: *"And those who say, Our Lord grant unto us from our spouses and children the bliss of our eyes, and make us leaders to the virtuous ones"* (25:74). This verse directly links leadership of the family to good public leadership; in order to qualify for the latter, bliss and comfort in the family are prerequisites. In fact, the Qur'an presents the virtuous life as that which is consistent and genuine, privately and publicly. It establishes a strong ethos for leaders creating a healthy, enlightened domestic atmosphere before attempting to transform the rest of society. Once again, this is linked to the theme of changing one's self before changing society and the world at large.

It is also interesting that Pharaoh considers himself a model of good leadership, protecting the truth of his ancestors. However, he is not aware that through his use of force, he has created a coercive atmosphere that violates his own tradition: He says, *“Let me kill Moses and let him call on his Lord, What I fear is lest he should change your religion or lest he should cause mischief to appear in the land”* (40:26). Here again, Moses responds in the tradition of the prophets: *“I have turned to my Lord and yours from every dictator who believes not in the Day of Account”* (40:27). There are many similar scenes with Pharaoh in the Qur’an. In fact, it is the Quran’s most repeated story, establishing the traits, qualities and patterns of the violent, coercive model in governance and also in its treatment of children and women.

#### **D. The Queen of Sheba Model: Non-Coercive, Peaceful, and Wise**

In contrast, Surah 27 gives us scenes from another court, that of the Queen of Sheba. The Queen of Sheba represents a different Qur’anic archetype of governance and leadership: the non-coercive, wise leader. Upon receiving a threatening letter from King Solomon, the Queen decides to consult with her people: *“She said, Advise me in regard to my situation, for I never decide any matter without your presence”* (27:32). Even upon receipt of this serious threat to her kingdom, she does not react hastily or unilaterally; instead, she creates a process for collective and democratic decision-making.

What were the consequences of the Queen’s actions? By yielding power to her people, they trusted her further and became more willing to follow her, though out of conviction rather than fear (as we saw in the Pharaoh’s court). In fact, she is rendered even more powerful by her court. *“They said: ‘We are endowed with strength, and given prowess in warfare, but the command is with you; therefore see what you shall order’”* (27:33). In response, the Queen makes an interesting observation: *“She said, ‘When kings enter a town, they despoil it, spread corruption and make the noblest of its people its most humiliated, and this they always do’”* (27:34).

Remarkably, the Qur’an not only describes the court of a powerful queen, but it also introduces us to the Queen of Sheba’s worldview and the way she views kings’ destructive patterns, as well as her decision to break away from this history. *“She said, ‘But I am going to send him a gift and then see what answer the messengers bring back’”* (27:35). Of course, Solomon was displeased with this move; however, because of the wisdom, power and gentleness of a non-violent queen, the story shifts from warfare to conflict resolution.

The importance of the Sheba story is that, like the Prophets, her refusal to reenact the old paradigm of coercion is not the result of her lack of power. Rather, her decision comes from a conscious decision to break away from a historical pattern and reject the paradigms of force. And she succeeds. The Queen of Sheba is capable of resolving her conflict with Solomon peacefully and non-violently, showing us the effectiveness of this third alternative model. The resolution, which averted the destruction of both sides, came through her wisdom and diplomacy, as she offered respect and exhibiting generosity in the face of threats and aggression.

In all these models, we observe consistent patterns which represent divergent worldviews. Each result in different attitudes and behaviors towards people, governance and the ways change can be achieved. This is

why Muslims read the Opening Surah of the Qur'an, praying that God will keep us steadfast to the third path - neither that of tyrants nor victims, but rather, the path of peacemakers seeking compassion, mercy, and justice. In fact, every chapter in the Qur'an opens to, "In the Name of God, the All-Compassionate, the All-Merciful," as compassion and mercy are amongst the Beautiful Names of God. We repeat these names at numerous occasions, because as the mystical philosopher Ibn 'Arabi said, those who believe in God as Creator do not necessarily know these divine attributes which are the underlying principle to the universe. Conversely, when God declares in the Qur'an, "*My Mercy extends to everything*" (7:156), mercy is truly rendered a principal law of all creation.

Therefore, we ask God to "*Guide us to the Straight Path, the path of those whom You blessed*" (1:7). In doing so, we invoke the "non-coercion" verse: "*Let there be no coercion.... It is the tightest knot which can never be undone*" (2:256). If only all Muslims included this verse with the Chair verse, which hangs on the wall of almost every Muslim home.

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