



Middle
East
Forum

The Middle East Quarterly

Jihad. Les textes fondateurs de l'islam face à la modernité

by **Johan Boulard**

Preface by Marie-Thérèse Urvoy. Paris: Studia Arabica VI, Editions de Paris, 2008. 194 pp. €20

Reviewed by Bat Ye'or

author of Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis

Middle East Quarterly Spring 2010

In a short, dense book, historian Boulard provides the public with clear and valuable information on the roots of jihad in the founding texts of Islam, a subject of obviously central importance these days. Boulard's study benefits from objectivity, brevity, and clarity while providing a profusion of sources.

Le Jihad is needed because the public largely sees jihad as a Muslim version of the Christian crusade. In fact, jihad and crusade are radically different ideologically, if not actually opposed, emerging from two different world-views. Contrary to the concept of crusade, jihad is an unending commitment to God that permeates an all-encompassing Muslim religious and legal view of the non-Muslim world.

This hegemonic understanding emerges from Muhammad, whose words and deeds establish forever the immutable, perfect, and divinely inspired conduct that every Muslim must emulate in deeds and words. As Boulard explains, over two hundred verses in the Qur'an mandate jihad, and these are then underscored in the Sunna and the biographies.

Boulard argues that the jihadist outlook is intrinsic to the whole body of Muslim and Islamic religious, legal, and foundational teachings. Muslim scholars disagree about the means to be employed for achieving the jihadist goal, whether by war or *da'wa* (proselytism), but they never disagree on jihad's aim, which is Islamization of the entire world.

The author then discusses the meaning of jihad in modern times, emphasizing that Muslim scholars praise it as a holy and perpetually just war expressing God's will. Boulard concludes that jihad is an integral part of Muslim spirituality, an act of piety confirmed by several Qur'anic verses, combining prayer and war, as Muslims execute God's will. Jihad operates as the fusion between faith and politics. For this reason, says Boulard, the jihadist tactic of contemporary terrorists aimed at destabilizing Western societies and imposing Islamic world supremacy reproduce the traditional, jihadist pattern. Therefore, it is impossible to declare that today's Islamist terrorism has nothing to do with Islam.

The author discusses modern initiatives by Muslim scholars. Those who view jihad as an exclusively spiritual effort are simply inventing a new concept. Boulard notes that Muhammad himself linked faith and war; who can disentangle these after Muhammad associated them? Another school, while not criticizing jihad, promotes principles of Islamic tolerance that allegedly have enlightened the West. In his assessment of such trends, the author concludes that most are apologetic stratagems more than genuinely constructive approaches.