

Conference Report

Conflict and resistance ethics: Towards a critical understanding of jihad and just War

The Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE) in the College of Islamic Studies, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, a member of Qatar Foundation, held its 5th Annual International Conference on “Conflict and Resistance Ethics: Towards a critical understanding of Jihad and Just War” at the Education City in Doha, Qatar from 18-19 March 2017. A number of renowned scholars from various countries shared their thoughtful views and experiences.

The conference aimed at resolving contemporary problems within an Islamic ethical framework. The general methodology of the conference provides a systematic approach that elucidates the three major aspects which are the theory and concepts (conflict, resistance, jihad, just war), the means and authorities (peaceful and violent, just/unjust) and the consequences of violent conflict and war.

Two prominent speakers, Bishop Miguel Angel Ayoso Guixot, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in the Vatican, and Dr. Tariq Ramadan, Director of CILE and Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at the University of Oxford, provided the keynote speech giving overall direction of the conference. Bishop Miguel pointed out that both Christians and Muslims are struggling to tackle the misunderstanding and misperception of the true meaning of peace and the manipulation of terms and principles, like “jihad and just war”, to justify violence and terror in the name of religion. He explained that the main point of the so-called ‘just war theory’ in the Christian tradition, as expressed by various scholars, is articulated in the works of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, is that a war can be just only when it is carried out by a legitimate authority, on the basis of a just cause, and motivated by right intentions. He expressed the need for moral legacy, responsibility and collaboration for the common good. Dr.

Ramadan, criticized the tendency to idealize the past (Islamic heritage) and launched a call for Muslims not to speak about Islam, but rather to act as good Muslims. He stressed on the importance of dealing with the reasons of violence to know why it is happening and not to justify the results. He also pointed out that the current global system produces war and violence, stating, “if there is no dignity there will be no peace”.

The panelists, on the second day of the conference, addressed the problem of ambiguities in such terms as ‘Jihad’, ‘Just War’, ‘Terrorism’, ‘Conflict’, ‘Resistance’ and ‘Ethics’. Dr. Colm McKeogh of Waikato University, New Zealand, pointed out that the sharp decrease in respecting International Law and ethics and the increasing role of military developments and technologies. He argued that religion, religious values and ethics can play a vital role in human well-being and in decreasing political violence. Dr. Zakaria Seddiki, founder and director of the Muslim Institute of Distance Education in France, emphasized on the danger and severe consequences of the poor understanding of Jihad and martyrdom and related issues. He criticized the one-sided view that confines Jihad to combating the enemy and stressed on the fact that the general objective of Shariah is to avoid harm and aggression., Dr. Muetaz Al-Khateeb, Assistant Professor of Methodology of Islamic Ethics in CILE, provided a detailed explanation of the historical development of the concept of Jihad and violence and elucidated the difference between the two terms. He argued that the problem of misconception and overlapping in using the terms ‘Jihad’ and ‘violence’ has led to the absurdity of ‘Jihad’ by Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The panelists of the second session discussed the meaning, scope and types of violence and investigated the legitimacy of the means used to achieve peace. Sheikh Abouzaid El-Mokrie El-Idrissi, Member of the Moroccan Parliament for the Justice and Development Party, wondered why many Muslims today resort to violence. He pointed out that violence and violent means has always been a dilemma and there is susceptibility to violence especially among youth that seriously threatens the strengths of any community. Sheikh El-Idrissi argued that certain phenomena such as ISIS and Boko Haram cannot be explained only in the light of intelligence infiltration and media propaganda, but also by looking into the roots of a susceptibility to violence. Dr. Mohammed El-Moctar Al-Shinqiti, Associate Professor of Political Ethics at CILE, pointed out that Jihad as a means is a moral stand

against oppressors because of their injustice, not a stance against non-Muslims and disbelievers. This includes the national liberation against colonialism, resistance to gain political freedom and revolutions against all types of tyranny and tyrants who are slaying people and draining their resources. Dr. Jerome Drevon, Research Fellow of the Swiss National Science Foundation at the Blavatnik School of Government in the University of Oxford, examined the issue of rebellion against Muslim rulers and their violent overthrow. He argued that the medieval theological debates on the characteristics of the rightful Muslim ruler and the conditions of using violence against them have catalyzed the formation of the Salafi Jihadi trend which adopts the use of violence to overthrow rulers. It is necessary to understand how violence emerges and how a just peace can prevail.

The third panel studied the negative consequences of violent conflicts and war on individuals and societies. The speakers highlighted the danger of the moral decay and the disastrous humanitarian cost of war and conflicts. Dr. Abdulfattah Mohamed, Adviser to the State Foreign Minister in Qatar, noted the sharp rise of violence, especially in Middle East countries, which has subjected vulnerable people especially women and children to all forms of violence and abuse. He brought to attention the important role of the OIC in improving protection mechanisms, utilizing the existing global norms and conventions of International Humanitarian Law. Dr. Ali Mohamed Al Sawa, Professor of Islamic Jurisprudence at Jordan University, explored the impact of Jihad on achieving peace, advancing the argument that Islam is characterized by being inclusive of human life. He stressed that the consequences of conflicts are devastating not only to the fighters themselves, but also to civilians, children, women and civilization as a whole. Dr. Dana Olwan, Assistant Professor of sociology and anthropology at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, addressed the issue of gendered violence in times of conflict. She explained the ways in which conflicts and wars are waged on the bodies of civilians, including men women and children. She explored the intersections of gendered violence and its various expressions beyond the binary of peace and war and identified the conditions under which instances of gendered violence that predominantly target the bodies of women and children become known to the public.

The conference emphasized on the importance of initiating more interdisciplinary approaches in addressing the problem of conflict, violence and their tragic consequences and also developing preventive measures. It also called for upholding the ethical principles of respect for human life and dignity, peace, justice and avoiding the bias that results from religious and political affiliation or personal interest. It stressed that conflicts should be resolved with peaceful means such as dialogue, negotiations, mediation, concession, and arbitration.

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