

Book Review

Rahman, Tariq. *Interpretations of Jihad in South Asia: An Intellectual History*
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Tariq Rahman is one of Pakistan's most distinguished scholars. After spending most of the third decade of his life in the Pakistan army, he resigned his commission to focus on English literature and Linguistics. He then moved on to consider issues of language more generally in the Pakistan context. His most recent major monograph in this was *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History* (2011). Amongst the many distinctions he was awarded along the way were: the first Pakistan Chair at Berkeley, University of California; the Directorship of the National Institute of Pakistan Studies at Quaid-i Azam University, Islamabad; and a Lifetime Achievement award from the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Nothing in his past activities, except his general distinction, has suggested that he was equipped to take on the issue of interpretations of jihad in South Asia. He was driven to do so by the way in which Islamic militancy seemed to be closing in on his world: his daughter told him of its growing presence in the United Kingdom, while jihadis were increasingly active in the cities he knew well – Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore. Unable to find a satisfactory explanation of these developments, he decided he must do so for himself.

While Islamic militancy is a worldwide problem, Rahman focusses on its presence in South Asia, which contains one third of the world's Muslims. He begins by studying references to militant action, broadly construed, in the sources of Islam, the Quran and Hadith. Considering just the Quran he notes that there are 183 verses which refer to war and fighting and supplies us with a table of the verses translated into English; these he refers to often as his book progresses. In most of the verses the word used for warfare is *qital*, meaning fighting or killing. In only 36 does he find the word jihad, meaning effort or struggle, and of them only ten 'are unequivocally interpreted as signifying warfare' (p. 3). Jihad is also used for peaceful struggle. Indeed, having reviewed all the verses relating to holy war, he finds *qital* a

more appropriate term than jihad. He notes that all the classical schools of law identify such wars with Sura al-Baqarah (2-26) which uses the term *qital* and quotes the late Patricia Crone 'it is a bit of a mystery that jihad came to be the technical term for holy war' (p. 4).

Scripture is one thing, and interpretation is another, Rahman's message is that interpretation traditionally has been flexible. Considering this process in relation to the Quran, he concludes 'one verse can be interpreted using different hermeneutical devices to yield not just different but even opposite meanings' (p. 48). Drawing Hadith into play he notes the extent to which interpretation was guided by the social norms and values of jurists. This notion is crucial 'since, in all interpretations of jihad as a concept, flexibility is not an outcome of the hermeneutic. Rather, one chooses the hermeneutic in the light of *a priori* commitment to change (flexibility) or conservation (inflexibility)' (p. 61). Studying Quran commentaries and books on jihad produced in the pre-modern period, when Muslims were firmly in power, Rahman notes, that jihad was to be both defensive and offensive; that it should be for propagating the faith and not for earthly objectives such as conquering more land or ruling more people; and that it could only be undertaken at the order of a ruler of an Islamic state. But matters changed in the eighteenth century when Muslims found themselves increasingly without power. He charts the differing responses of Shah Waliullah's (d. 1762) family and its circle. The Shah, himself, invited foreign rulers to invade and re-establish Muslim power. His son, Abdul Aziz (d. 1824), who had come to have a much greater understanding of British power issued fatwas encouraging forms of co-existence with the British. While Abdul Aziz's follower, Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly (d. 1831), led an armed struggle against the Sikhs in which he hoped to create an independent Muslim community on the North-West Frontier.

Rahman makes it clear that the South Asian context changes in an important way during the nineteenth century when it becomes subject to British imperial power. Moreover, this power was accompanied by missionaries, some of whom hoped to convert India to Christianity and most of whom took the line that Islam had been spread by the sword. Those Muslims, usually modernists, who wished to build bridges with British rule and Western civilisation, almost invariably interpreted jihad as purely defensive warfare for which there was no excuse under British rule because Muslims were free to practise their faith. For ulama, the learned men of Islam, matters were not so simple. While Abdul Hayy of Farangi Mahall (d. 1886), one of the great minds of the second half of the nineteenth century, made it clear that there was no argument to rebel against British rule, most ulama tended towards opposition. In the early nineteenth century, Hajji Shariatullah (d. 1840), the leader of the Faraidi movement in Bengal, defined the land as Dar al-Harb, in jihad terms a land of war, and would not permit congregational prayers to take place. One hundred years later, during the Khilafat movement, Abul Kalam Azad (d. 1958) also took the view that India was Dar al-Harb and promulgated his *hijrat* fatwa with the result that many Indian Muslims fled the infidel-controlled territory for the Muslim-ruled land of Afghanistan with tragic results. There were, in addition, many resistance movements in the North-West Frontier in which local mullas used the language of jihad in leading movements against the British. By this time there was no widely accepted religious authority; men no longer followed the classical rules on declaring jihad. 'Thus jihad', Rahman tells us, becomes 'more a matter of vocabulary and emotion than ... interpretation of religious texts. In a sense, then, it represents a certain democratisation of the theory of jihad which plays into the hands of anyone who takes the initiative to use the evocative words' (p.166-67).

Turning to the post-colonial era Rahman emphasises the new significance which is given to the importance of living in an Islamic version of the modern state. This was first developed by Maulana Maududi (d. 1979) in Pakistan but spread from there to influence key figures in the Middle East such as Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966). In his hands, and in those of men influenced by him such as Abd al-Salam Faraj (d. 1982), an aggressive jihad became necessary to overthrow their own Muslim regimes, often much tied up with outside forces, and to install a fully Islamic system. Rahman underlines how the nature and purpose of jihad has now changed. It is violent and aims to capture the modern state to fashion an Islamic society. Such ideas were brought to Pakistan by the writings of these men, but they were also brought by those Arabs who came to fight in the jihad against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan of 1979, men such as Abdullah Azzam (d. 1989), Usama bin Laden (d. 2011) and Ayman al-Zawahiri (b. 1961).

Rahman demonstrates that Pakistan's radical Islamists have travelled in the same direction as their Middle Eastern brothers. He studies in particular the writings of Muhammad

Hafiz Said (b 1948), the leader of the Lashkar -e-Tayyabah, and Masud Azhar (b. 1968), the leader of the Jaish-e-Muhammadi, and Mufti Shamazai (d. 2004) of the Jamia Binoria (Karachi), resentment at the actions of India in Kashmir, of the Israelis in the Middle East, and the USA in the world, run through all their writings. But in general they 'start with the ideological assumption that jihad is a duty which is incumbent on all Pakistani Muslims; that the leaders of the state have abandoned it; and, that it is now their duty to appoint a leader (*imam*) among themselves to carry it out. Moreover, they also believe that jihad is aggressive and, if it is against powerful enemies, unconventional methods of fighting can be used (including suicide missions). In an important sense then, they usurp the state's narrative that it has the monopoly of the means of violence.' (p. 232) It is clear that ideas of jihad in Pakistan have come a long way from the classical definitions. They have not quite matched those of the Middle East, where jihad is permissible against the regime, but they do permit action alongside, or perhaps even instead of, the state, and this why Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate is said to have found them a useful tool, although one which could always blow up in its face.

The burden of Rahman's book is that there has not been just one interpretation of jihad which has existed unchanged from the classical era to the present but ever-changing interpretations, particularly from the era of Western imperialism, in which different groups have produced different interpretations according to their beliefs, their political situation and the needs of their class. This argument has been supported by exhaustive research in the writings of religious and political thinkers which almost invariably includes analysis of those verses of the Quran brought forward in support of arguments. It is an impressive achievement. Not all the scholarship is secure: the founder of the so-called Wahhabis was not Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab (p. 2) but Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab; Abul Kalam Azad was certainly not the son of Hajji Imdad Allah (p. 138), and it is probably unwise to rest an argument on the *Malfuzat-e Taimuri* (p. 62) which is widely regarded as a forgery. This said, Rahman has investigated ideas of jihad in South Asia to a breadth and a depth rivalled by no other. He has produced arguments about how they have changed which all should note. In the process he has produced a book of great value both to the scholar and the policy maker.