THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT: PERPETUAL JIHAD

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Abstract

The Middle East conflict has been fiercely debated by politicians and religious and professional groups. In recent years, the Middle East conflict has been the primary source for unrest and instability in the world. Addressing this conflict objectively and rationally could reduce/eliminate bloodshed and profoundly change the direction of world politics. The conflict has led to deep resentments among people of various faiths and cultural backgrounds. Its persistence is attributed to the tremendous influence that religion and economic factors exercise upon policy. It appears that there are several groups that prefer to politicalize religion and are intended to keeping the world in a state of perpetual Jihad. In this paper, the various perspectives of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam regarding Jihad are outlined. The origins of and the historical perspectives on Jihad are clarified. The evolution of the meaning of Jihad in each religion is outlined in the context of the rise and fall of power in each religion. Various forms of Jihad are presented. This paper suggests that perpetual Jihad is a tragic and highly dangerous development and its consequences to the world are potentially devastating. Perpetual Jihad will fuel rather than resolve conflict and will eventually threaten world stability.

The Middle East conflict: perpetual jihad

In a sign of optimism Warren W. Christopher (1994), then U.S. Secretary of State, argued that if the forces of peace prevail and governments in the Middle East adopt free market reforms, the region will enjoy an era of economic growth that exceeds anything it has seen in the twentieth century. This same sentiment was been echoed recently by Colin Powell. Powell, among others, believes that the Middle East has all the required resources to enhance the economic welfare of its citizens and be a major economic player in the world economy. There are, however, various factors that have frustrated economic development and led to a general decline, in recent years, in the standard of living of the people there. The UN's *Arab Human Development Report 2002* asserts that from the Atlantic to the Gulf, people experience "deprivation, in all its forms." The Report reveals that there is a widespread economic stagnation and sluggish trade performance. These have been primarily attributed to "political upheavals, military conflicts, sanctions and embargoes." All have contributed to lack of political freedom, foreign occupation,

instability, and neglect of human development. Powell (2002), accentuates the need for genuine change in the Middle East. Nevertheless, he asserts that the Middle East economies "are stifled by regulation and cronyism. They lack transparency, and are closed to entrepreneurship, investment, and trade." Both Powell and the *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, however, acknowledge that the region suffers from a mismatch between aspirations and their fulfillment. This situation has often led to alienation, apathy and discontent. Consequently, human capacities have not been nurtured and economic opportunities have been missed.

There is a consensus among Middle East Experts that the region faces deep problems and genuine challenges that have paralyzed it from moving forward politically and economically. Among the most genuine challenges is political sentiment with deep religious underpinnings. Indeed, such sentiments have perpetuated conflict, instability, and suffering in the region. These sentiments have persistently impeded progress toward political understanding and economic stability in a region where international politics and religion are intertwined. In fact, the daily usage of the term Jihad reflects these sentiments. This paper addresses this crucial issue.

Jihad is among the most widely used terms in the current daily discourse on Middle East religion and international politics. Intentionally or unintentionally, various forces have given this simple word contention and meaning with far reaching political and religious implications. Jihad is an Arabic word that is derived from *juhd*—effort, exertion, strive, struggle, hard work, or hardship. In common usage and language it specifically means striving to perform a task, intense effort, or meeting a challenging goal or responsibility. For example, the Quran used it to mean efforts-*Jahidhim*- (9:79) or, even stronger, -*jahed*- (35:42) along with the common meaning, strive.

Jihad is not synonymous with other Arabic words *harb*, war, *qitaal* fighting or *Muaraka* quarrel. The Arabs used the word before Islam, whether they were pagans, Christians, or Jews. Nor is the Arabic word Jihad similar to the Hebrew term *milhemet mitzvah/hovah* for obligatory war (Firestone, 2001a) or the Christian term "just war." The term Jihad was never meant to mean "holy" in Islam; theologically the Islamic tradition did not sanction the term holy or just war. In addition, the linguistic roots of Jihad "have nothing whatsoever to do with military action, violence, or warfare" (Sullivan, 2003). Nevertheless, in recent years, and especially in Western literature and among extremist religious groups, Jihad has been utilized more than ever to convey the meaning of violence or holy war; a meaning that was promoted during the era of the Crusades.

In the absence of spirited dialogue, a positive understanding of the word Jihad may give way to prevailing negative connotations. Indeed, there are competing forces in the global political arena that seek to institutionalize a highly negative translation. Sullivan (2003), warns that there are intellectuals who promote the negative meaning of Jihad. Similarly, Pfaff (2002) asserts that these intellectuals attempt to create events that are "dangerous and potentially even more violent than they have already become. They are not a war of religion, and it is deeply irresponsible to try to turn them into one." The fact that these intellectuals and policy makers have access to various types of resources, especially the media and military, make it imperative to engage in intellectually spirited discourse in

order to provide a better understanding of the various meanings of the term, and to narrow the gap of misunderstanding and suspicion across cultures.

In this article, we intend to assess the perspectives of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam on Jihad in the context of the rise and decline of power of the entities associated with these religions. Using historical accounts and perspectives, we intend to demonstrate that Middle East conflicts and today's Jihad are directly influenced by religious fever, especially when policy appears to be an instrument of religion. Furthermore, the paper provides certain implications and their meaning for today's events in the Middle East and the rest of the world.

The nature and politics of jihad

Tom Robbins (1990, p. 52), in his history-based novel, predicts that we are witnessing a rebirth of the old crusade as a new Jihad to "…stop terrorism and take the damn oil" from the Arabs and to reclaim the Promised Land. Ironically, it is immediately after this prophecy, that the term terrorism and the Middle East issues have become the most debated topics in the political discourse (e.g., the First Gulf War,1990-91; the second Palestinian Intifada, 2000-2003; 9-11 terrorist attacks, 2001; the invasion of Afghanistan 2001; the second Gulf War against Iraq, 2003). It is possible that the abatement of the Cold War and the rise of political religion in the United States, that has evolved rapidly since the era of President Reagan, 1981-89, have created a new environment fertile for inventing a new enemy and associated terminologies.

It is without doubt, however, that politicization and misreading of religion have motivated various actors to pursue seemingly divisional policies at home and abroad. Indeed, the recent rise of religious extremism among the three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam has impaired constructive dialogue among civilizations and fueled the flames of Middle East sentiments. Curry (2002, p.42) argues that reflection and rationality, in the current debate on violence and war, have been "distorted almost beyond recognition by rhetoric and misunderstanding." He postulates that an important and logical understanding comes only through a clear vision of the past. Accordingly, Curry argues that the Crusaders' invasion of the Middle East provides incredible insight on today's events and their religious underpinning.

Commenting on the headline, "Pro-Israeli General Will Oversee Reconstruction of Postwar Iraq," in the Jewish weekly, *Forward*, Raban (2003) asserts that this appointment was a calculated act and "entirely in keeping with the Bush administration's policy of teaching the Middle East a humiliating lesson." Similarly, the *Washington Post*, in an editorial (2003), indicated that the White House nomination of Daniel Pipes, a person who was accused by several civil rights organizations of anti-Muslim bias, to the U.S. Institute of Peace, was "a sort of a cruel joke." Middle East experts acknowledge that today's events are analogous to the early twentieth century, when Britain and France invaded the Arab World and to the Crusades era. Mansfield (1985, p.176) documents that Sir Mark Sykes and Francois Picot, the authors of the 1916 Sykes-Picot British-French agreement to divide the Arab east between the two countries, were heavily influenced by religion.

Mansfield indicates that Sykes was delighted when the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George had "several British ministers who . . .[having] all been brought up in the spirit of nineteenth-century Bible – reading Protestantism, were attracted by the romantic idea of helping the Jewish people to 'return' to their promised land after two thousand years."

Likewise, Curry (p. 38) indicates that the Crusades in 1095 inspired more passion and enthusiasm than ever imagined in Europe and that 'The idea of an expedition to reclaim Jerusalem from the unbelievers seized the imagination of people from all social classes." Curry suggests that this passion has been slow to die. When the Europeans invaded the Middle East nine centuries later, they displayed a fierce religious pride. He quoted Sir Edmund Allenby (p. 39), the British General who captured Jerusalem in 1917, declaring, "Today the wars of the Crusaders are completed."

Barnard Lewis (2002, p.9), notices that in the last two centuries the World has witnessed the Military advances of Christendom in the heart of the Muslim World, the Middle East. He argues that the two major Muslim powers, the Ottomans and the Persians, "continued to fight each other until the nineteenth century, by which time they no longer constituted a threat to anyone but their own subjects." The ultimate collapse of these two powers initiated the rise of Christian Europe as the ultimate arbiter of power in the Middle East until 1956, when the U.S. made its presence in the region remarkably noticeable.

Many analysts seem to suggest that the true dimensions of the recent war mission are no different from past wars in the Middle East: religious rivalry and economic interest. Friedman (2003), among others, believes that the U.S. has used its power against Iraq more "to defend oil and Israel than democracy." Indeed, there are some who think that it is solely driven by a strong belief in doing God's work and serving the will of God. Writing in the *New York Times*, Maureen Dowd (2002) states that this "new fight isn't logical-it's cultural. It is the latest chapter in the culture wars." Rupert Cornwell (2003) believes that the current political atmosphere and development on the ground demonstrate without a doubt that '"the looming war with Iraq is indeed a "crusade" against Muslims."' Similarly, Barbra Ehrenreich (2002) argues that an '"invasion of Iraq and the attendant "collateral damage" will harden the impression that the United States is pursuing its own kind of jihad--against the Islamic world." Margolis (2003, p.8) succinctly summon up what he termed Jihad against Iraq and the problems in the Middle East by stating, "The real reasons North Korea is not in Bush's gun sights are, of course, that it does not challenge Israel, has no oil, and plays no role in Christian Armageddon."

The religious factor has always been important in shaping the discourse on the Middle East conflict and in understanding its true dimensions. This has been the case historically and should not be expected to diminish anytime soon. The risk, however, is that religion is more likely than any other variable, in the absence of tolerance, to lead to dogmatism and uncompromised stances. This certainly perpetuates conflicts and makes compromise and understanding a far reaching objective. In the context of the recent war in the Middle East, Neummann (2003) acknowledges that the root of the problem is the "issue of the occupation of the West Bank." But, he attributes the severity to the lack of implementation of the biblical prophecy by annexing all of the land by Israel. Pasko (2003) elaborates on this crisis when he argues that everything in the world is created for a biblical

reason and consequently the invasion of Iraq "is for us-i.e. the Jews and Israel… the Torah telling us that everything that happens in the world is for the benefit of the Jewish people."

Kristof (2003) reports that the White House plan to invade Iraq and remake the Middle East has "an element of messianic vision." Milbank (2003), quoting Richard Perle, an advisor to Bush, stated that the President, "comes from the conviction he's on the right course [and] knows exactly what he's doing." Milbank indicates that some southern Christian leaders believe that the President in this war is "on an agenda from God," and that "Divine Providence" has a role in the President's action. Rosenblatt (2002) agrees stating that , "it's ironic that President Bush, a born –again Bible reader, appears to have rejected the Christian position and adopted instead the Jewish stance on self-defense and responding to evil" in initiating a war against Iraq.

The idea that the current war and the U.S military presence in the Middle East is religiously and politically motivated is commonly held too among Middle East experts and Muslims. Edward Said (2003a) painfully acknowledges that Washington has made no secret that its plans "are to re-draw the map of the whole Arab world, perhaps changing other regimes and many borders in the process." He went on to suggest that the real objective is to please Israel and to have a vision for the region that is "based on a script written by Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz." Recently, Said (2003b) seems to suggest that the primary consideration of the war plans is Israeli domination. He states, "Along with Syria, Iraq once represented the only serious military threat to Israel and, therefore, it had to be smashed." Similarly, a statement attributed to Bin Laden (February 16, 2003), reiterates the religious underpinning of the war. It states, "We are following with great interest and utmost concern the preparations by the crusaders to occupy the capital of Islam . . . and to rob the wealth of Muslims and to appoint over you [Iraqis] an agent government that follows Washington and Tel Aviv, in preparation for the founding of greater Israel."

While there seems to be consensus among many experts on the underlying religious and economic motives for the current war, it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty that religious considerations have been transformed into a policy direction. But some Washington experts clearly allude to this possibility. Vulliamy (2003) insists that religion plays a significant role in shaping President Bush's Middle East policy. He indicates that Carl Rove (Bush advisor) and Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, are the masterminds behind Bush. He states, "Rove's position dovetailed with the beliefs of Paul Wolfowitz, and the axis between conservative Southern Protestantism and fervent . . . East Coast Zionism was gorged-each as zealous about their religion as the other." This led, according to Aluf Benn, to a policy that "is still focused on transforming the Middle East into an area under U.S. protection, in which Israel will enjoy privileged status." Lind (2003) asserts that the alliance between neoconservatives and fervent Christian Zionists "took over Washington and steered the U.S. into a Middle Eastern war unrelated to any plausible threat to the U.S." This alliance has led to an aggressive Middle East policy. According to Lind (2003) the neoconservatives are, "products of the influential Jewish-American sector of the Trotskyist movement of the 1930s and 1940s, which morphed into anti-communist liberalism between the 1950s and 1970s and finally into a kind of militaristic and imperial right with no precedents in American culture or political

history." Brownstein (2003) indicates that the neoconservatives exercise a strong influence on policy formulation and direction. He argues that President Bush 'seems personally most drawn to the neoconservative perspective, and that makes the neocons' thinking an important guide not only to how the administration got to Iraq but where it might go from there." Both Buchanan (2003) and Marshall (2003) also confirm that the administration's policy toward the Middle East has been completely designed by the neoconservatives.

Buchanan (2003) speculates that Washington is determined to engage in "endless wars on the Islamic world to serve" the interest of Israel and implement the neoconservatives' agenda. Many leaders of the neoconservatives do not veer away from confirming that their end goal is instability and destruction in the Middle East. Michael Ledeen (2002), former under Secretary of State and a leading neoconservative, states, "Stability is an unworthy American mission, and a misleading concept to boot. We do not want stability in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and even Saudi Arabia; we want things to change. The real issue is not whether, but how to destabilize." Previously, Ledeen (2001) argued that perpetual war is the only useful option to ensure the submission of the Muslim World. He eloquently elaborates on this point, "we will not be sated until we have had the blood of every miserable little tyrant in the Middle East, until every leader of every cell of the terror network is dead or locked securely away, and every last drooling anti-Semitic and anti-American mullah, imam, sheikh, and ayatollah is either singing the praises of the United States of America, or pumping gasoline, for a dime a gallon, on an American military base near the Arctic Circle."

The appeal of the "perpetual war" appears to have a strong hold in Washington. William Kristol (2003) believes that it is the desired blueprint for a new world order. In an editorial in the *Weekly Standard*, he indicates that the successful invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq is the beginning, "The Battles of Afghanistan and Iraq have been won decisively and honorably. But these are only two battles. We are only at the end of the beginning in the war on terror and terrorist states." While this perpetual war seems to be endless, the former director of CIA, James Woolsey, asserts it is only for a few decades. He states, "This fourth world war . . . will last considerably longer than either World Wars I or II did for us. Hopefully not the full four-plus decades of the Cold war. . . . I think, over the decades to come . . . we will make a lot of people very nervous." Perhaps this understanding of war and violent act resembles, more than ever, a perpetual form of Jihad. Indeed, however, this form may turn out to be unique in its risks and catastrophic in its consequences. This is because the concept of permanent war seems to imply a profound change in cultural orientation and economic priority that has to be sustained by an overwhelming use of military power.

Most importantly, perpetual war or Jihad is expected to lead to chaos. Marshall (2003) thinks this is not an undesired outcome, rather it is part of the plan: the polarization and fragmentation of the world are not something to be avoided but something that needs to be induced. Ben-Aharon (2002), an Israeli civil rights expert, warns about this state of affairs. He views this development as a serious threat to world stability and security. He states that the concept of empire "…is the in thing in the current political-diplomatic discourse. Peace, welfare, a law-abiding regime and international order will accrue to those who seek the protection of the global Western empire, while the language of force will be

employed against those who reject this protection." Policymakers in Washington do not seem anxious to distance themselves from this possible scenario. Paul Wolfowitz, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, articulated this new possibility by saying that Pax Americana entailed "demonstrating that your friends will be protected and taken care of, that your enemies will be punished and that those who refuse to support you will live to regret having done so" (Quoted in Keller, 2002).

Religious perspectives on Jihad

Robbins (1990, p.222) speculates that the "first recorded act of genocide" took place in the land of Canaan when the "Hebrew escaping from Egypt invaded Canaan and killed everybody, the whole country, old men, women, children, little babies what were in arms." In more recent history, only Hitler attempted to annihilate an entire population: the Jewish people. The possibility that such human tragedy may occur is a distant memory. Nevertheless, the adage that "history often repeats itself" is noteworthy in this context. Indeed, the logical extension then and now is that, " Once religion became political, the exercise of it, too, could be said to lead sooner or later to war" (Robbins, 1990, p. 168.

Most of the contemporary political commentators and subsequently the discourse on religion and violence seem to overlook the roots of the three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Their roots and the environment in which they were fostered have tremendously shaped their perspectives and evolution. The three monotheistic religions share common foundations. All trace their lineage to Abraham, an Iraqi Semitic person who claimed that Almighty God showed him a vision. All were founded in the Middle East. Judaism was the first religion, followed by Christianity and Islam, both of whom acknowledge the influence of Judaism on the formation of their respective tenets. Unlike the first two religions, Islam is not named after a person. It strictly means total submission to the will of Almighty God. Rev. Richard Nolan (2003) argues that "Islam is the middle way between Judaism and Christianity; it restores the unity of the children of Abraham and overcomes the limitations of Judaism and Christianity." The proposition that Islam is the middle way between the two religions that preceded it may help to shed a light on the meaning of Jihad among these three religions.

Jihad in Judaism

Judaism is the oldest among the three religions. In Judaism there is an emphasis on the specific and the relevant and on the role of man on earth. Its instructions are clear and encompass moral and military conduct among other tenets (Ali & Gibbs, 1998). The Torah illustrates the challenges that the Jewish people faced and the action that must be taken to ensure their continuity and survival. The Jewish tribes, which were outnumbered by other tribes and communities, found that the Torah answered to most of their immediate military and political concerns. Moser (2001) argues that in the Torah, there "is the vehemence, of violence." He indicates that the second Chronicles (20:24) shows us a landscape strewn with corpses, "and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and

none escaped." Furthermore, Rabbi Soloveichik (2003) asserts that unlike Christianity, Judaism does not accentuate the virtue of forgiveness. He states that when "hate is appropriate, then it is not only virtuous, but essential for Jewish well –being."

Rabbi Firestone (2001b) asserts that anyone can find excerpts in the Torah and Talmud that "would curdle the blood of the innocent reader." He refers to Deuteronomy (7) that "calls for mass extermination, for genocide of the native Canaanite inhabitants of the land." For example, I Samuel (15:3) commands, "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox or sheep, camel and ass." Likewise, under Joshua (11: 11-12) the destruction and killings described are unimaginable by today's standard. The Bible states, "And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them; there was not any left to breath: and he burnt Ha'zor with fire. And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and he utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord commanded."

W.H. Frend (1967) documents that the act of martyrdom and sacrifice is highly emphasized in the early teaching of Judaism. Both martyrdom and suicide were considered holy actions. The martyr was "regarded as representative of the people of Israel and 'an example of nobility and a memorial of virtue." Frend (p. 36) asserts that the "act of martyrdom was the means of his own entry into eternal life, and the sign that his persecutors would not escape God's judgment . . . For the victorious victim both resurrection and immorality were promised." These fatalistic attitudes and sacrifices are still practiced. Shahar Ilan (2002) quoted a religious broadcaster in Israel calling on supporters to take arms against Israeli leftists, "if we need to slaughter, we shall slaughter, and if we must be slaughtered, we shall be slaughtered."

Rabbi Firestone (2001a) insists that the notions of holy war lay virtually "dormant for most of our exilic existence." Rosenblatt (2002) argues that wars can be sometimes "necessary and even moral." Similarly, Rabbi Greenberg (2003) insists that the religious instruction regarding "a pre-emptive strike is warranted for greater security or for expanded boundaries yielding greater defensive depth against a possible future onslaught." Nevertheless, there are religious scholars who consider most of the quoted excerpts from the Torah and Talmud related to violence and war as irrelevant to today's affairs and should be viewed in their historic contexts. Most of them were instructions that were related to the process of establishing a state during primitive hostilities, dominating neighboring communities, or defending the Jewish communities from possible aggression. After the Jewish people spread into other lands, the use of holy war and the language of violence were no longer applicable. Indeed, during the Medieval era, the Jewish people posed little political and military challenge to existing powers (Royal, 1995). However, at the present time, Rabbi Irwin Kula (2002) warns against treating the Biblical teachings as especially valid. He states, "We teach a text where conquering another land and wiping out another people is something that is considered appropriate and good and even commanded by God." He suggests that this must be taught "not as precedent, but something to get better at."

Rabbi Firestone (2001a) argues that only in recent decades has the term Jewish "holy war" entered the religious and political discourse in relation to the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine in 1948. Rabbi Firestone claims that in some quarters of the Jewish community there are those who believe in the famous statement of Nahmanides in his gloss on Maimonides' Book of Commandments who teaches "that the conquest and settlement of the land of Israel . . . is a positive commandment for all generations obligating every individual, even during the period of exile." Consequently, the conflict with the Palestinians has become the most significant issue in the Jewish discourse.
In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Jewish "holy war" may take various forms, in addition to the ongoing daily conflict in the holy land. These forms include: financial support to Israel and its settlement policies in the occupied territories; volunteering in the Israeli army, especially during the time of war; exercising political influence on governments in various countries to support Israeli polices; and media campaigns against Arabs and Muslims.

Rabbi Ariel argues that Jewish morality is based on a balance of justice and compassion. To that end, he insists, "at the fundamental moral level, Judaism does not rule out use of violence" (quoted in Sheleg, 2002). The Jewish *Forward* (see Cattan, 2002) reports that most of the organized Jewish groups espouse the war sentiment. Nevertheless, there are many religious scholars who consider war as evil and unnecessary in today's world. The Rabbinic Leader of the Temple of Universal Judaism, Dawn Rose, ((2001) vehemently denounces the call for war. She states that we have been told that we are "at war," and "the implication is made that innocent lives are thus expendable-especially of those people who are not American, not Jewish or Christian, and not the family down the block. We must demand that President Bush call death, death-whether it occurs at home or abroad." Similarly, Rabbi Marc Gopin (2001) argues that there must be limits on the use of violence and the Jewish "just war" tradition and the "just war" traditions of other religions, in principle, "cannot justify much in the way of war, due to collateral damage. . . . In Jewish tradition we must emphasize *pikuach nefes*, the saving and protection of innocent life, as the ultimate arbiter of difficult decisions about war and violence."

The preceding discussion demonstrates that historically the inclination for using a violent form of "jihad" in Judaism was associated with the rise of a political entity and its acquisition of a dominate power. It was during the invasion of the Canaanite land that the Jewish people fiercely espoused war and violence as instruments for territorial expansion. In the centuries following the Roman domination, the use of force by the Jewish people was not emphasized. In recent years, this has been changed. For example, the Jewish *Forward* (2003) noted in an editorial a rise in what it called "Jewish toughness." The editorial indicated that among Jewish groups "expressions of pain at the suffering of others are commonly derided as weakness of spirit" and that for these groups "peace comes only through victory."

Jihad in Christianity

The environment in which Christianity first appeared had a tremendous influence on the stance of the early Christian Church relative to violence and war. The Romans were the dominant power in the area; their military and economic power was unrivaled at the

time. Jesus' instructions to the faithful to avoid violence were clear: (Matt. 5:39), "But I say into you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" and "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). Christ appeared to understand the boundaries of power. Therefore, he preached the doctrines of peace and forgiveness, and avoided confrontation with the Romans (Ali & Gibbs, 1989).

Once the Roman Empire espoused Christianity, the emphasis on non-violence disappeared or diminished. Like the Romans, the subsequent governments in the West embarked on empire building and political domination and rivalry. All used religion to justify their expansionist policies and engagement in endless war. Frend (1967) documents that Christianity adopted, in its early years, the concept of righteous suffering, martyrdom, resistance, and sacrifice from Judaism. Karen Armstrong points out that (1992, p. 22) in about 850 the concept of martyrdom became a rallying force among Christians. This took place when Spanish Christian fanatics publicly attacked the religion of their Muslim rulers and denounced the Prophet Mohamed. Armstrong indicates that the Muslims were "extremely reluctant to put these Christian fanatics to death, partly because they did not seem in control of their faculties but also because they realized that the last thing they needed was a martyr-cult."

Benjamin Kedar (1984) reports on the war against Muslims by Christian authorities during the formative years of Islam. He suggests that the Pope, about 650, attempted to convert Muslims to Christianity. A century later, Christian authorities considered the refusal of Muslims to convert "as justification for waging war on them." He (p. 8) quoted an Irish scholar active at the Court of Charles the Bald that the Muslims of the south and the pagans of the north "will bend their necks in subjection; Christ will reign everywhere; all submit to both King and God." The *Economist* (1999) eloquently shows that the Crusaders inflicted untold suffering upon Muslims. It indicates that when the crusaders besieged Caesarea, two Muslim emissaries presented a query to the Patriarch as follows: "Why do you tell your people to invade our land and kill us, when your religion says no one must kill anyone made in the image of God?" The Patriarch's answer regarding the killing was "whoever fights to destroy God's law deserves that. Give up the land, and you can go unharmed with your goods. If not, the sword of the Lord will kill you." The *Economist*, however, insists that the sword, rather than forgiveness, was the arbiter. Its quotation from European accounts of what happened when the Crusaders stormed Jerusalem is telling about the nature of violence:

Our men took many prisoners in the temple [the al-Agsa mosque], men and women, killing some and saving some alive . . .. They rushed through the city, seizing gold and silver, horses and mules, goods of all sorts. Then they went rejoicing and weeping for gladness to worship at the sepulcher of our Savior . . .. They climbed up to attack the pagans [Muslims], men and women, cutting off their heads with swords. Some Muslims jumped headlong from the roof.

Curry (2002) argues that the notion of martyrdom and death in the path of God were motivational factors for the Crusaders. He indicates that salvation through the sword was a powerful devotional element. Indeed, salvation "through violence was a

revolutionary idea." He quotes (p. 39) Pope Urban II calling on all Christians to "leave off slaying each other and fight[] instead a righteous war, doing the work of God, and God will lead them. For those that died in battle there would be absolution and the remission of sins." Nevertheless, Curry suggests that this idea was without precedent in the history of Christianity.

As the search for economic interests and land became closely intertwined with the movement of the spread of religion in the Christian world, an era of colonization was initiated. As indicated in the preceding discussion, charter corporations were instrumental in spreading Christianity and enhancing Western political and military domination. Even during the Cold War, religion played a pivotal role in arousing the public sentiment against the Godless Communists. The end of the Cold War has witnessed a new era where religion and cultural sentiments have become integral ingredients in redesigning the world and restationing military forces in many of its parts. At this time, the boundaries between economic interest, greed, and religions have become blurred and the world seems to have regressed back to the era of the Crusades; though with the application of the most sophisticated technologies.

It should be mentioned that, over the years, Christian theologians have developed the concept of "just war"; a term coined by St. Augustine. For St. Augustine, the intention behind a war is an important consideration. He declares, "The passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an unpacific and relentless spirit, the fever of revolt, the lust of power, and such things, all these are rightly condemned in war" (Quoted in Raymond, 2002). These concepts encompass mutually agreed rules of combat between two similar enemies. The principles of just war are: having just cause (e.g., initiation of aggression), being declared by proper authority (mostly a state), possessing right intentions (done for the sake of justice and not for reason of self-interest or aggrandizement), having a reasonable chance for success (costs & benefits of a campaign must be calculated), and the end being proportional to the means used (retrieve a land that was controlled by the invading forces) (Moseley, 2001). The U.S. Catholic Bishops' 1993 statement on just war emphasized that the "Christian has no choice but to defend peace." It states that the tradition of "just war" seeks to overcome injustice, reducing violence and preventing its expansion by: clarifying when force may be used, limiting the resort to force and restraining damage done by military forces during war. For all these reasons, most of the mainstream Christian churches have stood against the call for war and expansion in recent years. These Churches believe, unlike most of the Evangelical Christian Right groups, that war does an injustice to the majority of people and results in destruction and suffering to those innocent people caught in its wake.

It is plausible, therefore, to suggest that since the era of the Crusades, the Christian world has gained considerable military power and has often used force to pursue its interests. During the inception of Christianity, however, Jesus discouraged the use of force and called for tolerance and forgiveness. In the Christian Western World, however, there seems to be a tendency to exhibit an uncompromising stance and arrogance when religion is integrated into politics. While some may consider the era of colonization as a case in point (see Amin, 2001), Nazism in Germany demonstrates that mixing religion and politics can lead to tragic consequences. Theologically, however, the mainstream religious

authorities appear, in recent history, to condemn the use of violent forms of Jihad and have set certain restrictions and guidelines for sanctioning violence.

Jihad in Islam

The birth of Islam coincided with the declining influence of the Persian and Roman empires. It was revealed to Mohamed around 610. At that time, Arabia was characterized by widespread corruption, fierce tribal loyalty, abuse of power, and a complete absence of law and order. Mohamed recognized the need for establishing law and order and the necessity of emphasizing fairness and justice as preconditions for building the foundation for a new society. Armstrong (1992) believes that the immediate spread and acceptance of Islam reflected the unique message of Islam and was clearly a reflection of the genius of Mohamed. She argues, however, that the Arabs were not sufficiently developed for the sophisticated Islamic monotheism. She states (p. 53) "Christianity took root in the Roman empire where Jewish communities had paved the way and prepared the minds of the pagans. But Mohamed had to start virtually from scratch and work his way towards the radical monotheistic spirituality on his own."

Mohamed, both as a victim of violence and as a statesman, abhorred violence and instructed believers to forgive and be merciful. Both the Quran and the Prophet's sayings articulated the conditions for war and the conduct of war. Unlike Christianity and Judaism, the terms and conditions of war in Islam were specified, and gratuitous violence was condemned. Interestingly, neither during Mohamed's life nor in the first few centuries of Islam was Jihad treated as holy war. Indeed, the term was "coined in Europe during the Crusades to mean a war against the Muslims" (The Episcopal-Muslim Relations Committee, 2002). The proposition that Islam is the middle way between Christianity and Judaism is evidenced in the law that regulates war. The Torah condones territorial expansion and the slaying of those who do not submit. The New Testament, on the other hand, obligates the believer to avoid war. The Quran instructs believers not to start fighting unless the enemy starts first, and obligates Muslims to forgive those who ask for forgiveness or cease to fight. During one of the wars, the Quran instructed Mohamed to (9:5), "Slay the unbelievers wherever you find them. . . . When the unbelievers cease to threaten you, when they cease, then remember that God is compassionate and you have to stop fighting." When the unbelievers desire to fight you then fight them (9:36), "fight ye the polytheists all together, as they fight you all together; and know that God is with the pious ones." However, when the enemy asks for a peaceful solution, the Muslims must agree (Quran: 8:61); "And if they lean to peace, then leaneth thou too it, and trust in God." Then the Quran warns that killing innocent people is a serous crime. It states (5:32); "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 mankind as a whole. And if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved mankind as a whole." In defining Jihad, the Quran provides four categories: striving with one's own rebellious self-struggle within (9:41); striving with one's wealth (9:41); spreading knowledge to the benefit of those who need it; and fighting with the sword (2:216, 4:17). The first is called the greatest Jihad and the last is called the minor Jihad. The latter means that Muslims can fight only when it becomes unavoidable to defend their faith or their lives and is called Difa or self-defense (Ahmed Ali, 1988). That is, in Islam the use

of force is prohibited, and permitted only in self-defense. The self-defense Jihad in Islam according to Johnson (2002) has developed along lines compatible with international law. Prophet Mohamed elaborates on the greatest striving, Jihad, by stating that one shall not cause injury to any human, either with his tongue or with his hand. In terms of spreading knowledge, the Prophet states, "The search for knowledge is Jihad" and "He who goes forth in search of knowledge is striving in the path of God." In terms of striving with wealth, the Prophet instructs, "One who takes care of the widow and the poor person is like the one who strives [yajahid] in the way of God." The Prophet, however, insists that the best striving, Jihad, "is the uttering of truth in the presence of an unjust ruler." Those who engage in these types of Jihad, according to Islamic teaching, shall be granted a great recompense (4:74).

Islamic perspectives on Jihad have not been changed from the above four Quranic classifications. For example, when the Crusaders captured Jerusalem from the Muslims, they killed most of its inhabitants and "profaned some of Islam's holiest sites." Curry (2002, p. 38) states "The al-Aqsa mosque had been used as a stable for horses." When Muslims recaptured Jerusalem in 1187, Saladin "forbade acts of vengeance. There were no more deaths, no violence. A token ransom was arranged for the thousands of residents. Saladin and his brother paid for hundreds of the poorest themselves and arranged guards for the caravans of refugees" (Curry, 2002, p. 38). However, the Muslim countries have been subjected, since the eleventh century, to invasion and occupation by foreign forces. This reached its peak when the Western powers colonized these countries, exploited their resources and appointed dictators to rule most of them. In terms of recent history, the *New York Times* editorial (2002, July 4) states, "For too long, America has embraced corrupt and autocratic Arab leaders, asking only that they accommodate Western oil needs and not make excessive trouble for Israel. As a result, too many young Arabs now identify the United States more readily with the repressive dictators it supports in the Middle East than with the tolerant democracy it practices at home." The Muslims have been faced with a dilemma; accepting what they perceive as cruelty and foreign subjugation, or observing their tradition that forbids abuse and sanctions self-defense. During the decline of the Islamic empire, especially after the Moguls' invasion, some Muslims felt threatened and the Muslim community, on the verge of extinction, developed a pessimistic view. One of that period's writers, Ibn Taymiya (1268-1328) held that it was the duty of all Muslims to fight the invaders and protect their community; otherwise they were not believers. His philosophy influences contemporary extremist groups who perceive Western occupation and military subjugation and coercion as a continuation of the Crusades.

Bernard Lewis (1990) indicates that the Islamic civilization, relative to other civilizations, treated religious minorities well. He explains that Muslim states, during their rise and prosperity, displayed tolerance and remarkable openness. But during their decline and defeat, they showed a rigidity and indifference to others. Consequently, zealots and extremist groups during the era of foreign occupation and humiliation found fertile ground, as simple and extreme concepts of Islam appealed to their unsophisticated minds. In our present time these groups have often adopted terms and outlooks (suicidal and violent approaches) that appear to be inconsistent with the tradition of Islam. For example, Bin Laden and his groups find Talmudic instruction (Sanhedrin 72a), "If

someone comes to kill you, kill him first" highly appealing. These Muslim radicals exhibit a disdain for the traditional Islamic view of Jihad. But ironically, violent forms of Jihad and associate messages promulgated by historian like Daniel Pipes and Barnard Lewis strongly appeal to them. The overwhelming majority of Muslims, nevertheless, appear to resign themselves to submission and ostensibly most of them are spectators. A case in point is the current Western military build up in the Middle East to attack Iraq. The Muslims find themselves in a state of fear and anxiety; confused and paralyzed. This, however, does not mean that Muslim scholars are passive. On November 21, 2002 in Cairo, hundreds of scholars from various countries issued a statement calling for lawful resistance against foreign threats. The statement stated the, "U.S. administration's insistence on using its forces to attack the countries of the Arab region reminds us of the Crusades, and the era of imperialism. At that time, the imperialist armies killed innocent people, humiliated them, created disaster in Asia and Africa and looted their resources."

Plausibly, Islam, like Christianity, did not espouse the use of force in the beginning and, like Judaism, it did not force people to convert to its faith. Indeed, Mohamed and his immediate four caliphs perceived Jihad as primarily an internal striving for the purpose of obtaining spiritual and personal improvement. Subsequent dynasties, however, have found territorial expansion a useful tool for accumulating fame and economic power. This expansion is not condoned theologically (Ahmed Ali, 1988). During their rise to power, Muslim dynasties or states exhibited a remarkable tolerance to non-Muslims and generally were not inclined to use force (Armstrong, 1992). But since the domination of Muslims by the Western World, their response to defending themselves has been erratic and unorganized. Therefore, it seems that in Islam, the violent form of Jihad is not likely to be condoned theologically during the era of the rising power and domination of an entity espousing Islam.

The emergence of zealots in Islam who champion the idea of defending the faith by force is not a new phenomenon. After the invasion of the Mogul and the collapse of Baghdad, the Capital of the Abbasid Empire in 1258, many groups emerged to defend the Muslim lands. Some of them espoused extremism and violence to defeat the invading forces but were unsuccessful. After the1860s, France and Britain started to establish a military presence in the Middle East. This development reached its peak in 1914 when most of the Arab lands were occupied by European nations. Various nationalistic and leftists movements engaged in struggles for self determination. Freedom and liberation, rather than Islam were the rallying points. In the Arab East almost all the leaders of these movements were Christians. The occupying powers relied on tribal chiefs and corrupt individuals to sustain their occupation and managed to crush most of the independence movements. These individuals were appointed as kings (e.g., Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia) and presidents (Syria, Lebanon). They were placed in positions of authority after the colonial European powers arbitrarily divided the Arab lands. Between the 1930s and the1950s, the Western governments utilized nationalistic movements to obstruct the growing influence of the liberal and leftist movements. After Israeli victory in the 1967 War, the nationalistic movements (e.g., The Arab National Movement, Arab Socialist Union, and almost all Palestinian political groups) espoused radical slogans and ideas. Thus, Western powers directly and indirectly encouraged Muslim-oriented political movements to counter the growing influence of political movements aligned with the Soviet Union.

Two events in the 1980s, the invasion of Afghanistan and Lebanon by the Soviet Union and Israel respectively, empowered Islamic political movements. The Kuwaiti crisis and its aftermath, however, profoundly changed the political scene in the Middle East tilting it toward political Islam. The Arab streets are no longer dominated by the leftist and nationalist movements. Rather, Muslim political organizations have seized the political vacuum. The huge military presence, in August 1990, of the United States in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arab Gulf States, initially was justified by the Wahhabi religious establishment in Saudi Arabia as necessary to defend Islam and the faithful from the Iraqi threat. After the liberation of Kuwait, political Islamic movements thought the United States would immediately withdraw its troops from the region. Since this did not happen, these organizations have channeled their wrath against the presence of foreign troops in Arab lands. Consequently, they initiated a political campaign of violence against the United States and Arab governments since 1992. This marked the beginning of the end of the formal cooperation between most of the Islamic political movements and conservative Arab governments.   The region, therefore, has experienced two forms of violent Jihad with global reach. The first is waged by the Muslim political groups against the United States and Arab government camp and the second by the U.S and Arab governments against Muslim political organizations. This vicious circle of violence, in the absence of civilized dialogue, tolerance, and inclusion may ultimately engulf the whole world.

Discussion and conclusion

It is without doubt that the Middle East conflict is the result of a complex interplay of politics, religion, and economic factors. Among these factors, religion seems to be the most subtle. It provides a convenient cover to otherwise unpopular hostilities. Furthermore, it furnishes an easy justification for a complex subject. Across the centuries, religion has been utilized to serve the interest of the dominate elites. Furthermore, Middle East history reveals that religion had played a pivotal role in shaping alliances and events. Today's conflict confirms too that religious sentiments in one way or another may influence the thinking of the power elites. Current trends and violence, however, give the appearance that things might get out of control. The use of force and violence arising from religious sentiments and those that are attributed to religion may, in fact, initiate the downfall of civilization if they are not rationally confronted. Even though making precise prediction is not a primary concern of this paper, recent events provide ample evidence that violent forms of Jihad and related Middle East conflicts are not being contained. Indeed, world public opinion and world actors, at this juncture in history, seem incapable of restraining the forces that call for perpetual Jihad.

In terms of public policy and government relations certain implications stand out. The most important implication is that governments should avoid using policy as an instrument of religion. While in most parts of the world intellectual observers and to some extent ordinary people view the infusion of religion into political discourse with suspicion, others may act upon it. This is especially true when leaders of the powerful countries give the impression that their actions are guided by a divine power. Policy makers have to maintain a separation between their public roles and personal beliefs. Experience in most of

the developing nations and in Nazi Germany provides evidence that when policy is influenced by religious beliefs, it leads to devastating consequences. In an interview with Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense, Keller (2002) indicated that there were three things on Wolfowitz's mind: security of Israel, invading Iraq, and reforming Islam. Whether it is right or wrong, many observers in other countries see a strong interplay between personal beliefs and policy directions. Cohen (2003) argues that when the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz,* reported that President George W. Bush was quoted saying that he had gone to war in Afghanistan and Iraq on instructions from God, it gave the impression that this was the only explanation for "some of what Bush has done."

The second implication for governments is that short-term considerations almost always backfire. The early attempts by western and Arab governments to minimize the influence of Arab leftist and nationalistic movements by encouraging political Islam have resulted in undesired consequences. That is, policymakers, especially in international affairs, should not subordinate the vision of world peace and stability to immediate and/or domestic interests. For example, after Britain occupied Iraq in 1917 it made sure that the Iraqis would not have access to democracy. Gertrude Bell, Oriental Secretary to the High Commissioner in Baghdad of the British occupying power of Iraq, wrote in 1921 that one of the subjects that the Iraqis are "fond of expatiating upon is the crying need for democracy in Iraq-al damokratiyah, you find it on every page."   A year before, Bell had written that, "I don't for a moment doubt that the final authority must be in the hands of the Sunnis, in spite of their numerical inferiority; otherwise you will have a mujtahd [learned religious person]-run, theocratic state, which is the very devil."   This short-sighted policy is probably responsible for the instability in Iraq and the willingness of the minority to use brutal force to maintain the submission of the majority.

More importantly, policy makers in Western countries must be deliberate and consistence in promoting human rights and freedom in other countries. These policymakers have provided security for autocratic governments. Recently, Slevin (2003) indicates that historically, " U.S. Presidents have accepted the stability of autocratic rule" in the Middle East instead of promoting democracy. Furthermore, senior policymakers in Washington have repeatedly quoted the UN's *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, which states that the Arab countries experience a deficit related to freedom. Nevertheless, they overlooked a major point in the Report that foreign occupation of Arab lands is the most pervasive obstacle to security and progress in the region. This is because (p. 2) "occupation freezes growth, prosperity and freedom in the Arab world."   From a practical standpoint, foreign military occupation is a form of violent Jihad. In spirit and action, it violates basic individual and property rights. The three deficits related to freedom, empowerment of women, and knowledge that were specified by the UN in the region must be addressed by policy makers simultaneously and energetically to erode the foundations of the seemingly dysfunctional public management in the Middle East.

One of the most significant implications is that the lack of democratic institutions always leads to political instability and constitutes a serious obstacle to economic growth and prosperity. Indeed, the persistence of autocratic regimes in the Arab World not only enlarges the gap of mistrust between Arab rulers and their people; but, has also been utilized to question the true purpose of the Western countries in the region and thus

contributed to the growing anger at the Western governments, especially the United States. The people in the region, regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds, long for freedom and peace and their experience provides them with ample reason to demand no less than full access to knowledge, economic opportunities, and political freedom. Contrasting the current developments in the region with that under Britain, Zakaria (2003) states, "America is a different country, of course—less fascinated by empire—but in one important respect it faces the same paradox as Britain. No matter how compelling America's ideals, they still come wrapped in American power. People abroad may love the former but they are inevitably suspicious of the latter. And if America falters in its application of its ideals, people around the world will believe that they are simply a smoke screen for its power."

The current discourse on Jihad is politically charged and leaves uninformed readers confused and bewildered. It is inconceivable, though urgently needed, these days to objectively discuss the term Jihad. In recent years, the term has been distorted to suit prevailing political agendas (Sullivan, 2003). Once religion becomes politicized, reason and logic are generally overlooked. Consequently, fact, emotion, disinformation, and manipulation become difficult to differentiate with clarity. Perceptions regarding these distinct political issues have contributed to the promotion and adoption of violent form of Jihad. These issues revolve around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the concern for oil, and the rise of political religions. Among the three issues, the first stirs emotion among politically and religiously involved Jews and Muslims. It has also attracted Christian Zionists who believe that the gathering of Jews in Palestine will accelerate the coming of the messiah and therefore have joined the first group to discredit Muslim claims and faith (see Kristof, 2002; Milbank, 2001). All these groups have engaged in a political and media campaign to win public opinion. In the process, political expediency and mistrust of each others intentions have become greatly engraved in their daily discourse. A case in point is an article written by David Harris (2002), the executive director of the American Jewish Committee. He claims that Muslim American organizations' involvement in politics and in the media constitutes a threat to Jewish American strength and ultimately to Israel. He states, there has been "a sharp increase in Arab and Muslim political activity in the United States. These communities know they have a steep uphill struggle. They recognize the formidable strength of the pro-Israel advocacy movement in this country, but they believe it is assailable. And they have made no secret of one of their ultimate goals -to end American support for Israel... we must proceed carefully, ever alert to the physical and political threats posed by the Islamic radical network to Jews and Jewish institutions in this country."

Ironically, the state of the discourse on Jihad seems to affirm that the past is not only repeating itself. Furthermore, this discourse has the potential to dangerously affect the future if it is not wisely managed. History reveals that powerful forces over the centuries have seldom displayed an appreciation of facts and truth, and have almost invariably been inclined to discredit their perceived enemy. Likewise, history shows that land grasping, economic greed, and religious hysteria have often opened the gate to chronic cultural and economic instability. If allowed free rein these same forces may again propel human suffering and economic chaos. Understanding the past, however, can be a powerful arsenal in building a cooperative world community and avoiding blind rationalizations.

Specifically, the most dangerous minefield is the inclination, in some quarters, to treat religion as political. Once this becomes an exercise, rationality in decision-making easily gives way to emotion and eventually leads to conflict. When war and domination become the preferred instruments of policy, stability and confidence in world institutions are threatened.

As in the past, the Middle East's religious and political disputes constitute the background that motivates and energizes powerful political leaders and commentators. Many of them see it as their religious duty to maintain Middle East conflicts (Kaiser, 2003). These forces thrive in an environment of fear and uncertainty. Politics, therefore, is seen as a useful instrument for achieving what is perceived a religiously sanctioned goal. There are two seemingly contradictory impulses in the discourse on the violent form of Jihad. The first is advocated by Muslim extremists and treats violence as a method for asserting cultural identity and the removal of foreign dominations. The second is promoted by their counterparts in Christianity and Judaism. These groups seem to believe that militarization of the globe and the globalization of fear is the best instrument for religious and political domination. Both impulses are a threat to civilization and established norms of the international community. Indeed, both of them constitute a major setback and threaten a return to an endless era of conflict, worse than what mankind experienced during Nazism or during the Cold War. The globalization of fear, if materialized, may constitute the most harmful development on the global scene. This is because the world community would be subjected to three fatal consequences: restriction on the free movement of trade, capital, and labor across the globe; reductions in the flow of relevant information in and out of each society; and increases in uncertainty at national and international levels.

In short, perpetual Jihad is a dangerous trend and its consequences could impact regions well beyond the Middle East. Perhaps, its proponents believe that they are capable of containing these consequences within the geographic boundaries of the Middle East. This, however, may prove to be wishful thinking. From a distance, today's world may look large and unconnected but perceptions regarding geographic constraints have lost much of their utility. In the modern era, the world is not only finite but every part has greater proximity to every other part than ever before. Perpetual Jihad, therefore, would likely produce endless chaos/catastrophe.

The three religions Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, although they have understood the violent form of Jihad variously throughout their history in their respective ways, currently exhibit a similar trend in thinking. More importantly, Judaism perspectives on war and violence have seemed to influence the perspectives of both Christianity and Islam through out history. Generally speaking, the shift in emphasis to violence and war in the three religions seems to be associated with the rise of military and economic power and in the incorporation of religious tenets in policy. Nevertheless, the three religions offer hopeful perspectives for a peaceful world. These perspectives in an environment devoid of religious fever can facilitate coexistence and the transformation of the Middle East into a prosperous region. In their emphasis on respect for human dignity, cooperation, and the prohibition of killing of innocent people, the three religions offer reason for hope. Indeed, the relatively peaceful co-existence of the three indigenous religion communities in the region between 660-1936 evidence that tolerance and inclusion are not an alien concepts to

the region. Jewish historian and philosopher, S. Goitein (1968, p. 297) argues that the Jewish and Christian communities in the Arab World maintained their freedom and were tolerated under the Muslim role. He states, the "enormous degree of freedom of communication enjoyed by the people mirrored in the Cairo Geniza would not have been possible had it not been favored by the legal position and the general political climate in the states concerned."

Furthermore, we agree with Rabbi Kula (2002) against treating Biblical teachings as especially valid. Statements in the Bible or Quran that might seem to refer to violence should be treated in the context of their historical circumstances but not something to emulate in conduct in the contemporary world. They must be treated as a history lesson and a reflection on circumstances where primitive nomadic life and primitive conduct were the norm rather than the exception.

Nevertheless, the misreading of history and religion by politically charged power elites may, at this defining moment in world affairs, perpetuate the Middle East conflict. Historically, this misreading ended in disastrous consequences to the people of the region. Indeed, current events in Lebanon, the occupied territories, Afghanistan, and Iraq, remind us that it is often easier to embark on destruction rather than construction.

In conclusion, the Middle East conflict has been the most chronic source of uncertainty and chaos in the world. Its' persistence demonstrates that the conflict cannot be resolved through force and intimidation. The overwhelming use of force may subdue people and give a quick military victory, but it seldom eradicates the growing gulf of mistrust and mounting grievances. The severity and persistence of the conflict reflects an uncompromising view of world events and the incorporation of religious tenets into policy. Both stands facilitate the adoption and pursuit of perpetual Jihad. The cost could be immense and will not likely be confined to the Middle East.

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