

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS, AND IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE JUST  
WAR DOCTRINE AND THE CUSTOMARY LAWS OF ARMED CONFLICT:  
WESTERN (CATHOLIC) AND ISLAM (SHIITE)**

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper informs “western” military forces about the Islamic environment in the Middle East. It articulates similarities and differences between the Western and the Islamic perspectives of war and peace. It defines to what degree Shiite leaders reflect these religious perspectives and then makes recommendations for strategic decision makers regarding the same.

Probing into the intent behind the Western and Shiite war and peace traditions, presents more similarities than differences. Neither is universally held yet both traditions agree on a strong presumption against violence. Points of divergence appear regarding the justification of war for solely religious purposes and the treatment of noncombatants. Evaluation of Shiite cleric statements and written works demonstrate a wide variance in advocacy for the traditional Islamic rules of war. The majority of statements made by the clerics pertained to religious vice state matters, however, all the clerics referred to western military forces as occupiers. The variances and agreement points among the clerics lead to three recommendation for US leaders. First, each cleric wields influence and act as instruments of power. Second, to understand the cultural environment, these war and peace traditions and regional religious views should be taught to Department of Defense members. Third, to promote success in the Middle East, strategic communication should change to express a respect for both Islamic laws and practices.

## Introduction

The National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS), the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism, and the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq link the security of the United States (US) to conflicts occurring in the Middle East. As our nation strives to fulfill the missions directed within these documents, personnel must understand that “the stability of Middle Eastern politics and society is inextricably linked to religion.”<sup>1</sup> James Piscatori, a senior researcher in Modern Islamic Studies at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, states, “Religious factors, and specifically transnational religious ones, may be seen as important to political and security concerns for several reasons. First, religion can directly affect the internal politics of states and thus qualify as state power. Because of its symbolic power, religion has increasingly become the language of politics in many societies. Second, transnational religious concerns help to create new political constituencies and new communities, which become in effect actors competitive with the state.”<sup>2</sup> With this concept in mind, this paper presupposes Department of Defense members should comprehend the implications of Islamic traditions regarding war and peace; our success within Iraq, Afghanistan and in the global war on terror may depend up on it!

Currently, all military members receive training regarding international laws of armed conflict, predominantly derived from Western traditions. The US currently employs forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, seeks to affect the Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiations, and strives to influence Iranian state nuclear developmental decisions. Shaped predominantly by the Islamic religion, the ideology and culture of the Middle East region differs from our own. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Murden, “Religion, and the Political and Social Order of the Middle East,” in *Religion and Global Order*, ed. John L. Esposito and Michael Watson (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2000), 150.

<sup>2</sup>James Piscatori, “Religious Transnationalism and Global Order, with Particular Consideration of Islam,” in *Religion and Global Order*, ed. John L. Esposito and Michael Watson (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2000), 75-78.

Islamic military culture may not practice the Western traditions of war and peace. This paper considers these Islamic traditions, specifically the Shiite traditions of war and peace. The NSS advocates, “expanding educational opportunities for Americans to learn about foreign languages and cultures.”<sup>3</sup> The war and peace traditions described and evaluated herein should be part of any cultural training for our Department of Defense personnel.

James Turner Johnson in his book *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions* (1997) discusses how the current international order “requires the west to develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying” the civilizations with which we interact. As he states, this “will require an effort to identify elements of commonality between Western” and Islamic cultures.<sup>4</sup> Due to the importance of the Just War traditions and rules of conduct in war to the military strategist and warrior, this paper expands upon Johnson’s work by evaluating the beliefs held on these subjects by current Islamic leaders. This paper informs “western” military forces about the Islamic environment in which they are currently operating. It succinctly articulates similarities and differences that exist between the Western (Catholic) Just War Tradition and the Shiite perspectives of war and peace. Finally, it seeks to define to what degree Shiite leaders reflect these religious perspectives in their intellectual approaches and policy positions specifically regarding a) the decision to use armed force and b) the conditions that govern its actual use during times of armed conflict. Ultimately, this paper seeks to provide military members a basic cultural, ideological, and religious understanding of Islamic coalition and adversarial forces to facilitate appropriate strategic decisions and actions in the field.

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<sup>3</sup> Office of the President of the United States, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2006, p 45.

<sup>4</sup> James Turner Johnson, *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 6

## Traditions of War and Peace

Within the current world situation of reconstruction in Iraq and security concerns regarding Iran, the US finds itself required to interact and understand leaders who advocate Shiite war and peace traditions. It is imperative that we understand the differences and establish reasonable expectations of how these beliefs manifest themselves in diplomatic, military, and economic interactions. This section discusses similarities and differences of the Western and Islamic traditions.

Professor of Political Science at the University of Tennessee, April Morgan states, “neither Christians nor Muslims could fight and kill without contradicting the “clear intent” of Scripture.”<sup>5</sup> Yet wars are waged by religious and secular societies today; the global war against terrorism presents an adversary wrapping political objectives within a deeply religious context. Christians comprise approximately “one third of the world’s population; of that third, Catholics account for well over half.”<sup>6</sup> By contrast Islam “with one billion adherents” around the world “constitutes the most pervasive and potentially powerful transnational force.”<sup>7</sup> The rules, which govern when a state can use force and how engaged forces conduct hostilities, are “by no means universal.”<sup>8</sup> The US applies just war traditions derived from Catholic, Christian traditions; the Middle East leaders apply theories of war derived from Islamic traditions. Over the years, “legal, military, and historical sources” have influenced the understanding of both traditions.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> April Morgan, “The War on Terrorism: Time for a New ‘Wise War’ Framework?” in *The Law of Armed Conflict: Constraints on the Contemporary Use of Military Force*, ed. Howard Hensel (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2005), 144.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Walsh, “Catholicism and International Relations: Papal Interventionism,” in *Religion and Global Order*, ed. John L. Esposito and Michael Watson (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2000), 100.

<sup>7</sup> John L. Esposito, “Political Islam and Global Order,” in *Religion and Global Order*, ed. John L. Esposito and Michael Watson (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2000), 119.

<sup>8</sup> Sohail H. Hashimi, “Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace,” in *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religions and Secular Perspectives*, ed. Terry Nardin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 146.

<sup>9</sup> John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson, *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1991), xi.

The concepts of war and peace presented herein are normative definitions presenting the moderate or traditional religious views, held by the Western or Islamic communities respectively. Religious perspectives vice military standards were selected as a more accurate reflection of the nation state's popular culture and ideology.

## **Western Culture: The Christian (Catholic) Tradition**

Catholic tradition holds a “strong presumption against war.”<sup>10</sup> State leaders override this presumption for varying reasons. The preponderance of sources (see bibliography) indicate St Augustine, a Catholic theologian, greatly influenced the current western just war traditions. Over the years since then, international conferences, conventions, and institutions have updated and modified St Augustine's earlier arguments. One such modification added the concept of *jus post bellum* or the conduct during the period of transition from war back to peace. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops, an assembly of the Catholic hierarchy of the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands, summarized the major components of the just-war theory in 1993. Their synopsis, drawn from traditional Catholic teaching, largely reflects the beliefs regarding war and peace held by Western states. According to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the components of just war tradition are as follows:

First, whether lethal force may be used is governed by the following criteria [*jus ad bellum*]:

- *Just Cause*: force may be used only to correct a grave, public evil, i.e., aggression or massive violation of the basic rights of whole populations;
- *Comparative Justice*: while there may be rights and wrongs on all sides of a conflict, to override the presumption against the use of force, the injustice suffered by one party must significantly outweigh that suffered by the other;
- *Legitimate Authority*: only duly constituted public authorities may use deadly force or wage war;

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 4.

- *Right Intention*: force may be used only in a truly just cause and solely for that purpose;
- *Probability of Success*: arms may not be used in a futile cause or in a case where disproportionate measures are required to achieve success;
- *Proportionality*: the overall destruction expected from the use of force must be outweighed by the good to be achieved;
- *Last Resort*: force may be used only after peaceful alternatives have been seriously tried and exhausted.

Second...the following moral standards (*jus in bello*) for the conduct of armed conflict:

- *Noncombatant Immunity*: civilians may not be the object of direct attack, and military personnel must take due care to avoid and minimize indirect harm to civilians;
- *Proportionality*: in the conduct of hostilities, efforts must be made to attain military objectives with no more force than is militarily necessary and to avoid disproportionate collateral damage to civilian life and property;
- *Right Intention*: even in the midst of conflict, the aim of political and military leaders must be peace with justice, so that acts of vengeance and indiscriminate violence, whether by individuals, military units or governments are forbidden.<sup>11</sup>

The *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* (“war decision justice” and “war prosecution justice” respectively<sup>12</sup>) traditions taught by the US Air Force within Senior Developmental Education differ only slightly from the above definitions. The US Air University does not include the concept of comparative justice as one of the criteria for governing the use of force and includes “the aim of peace.”<sup>13</sup> Recently, a concept of ending a way, *jus post bellum*, has been proposed. Since *just post bellum* has not yet been accepted as part of the Western tradition, the concept is not discussed herein.

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<sup>11</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace,” 17 November 1993. <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/harvestextr.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> James H. Toner, “Just War Criteria: A Brief Overview” (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, April 2004), 1-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

## Middle East Culture: The Islamic (Shiite) Tradition

In agreement with the above, Islamic tradition also holds an extreme reluctance to declare war.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Western, secular traditions “war for religion has retained a meaningful place in Islamic religion and culture”<sup>15</sup> Members of Shiite Islam draw their traditions of war and peace from the Qur’an, *hadith* (Prophet Muhammad’s sayings and deeds), historical Imam interpretations, and current juridical opinions (*fatwas*). No one source succinctly articulates the Islamic justifications for and conduct during war; resources presented conflicting views regarding the Islamic standards for waging war. Therefore, the Islamic principles of war and peace provided below represent an amalgamation from multiple texts. Combining the concepts of James Turner Johnson, Khalid Abou El Fadl, and Sohail H. Hashimi the following principles makeup the traditionalist Islamic justification for war:

- “Wars must be fought in the cause of God; wars fought to defend or promote Islam are considered just.”<sup>16</sup> “Only an instance in which the lands of Islam were attacked would most Shiites clerics authorize a defensive jihad.”<sup>17</sup>
- “Muslim authorities must shoulder the burden of proof and establish that a particular use of force has not been undertaken primarily for territorial expansion.”<sup>18</sup> Specifically for Shiite, right authority and just cause

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<sup>14</sup> James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay, *Cross, Crescent, and Sword: The Justification and Limitation of War in Western and Islamic Tradition* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 93. Muslim philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi (870CE to 950CE) stated this extreme reluctance to declare war.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Tradition*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Conflict Resolution as a Normative Value in Islamic Law: Handling Disputes with Non-Muslims,” in *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*, ed. Douglas Johnston (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 183.

<sup>17</sup> Juan Cole, *Sacred Spaces and the Holy War: The Politics, Culture, and History of Shiite Islam* (New York, NY: Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2002), 171.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson and Kelsay, *Cross, Crescent, and Sword*, 44.

determined by an Imam; offensive jihad requires the “Imam (a divinely inspired descendent of the prophet).”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the above, Abu Nasr al-Farabi, a Muslim philosopher stated “five instances of warfare.”<sup>20</sup> These are:

- Defense
- Acquiring a good the city deserves
- Reforming others
- Subjecting those suited for it
- Taking back what is rightfully the city’s

Combining information from the same religious and Islamic experts, classic traditions for conduct during war include the following limitations:

- “Do not act treacherously
- Do not act disloyally
- Do not act neglectfully
- Do not mutilate or kill children, old men, or women
- Leave cloisters alone
- Do not allow Muslims to align themselves with non-Muslims.
- Rehabilitate not annihilate the enemy”<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of the specifics of individual rules, in general any “jihad must be in line with the Muslims general interest and should not cause harm to them or to the spreading of Islam.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cole, *Sacred Spaces and the Holy War*, 171.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson and Kelsay, *Cross, Crescent, and Sword*, 83-84.

<sup>21</sup> Hashimi, “Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace,” 161-164.

<sup>22</sup> Schmucl Bar, *Warrant for Terror: Fatwas of Radical Islam and the Duty of Jihad* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 32.

## Comparison of Two Traditions

Probing more deeply into the intent behind these two traditions, a comparison of the Western and Islamic traditions of war and peace presents more similarities than differences. Both traditions appear to agree on several broad points. First, war must be justified. The right to defend the state, the individual, and property provides appropriate justification for war. Defense in Western tradition includes not only a response to enemy actions “but also preemptive use of force against acts of war clearly intended but still in preparation.”<sup>23</sup> This concept seems to correlate to Nasr Al-Farabi’s statements that warfare may be waged “against implacable enemies.”<sup>24</sup> Other normative justification includes recovery of property, punishment in response to crime or evil, and the establishment peace or justice. Second, declaration of war requires a competent authority. Although classic Shiite tradition would require the authority of an Imam to declare offensive war, Shiites have also taken the position to “support [the authority of] the civil state.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, both Western and Islamic states have recognized the state’s authority to declare war. Third, limitations upon the conduct of forces during war exist. Both traditions contain the concept of discrimination based upon either a differentiation between combatant and noncombatant or a distinction between the innocent and the guilty. As John Kelsay states, “the presumption is that soldiers fight soldiers”<sup>26</sup> and that the consideration for the protection of civilians exists. Fourth, both declare war undertaken purely for revenge, cruelty, or power as unjust.

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions*, 53.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Juan Cole, *Sacred Spaces and the Holy War*, 161.

<sup>26</sup> John Kelsay, “War, Peace and the Imperatives of Justice in Islamic Perspective: What do the 11 September 2001 Attacks Tell Us about Islam and the Just War Tradition?” in *Just War in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Paul Robinson (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 84.

Differences exist within the specifics behind the above general agreements; however, as a whole, only two major differences became evident. The most obvious disagreement pertains to the Western secular ideal and the Islamic “ideal of unity of civil and moral authority under a divinely enacted legal system.”<sup>27</sup> This convergence of faith and statecraft justifies war for religious purposes or *jihad*. As Sohail H. Hashimi states in the book *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religions and Secular Perspectives*, “most of the legal scholars agree that the object of *jihad* is not the forcible conversion of unbelievers to the Islamic faith.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, James Turner Johnson defines Jihad as a “path to God.”<sup>29</sup> Turner describes four separate struggles of *Jihad*, only one refers to war in the classic sense.<sup>30</sup> The Shiite believe an offensive *jihad* undertaken to reform others, one of the five instances of warfare stated above, is no longer a possibility “until the hidden Imam reappears.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, although the Islamic faith may justify *jihad* to spread the faith, Shiite precepts only allow defensive war. Schmuell Bar, author of *Warrant for Terror* articulates that defensive *jihad* includes “defense against attacks or occupation of Muslim lands by non-Muslims; protecting Muslim property, freedom, and dignity; suppressing rebellion by non-Muslims (*dhimmi*); supporting rebellion against despotism; or even punishing Muslims guilty of corruption or destruction.”<sup>32</sup> Clearly, the union of Islam and statecraft broaden the secular, Western definition of defensive war. Another divergence appears regarding the treatment of noncombatants. Uniquely, an Islamic tradition allows for the seizure of noncombatants and their property if it is “judged to be of possible use to

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<sup>27</sup> Harvey Cox et al., “World Religions and Conflict Resolution,” in *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, ed. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 274.

<sup>28</sup> Hashimi, “Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace,” 157.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Bar, *Warrant for Terror*, 32.

the Muslim community.<sup>33</sup> Table 1 summarizes the similarities and differences of Western and Islamic war and peace traditions. The concepts contained within the table were used as the standard for evaluation of leadership perspectives described in the next section.

**Table 1. Comparison of Traditions**

Western Tradition	Shiite War and Peace Tradition	
	Similarity	Difference
<b>War Decision Justice</b>		
<b>Just Cause:</b> 1. Defense 2. Punishment of grave public evil 3. Recover property <sup>34</sup>	1. Defensive <i>Jihad</i> 2. Punish those who have committed some crime <sup>35</sup> 3. Taking back what is rightfully the city's	Cause of God - Reforming others
<b>Legitimate Authority</b> State Sovereignty	State Sovereignty	Imam
<b>Right Intention</b> Force for only just purposes.	Serve the Muslim interests.	
<b>Proportionality</b> Good outweighs destruction	Do not harm Muslim interest.	
<b>Probability of Success</b>	Probability of Success	
<b>Last Resort</b> Peaceful means first	Invitation to peace	
<b>War Prosecution Justice</b>		
Noncombatant Immunity	Combatant differentiation	Property and noncombatants may be seized
Proportionality		Emergency provision calls all Muslims to bear arms.
Right Intention		
<b>War and Statecraft</b>		
Secular, division of church and state.	Realist: supports the civil state.	Ideal: unity of civil and moral authority

<sup>33</sup> Johnson, *Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions*, 77.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

## **Influential Religious Leaders: Perspectives on War and Peace Traditions**

Having defined the similarities and differences between the Western and Islamic war and peace traditions, this section now turns to assessing the degree to which Shiite leaders reflect the war and peace perspectives described above. The conclusions reflect generalizations derived from official statements, speeches, messages, and news articles that state the leaders' opinions or describe their actions. In addition, the conclusions represent only a snapshot in time from the last five years; when available supporting documentation included in the review was dated from Jan 2001 until Nov 2006. The arguments presented within this section are supported by representative examples, which articulate the leader's policy positions regarding the decision to use armed force and the conditions that govern the use of armed forces. For each religious leader several relevant pieces of information are discussed: 1) a brief biography of the leaders influence within the Islamic community, 2) the breadth of sources reviewed for comparison data, 3) examples of the leaders' perspectives reflecting their faiths traditions. The religious leaders examined are Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid ali Hussayni Sistani, Ayatollah Muhammad Tagi Mesbah Yazdi, and Muqtada al-Sadr. Selected for their breadth and depth of opinions, these clerics represent an Iranian revolutionary statesman, an Iraqi traditional, quietist, an Iranian religious-extremist, and an Iraqi militant cleric. Research regarding several other clerics revealed diversities, which fell within the range of opinions presented by these four individuals. The other clerics reviewed included Sheikh Muhammed Sa'id al-Tantawi, Grand Ayatollah Mousavi Ardebili, Grand Ayatollah Muhammed Fazel Lankarani, and Grand Ayatollah Sayyed M.S. Al-Hakeem.

Before examining the statements of individual leaders, an explanation of the Shiite leadership structure assists in understanding the potential level of influence each leader may

exhibit. Within the Western culture, even most non-Catholics recognize the authority of the Pope to the church and its members. In contrast, no one cleric leads the Shiite believers. Summarized from the Global Security website,<sup>36</sup> Islamic clerics generally recognize six different levels. The highest level is *grand ayatollah*, which means great sign of God in Arabic. The intermediate ranks, in from *grand ayatollah* down, are *ayatollah*, *hijat al Islam*, *mubellegh al risala*, and *mujtahid*. These translate from Arabic as sign of God, authority on Islam, carrier of the message, and seminary graduate or jurist respectively. The lowest clerical rank is *talib ilm*, or translated from Arabic, religious student. Besides the student rank and the seminary graduate rank, “two important factors behind promotion are the size and quality of one’s student following and authorship of scholarly works on Islam.”<sup>37</sup> In addition to these clerical ranks, the highest authority on religious and the Shiite law is called a *marjah*.

### **Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei: The Revolutionary Statesman**

Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei currently holds two important positions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. He is the Grand Leader and the Commander-in Chief of the military. He also held the office of President of Iran from 1981 to 1989. He completed advanced studies from several recognized Islamic scholars and has written 17 books. According to Khamenei’s official website, these scholars were Ayatollah Borujerdi, Khomeini, Haeri Yazdi, and Tabatabai.<sup>38</sup> Because he is an official representative of the Iranian government, access to Ayatollah Khamenei’s policies was readily available and prolific. For this assessment approximately 80 speeches, statements and messages were reviews. Of these items, 31 presented information

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<sup>36</sup> Global Security Organization, “Shia Leadership,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/religion-shia2.htm>

<sup>37</sup> Global Security Organization, “Shia Leadership,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/religion-shia2.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, “Brief Biography of the Life of His Eminence Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” <http://www.khamenei.ir/EN/home.jsp>.

relevant to this study, only a small fraction of which may be interpreted contrary to traditional Shiite Islamic traditions. As Ayatollah “Khomeini’s hand-picked successor,” Ayatollah Khamenei generally represents “Islam as a as a revolutionary religion, in contrast to mainstream Islam, which was politically passive and usually supported rulers who were Muslim.”<sup>39</sup>

Overall, the Ayatollah Khamenei’s words are in accordance with the Shiite traditions of war and peace. Many of his statements can appear inflammatory but in accordance with the Islam traditions, generally support a defensive struggle against the occupiers of the Islamic holy lands of Israel and Iraq. For example, in a 31 January 2002 statement, Ayatollah Khamenei stated, “The Palestinians have now realized that their survival depends on their resistance against the occupiers of their homeland, since the international organizations are taking no action to stop the Zionist regime’s crimes and its gross violation of the Palestinian rights. The present struggle of the Palestinians has also been inspired by their religious beliefs and their strong faith in the Almighty.”<sup>40</sup> In another statement, Khamenei clearly describes the Palestinian intifada as an “act of self-defense” but clarifies the Islamic struggle as a duty to give “moral support to the oppressed Palestinian nation” vice a call to armed *jihad*.<sup>41</sup> Later, addressing his Iranian government executives, amidst statements acknowledging potential threats against the Iranian Islamic system, he advocates for the “watchful and vigilant” defense “in accordance with international norms.”<sup>42</sup> This particular theme of defensive support against Zionist occupiers continues throughout the years; it emphasizes moral, political, and financial aid for Muslim nations. Through his words to Iranian Air Force servicemen, Khamenei

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<sup>39</sup> Barry Rubin and Judith Cole Rubin, *Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East: A Documentary Reader* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>40</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, “Leader’s Statement in a meeting with the Islamic World Media Conference (IWMC),” 31 January 2002, <http://www.khamenei.ir/EN/Speech/detail.jsp?id=20020131A>.

<sup>41</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, “Leader’s Statement in a Meeting with Chinese President,” 21 April 2002, <http://www.khamenei.ir/EN/Speech/detail.jsp?id=20020421A>.

<sup>42</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, “Leader’s address to Government Executives,” 1 November 2002, <http://www.khamenei.ir/EN/Speech/detail.jsp?id=20021111A>.

articulates the Shiite tradition by calling for unity and solidarity of Islamic action “not through war and bloodshed but through patience, perseverance, prudence, and firm intention.”<sup>43</sup>

However, some references inferring violent *jihad* do appear. For example, in an address to the Reciters of the Holy Qur’an Khamenei declares that “a full-scale war against the entire Islamic Ummah, not just against certain Muslim nations” has been waged.”<sup>44</sup> According to Islam traditions, a declaration of war would be justification for armed defense. His statement to Army cadets in October 2004 goes as far as presenting Lebanese youngsters taking on the Zionist regime as a model of true Islam during this struggle.<sup>45</sup> Since 2004, Khamenei has increased his references to jihad as a means to preserve the Islamic way of life.

### **Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hussayni Sistani: The Quietist Marjah**

Paraphrased from his official website, the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid ali Hussayni Sistani holds the distinguished degree of Ijtihad.<sup>46</sup> This degree specializes in the deduction of legal judgment in matters of religion. He was awarded a diploma for his skill in the science of ‘hadith.’ Ayatollah Sistani was a rival to the martyr Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, whose views are now, reflected in his son Muqtada al-Sadr’s teachings. As a teacher of the Shiite faith for 34 years, many consider the Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani as the predominant Shiite leader in Iraq; “Ayatollah Sistani has the highest rank among the mujtahids and scholars throughout the Islamic World, and especially in the hawzahs of Najaf Ashraf and Qum.”<sup>47</sup> He claims to have written

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<sup>43</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, “Leader’s address to Air Force Servicemen,” <http://www.khamenei.ir/EN/Speech/detal.jsp?id=2006020A>.

<sup>44</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, “Leader’s address to Reciters of the Holy Qur’an,” 16 September 2004, <http://www.khamenei.ir/EN/Speech/detail.jsp?id=20040916A>.

<sup>45</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, “Leader’s address to Army Cadets,” 13 October 2004, <http://www.khamenei.ir/EN/Speech/detail.jsp?id=20041013A>.

<sup>46</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Sistani, “Biography of Grand Ayatollah Sistani,” <http://www.sistani.org>.

<sup>47</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Sistani, “Religious Authority.” <http://www.sistani.org/html/eng/main/index.php?page=1&lang=eng&part=1>

over 40 published and unpublished works.<sup>48</sup> Ayatollah Sistani's website posted only 24 statements, 12 of which were applicable to this study. Described as a quietist Shiite, Ayatollah Sistani's writings largely present religious guidance rather than political advice. His website reflects his views of assisting individual Muslims by discussing Islamic laws, codes and practices and religious rituals.

Ayatollah Sistani's statements and messages follow the quietist school of thought. The quietist, or traditional school, conveys the "message of holy writings and shun(s) active political involvement."<sup>49</sup> Although quietist practitioners have sometimes spoken out on political affairs, Ayatollah Sistani generally adheres to traditionalist practices. In concert with this quietist approach, the information reviewed for this evaluation reveal that Ayatollah Sistani supports the Islamic war and peace traditions described previously. The statements reviewed made no call for *jihad* or violence of any kind. The following message released on 2 August 2004 represents the majority of statements posted on the official website. This message from the "Office of Ayatollah Sistani states:

"As part of the cycle of criminal acts witnessed in beloved Iraq, targeting its unity, stability and independence, a number of Christian churches in Baghdad and Mosul were viciously attacked – leading to tens of innocent victims falling dead and wounded as well as the destruction of many public and private properties. While we disapprove and condemn such abhorrent crimes and see the necessity to consolidate efforts and cooperation by everyone – government and people – in order to stop attacks against Iraqis and root out the attackers; we stress the need to respect the rights of Christians and other religious minorities. Among these rights are their right to live in their country, Iraq, in peace and security."<sup>50</sup>

However, Ayatollah Sistani does refer to American and British forces in Iraq as "occupying forces" but calls for the Iraqi people to "quickly regain the sovereignty, independence, and

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<sup>48</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Sistani, "Works." <http://www.sistani.org>

<sup>49</sup> International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?" *Middle East Report No 55*, 11 July 2006, 1, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle\\_east\\_\\_\\_north\\_africa/iraq\\_iran\\_gulf/55\\_iraq\\_s\\_muqtada\\_al\\_sadr\\_spoiler\\_or\\_stabiliser.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east___north_africa/iraq_iran_gulf/55_iraq_s_muqtada_al_sadr_spoiler_or_stabiliser.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Sistani, "Statements Issued by the Office of Grand Ayatollah Sistani 2 August 2004," <http://www.sistani.org/messages/eng/bay9.htm>

stability of the wounded homeland.”<sup>51</sup> He initiated this theme in earlier statements when referring to Iraq’s history of confrontation against invading powers and holding coalition forces responsible for “allowing looting and ransacking.”<sup>52</sup> As previously explained, this association could indicate a justification for defensive *jihad*. Yet, his most recently published statements indicate the desire for peaceful methods to regain security in Iraq.

## **Ayatollah Muhammad Tagi Mesbah Yazdi: The Radical Extremist**

Shiite cleric Ayatollah Muhammad Tagi Mesbah Yazdi resides in Tehran, Iran. Currently he holds a seat on the Council of Experts in Iran and may be a “possible successor” to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali-Khamenei.<sup>53</sup> According to the biography posted on his official website, [www.mesbahyazdi.org](http://www.mesbahyazdi.org), Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi studied under several well-known Islamic clerics. He has taught Qu’ranic studies, philosophy, and ethics; he concerns himself with social problems of *jihad* and the Islamic political system. In accordance with learning, he has authored numerous works.<sup>54</sup> In addition to the five speeches and messages presented on Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi’s website, 25 articles were used for assessment in this essay.

In the few papers posted, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi’s addressed at length opinions on several topics. Most pertinent to this assessment were his discussions “Toward a Comprehensive Defense of Islam and Islamic Culture,” “The Origin of Rights,” and “Foundations and Principles of Education in Islam.”<sup>55</sup> The above articles reveal an internal, peaceful struggle but also include a call to *jihad* not entirely consistent with traditional Shiite norms. Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi

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<sup>51</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Sistani, “Statements Issues by the Office of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, 2 March 2004,” <http://www.sistani.org/messages/eng/bay5.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Sistani, “Statements Issues by the Office of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, 18 April 2004,” <http://www.sistani.org/messages/eng/ir2.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Bill Samii. “Iran: Resurgence of Religio-Political Society Raises Concerns.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 11 July 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticleprint/2006/07/e2b8d3d9-86c4-44c0-ba75-904d637c29b6.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, “Biography,” <http://www.mesbahyazdi.org/english>.

<sup>55</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, “Speeches,” and “Lectures,” <http://www.mesbahyazdi.org/english>.

talks of *jihad* and justice. Some examples are “The duty of people...is in...fighting the enemies of Islam, taking *jihad* with unbelievers, foes, and the assailants of Muslim rights” and a call for a “cultural *jihad*” open to “all sexes, races, nations, and communities.”<sup>56</sup> According to Colin Freeman a journalist for the United Kingdom *Telegraph*, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi “espouses total isolation from the West” and “the use of suicide bombers against enemies of Islam.”<sup>57</sup> Overall, numerous news articles portray Yazdi as a dangerous, radical extremist.

### **Muqtada Al-Sadr: The Militant Cleric**

Of the Shiite leaders researched for this assessment, Muqtada al-Sadr proved challenging and controversial. As the youngest, Muqtada al-Sadr holds the rank of *hijat al Islam*; this rank does not empower him to issue religious edicts, for example, he does not have the authority to interpret the Qur’an. Saddam martyred his father, Ayatollah Muhammed al-Sadr, and Muqtada appears to be carrying on his father’s teachings. Although Muqtada al-Sadr has been widely discussed as a key to the stabilization of peace in Iraq, his power is more political than religious. Supported by his Mahdi militia, Muqtada currently leads a Shiite community in Sadr City, Iraq. Unlike the previous two clerics, official statements, messages and teachings for Muqtada were difficult to find; information presented on his official website are not translated into English. Due to the limited access to official statements, only nine articles attributed quotes directly to Muqtada al-Sadr, this section presents examples derived from interviews, third party analysis, and news reports of his actions as the basis for assessment.

Over the last three years, Muqtada al Sadr presented a militant view to his follower, often using violent means. As the insurgency formed in Iraq, similarly Muqtada’s positions also

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<sup>56</sup> Official Website of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, “Speeches” and “Lectures,” <http://www.mesbahyazdi.org/english>.

<sup>57</sup> Colin Freeman, “The Rise of Prof ‘Crocodile’ – a Hardliner to Terrify Hardliners,” *United Kingdom Telegraph*, 19 November 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/11/20/wiran220.xml>.

evolved. Having announced the “intention to form an Islamic state in Iraq,” he has called the Iraqi people to “fight U.S. troops.”<sup>58</sup> In an interview for the Italian Newspaper, *IL Messaggero*, Muqtada al-Sadr justified this call for violent action in response to the “invasion and occupation” of Iraqi cities.<sup>59</sup> He further justified armed activities against American forces because of crimes perpetrated against Iraqi men and women. In another interview with the Iraqi Web Site of Al-Ketabah, he reminds his followers that “self-defense is a religious duty” and “the coalition forces must go.”<sup>60</sup> These statements use words in accordance with Shiite war and peace traditions yet because Muqtada al-Sadr does not hold the commensurate religious rank, these calls are actually in conflict with the peaceful means advocated by recognized Shiite authorities, for example Ayatollah Sistani and the current Iraqi government. The International Crisis Group (ICG) issued a Middle East Report in July of 2006.<sup>61</sup> The group analyzes Muqtada’s influence as more politically rather than clerically based. Regardless, because of his large following, the ICG view Muqtada as a key figure to Iraq’s stability. Muqtada’s political direction has occurred in three phases. In an extended interview with Al-Jazeera on 18 Feb 2006, Muqtada describes these phases against the American occupation of Iraq as 1) peaceful resistance (demonstrations), 2) military resistance, and 3) political resistance.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Global Security Organization. “Muqtada al-Sadr,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/al-sadr.htm>

<sup>59</sup> Open Source, “Iran: Report Provides Biography of Muqtada al-Sadr,” IAP20040602000115 Tehran *Jomhuri-ye Eslami (Internet Version-WWW)* in Persian 01 Jun 04, <https://www.opensource.gov>.

<sup>60</sup> <sup>60</sup> Open Source, “Iran: Report Provides Biography of Muqtada al-Sadr.” IAP20040602000115 Tehran *Jomhuri-ye Eslami (Internet Version-WWW)* in Persian 01 Jun 04, <https://www.opensource.gov>.

<sup>61</sup> International Crisis Group, “Iraq’s Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?” Middle East Report No. 55 – 11 July 2006, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle\\_east\\_north\\_africa/iraq\\_iraq\\_gulf/55\\_iraq\\_s\\_muqtada\\_al\\_sadr\\_spoiler\\_or\\_stabiliser.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/iraq_iraq_gulf/55_iraq_s_muqtada_al_sadr_spoiler_or_stabiliser.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> Juan Cole, “Thoughts on the Middle East, History, and Religion: Muqtada al-Sadr on Aljazeera,” 19 February 2006, <http://www.juancole.com/2006/02/muqtada-al-sadr-on-aljazeera-ready-to.html>.

## **Implications for Department of Defense Strategies and Actions**

Having explained the similarities and differences between Western and Shiite perspectives on war and peace and provided examples of how the Islamic clerics reflect Shiite traditions, this section ponders the implications of the information for “western” warriors serving in “Islamic” countries. What conclusions can be inferred from the examples presented? What connection should Department of Defense leaders make between these conclusions and current strategic decisions and actions?

From the cleric statements and actions above a few conclusions are drawn. First, individual clerics apply the Shiite religious precepts with very wide-ranging interpretations. Just as “for the West, the [just war] tradition is quite eclectically based and conceived, with contributions from Christian Canon law and theology but also secular law, philosophy, the norms of customs of military culture, and the practical experience of statecraft and of war.”<sup>63</sup> For Islam war decision justice and war prosecution justice are understood in light of varying explanations of the Qur’an, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, classical jurist writings on religion, the current political environment, statecraft, and the interpretations of all these items by each individual cleric. Second, all the clerics, researched for this assessment, referred to western military forces as occupiers. Thus regardless of quietist or extremist views, just cause exists for an individual Muslim to take defensive *jihad* actions. Yet, calls for such actions were predominantly peaceful in nature, presumably tempered by other, non-religiously based or secular realities. Third, the vast majority of statements made by the clerics pertained to religious vice state (or war and peace) matters. Besides Muqtada Al-Sadr, these clerics wrote prolifically about Islamic laws and traditions; relatively few statements tied directly to questions of war and peace. Rather, the clerics peripherally addressed issues of violence or conflict when discussing

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<sup>63</sup> Johnson, *Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions*, 23.

issues of faith or other topics of interest to Muslims. When comparing all of the statements together, a person lacking the context surrounding the issues or knowledge of other aspects of the Islamic faith and culture, would find it difficult to decipher right from wrong regarding war and peace decisions.

In the history of the world, certainly religion has been a cause of conflict. By evolving to a largely secular society, “western” nations often forget the importance of deep-seated religious beliefs in war. Because the Middle East traditions of war and peace are inextricably tied to the Islamic faith, the US ignores this culture at great peril. In trying to determine the nature of Islamic nations, the decentralization of leadership within their faith creates unique challenges for western nations. Yet the nature of US allies, and adversaries alike, remains an essential element of diplomacy or war and therefore the US government must effectively integrate solutions to these challenges into our responses across the range of military and non-military operations.

The conclusions derived from this assessment provide an initial awareness of these complexities to western national leaders when dealing diplomatically, economically, or militarily with countries of Islamic orientation. Specifically, Department of Defense leaders must adapt strategic decisions and actions in three ways. First, information-gathering assets must garner data on the views of religious leaders within the Islamic area of interest. The diversity of views articulated by individual Shiite clerics indicates that few generalizations should be drawn regarding Muslim communities. Each cleric wields influence over his region and each should be understood and respected as an instrument of power. The current situation in Iraqi illustrates how critical knowledge of religious leaders can be in stability operations. Second, the results of this intelligence gathering should be taught to soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines prior to entering the theater of operations. Until conflicts within the Middle East and Africa are not

expected, the department of defense should include training on Islamic traditions of war and peace to all Department of Defense members. Education as a minimum should include the differences that exist between Western and Islamic traditions. Most importantly, US diplomats and armed forces need to understand the differences regarding noncombatant immunity, serving the cause of Allah, and the significance of occupying Islamic territories. Prior to deployment, cultural awareness training should include location specific information detailing the expected religious influences that will be encountered. As the US government expands cultural training, it should include sensitivity to religious differences and conflict management of the same. In regions of the world where religion and state are inseparable, training of this type assists Department of Defense members to effectively execute missions across the range of military operations. Third, strategic communication should change to express a respect for both Islamic laws and practices. The neoconservative position advocating for democracy as the only means to promote human rights can be detrimental to our relations with Islamic nations. Clerics and public officials have perceived the communication of a hope for increased democratization around the world as a desire to transform Islamic communities into westernized nations. This hope is threatening to their Islamic faith and has justified violent, defensive responses by some Muslims. Understanding the sensitivity to corruption of the religious faithful should be a consideration of the US diplomatic communications and actions.

## **Summary**

The nuanced variances among Islamic communities and the differences between Western and Islamic traditions of war and peace do not easily reveal themselves to the average Department of Defense member. The issues presented in this paper lack the history, laws, and details only gained by years of diligent study. These issues are important to US interests and

operations in the Middle East. Just as the Department of Defense studied Soviet doctrine and worked to understand the influences of Soviet culture on their government actions, so to must the US study the Islamic traditions and influences on Middle Eastern affairs. The topics presented and evaluated in this paper, the war and peace tradition similarities and differences of the Western and Islamic cultures, the stated beliefs and influences of Islamic leaders on these use and conduct of armed forces, and the implications of these factors, should be inculcated into the Department of Defense training and planning environments. The successful implementation of the NSS, the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism and the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq provide ample reason to integrate the recommendations of this assessment.

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