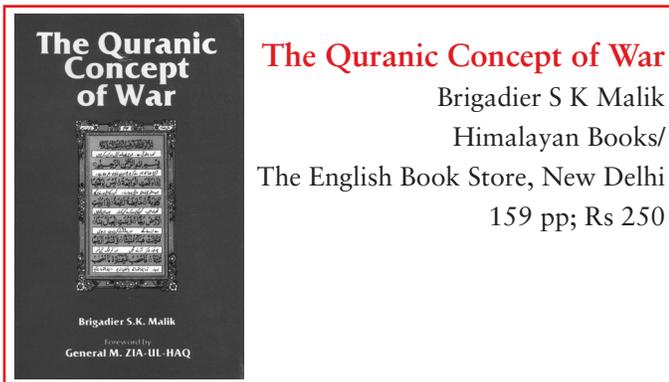




# CLAWS

## Misinterpreting the *Quran* to Justify *Jihad*

■ Gurmeet Kanwal and Samarjit Ghosh



### The Quranic Concept of War

Brigadier S K Malik

Himalayan Books/  
The English Book Store, New Delhi

159 pp; Rs 250

Eight years after the 9/11 attacks and the beginning of the United States-led Global War on Terror, the world is still far from eliminating terrorism caused by radical extremists belonging to various Islamist factions. The epicentre of this scourge lies astride the Durand Line in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan and the territory ruled by the Taliquaeda in Afghanistan. While the military forces of the US and its coalition partners (NATO and ISAF) are arrayed against the Taliquaeda and have achieved limited success, precious little has been done to explore the role played by radical Islamic teachings in the Taliquaeda's ongoing war.

It is not clear whether the Taliquaeda terrorists have been brainwashed by certain vested interests to act in an inhuman manner for the sake of waging a holy war

against infidels, or whether they are simply following what they believe is laid down in the scriptures. Put another way, are these terrorists motivated singularly by ideals of a self-serving nature and giving vent to their private demons, or is there a more concrete foundation for the acts of horror that they indulge in? If that is so, are they interpreting the *Quran* to suit their own beliefs, or are they actually following a doctrine of war contained within the scriptures?

Standard analytical texts on the doctrine of war propagated by Prophet Mohammed are practically non-existent. The closest that a book comes to attempting an understanding and explaining the doctrine of war in Islam is *The Quranic Concept of War*, authored by Brigadier S K Malik of the Pakistan Army. Though it is not a new book, it plays a crucial role in explaining the 'just war' theory and war in the Islamic context. There are differing opinions on whether the book was actually commissioned by General Zia-ul-Haq, but that the work had his blessing is beyond doubt, for he wrote a glowing foreword to it and recommended it to civilians and soldiers alike. General Zia has written that, in his opinion, *jihad* is not the purview of the professional soldier alone, nor does it have applications solely in combat. Rather, he believed that the citizens of an Islamic state had an equally important role to play in *jihad* and that

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the book would go a long way towards making them understand the importance of their contribution.

Islam, as portrayed by Brig Malik, divides the world into two schools of thought – the *Darus-Salam* and the *Darul-Harb*. *Darus-Salam* consists of people who are submissive to God and are ready to comply with His word in reordering the world in accordance with the teachings contained in the holy book. *Darul-Harb* is said to comprise those who are defiant of Allah, or are intent on perpetuating the defiance of Allah and the *Quran* – i.e. the ‘unbelievers’ or infidels. There is no middle path in this respect, and it is maintained that the believer and the unbeliever will meet in conflict, time and again, and that such conflict can only culminate in the submission of the unbelievers to Allah. (This lack of a middle path – as advocated by some followers of Islam – is ironically reminiscent of President George W. Bush, who while drumming up support for the GWOT, repeatedly emphasised, “You’re either with us or against us in the fight against terror.”)

The *Quran*, according to Brig Malik, instructs believers to subdue those defiant of the word of God, and promises to imbue them with the divine strength and ability to achieve their objectives. Malik emphasises that in Islam, “a war is fought for the cause of Allah. A Muslim’s cause of war is just, noble, righteous and humanitarian. A victory in Islam is a victory for the cause of Islam. So noble and humanitarian a cause cannot be allowed to be attained through inhuman and undignified ways. Humanitarianism, thus, lies at the very heart of the Islamic approach to war.” Thus, Malik’s convoluted thesis is a remarkable contradiction in terms.

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Malik cautions the prospective *jihadi* from interpreting the word of God to suit his selfish motives, for the gaze of God is always on the followers, and should they let the blood of the innocent tarnish their victory, they invite divine displeasure. This is an admonition, to be sure, but clearly not a stumbling block against perpetrating terror attacks on innocent civilians. Malik goes on to mention that while certain limits to war are outlined, the *Quran* does not visualise a war being waged with ‘kid gloves’. In fact, Allah Bukhsh K Brohi, in the preface to the book, makes it clear that the “cancerous malformation” that is the unbeliever, must be removed from this world by “surgical means”, if required.

Speaking of personal interpretations of the *Quran*, Malik notes that the divine philosophy of war was not revealed immediately after the advent of Islam, nor was it given to its followers in one singular unit of teaching; rather, it came about over a period of time. While Malik makes this distinction with the intention to portray that the doctrine of war came about after much deliberation, unwittingly, he leaves room for the fact that the very (personal) interpretations that the *Quran* warns against, could very well have influenced the original doctrine of war itself. For example, Malik mentions that initially, Muslims were granted the “permission” to fight in self-defence, should the need arise. But, with the passage of time, they were “commanded” to do so, making *jihad* a religious compulsion and obligation.

One of the most crucial aspects of Malik’s work is the emphasis he lays on the preparation required before a military conflict begins. This is the aspect of *jihad* in which the non-military populace has an important role to play. The *Quran* calls for all believers to strike terror into the hearts of the unbelievers, because if one is able to destroy the enemy’s spiritual and mental strength, they will prove to be no match for the followers of Islam. If it so happens that this objective is not met in the preparatory stage, methods to strike terror should continually be utilised even during the actual fighting. The implications of this aspect of Islamic doctrine are far-reaching, because it envisions terror not merely as a means towards an end, but also as an end in itself.

That is, when God chooses to impose his will upon his enemies, He chooses to do so by casting terror into their hearts. A perfect example of this tactic is the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the US – both were intended to strike terror into the hearts of the masses by attacking symbols held in high regard without the employment of a military force.

The conclusions which the author has drawn from Quranic theories, while dated and at times controversial, are accurate, and for the most part, conform to traditional Islamic jurisprudence. Every implementation of a Quranic war strategy is backed by historical case studies, most notably those of Prophet Mohammed's war against the Pagans. Malik goes into great detail in describing the victory of the forces of Prophet Mohammed as a result of an all-encompassing, military and non-military strategy, over those of the Pagans, who were merely concerned with the total annihilation of Muslims.

While all the tactical formulations mentioned have their basis in accepted Western strategic theories and contexts, Malik doesn't shy away from making light of Western military teachings. He finds Clausewitz's theories inspiring, yet wanting, as according to the *Quran*, it is war which defines policy and its parameters, and not the other way around. He quotes Edward Meade Earle as saying, "War is not an act of God. It grows out of what people, statesmen and nations do or fail to do," and refutes Earle's reasoning with the idea that the very initiation of war is for the cause of God. It is, therefore, controlled and conditioned by His Word, from conception till culmination. The implication in this reasoning is that since the theory of war is derived from God, and not man, the death and destruction caused in its wake is divine, and thus, absolved from sin. In addition, since the discussion of war is based on revealed truth and examples, it is clearly more practical than theoretical. After all, what need does God have to theorise?

A particular aspect of the book, however, is more consistent with traditional Pakistani rather than Quranic rhetoric. Whenever Malik makes note of the kind of conduct in the course of war that is

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unacceptable in the Quranic perspective, he never fails to cite India as an example, whether it is a "false treaty" with Russia through which India "invaded and dismembered" Pakistan, or when it "detained" Pakistani POWs far longer than permissible by human rights standards.

The latter part of the book lapses into a more academic description of Islamic warfare in standard, acceptable categories such as planning and organisation and offers no unique insight. Malik concludes the work by restating his major point that the emphasis in Quranic warfare is on preparation, which implies instilling terror into the heart of the enemy. The intention is to weaken the enemy to such an extent that no military conflict is actually necessary. He, thus, makes it clear that terrorism, war and devastation, are all integral parts of Quranic military instruction.

His thesis, therefore, concludes that "Islam is the answer" while planning and preparing for conducting war. Of course, like most modern Islamists, he is a bit of a romantic, seeking to return to a time when Islam enjoyed its most successful campaigns and growth. In the bargain, he neglects the reality that if following Quranic military precepts and teachings were to have such a major impact, more than a thousand years of Islamic military history might have had more to show than the geo-political significance of Islam today.

## ...to Justify *Jihad*

Malik's perspective throughout this book is rather insular and his style more editorial than academic. Yet, while his reach and audience in Pakistan can only be conjectured at, there is no doubt that his viewpoints on the Quranic concept of warfare and the role of terror in the same would resonate exceedingly well with modern extremists and radicals, and shades of it may even be found in the philosophies of terrorist organisations such as the Al Qaeda and others of the same ilk. Therefore, despite certain ambiguities and conceptual weaknesses, this work does merit intensive study, and should be valued for the insight it gives into the mind of the modern *jihadi*.

While older Pakistani army officers claim that Malik's book does not carry much weight in their thinking, it distinctly reflects the Pakistan Army's doctrine of waging irregular wars and proxy wars against its neighbours

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through asymmetric means. Clearly, the gist of Malik's writing has been inalterably ingrained in the Pakistani military psyche. This is especially so when it is well known that the younger Pakistani officers commissioned during the Zia years have been deeply Islamised. Despite the fact that it is understood in India that the *Quran* does not justify terrorism, this book should be prescribed for reading by all Indian armed forces officers, diplomats and bureaucrats, as a tool for understanding the Pakistani military psyche.

### N.B.

- The only authoritative online review of the book is by Lt Col Joseph C Myers, of the US Army, in the Winter 2006-07 Issue of *Parameters*, the US Army War College Quarterly [http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/06winter/win-ess.pdf]
- The Center for Counterintelligence and Security Studies [CI Centre], Alexandria, VA [http://cicentre.com], has put up a PDF version of the book online, on http://cicentre.com/BK/sk\_malik\_quranic\_concept\_of\_war.pdf, with an introduction by Patrick Poole and Mark Hanna, both anti-terrorism consultants to law enforcement and military.
- In India, the book is reprinted by Himalayan Books, New Delhi, in arrangement with Wajid Alis Limited, Lahore, Pakistan, and distributed by The English Book Store, New Delhi, since 1986.



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*Views expressed in this Issue Brief are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies.*



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