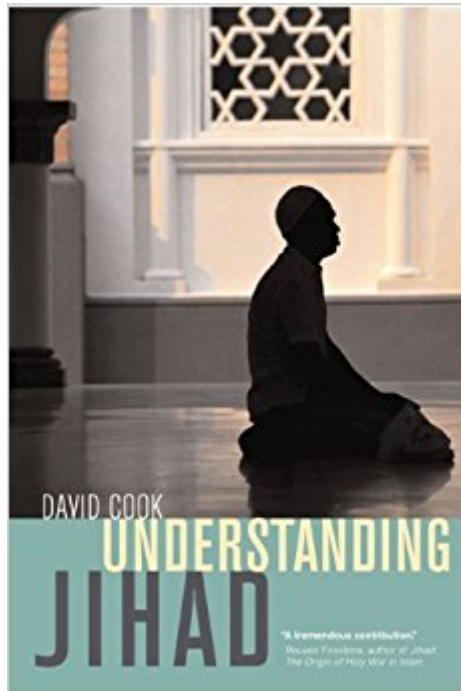




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# Understanding Jihad



## Synopsis

Jihad is one of the most loaded and misunderstood terms in the news today. Contrary to popular understanding, the term does not mean "holy war." Nor does it simply refer to the inner spiritual struggle. This book, judiciously balanced, accessibly written, and highly relevant to today's events, unravels the tangled historical, intellectual, and political meanings of jihad. Looking closely at a range of sources from sacred Islamic texts to modern interpretations, *Understanding Jihad* opens a critically important perspective on the role of Islam in the contemporary world. As David Cook traces the practical and theoretical meanings of jihad, he cites from scriptural, legal, and newly translated texts to give readers a taste of the often ambiguous information that is used to construct Islamic doctrine. He looks closely at the life and teaching of the Prophet Muhammad and at the ramifications of the great Islamic conquests in 634 to 732 A.D. He sheds light on legal developments relevant to fighting and warfare, and places the internal, spiritual jihad within the larger context of Islamic religion. He describes some of the conflicts that occur in radical groups and shows how the more mainstream supporters of these groups have come to understand and justify violence. He has also included a special appendix of relevant documents including materials related to the September 11 attacks and published manifestoes issued by Osama bin Laden and Palestinian suicide-martyrs.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Stands out in its ability to extend readers’ awareness of the breadth of Muslim writing about the topic.” • (Intl Journal Of Middle East Stds (Ijmes) 2010-07-15)

"Understanding Jihad is one of the most helpful of the spate of new books to appear since the tragic events of September 11, 2001 on the debate about jihad in Islam. Cook's approach is based on historical and textual analyses, and is enhanced by valuable theoretical discussion. This book will help readers find their way through the vast literature by Muslims and non-Muslim scholars on what we can't seem to get away from calling 'holy war'."#151;Richard C. Martin, Professor of Islamic Studies, Emory University" This book is important to current political and religious discourse on the role of Islam in today's world, and increases our understanding of the seemingly odd behaviors we observe through the media. A tremendous contribution."#151;Reuven Firestone, author of Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam

I once bought Ephraim Karsh's "Islamic Imperialism," hoping to learn about Islamic political theory of war, but it turned out to be yet another history of Muslim conquests. "Understanding Jihad" is the book I wanted. A comprehensive, exhaustively footnoted history of ideas, rather than events. In the absence of English translations of seminal Islamic works, such as the 8th century "Katib al Jihad" by Al Mubarak, this gives the western reader the widest access to Islamic thought on warfare published to date. The author is coolly analytical and carefully parses the sources, from the Quran, through the many Hadith, following the Sunna right through to modern times. He shows the evolution of the term Jihad and its variant meaning to different Muslim theorists, jurists, and activists. Most startling is his historical mapping of the popular modern distinction between "Lesser jihad" (religious militarism) and "Greater jihad" (struggle for self-mastery), showing it to have emerged only in the 10th-11th centuries in a Sufi context, and that the two have largely been seen as complimentary projects, rather than one negating the other. On rare occasions, the author drops into an emphatic tone that makes one want to test that particular claim, but all-in-all, this is a learned brief on the subject, majesterial in its citation, and largely compelling in its arguments.

Enlightening book... enables understanding of current events and motivations of the Islamic State...

It is difficult nowadays to get an objective, nuanced opinion on Islam, neither flattering nor biased against it. If I were to recommend a way to try and achieve that, I would suggest reading several good books on the matter, including this among them, for in my opinion it is quite complete and fairly assessed. This work aims to answer the following question: Which is the meaning of jihad? Holy war or spiritual striving to improve oneself? Pursuant to the author, during the first several centuries of

Islam the interpretation of jihad was unabashedly aggressive and expansive, and the conquest achieved by Islam in the VII and VIII centuries C.A. have been seen by Muslims as one of the incontrovertible proofs of Islam, so that nowadays they are unwilling to confront the fact that such conquest were basically as unjustified as European colonial conquests. The so-called "greater jihad" (i.e., the one with an ascetic and pacific meaning) seems a patently apologetic device not well attested in the hadith literature, which was adduced in order to overcome a resistance to the acceptance and legitimacy of jihad. Cook also points out a reasonable outsider must conclude that radical Islam is indeed a legitimate expression of Islam, yet the fact that the majority of contemporary Muslims do not actively participate in militant jihad demonstrates a decisive rejection of which the radical Muslims are keenly aware. The reality is that jihad during the past two centuries has been a dismal failure, with the possible exception of the expulsion of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. Besides, it also represents a danger to Muslims, for it is all too easy to turn it against them. All that (and much more that I do not mention in this summary) is developed in 235 pages (footnotes included), the book being divided in the following chapters: 1. Qur'an and Conquest; 2. The "Greater Jihad" and the "Lesser Jihad"

I have just finished reading, and would like to recommend, this superb book *Understanding Jihad*, by David Cook, a professor of religion at Rice University. Cook's specialty is there history and nature is jihad theology, martyrdom and martyrology, and apocalypticism in Islam. The book surveys the history of jihad ideology, beginning with its textual foundations in the Quran, the hadith, and the Sirs of the Prophet. It then move on to the medieval theologians, and examines the various debates between then about the subject, and what exactly defines the martyr (it turns out that martyrdom is actually quite easy to achieve). Cook examines how jihad effected historical events, and how this events in turn changed how the theologians thought about jihad. In the last part if the book, Cook goes through the latest developments in jihad theory. According to Cook, what has happened lately is that new interpretations have arisen which declare that the entire Muslim community is in a state of jahiliyya, or ignorance, the way that the Arabs were before the Prophet. This interpretation lead to the conclusion that all the world Muslims are actually apostates, unless they are currently wagging jihad. In an appendix, Cook has helpfully provided translations of popular documents regarding jihad, many of which circulate online. To read them is to go through the looking glass, into a crazy, topsy-turvy world, where truth is a matter of mere emotion, and death is the best thing that could ever happen to you.

Awfully written and I question some of the facts author chose to depict. Anyone doing scholarly research on Jihad should not purchase this book. I have also consulted with a Middle Eastern native who possesses extensive knowledge on the Taliban and Jihad, so my summation is correct on this book. I am also doing an honors thesis on Human Terrain System and have done extensive research on the Taliban and Jihad. A much more accurate account on Jihad is "Inside Jihadism" by Farhad Khosrokhava.

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