

Title—Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History

Author—Rudolph Peters

Year—1979

Categories: Islam, Colonialism, Politics, Theology

Place: The World

Time: 1780-1970

Argument Synopsis:

Peters' book is focused on the theory of jihad and uses various examples of jihad during the period of European colonialism as a means to explore the theory. He examines the usage and concept of jihad in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, aiming to establish whether this term has acquired a new or different meaning between Islam and the West. The book is divided into three main sections. The first presents an exposition of the classical Sunni theory of jihad, pulling on twentieth century work in Arabic to fully flesh it out. The second section provides a brief account of seven episodes in which the institution of jihad was employed to resist the encroachment of Western colonialism. He attempts to choose examples from across the colonized Muslim world. He looks at Muslim revivalism in India, with particular attention to the movement of Sayyid Admad of Bareilly. Other examples include: the revolt of Abd al-Qadir in Algeria, the Mahdiyya in the Sudan, the Urabi movement in Egypt, the Sanusiyya, the Ottoman jihad of 1914, and Palestinian Arab resistance to British rule in Palestine in the late 1930s. The third section of the book examines the work of Islamic modernists. Islamic modernists attacked the classical theory of jihad by attempting to restrict that application and by seeking to broaden its meaning as to encompass any manner of worthy striving for change, as a form of Muslim apologetics.

This book is the first comprehensive account of jihad available in English, speaking to the growth of studies on Islam since the mid-twentieth century. He argues that the ethnocentric image of an uncompromising, militant Islam helped to justify the civilizing mission of Western colonization. In terms of the revisionist's modern view of jihad, Peters characterizes it as defensive rather than offensive. He highlights Indian Muslims in particular as the first to coherently articulate modernist ideas. These Indian modernists prepared the ground for the for the separation of religion from politics encouraging secularism. He argues that in order to understand modern Islam, it is important to understand the evolution of Muslim institutions throughout history as it was affected by political, social and economic changes.

Peters argues that the concept of jihad has lost much of its appeal for Muslims, citing the failure of armed revolts during colonialism. While this argument certainly held true in 1979, the concept of jihad has been renewed through events such as 9/11 and 7/7. The rise of Islamic terror groups at the end of the twentieth and beginning of twenty-first centuries has made jihad a more influential concept on Muslims than it was in 1979.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The West used the classical doctrine of jihad as evidence that Muslims were violent and required to be subjugated during the colonial period
- Failure of the armed revolts against colonialism is largely responsible for the deterioration of the idea of jihad
- Indian Muslims at the end of the nineteenth century were the first to articulate modernist ideas in a coherent way