

# "ISNA CONDEMNS TERRORISM" AND OTHER ACTS OF LEGERDEMAIN

Why the Muslim Brotherhood front group should heed the advice from its own brochure.

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## خبر گزاری دانشجویان ایران

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) presents itself as "an association of Muslim organizations and individuals that provides a common platform for presenting Islam[.]" Leaders of ISNA are accorded access to all levels of government in the United States and are looked to as authorities on Islam and representatives of the Muslim-American community.

But there are two things in particular that need to be remembered about ISNA:

1. ISNA was, and still is, considered an unindicted co-conspirator in the federal terrorism case against the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development. On November 24, 2008, the Holy Land Foundation and five of its leaders were convicted on charges of providing material support to Hamas, a federally designated foreign terrorist organization. The five leaders subsequently received sentences ranging from 15 to 65 years in federal prison.
2. ISNA is connected to the Muslim Brotherhood. Among the evidence submitted by

the federal prosecutors in the Holy Land Foundation case was a document titled "An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America, May 22, 1991." This document stated

*The Ikhwan [Muslim Brotherhood] must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and "sabotaging" its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers [Muslims] so that it is eliminated and God's religion [Islam] is made victorious over all other religions.*

This document listed "our organizations and the organizations of our friends." Number 1 on this list was ISNA.

In spite of ISNA's links to the Holy Land Foundation case and its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, ISNA makes much of its condemnation of terrorism and refers to ISNA's 2005 brochure titled "Against Terrorism and Religious Extremism: Muslim Position and Responsibilities (<https://makkah.files.wordpress.com/2007/01/isna-anti-terrorism-and-anti-extremism-brochure.pdf>).". The brochure appears to condemn terrorism and refute claims that Islam has anything to do with such violence. But, as with acts of legerdemain, things in this brochure are not what they seem.

### **ISNA Condemns Terrorism**

In this brochure ISNA states that in the absence of "a universally agreed upon definition of terrorism," it has chosen to define terrorism as "any act of indiscriminate violence that targets innocent people." The idea of "indiscriminate violence" means random violence that fails to make a distinction among its recipients. It can even mean killing someone by accident.

But there are problems with this definition and the rationale for it. In the first place, due to the different cultures, religions and values in the world, there can never be "a universally agreed upon definition of terrorism." But that is irrelevant because our focus should be on how the concept of terrorism is understood in the United States. In the United States "terrorism" is commonly understood to be an act of violence used to create fear among people in order to further particular goals of the perpetrator. With this understanding of the word, there is no such thing as "indiscriminate violence" because there is a reason, and usually advanced planning, for the use of that violence.

We can probably all agree that innocent people should not be targeted for violence. But the crux of the matter is defining who is "innocent." ISNA is an Islamic organization that wants to, among other things, foster a better understanding of Islam. So who are innocent people according to Islamic Doctrine? Let's consider what Muhammad and the Koran have to say:

Abu Huraira reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) had said...A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He neither oppresses him nor humiliates him nor looks down upon him...All things of a Muslim are inviolable for his brother in faith; his blood, his wealth and his honour. (*Sahih Muslim*, No. 2564)

So Muhammad said that Muslims are not to harm each other. This was expanded on in Chapter 4, Verses 92-93 of the Koran:

It is not for a believer [Muslim] to kill a believer except (that it be) by mistake... And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein; and the Wrath and the Curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him.

In general, then, a Muslim is prohibited from intentionally killing another Muslim. But there are three exceptions to that:

It was narrated from 'Aishah that the Messenger of Allah said: "It is not permissible to shed the blood of a Muslim except in three cases: A [sic] adulterer who had been married, who should be stoned to death; a man who killed another man intentionally [and without legal authority], who should be killed; and a man who left Islam and waged war against Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, and His Messenger, who should be killed, or crucified, or banished from the land." (*Sunan An-Nasa'i*, No. 4053)

So there are three circumstances that allow a Muslim to kill another Muslim.

On the other hand,

It was narrated from 'Amr bin Shu'aib, from his father, from his grandfather that the Messenger of Allah said: "A Muslim should not be killed in retaliation for the murder of a disbeliever." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, No. 2659)

Muhammad tells Muslims that they can kill non-Muslims without a penalty. In contrast, Islam forbids Muslims from intentionally killing other Muslims who are staying true to their faith, and Allah will punish them with Hell if they do such a thing. So according to Islamic doctrine, the only innocent people are devout Muslims.

It appears then, that ISNA's definition of terrorism only applies to the random and/or accidental killing of devout Muslims.

#### **The Word *Jihad* does not mean "Holy War"**

The ISNA brochure states, "Contrary to common misperceptions and mistranslations, the

word *jihad* does not mean 'Holy War' [...]” If this is true, then such “misperceptions and mistranslations” of the word *jihad* are rampant in the Muslim community, e.g.:

1. "Jihad: Striving, holy war" (Dictionary of Islamic Words & Expressions).
2. "[T]he earliest (and therefore fundamental) Qur'anic reference to the question of jihad, or holy war..." (*The Message of the Qur'an*, n. 167, p. 51). This is the translation of the Koran endorsed and distributed by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).
3. "[H]e was taken prisoner in a jihad - that is, a holy war..." (*The Message of the Qur'an*, n. 72, p. 284).
4. "[A] woman taken captive in a "holy war" (jihad)...” (*The Message of the Qur'an*, n. 58, p. 727).
5. "And He (Allah) said: Jihad (Islamic holy war) is ordained for you (Muslims)..." (Sheikh 'Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Humaid, *The Call to Jihad [Fighting For Allah's Cause]* in the Qur'an).
6. "[T]he Prophet nevertheless said to his companions that they had returned from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war, the greater jihad being the inner battle..." (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Spiritual Significance of Jihad*). This article is found at a website titled *MyJihad* (<http://myjihad.org/>) ; a major focus of this website is the attempt to redefine the word *jihad* away from any connection to war. (It should be noted that the distinction between a lesser and a greater *jihad* is a fabrication. See my book *Islam According to Muhammad, Not Your Neighbor*, pp. 115-123.)
7. "The holy war (jihad) is a collective duty..." (*The Book of the Holy War [Kitab al-Jihad]*, *The Mainstay Concerning Jurisprudence [Al-'Umda fi 'l-Fiqh]*, p. 313).

Perhaps ISNA will contact CAIR, and the authors and publishers of these works and let them know they are perpetuating “misperceptions and mistranslations.”

### Cutting and Pasting from the Koran

The ISNA brochure is quite critical of “detractors of Islam” who take a “cut-and-paste” approach to verses of the Koran by ignoring their historical context and “textual analysis.” ISNA states that contrary to what these “detractors” say, “nowhere does the Qur'an call for violence against anyone merely on the grounds that he/she rejected Islam.” This is followed by the mentioning of a number of verses apparently in support of that claim, and the dismissal of verses 9:5, 9:29, and 9:123, which are used by the “detractors” against that claim. ISNA states that these last three verses were relevant

only to a particular historical period.

So what is the historical context of these three verses, according to ISNA? ISNA claims that these three verses from Chapter 9 were "revealed" during a period of threatening "aggression and gross oppression" against the "nascent Muslim community." ISNA is wrong. In reality, the verses in Chapter 9 were "revealed" in late 630 AD and early 631 AD. By this time Muhammad had already conquered Mecca, and the remaining non-Muslim tribes on the Arabian Peninsula, confronted by the burgeoning Muslim armies, were flocking to Medina to convert to Islam.

And ISNA has a problem in that these three verses from Chapter 9 were among the last verses to be "revealed" to Muhammad. According to the Islamic Doctrine of Abrogation, if there is a conflict between the message of a verse in Chapter 9 and that of a verse in another chapter, the verse in Chapter 9 abrogates (supersedes) the other verse; that other verse is still a valid part of the Koran, but the verse in Chapter 9 is the one now carrying the doctrinal weight. In reality, the verses in Chapter 9 were Allah's final instructions to the Muslims on how to deal with non-Muslims.

ISNA has an additional problem in that Islam teaches that the Koran consists of the perfect and eternal commands of Allah. So there is nothing in the Koran or Islamic doctrine that limits the messages of verses 9:5, 9:29, and 9:123 to the time period in which they were "revealed." The messages of these verses are as valid today as they were in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Let's do a textual analysis. Verse 9:5 is referred to by Muslim scholars as the "Verse of the Sword"; it commands Muslims to kill non-Muslims wherever they can be found, and to besiege and ambush them. The non-Muslims have only two choices: either fight to the death or convert to Islam. Here is that verse:

Then when the Sacred Months have passed, then kill the Mushrikun wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every ambush. But if they repent [by rejecting Shirk (polytheism) and accept Islamic Monotheism] and perform As-Salat (the prayers), and give Zakat (obligatory charity), then leave their way free. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Verse 9:29 commands Muslims to fight Jews and Christians, but it gives Jews and Christians an additional option along with the options of fighting to the death or converting to Islam. Jews and Christians can instead pay the *jizyah* (protection money) and live as second-class citizens under Muslim rule, feeling themselves subdued. Here is that verse:

Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad), and those

who acknowledge not the religion of truth (i.e. Islam) among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.

Verse 9:123 commands Muslims (believers) to fight non-Muslims (disbelievers) who are nearby and let those non-Muslims feel the harshness of the Muslims:

O you who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are close to you, and let them find harshness in you; and know that Allah is with those who are Al-Muttaqun (the pious).

There is no ambiguity in these three verses. And the attempt by ISNA to suggest that these three verses only applied to a time period when the "nascent Muslim community" was under attack is disproved by the facts that they were "revealed" during a time when the Muslims were the most powerful of the people on the Arabian Peninsula, and that the commands of Allah in the Koran are timeless.

And to further undermine ISNA's claim that the Koran does not call for violence against anyone for rejecting Islam, in 4:89 Allah commands death for any Muslim leaving Islam:

But if they turn back (from Islam), take (hold of) them and kill them wherever you find them...

### **Taking Verses of the Koran out of Context**

A regular response from ISNA is that critics of Islam have taken Koran verses out of context. But it is interesting to see that ISNA is quite willing to do that very thing. Here are two examples.

In the brochure, ISNA makes a blanket statement that war is described in the Koran "as a hated act," and refers to 2:216. Here is that verse:

Jihad (holy fighting in Allah's Cause) is ordained for you (Muslims) though you dislike it, and it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know.

Authoritative Koran commentaries (*tafsirs*) explain that this verse does not say that war is "a hated act." On the contrary, this verse says that war (*jihad*) is obligatory and "good" for Muslims, even though some Muslims might not like it. The "bad" thing that some Muslims might like is to not participate in war; and this is bad because it means the enemy can win (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir Al-Qurtubi*, *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, *Tafsir As-Sa'di*, and *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*). ISNA's statement that 2:216 proclaims that war is "a hated act" completely distorts the meaning of this verse and has no doctrinal basis.

The ISNA brochure mentions 60:8-9 to support the statement that

a basic rule governing the relationship between Muslims and people of other faiths is that of peaceful coexistence, justice and compassion.

Here are those two verses:

[8] Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity. [9] It is only as regards those who fought against you on account of religion, and have driven you out of your homes, and helped to drive you out, that Allah forbids you to befriend them. And whosoever will befriend them, then such are the Zalimun (wrongdoers – those who disobey Allah).

Authoritative Koran commentaries explain that in 60:8 Allah allows Muslims to be kind to non-Muslims who don't want to fight the Muslims (e.g. women and weak non-Muslims) or help other non-Muslims against the Muslims (e.g., *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, and *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*), although one commentary stated that this was allowed only up until the time that Muslims had been commanded to fight the non-Muslims in "jihad" (*Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*).

Our authoritative Koran commentaries explain that in 68:9 Allah forbids Muslims from being kind toward and/or having friendship with non-Muslims who are openly hostile and/or fought against Muslims (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, and *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*).

So we can see that ISNA's blanket statement about 60:8-9 supporting "peaceful coexistence, justice and compassion" is not an accurate explanation of the meaning of these two verses.

### Conclusion

ISNA proclaims that it condemns "terrorism," but ISNA's unique definition of terrorism means that this condemnation apparently only applies to the random and/or accidental killing of devout Muslims.

ISNA is critical of those who take a "cut and paste" approach to verses of the Koran and take verses out of context. However, as was pointed out above, ISNA appears to be quite willing to present erroneous historical contexts and provide new, doctrinally unsupported interpretations of verses in the Koran.

Perhaps ISNA should heed the following advice from the section of its brochure talking about Muslims' responsibilities:

**Educate Muslims, especially leaders and imams, about relevant Islamic teachings....Hold leaders responsible for un-Islamic teachings, and encourage them to seek training...**

Hopefully, such training will give the folks at ISNA a better understanding of Islam and minimize ISNA's un-Islamic teachings.

🏷 **Tags:** Islam, isna, Jihad, koran, Muslim Brotherhod

## **ABOUT DR. STEPHEN M. KIRBY**

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