



Opinion | 'Jihad' is not a dirty word

By Qasim Rashid

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Linda Sarsour speaks during the Women's March on Washington on Jan. 21. (Theo Wargo/Getty Images)

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“Jihad” appears to have become the scariest word in the world these days. This month, Muslim activist Linda Sarsour used the word in a lecture — expressing her hope that God accepts the efforts of Muslims to peacefully resist anti-Muslim discrimination in the United States as a form of jihad.

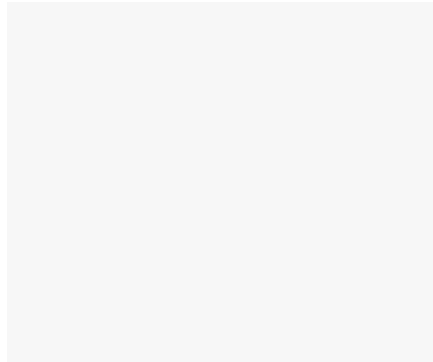
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The Internet went ablaze with fury, with critics fear-mongering that “Sarsour calls for jihad against Trump.” These responses grossly distort not only what she said, but also what “jihad” actually means.

Contrary to what extremists and anti-Muslim personalities claim, the word “jihad” does not mean “to wage holy war,” or “to kill the infidel,” or “to commit terrorism.” The word “jihad” means “to struggle.” The prophet Muhammad said the best jihad was to speak words of truth “in front of a tyrannical leader” — and this is what Sarsour clearly referenced in her lecture. Not violence. Not terrorism. Indeed, the only two groups who claim “jihad = Terrorism” are

Islamic State terrorists and Islamophobes with an agenda. Both are ignorant of Islam and serve only one another.



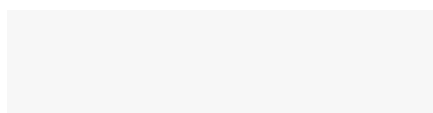
The Koran describes three types of jihad (struggles), and zero of them mean or permit terrorism. These are: the jihad against yourself, the jihad against Satan — which are called the greater jihads — and the jihad against an open enemy — known as the lesser jihad. Prophet Muhammad explained this upon returning from battle: “We are returning from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad.” This jihad against yourself manifests in many ways. For example, getting your college education is the greater jihad. Quitting smoking, losing weight, beating cancer, learning a skill, parenting, even “adulging” are all forms of the greater jihad. Thus, the first and greatest form of jihad in Islam is the jihad to improve yourself and to improve all humanity.

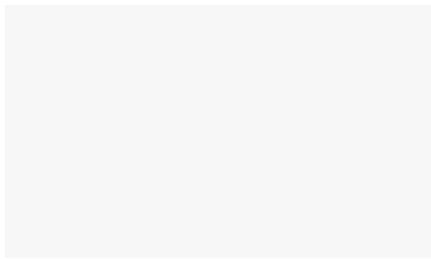
The second jihad is the jihad against Satan. This is the jihad to preach the word of God through the Koran, through scholarship and through dialogue. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Messiah and founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, coined this as the “jihad of the pen” in the late 19th century. He condemned those Muslim clerics who claimed Islam should be spread by force, writing in 1902, “No true Muslim has ever believed that Islam should be spread by the sword.” Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, teaches that Satan misleads and promotes fear and hate. He distorts the truth to create violence. This second jihad pushes back with knowledge, truth and love.

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Finally — the third, or lesser, jihad — is the struggle against an open enemy. The Koran clearly defines who is an “open enemy,” and I explained in detail in a viral thread and op-ed. The short answer is that “open enemy” is not your government, people of another faith or your fellow citizens. Instead, the Koran permits Muslims to fight in this lesser jihad when five strict conditions are met: self-defense; when they are being persecuted for their faith; have fled their homes and migrated to a different country to preserve peace; are targeted to be killed for their faith; and to protect universal religious freedom.

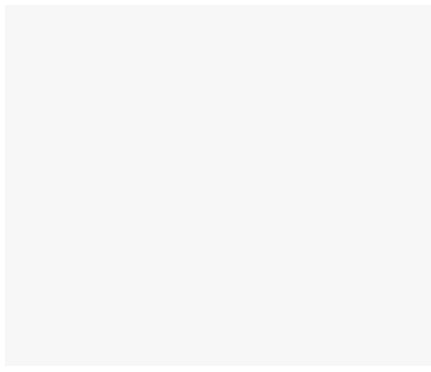




Indeed, the Koran 22:41 specifically commands Muslims to engage in this lesser jihad to protect “Churches, Synagogues, Temples, and Mosques” from attack. And even when fighting in self-defense in these strict conditions, the Koran 2:194, among other places, mandates that Muslims immediately forgive if the attacker stops: “And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is freely professed for God. But if they desist, then remember that no hostility is allowed except against the aggressors.”

And yet again the Koran repeatedly condemns creating any sort of violent disorder or rebellion against any faith or government: “And create not disorder in the earth after it has been set in order” (7:57) and likewise, “defraud not people of their things and commit not iniquity in the earth, causing disorder” (11:86).

And in yet another safeguard to prevent terrorism, prophet Muhammad’s rules of war forbid collateral damage, damage to property, livestock or greenery, or harm to any place of worship or temple — without exception.



No one wins when extremists and Islamophobes distort the correct meaning of “jihad.” America is witnessing record levels of anti-Muslim hatred and violence. Those who promote fear of Muslims with malicious distortions of words such as “jihad” only increase the likelihood of anti-Muslim hate crimes. “Jihad” — as defined by the true Islam of Prophet Muhammad and the Koran — means a struggle for self-reformation, education, and protection of universal religious freedom. Muslims should not censor themselves on a distortion of the true meaning of the word. Instead, Muslims and non-Muslims alike should stand united to emphasize the correct meaning of “jihad” and take this narrative away from extremists and Islamophobes.

We have a long road ahead, but whatever your jihad, make it a true jihad of peace, education, and protection of people of all faiths — and no faith.



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