



Revisiting the Past: The Value of Teaching Islamic Military History

By Professor Joel Hayward¹



THE SO-CALLED War on Terror ushered in by the 9/11 attacks in 2001 created a serious awkwardness for both Muslim scholars of Islamic military history and the institutions that had taught that history. The 1,400 years of Islamic history since the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the seventh century CE contains innumerable cases in which the pursuit of justice or the ending of tyranny were the primary causes of warfighting. It is a rich and wondrous history, which has seen a small and localized Arabic manifestation of Abrahamic monotheism transform into a major world religion, with around one-quarter of all humans as adherents. Warfare undeniably played a role in facilitating that transformation, and Islamic generals can be counted among history's greatest warriors. In the West, for example, we have always romanticized Saladin, the twelfth century sultan of Egypt and Syria, who defeated a powerful Crusader army at the Battle of Hattin (1187), restored Jerusalem to Islamic rule, and negotiated a fair-spirited truce with Richard the Lionheart that has been immortalized in literature and movies. Saladin, whose name was actually Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, has endured as the embodiment of medieval chivalry with an almost unequalled reputation for honour, fairness and generosity.²

Yet the widespread post-9/11 linkage of Islam with undeniable acts of wanton and indiscriminate violence — confirmed in many peoples' minds by ISIS's bestial inhumanity in Syria and Iraq—has left Muslim scholars, their readers and educational institutions nervous about expressing any pride in Islam's long and distinguished tradition of war. Wanting to distance themselves from the appearance of militarism and affirm that Islam stands for peace, and with many even claiming that Islam *means* peace, they have virtually

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² Franklin D. Margiotta, *Brassey's Encyclopedia of Military History and Biography* (Washington DC and London: Brassey's, 1994), p. 833.

stopped writing on Islam's illustrious military history and teaching it even in cadet and staff colleges in Arab and other Islamic countries. They draw their case studies from western history instead.

Muslim historians and other scholars are equally nervous in case a positive recounting of any historical Islamic success in war might be misunderstood as somehow legitimizing the spurious Jihadist and Islamist assertions that every pious Muslim is morally obliged take up arms against governments that the groups (*or the individuals themselves*) see as unfair, unrepresentative or repressive.

This article will argue that Muslim scholars should not feel the slightest awkwardness or embarrassment about Islam's past martial successes, and should indeed return to writing on Islamic military history, teaching it and ensuring its survival within the curricula of cadet and staff colleges. Far from damaging Islam's reputation, an objective and fair-minded reading of Islam's military history (according to the methodology and principles accepted within the discipline of history) will directly counter the current western misperception that Islam is somehow more aggressive and accepting of disproportionate or indiscriminate violence than the other great religions. It will in fact show that the Islamic laws and ethics of war have minimized violence and constrained misconduct and ensured that warfare was fought according to guiding principles which are very similar to those found within western "just war" teachings. And far from lending credence to Jihadist or Islamist assertions that warfare should be used by any Muslims who want to bring about political or social change, an honest and thorough recounting of Islamic military history will demonstrate clearly that recourse to violence had never been the prerogative of any individuals, however disgruntled they may be. It was always a right and responsibility bestowed only upon legitimate national leaders (caliphs, kings, emirs and presidents). The teaching of Islamic history is also replete with examples of strategic brilliance and leadership excellence that make wonderfully illuminating and inspiring case studies for today's civil and military leaders. It goes without saying that studying the campaigns and commanders of the past will develop a Muslim's civilizational self-respect and *esprit de corps* in the same way that any western reader would have their sense of civilizational or cultural pride enhanced by studying the World Wars or the strategies and lives of great commanders like Washington,

Wellington, Nelson, Grant, Lee, Haig, Montgomery, and Patton.

1. Why study military history at all?

Except in totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, history is no longer the narrative chronicling of the lives and times of great men, written often to express admiration or gratitude for, or to justify, their deeds. History books and articles now exist primarily to convey knowledge of the cultural, ideological, political and social changes—and their causes and consequences—that existed within and across earlier epochs. Although most historians nowadays do not write or teach to disseminate this knowledge for any political purposes, such as creating narratives that legitimize a particular ruler or system, it is commonly understood that "what happened in the past influences what happens in the present, and, indeed, what will happen in the future, [therefore] knowledge of the past – history – is essential to society."³ With this in mind, historians strive to construct analytical accounts upon a set of philosophical principles and methodological practices that will, they believe, best help them to ensure the soundness of their interpretations. They ordinarily prefer to use primary sources instead of secondary sources, and they strive to address issues of subjectivity and bias while they select, understand, and utilize those sources. Perhaps motivated by a belief that understanding the past will better help people to understand the present, historians tend to hope that people will see their work as an interesting and insightful means of gaining more understanding of the human condition in general. In other words, knowing where we have been helps us to understand where we are.

On the other hand, soldiers, sailors and airmen, and the politicians and civil servants who guide them or work alongside them, may feel drawn to the study of history because they believe it has a practical benefit. Naturally wanting to excel at what is often still called "the profession of arms", they see the study of history as a vital means of enhancing their understanding of the nature of war and conflict and of learning what has caused victory or defeat. They also hope to get into the minds of commanders in order to understand their decision-making processes or into the group psychology of ordinary soldiers in order to understand their morale, motivations, actions and performance.

³ Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 2.

There is truth in the view of Sir Michael Howard, one of the greatest contemporary scholars of war, that military history has often been a poor guide on these matters, given that too many authors of military history tend to be former participants in the events they describe, or because other writers have a nationalistic or patriotic agenda, perhaps of an accusatory or exculpatory nature. This has left the entire genre of military history accused of being strangely old-fashioned, subjective, jingoistic and, worst of all, glorying of war.⁴ Yet Howard is also correct in arguing that war is:

a distinct and repetitive form of human behaviour. Unlike politics, or administration, or economic activity, which are continuing and constantly developing processes, war is intermittent, clearly defined, with distinct criteria of success and failure. ... The historians of peace can only chronicle and analyze *change*. But the military historian knows what is victory and what defeat, what is success and what failure. When activities do thus constantly recur, and their success can be assessed by a straightforward standard, it does not seem over-optimistic that we can make judgements about them and draw conclusions which will have an abiding value.

Certainly much of the military history produced since the middle of the twentieth century has reached the highest scholarly standards and is no less rigorous, objective, reliable and illuminating than other forms of historical inquiry.

With this in mind, it is reasonable that anyone who strives for success in war or conflict, or who wants to avoid it, should ensure that they understand the mistakes of the past so that they will not repeat them out of ignorance, whilst ensuring of course that they do not let any obsolete theories, doctrines, decisions or methods from the past lock them into a rigid and unhelpful way of going about their business.

2. A positive story to tell

Despite the widespread negative propaganda which says the opposite, Islam was neither founded nor spread by the sword, and its history has been no more shaped and coloured by war than the history of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and the other world religions. Indeed, it is this author's opinion that the most effective way of countering the inaccurate and virtually ubiquitous narrative of Islam as a violent religion is neither baldly to assert that "Islam means

peace" (implying that it is somehow pacifistic by nature) nor to simply stop teaching Islamic military history so as to avoid saying anything that might seem even indirectly to support that false narrative. Islam teaches that peace is always preferred over war, but it is not a pacifistic religion. Like Christianity and Judaism, it is a religion of *justice* that does permit war in certain circumstances to preserve life and liberty and to resist tyranny. The best means of countering the seemingly pervasive counterfactual narrative is indeed to teach and write on Islamic military history openly and accurately so that the justice, morality and humanity at its heart are clearly revealed.

Islam emerged in the seventh century CE as a series of revelations by God to humanity via the Prophet Muhammad, an Arabian merchant. Formed into a single religious book, the Qur'an, shortly after Muhammad's death, these revelations clarify that God prefers humans to cooperate rather than compete, and to seek tolerant coexistence when differences between communities emerge. The Qur'an articulates a moral framework that limits human aggression and renders recourse to war as a last resort for a legitimate leader who must defend his people against aggressive violence.⁵ This framework is strikingly similar to the much-celebrated western "Just War" philosophy and is consistent with modern international humanitarian law, including the UN Charter and the Geneva Conventions of 1949 (and additional 1977 protocols). The Qur'an identifies self-defense as a nation's basic right, but imposes quite strict limits on when and how warfare can be waged. In particular, war cannot be for aggressive purposes, the level of force to be used must remain proportionate to that encountered, and no deliberate harm can be inflicted on the people we now call "noncombatants" (especially children, women, and the aged⁶). This ethical framework should be taught in universities and in military colleges and academies alongside the historical events themselves.

It is logical that the Prophet's conduct remained consistent with the revelation he brought. Indeed, between his migration to Yathrib (subsequently called Medina) in 622 CE and his death almost exactly a decade later, the

5 Joel Hayward, *Warfare in the Qur'an*. English Monograph Series—Book No. 14 (Amman: Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre / Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2012).

6 Joel Hayward, *Civilian Immunity in Foundational Islamic Strategic Thought*. English Monograph Series—Book No. 25 (Amman: Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre / Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2018).

4 Sir Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History", *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 107 (1961), pp. 4-8.

Prophet led increasingly large Islamic armies into battle on numerous occasions and sent others out under various commanders. A fair-minded reading of the earliest extant sources for these campaigns — Al-Wāqidi's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*⁷ and Ibn Hishām's recension of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*⁸ — reveals very clearly that the Prophet saw war as an unfortunate and unwanted but sometimes necessary and morally obligatory response to aggressive violence or severe repression. War must be waged cleanly, Muhammad said, meaning that no intentional harm could be inflicted on women, children, the aged, the wounded and captives.⁹ He not only said these things (and we have reliable *aḥādīth*, or recorded sayings, to this effect), but he practiced what he preached. Warfare waged by the Islamic armies under the Prophet's authority was humane, proportionate and discriminate. The Prophet was an artful and thoughtful leader, who understood that deceiving the enemy via strategic and tactical ruse was the best means of gaining psychological and positional advantage and of minimizing casualties on both sides,¹⁰ and the way he consistently acted reveals that he placed the utmost importance on justice, humanity, and morality.

Given that Muslims see the Qur'an as God's direct communication with humanity, and see the Prophet Muhammad as the epitome of wisdom, virtue and morality and the ultimate interpreter of Qur'anic meaning, Muhammad's understanding and conduct of warfare and its moral dimensions have served as the foundation upon which all Islamic laws of war and peace have subsequently been developed within the *sharī'a*.¹¹ In the year after Muhammad's death in 632 CE, his close friend and immediate successor, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, famously issued to the Muslim army before a campaign against the Byzantine armies in Syria what have

7 Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-ʿĀlamī, 1989). A useful English translation is edited by Rizwi Faizer, *The Life of Muḥammad: Al-Wāqidi's Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (London: Routledge, 2010).

8 ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra an-Nabawiyya* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2012). A useful English translation is Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford University Press, 1955).

Joel Hayward, *Civilian Immunity in Foundational Islamic Strategic Thought*, cited above.

10 Joel Hayward, "War is Deceit": *An Analysis of a Contentious Hadith on the Morality of Military Deception*. English Monograph Series — Book No. 24 (Amman: Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre / Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2017).

11 Cf. Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955).

been called the "Ten Commandments" of Islamic warfare. There is a version in Imām Mālik's seminal *al-Muwatta'*,¹² but the most common version is recorded in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*.¹³ Based directly on the Prophet's ﷺ guidance on the conduct of war, and expanded into a code that has served ever since as the basis of Islamic thinking on the conduct of war, this celebrated address to the army heading north to Syria under the leadership of Yazid ibn Abī Sufyān reads as follows:

Oh people! Stop, and I will tell you ten things. Do not be treacherous; do not steal from the booty; do not engage in backstabbing. Do not mutilate; do not kill a youngster or an old man, or a woman; do not cut off the heads of the palm-trees or burn them; do not cut down the fruit trees; do not slaughter a sheep or a cow or a camel, except for food. You will pass by people [priest and/or monks] who devote their lives in cloisters; leave them and their devotions alone. You will come upon people who bring you platters in which are all sorts of food; if you eat any of it, mention the name of Allah over it.¹⁴

It is clear that Abū Bakr's so-called principles were intended to regulate the moral conduct of warfare, rather than merely explain the way that military forces should be deployed and manoeuvred.

The Prophet's example and Abū Bakr's guidance formed the heart of Islamic laws and traditions that have routinely safeguarded civilians and other non-combatants and minimized the savagery that warfare can contain.¹⁵ Certainly when Islamic armies spread out

12 *Muwatta'* al-Imām Mālik ibn Anas (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2005), p. 319 (Book 21, Chapter 3, Hadith 10):

"Do not kill a woman or a child or an aged person. Do not cut down fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy any place of dwelling. Do not slaughter sheep or camels, except [if you need them] for food. Do not burn bees and do not scatter them. Do not steal from the booty, and do not be cowardly."

وَأِنِّي مُوصِيكَ بِعَشْرٍ لَا تَقْتُلَنَّ امْرَأَةً وَلَا صَبِيًّا وَلَا كَبِيرًا هَرَمًا
وَلَا تَقْطَعَنَّ شَجَرًا مُثْمِرًا وَلَا تُحْرِقَنَّ عَائِمًا وَلَا تَعْفِرَنَّ شَاةً وَلَا بَعِيرًا إِلَّا
لِلْمَأْكَلَةِ وَلَا تَحْرِقَنَّ نَحْلًا وَلَا تُفْرِقَنَّهٗ وَلَا تَغْلُلْ وَلَا تَجْبِنُ.

13 Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa'l-mulūk* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2008).

14 Ṭabarī, II, 518.

15 Joel Hayward, *Civilian Immunity in Foundational Islamic Strategic Thought*. English Monograph Series — Book No. 25 (Amman: Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre / Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2018); Joel Hayward, "Justice, Jihad and Duty: the Qur'anic Concept of Armed Conflict", *Islam and Civilizational Renewal*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (July 2018), pp. 267-303.

of Arabia in the seventh and eighth centuries CE, they broadly adhered to the same humane understanding of war and its moral dimensions.¹⁶ The mythology that Muslims spread Islam through violence, cruelty and forced conversions may survive in anti-Muslim polemics, but it has been disproven by historians. As De Lacy O’Leary wrote: “the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated.”¹⁷

Likewise, when the first jurists and theologians began to solidify and codify Islam’s philosophy and laws of war, they based them on the Qur’an, the Prophet’s example and sayings and Abū Bakr’s guidance. Early writers included Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (749–805 CE), Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (839–923), Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Māwardī (972–1058), Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiya (1263–1328) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406).¹⁸ With the exception of Ibn Taymiya—who is seen as a brilliant scholar, but an aberrant thinker on some aspect of war and violence by his contemporaries and most subsequent scholars—all these scholars agreed that war is not a personal obligation that one can decide for himself (فرض العين, *farḍ ‘ayn*) but a collective one (فرض الكفاية, *farḍ al-kifāya*).¹⁹ It can only be just when fought at the behest of a legitimate authority (meaning the caliph or ruler) and when the intention is self-defense, the removal of an imminent threat, or the righting of a serious injustice. In some limited circumstances, offen-

sive war could be waged to expand the state, but even then the conduct of combatants was significantly constrained by strict rules.²⁰ We have no Islamic scholarly or legal teachings or ruling that war can be for aggressive or exploitative motives, that noncombatants can be targeted, or that non-Muslim people in Muslim lands can suffer repression.

The point here is that, whether one teaches the historical events that make up Islamic military history, the laws and theology that framed them, or both, it is a positive story to tell. Teaching it and writing on it is the single best antidote to the counterfactual narrative that Islamic history was unusually brutal or philosophically more permissive of violence than other civilizational histories. It also entirely demolishes the Jihadist claim that every Muslim can, in effect, fight a jihad based on their own personal sense of grievance or injustice.

3. Leadership lessons from Islamic History

Leadership might best be described as the art of motivating and influencing people to share a vision of a goal-driven transformational process and to act collaboratively toward its realization. It is naturally valuable for Muslim students to study leaders and leadership and the way influence and motivation are understood within other cultures and contexts. Yet it is equally valuable, if not more valuable in terms of understanding how leadership best functions within one’s own culture, for them to draw lessons from their own past and present leaders. The academic disciplines of anthropology, economics, philosophy, politics, psychology, and religion all allow us to examine the philosophically interesting and practically beneficial topic of leadership and explore meaningful questions about who we are, how we live together, and how leaders and followers interact in order to accomplish common goals. When trying to understand how leadership *should be* understood and practiced, history is a rich source of information on how *it was* done and *how it became* the way it is. Military history provides a unique and important way of seeing and analyzing both task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership in situations of unusual emotion, stress and chaos.

Islamic history is replete with case studies of immense value to any civilians and military personnel who might want to understand leadership, and Mus-

16 Robert G. Hoyland, *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Fred M. Donner, ed., *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State* (Routledge, 2014); Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007).

17 De Lacy O’Leary, *Islam at the Cross Roads* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1923), p. 8. For further refutation of the spread-by-the-sword myth, see: Marshall G. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974); Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jamal Malik, *Islam in South Asia: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

18 Ahmed Mohsen Al-Dawoody, *The Islamic Law of War: Justifications and Regulations* (Palgrave Series in Islamic Theology, Law, and History, 2011); Majid Khadduri, trans., *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybani’s Siyar* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966).

19 Ibid., p. 60.

20 “Islamic Laws of War”, in Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and War* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 221–225.

lim students might gain special value from observing how leaders and leadership functioned within civilizational, political, cultural and ethical contexts that are more closely similar to their own than studying leaders and leadership from contexts that are dissimilar or even irrelevant to their own. For example, studying the Peloponnesian War fought from 431 to 404 BC by the Delian League led by Athens against the Peloponnesian League led by Sparta, and understanding the role played by leaders on both sides, including the famous Pericles, Demosthenes and Lysander, is certainly beneficial and enriching for students from any culture. Yet Muslim students will also benefit, and perhaps more significantly, from studying wars and warriors that come from within their own civilizational or cultural tradition. This will not only enhance their understanding of leadership in general, but also strengthen their sense of how their own religious and ethical framework influences the way that leadership and followership functions.

Muslims believe they have the ultimate case study anyway: the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who served as a head of state, the ultimate religious authority, a judicial leader, and of course a highly adept and successful military commander. Studying his life and campaigns provides Muslims with unequalled lessons on the way Islam directs, shapes and constrains a leader and imbues him (or her) with the necessary qualities of moral authority, integrity, dedication to community, selflessness, humility and of course courage.²¹

Muhammad may be the best case study of leadership drawn from Islamic history, but there are many others that would inspire and educate Muslims wanting to understand leadership. Other well documented case-studies that would both enrich their understanding of leadership and help them better to understand the evolution of their own civilization and culture include, but are by no means limited to:

- The first four Islamic caliphs' paradigmatic leadership after the death of the Prophet
- 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ's conquest of Egypt in 640.
- Khālid ibn al-Walid's remarkable military leadership during Islam's initial expansion outside Arabia.
- Abu'l-A'war al-Sulamī's defeat of the

Byzantine fleet in the Battle of the Masts in 655.

- Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād's successful campaigns against Visigothic Spain in the eighth century.
- Saladin's unification of Egypt, Syria and Palestine under his rule and his masterful and famously chivalrous campaigns against Crusaders during the twelfth century.
- Sultan Mehmed II's capture of Constantinople in 1453 (a watershed moment in world history).
- Shah Jahan's brilliant leadership during the expansion of the Mughal Empire (for which he is less well known than for building the Taj Mahal) during the seventeenth century.

4. Islamic history enhances healthy self-identity

Islam does not support nationalism, factionalism or any belief that than one state or people is better and has greater entitlement than others,²² but it does allow for love of country and kin, and it does promote the concept that all Muslims, wherever they are and regardless of their circumstances, form an *umma*, a community of shared belief. We can find this meaning mentioned in the Qur'an,²³ in hadiths and in the Constitution of Medina, which was a treaty of 622 CE binding the various tribes and peoples of Medina into a "single community" (أمة واحدة) under the Prophet's leadership.²⁴ In today's parlance, it is reasonable to say (without pushing it too far) that the global Islamic community of belief forms something of a civilization, with a distinct religious and ethical framework, legal codes drawing upon the Sharī'a, a single language used in worship and liturgy, shared views on science and reason, and a sense of shared identity. Despite regional and national distinctions, one can argue that the use of the term "Islamic civilization" (الحضارة الإسلامية), *al-Ḥadāra*

22 *Sunan al-Nasā'i* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 1971), V, 605 (Book 37, hadith 4121):

أَخْبَرَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْمُثَنَّى، عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا عِمْرَانُ الْقَطَّانُ، عَنْ قَتَادَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي مَجْلَزٍ، عَنْ جُنْدُبِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَنْ قَاتَلَ تَحْتَ رَايَةِ عُمَمَةٍ يُفَاتِلُ عَصِيْبَةً وَيَعْضِبُ لِعَصِيْبَةٍ فَقَتَلْتَهُ جَاهِلِيَّةٌ. قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ عِمْرَانُ الْقَطَّانُ لَيْسَ بِالْقَوِيِّ.

23 Frederick Mathewson Denny, "The Meaning of 'Ummah' in the Qur'an", *History of Religions*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (August 1975), pp. 34-70.

24 The text of this document survives in Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām's *Kitāb al-Amwāl*. Also see Michael Lecker, *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 2004).

21 John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad* (London: Kogan Page, 2010); Nabeel Al-Azami, *Muhammad: 11 Leadership Qualities that Changed the World* (London: Claritas Books, 2019).

al-Islāmiyya) is as appropriate for the Islamic world as the term “the West” is for those societies which have norms, values, customs, and belief systems that originated in Europe.²⁵

With this in mind, there is something inherently beneficial about understanding how norms, traditions, ideas and practices have evolved in one’s own civilization, and one can only see merit in Muslims defending the reputation of the Islamic *umma* when it has been tarnished by Islamists, Jihadists and terrorists, and by the inaccurate but popular writings of those who hate Islam,²⁶ causing widespread harm to the reputation of a civilization that now makes up a quarter of the world’s population²⁷. Presenting accurately and unapologetically the history of Islam — including its vibrant military history — not only exposes the conduct of the Islamists, Jihadists and terrorists as aberrant and non-representative of that history, but it strengthens the civilizational self-respect of Muslims, their sense of belonging to something positive in the world, and their solidarity with others who share the same connection to Islam. This sense of solidarity, unity and community is important within Islam. The Prophet said: “The believer is to the believer like parts of a building, each one of them supporting the other.”²⁸

25 Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge University Press, third edition, 2014); Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization* (Independence, KY: Cengage, 2011).

26 Cf. the published works, journalism and internet articles of Robert Spencer, Daniel Pipes, Benny Morris, David Horowitz, Bernard Lewis, David Bukay and David Pryce-Jones, among others. A central claim in these books is that Islam is an inherently violent and militaristic religion. The title of Spencer’s most controversial bestseller is indicative of the mistaken content: *The Truth about Muhammad, Founder of the World’s Most Intolerant Religion* (Washington, DC: Regnery Press, 2006). Spencer’s other books include: *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about the World’s Fastest Growing Faith* (New York: Encounter Books, 2002); *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (Regnery, 2003); Ed., *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: How Islamic Law Treats Non-Muslims* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2005); *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (And the Crusades)* (Regnery, 2005); *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn’t* (Regnery, 2007).

27 Muslims make up 23 percent of the world’s seven billion humans. See the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2 April 2015), p. 7.

28 *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1999), IV, 100 (Book I, hadith 1928):

حَدَّثَنَا الْحَسَنُ بْنُ عَلِيٍّ الْحَلَّالُ، وَعَبْدُ وَاحِدٍ، قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو

أَسَامَةَ، عَنْ بَرِيدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ أَبِي بَرْدَةَ، عَنْ جَدِّهِ أَبِي بَرْدَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي مُوسَى

Concluding thoughts

This article has argued that the teaching of Islamic military history and leadership should return to the curriculum in Muslim universities and military colleges and academies. Far from promoting political Islam, jihadism, extremism or militarism, it will expose the aberrant nature of those beliefs and strengthen Islam’s reputation for justice, humanity and constraint. It will equip students with the background and facts needed to counter the pernicious and untrue narrative that Islam is inherently violent, and it will provide invaluable knowledge for military practitioners and theorists, and for aspiring and actual leaders at all levels. Additionally, it will strengthen the self-respect and sense of cohesion of Muslims at a time when, in a world beset with challenges and tensions, holding fast to their religion can be likened (as Muhammad ﷺ foresaw) to “holding a burning ember”.²⁹

الْأَشْعَرِيُّ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْمُؤْمِنُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِ كَالْبُنْيَانِ يَشُدُّ بَعْضُهُ بَعْضًا. قَالَ أَبُو عِيْسَى هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ صَحِيحٌ.

29 *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, IV, 262 (Book 7, hadith 2260):

حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ بْنُ مُوسَى الْفَزَارِيُّ ابْنُ بِنْتِ السُّدِّيِّ الْكُوفِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا عُمَرُ بْنُ شَاكِرٍ، عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ زَمَانُ الصَّابِرِ فِيهِمْ عَلَى دِينِهِ كَالْقَابِضِ عَلَى الْجُمْرِ. قَالَ أَبُو عِيْسَى هَذَا حَدِيثٌ غَرِيبٌ مِنْ هَذَا الْوَجْهِ. وَعُمَرُ بْنُ شَاكِرٍ شَيْخٌ بَصْرِيُّ قَدْ رَوَى عَنْهُ غَيْرُ وَاحِدٍ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْعِلْمِ.