



Written by [James Heiser](#) on November 9, 2010

Obama Praises Islam During Trip to India

Only days after the first anniversary of alleged Jihadist Nidal Hasan's murderous rampage at Fort Hood in Texas, President Obama lauded Islam when asked his opinion of Jihad.

Obama was speaking at a St. Xavier's College, a 147-year-old Jesuit institution in Mumbai, India, when a student asked him a direct question: "[What is your opinion of Jihad?](#)" Obama's rambling, two-and-a-half minute reply began with the declaration, "The phrase Jihad has a lot of meanings in Islam and is subject to a lot of different interpretations. But I will say that, first, Islam is one of the world's great religions."



The subtlety of the broadest interpretation of the term "Jihad" is hardly newsworthy; the "struggle" of Jihad can be both a matter of personal conformity to the tenets of Islam, and the imposition of those beliefs and practices on others. Even JihadWatch—an organization well-known for its opposition to Islamic extremism—[notes the nuances which may be contained within the concept of Jihad](#):

Jihad (Arabic for "struggle") is a central duty of every Muslim. Modern Muslim theologians have spoken of many things as jihads: the struggle within the soul, defending the faith from critics, supporting its growth and defense financially, even migrating to non-Muslim lands for the purpose of spreading Islam. But violent jihad is a constant of Islamic history. Many passages of the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad are used by jihad warriors today to justify their actions and gain new recruits. No major Muslim group has ever repudiated the doctrines of armed jihad. The theology of jihad, which denies unbelievers equality of human rights and dignity, is available today for anyone with the will and means to bring it to life.

But the obvious intention of the question presented to President Obama was regarding a use of the term Jihad which goes back to Mohammed: the imposition of Islam by force. On this score, Mr. Obama fell back on the shopworn argument that Islam has somehow been co-opted by "extremists"; in the President's words:

I think that all of us recognize that this great religion in the hands of a few extremists has been distorted to justify violence toward innocent people that is never justified.

The primary difficulty for those who would dismiss violent Jihadism as the actions of "few extremists" is that Mohammed, the "prophet" of Islam, is the first such "extremist." IslamReview.com offers [the following example](#) of the founder of Islam's understanding of Jihad from Ibn Hisham's (d. 833 A.D.) biography of Mohammed:

After the war of the trench, in which Mohammed was besieged by the Qurayshites, led by Abu Sofyan, it was alleged that the Jewish tribe Bani Qurayza agreed to provide help from within to Abu Sofyan's forces. Although the alleged help did not materialize and the siege eventually ended,



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nevertheless, Mohammed never forgave them for their willingness to help his enemies. Muslims turned against Bani Qurayza and blocked their streets for twenty-five days. The Jewish tribe expressed readiness to accept surrender, to give up their belongings, and to depart from their homes.

Mohammed, however, would not consent to this, and instead appointed as an arbiter, Saad ibn Moaz, a man who was known to be on bad terms with Bani Qurayza. Saad ruled that all Bani Qurayza's men should be beheaded, that the women and children should be sold as slaves, and that all their property should be divided among the Muslims.

Trenches were dug in the bazaar of Medina for disposal of the eight or nine hundred Jewish bodies whom Mohammed had spent the previous night slaughtering.

Where the President's remarks were on-target was in recognizing that religious violence is not to be tolerated, and his trip to India could have provided a venue for a more considered speech on the topic.

In recent years, India has been wracked by anti-Christian violence which has primarily been perpetrated by Hindu extremists. [According to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches](#), in August 2008, "at least 120 people were murdered, 250 churches were destroyed, and over 50,000 people displaced." [Raphael Cheenath](#), the Roman Catholic Archbishop of the state of Orissa, had hoped that President Obama would speak out during his trip about the plight of Christians in India.

"Christians in India hope that President Obama will address religious intolerance and attacks led by Hindu fundamentalists against Christians in Orissa and other states, as well as against other religious minorities," said Archbishop Raphael Cheenath of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar.

"If fanaticism continues, thousands of faithful Christians will continue to suffer. Every Indian citizen should have the freedom to choose and practice their own faith. The radical Hindu groups should not be free to impose their ideology and cause social unrest."

On November 7, President Obama visited a Catholic high school in Mumbai, where he celebrated Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. Only 5 percent of the students at the school are Catholic; 60 percent are Hindu, while 35 percent are Muslim.

The occasion of President Obama's visit to a Christian institution committed to providing an education for all its students, regardless of religion, was a perfect opportunity to make the observation that the problem is not a safely-generic "extremism" (a term his administration has applied to conservative, pro-life Americans); the problem of Jihadism goes back to Mohammed himself. Mr. Obama could have even taken a stand for Christians, who have suffered tremendously in India the past few years. That opportunity was wasted. For Americans marking the anniversary of Nidal Hassan's allegedly Jihadist rampage in central Texas, Mr. Obama's ill-considered remarks could not have come at a worse time.

Photo: U.S. President Barack Obama speaks during a town hall meeting with students at St. Xavier's College in Mumbai, India, Nov. 7, 2010: AP

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