Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan's on the meaning of 'jihad'

"We are all familiar that al-Kindi, even in the 9th century, saw no shame in acknowledging and assimilating the truth, whatever its source. He argued that truth never abases, but only ennobles its seeker. Poetising the Prophet's teaching, Nasir Khusraw, the 11th century Iranian poet-philosopher, also extols the virtue of knowledge. For him, true jihad is the war that must be waged against the perpetrators of bigotry, through spreading knowledge that dispels the darkness of ignorance and nourishes the seed of peace that is innately embedded in the human soul."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Address to the International Colloquium 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions' organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London, United Kingdom) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6815/

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: So we will talk of Afghanistan. But first, how do you define jihad?

Aga Khan: But how do you see the jihad, what is the definition that you want to give yourself of jihad?

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: Holy War, what is called holy war since history, and the present interpretation, of course?

Aga Khan: To begin with, I think that there are several interpretations today. I do not think that there is in the Muslim
World only one definition of jihad. The word is used too frequently, and in too many fields. But the jihad is before anything else, a personal discipline. To begin, it is the search for personal improvement, which means that it is a personal effort in life. That’s one definition. Another definition is the war against non-believers. Well, another definition. Third definition, it is war against those who attack a Muslim community, those who victimise a Muslim community. Another definition. So if you want, in the notion of jihad, I think we have to be very careful not to give to this word a unique interpretation. Let’s say this word is used in various situations in our world, today.

**Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation:** Who are the non-believers for you?

**Aga Khan:** If I go back in time, a long time ago, I think we have to say that the ‘People of the Book’ are the monotheists. That’s the basic definition. Well, today I think in Islam we should admit that in social life, we are obliged, and we have to accept the notion of a larger responsibility. That’s the one in my interpretation. And I believe it to be true. I would say even more than that, that in Muslim history, when this type of circumstances has occurred, the Islamic period has often been the most beautiful. This is very strange, it’s a phenomenon of history but it is a reality.

**Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation:** Yes, (but) it has been most beautiful for the Muslims, no?

**Aga Khan:** But of course, that’s what I said. Because it is the humanism of Islam, which allowed us to build a society, where everyone was happy to live in that society. Isn’t this the wish that we should have?

**Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation:** When you say ‘non-believers’, you talk of the ‘People of the Book’ or the monotheist. Well, there has been a jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Regime, that is against communism, thus against ‘non-believers’. So you interpret that jihad as a good jihad in the interest of Muslims?

**Aga Khan:** The jihad in Afghanistan? Listen, certainly I could not
have been in favour of an invasion be it in Afghanistan or elsewhere. You see, the notion of invasion is, for me, an unacceptable notion. In retrospect, if you ask the Russians today, they will tell you 'We should have never done it'. By opposition, when you talk to me of a jihad between Muslims, I have a lot of difficulties accepting that, a lot!

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2001 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation Interview (Aleppo, Syria and Lebanon) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6073/

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