

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَالسَّلَامِ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ

A Brief Biography of
ʿash-Shaykh ʿal-Mujāhid ʿash-Shahīd
ʿAbdullāh bin Yūsuf ʿAzzām (رحمه الله)
Leader of the Caravan of Jihād in the 15th Hijrī Century



(*Ilhaq bil Qāfilah - Join the Caravan. By: ʿAbdullāh ʿAzzām رحمه الله*)

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Introduction

Since the murderous assault on the noble city of Ghazzah began in Rabī‘ al-ʿAwwal 1445, Muslims have become more familiar with the activities of *Mujāhidūn*, their fiery spirit and dedication towards the *Dīn* of Allāh (تعالى). Yet these lions of Islām have not acquired these qualities out of thin air. Indeed they are the spiritual children of Rasūlullāh (صلى الله عليه و سلم) and his Noble Companions (رضي الله عنهم). Then throughout the generations there have been such lions holding the banner of *Jihād* aloft – be it Alp Arslān, Ozbek Khān, Ṣalāḥuddīn, Mawlānā ʿIsmāʿīl ʿash-Shahīd, ʿUthmān Dan Fodio or ʿash-Shaykh ʿIzzuddīn ʿal-Qassām (رحمهم الله).

When Ṣalāḥuddīn ʿal-ʿAyyūbī (رحمه الله) began his *Jihād* against the Crusaders, in his capacity of Ṣultān of Egypt only, he faced a crushing defeat. He therefore began a two-pronged strategy which would eventually culminate in the purification of ʿal-ʿAqṣā from Crusader clutches. Firstly, he waged a *Jihād* to purify the lands of ʿIslām and the hearts of the Muslims of false ideology, which in that time and place manifested as *Shiʿasm*. Many of the *Shiʿī* lands of those times, are now blessed with the light of the *Sunnah* because of him, for example Ghazzah. Secondly, Ṣalāḥuddīn accepted that the purification of ʿal-ʿAqṣā could not be a solely Egyptian effort. He united the ʿAhlus *Sunnah* from Libya to Syria to Yaman. Finally when he, a Shāfiʿī ʿAshʿarī Kurd, summoned his troops, they included Ḥanafī Turks and Arabs of various *Sunnī* schools that marched to ʿal-ʿAqṣā. Mālikī Morocco was not under his rule, yet volunteers from there also joined. The ʿUmmah of Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم) had not been united in such a *Jihād* in centuries. Even if he had not succeeded thereafter at the Battle of Ḥiṭṭīn, this amazing miracle would have been enough to secure his place in the list of the heroes of ʿIslām.

After Ṣalāḥuddīn, the ʿUmmah again focussed its efforts on separate fronts. It would be centuries again before a similar call towards ideological purity (against nationalism, socialism etc) and a united and holistic *Jihād*, irrespective of race or school would be brought to the fore. In this 15th century of the *Hijrah* of Rasūlullāh (صلى الله عليه و سلم) the reward of this effort can arguably be attributed to ʿash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh bin Yūsuf ʿAzzām (رحمه الله), to a great extent.

This short composition is an attempt to educate the ʿUmmah on this honourable son of Islām and friend of Allāh (تعالى) who continues to inspire a noble people, long after he left his earthly abode.

Early Life

ʿash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh bin Yūsuf bin Muṣṭafā bin Yūsuf bin ʿAzzām (رحمه الله) was born in ʿas-Sīlah ʿal-Ḥarithiyyah (ʿas-Sīlah), British mandate Palestine, on 14 November 1941 (Shawwāl 1360). The village is 10 km North-West of Janīn. The 1922 British census showed that every single inhabitant was a Muslim. The village came under Jordanian rule after the *Nakbah* of 1948.

His ancestor, ʿAzzām, was said to be descendant of Ḥusayn (رضي الله عنه). His father, Yūsuf, was a farmer who could not afford to pay his son’s annual school fees of 30 Jordanian Dīnār. In view of his academic performance, the headmaster waived the fees.

The young ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله) was noted for his respect for his parents. He kissed his mother’s hand every morning. When he started teaching in his twenties, he kept a small part of his salary for expenses and gave most of it to his father.

His religious zeal started at a young age. His mother noted him praying *Tahajjud* at nine. His sister mentioned that when other village children stole almonds from the farmers, he refused as it was *Ḥarām*. Muḥammad ‘Abdurrahmān Khalīfah, the general supervisor of the Jordanian ‘Ikhwān (Muslim Brotherhood), narrated:



On one of my visits to...Janīn in the 1950s, I was sitting with the deputy of the branch when a young boy came over and said, ‘I am ‘Abdullāh ‘Azzām from ’as-Sīlah ’al-Ḥārithiyyah and from the Muslim Brotherhood. I am in seventh grade, and I have formed a study circle with my relatives and friends who meet in the local masjid. I invite you to visit us.’ So I promised to do so...

Local Legacy of Jihād

The people of ’as-Sīlah ’al-Ḥārithiyyah had fought against Napoleon when he invaded Ottoman Palestine. We can be fairly certain that the efforts of the great *Mujāhid*, ’ash-Shaykh ‘Izzuddīn ’al-Qassām (رحمه الله) influenced the young ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله). ’ash-Shaykh ‘Izzuddīn ’al-Qassām (رحمه الله) had been martyred at Ya’bad, 10 km South West of Sīlah, six years before the birth of ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله). Yūsuf ’Abū Durrah was from ’as-Sīlah. He was a student of ‘al-Qassām and played a prominent role in the anti-British *Jihād* that followed. ‘Abdullāh’s father bought a rifle to join the *Jihād*.

After the creation of Israel, the Zionists seized the local farms, including that of Yūsuf ‘Azzām. ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله) narrated:

On one occasion a group of young men went down to reap the wheat that they had sown [earlier that spring]. Then Jewish fighters seized them, cut their stomachs open, filled them with wheat and put the bodies on iron poles as an example to others.

100,000 refugees from other parts of Palestine flooded the area. In that same year, the young boy met Syrian and Iraqi ‘Ikhwān in the village *masjid*, who had come to defend ’al-’Aqṣā. The village was on the Jordanian side of the new border, but Jordan did nothing to protect the Palestinians from being killed by Israeli patrols and having their cattle stolen. All this would have profound effects on the young ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله).

Education & Marriage

In 1960 ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله) graduated from Kadoorie Agricultural School in Tulkarm. He was sent to teach in ’Adir, Jordan. It was a remote village, so he used the opportunity to catch up on reading Islāmī literature. The next year he began teaching in ’as-Sīlah. Although most of his subjects were “secular,” a student noted that he always managed to discuss Islām, whatever the subject.

In 1962 he enrolled as a student at the faculty of *Sharīʿah* at Dimashq (Damascus) University. He had to work in Jordan to support himself, while returning to Dimashq for necessities like exams. Searching for a wife was not easy, as the local women were not as religious as he. In 1965 he settled for marrying a woman, who at least covered most of her head and her knees. He graduated in 1966 and began teaching in Janīn.

In June 1967 Israeli tanks entered ʿas-Sīlah and Janīn. The Jordanian army did nothing. So ʿAbdullāh (رحمه الله) and his friends tried to resist with old English rifles. It was futile and he made *Hijrah* to Jordan. He would never set foot in Palestine again, but remained focused on militarily liberating Palestine.



Palestinian Jihād Hijacked

ʿash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh (رحمه الله) now joined other Palestinians in Jordan in operations against Israel. It was around April 1969 that he abandoned his job to join the fighters. The financial repercussions severely upset his parents and relatives. His wife’s relatives and friends ostracised her, but she stated:

...he took me and the few earthly possessions I had, and we left, and I stayed in this mudbrick room which was four meters by two-and-a-half meters for me and my three children...in this room I washed clothes and dishes, I cooked, I slept, I received guests. But by Allāh, I felt happiness engulf my heart and soul...The Shaykh always looked at me affectionately, feeling that he had made things difficult for me...

ʿAbdullāh (رحمه الله) did not confine his *Jihād* to the field, but would return to preach to the people. The Mayor of ʿaz-Zarqāʿ said:

We saw him in the Masjid ʿUmar bin ʿAl-Khaṭṭāb talking about the martyrs who had fallen near the Land of ʿal-ʿIsrāʾ...He spoke at times about a martyr from Yemen, at other times about a martyr from Syria. One day he took out from his pocket a handkerchief stained with the blood of a martyr from Ḥamāh, and he swore, “By Allāh, I can smell musk from the blood of this martyr more than ten days after his martyrdom”... he said that prior to his operation against the Jews, this martyr had darkened his eyelids with lemon leaves. His Mujāhidūn friends asked, “Why are you doing this?” He said, “Because I am about to meet the virgins of Paradise.”

One of his companions, ʿIsmāʿīl ʿash-Shaṭṭī, would later write, “I still remember you...on the banks of the Yarmūk...always with a Qurʾān in your breast pocket...your tears dripping on your beard as you wept for your brothers who fell as martyrs in operations.”

It was ʿash-Shaykh ʿIzzuddīn ʿal-Qassām (رحمه الله) who primarily initiated the Palestinian resistance. Now however, the Marxist influenced PLO controlled it. ʿash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh (رحمه الله) who had joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954 and later had contact with Ḥamās, was horrified to realise that the Islāmic ideals which ʿash-Shaykh ʿIzzuddīn ʿal-Qassām (رحمه الله) espoused had completely disappeared from the Palestinian resistance. This was no longer a *Jihād* for the pleasure of Allāh, but a leftist *Kufr* campaign of nationalism, Marxism, democracy, international law, secularism and other ideologies alien to Islām.

In the Shaykh's words:

And they began to cultivate revolutionary culture in the youth!! The culture of Mao and Guevara. The revolutionary doctrine of Lenin and Stalin, the views of Marx, and the life of Castro. They taught the youth twenty key terms...imperialism, bourgeoisie, demagoguery, proletariat...the youth thought they possessed something new and they substituted it for Allāh's religion...so the battle changed from a Jihād against the Jews and a struggle in Allāh's path to a claim for territory and holy sites to a war against reactionism (Allāh's Dīn)...

‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله) and about ten religious brothers therefore attempted to have a small separate camp in which Qur’ān recitation replaced the Marxist lessons of the other camps. The fighters in these “religious” camps would constitute a tiny minority of 200 amongst the secular and Marxist Palestinians. The Marxists would steal from the Mujāhidūn and shout slogans to disrupt the ‘Adhān.

Documents from the Jordanian Security Services indicate that by 1967 a maximum of a thousand West Bank Palestinians were affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, the only Islamic organisation at the time. The overwhelming majority were Marxists, nationalists and the like. In fact, when Egypt executed Sayyid Quṭb in 1966, the West Bank erupted in celebrations and teachers distributed sweets to children. These types of ideas and incidents from fellow Palestinians left ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله) bitter and disappointed and eventually he withdrew from PLO operations. He was clear that as long as Palestinians turned away from Islām they would remain defeated.

Unfortunately Muslims in our era have not learnt this lesson. Much of Palestinian “activism” has its roots in *Kufr* leftist ideology, not Islām. Calls for international law, international justice, human rights, land rights and every other secular thought are symptomatic of an inferiority complex and diseased heart.

It also became impractical to confront Israel, when the Arab regimes acted as guardians for Israel's borders and even prevented any fighter from getting within striking distance of Israel.

Again this is relevant in our times. Palestine “activists” sing the same song that Israel is besieging Ghazzah, yet remain strangely and hypocritically mute on the Saudi-Egypt siege of Ghazzah at Rafah. A Palestinian hothead once denounced the Shaykh for waging *Jihād* in Afghānistān, instead of Palestine. He replied:

My brother. Does Jihād not require preparation? Sons of Palestine who want Jihād – do you not want to train yourselves? Where will you train? In Jordan? So that they may slaughter you? Are you allowed to carry a bullet in Jordan? Or in Syria with Ḥāfiẓ al-‘Assad? Or with Ḥusnī Mubārak?... Do you not live in the real world? Are you going to fly from the East Bank to the West Bank?

Academic Life

There was no previous Islāmic scholar in his family, nor did his school grades indicate an exceptionally brilliant student. Discipline and hard work were the means by which Allāh's (تعالى) academic bounties to

him materialised. Since childhood he would fall asleep reading. As an adult he would read while eating, ignoring his wife’s threats to pour food over his book.

After leaving the West Bank ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله) enrolled in a Master’s programme in Islāmīc Law at ‘al-ʿAzhar. He would study during the battle life that was discussed. At that time one could write an examination instead of presenting a Master’s thesis. He thus went to ‘al-Qāhirah (Cairo) in 1970 to write his exams. He received a scholarship and moved the next year with his family to ‘al-Qāhirah to do his Doctorate on ʿUṣūl ʿal-Fiqh, which he completed in 16 months and received the highest possible grade. ‘al-Qāhirah also provided the opportunity to network, notably with the family of Sayyid Qutb.

In 1973 he returned to ‘Ammān. He began lecturing for seven years in the *Shari‘ah* dept at ‘Ammān University. He lectured on law and the state of the Muslim world. His lectures were so popular they were oversubscribed. Outsiders came to listen and sometimes one could not get seating without coming an hour early. He chose to live in Ṣuwayliḥ, near the university, so that students could easily visit him. Ṣuwayliḥ, had no *masjid*. So he raised funds for Masjid ‘Abdirraḥmān bin ‘Awf.

‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله) played a major role in creating an Islāmīc atmosphere at the liberal university. He separated his male and female students and encouraged the girls to cover their faces. Many of these students would later join Ḥamās.

Travels

During this period ʿash-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh (رحمه الله) performed *Ḥajj* almost every year. He took students along with him to meet other ‘*Ulamā*’, learn from each other, network and exchange ideas. He also went to Indianapolis in 1978 and 1979 to visit the Muslim Students Association. It was during the second trip that a young ʿUsāmah bin Lādin met him.

Writings

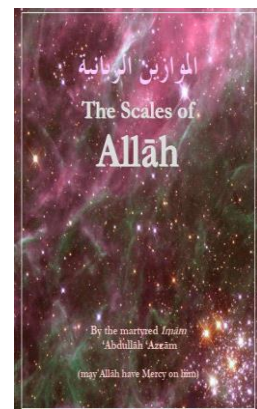
The Shaykh wrote extensively. His wife stated, “Whenever he sat down to write, he would perform *Wuḍūʿ* and pray two *Rakaʿāt*...and ask Allāh to inspire him. Only then would he begin to write.”



Signs of Raḥmān in the Jihād of the ʿAfghān



The Red Cancer



The Scales of Allāh

These are some of his compositions:

- BA thesis from Dimashq University, “Marriage Dissolution in Islamic Jurisprudence and Civil Law,” (1967) – 47,000 words.
- Ph.D. thesis from ʿal-ʿAzhar, “The Implications of the Book and the Sunnah for Legal Rulings” (1973) – 600+ pages.
- Sundry articles in ʿal-Mujtamaʿ magazine (1975).
- *The Creed and its Effect on Building the Generation* [On Islāmīc education] (1975).
- *ʿIslām and the Future of Mankind* [Superiority of ʿIslām over every ideology] (1980).
- *ʿas-Saraṭān ʿal-ʿAḥmar - The Red Cancer* [Evils of Communism] (1980).
- *The Lost Beacon* [in praise of the Ottoman state and an attack on Kemālism] (1987).
- *Signs of Raḥmān in the Jihād of the ʿAfgḥān* [Miracles during the Jihād] (1983).
- *ʿad-Difāʿ ʿan ʿArādī ʿal-Muslimīn ʿAhammu Furūd ʿal-ʿAʿyān - Defence of the Lands of the Muslims is the Most Important Obligation on Individuals* (1985).
- *ʿIḥaq bil Qāfilah - Join the Caravan* (1987)
- *Ḥamās: Historical Roots and Charter* (1989)
- *Etc...*

The Shaykh’s writings raised the awareness of Muslims in regards Jihād and related issues. A speciality of his writings was to bring to the minds of all Muslims certain precepts common to all but had previously been emphasised by specific groups. For example, previously it was the ʿIkhwān who emphasised Ḥākimiyyah (Allāh being the Supreme Lawgiver) and Salafiyyah who emphasised ʿal-Walāʾ wa ʿal-Barāʾ (loyalty to Allāh and the Muslims and disavowal from *Kuffār*). Now all Muslims could gain a holistic understanding.

Khomeini

Khomeini presented his 1979 revolution as Islāmīc, free of any sectarian bias. The Jordanian ʿIkhwān was deceived and supported him with a huge demonstration in ʿAmmān. ʿash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh ʿAzzām (رحمه الله) was also delighted at the apparent victory of Islām. He initially criticised Jordan for supporting Irāq in the war against Khomeini. However, in time, he came to understand the reality of the *Shīʿah* regime. He was disappointed and thereafter saw ʿIrān as bad as the other anti-Islamic regimes ruling the lands of Islām.

Pressure to Leave Jordan

ʿash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh ʿAzzām (رحمه الله) became prominent for his lectures and writings in which he denounced secularism. However, when he clearly called the Jordanian government and political system unislamic, the security “services” began to monitor him. When King Ḥusayn visited the university, the Shaykh refused to stand up for the rendition of the national anthem. His clashes with the authorities became more frequent. Amongst other issues the Shaykh organised protests against the planned compulsory military service for women. When well-wishers advised him that he was risking his job, he replied, “I am prepared to sell falafels to my students at the gates of the university.”

In October 1980 the prime minster, Muḍar Badrān fired the Shaykh. By this time the ʿIkhwān felt nervous that the fiery ways of the Shaykh would make the government clamp down on the movement. They had

already reduced his role and public lectures and felt it best that he leave Jordan. The Shaykh and his family therefore left for Makkah by the next month.

Makkah

ʿash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh ʿAzzām (رحمه الله) taught for one semester at King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz University in 1981. His children were unhappy with the unfriendly treatment from the Saʿūdī people, while their father felt restless. In his own words:

[My expulsion from Jordan] opened a door of mercy for me...and I looked around me when longing for Jihād was always pulling me, so I looked for it, there was Jihād in Yemen where [the] Islamic movement were fighting the Communists, and there was Jihād in ʿAfghānistān, so I decided I should go to one of these countries.

After choosing Afghānistān, he would say, “I was a university professor and I lived next to ʿal-Masjid ʿal-Ḥarām in Makkah, but Allāh knows that these kinds of places [in ʿAfghānistān] are dearer to me than my life in Makkah.”

The Shaykh was performing ʿUmrah before Fajr, when he met Kamāl ʿas-Sananīrī in ʿal-Masjid ʿal-Ḥarām. Kamāl was from the Egyptian ʿIkhwān. He had fought in Palestine in 1948 and spent 20 years in Egyptian prison. He became involved in the Jihād in ʿAfghānistān and now told the Shaykh, “ʿAbdullāh, your place is there, not here. Pack your bags and trust in Allāh.”

Transfer to Pākistān

ʿash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh ʿAzzām (رحمه الله) was to meet up with Kamāl in Peshāwar, Pākistān, but the Egyptian police again arrested Kamāl. The Shaykh therefore proceeded to Peshāwar, awaiting Kamāl’s release. Kamāl however died in prison, probably under torture. May Allāh (تعالى) accept him amongst the martyrs.

The Shaykh went to the border. As soon as he saw ʿAfghānistān, he was convinced of the importance of its Jihād and that he had to serve in it. He returned to Makkah, looking for a way out of his 5-year contract with the university. Amazingly the World Muslim League started a new programme to transfer professors to teach Qurʾān and Arabic in Pākistān. He signed up and would teach at the International University, ʿIslāmʿābād. How sad that today the League, under Mr ʿal-ʿĪsā, is now a tool for propagating interfaith *Kufr* with Jews and Buddhists.

During the *Ḥajj* season the Shaykh connected with the ʿAfghān *Mujāhid* leader, ʿAbd Rabbir Rasūl Sayyāf. Sayyāf welcomed the news that he was coming to join the Jihād.

ʿIslāmʿābād

The Shaykh, his wife and seven children moved to ʿIslāmʿābād in November 1981 and were given university accommodation. His focus however was on Peshāwar - the base of Jihād activities. He therefore start his

lectures from Saturday and squeeze them to be done by Monday. Then he would leave Monday afternoon to spend the rest of the week in Peshāwar (3 hour commute at the time) or nearby camps. When he did not complete a lecture in time, the students would follow him home where he would complete it. He also took students to visit refugee camps.

In 1986 he had to leave the university and moved to Peshāwar. It is ironic that World Muslim League then paid him a modest salary until his death, as “education supervisor for the Ṣafghāns” (*mushrif tarbawī ‘alā ‘al-Ṣafghān*). For this is the same organisation that betrayed Ghazzah in 2023, under the Interfaither, Mr ‘al-‘Īsā.

The Shaykh spent his initial years in Pākistān in continuing the attempts of the late Kamāl Ṣas-Sananīrī (رحمه الله) and others, to unite the extremely divided *Mujāhidūn* groups. This materialised in a joint *Mujāhidūn* leadership in 1984. He also lobbied governments and organisations to support the *Jihād*. These activities were so stressful, his nephew mentioned that within two years his once black beard turned grey and white.

To achieve unity, he continuously met one leader after the other as well as their foot soldiers. His notes during those meetings provided the material for his book, *Signs of ‘ar-Raḥmān in the Jihād of the Ṣafghān*. He presented himself as a guest who did not come to interfere with his hosts. Thus he earned their respect and was accepted as a mediator.

From 1985 onwards the Shaykh realised that his calls for a Sayyāf led central *Mujāhidūn* government were not practical. He was upsetting *Mujāhidūn* who felt that their years of work was being lost. Furthermore Sayyāf had very little military or political support within the country itself. ‘Abdullāh therefore started channelling resources directly to the *Mujāhidūn*.

Relationship with Westerners

Although it served western interests to support the *Mujāhidūn* against the Soviets, Ṣabdullāh ‘Azzām (رحمه الله) never stopped speaking against the USA and categorically said, “He who is an agent for American...or English intelligence...is a *Kāfir* outside the *Dīn*.”

Not only did he oppose western governments, but he felt that there was harm in accepting aid from western organisations. He severely reprimanded the Muslims for not serving in place of the *Kuffār* who came to Ṣafghānistān, “On the field of *Jihād* there is not a single Muslim doctor, except for a group of about ten Ṣafghāns. There are about a thousand battlefronts. Meanwhile, the field is swarmed by missionary delegations and some field hospitals from America, France, Germany, and Britain.”

He accused the westerners of promoting *Zinā* through distributing of birth control and pornography, and that they aimed to Christianise the country, “Most of the medical services depend on the Western Crusader organizations...” he said.

He did his best to have them removed. For example a French team was operating in Mazār-e-Sharīf. Ṣash-Shaykh ‘Abdullāh ‘Azzām (رحمه الله) arranged for a Libyan doctor, Ṣāliḥ Ṣal-Farisī to go there, and issued a

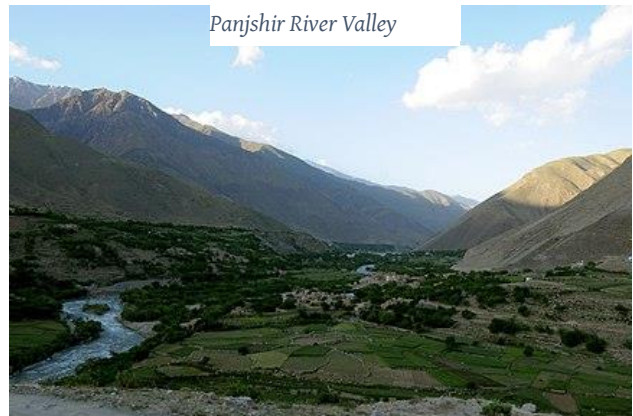
Fatwā that it was not permissible for the locals to accept medical assistance from *Kuffār* when a Muslim was available. The locals no longer went to the French who decided to leave.

On a more general level he used his networking skills to get Muslims NGOs to come instead of *Kuffār*. That was besides his own NGO, *Maktab ʿal-Khidamāt* (Services Bureau) which he would found.

Jihād Awareness

The Shaykh strove to create awareness of *Jihād* amongst Muslims at large, but specifically wanted to garner support from scholars. He thus travelled to various countries, wrote letters and articles. He went to the extent of asking ʿash-Shaykh Bin Bāz to issue a *Fatwā* that the *Jihād* was individually compulsory (*Fard ʿAyn*), and asking the Jordanian ʿIkhwān, “Send me sixty preachers who know the *Fiqh* of *Jihād* and *Daʿwah* and I promise you I will turn ʿAfghānistān into the Muslim Brotherhood for you within two years.”

Neither of these two requests bore fruit and only one scholar temporarily joined him, ʿAbdul Majīd ʿaz-Zindānī from Yemen. He thus had to accept that he would be the sole permanent ʿArab scholar in the field.



In regards Pākistānīs, the Shaykh worked with various Sunnī schools which arranged recruitment for the *Jihād*. This was mainly with Mian Ṭufayl Muḥammad of Jamāt-e-Islāmī, then the Deobandis of *Ḥarakat ʿal-Jihād ʿal-ʿIslāmī* (4000 recruits), while the smallest interaction was with the Salafī *Markaz Daʿwah wal ʿIrshād* (few hundred recruits). He would also take Arab *Mujāhidūn* with him to attend the *Tablighī ʿIjtimāʿ* at Raiwind.

To avoid confusing the generally uneducated ʿAfghāns, he instructed the ʿArabs, “Pray according to the *Ḥanafī madh-hab*,” but “If they ask you about your *madh-hab*, be truthful about your being a *Shāfiʿī* or otherwise.”

He probably specifically mentioned the *Shāfiʿī* school because of his Palestinian background.

Maktab ʿal-Khidamāt

Although Arab *Mujāhidūn* had come to ʿAfghānistān before ʿAbdullāh (رحمه الله), there were few and came individually and without system and might even return home after a week. The Shaykh therefore established *Maktab ʿal-Khidamāt* (Services Bureau) which would change the situation. It was aimed at helping in recruiting and supporting of Arab recruits and using them to support the ʿAfghāns. It was to operate in the military, logistics, education and medical fields.

It commenced in February 1984 with the opening of project Badr – a training camp for 313, reflecting the number of Muslims at Badr. It lacked funding. However, a Saʿūdī businessman, named ʿUsāmah bin Lādin, who had previously been visiting Pākistān to bring aid for the *Jihād*, was now convinced by ʿAbdullāh (رحمه الله)

الله) to commit to 'Afhānistān. He became a major instrument of alleviating the financial situation. For example, when the Students' Union banned the *Mujāhidūn* from using their premises at the university, 'Usāmah rented a house for the *Maktab* to use as a headquarters. Activities and recruits expanded, and more houses were needed.

'ash-Shaykh 'Abdullāh (رحمه الله) was the well-loved leader of the *Maktab*. He had a knack for identifying a person's skills and putting it to use. However, he oversaw bigger tasks and left micro-management to his director. The Shaykh described the achievements of the *Maktab* as:

1. It expanded the 'Afhān *Jihād* into a global Muslim concern.
2. It expanded knowledge of *Jihād* through its publications.
3. Established educational courses for leaders, 250 schools in the trenches and a Qur'ān course under artillery bombardment. 400,000 books were printed in 1988 alone.
4. Fanned the flame of battle with *Mujāhidūn* zealous of Paradise.
5. Raising the morale of 'Afhān *Mujāhidūn*.
6. Supervised the sending of 20,130 caravans carrying ammunition, food, clothes, and mattresses for the *Mujāhidūn*.
7. Uniting 'Afhān and 'Arab efforts into a single Islāmic *Jihād*.
8. Establishing five hospitals to care for war wounded.
9. Halting the brain drain through financial incentives for scientists and others to remain.
10. Helping and housing the children of martyrs.
11. Awakening the Muslims from their despair through *Jihād*.
12. Equipping the fighters and looking after their families.
13. Forming a committee of scholars to issue fatwas, spark interest, and correct flawed opinions.

Recruitment

The recruitment drive of 'ash-Shaykh 'Abdullāh 'Azzām (رحمه الله) included these five main facets in which he worked simultaneously:

1. Produce and disseminate publications (books, magazines, films, and recorded lectures).
2. Directly reaching out to people in his existing social network and asking them to contribute.
3. Media interviews and facilitating media coverage of the cause.
4. Personally travelling to lecture and meet new people. These trips were mainly to the Gulf and the USA (in which he visited more than 50 cities), but also Europe, Maldives etc. Muḥammad Ṣiddiqī, was student who attended the 1983 MAYA (Muslim Arab Youth Association) convention in St Louis. Muḥammad would soon thereafter leave for 'Afhānistān. He stated, "I discovered Shaykh 'Abdullāh 'Azzām was speaking... there were meetings and lessons with each shaykh in a separate room, fourteen or fifteen shaykhs altogether. In most of the rooms you would find a small number of people, but in 'Abdūllah 'Azzām's and 'Aḥmad al-Qaṭṭān's rooms you could barely find space for a needle. He said, "Come closer, come closer," and they gathered around him..."
5. Building an organisation that could scale up the communication work.

Mujāhid

Some of the Shaykh's earlier *Jihād* activities in Palestine has been mentioned. The situation in 'Afghānistān required more of his leadership and command skills, rather than direct fighting on the battlefield. Nevertheless he participated as he could. The 'Arab *Mujāhid* 'Abu Muṣ'āb 'as-Sūrī noted that unlike other commanders who gave orders telephonically, the Shaykh went to his men personally and travelled from frontline to frontline, outpost to outpost.

Amongst the battles he participated were: Zhawar (1986), Jaji (1987), and Jalāl'ābād (1989). Describing Jaji, the Shaykh said, "I was fasting and the sun was about to set in the horizon... the fighter jets attacked...I had a few dates in my pocket that I felt with my hands and I took them out waiting for 'adhān...and the missiles began to shower us from every direction...and I could not in two hours finish the dates that were in my hands!"

Character

Dīn moulded the Shaykh's daily life and personal habits. He arose every night for *Tahajjud* and fasted every second day (*Ṣawm Dāwūd*). He was conscious of *Masnūn Du'ā'* for daily activities: eating, going to the bathroom, or getting into a vehicle. Matters of *Dīn* made him shed tears often. One *Mujāhid* recalled hearing him "giving a *Khuṭbah* while crying heavily" at the Badr camp in 1984. He often wept during *Ṣalāh*. If he found a brother with a good recitation, he would make him lead the *Ṣalāh* and say, "I want to hear from you."

Another witness said, "His tears fell when he lauded the martyrs after their burial. He would stand on the grave of each martyr and say a few inflamed words full of enthusiasm and compassion, and it was almost never without tears. We saw them as a mark of distinction falling on his beard, like drops of dew fall on twigs. We saw his beard wet with tears."

He almost always wore either military dress, Afghan clothes, or Arab dress. He always carried three things: water for *Wuḍū'*, a *Miswāk*, and *Muṣḥaf* of the Qur'ān. He stated that he never used a toothbrush, only *Miswāk*.

The Shaykh insisted on a modest lifestyle. One day his wife bought new sponge cushions. He said to her, "While the *Mujāhidūn* are dying of hunger?" She said, "I donated a third of the value to the *Mujāhidūn*." He said, "Even then, it cannot remain."

When his daughter was proposed to be married, he bought the cheapest chocolates possible to celebrate.

His son, Ḥudhayfah, bought a cheap car. The Shaykh made him return it and walk to school like other people.

If someone invited him for a meal, he'd reply, "should work out the cost of his meal and give the equivalent to the *Mijāhidūn*," "then I will pay you a short visit in your house and we'll have a cup of tea." Conversely,

he was generous. His neighbour in Peshāwar stated, “Not a day passed without there being guests in his house.”

The Shaykh was a workaholic and a utility maximizer who would not waste a minute on anything or anybody that did not help the cause. He had no hobbies, did not watch films, and did not read fiction. He slept only three to four hours per night, resting with five-minute naps in the car throughout the day. He also spent little time at home. When he was not at the *Maktab*, he was meeting people elsewhere in Peshāwar. When he was not in Peshāwar, he was on the Ṣafghān border or abroad giving lectures. Once his wife was asked about his whereabouts. She replied, “I don’t know anything about him; ask the brothers, they know more than me.”

His absence from home does not detract that he cared for his wife and did not take her for granted. In his will, which he wrote in the midst of the battle of Zhawar in April 1986, he addressed her thus:

To you my wife: I have so much to say to you, Ṣumm Muḥammad, may Allāh reward you on my behalf and on behalf of Muslims. You were patient with me and you stood by me through thick and thin with patience and courage. From you I got the support I needed to carry on this Jihād. I let you assume the responsibility of the house in 1969, when we had three small children, and you were living in one small room with no kitchen and no utilities. When the family became larger, the children grew up and our guests increased in number, you tolerated this and much more for Allāh and my sake. I make Du‘ā’ that Allāh will reward you on my behalf. Had it not been for your patience, I would never have been able to bear this burden alone. You are a content wife who does not care for material things, and you never complained about having too little of it. You were never extravagant when we have had some wealth . . . I pray to Allāh that he unites us in Jannah as he united us in life.

Enemies

Besides the obvious enemy, the Communists and Soviets, hostility arose against the Shaykh from various quarters:

1. **Pākistān** had welcomed the ṢArab *Mujāhidūn* when they were few and a source of donor money. Sectors in the government began to regard the larger numbers as a security threat. Manifestations of Pākistānī hostility include interrupting the running of *Maktab Ṣal-Khidamāt* in 1986. There are also reports that it was Pākistān that pressured the University not to renew the Shaykh’s contract and wanted the Sa‘ūdīs to recall him.
2. **Sa‘ūdī** scholars and intelligence agencies increased in hostility. Rabī‘ bin Hādī Ṣal-Madkhalī was the inspiration for the contemporary *Madkhalī* movement which demands absolute obedience to the tyrants who rule the Muslims. As ṢAbdullāh ṢAzzām (رحمه الله) did not toe this line, Ṣal-Madkhalī launched a campaign against him. The Sa‘ūdīs eventually banned Shaykh ṢAbdullāh (رحمه الله) from lecturing in their “kingdom”.
3. The **Mujāhidūn** covered a broad spectrum of groups. Various moderate policies of ṢAbdullāh ṢAzzām (رحمه الله) angered certain *Takfīrī* and *Salafī* circles. The most prominent hardliner opposed to the Shaykh was ṢAyman Ṣaz-Zawāhirī. Some opposed the Shaykh’s pragmatism in dealings with Muslim

governments, or deference to the Ṣafghāns or while others denounced his accommodation of the Ḥanafī school. Leaflets were distributed denouncing the Shaykh as a “bad Muslim.”

4. **Anti-Masʿūd sentiment.** The Shaykh had always tried to work with all commanders, including ṢAḥmad Shāh Masʿūd. This increasingly upset his enemies like Gulbuddīn Ḥekmatyār, the Pākistānī ISI and some *Mujāhidūn*.
5. The Shaykh had suspended fighting **Israel** when false ideologies hijacked the Palestinian *Jihād*. However, when the ṢIntifāḍah erupted in December 1987 he began to write and talk in favour of Ḥamās and raised funds for them. He also edited the Ḥamās Charter. He also called on Palestinians to come to him for training, declaring that 2000 were enough to destroy Israel. The Shaykh’s writings were being read in Palestine and the Israelis paid attention.

Martyrdom

It was 24 Novemeber 1989. Just as every other *Jumuʿah* Ṣash-Shaykh ʿAbdullāh ʿAzzām (رحمه الله) was awake since *Fajr* reciting the Qurʿān and spent some hours studying. He took a last look at his notes and then dressed in clean new clothes. As the ṢImām of Peshāwar’s “Arab *Masjid*,” he was due to give the *Jumuʿah Khuṭbah* to hundreds of people.

He was happy. The night before he had finally secured a truce agreement between Ḥekmatyār and Rabbānī, the ṢAfghān *Mujāhidūn* leaders who had been practically at war for the past six months. He was to announce the peace at *Jumuʿah*, after which he was to go ṢIslāmʿābād to celebrate with all the *Mujāhidūn* leaders. The return of his eldest son, Muḥammad, to the house added to his happiness. Muḥammad had just returned from ʿAmmān. The Shaykh was in such a good mood he did not mind when his teenage sons, Ḥudhayfah and ṢIbrāhīm had asked to leave the Qurʿān-reading session early that morning to play sport instead.

At noon he was ready to go. He put on his jacket and called, “Ḥudhayfah, where are you? Can you still take us?” Ḥudhayfah peeked into the hallway with an embarrassed smile. “What, you haven’t washed yet?” the Shaykh exclaimed, “Never mind, Muḥammad can take us. You join us there later.” He went out to the courtyard and jumped into the passenger seat of his dark red Chevrolet Vega. The *Masjid* was just around the corner, but the roads were pedestrian unfriendly, so they always took the car. Muḥammad got in the front, ṢIbrāhīm in the back. It was now ten past twelve. As their car pulled out from the yard, five year-old Muṣʿab came running. He wanted to ride with his big brothers, but the Shaykh sent him back inside.

With Muḥammad driving, the car headed slowly down the residential street, then right up Arbab Rd, and then right again onto Grand Trunk Road. 50 meters up, they exited on the right, in the direction of the *Masjid*. Then, all of a sudden, there was a flash of light and a deafening explosion. A large bomb ripped the car apart from underneath. Abdallah Azzam’s jihad in Afghanistan was over. When the last piece of metal fell on the ground, people crowded around the wreck. It was clear that both sons had died instantly, but the father was still breathing. He was taken out of the car and taken to Ḥayāt Shahīd hospital, where his sould left his body shortly thereafter after. In the late afternoon the three bodies were taken to the martyrs’ cemetery in Pabbi, where a crowd of thousands had assembled to pay their respects. By the end of the evening ʿAbdullāh, Muḥammad and ṢIbrāhīm had entered their last earthly resting place.

To this day the murderers have not been revealed.

May Allāh ﷻ fill their graves with light and make us also zealous and striving for His Dīn - ṢĀmīn!

Further Reading

- *Min Manāqin 'al-'Imām 'ash-Shahīd 'Abdillāh 'Azzām: Dr Sa'īd Ṣāliḥ 'Azzām*
- *Abdallah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad: Thomas Hegghammer*
- *'ad-Duktūr 'ash-Shahīd 'Abdullāh Yūsuf 'Azzāz Shaykhī 'alladhī 'Araftu: Maḥmūd Sa'īd 'Azzām*
- *The Exemplary Virtues and Glorious Martyrdom of Shiekh Abdullah Azaam Spiritual Leader of the Afghani [sic] Jihaad: Mawlānā R. Mohamed*
- [Religoscope - Azzam - Join the Caravan - Foreword \(archive.org\)](#)
- [Miracles of jihad in Afghanistan - Abdullah Azzam : Abdullhadi : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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و صلى الله على النبي الامي