

Muslim teaching on war part of probe into murders: Should Muslims serve in armies that kill Muslims?

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Among the leads investigators explored as they sought to uncover what motivated Major Nidal M. Hasan to kill 13 fellow soldiers in early November at Fort Hood in Texas was his apparent worry that serving in the U.S. Army compromised his Muslim faith.

As his deployment to Afghanistan loomed, Hasan faced the possibility of killing innocent Muslims, or at least abetting an army responsible for killing thousands of fellow Muslims.

In a PowerPoint presentation to fellow soldiers in 2007, Hasan theorized that Islam prohibits Muslims from serving in a military force attacking Islamic populations, as he perceived the U.S. military to be doing. To support his argument he cited a verse from the Qur'an: "And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is Hell," according to the *Washington Post*, which obtained a copy of the presentation.

The solution, Hasan concluded, was for the military to discharge Muslim-American soldiers as conscientious objectors.

In the wake of the November 5 shooting, a number of leading Muslim-American soldiers and scholars are debating Hasan's interpretation of Islamic teachings on serving in non-Muslim armies. More than 3,500 servicemen and servicewomen identify themselves as Muslim, although the actual number is likely higher, observers say.

While no one condones Hasan's violent actions, some say his military arguments have merit. But others say Hasan misread the Qur'an and the U.S. military's actions.

A wide variety of fatwas and other opinions on this issue have appeared on the Internet, but Islam's lack of a centralized authority makes it difficult to say which

opinions hold the most sway.

For instance, a number of Muslims in the U.S. military see themselves not as waging war against fellow Muslims, but protecting them from enemies claiming to be Muslim, like the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Saddam Hussein.

Muzammil Siddiqi, an imam in California's Orange County and a member of the North American Fiqh Council, which rules on issues of concern to Muslims, said Islam in no way prohibits Muslims from serving in the U.S. or other non-Muslim militaries, and they may even participate in war.

"If the war fought by non-Muslims is a just war, then they can participate," Siddiqi said. This would include wars fought in self-defense or fighting against oppressors. "Otherwise, fighting is not allowed."

When asked how he would counsel a Muslim soldier who asked for his guidance on whether serving in Afghanistan or Iraq would compromise his faith, Siddiqi said it was a "difficult question" that depends on many factors. For example, Siddiqi would ask what role the person would have. Would he be a medic or a gunman? And what toll would the war take on innocent Muslims? "I would ask him to think about it," said Siddiqi.

Atif Qarni, a Marine reservist from 1996–2005, saw active duty in Iraq as a platoon leader in 2003. "I didn't have any hesitation," Qarni said. He regrets Muslim civilian deaths caused by U.S. forces but said that the Taliban, al-Qaeda and Iraqi insurgents are oppressors who violate Islamic principles. "Even though they claim to be Muslims, they are enemies to Islamic principles," said Qarni, now a junior high school history teacher in northern Virginia. "They're outside the realm of Islam."