Jihad has become a common tool in the hands of Muslim organisations, particularly those engaged in conflicts such as in Kashmir, Chechnya, Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan. At the same time, the word “Jihad” portrays negative connotations in much of the non-Muslim world, more specifically so in the West. In many non-Muslim gatherings the word “Jihad” raises serious eyebrows and very few are able to draw a distinction between Jihad and terrorism. In the non-Muslim world, different denominations are used for the phenomenon of Jihad: extremism, radicalism, fundamentalism and, after the emergence of Al-Qaeda, terrorism and even megaterrorism. These Muslim organisations, however, regard themselves as struggling for self-determination such as in Kashmir, Palestine, and Chechnya or engaged in self-defence such as Al-Qaeda claims. There seems to be a great deal of misunderstanding among both Muslims and non-Muslims about the meaning and spirit of Qur’anic Jihad. The scholarship on Jihad reflects that it is not only laypersons that are confused or misinformed. Scholars of Islam, both in the West and Islamic world, also do not agree on a single interpretation of Jihad. Therefore, there are different meanings and in many cases we get distorted faces of Jihad.

The recent proliferation of writing on Islamic Jihad as a form of extremism/terrorism has become a growth industry. A common weakness of much of those writings – a good deal of it by self-proclaimed “authorities” with only superficial knowledge and experience in the Islamic world – is that they are based on secondary sources and in many cases hearsay. These, therefore, are twice removed from reality. In most cases, publicists have no clear grasp of the Islamic legal system, culture, and language. This becomes acute in the case of Qur’anic justification and conduct of Jihad. It has led to such a great misunderstanding that one would hope to reintroduce Jihad to the non-Muslim world – and some Muslims – on new and objective terms.

There are four major sources of Islamic law: the Qur’an, the Sunnah (model behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad), ijma (consensus of opinion) and qiyas (analog-
This article uses the primary source of Islamic law – the Qur’ān – to explain its rules on the use of force in self-defence. There are two main reasons for relying on the “Qur’ānic approach”. First, it is a principle of Islamic law that in order to find an answer to any Islamic issue, the Qur’ān is the first place to start. If the jurists do not find an answer in the Qur’ān, they will seek it in the second and third sources of Islamic law. Hence, it is natural to start with the Qur’ān. Secondly, the Qur’ānic approach provides sufficient evidence on the subject of self-defence (defensive Jihad) so we do not need to go outside the Qur’ān. If the Qur’ānic evidence were lacking, naturally we would turn to the Sunnah followed by third and fourth sources of Islamic law. The strength of the Qur’ānic approach is that it relies on the undisputed source of Islamic law. The Qur’ānic approach would be acceptable to both Shias and Sunnis, thus applicable to the entire Islamic world. It is in contrast to those studies, which focus on classical jurists of the four schools that studies of this nature represent the view of Sunni Islam only. Shias, for instance, in Iraq and Iran might interpret Jihad differently. The proposed Qur’ānic approach is not sectarian. It is holistic. In addition, the purpose here is to look at the Qur’ānic justification of self-defence and how we can relate that to our age rather than to engage in the historical development of Jihad over 1,400 years. This is what I call the “Qur’ānic approach”. Focusing on the primary source of Islamic law, the Qur’ān, this article examines the concept of Jihad, theories of Jihad and who – state or non-state actors – may declare Jihad. This approach is in contrast to those writers who have written at length on the subject with little or no reference to the original source, e.g. John Kelsay and Hashmi. In many such instances, the authors engage in the historic development of Jihad but the focus here is to analyse what the Qur’ān says on self-defence (Jihad) and how we can relate the Qur’ānic concept of self-defence to our circumstances. The Qur’ān articulates clear rules for the justification and conduct of Jihad, peace processes and resumption of hostilities as well as rewards for taking part and punishments for not participating in Jihad. This article focuses on the Qur’ānic justification of Jihad only although some verses not directly relevant to the subject are reproduced in order to clarify the context and throw further light on the meanings of those under discussion. It will become evident that all the Qur’ānic verses are mutually complementary and can be misunderstood unless considered as parts of one integral whole.

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6. Punishment for not doing Jihad is applicable only when the conditions for legitimate Jihad are met and someone qualifying as Mujahid (who can and may participate in Jihad) refuses to participate in such Jihad. It may be compared to the practice of compulsory military service in some Western and other countries where in case of war, the government may call on conscripts to go to war.