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The Hasan Slide Presentation: A Preliminary Commentary

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Overview

for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men

-- I Kings 8. 39

There is no place as private as the interior of a human skull: the mind remains inviolate.

Words can reveal some of what goes on inside us, actions can speak some of our intents and passions forcefully, at times explosively. And yet there is no place more secret -- and what a hint, a phrase, a gesture, a speech or an explosion cannot reveal, what even the best forensic examination can only label a probability, is the complex interweaving of thoughts half thought, doubts entertained, emotions pushing on through, and clashing, building at times to a perfect storm perhaps, with all doubts and constraints cast aside and the emotions unleashed in a blind and defining moment.

Major Nidal Malik Hasan MD MPH, a psychiatrist in the U.S. Army, has now been charged with multiple specifications of premeditated murder in the mass shooting at Fort Hood, under Article 188 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Assuming that Major Hasan was in fact the shooter at Fort Hood and that, as alleged, he shouted "Allahu Akbar" during the event, the main question of fact and interpretation now would be whether Hasan was more an introvert under pressure whose "break" took the jihadist cry "Allahu Akbar" as its outlet, or a patient and long-standing lone wolf jihadist of the sort abu Musab al-Suri calls for (Jim Lacey, *A Terrorist's Call to Global Jihad*, p. 19), or a wannabe with failed or actual al Qaeda connections, or an al Qaeda or related "soldier" under orders.

This analysis attempts to provide some leads in that inquiry, by a careful reading of the only substantial documentation we have from Major Hasan himself, which may throw light on his trajectory:

From a young American of Palestinian descent, a Muslim by birth, whose parents, according to a cousin and as reported in the *New York Times*, didn't want him to enter

the military, and who told them, "No, I was born and raised here, I'm going to do my duty to the country"...

via college and Army medical school where he earned his MD, to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center where he was from 2003 an intern, then psychiatric resident and a fellow by 2007 when he delivered the presentation examined here...

to Fort Hood in July 2009 as a practicing psychiatrist who would shortly have been deployed to one of the theaters of war in Afghanistan or Iraq, had he not engaged in the activities with which he is charged.

Approach

Paul Berman, in *Terror and Liberalism*, characterized our contemporaries in general and jihadists in particular as of two (or more) minds:

The modern era is an age of multiple identities -- an era in which vast numbers of people are doomed by circumstance to display one personality on Monday, and a different personality on Tuesday, and are doomed on Wednesday to cope with their own complexities. And among those vast numbers can be found Osama bin Laden himself and his troop of warriors.

The task as I see it is to understand as clearly as we can the complexities which filled to the point of explosion the mind and heart of Nidal Hasan MD, psychiatrist, major in the United States Army, Muslim, accused and held for multiple counts of murder, and potential jihadist.

We should therefore be on the lookout for hints of an intensification process, which may or may not turn out to be "radicalization" as understood with regard to jihadist recruitment, and for "tipping points" from thought into identification with a cause, and from identification in thought into violent action, if such can be ascertained.

This will require a cross-disciplinary willingness to consider multiple modes of influence that may have contributed to Dr. Hasan's killing spree, a cautious appraisal of what evidence is in the public arena, an identification and avoidance of biases to the extent possible, clarification of probable and possible unfoldings that can be inferred or shown, and in particular a close reading of any religious and other symbolic elements that may be present, in the manner described in [a recent discussion on the Zenpundit blog](#).

We would then turn to the various responses to the tragic event at Ford Hood, and begin to understand the currents of impact that are already in play, and to consider their implications for society in general, for Muslims and Muslims serving in the military in particular, and for security.

This reading of [Major Hasan's' PowerPoint presentation](#) is a first step in those directions. I hope that others will comment in greater detail on some of the matters I raise, for theological,

psychological, military and perhaps yet other perspectives are all of value here, and I can only claim to be making a beginning.

Image

The Indian counter-terrorism analyst Shlok Vaidya, on first hearing of the Fort Hood event, informed those of his colleagues who follow him on Twitter, "This was Columbine, not 9/11." I shall suggest something along somewhat similar lines.

I propose an image that I believe will be of service here: that of an infected wound, with a "red streak" that then passes from the mass of infection towards the heart -- with fatal consequence. In this case, as perhaps befits a psychiatrist, the infection is in the mind.

The Mind

At first, his is a mind devoted to both God and Country, the mind of a Muslim and an American.

It should not need to be said that there are many fine Muslims whose lives and work is of inestimable benefit to humankind: the Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank and father of microfinance, is one whose words and works have recently gained world-wide attention and applause. Sadly, the same Islamic faith can also be used to justify acts of terror -- but while the evidence of Hasan shouting "Allahu Akbar" suggests that he may have framed his actions at Fort Hood that day in terms of an understanding of Islam, it should be no less clear from his cousin's witness that for Hasan, Islam was not in the beginning in conflict with a proud career as an American in the military.

The man was born an American, born Muslim: born a Muslim, born American. He was born to both proud heritages, and in the beginning, he appears to have been proud of their confluence.

Islam, the great Abrahamic religion, then, is not the cause of Hasan's explosion, and neither Islam nor Muslims should be blamed for or unfairly treated because of it -- but *his* Islam, as it developed between the time he signed up and the present, his relationship with his God as mediated through his understanding of the Qur'an and sunna, and as influenced by other Muslims, his patients, and global events, would seem to have been the locus of his slowly building internal conflict and eventual tragic act.

Let us take a closer look at some of those influences.

The Infection

The man is a psychiatrist, and his practice consists of counseling warriors suffering from traumas sustained in the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, two Muslim nations. His practice is to listen to, to absorb through the ears and eyes, the horrendous stories his fellow soldiers have to tell, overwhelmed as they are, at times furious at the enemy that wounded them, that took their comrades' lives, that put children and women at risk, at times furious at the war itself, at its seeming futility or brutality, at its ability to trigger such states that one imagines or commits

what one's calmer "home" self might consider atrocities and has to live with the memory, fellow soldiers furious at what they had done to them, what they have done to others, what they had seen done, furious at their own terror, terrified by their fury, furious at friendly fire directed at them, or by them, without malice perhaps but with stupidity or poor intelligence or careless disregard, furious, too perhaps, at the religion perceived as the cause of the war, its nourishment, viewed by some as demonic, by others as partial cause, as an excuse and pretext, as "OPFOR" in the great "clash" in which these two current wars -- and other conflicts scattered around the globe -- are but skirmishes...

And the intensity with which these materials pour into him -- the "transformative effects upon therapists resulting from empathic engagement with traumatized clients":

As part of their work, these clinicians must listen to graphically detailed descriptions of horrific events and bear witness to the psychological (and sometimes physical) aftermath of acts of intense cruelty and/or violence. The cumulative experience of this kind of empathic engagement can have deleterious effects upon clinicians, who may experience physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms similar to those of their traumatized clients

See: Harrison, Richard L.; Westwood, Marvin J. "Preventing vicarious traumatization of mental health therapists: Identifying protective practices." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*. Vol 46(2), Jun 2009, 203-219.)

This is what pours into him. And it pours into a man who is not just an American, but a Muslim by birth, and pious enough to seek a wife via an Islamic matchmaking service, "specifying that he wanted a bride who wore the hijab and prayed five times a day".

He is serious, then, about his religion. And it is a religion of peace which sanctions war under certain circumstances -- a religion that counsels moderation even in warfare, but whose warrior code differs in some respects from that of the contemporary western world and the Geneva Conventions.

Among the things that his religion, as he comes to understand it, finds reprehensible: the warring of Muslim on Muslim. In his mind he knows that. And as the traumas of his patients pour into him, slam into him, the impact on him is as described above, but has the added and nightmarish quality of touching, at times, on the precise conflict that is budding inside him, between his identity as a Muslim and his identity as an officer in an Army currently targeting two Muslim nations -- conflicts which he attempts to avoid by paying back his debts from medical school and by hiring a lawyer to procure him an early discharge.

Add to this the fact that Hasan, by several accounts, was a loner -- a man who had recently lost both parents, who searched for but could not find a wife -- and thus a man who may well have had little or nothing in the way of a release-valve.

I see Hasan's mind, then, as gradually becoming a sort of self-imposed prison, an echo chamber, infected with everything that is poured into it -- religious, social, intercultural, martial,

anthropological and psychological elements -- with all those components bouncing around in a space that is closed in by his aloofness, his apparent introversion, all of them mixing, melding, bruising, splitting, fragmenting as the pressure on/in him builds.

This is what makes him hate the wars we are engaged in, pitting himself against himself as a warrior, and which breaches at last the activist vein of his religion, so that the thin red line begins to creep from festering mind towards the heart, towards the seat of explosive emotion-devotion.

Perhaps there are lesser irritants, too, perhaps he is called a "camel-jockey" -- perhaps he is taunted for his race or religion. Such taunts, coming from his fellow soldiers, might disturb one man and be shrugged or laughed off by another. But Hasan is a loner, and such taunts might only exacerbate his feelings of isolation.

It would be the constant barrage of trauma, though, taken upon himself as therapist to relieve others, that would build to the climax.

The Presentation

We can observe the process as it develops. Major Hasan has to some extent seen trouble ahead, and made various interventions designed to avoid it. In his senior resident's lecture to his fellow students at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, he presents fifty slides, the last of which pleads for the military to "allow Muslim soldiers to be released as conscientious objectors instead of fighting in wars against other Muslims", saying "It's getting harder and harder for Muslims in the service to morally justify being in a military that seems constantly engaged against fellow Muslims".

In this slide show, we can witness the tug-o-war that is going on inside Major Hasan. As a physician, he presents the "case" that preoccupies him, his own I believe, as though it was a condition to be examined, diagnosed, understood -- and preventively treated.

There are some who were present at the presentation, and some who have heard reports of it or even read these slides in the Washington Post, who "read" the whole event as evidence of the dangers of Islam -- and there are others who may read the same events in such a way as to avoid all mention of Hasan's religion as a motivating factor in the events at Fort Hood, despite that alleged cry of "Allahu Akbar", and despite the very title of his talk, "The Koranic World View As It Relates to Muslims in the U.S. Military".

We should remember, however, that the wish to protect at all costs the good name of a great religion, or to tarnish a supposedly evil one, is prejudicial in either form to the uncovering of truth in the literal sense: it pre-judges what it purports to explore. Similarly, we should recognize that there are reasons why a witness may wish to give evidence that is favorable or unfavorable to the accused -- reasons that may be familial, personal, collegial, religious, political or otherwise ideological.

My preference, then, is to allow Major Hasan's own words, as set forth by the man himself in this document, to guide us towards a more nuanced understanding than either "blackout" or "whitewash" versions of the man, the event, or a hypothetical "clash of civilizations" can offer.

The slide presentation was acquired by *Washington Post* staff writer Dana Priest and posted on November 10th 2009.

Reading the Presentation

As I read Maj. Hasan's PowerPoint presentation, I found myself observing three parallel strands of ambiguity running throughout the text:

First, there is the ambiguity caused by having only the slides, with no direct access to what Hasan said about their contents. When he put up the slide with the quote "It's getting harder and harder for Muslims in the service to morally justify being in a military that seems constantly engaged against fellow Muslims" -- what did he say? That's the problem I want to discuss? That's how I feel sometimes, and I expect others do to, and some of them may do foolish things under the strain? That guy seems to have felt these problems and handled them well? That guy said it, and I feel that way too? *Look out?*

Remember Hasan's audience. There were senior officers as well as colleagues hearing the presentation, and some of them obviously felt it was edgy, that it was a bit much -- but again, there's a mix of possibilities. It may have seemed strange because Hasan wasn't presenting an obvious medical condition like the other presentations in the series, or because Islam was an unfamiliar and perhaps unpopular topic, and descriptions of Islamic hell get pretty vivid -- more vivid than the conventional western "wailing and gnashing of teeth" -- or because some in the audience could sense an intensity in Hasan's presentation... but in whatever manner it may have felt strange, it apparently wasn't strange enough for any of those senior officers to intervene, at the time or afterwards.

We also have to take into account the possibility that Hasan made a delivery that was consciously less pointed than his own feelings would support, because he was exercising caution, or because physicians distance themselves from the conditions they discuss, treating them as third party affairs, as observed phenomena...

Those are what I think of as "reader's ambiguities" -- they are ambiguities that we bring to the reading of a series of slides that illustrate an oral presentation to which we were not privy.

I believe we shall also find a second type of ambiguity, which I think of as "presenter's ambiguity" -- points in the text where Hasan explicitly raises questions, or points to the possibility of various ways to consider a given point. The presenter's ambiguities, then, are to be found embedded in the slides themselves, and were presumably discussed in the accompanying narration. Again, he may have been attempting to give a dispassionate account of what was to him an issue of passionate concern.

And that leads me to consider a third type of ambiguity, which I'll call an "ambiguity of concern" -- an ambiguity within himself, which the presentation attempts to address as if from the outside, and the recognition and (to the extent possible) calibration of which will be among the most delicate and profound tasks before those who wish to understand the process of his implicit radicalization.

I hope to account for all three strands of ambiguity in the following close reading of the text of Hasan's slides.

“The Koranic World View as it Relates to Muslims in the U.S. Military”

Hasan's opening slide shows an image of the Qur'an, and carries the title, "The Koranic World View As It Relates to Muslims in the U.S. Military".

Various people have criticized Hasan for this presentation, saying it was inappropriate since such presentations were supposed to feature "a medical topic" of the physician's choosing, and "other students had lectured on new medications and treatment of specific mental illnesses". Hasan was a trainee psychiatrist, however, and it is at least arguable that he had diagnosed a problem -- one indeed that he was trying to cope with himself -- and that he used his lecture to present his colleagues with an ailment of which he would have special reason to be aware -- and which was not to be found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM).

To put that another way, he was I all likelihood giving his colleagues a warning, as we shall see.

In his second slide, he describes his objectives:

Identify what the Koran inculcates in the minds of Muslims and the potential implications this may have for the U.S. military.

Describe the nature of the religious conflicts that Muslims may have with the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Identify Muslim soldiers that may be having religious conflicts with the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

I take that as his diagnosis of what he perceives to be a problem. In order to deal with it, he then turns to Islam and the Qu'ran, first giving definitions of *Islam*, *Muslims*, *Islamist* and *Fatwa*. Of these, the definition of *Islamist* (slide 4) is most interesting:

Islamist: Advocates rule by Gods law - Islamic political rule/Sharia law i.e. (No separation of Church and State)

It would be very helpful if we had a recording of his speech to note what exactly he said about this definition, so we could understand the degree to which he would or would not apply it to himself. Here, in fact, we have the first instance of an ambiguity which will follow us

throughout the document, the ambiguity which in his own mind may well have been a source of cumulative conflict.

Slides 6 to 8 offer some background statistics on Muslims and their distribution around the world, while 9 to 11 offer varying stats for Muslims in the U.S. Armed Services -- the focus of his talk.

Hasan then discusses fatwas applicable to Muslims in the U.S. Military, and here we find the first note of confusion as to what is required of a faithful Muslim. He notes that Islam has no single defining authority, with the result that there can be conflicting fatwas on this issue.

On slide 11 he notes that U.S. Muslim clerics have given "vague and ambiguous" fatwas, and raises the possibility that they are (or feel implicitly) "under duress" and says that non-U.S. scholars have issued fatwas "clearly stating no". In quotes, he writes, "It's getting harder and harder for Muslims in the service to morally justify being in a military that seems constantly engaged against fellow Muslims."

To me, this quote is the heart of the matter -- where he opens the wound and makes his one-sentence summation of the problem.

But notice the quotation marks. He is going to use them again for some of his Qur'anic quotations, e.g. in slide 17, but there are many other slides where he quotes the Qur'an and doesn't insert quotation marks, or uses them within a Qur'anic quote as (also) in slide 17, where "Thou art but a forger" is internal to Sura 16.101.

Slide 46 is the next place where he uses quote marks for a phrase that is not a Qur'anic quote: the first bullet-point there reads:

Islam "spread by the sword?"

And slide 49 offers his conclusions, and the third bullet point there is again in quotes: "I love the Koran and being a Muslim, but I don't want to live under Islamic rule." These two appear to be cases of remarks he hopes to discuss in his presentation (not especially the question mark in the first).

Apart from the occasional quote around "infidels" (slide 48) and "Conscientious objectors (slide 50), that's about it.

So I take the quote marks around this powerful remark in slide 11 as indicative of an awareness on his part that he's offering his audience a quotation, and a Google search indeed identified the source as a comment made by a retired U.S. Marine, Jeff Hammad, as reported by religion journalist Don Lattin in an [article on SFGate](#), the *San Francisco Chronicle* website.

It seems likely that Hasan read this article, perhaps during research for his presentation or perhaps earlier, and that this quote struck him as particularly to the point. He might also have come across it in a [2006 Maxwell AFB Research Report](#) by Timothy E. Stenmark, "Looking for

Gold Nuggets in the Melting Pot: Language, Cultural Awareness, and the Fourth Generation Warrior". Either way, we have a glimpse into Hasan's reading at a point where it resonated with his topic enough to take note of it and include a quote in his presentation. The resonance was likely personal, too.

Need I add that we may learn more of his thinking at this point by paying careful attention to [Lattin's article](#) and / or [Stenmark's report](#)?

Having stated on slide 11 the problem as he sees it, he turns on slide 12 to verify that it is indeed a problem, by presenting quotations from the Qur'an which could reasonably be interpreted in such a way as to cause conflict between military and religious duty. He quotes Sura 4.93 from the Shakir translation, (And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is hell; he shall abide in it, and Allah will send His wrath on him and curse him and prepare for him a painful chastisement.) and also the beginning of 17.33 (slightly misquoting 17.33 which reads "And do not kill any one whom Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause..." to read "And do not kill anyone whose killing Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause..." -- likely a copyist's error, which in any case doesn't change the meaning).

My reading is that these two quotes indicate grounds for concern that some Muslims in the armed forces may understandably feel a conflict between two chains of command -- that of God, and that of their superior officers in time of war.

In slide 13, he confirms this, giving four examples of various outcomes of such a conflict:

Hasan Akbar, the Army Sergeant who threw (misspelled "through") grenades into a tent in Kuwait and then shot those who attempted to escape, killing an Army Captain and an Air Force Major and wounding others

James Yee, the Muslim Army chaplain charged with espionage and later acquitted

A Marine Corporal, Waseef Ali Hassoun, who deserted in Iraq

Army Sergeant Abdullah Webster, who refused to deploy to Iraq on religious grounds

These are four very different cases, and Hassoun's in particular may involve more than meets the eye and I haven't researched it in any detail. But the cumulative effect of the list would presumably have backed up the point that conflicts of the type Major Hasan is discussing have in fact already occurred.

Note that he lists these four incidents as "Adverse Events" in the heading of this slide. His final slide 50, headed "Recommendation", will read:

Department of Defense should allow Muslim Soldiers the option of being released as "Conscientious objectors" to increase troop morale and decrease adverse events.

These four incidents are the type of thing he is, at this point, overtly attempting to avoid.

The next slides, 14 - 15, headed "Evaluation ideas/hints" are ambiguous, but likely have to do with ways in which such requests made by individual soldiers might be evaluated -- has the soldier changed his or her name? does the soldier show devotion, read the Qur'an, follow the hours of prayer?

The third bullet point on 14 is interesting:

Perceived support of unit/fellow soldiers/military

My reading is that he thinks this is a crucial issue, and that he's referring to perception of the Muslim soldier's support of the U.S. military -- but again there's ambiguity, and it might refer to the degree to which the soldier feels the support of his environment, i.e. the degree of tolerance of his being Muslim.

Note that he himself was affected, reports indicating he was called a "camel-jockey", and that the article he quoted included the following:

Hammad heard his faith disparaged dozens of times during his four years of duty. There were battle cries like "Kill ragheads," and "Let's go Muslim hunting."

Slide 15 includes the suggestion "Don't doubt their loyalty to U.S. - > God vs. Country", followed by "It must be hard for you to balance Islamic beliefs that might be conflicting with current war; feelings of guilt; Is it what you expected." I take these two bullet-points taken together to suggest that a tactful approach to the issue would involve taking care not to assume a lack of loyalty on the part of Muslim soldiers, while still offering them a sympathetic opening to discuss any problems they might be experiencing: "beliefs that might be conflicting" and "feelings of guilt" would be the symptoms a psychiatrist would want to hear about for therapeutic reasons, but doubting the soldier's loyalty would be perceived as insulting and would be likely to block any therapeutic exchange. The final bullet point reads, simply, "Mentor/chaplain".

Slide 16 introduces the Qur'an and hadiths, and the next several slides deal with the basics of Islamic life: the ways in which some portions of the Qur'an cancel out others ("abrogation", 17), the unique character of the Qur'an (18), the Five Pillars of Islam (19) -- note here that Hasan does not include jihad as the "sixth pillar" as was proposed by the Egyptian jihadist Muhammad Faraj in his pamphlet "The Neglected Duty" -- the Articles of Faith (20), and the Purpose of Life (21).

The purpose of life is explained in two ways: quoting Qur'an 51.56, "that they might worship Me" and 67.1 -2 "that He might put you to the test and find out which of you acquitted himself best". This may sound strange to Western secular ears, but is from a comparative religion perspective a Qur'anic equivalent to St Paul's comment in I Corinthians 10.13 (I am quoting here from the King James Version):

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Seeing one's human life as a test of one's fidelity to one's ultimate principles should not be underestimated as a factor in religious doctrine, and will tend to sharpen conflicts of conscience. Slide 22 draws the conclusion, citing 2.208: "Enter into Islam completely, whole-heartedly..."

Hasan then offers two slides (23, 24) on the figure of Abraham / Ibrahim as a model of devout submission to the will of God, who was obedient during the "manifest trial" (ie "the test") when ordered to sacrifice his first-born son (in the Qur'an it is Ishmael rather than Isaac who is to be sacrificed). Notable here is the extreme challenge between submission to the divine will and human paternal obligation to one's own child.

Hasan follows this with comments on the perils of disobedience (25), Allah's capacity to punish or show mercy and forgive (26), and the consequent need to fear God, for those who fear him and restrain their evil desires will attain to Paradise (27).

Slides 28 - 30 describe Paradise with verses 12 - 22 of Sura 76 and Sura 47 verse 15, in what are quite graphic and poetic terms compared with, say, the bare mention of "the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" in Revelation 2.7. Qur'an 76.21, for instance, reads:

Their garments will be of fine green silk, and gold embroidery. They will be adorned with bracelets of silver, and their Lord will give them a pure drink.

This description of Paradise is followed directly by a balancing account of Hell, drawn from the Qur'an 8.50, 44 verses 43 - 50 and 56. These verses too are quite graphic and indeed Dantesque, 44.56 (slide 33) for instance reading:

Surely, those who disbelieved in our Ayat (verses, signs, etc), We shall burn them in Fire. As often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for other skins that they may taste the punishment. Truly, Allah is Ever Most Powerful, All-Wise.

(The word "boling" in 44.48 is clearly a typo for "boiling" and signifies little more than that the slides may have been prepared in haste, and certainly without careful proofing.)

It was this section of the presentation that, perhaps not surprisingly, caused some in Major Hasan's audience to react with concern. This is from NPR's [Daniel Zwerdling's account](#) of an interview with a psychiatrist who knew Hasan well:

They have grand rounds, right? They, you know, dozens of medical staff come into an auditorium, and somebody stands at the podium at the front and gives a lecture about some academic issue, you know, what drugs to prescribe for what condition. But instead of that, he - Hasan apparently gave a long lecture on the Koran and talked about how if you don't believe, you are condemned to hell. Your head is cut off. You're set on fire. Burning oil is burned down your throat.

And I said to the psychiatrist, but this could be a very interesting informational session, right? Where he's educating everybody about the Koran. He said but what disturbed everybody was that Hasan seemed to believe these things. And actually, a Muslim in the audience, a psychiatrist, raised his hand and said, excuse me. But I'm a Muslim and I do not believe these things in the Koran, and then I don't believe what you say the Koran says. And then Hasan didn't say, well, I'm just giving you one point of view. He basically just stared the guy down.

I am including a [link to the complete transcript](#), because the interview is informative, and indicates among other things that "from the beginning ... the medical staff was very worried about this guy".

An NPR reporter gives his impression of a psychiatrist's sense of the medical staff's attitude to Hasan -- this is all getting a little third hand, and should neither be taken as proof nor disregarded as irrelevant. It is part of the puzzle, all part of the ambiguity of layered texts and personal interpretations we are unfolding here.

Noted, and not forgotten.

To summarize, then:

I read slide 21 quoting Qur'an 67.1 -2 "that He might put you to the test and find out which of you acquitted himself best" as beginning a series on "the test" (21), whose passing mode is submission (22), introducing Abraham as an example of one who is severely tested and passes the test (23 - 24), then turning to those who lack submission and fail (25), the possibility, even then, of mercy (26), the need to fear God for fear of judgment and in hope of Paradise (27), and then into the suite on rewards (28-31) and punishments (33-34). So the reward and punishment suite is really a subsection of a larger movement in the text.

I don't find it significant that there are four slides for reward and paradise, and only three for punishment and hell, but I do think he intends the two to be balanced -- although in the same way that Dante's *Inferno* gets a wider audience than his *Paradiso*, I note that his listeners commented notably on the punishments section and not on the section of rewards. The presentation itself is balanced: the human response is not.

Slide 35 in my view begins a new series. Hasan has laid out his concern for soldiers conflicted between their Islamic and military obligations, the fundamentals of Islam, the need for submission to the Divine will, the dual nature of Paradise and Punishment, and turns now to a more in-depth consideration of warfare as enjoined in the Qur'an.

First, he explains the timeline by which God's directives to the Prophet changed over time in response to circumstances in Mecca and then Medina -- a change that is reflected in the sequence of Qur'anic directives, and in the doctrine of "abrogation" which we noted briefly in slide 17.

The background here is that the earliest revelations of Suras to the Prophet (which are often short, and hence found towards the end of the Qur'an, wherein the longer Suras tend to be placed first) date from the Prophet's time in Mecca (the "Meccan Suras") are entirely peaceable, whereas those that date from after the Hijra and the Prophet's time in Medina (hence, the "Medinan Suras") permit first self-defense and then offensive fighting. Hasan notes that "later verses abrogated former ie: peaceful verses no longer apply" (see comments below on slide 42).

Reuven Firestone explains the process in his book, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*:

Muslim scholars came to the conclusion that the scriptural verses regarding war were revealed in direct relation to the historic needs of Muhammad during his prophetic mission. At the beginning of his prophetic career in Mecca when he was weak and his followers few, the divine revelations encouraged avoidance of physical conflict. Only after the intense physical persecution that resulted in the Emigration (Hijra) of the Muslim community to Medina in 622 were Muhammad and the believers given divine authority to engage in war and only in defense. As the Muslim community continued to grow in numbers and strength in Medina, further revelations widened the conditions and narrowed the restrictions under which war could be waged, until it was concluded that war against non-Muslims could be waged virtually at any time, without pretext, and in any place.

And this is indeed the sort of reading of abrogation within the Qur'an that Hasan very briefly outlines in slide 35.

It is worth noting that the replacement of one divine command by a later one is not uncommon in scriptures. Thus the words of Isaiah, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. ... When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations..." (Isa. 1.11-13) can be viewed as abrogating those of the (earlier) book of Numbers, "And ye shall prepare a burnt-offering for a sweet savour unto HaShem: one young bullock, one ram, seven he-lambs of the first year without blemish."

Similarly, Christ's instruction to his disciples in Luke 10.3-5, "Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house", is abrogated in Luke 22.35-36, "And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one."

Slide 35 closes with the observation that at one time the Islamic empire stretched from "Morocco/Spain to the Border of India/China".

In slide 36, Hasan offers Qur'anic verses promoting forgiveness (2.109, 7.199) and notably one which deals with former enemies:

And not alike are the good and the evil. Repel (evil) with what is best, when lo! he between whom and you was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend.

This translation is somewhat obscure, so I'll provide a part of the tafsir (exegesis) from Ibn Kathir, who unfolds the meaning of this verse, is as follows:

If you treat well those who treat you badly, this good deed will lead to reconciliation, love and empathy, and it will be as if he is a close friend to you and he will feel pity for you and be kind to you.

Slides 37-39 contain verses in which the Qur'an offers permission to those among the faithful who have been fought against, to fight back (Suras 22.39 - 40, 9.38 -39) but closes the series of "Defensive Verses" with verse 60.8 in slide 40, enjoining kindness and justice towards those who do not fight Muslims because of their beliefs, nor drive them from their homes.

Hasan emphasized the phrase "those who fight you not for (your) Faith" by placing it in bold type, the point as I take it being that it is specifically the persecution of Muslims *on account of their beliefs* that creates the sanction for defensive actions in the first place, and the last slide in the series, 41, again emphasizes that God does not welcome those who overstep the bounds "for Allah loveth not transgressors" (2.190) ... "But if they cease, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (2.192). Here, incidentally, Hasan is quoting from the Yusuf Ali translation rather than that of Shakir.

(It is noteworthy that the terms "Oft-Forgiving" (Al-Ghafur) and "Most Merciful" (Ar-Rahim) are two of the Names of God, Ar-Rahim being the second most important such name, found also in the "Bismillah" with which every Sura in the Qur'an save the ninth opens -- "In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.")

This is followed by the celebrated "Verse of the Sword" (Qur'an 9.5) which closes with the same phrase, emphatically stated: "Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful". First, however, it lays out what is arguably a more aggressive version of the relation of the Muslim community to warfare -- indeed, slide 44, which continues this discussion, is labeled "Offensive Jihad Cont" indicating in its title the continuity of topic as Hasan sees it.

The Verse of the Sword, in the translation used here by Hasan, reads:

So when the Sacred Months have passed, then fight the Mushrikin wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in each and every ambush. But if they repent and perform the Salah, and give the Zakah, then leave their way free. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

-- albeit Hasan has omitted the phrase "and besiege them". Here Hasan is using the translation from the Tafsir or exegetical commentary on the Qur'an of Ibn Kathir published by Darussalam, which in turn is based on the translation of the Qur'an by Drs. Al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan with some variations.

(An aside: in all, Hasan uses at least four versions of the Qur'an that I have identified: those of Yusuf Ali, Pickthal, Shakir and the Tafsir, and there may be others. It is my impression that he likely gathered his quotations from various sources at various times, and assembled them for this presentation without much thought as to their variety.)

This "Verse of the Sword" is followed in the Tafsir by a hadith which Hasan attributes to the hadith collection, Sahih Muslim (the Tafsir attributes it to "the two Sahihs", i.e. the collections of Bukhari and Muslim):

I have been commanded to fight the people until they testify that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establish the prayer and pay the Zakah.

The Tafsir continues at this point, commenting:

This honorable Ayah (9:5) was called the Ayah of the Sword, about which Ad-Dahhak bin Muzahim said, "It abrogated every agreement of peace between the Prophet and any idolator, every treaty, and every term."

In slide 44 quotes another verse proposing what he terms "Offensive Jihad" -- 9.29, and continues in slide 45 to the curious topic of "Offensive Islam If the Future". It is clear that he doesn't mean to suggest that Islam is offensive, so "Offensive Islam" must either mean "Islam on the Offensive" -- or he must have intended to write, "Offensive Jihad" thus continuing the title of the preceding slide 44 -- and in either case, we should read "If" here as a typo and not a prediction.

In this slide, 45, Hasan quotes another hadith found in both the Sahih collections, Bukhari and Muslim, a specifically apocalyptic (end times) hadith alluding to the Second Coming of Jesus, and indeed a hadith which deserves an entire lecture or book on its own, according to which the Prophet said:

By the One in Whose hand is my soul, soon the son of Maryam will descend among you as a just judge. He will break the cross, kill the pigs and abolish the jizyah, and money will become abundant until no one will accept it.

That is a densely packed hadith, beginning with a beautiful poetic acknowledgment that the prophet is in the hands of his Lord, phrased as if it were the preamble to a solemn oath, then proclaiming the soon and second coming of Jesus son of Mary, known to Islam as the prophet Issa, who will bring justice -- a perennial millenarian theme. And He, Jesus, acknowledging Islam (submission) as the corrective to those ways in which the Christians have "gone astray" from his own original teaching (of submission to God who is without son or equal, the teaching equally of Moses and all other prophets), will "break the cross" (liberating his "followers" to follow him in submission, refuse to accept any more the jizya tax as an alternative to submission since he himself is now present to clarify his own intention and teachings in that regard) -- and as if that wasn't enough, "money will become abundant until no one will accept it", in a society so

generous and an earth so abundant that the need for money will simply fall away.

Having laid out a timeline derived from the increasingly war-like life of Muhammad and extended it to the end times, whose arrival is also viewed as "offensive" (rather than "defensive"), Hasan now presents his audience with two slides embodying questions.

Slide 46, titled "History Cont", deals with the time between Muhammad's life and the return of Jesus, in two bullet points. The first simply asks:

Islam: "spread by the sword"?

The second quotes Sura 2.256, the famous verse in which the Qur'an begins by declaring, "There is no compulsion in religion".

Unless at some point we obtain a tape of Hasan's lecture, there is simply no way to know how he used that verse, nor how he answered the question. The inherent ambiguity of his presentation in slide-form is here plain to see.

Following right along, in slide 47 he asks another question, "Different Paths to heaven?" And here, at least arguably, he offers two different conclusions, each based in a verse from the Qur'an:

Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.

and:

And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers.

The first, from Qur'an 2.62, seems to imply that membership in one of the "peoples of the book" combined with the appropriate good works is indeed a "path to heaven" in the terms of the title question, whereas the second, from 3.85, appears to say quite the opposite. Again, it is impossible to determine how Hasan would have handled the apparent conflict, either with his audience or within himself at that point -- but it is worth noting that "Islam" is only one choice of translation here, "Islam" itself being the Arabic for Submission just as Allah is the Arabic for God -- so that Pickthal's celebrated translation renders this same verse:

And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (to Allah) it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter.

It is *surrender to the will of the one God* that is the message of all the prophets, from Noah through Jesus to Muhammad, and which in Arabic goes by the name of Islam.

The main body of the presentation concludes with those two slides, both of which are notable for raising questions (with the implicit possibility that Hasan left the question unanswered, and or felt they remained unresolved for himself).

Only three slides remain.

The first, "Comments", slide 48, appears to list topics that Hasan felt would inevitably arise in the minds of his listeners, and should therefore be tied in with the discourse he had just presented. Osama Bin Laden. The Taliban. Suicide bombers. Iran. It would be very interesting indeed to know what comments Hasan made about these four points. The fifth raises the issue of Muslims who become persuaded that insurgent groups are fighting "for God against injustices of the 'infidels'" -- ie that their actions are sanctioned in the Quranic terms explored earlier (slides 37 - 39), commenting "Muslims can become a potent adversary ie suicide bombing, etc." The final comment on that slide reads:

We love death more than you love life.

Steve Stalinsky wrote an informative article about the "concept of the love of death" in the National Review Online in May 2004, tracing the comparison back to a message Caliph Abu Bakr transmitted to Khosru, the Persian commander, at the Battle of Qadisiyya (636 CE):

You should convert to Islam, and then you will be safe, for if you don't, you should know that I have come to you with an army of men that love death, as you love life.

Stalinsky then references a number of other occasions when the same comparison has been made by Palestinian and Saudi sheikhs, and even by President GW Bush misquoting one of those who claimed responsibility for the bombings in Madrid.

Again, it is an aphorism about which much can be said -- not least that there is a striking resemblance between Islamic and Catholic theology on this point. Consider for instance, that the Qur'an says (3.169, Yusuf Ali):

Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord.

-- while as recently as December 2006, Pope Benedict XVI expressed something of the same sort from within the heart of Catholic orthodoxy:

For believers the day of death, and even more the day of martyrdom, is not the end of all; rather, it is the "transit" towards immortal life. It is the day of definitive birth, in Latin, *dies natalis*.

Slide 49, labeled "Conclusions", contain four bullet points that appear to affirm that, in the words of the fourth, "Fighting to establish an Islamic state to please God, even by force, is condoned by the Islam." That doesn't suggest that his fellow soldiers should go out and join Al-Qa'ida, but it sets his audience up for the fifth point:

Muslim soldiers should not serve in any capacity that renders them at risk to hurting/killing believers unjustly -> will vary!

Here, at the very end of the slide presentation, Hasan makes a statement in an affirmative tone that might well represent the opinion, in light of all that has already been presented, of a Muslim soldier, and which might well cause him to feel a conflict between his loyalty to Country and to God. And just as the comment is presented in an affirmative form, it is immediately followed with an arrow and the words "will vary" followed by an exclamation point.

Hasan does not believe that all Muslim soldiers will find a conflict here, but he is warning that some will. And from the combination of the affirmative tone of the statement itself, and the exclamatory quality of those forceful two words, "will vary", we may deduce that the conflict was in fact real for Maj. Hasan himself at this point.

He is trying to warn his colleagues of the existential danger of intrapersonal conflict that will follow from sending Muslim soldiers against an enemy who may be perceived as Muslim fighters in a cause that is just, and he is doing that both because he feels the conflict in himself, and because he is still on the side of restraint, trying to avoid the conflict, to steer the U.S. military away from it -- an effort which he then encapsulates in the single sentence "Recommendation" of his final slide, #50:

Department of Defense should allow Muslims Soldiers the option of being released as "Conscientious objectors" to increase troop morale and decrease adverse events.

Adverse events, that is, of the kind he had listed under that very title back in slide 13.

At this point, while making his presentation, Major Hasan is requesting a "bypass" which will avoid the potential for conflict inherent in the dual identities and obligations of a Muslim in the Armed Services -- which he is feeling in himself, presenting it in a third party manner as befits a physician, yet with enough intensity that others in the room become uncomfortable.

At this point, he is attempting to avoid events of the very sort that some years later he will himself feel impelled to enact.

Caveats, Conclusions, and Questions

The questions we should be trying to address in reading this slide show are: what was Hasan's state of mind at the time of preparing and giving his presentation, what influence did he hope to exert on his audience, and where does the presentation lie on the time-line of his thoughts and feelings as they move to their tragic conclusion.

Hasan's presentation was about Islam, the Qur'an, and potential conflicts in the minds and hearts of Muslim servicemen and women. He himself was a Muslim, in the Army, and a psychiatrist. It appears to me that "religious motivation" was indeed involved.

But in what way?

I have suggested that Hasan himself was feeling a conflict between his religious and military duties at this point, exacerbated by his contacts with fellow Muslim soldiers, his reading of such documents as the Don Lattin article, perhaps some taunting from his fellows, his readings about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the news as they correlated with his readings in the Qur'an and sunna, and -- I am not sure when this began, it may not precede this lecture, but if it did would likely be the strongest influence -- whatever of the traumas of others he may have absorbed in the course of his residency and practice.

It is my sense that this conflict was disturbing enough to him that he took the somewhat unusual course of presenting it in his "grand rounds" presentation., and that while this may have been something of a cry for help on his part, it was clearly delivered as a warning and as a plea for the provision of a workaround for the conflict in those in the armed services who might feel the need for it.

He was, in his conscious mind and self identity, in other words, attempting to help the U.S. military at that point, not acting on behalf of anyone's jihad.

Indeed, the warning he was giving is not too dissimilar to the warnings that many patriotic non-Muslim Americans have given since the shootings at Fort Hood, suggesting in some cases quite simply that Muslims should not serve in the armed forces.

And yet his conflict was on the rise, the dark undertow of pain, passion, anger was growing, and at a certain point (after one too many horrendous stories heard in the confidence of his therapeutic practice? when he learned that he was shortly to be deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq? -- in any case, before or at the time that he decided to give his Qur'an and other possessions away to friends), there came a tipping point.

Islam had been there throughout, there was no tipping point in regard to Islam.

The tipping point was the point at which he decided that his own interpretation of Islam now demanded of him, as an individual obligation, *fard 'ayn*, that he take violent action.

If he then visited a club more than once, and paid for a lap dance where he "was respectful" and "kept his hands behind his head the whole time" as has been alleged, that might well indicate a compulsion to ground himself, to get away for a while from the conflict raging in his head. He might well have considered himself just one week short of martyrdom at this point, not expecting to survive alive, confident that, in the words of the Prophet as recorded in the collections of Tirmidhi and Ahmad, "all the (martyr's) sins and faults are forgiven with the first drop of blood that comes out of his body".

Again, assuming the veracity of the allegation that he cried "Allahu Akbar" during the shooting, I would read this as indicating that the figurative "red streak" of his shifting interpretation of Islam, influenced by the swelling "infection" of his recognition of the horrors of war, the nature

of those horrors specific to Muslim American combatants, and his own upcoming deployment, had now at last reached the heart -- touching off the explosive denouement of his conflict.

Great caution is in order here: I would no more blame Islam or all Muslims for this than I would blame Christianity or all Christians for the actions of a lone anti-abortion activist who bombed a clinic, shouting "Praise the Lord."

But I would take Hasan's recommendation very seriously indeed, since we can see what the lack of such an option led to in the case of Major Hasan himself:

Department of Defense should allow Muslims Soldiers the option of being released as "Conscientious objectors" to increase troop morale and decrease adverse events.

I say that I would take his suggestion very seriously: I do not say it should be implemented. That is a decision which is not mine to make -- nor do I have either access to or understanding of all the considerations which would go into such a decision.

I have offered one reading of one text, and I hope that it will stimulate comments from others with more specialized knowledge than I. This reading is offered as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of a variety of legal, theological, psychological, sociological and military topics, one very small piece of a much larger puzzle.

It is one of the joys and sorrows of open source reading of this sort of text that relevant data that is and may always remain secret might considerably alter my reading, were it available to me.

But then, as I proposed in my epigraph, not one of us is all-knowing. If anyone has full knowledge of human affairs, that would be the one of whom it was written, "for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men."

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Charles Cameron is an independent scholar and writer, and was at one time a Principal Researcher with the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University. He would like to thank Stephen O'Leary, Richard Landes and David Cook for their encouragement and support over the years, the members of the NRM mailing list and particularly Jean Rosenfeld, Jayne Seminaire Docherty, Phil Arnold and John R Hall for their thoughts on this subject, David Ronfeldt, Ibn Siqilli and Leah Farrall among others for recent interactions, Mark Safranski for graciously allowing him to guest-blog on Zenpundit, and Howard Rheingold and the Brainstorms community, the folks at TMN, and Jaen Martens and Kevin Murphy for various other forms of hospitality.

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