

The Qur’anic View on Peaceful Interaction between Followers of Divinely Revealed Religions

Muhammad Mahdi Kariminia

Abstract

The Qur’anic view on peaceful coexistence and encouraging dialog with non-Muslims (in particular ‘the people of the Book’) is a topic of significance in international law, peace, and peaceful coexistence between followers of different religions and is indicative of the role that may be played by major religions, particularly Islam. There exist more than fifty Muslim countries with various economic, political, and social ties with each other and also with non-Muslim countries. It is of great significance to demonstrate ‘genuineness of the idea of peaceful coexistence in Islam’ as it practically paves the path to cooperation of Muslim countries with others based on common principles and peaceful relations.

Proving that the Islamic Republic of Iran is competent to manage the affairs of the society at domestic and international levels will require fundamental and infrastructural discussions, e.g. whether the ties with non-Muslim countries are based on peace and peaceful coexistence. Is maintaining peaceful coexistence attested in authoritative Islamic sources?

In other words, this study requires, among others, a discussion on ‘attributing or not attributing violence to Islam and the Prophet of the Islamic faith’. It is maintained by some uninformed or begrudged people that ties Muslims and non-Muslims are based on animosity and waging battles, but the fact is that they have misconstrued the great significance accorded by Islam to jihad and such misconception has led some people – in the past, e.g. Montesquieu (d. 1755), and the present, e.g. Pope Benedict XVI (b. 1927) – to believe that Islam is the religion of the sword. Such false accusations abound in modern day context.

It is reflected in authoritative Islamic sources that peace and peaceful coexistence of different religions, denominations, and doctrines constitute a value and an objective. From the Islamic perspective, peace and peaceful coexistence with other religions and denominations, as a fundamental principle, are stipulated in Islamic laws and precepts. Racism, imposition of beliefs on others, and biases are denounced in the Holy Qur’an but making peace initiatives, cooperation based on common principles, and conducting peaceful dialogs are encouraged. The Holy Qur’an recognizes pre-Islamic Prophets and divinely revealed scriptures and respects minority rights.

Peace and peaceful coexistence are frequently attested in the Holy Qur’an, biographical accounts and wise sayings of the Prophet of Islam and those of the Infallible Imams. It is worthy of note, however, that the

present study is solely devoted to the Qur'anic view on the necessity of peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims, particularly with the followers of divinely revealed religions.

The Qur'anic approaches in developing and safeguarding peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims include: 1. The Holy Qur'an and denouncing racism; 2. The Holy Qur'an and confronting the superiority illusions of some followers of other religions; 3. The Holy Qur'an and freedom of belief and thought; 4. The Holy Qur'an and respecting minority rights; 5. The Holy Qur'an and cooperation in world issues; 6. The Holy Qur'an and welcoming peace initiatives; 7. The Holy Qur'an and world peace; 8. The Holy Qur'an and call to peaceful coexistence and attending to common principles; 9. The Holy Qur'an and peaceful dialog.

Introduction

Peaceful coexistence in this context denotes "living together of two individuals or two groups even though they may not be suitable for such objective".¹ As a term in international law it is used in the sense of manner of relations between countries with different social and political systems, i.e. respecting the principles of right to sovereignty, equality of rights, territorial integrity and immunity of any country irrespective of its size, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, respecting the rights of all peoples in freely selecting their social systems and settlement of international issues through negotiation.²

The connotative meaning of the term is in fact derived from its denotative sense, but what is intended by lexicographers and international law experts is that it is by virtue of this significant international principle

1. Dehkhudā, 'A. A., *Lughatnāmah-yi Dihkhudā*, vol. 12, p. 20817.

2. Āqābakhshī, 'A. A., *Farhang-i 'Ulūm-i Siyāsī*, p. 246.

that different nations, despite different religious and denominations, live in peace and cooperation, but differences arise from the extraordinary significance accorded by Islam to jihad. Such interpretation led thinkers, like Montesquieu, to consider Islam as a religion of the sword. In *The Spirit of the Laws (De l'esprit des loix)* he says, "It is a misfortune for humanity (*la nature humaines*) when religion is imposed by a conqueror. Mohammadanism, which speaks only by the sword, continues to act upon men in that destructive sword by which it was founded."¹

Montesquieu is not alone in spreading untruth, but the same policy is adopted by the majority of Western orientalist and experts on Islamic studies. Islam has been misrepresented from olden times as a religion of violence and sword. It was on 12 September 2006 that Pope Benedict XVI made a display of his religious prejudice by declaring, as a Christian leader, crusaders' enmity toward Islam, in general, and toward the Prophet of the Islamic faith, in particular, by making wild allegations against Islam through taking his last venomous shots at Islam and the Prophet of Islam thus aiming at impeding promulgation of Islam in the West, the serious rival of other religions and Christianity in particular.

It is worthy of note that hundreds of thousands of Qur'an copies have sold in the West, multitudes of Westerners are eager to gain familiarity with the teachings of Islam, the Qur'an, and Muslim leaders, and hearts in the West have been impressed by such enlightening teachings. This is reminiscent of the Qur'anic message: *When Allah's help comes with victory and you see the people entering Allah's religion in throngs* (110:1-2).

It goes without saying that such baseless propaganda aims at instigating non-Muslims against Muslims, even though followers of

1. Montesquieu, *Rūḥ al-Qawānīn [The Spirit of the Laws, Persian translation, Translator]*, p. 671 [opening of Chapter IV, Translator].

other religions have been kindly treated in Islam. Gustav Le Bon writes, "The Christian nations accepted their conquerors, the Arabs, and even adopted their language, mainly because they observed that, compared to their former rulers who made them suffer torture at their hands, the new rulers showed more fairness and justice toward them."¹ He also says that the religious toleration shown by Islam toward Judaism and Christianity is barely attested in other religions.²

Islam is not only restricted to performing rites and rituals and individual acts of worship but it embraces a series of ritual, social, political, and economic affairs and issues. It includes all the affairs required in human individual and social life in this world and his life in the hereafter. In other words, it takes account of the relations between man, on the one side, and the Creator, ruler, society, family, one's nation as well as other Muslim and non-Muslim nations, on the other. The earliest manifestation of Islam occurred in the Arabian Peninsula but it transcended geographical and ethnic boundaries. It was divinely revealed and brought to mankind by the Prophet Muhammad as the last divinely revealed religion with a worldwide mission in effect to the Day of Resurrection. This is reflected in the Holy Qur'an:

We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and warner to all mankind, but most people do not know (34:28).

Say, "O mankind! I am the Apostle of Allah to you all, [of Him] to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no god except Him. He gives life and brings death" So have faith in Allah and His Apostle, the uninstructed prophet, who has faith in Allah and His

1. Le Bon, G., *Tamaddun-i Islam wa 'Arab [La Civilization des Arabes (1884); The World of Islamic Civilization (1974)]*, p. 148.

2. Ibid.

words, and follow him so that you may be guided (7:158).

What is the Islamic view on peaceful coexistence? Are peaceful coexistence and developing and maintaining peaceful relations with the followers of other religions and denominations recognized in Islam? In other words, how did the Prophet of Islam treat non-Muslims? Was he willing to develop and maintain peaceful coexistence and relations with non-Muslims or he sought to wage battles against them?

It is of great significance to select a topic that besides studying and investigating the theoretical aspects could meet the demands of at least one of the executive organizations of the country. We need, willingly or unwillingly, to interact with other countries and Islam, as a world religion, calls us to be involved in the world's political arena and avoid isolationism and monasticism.

It would be unreasonable to sever our ties with the world and live in confinement and thus fulfil the goals of the sworn enemies of Islam who seek our isolation by devising many a stratagem. We need, therefore, to establish the most efficient and the most dynamic relations, in the arena of international law, with other countries, such relations that safeguard our independence, dignity, and national interests. It is to be noted that relations of that nature may only be based on Islamic teachings and standards.

Realization of such relations requires familiarity with the standards and principles provided by Islam aiming at developing and maintaining those relations. Those familiar with jurisprudential and legal principles are therefore obliged to discuss and investigate the application of those principles and relations. Considering the fact that the structure of the relations of Islamic state with other countries is intertwined with

the prestige of the Islamic faith worldwide, further significance should be accorded to the applicability of Islamic infrastructure as to foreign policy and international law.

We need to consult authentic sources, e.g. the Holy Qur'an, the traditions narrated from the Infallibles as well as their biographical accounts, to familiarize ourselves with the Islamic perspective. Those who have studied history of Islamic civilization and *sharia* have neglected authoritative sources and turned to less significant ones. Some have confused particular issues with generally applicable ones; as a consequence, they have come to inaccurate conclusions. Some others have gone further to accept such inaccuracies and even consider them as axiomatic. It is also imagined by some people that in Islam international relations and law have been based on waging war and have at times made references to certain measures taken by some rulers and kings in Islamic history.

The opposite of such inaccurate conclusions are reflected in authoritative Islamic sources in which peace and peaceful coexistence with other religions and denominations have been represented in Islamic laws as fundamental principles and waging war may only be legitimate in dealing with exigencies. Therefore, it is to be noted that inaccurate measures taken by some Muslim rulers in the history of Islam may not invalidate such authentic sources.¹

Peace is the fulcrum of Islam. The word *islām*, derived from the root *s-l-m* and cognate with *salam*, *salām*, and *salāmah*, connotes “to seek peace for the world” and “coexistence” as a result of which contentment and peace of mind are produced.

1. Thaqaḫī, S. M., *Sākhṭār-i Ijtīmā'ī wa Siyāsī-yi Nakhustīn Ḥukūmat-i Islāmī dar Madīnah*, p. 253.

Salām and *Salāmah* lead to deliverance from evil and attaining good. Qur’anic attestations of the term exceed a hundred. ‘Peace’ and ‘peaceful coexistence’ lie at the heart of Islam and ‘war’ has been rendered as obligatory in exceptional cases. Islam embraces peace and peaceful coexistence and these basic principles have been encouraged in Islamic teachings.

Islam recognizes the rights of the followers of divinely revealed religions; however, such recognition is not contrary to conducting studies about the religion of truth, comparing the concepts and teachings of religions, and following the best of them. In other words, the scope of conducting such studies is different from the domains of law and civil law, since the former is studied with precision and the latter is susceptible to negligence and neglect.

The Prophet of Islam respected laws in his kind treatment of the followers of other religions, even though he declared that those believing in Islam and doing meritorious deeds would attain salvation.

Indeed, with Allah religion is Islam (3:19).

Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter (3:85).

Islam is related to former religions. Its mission encompasses their fundamental principles and also something needed by man until the Day of Resurrection. Fundamental principles of Islam include recognition of all divinely revealed religions and former prophets.¹

He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have [also] revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus... (42:13).

1. Shiblī, A., *Muqāranah al-Adyān fī al-Islām*, vol. 3, p. 116.

Numerous instances of enjoining peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims are attested in the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the wise sayings and biographical accounts of the Prophet of Islam and the Infallible Imams, but the scope of the present study solely encompasses the Qur'anic view on the necessity of adopting a policy of peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims; it is to be noted that the instances of the Infallible Imams' similar wise sayings and biographical accounts would require another study.

'Peaceful coexistence' or 'religious coexistence' is an originally Islamic idea that is explicitly and variously accorded emphasis in different verses of the Holy Qur'an. It is to be noted that the concept of 'religious coexistence' was not fully known to mankind and it was the Holy Qur'an that frequently emphasized the concept and enjoined Muslims to respect it.

From the Qur'anic perspective, religious war and conflict arising from different beliefs, as reflected in some other religious traditions, e.g. the Crusades, are groundless and bearing grudge and animosity toward the followers of other religions is unwarranted. Similarly, treating others contemptuously is denounced.

The Holy Qur'an makes mention of some Christians and Jews who derided and declared one another infidels. They infringed on the rights of the other party and thus fanned the flames of conflicts:

The Jews say, "The Christians stand on nothing," and the Christians say, "The Jews stand on nothing," though they follow the [same] Book. So said those who had no knowledge, [words] similar to what they say. Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ (2:113).

1. Methods Suggested by the Holy Qur'an for Developing and Maintaining Peaceful Coexistence with Non-Muslims

Mention will be made below of the most significant of such methods.

1.1. The Holy Qur'an and Denouncing Racism

Racism in any of its forms has been denounced in the Holy Qur'an, since mankind is considered as the offspring of the same parents in this Holy Book and they are equal without any racial, ethnic, or religious considerations.

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God wary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware (49:13).

Equality of human beings is one of the significant principles of peaceful coexistence, since racism, megalomania, and humiliating other nations and religions have brought innumerable damages to all humanity.

Differences in color, race, and nationality are not indicative of superiority, but the Holy Qur'an says that differences in languages and colors are divine signs and serve but as means of knowing people; without such physical differences human life would have plunged into chaos.

Human social life would have been indubitably impossible without knowing people and chaos would reign if all human beings were physically identical. In such case, neither parents nor spouses would have been distinguished and criminals, the innocent, creditors, debtors, superiors, inferiors, hosts, guests, enemies, and friends would have looked alike – such a chaos!

Languages, colors, races, and ethnic backgrounds have been

divinely made different for the organization of human society. Humans are credited in the Qur'an by dignity and it is in the light of humanity that they deserve the divine dignity – vicegerency of God in the world. Humans from any racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic background possess the faculties for attaining such exalted rank. Such divine blessing is equally available to all mankind. Possessing intellect, understanding, and other particular faculties renders man eligible to serve as the leader of beings in this world and be endowed by innumerable blessings.

When your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth," they said, "Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?" (2:30)

It is reflected in the Holy Qur'an that human beings may not excel one another but for piety and God wariness. Mankind constitutes "a unified nation" and "a family of human beings":

Mankind was a single community; then Allah sent the prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed... (2:213).

Mankind is addressed in many verses of the Holy Qur'an – e.g. o children of Adam (7:26, 27, 35, 171; 17:70, etc.); o man (attested in approximately 60 verses, e.g. 82:6; 84:6) – signifying that such expressions are indicative of humanity as the common feature of all human beings living in different regions of the world. There have been differences among mankind in terms of language, color, race, and the like, but the Islamic perspective is that mankind has the same parents, Adam and Eve, and such differences may never alter humanity.¹

1. Abū Shabānah, Y., *al-Naẓām al-Duwalī al-Jadīd bayn al-Wāqī' al-Ḥālī wa al-Taṣawwur al-*

2. The Holy Qur'an and Struggling with Other Religions' Illusions of Superiority

A number of the verses of the Holy Qur'an deal with the bigotry promoted by other religions, unwarranted beliefs from which arise many instances of hatred and animosity against the followers of other religions. Our divinely revealed Book specifies the method employed by Muslims in dealing with religious opponents (being identical with religious coexistence and toleration in dealing with followers of other religions) and refutes other religions' unwarranted illusions and misconceptions.

Jews and Christians held that they were "the divinely chosen people" and they had established imperishable ties with the "divine realm". Paradise will be exclusively theirs since the followers of other religions did not deserve to be admitted to it! They held that the Jews and the Christians exclusively deserved veneration and respect and all other peoples had to pay homage to the divinely chosen people.¹

The Jews and the Christians say, "We are Allah's children and His beloved ones." Say, "Then why does He punish you for your sins?" Rather you are humans from among His creatures. He forgives whomever He wishes, and punishes whomever He wishes, and to Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and whatever is between them, and toward Him is the return (5:18).

And they say, "No one shall enter paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian." Those are their [false] hopes! Say, "Produce your evidence, should you be truthful." Certainly whoever submits his will to Allah and is virtuous, he shall have his reward near his Lord, and they

Islāmī, pp. 542-543.

1. Mujtahid Shabistarī, M., "Hamzīstī-yi Madhhabī", the *Maktab-i Islam*, vol. 8, no. 3, p. 37.

shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve (2:111-112).

The Holy Qur'an thus confronts arrogance and bigotry that lead to bloodshed and demonstrates their unfoundedness. It goes without saying that predominance of such unwarranted and perilous attitudes over any society will exclude them from universal peace and religious coexistence. It will be solely through elimination of bias, racism, and striving for superiority that ground will be paved for peaceful coexistence of religions and denominations.

There are no "chosen people" from the Qur'anic perspective, but superiority and grandeur fall into the share of people who humble themselves before Truth and show no resistance to it.

3. The Holy Qur'an and the Freedom of Thought and Belief

A number of the verses of the Qur'an deal with the principle that the nature of heartfelt beliefs and issues pertaining to conscience may not be restricted to compulsion. Making a pretense, out of compulsion, of believe in the tenets and injunctions of a religion may not be indicative of acknowledging them by heart and conscience.

There is no compulsion in religion: rectitude has become distinct from error (2:256).

And had your Lord wished, all those who are on earth would have believed. Would you then force people until they become faithful? (10:99)

The Prophet is supposed to impart divine injunctions whether his opponents believe or not:

And say, "[This is] the truth from your Lord: let anyone who wishes believe it, and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it" (18:29).

Had Allah wished they would not have ascribed partners [to Him]. We have

not made you a caretaker for them, nor is it your duty to watch over them (6:107)

Freedom of thought is another dimension of freedom. Man is divinely called to judiciousness, prudence, and thinking in different verses of the Holy Qur'an, bidding him to distinguish, through intellection, advantages from disadvantages and take steps toward deliverance from any kind of bondage, vice, and error toward perfection and freedom.

Soon We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real. Is it not sufficient that your Lord is witness to all things? (41:53)

4. The Holy Qur'an and Recognition of Minority Rights

Islam excels other religions in safeguarding the freedom, dignity, and rights of minority groups. Social justice par excellence is guaranteed by the Islamic state, not only for Muslims but also for all citizens despite their different religious, racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. It is one of the great advantages of humanity that, except for Islam, such ideal may not be realized by any religion or set of laws.

Religious minorities – similar to Muslims – may live freely and enjoy social rights as well as domestic and foreign security as per Islamic laws under the Islamic state. The Islamic universal policies on respecting the rights of other peoples and religions are explicitly declared in this verse:

Allah does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes that you deal with them with kindness and justice. Indeed Allah loves the just (60:8).

In other words, religious minorities or the ideological opponents

of Islam are supposed to be treated fairly and kindly so long as they have neither declared a religious war against Muslims, nor have they caused problems for them, nor have they driven Muslims out of their homes. Religious minorities and opponents of Islam are thus free to live in the Islamic society and enjoy civil rights so long as they have not caused troubles for Islam and Muslims.

In another blessed verse it is said:

Allah forbids you only in regard to those who made war against you on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them it is they who are the wrongdoers (60:9).

It is reflected in these two verses that the Islamic universal policy as to religious minorities and opponents of Islam is that so long as they have not infringed on the rights of the majority and have not involved themselves in conspiracy against Islam and Muslims, they are free to live in the Islamic state and Muslims are obliged to treat them fairly and kindly; nonetheless, in case they collaborate with other countries against Islam and Muslims, it will be an obligation rendered on Muslims to impede their activities and refrain from having friendly ties with them.

Religious minorities enjoy such freedom and respect in Islam that when such minorities living under the protection of the Islamic state carry out something warranted in their own religion but unwarranted in Islamic sharia (e.g. consuming alcoholic beverages), they are still protected by the laws so long as they do not make a display of what is unwarranted in Islamic sharia and the punishments stipulated in the laws of protecting religious minorities will not be applicable to them.

Further, commitment of the offenses unwarranted in their religion

– e.g. unwarranted sexual activities and the like – will be indictable and punishable by law and in this respect they will be treated similar to Muslims. However, the judge may submit them to the minority authorities to be punished according to their religious laws.¹

It is stipulated in Islamic jurisprudential laws that when two parties to a claim refer to a Muslim judge, he will be allowed to judge as per Islamic laws or “turn away from them”.

This is also attested in the following verse: ... *if they come to you, judge between them, or disregard them* (5:42).

5. The Holy Qur’an and Cooperation in World Issues

Cooperation is a requirement in social life. Social life and world order will not be possible without cooperation in political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Cooperation, as a principle acknowledged by reason, is emphasized and recommended in the Holy Qur’an. Its course is elucidated in the following verse:

Cooperate in pious goodness and God wariness, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression (5:2).

Striving for establishing justice, equality, peace, security, and development on a world scale are all instances of pious goodness (*birr*) and struggling with domination, exploitation, racism, and making any endeavors to uproot aggression worldwide are considered as making effort toward God weariness and the people’s willingness to act upon divine will. It is for the same reason that one should avoid any cooperation leading to corruption and injustice.²

1. Subhānī, J., *Mabānī-yi Hukūmat-i Islāmī*, p. 526 f.

2. ‘Amīd Zanjānī, ‘A. ‘A., *Fiqh-i Siyāsī*, vol. 3, pp. 461-463.

The more people pay attention to common principles, the more international understanding will grow; as a result, world peace and security will be safeguarded. Besides recommending people to seek common principles¹ and cooperate in God wariness, the Holy Qur'an grants Muslim men the permission to marry women from among the 'people of the Book' (*ahl al-kitāb*)² and partake of their food:

Today all the good things have been made lawful to you: the food of those who were given the Book is lawful to you, and your food is lawful to them and the chaste ones from among faithful women, and chaste women of those who were given the Book before you, when you have given them their dowries, in wedlock, not in license, nor taking paramours. Should anyone renounce his faith, his work shall fail and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter (5:5).

It goes without saying that granting the permission to partake of the food of the people of the Book and marry their women has been and will be the most significant preliminaries to cooperation and peaceful coexistence with them. Cooperation is not only a religious obligation but a human necessity. God created the earth and lay possessions in it but deriving benefits from them will be but possible through cooperation.

6. The Holy Qur'an and Welcoming Peace Offering

The Arab tribe of Banū Ḍamrah had concluded a non-aggression treaty with Muslims and the tribe of Ashja' had been allies of Banū Ḍamrah. Muslims were later informed that the Ashja' tribe, led by Mas'ūd ibn Rujaylah, had reached the vicinity of Medina. The Prophet sent them

1. Say, "O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah." But if they turn away, say, "Be witnesses that we are Muslims" (3:64).

2. That is, Jews and Christians, and later it was extended to Sabeans and Zoroastrians.

a delegate to know what they sought there and they said, “We are here to conclude a non-aggression treaty with Muhammad.” The Prophet had loads of date brought to them as gift and then sent a delegate to them. They said, “On the one hand, we will be unable to confront your enemies, since we are small in number, and on the other hand we neither have the power nor the intention to confront you, since our settlements are close to yours. Therefore, we have come to conclude a treaty of non-aggression with you.”¹

Offering the peace treaty occasioned the divine revelation of the following verse with the required instructions:

... So if they keep out of your way and do not fight you, and offer you peace, then Allah does not allow you any course [of action] against them (4:90).

7. The Holy Qur’an and World Peace

The principles of offering and maintaining peace have been established from the earliest Islamic times and thus the path to establishing world peace and peaceful coexistence has been paved. It is to be noted that peace lies in the spirit of Islam and the term *islām* is derived from the root *s-l-m* “to be safe and secure”; therefore, the Holy Qur’an calls mankind to be admitted to the realm of safety and peace:

O you who have faith! Enter into peacefulness, all together... (2:208).

‘Peacefulness’ (*silm*) is by far better and more sustainable than ‘peace’ (*ṣulh*), since it connotes ‘safety and security’, rather than the outward, transient peace. God Almighty commands the Prophet of Islam to take the opportunity and welcome the peace offer made by his enemies:

1. Makārim Shīrāzī, N. et al, *Tafsīr-i Nimūnah*, vol. 4, p. 54.

And if they incline toward peace, then you [too] incline toward it ... (8:61).

Peaceful coexistence is so encouraged in Islam that believers are promised to form friendship with their enemies through treating them kindly and peacefully.

It may be that Allah will bring about between you and those with whom you are at enmity affection, and Allah is all-powerful, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful.

Non-Muslims fall into two groups. First, those who drew swords on Muslims, expelled them from their homes, and, in short, made a display of their animosity, verbally and practically, against Islam and Muslims. Muslims are obliged to sever any ties with them, an instance of which is the mistreatment of Muslims by Meccan polytheists, particularly the chiefs of Quraysh. There was a group of those polytheists who committed such offense and there was another group that supported them. Second, there were Meccan polytheists who did not mistreat Muslims and a number of them had even concluded a treaty of non-aggression with them.

Muslims could befriend the second group and were obliged to maintain such treaty, if any, and strive to exercise justice. An instance of the second group was the tribe of Khuzā'ah who had concluded a treaty of non-aggression with Muslims.¹

The policy of supporting peace and peaceful coexistence in foreign policy is one of the wisest and the most progressive plans. The same policy is adopted by Islam as per which reinforcement of power leads to consolidation of peace and providing means of defense when needed. Peace and peaceful coexistence are so emphasized that even small groups are

1. Ibid., vol. 22, pp. 31-32.

enjoined to welcome peace and reconciliation. “Reconcilement is better” (*wa al-ṣulḥu khayrun*) is recommended in domestic problems as well.

8. The Holy Qur’an, Call to Peaceful Coexistence, and Attending to Common Principles

Islam is a religion whose call to mankind commenced with peaceful coexistence. Addressing the people of the Book the Holy Qur’an says:

Say, “O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah.” But if they turn away, say, “Be witnesses that we are obedient (to the will of God)” (3:64).

This verse is one of the significant verses in calling the people of the book to unity. The reasoning in this blessed verse differs from the one attested in previous verses (also in the same chapter) in which the call to embrace Islam was direct. It is to be noted that mention is made of the features common between Islam and the people of the Book. The Holy Qur’an is teaching Muslims that when they do not find people cooperating with them in accomplishing all their holy objectives, Muslims are supposed to seek their cooperation on the common grounds aiming at attaining their holy goals.¹

The Prophet of Islam, therefore, included the said verse, i.e. the universal declaration of Islam, in his epistles to the kings believing in God. The peacefulness of his call is reflected in his epistles written to kings, rulers, tribal chiefs, and other political and spiritual personalities. The epistles written by the Prophet for propagation of the Islamic faith or concluding treaties run to 185 in number.²

1. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 450.

2. For the Prophet’s epistles, see al-Aḥmadī al-Mayānājī, ‘A., *Makātīb al-Rasūl*, and Ḥamīd Allah

9. The Holy Qur'an and Peaceful Dialog

Muslims have been specifically instructed in the Holy Qur'an to talk to the people of the Book through 'the best disputation' and 'peaceful dialog' and establish their relations on the basis on 'common principles':

Do not dispute with the People of the Book except in a manner which is best, barring such of them as are wrongdoers, and say, "We believe in that which has been sent down to us and has been sent down to you; our God and your God is one [and the same], and to Him do we submit" (29:46).

Mention had been mainly made in previous verses of obdurate and ignorant idolaters' attitude and they were addressed, considering the force of circumstances; however, in the last verse, it was suggested that disputations with the people of the Book should be made more gently, since, having heard some of the messages imparted by the Prophets and conveyed in divine scriptures, they were more prepared to listen to the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

Muslims are obliged in the Holy Qur'an to avoid abusing disbelievers and idolaters verbally, since they resort to the same underhanded trick:

Do not abuse those whom they invoke besides Allah, lest they should abuse Allah out of hostility, without any knowledge. That is how to every people We have made their conduct seem decorous. Then their return will be to their Lord and He will inform them concerning what they used to do (6:108).

Islamic instructions are accompanied by logic, arguments, and peaceful methods. Quite upset by idolatry some believers abused

Ḥaydarābādī, Muḥammad, *al-Wathā'iq al-Siyāsiyyah*.

polytheists' idols verbally. They are admonished in the Qur'an for such misconduct and emphatically bidden to be courteous in their manners, even in facing the most superstitious and the worst beliefs and religious doctrines, since people tend to be partial toward their beliefs and deeds and mistreating them will further reinforce their attitude.

2. Instances Wherein Waging War is Warranted from the Islamic Perspective

From the Islamic perspective, waging war is but warranted in cases where adopting peaceful measures prove futile. In contrast to wars fought worldwide, personal objectives, murder, conquest, imposing one's opinions, and military intervention are not considered in jihad. Waging war aims, in the Holy Qur'an, at attaining particular objectives, some instances of which include the following:

1. Repelling an Assault

Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed Allah does not like transgressors (2:190).

The blessed verse explicitly indicates that so long as the adversary has not taken up arms, Muslims are not allowed to pre-empt any military assault. Further, Muslims are not supposed to indulge in fighting.

2. Eliminating Faithlessness

Fight them until faithlessness is no more, and religion becomes [exclusively] for Allah. Then if they relinquish, there shall be no reprisal except against the wrongdoers (2:193).

In wars other than Islamic jihad, parties to the war seek objectives like conquest, gaining booty, securing markets and raw materials, and providing certain groups with superiority over others; nonetheless, jihad aims at

acquiring divine contentment, supporting the deceived and those led astray, elimination of polytheism and idolatry, and acting upon divine commands.

Islam, calling mankind to embrace it as the last and the most sublime religion, respects freedom of opinion. People of the Book are thus provided with the opportunity to contemplate on Islam, but in case they do not embrace the Islamic faith, they will be treated as minority protected by the Islamic state on the basis of particular, but not complicated, conditions according to which they will live with Muslims in peaceful coexistence.

It is to be noted that polytheism and idolatry are neither honored nor recognized as a religion, but the products of superstition, deviation, irrationality, and a kind of moral and intellectual ailment that has to be eradicated in some way or another. Freedom and respecting the opinions of others imply that such opinions and ideas have some sound basis, but deviation, superstition, and ailment are not to be respected.¹

3. Fighting Those Breaking Pledges, Conspiring, and Attempting to Start a War

Will you not make war on a people who broke their pledges and resolved to expel the Apostle, and opened [hostilities] against you initially? Do you fear them? But Allah is worthier than being feared by you, should you be faithful (9:13).

In this blessed verse Muslims are commanded to fight those who broke their pledge and tried to send the Prophet of Islam into exile.

4. Elimination of Oppression

Why should you not fight in the way of Allah and the abased men, women, and children, who say, "Our Lord, bring us out of this town whose people

1. Makārim Shīrāzī, N. et al, *Tafsīr-i Nimūnah*, vol. 2, pp. 14-16.

are wrongdoers, and appoint for us a guardian from You, and appoint for us a helper from You”? (4:75).

Jihad thus seeks two comprehensive objectives: the divine objective of propagation of faith and moral qualities; the human objective of supporting the oppressed, abased men and women, and underprivileged children.

5. Defending One’s Land

Those who are fought against are permitted [to fight] because they have been wronged, and Allah is indeed able to help them, those who were expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, “Allah is our Lord”... (22:39-40).

People who have been oppressed and driven unjustly out of their land are allowed to fight oppressors.

3. A Response to Pope Benedict XVI

It was mentioned above that Pope Benedict XVI in a speech delivered in Regensburg on 12 September 2006 said that Islam is a religion of sword and the ever increasing spread of Islam as a consequence of exercising force and violence. The above serves as a well-reasoned response to him and those who misrepresent Islam and the Prophet of Islam as promoters of violence. What follows is a more detailed response to some mischaracterizations in his speech.

It goes without saying that spiritual messages may never be disseminated through imposition and resorting to exercising force, but it is in an atmosphere of peace and serenity that “the best disputation” will materialize. Islamic instructions and Qur’anic teachings must only penetrate all the chambers of human heart through logical arguments. It is possible to

rule human bodies through resorting to violence, but it will not be possible to rule hearts by resorting to such means. The ever increasing dissemination of Islam is explicitly indicative of the opposite of such groundless claim.

It is clearly reflected in the biographies and accounts of the Prophet of Islam that he strongly supported tolerance and moderation in domestic and foreign affairs. His good temper and tolerance are commended in these blessed verses:

... And had you been harsh and hard-hearted, surely they would have scattered from around you (3:159).

You are liable to imperil your life [out of distress] that they will not have faith (26:3).

Had the Prophet of Islam commanded his followers “to spread by the sword the faith he preached”, he would not have immigrated from Mecca to Medina, but he would continue to live in Mecca and granted the ever increasing requests of Muslims who were keen on fighting unbelievers and polytheists. Nonetheless, accompanied by a number of Muslims, he emigrated from Mecca to Medina and bade some other Muslims to immigrate to Ethiopia. The first verse about Jihad was divinely revealed following years of oppression and injustice done to Muslims and they were granted the permission to confront unbelievers and defend themselves (22:39-40).

The Prophet sought a peaceful environment, free from battles and bloodshed, to impart the divine call and Islamic teachings and instructions. Upon his arrival at Medina he thus concluded a treaty with the Jews and infidels in that city which was mentioned above.

In his epistles to the leaders of Christian and non-Christian lands the Prophet of Islam did not seek annexation of their territories to the Islamic state but he called them to embrace the Islamic faith. In certain

instances, he would guarantee their sovereignty over their realm and would finally warn them against divine punishment in the hereafter had they turned away from the divine call.

In his epistle to the King of Persia and the Caesar of Rome, for instance, he said, “If you fail to accept this call, you will be responsible for the sins committed by your subjects”, since when kings refused to accept the call to Islam, their subjects would be deprived of the freedom of belief and converting to Islam.

Muslim leaders have always enjoined Muslims to respect the rights of the followers of other religions and treat them fairly. They would never grant permission to their followers to take the lives of the followers of other religions. Having different beliefs may never justify hostile and violent treatment of others, but Muslim leaders render it an obligation on people to treat fairly the opponents of Islam.

From the perspective of the Holy Qur’an, instances of warranting military confrontation include the following: repelling an assault (2:190); elimination of faithlessness (2:193); fighting those breaking pledges, conspirators, and those attempting to start a war (9:13); elimination of oppression (4:75); defending one’s land (22:39-40).

Bibliography

The Holy Qur’an¹

‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ṭabbārah, ‘Afīf, *Rūḥ al-Dīn al-Islāmī*, Dār al-Kutub, Lebanon, n.d.

Abū Shabānah, Yāsir, *al-Naẓām al-Duwalī al-Jadīd bayn al-Wāqi‘ al-*

1. Ali Quli Qara’i’s English translation of the Holy Qur’an has been used in the English translation of this article.

Hālī wa al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī, Dār al-Salām, Egypt 1998.

al-Aḥmadī al-Mayānājī, 'Alī, *Makātīb al-Rasūl*, 2 vols., Yāsīn, Tehran 1990.

'Amīd Zanjānī, 'Abbās 'Alī, *Islām wa Hamzīstī-yi Musālamatāmīz*, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, Tehran 1965.

'Amīd Zanjānī, 'Abbās 'Alī, *Ḥuqūq-i Aqalliyat-hā bar Asās-i Qānūn-i Qarārdād-i Dhimmah: Barrasī-yi Gūshah-hā'ī az Mafāhīm-i Ḥuqūq-i Bayn al-Milal az Naẓar-i Fiqh-i Islāmī*, Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islāmī, 1983.

'Amīd Zanjānī, 'Abbās 'Alī, *Barrasī-yi Taṭbīqī-yi Mafāhīm-i Ḥuqūq-i Bayn al-Milal az Naẓar-i Fiqh-i Islāmī*, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, Tehran 1967.

'Amīd Zanjānī, 'Abbās 'Alī, *Fiqh-i Siyāsī: Ḥuqūq-i Ta'ahhudāt-i Bayn al-Milālī wa Dīplomāsī dar Islām*, Sāzmān-i Muṭāla'ah wa Tadwīn-i Kutub-i 'Ulūm-i Insānī-yi Dānishgāh-hā (SAMT), 2000.

Āryānpūr Kāshānī, 'Abbās. & Āryānpūr Kāshānī, Manūchihr, *Farhang-i Dānishgāhī*, 2 vols., Amīr Kabīr, Tehran 1990.

Balāghī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, *Adālat wa Qaḍā dar Islām*, Amīr Kabīr, Tehran 1991.

al-Banāwī, Ja'far, *al-Ta'āyush fī al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī*, Dār al-Khalīj al-'Arabī, Beirut 1999.

Boisard, Marcel A., *Insāndūstī dar Islām (L'Humanism de l'Islam)*, 1979), translated into Persian by Mahdawī Ardibīlī, Muḥammad Ḥasan, and Yūsufī, Ghulām Ḥusayn, Ṭūs, Tehran 1983.

Ḍiyā'ī Bīgdilī, Muḥammad Riḍā, *Ḥuqūq-i Jang*, 'Allāmah, Tehran 1994.

Ḥamādah, Fārūq, *al-Tashrī‘ al-Duwalī fī al-Islām*, Faculty of Letters and Humanities (Kulliyah al-Ādāb wa al-‘Ulūm al-Insāniyyah) Rabat 1997.

Ḥamīd Allah Ḥaydarābādī, Muḥammad, *Majmū‘ah al-Wathā‘iq al-Siyāsiyyah al-‘Ahd al-Nabawī wa al-Khilāfah al-Rāshidah*, 2nd ed., Dār al-Nafā’is, Beirut 1983.

Ḥamīd Allah Ḥaydarābādī, Muḥammad, *Ḥuqūq-i Rawābiṭ-i Bayn al-Milal dar Islām (Muslim conduct of state: being a treatise on siyar, that is Islamic notion of public international law, consisting of the laws of peace, war and neutrality, together with precedents from orthodox practice and preceded by a historical and general introduction)*, annotated translation by Muḥaqqiq Dāmād, Muṣṭafā, Markaz-i Nashr-i ‘Ulūm-i Islāmī, Tehran 1994.

al-Iṣfahānī, Rāghib, *Mu‘jam Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm*, Ismā‘īliyān, Qum, n.d.

Karīmīniyā, Muḥammad Mahdī, *Hamzīstī-yi Musālamatāmīz dar Islām wa Ḥuqūq-i Bayn al-Milal*, Imam Khomeini Institute, Qum 2007.

Khalīliyān, Sayyid Khalīl, *Ḥuqūq-i Bayn al-Milal-i Islāmī*, Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islāmī, Tehran 1987.

Khallāf, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Abd al-Wāḥid, *al-Siyāsah al-Shar‘iyyah aw al-Nazām al-Dawlah al-Islāmiyyah fī al-Shu‘ūn al-Dustūriyyah wa al-Khārijiyyah wa al-Māliyyah*, Mu’assasah al-Risālah, Beirut 1978.

Lājiwardī, Muḥammad Riḍā, *Guftugū-yi Tamaddun-hā dar Qur‘ān*, MA Dissertation, Department of Theology and Islamic Teachings, Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute, 2000.

Maḥmaṣānī, Subḥī Rajab, *al-Qānūn wa al-‘Ilāqāt al-Duwalīyyah fī al-Islām*, Dār al-Milāyyīn, Beirut 1973.

Mu'ādīkhāh, 'Abd al-Majīd, *Tārīkh-i Islām: 'Arṣah-yi Digarandīshī wa Guftugu*, Dharrah, Tehran 1998.

Mujtahid Shabistārī, M., "Hamzīstī-yi Madhhabī", the *Maktab-i Islam*, vol. 8, nos. 1, 2, 5.

Muṭahharī, Murtaḍā, *Jihād*, 3rd ed., Ṣadrā, Tehran 1988.

al-Qabbānjī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, *al-Madhhab al-Siyāsī fī al-Islām*, Wizārah al-Irshād al-Islāmī, Tehran 1984.

Qurbānī, Zayn al-'Ābidīn, *Islām wa Huqūq-i Bashār*, 5th ed., Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islāmī, Tehran 1996.

Shalabī, Aḥmad, *Muqāranah al-Adyān, al-Islām*, 9th ed., Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo 1989.

Subḥānī, Ja'far, *Mabānī-yi Hukūmat-i Islāmī (Mabānī al-Hukūmah al-Islāmiyyah)*, translated into Persian by Ilhāmī, Dāwūd and Khushniwīs, Ja'far, Tawḥīd, Qum 1991.

Zuḥaylī, Muḥammad, *Huqūq al-Insān fī al-Islām : Dirāsah Muqāranah ma'a al-I'lān al-'Ālamī wa al-I'lān al-Islāmī li-Huqūq al-Insān*, Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib and Dār Ibn Khathīr, Damascus and Beirut 1977.

Zuḥaylī, Wahbah, *Āthār al-Ḥarb fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, 4th ed., Dār al-Fikr, Damascus 1992.

