ISLAMIC PACIFISM:
AN ETHICO-THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE IN ISLAM

Sabina Abdulaev
Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel
E-mail: abdulaev@post.bgu.ac.il

Abstract: Islam calls for the avoidance of violence, if possible, or at least its minimization and use only as the last resort. The purpose of this study is to highlight the roots of pacifism in Islam; the primary sources studied are the main Muslim theological texts—the Qur'an and Sunnah (the Prophetic tradition). After analyzing these two sources, I claim that Islam and 'devout pacifism' are compatible. Islam calls Muslims to be faithful, decent, and good human beings, who respect the life and property of others, Muslim and non-Muslim. A model of the devout Muslim pacifist is not different from the universal model, but similar to that found in other civilizations and cultures. According to both sources, Islamic pacifism derives from human obedience to Allah, just as in other monotheistic religions that promote peaceful solutions to internal and external crises, domestic and foreign. This paper offers a new perspective on nonviolence in Islam, ethico-theological justification of war, and applications of jihad and violence as factors in managing political relations among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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Introduction

The number of studies on Islamic attitudes towards normalization with the non-Islamic world and the willingness of Islam to promote nonviolent relations with *kuffār* (infidels, non-believers, non-Muslims) is abundant. While these studies show that Islam favors peace over violence, they do, however, emphasize that, throughout Islamic history, Muslim's violence was caused by certain political factors, some, unfortunately, still relevant today.[1] Moreover, these studies mostly focus on just causes and principles of *jihād al-dafʿ* (defensive war), including instructions on the treatment of prisoners captured in battle, that were developed from the early Islamic period, contrary to *jihād al-ṭalab* (offensive war).

In several cases, as described in the Qur'an and Sunnah, a war is a necessary evil; both sources permit Muslims to go to war to stop oppression, to uphold justice, and to defend sacred places, while, simultaneously, prohibiting persecution, which is considered worse than manslaughter.[2] In fact, current moderate, mainstream Islam, *al-*

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[1] See, for example: Nathan C. Funk and Said Abdul Aziz, *Islam and Peacemaking in the Middle East* (Balder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009); Qamar-ul Huda, *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam* (United States: Institute of Peace Press, 2010); Uzma Rehman, "Conflict Resolution and Peacemaking in Islam: Toward Reconciliation and Complementarity between Western and Muslim Approaches", *Islamic Studies* 20, no. 1 (2011): 55-69; Nikmah Rochmawati, "Redeveloping Peace in Contemporary Islam", *International Journal Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* 20, no. 1 (2018): 87-108; Irfan A. Omar, "Jihad and Nonviolence in the Islamic Tradition," in Irfan A. Omar and Michael K. Duffey (eds.), *Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions* (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 9-36.

[2] See in the Qur'an 4:36: "Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.") and Qur'an 5:35: O believers! Be mindful of Allah and seek what brings you closer to Him and struggle in His Way, so you may be successful." And verse 67: "O Messenger! Convey everything revealed to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you have not delivered His message. Allah will certainly protect you from the people. Indeed, Allah does not guide the people who disbelieve."). All cites from the Holy Qur'an are from: https://quran.com/. William Morgan-Miller, "An Exploratory Study of Different Types of Violence Presented in Early Christian and Islamic Historical Documents", *Psychological Reports* 91 (2002): 522; Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "A Framework for Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam", *Journal of Law and Religion* 15, no. 1-2 (2000): 217-265. https://doi.org/10.2307/1051519; Muhammad Haniff Hassan, "Reconciling Islam and Pacifism: A Traditionalist Approach" in Nassef Manabilang Adiong, Raffaele Mauriello and Deina Abdelkader

Wasaṭiyyah, unequivocally declares that whereas offensive war is forbidden, defensive war is permitted by Islam and is even consistent with modern international law.[3] Therefore, these studies support an absolute pacifism regarding what is *ḥaram* (forbidden) for Muslims.[4]

This correlation between pacifism and religion has attracted the attention of several scholars recently; most of their studies on moral pacifism and religious pacifism focus on Judaism, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, and a variety of cultures, but not on Islam, due to the presumption that pacifism does not play a dominant role in Islam, as it does in other religions and traditions. This misleading assumption was derived from readings of theological and juridical sources by certain scholars who misinterpreted the texts as if allowing the use of violence.[5]

The term 'pacifism' does not have one specific meaning. Duane Cady clarifies that "pacifism means 'peaceloving'. It should not be mistaken for 'passivism', which means being passive, suffering acceptance, not resisting evil."[6] Richard Jackson stresses that pacifism "should not be dismissed as naïve, hierarchically inferior."[7] This belief has applications that span a broad spectrum: from 'passive pacifism', to 'nonviolence', sometimes even manifesting as seemingly contradictory 'pro-activity'.[8] As such, here, for the purpose of this

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(eds.), *Islam in International Relations: Politics and Paradigms* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 91-102; Michael N. Nagler, "Is There a Tradition of Non-violence in Islam?," in Patout J. Burns (ed.), *War and Its Discontents: Pacifism and Quietism in the Abrahamic Traditions* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 163.

[3] Malcolm Brown, "Reflections on Islam and Pacifism," *Australasian Journal of Human Security* 2, no. 1 (2006): 5-18; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'ānic Principle of Wasaṭiyyah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[4] Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, "Justifications for Violence in Islam" in Patout J. Bruns (ed.), *War and its Discontents: Pacifism and Quietism in the Abrahamic Traditions* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 122-160.

[5] Ibrahim Kalin, "Islam and Peace: A Survey of the Sources of Peace in the Islamic Tradition", *Islamic Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 327-362.

[6] Duane Cady, "Pacifism is not Passivism", *Philosophynow*, (no date), https://philosophynow.org/issues/105/Pacifism_Is_Not_Passivism

[7] Richard Jackson, "Introduction: Rethinking the Relevance of Pacifism for Security Studies and IR", *Critical Studies on Security* 6, no. 2 (2018): 155. https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2018.1472917

[8] John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), 12.

study, the broadest, basic definition of 'pacifism' is—the refusal to fight or use any form of violence, based on moral principles derived from certain ethico-philosophical or religious values. 'Pacifism' means striving for peace and peaceful solutions, without the use of violence.

A devout pacifist presents textual evidence of 'absolute pacifism' rooted in his faith. In the case of Christianity, a devout pacifist will suggest that the roots of absolute pacifism may be found in New Testament scriptures. Moreover, a Christian sees Jesus as an exemplary model of absolute pacifism because Christ commanded his followers to refrain from harming even those who intend to do them harm—to turn the other cheek: "[…] Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also… But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting anything back. (Luke 6: 27-28, 32, 35)."[9]

However, secular pacifists claim that only secularism (or perhaps atheism) enables the ideology of pacifism to endure. Even moderate pacifists, who follow the principles of nonviolence, agree that in order to establish justice it is sometimes necessary to use violence or, at least, to dedicate resources for the development of nuclear weapons solely for the purpose of deterrence.[10] In the case of war, they emphasize that civilians should not be harmed or killed.[11]

Islam may be not an absolutely pacifistic religion, but I have found several studies that stress that Islam tends towards a nonviolent approach, rather than towards absolute pacifism. Nonviolence stems from pacifism, opposing violence not due to moral principles, but rather in light of pragmatic or political factors. Like Nagler claims in his study: "Islam as a belief system with a specific scriptural foundation and an accompanying sacred history, took root in many different societies and cultures. In none, I think it is fair to say, did Islam as such repress any existing developments that were toward

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[9] Quote from: Christopher J. Eberle, "Religion, Pacifism and the Doctrine of Restraint", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 34, no. 2 (2006): 205.
[10] Stephen R. Rock, "From Just War to Nuclear Pacifism: The Evolution of U.S. Christian Thinking about War in the Nuclear Age, 1946–1989", *Social Sciences* 7, no. 6 (2018): 1-18.
[11] Reid Gordon, "In the Name of God: Must Religion and War always Go Together? Religion and War Have a Complex History", *RS Review* 2, no. 1 (2005).

nonviolence. There is no theological reason an Islamic society could not take a lead in developing nonviolence today…. ".[12]

A study of Muslim history presents evidence of prominent Muslim pacifists and movements based on various aspects of Islamic theology, among them: Sufism (Islamic mysticism) and the theologian, scholar, and Sufi mystic, Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273);[13] the creator of Suwarian tradition, al-Haj Salim Suwari (1523/4-1594);[14] Khan Abdul Jaffar Khan ('Badshah Khan', 1890-1988), a nonviolent resistance leader who fought against British colonialism in Pakistan and Afghanistan;[15] and Lamin O. Sanneh, a scholar and theologian from Gambia (1942-2019)[16] and Muslim scholar of our time, Jawdat Saʿīd (1931-2022) who was born in 1931 to a Circassian family in Deraa, Syria.[17]

For example, Saʿīd presented an intellectual perspective on the strategic application of pacifism for social change within the Muslim world, as well as its external, diplomatic use. For example, the first and best-known of Saʿīd's books is: *The Doctrine of the First Son of Adam: The Problem of Violence in the Islamic World* (1966), which describes his concept of pacifism in Islam. He pointed out the illegitimacy of tyrannical rulers in Muslim states throughout history who instigated the use of violence in the Islamic world, subsequently making violence the only method known to Muslims. One noteworthy interview was translated into Russian and published in

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[12] Nagler, "Is There a Tradition of Non-violence in Islam?", 162.

[13] Ehsan Ghabool, "The Studies on Pacifism of Rumi's Thoughts", *ICANAS* 38 (2008): 697-705.

[14] Louise Müller, *Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana: An Explanation of the Persistence of a Traditional Political Institution in West Africa* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 207-208.

[15] Easwaran Eknath, *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam: Badshah Khan, a Man to Match his Mountains* (Tomales: Nilgiri Press, 1994); Amitbach Pal, *Islam Means Peace: Understanding the Muslim Principle of Nonviolence* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2011).

[16] Lamin O. Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[17] David Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Muslim-Theology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 149-50; Jeffry L. Halverson, *Searching for a King: Muslim Nonviolence and the Future of Islam* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2012), 67-78; Abdessamad Belhaj, "Jawdat Saʿīd and the Muslim Philosophy of Peace," in Heydar Shadi (ed.), *Islamic Peace Ethics – Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Bade-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017), 231; Karolina Rak, "Ǧawdat Saʿīd's Thought within the Discourse of Muslim Revival," *Hemispheres* 31, no. 2 (2016): 33-42.

Islam-portal.ru in February 2011, Saʿīd tells an anecdote from Ibn Khaldun's *al-Muqaddimah* about a boy who had seen only one animal in his life, a rat, while sitting in jail with his father, who was an imprisoned Governor's clerk. One day, the father described a big horse to his son but, after his long description, the boy asked: "Doesn't the horse look like a rat?" The father sorrowfully said that it does. As such, in Saʿīd's opinion, just like the little boy in that anecdote, Muslims only know to how use familiar violence to solve problems and/or to rule states, being unable to conceive of anything else.[18] Therefore, his main claim is that Muslims do not understand that violence and war are not legitimate today in times of crisis, especially in the Islamic world. Thus, Saʿīd preaches a pacifism that is based on human harmony and the ethical rejection of violence, on one hand, and on faith in Allah, on the other.[19]

Thus, a crucial question is: What are the roots of pacifism in Islam? This study traces those roots in the two primary sources of Islam—the Qur'an and Sunnah—emphasizing the argument that Islam supports universal religious pacifism, based on its tenets of obedience and faithful reliance on Allah and common moral and ethical considerations.

This article is divided into four sections. The first section presents a model of the devout Muslim pacifist, which is not different from the universal model, but similar to that found in other civilizations and cultures. The following sections discuss pacifism in regard to the principle of 'the sanctity of life' and as it relates to *jihad* (holy war), war, violence, and peace. The discussion below emphasizes the similarity of the principles of Islamic pacifism to those of monotheistic pacifism.

Islamic Model of Monotheistic Pacifist

My main claim is that the Qur'an and Sunnah sketch the characteristics and behavioral traits of the moral, pious, monotheistic

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[18] "America can be Conquered not with Weapons, but with Thoughts," Islam Portal.ru, February 24, 2021, http://www.islam-portal.ru/communication/stat/100/1696/(in Russian).

[19] Jawdat Saʿīd, *Non-Violence: The Basis of Settling Disputes in Islam*, trans. Munzer A. Absi and H. Hilwani (Istanbul: Dar al-Fikr, 1993), 10; Jawdat Saʿīd, "The Conditions for Violence in Islam," Jawdat Said.net, https://www.jawdatsaid.net/en/index.php/The_Conditions_for_Violence_in_Islam

pacifist—what I call the 'universal monotheistic model of pacifism'—a positive model for pacifism, upholding the highest level of human moral and ethical standards (without the aspect of the 'fear of Allah'). The human being is a perfect creature created by Allah, (*sūrah* al-Tīn, Qur'an 95:4: "Verily, we created man in the best form"). Muslim theologian and writer of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), Ibn Kathīr, stated that Allah honored the sons of Adam and made them noble by creating them in the best and most perfect of forms, with the ability to distinguish between the good and the bad, both in worldly and religious terms.[20] So, by virtue of giving human beings wisdom and logic, Allah guides Muslims to be moral humans, as demanded by every previous monotheistic religion.

A Muslim must be good and kind to his parents, male and female relatives, widows and orphans, friends and neighbors, servants and slaves, Muslims and non-Muslims. Several references follow. According to Qur'an 4:36: "… do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and those (slaves) whom your right hands possess."), Muslims must be just and benevolent human beings. In addition, it is mentioned in the Ḥadīth that when the Prophet Muhammad was asked by a Muslim: What is considered a good deed in Islam? To which Muhammad replied: "To feed others."[21] In another case, he will not be considered Muslim: "The Prophet said: "None of you is a believer until he loves for his brother"—or he said: "for his neighbor"—what he loves for himself."[22] Moreover, according to below Ḥadīth, Muslim has three characteristics: "Whoever acquires the following three qualities will acquires faith: 1. To treat others as one like to be treated by others. 2. To greet everybody (known and unknown). 3. To spend (give charitable gifts) in Allah's cause, despite poverty."[23]

Also, an Islamic prohibition found in the Ḥadīth considers annoying one's neighbor to be a sin. It states that those who believe

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[20] 'Imād al-Dīn Abī al-Fidā' Ismāīl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr al-Qurshī al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*: http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/17/70.

[21] Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Ismāīl b. Ibrāhīm b. Mughīrah b. Bardizbah al-Ja'fī al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 2, Ḥadīth 5 and 27. For translation of Sunnah in English, see in: https://sunnah.com/.

[22] Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 1, Ḥadīth 77.

[23] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 2, Ḥadīth 9. For more see, for example: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 78, Ḥadīths 44 and 45.

in Allah and in the Last Day, but harm their neighbors, will not enter Paradise, because their neighbors had suffered from their wrongful conduct.[24] Another such narrative advises Muslims to care for their neighbors, even to feed them, if they are hungry.[25]

Muslim believers must also be role models for others, displaying their superior human qualities, decency, positivity, and nonviolent behavior. Allah obligates Muslims to strive throughout life to be good human beings, exemplary and honest. Moreover, Islam prohibits bad behavioral patterns, such as self-harm or hurting others (discussed further below), thus condemning extreme behaviors like suicide or suicidal terrorism, that contradict the theological principle that life is sacred. As such, Muslim believers and benevolent human beings must avoid bad behavioral patterns, like causing injustice and other evils and sins (Qur'an 2: 195: "And spend in the cause of Allah and do not throw yourselves into destruction and do good. Truly, Allah loves *al-Muḥsinīn* (those who do good)."[26] Most of the primary sins in Islam are committed between Allah and Muslims and between people: disobeying parents; charging *ribā* (interest), gambling, committing murder or suicide.

The Principle of the Sanctity of Life

The main factor in Islamic pacifism, as in other monotheistic religions, is that Islam considers all human lives to be sacred and precious, not only Muslim lives. Several verses in the Qur'an support pacifist behavior, as in Qur'an 5:28: "If you do stretch your hand against me to kill me, I shall never stretch my hand against you to kill you, for I fear Allah; the Lord of all that exists." and Qur'an 5:32: "…we ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land—it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind").[27]

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[24] al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 1, Ḥadīth 79; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 78, Ḥadīths 48 and 49; Abū ʻAbd Allah Muḥammad b. Ismāīl b. Ibrāhīm b. Mughīrah b. Bardizbah al-Jaʻfī al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, book 6.
[25] al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, book 6.
[26] Basil H. Aboul-Enein, "Health-Promoting verses as Mentioned in the Holy Qur'an," *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 3 (2016): 821-829.
[27] al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*: http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/5/32.

In his *tafsīr* on these verses, Ibn Kathīr explained that the story of Adam's sons, Qabil (Cain, the firstborn) and Habil (Abel, the younger brother)—humanity's first recorded murder case—was a serious transgression resulting from envy. Qabil fought against his brother and ultimately killed him. Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* emphasized that Habil was the stronger of the two brothers but had refrained from fighting; as such, Habil, the murdered brother, earned forgiveness for his sins.[28] This narrative is also found in Sunnah, stating that the responsibility for the crime is placed on Adam's firstborn son, Qabil, who brought murder into the world.[29]

A Muslim pacifist with impeccable morality stands on the upper level of Islamic religiosity. The Prophet Muhammad instructed Muslims that whoever is not merciful to all others (not only to Muslims), will not be treated mercifully by Allah;[30] thus, conversely, if Muslim believers avoid hostile behavior and show mercy towards others, Allah will reward them.[31] The below Ḥadīth propagates Muslims to be better human being and believer: "[…] the Prophet was sitting, and a man came and begged or asked for something. The Prophet faced us and said: "Help and recommended him and you will receive the reward for it, and Allah will bring about what he will through his Prophet's tongue.""[32]

Moreover, *sūrah* al-Nisā' (Qur'an 4:29-30: "Eat not up your property among yourselves unjustly except it be a trade amongst you, by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves (nor kill one another). […] And whoever commits that through aggression and injustice, we shall cast him into the Fire, and that is easy for Allah.") calls for the protection of human life and property. A similar message may be found in Qur'an 17:70: "And indeed We have honored the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with *al-Ṭayyibāt*, and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preferment").

Hence, Islamic pacifism prohibits the use of violence as a method for punishing others. For instance, it is stated in the Qur'an

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[28] Ibid., http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/5/27.

[29] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 87, Ḥadīth 6.

[30] Ibid., book 78, Ḥadīth 44 and book 97, Ḥadīth 6.

[31] Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad b. 'Īsā b. Sawrah b. Mūsā al-Sullamī al-Būghī al-Tirmīdhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmīdhī*, book 36, Ḥadīth 78.

[32] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 78, Ḥadīth 49.

that Allah only can judge offenders and sinners, believers and non-believers, but not human beings (Qur'an 10:25-27: "Allah calls to the Abode of Peace (Paradise) and guides whom He wills to the straight path. For those who have done good is the best, and even more. […] And those who have earned evil deeds, the recompense of an evil deed is the like thereof, and humiliating disgrace will cover them (their faces). No defender will they have from Allah"). Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of this verse is that Allah will reward the faithful, who do good in this world and perform righteous deeds, by rewarding them well in the Hereafter. [33]

Likewise, several references from Sunnah emphasize that it is only Allah who may judge and punish evildoers—not Humanity: "If anyone harms (others), Allah will harm him, and if anyone shows hostility to others, Allah will show hostility to him"[34] also, "He who causes harm to a Muslim will be harmed by Allah, and he who acts in a hostile manner against a Muslim, will be punished in the same way by Allah." Related by Abū Dāwud and al-Tirmīdhī who graded it to be Hasan (good)."[35]

In fact, the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (a collection of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and deeds) prohibits the killing of Muslims (the prohibition against killing non-Muslims is discussed below), for example, according to this narrative: "when two Muslims fight (meet) each other with swords, both the murderer as well as the murdered will go to the Hell-fire."[36] In the same *Ṣaḥīḥ* states "a Muslim is one who avoids harming Muslims with his tongue and hands. And a Muhajir is the one who gives up (abandon) all what Allah has forbidden."[37] A *muhājir* (emigrant) is who joined to Prophet Muhammad when he emigrated with his companions from Mecca to Medina in 622. The term hijra means be distancing physical or otherwise from evil.[38] A similar ḥadīth narrates: "Some people asked

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[33] al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*: http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/10/27.

[34] Abū Dāwud Sulaymān b. al-Ashʿath al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwud*, book 25, Ḥadīth 65.

[35] Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Bulūgh al-Marām*, book 16, Ḥadīth 1501.

[36] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 2, Ḥadīth 24.

[37] Ibid., book 2, Ḥadīth 3.

[38] Muhammad Khalid Masud, "The Obligation to Migrate: The Doctrine of Hijra in Islamic Law", in Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (eds.), *Muslim Travelers:*

Allah's messenger "whose Islam is the best (i.e., who is a very good Muslim?) He replied: "One who avoids harming the Muslims with his tongue and hands."[39]

In the same vein, Muslim preachers tend to act kindly towards animals (also Allah's creations):

> What is said regarding merciful to the people and to the animals—"while a man was walking on a road, he become very thirsty. Then he came across a well, got down into it, drank (of its water), and then came out. Meanwhile, he saw a dog panting and licking mud because of excessive thirst. The man said to himself: "This dog is suffering from the same state of thirst as I did." So, he went down (again) and filled his shoe (with water) and held it in his mouth and watered the dog. Allah thanked him for that deed and forgave him. "The people asked, O Allah's Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving any animate (living being)."[40]

Also, there is a prohibition against the killing of animals (except in cases of the ritual sacrifice of animals which, it is important to stress, is not a pillar of Islam). For example, it was narrated by Abdullah that the Prophet said: "A woman was punished because of a cat which she imprisoned until if died, and she entered Hell because of that: she did not feed it or give it water when she imprisoned it, and did not let it eat from the vermin of the earth."[41]

Thus, pacifism, morality, and belief in Allah are compatible. A pacifist Muslim can be a pious human who trusts in Allah, while also being a moral human being, who understands the severe consequences of violence. It may seem, at first glance, that an Islamic pacifism has a passive nature, due to the blind, fatalistic belief in Allah and His absolute morality and judgment. However, I have shown, and will further demonstrate, that Islamic pacifism also condemns impulsive action, preaches self-control, and supports the human right to decide how to act towards others—Muslim believers and non-believers, and non-Muslims.

Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 30-31; Tahir H. Naqvi, "Islam and Migration", *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (United States: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 1-3.

[39] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 2, Ḥadīth 4.

[40] Ibid., book 78, Ḥadīth 40.

[41] al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 39, Ḥadīth 206.

Muslim Pacifism and Non-Muslims within Islamic States

The tendency towards peace, touched by a measure of tolerance and a pacifist attitude towards the non-Muslim minorities living in an Islamic state (such as the 'People of the Book'—Jews, Christians, and Sabians [converts to Islam]—and other non-Muslims) appears both in the Qur'an and Sunnah. For example, can find in Qur'an 5: 69: "Surely, those who believe, and those who are the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians, whosoever believed in Allah and the Last Day, and worked righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."

The key attitude of Islam towards the 'People of the Book' is found in Qur'an 5:5: Islam considers them friends and Muslims are required to respect their women and may marry them: "[…] The food of the people of the Book is lawful to you, and your food is lawful to them. (Lawful to you in marriage) are chaste women from the believers and chaste women from those who were given the Scripture before your time when you have given them their due, desiring chastity, not illegal sexual intercourse, nor taking them as lovers. And whosoever rejects faith, then fruitless is his work; and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers."

As mentioned above, only Allah has an absolute right to punish Muslims and non-Muslims. Another example from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* tells about a *dhimmī* (a 'protected person' residing in a Muslim land) who offended the Prophet by using a rude play on words, not saying: "*al-Salām 'Alayka*"; nonetheless, Muhammad forbad anyone to harm him:

> A Jew passed by Allah's Messenger and said "*al-Samm 'Alayka*". Allah's Messenger said in reply—"*Wa 'Alayka*". Allah's Messenger then said to his companions, "Do you know that he (the Jew) has said? He said, *al-Samm 'Alayka*. They said: "O Allah's Messenger shall we kill him? The Prophet said – "No, when people of the book greet you, say "*Wa 'Alaykum*."[42]

A Muslim should be tolerant, make efforts to forgive and strive for reconciliation, even when assaulted by a non-Muslim. This prohibition against fighting or punishing also extends to *kuffār* who do evils deeds (see Qur'an 22:17: "Verily, those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Majus, and those who worship others besides Allah; truly, Allah will

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[42] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 88, Ḥadīth 11.

judge between them on the Day of Resurrection."). Islam instructs Muslims to consider their reactions, acts, and words, during delicate situations with non-Muslims. Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* says that Allah will adjudicate between the different religious factions on the Day of Resurrection. Followers of various religions, Muslim believers, and others, such as Jews, Christians, Sabians, Magus, and other polytheists, will all be gathered on that day.[43]

Jihad, War, Peace and Pacifism and Non-Muslims outside the Islamic World

The term '*jihad*' is not specifically used in the Qur'an to describe a 'holy war'. The most common meaning of '*jihad*' is that Muslims should be occupied with prayer and study, continuously striving to become better believers and human beings, and to take part in empowering their society; this kind of '*jihad*' is known in Muslim tradition as 'greater jihad'.[44] Moreover, actual 'fighting' is indicated in the Qur'an by the use of a different, specific term, *qitāl* (armed combat), which is a part of 'lesser jihad'.[45] In fact, there is no scriptural instruction for waging war or employing other means to compel non-Muslims to accept Islam.[46]

During the 'Meccan period' (610-622 AD), verses were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad demanding that Muslims be patient and refrain from using violence against non-believers, behavior that agrees with the definition of 'absolute pacifism'. Later on, the Prophet decided to emigrate to Medina (the *hijra*) marking the start of the 'Medina period' (622/3-630 AD). Only in the city-state of Medina, additional verses were revealed for the first time, allowing the Prophet Muhammad, who had become a political and military leader with a Muslim army, to unsheathe their swords against those who had

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[43] al-Dimashqī, *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr*: http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/22/17.

[44] David Cook, *Understanding Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 32-41; John L. Esposito, "Islam and Political Violence", *Religions* 6 (2015), 1070.

[45] Mohammad Abo-Kazleh, "Rethinking International Relations Theory in Islam: Toward a More Adequate Approach", *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 4 (2006): 44; Aydin Hayati, "Jihad in Islam", *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* 2, no. 2 (2012): 7. https://doi.org/10.7187/GJAT182012.02.02; Manisuli Ssenuinjo, "Jihad Re-examined: Islamic Law and International Law", *Santa Clara Journal of International Law* 10, no. 1 (2012): 1-34.

[46] Ssenuinjo, "Jihad Re-examined", 10-12.

resorted to armed hostilities against Islam, himself and the Muslims. During the last ten years of Muhammad's life, the Muslims in Medina focused on weakening the non-believers in Mecca by the temporary use of violent methods, with or without giving an ultimatum.[47]

Those 'Medina' verses did promote the temporary use of violence against Meccan idolaters. Ibn Kathīr wrote: "This was the first *āyah* [sign of Allah's existence and greatness] about fighting that was revealed in Medina. Ever since it was revealed, Allah's Messenger used to fight only those who fought him and avoided non-combatants. Later, *sūrah* al-Barā'ah (known also as *sūrah* al-Tawbah) was revealed."[48] These controversial 'sword verses' in Qur'an 9:2-6, the last *sūrah* revealed in Medina, justified warfare specifically against those idolaters who persecuted Muslims and endangered Islam. Those verses were soon countermanded by the Prophet in later Qur'anic verses, in line with the changed circumstances.[49]

Although the above argument may seem closer to a nonviolent approach in cases of self-defense, rather than to pacifism, the question of 'self-defense' remains open, due to its multiple definitions. There are still questions, such as: If and when is it ever the proper time to engage in a violent pre-emptive—or counter-attack against a threatening or an attacking enemy in self-defense?

According to the primary Islamic sources—the Qur'an and Sunnah—Islam considers war to be an 'unwanted obligation'. Ibn Kathīr claimed that in order to understand Muslim violence, one must read such Qur'anic verses in their historical contexts. After studying Muslim history and the aforementioned controversial Qur'anic verses, it is possible to conclude that the first people who initiated a war against the Prophet Muhammad and Muslims were the *kuffār* in Mecca. Muslim warfare was temporary and fought only with Allah's explicit permission and only in very specific cases, in which the use of force was the last resort, as stated in the verses under discussion here.

As soon as Mecca was finally conquered by Muslims in 630 AD, the Prophet Muhammad rescinded the use of violence in newly revealed verses, as in Qur'an 8:60-63: "[…] But if they incline to peace, you also incline to it, and trust in Allah. Verily, He is the All-

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[47] Abo-Kazleh, "Rethinking International Relation", 43.
[48] al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*. http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/2/190.
[49] Esposito, "Islam and Political Violence", 1070; Hayati, "Jihad in Islam", 7, 12.

Hearer, the All-Knower. [...]"). Moreover, several verses in the Qur'an specifically prohibit the instigation of aggression against the enemy (the *kuffār*), for example, in Qur'an 2:190: "And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly, Allah likes not the transgressors").

As in prior monotheistic religions, the shunning of revenge and murder goes hand in hand with accepted norms of morality and pacifism. The Qur'an prohibits violent reactions to unjust behaviors, prompted by anger and/or the desire for revenge (two emotions involved in any form of violence), as stated in Qur'an 5:8: "[...] Stand out firmly for Allah as just witnesses; and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just, that is nearer to Taqwa; and have Taqwa of Allah. Verily, Allah is Well-Acquainted with what you do"). Another verse (Qur'an 9:26: "Then Allah did send down His *Sakīnah* (tranquility) on His Messenger, and on the believers, and sent down forces (angels) which you saw not, and punished the disbeliever.") explains why Allah provided the Prophet Muhammad and Muslims calmness and empathy, so they might understand 'the other', since the Prophet had judged the *kuffār*. Pacifists avoid the use of violence and seek reconciliation for moral and theological reasons, as seen in Sunnah; such characteristics are compatible with a pacifistic state of mind and superior morality. A can see, for instance, in two Ḥadīths. The first:

> Whoever has (the following) four (characteristics) will be a hypocrite, and whoever has one of the following four characteristics will have one characteristic until he gives up. These are: 1. Whenever he speaks, he tells a lie. 2. Whenever he makes a promise, he breaks it; 3. Whenever he makes a covenant, he proves treacherous; 4. And whenever he quarrels, he behaves impudently in evil insulting manner.[50]

And the second:

> What has been said regarding (re)conciliation between the people in Qur'ān 4: 114: There is no good in most of their secret talks save him who orders *ṣadaqah* (charity), or goodness, or reconciliation between mankind; and he who does this, seeking the good pleasure of Allah, we shall give him a great reward.[51]

Starting from the eighth century, Islam divides the world into three domains: *dār al-Islām* (abode of peace), *dār al-ḥarb* (abode of war),

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[50] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 46, Ḥadīth 20.

[51] Ibid., book 53, Ḥadīth 17.

and *dār al-ʿahd*, or *dār al-ṣulḥ* (abode of covenant); each one should be understood as a product of its historic circumstances, motivated by political, cultural and economic factors. The first two 'abodes' (of peace and war) are neither named nor explained in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth.[52] However, the third 'abode', *dār al-ʿahd* (mentioned in Qur'an 4:90: "Except those who join a group, between you and whom there is a treaty (of peace), or those who approach you with their breasts restraining from fighting you as well as fighting their own people. Had Allah willed, indeed He would have given them power over you, and they would have fought you. So, if they withdraw from you, and fight not against you, and offer you peace, then Allah has made no way for you against them") was added by Shāfiʿī jurists to prevent wars with non-Muslim states and to diminish hostility and violence between them for pragmatic reasons, as justified by Islamic ethico-theological sources.[53]

This verse was revealed in the period before the signing of the Ḥudaybiyyah Treaty between the Muslims in Medina and the non-Muslims in Mecca in 628 AD.[54] Furthermore, the verse 128 says: "And making peace is better. And human souls are swayed by greed. But if you do good and have *taqwā*, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do." According to Ibn Kathīr's tafsīr, settlement and peace are better than parting in Islam.[55]

As such, non-Muslim states could be regarded as *dār al-ʿahd*, once they ceased to be *dār al-ḥarb* by entering armistice agreements with *dār al-Islām*. Again, the goal of the Islamic approach is to diminish disagreements and conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims. Moreover, Islam advocates for peace or, at least, for the

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[52] Wahbeh Al-Zuhaili, "Islam and International Law", *International Review of Red Cross* 87, no. 588 (2005): 269-283; Hasnan Bachtiar, Luciana Anggraeni, and Muhammad Asep, "Rethinking the Contemporary Discourse of Jihād", *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 2 (2019): 306-325. https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2019.9.1.306-325.

[53] Abo-Kazleh, "Rethinking International Relations", 45-46; Al-Zuhaili, "Islam and International Law", 278; Ahamat Haniff and Mohd Kamal Mohd Hisham, "Modern Application of Siyar (Islamic Law of Nations): Some Preliminary Observation", *Arab Law Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2011), 409-410.

[54] al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr:* http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/4/88.

[55] Ibid., http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/4/128.

normalization of conflict situations with minimal or no violence, as the proper path.

Nonetheless, there is a claim in Sunnah that Islam only permits Muslims to sign temporary agreements, valid for up to ten years, as in the case of the Ḥudaybiyyah Treaty; but that is a mistaken assumption. For instance, one can find in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* that the Prophet had no intention of signing a temporary contract:

> Allah's Messenger set out with the intention of performing 'Umra, but the infidels of Quraish intervened between him and the Kaʻba, so the Prophet slaughtered his Hadi (i.e. sacrificing animals and shaved his head at al-Hudaybiyyah and concluded a peace treaty with them (i.e. the infidels) on condition that he would perform the 'Umra the next year and that he would not carry arms against them except swords, and would not stay (in Mecca) more than what they would allow. So the Prophet performed the 'Umra in the following year and according to the peace treaty, he entered Mecca, and when he had stayed there for three days, the infidels ordered him to leave, and he left.[56]

Ibn Kathīr stressed that Allah only obliges Muslims to sign peace treaties with their enemies on equal terms; but, if those opponents continue their hostilities against Muslims, then they are permitted to defend themselves.[57] However, this Ḥadīth still emphasizes that Islam is inclined towards peace and harmony within communities, in the *umma* (the supra-national Islamic community) and between different countries. Sunnah teaches that reconciliation has great importance in politics: "It is not lawful to lie except in three cases: something the man tells his wife to please her, to lie during war, and to lie in order to bring peace between the people."[58]

Concluding Remarks

This paper offers a new perspective on nonviolence in Islam, ethico-theological justification of war, and applications of *jihad* and violence as factors in managing political relations among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims. According to the two sources, the Qur'an and Sunnah, a cornerstone of pacifism exists in Islam.

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[56] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 64, Ḥadīth 287.

[57] al-Dimashqī, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*: http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/8/61.

[58] al-Tirmīdhī, *Jāmi' at-Tirmīdhī*, book 27, Ḥadīth 45.

Islam does support pious and moral pacifism stemming from obedience to Allah. Muslim pacifists strive to be good and decent in their thoughts and deeds and distinguish between good and evil, as universally understood by all monotheistic believers. Devout Muslims help and feed their families and relatives, as well as needy strangers and non-Muslims, showing empathy and kindness. They are inclined towards peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as guided ethico-religious tenets, also in relations with non-Muslims.

According to Islamic sources, Muslims are encouraged to achieve peace treaties with enemies and to create Muslim and non-Muslim allies. Moreover, Muslim pacifists do not view 'others' (non-Muslims) as enemies. They strongly oppose the idea of using force in the name of Islam and faith in Allah, because Islam prohibits needless killing and considers life to be sacred and precious.

The original meaning of *jihad* is not 'war', but rather striving to be a good and decent believer. Even during the *jāhiliyyah* (the pre-Islamic period), when the Prophet Muhammad was establishing the faith in Arabia, he restricted the use of violence by Muslims to specific locations and minimal durations. After the establishment of Islam, the resort to warfare and the use of violence were significantly reduced, becoming measures of last resort. Instead, diplomatic methods such as ultimatums and mediation were preferred for resolving crises, both within the Muslim community and in interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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