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Towards a Pragmatic but Moral Approach: Rethinking Islamic International Relations

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Abstract

This study has dual objectives: First, to scrutinize diverse perspectives within traditional foreign relations theory through the lens of authentic Islamic principles, drawing insights from historical Islamic conquests, wars, and conflicts. Second, it aims to construct a realistic theoretical framework aligning with contemporary international relations concepts without contradicting historical Islamic State external relations. Emphasizing a non-jurisprudential approach, the study seeks to enhance understanding of Muslim States' relationships with other nations and societies. Rooted in Quranic texts, it establishes five key principles for the contemporary Islamic theory of international relations: global unity, peace as a foundational element, cautious construction and use of force for deterrence and defense, and categorical rejection of preemptive wars. The study asserts that peace is the unequivocal legal foundation for these relations, offering a comprehensive and realistic comprehension of Islamic States' historical and present external engagements.

Keywords

IR in Islam, War and Peace, Traditional Theory, Contemporary Theory, Preemptive Wars

1. Introduction

The legal underpinnings of foreign relations and international interactions in Islam are grounded in Islamic law or Sharia, with the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (*Sunnah*) being the primary sources of this law. Sharia, from which jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) is derived, regulates various aspects of individual and community life, addressing contemporary concerns. Notably, modern Islamic law places significant emphasis on international relations, making it one of the most crucial issues within its purview. However, the governing principles of these relationships

have been controversial over the centuries due to the ambiguity or conjecture present in some Quranic texts and related Hadiths (Kamali, 2003). The term "presumptive" reflects this ambiguity, signifying multiple opinions or interpretations that are not explicitly fixed, implying that the meaning is not definitively established (Al-Khan, 2007). This ambiguity is evident in different interpretations of Quranic verses concerning relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, leading to varied opinions among scholars from different schools of law. This complexity arises as each group cites Quranic verses and *Sunnah* to substantiate their positions, further compounded by the diversity in interpretations.

The unprecedented complexity of the matter is underscored by major differences in interpreting relevant Quranic verses and *hadiths* of the Prophet. Consequently, there arises a pressing need to reevaluate the theory of international relations in Islam and develop a perspective that aligns more consistently with and is suitable for contemporary circumstances and global developments. Such a perspective should encompass the Quranic call for mutual understanding, coexistence, and cooperation among nations and peoples, as articulated in the Quran: "*O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware*" (Q49, 13). Simultaneously, it should provide an understanding of the *jihadist* character that has historically characterized the behavior of the Islamic State over the centuries.

1.1. The Problem of Study

This study posits that the Islamic theory of international relations is both normative and value-oriented, founded on the principle that peace serves as the foundation for foreign relations in Islam. Simultaneously, it acknowledges the realistic dimension, recognizing that state relations are influenced by interests and power dynamics. This implies that a state needs the requisite strength to deter adversaries, assert its prestige, and promote and safeguard its interests. Consequently, the objective of this study is to tackle this issue by evaluating the assumptions of traditional Islamic theory, assessing its suitability for the contemporary era, and outlining distinctive features of a more coherent and harmonious alternative theory. It is essential to clarify that the intention is not to challenge established legal viewpoints or introduce novel perspectives. Rather, the aim is to formulate an acceptable theoretical framework that facilitates a more realistic and appropriate analysis of the state's external behavior from an Islamic perspective, aligning with the nature of contemporary international relations.

1.2. The Questions of Study

This study seeks to address the following questions:

1) Under what circumstances is there a need for a reconsideration of traditional ideas regarding international relations in Islam?

2) What historical conditions led to the conceptual division of the world into the domains of war and peace in Islam, and why is this division no longer applicable today?

3) What are the fundamental principles of the Islamic religion that should form the basis for regulating international relations?

4) How can the principle of self-defense be implemented in the context of contemporary Islamic theory while rejecting preventive wars?

5) Is the Islamic theory of international relations in alignment with the overarching principles of international law?

6) In what ways do the rules of this theory contribute to fostering more peaceful, less aggressive, and orderly international relations?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to formulate a contemporary theoretical framework for international relations in Islam. This framework aims to explain the external behavior of an Islamic state not only in terms of values but also considering the realities of the geopolitical landscape. To achieve this overarching goal, the sub-questions that serve as specific objectives are as follows:

1) Explore the general stance of the Qur'an on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims.

2) Understand the underlying premises and assumptions of the traditional approach and the theory of war, placing them in their historical context.

3) Explain the conditions necessitating a natural evolution of traditional concepts without questioning their validity.

4) Identify the general principles that underpin international relations in Islam.

5) Determine the key elements or rules governing the contemporary Islamic theory of international relations.

1.4. Importance of the Study

The concept of "international relations in Islam" is relatively recent, emerging rather late despite the practical implementation of rules and regulations governing foreign relations since the establishment of the first Islamic State in Medina. However, historically, this concept has been contained within the Islamic legal tradition, primarily in the chapters related to "Transactions" and "Pathways" (Bubush, 2010: p. 270). It gained prominence in the second half of the 20th century and has since become a focal point for researchers, academics, and politicians. Currently, it is a subject taught at numerous universities and scientific institutions worldwide. The interest in this topic has witnessed an unprecedented surge over the last two decades, particularly amidst the successive developments in the Arab region. The nature of existing conflicts, their causes, and the methodologies employed in their study have become intertwined with these developments, extending into and influencing various aspects of public life. This is especially true for those concerned with religious matters and their relationship with governance and politics.

Within this context, diverse jurisprudential opinions and interpretations have surfaced regarding the handling of foreign relations in Islam. Often, these perspectives manifest political attitudes and disputes rather than objective conditions.

1.5. Related Contemporary Studies

Numerous studies address the phenomenon of international relations in Islam and explore the dynamics between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. There is a wealth of contributions in this field, including works by Al-Khazindar (2015), Mustafa (1996), Al-Lahibi (2013), Dameiriya (1999), Hussein (2005), Shuman (1999), Shata (1996), Ferjani (1988), Al-Zuhaili (2000), Abu Atla (1983), Abdelsalam (1981), Abu Zahra (1964), Abu Sulayman (1993), Shaltout (1951), Al-Zahrani, (2005), and many others that are not the focus of this research.

Upon reviewing these studies, it becomes evident that they vary in their perspectives on the fundamental principles of international relations in Islam and the interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim nations and societies. Scholars like Nadia Mahmoud Mustafa (1996), Al-Sayyed (2005), Sheta (1996), Al-Zuhaili (2000), and Shaltout (1951) contend that peace is the foundation of relations between Muslims and others. They argue that the division of the world into two realms (one of war and one of peace) was a temporary necessity dictated by historical circumstances. Additionally, they assert that the use of force or a return to war is only permissible in cases of self-defense. For instance, Al-Zuhaili explicates, "*The basic principle in relations between Muslims and others is peace*, *while war is temporary*; *and the call to Islam must be made through arguments and evidence*, *not through swords and weapons or* '*Spearheads*'" (Al-Zuhaili, 1962: p. 93). Abu Zahra shares a similar viewpoint, stating, "*The basic principle of relations between Muslims and others is peace*; *this is the opinion of the vast majority of Muslim jurists*; *and the few who disagree do not ignore the original but look more at reality*" (Abu Zahra, 1964: p. 52).

In contrast, a second group, including Shuman (1999), argues that Islamic jurisprudence supports the combat principle. According to this view, non-Muslim societies have three options: Accept Islam, pay tribute (*Jizya*), or engage in combat (Shuman, 1999: p. 113). Al-Zahrani (2005), another proponent of this view, states about the division between the two worlds: "*The matter of jihad in Islam is based on the fight against the infidels*, *whether they start the fight or not*" (Al-Zahrani, 2005).

This contrast between scholars of the early Islamic periods and modern or contemporary scholars suggests important observations. Ancient scholars, particularly from the early period of Islam, divided the world into two realms: the realm of Islam and the realm of war. They considered the realm of the covenant to fall within the realm of Islam. Abu Hanifa assumed that, but Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah contradicted this. He said: "*Dar al-Ahed is an independent division in itself*" (Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1981: p. 475). Late jurists, particularly in modern

times, the 20th-century jurists, also focused on the federal realm as an independent realm (Abu Eid, 1996: pp. 57, 59). This focus primarily reflects the nature of developments in relations between nations or peoples, mainly governed by agreements to promote common interests. The claim that contemporaries align with the ancient jurists on the three divisions is incorrect, as the ancients did not consider the third domain alongside the two domains of Islam and war. There was likely no justification for the existence of such a division (the Third) due to the conflictual relations between the Islamic State and competing powers or empires such as the Roman Empire and the Byzantine State, and later the Crusades up to the colonial period. Thus, the return of contemporaries to the sources of the first two is mainly aimed at reconciling the ancient with contemporary facts, where Muslims must deal with non-Muslims in light of different facts, circumstances, situations, and realities than those in the early periods of Islam and even later, during the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman caliphates.

While these studies have significantly contributed to the development of the Islamic perspective on international relations, they tend to focus more on the "legal and ethical rules" or "legal and Sharia rules" governing this relationship during times of peace and war rather than on the general perspective from which these rules and provisions emerge. Except for the extensive research of the International Institute for Islamic Thought in 1996, none of the studies conducted to date—despite their importance and scientific value—have crystallized an integrated and specific Islamic theory of foreign relations. Such a theory could potentially serve as an alternative or competing theory to dominant theories in the field of international relations. For this to happen, there must be a theory that interprets and analyzes the external behavior of the Islamic State on the ground, not just as it should be.

1.6. Method of the Study

To achieve the study's objective, an examination of the primary source of Islam, the Quran, was conducted. The approach employed is objective, with the initial goal being the identification of relevant topics addressed in the Quran and the collection of pertinent verses. Subsequently, a thorough analysis was undertaken to elucidate the Quran's overarching perspective on the subject. An inductive approach was also adopted, involving the exploration of Quranic verses pertaining to diverse facets of relations between Muslims and others. This method aimed to uncover implicit meanings and ideas embedded in these verses and, ultimately, to establish the foundational principles governing the theory under consideration. The methodology unfolded as follows:

1) Identification of Quranic verses pertaining to the topic through reputable Quranic indices.

2) Analysis of these verses with the assistance of various interpretations (*Tafseers*). The objective was not merely summarization but rather the extraction of theoretical components or elements inherent in the verses. This process aimed to

examine the Quranic standpoint on the subject under investigation.

3) Derivation of commonalities from the analyzed verses: Following the analysis, the identification and definition of general concepts and patterns within the text were carried out. This step facilitated (a) the extraction of general principles encompassing the relevant verses, (b) the crystallization of the Quran's perspective on the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim societies, and (c) the delineation of the general features of the Islamic theory of international relations. These features include the promotion of peaceful relations, mutual understanding, and cooperation among nations and peoples, as outlined in the Quran.

2. Key Features of Islamic Theory

Islamic theory encompasses a broad framework integrating religious, philosophical, legal, and political dimensions. It is deeply rooted in Tawhid (the oneness of God) and the guidance provided in the Qur'an and Sunnah, shaping its principles in governance, ethics, economics, and international relations. Key features include:

1) Theological Foundation

The theological foundation of Islamic theory is based on the belief in Tawhid (monotheism), which asserts the oneness of God. This concept influences all governance, law, and ethics (Kamali, 2021). Divine sovereignty is another fundamental principle, emphasizing that ultimate authority belongs to God, with human rulers acting as His stewards (Hashmi, 2020). The legal framework within Islamic theory is governed by Sharia, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, which provide regulations for social, economic, and political life (Vikør, 2022). Additionally, the concept of Maqasid al-Sharia (Objectives of Islamic Law) serves as a guiding principle, ensuring the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Auda, 2018).

2) Political Theory

Islamic political theory traditionally revolves around the concept of Khilafah (Caliphate), though contemporary scholars debate its application in modern nation-states (Yılmaz, 2023). Governance in Islam is also based on the principle of Shura (consultation), which emphasizes the importance of leaders consulting with the governed in decision-making processes (Esposito & Yilmaz, 2021). Justice and accountability play a crucial role, as leaders are expected to rule justly, while the community has the right to hold them accountable (Kamali, 2021). Moreover, there exists a balance between authority and obedience, where citizens are required to obey lawful authority unless it contradicts Islamic principles (Hashmi, 2020).

3) Economic Theory

Islamic economic theory is centered around ethical, economic practices and social justice. One of its key principles is the prohibition of Riba (usury), which forbids interest-based financial transactions to prevent economic exploitation (El-Gamal, 2020). The institution of Zakat (almsgiving) serves as a wealth redistribution

mechanism, ensuring economic justice and poverty alleviation (Kahf, 2022). Furthermore, Islam encourages ethical business practices and trade, promoting fairness, honesty, and risk-sharing (Chapra, 2019). Islamic banking and finance, particularly through systems like Mudarabah (profit-sharing) and Musharakah (joint partnership), provide alternatives to conventional interest-based banking (Siddiqi, 2021).

4) Social Theory

The social structure in Islamic theory is founded upon the concept of the Ummah (community of believers), promoting a unified, moral, and cooperative society (Ramadan, 2020). Justice and human rights are also fundamental, as Islamic teachings emphasize equality, dignity, and rights for all individuals, including religious minorities (An-Na'im, 2021). The family is regarded as the core unit of society, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to maintain stability (Al-Hibri, 2019). Additionally, the pursuit of education and knowledge is highly encouraged, with an emphasis on balancing religious and scientific learning (Sardar, 2014).

5) International Relations (Siyar)

Islamic international relations, known as Siyar, govern the conduct of Muslim states in their interactions with non-Muslim entities. Traditional classifications distinguish between Dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam) and Dar al-Harb (the abode of war), though modern interpretations emphasize cooperation over conflict (Abou El Fadl, 2020). Jihad (struggle) is often misunderstood; in its broader sense, it refers to spiritual, intellectual, and social struggle rather than just military conflict (Bonney, 2021). Islamic theory also allows for treaties and diplomacy, facilitating peaceful coexistence and alliances with non-Muslim states (Hashmi, 2020). Humanitarian ethics in warfare are strictly upheld, with prohibitions against harming civilians, destroying crops, and engaging in excessive violence (Sachedina, 2022).

In brief, Islamic theory provides a holistic and integrated approach to human life, blending spiritual, moral, and socio-political elements. Historically, it has demonstrated flexibility and adaptability, allowing for different governance models across time and space. However, challenges arise in its modern application, particularly in pluralistic societies where religious governance is debated. Contemporary discussions focus on how to harmonize traditional principles with modern democratic frameworks, ensuring that justice, ethical economics, and human rights are upheld while maintaining religious identity (Esposito & Yilmaz, 2021; An-Na'im, 2021).

3. Traditional Approach and the Theory of Combat

The traditional approach stood as the prevailing paradigm for foreign relations in Islam, offering robust and lucid explanations for the Jihad and conquests that marked the Islamic State's extensive history. As an international relations theory, the traditional theory rests on two primary assumptions. First, it posits a division of the world into two realms: the Domain of Islam and the Domain of Infidelity (Kufr). (Kepel, 2003) Moreover, it asserts that conflict or war is the governing

principle shaping relations between these two domains (Abu Eid, 1996: p. 270). Second, the theory asserts that the primary goal and duty of the Islamic state (the Caliphate) is to propagate Islam and engage in *Dawa* to God. This objective should be pursued foremost through inviting people to Islam with "wisdom and good exhortation," guided by the Quranic injunction: "*Invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and good exhortation, and debate with them about what is better. Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, and He knows best.*" (Q16: 125)

However, if necessary, force or Jihad is sanctioned, according to Traditionalists, as directed by the Quran: "*When the sacred months have passed, fight the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, establish prayer, and give zakat, then leave their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.*" (Q9: 5) This, according to traditionalists, implies that disbelief itself may be, though not necessarily, a reason or justification for combat against Infidels and Polytheists. Advocates of this theory distinguish between polytheists, who can choose between Islam or combat, and the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), who have the option of choosing Islam, paying tribute, or engaging in combat. (Al-Razi, 1981: pp. 232-233) It is crucial to emphasize that this distinction applies to groups or states, not individuals. Islam governs the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims as individuals within a framework based on respect, cooperation, affection, and justice. (Q4, 135; Q29, 46; Q3, 134; Q5, 8)

4. The Division of the World into Two Domains

Proponents of the Traditional Theory fundamentally divide the world into two parts: Dar al-Islam, or the Domain of Peace, and Dar al-Harb, or the Domain of War. (Al-Zahrani, 2005) Muslim jurists do not universally agree on the definitions of these two domains. However, generally, Dar al-Islam refers to territories where Islam prevails, submission to God is observed, and peace and tranquility prevail. (Dameiriya, 1999: pp. 249-250) Dar al-Harb, on the other hand, refers to lands or regions where Islam does not dominate or areas under the control of unbelievers, which are inherently hostile to the Domain of Islam or Muslims residing within its domain. (Abu Sulaimān, 1993: pp. 79-80) Alternatively, it can be termed the House of the Covenant if a peace or truce agreement exists between it and Muslims, or the House of al-Baghi (transgressor), encompassing the entire state's territory, or a portion of the House of Islam that has entered a state of rebellion and separation from the House of Islam and its Imam or Guardian. (Shuman, 1999: p. 10; Raissouni, 2021)

The Hanafi school was perhaps the first to introduce this division and the concept of Dar al-Kufr in Islamic jurisprudence. According to Abu Hanifa, a region or country becomes part of Dar al-Islam if Muslims can reside in it peacefully and securely. (Al-Sarkhasi, 1971: p. 1253) For him, the determination is not based on Islam or disbelief but on the notions of safety and fear. (Al-Sarkhasi, 1971: p. 1253)

Consequently, the distinction between Dar al-Harb and Dar al-Islam hinges on the nature of the governments governing the respective territories. From this perspective, even Muslim-majority countries not governed by Islamic law are considered a house of war or unbelief. Conversely, countries where Muslims lack a majority but are governed by Islamic law can be part of the abode of Islam. (Ala 'al-Din, (d.t.)) In essence, the difference between the abode of Islam and the abode of unbelief lies in the rule of Islamic law or Sharia in the former and its absence in the latter. Thus, Dar al-Islam is a country where Muslims enjoy security over their lives and property, freely practice their religious rites, and no place qualifies as the abode of Islam if Muslims do not feel secure in their lives, property, and faith, even if its ruler is a Muslim, as perceived by proponents of this view. (Al-Sarkhasi, 1971: p. 2197; Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1961: p. 366)

5. Preaching Dawah as a Goal and a Legitimate Duty

Proponents of this theory assert that inviting people to God is a legitimate duty for the Islamic state. As Islam is a universal and final religion for all people, Muslims are obligated to spread the message of God with good advice. The use of force becomes necessary when countries designated as "houses of war" (referring to states and governments, not individuals) resist or combat the role the Islamic State is expected to play, grounded in the idea that says, "*And the Word of God is Most High*." (Q9: 40; Ibn Katheer, 1983: pp. 308-310; Al-Mawardi, 1982: p. 39) Supporters of this theory often resort to the science of the abrogator and the abrogated to explain or defend their position, a concept arising when one Quranic verse seems to contradict another, and the latter is considered as abrogating the former. (Sheta, 1996: p. 135)

According to this perspective, the relevant Quranic verses addressing foreign relations in Islam unfolded gradually in four phases, dictated by the evolving circumstances of Islam's development. As a result of this progression, Jihad or struggle emerged as the dominant factor in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. (Ibn al-Arabi, 1957: p. 302; Ibn Taymiyyah, 1983: pp. 102-105) In the initial phase in Mecca, Jihad denoted non-violence and personal struggle, focusing on the spiritual aspect. During this period, violence was strictly forbidden, even in self-defense. Muslims were commanded to forgive and pardon, as exemplified in Chapter Two of the Quran: "*Forgive until God comes to His command*." (Q2: 109; Ibn Katheer, 1983: p. 212) This non-violent approach was emphasized, demonstrating the early vulnerability of the Muslim community.

In the second phase, following the migration of the Prophet to Medina and the establishment of the first Islamic state in 622, the Quran began advocating fighting only in self-defense. This shift occurred as Muslims gained strength and found themselves under persistent attack from enemies. The Quran allowed defensive fighting within the bounds of self-defense. As Muslim capabilities increased, a subsequent stage emphasized fighting only those who fought against them, with a strict injunction not to transgress. The following verse in Chapter Two of the

Quran emphasizes undoubtedly and explicitly this point: "*Fight in the way of God those who fight you, and do not transgress, for God does not love the transgressors*." (Q2: 190; Ibn Katheer, 1983: p. 307; Q22: 39; Al-Tabari, n.d.: p. 160)

After the Battle of Badr, where the Quraysh persisted in attacking and causing harm to Muslims, fighting became a general principle. Surat At-Tawbah reflects this change in emphasis. (Q9: 36; Al-Tabari, n.d.: p. 364)

The rules and provisions contained in all these verses, especially those of Surah *AL Tawbah* (Repentance), endorse the continuous war against enemies or infidels, establishing fighting as a general principle for Muslims and the Islamic state.

Proponents of this theory argue that these verses, when interpreted in isolation and without considering the context or reasons for revelation, emphasize continuous conquests against enemies or infidels, making fighting a fundamental basis for foreign relations in Islam. (Canzano, 2019)

Despite these assertions, questions arise about the validity of these assumptions and whether alternative perspectives that contradict this trend can be formulated. This necessitates an exploration of general rules inherent in Islam and an examination of whether these assumptions align with the current reality of state relations.

6. Limitations of Traditional Islamic Theory in International Relations

Traditional Islamic theory of international relations faces several limitations that hinder its applicability in the modern world. One of its fundamental flaws is the rigid dichotomy between *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam) and *Dar al-Harb* (Abode of War). This binary framework assumes that relations between Muslim and non-Muslim entities are inherently adversarial, limiting diplomatic flexibility. In contrast, modern international law is based on sovereignty, equality, and peaceful coexistence, making such a classification impractical. The existence of neutral states, international organizations, and multicultural societies further complicates this traditional worldview.

Another major limitation is the overemphasis on *Jihad* as the governing principle of foreign relations. The traditional theory suggests that conflict is the default state between Islamic and non-Islamic entities, yet historical realities contradict this. Muslim states have historically engaged in treaties, alliances, and trade with non-Muslim counterparts. Moreover, the Quran itself emphasizes non-coercion in religion, as seen in Surah Al-Baqarah: "There is no compulsion in religion." The idea that disbelief alone justifies warfare is not universally supported within Islamic teachings. Today, Muslim-majority states engage in diplomacy, trade, and security partnerships, proving that war cannot be the default mode of engagement.

The ambiguity surrounding the definition of *Dar al-Islam* presents another challenge. Classical Islamic scholars disagreed on what qualifies a territory as *Dar al-Islam*. Some, like Abu Hanifa, argued that any land where Muslims can practice their religion peacefully should be classified as such, regardless of whether Islamic

law is implemented. This contradicts more rigid interpretations that consider Muslim-majority countries not applying full Sharia as *Dar al-Harb*. Given today's globalized world, where Muslims live as minorities in secular states and many Muslim-majority countries function under hybrid governance, such classifications create unnecessary divisions.

Traditional Islamic theory also fails to accommodate the modern concept of state sovereignty and international law. Developed in an era of Islamic empire expansion, it does not align with the post-Westphalian system based on mutual recognition and non-interference in sovereign affairs. The idea of *Dar al-Sulh* (Abode of Truce), which allowed temporary peace agreements, does not sufficiently address today's long-term diplomatic and economic alliances.

Another issue is the selective use of *Naskh* (abrogation) to justify perpetual conflict. Some traditionalists argue that militant Quranic verses override peaceful ones. However, many scholars assert that Quranic injunctions must be understood holistically, emphasizing peace and justice. The Quran advocates peaceful resolution whenever possible, contradicting interpretations that promote endless warfare.

The reductionist view of *Dawah* (Islamic invitation) as a justification for military expansion is another limitation. Some interpretations argue that resistance to Islam's spread warrants conflict. However, this contradicts Quranic principles that affirm guidance is a divine will (Surah Yunus). Historically, Islam spread more through trade, scholarship, and cultural exchange than through conquest. In today's world of state sovereignty and international law, forceful religious expansion is not only impractical but counterproductive.

Traditional Islamic theory also struggles with pluralism and multilateralism. Its strict division of the world does not account for multicultural societies where Muslims and non-Muslims coexist with equal rights.

In brief, the traditional Islamic theory of international relations, with its binary division of the world, emphasis on perpetual conflict, and rigid legal framework, is largely incompatible with the complexities of modern geopolitics, international law, and contemporary Muslim societies. While historically significant, this theory does not account for state sovereignty, international diplomacy, and the reality of multicultural, pluralistic societies. A reinterpretation that emphasizes peaceful coexistence, respect for sovereignty, and non-coercion in religious matters is necessary to align Islamic international relations with contemporary global norms (Abou El Fadl, 2020; Kamali, 2021).

7. The General Rules Underpinning IR in Islam

Islam, as the culmination of divine religions and a mercy to the world, as its followers believe, advocates for the establishment of societies governed by justice and equality. The foundations of relations between societies, according to Islam, are based on cooperation and peace, with the overarching goal of achieving happiness and prosperity for all of humanity. Therefore, the field of foreign relations in Islam

cannot be divorced from the fundamental rules upon which this religion is based. These rules, unanimously agreed upon throughout Islamic history, represent foundational principles and constants in Islam that serve the primary objectives of its existence. These requirements are:

Justice

The first requirement is justice. God sent messengers to establish justice among people and revealed Books that guide the realization of this goal. (Q57: 25) Islam commands the establishment of justice and emphasizes the necessity of discerning the truth. The Quran says: "*Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice*." (Q4: 58) Justice is a fundamental human value that Islam promotes, serving as the balance of God on earth. It acts both as a means to achieve security and tranquility among all members of society, regardless of their origin, race, religion, or color, and as an end in itself. The absolute justice and wisdom of God were revealed as He addressed His prophets and rulers to administer justice among people, extending beyond Muslims or believers. (Q11: 113) Muslims are thus obliged to uphold justice in their relations, be it among themselves, with others, or even with enemies. (Al-Sawaghi, 2011: p. 48). The Almighty states: "*O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is closest to being God-conscious. And remain conscious of God: verily, God is aware of all that you do*." (Q5: 8)

God praises those who establish justice and strive to achieve the truth, regardless of their religious affiliation. He mentions in the Quran: "*And among the people of the Book, whoever believes in it with a line that leads them to you, and to whom it is not, as long as you stand on it, that is that they say there is no way against us among the illiterates, and they say lies, to God*." (Q3: 75) The value of justice among all people is evident in God's decision against injustice, emphasizing its prohibition among His creation. In a Hadith Qudsi, He says: "*O my servants, I forbade injustice to myself, and I made it forbidden among you, so do not do wrong*." (Ibn Al-Hajjaj, 1991)

Islam not only enjoins and encourages justice but vehemently prohibits injustice, particularly the oppression of the powerful against the weak, the exploitation of the rich over the poor, and the tyranny of rulers over the ruled. The Prophet warned Muadh bin Jabal, saying: "Beware of calling the oppressed because there is no veil between it and God." (Al-Bukhari, 2002: p. 592)

Equality

The second requirement is equality (Ghanem, 2001: p. 91), which signifies that all individuals, irrespective of their origin, religion, race, color, or nationality, possess equal rights and duties. (Al-Lahibi, 2013: p. 7) They stand on an equal footing before *Sharia* and the law and have equal access to opportunities. Distinctions among them are only permissible based on piety, and any disparities that may arise are rooted in objective criteria, such as the exertion of effort or the performance

of righteous deeds. This notion is succinctly captured in the following divine statement: "*Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is* (*he who is*) *the most righteous of you*" (Q49: 13). This verse emphasizes that true nobility and honor before God are not based on race, gender, ethnicity, or social status. Instead, the truest measure of a person is their level of righteousness and their consciousness of God. (Q2, 177; Q3, 102; Q4, 131)

Equality holds immense value as it fosters harmony and coherence among members of society, transcending religious or affiliative differences. It serves as a guarantee for security and stability within the social framework. Conversely, inequality and marginalization can give rise to issues, tensions, and conflicts and, in extreme cases, result in bloody confrontations and wars.

Freedom

The third imperative is freedom. Islam, recognizing the dignity of mankind in both worlds, upholds the freedom of individuals from all forms of slavery, regardless of its extent. Freedom, in this context, signifies that a person has the complete liberty to act and govern their life affairs in a manner that does not infringe upon the rights of others. The Quran emphasizes the concept of individual freedom in various contexts, particularly highlighting the importance of free will and personal responsibility. While the explicit term "freedom" may not appear in the Quran, its meanings, connotations, and representations are frequently invoked. (Q18, 29; Q10, 99; Q42, 21)

The early years of Islam provide practical examples of this commitment, as seen in the interaction between Omar bin Al-Khattab and Amr bin Al-Aas, as documented in the statement of Omar bin Al-Khattab: "*When did you enslave people when their mothers gave birth to them free?!*" (Haykal, 1944: p. 45) The principle of freedom in Islam is intricately linked to the overarching principle of equality. Islam, in promoting equality among all individuals, underscores the importance of justice, freedom, and non-coercion, even in matters of belief. The Prophet never compelled anyone to embrace Islam. Moreover, upon migrating to Medina, he recognized the rights of the Jews of the Book, fostering a covenant and establishing normal relations with them. (Ramadan, 2007: pp. 88, 100) Legal rules were instituted to govern the relationship with them based on principles of friendliness, cooperation, justice, equality, and the pursuit of the general interest of all. (Hussein, 2005)

The Unity Humankind

The fourth prerequisite is the unity of origin and human fraternity. All human beings are considered brothers, belonging to Adam, just as they share a common Creator. God has affirmed the unity of mankind and advocated for human brotherhood. (Al-Khazindar, 2015: p. 11) The Quranic verse highlights this shared origin and calls attention to the commonality among people: "*People were one nation*; *then Allah sent prophets*, *missionaries*, *and warners and sent down with them the Book in truth to judge between people as they differed in it. And differed only those who were given it after it came to evidence*, *out of jealousy among themselves.*

And Allah guides whom He wills to a Straight Path." (Q 2: 213) While human beings are inherently connected through a common ancestry, they have chosen to differ through their own free will. (Al-Razi, 1981: p. 11) In God's grace, He did not abandon them to their individual perceptions and desires. Instead, He sent messengers with books to guide them, aligning their conduct with what would be beneficial and unifying for them. It is crucial to emphasize that differences should not serve as a source of conflict and enmity; rather, they should be the basis for mutual understanding, compassion, and cooperation for the collective benefit.

The underlying truth is that what unites peoples and nations far outweighs what divides them. However, discord may arise due to the prevalence of malevolence and selfishness.

The fifth requisite is the fulfillment of covenants and charters, constituting one of the fundamental principles underpinning the foreign relations of both the state and the Muslim community. The inherent nature of interactions among nations and peoples necessitates the establishment of agreements and treaties to govern and regulate the dynamics of international cooperation. It is imperative that Muslims, whether individuals, groups, or states, adhere to these agreements and charters, fulfilling covenants with both the strong and the weak. Explicit texts in the Quran and Sunnah leave no room for interpretation and unequivocally emphasize this principle: "O those who believe, fulfill the contracts." (Q8: 1)

The sixth prerequisite involves considering the public interest and maintaining a balance of international powers. The objective of relations between nations and peoples is to pursue common interests. In the realm of foreign relations, whether through peace or war, the Islamic State seeks to promote the well-being of Muslims, ensuring benefits without causing harm to others—an injustice that Islam categorically rejects. Islamic jurisprudence upholds a golden rule that advocates for the realization of interests without detriment to any party, prioritizing the prevention of harm over the pursuit of benefits.

Additionally, it is crucial to factor in the prevailing balance of power within the international system when making decisions related to war or peace. This consideration aims to achieve common interests, eliminate harm, and prioritize the preservation of human life and dignity, as emphasized in the Quranic verse: "And spend in the cause of God and do not throw your hands into ruin. And do well. Indeed, God loves those who do good." (Q2: 195)

The seventh criterion involves distinguishing between good and evil, categorizing individuals as either aggressors or peaceful, irrespective of their religion, color, belief, race, culture, or traditions. Human nature is marked by tendencies towards good, evil, or a combination of both. Some individuals may exhibit dominance of one characteristic over the other, while others may engage in both.

It is essential to recognize that there is no absolute good or absolute evil. Consequently, a crucial distinction must be made between those who commit evil and attack others and those who adopt a peaceful approach towards people. In other words, a differentiation between the aggressor and the pacifist is imperative. The

Quran acknowledges two types of non-Muslims, as elucidated in the verses from Surat Mumtahinah: "May God make between you and those who Aadeetm them love, and God Almighty and Allah are Forgiving, Merciful. God does not forbid you from those who did not fight you over religion and did not drive you out of your homes to be just and fair to them, for God loves those who are just." (Q60: 7-9)

These principles serve as the foundational rules upon which the Islamic religion is built. They are integral to the behavior of Muslims, whether individuals, groups, or countries, and must be adhered to without exceeding their bounds. These principles are obligatory assets, guiding every aspect of life, including interactions with non-Muslims, be they individuals, groups, or countries.

8. The Contemporary Islamic Theory of International Relations against the Backdrop of Traditional Opinions

While acknowledging the importance of the traditional theory in elucidating the external conduct of the Islamic State, particularly during the era of Conquests, it becomes evident that some assumptions underlying this theory, though realistic in the context of the Islamic conquest periods, may not align seamlessly with certain pertinent texts. These texts bear presumptive significance, featuring multiple interpretations, especially when viewed in light of contemporary international circumstances.

While numerous opinions challenging traditional assumptions have surfaced, attempting to present more fitting jurisprudential perspectives, they have not coalesced into a cohesive theory. A lack of an integrated theory hinders our ability to explain the external behavior of the Islamic state based on contemporary circumstances and the terminology utilized in the field of international relations. Consequently, there arises a need for a more apt theory capable of not only explaining Islamic external relations in concordance with modern circumstances but also addressing inquiries raised by traditional theories. This requirement arises not from asserting inconsistency in traditional opinions derived from authoritative texts—a precarious assertion that could lead to misconceptions promoted by adversaries of Islam, questioning the legitimacy of Islamic conquests. Instead, it stems from the recognized jurisprudential principle that fatwas or legal opinions evolve with changing times and locations.

However, the newly formulated theory does not introduce entirely new jurisprudential opinions; rather, it contradicts traditional theories while drawing evidence from the same Quranic verses that have received diverse interpretations. This theory is grounded in five interconnected principles: the unity of the world, peace as a governing and organized principle, building power for deterrence, utilizing strength solely for self-defense, religion, and land, and ultimately rejecting preventive wars. The subsequent section provides an elucidation of these principles, elucidating their legal and intellectual foundations following Quranic verses.

The Unity of the World

The first requirement revolves around the unity of the world. While some eminent jurists, particularly within Hanafi jurisprudence, have historically divided the world into two realms—Dar Islam and Dar Kufr—their rationale for this division is not rooted in the immediate occurrence of war but rather in the emergence of legal rulings and the dominance or absence of Sharia. (Dameiriya, 1999) Notably, scholars like Imam Abu Hanifa and his student Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hassan contend that the foundation of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims (the House of Islam and the House of Infidelity) is, upon scrutiny, centered around the call to Islam rather than a binary choice between peace and war. (Al-Kasani, 1986: p. 130)

Conversely, other prominent jurists, including al-Shafi'i, perceive the world as a singular entity and regard the division into two domains as a contextual or phased response prompted by repeated external attacks on Islamic lands. (Abu Zahra, 1964: p. 31; Al-Zuhaili, 1962: p. 76)

According to this perspective, this division was not a divine decree, lacking textual support in either the Quran or the Sunnah. (Al-Zuhaili, 1962: p. 193) Rather, it emerged as a result of the diligence of certain Muslim jurists in response to the circumstances prevailing during the early years of Islam, marked by conflicts between the Islamic State and other nations. Consequently, this division is viewed as a pragmatic aspect of jurisprudence (Abu Zahra, 1964: p. 14) subject to *ijtihad* and change based on the circumstances and data dictated by a specific period, era, or state of affairs. This shift becomes imperative when we recognize that the circumstances leading to this division no longer persist today.

Even when considering the justifications put forth by jurists who have delved into this area, it may not be realistic to apply this division to the contemporary world. Presently, Muslim countries maintain diplomatic relations with most nations globally, necessitating the application of provisions from the Covenant House. According to the majority of Muslim jurists, including proponents of the traditional theory, peaceful and cooperative relations should prevail under the Covenant House. (Al-Zahrani, 2005: p. 22; Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1986: p. 160; Al-Zuhaili, 2000: pp. 577-578) However, it's essential to acknowledge that this division has historical roots in international relations and law and still holds relevance in specific cases. In instances of interstate conflicts, a condition referred to as the "state of war" prevails, wherein each belligerent country designates an enemy state governed by specific laws. (Bubush, 2010: p. 270)

Peace as the Organizing Principle

The second requirement emphasizes peace as the governing and organizing principle, anchored in the belief that Islam, being a religion of peace, should dictate external relations within Islam and in the broader context of international relations. (Al-Qurtubi, 2006: pp. 310-311; Al-Baghdadi, 1968: pp. 197-199) The rationale for this perspective is logically and realistically justified. Firstly, it argues that making fighting or war the primary basis for Muslim external relations contradicts the cooperative and acquaintance principles outlined in the Quran. The

Quran, acknowledging the diversity of nations and peoples, explicitly rejects compulsion in religion and underscores the futility of using force in matters of faith. (Q2: 256) This perspective is further supported by various Quranic verses, as will be explored later.

Secondly, proponents of this view argue that if spreading Islam and protecting Muslim lives and property are justifications for resorting to war, these justifications become illogical when Muslims are permitted to advocate their religion freely and are entrusted with the protection of their lives and property. Observing the current reality, it is evident that Muslims, particularly in Western countries, are allowed to preach Islam freely and have legal rights to practice their religious rites. Muslims enjoy legal protection for their lives and property in most, if not all, Western countries, as well as in some other regions like Latin America and East Asia.

The relevant Quranic verses, alongside the motives for wars and conquests fought by the Prophet, indicate that the foundational aspect of external relations between Muslims and non-Muslims is peace (Abu Zahra, 1964: pp. 50-52), provided that the latter do not engage in actual acts of hostility against the lives, faith, and property of Muslims. (Al-Qurtubi, 2006: pp. 310-311)

This is in alignment with international law, which recognizes peace as the natural state that should prevail among nations, allowing the use of force only in cases of self-defense and when there is a blatant threat to global peace and security.

The Quran not only asks believers to embrace peace but explicitly condemns unlawful wars waged for national interests, deeming such actions as influenced by Satan. (Q2: 208) It prohibits Muslims from fighting those who do not engage in hostilities and simultaneously encourages the establishment of cooperative relations and peace with them. (Q4: 90) These Qur'anic verses form a set of clear rulings and rules indicating that peace is the governing basis and the organizing element for external relations in Islam. (Sheta, 1996: p. 151)

Constructing Strength for Deterrence

The third requirement emphasizes the construction of strength for deterrence. Islam advocates building material strength in various forms, with the primary goal of deterrence, self-defense, religious protection, and land safeguarding. The Quran explicitly commands Muslims to develop the necessary capabilities to achieve these objectives. The overarching objective is to deter enemies and safeguard the "selves" and the country from aggression rather than seeking hegemony, tyranny, or the imposition of ideas and policies. The authority to determine this lies with the guardian, not the public, regardless of their affairs. In the Quran, God states: "*Prepare against them what you can of power, including steeds terrify by the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them you know not God teach them and what you spend nothing in the way of Allah provide you and you do not do wrong.*" (Q8: 60)

While the immediate context of the verse pertains to the early periods of fighting in Islam, the broader meaning applies to Muslims at all times and places.

Muslims are urged to build strength and arm themselves with the best and most modern weapons available, not only as a deterrent but also to command respect for the just causes they advocate. The term "fear" in this context means deterring enemies and preventing their aggression. (Al-Tabari, n.d.: p. 274) Consequently, the development of strength and capabilities should serve as a means not only to avoid wars and conflicts (in terms of deterrence) but also to achieve peace and stability when needed. This is evident in God's command to believers in the subsequent verse, immediately after discussing preparation, to be prepared for peace if the other side expresses a desire for it: "And if they deviate to peace, then obey it and entrust it to God." (Q8: 61; Al-Tabari, n.d.: p. 278; Ibn Katheer, 1983: p. 426)

While Muslims must be prepared for Jihad and legitimate fighting if imposed upon them, they are also required to be prepared for peace, even during conflict, if the other side expresses a willingness for it. Fighting is not an end in itself; it is a right and a legitimate duty for self-defense and for establishing a peace based on justice and truth—not a peace that involves waiving legitimate rights or religious sanctities. Consequently, there is a direct command from God for Muslims to consider the option of peace if the enemy is willing to halt the war and establish peace. Muslims are instructed to pursue peace even if they are uncertain about the enemy's intentions. In its entirety, this signifies that one of the goals of building power is to achieve peace, not only as a priority according to Islamic teachings but also as the legitimate, governing, and regulating basis for relations between states. This aligns with the investigation and application of the Quranic verse that underscores this principle. (Q2: 190; Reda, 1973: pp. 268-269)

Strict Restrictions on Force

The fourth requirement outlines the stringent conditions for the use of force in Islam, emphasizing that Islam places very strict restrictions on the application of force and coercion. Quranic verses addressing the issue of fighting enemies are not absolute. For instance, the Quran states: "*And fight them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have Turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they* (*first*) *fight you there; but if they fight you, fight them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith.*" (Q2: 191) This verse, narrating events post the Pact of Hudaybiyya[1] in the sixth year of the Hijra, underscores that Muslims, despite being stronger and more influential, did not misuse their power and adhere to the limits set by God. (Farman & Yucel, 2023; Al-Zamakhshari, 2009: p. 117) The verse and related ones, especially those in Surat al-Tawbah, explicitly state the reasons for allowing Muslims to resort to force. These reasons are limited to cases such as actual assault against Muslims, producing the Messenger from

[1]The Pact of Hudaybiyya, also known as the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, was a pivotal agreement signed in 628 between Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh tribe of Mecca. The treaty was a significant turning point in early Islamic history for several reasons. It marked the first time the Quraysh recognized the Muslim community as a legitimate political entity. Though initially seen as a setback by some Muslims, the treaty ultimately proved to be a strategic advantage for the Muslims. The ten-year truce allowed them to focus on internal development and strengthen their position. They also gained valuable experience in diplomacy and negotiation.

Makkah, breaching treaties, supporting non-Muslims financially against Muslims, and preventing Muslims from entering the Sacred House. (Al-Qurtubi, 2006: p. 78; Al-Shanqeeti, 1983: pp. 429-431) None of these reasons implies disbelief or polytheism as a basis for Jihad or fighting.

The motives of Prophet Muhammad in his conquests and battles further support this belief, as they were responses to direct aggression or hidden aggressive intentions against Muslims. Despite these legitimate reasons, the Prophet always called on his enemies to change their behavior and adopt peaceful stances. Coercive means, such as fighting, do not contradict Islam's status as a religion of peace; instead, they emphasize the defense of truth and justice.

Islam permits the use of force in self-defense but sets clear limits, following the principle of likeness or equal use of force. (Q2: 194) Muslims are commanded to respond to aggression to the same extent to which they were violated, ensuring proportionality. Despite this, Islam emphasizes restraint and encourages the use of force only as a last resort. Force, being a potent and destructive tool, should be employed solely for self-defense, religion, and land, without resorting to killing, intimidation, or injustice. (Ali, 1986: p. 81)

Rejection of Retaliatory and Preventive Wars

The fifth requirement underscores the rejection of retaliatory and preventive wars in Islam. While the Quran advocates the use of force in self-defense, for religion, or when a country is under occupation, it explicitly prohibits seeking revenge. An incident in the sixth year of the Hijra, where polytheists cruelly prevented Muslims from entering the Grand Mosque, serves as an example. Despite the desire for revenge by some Muslims, the Quran emphasizes that aggression based on hatred or revenge is unjustifiable. (Al-Qurtubi, 2006: p. 110) The verse states, "*Fight for the cause of God those who fight you, and do not transgress, for God does not love the transgressors.*" (Q2: 190)

This ruling remains steadfast and has not been abrogated (Al-Tabari, n.d.: p. 195; Sheta, 1996: p. 147), making it clear that preventive wars are considered aggression.

Claims of abrogation to argue for the duty to fight unbelievers contradict the Quran's explicit statements and the practice of the Prophet during his prophethood.

The Islamic theory of international relations, rooted in relevant Quranic verses, fundamentally rests on the unity of the world. It posits that peace is the governing and organizing principle for the external relations of the Islamic state. Peace is not only the origin but also a primary goal of international interactions in Islam. While the use of force is permissible in specific cases of self-defense, defending religion, and responding to aggression, it must be the last resort when pursuing national goals or interests.

Islam does not forbid possessing necessary power and building capabilities; instead, it encourages Muslims to be prepared for defense and deterrence. The Quran rejects aggression and instructs Muslims to establish cooperative and good neighborly relations with non-Muslims. (Q60: 8) Muslims are required to deal with kindness, equality, and fairness with their enemies unless they actively seek

to harm or destroy Muslim beliefs. The Islamic theory of international relations, as defined by Quranic verses and the practices of the Prophet, emphasizes justice, equity, and kindness in dealings with others.

9. Conclusion

This study operates under the premise that the theory of international relations in Islam is a normative theory of value, with the fundamental belief that peace constitutes the foundation of foreign relations in Islam. However, it also acknowledges the realism inherent in these relationships, acknowledging their ties to interests and power dynamics. The key findings of the study are outlined as follows:

1) Dominance of Traditional Theory: Historically, the traditional theory has exerted the most significant influence on the practice and interpretation of external relations in Islam. It has provided crucial theoretical and practical explanations, particularly during the period of Islamic Conquests, representing an *ijtihad* reflecting the conflicts of the Islamic state with its adversaries.

2) Critiques of Traditional Theory: The traditional theory has faced substantial criticism, not only for its static nature that disregards changes in international relations and the unprecedented phenomenon of interdependence but also for its origin in the assumption that the relations between Islamic and non-Islamic countries are inherently conflictual.

3) Need for Modification: The study, guided by Quranic texts, identifies that certain assumptions or jurisprudential aspects of the traditional theory are no longer realistic and therefore require modification. The circumstances that gave rise to these interpretations are deemed obsolete in contemporary international interactions.

4) Contemporary Theoretical Framework: While this doesn't necessarily invalidate traditional views, there is a call for a contemporary theoretical framework aligned with the broader objectives of Islamic law. This framework could serve as an alternative or a valuable challenge to current dominant theories, including realism centered on power and devoid of attention to values and liberalism focused on economic interests with diminishing concern for values.

5) Emergence of Real Value Theory: Based on Quranic texts, the study proposes a new theoretical framework termed "real value theory." This framework rests on five principles:

- Unity of the world, rejecting its division into two domains.
- Peace is the governing basis for external relations in Islam.
- Building strength for deterrence, defense, and prevention of aggression.
- Sharia restrictions on the use of force.
- Rejection of preemptive wars.

6) Limitations on the Use of Force: Regardless of justifications for resorting to force or fighting, the study emphasizes that Muslims are not permitted to employ violence without restrictions. Islam's ethos of tolerance condemns the killing of the innocent as a grave sin unjustifiable under any circumstances. This underscores

the peaceful nature of Islam, emphasizing values and morality in international relations.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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