

Peaceful Coexistence according to Islam

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Introduction

By nature, man is a social creature. To meet his needs, he has to live in society. As the population of the earth grows, human needs augment. This may lead to clashes of interest. Experience has taught human beings that they can achieve their ends better in a peaceful and cooperative atmosphere. From the two bloody and devastating world wars in the 20th century, humanity learned a great lesson: efforts must be put into promotion of friendly relations and cessation of hostilities. Since then, a new term was introduced to political literature; peaceful coexistence. It was promoted to a high legal status gradually appearing in international legal documents though not in UN Human Charter. In this paper, we investigate the status of this notion in international law and Islamic view. We shall confine our discussion to central essential issues to cope with the limitations of this work.

Part one: Peaceful Coexistence in International Law

Chapter 1: Historical Background

The term peaceful coexistence belongs to international law but has no long history in the literature. It was first introduced in the beginning of the 20th century. Discussions about it flourished after the Second World War and the establishment of United Nations Organization. It is not mentioned in

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the UN Charter but in successive documents it occurs depicting the will to avoid violence and war.

War is as old as human life on this globe. It has always been detested because of the bloodshed, destruction, and wide-range injustice it brings about. Wise men considered it a great hindrance to natural progress of societies¹. Historical documents available to us now show that at the advent of history, people lived in isolation. Small groups of people bore hostile relations to one another. Each group tried to overcome the other one and destroy it. War and contract were the only known forms of encounter of these groups². In the ancient time, wild wars, bloody carnage, torture, execution of POWs, and fiercest punishment of defeated war lords happily reined. Up to the fourth century BC, peace treaties were usually temporary. This fact indicates that war was the normal status.³ As to the Middle Ages, it is worth mentioning that the collapse of the grand Roman Empire in the fourth century and the emergence of the two fractions, the Eastern Rome and the Western Rome, and the consequent collapse of the latter mark the beginning of the Middle Ages. Then the new countries emerged on the European continent. Two grand occurrences constitute the main characteristic feature of the Middle Ages; the Crusades and the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants which lasted for 30 years⁴. It goes without saying that in that epoch, talk of peaceful coexistence could have been but nonsense. War was the rule and peace the exception. That was the status quo until peace conferences of the Netherlands were held. The first conference in 1899 and the second one in 1907 promised the integration of a different future. In 1920, the League of Nations was established. Absence of America from this convention, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1934, and the failure of great powers that led the League of Nations in stopping these invasions constituted blows hard enough to do away with the pact⁵. The failure of the League of Nations as an experience had a collateral affect; suitable grounds for the notion of peaceful coexistence were paved. Between the two world wars, local conventions barring resort to use of force emerged with little or

1. Kariminia Mohammad, *Peaceful coexistence in Islam and International Relations*, P.41.

2. Matindaftari, Ahmad, *international relations since antiquity up to UNO*, P.169.

3. Ziaibigdeli, Mohamad Reza, *the laws of war*, P.1-2.

4. Kariminia Mohammad, *Peaceful coexistence in Islam and International Relations*, P.49.

5. Zand, Fereydun, *Iran and internationally community*, P.64.

no impact because they lacked sufficient executive force. It was only after the establishment of United Nations Organization in the post-World War II period that resort to war and threatening to do so were banned hence a milestone in the path to peaceful coexistence. When the two superpowers yielded to this principle, especially after the Soviet leader Khrushchev subscribed to it, the notion of peaceful coexistence grew to the level of an ideal.

Chapter 2; Definition of the Principle of Coexistence

A principle is a legal rule applicable to a wide range of cases or a genuine general norm that states must implement in foreign relations¹. In order to define the principle of coexistence and determine its foundations, we should refer to legal rules. Irrespective of the social, economic, and political systems states have and policies they pursue, they are charged with the responsibility to cooperate for the promotion of international organizations and to set up necessary instruments for the realization of the ideals set in the United Nations' Charter. They should cooperate in the peaceful settlement of disputes among states. The developments in the international community since the San Francisco conference and the overall international legal regime should be taken into account in the determination and enumeration of the ingredients of the principle of coexistence². Coexistence among nations and religions constitute the foundation stone of the principle of peaceful coexistence. Lawyers in different countries and international organizations have studied the different aspects of peaceful coexistence. The Association for International Law formed a committee in charge of studying legal aspects of coexistence in compliance with the final resolution of the Dubrovnik Conference of 1956. This comity presented a draft statement containing 16 clauses determining the foundations of peaceful coexistence. This report was ratified in Tokyo Conference of the Association of International Law in 1964. The outcome of investigations and studies carried out for around a decade in various organs of the United Nations organization about the principles of international law in relation to friendly relations and cooperation among states was presented to the 25th session of the General Assembly on October 24, 1970. The following seven clauses were agreed upon.

- Commitment of the states to avoid using military force against the political independence or territorial integrity of other states and any threats to do so

1. Khalilian, Khalil, Islamic international law, P.204.

2. Kariminia Mohammad, Peaceful coexistence in Islam and International Relations, P.134.

- or any attempts of similar nature that goes against the objectives of the United Nations Organization;
- Commitment to the settlement of international disputes in peaceful manners in a way that international security and peace and principles of justice are not violated;
 - Commitment to noninterference in the affairs that fall within the exclusive affairs of the other states in accordance with the principles of United Nations' Charter;
 - Commencement of the states to cooperate with each other according to the principles of United Nations' Charter;
 - Equal rights for all relations and the right of self-determination for all states;
 - Equality of the states in their sovereignty;
 - Commitment if the states to comply with obligations stemming from the United Nations' Charter¹.

As we said earlier, there is no unanimous agreement among experts about the number of principles constituting peaceful coexistence. While some of them contain the late 16 principles as we saw in the proposal set forth by the Association of International Law, some others propose only five principles. Pakistan proposed a draft to Bandung conference on April 24, 1955, containing seven principles named "the seven pillars of peace", but the final resolution of the conference contained 10 principles².

Despite the disagreement about the number of these principles, there are common ideas seen in all propositions. These main principles are inseparable because failure to implement one of them would lead to the failure in all.

Part two: Islam's View about Peaceful Coexistence

As we mentioned earlier, Islam is a comprehensive religion containing plans of action for human personal and social life. Although it emerged in the Arabian Peninsula, its mission is universal. In the outset, we should note that the term peaceful coexistence is a new word introduced into literature recently. So, they must not expect to find it or its equivalent in Islamic tradition. Nevertheless, the main ideas constituting this principle are also attended to sporadically in Islamic texts and tradition.

1. Ibid.

2. Cloud Albert Claire, international relations, P.563.

Chapter 1: the Koran, Hadith, and the Conduct of Immaculate Imams

The Koran

Different verses in the Koran explicitly emphasize religious coexistence as a genuine Islamic idea. We should remember that the Koran was revealed 14 centuries ago when human beings had no idea of coexistence at all. According to the Koran, the religious disputes which history records in the case of other religions are meaningless. Hostility towards other religions is banned. The Koran proposes certain ways to ensure peaceful coexistence. We shall explain some of them here.

Freedom of Belief

In several Koranic verses, God says religious beliefs must be maintained wholeheartedly hence freely. In verse 256 of Sura Baqarah, forced conversion is refused. The only responsibility the holy Prophet is charged with is to demonstrate the path of perfection to human beings and make it distinct from the path of ignorance and deviation. In verses 99 of the Sura Yunus, 29 of the Sura Kahf, and 107 of the Sura Anaam, it is made clear that Islamic call is based on rational methodology and far from compulsion and violence.

The Koran advocates peaceful coexistence on the basis of common principles. In verse 64 of the Sura Al-i Imran, common principles Islam and previous heavenly religions share are mentioned as basis for minimal cooperation for common good. The Koran urges Muslims to promote cooperation with the followers of other religions in so far as the religious precepts common among them require¹.

Racism is denounced by the Koran. In verse 13 of the Sura Hujurat, God says that all human beings are created from a man and a woman, the characteristic differences separating people merely mean to facilitate social interaction among them, and the only parameter responsible for the superiority of an individual over another is piety. Equality among all human beings is a fundamental condition for peaceful coexistence. Racist tendencies, egoistic inclinations, and contempt for people belonging to other nations or ethnic groups or religious communities spark hostilities, conflicts, and destructive wars. Two world wars in the 20th century testify to this fact². There are many verses in the Koran addressing all human beings in terms of "O man"

1. Makarem Shirazi, Naser, et al. Tafsir Nemuneh, Vol.4, P.54.

2. Salimi, Abdolkarim, a the role of Islam in the development of international law, P.173.

implying that God counts all of them as the children of the same parents. In verses 81 of the Sura Maidah , and 111 and 112 of the Sura Baqarah, God denounces the racist prejudice and thirst for superiority and domination exercised by some Jews and Christians declaring once and for all that no nation is chosen by God hence no inherent superiority.

The Koran invites to pacific rational dialogue. In verse 46 of the Sura Ankabut, it instructs Muslims to adopt the best possible method of dialogue with the followers of the Holy Scriptures and to organize this dialogue around common principles such as monotheism. In verse 108 of the Sura Anaam, the Almighty God prohibits insulting infidels and even idol worshipers. It urges all parties of the discourse to remain polite and respect what is sacred to the followers of any religion. It goes without saying that insulting what people consider holy can only bring about animosity among people and hinder rational understanding.

The Koran welcomes every offer of cease-fire, cessation of hostility, and peace made by adversaries. When one of the Arab tribes living in the vicinity of Medina named Ashjaa decided to enter into an agreement for cessation of hostility with Medina, the 90th verse of the Sura Nisa was revealed to the holy Prophet instructing that Muslims must accept every offer of peace made by those who have not engaged in war against Muslims¹. In verse 61 of the Sura Anfal, the Almighty God orders the holy Prophet to wholeheartedly welcome an offer of peace made by the enemy in the battlefield and immediately stop fighting. This verse of the Koran indicates that seeking the status of peace is a matter of principle².

The Koran recognizes the rights of minorities. Religious minorities enjoy the right of living among Muslims peacefully under the protection of Islamic government provided that they refrain from fighting Muslims or plotting to harm them. Religious freedom of religious minorities living within the Islamic jurisdiction goes as far as to let them live according to their own Sharia even where it conflicts with Islamic Sharia. The only limitation here is that they should avoid public breach of Islamic Sharia laws. If they observe the Muslim public's considerations, they can keep their style of life without any problem³.

1. Kariminia Mohammad, Peaceful coexistence in Islam and International Relations, P.101.

2. Amidzanjani, Abasali, political jurisprudence, Vol.3, P.461.

3. Kariminia Mohammad, Peaceful coexistence in Islam and International Relations, P.274.

The acknowledgment of previous prophets and Holy Scriptures by the Koran is the other step taken by Islam to foster peaceful coexistence of religions. Many Koranic verses including verses 48 and 46 of the Sura Maidah indicate that Islam recognizes all heavenly religions, and urges their followers to practice their faith correctly.

The Koran advocates cooperation on the international scene to promote virtues and prohibits contribution to the spread of vices. This is a reasonable advice every rational human being deems appropriate. Efforts put into the establishment of justice, equality, peace, solidarity, fraternity, security, and development on the international level are undoubtedly virtuous. In the second verse of the Sura Maidah, the Koran explicitly invites to cooperation for virtues and bans involvement in whatever activities that may bring about corruption, injustice, or deviation¹. In the verse 15 of the same Sura, it is declared that Muslims are permitted to marry spouses from the followers of other Holy Scriptures and eat from their food except what has been declared prohibited in Islam. This is another step towards the solidification of peaceful coexistence with followers of other faiths.

Peaceful coexistence according to Islamic tradition

A glance at the sayings related to the holy leaders of Islam and in their practical conduct in life suffices to reveal the fact that establishing friendly relations with non-Muslims is an accepted principle in Islam. As a religion based on human natural disposition, Islam respects human natural emotions. It enjoins observing the principle of justice and fairness, respecting the rights of other people, and refraining from insulting the followers of other religions². Several sayings related to the holy Prophet of Islam stress this point. In one of them, He says, “Anyone who insults non-Muslims living under the protection of Islamic state according to a treaty commits a crime that incurs my wrath and I shall disclose my animosity to him on the Day of Judgment”. Elsewhere, He says, “Anybody who wrongs a person protected by a treaty with the Muslim state or charges him with a burden too heavy for him to bear shall find me his enemy in the day of judgment”. In a third saying, He is quoted as saying, “No one is permitted to wrong people with whom we have peace treaty or undermine their rights or charge them with a responsibility too heavy for

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

them to bear or take anything from them without their consent. Anyone committing such acts will find me his opponents on the day of judgment". In a fourth hadith, He says, "Anybody who levels any accusation against the followers of other religions who have entered into a peace treaty with the Muslim state shall be punished on the day of judgment by lashes of fire". The holy Prophet has also advised Muslims "to give alms to the needy among the believers of all divine religions". Several sayings are also related to Imam Ali (A) to this effect. In His letter to His governor in Egypt, Malik Ashtar, He writes, "Be compassionate, look at your subjects with eyes full of affection and wholeheartedly felt love; never behave as a beast does plundering and oppressing the citizens; your subjects are either your brothers in faith or the followers of other religions hence your brothers in humanity". Elsewhere, in the same letter, He instructs, "Do not hesitate to accept a peace offer by your enemy in a battlefield if it is acceptable to God; for, cease-fire helps keep your territory safe and secure, your soldiers tranquil and refreshed, and your concerns diminished". He also emphasizes on keeping one's promise and tells His governor to respect the pledge of amnesty or protection given to old adversaries¹.

Peaceful Coexistence Embodied in the Practical Conduct of the Holy Religious Leaders

The personal behavior and conduct of a leader is called "Syrah" or "Sunnah" in Arabic. The Koran introduces the holy Prophet as the best example for humanity to follow. Let us take a brief look at the personal conduct of the holy Prophet of Islam in regards to the issue of coexistence.

The first item that strikes us in this regard is the letters the holy Prophet of Islam wrote to the world leaders of His time. As a prophet entrusted with a global mission, He dispatched envoys carrying His letters to the Roman Emperor, the Persian Emperor, the King of Ethiopia, and the Egyptian leader. This very move indicates in the first place that the holy Prophet acknowledged these leaders. It also shows that Islamic call deployed constructive dialogue as a means of propagation. A Glance at the content of these letters shows that threat to use of force has no place in the strategy the holy Prophet adopted. All these letters include one verse of the Koran: the holy verse 64 of the Sura Al-I Imran that emphasizes the common beliefs different religions share as the basis for dialogue and invitation to Islam. Understanding these

1. Ebrahimi Mohammad & Hosseini Alireza, Islam and general international law, Vol.1, P.399.

letters, we can conclude that Islam relied on logic and argument rather than on sword for the promotion of the new religion. History records the advices the holy Prophet gave to people, the advantages He offered and compromises He made in order to strike deals with the followers of other faiths in order to avoid conflict¹.

The peace treaties signed between the holy Prophet and different groups of His enemies in order to put an end to hostilities represent another angle. Islamic state remained loyal to all these treaties in practice so long as other parties did so. Islam considers breach of promise a grave and unforgivable sin². To discuss these treaties thoroughly will go beyond the limits of this paper. Therefore, we mention just a few points here.

The first treaty the holy Prophet of Islam signed was a trilateral comprehensive one between Muslims of Medina, Jews living in the vicinity, and the polytheists. This treaty defined the relationship between different groups of Muslims, i.e., the immigrants and local Muslims, the relation between Muslims and the Jews, and finally the relations between Muslims and the polytheists. The main goal of this treaty was to establish peaceful coexistence between all those who lived in Medina³. The content of this treaty shows that Islam recognized the rights of all non-Muslims of any category even the polytheists. Muslims never resorted to suppression or elimination of communities that rejected Islamic faith. Peaceful coexistence, fair treatment, and compassionate conduct were matters of principle to Muslims.

The second treaty the holy prophet signed is called Hodeybyeh peace treaty. The polytheists living in Mecca the stronghold of the initial enemies of Islam were the party to this Treaty. Its main purpose was to facilitate Muslims' pilgrimage to the holy sites in the city. The belligerent parties agreed on a cease-fire for a decade, secure commuting for religious and trade purposes during the period and extending the domain of the treaty to all tribes joining it⁴ in future.

As the result of this treaty, ties between Muslims and their arch enemy the Quraysh tribe slightly improved. It was the Muslim party that meant to reduce hostility because it advocated peace and coexistence. Contracts Muslims

1. Kariminia Mohammad, *Peaceful coexistence in Islam and International Relations*, P.293.

2. Hamidallah, Mohamad, *Sokunat beinalmelli dolate eslami*, P.315.

3. Sobhani, J., *history of Islam*, P.137.

4. Zanjani Ali, *Islam and peaceful coexistence*, P.105.

signed with Christians guaranteed religious freedom, and free and secure life and activity for them within the jurisdiction of Islamic state.

It is worthwhile to mention a number of instances of the holy Prophet's conduct with non-Muslims. At the initial stage, when the holy Prophet declared His mission, His followers were fiercely prosecuted and tortured by the leaders of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca. The second step taken by the polytheists was to impose a general embargo against Muslims. They were driven out of their homes, put to exile in a valley, and barred from any transaction or association with people. During the three years of sanctions, a number of Muslims starved to death. The failure of all these measures led the leaders of Quraysh to resort to their last remedy, i.e., the assassination plot. The heads of 40 tribes gathered in their assembly and planned for a shrewd assassination plot, which would prevent the heirs of the holy Prophet from taking revenge. After the holy Prophet's immigration to Medina, conspiracies continued. Four successive wars were imposed on Muslims. In spite of the malicious intentions and hostile activities by the adversaries, the holy Prophet never initiated a war. When finally polytheists were defeated in the conquest of Mecca, a general amnesty was declared for all those who lay down their arms. Muslims declared that day "the day of mercy and forgiveness" as a gesture proving that Islam is pro-peaceful coexistence.

The holy Prophet's treatment of the Jews who broke away from the treaty with Medina government is exemplary. The Jews enjoyed full economic liberty. The rapid spread of Islam among different tribes living around Medina worried some Jews and hypocrites and instigated their jealousy. Some important Jewish personalities converted to Islam. One of them even appointed the holy Prophet Mohammed as His personal attorney¹. Ties between the holy Prophet and the Jews were normal and friendly. He took part in their festivals, attended their funerals, and visited their patients expressing sympathy with them. When Ibn Obbey, an important ally to the Jews and scrunch enemy of Islam died, He attended his funeral². At times, the affectionate treatment of the Jews by the holy Prophet was criticized by some Muslims. Some disciples criticized the holy Prophet for His participation in the funeral of one of the Jews of Medina. The holy Prophet convinced them by reminding them of the fact that the person deserved respect and dignity on account of being a human though he was non-Muslim³.

1. Ziaibigdeli, Mohamad Reza, the laws of war.

2. Kariminia Mohammad, Peaceful Coexistence in Islam and International Relations, P.315.

3. Kariminia Mohammad, Peaceful coexistence in Islam and International Relations, P.332.

Despite this, some Jews kept conspiring against Islam and Muslims. They tried to shake Muslims' beliefs by posing complicated questions and problems. Their hostile acts included slaying a Muslim Merchant in the marketplace in cool blood, plotting for the assassination of the holy Prophet, and siding with the enemies of Muslims in the war of Ahzab contrary to the peace treaty they had with Medina. In all these cases, the reaction by the holy Prophet was measured and just. He punished only the perpetrators of these crimes in person refraining from taking revenge.

As to the Shiite Imams, it should be noted that only Imam Ali and Imam Hassan (A) were in the position of leadership for a short period of time. Other Imams did not have this opportunity. So, they did not have official relations with other states and nations. During His tenure, Imam Ali (A) was preoccupied most of the time with domestic crises including civil wars. The wars waged by Muawiyah cannot be studied in the light of general international law¹. Nevertheless, there are isolated incidents that teach us much. History records the assault by Muawiyah's troops on the city of Anbar during which a non-Muslim lady was robbed. Hearing the news, Imam Ali expressed his grief and said "this wild and cruel treatment of an innocent woman by the so-called Muslim soldiers is so horrible that if the righteous react to it by preferring death to witnessing these crimes I would not blame them".

Chapter 2: What is the Primary Principle in Islam; Peace or War?

There is a difference of opinion among scholars on the question whether the primary principle in Islam is peace or war. Orientalists and Muslim jurists, both the Shiite and the Sunnite, can be divided into two groups; one believing that the primary principle is peace and one believing the contrary. Among the latter group, the British Orientalist, Bernard Louis, and the Sunnite jurists, Ibn Qudamah and Zeydan, as well as the Shiite jurists Allameh Helli, Shahid Thani, and Ameli are outstanding. They have presented arguments to prove the point. The verses in the Koran about jihad and some traditions are cited for this purpose. The holy Prophet of Islam is quoted to have said "I am charged with the task of struggling with people until they believe in monotheism and in me as the Prophet of God, and perform prayers and pay religious tax". Another reason they site is the Koranic verses that reproach those Muslims who make friends with non-Muslims such as the verse 28 of the Sura Al-i Imran.

1. Kariminia Mohammad, *Peaceful coexistence in Islam and International Relations*, P.338.

Another group of scholars believe that a primary principle of Islam is peaceful coexistence and Fair treatment of non-Muslims. In the very term “Islam” coming from the root “slm” meaning peace, we can see the traces of the original Islamic view towards coexistence. They site some other verses of the holy Koran and the chronological sequence of the revelation of the verses to prove that point. Sura Kafirun is among the early revelations in Mecca. It invites to permanent cessation of hostility between Muslims and non-Muslims on the basis of absolute freedom of choice for all. When the polytheists of Mecca rejected this option and mobilized army to eradicate Islam, the verse number 39 of the Sura Haj was revealed instructing Muslims to get prepared for a holy war. This verse clearly indicates that the holy war is legitimate only because Muslims were prosecuted unjustly and actually attacked by enemy. Other verses in the Koran such as verse number 61 on the Sura Anfal, verses 9 and 49 of the Sura Nisa, and verses number 8 and 9 of the Sura Mumtahanah emphasize the pacific nature of Islam as a faith. This group of jurists refutes the arguments presented by their opponents; inferring divine will from the Koranic verses requires that the entire verses are considered harmonically. Those verses that call to fighting non-Muslims should be understood in the light of other verses justifying them such as verses 190 and 193 of the Sura Baqarah and verse number 8 of the Sura Mumtahanah which state that war is legitimate only as a defensive measure and against anarchy. The Koranic verses prohibiting friendship with non-Muslims mean to ban any relation that harms the vital interests of Muslims as a nation. The Koran allows certain social interactions with non-Muslims. For example, Muslims can marry non-Muslim girls. They can eat the food of Christians, Jews, and other followers of Holy Scriptures.

The practical conduct of the holy Infallible Imams also shows that they believed in peace and coexistence as the primary principle and allowed use of force and violence as an inevitable remedy in particular circumstances. A number of disciples of Imam Ali (A) criticized Him for postponing attack on the enemy in the three wars imposed on Him. Imam Ali (A) always deferred the engagement until He addressed the enemy warning about the consequences of war and calling them to lay arm. He always avoided taking the offensive. This behavior interprets the Koranic verses about holy war. Accordingly, we can conclude that Muslims ought to work for peace, to call for peace, and establish peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims. If all these efforts turn out futile and

Muslims are actually attacked, then they must defend. As soon as the enemy lays down weapons and calls for cease-fire, Muslims have to stop fighting.

To see that Islam regards peace as a primary principle, it is enough to study the circumstances under which Islam considers war legitimate. They include defense against aggression, eradicating anarchy, rescuing the oppressed, defending territory, and facing warmongers who break their promises or agreements and contracts. It goes without saying that defensive war is rationally justified and the mentioned circumstances make war defensive.

Conclusion

The above discussions illustrate that peaceful coexistence is more than peace. Countries may be in peace with one another but fail to have peaceful coexistence. Peaceful coexistence has four stages; peace, cooperation, solidarity, and union. Cooperation is a very important element in peaceful coexistence recognized by international organizations such as the UN. Muslim countries member of the Islamic Conference Organization have stepped into this stage. In the case of European nations, we see the stage of solidarity that targets thorough union. The fourth stage has not yet been realized. Islam deems it necessary that Muslim nations enhance their cooperation in order to reach full union and develop their constructive friendly ties with non-Muslim nations to the level of peaceful coexistence.

