

Ozalp, M. (2008) "Peace and Military Engagement in the Qur'an and in the Action of the Prophet Muhammad", in W. W. Emilsen & J. T. Squires (eds.) *Validating Violence – Violating Faith: Religion, Scripture and Violence*, Adelaide: ATF Press, pp. 111-126, ISBN 978-1-92069-189-9.

## **Peace and military engagement in the Qur'an and in the actions of the Prophet Muhammad**

Global terrorism, suicide bombings and the identification of Muslims with terrorist activities have caused many to question the core teachings of Islam and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>.<sup>1</sup> While a minority of Muslims respond in violence to what they perceive to be injustice done to them, other Muslims with extreme views seem to justify their violent actions with references to the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Horrified by what they see in news coverage, many non-Muslims wonder about the peaceful nature of Islam. Some critics go even further to claim that 'violence is in the nature of Islam' as the Qur'an seems to allow and justify wars and killings and that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> engaged in warfare in his lifetime.

There is a need to critically analyse claims of both camps and examine how the Qur'an refers to warfare and what actions the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> took and behaviours he displayed in military engagement. Was violence and aggression part of the Prophet Muhammad's plan to advance Islam or did he find himself and Muslims under attack from a hostile world having to fight for survival and in doing so followed a humane and ethical standard of warfare? I will attempt to explore the answer to this question by looking at the following four areas.

- General characteristics of Islam in the Qur'an
- Military engagement in the Qur'an
- Circumstances that lead to wars engaged by the Prophet Muhammad
- Warfare in the actions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The acronym 'pbuh' is short for 'peace be upon him'. It is a statement of reverence practiced by Muslims for all prophets including Prophet Muhammad.

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I will argue that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, who is accepted by Muslims as the embodiment of Qur'anic teachings, in fact, practiced a deliberate strategy of peace and diplomacy to deal with the conflicts of his time. He practiced active non-violence in the face of suffering persecution and economic embargo he and his followers endured in Mecca. After having to migrate from his home town, he established a pluralistic and multifaith society in Medina. He took active steps to sign treaties with all neighbouring tribes. He even signed a disadvantageous 10 year treaty with the Meccan leadership much to the discontent of his followers to end the conflict. Despite this, there was a hostile world which attacked Muslims in Medina. Engaging these attackers in warfare was inevitable.

The fact that the Qur'an includes verses that discuss warfare and that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> lead armies in a number of battles may seem counterintuitive to a God-revealed religion. The historical evidence suggest that, this aspect of Islam is actually an advantage rather than being a liability. Since warfare has been around since time immemorial and that inevitably people will find themselves in some defensive warfare and international conflict, a 'final religion' like Islam would have to provide guidelines in this area as well. As a result of these guidelines, we do not see any holocausts, holy wars, inquisitions, systematic rape of women and mass murder of civilians in Muslim history. Without the guidelines of the Qur'an and the example set by the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in warfare, the Muslim history, in fact the world history, would have transpired quite differently for the worst indeed. Certainly, Islam wants to establish a social order where people live in peace and security.

### **1. General characteristics of Islam in the Qur'an**

Every religion has core teachings that characterise the religion and majority of its followers. It is important that we know what these are in the case of Islam so that we can make a healthy analysis of verses of the Qur'an that talk about warfare and the behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in military engagement.

In order to illustrate the point, consider for instance, the following quotation from Jesus<sup>pbuh</sup>, 'But those enemies of mine who did not

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want me to be king over them; bring them here and kill them in front of me.'<sup>2</sup> and the following passage:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.<sup>3</sup>

Are we to conclude that Jesus<sup>pbuh</sup> has taught violence? We know that the core message of Jesus<sup>pbuh</sup> was one of love and compassion. A well-intended examination of these verses and the context leads to the understanding that Jesus was really talking about the inevitable consequence of a conflict that would arise between those who believed in him and those who did not accept his message. In a similar way, the Qur'an should be read with the same intent and the reader should understand verses within the general spirit of Islam.

So what is this spirit? It is beyond the scope of this paper to look at all characteristics of Islam. It should however suffice to look at the general tone of the Qur'an with respect to human life; the nature of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>; how Islam seeks converts?

Driven from the root word 's/l/m', which has the meanings of 'peace' and 'submission', Islam as a religion claims to have been revealed to the whole humanity with a peaceful message of good news and devotion to God. The Qur'an says 'And We have not sent you (O Muhammad) except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind . . .'<sup>4</sup> The emphasis of mercy and compassion in the mission of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> is highlighted more in the verse, 'And We have sent you (O Muhammad) nothing but as a mercy and grace for the worlds'<sup>5</sup> of humans and creatures.

When the Prophet was wounded in the Battle of Uhud, some suggested that he curse the 'idolaters', the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 19:27

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 10:34-36

<sup>4</sup> Qur'an 34:28

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an 21:107

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replied, 'I am not sent for damnation. O Lord! Guide my nation, they don't know.'<sup>6</sup> The wife of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> Aisha reported that whenever the Prophet was confronted with an issue he always chose the path that was easy or better for people. In another instance, a Bedouin becomes Muslim, but after a while urinates in the mosque. Infuriated by this behaviour, people in the mosque start to push and shove him. The Prophet emerges from his room to see what the commotion is about. Upon finding out what has happened, he scolds people that with this action this Bedouin man does not know and he needs to be educated and then utters his timeless remark that underscores the right Muslim attitude in mission, 'Facilitate (ease) things to people (concerning religious matters), and do not make it hard for them and give them good tidings and do not make them run away (from Islam)'.<sup>7</sup> These examples give us an insight of the character of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> as a peaceful, humble person who empathised with the needs and feelings of people.

With respect to human life, it has great value in the teachings of the Qur'an. Without making any distinction of race, colour and status, the Qur'an teaches that the human being is 'created in the best of composition'<sup>8</sup> and 'has been honoured with goodness'<sup>9</sup>. Since only 'God gives life and causes death'<sup>10</sup>, then 'it is forbidden to kill anyone except for a just cause'<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, 'if anyone killed a person – not in retaliation of murder or to spread mischief in the land'<sup>12</sup> 'it would be as if he killed all mankind'<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, human nations and societies exist so that 'they may know one another not to despise one another'.<sup>14</sup>

For convert seeking religions, there is a temptation to use violence and coercion to force people into the faith. This is particularly so, if they hold power over people. The justification is that people do not

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<sup>6</sup> Bukhari, *Anbiya*, 37

<sup>7</sup> Bukhari, *Ilm*, 12; Muslim, *Jihad*, 6

<sup>8</sup> Qur'an 95:4

<sup>9</sup> Qur'an 17:70

<sup>10</sup> Qur'an 3:156

<sup>11</sup> Qur'an 6:151

<sup>12</sup> There is consensus between Muslim scholars that the two exceptions where human life could be ended are 1) capital punishment for proven murder by a court of law 2) the inevitable killings that occur in lawful warfare.

<sup>13</sup> Qur'an 5:32

<sup>14</sup> Qur'an 49:13

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know what is the truth and falsehood. Once they are in the faith albeit forcefully, they will appreciate it and thank those people who forced them into it.

Although Islam seeks converts, we do not see any reference in the Qur'an and in the actions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> that forced conversions were sought through conquest and domination. In many verses of the Qur'an, the Prophet is reminded that his duty is only to convey the message of God<sup>15</sup>. The Qur'an also warns the Prophet that he is not to force people into faith. 'So inform them (O Muhammad), you are only one who reminds. You are not a dictator over them.'<sup>16</sup>

Before Islam, one of the tribes in Medina had a peculiar practice. If their kids died in infancy, they would give an oath to God that if their next child survived the infancy, they would grow them up as a Jew or a Christian thinking that these were superior religions and therefore their prayer was more likely to be accepted. Consequently, when Islam came to Medina some of the Arab children were Jews or Christians. The following verse was revealed when their parents tried to force their children to convert to Islam: 'There is no compulsion in religion. Verily the right has become distinct from the wrong . . .'<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that Islam taught grace and mercy; gave great value to human life; and did not seek to advance its teachings through forced conversions. We, therefore, need to examine wars and other events that resulted in deaths during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in this frame of reference.

## 2. Concept of jihad and the Qur'an

A closer examination of the Qur'an reveals that no word equating to mean 'holy war' is used. As a matter of fact, we don't see the use of this phrase in the authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> or in major Islamic works. The Arabic term for 'military war' is 'harb' and for 'fighting' is 'qital', not necessarily 'jihad', as would be expected by most people today. Jihad has a broader meaning to mean

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<sup>15</sup> See verses from the Qur'an such as 3:20, 5:92, 5:99, 13:40, 14:52, 16:35, 16:82

<sup>16</sup> Qur'an 88:21-22

<sup>17</sup> Ibrahim Canan, 'Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance', *Yeni Umit*, Jan-Mar Issue (2004), 21. The Qur'anic reference is 2:256.

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a 'struggle' against adverse circumstances within a person and externally in a society for good purposes. Jihad is covered in the Qur'an in many contexts.<sup>18</sup>

- Recognising the Creator and loving Him above any other<sup>19</sup>
- Resisting the pressure of relatives, peers and the society to do wrong<sup>20</sup>
- Staying steadfastly on the straight path of faith and equilibrium<sup>21</sup>
- Striving to do righteous deeds<sup>22</sup>
- Having the courage and steadfastness to convey the message of Islam<sup>23</sup>
- Defending Islam and the community<sup>24</sup> as well as helping allied people who may not necessarily be Muslim
- Removing treacherous people from power<sup>25</sup>
- Gaining freedom to practise Islam as well as to educate and convey the message of Islam in an open and free environment<sup>26</sup>
- Freeing people from tyranny and oppression<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Military engagement in the Qur'an

A military jihad or war becomes lawful as a last resort in self-defense against aggression. The defensive nature of war and its legitimate justification are given in the following verses that were revealed in the first year of migration to Medina:

Permission to fight is given to those who were attacked for they have been wronged. Only God is able to give them victory. They are those who were

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Bonney, *Jihad from Qur'an to Bon Laden*, (United States: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 26-27

<sup>19</sup> Qur'an 9:23-24

<sup>20</sup> Qur'an 25:52

<sup>21</sup> Qur'an 22:78, 3:142

<sup>22</sup> Qur'an 29:69

<sup>23</sup> Qur'an 41:33

<sup>24</sup> Qur'an 22:39-40

<sup>25</sup> Qur'an 8:58

<sup>26</sup> Qur'an 2:217

<sup>27</sup> Qur'an 4:75

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driven from their homes unjustly and for no other reason than that they said 'Our Lord is God'.<sup>28</sup>

According to this verse there are basically two main justification for military warfare:

1. Being driven from one's homes or land unjustly meaning occupation by a foreign power.
2. Muslims forced to change their faith or their freedom of faith is grossly violated to the point of persecution.

Even in these cases, there are important principles to follow. There is to be no aggression on the part of Muslims, since 'God loves not the aggressors.'<sup>29</sup> The Qur'an also provides detailed guidelines and regulations regarding the conduct of war; who is to fight and who is exempted<sup>30</sup>; when hostilities must cease<sup>31</sup>; and how prisoners should be treated<sup>32</sup>. Most importantly, verses such as 2:294 emphasise that warfare and response to violence and aggression must be proportional, 'Whoever transgresses against you, respond in kind'.<sup>33</sup> Peaceful solutions to disputes are preferred to military ones. In the event of unavoidable war, every opportunity to end the war must be pursued. The Qur'an directs, 'But if the enemy inclines towards peace, then you must also incline towards peace . . .'<sup>34</sup>

Critics of the Qur'an often quote the first part of the Qur'anic verse 9:5, 'When the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them and take them and confine them and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush . . .' to argue that Islam is inherently violent. This is the same passage that religious extremists use to justify their violent actions in recent times. When one takes this passage out of the context of the complete verse and the other verses that come before and after it, the real intent could be easily missed. The verse continues to say, ' . . . but if they repent and

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<sup>28</sup> Qur'an 22:39-40

<sup>29</sup> Qur'an 2:190

<sup>30</sup> Qur'an 48:17, 9:91

<sup>31</sup> Qur'an 2:192

<sup>32</sup> Qur'an 47:4

<sup>33</sup> John Esposito, *What everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, (Britain: Oxford University Press, 2002), 118.

<sup>34</sup> Qur'an 8:61

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perform prescribed prayers and give charitable alms then let them go their way, for God is Oft-Forgiving and Most Merciful.<sup>35</sup>

We need to bear in mind the historical context of the set of verses in Chapter 9 of the Qur'an. These verses were revealed in 631 CE, a year after the peaceful capture of Mecca by Muslims that ended the aggression led by Mecca towards Muslims, who thereafter legitimately held popular power in Arabia. Although organised aggression against Muslims ended, small bands of individuals and tribes were still attacking Muslims in a way that we classify today as terrorism. The greater Muslim population was subjected to acts of terrorism by a few remnant 'idolaters' and small tribes who refused to accept the conclusive Muslim victory and government of the Prophet. This chapter is an ultimatum to these individuals and tribes, telling them to end their aggression.

Verse 9:4 clearly asks Muslims to fulfill their obligations towards tribes with whom they have a treaty. Verse 9:6 also commands Muslims to treat well any 'idolater' refugee who seeks protection with Muslims and asks them to be escorted to a place where they can feel safe. From all of this additional information we understand that 'slaying those idolaters' mentioned in verse 9:5 only applies to those individuals who are carrying acts of terrorism against a peaceful society and a popular and legitimate government. This is quite similar to the current (2004) American policy to kill Al-Qaida members wherever they find them because they feel these terrorists are in turn at war with them.

Therefore, Muslims historically never understood verse 9:5 or other similar verses<sup>36</sup> as an open license to kill non-Muslims. An overwhelming majority of Muslims, with the small exception of those who resort to terrorism, are still of the same understanding.

### **3. Circumstances that lead to wars engaged by the Prophet Muhammad**

The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> followed an active non-violence strategy for the thirteen-year mission in Mecca. Although he and his followers suffered oppression, persecution and even murder of some

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<sup>35</sup> Qur'an 9:5

<sup>36</sup> Qur'an 2:190-3; 8-59-70, 9:12, 9:30, 9:38-9, 61:4



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Muslims, the Prophet never resorted to violence even though some of his followers urged him to take arms. He bluntly refused saying that he was not commended to do so.

In order to escape the persecution, Muslims finally migrated to Medina in 622 CE and a fledging Muslim community was established. A City Charter was drafted, which was the first such document defining a pluralistic society. The Charter served as a constitution of the new city polity with remarkable emphasis on the citizenship rights and responsibilities regardless of the religious convictions of the citizens belonging to the new state in Medina. Jews, for example, were allowed to practise their faith freely and even have their own laws. They were exempt from the application of Islamic law and military service. Interestingly, there were still a large pagan population in the city.

The migration of Muslims to Medina did not end the hostility of the Meccans towards Muslims. On the contrary, it appears that it had even increased it, despite the fact that Muslims were no longer in the city to influence their pagan tradition. This intractable hostility inevitably led to military conflicts. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, being the Prophet and the temporal leader of Muslims, had to lead Muslims in these difficult times and to defend them in order to ensure the very survival of his followers and Islam.

In this struggle for survival, history notes that the Prophet never initiated aggression. Military wars that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> or Muslims had to engage in were either purely defensive or they were pre-emptive strikes against the other party who were preparing to attack Muslims. In the case of a pre-emptive strike, intelligence gathered was confirmed by independent sources and investigated prior to taking action.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to look at the causes of all military skirmishes and battles fought in the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. I will only examine significant ones for us to be able to see the pattern. All of the three major wars were defensive in nature.

1. **Battle of Badr (623 CE):** When Muslims migrated to Medina they had to leave all their assets and heavy positions behind. Meccans set up a large trade caravan to

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Syria to sell the confiscated assets of Muslims.<sup>37</sup> Muslims in the Prophet Muhammad's command lead a lightly armed force, 313 men to intercept the caravan. When Mecca heard this move they raised an army of more than 1,000 men to prevent the interception. While the caravan escaped, Muslims won a clear victory in the ensuing battle at Badr.

2. **Battle of Uhud (625 CE):** Little more than a year later, Mecca raised a 3,000 men army and moved to attack Medina to revenge for the loss at Badr. The Muslim army, 700 men, led by the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, faced the Meccan army near Mt Uhud. Initial Muslim victory was turned into a loss when the Muslim army broke ranks, thinking the war was over and the cavalry led by Khalid bin Walid led a surprise attack from the back. Satisfied that they took their revenge, Meccans did not further attack Medina. The Prophet was injured in this battle.
3. **Battle of Trench (627 CE):** With the facilitation and instigation of the Banu Nadir Jews now living in the fortress city of Khaybar, the Meccans raised an inter-tribal coalition army of over 10,000 warriors and laid a month long siege to Medina. Muslims defended the city by digging trenches near the exposed parts of the city. The siege was unsuccessful and the result was a decisive victory for Muslims.<sup>38</sup>

The following examples are the major pre-emptive strikes. It is important to note that offensive strike to an enemy force in a long-standing military conflict is an expected military tactic. One does not always wait for the enemy to strike. There will have to be offensive at some stage in the conflict to clinch victory and end the conflict.

1. **Banu Mustaliq Expedition (627 CE):** Another tribe, Banu Mustaliq, wanted to try its luck against Muslims and started to prepare for an attack. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> learnt

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<sup>37</sup> Yahiya Emerick, *Muhammad*, (United States: Marie Butler-Knight, 2002), 159

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 216

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of the plan and moved first with a pre-emptive strike catching the tribe by surprise.<sup>39</sup>

2. **City of Khaybar Expedition (628 CE):** The Jews living in the fortress city of Khaybar were protecting the Banu Nadir tribe who were the main instigators of the siege of Medina. This conspiracy had to be dealt with. If it happened once it was likely to occur again. The city was captured after an expedition and a siege.<sup>40</sup>
3. **Muta Expedition (630 CE):** A large delegation of the Prophet sent to the neighbouring countries were captured and killed by the tribes in Southern Syria. Another tribe Ghassan, allied to the Byzantines, killed another envoy of the Prophet. There was a need to confront these tribes that killed the Prophet's envoys. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> sent an army of 3,000 men to the north. The army met a 100,000 men Byzantine and tribal army. Ingenious military skills of now Muslim, Khalid bin Walid, saved the army from annihilation while the Byzantine army retreated.<sup>41</sup>
4. **Tabuq Expedition: (631 CE):** Another news of a large gathering of the Byzantine army in Syria reached the Prophet. The Roman emperor, Heraclius was seriously intending to invade Arabia and Medina. An army of about 30,000 men were raised and the Prophet personally led the army north. No fighting took place as the Byzantines retreated. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> renewed his existing treaties with border tribes and made new allies.<sup>42</sup>

Critics often site the conflicts between Muslims and the three Jewish tribes in Medina to argue that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was not a peaceful person in the heart and had a special animosity towards Jews. The truth of the matter is that all three tribes violated the City Charter that they agreed to under no coercion.

While the Banu Qaynuga tribe laid an open military challenge to the Prophet after a fight in the market place between a Jew and a

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 227

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 241

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 269

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 276

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Muslim,<sup>43</sup> the Banu Nadir tribe secretly attempted to assassinate the Prophet.<sup>44</sup> Both tribes were asked to leave the city. The crime of the third Jewish tribe, the Banu Qurayza, was even more serious. During the heat of the siege of Medina in the Battle of the Trench, the Banu Qurayza, the citizens of the same polity in Medina, declared their agreement null and void and conspired with the enemy ignoring the serious warnings of Muslims. Their crime equated with treason. When the siege was lifted, the Prophet left the judgement of the fate of the Banu Qurayza to someone that they would select. They selected Sa'd ibn Mu'adh and the Prophet promised he would not alter the judgement. Sa'd asked Jews what was the punishment for traitors according to Jewish law. The punishment for treason in Torah was death. Sa'd passed judgment according to Jewish law and decreed the men to be executed. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> could not intervene because he had already given up his right to alter the judgement.<sup>45</sup>

Jews continued to live in Medina. Just before the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> died, he pawned his armour to a Jewish citizen. After witnessing the fairness and openness of the Muslim rule, the Jews of Khaybar were extremely happy and commented, 'this is Paradise created by Muslims on earth'.<sup>46</sup> Muslim-Jewish relations were exceptional for the next fourteen centuries such that Jews call the era under Muslim rule as the Golden Age of Judaism.

It is important to note that the total amount of people who died in all military battles is only a few thousand in the most pessimistic estimations – a number remarkably low for the times.

#### **4. Military Engagement in the actions of the Prophet Muhammad**

It is a fact of history that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> led a number of battles in his ten-year leadership in Medina. His involvement in wars provides Muslims a solid example on principles of behaviour in warfare. I will continue my examination of this topic by looking at

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 184

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 208

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 222-226

<sup>46</sup> Ali Akpınar, 'Religion of Peace, Prophet of Love', *Yeni Umit*, Jan-Mar Issue (2004)

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how the Prophet acted in wars and how he treated civilians and prisoners of war.

Significantly, in some of the examples I will give below, it will appear that some of the early Muslims were not living up to the standards of Islam. One should bear in mind that all of these events occurred in the formative years of Islam and the followers of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> were going through an educational process. We see that after the death of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, these early Muslims<sup>47</sup> staunchly upheld the standards of Islam. Most importantly, the behaviour of the Prophet outlined below might seem normal in today's standards. However, even today these standards set and practiced fourteen centuries ago are not reached by the civilised world as we have discovered in graphic pictures of the 2004 Iraq war.

#### **4.1 War is the last resort**

There is ample evidence that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> tried to resolve conflicts through diplomacy and signed many treaties with neighbouring tribes. We have no record of the Prophet dishonoring these treaties. In order to ensure peace, he even signed disadvantageous treaties, such as the treaty of Hdaybiyah (628 CE), with the Meccans much to the dissension of his followers. One of the terms of this treaty, for example, was that if a Muslim from Mecca escaped and took refuge in Medina, he or she had to be returned to Mecca. According to the Qur'an, peace is the real victory as the Qur'an called this treaty as an 'open victory'.<sup>48</sup> The treaty of Hdaybiyah had a ten-year term, but the Meccans broke the treaty in two years.

Perhaps as an unparalleled feat in history, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> pulled off a diplomatic victory and captured the city without a battle. All measures were taken to prevent a battle. The prophet asked the assembled Meccans, 'O people of Mecca, What do you think I am going to do with you?' He continued to the crowd in

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<sup>47</sup> The Muslims who converted to Islam in the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad have the special title of *sahaba*, companions. This title was given to them by the Prophet who did not like calling them his followers or disciples. So he simply called them 'my friends'.

<sup>48</sup> Qur'an 48:1

Ozalp, M. (2008) "Peace and Military Engagement in the Qur'an and in the Action of the Prophet Muhammad", in W. W. Emilsen & J. T. Squires (eds.) *Validating Violence – Violating Faith: Religion, Scripture and Violence*, Adelaide: ATF Press, pp. 111-126, ISBN 978-1-92069-189-9.

silence, 'There is no blame on you this day. Go to your homes, you are all free.' This was a general amnesty for the people of Mecca despite the fact that these were the same people who persecuted and attacked the Prophet and his followers for 20 years.<sup>49</sup>

#### ***4.2 Not to be merciless towards the enemy***

The prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> did not aim to crush his enemies neither physically not psychologically, even in warfare. When the news of Khalid Bin Walid killing a few prisoners of war after a battle with a tribe reached the Prophet, he lifted his hands in the sky and said 'O Lord I am far from what Khalid has done. I did not command him what he has done.'<sup>50</sup>

After the Khaybar siege, Bilal was taking away two female prisoners of war and inadvertently passed them through the dead bodies of their relatives. Seeing the scene, the women started to cry. The Prophet reprimanded Bilal saying, 'O Bilal! Is your sense of mercy removed from your heart that you are passing these ladies among the dead.' Surprised by the prophet's response, Bilal apologised.<sup>51</sup>

#### ***4.3 Prohibition of torture***

The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> did not allow inhumane torture practices. Suhayl bin Amr was a poet and captured as a prisoner of war in the Battle of Badr. Knowing that poets can be more damaging than the warriors to set public opinion, Omar ibn Khattab suggested to the Prophet that Suhayl's front teeth be removed rendering his destructive poetry ineffective. The Prophet replied, 'No I cannot torture him. If I torture him God would punish me. Besides one day perhaps he could say something you may like.'<sup>52</sup> A prophecy that came true later when Suhayl became Muslim.

#### ***4.4 Prohibition of the mutilation of dead enemy soldiers***

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<sup>49</sup> Yahiya Emerick, *Muhammad*, (United States: Marie Butler-Knight, 2002), 248

<sup>50</sup> Ali Akpinar, 'Religion of Peace, Prophet of Love', *Yeni Umit*, Jan-Mar Issue (2004)

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 50

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 51

Ozalp, M. (2008) "Peace and Military Engagement in the Qur'an and in the Action of the Prophet Muhammad", in W. W. Emilsen & J. T. Squires (eds.) *Validating Violence - Violating Faith: Religion, Scripture and Violence*, Adelaide: ATF Press, pp. 111-126, ISBN 978-1-92069-189-9.

The mutilation of the dead bodies of the enemy warriors was a common practice in Arabia. After the Battle of Uhud, the Meccans mutilated the dead bodies of the Muslims including Prophet's beloved uncle Hamza. When the Prophet saw the mutilated body of Hamza, in sorrow he vowed to mutilate 30 dead bodies from the enemy side next time if he was victorious. As a result of this the Qur'anic verse 16:126, 'And if you punish (your enemy), then punish them with the like of that with which you were afflicted. But if you endure patiently, verily it is better for the patient ones' was revealed.<sup>53</sup> The verse clearly prohibited excessive response to aggression and even advised patience. The Prophet retracted from his vow and paid the compensation for breaking an oath.<sup>54</sup>

#### **4.5 Not to attack civilians**

After the conquest of Mecca, a number of tribes got together and attacked the Muslims. The Muslims were winning the ensuing battle at Hunayn. The Prophet saw a female body among the dead. When he asked what happened to her, he was informed that the forces of Khalid killed the woman. He sent a courier to Khalid prohibiting him from killing women, children and servants. When the courier exclaimed, 'O prophet of God aren't they the children of idolaters?' the Prophet replied, 'Weren't the best of you once the children of idolaters. Every child is born in a natural disposition.'<sup>55</sup>

When the Prophet was sending an army to the north to meet another Byzantine expedition just before his death, he gave the following guidelines to young commander Osama:

Only fight with the aggressors. Do not breach your word. Do not cut down fruit bearing trees. Do not damage livestock. Do not kill women, children and monks who are withdrawn from the world and worship in monasteries. Do not wish to meet the

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 51

<sup>54</sup> In Islam, the compensation for breaking one's oath is to feed a poor person for ten days

<sup>55</sup> Abu Dawood, *Jihad*, 111

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enemy. You never know, you may be inflicted with a calamity as a result.<sup>56</sup>

The most striking example in this area is the behaviour of Hubayb ibn Adiyy. In 626 CE, the Meccans captured Hubayb and his Muslim friend Zayd ibn Dasinnah. They were both to be killed in the middle of the city in a public spectacle. While waiting in chains for his certain death in a house, Hubayb asked for a razor to clean himself from a servant, Mawiyah. Unwittingly, she sent a razor to Hubayb with her three-year-old stepson. When she realised the potential danger and ran towards Hubayb, she screamed seeing the child sitting on the lap of Hubayb with the razor in Hubayb's hand. Hubayb let the child go saying, 'Are you scared that I will kill the child? God forbid, I would never do such a thing. Taking life unjustly is not one of our attributes. You are not the ones trying to kill me are you?'<sup>57</sup>

#### ***4.6 Act under legitimate authority***

It was important to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> that no one took the law unto their hands and acted on their own accord without the decision of the central authority. This was largely the case for the great majority of cases. When a few incidents occurred beyond his control, he scolded those who were responsible and made sure compensation was paid to the families of the victims. One particular case occurred when Abdullah ibn Jahsh led a small petrol battalion. Abdullah intercepted a Meccan caravan. In the struggle one man was killed and two captured with the caravan. When they returned to Medina, instead of expected acclaim, the Prophet heavily scolded them saying, 'I did not instruct you to fight during the sacred months.'<sup>58</sup>

#### ***4.7 Investigate intelligence before striking***

The risk in pre-emptive strike is that if the intelligence is wrong, the act of war would no longer be legitimate. In cases where the Prophet

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<sup>56</sup> Ali Akpınar, 'Religion of Peace, Prophet of Love', *Yeni Umit*, Jan-Mar Issue (2004) 52

<sup>57</sup> Bukhari, *Magazi*, 28

<sup>58</sup> Yahiya Emerick, *Muhammad*, (United States: Marie Butler-Knight, 2002), 157



Ozalp, M. (2008) "Peace and Military Engagement in the Qur'an and in the Action of the Prophet Muhammad", in W. W. Emilsen & J. T. Squires (eds.) *Validating Violence – Violating Faith: Religion, Scripture and Violence*, Adelaide: ATF Press, pp. 111-126, ISBN 978-1-92069-189-9.

received intelligence information about preparation for war by a hostile tribe, he always confirmed the news by independent sources and made sure there was solid evidence for the news.

For example, after the conquest of Mecca, the Banu Mustaliq tribe became Muslim. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> sent Walid ibn Uqba to collect zakat alms from the tribe. When the people of the tribe saw Walid approaching, they went out to greet him. However, Walid got scared and ran back to Medina and reported to the Prophet that the Banu Mustaliq tribe tried to kill him and were now preparing to attack Medina. The Prophet sent Khalid ibn Walid to confirm the news. Khalid had learnt the truth of the matter and no further action was necessary.<sup>59</sup> After this incident the following verse was revealed: 'O you who believe! If a seditious person comes to you with a news, verify it, so that you don't harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful to what you have done.'<sup>60</sup>

#### ***4.8 Not to cause Muslim casualties as collateral damage***

One of the current issues with certain terrorist acts or resistance movements against foreign occupation is that Muslim civilians are killed in some attacks as well as the target group. In the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, the lives of Muslims were not knowingly put to risk. According to the Qur'an, one of the reasons why the Prophet signed the treaty of Hdaybiyah as apposed to fighting the Meccans was in order not to risk the lives of Muslims who could not migrate and were still living in Mecca, ' . . . Had there not been believing men and women whom you did not know, that you may have killed them and on this account a sin would have been committed by you without knowledge . . .'<sup>61</sup>

#### ***4.9 Humanitarian help to enemy***

One of the best examples of the well-intent of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> is the way he gave food aid to the Meccans during the years of bitter conflict. This is even more remarkable considering that it was the same people who subjected the Prophet and his tribe

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<sup>59</sup> Ali Akpınar, 'Religion of Peace, Prophet of Love', *Yeni Umit*, Jan-Mar Issue (2004)

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<sup>60</sup> Qur'an 49:6

<sup>61</sup> Qur'an 48:25

Ozalp, M. (2008) "Peace and Military Engagement in the Qur'an and in the Action of the Prophet Muhammad", in W. W. Emilsen & J. T. Squires (eds.) *Validating Violence - Violating Faith: Religion, Scripture and Violence*, Adelaide: ATF Press, pp. 111-126, ISBN 978-1-92069-189-9.

to economic sanctions for three years prior to migration to Medina. During a drought in Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> sent financial aid for them to purchase food. While some Meccan leaders such as Umayyah bin Halaf did not want to accept the aid, Abu Sufyan accepted the aid in embarrassment.<sup>62</sup>

In a similar tone, when the tribe of Yamama stopped the shipment of food to Mecca because of maltreatment of one of its tribesman, Meccans asked the prophet to intercede. The Prophet asked the tribe to continue the food shipments with a letter. The tribe of Yamama restarted selling food on this request.<sup>63</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

It would be stating the obvious that war and conflict is unfortunately a reality of human existence. In human history, there has always been aggressors who wanted to achieve their goals by force and transgress the freedom, land and wealth of others. It would not be a dark outlook of the future to predict that warfare will most likely continue to be part of this human condition for as long as humans last on this planet.

While it is not realistic to rid the earth from warfare, it is possible to control what falls in one's circle of influence. Certainly, the decision to start wars, the conduct of soldiers in warfare and the treatment of civilians and prisoners of war are all within this circle of influence. The fundamental sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the actions of the Prophet Muhammad, lay out standards in these three areas that were far advanced to its time. It appears that even today modern societies are having problems in following universal principles despite international conventions, declarations and laws.

The fact that the Qur'an includes verses that discuss warfare and that the Prophet Muhammad lead armies in battle may seem counterintuitive to religion. Rather than being a liability, this fact is really an advantage in the case of Islam as it provided a very high standards of warfare and a set of guidelines to follow for Muslim rulers throughout history. As a result of these guidelines, we do not

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<sup>62</sup> Ali Akpınar, 'Religion of Peace, Prophet of Love', *Yeni Umit*, Jan-Mar Issue (2004) 52

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 52

Ozalp, M. (2008) "Peace and Military Engagement in the Qur'an and in the Action of the Prophet Muhammad", in W. W. Emilson & J. T. Squires (eds.) *Validating Violence - Violating Faith: Religion, Scripture and Violence*, Adelaide: ATF Press, pp. 111-126, ISBN 978-1-92069-189-9.

see any holocausts, holy wars, inquisitions, systematic rape of women and mass murder of civilians in Muslim history. Without the guidelines of the Qur'an and the example set by the Prophet Muhammad in warfare, the Muslim history, in fact the world history, would have transpired quite differently indeed.

Since Islam as a religion sets high standards of behaviour at times of conflict, we can therefore confine the present day events involving Muslims in the present time and space and conclude that the present day manifestations of violence conducted by some Muslims are an aberration of history and will eventually end when the prevailing circumstances no longer exist.

In some cases, people will do things in spite of Islam. Once, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was speaking to a man. A child comes by and the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> displays love and affection for the child. The man is surprised and says 'we do not do this to our kids where I come from'. The Prophet looks at him amazed and replies 'what can I do if God took away love and compassion from your heart'. So, what can Islam do today, if some people's hearts are so deprived from love and compassion in that they do not hesitate to kill innocent people in cold-blood.