

# Peaceful Co-existence and Violence in a Pluralistic Society: A Comparative Study of Two Distinct Interpretations of Qur'anic Verses

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## Abstract

We commonly encounter two opposing arguments: one that the peace verses of the *Qur'an* have been repealed by the war verses of the *Qur'an*, and the other that the peace verses have not been repealed and that the interpretation of *Qur'anic* verses of war should be done in light of the context and historical importance of the verses in question. To address the conflicting interpretations of *Qur'anic* passages on peace and war, an exhaustive comparative literature study of the two arguments was conducted in order to comprehend the rationale and context for each. A contextual and comparative study of *Qur'anic* verses reveals that the Muslim society was more akin to a simple and inclusive civilization than an intolerant one. When taken in its totality, with the verses' revelation and historical context in mind, it promotes peaceful coexistence among diverse communities. The key conclusions of this study suggest that, while the *Qur'an* concedes different faiths, it maintains and upholds its monotheistic system of belief. Even though the *Qur'anic* notion of peaceful coexistence does not connect with the conventional concept of secularism, where all faiths are perceived as true, it has been contended that the *Qur'anic* concept of peaceful coexistence does accept the diversity and existence of various communities having different faiths living in harmony. From the standpoint of the *Qur'an*, it is conceivable to build a society in which individuals of different religions may coexist peacefully while retaining their unique religious identities.

**Keywords:** *Religious violence, Islamophobia, peaceful co-existence, Qur'an, Islam*

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## Introduction

The *Qur'an* discusses peaceful coexistence, embraces Christian and Jewish scriptures, and encourages the concept of diversity via collaboration, respect, and understanding amongst various communities. Through the centuries, however, it has been subjected to anti pluralist interpretations to advance hegemonic goals (Asani, 2002). Extremists in the past and present have attempted to provide a contrary interpretation by claiming that the verses of peace were abrogated by the verses discussing the war in *sura The Repentance* (Abd-al Salam Faraj, 1995, p.16-17). While certain *Qur'anic* texts are encouraging intolerance, others appear to be encouraging peaceful co-existence. A thorough examination of the context of these verses and other pertinent *Qur'anic* passages reveals that it has always chosen peace over violence (e.g., *Qur'an* 8:61-62). The combat verses of the *Qur'an* should be interpreted in their contextual setting. *Qur'anic* epistemology of humankind indicates that peace is an eternal phenomenon, and that the *Qur'an's* peace verses have not been abrogated. These are two distinct interpretations of the *Qur'an* verses concerning war and peace. However, are these rationales sufficient to comprehend the *Qur'anic* notion of heterogeneity and peaceful coexistence in its entirety? The author aims to conduct comprehensive research in order to critically assess both viewpoints and arrive at some intricacies about the *Qur'anic* vision of peaceful coexistence and diversity. This study is critical in today's society when we are witnessing an upsurge in violence towards the Muslim population worldwide and their stereotyping as terrorists. Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon, but it is becoming more prevalent now than ever. Certain Muslim organisations bear an equal share of the blame for how Islam has been portrayed to the rest of the world. In order to comprehend the notion of peaceful coexistence and violence in the *Qur'an*, we must first discover other findings that are relevant to the discussion. This paper will conduct a comparative examination of two distinct sorts of scholarly opinions. It will attempt to examine *Qur'anic* passages that appear to promote conflict and exclusion using a historical context of their revelation while exploring the counterarguments presented by the contemporary authorities on such verses, as well as the evidence from the *Qur'an* backed by the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), in favour of peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, it will present a critical study of the verses of *Qur'an* encouraging diversity culminating with a discussion on the study and its relevance for the further research.

## **A Critical Analysis of Extremists' Arguments and Counterarguments Presented by the Contemporary Scholars**

While extremists have exploited verse 9:29-"... *slay the idolators wherever you find them...*" to justify violence, this verse was revealed during the seventh-century war between a marginal Muslim community and powerful pagan Arabs, Christians, and Jews adversaries. When confronted, Muslims are permitted to protect themselves and their property, but they are not instructed to fight non-believers for no justification. Verse 5:51 espousing believers against making friends with Jews and Christians was revealed in a similar context when specific Jewish and Christian groups betrayed the cause of Muslims by joining in military assaults against the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) alongside pagan Arabs. On the contrary, the *Qur'an* instructs believers in verse 29:46 to avoid arguing with the people of the scriptures (Jews and Christians) unless it is ethical, and later in this verse to affirm that "we believe in what has been revealed to us and to you," confirming peaceful coexistence with the Jewish and Christian scriptures. How is it possible for scripture that advocates for peaceful dialogue with other communities to also advocate for violence in direct contradiction to its verses? This paradox arose as a result of conflicting interpretations of the *Qur'anic* texts. The *Qur'an* declares diversity to be an inherent feature of humanity as a whole, stating, "*If the Lord had willed, he would have made mankind in the single nation, but they will not cease to diverse*" (El Fadl, 2002). *Qur'an* expresses unequivocally its opposition to coercion about religion: "*there is no coercion in religion*" (*Qur'an* 2:256). Additionally, verses 17:107 and 18:29 grant individuals the liberty to follow their own theistic beliefs. The *Qur'an* goes one step further in verse 8:61, urging Muslims to unite and tend towards peace, an idea that has been realized not only in theory but also in practice.

Extremists argue that the verses cited above, as well as others alluding to religious freedom, tolerance, and peace, were rendered invalid by the combative passages (e.g., *Qur'an* 9:5, 29) of the sura "*The Repentance*" (Abd-al Salam Faraj, 1995, p. 16-17). Gasser Auda (2004, p.196) comments that jurists utilized abrogation extensively, which resulted in several contentious rulings. The view that a single sword passage may nullify over a hundred verses of peace is untenable and dilutes the *Qur'an's* universal messages of tolerance, freedom of religion, and speech. From the standpoint of contemporary authorities on the *Qur'an*, such as Joel Hayward, the lessons of the *Qur'an* concentrating on peace, tolerance,

reconciliation, and inclusivity were not abrogated by the combat verses of the *Qur'an*. Hayward stated that certainly most Islamic authorities on the *Qur'an* and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) today, as opposed to scholars from, say, the war filled medieval period, are firm in their judgment that the most warlike verses in the *Qur'an*, even those revealed very late in Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) mission, do not cancel out the overwhelming number of verses that extol tolerance, reconciliation, inclusiveness, and peace (Hayward, 2012). That is because if only *Qur'anic* verses advocating violence are allowed to define Islam, Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) twenty-three years of preaching Islam will be fruitless (Sulayman, 1993).

Thus, the idea that the combat passage invalidates the majority of verses supporting tolerance is rebutted by several contemporary authorities. Abdulaziz Sachedina convincingly argued in his book *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (2001), that the primary means by which exclusivists promoted their view was by claiming that the numerous verses commanding Muslims to build bridges of understanding with non-Muslims had been supplanted by verses commanding Muslims to fight the infidels. He asserted that it is only through decontextualizing the exegesis of such verses, ignoring their original historical context of revelation and employing them to engage in ubiquitous abrogation of contradictory verses, that exclusivist Muslim exegetes have been able to counteract the pluralist ethos that so pervades the *Qur'an* (Sulayman, 1993).

### **Peaceful Co-existence in the Qur'an**

Islam is a religion of moderation, straddling the two extremes. When it comes to the Muslim community, verse 2:143 characterizes it as rational and well-balanced, a description that applies to both the spiritual (faith) and physical (action) aspects of Islam. The *Qur'an* advocates moderation in all aspects of life, and it should serve as the cornerstone upon which varied cultures can dwell peacefully while retaining their characteristics. Since the inception of Islam as a unified and coherent identity, 1430 years ago, Muslim dynasties have shown exceptional tolerance for others (Gülen, 2004). A community made up of people from all cultures and races is accepted and encouraged in the verse 30:22. This act of God has been interpreted as a sign, validating the idea of peaceful co-existence. Verse 49:13 of the *Qur'an* reveals that humankind is the result of a single male and female; tribes exist to identify one another rather than dishonour one

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another. God never intended diversity to be a source of contention, division, or polarisation in society (Asani, 2003).

The *Qur'an* does not negate the messages of the preceding scriptures; rather, in the verse 10:94, it instructs the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to consult the people of the scriptures (when in doubt), fostering a peaceful discourse. Concerning repudiation of a reminder proclaimed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the *Qur'an* tells Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that he is merely a warner (one who reminds) and that he is not a dictator over them (*Qur'an* 88:21–26). These verses elucidate a contentious debate that continues to rage today, in which extremist groups encourage violence in the event of non-acceptance of their message, while the *Qur'an*, on the other hand, argues that it is God's responsibility, not that of human beings, including the prophet, to hold individuals accountable. This divine command is reiterated multiple times in the verses of the *Qur'an*. For instance, verses 88:68 and 88:69 instruct the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Muslims that in the event of argument, they should say, "*Allah knows best of what you do*" and that Allah has the authority to judge. One of the *Qur'anic* guidelines for civil discourse is stated in the verse 16:125, which commands Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to argue with people in a way that is wiser and to invite them to God's way with wisdom and fair preaching. This verse rebuts the arguments advanced by extremists who advocate violence.

Extremists' interpretations of *Qur'anic* verses resulted in the *Qur'an* being portrayed as exclusive and anti-pluralist, which runs counter to the *Qur'anic* concept of guidance (*Qur'an* 2:185, 3:4). It is especially evident from Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) life, who is the best example of a *Qur'anic* follower, that the *Qur'an* prefers peace and has an inclusive approach, as evidenced by the *Qur'an's* emphasis on inclusion. Albert Hourani's (d. 1993) book *The History of the Arab People (1991)* illustrates that during much of Arab-Muslim history, there hardly existed any systematic persecution of people of different religions living under Muslim rule. He also referenced Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his arrangement with both Jews and Christians in Madinah, where each party was permitted to maintain its laws and customs. Moreover, the entire community across the entire area was to be one of harmony (Ibrahim, 1998). The Madinah charter is another example of pluralism, as it brought together Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Pagans under a single contract that

safeguarded all people's fundamental human rights, including religious liberty (Guillaume, 1978). This shows that not less, but a greater understanding and adherence to the entirety of the Islamic message will lead to individual and societal stability. The contrary will lead to the opposite (Chak, 2009). Respect for all communities' spiritual beliefs and places of worship is crucial for peaceful coexistence and pluralism. It is documented in Muhammad ibn Sa'd's (d. 845) *Kitāb al Ṭabaqāt al Kabīr* that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) entered into a covenant with the Christians of *Najran* (Ibn Sa'd, 1990). In this covenant, he promised the Christians of *Najran* complete freedom to pray in their way, as well as the safety of their homes, worship places, and the freedom to stay Christian (Guillaume, 1978). According to al-Wāḥidi's *Asbāb al Nuzūl*, verse 6:108, "*And insult not those whom they worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge*" is connected with the occasion when idolators complained to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), saying, "*O Muhammad, either stop reviling our idols or we shall revile your God.*" (Guezzou, 2008, p.78) As a result, Allah revealed this verse, warning them not to despise their respective gods. According to *Qatādah's* account, Muslims were the ones who reviled their deities (Guezzou, 2008). Thus, it is plausible to infer that this was not Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) practice, but that of some other Muslims. While Islamic scripture (the *Qur'an*) recognizes the diversity of opinion and interpretation, it specifically preserves the liberty of individuals to hold divergent viewpoints by asserting that believing is a matter of choice (Asani, 2003).

## Discussion

According to the analytical, historical, and contextual analysis, and interpretation of scholars, war verses have not superseded peace verses in their essence. These verses are context-specific and were revealed in a specific scenario. Extremists' stance on the sword verses, while ignoring their practical juridical ramifications, is deleterious to the Muslim community's interests (Auda, 2004). Contemporary authorities presented an excellent counterargument to extremists by demonstrating that passages directing Muslims to be placid, tolerant, and non-aggressive are perennial verses with a clear meaning and that the established ideal of tolerance cannot be nullified by situational realities from history. The examination of this study revealed that the study of *Qur'an* suggests that it is possible to create a society in which people of all religious backgrounds may live peacefully beside one another while yet maintaining their own religious identities and while doing so, it sustains and maintains its monotheistic

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theological framework. Author does not want to imply that the *Qur'an* endorses secularism unconditionally when using its verses in support of arguments concerning the peaceful coexistence and the diversity. The endorsement of secularism and respect for diversity are two distinct things. The verse number 19 of the *sura The Family of Imran* in the *Qur'an* demonstrate that the *Qur'an* does not regard all religions equal. Despite the fact that the *Qur'an* endorses and considers monotheism to be the right path, it does not compel anybody to adhere to a specific faith. Every person has the right to follow a religion of their choice. The *Qur'an*, on the other hand, accepts the diversity and peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths and allows them to practise their faith and worship at their places of worship. In this sense, this study argues for a more sensible footing to come and congregate at for both Muslims and people of other faiths.

According to history, the *Qur'an*, and the *sunnah*, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not initiate conflicts against polytheists, Jews, or Christians in the first place, but only fought in defence and to defend the area of Madinah. Therefore, many verses of the *Qur'an*, which encourage believers to fight against polytheists, must be understood in the light of their historical context. For instance, *Qur'an* states that one who is wronged is allowed to fight back to safeguard oneself (*Qur'an* 22:39). While it is true that Muslims are not permitted to fight non-Muslims for no justification, the author contends that they are permitted to defend themselves whenever they find themselves in a war zone and confront enemies who are causing injury and violence to their property and lives, in addition to waging war against Muslims, it is strongly suggested that Muslims defend their own lives and property.

Even when it is advocated to defend and fight back in exceptional circumstances, analysis of this research shows that the phenomenon of the piece continues in perpetuity in Islam, and that the concept of war is circumstantial and cannot be generalized. In Islam, peace will always be preferred over violence. Even during times of war, Muslims are instructed to deal with their adversaries in accordance with the standards and procedures established by the *Qur'an* and the *sunnah*. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) outlawed any type of violence against women or children. He advocated for the humane treatment of prisoners of war, and ransomed captives in exchange for teaching ten Muslim boys how to read and write in exchange for their freedom (Mubarakpuri, 2002). According to the Islamic rules of battle, Muslims are advised to feed prisoners for the

countenance of Allah. This is evidenced in verses 76:8-9 of the *Qur'an* stating, “*They give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive, saying: We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We do not desire from you reward or gratitude.*” According to the numerous verses of the *Qur'an* discussed above, peace is addressed throughout the *Qur'an* and is considered a crucial part of Islam, whereas conflict is unique and contextual. As a result, the *Qur'anic* concept of peaceful coexistence emphasizes plurality above hostility and violence.

## Conclusion

The summary of this paper demonstrates that the fight verses should be interpreted in their contextual setting. The *Qur'an* instructs humankind, specifically Muslims, to coexist peacefully with members of other faiths while maintaining their own monotheistic views. The *Qur'an* promotes monotheism as the true path, yet it does not compel anybody to follow it. Muslims are allowed to defend themselves and their properties when they are approached and battled. In contrast to extremists' argument, they are not ordered to fight people of other faiths without a compelling reason. The teachings of Islam strongly encourage the concepts of tolerance and peaceful co-existence, as evidenced by a contextual and historical examination of the fight and peace verses of the *Qur'an*. It not only permits non-Muslims to practice their religion in their sacred places, but also guarantees that their lives, property, and dignity are completely protected. The study of the *Qur'an's* verses should be exhaustive, and the *Qur'an* itself should be studied in its entirety. That is, contextual and perceptive study, in addition to a devotion to the entirety of the *Qur'anic* discourse, would result in harmonious societal coexistence. This study will contribute to future research towards building a *Qur'anic* worldview of peace, pluralism, and peaceful coexistence that will aid in combating islamophobia and bringing a holistic study of the *Qur'an* into focus.



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