

## **The Qur'anic Idea of Peace**

Paper for:  
Political Studies Association 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> April 2006 – The Department of Politics and International Studies,  
University of Reading

Hamid Hadji Haidar  
Faculty of Oriental Studies – University of Cambridge  
Email Address: [hh301@cam.ac.uk](mailto:hh301@cam.ac.uk)

## Abstract

Peace is a chief social value, which the Qur'an appreciates, along with social justice, and submission to God and worshipping Him. War is initially an implausible situation, which should be invoked only when necessary. Hence, the rule is peace, and war is the exception. Using Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai's methodology in the interpretation of the Qur'an and his Qur'anic views regarding war and peace, this paper will attempt to show that the Qur'anic picture of war and peace is different from what is commonly supposed by non-Muslims.

This paper will argue that since disagreement on the truth of religion is inevitable and perpetual; since imposition of religion is inconceivable; since the faithful have no responsibility for disbelievers' choice except clearly delivering God's Messages to them, and since the faithful are obliged to offer absolute respect to their disputants on the truth of religion, the reasonable way of managing disputes on religion is peaceful interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. It will be further argued that in addition to the moral principle of peace, there is another ground on the basis of which Muslims are advised to establish peaceful relations with non-Muslims; that is, through making peace contracts. In this way, the principle of peace is reinforced by the duty of respecting peace contracts.

## Introduction

This paper is an attempt to explore the Qur'anic idea about international peace and security.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, the methodology that is employed in this paper for interpreting the Qur'an and its ideas will be discussed. Then, after a brief examination of the Qur'anic terminology of war and peace, the Qur'anic appreciation of peace as a top human value will be shown. Finally, a Qur'anic argument, which necessitates peaceful settlement of conflicts of interests, as well as peaceful management of the inevitable disagreement on the conception of the good life and religion, will be developed. It will be demonstrated that, according to the Qur'an, the moral principle of peace is, further, reinforced by the moral duty of respecting peace contracts.

## The Rationalist Method of Interpreting the Qur'an

The methodology used in this paper is the rationalist method of 'the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an'. This methodology is well developed by Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai (1903-1981) in his 20 volumes masterwork regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an, '*Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*'. This collection has been repeatedly published in Beirut, Tehran, and Qum in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tabatabai is well known as the greatest interpreter of the Qur'an, as well as the greatest philosopher in the contemporary Shia world.<sup>2</sup> He has delivered an original style of the interpretation of the Qur'an,<sup>3</sup> which can be considered as the greatest interpretation that has been ever written on the Qur'an in Islamic history.<sup>4</sup> He is also thought to have promoted Islamic philosophy through making a strong attempt to reconcile between the teachings of the Qur'an and Islamic philosophy and mysticism.<sup>5</sup> His students have been among the top authorities and thinkers of the Islamic Republic of Iran since its establishment.<sup>6</sup>

His style in the interpretation of the Qur'an is different from other styles, such as traditionalist, theological, philosophical, mystical, and scientific. He argues that in traditionalist style of interpretation, the Qur'anic views are subjected to traditions and

the power of the intellect in understanding the Qur'an is denied. In other styles, the interpreter initially develops some ideas independently of the Qur'an and then attempts to accord the verses of the Qur'an to those ideas. As opposed to all these styles, what he supports is a style that is compatible with the teachings of the Qur'an itself; that is, 'the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an'. Tabatabai's rationalist-Qur'anic style is based on two chief suppositions: (1) the supposition of rationality of the Qur'anic views and judgments understandable by human intellect; and (2) the supposition of internal consistency of the Qur'an.

Tabatabai argues that the validity of the Qur'an itself derives from some intellectual demonstrations, and hence the intellect should be valid in comprehension of the verses of the Qur'an; a view that the Qur'an itself confirms. In addition, he argues that the Qur'an uniquely enjoys perfect internal consistency.<sup>7</sup> Major evidence from the Qur'an is the following verse: 'Do they not ponder about the Qur'an? Had it been from other than God, surely they would have found therein so many contradictions'.<sup>8</sup> Tabatabai infers from this verse that, firstly, the Qur'an is comprehensible by ordinary people, because this verse condemns people for not pondering about the Qur'an. Secondly, the verses of the Qur'an interpret each other, because this verse rejects the likelihood of inconsistency in the Qur'an; a fact that is mentioned among evidences of its being revealed from God.<sup>9</sup>

According to this methodology, one should look at the Qur'an in its totality and attempt to reconcile any initial inconsistency between different verses regarding any given subject. Therefore, with regard to exploring the Qur'anic idea of war and peace, it is unacceptable to confine our view to some selected verses of *jihad* and forget the verses of peace. Equally unacceptable is ignorance about the context, in which the verses of *jihad* were revealed, as well as ignorance about other subjects that are related to the issue of religious obligations in managing the internal and external relations of Islamic societies. Using Tabatabai's methodology in the interpretation of the Qur'an and his views regarding war and peace, *this paper attempts to show that the Qur'anic picture of war and peace is different from what is commonly supposed by non-Muslims*.<sup>10</sup>

## The Qur'anic Appreciation of Peace

When the Qur'an engages in the moral duty of Muslims towards non-Muslims, the term it uses to show its appreciation of the peaceful settlement of disputes is often *silm* and its derivatives. *Silm*<sup>11</sup> and its derivatives, such as *salm*,<sup>12</sup> *salam*,<sup>13</sup> and *salam*<sup>14</sup>, mean compromise, peace, health, security, protection, obedience, acceptance, and the like.<sup>15</sup> The Qur'an uses these terms in many places in the literal meanings mentioned above.<sup>16</sup> An alternative term, which the Qur'an rarely employs to recommend the legitimate way of settlement of disputes, is *sulh* meaning peace, compromise, and reconciliation.<sup>17</sup>

The term *jihad*<sup>18</sup> derives from the term *jahd*<sup>19</sup> and *juhd*<sup>20</sup> meaning one's ultimate ability. Hence, *jihad* means to make one's ultimate effort of any form and to tolerate difficulties in order to arrive at a goal. Also, *jihad* means military combat with one's enemy, as a form of using one's ultimate ability to arrive at a goal.<sup>21</sup> The specific Qur'anic term for military combat is *qital* and *muqatalah*, which derive from the term *qatl* meaning killing. The terms *qital* and *muqatalah* indicate a situation, in which at least two sides engage in violent conflict resulting in losing lives in both sides. Hence, the Qur'anic terms *qital* and *muqatalah* are equal to the English term war.<sup>22</sup>

Peace is a chief social value, which the Qur'an appreciates, along with social justice, and submission to God and worshipping Him. War is initially an implausible situation, which should be invoked only when unavoidable. Hence, *the rule is peace, and war is the exception*. As far as the Qur'anic major purposes are concerned, Muslims should attempt to establish peaceful relationships with non-Muslims and invoke military engagement only in self-defence when unavoidable. Peace is a necessary condition, which Muslims need for development of their capabilities in accordance with the Qur'anic pattern of spiritual progress. According to Tabatabai, the basic needs, which are necessary for social cooperation, are the safety of life, the protection against harm, and the safety of individual ownership. He maintains that all other needs derive from these basic needs, which are derived in turn from security and peace.<sup>23</sup>

The Qur'an appreciates peace as a constituent component of the well-being of human beings.<sup>24</sup> In general the Qur'an appreciates *sulh* and says: 'compromise is better'.<sup>25</sup> In a further step, in appreciation of peace and security the Qur'an goes so far that when it intends to portray the Paradise, it adopts peace as an indicator to the eternal happy life. 'And God calls [mankind] to the home of peace and does guide whom He wills to the straight path'.<sup>26</sup> Speaking about the destination of the faithful, the Qur'an says: 'For them will be the home of peace with their Lord, and God will be their guardian because of their righteous deeds'.<sup>27</sup> Again, the Qur'an states: 'Surely, the pious will be in a comfort and secure place [in the Hereafter]'.<sup>28</sup>

Since peace is a constituent component of the well-being of man, according to Tabatabai, the first *shariah* emerged for the restoration of the initial situation of peace in the primitive communities. Invoking some verses of the Qur'an, Tabatabai argues that man by nature is self-interested and inclined to employ every means to obtain his individual interests. So far as non-human entities were concerned, man had no difficulty exploiting natural resources to his interest. After using non-human resources, man noticed that he could, also, use the capabilities of other individuals of his own kind. Yet, since he realised that every man wanted to use others to obtain his own individual interest, he consented to be used by others to the degree that he used them to obtain his own interest. In this way, man chose to live with other members of his kind in society. Hence, according to Tabatabai, social life was the decision by the self-interested man to safeguard and promote his individual interests. Yet, since people were different in power and capabilities, the more powerful persons started to benefit from the powerless more than they benefited them. In reaction, the powerless members of society resorted to cheating and deceit, as long as they were powerless. In addition, they attempted to obtain more power to take revenge from the powerful members. Hence, the self-interested nature of man that forced him to enter society led to social disorder and conflict, too. The solution was to make a collection of laws, whose enforcement could settle disputes in a just way. According to Tabatabai, it is for the restoration of social order and peace that God announced His *shariahs* by His Messengers.<sup>29</sup>

Explaining the emergence of *shariah*, the Qur'an says: 'Humanity were a single nation at the beginning; and [after the rise of dispute<sup>30</sup>] God sent forth prophets to deliver both tidings glad and warnings, and He sent down with them Scriptures based on Truth, in order to judge disputes between the people; ...'.<sup>31</sup> The Qur'an introduces itself as one of God's peace-seeking Messages for humanity: 'Through the Qur'an God guides whomever that seeks His pleasure to the ways of peace; ...'.<sup>32</sup> However, it should be noticed that the settlement of disputes and the restoration of the initial situation of peace should be managed with equity and justice. This is another purpose of sending Messengers and

establishing *shariahs*. 'We have sent Our Messengers with clear Signs, and We have sent the Scriptures and the Balance down with them, in order for mankind to establish justice ...'.<sup>33</sup> Combining the value of peace and the value of justice, the Qur'an stipulates that the restoration of peace should be made in an equitable way: 'If two parties among the faithful are at war against each other, make peace between them; ... make peace between them in fairness and with justice; for God surely loves the people who are truly equitable'.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the conflict of interests, people disagree on the conception of the good life. The disagreement goes so far as to divide even the followers of Divine religion into different and sometimes conflicting groups. According to Tabatabai, the interpretation of *shariah* became controversial and disagreement on Divine laws arose. Hence, disagreement on the truth, as well as conflict of interests became an inevitable feature of social life.<sup>35</sup> The Qur'an says: 'God sent forth prophets to deliver both tidings glad and warnings, and He sent down with them Scriptures based on Truth, in order to judge disputes between the people; but disputes arose among the folks who were given it, after they received clear Signs, because they wanted to oppress each other; ...'.<sup>36</sup>

Again, the Qur'an appreciates peaceful settlement of disagreement on the conception of the good life, as it appreciates peaceful settlement of conflicts of interests. Addressing Muslims in general, the Qur'an says: 'God shall hopefully establish amity between you and the others with whom you are at odds, for God is the Absolute power and God is also the Merciful Forgiving. God does not forbid you to do good and to do justice to those who have not fought you in religion's cause and have not driven you out of your homes; surely, God likes justice-doers. But God forbids you from having friendship with those who fought you in religion's cause and drove you out of your homes and helped one another in driving you out. And whoever among you has friendship with them is certainly transgressor'.<sup>37</sup>

A question immediately arises as why there are some verses in the Qur'an that encourage Muslims to resort to war and *jihad*. If the Qur'an instructs the faithful to establish peaceful relations with disbelievers and restricts the invocation of war in self-defence, which is self-evidently legitimate, why there should be any *encouragement* to military combat at all? The answer to this question lies in the fact that before the legitimisation of military combat, Muslims were obliged to tolerate the lack of freedom of religion, torture for submitting to Islam, and appropriation of their houses and properties by disbelievers. They were obliged to tolerate, even to deny their belief in front of their opponents, and finally to emigrate from their homeland. Hence, the verses, which encourage the military combat, abolished the previous duty and legitimised self-defence.<sup>38</sup>

Addressing Muslims in general, the Qur'an says: 'You shall certainly be examined in your possessions and in your lives and certainly you shall hear much annoyance from those who have been given the Book before you and from the idolaters; and if you be patient and be pious, that is, certainly, a matter of great resolution [in God's way]'.<sup>39</sup> The following verse points to an occasion, in which a Muslim was compelled to insult God for saving his life: '... they are indeed the liars. The one who disbelieved after his belief in God, except a person who under persecution has been compelled to utter blasphemy and his heart was full of faith; ...'.<sup>40</sup>

Pointing to the necessity of emigration for keeping one's faith, the Qur'an says: 'And those who migrated in God's way after they suffered oppression, We will give them an honourable lodging in this world and surely their reward in the Hereafter is greater if they but knew'.<sup>41</sup> Again, with regard to necessary emigration, the Qur'an says: 'Surely your Lord is the Merciful Forgiving to those who emigrated after persecution [by the disbelievers]; and also to those who worked hard and patiently in God's path'.<sup>42</sup>

Then, the first verse of *jihad*, which abolished the previous duties, gave Muslims permission to fight back against those who had oppressed them before.<sup>43</sup> The term permission indicates the lack of permission for self-defence before that time. 'Permission to fight back is now given to people who have come under attack and have been oppressed; surely, God is Powerful enough to assist them. The people who were expelled unjustly from their homes, only because they utter: 'God the One is our only Lord'; ...'<sup>44</sup>

Overall, with regard to the settlement of conflict of interests, the Qur'anic idea is a peaceful resolution through 'compromise' between different sides. Military conflict for obtaining interests is illegitimate. Hence, when the Qur'an stipulates that war should be in God's path, it intends to reject the legitimacy of war for national interests.<sup>45</sup> As for the management of disagreement on the truth and religion, the final Qur'anic advice to Muslims is the peaceful resolution of absolute respect of all men, though they should keep their commitment to their faith as the most justifiable doctrine of the good life. When their disagreement with people from other *shariahs*, as well as various secular ways of life becomes intensified and military combat seems to be occurring, Muslims should seek to find a peaceful resolution, rather than initiating war. However, if non-Muslims insist on military combat, a Muslim nation should defend itself against any military attack. This is a brief picture of the Qur'anic idea of international peace and security. In the following section, an attempt will be made to develop a Qur'anic argument, which reveals the underlying assumptions for the Qur'anic appreciation of peace.

## The Qur'anic Argument for Peace

The Qur'anic argument for peace proceeds through some ideas, values, and facts that altogether lead to recommending peaceful relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. These ideas and facts include the followings: (1) the idea of the truth of the Divine religion; (2) the fact of inevitable disagreement on the truth of religion; (3) the fact of inconceivable imposition of religion on individuals; (4) the lack of responsibility by the faithful for disbelievers' choice in adopting other ways of life; (5) the duty of clear deliverance of God's messages to people by the faithful; (6) the duty of absolute respect of all men by the faithful. These ideas and facts altogether lead to (7) the principle of peace between Muslims and non-Muslims. By explaining the above ideas and facts, the successive discussion shows that Divine religion in general should be conceived as being peace-promoting. In addition, the Qur'an attaches supreme importance to respecting any contract made between Muslims themselves, as between them and non-Muslims. Hence, (8) 'the Qur'anic duty of respecting peace contract' will further reinforce 'the Qur'anic principle of peace'.

### (1) The Idea of the Truth

The Qur'an declares that there is one truth, which has come down from God. Addressing the Prophet, the Qur'an says: 'The Truth is from your Lord; therefore be not ever in doubt'.<sup>46</sup> Then, it declares that there has come down only one religion from God in the history of mankind: 'Truly, the religion in the sight of God is islam; ...',<sup>47</sup> where *islam*<sup>48</sup> means to submit oneself to God and His Will.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the Qur'an affirms that there have been five *shariahs*,<sup>50</sup> notwithstanding the unity of the Divine religion. The following Messengers have introduced the *shariahs* to people:<sup>51</sup> Noah, Abraham,

Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the Qur'an confirms the availability and the validity of the holy Books of the last three Divine Messengers to mankind.<sup>53</sup>

## **(2) The Fact of Inevitable Disagreement**

Whilst the Qur'an affirms the truth of religion, it accepts that disagreement on the truth and religion is so inevitable that the unification of people under one religion is 'impossible'<sup>54</sup> for which only 'uninformed' people might aspire.<sup>55</sup> What accounts for the inevitability of disagreement on the truth is God's Will. For He has created human beings with free will in order for them to freely choose their way of life and religion.<sup>56</sup> According to Tabatabai, a natural consequence of free will is, definitely, disagreement on the conception of the good life.<sup>57</sup> Since disagreement on the conception of the good and religion is an inherent attribute of human beings with free will, it has been and will be certainly perpetual in human society.<sup>58</sup> Addressing the Prophet, the Qur'an says: 'Had your Lord wished, He would have made mankind one community; but they continue to differ'.<sup>59</sup>

## **(3) The Fact of Inconceivable Imposition**

In addition to the fact of inevitable disagreement on religion, the faith in religion is not susceptible to imposition. For faith is the act of the intellect and heart, which is susceptible only to rational reasoning and the like, rather than being the act of the body, which is potential for imposition. Consequently, not only is imposition of religion on individuals *inconceivable*, but also the very act of imposition is morally forbidden in Islam:<sup>60</sup> 'There is no compulsion in religion'.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, it is up to each individual to freely choose whether or not to accept the truth of God's Messages, which have been clearly delivered to people: 'We showed him the Straight Path: whether he chooses to be grateful or be ungrateful and disbeliever'.<sup>62</sup> What reinforces freedom of religion is its self-sufficiency with regard to imposition. For religion is supported by rational reasons accessible to every individual, and hence there is no *need* for coercion of religion.<sup>63</sup> In advocacy of freedom of conscience and religion, Tabatabai goes so far as to argue that this case of freedom has been recognised since the first *shariah* came by Noah to people. And this Divine decree has been valid since then up to the present time.<sup>64</sup> Hence, freedom of conscience and religion has been a major principle of Divine religion.

## **(4) The Lack of Responsibility for Disbelievers' Choice**

Given the fact of inevitable disagreement on religion and the fact of inconceivable imposition, neither the Messengers nor the faithful have any responsibility with regard to disbelievers' choice: 'O You who believe! Look after your own souls; if you yourselves are rightly guided, no hurt could come to you from those who stray. You will all return to Him, and it is God that will inform you of all things you did'.<sup>65</sup> The Qur'an explicitly derives the lack of the Prophet's responsibility with regard to disbelievers' choice from the fact of inconceivable imposition, which derives in itself from human free will.<sup>66</sup> 'Had God pleased, they would have never prayed to gods beside Him; and We have not made you a keeper over them, neither are you their guardian ever'.<sup>67</sup> Hence, it is up to individuals to freely choose to follow His Message to their own interest.<sup>68</sup> 'Say: 'O Mankind! The Truth has come to you indeed from your Lord; now whoever is guided,

he does so for his own good; and he that strays, will take himself to error; and I am surely not your keeper'.<sup>69</sup>

By contrast, in managing the internal relations of the Islamic society, those who have submitted to God are unified under one doctrine, and hence should encourage each other with regard to Divine laws, as each faithful is obliged to fulfil his own religious duties:<sup>70</sup> 'And the believers, men and women, are supporters and helpers of one another; they enjoin good and inhibit evil; and they perform regular prayers; and pay alms and obey God and His Messengers; ...'.<sup>71</sup>

### **(5) The Duty of Clear Deliverance**

Although freedom of religion has been recognised by all *shariahs*, God's Messengers have been instructed to deliver His Messages to people as clearly and broadly as possible: '... is the apostles' duty other than the clear Message to deliver?'.<sup>72</sup> This general duty equally applies to the Prophet of Islam: 'And We sent down this Book to you [O Messenger] in order that you may explain things which people differ in them; and also it is a guidance and a grace for those who believe'.<sup>73</sup> A rational consequence of clearly delivering God's Messages to mankind is that on the Day of Judgment people will have no excuse in the sight of God for disobeying His laws: 'Messengers were as bearers of glad tidings and warnings in order that mankind should have no excuse to plead, when facing God [in the Hereafter]; ...'.<sup>74</sup>

As to how the Messengers should deliver God's Messages to people, given the fact of inconceivable imposition, what the Qur'an legitimises is discussion and persuasion.<sup>75</sup> Addressing the Prophet with regard to the legitimate methods of the expansion of religion, the Qur'an says: 'Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best'.<sup>76</sup> Depending on the interlocutors' position, ranging from intellectuals, through ordinary people, to those who employ rhetorical argument against religion,<sup>77</sup> this verse emphatically instructs the Prophet to resort only to different forms of peaceful discussion in order to convince them of the truth of religion, or to defend it against its critics. Whilst the legitimate method of peaceful discussion effective with regard to intellectuals is the 'intellectual demonstration', for ordinary people it is the 'good preach', which can convince them of the worth of religion. A third method of peaceful discussion recommendable in dealing with rhetorical disputants is 'the best kind of argument' with the aim of dismissing the interlocutor's rhetoric.<sup>78</sup>

### **(6) The Duty of Absolute Respect**

Having fulfilled the duty of the clear and broad deliverance of God's Messages to people, and given the basic freedom of conscience and religion, the Qur'anic advice for managing external relationships of the Islamic society with non-Islamic societies is 'absolute respect'. In the first place, the Qur'an obliges Muslims to reciprocally respond to all good behaviour by similar behaviour. 'Shall the recompense of goodness be other than goodness?'.<sup>79</sup> This verse indicates that Muslims are obliged to reciprocally respect non-Muslims, if they respect Muslims.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, Muslims should respect non-Muslims, even if they do not respect Muslims: 'And the Merciful [God]'s servants are the people who walk upon the earth in humbleness, and when the ignorant people address them [by inappropriate words] they only say peace [upon you]'.<sup>81</sup> Or else, describing the faithful, the Qur'an says: 'And when they are in a circle and they hear idle talks regarding their religion they either change the discourse or leave the place saying: 'Our deeds we are

responsible for and your deeds you are responsible for; peace be upon you; but we do not seek the ways of ignorant folks'.<sup>82</sup> In a further step, the Qur'an requires Muslims to respect their disputants *in the best way* and at the highest level they themselves expect others to offer to them.<sup>83</sup> 'Repel ill [conduct] with that which is the best'.<sup>84</sup> This verse instructs Muslims to respond to any probable lack of respect from non-Muslims not only by abstinence from reciprocal disrespect, but also by respecting them in the best way possible.<sup>85</sup> Overall, the Qur'an asks all faithful individuals to speak good to all human beings. Criticising those who have disobeyed some of their religious tasks, the Qur'an locates among significant religious laws the absolute duty of respect for all men: '... and speak good to men'.<sup>86</sup>

It is worth noticing that the Qur'an explicitly combines the idea of the truth of religion and the moral value of absolute respect:<sup>87</sup> 'Truly, the religion in the sight of God is Islam; and those who were given the Scripture differed out of envy after knowledge came to them; ... But if they dispute with you [O Messenger!], say: "I have surrendered myself to God and so have those who follow me". And say to those who have been given the Scripture and to the disbelievers: "Have you surrendered?" and if they surrender, surely they are rightly guided; but if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the message. And God is the Most-Informed of His servants'.<sup>88</sup>

### **(7) The Moral Principle of Peace**

The principle of peace is the logical consequence of the above ideas and facts. If disagreement on the truth of religion is inevitable and perpetual, if imposition of religion is inconceivable, if Muslims have no responsibility for disbelievers' choice except clearly delivering God's Messages, and if Muslims are obliged to show absolute respect to their disputants on the truth of religion, the reasonable way of managing disputes on religion is peaceful interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, the disagreement between the faithful and disbelievers sometimes can be intensified and motivate them for violent conflict. Although the faithful should be ready for self-defence, they are obliged to show their inclination to peace. In this regard, the Qur'an addresses the Prophet and says: 'And if they incline to peace, you must incline to it, and put your trust in God, the Hearer and the Knower Best'.<sup>89</sup> The last part of this verse implies that initially the Prophet was worried about achieving peace with non-Muslims, and hence the Qur'an asks him to trust in God and accept an offer for peace from non-Muslims.

In detail, the Qur'an addresses the Muslim community and explains their religious duty with different groups of disbelievers: 'What has happened to you that you are two parties about the hypocrites? ... They wish that you should disbelieve as they disbelieve, so that you may be all alike. Therefore, do not take friends from among them until they migrate in God's way, but if they refused, then seize them and slay them wherever you find them and take none of them as friends and helpers. Except those who join a group, that between you and them there is a treaty [of peace] or those who approach you with their hearts restraining from fighting you, as well as fighting their own folk; ... then if they withdraw from you and do not fight against you and offer you peace, then God has not given you any reason [to fight] against them. Soon you will find some others who desire security from you as well as security from their own people [who are disbelievers], every time they are called back to mischief they plunge into it; therefore, if they do not withdraw from you and not surrender seeking peace and nor restrain their hands, then seize them and slay them wherever you find them; and [it is] against this type of people that we have given you an evident authority'.<sup>90</sup>

## (8) The Moral Duty of Respecting Peace Contracts

In addition to the principle of peace, as developed above, there is another ground on the basis of which Muslims are advised to establish peaceful relations with non-Muslims; that is, through making a peace contract. In this way, the moral principle of peace is reinforced by the moral duty of respecting contracts.<sup>91</sup> According to the Qur'an, the faithful are obliged to absolutely respect their contracts, including peace contracts, which are made between them and non-Muslims: 'O you who believe! Fulfil the promises and covenants once made [by you] ...'.<sup>92</sup> Or else, the Qur'an says: '... And fulfil your covenant once it is made; surely, the covenant will be questioned about [in the Hereafter]'.<sup>93</sup> However, retaliation against infringements by the other side is legitimate: '... So long as they are faithful to their covenant, you too be faithful to your covenant. Surely, God does like the pious'.<sup>94</sup> In another verse, after speaking about some disbelievers who had repeatedly infringed their peace contract with the Prophet, although the Qur'an legitimised retaliation, it emphasises that the ultimate purpose is peace: 'And if you [O Messenger] fear treachery from any people, throw back their treaty to them in a fair manner, for God does not like the treacherous people'. ... And if they incline to peace, you must incline to it, and put your trust in God, the Hearer and the Knower Best'.<sup>95</sup>

It should be emphasised that in chapter 'The Repentance', which was the last chapter revealed in Medina at a time when the Islamic society had been firmly established, the Qur'an emphasises the absolute duty of respecting peace contracts with non-Muslims. In the interpretation of this chapter, which strongly encouraged Muslims to fight against a group of disloyal idolaters to their peace contract with Muslims, Tabatabai argues that commitment to contracts is absolutely necessary so that any infringement is considered as a great sin, except when the other side infringes it. In that case, retaliation is permissible. He suggests that the underlying principle for respecting contracts is piety and self-restraint, and hence this ground is present and valid to the end of history. Tabatabai emphasises that the unilateral infringement of contracts is not permissible in Islam at all. Therefore, if Muslims make a contract with non-Muslims at a time when they enjoy less power, and by getting more powerful they can violate that contract under some ostensibly reasonable guises with the hope to obtain some benefits, the infringement is not permissible. For the norm, according to Tabatabai, is that keeping to one's promises is a true moral value, which does not derive from any interest of temporary present life.<sup>96</sup>

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> I have already explained the Shia jurisprudential view of war and peace in the following Farsi book: Hamid Hadji Haidar, *Tawassul bi Zour dar Rawabiti Bein al-Milal, Az Didgahi Huquuqi Bein al-Milali Umumi wa Fiqhi Shia* [Use of Force in the International Relations, according to International and Islamic Law], (Tehran: Intisharati Ittilaat, 1997). I have also presented the gist of this explanation in the following English article: Hamid Hadji Haidar, 'Islamic Jihad and Terrorism', in Hasan Bashir (ed.), *Terrorism: Definition, Roots and Solution*, (London: Institute of Islamic Studies, 2003). Here the focus of exploration is on the Qur'an and its interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Taqi Misbah, 'Sukhani Pirmouni Shakhsiyyati Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai', in *Yadnami-yi Mufasssiri Kabir Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai*, (Qum: Intisharati Shafaq, 1982), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Jaafar Sobhani, 'Nazari wa Gozari bar Zindigani-yi Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai', in *Yadnami-yi Mufasssiri Kabir Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai*, (Qum: Intisharati Shafaq, 1982), pp. 70-2.

<sup>4</sup> Abul Qasim Razzaqi, 'Ba Allama-yi Tabatabai dar al-Mizan', in *Yadnami-yi Mufasssiri Kabir Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai*, (Qum: Intisharati Shafaq, 1982), p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Taqi Misbah, 'Naqshi Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai dar Nihzati Fikri-yi Hawzi-yi Ilmiyyi-yi Qum', in *Yadnami-yi Mufasssiri Kabir Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai*, (Qum: Intisharati Shafaq, 1982), pp. 141-3; and Abdullah Jawadi-yi Amoli, 'Siri-yi Falsafi-yi Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai', in *Yadnami-yi Mufasssiri Kabir Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai*, (Qum: Intisharati Shafaq, 1982), pp. 167-8.

<sup>6</sup> Among his students are the following: Murtaza Mutahhari, a unique Islamic thinker in the contemporary Shia world whose books have been broadly studied in the last three decades; Muhammad Hussein Beheshti and Abdulkarim Mousavi Ardabili, the first and the second heads of the judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Ibrahim Amini, the deputy director of the Assembly of Experts for the appointment of the supreme leader in Iran; Hassan Hassanzadi Amoli and Abdullah Jawadi Amoli, the most distinguished philosophers of present Iran; Muhammad Taqi Misbah, the most influential religious scholar in present Iranian politics; Nasir Makarim Shirazi and Hussein Nouri Hamidani, two top jurists of present Iran; and finally Jaafar Sobhani, maybe the most prominent theologian in the contemporary Shia world. See: Jaafar Sobhani, 'Nazari wa Gozari bar Zindigani-yi Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai', in *Yadnami-yi Mufasssiri Kabir Ustad Allama-yi Tabatabai*, (Qum: Intisharati Shafaq, 1982), p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> new edition, (Beirut: Muassasah al-Aalami lil-Matbuaat, 2002), pp. 7-17.

<sup>8</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 4, verse 82.

<sup>9</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 5, pp. 19-21.

<sup>10</sup> In the translation of the verses of the Qur'an I refer to the following English translation of the Qur'an with minor changes that sometimes I freely make: (1) *The Holy Qur'an*, trans. by Tahereh Saffarzadeh, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Tehran: Kauthar Computer World, 2001); (2) *Qur'an, A Poetic Translation from the Original*, trans. by Fazlollah Nikayin, (Chicago: The Ultimate Book, 2000); (3) *The Qur'an*, trans. by Arthur J. Arberry, (Qum: Ansariyan Publication, 1995); (4) *The Qur'an*, trans. by 'Ali Quli Qarā'ī, (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> **S i l m**

<sup>12</sup> **S æ l m**

<sup>13</sup> **S æ l æ m**

<sup>14</sup> **S æ l a : m**

<sup>15</sup> Ibn Al-Manzur, *Lisan Al-Arab*, ed. By Ali Shiri, Vol. 6, (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1988), pp. 342-6.

<sup>16</sup> Ali Akbar Qarashi, *Qamousi Qur'an*, Vol. 3, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1996), pp. 296-8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Al-Manzur, *Lisan Al-Arab*, Vol. 7, p. 384; also see: Qarashi, *Qamousi Qur'an*, Vol. 4, p. 141.

<sup>18</sup> **d ʒ i h a : d**

<sup>19</sup> **d ʒ æ h d**

<sup>20</sup> **d ʒ u h d**

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Al-Manzur, *Lisan Al-Arab*, Vol. 2, pp. 395-7.

<sup>22</sup> Qarashi, *Qamousi Qur'an*, Vol. 5, pp. 231-34.

<sup>23</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 5, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 9, pp. 192-3.

<sup>25</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 3, verse 128.

<sup>26</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 10, verse 25.

<sup>27</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter, 6, verse 127.

<sup>28</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 44, verse 51.

<sup>29</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 2, pp. 118-22.

<sup>30</sup> What indicates that dispute arose before the introduction of divine *shariah* is the following verse: 'There was a time when all mankind was a single nation indeed; but they disagreed ...' (*The Qur'an*, Chapter 10, verse 19).

<sup>31</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 2, verse 213.

<sup>32</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 5, verse 16.

<sup>33</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 57, verse 25.

<sup>34</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 49, verse 9.

- <sup>35</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 2, pp. 123-4.
- <sup>36</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 2, verse 213.
- <sup>37</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 60, verses 7-9.
- <sup>38</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 14, p. 384.
- <sup>39</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 3, verse 186.
- <sup>40</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 16, verse 106.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 16, verse 41.
- <sup>42</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 16, verse 110.
- <sup>43</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 14, p. 384.
- <sup>44</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 22, verses 39-40.
- <sup>45</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 2, p. 288.
- <sup>46</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 2, verse 147.
- <sup>47</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 3, verse 19.
- <sup>48</sup> The Arabic terms *islam* (ɪslɑ:m), *istislam* (ɪstɪslɑ:m), and *taslim* (tæslɪ:m) have the same meaning as religion, that is, to obey and to submit to someone (Ibn Al-Manzur, *Lisan Al-Arab*, Vol. 6, p. 345). The Qur'an interprets the Arabic term *din* (dɪ:n) which means religion, as equal to the term *islam*.
- <sup>49</sup> Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai, *Qur'an dar Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1974), p. 12.
- <sup>50</sup> **Jæri: æh**
- <sup>51</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 18, pp. 29-30.
- <sup>52</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 42, verse 13.
- <sup>53</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 5, verses 44-8.
- <sup>54</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 12, verse 103.
- <sup>55</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 6, verse 35.
- <sup>56</sup> Muhammad Hassan Tabarsi, *Majma al-Bayan*, Vol. 5, (Beirut: Dar al-Hikmah, 1986), p. 311.
- <sup>57</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 10, pp. 121-2.
- <sup>58</sup> Jaafar Sobhani, *Mafahim al-Qur'an*, Vol. 7, (Beirut: Dar al-Anwar, 1992), p. 457.
- <sup>59</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 11, verse 118.
- <sup>60</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 2, p. 347.
- <sup>61</sup> *The Qur'an*: chapter 2, verse 256.
- <sup>62</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 76, verse 3.
- <sup>63</sup> Nasir Makarim Shirazi, *Al-Amthal fi Tafsir Kitabi Allah al-Munzal*, Vol. 2, (Qum: Madrasah Imam Ali, 2000), p. 261.
- <sup>64</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 12, p. 197.
- <sup>65</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 5, verse 105.
- <sup>66</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 7, pp. 323-4.
- <sup>67</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 6, verse 107.
- <sup>68</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 10, p. 127.
- <sup>69</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 10, verse 108.
- <sup>70</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 9, p. 349.
- <sup>71</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 9, verse 71.
- <sup>72</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 16, verse 35.
- <sup>73</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 16, verse 64.
- <sup>74</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 4, verse 165.
- <sup>75</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 12, p. 371.
- <sup>76</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 16, verse 125.
- <sup>77</sup> Al-Feid al-Kashani, *Kitab al-Safi fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 4, (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1998), pp. 365-6.
- <sup>78</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 12, pp. 371-4.
- <sup>79</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 55, verse 60.
- <sup>80</sup> Tabarsi, *Majma al-Bayan*, Vol. 9, pp. 315-6.
- <sup>81</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 25, verse 63.
- <sup>82</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 28, verse 55.
- <sup>83</sup> Al-Kashani, *Kitab al-Safi fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, p. 225.
- <sup>84</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 23, verse 96.

<sup>85</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, p. 217; and Vol. 15, p. 65.

<sup>86</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 2, verse 83.

<sup>87</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 3, pp. 139-40.

<sup>88</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 3, verses 19-20.

<sup>89</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 8, verse 61.

<sup>90</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 4, verses 88-91.

<sup>91</sup> According to article 2/4 of the UN charter, the principle is peace: '*All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations*'. And only self-defence is permissible in accordance with article 51: '*Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security*'.

<sup>92</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 5, verse 1.

<sup>93</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 17, verse 34.

<sup>94</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 9, verse 7.

<sup>95</sup> *The Qur'an*, chapter 8, verses 58, 61.

<sup>96</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 9, pp. 152, 193-5.