

Why did Prophet Muhammad Fight?

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(Summary: This article repudiates the allegation that Islam is "the religion of the sword" and that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was "a man of the sword". It does so by analysing why and how the Prophet fought. The article concludes that the Prophet's biggest enemies were falsehood, injustice and oppression. As a mercy for all creation, he was disposed to fighting only for self-defence and when freedom and people's basic human rights were in grave danger. Still, he fought only occasionally and briefly, after all other alternatives had been exhausted. Fighting was the last resort and could not be undertaken for any of the vain worldly benefits. In the process, the Prophet created a remarkable legacy of war ethics, as part of Islamic general ethics. It served as a standard-setter in the fields of conflict and warfare, within which, traditionally, benevolence and rationality are seldom observed. At the end of the article, "fighting, or war, verses" are also explained.)

Washington Irving (1783-1859), an American writer, historian and diplomat, was among the first who systematically stereotyped Islam as "the religion of the sword" and Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as "a man of the sword". According to him, the Prophet was sent with the sword as "the instrument of Faith". He taught that those who engaged themselves in promulgating his faith should enter neither into "argument nor discussion; but slay all who refuse obedience to the law". "The sword is the key of heaven and hell", the Prophet is alleged to have said to his followers.

Washington Irving wrote this in his book titled "Mahomet and his Successors". The book has two volumes. The first volume was published in 1849 and the second in 1850.

This book was not an isolated case. It represented a trend and the author was its spokesperson, so to speak. He declares at the beginning of the book's preface: "Some apology may seem necessary for presenting a life of Mahomet at the present day, when no new fact can be added to those already known concerning him." In other words, the notoriously violent reputation of Islam and its Prophet was a well-established reality. The author was simply re-emphasizing the obvious.

Demonizing Islam and Muslims

The book and the trend it represented were products of a long and concerted campaign against Islam and Muslims. It was a crusade in its own right. The campaign aimed to discredit the ideological foundations of Islamic civilization and cultures and thus pave the way for physical colonization, subjugation and exploitation of the Muslim world.

At the heart of legitimization of those unholy enterprises lay the demonization of Islam and its adherents. Orientalism, as a Western scholarly discipline that flourished especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, was their soul and driving force.

It was held that the Prophet - and with him all Muslims - were wrong and needed to be set right. They and whatever they had defiled needed to be purified and rescued. They needed the Saviour and his terrestrial exponents for the purpose. The Prophet was no more than a false prophet (an impostor) who cunningly deceived multitudes.

On account of all that, the colonization drive was heavily saturated with the spirit of Christianisation, proselytization and westernization - all at once. It was an extension of the Crusades. Hence, when Field Marshall Allenby captured Jerusalem in 1918 in the name of the Allies,

while standing on the steps of the Dome of the Rock, he made a proclamation: "Today the Crusades have come to an end." In the same vein, Peterson Smith, in his book on the life of Jesus, wrote: "This capture of Jerusalem was indeed an eighth Crusade in which Christianity had finally achieved its purpose" (Haykal).

According to Washington Irving, furthermore, while in Makkah, the Prophet exhorted the people to bear with patience and endure the violence of their enemies, almost emulating the standards established by "our Saviour". But upon migrating to Madinah and establishing a state with an army at his command, the Prophet "arrived at a point where he completely diverged from the celestial spirit of the Christian doctrines, and stamped his religion with the alloy of fallible mortality. His human nature was not capable of maintaining the sublime forbearance he had hitherto inculcated."

It was then and there that the Prophet as "a man of the sword" and Islam "as the religion of the sword" came to the fore. "Human passions and mortal resentments were awakened by this sudden accession of power. They mingled with that zeal for religious reform, which was still the Prophet's predominant motive" (Irving). That is, no sooner had they been afforded a chance, than the Prophet, Islam and Muslims began to display their true colours - and the rest is history.

Later, however, whatever misfortunes befell Muslims at the hands of rising Westerners, in particular in Europe where, once so mighty, "the crescent has waned before the cross", was an illustration of a heavenly precept according to which "all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

In this manner, Washington Irving, essentially, affirms that the Crusades and later Western colonization were the acts of God. By using violent and underhanded methods against others as instruments of their Islamic faith, the same methods in the end were used against Muslims. They all came back to haunt them, for what goes around comes around.

Washington Irving even implies that, looking from the perspective of the sixth and last article of the Islamic faith - which is predestination - the declining of Islam and Muslim influences was a preordained matter and no human (Muslim) intervention could prevent or alter it. He states that the Prophet - and his successors - capitalized on this very principle to justify their violent military conquests. He also alludes that Muslims should be consistent and do the same now after the tables had been turned on them. In both instances, predestination was in full force.

What the author suggests is that Muslims should embrace a sense of fatalism, which to him is an orthodox view despite a number of "doubters". Muslims' regression and the advances of the Christian West was part of God's providence and plan. It was predetermined and therefore inevitable. Muslims should give up all their plans - and hope - to resist or try to change the fate. Doing so would be irreverent. Resistance would be useless.

Intellectual garbage

This book and many other composed for the similar objectives are so superficial and fake that even a casual observer with little or no interest in the subject can conclude so. The book is nothing but a bunch of gross misrepresentations, distortions and crude lies. One wonders how anyone other than those who are supposed to and are duped, would read such nonsenses.

The book is an intellectual garbage intended but to try to taint the truth and history. However, both the truth and history are so overwhelmingly established and self-evident, and as such are accessible to all, that any attempts to discredit them are bound to fail sooner rather than later. As the Qur'an asserts: "But the plotting of evil will hem in only the authors thereof" (Fatir, 43).

The book is reduced to a mere footnote in authentic scholarship. In hindsight it is hard not to see it as a historical litter, or left-over,

seriously used and "benefitted from" only by such as possess the same value as the book itself.

Accordingly, the book is a treasure only for myopic Islamophobes and bigots. It is a good reference for upholding and promoting fabrications and pretence, and for trying to silence and subvert the truth and its ways as well as people. Every Islamophobe owes a stake to Washington Irving and his "Mahomet and his Successors". Islamophobia is a form of Irving-ism.

Their ingrained and apparently growing presence in a number of sectors of Western civilization - and elsewhere - demonstrates how questionable, and even outright fallacious, some premises, upon which the edifice of Western civilization is erected, are. Its direction together with sustainability prospects, in equal measure, are to be genuinely questioned as well.

Prophet Muhammad as a mercy for all creation

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was the last messenger and the Qur'an revealed to him the last revelation of God to mankind. He was the seal of the prophets (*khatam al-nabiyyin*) and was sent as mercy for all creation. The Qur'an says: "And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds" (*al-Anbiya'*, 107). As such, the Prophet's task was as much to rectify, reform and endorse, as to initiate, create and originate, and as much to look back - and at the present - and put things right, as to look forward and chart future courses.

The Prophet's mission was one of total purity, universal goodness and mercy. All Islamic principles and injunctions are based on those three thrusts, originating and branching therefrom. Prohibited are only those things as conflict with this spirit. The more they do so, the more objectionable they become.

The Prophet aimed to create a global community (*ummah*) which, by means of living and propagating the truth, would worship its one and

only Master: Almighty Allah, as the Creator of everything and as the truth's only source. Hence, of utmost importance for the realization of Islam's goals were always the notions of justice, equality, brotherhood, kindness, god-consciousness and altruism.

The Qur'an says on this: "Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong, and makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits for them the evil, and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them" (al-A'raf, 157).

In order to succeed in his mission, the Prophet wanted only one thing: freedom, entailing its physical, spiritual and intellectual dimensions. He wanted such freedom for himself, for the truth, and for his and the truth's followers.

He knew that when left unobstructed and free, the truth and its people are invincible. No amount of falsehood and its benefactors can withstand the active presence and dynamic function of the truth. The truth's intrinsic power and value denote the antidote to falsehood: "And say: 'The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished away; surely falsehood is ever certain to vanish'" (al-Isra', 81). This is so because the truth is real and genuine, and produces sustainable goodness, whereas falsehood is illusory and fake, and produces nothing but false hopes and even more false dawns.

In pursuit of freedom

Living the truth and enjoying its fruits is possible only in environments that champion freedom. Hence, having failed to secure that asset during the first thirteen years of his prophetic mission in Makkah, the Prophet decided to migrate to a more conducive milieu. Even though he and his first followers suffered greatly during those difficult times, they did not fight back nor plan to give tit for tat. The persecution was severe, but there were still other alternatives

to explore. Fighting was the last alternative to reluctantly have recourse to, but only after other alternatives come to nothing.

The Prophet abhorred fighting, just as he did abhor injustice, cruelty and oppression. When he eventually migrated to Madinah, he did not thus run away from troubles and difficulties, nor to acquire a safe haven where he could enjoy the comfort of peace for peace's own sake, and from where he could plot acts of vengeance against his enemies in Makkah and beyond. Rather, the Prophet moved to Madinah, sacrificing basically everything he had, only to be free and live for his ideals freely, and to ensure that his followers were also free and in a position to practice their new religion freely.

Without a doubt, such was the greatest act at once of sacrifice, courage and heroism. Consequently, the Prophet and Muslims found their true lives in Madinah. Yet they found themselves and their earthly paradise there. The city was an epitome of all righteousness, decency and virtue. That is why the Prophet called it "tayyibah", which means "good, pleasant and agreeable". The Prophet and Muslims just wanted to be left alone. They wanted to freely live their newly established lives, while at the same time letting others, in Madinah and elsewhere, do the same.

Promoting freedom

The Qur'an is explicit that the Prophet's only responsibility was to convey unequivocally the manifest message of Islam as the ultimate truth (al-Nur, 54), which was the task of each and every prophet before him. The Qur'an also says: "Upon you is only the (duty of) notification, and upon Us is the account" (al-Ra'd, 40).

The Prophet was thus instructed to create free and conducive environments where people will be able to willingly and consciously decide whether to follow or reject the truth. He was to actualize these words of God: "Say: '(It is) the truth from the Lord of you (all). Then whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him

disbelieve'" (al-Kahf, 29). The Qur'an underlines that the Prophet was neither a compeller (Qaf, 45) nor a controller (al-Ghashiyah, 22) over people.

What was required to establish and promote by all legitimate means was physical freedom, which was a precondition for the freedom of belief, thought and expression. In Islam, freedom is sacred. It extols every system, policy and initiative that espouses it. People are created as God's vicegerents on earth. Thus honoured, they are to live freely and responsibly, serving and worshipping only their Creator.

Conversely, all forms of suppression and injustice are greatly detested in Islam. Equally abominated are also all means and methods that lead to and sustain them. The existential purpose of man - and of every other creation, including the earth and heavens - is not compatible with those vices. No life's entity approves of them, so neither should man if he wanted to live in accordance with the innate spiritual paradigm of life.

Herein lies the essence of the Islamic concept of *jihad*. *Jihad* is derived from the verb *jahada*, which means "to exert oneself". Hence, *jihad* is "exertion and striving". Its antonym is *qu'ud*, which means "sitting still or at home (lethargy and inactivity)". In a more technical sense, *jihad* is the exertion of all power and capacities in the cause of God. It is an inclusive struggle against all forms and intensities of evil that are bent on depriving people of their freedom, honour, dignity and human rights.

People are born free, should live and make their choices freely, and should in the end die freely and honourably. This way, the natural order and equilibrium on earth - and heavens - are acknowledged as well as maintained, and God's authority and the authority of His truth held supreme. The forms of *jihad* vary from mere words and goodly counsel to defensive and strategic warfare, the latter being resorted to only when all other options were exhausted.

It follows that since life is an extremely serious business with man being thrust into the heart of it, *jihad* was the Prophet's - and all Muslims' - *raison d'être*. Life is man's only - and very brief - opportunity, so all avenues must be explored to make sure the opportunity is not wasted.

Fighting and the highest standards of virtue and humanity

The Prophet was concerned about humankind at large and its impending eternal destiny in the Hereafter. His point of reference was Heaven and its higher order of things, events and experiences. In no way was he affected by the prospect of securing some low worldly gains, such as power, authority, fame, enjoyment and territorial expansion.

The Prophet never intended to be a king, nor to create an empire. Hereditary empires ruled by kings who enjoyed absolute powers, and whose citizens were mere subjects with their welfare fully dependent on the will of their total rulers, are subsequent un-Islamic inventions. They did not represent the Prophet's way. In Islam, by the way, a ruler does not rule over people. Instead, he serves them and lives for them. They have been entrusted to him and they remain the source of his legitimacy. The only Ruler (*al-Malik*) is Almighty God.

By the same token, the Prophet wished to fight nobody, in the conventional sense of the word. He did not have reasons that warranted doing so. To thus fight people would have been against his principles. It would have defeated the purpose of his prophet-hood mission. To fight for any of those worthless earthly gains would have been inconceivable, and to fight for the sake of imposing his faith on people and to coerce them into accepting it, would have been not only unthinkable and unacceptable, but also detrimental and counterproductive.

When he had no choice but to fight, though, the Prophet did so in ways that exemplified the highest standards of virtue, humanity and

compassion. As a result, even his fighting was a form of mercy for everybody involved: for oppressors and tyrants, who normally fight for self-glorification, avarice and the exploitation of the weak and defenceless, because their evil was thus contained and they were presented with a chance to review their position and make amends; for those who were ill-treated and oppressed because they were relieved of their suffering and were given a new lease of life; and for the whole universal setup because the moral and natural order of creation like so was restored.

Without doubt, in Islam, fighting is not an act of mad brutality. It has its material and moral functions, i.e., self-preservation and the preservation of others as well as of the intrinsic spiritual and moral configuration of the whole world. It is a worldly means for achieving a set of noble worldly and heavenly objectives. When one nation is assailed by the ambitions and cupidity of another, the doctrine of non-resistance is anti-social as it involves non-assertion, not only of one's own rights, but also of those of others who need protection against the forces of tyranny and oppression. A Muslim is saddled with the responsibilities to protect himself and all those who need and seek his protection. He cannot afford to abandon the weak and defenceless to privation, suffering and moral peril (Sahih Muslim, Book 19; Introduction).

Freedom and truth-versus-falsehood dialectics

The only enemy of truth is its antithesis: falsehood. Its people, in principle, are not enemies. They are perceived as victims, partly owing to the factors that operate within themselves, and partly owing to those factors as operate from the outside. By virtue of their rejecting the truth, those people do not become instantaneously enemies either. That is their free and calculated choice which should be respected. Their status changes only when, after rejecting the truth as a result of their exercising of their right to freedom, they start working and plotting against the truth and its people, infringing

thereby and trying to eliminate in others the most consecrated life asset: freedom.

The wrongdoing of those people is fourfold. Firstly, they miscomprehend and mishandle their own freedom, trying to manipulate and even harm such as are different. If they are respected for who they are and if they are left alone as such, they should reciprocate the favour. Secondly, they try to silence and extinguish the voice of the truth, denying it the right to be freely articulated and heard like all other ideological "voices". Thirdly, they target and try to undermine the rights of followers of the truth to freely believe, freely express themselves, and freely practice their lifestyles. Fourthly, they place numerous impediments and obstacles, material and immaterial, between the truth and its people, and those who are yet to come into free contact with them and are yet to freely appraise the truth.

On the other hand, the enemy of falsehood is not merely the truth, but also its people. In point of fact, everything relatable to the truth is regarded as suspicious. The situation often morphs into paranoia, gradually developing into systematic and collective acts of discrimination and persecution. This is so because the advocates of whatever form of falsehood (the lack of truth) recognize, consciously or otherwise, how qualified their potency is and how vulnerable their status and position are. Under such circumstances, any calls for improvements and reforms, let alone paradigm shifts, are viewed with scepticism. Freedom, justice, equality and righteousness turn into biggest nemeses. Consequently, the truth and its protagonists become the bane of those people's lives and of their ideologies' directions.

When to fight?

The standards of any cultural awareness and civilizational progress could be asserted through a variety of channels, such as peaceful coexistence, peaceful interactions, dialogue, integration, harmonization, negotiations, accords, treaties, and cultural together

with civilizational exchanges. Though inherently neither coveted nor exalted, fighting not only can be resorted to, but also becomes desirable and praiseworthy for defensive purposes: for defending life, property, home, country, religion, human honour and dignity. The same holds true as regards confronting the acts of treason, treachery and deception that put all life's sanctities and inviolabilities in danger.

Fighting can likewise be justified by strategized attempts to weed out rampant tyrannies and oppressions, which terrorize the innocent and weak, and blatantly violate their core human rights. The followers of the truth should work tirelessly on improving the situation, with all options, including fighting, on the table.

Ruling with an iron fist and divesting their people of rights and freedom additionally means that tyrants and oppressors are never inclined to the probability of conveying the truth in their midst and making it known and accessible. On the contrary, they work relentlessly on distorting the truth and blocking its ways, in turn diligently disseminating their own fraudulent ideas and their own "versions of the truth". Those people should never be left alone and off the hook, because doing so would be tantamount to letting down and betraying victims, dishonouring the heavenly trust, and violating the terms of the natural and moral order of the world, and because "tumult and oppression are worse than killing" (al-Baqarah, 191). Tyrants and oppressors understand only one language, the language of force.

The Prophet's experiences

The Prophet fought exactly due to those reasons. His fighting was defensive and preventive. It was a means of general striving, safeguarding and upholding the truth, justice and freedom. Moreover, his warfare engagements were even-handed, moderate and principled.

While in Makkah, the Prophet experienced first-hand the meaning, working and brutality of injustice and persecution. He was eventually

expelled from his home and property just because he refused to yield to oppressors, remaining faithful to the ideals and principles of his struggle.

However, having migrated and settled down in Madinah, the Prophet was not to be left alone and in peace. The forces of evil never slept and were always on the move, unceasingly conspiring and working against the truth and whoever adopted its ways. Conspiracies and machinations of infinite kinds and degrees abounded. They still originated from Makkah but were increasingly assuming a wider regional character. Later, as the voices of the truth grew louder and its foothold in the region came to be ever more conspicuous, the scheming and downright physical threats became yet international in essence, with the Byzantines and Persians standing at the forefront of the new developments.

Unholy alliances, involving the Makkans, numerous hostile Arab tribes, the Jews, hypocrites, and later the Byzantines and Persians and their proxies, were increasing in number and strength by the day, applying more and more pressure on the city-state of Madinah. Without fighting, dignified life for Muslims in Madinah would have been untenable, not to mention the prospects of conveying the truth to the world and building a civilization. The enemies were set on placing a yoke around the "neck" of Madinah and its Islamic project, gradually then tightening it up until the peril of Islam, the Prophet and Muslims was done away with forever.

An excellent illustration of the situation was the Battle of the Trench (*Khandaq*) in the 5th year after the *hijrah* (migration). The battle is also called the Battle of the Confederates, as the Quraysh of Makkah, two prominent Jewish tribes, and a great many other Arab tribes took part in an attempt to invade and destroy Madinah. The size and strength of the confederate armies were so huge that Muslims could not fight them. As a military strategy, therefore, Muslims dug a trench which together with the city's natural fortifications kept the invaders at bay, rendering their military might essentially useless. The

siege of Madinah lasted 27 days, following which the invaders retreated. The strength of the invading armies is estimated around 10,000 soldiers, while the Madinah defenders numbered 3,000.

It was because of all this that not so long after arriving in Madinah, the Prophet and Muslims were permitted to fight and defend themselves. Enough was enough. Criminals had to be confronted and their spreading of mischief on earth stood up to. What is more, Muslims were duty-bound to do so, in that passivism, inertia and non-assertion in the face of outright dangers, rife oppression and persecution are both un-human and un-Islamic. Fighting in the cause of Allah and His truth was deemed the best and most meritorious deed. Apart from being good in itself, fighting also promoted and facilitated good, pitting it and the truth against evil and falsehood on equal terms and on a level playing field. Dying while fighting is acknowledged as the most recompensing act. It is the finest form of martyrdom.

The Qur'an reveals, for example: "Permission (to fight) has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory. (They are) those who have been evicted from their homes without right - only because they say: 'Our Lord is Allah'. And were it not that Allah checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned. And Allah will surely support those who support Him. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might. (And they are) those who, if We give them authority in the land, establish prayer and give zakah and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. And to Allah belongs the outcome of (all) matters" (al-Hajj, 39-41).

"And what is (the matter) with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and (for) the oppressed among men, women, and children who say: 'Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from

Yourself a helper'? Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah, and those who disbelieve fight in the cause of evil. So fight against the allies of Satan. Indeed, the plot of Satan has ever been weak." (al-Nisa', 75-76).

"Would you not fight a people who broke their oaths and determined to expel the Messenger, and they had begun (the attack upon) you the first time? Do you fear them? But Allah has more right that you should fear Him, if you are (truly) believers" (al-Tawbah, 13).

Striking a balance between peace, dialogue and fighting

The Prophet fought the Quraysh of Makkah, some other hostile Arab tribes, the treacherous Jews, and the Byzantines and their Arab proxies. In all, there were twenty something major and minor battles. The Prophet participated in nine of them. Nonetheless, his non-combat activities vis-à-vis the same categories of people greatly surpassed his battles. The former connoted a rule, choice and predilection, the latter an exception, necessity and aversion.

For instance, Madinah, especially at the outset, was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious city-state in which Jews, among others, occupied a noteworthy position. No sooner had the Prophet arrived in the city, than he composed the Constitution of Madinah. In it, he referred to all the integral groups as "one community (*ummah*)". They formed "one and the same community as against the rest of men." The Constitution established all groups in their religions and possessions, assigning to each of them their overall rights and duties.

According to the Qur'anic message: "God does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with those who have not fought against you about the religion or expelled you from your homes. God does not love the unjust people. Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion - (forbids) that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrongdoers." (al-Mumtahanah, 8).

The Prophet furthermore conducted regular dialogue sessions with the Jews, Christians, polytheist Arabs, hypocrites and Bedouins. His mosque in Madinah was often the epicentre of events. When famously a Christian delegation from Najran, a city in southwestern Arabian Peninsula, visited the Prophet, he met them in the shades of his honourable mosque. Their number was 60. They were led by a group of their priests. When the time of one of their prayers was due, they were allowed to pray right inside the mosque.

This way, the mosque, which functioned as a community development centre, was as well a centre for promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and unity. It was the first active centre in history for interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

The Prophet also sent letters to many rulers of the world, informing them who he was and inviting them to Islam as the only truth. At the same time, the letters were his tokens of goodwill. Of the kings contacted were Heraclius the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire, Chosroes II the Khosrau of Persia, the Negus of Abyssinia, Muqawqis the ruler of Egypt, Harith Gassani the governor of Syria, and the ruler of Bahrain.

The text of the Prophet's letter to Heraclius was as follows: "In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. From Muhammad the slave and Messenger of Allah to Heraclius the ruler of Byzantium. Peace be upon those who follow true guidance. I call you with the call of Islam. Become Muslim and you will be safe, and Allah will grant you a two-fold reward, but if you turn away, upon you will be the sins of the Arisiyyin (peasants i.e., his followers and subjects who would follow him in non-belief).

"Say (O Muhammad): 'O People of the Scripture (the Jews and Christians), come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah'. But if they turn

away, then say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims (submitting to Him)'" (Alu 'Imran, 64).

The Qur'an insists on wise dealings, affable relations, good counsel, constructive dialogues and debates - before anything else. There is no place whatsoever for duress and coercion in the provinces of promoting, embracing and enjoying the truth. The Qur'an commands: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is (rightly) guided" (al-Nahl, 125).

"And do not argue with the People of the Scripture (the Jews and Christians) except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say: 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims (in submission) to Him'" (al-'Ankabut, 46).

War ethics

The Prophet's philosophy of fighting was ground-breaking. So were the ways in which fighting, whenever unavoidable, was carried out. They heralded the most comprehensive and most benevolent and humane code of conduct in war. By way of illustration, the Qur'an commands: "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors" (al-Baqarah, 190).

"And if you punish (an enemy, O believers), punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed. But if you are patient - it is better for those who are patient" (al-Nahl, 126).

"And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know" (al-Tawbah, 6).

"And if they incline to peace, then incline to it (also) and rely upon Allah. Indeed, it is He who is the Hearing, the Knowing" (al-Anfal, 61).

When the Prophet appointed anyone as leader of an army or detachment he would especially exhort him to fear Allah and to be good to the Muslims who were with him. He would then say: "Fight in the name of Allah and in the way of Allah. Fight against those who disbelieve in Allah. Make a holy war, do not embezzle the spoils; do not break your pledge; and do not mutilate (the dead) bodies; do not kill the children. When you meet your enemies who are polytheists, invite them to three courses of action. If they respond to any one of these, you also accept it and withhold yourself from doing them any harm. Invite them to (accept) Islam; if they respond to you, accept it from them and desist from fighting against them...If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the Jizya. If they agree to pay, accept it from them and hold off your hands. If they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah's help and fight them" (Sahih Muslim).

Abu Bakr, the first Muslim Caliph, gave an address while sending his army on the expedition to the Syrian borders: "Stop, O people, that I may give you ten rules for your guidance in the battlefield. Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy's flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone."

Conquest and colonization are not part of Islam

The Prophet only intended to deliver the last heavenly message to the world, as much as he could. He was mankind's saviour par excellence. Regulated fighting was an option merely if his, people's and the truth's freedom, safety and other fundamental rights were endangered. The Prophet's foremost adversaries were suppressive falsehood, injustice, oppression, despotism and tyranny.

The Prophet furthermore wanted the truth to be heard and understood, regardless of how people might have reacted afterwards. He wanted good and reciprocal communication. He was ready to listen, too. Everybody was free to present his case with him, from rulers to Bedouins. He was accessible to all and he treated everybody equally. He knew that the truth could be asserted either by actively preaching it, or by methodically dismantling its opposites. Either way, it was bound to come out on top.

It was grossly unjust if people by devious and enforced means were kept away from freely hearing the truth and freely making their choices. Such denoted the utmost form of injustice and repression, for people are what they believe and how much ethically sound, or otherwise, their life patterns are, sealing thereby their existential destinies in this world and in the Hereafter.

This is the meaning of the Qur'anic injunctions to wisely communicate, debate and argue with people concerning primarily their beliefs and values. All paths leading both to the truth and falsehood must be cleared. Both of them had to be clearly visible, freely accessible and freely dealt with, causing the best model to "win" and survive.

The Prophet was renowned for his affability, fairness and consistency. Which makes sense because if the truth could be accepted only in free and conducive milieus, falsehood too could be exposed and repudiated only under the same circumstances. The Prophet feared nothing and nobody, for the truth which he was wielding was the mightiest of weapons. He was ready and willing to stride towards any lair of falsehood, confronting it head-on, knowing how weak and inconsequential non-belief is and how quickly it withers away in view of the commanding presence of the truth.

However, the agents of falsehood, discrimination and tyranny were also in the know as regards this verity, causing all sorts of hullabaloo concerning the notions of prophet-hood and its truth. They knew that, as the active embodiments of falsehood (the absence of truth), they

could not unworriedly coexist with the truth and its backers. With the inevitable gradual waning of falsehood, they were set to wane as well, correspondingly with the former, for "falsehood is by its nature ever bound to perish" (al-Isra', 81). Thus, maintaining the status quo and subduing the voices of freedom and the truth was their best bet.

The Prophet's viewpoint was democratic in the extreme. He was ready to do to people only that which he would like them to do to him. He walked his talk. He lived up to the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

That is why in Islam, there is no "conquest" in the established sense of the term. There is only "fath or opening", which means "victory as a result of opening something, like a territory, a city, a village, etc., to Islam". Only with this type of victory, moreover, there can be victories over people's hearts and minds by opening them to the light and surge of the truth. Undeniably, Islam, above all, targets hearts and minds, which can be accomplished only by means of compassionate hearts and sensible minds. Threats and compulsion play no role whatsoever in the equation, while force and fighting are desirable only to preserve that very blessing and to defend people's right to it.

So important is this subject in Islam that a Qur'anic chapter is called "Fath", implying the Prophet's moral victory achieved by the Truce of Hdaybiyyah. This victory was a precursor to opening Makkah (*fath Makkah*) and the entire Arabian Peninsula to Islam.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal beautifully elaborates in his book "the Life of Muhammad": "As for the early Muslims, during the time of the Prophet and of his immediate successors, they did not conquer for the purpose of conquest and colonization but in defence of their faith when it was threatened by Quraysh, Arab tribes, Byzantines, and Persians. Throughout their conquests, they never imposed their religion on anyone, for it was a cardinal principal of their faith that 'there shall be no coercion in religion' (al-Baqarah, 256)."

"Forced by the needs of defence against persistent attack, the Muslims' conquests were never motivated by the will to colonize. The Prophet left the kings of Arabia and her princes on their thrones with their territories, economies, and political structures virtually untouched. In conquering, the Muslims sought the freedom to preach the faith. If the Islamic faith spread, it was simply because it of itself was strong by virtue of the truth which it proclaimed, the universalist non-discrimination between Arab and non-Arab which it commanded and its adherents practiced, and the strict monotheism by which Islam enabled man to have no master except the one true God."

"It was because of these innate strengths of the Islamic faith that it spread throughout the earth, just as any genuine truth would spread. When the Tatar latecomers to Islam fought only for the purpose of conquest and took men by the sword, they, too, were soon taken by the sword. But Islam never took anything or anyone by the sword, and no one will take it by the sword. On the contrary, Islam conquered the minds, hearts, and consciences of the people by its innate strength. Consequently, the Muslim people have seen many governments, dictators, and tyrants, none of which has changed their faith and religion in the least" (Haykal).

Islamic war ethics as a standard-setter

It was in consequence of this humane notion of fighting and this exemplary war ethics that in all confrontations between Muslims and non-Muslims during the Prophet's era only 1018 people died on both sides: 259 Muslims and 759 non-Muslims (Sahih Muslim, Book 19; Introduction).

Compare this, for example, to more than 10,000 men, women and children massacred by the Christian crusaders only inside the area of al-Aqsa mosque (between 40,000 and 70,000 in total) after the city of Jerusalem had been captured "in the name of God". According to

eyewitness accounts, "the streets of Jerusalem were filled with blood".

French atrocities against Algerians only within the first three decades of the conquest resulted in between 500,000 and 1,000,000 deaths. About 80,000 Libyans died as a result of the Italian pacification of Libya. Between 15,000 and 30,000 Palestinians have died since the illegal formation of Israel in 1948.

British colonization likewise caused many millions of deaths. While according to a research, "European colonization of the Americas resulted in the killing of so many native people that it transformed the environment and caused the Earth's climate to cool down." Apart from mass killings, the European colonizers also brought diseases, caused large-scale depopulation, upset agriculture patterns, and generally introduced new and unknown ways for doing everything (The Guardian).

And the list goes on and on, so much so that the foundations of the modern West-driven civilization are all soaked in blood. Its main pillars are colonization, bias, prejudice, cruelty, double standards and exploitation of the weak and powerless. Because of the prevalent tenets to the effect that "might is right" and that "man is a wolf to man", it is not seldom that so much power is deposited in wrong hands, and that butchers and downright idiots rule and determine the fates of multitudes. The most alienated concerns worldwide are the truth, virtue, morality, egalitarianism and impartial justice.

It must be stressed, as a matter of affirming objectivity, that the fighting patterns of subsequent Muslim generations throughout history were generally guided by the spirit of this Islamic war ethics. But since people are not perfect, nor infallible - some more and others less - it is fair to say that there were instances where Muslims, to various degrees, contravened their orthodox principles.

However, those instances need to be grasped as no more than isolated cases and exceptions. As such, they are not to be generalized, nor are they in a position to invalidate the well-known rules. They furthermore ought to be gauged solely against the background of Islamic values and ethics in general, and Islamic war ethics in particular.

"Fighting, or war, verses"

Finally, some people feel uncomfortable about the Qur'anic verses where Muslims are explicitly urged to fight, seize and kill their enemies wherever they find them, and to besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush (al-Baqarah, 191; al-Nisa', 89; al-Tawbah, 5).

These verses are "fighting, or war, verses", so to speak. They talk about fighting itself, and hence cannot be taken out of their specific contexts. For instance, they cannot be applied to the contexts of peace, ceasefire and coexistence.

The message contained therein is like this. You never wanted to fight. The situation has been imposed on you and you were forced to react. And just like in every circumstance, you should excel and teach your enemies a lesson they will never forget. They desperately wanted to fight and harm you, so now show them what fighting really is, so that they may perhaps give up bullying and terrorising you.

Such is the nature of actual fighting: if you do not kill, you will be killed, and if you do not display firmness, aggression and strength all the way through, the enemy will interpret it as a weakness and will try to capitalize on it. Fighting is as much physical as psychological an affair.

In addition, those verses should be perceived as a form of motivation and as an incentive. It is a fact that for every battle, commanders motivate and inspire their soldiers. That is part of their job and they

have been extensively trained for that. Indeed, many battles are won or lost before they even started.

Commanders and generals employ different means and strategies for the purpose, often going to extremes. Soldiers are expected to possess an aggressive and fighting spirit. They are supposed to be ready to give their best under all conditions and to sacrifice everything they have, including their lives, for the cause of their struggle.

However, when all is said and done, "if they incline to peace, then incline to it (also) and rely upon Allah" (al-Anfal, 61), and "if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them (go) on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful" (al-Tawbah, 5).

If Almighty God is Forgiving and Merciful, so must be people as well, with the Prophet setting an example: "Indeed in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example to follow, for him who hopes in (the meeting with) Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much" (al-Ahzab, 21).