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Letter to the Editor

The Collapse of the Theological Doctrine of the Ethics of War; A Systematic Theological Analysis of the Gaza Humanitarian Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Islam establishes strict moral rules for warfare, emphasizing the sanctity of civilians, the prohibition of environmental destruction and the provision of essential needs such as food, water and medicine to populations affected by war. These principles overlap significantly with the rules of international humanitarian law on the protection of civilians and access to humanitarian assistance. The ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip, under Israeli military operations, is a clear example of the gross failure of these features. The prolonged siege, coupled with severe restrictions on the entry of vital aid, along with the destruction of essential infrastructure, has led to a profound humanitarian crisis that has severely limited access to the bare necessities of life for civilians. The evidence of widespread destruction, forced displacement of the population and disproportionate civilian casualties, coupled with the lack of access to essential food and medicine, especially for children, adolescents and pregnant and lactating mothers, confirms the commission of war crimes and genocide. The killing of 60,000 civilians, the deaths of dozens due to starvation and the killing of a large number of people in food queues are all examples of this genocide. This situation highlights a deep gap between the theoretical commitment to the ethics of war in Islam and international law and the reality of the battlefield in Gaza and requires urgent examination from a legal and ethical perspective. This study examines the ethical norms and counter-norms of war from an Islamic perspective.

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Introduction

An examination of the theological doctrine of the ethics of war in Islam requires an analysis of the duty-based theological structures that, based on Quranic texts and prophetic tradition, establish the preservation of the human dignity of civilians as an inviolable

limit. This normative framework, which has also been developed in the works of Islamic scholars, considers the provision of vital needs such as food, water and medicine not only a legal obligation but also recognizes it as a religious duty (1). The ongoing crisis in Gaza, with field evidence of a systematic blockade of access to

drinking water, the deliberate destruction of medical infrastructure and the prevention of food aid, has created a paradoxical confrontation with these theological foundations. Within Islamic ethics-of-war frameworks, this reality places the core dilemma of diverging scholarly principles from battlefield practices at the center of critical inquiry. While all revealed religions explicitly condemn such asymmetrical and immoral warfare, this study specifically centers its analytical focus on the foundations of Islamic moral theology. There are many verses in the Holy Quran regarding war and jihad. However, the author of the article has selected one of the most important verses of the Quran. Verse: “fight in the way of Allah those who fight against you, but do not aggress. Allah does not love the aggressors” (2).

This verse, with an unparalleled horizon, draws a comprehensive moral system in the face of the phenomenon of war. In a way that, while recognizing the natural right to defense, it limits it within the framework of lofty moral values. The phrase “in the way of Allah” as a final clause elevates any military action from the level of a mere material act to the level of a moral-religious duty. This view removes war from the realm of pure power and places it within the framework of divine responsibility. The restrictive clause “those who fight against you” indicates adherence to the principle of proportionality in the ethics of war, which only permits confrontation with armed forces and also denies any aggression against civilians. This part of the verse clearly anticipates the principle of distinction in contemporary humanitarian law.

The prohibition “Do not aggress”, expressed in absolute terms, indicates a universal moral rule that prohibits any transgression of the limits of legitimate defense, whether this transgression is spatial, temporal or in the manner of warfare. While the principle of non-aggression is a fundamental rule, some Islamic jurists have debated its application in critical situations, particularly in light of the principle of necessity. Of course, this article does not seek to discuss this point.

The final sentence, “Indeed, Allah does not love the aggressors”, is very profound in terms of moral philosophy, because it links the ultimate criterion of moral evaluation to divine love.

Here, it is worth mentioning a few important points in this part of the verse:

First, from the perspective of moral psychology, this sentence has a simultaneous deterrent (threat) and educational (punishment) function. Threat, because it introduces aggression as a cause of the withdrawal of divine love and punishment, because it calls on the wrongdoer to reconsider his behavior. This duality of “fear and hope” in Islamic moral philosophy creates an internal incentive to adhere to morality (3), even in the most difficult circumstances, such as war. Secondly, the phrase “Allah does not love” indicates that aggression in war is not simply a violation of a legal law but a kind of existential sin that distances man from the nearness of God. Certainly, in accordance with the views of some Shiite jurists who uphold the doctrine of the Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist) for those possessing all requisite qualifications, offensive jihad can be authorized by the supreme leader of the Muslims (Vali-ye Amr-e Muslimeen). The reasoning of this group of jurists is that the Vali-ye Faqih possesses all the authorities of an infallible Imam (4-5). However, as our current discussion is focused on a different subject, we shall refrain from elaborating further on this matter. Third, this part of the verse clearly shows that the ethics of war in Islam is rooted in Islamic metaphysics and is not simply a construct of collective reason or social conventions. These characteristics allow the moral precepts of war to retain their validity even when earthly laws are silent or the international community condones violations. The transcendental value system in question has three key characteristics:

1. Absoluteness;
2. Sacredness, not earthly or material;
3. Divineness.

These characteristics allow the moral precepts of war to retain their validity even when earthly laws are silent or the international community condones violations. In fact, the criterion of “divine love” as the ultimate touchstone shows that in Islamic moral philosophy (6), even

seemingly necessary actions such as war must pass through the filter of transcendent values or else they lose their legitimacy. This view, while preventing unbridled violence, creates a sacred motivation for adhering to morality in the most difficult circumstances. Overall, by creating a balance between “right” and “duty”, “necessity” and “morality” and “realism” and “idealism”, this verse presents a sublime model of the ethics of war that both prevents silence in the face of oppression and prevents excesses in violence.

There are many verses and narrations in Muslim religious texts that emphasize the duties of governments and states towards the Islamic Ummah.

The conduct and tradition of the early Muslims, who, as Ansar, rushed to help the emigrants with all their means, speaks for the moral responsibility of the members of the Islamic Ummah.

The Holy Quran has said in this regard: “Those who believe and migrate from their homes and fight in the way of Allah and those who have sheltered them and helped them, they are truly the believers. Theirs shall be forgiveness and a generous provision” (2).

This verse clearly shows that:

1. Helping your brothers in religion is a religious duty (7);
2. This responsibility is not limited to a specific time or place;
3. Supporting the oppressed should be independent of personal and ethnic interests.

The practical life of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions also confirms the principle that Muslims around the world have a responsibility to each other and must stand against oppression. These Quranic teachings and the Prophet’s life outline the framework for the relationship between Islamic governments and the Ummah.

“Whoever begins the morning without showing concern for the affairs of Muslims is not truly a Muslim” (8). The hadith narrated from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has profound sociological and political jurisprudential dimensions in the context of crises such as wars against oppressed Muslims. From the perspective

of Islamic discourse analysis, this narrative creates a frame of identity in which membership in the Islamic Ummah requires active responsibility towards other members of society.

In crisis situations such as war, this hadith outlines three levels of responsibility:

1. Cognitive level: Creating a collective sensitivity to the suffering of other Muslims, which is a prerequisite for social solidarity. Social psychological studies show that this “broad empathy” is the basis of supportive behaviors;
2. Practical level: Requiring active intervention, which can take many forms, from financial and logistical support to field participation. Shiite political jurisprudence interprets this as “wajib al-kifa’i”;
3. Structural level: Forming spontaneous networks of people.

From the perspective of Islamic international relations, this hadith is the basis for the theory of Islamic collective security. Critical discourse analysis also shows that this narrative stands in contrast to isolationist discourses and social indifference and promotes an ethic of collective responsibility that is essential for resisting occupiers.

Conclusion

The analysis of Islamic theological ethics on warfare demonstrates that Quranic teachings and prophetic tradition establish an inviolable moral framework, prioritizing human dignity and strictly prohibiting harm to civilians. The examined verse synthesizes “legitimate defense” with “prohibition of aggression”, presenting war not as a mere material act but as a divinely regulated responsibility with transcendent ethical standards.

Although, of course, in cases of necessity, the Supreme Leader has also been given permission for primary jihad. The glaring contradiction between these principles and on-the-ground realities - such as the blockade of Gaza - raises critical questions about the inertia of Islamic institutions and the inadequacy of international law. Hadiths like “concern for Muslim affairs” further mandate collective responsibility against

oppression. Thus, revisiting these foundations is essential not only for redefining Islamic just-war ethics but also for critiquing contemporary legal systems and revitalizing a justice-oriented discourse in global conflicts.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

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