



A Peaceful Interpretation of Jihad in the Qur'an

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the subject of jihad in the Qur'an and the Prophet's conduct, and seeks to answer the following questions. What is the primary principle in the Islamic state's international relations with non-Muslim states? Is war or peace the primary principle in the relationship of the Islamic state with non-Muslim states? What is the nature of Islamic jihad? The primacy of war means that the cause of war and jihad with infidels and pagan states lies in their people's disbelief. The primacy of peace means that war is an exceptional situation, and whenever it occurs, it is not because of disbelief, but because of the aggression or hostility that has been shown by those states. This paper defends a pacific interpretation of jihad using an intra-textual interpretive method according to which the general verses of jihad should be understood based on the conditional verses, as opposed to claiming that the verses of peace have been abrogated by the verses of jihad.

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The (mis)interpretation of the Quran has been a major factor in the formation and revival of religious terrorism. As the religious advocates give their absolute obedience to their holy texts, discussing and, possibly, correcting the interpretations of these texts are of high importance in peacemaking and avoiding terrorism.

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism whose thought inspires many extremist groups such as al-Qaeda, justified his account of expansionary jihad based on the Quran's call to eliminate idolatry in verse (8: 39).¹ We can also see this approach in the ISIS terrorist group's appeal to the so-called Verse of Sword.² In their view, this single verse has abrogated the conditional verses of jihad and the verses of peace.

Abu Abdullah Mohajer, the former ISIS ideologue and religious leader, argues that it is a clear and consensual principle in Islam that taking the property and life of an infidel is permissible unless he converts to Islam or makes a peace treaty with the Islamic state.³ He appeals to verses (9: 1–3), among other reasons, to justify this verdict.

As Wagemakers holds, the Qur'anic notion of *al-walaa' wa-l-baraa'*, meaning respectively loving and hating for the sake of God, has been a tool to "steer Salafis away from *bid'a*, *kufr*, and *shirk*".⁴ It has acted as a tool of otherizing and protecting the Muslims from outside dangers.

Contrary to the Salafis view, our purpose in this study is to show that jihad in Islam is legitimate only to repel aggression, to fight corruption, and to remove barriers

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to peaceful invitation. Jihad with infidel states or people is not for imposing belief, and it is not waged against any infidel state, but only against a state that wages war or prevents the divine message from reaching its people. The love and hatred to infidels appealed to by some jihadis should not necessarily translate into violence and war. Rather, it just means taking care, protecting the faith from deviations, and not taking the infidels as intimates (verse 3:118).⁵

Although the Islamic state (not the Islamic State, known as the ISIS group) invites people to Islam, it shall not do this through military jihad. This paper defends a pacific interpretation of jihad. As Islam is a divine religion to save people from all kinds of wrongdoings, including idolatry, atheism, and polytheism, it seeks to invite people to this religion throughout the world, and this had been the universal mission of the Prophet of Islam. However, this invitation should be based on reason and logic, and not on coercion. The goal of jihad is to eliminate the hostility and aggression expressed by some infidel states, which cannot be dealt with in other peaceful ways.

To defend this pacific understanding of jihad, this article uses an intra-textual interpretative method, according to which the general verses of jihad are understood based on (1) the conditional verses of jihad, (2) in the light of the *siaq*, i.e. the context of the verses of jihad, and (3) the verses of peace. This method is opposed to the idea that the verses of peace have been abrogated by the verses of jihad.

A potential source of misinterpretations of the Quran is the way it discusses different issues. Issues such as jihad have been discussed in different verses, surahs, in different ways and with different modifications, as they have been revealed on different occasions. Therefore, it is difficult, and yet essential, to arrive at a unified and consistent understanding of these issues. We propose the intra-textual and contextual method used in this research to achieve this understanding.

In prescribing jihad, the Qur'an and the Islam's Prophet never strayed away from the principles of justice, guidance, and peaceful conduct. The Qur'an invites infidels logically to monotheism, and the People of the Book to the common grounds between divine religions. Invitation to the monotheistic religion is one of the essential precepts of Islam (Qur'an, 16:125).⁶ Invitation is a cultural principle based on the principle of peaceful coexistence, which precedes jihad in the defensive thought of Islam. This should be the basic principle of foreign relations of Islamic states, which will be realized according to the requirements of the age.⁷

Some verses of jihad emphasize promulgating the universal religion of Islam. According to most exegetes in the Shiite tradition, the messenger must be the infallible Imam (one of the twelve Prophet's successors), or appointed by him.⁸ Armed confrontation arises when individuals or states impede this invitation for their own benefit.

Jihad against aggression or in defense of the oppressed is defensive. We will discuss these issues in detail in this article, and conclude that the primary principle in Islam is peace and invitation, not war. We will present all verses of jihad and peace, and then see how a possible conflict between them can be dispelled.

To illustrate the peaceful nature of jihad in the Qur'an, we will apply a rule of Islamic jurisprudence in our intra-textual method, i.e. the conceptual compatibility between general and conditional verses, according to which general verses should be interpreted in the light of conditional verses (*takhsis*), which exist on the same subject. In other words, when there is contradictory verses on a subject, to accommodate between them the

conditional verses constrain the scope of the general verses.⁹ Also, the general context of a surah in which the verses are located sheds light on their true meaning.¹⁰ This approach stands against the abrogation approach.

The jihadist Salafis, using the abrogation approach, believe that the general verses of jihad, which are chronologically later and belong to the time the Islamic state has established itself, abrogate the conditional and more peaceful verses of jihad. According to the extremist jihadists, such as Abdul Salam Faraj and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Verse of Sword (Quran, 9:5) has abrogated more than 200 Qur'anic verses which all call for dialogue, freedom of opinion, forgiveness and peace. The ISIS terrorist group justified their crimes against the Yazidis by citing the same verse.¹¹

Auda attributes the view to well-known Sunni exegetes such as Tabari, Bidawi, Zamakhshari, Ibn Kathir, and Qartabi that this verse has abrogated other verses of peace, forgiveness and patience.¹² However, our study, at least in the case of Ibn Kathir, rejects this, and shows that these exegetes have been narrating others' views without confirming them.¹³

Before proceeding further, we will discuss some misconceptions about jihad among some Orientalists, which show relevance to the jihadist interpretations.

Misconceptions about Jihad among Some Orientalists

After the death of the Prophet of Islam, the tendency to conquer territories was rife, requiring religious justification. In this regard, theologians affiliated with the caliphate system fabricated hadiths about primary jihad, i.e. non-defensive jihad, and believed that the verses of peace and conditional jihad were superseded by the general verses of jihad. Thus, they provided a violent interpretation of jihad and of the Prophet's *sira*.¹⁴ For example, the book of *Sira ibn Hisham*, the first book written about the life of the Prophet in the *Abbasid* era, contains a lot of material that is incompatible with his *sira*, and is not credible according to the science of hadith.

This book includes issues such as jihad purely for the sake of booty, orders to assassinate dissidents, the order to massacre captives, and indiscriminate war methods.¹⁵ Thus, the current image of Islam is influenced by the legacy of the medieval Islamic scholars who relied on the presuppositions of their age to introduce an expansionist and violent image of Islam.

In this regard, Max Weber held that the early carriers of each religion transmit their own lifestyle and culture to that religion. The messenger of religion needs a carrier-class to spread its message, and as a result, the spirit of that class transmits to religion. Weber holds, the tribal warriors of the early days of Islam adopting the new religion transmitted their own militant spirit to it.¹⁶

Anne Lambton holds that Islam pursues its mission through war, and the only theory governing Islamic international relations is primary jihad to invite non-Muslims to Islam. The duty of the Islamic state against non-Islamic states is to wage primary jihad to invite them to Islam. In her view, peace has no place in Islam unless the Islamic state is weak and, thus, enters into peace treaties expeditiously.¹⁷

Holt has identified Sharia and Jihad—the holy law and the holy war—as the two main institutions of Islam. The holy law expresses conservative aspects, and jihad expresses its military aspects. In his view, these two aspects are not completely different, as the holy war is waged in defense of the sacred law against its internal and external enemies.¹⁸

According to Watt (1970: 50), after the Prophet's migration to Medina, most of the Medina population converted to Islam. The Prophet was expecting his companions to live in peace, but since much of the Arab's energy was involved in tribal wars, they sought to find an alternative way to spend that energy, thus introducing the concept of jihad or holy war. Jihad was, in fact, a *razzia*¹⁹ to acquire booty, against non-Muslims.²⁰

According to Watt, the Prophet led this energy toward non-Muslims through the notion of jihad in order to prevent the Arab warrior spirit from destroying the new society. Internal peace and foreign expansion were, thus, complementary. Internal peace allowed the Arabs to have a united army, and foreign expansion was needed to maintain internal peace.²¹

Watt argues that the Prophet in the last years of his life paved the way for expansion outside the Arabian Peninsula. The Prophet, in his last military expedition, Tabuk, carried out the largest mobilization of troops toward Syria to fight the Romans. This was the beginning of subsequent conquests. Thus, jihad transformed the notion of tribal raids into a war for conquest.²²

According to Watt, a characteristic of the Prophet's behavior after immigrating to Medina was an apparent hostility to the Meccans and sending forces for war with them. The Prophet could not expect the people of Medina to remain farmers or dependent on *Ansar*.²³ Sending caravans to Syria inevitably put Muslims at odds with the Meccans. Attacks and raids were a normal activity for the desert Arabs and even a sport for them. In Watt's view, the general purpose of these attacks was to seize sheep and camels from rival groups. After six months of staying in Medina, the Prophet began to lead attacks with the specific aim of seizing the Mecca convoys that were heading to Syria or returning from Syria.²⁴

Bonner refers to hadiths about jihad—such as the prophetic hadith that “I have been ordained to fight with the people (or the infidels) until they testify to the unity of God and my mission”—and concludes that a central principle of jihad is the propagation of the faith through combat. According to Bonner, this struggle will continue until the end of the world.²⁵

Firestone holds that the verses of jihad are contradictory, and there is no consistent way for understanding these verses. He has developed an evolutionary theory of jihad to make sense of what he views as contradictory verses. According to this evolutionary theory, the concept of jihad in the Qur'anic verses has evolved from a peaceful and defensive state to an aggressive one. As the Muslims' power developed, the concept of peaceful and defensive jihad turned into an offensive and primary jihad. Firestone argues that there were different groups in the Islamic community at the time of the Prophet, each with its own particular understanding of jihad. Eventually, the aggressive and war-seeking group dominated and used the warlike verses which were revealed during the Prophet's later life. This group put forward the idea of abrogation based on which the later verses in defense of the war abrogated the earlier pacific and conditional verses of jihad.²⁶

The purpose of the present article is to show that a detailed, systematic and contextual understanding of the verses of jihad in the Qur'an shows that this orientalist and jihadist understanding of jihad as violent and contradictory is flawed.

The conquests committed during the time of the Islamic caliphs after the Prophet's death are not compatible with the verses of jihad and should not cause a false

interpretation of this concept. To this purpose, we will use an alternative method to abrogation, which yields conceptual adaptability between the two sets of verses. This method is a part of the intra-textual interpretation of the Quran, which seeks to be faithful to the unity of the text and interpret diffident verses on a subject in the light of each other and in line with the general context of the verses.²⁷

The Dominant Interpretation of Jihad among Shiite and Sunni Jurisprudents

Early Shiite scholars have often maintained the primacy of war in Muslim-non-Muslim relationships. Shiite scholars, including Sheikh Tusi, Allameh Majlesi, Mohaghegh Helli, Muhammad Jamaluddin al-Makki al-Amili (known as Shahid Awwal), Zayn al-Din al-Juba'i al-Amili (known as Shahid Thani), Sheikh Hassan Najafi, Sayyed Ali Tabatabai, believe that war is the primary principle in dealing with non-Muslims, such that if they do not embrace Islam, they should be fought.²⁸ In their view, primary jihad with non-Muslims for making them convert to Islam is legitimate, unless expediency requires otherwise.

For instance, Sheikh Tusi (995-1067), the prominent Shiite jurisprudent and exegete, holds that "it is not permitted to fight infidels before inviting them to Islam, and if they were invited but not accepted Islam, fighting them is permitted".²⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah, holds that "it is incumbent to fight anyone who received the invitation of the Prophet to Islam but did not accept so that there will be no sedition and religion would be exclusively for Allah".³⁰

According to this view, based on verse (2:193), the goal of jihad is to eliminate idolatry from the world: "Fight them so that there will be no sedition [*fitna*], and God's religion will become dominant..." In this verse, sedition is taken by exegetes to refer to polytheism. "The ultimate necessity of jihad is the elimination of sedition and polytheism in a way that obedience and submission are only for God".³¹ These jurisprudents refer to hadiths, including a hadith of the Prophet: "All good is in the sword and under the shadow of the sword, and the people are upright only by the sword, and the sword is the key to the heaven and hell".³²

Contrary to this dominant view, some recent jurisprudents have defended the primary principle of peace. Some have defended its recommendation rather than its obligatoriness.³³ Some hold that only defensive jihad is legitimate.³⁴ Rashid Reza, Shalotut, and Zuhaili believe that the cause of jihad with the infidels is not to lead them to convert to Islam, but because they have shown enmity toward Muslims. They consider the elimination of barriers to the invitation, or the salvation of the oppressed from the oppressors as a defensive rather than a primary jihad.³⁵

In what follows, we attempt to examine the primacy of war or peace by providing a unified understanding of the verses of jihad in the Qur'an. To this end, we examine the various verses of jihad in the Qur'an and try to reconcile the apparently contradictory verses of jihad with the method used in Islamic jurisprudence, according to which conditional verses interpret and outline general verses.³⁶ We will first explain the terminology of jihad in the Quran, and then discuss the division of the verses of jihad into primary and defensive, and then into conditional and general verses, and show how we can reconcile them without appealing to the method of abrogation.

Terminology of Jihad in the Qur'an

According to our survey, jihad in the military sense occurs in 47 verses in the Qur'an. The terms that refer to this notion are derived from the origin of "*jahd*" or "*johd*", in the sense of trying one's best to achieve an end, or from "*qital*" or "*harb*" in the sense of fighting and war.³⁷ The jahd/johd origin denotes the hardship involved in jihad, and the *qital*/*harb* origin denotes its military aspect. The imperative verb *qatiloo*, fight, is a reciprocal verb, which casts doubt on the primary meaning of jihad in these verses, and gives it a defensive sense.

The general verses of jihad were revealed after the migration of the Prophet and his early advocates to Medina and forming the first Islamic state and gaining power. The verses of military jihad, with their core meaning, are listed in [Table 1](#) below.

Table 1. The Military Verses of Jihad.

No	Verse	Core meaning	No	Verse	Core meaning
1	(2:190)	defensive jihad	26	(8:67)	War regulations
2	(2:191)	Primary/defensive jihad	27	(8:72)	Merits of jihad/defensive jihad/adherence to treaties to stop war
3	(2:193)	Primary/defensive jihad	28	(9:5)	Primary jihad
4	(2: 216)	General encouragement to jihad	29	(9:12)	Defensive jihad
5	(2:244)	General order to jihad	30	(9:13)	Defensive jihad
6	(3:167)	General order to jihad	31	(9:29)	Primary jihad
7	(3:195)	Merits of jihad	32	(9:36)	Primary/defensive war
8	(4:71)	Military readiness	33	(9:38)	General encouragement to jihad
9	(4:74)	General order to jihad/merits of jihad	34	(9:41)	General encouragement to jihad
10	(4:75)	General order to jihad/defensive jihad	35	(9:81)	Blaming evading from jihad
11	(4:76)	General order to jihad	36	(9:91)	People exempted from jihad order
12	(4:77)	General order to jihad	37	(9:123)	Primary jihad
13	(4:84)	General order to jihad	38	(22:39)	Defensive jihad
14	(4:89)	Primary jihad	39	(33:26)	General description of and encouraging jihad with the people of book
15	(4:91)	Defensive jihad	40	(33:61)	Killing hypocrites
16	(4:95)	Merits of jihad	41	(47:4)	General encouragement to jihad
17	(8:12)	Killing the infidels	42	(49:9)	Defensive war/peacemaking among Muslims
18	(8:15)	Resistance in war	43	(57:10)	General encouragement to jihad
19	(8:16)	Resistance in war	44	(61:4)	General encouragement to jihad
20	(8:39)	Primary jihad	45	(61:11)	General encouragement to jihad
21	(8:57)	Military advice/trying to stop war	46	(66:9)	Being harsh upon the disbelievers and the hypocrites
22	(8:58)	Proportionate measures in negotiations	47	(73:20)	General encouragement to jihad
23	(8:60)	Military readiness/deterrence			
24	(8:61)	Accepting peace from infidels			
25	(8:65)	General encouragement to jihad			

Types of Jihad

Jihad is divided by the Islamic jurists into two groups: primary jihad and defensive jihad. Primary jihad involves inviting non-Muslims to Islam. Defensive jihad involves defending the territories, life and property of Muslims.³⁸

Defensive Jihad

Defensive jihad is obligatory when enemies attack Islamic countries, and does not require the permission of the infallible Imam and other conditions of primary jihad. This kind of jihad is, in fact, a legitimate defense, which is also allowed according to Article 51 of the UN Charter.

There are two general guidelines in the Shari'a Law about defense:

1. Defensive Readiness: Preparing equipment to defend the Islamic community and its interests. This equipping might deter the enemy from attacking the Muslims, and so is a kind of defense.³⁹
2. Defense order: Defense is necessary and obligatory if an enemy invades or intends to invade in any way an Islamic country or its people. Defending the people's rights and the oppressed who call for aid is also a kind of defensive jihad (Qur'an 4: 75).⁴⁰

The main purpose of the Prophet in sending out military groups to the Quraysh merchant caravans was to make the Meccans aware of Muslims' military power, and to stop threats to Medina.⁴¹ Military preparation and strength are necessary for all countries to prevent enemies' aggression.

Primary Jihad

In primary jihad, the Muslims wage war to remove barriers to proselytizing. According to the dominant view in Shiite jurisprudence, primary jihad is permissible only with the presence and permission of the infallible Imam. The decision to wage jihad is specific to the Prophet or the Infallible Imam.⁴² The Shia infallible Imam has been absent since 261 AH (874 C.E). Therefore, in the age of occultation, primary jihad for converting others to Islam is ruled out.

Indeed, in the age of the Imam, primary jihad is not for making people convert to Islam; rather, it is to remove barriers against such an invitation. Some Qur'anic verses (5:14; 3:55) imply that Christianity and Judaism will last until the Day of Judgment, and there are hadiths which point to the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and non-Muslims in this age.⁴³

Most Shiite scholars, such as Sheikh Saduq, Halabi, Sheikh Tusi, Ibn Braj, Ibn Hamzah Tusi, Ibn Idris Al-Hilli, Mohagheq Al-Hilli, Allamah Al-Hilli and Fakhr al-Mohqiqin Al-Hilli, Shahid Thani, Imam Khomeini, and many others, explicitly defend this view and consider it a consensual matter. All of them believe that primary jihad is not permissible in the absence of the infallible Imam.⁴⁴ Sheikh Tusi, for example, writes "if the Imam does not appear or his representative is not present, jihad with the enemy is not allowed".⁴⁵ Shahid Thani holds, according to all religious scholars,

this type of jihad is not allowed without the permission of the Imam or his appointee.⁴⁶ Imam Khomeini has also excluded primary jihad from the jurisdiction of the jurists, which means it is legitimate only with the permission of the infallible Imam.⁴⁷ Najafi holds that it is necessary (or recommendatory) that the inviter be infallible or appointed by the Infallible.⁴⁸

However, the main claim of the present article is that even in the presence of the infallible Imam, jihad is not for imposing belief; it, rather, aims to remove obstacles such as polytheistic rulings that impede the message or freedom of the people to choose religion. Forced conversion to religion has been explicitly rejected in the Quran (2:256).⁴⁹ Free invitation to Islam has been recommended in the Quran (9:6) immediately after a primary jihad verse.⁵⁰

As this verse shows, the disbelievers and the polytheists, after hearing the message of revelation, should be free to accept or reject the divine and monotheistic invitation, and there is no compulsion after the message is delivered. This shows the utmost respect for the dignity of humanity.⁵¹ In Table 2, we have summarized the verses of primary jihad, which are likely to raise a violent and warlike interpretation of jihad. If we engage adequately with these verses, we will be able to dismiss this interpretation, and show that these verses are in fact defensive.

For this purpose, in the next sections, after explaining and criticizing the abrogation approach, we will present these verses to the conditional verses of jihad and the verses of peace, and examine their context. Using this contextual and intra-textual method, we shall achieve a more comprehensive interpretation of these verses, than offered by some jihadists.

General and Conditional Verses of Jihad

We define general verses of jihad as those verses in which jihad, fighting or killing infidels has not been attributed to a prior aggressive action such as oppression. The general verses of jihad, therefore, correspond to the verses of primary jihad outlined

Table 2. The Verses of Primary Jihad.

Verse	Verse
(2:191)	(9:29)
(2:193)	(9:36)
(4:89)	(9:123)
(8:39)	(9:5)

Table 3. General Verses of Jihad.

General verses
(9:5): "And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them ..."
(2:191): "And kill them wherever you find them, ..."
(4:89): "They wish you would disbelieve as they disbelieved so you would be alike. So do not take from among them allies until they emigrate for the cause of Allah. But if they turn away, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them."
(8:39): "And fight them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah. And if they cease, then, indeed, Allah is seeing of what they do."
(9:29): "Fight those who do not believe in Allah ... until they give the <i>jizyah</i> willingly while they are humbled."
(9:36): "fight against the unbelievers all together as they themselves fight against you all together."
(9:41): "Go forth, whether light or heavy, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the cause of Allah. That is better for you, if you only knew."
(9:123): "O ye who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you..."
(61:11): "You shall believe in God and His Messenger, and struggle in the way of God with your possessions and your selves."

Table 4. Conditional Verses of Jihad (the Conditioning Part Is Underlined).

Conditional verses

(2:190): "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress"

(part of 2:191): "... And do not fight them at al-Masjid al- Haram until they fight you there. But if they fight you, then kill them..."

(2:193): "Fight them until there is no *fitnah* [sedition] and worship is for Allah. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors."

(2:194): "If any one transgresses against you, you also may retaliate against them to an equal extent."

(4:75): "And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed ..."

(22:39): "Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged."

(42:39-42): "And those who, when great wrong is done to them, defend themselves, ... There is no blame against him who avenges himself after he has been wronged."

in Table 2. By contrast, the conditional verses of jihad are those verses in which jihad, fighting or killing infidels has been attributed to a prior aggressive action such as oppression. The conditional verses of jihad correspond to the verses of defensive jihad (see Table 4).

The indirect implication of the conditional verses of jihad is that jihad is not legitimate if it is not a proportionate response to an attack, or any kind of injustice.

Reconciling General and Conditional Verses: Abrogation and Conceptual Compatibility (*Takhsis*)

There are two views on how to reconcile the general and conditional verses of jihad, as well as of other conflicting subjects. One is through abrogation, and the other is through conceptual compatibility. Abrogation means the abolition of conditional verses by general verses. In the context of jihad, it means the abolition of the conditional verses of jihad by the later general verses of jihad. Conceptual compatibility seeks to yield compatibility between the two groups of verses by assigning priority to the conditional verses. In what follows, we will explain these two approaches in more detail.

Abrogation

Abrogation in the Qur'anic sciences, *naskh*, is the view that some later verses supersede other verses revealed earlier about the same subject, if they are at clear odds with each other, or based on a consensus among scholars or hadiths.⁵² In this case, later verses abrogate earlier verses. In the case of jihad, according to some (mainly Sunni) exegetes, the Muslims were in minority in the beginning of the Prophet's mission, but gained prominence after immigrating to Medina and successful wars. During this ten-year period, the situation changed, resulting in new revelations that abrogated previous defensive verses in favor of the verdict to kill all infidels not converting to Islam with the aim of eradicating infidelity. According to some commentators, the basic verses which prescribe primary jihad, verses (9:5; 9:29), have been revealed in the last years of the Prophet's life, abrogating previous verses.⁵³ These two abrogating verses are as follows.

"And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of

ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful” (Verse 9:5).

“Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture ...” (Verse 9:29).

Shiite scholars do not allow abrogation in the Quran, except in three cases.⁵⁴ Regarding the above discussion, the prominent contemporary Shiite scholar, Khoi, argues that verses (9:5) and (9:36)⁵⁵ have not abrogated verse (2:191),⁵⁶ as the former verses are general, and a general verse cannot abrogate a conditional and restricted verse.⁵⁷ The conditional verses, in fact, interpret and outline the true application of general verses. In other words, generally, abrogation does not obtain between two sets of verses as long as they can be rendered compatible. Also, as Khoi states, abrogation cannot be verified by appeal to a single hadith, that is, a hadith which is not narrated by different series of narrators to yield us certainty about its origination from the infallible Imam.⁵⁸

One of the disadvantages of the abrogation approach is that it requires careful knowledge of the chronology of the revelation of the Qur’anic verses so that later verses can be considered as abrogating the earlier verses. However, our knowledge is limited in this regard. There are also many fraudulent hadiths about the chronology and causes of revelation that might cause misinterpretations. Therefore, it is virtually impossible to separate the abrogated verses from the obsolete. Therefore, the two categories of jihad verses cannot be understood in this way, particularly since they can be made compatible.^{59,60}

Ibn Kathir, the famous exegete, denies the abrogation of the verses of peace by the Verse of Sword (29: 5).⁶¹ Tabari, the famous historian and exegete of the Qur’an, has also rejected the abrogation of the verses of peace, as these two sets of verses are conceptually compatible with each other.⁶²

The second approach seeks conceptual compatibility between general and conditional verses. In this approach, general verses are constrained by conditional verses.

Conceptual compatibility (Takhsis)

The second approach seeks to gain a unified understanding of the verses of the Qur’an on the subject of jihad. For this purpose, it uses a rule of the Islamic jurisprudence according to which conditional verses outline the scope of general verses (*takhsis*). In this approach, the Qur’an is understood as a unified text in which its verses interpret each other. This is an intra-textual interpretation, which instead of isolating the verses from each other, seeks to be loyal to the unified meaning which can be obtained from the text in its entirety. This method is also called the interpretation of the Qur’an by the Qur’an.

On this basis, conditional verses specify the boundaries of general verses. Accordingly, there is no conflict between these two groups of verses; rather, general verses are interpreted in the light of conditional verses, and thus conceptual compatibility is achieved.^{63,64} Accordingly, the conditional verses serve as an explanation for the general verses of jihad. The true meaning of jihad is outlined in the conditional verses.

We presented the conditional and general verses of jihad in [Tables 3](#) and [4](#). In the general verses, war with all infidels or polytheists is incumbent unconditionally due

to their disbelief. However, according to the conditional verses of jihad, war is only incumbent with particular groups of the polytheists and people of the Book and in particular circumstances. We will show how the general verses are in fact made conditional by the other group. As is clear in Table 3, jihad has been conditional on issues such as oppression and injustices made to the Muslims. Table 3 consists of Table 2 *plus* the verses which generally encourage jihad or mention its merits. In fact, the defensive verses of jihad are inherently conditional on the attacks or injustices made to the Muslims.

Besides the conditional verses, the verses that encourage values such as peace, justice, forgiveness and freedom of thought also illuminate the true meaning of the general verses, as will be shown below in our discussion of the verses of peace and peaceful conduct.

Verses of Peace and Peaceful Conduct

The verses of peace in the Qur'an can also outline the true meaning of the general verses of jihad. These verses can be categorized in two groups: peace among Muslims, and between Muslims and non-Muslims. As jihad concerns mainly the Muslim-non-Muslims relationship, we skip the first category, i.e. peace among Muslims. We have located the verses which dismiss any kind of belief imposition in the peaceful conduct category. These verses can be shown in the tables below, but are not limited to this list.

Table 5. The Verses of Peaceful Conduct.

(49:13): "Human beings, We created you all from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another."
(2:256): "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong..."
(88:21): "So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not a warden over them."
(109:1–6): "Say, 'O disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshipers of what I worship... For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.'"
(13:40): "...your duty is no more than to convey the Message, and it is for Us to make a reckoning."
(3:20): "... If they embrace Islam, they will find guidance but if they turn away, your task is just to preach. God knows all about His servants."
(13:40): "your duty is no more than to convey the Message, and it is for Us to make a reckoning."
(3:64): "say to the People of the Book, 'We must come to a common term. Let us worship no one except God, nor consider anything equal to Him, nor regard any of us as our Lord besides God.' However, if they turn away from (the Truth), tell them, 'Bear witness that we have submitted ourselves to the will of God.'"
(16:125): "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them [the People of Book] 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."

Table 6. The Verses of Peacemaking.

(8:61): "But if they [infidels] are inclined to peace, make peace with them, and have trust in God, for He hears all and knows everything"
(4:90): "...If they leave you alone and do not fight against you and offer you peace, then Allah does not permit you to harm them."
(60:8): "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."
(4:94): "Believers! When you go forth in the way of Allah, discern (between friend and foe), and do not say to him who offers you the greeting of peace: 'You are not a believer!...'"
(9:6): "If any of the polytheists seeks asylum from you, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of Allah. Then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know."

The above verses do not make peaceful coexistence dependent on faith. They reject any kind of compulsion in accepting a religion or belief. According to these verses, the Prophet just must convey the divine message. In the context of wars, once the enemy stops war or proposes peace, war with them is no longer legitimate. As verse (49:13) indicates, human beings, despite their diversity in the creation and customs of life, should lean toward peaceful relationships. This verse, which was revealed in Medina after the formation of the Islamic state, establishes the principle of human relationships, both within the Islamic society and with non-Islamic societies, and requires respect for freedom of thought.⁶⁵

It may be argued that we are imposing on the Qur'an the modern values of the Enlightenment and the liberal age, values such as freedom of thought and faith. In response, it should be noted that we have not imposed any values, but as the above verses show, these values exist in the text of the Qur'an. Consider again verse (9:6): "If any of the polytheists seeks asylum from you, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of Allah. Then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know." Respect for freedom of thought is evident in this verse.

However, it should be noted that this freedom is different from the freedom desired by the philosophers of the Enlightenment and liberalism. The difference is that the freedom sought by the Qur'an is devoid of the elements of extreme subjectivism, individualism, and relativism. In other words, although the Qur'an defends freedom of thought and belief, this does not mean that, in its view, there is no objective criterion for distinguishing right from wrong. One is free to accept truths or not in this worldly life, and should not be coerced, but he will be responsible for his choice in the presence of God.

So far, we have explained how the conditional verses of jihad and the verses of peace can specify the true meaning of general verses. We now turn to the role of the context of the verses.

Discovering the Context of the Verses of Primary Jihad

To discover the context of the verses of primary jihad, we should attend to the surrounding verses of these verses, *siaq*, in the surahs in which they are located. The placement of the verses in surahs has not been arbitrary; rather, it has been determined during their revelation.⁶⁶ Thus, the surrounding verses, and generally the entirety of the surah, enable us to understand better the point that the verse conveys.

Table 7. Understanding the Context of the Verses of Primary Jihad.

Verse	Context
(2:191) (2:193) (4:89)	Describing the infidels fighting or expelling the Muslims from their territory Describing the hypocrites (apparent Muslims but infidels in reality) causing troubles for Muslims and not proposing peace
(8:39)	Describing the infidels spending their money to avert people from the right way
(9:5) (9:29) (9:36) (9:123)	Describing the infidels breaking their oaths and planning to expel the Prophet from the city

As Table 7 shows, the verses of primary jihad and the order to kill the infidels have occurred in a context in which certain injustices and wrongs have been committed against the Muslims, such as plotting, expelling, breaking oaths, etc. As is clear, jihad in these cases do not address non-Muslim's disbelief, rather, their plot to harm the new religion and its advocates.

Using this intra-textual interpretive method, if we present the most hardline verses of jihad from Table 3, i.e. (9:5) and (2:191), in which the verb “kill” is used instead of the reciprocal verb “fight”, to the conditional and peace verses, and take into account their context, we can infer that their unlimited scope would become limited to the cases in which the infidels have done severe injustices to the Muslims. Having a different belief by itself does not count as an injustice to Muslims, particularly if we take into account the verses which ordain freedom of conscience. However, if a state or group of people prevents the right of its people to receive the divine message and think for themselves, it has committed a serious damage to them. In this case, it is legitimate to fight with it to remove this barrier.⁶⁷

Recourse to verse (2:193) to show that polytheism is the primary cause of war depends on the meaning of the term *fitnah* (sedition) in this verse. But not all kinds of polytheism are seditious. It is seditious when it leads to the oppression and enslavement of human beings. In the parlance of the Quran, this is described in many verses as *sadd an sabeeli Allah*, i.e. averting people from the way of Allah: “Those who disbelieved and averted [others] from the way of Allah—We will increase them in punishment over [their] punishment for what corruption they were causing (16:88).

A good example of this is the confrontation between the Prophet Moses and Pharaoh narrated in the Qur'an, when Moses asks Pharaoh to deliver the people and let them decide for themselves: “And We had already tried before them the people of Pharaoh, and there came to them a noble messenger, [Saying], ‘Render to me the servants of Allah. Indeed, I am to you a trustworthy messenger’” (verse 44:17–18).

From the Qur'anic view, sedition is a process that causes social horror and misleads human beings by creating oppression and panic.⁶⁸ Disbelief is not a reason for jihad, unless it turns into a barrier to guidance and salvation. If disbelief was at stake, it was not possible to explain why the Qur'an (2:190 & 194) prohibits Muslims from transgressing in their fights against infidels, which has been understood by many exegetes as prohibiting them from killing old men, women and children⁶⁹; a view that is also supported by many hadiths in this subject. If their disbelief was the issue, these people should also be fought and killed. Therefore, the cause of jihad is the oppression and enslavement of Muslims by some infidels.

Therefore, the true understanding of jihad requires paying due attention to all verses on this subject, which outline the true scope of jihad. Jihad with infidels in the Quran is limited to infidels with realized enmity, which includes waging war, preparing for war, conspiracy and impeding the people from receiving the divine message and decide for themselves.⁷⁰

The jihadist Salafis use verse (9:29) to justify the legitimacy of primary war against the infidels,⁷¹ and consider their disbelief as a sufficient reason for waging war against them.⁷² In their view, primary war is legitimate against all of the People of the Book,

whether being at war or not with Muslims, to make them convert to Islam, or being killed or pay *jizya*, i.e. tax.⁷³

In our view, this interpretation of the verse is incorrect, because it is not possible to take polytheism or atheism as a reason for jihad. Jihad against the people of the Book and infidels, has its limits and conditions. Hence, some exegetes hold that these verses refer to those who have murdered Muslims.⁷⁴ Rashid Reza also believes that jihad in Islam is merely defensive and for removing the barriers against the invitation to God.⁷⁵ According to Motahhari, this verse is conditional.⁷⁶ Takfiris have been mistaken in their interpretation because of their neglect of the terms and conditions in this and other similar verses.

A question may arise that we have introduced two methods, the abrogation, and the *takhsis* method, but did not show that the second method is superior to the first method. In response, we would say that there are several reasons for the superiority of the *takhsis* method:

1. The consensus of Sunni and Shiite scholars is that the abrogation method is used when it is not possible to reconcile different verses. Only a group of Salafis have resorted to the idea of abrogation in the field of jihad.⁷⁷
2. The principles of justice and fairness are among the main principles and messages of the Qur'an. Many verses refer to these messages, as was shown in [Tables 5 and 6](#). It is not possible to abrogate all the themes of the Qur'an by a few simple verses.
3. Abrogation is an exceptional and against the rule method. Its application requires certitude regarding abrogating verses and cannot be applied based on conjectures. This certitude is hardly achievable. While *takhsis* is a less demanding and conventional method that is used in our daily communications. For instance, if I say to my son "Never tell a lie", and later say to him that "Do not give your address to strangers", the later command does not negate the first one; rather, it clarifies its true application.
4. The correct interpretation of a text requires that we remain as faithful as possible to the text as a whole, except when we encounter an unresolved conflict. By the method of *takhsis*, we are faithful to the whole text. The Qur'an has introduced itself as the light and illuminator of everything (verse 16:89). A book that introduces itself to explain all subjects should not fail to explain and interpret an important issue such as jihad, in a way that it is necessary to abrogate most of its verses.
5. Abrogation as a *generalizable* method has no roots in the Qur'an and Hadith. The few cases that have occurred in the Qur'an, such as the change of Qibla, have been stated and confirmed by the Qur'an itself, explaining their wisdom. The term abrogation, in this sense, has not occurred in any verse or hadith, and has been mentioned only by commentators to resolve apparent conflicts.⁷⁸ Therefore, this method should not be widely used, especially when it is possible to resolve the conflict.
6. The widespread use of the method of abrogation by Salafis like Ibn Taymiyyah is because for them abrogation has a wider meaning, which also includes the *takhsis* method. In other words, because conceptual adaptation restrains the concept, it is considered by them as a kind of abrogation.⁷⁹

7. Concerning the issue of jihad, the Sword Verse, as we showed in our discussion of the context of the verses, is about a particular group of infidels who have shown enmity or breached the peace agreement with Muslims. Its subject is not infidels as such. Thus, it cannot abrogate other verses about general infidels, as their subject is different.
8. The immediate verses after the Sword verse enjoin adherence to peace agreements with infidels and giving them security and freedom to hear the word of God (verse 9:6–7). An earlier verse cannot abrogate later verses.

In light of the above reasons, we believe that the superiority of the conceptual adaptation method is not a subjective or arbitrary preference; rather is based on good textual and interpretative reasons.

The discussion shows that Islam is based on pacifism. War is an exceptional situation, and the general rule is to invite people to the acceptance of the religion. Forced conversion to Islam is not mentioned at all in the Qur'an. Hence, the claim of some Salafis about the abrogation of the verses of peace and that the only way to deal with infidels is through war is not justified.

The Arabian society was a nomadic and war-like society before and at the time of the rise of Islam. The slightest dispute could lead to war and bloodshed. At a time, a war happened because a camel violated the grass of another tribe (Bosus War). The bloody battles of Fajr and Ba'ath, which lasted for 40 years, followed a dispute in a horse racing. However, the Qur'anic injunctions about jihad and the conduct of the Prophet are far removed from this violent atmosphere and have tried to control this militant temperament.⁸⁰

About 30 out of the total military missions of the Prophet led to military conflict. The total death toll of both sides is slightly different in various historical sources, but according to one study, the average number of people killed on both sides narrated in different sources is about 610.⁸¹ This number of casualties is not high compared to the warlike culture of the time, and shows that the intention of the Prophet was not bloodshed.

The analysis of the Prophet's wars shows no record of a war for imposing Islam on people. All of the Prophet's wars with infidels and the Jewish tribes were triggered by a prior attack or treason by them. A full analysis of these wars requires a separate article; however, we here focus on two cases cited by some orientalists to show a violent picture of Islam. One is the alleged attack of the Prophet and the Muslims on the Quraysh merchant caravans after the migration to Medina, and the other is the so-called killing or massacre of the Jews of Bani Qurayzah.

The threat of the Quraysh caravans by the Muslims occurred at a time when the remaining Muslims in Mecca were being persecuted by the pagans. The Muslims wanted to prevent their persecution by showing their power. Basically, no war happened against the Quraysh caravans, it was just a show of power. The pagans attacked the Muslim near Medina after this incident and waged the battle of Badr.⁸² It is clear that this threat by Muslims has been a defensive act.

Regarding the so-called massacre of the Jews of Bani Qurayzah, it should be noted that a peace treaty was established between the Muslims and this group of Jews living in Medina not to engage in any war against the Muslims. This covenant would allow

the Prophet to shed their blood and take his family captive if they violated it. This treaty prevented Bani Qurayzah from cooperating with the opponents of the Prophet until the fifth year after the migration, and they confessed that they had seen nothing from the Prophet except fidelity and truth, and that he did not force them to accept Islam.⁸³ But with the instigation of Abu Sufyan's envoy, the Bani Qurayzah violated the peace treaty and helped the polytheists in the Ahzab war.⁸⁴

After the end of the Ahzab war, the Jews of Bani Qurayzah surrendered after a 25-day siege. There are two accounts of the Prophet's treatment of them. According to the first report, the result of the arbitration process introduced by the Bani Qurayzah themselves was that all the men of the Bani Qurayzah be executed and their wives and children be taken captive and their property confiscated. According to the second report, the result of the arbitration was that only their fighters should be executed.⁸⁵

There is some evidence that casts doubt on the accuracy of the first report. First, there are different historical accounts of those who carried out the executions. The speed of execution of this number of men, about 700, is not consistent with what has been reported. Moreover, the Prophet's treatment of the Bani Qurayzah is inconsistent with his treatment of other Jews who fought or broke the treaty with him. The Prophet reconciled with the Jews of Bani Qinqa, Bani Nadir and Khyber, who had all violated the treaty, participated in the war or even intended to assassinate him, and agreed that they leave the city unarmed.⁸⁶

There are differences between the two reports in terms of the number of people killed, the people who were killed, those who did the executions, and the place where they were killed; thus the credibility of both reports is disputed. In addition, the verse referring to this incident indicates that a war happened between Jews and Muslims in this incident and some were killed and some were taken prisoner.⁸⁷ Capture here refers to warriors, not women and children. There is also no mention of beheading in the verse, but that a number of people were killed during the war. In the language of the Quran, where the concept of beheading is considered, the verb "*zarb alrriqab*" is used, not murder.⁸⁸

Although in all the battles of the Prophet the name and lineage of those killed on both sides are recorded, and there might be slight disagreements among historians about this, we cannot find the name of more than 10 people of Bani Qurayzah killed in this incident. All these cast doubt on the veracity of these two reports. According to some historians, like Jafar Shahidi, the exaggeration about the death toll is related to the internal rivalries and enmities between the Aws and Khazraj Jewish tribes. In Shahidi's view, this story has been written from the beginning based on intra-group competitions.^{89,90}

Conclusion

An examination of the verses of peace and jihad shows that the general order to fight infidels does not target their disbelief, but their revealed enmity toward Muslims. In fact, jihad is directed at warring infidels, whether those who have actually waged war or those who have prevented people from accessing the divine message. Jihad with infidels has specific purposes, including defending life and property, the elimination of oppression (verse 22:40), the elimination of obstacles to the invitation to God (verse 2:193), and the salvation of the oppressed (verse 4:75).

In this paper, instead of the abrogation approach, we advocated the view that the general verses of jihad, which issue absolute orders to jihad and killing, must be interpreted based on the conditional and peace-inclined verses and in the light of their context. This is a principle accepted in Islamic jurisprudence that leads to the reconciliation between seemingly contradictory verses and religious verdicts. Using this intra-textual interpretive method (*takhsis*), we can obtain a unified understanding of the Qur'an. The verses of the Qur'an interpret each other. On this basis, one-sided interpretations that justify extremism would be rejected. The conditional verses of jihad and the verses of peace would outline the true meaning of the general meaning of jihad.

We argued that the *takhsis* method is a more reliable interpretive method than the abrogation method, and can produce a more authentic interpretation of jihad in the Qur'an. Using this method, we concluded that the primary principle in Muslim's encounters with other groups is peace and not war.

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Notes

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39. "And prepare against them all the power you can muster, and all the cavalry you can mobilize, to terrify thereby God's enemies and your enemies, and others besides them whom you do not know, but God knows them ..." (Qur'an 8: 60).
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48. Najafi, *Jawaher Al-kalam fi Sharh Shari'a al-Islam*, 51–52.
49. "There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; ..."
50. "And if one of the idolaters seek protection from you, grant him protection till he hears the word of Allah, then make him attain his place of safety; this is because they are a people who do not know".
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56. "... But if they fight you, then kill them..."
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