



*Prophetic Strategies in Peaceful Coexistence with\* non-Muslims*

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**Abstract ;**

*Peaceful coexistence between religions in this contemporary age is both an individual and societal necessity. It is particularly important given the interconnectedness of today's world in various areas such as politics, economics, society and culture. This article examines the concept of coexistence and its importance between Muslims and non-Muslims. Also this article discusses Prophet Muhammad's strategies in actualizing peaceful coexistence between Muslims and the people of Book (where a desired pluralistic society in which citizenship and equal rights were granted to all people regardless of religious beliefs and practices). The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians and Jews are used as a framework for analysis. The article campaigns for reviving the egalitarian spirit of the Covenants by refocusing our understanding of the Ummah as a site for religious freedom and civil rights, and can be used to develop a stronger narrative of democratic partnership between Muslims and Christians in the "Islamic world" and beyond.*

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## **Introduction**

One of the cardinal issues engrossing prominent scholars and intellectuals and focusing the attention of prospective studies specialists as well as all those concerned with the fate of civilizational race on all levels is inter-religious coexistence. Such engrossment is ascribed to the intricate nature of the subject, as it ramifies into complex issues and generates formidable challenges that, for the most part, go beyond the religious, civilizational and cultural scope, posing broader questions pertaining to thought and opinion at large.

The considerable impact of the issue of inter-religious coexistence on the life of humans entails that Islamic thought adopt a clear-cut stance in this connection. The required stance must build on a body of judicious opinions that lay bare the truth and determine principles after dispelling dubious ideas and confuting fallacies.

Hence the importance of the subject of this paper. It will address the topic of Islam and inter-religious coexistence, showing the stance of Islam vis-à-vis coexistence in its own right, it being one of the loftiest human values, and vis-à-vis inter-religious coexistence in view of its sovereign importance. Deep pondering is needed, here,

till we arrive at a crystal-clear position that expresses, in essence, the spirit of our civilization, tallies with our mission and reflects our earnest will to deal equitably with the other religions, cultures and civilizations

## **2. Concept of Coexistence**

Satisfactory analysis of the relationship between Islam and interreligious coexistence hinges on an accurate definition of the term «coexistence» since the concept constitutes the backbone of the whole study.

Looking into the lexical meaning of the term “ta’ayush” (coexistence), from which the concept of coexistence actually originates, we find in the Al-Wasit Dictionary: “ta’aayashu,” meaning they lived in a climate of communion and amity - tantamount to peaceful coexistence-, then the term «’aayashahu,» that is to say he lived with him, with “’aaysh” meaning here, life, and thereby all the means of subsistence, including food, drink and income.<sup>1</sup>

Objective approach to the nature and mission of coexistence shows that coexistence is essentially an agreement between two parties, by virtue of which they not only elect to dispose the means of living among themselves in accordance with specific rules determined by themselves, but

they also pave the way for a sustainable life on these lines. There is, indeed, a fundamental difference between life in isolation and life in coexistence with others. In the latter case, the interested party decides to enter into an exchange process with one or more parties, provided that the process be based on a set of approved common interests, objectives or needs.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1 Islam and Coexistence

To trace the contours of the principle of coexistence and its dimensions, in the Islamic sense, nothing is more eloquent and relevant than the holy verse: [*Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you'*]<sup>3</sup>. So vast indeed is the common denominator between Muslims and the People of the Book. Since Islam has instilled in the hearts of Muslims the seeds of a predisposition for coexistence with the entire humankind, it is naturally more inclined to foster coexistence among the believers in Allah. But coexistence, from this perspective, does not mean a mandatory agreement on all matters. However, as a general rule, if I put the condition not to administer good treatment except to those who are like me (Muslims or non-Muslims), this means that I am utterly selfish, and that difference means enmity<sup>4</sup>

Islamic scripture and religious teachings are rich sources of values, beliefs, and strategies that promote the peaceful and nonviolent resolution of conflicts. Awareness of the Qur'an, the Prophetic tradition, and the early Islamic period is indispensable for understanding Islam, since these scriptures and traditions have continued to provide a paradigm for emulation by Muslims and Islamic movements in every age, and their influence can be traced in every philosophical, ideological, and scientific inquiry among Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

Coexistence in Islam is grounded on an ideological basis, taking root in the faith. For this reason, the concept of coexistence from an Islamic perspective does not belong to the modern, positive concepts underlying the rules of international law.

Muslims believe that the divine guidance was relayed through a long series of messages and prophecies, the last of which were Judaism, then Christianity and finally Islam. It is, therefore, only natural that the three religions should be nearer to one another than to the rest of religions. The Quran refers to the Christians and the Jews as the "People of the Book," because Almighty Allah had revealed the Torah to Moses and the Gospel to Jesus (may the peace be upon them) before Muhammad

(PBUH) received the integral Message giving credence to the former messages, and putting right all matters pertaining to the law, religious observances and ethics. The Holy Quran is the only sacred book that has remained intact, in the very original language in which it was revealed, in word and character.<sup>6</sup>

The coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims is a legal obligation in Islam. Islam took the utmost care to consolidate a set of principles, foundations, and general rules in the hearts of Muslims, through a number of Qur'anic verses and Hadiths, to achieve peaceful coexistence, the acceptance of others, and constructive cooperation.

The Islamic texts that indicate the legal obligation of coexistence are as follows:

- Islam praised the divine religions, their divine books, and prophets. Allah said, “Oh Children of Israel! Call to mind the (special) favour which I bestowed upon you, and that I preferred you to all other (for My Message).”<sup>7</sup> It also praised the Christians, “Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, “We are

*Christians”*: because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.”<sup>8</sup>

- Islam also gave a beautiful description of the Torah and Bible. Allah described the Bible as, “And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah.”<sup>9</sup>
- Islam also set the condition for a correct and complete belief to believe in all the Messengers. Allah said, “The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believeth in Allah, His angels, His books, and His apostles. “We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His apostles.” And they say: “We hear, and we obey: (We seek) Thy forgiveness, our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys.”<sup>10</sup> This condition aimed towards drawing Jews and Christians close to Islam and to distance them from quasi-

conflicts. But they did not sufficiently consider the contents of the Qur'an regarding earlier religions, their books and Messengers, and what pertained to the Children of Israel and the Christians.

- Islam did not generalize rulings onto others. Among the greatest means to draw close to people is that the Qur'an did not circulate a general judgment on religions, but left much room for dialogue and coexistence with others *"Not all of them are alike: Of the People of the Book are a portion that stand (For the right): They rehearse the Signs of Allah all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration"*.<sup>11</sup> This verse creates an environment conducive to coexistence, dialogue and cooperation.
- Allah said, *"Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loved those who are just."*<sup>12</sup> This verse encourages Muslims to act on the basis of goodness and righteousness<sup>13</sup> with those who have not waged war against the Muslims or conspired to fight them. The righteousness

enjoined in the verse encourages kindness toward their weak, the preservation of their wealth, families, honour, and all their rights, in addition to cooperating towards their protection.

- To interact with non-Muslims with consideration far from compulsion and enmity. Allah said, *"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things."*<sup>14</sup> Allah said determining the role of the Messenger (PBUH), *"Therefore do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish. Thou art not one to manage (men's) affairs."*<sup>15</sup>
- Allah said *"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)."*<sup>16</sup> The verse invited to familiarization, which requires coexistence, between peoples that is



far removed from ethnic partisanship. It asserted that no differences are there among men except through piety.<sup>17</sup>

The Islamic texts that indicate the legality of coexistence with non-Muslims as found in the Sunnah are highlighted below:

- The prohibition of injustice towards with whom there is a covenant and with the dhimmis The Prophet (PBUH) said: *Whosoever hurts a dhimmi, or burdens him with the which he cannot manage, or takes his property without his permission, I will dispute with him on the Day of Resurrection.*<sup>18</sup>
- Dealing with non-Muslims on the basis of loans. Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her said: the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) died and his shield was pledged to a Jew for thirty sacks of barley.<sup>19</sup>

Honoring the dead whether Muslim or non-Muslim. Jabir ibn Abdallah, may Allah be pleased with them, reported: a funeral procession passed by us and the Prophet (PBUH) stood up so we followed suit. We said, O Messenger of God: it is the funeral of a Jew, he said: If you see a funeral then stand. Narrated by al-Bukhari.<sup>20</sup> Abdallah ibn Abi Layla said: Sahl ibn Hanif and Qays

ibn Saad were sitting at al-Qadissiyah when a funeral procession passed them by so they stood up. It was said to them: It is from the people of the land, meaning the dhimmis, they said: A funeral passed by the Prophet (PBUH) so he stood up. He was informed that it was a Jewish funeral. He said: are they not human beings. Narrated by Al-Bukhari.**2.2 Second Subtitle**

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### 3. Strategies for Security and Peaceful Coexistence

The prophet (SAW) during his life in Makkah and Madinah, and within the period of twenty-three years, employed very strong strategies which established adequate security and brought about peaceful coexistence in the Arab society. I have identified five of such strategies which are discussed extensively hereunder.<sup>21</sup>

#### 3.1 Negotiation with Makkani Elites

When the Makkans were rebuilding the ka'abah and the time came to place the secret Blackstone in its place in the east wall, they differed as to who would have the honour of

laying it in place. Competition was so keen that it almost led to a new civil. The descendants of Abdul-Dar and Adiyya allied themselves together and swore that none would rob them of this honour. They were so serious in their resolution then members of the clan of Banu Abd al-Dar brought a bowl full of blood in which they dipped their hands in confirmation of their solemn oath. For thus they later called “The blood monger” when Abu Umayyah, son of Mughirah Almakhazumi saw what happened, he took advantage of his power and prestige and said to the Makkan’s, “While we are all standing here, let the first one to pass through the gate of al-saffah be our arbitrator in this dispute.

“the first one to pass through the gate was Muhammad (SAW). When they beheld him they said, “There goes al-Amin. We shall agree with his verdict realizing, as he hastened to them, that the contenders had worked themselves up into a passion, Muhammad (SAW) thought for a moment and said: “Bring me a robe”, He took the robe they brought, spread it on the ground, and placed the Blackstone on it and then said, “let the elders of each clan hold onto one edge of the robe. “they all complied and together carried the stone to the site of construction. There, Muhammad (SAW)

picked up the stone and laid it in its place by himself. Bloodshed was thus averted and the dispute was solved”. (Haykal, 1982:65-66).

The lesson that could be deduced from this episode is fact that the prophet (SAW) was agreed by all the Makkah clans to be their arbitrator due to their recognition of his sublime character and trustworthiness, which led to naming him as Al-Amin (the trustworthy). It could also be noted that at the time of this episode, Muhammad (SAW) was appointed as a Prophet, nevertheless, he exhibited this sound character and fair judgment.

### **3.2 Diplomacy with the King Negus**

When the oppression, suppression and persecution of Prophet Muhammad’s companions by Makkan elites reached the red line, he sought for a positive alternative to ease the suffering of his people, where he remembered a Just and Staunch Christian King, Negus (Najjashi) of Habasha (Ethiopia). However, the diplomatic approach used by prophet Muhammad may Allah exalt his mention in resolving the conflict shows his esteem desire for a pluralistic state where everybody shall have the right to practice his religion without been intimidated or harassed.

Muhammad I. A. (1956:61) 'in the fifth year after hijrah, when the persecution was severe on the companions to endure, prophet Muhammad command them to migrate to habasha, he says: 'Indeed there is a man (in Ethiopia) who allows nobody to be cheated before him'. Habasha was a commerce area where Makkans stamp for businesses, and the number of immigrants was twelve men and four women'.

### **-Letter of prophet Muhammad to the King Negus**

The letter was a clear evidence on how Islam values and enhances peaceful coexistence with the People of Book, where Allah's Apostle seek refuge from the King Negus.

Muhammad I. A. (1956: 63) 'When it was Rabi'ul Auwal of seventh after hijrah, prophet Muhammad writes a letter to the King Negus calling him to embrace Islam and to marry him (Allah's Apostle) Ummu Habiba, who was a Muslima immigrant in his nation (she migrated together with her husband; Abdullahi bin Jahash, who later on decamped to Christianity and died Christian), and to send him the remaining Muslims immigrants. When he reads the letter, he embraces Islam, and said 'if I were capable of meeting him, I would've do'. He married out Umma Habiba to prophet

Muhammad (may Allah exalt his mention) and pays the dowry of four hundred dinars'.

This evidently shows how strategic prophet Muhammad was in security building and sustaining peaceful coexistence with Christian country.

### **Pluralistic State**

When the prophet (SAW) arrived in Medina, he started with three fundamental things. There was construction of mosque, creating brotherhood between Muhajirun and Ansar, and drafting Madinah constitution.

In Medina, the prophet (SAW) faced different categories of people his companion isolators of Medina, Jews and Christians in order to co-exist in a peaceful atmosphere, the prophet called for agreement with different groups of people. It was agreed in the meeting a constitution should be drafted to cater for the needs of each party in the agreement.

Herein, we look over some of its provisions.

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

This is a document from Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, concerning Emigrants and Helpers and those who followed and strove with them.



1. They are one nation to the exclusion of other people.
2. The Emigrants of Quraysh unite together and shall pay blood money among themselves, and shall ransom honorably their prisoners. Every tribe of the Helpers unite together, as they were at first, and every section among them will pay a ransom for acquitting its relative prisoners.
3. Believers shall not leave anyone destitute among them by not paying his redemption money or blood money in kind.
4. Whoever is rebellious or whoever seeks to spread enmity and sedition, the hand of every God fearing Muslim shall be against him, even if he be his son.
5. A believer shall not kill another believer, nor shall support a disbeliever against a believer.
6. The protection of Allah is one (and is equally) extended to the humblest of the believers.
7. The believers are supported by each other.
8. Whosoever of the Jews follows us shall have aid and succor; they shall not be injured, nor any enemy be aided against them.

9. The peace of the believers is indivisible. No separate peace shall be made when believers are fighting in the way of Allah. Conditions must be fair and equitable to all.
10. It shall not be lawful for a believer, who holds by what is in this document and believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement, to help a criminal nor give him refuge. Those who give him refuge and render him help shall have the curse and anger of Allah on the Day of Resurrection. Their indemnity is not accepted.
11. Whenever you differ about a matter, it must be referred to Allah and to Muhammad.
12. Killing a believer deliberately with no good reason entails killing the killer unless the sponsor deems it otherwise.<sup>22</sup>

The Medinan document provided mutual understanding between various groups in Medina which guaranteed peaceful coexistence under the leadership of the prophet (SAW). They all agreed that if whenever they differ about a matter, it must be referred to Allah and to Muhammad (SAW). This shows the kind of recognition given to the prophet (SAW) as a peace maker and responsible leader.

## **Treaty of Hudaibiyah**

It was in the sixth year of Hijrah, the prophet (SAW) saw in a dream, while he was still in Medina, that he had entered Makkah in security with his followers, and was performing the ceremonies of Umrah (lesser Hajj). The prophet (SAW) informed companions about his dream, they happy and immediately prepared their mind, for the journey.

The prophet (SAW) had his clothes washed, mounted his camel and marched out towards Makkah with about 1,500 Muslims together with his wife Ummu Salamah. They carried no weapons with them except sheathed swords because they had no intention of fighting.

When the Quraysh heard about the prophet, mission, they held a meeting during which they considered the while situation and decided to resist the prophets mission at all costs. Two hundred horsemen led by Khalid bin Al-Waleed were dispatched to take the Muslims by surprise during Zuhr (the afternoon) prayer. The prophet (SAW) and his companions camped at Hudaibiyah and sent Uthman ibn Affan to explain to Quraysh their mission they only intended forming the lesser Hajj not fighting. News came that Uthman was assassinated. The Muslims

were greatly worried and took a solemn pledge at the hand of the prophet (SAW) that they would sacrifice their lives to avenge the death of their companions and stand firmly by their master, Muhammad (SAW), under all Ridwan (A covenant of fealty). Allah (SWT) says: *'indeed, Allah was pleased with the believers when they gave their Bai'a (pledge to you Muhammad (SAW)) under the tree'* <sup>23</sup>

When Quraysh saw the firm determination of the Muslims to shed the last drop of their blood for the deface of their faith, they came to their senses and realized that Muhammad's followers could not be cowed down by these tactics. After some further interchange of messenger, they agreed to conclude a treaty of reconciliation and peace with the Muslims.

### ***The clauses of the said treaty go as follows:***

1. The Muslims shall return this time and come back next year, but they shall not stay in Makkah for more than three days.
2. They shall not come back armed but can bring with them swords only sheathed in scabbards and these shall be kept in bags.
3. War activities shall be suspended for ten years, during which both parties will live in

full security and neither will raise sword against the other.

4. If anyone from Quraysh goes over to Muhammad (Peace be upon him) without his guardian's permission, he should be sent back to Quraysh, but should any of Muhammad's followers return to Quraysh, he shall not be sent back.

5. Whosoever to join Muhammad (Peace be upon him), or enter into treaty with him, should have the liberty to do so; and likewise whosoever wishes to join Quraysh, or enter into treaty with them, should be allowed to do so.

Al-Mubarikapuri, S. (2005:154) 'Some dispute arose with regard to the preamble. For example, when the agreement was to be committed to writing, „Ali bin Abi Talib, who acted as a scribe began with the words: Bismillâhir-Rahmanir raheem, i.e., "In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful" but the Makkan plenipotentiary, Suhail bin Amr declared that he knew nothing about Ar-Rahman and insisted upon the customary formula Bi ismika Allahumma, i.e., "In Your Name, O Allah!" The Muslims grumbled with uneasiness but the Prophet (Peace be upon him) agreed. He then went on to dictate, "This is what Muhammad, the Messenger of

Allah has agreed to with Suhail bin Amr." Upon this Suhail again protested: "Had we acknowledged you as Prophet, we would not have debarred you from the Sacred House, nor fought against you. Write your own name and the name of your father." The Muslims grumbled as before and refused to consent to the change. The Prophet (Peace be upon him), however, in the larger interest of Islam, attached no importance to such an insignificant detail, erased the words himself, and dictated instead: "Muhammad, the son of Abdullah." Soon after this treaty, Khuza'a clan, a former ally of Banu Hashim, joined the ranks of Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and Banu Bakr sided with Quraysh'.

### *Treaty with Christians of Najran*

Scher argued that the Covenant with the Christians of Najran is written in flawed Arabic, Morrow again points out that the Archbishop "does not avail himself of his linguistic expertise to support the supposition"<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as Ibn Ishaq (704–761 CE) reports, the Prophet seems to have been in contact with the Christians of Najran around the second year before the hijrah (the migration or journey of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina):

Ibn Ishaq discusses Muhammad's tolerance and hospitality towards the visitors of Najran:

When they came to Medina they came into the Messenger's mosque as he prayed the afternoon prayer clad in Yamani garments, cloaks, and mantles, with the elegance of men of B. al-Harith b. Ka'b. The Prophet's Companions who saw them that day said that they never saw their like in any deputation that came afterwards. The time of their prayers having come they stood and prayed in the Messenger's mosques; and he said that they were to be left to do so. They prayed towards the east<sup>25</sup>

After several rounds of negotiation over whether the Najrans should pay the jizya (poll tax) for non-Muslims, the Christians of Najran eventually sent a delegation to meet with Prophet Muhammad in Medina. Resulting from this meeting was the Treaty of Najran which according to AbuBakr, conferred on the non-Muslims, living in the Islamic State, autonomy, both religious and administrative<sup>26</sup>

Evidently, the Christians of Najran "had been accorded special terms and privileges by the Prophet, which were maintained by Abu Bakr and Umar"<sup>27</sup> Based on the various meetings and treaties between

Prophet Muhammad and the Christians of Najran, the messages in the Covenant with the Christian Najrans appear at the least feasible, if not authentic.

#### **4. conclusion**

The coexistence is to accept earthly reconciliation and agree on a set of human virtues, which provide opportunities for the exchange of dialogue. It rejects tyranny, misplaced pride and the domination of others. Coexistence between religions must be for God alone, and for a free and gracious human life based on faith, goodness and virtue. As for how coexistence between Muslims and other religions is achieved, it starts with mutual trust and respect, and the desire to cooperate for the good of humanity in the areas of common interest, which will lead to the establishment of advanced knowledge-based civil societies that put the higher interests above all else.

The study entails broad conceptualization of coexistence and its importance between Muslims and non-Muslims, it also concluded with emphasis on the identified prophetic approaches in peace building with non-Muslims. His sublime character had earned him recognition even among non-Muslims, high sense of responsibility and able leadership when he united the people of

Medina, and the foresightedness in dealing with people when he signed treaty with Quraysh in Hudaibiyah even though some of the items of the treaty were not favorable to the Muslims. These are the areas of concern in this paper, and it is strongly recommended if Muslim could emulate and implement these strategies, there would be peace and adequate security in the Nigerian society.

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