

TOWARDS AN ISLAMIC APPROACH TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

NURA AHMAD

Department of Islamic Studies
Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto
nuramadina81@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Islam is a religion and way of life to Muslims, has recognized the importance of peace and a non-violence attitude in society. Peace reflects the presence of order, justice, equity, cultural co-existence and stability. On this background, this paper intends to highlight some Islamic approaches to Conflict resolution in contemporary contexts. The primary objective of this paper is to introduce the basic application of Islamic approaches to Conflict resolution, which no doubts are beneficial in solving the contemporary social problems of the entire Muslim Ummah. The study employed a quantitative methodology whereby a content analysis procedure was used; this technique contains the hermeneutical study of text extracted from the glorious Qur'an and Hadith, which are regarded as the main sources of information in Islam, and supported by other relevant Islamic literature. Furthermore, the study formulated a relevant conceptual framework and adopted a theoretical framework using S.N.T. Model to articulate the issues under review; the study findings reveal that, among the entire approaches of conflict resolution known and postulated by scholars, the Islamic principles and approaches to conflict resolution are considered to be better in building peaceful atmosphere among the Muslim society of all ages. However, the paper concluded and recommended that Muslims seek more Islamic guidance and adopt the principles of conflict resolution to solve all their societal and communal problems despite the contemporary challenges of today.

Keywords: Islam, Conflict, Conflict resolution, Peaceful, approach

INTRODUCTION

The word Islam stems from the root *S.L.M.*, meaning peace. There is a general agreement among the scholars of Islam that it has been based on values and principles that promote peace and harmony as a religion. This can be attested following the teachings of peace and non-violence initiated in the glorious Qur'an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) Thus: "Invite to the way of your lord with wisdom and good advice, and debate with them In the most dignified manner your lord is aware of those who stray from His path and He is aware of those who are guided" (Q 16:125) if understood clearly; it will not only enable

others to understand Islam but will also enable Muslims to comprehend themselves and actively participate in transforming their attitude, activities and societies through democratic and peaceful means. Therefore, the paper discusses the basic Islamic principles relating to peaceful approaches to conflict resolution in Contemporary Contexts and showcases the importance of peace and non-violence in Islamic teachings. The approaches shall be discussed in *sequential order and include forgiveness, reasoning, thinking and reflection, non-violence, consultation, conciliation, advocacy, kindness, and truth-seeking.

Conceptual Clarification

Peace: According to the explanations of the Wikipedia encyclopedia (2008), peace can be a state of harmony or the absence of hostility. Peace can also be a nonviolent way of life. Therefore, it can be used to describe the cessation of Violent Conflict. Peace, however, means a State of quiet or tranquillity, an absence of disturbance or agitation; quitting is also an established relationship between people characterized by respect, justice and goodwill. Therefore, peace may be described as a state of calmness, serenity, and silence.

Peace in Islam: The term derived its root from the holy name of Almighty Allah (*Al-Salaam*). It Means peace accordingly in the Qur'an, Allah says: "He is Allah (G.O.D.) besides whom there is no god, the king, the holy one, peace, the giver of security".... (Q59:23), in essence, it communicates the perfection of Allah (S.W.A.) and that He is the source of all peace and contentment. Therefore, for Muslims, Peace is not merely the absence of war or organized violence; it is the presence of justice and the creation of conditions in which human being can realize their full potentials (Nasr, 2002). However, the concept is derived from the Arabic term "*SULH*" which means to make peace and serenity, leaving conflict and deviations. It establishes reconciliation, agreement, and settlement of disputes between the two parties.

Approach: According to Wikipedia encyclopedia (2008), approach means to come near or nearer to something or someone in space, time, quality, or amount. However, in this context, it means a way of considering or doing something or thinking about something which one can take preliminary steps towards accomplishing a particular activity.

Conflict: from the Islamic point of view, conflict denotes taking a different position or course from another person in opinion, utterances, or actions. Differences between people may begin with a difference of opinion over an issue which often may lead to argumentation, mutual wrangles, active controversy, discord and schism. Allah the Almighty says: "If your Lord has so willed, He could have made mankind one people, but they will not cease to dispute" (Q11:118)

Conflict Resolution in Islam: It is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating a peaceful ending of conflict through repairing broken relationships so

that the conduct of the warring parties has been completely transformed. (Saleem, 2013). Conflict resolution in Islam focuses on the principles and values central to peaceful life, such as Justice (*Adl*), which is perceived as a precondition to peace, the Concepts of Patience (*Sabr*), Compassion, Mercy, Forgiveness and Kindness.

Conflict resolution in this regard got its roots from Islamic tradition and practices that are mentioned in the glorious Qur’an and are commonly acknowledged; for instance, Arbitration (*Tahkeem*) is mentioned several times in the Qur’an to mean a judge should be assigned to design an agreement which shall be legally agreed and accepted as a method of resolving conflict. Likewise, conciliation (*Sulh*) aims to end conflict and hostility between believers so that they shall exercise a relationship at a common ground peacefully (Irani, 2013). Therefore, conflict resolution has a strong basis in Islam and has been widely used to solve different life issues during the early period.

Conceptual Framework	
Islamic Approaches	Conflict Resolution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiveness • Reasoning and thinking • Mutual Consultation • Conciliation • Non-violence • Truth-Seeking • Advocacy and Activism <p>Kindness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace and stability • Mutual Respect and Understanding • Brotherhood • Self-Satisfaction
Contemporary challenges	

Source: adapted from Rahim MA (2002) S.N.T. Model a theory for Conflict Management and Resolution as modified by the researcher.

The Conceptual Framework was formulated in line with the paper understudy, that is to say, Islamic Approaches to conflict resolution, taking account of contemporary contexts, by assumption if the above approaches were adequately put in place, people would enjoy peaceful living in their respective domains.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

S.N.T Model is one of the theories formulated for Conflict management and resolution traditionally; the “S” stands for a fundamental principle in Islamic religion which is “*Shura*”(Consultation) which implies that consulting others before implementing any action or change, such an approach minimizes disagreement. The second principle, “N,” stands for



‘*Nasiha*,’ which means advice; in this context, advice can be offered to all parties involved if sincerely given. Third, it changes the feel and fosters a shared understanding of the warring parties. The last element, “*Ta’awun*,” denoted by “*T*,” indicates cooperation, which is essential for the change process to promote healthy communication. Accordingly, Ahmad Khaliq postulated it in the year 2007. In another word, the model is proactive and conducive to positive outcomes of conflict; (and is very much relevant to the paper under review); this is due to the existence of *shura*, a consultative council of experts on a relevant and particular matter.

The nature of *shura* is to consult with non-partisan individuals alongside stakeholders and parties involved in the conflict. While Advice (*Nasiha*) in this model is similar to the *salam* concept, in this situation, involved parties are given advice or feedback toward corrective action, thereby increasing the probability of a favorable outcome. Based on the consultation and advice, concerned parties are encouraged to cooperate for good (*Ta’awun*); the cooperation aims to create a positive atmosphere and reduce possible tension resulting from the conflict. This model seems to be relevant to the paper because it focuses on the application of Islamic approaches to conflict situations which, if it works properly in our society, the results are expected to be positive, that is to say, conflict must be relegated to the minimal level despite the tendencies of contemporary challenges that might affect the process.

Islamic Approaches to Conflict Resolution - Forgiveness (*Afw*)

Forgiveness is the most valued Principle in Islam; it is held high in matters of conflict, both on a personal and public level. No matter how evil the offense is, it has been given preference over anger and revenge. The glorious Qur’an stated that: “And who shun the most heinous sins and abominations, and who, whenever they are moved to anger readily forgive” (Q42:37)

It is expressed in the glorious Qur’an as “*Afw*” ‘*Ghafara*,’ and ‘*Maghfira*’ means to pardon, waiver of punishment and Amnesty. (Manzir, 1982), *Ghafara* or *Maghfira* means to cover, to forgive and to remit. The glorious Qur’an does not limit forgiveness only to significant conflicts. Instead, it also mentions Forgiveness and Kindness as a matter of interaction among individuals and communities to cultivate peace and harmonious relations within the society. This is about the Qur’anic verse thus: “Keep to forgiveness, and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant. And if a prompting from Satan stirs thee up to anger, seek refuge with Allah, behold He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing” (Q 7: 199-200). However, the Qur’an is explicit on the same in another verse. “Let them pardon and overlook, would you not love for Allah to forgive you? Allah is forgiving and merciful” (Q24:22)

The prophet's life (S.A.W.) also reflects an unwavering commitment to acts of forgiveness and mercy, despite all the brutalities carried out by opponents. Uqbah bin Amir (R.A) reported that the messenger of Allah said: "You shall keep relationship with one who cut it off from you, you shall give the one who disappointed you, and you shall pardon on who oppressed you" (Muslim vol.5 No.26)

Forgiveness is a transformative process, simultaneously aiding in attaining other virtues associated with it. Abu Hurairah (R.A) reported that "the messenger of Allah said: Musa son of Imran has asked: O my lord, who is the best honorable of thy servants to Thee? He the (Almighty) said: He who pardons when he is in a position of power" (Bukhari, Book 71 No.957)

Here forgiving others while being in power is a sign of generosity and humility. Therefore, Forgiveness in Islam is not just forgetting and moving on but also an attempt to improve relationships with adversaries and gain their respect and trust. Therefore, the application of forgiveness in the contemporary period should be a matter of concern to all, especially in our respective communities and mostly in dealing with one another.

However, there are a lot of existing issues bothering family relations, friends, brothers and sisters, which bring misunderstanding and often lead to clashes which need to be addressed using the Islamic approach of forgiveness because it heals the heart if it is accepted, it also builds a new and improved relationship. It fades away personal grudges. There is another Hadith that encouraged Muslims always to exhibit forgiveness among one another. "Abdullah ibn Amr reported that: The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him was upon the pulpit, and he said: "Be merciful to others, and you will receive mercy, forgive others and Allah will forgive you" (Musnad Ahmad, 7001)

Reasoning, Thinking and Reflecting (*Ta'qul, Tafk'ur, Wa Ta'mul*)

Reasoning, thinking and reflection are known as *Ta'qul, Tafk'ur, wa Ta'mul* in Islam. Critical thinking is considered a prized virtue. Critical thinking is an essential prerequisite for any dialogue and conflict resolution process. (Abu Nimer,2003). It is the ability to engage in reasoned discourse with intellectual standards such as clarity, accuracy, precision, and logic. For instance, Allah (S.W.T.) invites the Muslims to reflect and ponder on the Qur'an text: "Here is a book which we have sent down unto thee, full of blessings that they may meditate on its signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition" (Q38:29)

The pursuit of knowledge and reasoning is central to the Islamic worldview. Islam considers knowledge essential for spiritual and mental development; however, knowledge without creativity and critical thinking are vain (Syed, 1999). Moreover, creativity has been an integral part of Islamic reconciliation and conflict resolution. This can be seen in a prophet's (S.A.W.) novel approach to resolve the disagreement between tribes of Makkah

regarding the replacement of the black stone of Ka'abah. However, what is happening in most of our Communities today concerning the pursuit of knowledge and reasoning is unbecoming and has not been unconnected with lack of thinking and pounder on life experiences coupled with ignorant attitudes towards Islamic knowledge; you may find an area within a Muslim community whereby every one cares not with the condition of his neighbor and less privileged no one cares with destitute as well orphans who lose their parents, these are severe problems needs to be solved using critical thinking, reasoning and reflections if we want to have ideal Muslim communities.

Non-violence (*Rifq wa Al- Rahma*)

Islam prefers non-violence over violence; almost all the essential virtues revealed in the Qur'an like patience, Kindness, Forgiveness, truth, generosity, and respect for human life and dignity are also guiding principles for modern-day nonviolent strategic action. Each time individuals or communities disagree or face a conflict, there are two approaches to conflict resolution: violent and nonviolent methods. Violence leads to destruction, anger and hatred, whereas non-violence makes way for peaceful means, avoiding violence and confrontation (khan, 2001).

The glorious Qur'an attaches great importance to patience in all human affairs, for instance: "And follow what is revealed to you, and be patient until Allah issues His judgment for He is the best of Judges" (Q10:109). Also, in another place in the glorious Qur'an, Almighty Allah says: "And be patient Allah will not waste the reward of the virtuous" (Q11:115). He, however, mentioned in the Qur'an 16: v126-127, "If you were to retaliate, retaliate to the same degree as the injury done to you. But if you resort to patience, it is better for patients. So be patient. Your patience is solely from Allah, and do not grieve over them, and do not be stressed by their schemes" In the same vein, almighty Allah stressed the need for extra patience in surah 3: verse 200. "O you who believe! Be patient, and advocate patience, and be united, and revere Allah so that you may thrive."

The better way to solve our present societal and communal problems is through the application of a non-violence culture; we are now in a severe dilemma of moral decay carefree attitude towards security, which affects every angle of today's life, particularly in Northern Nigeria, the only way out is to go back to the actual teachings of Islam and mold our behavior and that of our youth it is only if we understand our problem then a solution would be determined. We have already possess the values and principles in our religion and practice, which is non-violence as a tool for peace-building and conflict resolution.

Consultation (*Shura*)

Shura means mutual consultation in a society; it is among the other four fundamental principles of Islam such as justice, equality, and human dignity, mutual consultation however is; solidarity in society is based on the principle of free consultation and genuine dialogue, reflecting equality in thought and expression of opinion (Sadek, 2007). Similarly, inclusiveness and participation are integral elements of any process of conflict resolution and peace. Instead, any attempt or effort towards peace will be futile if it is exclusive and hierarchical in nature and benefits only a few. Likewise, consensus building and consultation are essential ingredients that make conflict resolution and peace-building strategies democratic. The glorious Qur'an attaches great importance to mutual consultation and consensus-building and has, therefore, introduced the principle of *shura*. Thus; "Those who answer their Lord, establish the prayers and their affairs are by consultation, who spend of that which we have given them" (Q42:38)

Caliph Abu-Bakr, (R.A), after being confirmed as a successor to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), said: "I have been given authority over you, but I am not best among you. Obey me so long as I obey Allah in the administration of your affairs. Where I disobey Allah, you owe me no obedience".(Khwaja,1952) In another instance, Caliph Umar, while upholding the principle of *shura* and *ijma* (consensus), said: "Where I do right assist me, where I do wrong correct me."(Ibrahim, 2000.)

Therefore, *shura* is one of the approaches used to obtaining peace and harmonious relationships in a Muslim community; it is also widely used for social cohesion among the Muslim Ummah a long time ago, making decisions and taking action. Likewise, in a contemporary era, it is still an essential tool for organizing and uniting the Muslim community; despite all the challenges facing Muslims today, the relevance of *Shura* consultation cannot be over-emphasized since it minimizes conflict and leads to a positive atmosphere.

Conciliation (*Sulh*)

Islam promotes peace and harmony both at the interpersonal and communal levels. Muslims are expected to settle their clashes and disagreements in a nonviolent manner using a conciliation approach. "*Sulh*" is an Arabic word that means cleaving to peace or moving towards Peace (Albayrak, 2006). Accordingly, the glorious Qur'an and Sunnah provide that Muslims are supposed to settle their conflicts and disagreements with peace thus: " In most of their secrets talks, saved him with orders, charity, or kindness or conciliation between mankind and he who does this seeking the good pleasure of Allah, we shall give him a great reward" (Q4:14)

Therefore, conciliation, especially in conflict, is required to attain a successful living. In the same vein, the glorious Qur'an states: "If two parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them: but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses till it complies with the command of Allah, but if it complies then make peace between them with justice and be fair: for Allah loves those who are fair. Believers are but a single brotherhood: so make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers and fear Allah that you may receive mercy" (Q49:9-10)

Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) also supported "*Sulh*" He encouraged people to settle their disputes by it. He was reported to have said: "He who makes peace (*Sulh*) by inventing good information or Saying good things is not a liar" (Al- Bukhari, No.2692). He (S.A.W), however, highlights the impacts of conciliation within the Islamic society in a related Hadith which upholds peace-making and dialogue, the Messenger of Allah has been reported to have said: "Shall I inform you of merit greater than fasting, charity, and prayers? It is in the conciliation of people" (Sahih Al-Bukhari,book71 No.957)

Therefore, the above verses and traditions stress the significance of peaceful interventions in settling a dispute and the need for dialogue or any other effort to attain peace among the Muslims Ummah. Contemporarily "*Sulh*" has been there in our midst, playing a significant role of bringing peace, harmony, and stability, reducing hatred and personal grudges. However, it encourages mutual respect and intimacy among one another, provided Islamic injunctions apply it. Therefore, today's Muslims, especially in Nigeria, would benefit from conciliation if they truly followed and practiced the Islamic approach to conflict resolution.

Activism and Advocacy (*Nusrat Al-Haq*)

Islam as a religion lays down foundational principles towards a peaceful and just society and has also stressed upon putting these values and principles into practice for the empowerment of weak and oppressed ones. (Abu Nimer, 2003). In Islam, passivity is looked down upon, and there is excellent support for dynamic social activism in terms of individual duties and sense of social responsibilities. The glorious Qur'an elaborates on the characteristic of the right ones as the ones who are active in executing tasks that will benefit others and says: "They believe in Allah and the last day, and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and compete in doing good they are among the righteous" (Q3:114).

In addition, these traits are also among the factors distinguishing true Muslims from others as they compete for goodness. In another place in the Qur'an, it states thus: "What reason could you have for not fighting in the way of Allah, for those men, women and

children who are oppressed and say “O Lord take us out of this city whose inhabitants are wrongdoers! Could you give us a protector from you? Give us a helper from you!”(Q4:75)

It is a clear indication from the above verses that whatever the conditions might be, all Muslims are obliged to lend a helping hand to the oppressed people. So also Zakah and Sadaqah serve as Mechanisms in Islam that relate to social and individual responsibility for the betterment of the poor, needy, orphan, and destitute. Therefore, Muslims are expected to show an excellent example of brotherhood endurance and establish a spirit of truthfulness and virtuous acts no matter what condition they might find themselves in. EBut, equally, Muslims have learned (Q5:1).

Kindness (*Al-Ihsan*)

Peace-building approaches generally try to create an atmosphere where everyone is respected and valued. Equality for all humans, respect for human dignity and constructive behavior and communication among individuals is of great importance for the success of any peace-building (Kabir, 2007). the root word for *Ihsan* is *H-S-N*, which means to do right, improve, and treat with kindness. *Ihsan* is all about those human qualities and behavior related to goodness and desired by the Almighty Allah. *Muhsin* is those individuals who practice *Ihsan*. In the Islamic framework of Peace, Kindness provides the basis for constructive behavior both in Peace and conflict situations and constitutes one of the basic themes in the Qur’an. It is mentioned that: “is there any reward for *Ihsan* other than *Ihsan*”(Q55:60)

The Sunnah of the prophet (S.A.W) maintained that:

“Whoever is kind to Allah’s creatures, Allah is kind to him, therefore be kind to man on earth, whether good or bad and being kind to the bad is to withhold him from badness, thus in heaven, you will be treated kindly”(Saheeh Al- Bukhari, book.71 No.955). The prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), while elaborating on the nature of noble actions, said: “What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured”(Sahih Al- Bukhari, book 2 .No12)

Forgiveness, struggle to fight evil, oppression, charity, and generosity are all considered acts of kindness. Acts of Kindness within Islam are limited to humans, but rather animals and other creatures were inclusive. The act of kindness today can be seen as Waterloo by fear of poverty and economic hardships; people are now scared of becoming poor, thinking that if they extend kindness to others, their richness will go away, not knowing that the wealth of a person has never decreased due to charity given. Therefore Muslims are being encouraged daily to extend an act of kindness and all its categories to enable the less privileged to live peacefully. If this approach can be adequately handled, our respective communities will be better living places.

Truth-seeking (Clarification)

Truth-seeking in matters of dispute and its resolution holds great importance in any peace-making effort to be sustained. There is great emphasis in Islam to be truthful in all matters, and to be truthful, it is mandatory to seek knowledge of the truth. Islam is based on knowledge and does not accept ignorance; this can be attested in the following Qur'anic verse: "Elevated status is accorded to those who seek, possesses each and act upon the knowledge. Dismiss any thought of equality between those who know and those who do not" (Q39:9)

The life and tradition of prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) also upholds truth, truthfulness and truth-seeking both in action and word, particularly during Conflict He (S.AW) said: "No man's faith is complete if he doesn't discard falsehood even in a joke and refrain from it even in a dispute, though his cause maybe just" (Sahih Al- Bukhari book 50. NO.560)

Truth is the fundamental ethic and essence of the Islamic religion; if the truth is missing in a Muslim's actions or words, his worship lacks sincerity. Not only will his religious acts, but even mundane affairs also lack merits. However, the application of truth-seeking in our present time has been very significant in shaping the minds of Muslims, especially if one looks at how Muslims interact, transact and conduct some activities of today's life. We are now facing the challenge of moral decay and deceitful act. If this approach can be utilized properly, it will build a sense of confidence and acceptance in the Mind of all. As the Qur'anic verse 119 of surah *Taubah* encourages: "O you who believed, fear Allah and be among with those who are truthful" (Q9: 119).

CONCLUSION

Islamic approaches and principles are best among all other approaches leading to conflict resolution. To this end, the study shows that when people hold on to the above approaches despite all challenges amidst our communities, Allah (S.W.A.) will provide peace, stability and tranquillity in our minds and environment. However, at the same time, peace cannot be attained while people engage in sins and disobey the Islamic rules. However, the study deduced that Muslims of present-day need total repentance and attitudinal change; it is equally important to recognize these Islamic approaches properly and understand the way to adapt them to solve our societal problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper has extensively stressed the significance of peaceful approaches towards resolving conflict in life and therefore recommends the followings:

- (a) That Muslims should learn to live within the purview of Islamic guides and principles so that all these principles shall be put into practice, particularly in dealings with one another.
- (b) Muslims at all levels need to adjust and mold their behavior to be true to their original identity.
- (c) They should also be brother keepers and exhibit a tolerance and accommodation culture.
- (d) No meaningful development could be achieved in a chaotic life or environment.

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