

Islam Forbids Aggression by Muslims

Introduction:

The very foundation of the word “Islam” comes from the Arabic root word “Salem¹” which means peace. Islam means submission to the will of Almighty God. Submission to the will of Almighty God certainly does not mean aggression! On the contrary, Muslims are permitted to defend themselves ² against aggression, only insofar as the aggressor aggresses. Once the aggressor has withdrawn or has been defeated in defence, peace must prevail after forgiveness and reconciliation. The worst form of aggression is Muslims against Muslims, knowing fully well both sides are based on rules of the Holy Qur’an³.

Discussions on Islam Forbidding Aggression:

- 1)** The Holy Qur’an is more than just a religious scripture. Comprehensive analysis indicates that the Holy Qur’an is the basic Constitution for Muslims, the handbook for correct living amongst any community of the world, an immaculate work of reference on any religious matter and indeed brings about the desired commonality of life for all Muslims, resident anywhere in the world. Whatsoever of all permissions and restrictions, which were made valid 1,400 years previously, are still valid to this day, and will continue to be valid forever into the future; technological changes notwithstanding.
- 2)** This therefore brings into discussion about Islam forbidding aggression by Muslims, with appropriately validated quotations from the Holy Qur’an. The fundamental principle with Islam is that there should not be any aggression initiated by Muslims. Aggression by Muslims would be directly in conflict with the meaning of the word “Islam” which means submission to the will of God and obedience to His law.

¹ "Salem": implies peace, purity, submission and obedience. In the religious sense, Islam means submission to the will of God and obedience to His law. These principles have remained unchanged and include similar messages by the historically past Prophets of Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, David, Solomon, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (*pbuh*). All past prophets submitted themselves to the will of Almighty God.

² Muslims are permitted to defend themselves for survival of Islam, as the decreed religion of choice by Almighty God. (Authority in Holy Qur’an: HQ3:19; HQ3:85; HQ5:3)

³ In the main insofar as correct living applies, Islam is a complete code of life for all peoples of whatsoever walk of life and systematically incorporates matters on spiritual, intellectual, personal, family, social, economic, political and international facets of material life in this world. These have been widely described in most literature on Islam.

- 3) However, that does not mean that Muslim must always remain relegated at the receiving end and suffering away, and then allow the ruthless aggressors to take undue advantage of Muslims.
- 4) Islam has established amongst its principles on the matter of aggression, the rights of self-defence both for the victim individual and the community rights of defence for the victimised collective group of Muslims. Both situations have been appropriately encapsulated in the Holy Quran at **HQ2:190** *“And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but do not be aggressive. Surely Allah does not love the aggressors.”* This is clearly defensive fighting and not aggressive fighting. A more subtly detailed explanation is given at paragraph 7 below.
- 5) Islam is very accommodative and also provides solutions to such situations. The basic solution is understanding the complexity of the situation and reaching forgiveness and reconciliation. In Islam, it is important to distinguish the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, as they are not the same thing.
- 6) As prerequisite, Islam rules that there cannot be reconciliation without first reaching forgiveness between aggrieved parties. Without forgiveness, reconciliation is doomed to fail. Forgiveness is unconditional and does not require the other party to respond equally or at all. Whereas reconciliation is conditional on both parties reaching an acceptable position, on which an agreement can be reached and hence is a compromise or peace-making deal.
- 7) Sometimes aggression can be politically motivated. In the past, often in such situations, aggression involved armed conflicts, with the intention of killing Muslim people⁴. Around 1,400 years previously, the Law of Retribution existed and conducted by the Sheiks of various tribal communities in Arabia. Most countries did not have formally documented Constitutions or criminal laws against acts of sacrilege and desecrations to places of worship. The Holy Qur’an has most magnificently set out rules of how to approach and respond to such aggressions. Prior to reading this quotation, it must also be noted that Islam was the main target group by many communities, whilst there was no other written law: The Holy Qur’an was the only written law and Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was the Head of State for Arabia at that point in time. Protection of the Sacred

⁴ In the main this involved conflicts with large groups of idolaters and polytheists, such as Mithraism, which commenced in Persia and moved westwards to Rome and finally became the official State religion of the Roman Empire. Romans promoted Mithraism and helped it spread to Europe and England. Historical remnants and ruins of Mithra temples still exist in those countries.

Mosque⁵ became vitally important and the Arabs were prepared to place their life at risk to protect the Sacred Mosque. This is stipulated in the Holy Qur'an at **HQ2:191** *"And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from where they drove you out, and persecution is worse than slaughter. And do not fight with them at the Sacred Mosque until they fight with you in it; so if they fight you (in it), kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers."* However, by today's global standards, aggression against any religion or place of worship must be reported to the Police Force of that country, for appropriate law enforcement actions to be taken. The Law of Retribution no longer applies in almost all countries.

- 8) The amazing beauty of Islam is resting on peace and fairness; even in such grave circumstances, when Islam's holiest place gets attacked, Islam allows certain flexibility to neutralize the tenseness and reach mutual understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation. Whereas in the past, if elements from the aggressors' side wanted to continue fighting, then Muslims had been given the mandate to kill them wherever they could be found.⁶ The fairness of this injunction and its absolute unmistakable clarity is given in the Holy Qur'an at **HQ2:192-193** *"But if they cease, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is only for Allah. But if they cease, then there should be no hostility except against the oppressors."*
- 9) Islam requires and invites people to forgive faults. This requirement is for all people of all ages and both genders. The Islamic philosophy of asking people to forgive was also practised by the previous prophets, prior to Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*). The case of Prophet Abraham forgiving his sire was going to happen as promised; but when Prophet Abraham found out with proof that his sire was against Almighty God, then Prophet Abraham decided to disassociate himself from his sire. Prophet Abraham was tender-hearted and forbearing.
- 10) It is imperatively necessary for Muslims to understand that the four sacred⁷ months also attract large numbers of Muslim gatherings. If however, the aggressors were to attack Muslims at these sacred gatherings, the toll of Muslim people hurt and killed will be substantial. Hence Muslims were given mandated permission to fight back and kill or maim the enemies, wherever they may be found within those premises⁸.

⁵ The Grand Mosque of Mecca is the Sacred Mosque referred to here and regarded as the largest mosque in the world at all times.

⁶ This mandate became necessary in Arabia mainly to protect the seat of Islam in Mecca.

⁷ The sacred months are the four Hijri months of Rajab (7th), Dhū al-Qa'dah (11th), Dhu al-Hijjah (12th) and Muḥarram (1st).

⁸ The laws of current Saudi Arabia govern this aspect. Saudi Arabian laws are consistent with Holy Qur'an.

This express permission is stipulated in the Holy Qur'an at **HQ2:194** *"The sacred month for the sacred month, and retaliation (is allowed) in sacred things. Whoever then acts aggressively against you, inflict injury on him according to the injury he has inflicted on you and keep your duty to Allah, and know that Allah is with those who keep their duty."*

- 11)** Sometimes aggression with violence may develop in non-war situations, such as matters of domestic administrations. Islam in its marvelous fairness, sets same standards and requires measured peaceful approach rather than violence. This means coming to a mutual understanding, followed by forgiveness.
- 12)** Reconciliation also applies to family circles. The Holy Qur'an makes a declaration that whoever involves oneself in matters of charity and reconciliation, then that person is promised rewards from Almighty God. The Holy Qur'an recommends reconciliation between spouses, following serious disagreements and reconciliation is better than allowing issues to worsen into deeper seriousness.
- 13)** The foundational principles of managing aggression in the Holy Qur'an are relatively the same, regardless whether the matters are territorial wars, community aggression or family disputes, the resolutions take the safe approach of resolving the dispute first by understanding the circumstantial elements, then forgiveness and then finally seal off with reconciliation (and peace treaty⁹ for territorial wars).

Conclusions:

- a) Muslims must never initiate aggression in any matter whatsoever. Initiating aggression is forbidden to Muslims in the Holy Qur'an.
- b) Muslims must in all situations of disputes, take the safe approach of resolving the dispute first, by understanding the circumstantial elements, witnesses, then seek forgiveness and then finally settle with reconciliation.
- c) Muslims must live within the boundaries of peace at all places and at all times, but permitted to retaliate only insofar as matters of self-defence.

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⁹ An example of such peace treaty was the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah in 628AD