

The peaceful regulation of international relations between human societies, particularly among the states, has been a difficult task from the very beginning. From time immemorial, jurists and philosophers have been trying to develop legal and/or moral principles that could be effective in controlling the use of force and in regulating relations between rulers and states in accordance with principles of justice and fair play. Islam is not only international but universal in its message and approach, and the Muslim community has performed its universal role from the very beginning. The first calls made by the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) were addressed to humanity rather than to any particular group of people.

We never find that the Quran or the Prophet (pbuh), in his recorded sayings, speak exclusively to the Arabs, the Iranians, or other ethnic or linguistic entities. People are addressed either as O mankind or O children of Adam. Many verses and important discourses in the Quran open with one of these phrases, particularly in the Makkan surahs (chapters). This shows that contrary to the notion of some western writers the approach and message of the Quran was universal and pan-human from the beginning of revelation in Makkah. Not only does Islam respect the diversity of nations, it also recognizes that other religious beliefs and ideologies exist side by side with it. Recent Muslim jurists have placed special focus on this feature.

The Quran is perhaps the only Divine Book in the history of religions that has acknowledged the existence of other religions. It refers to the People of the Book, the Christians, the Jews, the Sabians, idolators, atheists, etc. It guides Muslims in how they should conduct themselves with those among these followers of other beliefs who enter into agreements with them, those who prefer to stay away from any kind of relationship, those who wish to remain neutral, and those who wish to enter into a hostile relationship.

The fact that these various categories have been mentioned in the Quran and that high moral standards have been declared for Muslims to deal with each of them indicates that the Quran not only contemplates a variety of international relationships but has also taken care of possible avenues of interaction and intercourse between Muslims and non-Muslims. Practical details of this interaction were demonstrated by the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) through his normative practice, the Sunnah, or the model example. Based on the Quran and Sunnah, Muslim scholars and jurists of the second century (ah) developed an independent legal-historical discipline known as siyar. The five principles are:

1. To prevent a war;
2. To resolve the dispute peacefully with compromise;
3. To contain the war to the minimum;
4. To contain the effects of war; and
5. To protect the affectees of war.

All of these criteria are found in the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet and have further been expatiated upon by Muslim jurists.