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Islam's War and Peace Signals

Context, Chronology, and Consequences

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An Essay

Introduction

[1] The November 2, 2009 killing of 13 innocent people at Fort Hood by Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a Muslim, was praised by Anwar al-Awlaki, a radical Muslim leader, who added: "The fact that fighting against the U.S. army is an Islamic duty today cannot be disputed. Nidal has killed soldiers who were about to be deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in order to kill Muslims" (Isikoff). But this was condemned by the Islamic Society of North America, which clarified:

. . . ISNA vigorously condemns Al-Awlaki's message of violence that reportedly urges attacks on America. Such calls to perpetrate violent acts find no ground in Islamic teachings. Renowned Muslim American scholars have rejected Al-Awlaki's extremist views which are based on lack of proper traditional Islamic training and discipline, a prerequisite for issuing Islamic opinions. Islam strictly condemns religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism. Targeting civilian life and property through suicide bombings or any other method is *haram* – or forbidden – and those who commit such barbaric acts are criminals, not "martyrs" (2010).

[2] The challenge Muslims face in interpreting the Qur'an (their holy book); and hadith (Muhammad's purported guidance) is highlighted by the fact that, while an ISNA's position paper quoted over fifty Qur'anic verses and several hadith underscoring Islam as religion of peace, Sheikh Abdullah, a former Saudi chief quoted over fifty *other* Qur'anic verses and hadith to incite Muslims to fight Jews, Christians, and pagans continuously. And while ISNA's position caught little public attention, the Sheikh's 19-page essay is reportedly widely available in the Muslim world.

[3] These diametrically opposite positions exemplify the deepening chasm between peace-loving Muslims – who, I believe constitute a vast majority – and dedicated extremists having no qualms about killing others and/or getting killed, looking forward to “indescribable rewards” in Paradise. And since extremists justify their actions by quoting sacred passages, moderates are at a loss as to how to respond – without challenging those sacred passages. This article suggests an objective way to challenge the extremist position without appearing blasphemous. We will first consider some “mixed signals” contributing to this religious “divide” and then discuss an objective way to respond.

The Qur'an's Mixed Signals: War-Inciting Verses

[4] Reproduced below are five “war-inciting” Qur'anic verses. Indicated in bold are their truncated portions often quoted by extremists. A discussion of five “peace-inspiring” verses follows. The numbering of Qur'anic verses (Q-1, Q-2, etc.) and Hadith (H-1, H-2, etc.) is to help us refer back to these passages. From the writings of Ishaq, Tabari, and Ali, I am able to propose their chronology and context of revelation. Written within 150 years of the prophet's death, Ishaq's is the earliest extant book on Muhammad; Tabari's was written about 100 years later; Ali's translation of the Qur'an was first published around 1934. This section is based on my earlier work (Ahmed: 73-99), and is also summarized in the Appendix.

Qur'an 22:39-40 (Q-1)

To those (Muslims) against whom war is being waged, **permission to fight is given**, because they have been wronged – and verily God is most powerful for their aid. (They are) those (Muslims) who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of their right – for no cause except that they say “Our Lord is God.” If God had not checked (the aggressive designs of) one set of people by means of another, (then) surely monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure, would have been destroyed.

[5] This first permission to Muslims to take up arms was revealed to Muhammad shortly after his flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE (Ali: 832, n. 2816; Ishaq: 212-13). Frustrated that Muhammad had escaped from their clutches, his Meccan enemies launched a concerted attack against him. This verse permitted Muhammad and his followers to fight back. Three noteworthy points are: (1) Muslims were *not* given permission to initiate war; nor to “kill Jews, Christians, or pagans.” They could only defend themselves when attacked; (2) by affirming that God's name is commemorated “in monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques” this passage underscores that hostility toward any Jewish or Christian tribe was *not*

to be taken as hostility against Judaism or Christianity *per se*, but only against specific tribes acting aggressively against Muslims; and (3) the “belligerent” tone of the truncated version disappears when we consider the entire verse.

Qur'an 2:190-93 (Q-2)

Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for God does not love transgressors. **And slay them wherever you catch them**, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter. . .

[6] These verses were probably revealed before the Battle of Badr (around 622-624 CE), when some 300 poorly armed and disorganized Muslims faced a 1,000-men strong, well-equipped and well-organized Meccan army. Muslims routed their enemies.

Qur'an 5:51 (Q-3)

Do not take the Jews and Christians for friends and protectors: they are but friends and protectors to each other. He amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is one of them.

[7] In 625 CE, three thousand Meccans, of whom seven hundred were armed with “coats of mail” and had two hundred horses, marched against the Muslims at the Battle of Uhud. Muhammad had one thousand men, of whom one hundred were armed with coats of mail, and he had only one other horse beside his own (Ishaq: 370-91). Furthermore, three hundred of his men, later called hypocrites (*munafiqeen*), deserted him before the battle. In spite of this desertion, the significantly reduced Muslim army was winning the battle at first. But when some Muslim archers left their positions to collect war booty from the withdrawing enemy, the enemy regrouped and attacked from the rear. The prophet lost the day and nearly his life. However, the Meccans were too exhausted to follow up and withdrew.

[8] The immediate cause for this verse concerned a Jewish leader named Abdullah bin Ubayy, who apparently aspired to become Medina's overall leader. His ambitions were thwarted by the overwhelming support Muhammad received on arrival in Medina. Although Abdullah eventually converted to Islam, he and some others maintained hostility toward Muhammad. It was he who led the 300 hypocrites in deserting Muhammad (Ishaq 363-64). Even though Christians are also mentioned in this verse, I could not find any reference to their acting in a hostile manner toward Muhammad.

Qur'an 5:82 (Q-4)

Strongest among men in enmity to the believers will you find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers will you 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 (Qur'an 5.82).

[9] Ishaq suggests this verse was revealed during the early years of Muhammad's ministry and in reference to some Christians from Najran who had converted to Islam (179-80).

However, if these Christians had already converted to Islam, the above reference to them as Christians would not apply. I propose this verse was revealed after the Banu Quraiza affair (627 CE), during which a Jewish tribe reneged on its promise to help Muslims during the Battle of the Trench. About that time, the prophet signed a charter with the monks of St. Catherine's monastery near Mount Sinai, granting them privileges and immunities (Davenport). He asked his followers to protect the Christians and defend their churches and homes of their priests. They were not to be unfairly taxed; no bishop was to be driven out of his diocese; no Christian was to be forced to reject his religion; no monk was to be expelled from his monastery; no pilgrim was to be stopped; nor were Christian churches to be destroyed. Christian women married to Muslims were to enjoy their own religion and not be subjected to compulsion or annoyance (running counter to the general Muslim belief that non-Muslim women must convert to Islam when marrying Muslims). Muslims were to assist Christians in repairing their churches or monasteries, or in any other matter that Muslims could help. Should Muslims be engaged in hostilities with other Christians, no Christian resident among the Muslims was to be treated with contempt.

Qur'an 9:3-6 (Q-5)

An announcement from God and His messenger . . . that God and His messenger dissolve obligations with the pagans (who break treaties with Muslims). If then, you (treaty-breaking pagans) repent, it were best for you. But if you turn away, know that you cannot frustrate God. . . (But the treaties are) not dissolved with those pagans with whom you have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you, nor aided anyone against you. So fulfill your engagements with them to the end of their term; for God loves the righteous. But when the forbidden months are past, then **fight and slay these pagans wherever you find them. Seize them and beleaguer them and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)**. But if they repent and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them. If any one of the (treaty-breaking) pagans asks you for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of God, and then escort him to where he may be secure. That is because they (the pagans) are men without knowledge.

[10] Ali states: "During the prophet's absence from Medina (on the Tabuk expedition, 631 CE), the hypocrites had again played a double game. The policy hitherto followed, of free access to the sacred center of Islam – to Muslims and pagans alike – was now altered, as it had been abused by the enemies of Islam. . ." (435). Thus, these verses were possibly revealed to guide the prophet on how to deal with those pagans who had created anarchy during his absence (see also Ishaq: 619-24). Although these verses permitted Muhammad to "fight and slay the pagans," there is no record that he actually punished – let alone kill – anyone on his return from Tabuk. The prophet apparently followed the "forgiveness clause" in the passage.

The Qur'an's Mixed Signals: Peace-Inspiring Verses

[11] To contrast with the above “war-inciting” verses, here are five “peace-inspiring” verses that extremists ignore. These verses are not always linked to an event – unlike violence verses discussed above.

Qur'an 16:125 (Q-6)

Invite all to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and discuss with them in ways that are best and most gracious.

[12] Ali suggests Surah 16 belongs to the late Meccan period before Muhammad migrated to Medina in 622 CE (636). While not linked to any incident, its message of spreading Islam proactively and peacefully is clear.

Qur'an 2:256 (Q-7)

Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error; whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks.

[13] Ishaq suggests that Muhammad conveyed this verse to the Jews of Khaibar before the Battle of Badr (256). This guidance, revealed in the early years of Muslim history, and Q-10 below, the last revelation the prophet received shortly before his death, underscore unequivocally the religious freedom the Qur'an emphasizes.

Qur'an 4:93 (Q-8)

If a man kills a believer intentionally his recompense is Hell to abide therein (for ever): and the wrath and the curse of God are upon him and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him.

[14] Ali believes most of Surah 4 was revealed after the Battle of Uhud when some Muslims wanted to kill those “hypocrites” who had deserted the prophet before that battle, thereby contributing to the day's reverses (182). However, God clarifies that, notwithstanding their desertion, they were still believers. Thus, killing them would be self-condemnation.

Qur'an 2:62 (Q-9)

Those who believe (in the Qur'an) and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians, and the Sabians – any who believe in God and the Last Day and work righteousness – shall have their reward.

[15] I suggest this verse was probably revealed toward the end of Muhammad's ministry, when he was trying to assure Jews and Christians and other believers of the common bond between all of them. The “Sabians” were another monotheistic people living in the Middle East.

Qur'an 5:3, 5 (Q-10)

. . . This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. . . This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of

the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers but chaste women among the People of the Book revealed before your time when you give them their due dowers and desire chastity not lewdness nor secret intrigues.

[16] This verse was part of the last revelation the prophet received (Ali: 241). He died shortly thereafter. The contrast between Q-3 and Q-10 underscores the significantly changed socio-cultural-historical context within that decade – from a position of Muslim vulnerability to superiority; from Muhammad living as fugitive seeking followers, to becoming a statesman leading a nation.

[17] The final corresponding guidance (hadith) Muhammad left for his people was:

(H-1) A Jew or a Christian who becomes a sincere Muslim of his own accord and obeys the religion of Islam is a believer with the same rights and the same obligations. If one of them holds fast to his religion, he is not to be seduced from it (Ishaq: 647-48).

Two major emerging guidelines from H-1 are: (1) No one should be forced to become a Muslim – by threat, financial inducement, racial/ethnic persuasion, or marriage. People should convert only voluntarily; and (2) those who choose to follow other religions should be free to do so; after all, there is to be no compulsion in religion (Q-7). This hadith mentions Jews and Christians because these were the only other “organized” religious groups living in Arabia then. But as Q-9 elaborates, the message is for all who believe in God and lead a righteous life. Elsewhere I argue that all such people should be considered as “People of the Book,” to be given equal honor (Ahmed: 149-64).

[18] “War-inciting” verses were revealed to Muhammad in response to particular uncertainties he faced. When the goals of these limited-term verses were successfully concluded, their mission stood fulfilled. In contrast, “peace-inspiring” verses were often revealed as “guiding stars” and not in response to particular situations the prophet faced. Therefore, I believe they have permanent relevance.

Bridging the Chasm

[19] While the above discussion helps explain, to some extent, the chronology and context of revelations of some verses, it does not help us decide which guidance should contemporary Muslims follow. Should they, for example, follow Q-1 and *not* trust Jews and Christians, or follow Q-10 and eat and intermarry with them? Merely stating this depends upon the context of the situation does not help because interpretations differ – as the opposite responses from ISNA and al-Awlaki to the murders committed by Major Nidal Hasan demonstrate. Fortunately, I found an objective way to address these “mixed signals,” based on the following Qur’anic verse:

(Q-11) None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten but We substitute something better or similar (Qur’an 2:106).

This verse clarifies that later guidance on any subject abrogated earlier guidance on that subject. Ali explains:

. . . If we take it in a general sense, it means that Allah's message from age to age is always the same, but that its form may differ according to the needs and exigencies of the time. That form was different as given to Moses and then to Jesus and then to Muhammad. Some commentators also apply it to the *Ayat* (verses) of the Qur'an. There is nothing derogatory in this if we believe in progressive revelation . . . (46 n. 107).

[20] While endorsing Ali's comments, I suggest a slight modification: While the Arabic word *mansookh* is usually translated as "abrogate," here it should be translated as "supersede" in order to convey a "softer" intent (Ahmed: 145-46). Superseded verses remain in the Qur'an and serve an important historic function, but Muslims should only follow the "abrogator" verses. As Kamali puts it succinctly:

We recite the abrogatee verses, but follow only the abrogator verses (145-46).

Thus, with Q-10 superseding Q-3, Islam emerges as religion of peace. Adopting the same approach of investigation, one can also conclude that gender equality superseded misogyny and forgiveness superseded punishment (see Ahmed: 131-47).

Discussion

Conservative Muslim Position

[21] Conservative Muslims reject the concept of abrogation of verses, pointing to the following verse:

(Q-12) This is a Glorious Qur'an (inscribed) in a Tablet Preserved (Qur'an 85:21-22)

For those using this verse to justify their actions, context and chronology of revelations carry no meaning. They consider "war-inciting" verses obligatory; unfortunately, they do not feel the same way about "peace-inspiring" verses. And while they believe that verses chosen should depend upon the context of the situation, they do not explain who decides the context? For example, convinced that Islam is "in danger," extremists believe the time is right for "war-inciting" verses to be followed. The fact that Islam is currently considered the fastest-growing religion in the world (primarily because of higher birth rate among Muslims), and therefore in no danger of extinction, is ignored. Thus, suicide bombing has become the "weapon of choice" to settle disputes with not only non-Muslims, but also with other Muslims who disagree with their interpretation. Consequently, the vendetta is against non-Muslims (especially Jews and Christians and particularly in America and Europe) and other Muslims alike. Attacks by Shia and Sunni extremists on each other's mosques are continuing in Pakistan. Extremist attacks on members of the Ahmadi sect ("excommunicated" by Pakistan) are continuing unabated. Suicide bombers take their deadly toll indiscriminately in crowded Pakistani market places, killing countless – apparently to "teach the government a lesson." Similar violence, "justified" by verses such as Q-1 to Q-5, also occur elsewhere in the world, as we are painfully reminded by the 9/11 attack in New York, the Bali nightclub bombing in 2002, and the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

[22] Extremists often point to the following verse to underscore the Qur'an's "changeless" character (usually only citing the sentence in bold):

(Q-13) Those who believe and (constantly) guard against evil – For them are Glad Tidings in the life of the Present and in the Hereafter: **no change can there be in the Words of Allah**. This is indeed the supreme Felicity (Qur'an 10:64).

The complete verse, however, indicates that it is God's promise of rewards for righteous believers that remains "changeless." And while it is often categorically stated that the All-Knowing God knows the past, present, and future, and therefore does not "change" his mind, the following hadith highlights how the prophet succeeded in making God "change" his mind several times:

(H-2) On return from his Night Journey, the prophet narrated: On my return (from the seventh Heaven), I passed by Moses and what a fine friend of yours was he! He asked me how many prayers had been laid down upon me and when I told him it was fifty he said: "Prayer is a weighty matter and your people are weak, so go back and to your Lord and ask him to reduce the number for your community." I did so and he took off ten. Again I passed by Moses and he said the same again; and so it went on until only five prayers for the whole day and night were left. Moses again gave me the same advice. I replied that I had gone back to my Lord and asked Him to reduce the number until I was ashamed, and I would not do it again. He of you who performs them in faith and trust will have the reward of fifty prayers (Bukhari 1.345; Ishaq: 186-87).

[23] With minds already made up, conservative Muslims adopt an intolerant posture, not only when they believe "Islam is in danger" (and hence suicide bombings), but also when they feel their prophet has been "insulted." Consider the following two incidents: The publication of "unfavorable" caricatures of Muhammad in some European papers in 2006 led to large-scale protests. Describing the cartoons as blasphemous, demonstrators set fire to the Danish Embassies in Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, stormed European government buildings, and desecrated the Danish, Dutch, French, German, and Norwegian flags in Gaza City. More than 100 demonstrators reportedly died in police firing to control this violence. In contrast, Buddhists worldwide offered peace prayers when the Taliban "insulted" Buddha by destroying his priceless statues in Afghanistan in 2001. I cannot help but wonder: Which action – Taliban's or Buddhists' – was more "Islamic"? And whose status as messenger of peace soared in the eyes of the world?

[24] Similarly, recall the more pronounced protest in the Muslim world when Pope Benedict XVI referred to the following statement made by Emperor Manuel II Paleologus in 1391 CE: "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." This led to more violent protests. A high-powered Muslim delegation even visited the Vatican to lodge a protest. The only agreement at the meeting was to stress the need for more open communication.

[25] But, was the emperor's statement incorrect? Ishaq discusses 38 "raiding parties" Muhammad sent, often with orders to kill, but to spare those converting to Islam (660-78).

As a result, many pagans who refused to convert to Islam were killed. Thus, instead of protesting the Pope's statement, Muslim leaders could have explained the context of these incidents. In fact, they could have even come out ahead by encouraging Jewish and Christian scholars to similarly investigate the context of numerous Old Testament/Tanak passages, such as the directive to Saul to "kill all men, women, infant, and suckling; ox, sheep, camel and ass" (1 Samuel 15:3) without even giving them an option to convert; and that "David killed 20,000 men in one night" (2 Samuels 18:6-8). Those Jewish and Christian scholars would have undoubtedly concluded that such "war passages" in the Bible were also superseded by "peace passages."

[26] Moderate Muslims give preference to other Qur'anic affirmations such as:

(Q-14) It is We Who Have sent down the Qur'an to thee by stages (Qur'an 76:23).

They consider the Qur'an as a dynamic document, responding to the rapidly changing challenges the prophet faced. For them, understanding the context and chronology of the revelations is important (Ahmed: 27-30). Thus, in spite of the prominent press given to the incidents resulting from the cartoons and the Pope's speech, the protests involved only a small percentage of the Muslim population. Moderates simply shrugged their shoulders and felt sad at how the name of Islam was being maligned.

Debate on Abrogation of Verses

[27] Debate on the concept of abrogation of verses has been continuing since the time of the first four caliphs (Ahmed: 131-47). Among earlier scholars, the question of *asbab ul nuzul* (context of revelation) was important – just as this essay proposes. Providing a comprehensive review of literature, Burton states:

The term *naskh* is derived from *nasakha al-kitab* – its transfer from one exemplar to another, different exemplar (*nuskha*). The *naskh* of a ruling means its transfer (*tabwil*) from one legal category to another. God moves the ruling from category to category (*naql*) what He had said about the ruling in an earlier utterance into a later, different, utterance, touching upon the same topic and ruling. Since that is what is meant by the *naskh* of an *aya* once the ruling of any verse has been *naskhed*, that is, altered (*taghyir*) and replaced (*tabdil*) by the second ruling, the obligation imposed by the original divine utterance being now transferred (*naql*), it is a matter of complete indifference whether the wording of the original verse is endorsed and left as it was (in the *mushaf*) or whether it is expunged (*mubiyā*) or erased (*'ufiyā*) or forgotten (*nusiyā*). In either event, the verse is *mansukh*. This newly-revealed ruling of the earlier verse has been replaced (*mubdal*) and to which the obligation imposed upon men is now transferred (*naql*) is the *nasikh* (458-59).

Powers explains this issue was recognized as early as 742 CE by Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, and commented upon by other Muslim scholars over the centuries (124). Powers cites Ibn Salama (d. 1020 CE) who claimed that the "sword verse" (Q-5) abrogated 124 verses. I have argued that the "sword verse," revealed in 631 CE after the prophet returned from the Tabuk Expedition, was in turn abrogated by Q-10, revealed a year later after Islam was

firmly established in Arabia (Ahmed: 140-41). This was part of the last guidance Muhammad received. He died shortly thereafter. The view that some Qur'anic verses were abrogated is also affirmed by the following hadith:

(H3) During prayers, the prophet . . . inadvertently omitted some verses. Later, a man said to him: Apostle of Allah, you omitted such-and-such verse. The Apostle asked: Why did you not remind me of it? The man said: I thought that it was repealed (Abu Dawood 349).

[28] Consider the following three Qur'anic verses:

(Q-15) The Arabs of the desert are the worst in unbelief and hypocrisy and most fitted to be in ignorance of the command which Allah sent down to his apostle. Some of the desert Arabs look upon their payments as a fine and watch for disasters for you: on them be the disaster of evil. . . Certain of the desert Arabs round about you are hypocrites as well as (desert Arabs) among Medina (city) folk: they are obstinate in hypocrisy (Qur'an 9:97-98, 101).

Muslims have two choices: First, they can accept these verses unquestioningly. Then, all Arabs – from the monarch to the Bedouin – are incriminated. Since I have not heard of any Muslim branding the Saudi monarch and/or Bedouins as such, these verses are generally “ignored.” But, can any Qur'anic verse be “ignored,” especially by those believing that the Qur'an is a “Tablet Preserved”? Second, they can assume these verses were superseded by:

(Q-16) But some of the desert Arabs believe in Allah and The Last Day and look on their payments as pious gifts bringing them nearer to Allah and obtaining the prayers of the apostle. Aye indeed they bring them nearer (to Him) (Qur'an 9:99).

[29] So, while many Muslims do not accept the concept of abrogation of verses explicitly, they implicitly follow it by *not* labeling the Saudi monarch and other desert Arabs as the “worst in unbelief and hypocrisy. . .” I also wonder how they respond to the fact that, while Q-15 incriminates *all* Arabs of the desert, Q-16 speaks favorably about only *some* desert Arabs. While Ishaq reports that these verses were revealed after Muhammad returned from the Tabuk Expedition (623-24), he does not elucidate the specific contexts in which each was revealed.

[30] Let us examine the following verse that, along with Q-10, is considered the very last guidance the prophet received before his death:

(Q-17) This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion (Qur'an 5:3).

This verse ushered in two important developments: (1) The religion was “perfected” on “This day” (the day when the last guidance – such as this verse and Q-10 – were revealed). Earlier, God's message had been incomplete, reflecting the changing war and peace milieu the prophet faced. (2) The religion was called “Islam” (peace). Earlier, the religion carried no name and had its fair share of war and peace urgings. After 23 years of Muhammad's struggle to spread the message of monotheism and righteousness among pagan Arabs, he had at last succeeded. The path to success was, at times through peaceful conversion and, at

other times, through fighting his enemies with his back to the wall. Now, that his mission had been accomplished, the time had come to put the sword back in its sheath and to move forward with the Qur'anic instructions to:

(Q-18) Invite others to the Way of Your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and to discuss with them in ways that are best and most gracious (Qur'an 16:125).

This is the path that Muslims should now follow.

[31] I should also clarify that, while the theme of guidance on temporal matters changed from war to peace, from punishment to forgiveness, and from misogyny to gender equality, there was no change in the theme of guidance on spirituality (such as God's attributes and wonders of creation) throughout those 23 years of Muhammad's prophethood.

Conclusion

[32] There is much justification in using the concept of abrogation of verses and hadith to explain the mixed signals found in Muslim sacred texts, thereby helping promote a "peaceful Islam." Merely condemning extremists' violence as "un-Islamic" does not help as the latter can – and do – quote Qur'anic passages to justify their violence. By extrapolation, any extremist group (whether Shia or Sunni) can levy the "guilty" charge against any other group to justify its violence against the other.

[33] Some conservative Muslims stress that whether Muslims should be peaceful depends upon others: if others behave peacefully, Muslims must respond peacefully; and if they are war-like, Muslims should also be war-like. But then, would not Islam become a reactive religion of retaliation instead of a proactive religion of peace? The above example of the diametrically opposite responses from some Muslims and all Buddhists to "insults" hurled on their respective founders underscores the difference between the two approaches.

[34] There is no guarantee that underscoring the concept of abrogation of verses will lead to its acceptance by extremists – or even by conservative Muslims. But is it not worth trying? The process of reflecting on the bottom-line message of Muslim sacred texts has to begin somewhere.

[35] Thus, Muslims should use the Qur'an's peace-inspiring verses in dealing with non-Muslims and fully cooperate with authorities in stamping out extremism. And while they might be looked upon with suspicion in some circles because of questionable acts of some extremists, they should learn from the manner in which the 120,000+ Americans of Japanese descent (and mostly Buddhists), held illegally in internment camps for 3-4 years during World War II on suspicion of being supporters of Imperial Japan, responded on being released: Instead of coming out with hate and a determination to "get even," they resolved they will prove they are "better" Americans. By diligence, hard work, and proactive involvement in mainstream American activities, they have risen to become among the most admired communities in America. Can American Muslims and European Muslims – indeed all Muslims who have migrated to other countries in search of better economic opportunities – follow suit?

Appendix

Some Peace and War Verses in the Qur'an: Chronology and Context of Revelation (Ahmed: 41-48)

Date	Context and Verse
Before Hijrah	Muhammad explains Islam to people of Mecca. <i>Invite others to your Lord with wisdom and preaching (16:125); Let there be no compulsion in religion (Q-6, Q-8).</i>
622	Hijrah (persecuted Muslims migrate to Medina). <i>Permission to fight is given to Muslims (Q-1).</i>
624	Battle of Badr. <i>Fight those who fight you, but do not transgress limits (Q-2).</i>
625	Pre-emptive strike against a Jewish tribe. <i>Do not take Jews and Christians for friends (Q-3).</i>
625	Muslims wanted to kill hypocrites for desertion. <i>The recompense for killing believers is Hell (Q-8).</i>
627	Jewish Banu Quraiza tribe reneged on pledge. <i>Strongest in enmity to Muslims are Jews & Pagans; nearest to Muslims are Christians (Q-4).</i>
?	General message; context unknown. <i>Any who believe in God and the Last Day and work righteousness – shall have their reward (Q-9).</i>
631	Some pagans created anarchy in Medina. <i>Fight and slay pagans wherever you find them (Q-5).</i>
632	The last revelation Muhammad received. <i>This day God has perfected your religion and named it Islam; You can eat with and intermarry with 'People of the Book' (Jews, Christians and others believing in the Eternal Being) (Q-10).</i>

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