

Ethical Dimensions of Islamic Military Strategies: Historical Insights and Modern Applications

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Abstract

This research provides a comprehensive analysis of military strategies employed throughout Islamic history emphasizing their ethical, tactical and strategic dimensions and examining their enduring significance in contemporary context. Drawing from pivotal battles such as Badr, Uhud and Khandaq as well as the campaigns of prominent Muslim leaders the study investigate the principles that defined Islamic military efforts including strategic planning, adaptability, justice and moral conduct. These principles deeply rooted in the Quran Sunnah and Islamic jurisprudence not only ensured battlefield success but also upheld ethical values justice and proportionality in warfare. Through an extensive review of classical texts, historical accounts and case studies the research uncovers critical lessons in leadership, resource management, collective decision making and the protection of non-combatants and the environment. The study further evaluates how these strategies align with universal principles of human dignity, ethical warfare and conflict resolution offering practical insights for modern military doctrines. In addressing contemporary challenges such as asymmetric warfare, humanitarian crises and ethical dilemmas in modern conflict this research underscores the relevance of Islamic military strategies in an era marked by complex global dynamics and technological advancements. By bridging the historical and the modern, the findings advocate for the continued study and application of these time honored principles offering a framework for ethical, effective and sustainable approaches to conflict resolution in the 21st century

Keywords: Islamic military strategy, Ethical conduct in warfare, Tactical principles, Conflict resolution frameworks, Leadership and justice in war.

Introduction

Military strategies have always played a foundational role in shaping the trajectories of civilizations and societies. Throughout history warfare has served not only as a tool for

conquest but also as a mechanism for defending principles establishing order and achieving justice. Islamic military strategies in particular reflect a unique synthesis of ethical principles, divine injunctions and pragmatic measures grounded in the guidance provided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Unlike purely materialistic or secular doctrines Islamic principles of war emphasize justice, proportionality, moral discipline and restraint aiming to minimize harm, preserve life, and protect human dignity. These strategies are not merely battlefield tactics or instruments for territorial expansion but represent a comprehensive ethical framework designed to promote lasting peace and order.

Despite this rich tradition, many Islamic nations today appear to prioritize external military models over their own historical and ethical foundations. Reliant on the international arms market these countries often purchase weapons, training programs and strategic concepts from Western, Russian or Chinese sources. They also send senior military personnel overseas to study in foreign staff colleges tacitly accepting that the political and military doctrines taught there are universal and universally applicable. This trend risks marginalizing 1,400 years of Islamic political and military experience and diluting the distinct principles that characterize Islamic approaches to warfare. Moreover the devastating legacy of modern warfare exemplified by the large-scale targeting of civilians especially during the 20th century raises critical questions about the suitability of foreign military paradigms for Islamic states seeking to align their strategies with ethical and religious imperatives.¹

Importance of This Research

This research underscores the ethical degradation in modern warfare especially in Islamic countries and highlights how adherence to Islamic military principles can mitigate the suffering caused by conflicts. By analyzing the devastating consequences of unrestrained violence and systemic injustices this study draws attention to the relevance of ethical warfare grounded in justice, humanity and dignity. The research is crucial in fostering accountability, promoting dialogue and addressing global double standards. It demonstrates how integrating Islamic strategies into global conflict management could serve as a blueprint for reducing suffering and building a more equitable world.

Research Problem

The ethical dimensions of warfare in Islamic military strategies remain a subject of significant academic and practical debate. While rooted in the principles of the Quran and Sunnah, these strategies are often misunderstood or misrepresented in modern discussions particularly in contrast to the norms of contemporary conflict resolution and international law. Furthermore, there is a gap in understanding how historical Islamic strategies balance ethics with military objectives and how these principles can be effectively applied in today's geopolitical landscape.

Research Scope

This research explores the ethical foundation of Islamic military strategies analyzing their historical context and examining their application during key moments in Islamic history. It also evaluates how these ethical principles can be applied to modern warfare and conflict resolution providing insights into the relevance of Islamic teachings in contemporary military

practices. By focusing on historical examples and their alignment with Quranic and Prophetic teachings this study offers a framework for understanding the enduring impact of these strategies on both military and ethical discourses globally.

Research Objectives

This research explores the ethics, historical application and modern relevance of Islamic military strategies.

- To explore key military strategies in Islamic history.
- To examine their ethical foundations.
- To assess their contemporary relevance.

Research Questions

The research investigates the foundational principles, historical implementation, and modern-day relevance of Islamic military strategies.

- What are the foundational principles of Islamic military strategies?
- How were these principles implemented historically?
- What is their relevance in modern military and conflict scenarios?

Research Methodology

The research analyzes Islamic military strategies through historical, textual and contemporary lenses.

- Literature Review: Analyze historical and scholarly sources to understand the foundations of Islamic military strategies.
- Historical and Textual Analysis: Examine key battles and figures in Islamic history to extract strategic principles.
- Contemporary Analysis: Assess the relevance of Islamic military strategies in modern warfare and conflict resolution.

Literature Review

This section presents an overview of previous research on Islamic military strategies, focusing on their historical development and contemporary relevance.

- Military and combat strategies of Muslims in Islamic sources from (2AH-658AH) (624AD-1260AD), (In Arabic), by Hebaallah Mohamed Abdalfattah Sayed, Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Sadat City University, Vol 7, Issue 2/2, 2023. In this article, the researcher has discussed the military strategies utilized or adopted by Muslims from 2AH-658AH) to (624AD-1260AD).
 - “Beyond Jihad”: The Islamic Contributions to the Field of Strategic Studies, by Felix Idonegist Oyosoro, International Journal of Islamic Thought, Vol 24: (Dec) 2023. This article explores the role Islam has played in the development of military strategies, emphasizing its contributions and addressing the denial of these contributions by contemporary Western scholars.
 - The Strategies in the Battles and Struggles of Prophet Muhammad(ﷺ): How It Can Be Applied in Modern Business by GholamReza Zandi, Naser Zandi Pour Joupari & Ayesha Aslam, International Business Research, Vol. 8, No. 11: 2015. In this scholarly article, the authors
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have critically analyzed the military strategies employed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), aiming to establish their relevance and applicability to contemporary business practices.

Research Gap

While existing literature provides insights into Islamic military strategies particularly from historical perspectives a gap remains in understanding the contemporary relevance of these strategies in modern conflicts. Studies like those by Hebaallah Mohamed Abdalfattah Sayed, Felix Idonegist Oyosoro and GholamReza Zandi explore historical and interdisciplinary dimensions but fail to sufficiently address how Islamic military principles such as justice, restraint and the protection of non-combatants can inform contemporary military and diplomatic practices in current global crises. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the relevance of Islamic military strategies in modern conflicts analyzing how their ethical foundations could mitigate the destruction and suffering seen in contemporary wars and contributing to global strategic and humanitarian discussions.

Definition of military strategy

Military strategy as defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica

“Strategy, in warfare, the science or art of employing all the military, economic, political and other resources of a country to achieve the objects of war. The term strategy derives from the Greek strategos, an elected general in ancient Athens. The strategoi were mainly military leaders with combined political and military authority, which is the essence of strategy. Because strategy is about the relationship between means and ends, the term has applications well beyond war it has been used with reference to business, the theory of games and political campaigning among other activities. It remains rooted however in war and it is in the field of armed conflict that strategy assumes its most complex forms.”²

In arabic language the word for strategy corresponds to tadbir which is elaborated as, The term tadbir originates from the root (دبر) which signifies reflecting on the conclusion or end (دبر الامور) of matters. In essence, tadbir refers to the act of deliberate thought and planning aimed at achieving optimal outcomes in any situation. As defined by Imam Raghیب al-Isfahani in Mufaradat al-Quran, the term for strategy is described as:

التدابير التكفير في دبر الامور³

Tadbir is the thoughtful consideration of the outcomes of matters coupled with strategic planning to ensure their proper execution.

In Urdu the term (حکمت عملی) is used for strategy. The strategic approach (حکمت عملی) refers to a meticulously planned course of action designed according to the specific situation aligned with the demands of the circumstances. This concept encompasses national policies, tactical actions and defense strategy. As defined by Feroz-ul-Lughat it includes element like : "حکمت عملی" (wisdom in strategy), "تدبیر" (calculated measures), "هوشیاری" (alertness), "دوراندیشی" (foresight), "ملکی" (national interest or pragmatism).⁴

Difference between strategy, tactics and ethical principles

The principles you learn lead to a set of strategies and each strategy is executed through tactics. A strategy is a broad plan that defines the overall method for achieving a goal, whereas tactics refer to the specific actions implemented to carry out that strategy. Ethical principles are foundational guidelines that determine morally appropriate behavior and provide a framework for making decisions within both strategies and tactics.

Strategy can be defined as the alignment of objectives, methods and resources. Objectives or ends represent the goals to be achieved. Resources or means are what is available to accomplish those goals. Methods or ways describe the approach to organizing and applying resources effectively. Each component addresses a key question, what are the desired goals (ends)? What resources are available (means)? And how will they be applied (ways)?⁵

Tactics and ethics both play important roles in warfare but serve distinctly different purposes. Tactics are the practical methods and actions used in combat, focusing on how battles are fought, including troop deployment, the use of weapons and maneuvers for offense or defense. They are concerned with operational aspects of warfare aiming to achieve victory through strategic execution. Ethics in contrast is concerned with moral dimensions of warfare. It guides the principles of what is considered right or wrong, good or bad, in actions taken during conflict. While tactics focus on achieving success on the battlefield, ethics ensures that the means and actions employed in warfare align with broader moral standards.⁶

Sources of Islamic military strategies

Islamic military strategies are primarily derived from the Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The Quran outlines ethical guidelines and principles for warfare while the Sunnah provides practical examples of how these principles were applied during the Prophet's time. Together they form the core of Islamic strategic thinking.

Military strategy in the Quran

Islamic military strategies derive their foundation from divine guidance articulated in the Quran. The Quran provides specific rules for engagement emphasizing restraint and ethical considerations. For instance Allah commands:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ⁷

Fight in the cause of Allah only against those who wage war against you, but do not exceed the limits. Allah does not like transgressors.

In his seminal Quranic exegesis *Ma'ariful Quran* Mufti Shafi elaborates on the ethical framework of warfare outlined in this verse. He explains that the directive strictly limits combat to those disbelievers actively engaging in hostilities against Muslims. Non-combatants including women, children, the elderly, clergy, individuals engaged in peaceful religious practices the physically disabled and laborers uninvolved in combat are explicitly excluded from being targeted in Jihad. This commentary underscores the Quranic emphasis on distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants reflecting a moral and humanitarian approach to conflict in Islamic teachings.⁸

This verse establishes the limits of warfare, prohibiting acts of aggression and excessive violence. War in the Islamic context, is a means of establishing justice and defending

oppressed communities rather than serving imperialistic ambitions. Similarly another verse highlights the imperative to fight only for righteous causes:

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ⁹

Permission to fight back is hereby granted to those being fought, for they have been wronged. And Allah is truly Most Capable of helping them prevail.

Mufti Shafi, in Ma'ariful Quran highlights the historical and strategic background of the first Quranic verse permitting armed resistance emphasizing its significance in the development of Islamic military principles. He explains that during the early years in Makkah despite enduring severe persecution Muslims were commanded to remain patient as no divine sanction for armed resistance had been given. This period of restraint lasted nearly a decade even as oppression worsened. Following the Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) migration to Madinah the severity of the situation necessitated self-defense and the first permission for armed resistance was granted. As reported by scholars like Tirmidhi, Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah on the authority of Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), this verse marked a crucial turning point replacing the previous prohibition of combat which had been reinforced in over seventy earlier verses. This strategic evolution demonstrated a balance between patience and preparedness in Islamic military strategy.¹⁰

The Quran also highlights the importance of strategic foresight and preparedness emphasizing ethical responsibility in safeguarding peace and justice as Allah commands:

وَأَعِدُوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِن قُوَّةٍ وَمِن رِّبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَعَآخِرِينَ مَن دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِن شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تظَلَمُونَ¹¹

Prepare against them what you believers can of military power and cavalry to deter Allah's enemies and your enemies as well as other enemies unknown to you but known to Allah. Whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be paid to you in full and you will not be wronged.

In the context of Islamic military strategy, the Quran emphasizes the importance of strategic preparedness and moral conduct during warfare. As Mufti Shafi explains in Ma'ariful Quran, the injunction in verse 60 about making ready "whatever you can" signifies that success does not require matching the enemy's strength. Rather, it is sufficient for believers to prepare and equip themselves to the best of their ability. This reflects the broader principle in Islamic military strategy that stresses reliance on Allah's support, while still encouraging practical and responsible planning, even if the resources available are not equal to those of the adversary.¹²

Military strategies in the Sunnah of Prophet (ﷺ)

The Sunnah further elaborates on these guidelines by providing practical examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). During military campaigns, the Prophet issued clear instructions to avoid harming civilians, destroying crops or targeting non-combatants such as women, children, and religious figures. These directives not only constrained the excesses of war but also fostered a humane approach to conflict resolution. The emphasis on protecting the weak and showing mercy, even in times of hostility. Narrated Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him): During some of the Ghazawat of the prophet (ﷺ), a woman was found killed. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) disapproved the killing of women and children.¹³

In his Sahih, Imam Muslim narrates a letter from Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), wherein he writes: Indeed, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) and by extension, the Muslim army during his time did not kill the enemy's children. Therefore, you too must not kill children.¹⁴

Imam Abu Dawood reports from Hazrat Anas bin Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Do not harm the elderly, women or children and avoid unjustly seizing the spoils of war. Instead collect them justly and act with righteousness as Allah loves those who do good. This instruction reflects the core principles of Islamic military conduct emphasizing the protection of non-combatants the ethical collection of war spoils and the importance of integrity during warfare. The guidance highlights that military efforts should be conducted with respect and fairness, ensuring that actions align with moral values even in the context of armed conflict.¹⁵

Imam Bayhaqi recorded the hadith narrated by Hazrat Buraidah (may Allah be pleased with him), in which it is mentioned that whenever the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) dispatched an Islamic army towards the disbelievers he would provide them with the following instructions:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم اذا بعث اميرا على جيش او سرية امره في خاصة نفسه بتقوى الله ومن معه من المؤمنين خيرا ثم قال اغزوا باسم الله فقاتلوا في سبيل الله وقاتلوا من كفر بالله اغزوا ولا تغلوا ولا تغدروا ولا تمثلوا ولا تقتلوا وليدا¹⁶

whenever the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) appointed a commander for an army or a military expedition (sariyah), he would first instruct him to observe piety (taqwa) in his personal conduct and to treat the believers under his command with kindness. Then he would say: "Set out in the name of Allah, fight in the path of Allah, and combat those who reject Allah. Do not commit treachery, do not steal from the spoils of war, do not mutilate the bodies (of the dead), and do not kill innocent children.

In accordance with the aforementioned guidelines that prohibit the killing of non-Muslim women, children and the vulnerable during warfare the prominent Hanafi scholar Imam al-Sarakhsi presents his views in his famous work Al-Mabsut as follows:

قال صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم : ولا تقتلوا وليدا والوليد المولود في اللغة وكل آدمي مولود. ولكن هذا اللفظ إنما يستعمل في الصغار عادة. ففيه دليل علي انه لا يحل قتل الصغار منهم. إذا كانوا لا يقاتلون. وقد جاء في الحديث ان النبي صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم نهى عن قتل النساء والولدان. وقال: اقتلوا شيوخ المشركين. واستحيوا شروهم. والمراد بالشيوخ البالغين وبالشيوخ الاتباع من الصغار والنساء والاستحياء الاسترقاق. قال الله: {وَاسْتَحْيُوا نِسَاءَهُمْ} ¹⁷ وفي وصية ابي بكر رضي الله عنه ليزيد بن ابي سفيان: لا تقتل شيخا ضرا عا ولا صبيا ضعيفا. يعني شيخا فانيا وصغيرا لا يقاتل ¹⁸.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) stated, "Do not kill children." The term walid linguistically refers to a newborn although it is commonly used to denote young children. This statement of the Prophet (ﷺ) serves as clear evidence that the killing of children is impermissible particularly when they are not engaged in combat. The hadith further clarifies that the Prophet (ﷺ) forbade the killing of women and children saying: "Kill only those mature individuals among the polytheists who are involved in the conflict (and only during the state of war), but spare the women and children." In this context, the term shaykh refers to elderly or mature individuals participating in the battle, while shuruq denotes women and children. The term istihya implies a treatment characterized by softness and respect as exemplified by Allah's

command: {And show kindness to their women}. Here *istihya* connotes gentle and considerate behavior. Additionally Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) in his instructions to Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan emphasized not to harm frail elderly individuals or vulnerable children, reinforcing the ethical approach to warfare.

Key Characteristics of Islamic Military Strategy

Islamic military strategy is distinguished by a combination of ethical principles, tactical efficiency and a focus on justice and protection of civilians. Rooted in the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, it emphasizes strategic planning, disciplined execution and moral conduct in warfare. These strategies aim to balance military objectives with respect for human dignity and the promotion of peace.

Justice and Restraint

- Islam encourages fairness and compassion even towards those who may differ in faith. As the Quran states, Allah does not forbid you from dealing kindly and fairly with those who have neither fought nor driven you out of your homes. Surely Allah loves those who are fair.¹⁹
- Islam places a strong emphasis on restraint and proportionality in responses to harm. The Quran commands, If you retaliate then let it be equivalent to what you have suffered. But if you patiently endure it is certainly best for those who are patient.²⁰

Collective Decision-Making (Shura)

- Islamic decision making is deeply rooted in consultation and mutual trust. Allah commands the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to not only forgive and pardon his followers but also to consult with them in matters. This underscores the principle of inclusive leadership where collective wisdom is valued especially when confronting difficult circumstances. Once a course of action is decided the Quran advises placing full trust in Allah. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. This dual strategy of consultation and reliance on divine support provides a balanced approach to both governance and military strategy in Islam.²¹
- In the Islamic context leadership and communal harmony are fostered through devotion to Allah mutual consultation and charity. The Quran emphasizes that true believers are those who respond to their Lord establish prayer conduct affairs through consultation and give from what We have provided.²²

Protection of non-combatant

- In Islamic teachings non-combatants such as those not engaged in fighting must be protected. As Allah commands in the Quran Muslims are prohibited from harming individuals who do not actively participate in the conflict. This includes those bound by treaties or those who have chosen peace over combat. The principle stresses that even if such individuals have the capacity to fight if they opt for peace and refrain from engaging in the violence they should be left unharmed.²³
- In the Islamic military strategy the sanctity of human life is prioritized and strict guidelines are outlined in the Quran. As Allah command: Do not take a life that Allah has sanctified except for a just cause.²⁴

Ethical treatment of prisoners of war

- In the context of Islamic military strategy the emphasis on ethical behavior extends beyond the battlefield promoting compassion even during times of war. The Quran underscores this principle by stating: Despite their own needs they provide food to the poor, orphans and captives.²⁵
- In the context of warfare the Quran guides the ethical treatment of prisoners emphasizing that even in victory mercy and justice should prevail. It instructs that when defeating the enemy combatants should act with restraint and dignity binding prisoners only after subduing them and allowing for their release either through grace or ransom until the conclusion of the conflict. The verse further reveals that Allah could have chosen to punish them directly but instead allows such encounters as a test for His believers with the martyrdom of those who fight for His cause ensuring the acceptance of their deeds.²⁶

Fulfilment of Agreements

- As Allah commands in the Quran, Muslims are instructed to fulfill their agreements and treaties with others. When a pact is established and the other party adheres to its terms, Muslims are obligated to uphold their side of the agreement. This teaching reflects Islam's emphasis on justice, trust, and integrity in all dealings, especially in times of conflict or war. The fulfillment of such treaties helps ensure peace and stability and it signifies the value Islam places on honor and responsibility in both personal and societal relationships.²⁷
- The Quran emphasizes the importance of honoring agreements but it also acknowledges the right to terminate treaties when the opposing party shows signs of betrayal. The principle governing the sanctity of agreements in Islamic military strategy is that treaties must be respected as long as both parties remain faithful. However, when a breach occurs a measured response is warranted signaling the termination of the agreement. This approach ensures that trust and integrity are maintained in diplomatic relations while allowing for a strategic response to violations. Thus, the sanctity of agreements in Islam is not only about honoring terms but also about upholding justice and maintaining moral conduct in situations of betrayal.²⁸

Examples of Military Strategies from the Prophet's (ﷺ) Major Battles

During the decade in which the Prophet (ﷺ) resided in Madina (622–632CE) a total of 74 expeditions of varying scales and objectives were organized. This corresponds to an average of one expedition approximately every seven weeks underscoring the substantial military activity during this period. The size and nature of these operations ranged widely from small raiding parties comprising a few horsemen to large-scale battles involving up to 12,000 combatants. Of these 74 expeditions, the Prophet personally led 27 campaigns. According to the biographical account of Ibn Ishaq, the Prophet actively participated in 27 military endeavors.²⁹

The Battle of Badr(2AH/624CE): Leveraging Terrain and Intelligence

In the Battle of Badr the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) displayed remarkable strategic insight by controlling the vital wells of the area thereby limiting the Quraysh army's access to water a

decisive factor in their defeat. Additionally he deployed scouts to gather critical intelligence on the enemy's movements which allowed for a well-informed military decision. These strategies helped position the Muslims for a successful confrontation, reflecting the importance of leveraging both terrain and intelligence in warfare.³⁰

The Battle of Uhud(3AH/625CE): Structured Formation and Delegation

In the Battle of Uhud the Prophet (ﷺ) strategically placed archers on the hills of Mount Uhud to defend the Muslim forces from any potential flanking by the Quraysh cavalry. The disciplined positioning initially proved successful but after some archers abandoned their posts in pursuit of spoil the structured defense faltered shifting the battle in favor of the Quraysh. This event demonstrated the importance of maintaining discipline and adhering to pre-arranged military formations for optimal strategic advantage.³¹

The Battle of the Trench (5AH /627CE): Defensive Innovation

The Battle of the Trench marked an innovative strategic approach by the Prophet (ﷺ) who faced with a much larger enemy coalition introduced the tactic of digging a trench around Medina an unheard-of defense strategy in Arabian warfare. This trench effectively neutralized the Quraysh cavalry's mobility and forced the enemy into a prolonged siege. By adapting to the circumstances creatively the Prophet (ﷺ) turned a defensive position into a victory showcasing his ability to think strategically under pressure.³²

The Treaty of Hudaibiyyah(6AH/628CE): Diplomacy as Strategy

The Treaty of Hudaibiyyah highlighted the Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) diplomatic acumen as he chose negotiation over conflict by securing a peace agreement with the Quraysh despite their initial hostility. This strategic foresight provided the Muslims with breathing space to solidify their internal unity expand their alliances and strengthen their community. The treaty though criticized at the time proved invaluable in the long term by laying the groundwork for future success and eventual conquest.³³

The Conquest of Makkah(8AH/630CE): Avoiding Bloodshed

During the conquest of Makkah the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) employed a well-coordinated strategy that sought to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and violence. By organizing his forces into carefully planned divisions and ensuring peaceful entry into the city the Prophet achieved a significant military and symbolic victory with minimal resistance. This approach showcased his ability to prioritize mercy and minimize harm even in the face of overwhelming military advantage aligning his strategic objectives with broader ethical principles.³⁴

The Expedition of Tabuk(9AH/630CE): Demonstrating Power Through Presence

The expedition to Tabuk though lacking direct confrontation served as a potent demonstration of the Muslim community's strength and military preparedness. The sheer mobilization of forces sent a clear message to surrounding enemies including the Byzantines showcasing that the Muslims were capable of defending themselves and deterring potential aggressors. By leveraging this visible show of force the Prophet (ﷺ) achieved diplomatic gains

such as securing alliances and trade agreements without engaging in battle thus demonstrating the importance of strategic presence.³⁵

The Military Strategies of the Rightly Guided Caliphs(11-41AH/632-661CE)

The military strategies of the Rightly Guided Caliphs were pivotal in expanding and consolidating the early Islamic state while upholding the ethical guidelines of the Quran and Sunnah. These strategies demonstrated exceptional adaptability, strategic foresight and an emphasis on justice and unity. Under the leadership of Hazrat Abu Bakr(RA), Hazrat Umar(RA), Hazrat Uthman(RA) and Hazrat Ali(RA) (may Allah be pleased with them), the early Islamic state witnessed significant military successes characterized by disciplined armies, careful planning and a commitment to avoiding unnecessary conflict. These approaches set the foundation for Islamic military and governance practices in later periods.

Hazrat Abu Bakr's (RA) Visionary Military Strategies

Hazrat Abu Bakr's (may Allah be please with him) caliphate was characterized by decisive and well-planned military campaigns that secured the stability and growth of the Islamic state. During the Ridda Wars his swift actions crushed tribal uprisings, preserving the unity of the Muslim community. In the Battle of Yamama his strategic approach effectively dismantled the threat posed by false prophets, reinforcing the ideological cohesion of Islam. Against the Byzantine Empire Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) directed simultaneous operations to destabilize enemy defenses while fostering alliances and minimizing conflict. His judicious resource allocation appointment of skilled commanders and adaptability to shifting circumstances reflected remarkable foresight. These strategies not only safeguarded the Muslim state but also established a lasting foundation for its future expansion and prosperity.³⁶

Hazrat Umar's (RA) Revolutionary Military Strategy

Hazrat Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA) transformed the Muslim military system through visionary leadership and strategic innovation. He established the first military department, the "Diwan al-Jund," to ensure organization discipline and sustained soldier support. His strategy balanced centralized oversight with decentralized operational command empowering competent leaders chosen on merit. Hazrat Umar (RA) introduced garrison cities (Amsar) like Basra, Kufa and Fustat, combining military bases with administrative centers to secure conquered regions. Respect for civilian populations through treaties and fair governance minimized resistance and fostered loyalty. His focus on logistics ensured steady supplies for long campaigns while his emphasis on rapid mobility and preemptive strikes destabilized enemies effectively. Employing a divide-and-conquer approach he exploited rivalries between Byzantines and Sassanids securing swift victories. Hazrat Umar's (RA) military strategies not only expanded the Islamic state but also established lasting systems of governance and defense marking a profound legacy of ethical and efficient leadership.³⁷

Hazrat Uthman's (RA) Pioneering Military Strategies

Hazrat Uthman (RA) focused on consolidation expansion and naval strength during his caliphate. He established the first Muslim naval fleet securing a decisive victory at the Battle

of the Masts in 655 CE, challenging Byzantine maritime dominance. On land, he strengthened borders with garrisons and forts expanding the caliphate into North Africa, Central Asia and Armenia through a combination of diplomacy and military action. By ensuring efficient resource management and a decentralized administration Hazrat Uthman (RA) maintained stability while supporting sustained military campaigns. His visionary strategies secured Islamic growth and fortified the state's maritime and territorial dominance.³⁸

Hazrat Ali's (RA) Strategic Military Approach in Times of Conflict

Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) the fourth caliph of Islam implemented a military strategy focused on maintaining internal unity upholding justice and defending the Islamic state during a time of civil turmoil. His leadership was characterized by a commitment to minimizing bloodshed in conflicts like the Battles of the Camel and Siffin where he prioritized reconciliation and peace. He emphasized ethical conduct in warfare ensuring that his troops adhered to Islamic principles sparing non-combatants and preserving dignity. Hazrat Ali's (RA) defensive strategies particularly in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula solidified the security of key regions. His efforts in diplomacy and dialogue aimed to sustain cohesion within the Muslim community. Through these methods Hazrat Ali's (RA) military approach left a legacy of ethical leadership and principled warfare.³⁹

Iconic Muslim Military Figures and Their Military Strategies

Islamic history is filled with exemplary military leaders whose strategies combined tactical brilliance with adherence to the ethical guidelines of the Quran and Sunnah. Hazrat Khalid ibn al-Walid (RA), Hazrat Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas (RA) and Hazrat Amr ibn al-As (RA) stand out for their remarkable achievements in expanding and defending the early Islamic state. Their victories were grounded in thorough preparation, reliance on Allah and upholding the principles of justice and mercy in warfare. This reflects the Islamic emphasis on strategic planning, as evident in the Quranic teaching "Prepare against them what you believers can of military power and cavalry to deter Allah's enemies and your enemies"⁴⁰urging believers to plan and assess before engaging in battle. This is echoed in the Sun Tzu's Art of war "The one with many strategic factors in his favor wins; the one with few loses."⁴¹ By carefully considering their advantages and upholding moral conduct, these leaders ensured that their military successes were not only tactical but also aligned with the higher objectives of justice and peace in Islam.

Military Genius of Hazrat Khalid ibn al-Walid (RA) The Battle of Ajnadayn and the March to Damascus

Hazrat Khalid ibn al Walid (may Allah be pleased with him) demonstrated unmatched military brilliance in two defining events of early Islamic history the Battle of Ajnadayn (634 CE) and his audacious march from Iraq to Damascus. At Ajnadayn, the first major clash between Muslims and the Byzantine Empire Hazrat Khalid (RA) used exceptional tactics of deception, swift cavalry maneuvers and a feigned retreat to encircle and decisively defeat the Byzantine forces. Equally remarkable was his daring march through the harsh Syrian Desert via an unconventional route to evade detection, where he used camels as water reservoirs to sustain his army's unprecedented speed. Upon arriving in Damascus Hazrat Khalid's (RA)

leadership shifted the balance of power and he executed a surprise night assault to capture the city. These events underline Hazrat Khalid (RA) unparalleled strategic mastery, adaptability and leadership in overcoming superior forces to secure the success of early Islamic conquests.⁴²

Hazrat Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas (RA) Strategy at Qadisiyyah

The Battle of Qadisiyyah (636 CE), led by Hazrat Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him) was a decisive confrontation where Hazrat Sa'ad's (RA) strategic acumen overcame the numerically superior Persian forces. He effectively utilized the terrain to offset the enemy's strengths and coordinated his cavalry and infantry for maximum flexibility. Hazrat Sa'ad (RA) maintained high morale by reinforcing religious motivation and ensuring ethical conduct among his troops. His ability to adapt to Persian tactics such as countering war elephants was crucial. The death of Persian General Rostam Farrokhzad disrupted their command leading to a collapse in Persian morale. This victory solidified Muslim control in the region and marked a pivotal moment in the expansion of Islam.⁴³

Military Strategies of Hazrat Amr ibn al-As (RA): The Conquest of Egypt

Hazrat Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him) demonstrated brilliant military strategies during the Conquest of Egypt in 640 CE. He employed effective siege tactics during the siege of Alexandria using siege engines and blockades to weaken the Byzantine defenses. Hazrat Amr's (RA) use of psychological warfare and promises of religious tolerance won local Egyptian support aiding his conquest. He also utilized deception feigning retreats to trap the Byzantine army and employed maneuver warfare particularly at the Battle of Babylon Fortress to outmaneuver a larger enemy. After the conquest Hazrat Amr's (RA) ethical leadership guided by Caliph Hazrat Umar ibn al-Khattab's (may Allah be pleased with him) principles of justice helped maintain stability in the newly acquired territory.⁴⁴

Contemporary Relevance of Islamic Military Strategy: Reflecting on Modern-Day Wars

The devastating impacts of wars in Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, Palestine, and the genocide of Rohingya Muslims highlight the critical importance of ethical military strategies. Modern conflicts have revealed how abandoning principles like justice, restraint, protection of non-combatants and the preservation of human dignity leads to untold suffering. Here, we analyze the significance of Islamic military strategy in the context of such destruction, drawing from credible reports, articles, and global events.

Justice and Restraint: Ignored Lessons in Yemen and Syria

In Yemen, one of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century unfolded due to airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition supported by Western powers like the United States and the United Kingdom. According to the United Nations over 375,000 people have lost their lives, half of them due to indirect causes like starvation and lack of healthcare.⁴⁵ In Syria the civil war fueled by the Assad regime's indiscriminate bombings and global involvement by regional powers displaced millions and killed nearly 306,000 people by 2023.⁴⁶ Islamic military strategy emphasizes restraint and prohibits indiscriminate destruction in warfare. If these principles had been observed in Yemen and Syria, the large-scale bombing of civilian areas

and destruction of essential infrastructure could have been prevented. The strategy also prioritizes mediation and negotiation over aggressive escalation encouraging conflict resolution through peaceful means rather than prolonged violence.

Genocide in Palestine: Systemic Injustice and Hypocrisy

The ongoing violence in Palestine represents one of the most prominent examples of systematic injustice in modern history. Amnesty International reports that Israeli military actions have killed thousands of Palestinians including women and children while systematically eroding Palestinian rights and reducing Gaza to ruins. Entire neighborhoods have been wiped out in airstrikes and illegal settlements continue to displace Palestinian families.⁴⁷ Islamic military ethics strictly forbid targeting civilians, destroying homes and displacing populations during conflict. Military actions that destroy entire neighborhoods and oppress a population over decades violate these principles. An adherence to Islamic teachings would advocate fair treatment, protection of the oppressed and the establishment of lasting peace through justice and equitable solutions.

Protection of Non-Combatants: Violations in Iraq and Afghanistan

The invasion of Iraq predicated on false claims of weapons of mass destruction caused immense civilian suffering. Between 2003 and 2011 at least 85,000 civilians were killed (Iraq Body Count, 2019), with additional deaths resulting from insurgency violence.⁴⁸ The torture and abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Camp Boka further exposed violations of human dignity.⁴⁹ Similarly in Afghanistan indiscriminate airstrikes and drone attacks devastated entire villages leaving thousands dead and millions displaced.⁵⁰ Islamic military strategy ensures the protection of non-combatants and forbids acts that degrade human dignity such as torture or abuse of prisoners. These ethical principles demand that warfare must focus only on combatants and be proportionate to the threat. The indiscriminate bombing and mistreatment of individuals in Iraq and Afghanistan would have been avoided under these guidelines ensuring the preservation of lives and dignity while limiting unnecessary suffering.

Persecution of Rohingya Muslims: The Ignored Genocide

The ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar remains one of the darkest chapters of modern history. Reports by the United Nations highlight mass killings widespread sexual violence and the burning of entire villages. More than 700,000 Rohingya fled to neighboring Bangladesh, living in squalid refugee camps with little hope of justice.⁵¹ Islamic principles strongly emphasize the protection of oppressed populations and oppose all forms of persecution and genocide. Had global responses to this crisis adhered to these ethical guidelines efforts to protect the Rohingya and address their displacement would have been prioritized. Providing refuge and justice would align with the Islamic value of safeguarding vulnerable communities ensuring their survival and dignity.

Preservation of Resources: Lessons from Syria, Iraq and Yemen

Wars in Iraq, Syria and Yemen have caused the systematic destruction of essential infrastructure including hospitals, schools and water supplies. In Syria the targeted bombing

of civilian infrastructure left millions without access to clean water while Iraq's oil economy suffered due to targeted attacks. A report found that Yemen faced critical shortages of medical supplies as hospitals were destroyed in airstrikes, resulting in millions of preventable deaths.⁵² Islamic warfare ethics emphasize the preservation of essential resources and infrastructure as these are vital for human survival. The deliberate destruction of hospitals, water supplies and schools directly contravenes these principles. If followed Islamic strategy would have safeguarded essential facilities during conflict preventing unnecessary suffering and preserving opportunities for post-conflict recovery.

Key findings

- Islamic military strategies prioritize justice, restraint and ethical treatment of non-combatants rooted in Quran and Sunnah.
- Historical battles and campaigns highlight leadership, adaptability and collective decision-making.
- These strategies offer solutions for modern conflict challenges emphasizing humanitarian principles and reducing suffering.
- Ethical warfare frameworks advocate diplomacy, preservation of resources and minimal harm.
- Applying Islamic principles can foster global stability and humane conflict resolution in contemporary crises.

Conclusion

The ongoing conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar exemplify the catastrophic consequences of disregarding ethical and humanitarian principles in modern warfare. These conflicts have been marked by widespread violations of justice, indiscriminate violence and the failure to protect civilian populations resulting in immense human suffering and long-term regional instability. This research highlights the enduring relevance of Islamic military strategies which prioritize justice, restraint the protection of non-combatants, and the preservation of vital resources. Rooted in the Quran, Sunnah and Islamic jurisprudence, these principles offer a framework for ethical and effective conflict management. By emphasizing leadership accountability, strategic planning, and moral conduct Islamic military teachings align closely with universal values of human dignity and proportionality in warfare. The findings underscore that integrating these principles into modern military doctrines can provide actionable solutions to contemporary challenges such as asymmetric warfare, humanitarian crises and ethical dilemmas. This study also advocates for a shift toward ethical and balanced international conflict resolution efforts that transcend geopolitical biases. By bridging historical lessons with modern-day conflicts the application of these principles can guide the global community toward more just, sustainable and humane approaches to warfare. Embracing these time-honored strategies not only addresses current challenges but also serves as a critical step in fostering long term peace and global stability.

Recommendations

- War strategies must include frameworks grounded in justice and restraint ensuring combatants follow international and religious ethical standards to reduce human suffering.
- Create mechanisms tailored to specific conflicts for investigating war crimes ensuring justice is delivered timely and transparently.
- Utilize technologies such as AI and satellite imagery to monitor and mitigate civilian harm especially in high risk areas during conflicts.
- Introduce diplomacy initiatives that prioritize humanitarian concerns over political gains to achieve sustainable peace agreements.
- Global and local militaries should be trained on Islamic military ethics and international humanitarian law to foster compassionate conduct in war.
- Ensure deliberate measures to protect places of worship, cultural sites and historical landmarks from destruction during warfare.
- Engage local communities in decision-making processes to better understand on-ground realities and offer long-term stability.
- Establish international guidelines for safeguarding essential services like water, healthcare and education in conflict zones preventing irreversible societal harm.
- Create rehabilitation programs for war affected populations, including trauma counseling especially for children and survivors of violence.
- Establish neutral bodies to monitor and counter false narratives which often fuel conflicts and hinder peace processes.

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