

Conflict Resolution and the Strategies of the Prophet Muhammad

Dr Shabana Qazi

Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, Balochistan University

Dr. Abdur Rahman

Asst Prof, Ziauddin University of Karachi

DOI: (<https://doi.org/10.46568/ihya.v21i2.119>)

Abstract

The primary aim of this article is to analyze the life events and strategies of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to reveal conflict resolution (CR) forms that may offer solutions to contemporary global problems and challenges faced by contemporary human societies. This study also aspires to contribute to world peace and interfaith harmony by discussing the ideal personality of the Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ who is stereotypically quoted in the west. The main characteristics of a successful leader and examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ are included. It is evident from the given literature that he greatly respected for other religions, cultures, and ideas; even in case of disagreement, he showed tolerance and took great care to handle the situation. In this study, the existing literature is examined and a qualitative exploration is carried out in order to formulate a better understanding of the dynamics of the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ, with regard to peace and conflict resolution. In the end it reveals that the Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ employed all his energies and divine assistance to resolve the conflicting issues through negotiations and peacefully. He showed an appreciation of the dignity of all living beings irrespective of their gender, race, or societal status. The article covers the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ and analyzes the historical events of the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Some of the questions addressed in this research are: how can this knowledge be used to solve difficulties that the Muslims are witnessing after 9/11? What is status of the Qur'an and the Hadith related to peace and conflict? And above all, how does Islam handle conflict resolution?

Keywords: Tolerance, Interfaith, Respect, Prophet Muhammad, Globalization, Conflict Resolution, World Peace.

Introduction

As humanes biologically incline to live together in groups, it may cause disagreements between people with opposing opinions and principles. It is nearly impossible to assemble a society where everyone is in favour of other's opinion; differences are normal which sometimes give rise to disputes and conflicts. The peace has always been the primary need of human society from times to the current modern world.¹ According to Webster's definition, the concept the ancient of peace can be described as:²

- Harmony or calmness;

- *Social discipline;*
- *Security;*
- *To create order by using laws;*
- *Absence of war;*
- *State of compromise after conflict or hostility.*

John Galtung describes peace as the absences of premeditated combined form of violence and the existence of collective social ethics.³ The word 'conflict' is derived from the Latin word *confligere* which means to hit collectively. ⁴ A conflict arises when a party believes that its interests are being harmed by another party, that is, when the interests of two parties collide and both the groups fail to receive benefits at the same time⁵ It is clear that conflict is inevitable because everyone has a different set of beliefs, standards, and a code of conduct, which guides their relationships and inspiration.⁶

Usually three causes are attributed towards conflict generation: firstly, in case of disagreement between the two parties on a particular issue. Second, if there is a correlation between the parties that have created mutual pressure on each other. Third, lack of resources leads to conflict.⁷ Some researchers are optimistic that sometimes conflict triggers individual progress and community development. As differences and conflicting opinions generate new dimensions of thinking and help us to manage these differences in a way that can lead us to progress.

A conflict management strategy involves formal dialogue, negotiation, arbitration, or mediation methods to resolve a dispute. These techniques are also known as conflict resolution methods or strategies.⁸ Some researchers describe five types of conflict resolution strategies, such as avoidance, assimilation, coercion, cooperation, and settlement. Generally, there are three stages to conflict resolution, which are avoiding conflict, reducing its severity and resolving it. As the nature of the conflict does not remain the same in different times and situations, different methods, or strategies are used according to its nature. The conflict can be solved fundamentally in two ways: using violent or peaceful methods.⁹

Consequently, there are many types of conflict resolution or management strategies. Peaceful methods, such as negotiation, dialogue, arbitration, mediation, and arbitration, are desirable strategies for maintaining a lasting peace in the world. In democratic societies, conflicts are resolved through using different strategies and procedures. These conflicts might be personal, social, religious, or political. Often, unresolved disputes lead to serious consequences which have appeared in bloody wars in the past. In the modern history, the world has witnessed the incident of 9/11 which took place due to unresolved issue of Middle-East. Unluckily, this incident triggered a wave of Islamophobia in the West that blames Islamic doctrine of conservative and intolerant behaviour towards the West and its industrial development. Generally, a

stereotypical rhetoric is spread that the Islam and Muslims are no longer agreed to accept western culture and non-conformist to Islam.

The main thrust of this paper is to investigate the strategies which the Prophet ﷺ adopted to resolve conflicts in his entire life in the context of said western allegations about Islam and Muslims. Although the Qur'an provides basic guidelines to solve disputes, live examples from the life of the Prophet ﷺ can help readers to understand practical solutions of the conflicts from his biography. Before starting our analysis of conflict resolution strategies, it would be plausible to discuss general causes of disputes at social and religious level. The Qur'an as a divine book reveals the sources of a conflict in a society. Surah al-hujrat describes these causes as: ¹⁰do not ridicule one another; in some cases, mutual ridicule becomes fun when arrogance or egotism is concealed in it. However, to laugh for sharing happy moments is acceptable. Women are especially forewarned from ridiculing each other, because sometimes purpose is to disrespect other people.

Do not insult or call each other with offensive nicknames; it may include speaking ill of spoken or written words or mimic others for charging them based on false assumptions. Another type is to call others with real or fancied nicknames based on their physical defects. For example, it is inappropriate to call a person as "O lame one" who is even if a lame.

Avoid baseless suspicions because some are immoral and based on mere assumptions without any concrete proof or evidence.

Spying or being curious into other people's affairs is prohibited for it may lead towards baseless suspicion which amounts to sin.

Another possible cause of conflict might be back-biting; either it may be harmful or added with evil intention; in that scenario, it is also a sin. To depict its gruesome effect, the Qur'an describes this act metaphorically, as one is eating the flesh of his own brother's dead body. In the same way, humans are addressed to avoid damaging people's dignity, especially, in their absence. All the above mentioned aspects cover domestic life events.

However, according to surah al-Hujrat believers must not pass on any news item or report but ascertain its truth first, otherwise it can lead towards a bloody war or create panic in the public. So, all kinds of scandal or slander are condemned.

The Islamic concept of CR would be mere theoretical discussion without exploring the CR strategies from the life of Prophet's ﷺ. In the next section, his CR strategies will be discussed in detail.

Conflict Resolution Strategies of the Prophet ﷺ :

Once the Prophet ﷺ said to his companions, "Shall I inform you of a better act than fasting, alms and prayers? Make peace between one another: enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by roots".¹¹

Today, the western world portrays stereotypical and negative

opinions about the Prophet's ﷺ life and teachings which rarely show the true picture; usually, people are ignorant about the life of the Prophet ﷺ. He was a man of great character with a forgiving and merciful nature, always in pursuit of peace, which is why the Qur'an refers to him as "a mercy to the worlds".¹²

At several places, the Qur'an indicates his sublime character. The biographical history of the Prophet has ﷺ revealed that anyone who met him once aspired to meet him again.

A Peace Loving Character:

In Islamic tradition, a sound character is a sign of good faith. As indicated in a hadith, the Prophet said, "The best amongst you are the best in character and manners".¹³

Through a virtuous character, one can repel the evils around him and an individual having bad character causes a lot of damage to him and society around him. Therefore, a virtuous person can easily resolve conflict and make peace in the society. The Quran endorses the fact that the Prophet ﷺ maintains the best character among all human beings.¹⁴ While speaking of character, integrity and honesty the Makkans always knew that the Prophet ﷺ held these characteristics even before his prophet hood; so, they titled him "the truthful" and "trust worthy". Even his bitter enemies never denied the Prophet's truthfulness and honesty. Once Abu Jahl, a staunch enemy of the Prophet ﷺ, was inquired of the Prophet's integrity, he swore by God that "Muhammad ﷺ is a truthful man and never lies".¹⁵ Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ cultivated this sense of high integrity among his disciples and directed every Muslim to follow it.

According to Islamic interpretations, humility is to be conscious of one's shortcomings whilst having no expectations of applause from others. Similarly, even after the commencement of prophet hood, the Prophet ﷺ kept performing his domestic chores like milking goats, going to the market etc. His humble attitude was not confined only to his fellow companions. Regarding but it is narrated in the Hadith that after the conquest of Makkah, as he entered the city in such a manner that while bowing in humility his head was touching the saddle of his camel.¹⁶

For conflict resolution, another important trait is to be patient. It means to remain calm and composed in times of difficulty.¹⁷ The Qur'an asserts this virtue by calling Muslims to be patient.¹⁸ It further says that the believers will be tested with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods, lives and the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere".¹⁹ One day the Prophet ﷺ passed by a woman who was weeping beside a relative's grave. He told her to be patient. Not recognizing him, she said to him, "Go away, for you have not been afflicted with a calamity like mine." Later she was informed that he was the Prophet, so she went to his house and said to him, "I did not recognize you." He said, "Verily, patience is at the first

stroke of a calamity".²⁰ Here the Prophet ﷺ set the precedence for common Muslims in such situations.

The virtue of patience is closely associated with gentleness which is a vital characteristic while dealing with people to resolve conflicting issues. A Muslim scholar defined gentleness as "a state of dignified bearing, and remaining calm despite provocation".²¹

It is noticeable from the biographies of the Prophet ﷺ that despite the torment and persecution that he bore in Makkah, he never cursed or took personal revenge to them. However, due to social and trade sanctions of Makkans, in the early days, the Prophet ﷺ and his followers nearly starved to death.²² Moreover, despite applying their brutal tactics on Muslims, the Makkans later plotted an assassination attempt against the Prophet ﷺ, yet he refused to respond.

Another great virtue of the Prophet's character was forgiveness, which is a highly factor in building peace and reconciliation among people. According to dictionary meaning, "Forgiveness is to forsake revenge when one is capable of taking revenge".²³ Unfortunately, this virtue is often missing in our society today. Once the Angel Gabriel told the Prophet ﷺ that God has ordered him to "befriend those who break off from you, give to those who refuse to give to you and forgive those who are unjust with you".²⁴

A clear example of forgiveness is recorded in the history when the Prophet ﷺ visited to the town of Ta'if where he hoped to gain support for Islam. The people there not only refused to accept his message, but they unleashed vagabonds and the street children who pelted stones at him. By the time the Prophet ﷺ took refuge in a grapes backyard, he was badly injured that his shoes were drenched with blood, yet when the angels offered their help to destroy the town he refused them and instead prayed for their guidance to Islam.²⁵ Even he forgave his bitter enemies who tried their best to kill him. At the conquest of Makkah, he let off his enemies and fellow Makkans without any charge.²⁶ As far as the Prophet's views on war are concerned, Iqbal (1974) points out that war was his last resort except he was restricted to fight for the survival of the Muslims. The Battle of Badr (624 CE), and Uhud (625 CE) are the prime cases of it.²⁷ However, the Prophet ﷺ made several peace accord with the pagans of Makkah, Jews of Medina, neighboring Christians and other surrounding Arab tribes. Significantly, he never broke a single treaty made with his neighbors or enemies. Therefore, Islam strictly forbids the breaking of any agreement or covenant.²⁸

As the previous provides some seminal characteristics of the Prophet's personality relevant to CR strategies. In the subsequent portion some historical events will be discussed briefly to observe the prophetic strategies acquired for CR.

Placement of Hajar al-Aswad:

At the age of 35, the Prophet ﷺ avoided the bloody war by

settling the issue which came up on the placement of Hajar al-Aswad (the sacred black stone) in the wall of the Kaba. Owing to flooding, the walls of the Kaba were demolished, so all the 18 Arab tribes equally divided the reconstruction work among themselves. However, a conflict occurred at the fixing of the black stone; every clan wanted to honour this responsibility alone. At this crucial moment, all the tribes unanimously chose the Prophet ﷺ to neutralize the issue. Through his wisdom, he put the stone in a sheet of cloth and asked all chieftains to hold the sheet. They all took the stone to the site and the Prophet ﷺ erected the stone on its previous place.²⁹ Here the Prophet ﷺ concluded a fierce conflict and calmed the situation peacefully through his unique arbitration.

Social and Economic Boycott:

As the Prophet ﷺ started to preaching Islam openly, the Makkah elite opposed him and his new belief system strongly. They used every method to break off Muhammad ﷺ from his mission but their efforts went in vain. At the end, the Prophet ﷺ and his clan had to face social and economic boycott from the Quresh and their allied tribes for supporting his cause. Muhammad and his clan were confined for nearly three years to a valley which was 'Shi'b Abu Talib (the valley of Abu Talib). This is a clear example of the Prophet's ﷺ patience and his peace loving nature that he never thought of war against his own people; although, historically the Arabs used to wage war to each other in such cases. Rather he endured all the hardships daringly and stood firm against all odds.³⁰

Establishment of Brotherhood between Aws and Khazraj:

After the migration to Medina the Prophet ﷺ created a strong relation between the tribes of Aws and Khazraj which had been indulged in bloody wars in the past. Through his wise CR strategies, the Prophet ﷺ initiated a sense of brotherhood among them and they accepted him as their leader to settle their mutual disputes. This unique idea of brotherhood was a product of the Prophet ﷺ's successful approach towards conflict resolution.

The Charter of Medina

This covenant is the best example of how conflicts can be resolved and peace be restored. At the Prophet's migration to Medina, it consisted of different Arab tribes and Jews. As the Jews were prosperous economically, they enjoyed social influence in Medina. The arrival of the Prophet ﷺ had created an unknown fear in the Jewish ranks because all the tribes in Medina had showed their faith under the leadership of Muhammad ﷺ. To unite the society, the Prophet ﷺ signed an agreement with the Jews to solve the conflicting issues and live peacefully side by side. This treaty is known as the Charter of Medina. Some important clauses of this treaty are described in following lines as:³¹

1. Each side will be free to practice its faith and will not interfere to

others' beliefs.

2. Both the parties will protect the city from invaders and help each other in need.
3. Each group shall maintain peace in the city through discussion.
4. Medina should be declared sacred city and any bloodshed in the city should be forbidden.
5. The Prophet ﷺ will have the authority to settle all the disputes and his judgment shall be deemed final.

This Charter is a great example of a pluralistic society where people attached to different belief system can live peacefully.

The Treaty of Hudaibiyya

During the sixth year of Hijra (migration), the Prophet ﷺ intended to visit the Holy place of Kaba to perform Umarah. Around 1,400 companions were accompanied him. However, the Meccans denied their access in the city and demanded to return next year.

It was a heartening revelation for them because no pilgrims were ever refused to enter the city of Makkah and the Muslims had no intention except performing Umarah there. At this critical moment, the Prophet ﷺ displayed an extraordinary tolerant behaviour and while acknowledging all their demands signed an agreement with them which is called the Treaty of Hudabiya. Some of the main points of this treaty give an idea that how much the Prophet ﷺ was serious in creating peace among humans.

1. This year the Muslims will return to Medina without performing the Umera
2. For pilgrimage the Muslims will come next year, but will stay in Mecca only for three days;
3. The Muslims will be obliged to return the newly converted Muslims back to Quresh who take refuge in Medina and will not demand for those who leave Islam and return to the Meccans;
4. Each tribe of Arabs will have the free right alien any of the sides;
5. There would be no war between the Muslims and the Quraysh for the next ten years.

This agreement exhibits the Prophet's ﷺ eagerness to use dialogue and negotiation approach to resolve the conflict. Another important point is that apparently, all the conditions put forward by Quresh were against the interest of the Muslims but in the end they prove to a blessing disguise.

The Conquest of Mecca:

The conquest of Makkah is the prime example of the Prophet's ﷺ divine wisdom and desire for peace through his best exemplary morals. The Quresh could not hold them tied to the treaty of Hudabiya and an incident caused the annulment of this peace treaty from their allied tribe. Rather than settling the issue, they preferred to war against the Muslims. They failed to realize the actual ground position; now the

Muslims were much to them. The Quresh were given three options against the violation of the treaty by the Prophet's ﷺ:³²

- *to declare a break up from Banu Bakr;*
- *Pay compensation money against the murder;*
- *or terminate the peace treaty.*

They preferred the last option and invited to their defeat. The Prophet ﷺ entered the city victoriously without any violence and bloodshed. Even on that occasion, the Prophet's ﷺ demonstrated his desire for peace. Instead of taking revenge on the Meccans, he declared a general amnesty for all of them by saying "Go, You are all free". The victory of Mecca is a historical event of CR through a peaceful strategy.

Conclusion:

All the above-mentioned events prove that the Prophet ﷺ is the messenger of peace who gave his full energies to restore peace through different strategies. Every time he preferred peace to violence. The article deems it essential to disseminate the teachings and biography of the Prophet's ﷺ in the west. On the other hand, many Muslims themselves miss the comprehensive knowledge relevant to CR. The article sums up that the life example of the Prophet's ﷺ offer abundant solution for CR for present world. Unfortunately, negative image of Islam and stereotyping of Islam is much prevalent and easily accessible in the Western media. The issue of Islamophobia has faded away the true picture of Islam in the West. Especially after the incident of 9/11, only Islamic teaching can debunk the negative propaganda of the Western media. It is now more clear from this article that only the strategies adopted by the Prophet ﷺ can provide a practical and viable solution for conflict resolution in the modern world.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

References

1. A. Anthony, *Peace: A World History*, Cambridge 2010, p. 1.
2. The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (Deluxe Encyclopedic Edition), New York 1963, p. 292.
3. J. Galtung, *Theories of Peace – A Synthetic Approach of Peace*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, Oslo 1967, p. 6.
4. D.P Barash, C.P. Webel, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, California 2002, p. 26.
5. R. E., Jones, B. H. Melcher, "Personality and the preference for modes of conflict resolution", *Human Relations*, vol. 35, no. 8, 1982, pp. 649–658.

6. K. Randeree, A. T. El Faramawy, "Islamic perspectives on conflict management within project managed environments", *International Journal of Project Management*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2011, pp. 26-32.
7. A. Aritzeta, S. Ayestaran, S.Swailes, "Team role preference and conflict management styles", *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2005, pp. 157-182.
8. M.A. Rahim, "Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict", *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, Vol. 13, 2002, pp. 206-235.
9. H.U. Rashid, *An Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies*, Dhaka 2005, p. 66.
10. Surah al-Hujrat
11. Al-Suhrawardy, A.. *The Wisdom of Muhammad* (p. 90). New York, NY: Citadel Press. (2001).
12. al- Quran (21:107)
13. Al-Bukhari, I, 8:61 (1996). *Sahih Al-Bukhari*. Riyadh: Maktaba Darus Salam.
14. Vehapi, F. *Conflict resolution in Islam: Document review of the early sources*. (2013).
15. Ibid. pp. 30-31
16. Ibid. pp. 44.
17. Ibid. pp. 45.
18. Qur'an, 3:200
19. Qur'an, 2: 155
20. *Sahih al- Bukhari*, Book 23, Hadith 372
21. Vehapi, F. *Conflict resolution in Islam: Document review of the early sources*. (2013).pp. 45
22. Emerick, Y.. *Muhammad* (1st ed.). Indianapolis, IN: ALPHA. (2002) pp. 88-89.
23. Vehapi, F. *Conflict resolution in Islam: Document review of the early sources*. (2013).
24. Ibid.pp.46.
25. Ibid.pp.47
26. Armstrong, K. *Muhammad: A Prophet for our Time*. New York, (2006). pp. 243-246
27. Iqbal, A. *The Prophet's Diplomac*. Cape Cod, MA: Claude Stark & Co, (1957).
28. al- Qur'an, 8:55-56.
29. M. Naeemi, M. Zubiarii, "Foundations of Social stability in perspective of Seerah: A research study", *Acta Islamica*, Vol., 3, no. 2, 2015, p. 12.
30. A. Guillaume, op.cit., p. 85.
31. H.G. Sarwar, op.cit., p. 313; M. Lings, *Muhammad his life based on the earliest sources*, New Delhi/London 1983, pp. 31-32.
32. G. R. Hawting, "Al-Hudaybiyya and the Conquest of Mecca", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Vol. 8, 1986, pp. 1-23.