

Can it be any clearer that context restricts the time and place of the application of the verses that follow? The command to fight the "unbelievers" was limited to those Arabian tribes who had initially made peace treaties with the Muslims and later violated the treaty. (e.g. the Compact of Medina, that guaranteed freedom of worship to all, Jews, Christians and Pagans). "Unbelievers" is really a mistranslation, "pagans" or "idolaters." The Arabian tribes who broke their oaths are the ones that Surah 9 refers to. A reading of the entire Surah will show these permissions for Muslims to fight did not extend to all pagan tribes but only those who allied themselves with Islam's enemies and launched attacks against the nascent Muslim Community.

Quran 9:3-4 - And an announcement from Allah and His Messenger... that Allah and His Messenger dissolve (peace treaty) obligations with the Pagans.... (But the treaties are) not dissolved with those Pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor aided any one against you. So fulfil your engagements with them...

Quran 9:12-13 - But if they violate their oaths after their covenant, and taunt you for your Faith, - then fight the chiefs of Unfaith: for their oaths are nothing to them: that thus they may be restrained. Will ye not fight people who violated their oaths, plotted to expel the Messenger, and took the aggressive (path) by being the first (to attack) you? Do ye fear them? Nay, it is Allah Whom ye should more justly fear, if ye believe!

In contrast with the often portrayed violent picture of Islam, the Quran itself teaches only defensive war and religious tolerance.

Quran 2:256 - Let there be no compulsion in religion...

Quran 6: 107-108 - If it had been Allah's plan, they would not have taken false gods: but We made thee not one to watch over their doings, nor art thou set over them to dispose of their affairs... In the end will they return to their Lord, and We shall then tell them the truth of all that they did.

Further, it is important to note that Judaism and Christianity have a protected and blessed status within the Quranic teaching, although a distinction was made between those who lived up to their faith and those who failed to do so.

Peace and salutation to Abraham... and we gave him the good news of Isaac, a prophet – one of the Righteous. We blessed him (Abraham) and Isaac; but of their progeny there are (some) who do right, and (some) that obviously do wrong to their own souls... Again (of old) we bestowed our favor upon Moses and Aaron. And We gave them the Book, which helps to make things clear. And We guided them to the Straight Way. And we left (this blessing) among them among for generations (to come) in later times. "Peace and salutation to Moses and Aaron." (Quran 37:109-120)

Muslims are commissioned to protect Jewish and Christian institutions:

Quran 22:40 - (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, - (for no cause) except that they say, "our Lord is Allah...

Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure (if Muslims did not protect them).

2. "Sword Verses" in the Qur'an 2:190-193

Opposers of Islam often label Islam a religion of violence. Others state that Islam is a religion of peace. There are numerous scholars on both sides of the debate about the inherent peacefulness or violence of Islam and the Qur'an. Some claim that there are over 100 verses in the Qur'an which advocate violence.

The Quran contains at least 109 verses that call Muslims to war with nonbelievers for the sake of Islamic rule.
(thereligionofpeace.com/pages/quran/violence.aspx)

Others cite verses in the Qur'an, asserting that true Islam advocates peace and permits only defensive war.

True Islam rejects violent jihad, whether it be against Muslims or non-Muslims. The Holy Quran explains that Muslims are permitted to fight only in specific situations: "Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is made, because they have been wronged" (22:40). True Islam recognizes that fighting is only permissible in self-defense, and only after an aggressor first wages war.
www.trueislam.com

The only way to get to the bottom of this issue is to individually investigate the Qur'anic verses and not to rely on the opinion of "experts." For example, when looking at the 109 verses that allegedly advocate violence in the website cited above, it is become immediately clear that many verses claiming Allah will punish evildoers are mixed in with verses about war. This is like claiming that Christianity advocates violence by citing verses about God punishing sinners in "hellfire." Clearly, a distinction must be made between what people are told to do and God's judgments. To say, "Let's live together in peace and let God judge between us" is a religiously tolerant view advocating peaceful coexistence. Using "hellfire" verses in the way the above website does distorts the reality of human interaction.

Above, we examined one supposed sword verse, Quran 9:5, and showed that in context, the verse told Muslims to fight against those who had attacked them first and to desist from fighting if their opposers quit their attacks. Now we will look at another alleged violence-advocating passage in the Qur'an.

Quran 2:191-193 - And kill them wherever you find them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out. And Al-Fitnah [disbelief or unrest] is worse than killing... but if they desist, then lo! Allah is forgiving and merciful. And fight them until there is no more Fitnah [disbelief and worshipping of others along with Allah] and worship is for Allah alone. But if they cease, let there be no transgression except against Az-Zalimun (the polytheists, and wrong-doers, etc.) (Translation: The Noble Quran)

Advocates of the violent Quran interpretation make several dubious claims about this verse:

The historical context of this passage is not defensive warfare, however, since Muhammad and his Muslims had just relocated to Medina and were not under attack by their Meccan adversaries. (thereligionofpeace.com/pages/quran/violence.aspx)

No historical evidence is given for the assertion that the Muslim community in Medina was not under attack. Muslim historians teach the opposite, namely that early Muslims were persecuted in Mecca, fled to Medina to escape killings and death threats. The Meccans then pursued the Muslims to Medina and allied themselves with opposers of Islam there. An ancient letter from the Meccans to their collaborators in Medina, documents the continuing violent schemes of the enemies of Islam.

Now that you have admitted that our enemy is in your home, we swear by God and declare that we, the people of Mecca, will join in an attack against Medina unless you, the people of Medina, turn him out of Medina or give him a joint fight. When we attack Medina, we will put the sword to all able-bodied men and enslave all women. (Abu-Dawud, Kitab al-Kharaj, Life of Muhammad, Islam International Publications, 2014, page 46).

Another claim is that Q 2:191-193 advocates fighting to convert unbelievers to Islam.

...the violence is explicitly commissioned "until religion is for Allah" - ie. unbelievers desist in their unbelief.
(thereligionofpeace.com/pages/quran/violence.aspx)

There is a question of understanding Arabic grammar in this verse. What does "worship is for Allah" mean? The verse is better translated as "fight until worship of Allah is freely allowed."

Fight in God's cause against those who fight you... If they do fight you, kill them... Fight them until there is no more persecution and your worship is devoted to God.... If they cease hostilities, then there can be no further hostilities except against aggressors. (Q 2:190-194, Trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem.)

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you... And fight until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevail justice and faith in Allah, but if they cease, let there be no hostility... (Footnote on this verse refers to the word translated as "justice and faith, explaining: "din" for Allah, in other words justice/freedom of worship for Muslims) (Q 2:190-193, Trans Abdullah Yusuf Ali.)

The final sentence in the verse shows that hostilities are to stop when opposers of Islam stop attacking. No forced conversion is advocated.

Certainly, there are those, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who give violent interpretation to this passage. However, the fact that there are valid, long-standing, peaceful interpretations, means that those who claim that Islam

is inherently a violent religion have not proved their case. To do so would require that the only possible interpretations are violent. If there are both violent and non-violent interpretations then Islam is not inherently violent.

Other verses in Surah 2 demonstrate that there was no expectation that Muslims would exterminate unbelievers. One concise example:

Do not marry idolatresses until they believe.... Do not give your women in marriage to idolaters until they believe. (Q 2:221, Trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem.)

What sense would this verse make if all idolaters were simply to be slaughtered? Note: Jews and Christians, being worshippers of the God of Abraham who prohibit idolatry, are regarded as "believers" in the Quran. Hence marriage to them is permitted.

(Lawful unto you in marriage)... are chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time (Jews and Christians)... Q 5:5, Trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali.)

Further, when discussing the difference between Jews, Christians and Muslims on whether to face Jerusalem or Mecca when praying, the Prophet of Islam made the following unifying statement:

Each community has its own direction to which it turns: Race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power do to everything. (Q 2:148, Trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem)

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