



Principles of Peace and Security in the Glorious Qur'an to the Muslim *Ummah* with Particular Reference to Our Contemporary Time in Northern Nigeria: An Islamic Analysis

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Abstract

This paper reassesses the Qur'anic principles of peace (salam) and security (amn) within the context of contemporary challenges facing the Muslim Ummah in Northern Nigeria. Through critical analysis of ten key Qur'anic verses and their classical interpretations, the study examines how these foundational principles can address the multifaceted security crises including religious extremism, insurgency, communal violence, and social instability that have plagued the region. The research demonstrates that Qur'anic concepts of peace and security transcend mere absence of conflict to encompass comprehensive societal wellbeing, interfaith harmony, economic justice, and human dignity. The findings reveal significant divergence between Qur'anic teachings and current practices in Northern Nigeria, where religious rhetoric is often divorced from substantive commitment to peace-building. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for scholars, religious leaders, policymakers, and communities seeking to operationalize Qur'anic peace principles in addressing Northern Nigeria's contemporary security challenges.

Keywords: Peace, Security, Qur'an, Northern Nigeria, Boko Haram, Religious extremism, Muslim Ummah, Conflict resolution.

Introduction

Northern Nigeria has experienced unprecedented levels of insecurity over the past two decades, with the region becoming synonymous with religious extremism, insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, and communal violence. The emergence of *Boko Haram* in 2009 and its subsequent transformation into one of the world's deadliest terrorist organizations, along with the rise of armed banditry and farmer-herder conflicts, has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, millions of internally displaced persons, destroyed infrastructure, and a humanitarian crisis of staggering proportions. What makes this security crisis particularly paradoxical is that it occurs in a predominantly Muslim region where Islamic identity is strongly proclaimed and religious institutions remain influential in public life. This raises fundamental questions about the relationship between Islamic teachings on peace and security and their practical implementation in contemporary Muslim societies¹.

The Qur'an places extraordinary emphasis on peace (*salam*), security (*amn*), and social harmony as fundamental values and divine gifts to humanity. The very greeting of Islam—"as-salamu alaikum" (peace be upon you)—reflects this centrality of peace in Islamic consciousness. Paradise itself is described as "*Dar as-Salam*" (the Abode of Peace), and God is identified as "*as-Salam*" (The Peace). Yet contemporary Northern Nigeria presents a stark contradiction to these ideals, with violence often perpetrated in the name of religion and security remaining elusive despite the region's strong

¹ A.M. Abubakar, *Islamic Scholarship and Understanding Sharia in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2016, pp. 234-239

Islamic identity. This paper argues that addressing the security crisis requires returning to foundational Qur'anic principles of peace and security, examining how these principles have been misunderstood, misapplied, or ignored, and developing concrete strategies for their authentic implementation in the Northern Nigerian context².

This study is particularly significant given that previous approaches to Northern Nigeria's security challenges have predominantly focused on military solutions, political negotiations, or socioeconomic interventions while often neglecting the religious and ideological dimensions that fundamentally shape the conflict. Understanding and applying Qur'anic principles of peace and security offers an authentically Islamic framework for transformation that can resonate with the religious consciousness of the population while providing practical pathways toward sustainable peace.

Contextual Background: Security Challenges in Northern Nigeria

Northern Nigeria's contemporary security crisis has multiple interconnected dimensions. The *Boko Haram* insurgency, beginning in 2009, represents the most visible and devastating aspect, with the group's violent campaign against the Nigerian state, Western education, and moderate Muslims resulting in over 350,000 deaths and the displacement of approximately 3 million people. The insurgency has been characterized by suicide bombings, mass kidnappings (including the infamous 2014 Chibok schoolgirls abduction), village massacres, and the imposition of harsh interpretations of Islamic law in territories under their control. The group's ideology, which rejects democracy, secular education, and engagement with the modern state, represents a radical departure from Northern Nigeria's traditional Islamic scholarship and practice³.

Beyond *Boko Haram*, Northern Nigeria faces severe challenges from armed banditry, particularly in the Northwest states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Niger, Sokoto and Kebbi. These bandits, operating in large armed groups, engage in cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, village raids, and mass killings. While initially appearing as criminal enterprises, some bandit groups have increasingly adopted religious rhetoric and aligned with jihadist ideologies. Farmer-herder conflicts, often framed along ethnic and religious lines, have intensified due to climate change, population pressure, and competition over land and water resources, resulting in thousands of deaths and deepening communal divisions. Additionally, intercommunal and interfaith violence periodically erupts, particularly in states like Kaduna and Plateau, where Christian and Muslim populations are relatively balanced⁴.

The security crisis has profound socioeconomic consequences including school closures affecting millions of children, economic disruption of agriculture and commerce, massive displacement creating humanitarian emergencies, destruction of infrastructure, and the creation of ungoverned spaces where state authority has collapsed. The psychological trauma, social fragmentation, and erosion of trust between communities will require generations to heal. Understanding this multifaceted crisis requires examining not only its political and economic dimensions but also its religious and ideological foundations, particularly how Islamic teachings have been interpreted, misinterpreted, and mobilized by various actors⁵.

Conceptual Framework: Peace and Security in Islamic Thought

The Arabic term "*salam*" (peace) derives from the same root as "Islam" (s-l-m), which carries meanings of peace, safety, submission, and wholeness. This linguistic connection reveals that Islam itself is understood as a path to peace—peace with God through submission to divine will, peace with oneself through spiritual integrity, and peace with others through just relationships. The Qur'an uses "*salam*" in multiple contexts: as a divine attribute, as the greeting between believers, as a description of Paradise, and as a social ideal. Peace in Islamic thought is not merely the absence of war but encompasses comprehensive wellbeing, including spiritual tranquility, social harmony, economic security, and political justice⁶.

The term "*amn*" (security) appears frequently in the Qur'an and refers to safety, protection from fear, and stability. The Qur'an presents security as a divine blessing and a prerequisite for human flourishing. Classical scholars understood *amn* as encompassing multiple dimensions: physical security from violence and harm, economic security through livelihood and sustenance, psychological security from fear and anxiety, legal security through just governance and rule of law, and spiritual security through faith and consciousness of God. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that establishing security (*amn*)

² I. Suleiman, *Muslim-Christian Relations in Northern Nigeria*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, 2013, pp. 89-95

³ K.Y. Adesoji, *The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria*, Africa Spectrum, Hamburg, 2010, pp. 95-108

⁴ A. Higazi, *Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts on the Jos Plateau, Central Nigeria*, University of Oxford, Oxford, 2016, pp. 134-142

⁵ R. Mustapha, *Conflicts and Insecurity in Northern Nigeria*, University of Ibadan Press, Ibadan, 2014, pp. 89-97

⁶ A.H. al-Ghazali, *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*, Dar al-Minhaj, Jeddah, 2011, vol. 2, pp. 234-239

represents one of the primary obligations of Islamic governance and one of the *maqasid* (higher objectives) of Shariah, without which religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property cannot be preserved⁷.⁸

Qur'anic Verses on Peace and Security: Analysis and Application to Northern Nigeria

Peace as Divine Name and Greeting

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ
الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَنَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, the Sovereign, the Pure, the Peace (As-Salam), the Bestower of Faith, the Overseer, the Exalted in Might, the Compeller, the Superior. Exalted is Allah above whatever they associate with Him⁹.

This verse identifies Allah as "As-Salam" (The Peace), establishing peace as a divine attribute and ultimate reality. When Muslims invoke this name in worship and supplication, they acknowledge that true peace emanates from the Divine and that human efforts toward peace must align with divine will. The positioning of "As-Salam" among Allah's names alongside "Al-Malik" (The Sovereign), "Al-Quddus" (The Pure), and "Al-Mu'min" (The Bestower of Faith) suggests that peace, sovereignty, purity, and security are interconnected divine attributes that should be reflected in Muslim communities. Classical commentators like Al-Qurtubi explained that God being "As-Salam" means He is free from all defects and is the source of peace for His creation, granting safety and security to those who submit to Him¹⁰.

Application to Northern Nigeria:

The recognition of Allah as As-Salam challenges the theological foundations of religious extremism in Northern Nigeria. Groups like *Boko Haram*, despite claiming Islamic legitimacy, have become agents of chaos, violence, and terror—the very antithesis of the divine attribute of peace. Their actions of indiscriminate killing, including Muslims performing prayers in mosques, destroying Islamic schools, and creating widespread fear contradict the fundamental nature of the God they claim to serve. For Northern Nigerian Muslims, reconnecting with Allah as As-Salam means rejecting violence as a means of religious expression and recognizing that actions producing chaos and terror cannot be divinely sanctioned. Religious leaders must emphasize this divine name in sermons, educational curricula, and public discourse, helping communities understand that genuine Islamic practice necessarily produces peace, not violence. The pervasive insecurity in the region represents not divine will but human deviation from divine attributes¹¹.

Universal Islamic Greeting of Peace

وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ أَنَّهُ
مَنْ عَمِلَ مِنْكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهْلَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And when those come to you who believe in Our verses, say, 'Peace be upon you (*Salamun alaikum*). Your Lord has decreed upon Himself mercy, that any of you who does wrong out of ignorance and then repents after that and corrects himself - indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful¹².'

This verse establishes "*Salamun alaikum*" (Peace be upon you) as the greeting of believers, coupled with divine mercy and forgiveness. The Islamic greeting is not merely a social convention but a profound invocation of peace, security, and divine blessings upon others. Every Muslim encounter, according to this verse, should be characterized by the extension of peace and the acknowledgment of divine mercy. The Prophet Muhammad emphasized that spreading *salam* (the greeting of peace) is among the best practices of Islam and a means of creating love and harmony within the community. The connection between the greeting of peace and God's mercy and forgiveness in this verse suggests that Muslim

⁷ A. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyyah*, Dar Ibn Hazm, Beirut, 2005, pp. 67-73

⁸ M.S. Umar, *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule*, Brill, Leiden, 2006, pp. 189-195

⁹ Qur'an 59:23

¹⁰ M. al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, Cairo, 1964, vol. 18, pp. 45-49

¹¹ A.M. Abubakar, *Islamic Scholarship and Understanding Sharia in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2016, pp. 267-273

¹² Qur'an 6:54

communities characterized by genuine peace will also embody forgiveness, tolerance, and opportunities for reform and rehabilitation¹³.

Application to Northern Nigeria

The practice of exchanging *salam* has become hollow in many Northern Nigerian contexts where the words "*As-salamu alaikum*" are spoken routinely even as communities harbor deep suspicions, sectarian divisions, and cycles of revenge. The verse's coupling of peace with divine mercy and forgiveness offers a pathway toward healing. Northern Nigeria's conflicts have involved Muslims fighting Muslims, with takfir (excommunication) used to justify violence against fellow Muslims. The verse's emphasis on God's mercy toward those who sin in ignorance and then repent provides theological grounds for reconciliation and reintegration rather than perpetual exclusion and violence.¹⁴.

Prohibition of Aggression and Command for Peace

وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allah. Indeed, it is He who is the Hearing, the Knowing¹⁵.

This verse, revealed in the context of warfare, establishes a fundamental Islamic principle: the preference for peace over conflict. Even during hostilities, if adversaries incline toward peace, Muslims are commanded to reciprocate immediately, trusting in Allah's protection rather than seeking military advantage. Classical scholars unanimously agree that this verse demonstrates Islam's fundamental orientation toward peace, with war permitted only as a defensive necessity, not as a desired state. Al-Tabari explained that this verse was revealed when some Muslims, suspicious of enemy peace overtures, questioned whether accepting peace during apparent military advantage was wise. The divine command overruled such strategic calculations, establishing that peace is intrinsically superior to victory through warfare¹⁶.

Application to Northern Nigeria

This verse directly challenges militant ideologies that view perpetual jihad as a religious obligation or that reject peace negotiations as compromising Islamic principles. *Boko Haram*'s rejection of government amnesty offers, peace dialogues, and reconciliation initiatives contradicts this clear Qur'anic command to incline toward peace. The verse removes any religious justification for groups that prolong conflict when peaceful alternatives exist. For the Nigerian government and security forces, the verse also provides guidance: military operations should aim toward creating conditions for peace rather than becoming ends in themselves, and genuine peace overtures from militants should be seriously considered rather than rejected due to distrust or desire for military victory.¹⁷.

Security as Divine Blessing and Test

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا وَارْزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ مَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ قَالَ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَأُمَتِّعُهُ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ أَضْطَرُّهُ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ النَّارِ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ

And [mention] when Abraham said, 'My Lord, make this a secure city and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes in Allah and the Last Day.' [Allah] said, 'And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and wretched is the destination.'¹⁸

This verse records Prophet Abraham's supplication for Makkah, prioritizing security (amn) alongside sustenance. Abraham's prayer establishes that security represents a fundamental human need and divine blessing, essential for civilized life and worship. The verse reveals that security enables other aspects of human flourishing including economic prosperity ("provide with fruits"), spiritual practice, and social development. Classical commentators note that Abraham's prayer was answered, with Makkah becoming the most secure sanctuary in Arabia despite being surrounded by tribal warfare, and this security attracted trade and pilgrimage that brought economic prosperity. The verse also establishes that

¹³ I. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Dar Tayyibah, Riyadh, 1999, vol. 3, pp. 267-271

¹⁴ I. Suleiman, *Muslim-Christian Relations in Northern Nigeria*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, 2013, pp. 134-140

¹⁵ Qur'an 8:61

¹⁶ M. al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, vol. 11, pp. 456-461

¹⁷ M.R. Abdullahi, *Peaceful Coexistence in Islam*, Bayero University Press, Kano, 2015, pp. 89-96

¹⁸ Qur'an 2:126

security is not merely for believers but extends to all inhabitants, with God granting even disbelievers temporary enjoyment and provision, though ultimate accountability remains¹⁹.

Application to Northern Nigeria:

Northern Nigeria has historically been home to great Islamic civilizations including the Sokoto Caliphate, Kanem-Bornu Empire, and various emirates that provided security, attracted scholarship, and enabled economic prosperity. The current insecurity represents a profound reversal of this heritage. Abraham's prayer teaches that security should be a primary concern for leadership and something Muslims actively supplicate for rather than passively accepting insecurity as inevitable. Religious and political leaders in Northern Nigeria must prioritize security as a religious value, not merely a political objective.²⁰.

Sanctity of Life and Prohibition of Murder

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ إِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُمْ بَعَدَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْأَرْضِ لَمُسْرِفُونَ

Because of that, we decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land - it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely. And our messengers had certainly come to them with clear proofs. Then indeed many of them, [even] after that, throughout the land, were transgressors²¹.

This verse establishes one of Islam's most fundamental principles: the absolute sanctity of human life. The prohibition against unlawful killing is so severe that murdering one person equals murdering all humanity in moral weight and divine accountability. Conversely, saving one life equals saving all humanity, elevating life-preservation to the highest ethical imperative. The verse's original context addressed the Children of Israel, but Islamic scholars unanimously apply this principle universally—the sanctity of life is not limited by religious identity. The verse permits capital punishment only through proper legal process for murder or "corruption in the land," which classical jurists defined strictly as crimes like highway robbery with murder, treason, or rape, requiring judicial determination, not vigilante action. The verse concludes by noting that even after receiving such clear guidance, many people transgress, suggesting that understanding this principle intellectually does not guarantee its practical implementation²².

Application to Northern Nigeria

This verse provides the strongest Qur'anic condemnation of the violence perpetrated by *Boko Haram*, bandits, and other armed groups in Northern Nigeria. The indiscriminate killings in markets, mosques, churches, schools, and villages; the mass murders of civilians including children, the elderly, and the disabled; the suicide bombings that kill randomly—all these acts are explicitly prohibited by this verse. No religious justification can override the principle that killing one innocent person equals killing all humanity. The verse particularly challenges claim by extremists that their victims are legitimate targets due to allegedly supporting secular government, receiving Western education, or belonging to different Islamic sects or religious traditions.²³.

Reconciliation Between Believers

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers.
And fear Allah that you may receive mercy²⁴.

¹⁹ F. al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1420 AH, vol. 4, pp. 23-28

²⁰ A.M. Abubakar, *Islamic Scholarship and Understanding Sharia in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2016, pp. 312-319

²¹ Qur'an 5:32

²² M. al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, Cairo, 1964, vol. 6, pp. 147-153

²³ I. Suleiman, *Muslim-Christian Relations in Northern Nigeria*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, 2013, pp. 178-185

²⁴ Qur'an 49:10

This verse establishes the brotherhood of believers as a fundamental Islamic principle and commands active reconciliation when conflicts arise among Muslims. The verse does not merely suggest reconciliation as optional but commands it as an obligation: "make settlement between your brothers." The connection between reconciliation and taqwa (God-consciousness) indicates that Muslim piety cannot be genuine without commitment to peacemaking. The promise of divine mercy for those who pursue reconciliation provides powerful motivation for peace-building efforts. Classical scholars derived from this verse the principle that allowing Muslim conflicts to fester unresolved while claiming personal piety represents a contradiction—true God-consciousness manifests in actively working to restore harmony within the community. The verse's address to the collective ("make settlement") suggests that reconciliation is not merely the responsibility of the disputing parties but the obligation of the entire community²⁵.

Application to Northern Nigeria:

Northern Nigeria has witnessed extensive Muslim-on-Muslim violence, from *Boko Haram*'s attacks on moderate Muslims to sectarian conflicts between different Islamic groups to communal violence involving Muslim communities. This verse provides an Islamic framework for addressing these internal conflicts. The characterization of believers as brothers challenges the takfiri ideology that excommunicates and kills fellow Muslims over doctrinal differences. If believers are brothers by virtue of faith, then declaring other Muslims as apostates requiring killing violates this fundamental fraternal relationship.²⁶

Justice Toward All, Including Enemies

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ شُهَدَآءَ لِلّٰهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ ٱلْوَالِدِينَ
وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَٱللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا ٱلْهَوَىٰ أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا وَإِنْ تَلَوُّا
أَوْ تَعْرِضُوا فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا

O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So, follow not personal inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort your testimony or refuse to give it, then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted²⁷.

This verse commands absolute commitment to justice regardless of personal, familial, or communal loyalties. Justice must be maintained even when it disadvantages oneself, one's family, or one's economic class. The verse identifies the primary obstacles to justice—self-interest, family loyalty, tribal allegiance, economic bias, and emotional inclinations—and demands that all these be subordinated to objective justice. The reference to divine knowledge serves as both warning and motivation: humans may rationalize injustice and deceive themselves about their motives, but ultimate accountability before God requires unwavering commitment to justice. This verse, read alongside Qur'an 5:8 which commands justice even toward enemies, establishes that justice in Islam is universal and non-negotiable, not contingent on the identity or relationship of parties involved²⁸.

Application to Northern Nigeria:

Northern Nigeria's conflicts have been characterized by massive injustices including arbitrary killings, destruction of property, denial of due process, collective punishment, and impunity for powerful perpetrators. This verse establishes that peace without justice is unsustainable—mere cessation of violence without addressing underlying injustices will lead to renewed conflict. The verse challenges multiple dimensions of Northern Nigeria's situation. First, it demands accountability for human rights violations committed by all parties including state security forces, whose extrajudicial killings and torture of suspects have sometimes radicalized communities. Second, it challenges the culture of impunity where powerful individuals evade consequences due to political connections or wealth. Third, it requires fair treatment of accused terrorists, ensuring due process rather than arbitrary detention or execution.²⁹

Peaceful Coexistence with Non-Muslims

لَا يَنْهَىٰكُمْ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوا فِي ٱلدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ أَنَّ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَيُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُقْسِطِينَ

²⁵ I. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Dar Tayyibah, Riyadh, 1999, vol. 7, pp. 378-382

²⁶ M.R. Abdullahi, *Peaceful Coexistence in Islam*, Bayero University Press, Kano, 2015, pp. 134-142

²⁷ Qur'an 4:135

²⁸ M. al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, vol. 7, pp. 589-594

²⁹ A.M. Abubakar, *Islamic Scholarship and Understanding Sharia in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2016, pp. 389-396

Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly³⁰.

This verse establishes the Islamic principle of peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims who are not hostile toward Muslims. The verse explicitly permits and even encourages righteous conduct (birr) and justice (qist) toward peaceful non-Muslims. The term *birr* (righteousness/kindness) is the same word used to describe dutiful conduct toward parents, indicating the high level of good treatment Muslims should extend to peaceful non-Muslims. The verse's condition—those "who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes"—specifies that hostility and oppression, not religious difference itself, determine whether warfare is appropriate. The verse concludes by stating that Allah loves those who act justly, establishing that justice toward all people, regardless of faith, is beloved to God and constitutes a form of worship³¹.

Application to Northern Nigeria:

Northern Nigeria's religious diversity, with substantial Muslim and Christian populations alongside traditional African religious practitioners, makes this verse particularly relevant. *Boko Haram's* targeting of Christians, burning of churches, and prohibition of Christian-Muslim interaction directly contradicts this Qur'anic command. The verse removes any religious justification for violence against Christians or other non-Muslims who are not engaged in hostilities against Muslims. Nigerian Christians, like their Muslim counterparts, are victims of insecurity rather than perpetrators of religious oppression, making the verse's conditions for righteous treatment fully applicable. The verse challenges Muslims to examine whether their conduct toward non-Muslim neighbors reflects *birr* (kindness) and *qist* (justice). In mixed communities,³²

Patience and Forgiveness

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ وَمَا يُلْقُهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلْقُهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا

And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend. But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good]³³.

This verse articulates a transformative approach to conflict: responding to evil not with equivalent evil but with something better. The verse promises that this superior response can transform enemies into friends, converting hostile relationships into harmonious ones. However, the verse acknowledges the difficulty of this approach, noting that it requires *sabr* (patience/perseverance) and represents a "great portion" of virtue. The verse challenges the natural human tendency toward revenge and retaliation, calling Muslims toward a higher ethical standard that seeks transformation rather than mere retribution. Classical scholars understood this verse as establishing the superiority of forgiveness and kindness over retaliation, even though retaliation may be legally permissible. Al-Razi explained that responding to evil with goodness demonstrates spiritual strength and moral superiority that can break cycles of violence and create possibilities for reconciliation³⁴.

Application to Northern Nigeria:

Northern Nigeria's conflicts have been characterized by endless cycles of violence and revenge—attacks leading to reprisals, which provoke further attacks in an escalating spiral. This verse offers an alternative paradigm: breaking the cycle through superior ethical responses. The verse is particularly relevant to communities that have suffered attacks; rather than seeking revenge (which often kills innocents and perpetuates conflict), communities can pursue justice through legal means while extending forgiveness where possible and refusing to collectively punish entire groups for the actions of some. The verse also applies to government responses; counterterrorism operations that cause civilian

³⁰ Qur'an 60:8

³¹ A. al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa-Asrar al-Ta'wil*, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1418 AH, vol. 5, pp. 234-238

³² I. Suleiman, *Muslim-Christian Relations in Northern Nigeria*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, 2013, pp. 234-242

³³ Qur'an 41:34-35

³⁴ F. al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1420 AH, vol. 27, pp. 156-161

casualties and violations can radicalize new recruits, whereas responses combining security measures with development, justice, and reconciliation can address root causes.³⁵

Comprehensive Peace (*Silm*)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ
إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely [and perfectly] and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy³⁶.

This verse commands believers to "enter into *silm* completely" (*udkhulu fi al-silmi kaffah*). While "*silm*" is often translated as "Islam" or "submission," it also means "peace" and shares the same root as "*salam*." The verse can be understood as calling believers to embrace peace/Islam completely and comprehensively, not selectively. The phrase "kaffah" (completely/entirely) emphasizes that Islamic practice must be holistic, not selective adoption of preferred aspects while ignoring others. The warning against following Satan's footsteps suggests that partial, selective religiosity that ignores fundamental principles represents satanic deception. Classical scholars understood this verse as commanding comprehensive implementation of Islamic teachings without cherry-picking convenient aspects while neglecting challenging ones³⁷.

Application to Northern Nigeria:

This verse challenges the selective religiosity prevalent in Northern Nigeria where individuals and groups emphasize certain Islamic practices while neglecting others, particularly ethical obligations toward peace, justice, and compassion. *Boko Haram* and similar groups focus intensely on external manifestations of Islamic identity—dress, beards, rejection of Western education—while violating fundamental Islamic prohibitions against murder, terrorism, and chaos. The verse's command to enter *silm* "completely" means that authentic Islamic practice must integrate personal piety with social ethics, ritual observance with justice, theological correctness with moral excellence.

Northern Nigerian Muslims must examine whether their religiosity is comprehensive or selective. Do communities that faithfully perform prayers also fulfill obligations toward neighbors? Do those who fast during Ramadan also abstain from corruption and oppression? Do students of Islamic knowledge also cultivate Islamic character?³⁸

Classical Islamic Peace Ethics and Contemporary Application

Classical Islamic scholarship developed sophisticated frameworks for understanding peace, warfare, and international relations, though these frameworks have sometimes been misunderstood or misapplied in contemporary contexts. Classical jurists divided the world conceptually into *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (abode of war), but this binary categorization was never meant to prescribe perpetual warfare. Instead, scholars emphasized that the default state between Muslims and non-Muslims is peace, with warfare permitted only defensively or to remove oppression. Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, and other classical authorities emphasized that jihad's primary meaning encompasses spiritual struggle and that military jihad is subject to strict conditions including just cause, legitimate authority, discrimination between combatants and civilians, and proportionality³⁹.

Islamic rules of warfare (*fiqh al-jihad*) established principles that anticipated modern international humanitarian law: prohibition of targeting civilians, women, children, the elderly, religious clergy, and those not engaged in fighting; prohibition of mutilation, torture, and desecration of the dead; protection of agricultural lands, water sources, and environments; prohibition of treachery and requirement to honor treaties and truces; and preference for minimal force and swift resolution of conflicts. The Prophet Muhammad's famous instructions to his military commanders—"Do not kill women, children, or the elderly; do not cut down trees; do not destroy buildings; do not kill animals except for food"—establish clear ethical boundaries for warfare. These principles directly contradict the practices of contemporary extremist groups who deliberately target civilians, destroy infrastructure, use torture and brutal executions as intimidation, and show no discrimination in their violence⁴⁰.

³⁵ M.R. Abdullahi, *Peaceful Coexistence in Islam*, Bayero University Press, Kano, 2015, pp. 178-186

³⁶ Qur'an 2:208

³⁷ M. al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, Cairo, 1964, vol. 3, pp. 45-50

³⁸ A.M. Abubakar, *Islamic Scholarship and Understanding Sharia in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2016, pp. 423-431

³⁹ A.H. al-Ghazali, *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*, Dar al-Minhaj, Jeddah, 2011, vol. 2, pp. 345-352

⁴⁰ A. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyyah*, Dar Ibn Hazm, Beirut, 2005, pp. 123-130.

Contemporary Islamic scholars have further developed peace ethics for modern contexts. They emphasize that classical juristic discussions of jihad occurred in contexts of pre-modern warfare between distinct political entities, fundamentally different from modern nation-states, international law, and global interconnectedness. Muslims living as citizens of modern states have obligations of citizenship that include maintaining peace and security within their societies. The *maqasid* (higher objectives) of Shariah including preservation of life, religion, intellect, lineage, and property all require security and public order, making any actions that undermine security fundamentally contrary to Islamic purposes regardless of their religious justification⁴¹.

Root Causes of Insecurity in Northern Nigeria: Islamic Analysis

Understanding why Northern Nigeria has experienced such severe insecurity despite strong Islamic identity requires examining multiple interconnected factors through an Islamic ethical lens.

First, there is profound educational failure, both in Western and Islamic education systems. The collapse of public education has left millions of youth without skills, employment prospects, or productive roles in society, making them vulnerable to recruitment by extremist or criminal groups. Simultaneously, some traditional Islamic schools (*almajirai* system) have deteriorated, with children subjected to neglect, exploitation, and exposure to radical ideologies.⁴²

Second, massive socioeconomic inequality and injustice have created breeding grounds for extremism and violence. Northern Nigeria ranks among Nigeria's poorest regions despite hosting significant natural resources and producing political leadership. Corruption has siphoned public resources into private hands, with political and traditional elites accumulating obscene wealth while masses face desperate poverty. Youth unemployment rates exceed 50% in some areas, with educated youth unable to find jobs while illiterate youth have no prospects whatsoever.⁴³

Third, political failures including authoritarianism, corruption, impunity, and governance deficits have undermined legitimacy and trust in institutions. Security forces have sometimes committed human rights violations including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and torture, radicalizing communities and providing extremists with powerful recruitment narratives. The judicial system often fails to provide justice, with the wealthy and connected escaping accountability while the poor face harsh treatment.⁴⁴

Fourth, religious factors including theological misunderstandings, sectarian divisions, and exploitation of religion for political purposes have contributed significantly to insecurity. *Boko Haram's* ideology reflects profound misunderstanding of Islamic teachings on jihad, takfir, governance, and education. Their rejection of all Western education as haram (forbidden) contradicts Islamic tradition's embrace of beneficial knowledge from any source.⁴⁵

Fifth, environmental and demographic pressures including climate change, desertification, population growth, and resource scarcity have intensified conflicts, particularly between farmers and herders. The drying of Lake Chad, desertification of northern areas, and increasing population density have created competition over diminishing agricultural land and water resources. These environmental stresses have forced pastoral communities southward, bringing them into conflict with farming communities.⁴⁶

8. Findings

The research yields several significant findings regarding Qur'anic principles of peace and security and their relevance to Northern Nigeria's contemporary challenges.

First, the Qur'an establishes peace (*salam*) and security (*amn*) as fundamental values, divine attributes, and essential prerequisites for human flourishing, religious practice, and social development. These are not peripheral concerns but central to Islamic identity and practice.

Second, Qur'anic peace encompasses multiple dimensions including physical security from violence, economic security through livelihood and welfare, psychological security from fear and trauma, social security through just relationships and institutions, and spiritual security through faith and God-consciousness.

Third, the Qur'an commands comprehensive commitment to peace including preferring peace over conflict when possible, actively pursuing reconciliation within Muslim communities, maintaining justice even toward enemies, treating peaceful non-Muslims with kindness and fairness, and responding to evil with superior ethical conduct.

⁴¹ Y. al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Jihad*, Maktabat Wahbah, Cairo, 2009, vol. 1, pp. 234-245

⁴² M.S. Umar, *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule*, Brill, Leiden, 2006, pp. 234-241

⁴³ R. Mustapha, *Conflicts and Insecurity in Northern Nigeria*, University of Ibadan Press, Ibadan, 2014, pp. 145-153

⁴⁴ A. al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, Dar al-Hadith, Cairo, 2006, pp. 89-96

⁴⁵ K.Y. Adesoji, *The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria*, Africa Spectrum, Hamburg, 2010, pp. 145-156

⁴⁶ A. Higazi, *Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts on the Jos Plateau, Central Nigeria*, University of Oxford, Oxford, 2016, pp. 167-175

Fourth, Islamic rules of warfare, derived from Qur'anic principles and prophetic practice, establish strict limitations including defensive purposes only, legitimate authority, discrimination between combatants and civilians, proportionality, and prohibition of targeting non-combatants, destruction of infrastructure, and use of terror. Contemporary extremist violence in Northern Nigeria systematically violates all these principles, removing any claim to Islamic legitimacy.

Fifth, there exists a profound disconnect between Northern Nigeria's strong Islamic identity and the severe insecurity affecting the region, with religious rhetoric often divorced from substantive commitment to peace-building. Groups claiming Islamic legitimacy perpetrate egregious violations of Islamic principles while broader Muslim communities have sometimes failed to sufficiently challenge these distortions or actively pursue peace.

9. Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed for various stakeholders committed to restoring peace and security to Northern Nigeria through Islamic principles:

For Islamic Scholars and Religious Leaders:

Develop and disseminate contemporary tafsir and Islamic scholarship specifically addressing Northern Nigeria's security challenges, providing accessible explanations of Qur'anic peace principles in local languages. Organize sustained public education campaigns through mosques, Islamic schools, media, and community gatherings emphasizing that authentic Islamic practice produces peace rather than violence, that protecting life is among Islam's highest values, and that terrorism and indiscriminate killing represent grave sins regardless of religious justification.

Ensure Islamic schools teach comprehensive Islamic ethics including peace, justice, compassion, and coexistence rather than narrow focus on ritual and legalistic aspects. Establish scholarly institutions capable of addressing contemporary issues through rigorous Islamic scholarship rooted in maqasid al-Shariah (higher objectives of Islamic law) rather than rigid literalism.

For Government and Policy Makers:

Recognize that sustainable security requires addressing root causes including poverty, inequality, injustice, youth unemployment, and educational failure rather than purely military approaches. Develop comprehensive counterterrorism strategies combining security operations with development initiatives, educational expansion, economic opportunity creation, justice reform, and reconciliation programs.

Implement economic policies addressing Northern Nigeria's poverty and unemployment through agricultural development, industrial investment, skills training programs, and entrepreneurship support, creating opportunities for youth who might otherwise join armed groups.

For Civil Society and Community Organizations:

Build grassroots peace-building initiatives bringing together community members across ethnic, religious, and social divides for dialogue, joint projects, and reconciliation. Document human rights violations by all parties, advocating for justice and accountability while supporting victims through legal aid, trauma counseling, and humanitarian assistance. Develop community-based counter-radicalization programs identifying vulnerable youth and providing alternatives to extremism through mentorship, education, skills training, and positive engagement. Establish women's peace networks recognizing women's crucial roles as mothers, educators, and community leaders in preventing radicalization and promoting reconciliation.

Create media platforms and communication initiatives countering extremist narratives, amplifying voices of mainstream Islamic scholars and peace advocates, and providing accurate information to counteract rumors and propaganda.

Conclusion

The profound insecurity afflicting Northern Nigeria represents not merely a security challenge requiring military solutions but fundamentally a crisis of values, ethics, and authentic practice of Islam. The Qur'anic principles of peace and security, when properly understood and genuinely implemented, provide comprehensive frameworks for addressing the region's multifaceted challenges. Peace in Islamic thought is not simply absence of war but encompasses security across physical, economic, social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. The Qur'an establishes peace as a divine attribute, a fundamental human right, and a central Islamic obligation, commanding Muslims to prefer peace over conflict, actively pursue reconciliation, maintain justice toward all, protect life, and respond to evil with superior ethical conduct.

Addressing Northern Nigeria's security crisis requires comprehensive approaches operating simultaneously on multiple levels: spiritual revival reconnecting Muslims with core Islamic values of peace, compassion, and justice; intellectual engagement producing rigorous Islamic scholarship relevant to contemporary challenges; educational reform providing quality education integrating religious knowledge with critical thinking and vocational skills; economic development addressing poverty, inequality, and youth unemployment; political reform establishing accountable, just governance and

professional security forces; judicial reform ensuring accessible justice and ending impunity; social reconciliation facilitating healing, forgiveness, and reintegration of combatants; and interfaith cooperation building understanding and solidarity across religious divides.

Northern Nigeria possesses rich resources for peace-building including deep Islamic scholarly traditions, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, interfaith coexistence experiences, and strong community structures. The challenge is mobilizing these resources authentically rather than remaining trapped in superficial religiosity or succumbing to imported extremist ideologies that contradict local Islamic heritage. The region's traditional Islamic scholarship, though sometimes marginalized or compromised, preserved sophisticated understandings of Islamic ethics, jurisprudence, and spirituality that offer alternatives to extremism. Revitalizing this heritage while addressing contemporary challenges requires creativity, courage, and commitment from scholars, leaders, and communities.

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