



## The importance of Islamic diplomacy in international Relations of the Modern world: Prophet Muhammad (SAW), As a model

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### Abstract

*Peaceful settlement of conflicts has historically relied on diplomatic negotiation as one of humanity's earliest and most effective methods. In the contemporary world, nations widely employ diplomacy to ease tensions, lessen hostility, build political and economic partnerships, prevent armed confrontations, and promote lasting peace. This long-standing practice, inherited from ancient civilizations, was actively applied in Islam from the era of Prophet Muhammad, continued by the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and further developed under the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman periods. As a dynamic and practical field within international relations, diplomacy has been acknowledged by Islam since its inception as a rational and essential means of managing relations between states through peaceful envoys and representatives. In accordance with Qur'anic guidance and prevailing customs of his time, the Prophet ﷺ engaged in formal agreements with Arabian tribes and foreign powers and dispatched ambassadors to various regions. His diplomatic conduct reflected core Islamic values, including justice, tolerance, honesty, and fairness in dealing with all communities.*

**Keywords:** Islamic diplomacy, international relations, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

### Introduction

Islamic teachings portray the human being as a dignified and honored creation. The religion brings all people together under the principle of universal brotherhood, emphasizing respect, compassion, and goodwill as essential values for peaceful coexistence among diverse nations and cultures. At the same time, Islam recognizes the necessity of preserving a distinct religious identity and setting appropriate limits in relations with followers of other faiths in order to safeguard its authenticity, universality, and comprehensive nature.

This study seeks to examine the foundations of international relations as reflected in the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, with particular focus on his engagement with various communities. It highlights key principles rooted in the Prophetic biography and early Islamic history. Islam promotes constructive interaction with other religious groups to strengthen harmony and minimize conflict, while remaining firmly anchored in Islamic



values. Dialogue and mutual communication played a central role in this process, as evidenced during both the Makkan and Madinan phases of the Prophet's mission. Through his wise diplomatic initiatives, the Prophet ﷺ effectively conveyed the message of Islam beyond Arabia to neighboring lands and distant regions of the world.

### • **Diplomacy in Islam**

Islamic diplomacy constitutes a well-structured framework for managing international relations and resolving conflicts, firmly rooted in religious teachings and historical experience. Rather than focusing solely on political advantage, this system places ethical responsibility, justice, and peaceful coexistence at the center of diplomatic engagement. Its methods include dialogue, formal agreements, exchange of envoys, and mediation processes, all derived from the guidance of the Qur'an and the practical model of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>1</sup>

From the formative period of Islam onward, diplomatic activity played a vital role in maintaining relations with neighboring tribes and foreign powers. The Prophet ﷺ established treaties, dispatched emissaries to regional rulers, and resolved disputes through peaceful negotiation, demonstrating that diplomacy was not merely a political strategy but a moral duty aimed at preventing conflict and ensuring justice.<sup>2</sup> These practices continued throughout later Islamic governance, where rulers maintained diplomatic networks to preserve stability and foster cooperation across vast territories.<sup>3</sup>

Islamic legal scholars further emphasized peaceful engagement as a religious obligation when it serves the common good and protects human life. Classical jurists such as Al-Mawardi<sup>4</sup> and Ibn Taymiyyah<sup>5</sup> discussed treaties, truces, and diplomatic representation within Islamic jurisprudence, highlighting their legitimacy and necessity in international affairs.

Contemporary international relations scholarship increasingly acknowledges the effectiveness of early Islamic diplomatic traditions, particularly in balancing power, encouraging cultural interaction, and resolving disputes without violence.<sup>6</sup> These historical experiences offer practical models for modern conflict management and intercultural dialogue.

A comprehensive study of Islamic diplomacy therefore provides valuable perspectives on ethical foreign policy, peaceful conflict resolution, and global cooperation. As Muslim

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'an 8:61; 49:13

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah*; Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*

<sup>3</sup> Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*

<sup>4</sup> Al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyah*

<sup>6</sup> Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, Hamidullah, *Diplomacy in the Muslim World*



societies engage with modern diplomatic institutions, renewed attention to these foundational principles offers constructive solutions to present-day international challenges.

- **Theological Foundations of Diplomacy in Islam:**

- **1-Quranic Principles Governing International Relations:**

The Qur'an serves as the primary source of guidance for diplomatic conduct in Islam, laying down ethical and legal principles that regulate relations between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Surah al-Mumtahina clarifies the basis of peaceful interaction:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ  
الْمُقْسِطِينَ<sup>7</sup>

*“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 justly.”*

This verse permits kindness and justice toward those who do not engage in hostility, forming the moral basis of peaceful diplomacy.<sup>8</sup>

- The concept of aman (safe conduct) is rooted in Qur'an 9:6:

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ<sup>9</sup>

*“And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah; then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know.”*

This verse establishes the obligation to grant protection even to enemies seeking safety, which jurists later recognized as the foundation of diplomatic immunity.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, the duty to honor agreements is clearly commanded in Qur'an 5:1:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ<sup>11</sup>

*“O you who have believed, fulfill [all] contracts.”*

<sup>7</sup> (Qur'an 60:8)

<sup>8</sup> Al-Tabari, Tafsir al-Tabari

<sup>9</sup> Qur'an 9:6

<sup>10</sup> (Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim; Al-Shaybani, Al-Siyar al-Kabir)

<sup>11</sup> Qur'an 5:1



This directive makes treaty compliance a religious obligation rather than a mere political convenience.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, Surah al-Naml (27:23–44) presents the diplomatic correspondence between Prophet Sulayman and the Queen of Shaba, beginning with his formal letter:

إِنَّهُ مِنْ سُلَيْمَانَ وَإِنَّهُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ أَلَّا تَعْلَمُوا عَلَيَّ وَأُتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ<sup>13</sup>

*“Indeed, it is from Solomon, and indeed, it is [in the name of] Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful: Do not exalt yourselves against me but come to me in submission [as Muslims].”*

This episode demonstrates structured communication, negotiation, and respect between rulers of different beliefs, confirming the legitimacy of diplomacy in Islamic teachings.<sup>14</sup>

## 2-Prophetic Traditions (Hadith) and Diplomatic Conduct:

The Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad provides practical illustrations of how Qur’anic principles were applied within real diplomatic contexts. Through his statements and actions, the Prophet ﷺ established ethical norms governing treaties, protection, and diplomatic engagement among nations and communities.

One of the most explicit teachings concerns the sanctity of agreements and the protection of non-Muslims living under Muslim authority (mu‘āhid). The Prophet ﷺ declared:

مَنْ قَتَلَ مُعَاهِدًا لَمْ يَرِحْ رَائِحَةَ الْجَنَّةِ<sup>15</sup>

*“Whoever kills a mu‘āhid (a person granted protection) shall not smell the fragrance of Paradise.”*

This Hadith affirms the inviolability of diplomatic guarantees and safe conduct, making their violation a grave moral and religious offense.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ demonstrated the importance of appointing capable and trustworthy envoys. He selected individuals such as Dihyah al-Kalbi and Abdullah ibn Hudhafah to represent Islam before foreign rulers, emphasizing integrity, wisdom, and eloquence as essential diplomatic qualities.<sup>17</sup> This practice later influenced Islamic jurists in formulating standards for diplomatic representation.

<sup>12</sup> Hamidullah, Muslim Conduct of State

<sup>13</sup> Qur’an 27:30

<sup>14</sup> Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir al-Jami‘ li Ahkam al-Qur’an

<sup>15</sup> (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 3166)

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bari

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, Tabaqat al-Kubra; Ibn Hisham, Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah



The principle of sincerity and good faith in negotiations is also reinforced through Prophetic teachings encouraging honesty and fulfillment of promises. The Prophet ﷺ stated:

المُسْلِمُونَ عَلَى شُرُوطِهِمْ

*“Muslims are bound by their conditions.” (Muslims must honor the terms of their agreements.)*

This Hadith underscores the binding nature of agreements and promotes transparency even in dealings with adversaries.<sup>18</sup>

Collectively, these Prophetic traditions establish diplomacy in Islam as a moral responsibility grounded in justice, trustworthiness, and peaceful coexistence, rather than mere political expediency.

- **Historical Development of Islamic Diplomacy**

### **Diplomacy During the Era of Prophet Muhammad**

The Prophetic period laid the essential foundations of Islamic diplomatic theory and practice, shaping principles that guided Muslim engagement with other communities for centuries. The Prophet’s approach to international relations developed progressively in response to changing social and political conditions.

#### **Pre-Hijrah Phase (Before 622 CE)**

During the Makkan period, diplomatic efforts centered on conveying the Islamic message to surrounding tribes and regional leaders. The Prophet ﷺ personally approached influential figures, including the chieftains of Ta’if, seeking peaceful acceptance of Islam despite facing rejection and persecution.<sup>19</sup>

An early example of diplomatic asylum occurred with the migration to Abyssinia in 615 CE, where Muslims sought refuge under the Christian ruler known as the Negus. The delegation led by Ja'far ibn Abi Talib successfully secured protection through reasoned dialogue grounded in shared moral value<sup>20</sup>. This episode illustrates early Islamic reliance on negotiation rather than confrontation.

#### **The Medina Charter (622 CE)**

Following the migration to Medina, the Prophet ﷺ established a formal political agreement regulating relations among Muslims, Jewish tribes, and other groups within the city. This charter institutionalized collective security, religious freedom, and mutual responsibility

<sup>18</sup> Al-Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Hisham, Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah

<sup>20</sup> Al-Tabari, Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk



while appointing the Prophet ﷺ as the ultimate authority in dispute resolution.<sup>21</sup> It represents one of the earliest models of pluralistic governance through diplomatic consensus.

### **The Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (628 CE)**

The truce concluded between Muslims and the Quraysh marked a turning point in Islamic diplomacy. Although some provisions appeared disadvantageous in the short term, the treaty facilitated political stability and enabled the peaceful spread of Islam across Arabia.<sup>22</sup> The structured negotiation process reflected advanced diplomatic practice involving negotiation, documentation, witnessing, and implementation.

### **Diplomatic Correspondence with World Rulers**

In the later years of his mission, the Prophet ﷺ initiated international diplomatic outreach by sending formal letters to prominent rulers, including Heraclius, Khosrau II, and the ruler of Abyssinia, Ashama ibn Abjar. These communications invited leaders to Islam while establishing peaceful relations.<sup>23</sup> The letters bore a formal seal, reflecting emerging norms of diplomatic protocol.

### **Evolution During the Medieval Islamic Era**

Following the Prophet's death, diplomacy became increasingly institutionalized as Muslim territories expanded. The Rashidun and Umayyad periods developed structured envoy systems, while the Abbasid era introduced formal bureaucratic offices responsible for foreign correspondence (diwan al-rasa'il).<sup>24</sup>

Islamic jurists simultaneously formulated legal theories governing international relations, including the concepts of Dar al-Islam, Dar al-Harb, and Dar al-'Ahd, recognizing treaty-based coexistence alongside conflict regulation.<sup>25</sup> In practice, diplomatic engagement remained flexible and pragmatic rather than rigidly ideological.

### **Diplomatic Principles in Foreign Relations: Lessons from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ**

The foreign policy of Prophet Muhammad provides a timeless framework for ethical, strategic, and effective diplomacy. His approach was not merely political but deeply grounded in Islamic principles of justice, honor, and peace.

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<sup>21</sup> Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution in the World*

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*

<sup>23</sup> Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*

<sup>24</sup> Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*

<sup>25</sup> Al-Shaybani, *Al-Siyar al-Kabir*; Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*



### 1. The Primacy of Peace and Peaceful Coexistence

The default state in international relations, according to the Qur'an and Prophetic practice, is peace, with warfare permissible only in self-defense or against severe persecution.

#### **Qur'anic Principle:**

وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلْمِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ<sup>26</sup>

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

This verse commands Muslims to accept genuine offers of peace.<sup>27</sup>

### 2. The Sanctity of Treaties (Pacta Sunt Servanda)

Treaties and agreements are to be honored fully, even if conditions become disadvantageous.

#### **Qur'anic Principle:**

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ<sup>28</sup>

*“O you who have believed, fulfill [all] contracts.”*

#### **Prophetic Example:**

During the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (628 CE), the Prophet ﷺ adhered strictly to the treaty's terms, responding to violations only after the Quraysh themselves breached the agreement.<sup>29</sup> This demonstrates the inviolability of agreements in Islamic diplomacy.

### 3. Strategic Patience and Long-Term Vision

Diplomacy requires foresight and the willingness to accept short-term setbacks for long-term gains.

#### **Prophetic Example:**

The apparent “loss” at Hudaibiyyah was initially difficult for the companions. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ instructed them to perform the ritual sacrifice three times before they complied, demonstrating his long-term vision that transformed a temporary compromise into a decisive diplomatic victory.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Qur'an 8:61

<sup>27</sup> Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an

<sup>28</sup> Qur'an 5:1

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah

<sup>30</sup> Al-Tabari, Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk



#### 4. Selecting Envoys of the Highest Caliber

The success of diplomatic missions depends on the character, intelligence, and skills of envoys.

##### Prophetic Example:

Envoys like Dihyah al-Kalbi and Abdullah ibn Hudhafah were chosen to represent Islam to Heraclius (Byzantine Emperor) and Khosrau II (Persian Emperor) due to their eloquence, courage, and knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

#### 5. Granting Full Diplomatic Immunity (Aman)

Envoys and those under protection must be guaranteed complete safety and security.

##### Qur'anic Principle:

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّىٰ يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ<sup>32</sup>

*“And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah; then deliver him to his place of safety.”*

##### Prophetic Tradition:

مَنْ قَتَلَ مُعَاهِدًا لَمْ يَرِحْ رَائِحَةَ الْجَنَّةِ<sup>33</sup>

*“Whoever kills a mu‘āhid (a person granted protection) will not smell the fragrance of Paradise.”*

This establishes the inviolability of diplomatic agents in Islamic law.<sup>34</sup>

#### 6. Dialogue and Communication as a First Resort

Engagement and dialogue are prioritized over conflict. Even with adversaries, discussions, negotiations, and correspondence are the first steps before resorting to coercion.<sup>35</sup>

#### Conclusion

The Islamic framework of diplomacy combines ethical guidance, strategic acumen, and institutional mechanisms. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ's diplomacy through treaties like Hudaibiyyah, letters to foreign rulers, and careful selection of envoys offers enduring lessons in patience, justice, and honesty. Complementary mechanisms like Al-Ijma', Al-

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, Tabaqat al-Kubra

<sup>32</sup> Qur’an 9:6

<sup>33</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari

<sup>34</sup> Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bari

<sup>35</sup> Hamidullah, Muslim Conduct of State



Urf, Shura, and protection of non-Muslims ensure this framework is dynamic, inclusive, and just. Together, these principles provide a holistic model for governance, human rights, and international relations, highlighting Islam's enduring relevance for contemporary global affairs.