
SUSTAINABLE CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A CASE STUDY OF THE CONQUEST OF MAKKAH

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Abstract

Whether East or West, the stature of Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace) is an acknowledged one because of his magnanimity which is not reserved for Muslims alone. The resolution of the conflicts in his life had not only been creative and constructive but also non-violent; achieving sustainable development goals simultaneously. This paper analyses the situation at the conquest of Makkah from the life of the last Prophet in Islam from the perspective of sustainable development. It explores the situation as early as the Treaty of Hudaibiya and examines it under the framework of the United Nation's sustainable development goals and popular nongame theory of negotiation reviewed by P.H. Gulliver. It, therefore, concludes that the Seerah of the Prophet is a progressive tool to transpire the national and international agenda for sustainable development and can serve as an approach towards multi-disciplinary collaboration to attain peace in the region and ultimately in the whole wide world.

Key Words: Sustainable development, conflict resolution, *Sirah*, globalization.

I. Introduction

Sustainable development's agenda for 2030 with the targets and indicators mandated by the United Nations is considered an important framework to put back the everchanging world on its right track. However, the recognition at the national level and its coordination at the international level have remained slower than expected. One of the important factors for the slow results is the missing integration of the 2030 agenda with the cultural setting of its place of implementation in a similar fashion like democracy. In a society like Pakistan, where the constitution would not allow anything repugnant to the injunctions of the *Shari'ah*, it is highly recommended to align the Sustainable development agenda with the teachings of the primary sources of Islam, and what better would be to align the former with the *Sirah* of the Prophet Muhammad upon whom be peace. Whether East or West, the stature of the Prophet is an

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acknowledged one because of his magnanimity which is not reserved for Muslims alone. Lakhani and Kandharo suggest that the acceptance of culture brought by Islam during and after the conquests in Europe, despite being repulsed through attempts during the Renaissance, made its way to the hearts of the people.¹ Since the central figure in Islam is the last prophet, Prophet Muhammad upon whom be peace, therefore, the *Sirah* of the Prophet became an important aspect of study for orientalist like William Muir and William M. Watt. It is undoubtedly not today that people have realized the high stature of the Prophet, but he remained a focal point for the Meccans even after their acrimony started.

II. *Sirah* and sustainable development

Islam has always been regarded as a complete code of life because of its ability to deal with any matter comprehensively and may adapt to an evolving situation yet would not alter its principles. Based on the same idea, the perception of sustainability in Islam is distinct, far better, and long lasting as compared to its secular description. The latter defines it on three principles namely, social, economic, and environmental.² It is most likely that the social and economic concerns would finally merge into concreting the environmental principle of the secular definition.³ However, Islam fulfills the notion of sustainable development with one additional factor due to the distinct cognitive development in an Islamic habitus. In Islam, the concept of *Khilafah* (vicegerency), *Amanah* (trust), and *Ummatan Wasatan* (moderate nation) develops into the idea of sustainability as one should not go beyond the prescribed limits on the face of the Earth because humankind has been made a *Khalifah* (vicegerent) and *Ameen* (trustworthy) to emerge as a moderate nation collectively and not transgress in the matter of the present inhabitants of this world and for the ones to come after.⁴ Moreover, the quest for happiness in Islamic faith is not par excellence but the love of God, which is end of all human activity and desire⁵, again which is tied with the submission to the method of the Prophet, hence, arriving to the *Sirah* of the Prophet as the Holy Quran also suggests the following,

“Say, (O Muhammad to mankind), "If you (really) love Allah, then follow me, (i.e., accept Islamic monotheism, follow the Quran and the Sunnah), Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is oft-forgiving, most Merciful.”⁶

Lakhani explains to us that if sustainable development must be understood in the Islamic context, it must be done with one additional factor – spirituality, derived theoretically from the divine law and practically from the life of the Prophet Muhammad upon whom be peace.⁷ This additional metaphysical factor serves as a soul to the physical pillars in the secular definition of sustainable development, like sovereignty to the legislature, executive, and judiciary – the pillars of the state. This spiritual factor motivates to work for the betterment of the people around and thinking for the future generations because this makes God happy, and therefore, being a vicegerent on the

earth, one must strive to achieve this and focus on development that is sustainable. Thus, there seems no doubt that the *Sirah* of the Prophet is by far the most the important tool to aware and adapt sustainability in a society like Pakistan.

III. Sustainable conflict resolution

Dispute resolution mechanisms, especially ADRs, have offered important ways to reorganize and rearrange problems to the parties that they don't perceive it as a problem anymore. This perception involves the use of creativity and requires great mental skills to explore and discover alternatives. For this, negotiation scholars have tried creativity puzzles like nine-dots puzzles and oranges peel problem.⁸ Alike creativity, there are numerous factors that ease up the process of conflict resolution, however, one must admit that bringing them on the table at once is not a piece of cake. On the other hand, sustainable conflict resolution (SCR) is yet another dimension to this debate after the United Nations mandated the framework of sustainable development and vowed to enhance its achievement through collaboration and cooperation in all phases of human life to speed up the process. SCR is not just creative and non-violent, rather it gives an opportunity to the parties involved to create a win-win situation through submission to an authority meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of the future generations to conclude. Fortunately, the *Sirah* of the Prophet specifically is full of such non-violent and creative SCRs where parties had a win-win situation. One such event is the conquest of Mecca.

IV. The Conquest of Mecca

The conquest of the city of Mecca by the Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace) in the 8th year after migration to Medina is an extra-ordinary event that became guiding light for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This fruit bearing activity had its root in the famous treaty of Hudaibiya, concluded between the Prophet and the pagans of Mecca. This treaty is considered as the turning point in the history of Islam because it led Muslims to the conquest of Mecca.⁹

i. The long-term causes of the conquest

The treaty of Hudaibiya is a remarkable illustration of SCR where the Prophet had an unusual sight of events. This was not only notable because of its conclusion but also because of the perfection of its process. This all started with a dream of the Prophet of visiting Mecca after three wars with the pagans in the tribe of Quraish and spending five years in Medina after migration from Mecca. The Prophet saw in the dream that he along with his companions had entered the sacred sanctuary in Mecca, took the keys of the Ka'aba, circumambulated around the Ka'aba and completed a minor pilgrimage, and either shaved their heads or shortened their hairs.¹⁰ The Prophet announced of the dream and almost 1400-1500 dressed up in *Ihram* started their way towards the holy city of Mecca to perform a minor pilgrimage only with the swords and their

sheaths. The Prophet and the companions had no intention of fighting; however, the prophet was aware of the attitude of the pagans in the tribe of Quraish, therefore, he had already dispatched a spy to collect the reaction of the Meccans upon reaching the news of the Prophet's actions. The spy informed of the vow of the Quraish and the allied tribes to stop Muslims from entering Mecca. He said that the people have brought their children and women to the ground and are clothed in Panther's skin.¹¹ This marked the beginning of the tactics by the pagans in Mecca to turn this peaceful journey into a conflict. The Muslims had gotten emotionally overwhelmed by this news but not their leader. His vision was farsighted than the others, and he dropped the idea of fighting even if it were too early to say how this situation would turn out.¹²

The pagans were carried away by the fighting wanted to turn this journey of the pilgrimage into a spiteful event, therefore, they dispatched another 200 horsemen under the command of the Khalid bin Walid (who had not accepted Islam then) to take Muslims by surprise at the noon prayers. Allah's help came down with a new method of prayer, and the Prophet managed to get away with this by the help from *Banu Aslam* who steered the caravan from a different route to reach the plains of Hudaibiya. Lakhani writes that the diversion from the original route was to avoid any confrontations with the non-Muslims because the Prophet and his companions were not on a military mission to conquer a piece of land, instead to perform a ritual.¹³ This was the second time in the same journey that the Prophet had dropped the idea of fighting, though it was permissible now to fight those who fight with the Muslims. This seems rather an easy move to make, but the reality is that this what the character of the Prophet was – to keeps matters non-violent, significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

ii. The Prophet's negotiations and the Gulliver's review of the non-game theory

The stay of the Prophet at Hudaibiya marked the beginning of negotiations where different messengers from the pagans in the tribe of the Quraish visited the Prophet until at last Sohail bin Amr came in with the authority to conclude the terms with the Prophet. The Prophet led the talks in a way which was later to be found in the works of Patchen¹⁴ reviewed by Gulliver¹⁵ as the famous nongame model of joint decision making. These models are manipulative where parties influence each other's expectations, assessments, and behaviors during the search for an outcome. The Prophet had spent around 53 years of his life amongst the pagans and was well-aware of their mindset. Therefore, the Prophet's approach can be analyzed as the following,

A. Cognitive Model

Gulliver explains in his work that it is the party's supposition of the future results, whereby, one party attempts to influence the expectations of his opponent in his own favor.¹⁶ This can be done in a variety of ways, for instance; might and power, presentation of information, threat, reference to rules, locus standi, etc. According to the thesis

proposed by Lakhani the prophet had effectively utilized the cognitive model. He communicated wisely through different messengers approaching him to negotiate and mediate that the Prophet was in a better resolve than the Quraish, however, the Prophet has preferred peace over violence.¹⁷ The Quraish also had information about Muslims solemn 'Pledge of the Tree' to fight until the last breath. Ergo, it was possible for the Prophet to settle only for something which brought a sustainable resolution to the conflict.

B. Learning Model

This model is based on the information of the past events. It is a well-known fact that the Prophet did not have to remind the pagans in the tribe of Quraish about their defeats on the battlefields and failures of diplomacy in the past. They had once brought an alliance of tribes of Arabia to Medina, consisting of 10,000 strong men against the Muslims, but it had failed too. Therefore, as Gulliver terms it that it is used as a 'standard of assessment' by which to choose what to aim for and what to do next.¹⁸ The pagans in the tribe of Quraish opted to settle the matter outside the battlefield.

C. Process Model

The process model also known as the reaction process models, in which Gulliver points out that the party may have established a set of preferences and expectations that he is unwilling, even unable to modify.¹⁹ Analogous was the case with the pagans in the tribe of Quraish who were embarrassed about the fact that they could not stop Muslims with all their ploys and now their only motive is to stop them from entering Mecca for that they will blindly accept the things which will cause them to be hoist by their own petard.

Astonishingly, the Prophet gave them what the pagans in the tribe of Quraish were desiring for in the myopia. However, it was not until the conquest of Mecca when they had realized that they only gave the Prophet enough time, strength, and the resources to build an army of the believers that is capable to take care of the whole of the Arabian Peninsula in just few years and the days of the leadership for the pagans in the tribe of Quraish are soon going to be over.

iii. The immediate cause

Mubarakpuri narrates that according to the terms of the treaty of Hudaibiya, the Arab tribes were given the option to join either of the parties, the Muslims or the Quraish, with which they desired to enter the treaty alliance.²⁰ Ruling out one of the terms, the pagans in the tribe of Quraish took advantage of the dark night and sided with one of the tribes, *Banu Bakr*, against a tribe, *Banu Khuza'ah*, which had allied with the Prophet. *Banu Bakr* also violated the sanctity of the Holy Ka'aba by shedding blood over there. This conflict demanded for a quick reparation which could have been violent in nature as per the traditions of the Arabs, however, when the

Prophet received the news, he managed to deal the situation with total perfection. He did not let go of the situation altogether rather demanded the following as narrated by various historians and acceptance of any one of them was crucial,

1. To pay the blood money for the victims of Khuza'ah, or
2. To terminate their alliance with *Banu Bakr*, or
3. To consider the treaty of Hudaibiya to have been nullified.

The Quraish half-wittedly responded to this intelligent proposal by not accepting the either of the first two options. The treaty was already breached, therefore, Abu Sufyan with the authority conferred upon him by the leaders of the Quraish reached Medina for the renewal of the truce, but to no avail.

iv. The manifest victory

Prophet Muhammad upon whom peace had completely blacked-out the preparation of the attack, meanwhile a letter from *Hatib* (may Allah be pleased with him) alarming the pagans in the tribe of Quraish of the intended plan was intercepted. Later, he was forgiven because of his participation earlier at the Battle of Badr.

The Muslims army proceeded with honor and grace. The Prophet was joined on the way by Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib who later managed to awaken the Quraish and arranged for Abu Sufyan to meet the Prophet whereby the Prophet exclaimed the following,

“He who takes refuge in Abu Sufyan’s house is safe: whosoever confines himself to his house, the inmates thereof shall be in safety, and he who enters the sacred Mosque is safe”²¹

Khalid bin Walid, Zubair bin Awwam, and Abu Ubaidah entered the holy city with might from the lower, upper, and the valley side respectively. They were given strict orders to be defensive and react only in case of aggression by the opposition. The opposition was already dispersed due to the caution by Abu Sufyan who at the top of his lungs reported the blessing of the Prophet to the people of Mecca, however, the few remained were dealt with the sword by Khalid bin Walid.

The Prophet, modestly and submissively, entered the holy city reciting the verses of the Holy Quran revealed at the instance of the Treaty of Hudaibiya regarding the manifest victory. After the purification of the sacred Mosque from the idols and the usual circumambulation around the Ka'aba, delivered a cogent and eloquent speech elevating the oneness of Allah through submitting to Him all alone, restoring peace through peace, vanishing all forms of

discrimination, and announcing the following that has remained written in gold in history of human race,

“I speak to you in the same words as Yousuf (the Prophet Joseph) spoke unto his brothers. He said: ‘No reproach on you this day,’ [12:92] go your way, for you are the freed ones.”²²

The Prophet submitted his will to Allah SWT and performed a prayer of gratitude or victory at the house of Umme Hani (may Allah be pleased with her).

V. The sustainability factors

Historians, including Mubarakpuri and Sallabi have explained extensively in their works as how the treaty and the conquest were especially important for Muslims and generally for the Arabs.²³ Apart from what historians have said, we will be focusing on how sustainable the processes were to reach the treaty & the conquest and the treaty & the conquest in themselves. It can be clearly interpreted that the Prophet never wanted a violent way to end things, rather he wisely opted for the resolution that were peaceful and creative not just in the processes but had long lasting impacts on the politics, economy, and social behaviors of the region. Therefore, following are the sustainable takeaways based on the events during the journeys for the minor pilgrimage & the conquest and the treaty and the conquest,

- i. Target 16.1 under Goal 16 demands to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Analyzing both the journeys, the prophet had enough time, strength, and backup resources to crush the attitude of the pagans and have an over whelming victory, rather he chose peace over violence, ultimately achieving the said target.
- ii. This move of the Prophet to remain non-violent while he camped at Hudaibiya and when he entered the city of Mecca allowing people to shut themselves in their homes also helped achieve the target of public safety under goal 16.
- iii. The Prophet chose to remain peaceful and commanded the same to his companions during the journey in the 6th year and subsequently in the 8th year saved children on both the sides from psychological pressures by the loss of their loved ones and even physical pressures if they were enslaved later, thus, helped achieving target 16.2.1.
- iv. The Prophet’s farsighted vision helped him make decision in a swift manner, perhaps in one sitting, because he was clear about his ambitions. Therefore, the conclusion of the treaty did not take much time and aided in the achieving target 16.7.
- v. The terms of the treaty, as recorded by Ibn e Hisham²⁴ and Mubarakpuri²⁵ later on, were well open to the masses at the time of the treaty – (target 16.10 achieved).
- vi. The treaty mentioned the pronouns for ‘men’; however, it was later realized by the pagans in the tribe of Quraish that when their focus was on returning the Muslims to

Medina, they had forgotten to pay attention to the language of the document. So, when some women migrated from Mecca to Medina, they were not returned, and they got integrated into the Muslim society in Medina. Therefore, Allah (SWT) revealed the following verse to deal with the women emigrating from Mecca to Medina,

“O you who believe! When believing women come to you as emigrants, examine them; Allah knows best to their faith, then if you ascertain that they are true believers send them not back to the disbelievers. They are not lawful (wives) for the disbelievers nor are the disbelievers lawful (husbands) for them. But give them (disbelievers) that (amount of money) which they have spent (as their Mahr) to them. Likewise hold not the disbelieving women as wives...”²⁶

This helped these women being saved from the harassment and discrimination that they were facing in Mecca because of their faith – (target 16.B, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.C achieved).²⁷

- vii. The Prophet’s mission was to invite more people to the submission to their one true Lord, the treaty’s clause to make an open alliance and general amnesty to the masses (except for few) helped make parties in peace and achievement of the noble causes of Islam – goal 17 partially achieved.
- viii. The treaty’s 10 years armistice and later the leadership in Arabia gave Muslim merchants a fair chance to be submissive and sincere to Allah (SWT) by providing for themselves, their families, and the vulnerable in the society – goal 8 partially achieved.
- ix. The flow of money and the implementation of *Zakat* (obligatory charity in Islam) had made it possible reduce poverty (goal 1), hunger (goal 2), and ultimately nourished people for a healthy lifestyle (goal 3).
- x. The fold of Islam is distinct in so many ways, the several thousand people who had come into this fold after the treaty and the conquest only to realize that what matters in Islam is the piety and submission; their color, race, and origin might only define their background not their current state – goal 10 partially achieved.

The Treaty and subsequently the conquest were the eye-opener for the whole of Arabia. It defined the firm standing of the truth and progress of anything that aligns with it. It had made it clear to the tribes in Arabia that Muslims are people of faith and give priority to their word as compared to the worldly benefits. Their trust in their true Lord for sustenance has swayed them away from seizing people’s property or killing them. After all, the two events proved to be a manifest victory as suggested in the Holy Quran in the whole of Arabia for upholding the essence of Islam that teaches humanity not to transgress and be trustworthy and truthful – sustainable.

VI. Conclusion

The persona of the Prophet Muhammad upon whom be peace is a bouquet of flowers. The generations have been collecting petals and pearls from his blessed life and it seems infinite. The discourse of sustainability may be new, but the positivity of any kind emerges from the worthy life of the Prophet. Therefore, the *Sirah* of the Prophet when defined under the scope of sustainability, even with the help of the mandated framework of the United Nations, can help towards a peaceful society where the disputes are not turned into conflicts, and even if there are any, they are dealt through SCR.

One of the important factors of SCR is submission. It is mandatory for the parties to acquiesce to the authority of one supreme being in to order to make either a sacrifice or a compromise to attain and transpire peace. It is rather easier to stonewall a negotiation or block it all together; what is important but difficult is to stick to the principles and let the ball rolling. These resolutions become even important when looked in a broader perspective because there might be a lot of positive externalities attached to it. The swift measures taken by the Prophet showed us the importance of quick, efficient, flexible, and sustainable resolutions that help grow cultures that might be different in race, color, or religion, but respond to a call that unifies them under the same umbrella to reap the benefits without any discrimination. The events described here may be centuries old, but the lessons still align and very much applicable today. This proves that the *Sirah* of the Prophet is a progressive tool to advance the agenda of sustainable development and can help emerge societies not just inclusive, resilient, and equitable but also submissively peaceful.

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