

## Islamic Foreign Policy Principles Derived from the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad\*

Research Article



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### Abstract

Countries often establish principles to guide their foreign policies, often prioritizing their own interests over those of others. This paper will explore Islamic principles of foreign policy, drawing from the covenants of Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet's letters to kings and leaders are considered pivotal in shaping the foreign policy of the early Islamic state. These letters emphasized the universality of his mission, underscoring its

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significance in both religious and political contexts. From this historical heritage, thirteen universal principles have been derived that could serve as an alternative to current foreign policy norms. Rooted in justice and equity, these principles promote an egalitarian society and are beneficial not only for Muslims but for humanity as a whole. This study adopts a library-based and analytical methodology to present these principles.

**Keywords**

Islam, principle, foreign relation, policy, covenants of Muhammad.

## Introduction

In ancient times, foreign policy was conducted through traditional practices involving interactions among monarchies, emperors, kings, and princes, as seen in historical powers like China, Persia, and Rome. This tradition also included Islamic foreign policy, represented by covenants established by Prophet Muhammad with kings and princes of his time (Fairbank, 1969; Feirahi, 2020). Today, foreign policy is defined as a set of general objectives guiding a state's activities and relationships with other states. The formulation of foreign policy is shaped by domestic factors, the actions or policies of other states, or strategies to pursue specific geopolitical aims (Foreign Policy, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). In essence, foreign policy serves as a code of conduct for a nation's economic, political, social, and military engagements with other countries. It encompasses aspects such as international trade, foreign aid, military alliances, and warfare. Each country formulates a foreign policy aligned with its national interests; examples include the foreign policies of the United States (Murphy, 2011; Johnson, 2008), Russia, and South Africa. Numerous texts, including *Theory of Foreign Policy* by Palmer and Morgan (2011), delve into the theoretical underpinnings of foreign policy, reflecting the diversity and complexity of these national strategies.

Today, three major monotheistic religions exist globally (Volf, 2011), with Islam—boasting over 1.2 billion followers known as Muslims—being one of the fastest-growing among them. Countries where Muslims make up the majority or where Islam holds a historically significant influence are often referred to as Islamic countries. In these nations, Islam continues to shape social, political, and economic life, including their diplomatic and foreign policy approaches. The foreign policies of many countries, particularly those of the so-called superpowers, are largely driven by nationalism. Frequently, these

policies prioritize national interests, even at the expense of other nations' rights.

In contrast, Bijan Bidabad argues that Islam's approach to foreign policy is fundamentally different. While Islam respects national interests, it does not condone violating others' rights to achieve national objectives. The primary goal of Islam is human transcendence, not the dominance of Islamic nations. The benefits arising from this focus on human transcendence are so substantial that Islamic countries, in turn, benefit from it naturally (Bidabad, 2012). Islam's mission is universal, aiming to uplift all humanity regardless of national, tribal, or other affiliations. Thus, Islamic foreign policy can be defined as a code of conduct guiding a country's economic, political, social, and military relations with others, grounded in Islamic principles and ethics.

The term "covenant" originates from the Latin *con venire*, meaning "coming together." It refers to a formal agreement between two or more parties to carry out or abstain from certain actions. Groningen (1996) provides an analysis of the term's origins, noting that while "covenant" is rarely used in everyday conversation, it is common in legal, social (e.g., marriage), religious, and theological contexts. In political contexts, it can translate to a treaty; socially, it may signify a lifelong friendship agreement or a marriage (Groningen, 1996). The term has various synonyms, including treaty, convention, agreement, protocol, declaration, accord, compact, contract, instrument, and optional clause (Shaw, 2019). Different religions and scholars interpret "covenant" uniquely. In Christian theology, scholars debate the precise meaning of a covenant according to biblical usage, as it varies across contexts. The Hebrew *berith* and Greek *diathēke*, often translated as "covenant," convey diverse meanings depending on the scriptural context. At its core, a covenant is an oath-bound relationship between two or more parties, encompassing human covenants (such as

marriage) under this broad definition. Divine covenants, by contrast, involve God establishing a binding relationship with His creation, in which He promises to fulfill certain commitments. A divine covenant made after Adam's fall is a binding promise where God swears by His own oath to keep His word (Jones, 2014). Therefore, a covenant is a binding promise with deep significance in social, legal, and religious relations (Mendenhall, 2012).

In Islamic theology, the original covenant between God and humanity is believed to have marked the beginning of creation (Quran, 7:172). According to this belief, before the creation of the heavens and the earth, God gathered all future creation in a timeless, placeless realm and made known to them the truth of His existence (Kadi (Al-Qadi), 2003).

Covenants (in Arabic, *mīthāq* and *‘ahd*) held significant importance during the formative period of Islam. Various verses in the Quran address different aspects of covenant relationships. Two key Arabic terms central to the Qur’anic concept of covenant are *‘ahd* and *mīthāq*. The term *‘ahd* appears 29 times in the Quran, with its verbal form occurring nine times, while *mīthāq* is mentioned 25 times (Lumbard, 2015).

Socially and historically, it is well established that the community during Islam's formative period was founded on covenant acts, in which individuals or groups formally declared their acceptance of Muhammad's message and swore an oath of loyalty, committing to specific obligations. References to handclasps suggest that this was regarded as the formal act of commitment and acceptance by the community. However, in later Islamic theology—much like in Christianity—the concept of covenant seems to have diminished in importance (Mendenhall, 2012).

Numerous articles and books have examined the covenants of Prophet Muhammad. Before proceeding with our article, we will

review some of these works. In 2002, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Sa‘d ibn Manī‘ al-Baṣrī al-Hāshimī, commonly known as Ibn Sa‘d, discussed the Prophet’s covenants in his *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Ibn Sa‘d, 2002). In the 10th century, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī also explored these covenants in *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk* (History of the Apostles and Kings), known as *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (Ṭabarī, 1979). Similarly, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām al-Baṣrī mentioned the Prophet’s covenants in his *Sīra Rasūl Allāh* (Ibn Hishām, 1990). ‘Abd al-Muḥaymin’s research (2014) focuses on the Prophet’s treaties, emphasizing the significance of *Sīra* literature across Arabic, English, and Urdu languages in the 20th century. Craig Considine’s article, “Religious Pluralism and Civic Rights in a ‘Muslim Nation’: An Analysis of Prophet Muhammad’s Covenants with Christians,” examines religious pluralism and civic rights within Prophet Muhammad’s vision of a “Muslim nation,” illustrating his desire for a pluralistic society granting equal rights regardless of religious beliefs (Considine, 2016). Anderson & Grubb (2018) discuss the importance of covenant in Islam in their article, “A Religion of the Covenant: The Centrality of Covenant Theology to the Islamic Faith.” In his 2019 article, “The Covenants of the Prophet and the Subject of Succession,” Morrow analyzes the first covenant Prophet Muhammad established to appoint a successor. Amini Golestani (2019) also highlights Islamic proofs narrated by the Prophet supporting peaceful negotiations between Muslims and Christians, underscoring the significance of interreligious and intercultural roles in peace and conflict resolution.

In this research, we will examine the covenants of Prophet Muhammad and derive principles for Islamic foreign policy from them. This study addresses an educational and research gap, presenting a novel topic. The article is organized as follows: the next section will focus on Prophet Muhammad and his mission; Section 3

will discuss the covenants of the Prophet; Section 4 will provide analysis and discussion of the preceding sections; and Section 5 will offer concluding remarks.

### **Prophet Muhammad and His Mission**

In 570 AD, the Arabian Peninsula—specifically Mecca—welcomed a child who would profoundly change the course of Arab and world history: Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allah (Esposito, 1999). Muhammad was born into the Quraysh tribe and the Banū Hāshim clan. He became a prophet at the age of forty, with a mission to guide humanity to the right path and preach the oneness of God. Muhammad’s message and Shari`ah were intended to be universal, not limited to any single race, nation, linguistic, or regional group (Hart, 1978). Supporting these assertions, the Qur’an states that the Prophet (S) was sent to guide all of humanity and was designated as both a bearer of good tidings (*bashīr*) and a warner (*nadhīr*) (Quran, 7:158; 34:28). In other verses, Islam is described as a religion for the entire world, destined to prevail over all other faiths (Quran, 9:33; 48:28).

Similarly, in some verses, God promises to ultimately entrust believers with the responsibility of ruling the earth, with power eventually coming into the hands of Islam (Quran, 24:55; 28:5). These verses suggest a bright future for true believers and the righteous, who will lead the world, with Islam as the guiding force. Believers will live free from fear in matters of worship, and polytheism will be entirely eradicated.

Islam did not—and cannot—spread on its own; it requires active propagation and effort. This responsibility was entrusted to the Prophet, who strove diligently to fulfill it (Quran, 16:125; 42:15). In these verses, the Prophet is instructed to invite people to Islam through wise and effective persuasion. Even in debates, he is advised to observe the

best manners. In fulfilling this responsibility, he is urged to be resolute and not to yield to people's desires (Quran, 5:67; 74:1-5; 28:87). These verses encourage the Prophet to convey God's message without fear, assuring him of divine protection.

A review of historical texts and the biographies of the Prophet (*Sīra*) reveals the extensive efforts he undertook to propagate Islam and guide people toward the belief in the Unity of God (*Tawḥīd*).

At every opportunity, the Prophet addressed people individually and collectively, inviting them to Islam through the strength of his argument and encouragement. He visited cities and towns with this purpose in mind, sent some of his Companions to recite the Qur'an to guide the people, and wrote letters to rulers of many nations inviting them to embrace Islam. Through such preaching and invitation, Islam gradually spread. The responsibility to spread Islam was not limited to the Prophet alone; all believers were charged with the duty of propagating its message and teachings (Quran, 12:108). This verse emphasizes that the Prophet's followers would continue his mission, regardless of whether they lived during his lifetime or in later generations. In fulfilling this Divine mission, committed Muslims endured great hardships, including torture, imprisonment, and even assassination, yet they never relented. Without these efforts, Islam would not have achieved its ultimate victory (Amini, 1985).

### **Covenants of Prophet Muhammad**

In this section, we will present fifteen covenants of the Prophet, as mentioned in historical Islamic texts such as *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk* (popularly known as *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*), *Sīra Rasūl Allāh*, and others. From these covenants, we will derive principles for foreign policy, which will be discussed in the following section.



## **COVENANT I**

### **Prophet Muhammad's Letter to the People of Athrah**

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

This is a letter from Prophet Muhammad to the people of Athrah. They are under the security of Allah and Muhammad, and they owe one hundred dinars every Rajab, to be paid faithfully and kindly. Allah suffices them in offering advice and showing kindness to the Muslims, as well as to those who seek refuge with them in times of fear and punishment, when they fear for the Muslims. They shall remain faithful until Muhammad comes to them before his departure (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

## **COVENANT II**

### **Prophet Muhammad's letter to Bani Janaba and the people of Maqnah**

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), to the people of Janbah and Maqnah: This message reaches you as I return to your village. Upon receiving this letter, know that you are safe, under the protection of Allah and His Messenger. Indeed, the Messenger forgives your past sins and wrongdoings. You are under the protection of Allah and His Messenger, shielded from any injustice or breach. The Messenger of Allah extends his protection over what he has reserved for himself. You are obligated to give a quarter of your date harvest, a quarter of your fishing yield, and a quarter of the goods spun by your women. Beyond this, you are exempt from any further taxes or levies. If you listen and obey, the Messenger of Allah will honor your nobles and pardon those who have wronged. Finally, to all believers and Muslims: Whoever brings goodness

to the people of Maqnah will receive goodness, and whoever brings harm will receive harm. Your leader shall be chosen from among yourselves or from the people of the Messenger of Allah. Peace be upon you (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

### COVENANT III

#### Prophet Muhammad's letter to the people of Khaybar and Muqna

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful  
This is a letter from Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to the people of Hunayn, Khaybar, Muqna, and their allies, as long as the heavens and earth remain. Peace be upon you. I praise Allah, for there is no god but Him. To proceed: It has been revealed to me that you should return to your villages and live in your homes, in security and under the protection of Allah and His Messenger. You are under this protection for your lives, faith, wealth, servants, and all that you possess. You will not be required to pay *jizya*, nor will anyone impose it upon you. No army will march through your lands, you will not be gathered against your will, and you will not suffer oppression. No fines will be imposed upon you, and you are free to wear silk and colorful garments, ride horses, and carry weapons. If anyone fights against you, you may defend yourselves; if any of your warriors fall in battle, none of your people will be taken captive, nor will any blood money be imposed. If any of you deliberately kills a Muslim, judgment will be as per the Muslim law. You shall not be accused of obscenity or be treated as dhimmis. If you seek assistance, you will receive it; if you seek provisions, they will be provided. You will not be restricted in your attire, including white, yellow, brown, or saffron garments, turbans, or sandals with straps. No one will prevent you from entering

mosques or from accessing Muslim authorities. Only leaders from among you or from the family of the Messenger of Allah will be appointed to govern you. Your funeral processions will have the right of way. Honor your dignity and that of Şafiyya, the daughter of your kin. It is the duty of the family of the Messenger of Allah and the Muslims to respect your noble people and forgive any wrongdoers among you. Whoever travels among you in the protection of Allah and His Messenger shall be free from compulsion in religion. Whoever follows the way of the Messenger of Allah shall receive a quarter of the portion Allah decreed for his family, namely fifty dinars, as a gift from me to you. It is the duty of the family of the Messenger of Allah and the Muslims to uphold everything in this letter. Whoever brings good to the people of Ḥunayn, Khaybar, and Muqna will receive goodness in return; whoever brings harm upon them will be met with harm. Anyone who reads or hears this letter and alters its content in any way shall bear the curse of Allah, the angels, and all who invoke curses, and will be excluded from my protection and intercession on the Day of Resurrection, and I will be his opponent. Whoever opposes me has opposed Allah, and whoever opposes Allah will be in the Fire, a most grievous destination (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

#### **COVENANT IV**

##### **Prophet Muhammad's Letter to Ziyād inm Jahūr**

From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Ziyād inm Jahūr. It has come to my attention that among you is a man named ʿAmr bin al-Harith, who has led others astray and encouraged their misguidance. As a result, they have strayed from the truth.

Therefore, let them fulfill every obligation, except that of Islam. Be aware of this matter. Additionally, your messenger has come to me, and I have not been swayed by any desires in dealing with this issue, nor do I offer apologies for it. Furthermore, anyone from the people of Abī al-Ḥusayn ibn Qan'a, a tribe from Yemen, shall be under the protection of Allah and Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah. Fear Allah, your Lord, and be mindful of His guidance. (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

## COVENANT V

### Prophet Muhammad's letter to Al-Muqawqis, The Great Copt

From Muhammad, the servant of Allah and His Messenger, to the esteemed Coptic Patriarch. Peace be upon those who follow guidance. This message is an invitation to Islam. Accept Islam, and you will receive a double reward from Allah. However, if you turn away, then the sin of the Copts will fall upon you. "O People of the Book, come to a word that is equal between us and you—that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims." (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

## COVENANT VI

### Prophet Muhammad's Letter to Khosrau II

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to the Great Persian Emperor. Peace be upon those who follow guidance, believe in Allah and His Messenger, and bear witness that there is no god but Allah, alone, without partner, and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger. I invite you to accept the call of Allah, for I am His Messenger to all people—to warn the living and to

establish the truth for those who reject it. Embrace Islam, and you will find peace. But if you decline, then the sin of the Magians will be upon you. (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

## **COVENANT VII**

### **Prophet Muhammad's letter to al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā**

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.  
From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā: Peace be upon you. I praise Allah, there is no god but Him, and I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. I remind you to keep Allah in your thoughts, for advising others is ultimately for one's own good. Whoever obeys my messengers and follows their guidance has indeed obeyed me, and whoever advises them has advised me. My messengers have spoken well of you, and I have interceded on your behalf with your people, so adopt what the Muslims have embraced. Forgive those who err, and accept their repentance. As long as you continue to act justly, your position will be secure. For those who choose to remain in their Judaism or Zoroastrianism, the *jizya* will apply to them. (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

## **COVENANT VIII**

### **Prophet Muhammad's letter to the people of Najran**

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.  
This document is what Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), wrote for the people of Najran. If the people of Najran wish to be assessed for their fruits, both ripe and unripe, that will be best for them, and it is left to their discretion. They are to provide a thousand garments of the finest quality fabrics: one thousand garments in Rajab and one

thousand in Safar, with each garment equivalent to an ounce of silver. If there is any shortfall or excess beyond the due tax, it will be settled by calculation. The value of any provisions they provide—such as shields, horses, riders, or gifts—will also be determined by calculation. Najran shall be under the protection of my messengers, who will not remain more than twenty days without provision, and should not be detained for over a month. In times of conflict, such as in Yemen or Ma'arra, they are required to provide thirty shields, thirty horses, and thirty camels. Should anything be lost from these supplies, my messengers bear the responsibility to return them. Najran and its surroundings are under Allah's protection and the covenant of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, covering their wealth, persons, religion, those present and absent, families, business dealings, and everything under their authority. Their leaders shall remain unchanged, their monks shall stay in their monasteries, and their priests will not be removed from their priesthood. They will not be subject to tribute or oppression, nor will they face conscription or military occupation of their land. Should any among them seek justice, it will be granted fairly without any injustice or oppression. If anyone among them engages in usury, I am innocent of him. No man among them shall wrong another. (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

## COVENANT IX

### Prophet Muhammad's letter to Banī Ḍamra

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

**This is a Letter from Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to the Banū Ḍamra:** The Banū Ḍamra are assured safety over their wealth and their persons, as well as victory against anyone who seeks to harm them, except if they fight in the cause of Allah.

When the Prophet calls upon them to offer their support, they respond. They are bound by the covenant of Allah and the covenant of His Messenger, receiving victory over those who treat them with kindness and mindfulness.

This is a Letter from Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to the Tribe of Aslam: To those among Aslam who have emigrated for the sake of Allah, testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger: they are bound by the covenant of Allah and the covenant of His Messenger, in whom they believe. Our command and your command are one for those who have been wronged by us (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

#### **COVENANT X**

##### **Prophet Muhammad's letter to Mālik ibn Aḥmar**

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

This is a letter from Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Mālik ibn Aḥmar and his followers among the Muslims. It guarantees their security so long as they establish prayer, pay alms, align themselves with the Muslim community, avoid the polytheists, and fulfill their obligations regarding war spoils, debtor shares, and designated portions. They are under the protection of Allah, the Almighty, and the protection of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

#### **COVENANT XI**

##### **Prophet Muhammad's letter to al-Akbar ibn 'Abd al-Qays**

From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to al-Akbar ibn 'Abd al-Qays: You are under the protection of Allah and His Messenger, covering past actions taken in ignorance. You are obligated to honor your commitments. You shall not obstruct

irrigation paths, impede water flow, or prevent fruit gathering when ripe. Al-Alā<sup>c</sup> ibn al-Ḥaḍramī has been appointed by the Messenger of Allah as custodian over the lands, waters, shores, garrisons, and all that is produced. The people of Bahrain are to be its protectors against injustice, allies in adversity, and supporters against oppression. They are bound by Allah's covenant and agreement, and they must maintain unity. They share responsibility with the Muslim forces in war spoils, justice, and equitable governance—this decree shall not be altered by either party. Allah and His Messenger witness their commitment (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

## COVENANT XII

### The Prophet's Message to the Great Heraclius of the Romans

Ibn ʿAbbās (may Allah be pleased with them both) reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) wrote to Caesar, inviting him to Islam, and sent his letter with Dihyah Al-Kalbi, instructing him to deliver it to the governor of Busra, who would then forward it to Caesar. The letter read as follows:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. From Muhammad, the son of Abdullah and His Messenger, to Heraclius, the Great of the Romans. Peace be upon those who follow the guidance. To proceed, I invite you to accept Islam. If you embrace Islam, you will find security, and Allah will double your reward. But if you turn away, the sin of your subjects will be upon you. Say, 'O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you—that we will not worship except Allah, associate nothing with Him, and not take one another as lords instead of Allah.' But if they turn away, then say, 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.'" (Quran 3:64) (Al-Haq & Qur'an, 2014).



**COVENANT XIII**

**The letter of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, to the Negus, the king of Abyssinia**

The Prophet's Letter to Negus, the King of Abyssinia  
Al-Wāqidī recorded that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) sent a letter to Negus, the King of Abyssinia, delivered by ʿAmr ibn Umayya al-Ḍamrī. The letter read:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Negus, the King of Abyssinia. Embrace Islam, for I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, the One, the Eternal, the Sustainer of all, who sent down the Scripture to Mary and breathed His spirit into her, and from her created Jesus, just as He created Adam with His hand. I invite you to worship Allah alone, associating no partners with Him, and to obey Him by following me and believing in the message that has come to me. I am the Messenger of Allah, and I call you and your soldiers to Allah, the Almighty. I have delivered the message and given sincere advice, so accept my advice. Peace be upon those who follow the guidance" (Al-Haq & Qura'an, 2014).

**COVENANT XIV**

**The letter of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, to the King of Egypt**

The Prophet's Letter to al-Muqawqis, the Ruler of Egypt  
Al-Wāqidī recorded that the Prophet (peace be upon him) sent a letter to al-Muqawqis, delivered by Ḥātīb ibn Abī Baltaʿa, which read:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. From Muhammad ibn Abdullah to al-Muqawqis, the great

leader of the Copts. Peace be upon those who follow guidance. To proceed: I invite you to accept Islam. If you embrace Islam, you will find security, and Allah will double your reward. But if you turn away, the sin of the Copts will be upon you. 'Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you—that we will not worship except Allah, and not associate anything with Him, and not take one another as lords instead of Allah." But if they turn away, then say, "Bear witness that we are Muslims"' (Quran 3:64)" (Hameedullah, 1985; Layla, 2020).

## COVENANT XV

### The Prophet's letter to Khosrow, King of Persia

The Prophet's Letter to Khosrow, the King of Persia

The Prophet (peace be upon him) sent this letter with 'Abd Allāh ibn Hudhayfa (may Allah be pleased with him), as recorded by al-Wāqidī. The letter read as follows:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Kisra, the great leader of Persia. Peace be upon those who follow guidance, believe in Allah and His Messenger, and bear witness that there is no god but Allah, alone, without partner, and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. I invite you to accept the call of Allah, for I am the Messenger of Allah to all people, to warn the living and affirm the truth against the disbelievers. Embrace Islam, and you will be safe. But if you turn away, then upon you shall be the sin of the Magians" (Al-Haq & Qura'an, 2014).

## Analysis and Discussion

The Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) letters to various kings and princes marked a significant development in the foreign

policy of his state. These communications elevated the stature of the Islamic state, which now carried both religious and political influence among other nations. Through these letters, the Prophet underscored the universal scope of his mission, calling these leaders to worship Allah alone without any partners and to accept the message of Islam. Allah the Almighty sent him as a mercy to all worlds, as affirmed in the Quran: “But as a mercy to the worlds” (Quran 21:107); “We sent thee not, but as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner unto all people, but most people do not know” (Quran 34:28); “Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion to His servant, that it may be an admonition to all creatures” (Quran 25:1). These messages carried the essence of Islam’s call and contained elements of encouragement to embrace this new religion brought by the Prophet, who was sent as a messenger to all humankind. From these letters, as outlined in the previous section of this research, we can derive key principles of Islamic foreign policy. Remarkably, these principles remain relevant to the present-day global context. We will examine each principle in detail in the following section.

### **Principle of Distinctive Objective**

All of these messages share a central theme: the call to Islam, conveyed in ways that consider the recipient’s unique personality, political, social, and religious standing. Besides this central theme, several key sub-themes, closely related to the main message, are common across these letters. These include:

1. Safety in Accepting Islam: The promise of security for those who embrace Islam, while those who refrain from it bear responsibility for their choice.
2. Affirmation of Muhammad’s Prophethood: Emphasis on Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah, sent to all humankind.

3. Shared Accountability: Leaders who reject Islam bear not only their own sin but also that of their subjects, who are likely to follow their leaders' guidance or misguidance.
4. Use of Quranic Verses: Relevant Quranic verses are often cited, suited to the context and background of the recipient.

These themes together underscore the universal message of Islam and highlight its appeal to individuals from all backgrounds and standings.

#### **Principle of Safety and Security**

One of the key principles in the Islamic foreign policy set forth by the noble Prophet Muhammad in his covenants is the emphasis on "safety and security." As we know, safety and security are fundamental to human life and society; they are a priority for any community or country, as without them, life loses its stability and value. For any nation to progress, maximum security and freedom from threats are essential. This focus on security is evident in many of the Prophet's covenants, where he assures, "They are safe for their money and themselves," or affirms that "They believe in the safety of God and His Messenger." The Prophet consistently guaranteed full security for the lives and properties of those who entered into covenants with him.

#### **Principle of Knowledge and Wisdom**

The Messenger of God demonstrated profound knowledge and wisdom in his approach to foreign policy, addressing each covenant partner and leader in a manner suited to their status and background. This careful approach varied depending on whether he was corresponding with kings or tribal chiefs, highlighting his deep understanding and insight. For instance, some messages were brief and direct, limited to two or three lines that straightforwardly

conveyed the call to Islam, as seen in his letter to al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Shammar al-Ghassānī. The text reads:

"In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, from Muhammad, the Messenger of God, to al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Shammar. Peace be upon those who follow guidance. Believe in God and be truthful; I invite you to believe in God alone, with no partner, and you will remain a king as you are."

In one specific message, addressed to al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) highlights the distinguishing features of a Muslim. According to his words, a Muslim is one who performs our prayer, faces our qibla (direction of prayer), and eats from our sacrifices.

The Prophet's message to al-Najāshī was unique among all his letters in two aspects: it included some of the Most Beautiful Names of God—King, Holy, Peace, Believer, and Dominant—and provided a clear explanation of the nature of Christ, Jesus son of Mary. The letter states that Jesus is "the spirit of God and His word, delivered to Mary, the virgin, pure and fortified. She conceived Jesus and carried him from His spirit, which He breathed into her, just as He created Adam with His hand from clay and breathed into him."

Interestingly, the Prophet emphasized the nature of Christ in his letter to the Negus, which may seem more fitting for a religious figure like "the Great Copt" to revive his religious sentiment. The Negus, however, was a ruler with a strong religious sense, and the historical context reveals the wisdom in the Prophet's approach. Several years before the Prophet's migration to Medina, Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib and a group of Muslims had sought refuge in Abyssinia. When the Quraysh sent emissaries to Abyssinia to persuade the Negus to send the Muslims back, they aimed to exploit the theological issue of Christ's nature, hoping it would provoke the Negus against the Muslims. But the "fleeing" Muslims clarified Islam's perspective on Christ's

creation and status, and, rather than turning against them, the Negus extended his kindness and protection to them, foiling the Quraysh's plan.

The Prophet intended to reinforce the topic of Christ's nature in his message to the Negus. This was to affirm what the Muslims had previously conveyed, strengthen the relationship, and appeal to the Negus's own religious sentiments. The Prophet's goal was achieved; the Negus responded with a letter affirming his conversion to Islam, initially guided by Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib, and expressing his belief in the Prophet's words regarding the nature of Christ.

The Prophet's message to the Negus was also unique in including a "special request" for the Negus to show kindness to Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib and the Muslim emigrants who had sought refuge in Abyssinia.

The Prophet, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, emphasized the rulers' responsibility for leading their people astray in some of his letters. This assertion was explicitly and strongly worded in three specific letters: to the Persian Emperor, to Heraclius, and to the Great Copt of Egypt. In his letter to Heraclius, he warned, "If you turn away, you will bear the sin of the Arians." Similarly, in his letter to the Persian Emperor, he stated, "If you refuse, then upon you shall be the sin of the Magians." In his letter to al-Muqawqis, he conveyed the same responsibility regarding the sin of the Copts.

The differences mentioned between these messages do not imply a contradiction within them; rather, they relate back to the central purpose of all the messages, which is the call to Islam.

### **Principle of Strength and Courage**

Another aspect of the Prophet's foreign policy is his demonstration of strength and courage. The Prophet showed remarkable resilience and bravery in his agreements with various people. Were he not the Messenger of God, he might have feared the consequences, especially

since some of these messages were sent to powerful kings and large empires, such as Heraclius, Khosrow, and al-Muqawqis. Yet, the Messenger was steadfast in communicating the call of God, relying on his absolute belief in God Almighty's support. This example implies that any leader engaging in international relations must possess extraordinary strength and courage, a quality rooted in self-belief, love for one's country, and commitment to its people.

#### **Principle of Good Approach**

These messages also reflected the Prophet's wisdom in his approach to calling others to faith, as evidenced by the content of his letters. To Heraclius and al-Muqawqis—leaders who adhered to a form of Christianity that had, in the Prophet's view, distorted the role of Christ (Jesus, peace be upon him), raising him to the level of divinity—the Prophet emphasized the humility of all people, including messengers, before God, the Lord of the worlds. In his letter to them, he cited the verse, "Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to a common word between us and you: that we worship none but Allah, that we associate no partners with Him, and that we do not take one another as lords besides Allah.' But if they turn away, then say, 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.'" (Quran 3:64). In contrast, the Persian empire, led by Khosrow, practiced sun and fire worship, so the Prophet, peace be upon him, sought to correct this by emphasizing the truth of monotheism within his message to them.

#### **Principle of Giving and Receiving Gifts**

It was a common practice among leaders to exchange letters and gifts as a sign of goodwill and respect. The Prophet also understood this, and whenever he sent a message to make a covenant, he often included a gift. Al-Ṭabarī notes in *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (Ṭabarī, 1979) that one aspect of the Prophet's wisdom was to present a ring inscribed with

"Muhammad, the Messenger of God," which he used to seal letters sent to kings and tribal leaders. The Prophet also accepted gifts from other rulers and respected their customs, provided they did not involve anything sinful or forbidden in Islam.

#### **Principle Avoiding Threats**

Islam is well known as a religion of peace, a principle demonstrated by the Prophet in his covenants with others. His messages carried no threat but instead offered security for their possessions if they accepted Islam or sought peaceful reconciliation. In his letter to al-Mundhir ibn al-Hārith, the ruler of Damascus, he wrote: "Peace be upon whoever follows the guidance and believes in it. I invite you to believe in God alone, who has no partner, and your possessions will remain secure." Similarly, in his message to al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā, the ruler of Bahrain, he assured him: "Embrace Islam, and I will give you what is under your authority." To Jaifar and his brother, the rulers of Oman, he wrote, "If you both affirm Islam, you will both remain in your position as kings." This approach clearly shows that the Prophet was not interested in their positions or wealth. His covenants emphasized peace and offered security without any implicit threat.

#### **Principle of Considering National Interests**

The covenants also emphasize a focus on national interest over personal gain. Some kings exemplified this by taking the right steps to benefit their people, leading them away from the darkness of unbelief. Notable among them were al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā, the king of Bahrain, and Jaifar and 'Abd al-Jalandī, the rulers of Oman, who took significant steps to safeguard the well-being of their nations.

#### **Principle of Introducing New Ideas**

Through these messages, the Prophet conveyed his call to the rulers



of the earth, introducing them to a new faith that promises happiness in both this life and the hereafter for its followers. This reflects the universal nature of Islam, as emphasized in the Qur'an, where God says, "And We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds" (Quran 21:107). Consequently, these letters from the Prophet to kings and leaders mark a significant shift in the political direction of the Islamic State.

#### **Principle of Freedom of Religion**

An important principle we can deduce from the Prophet's covenants is the principle of freedom of religion. In one of his letters, the Prophet emphasized this by granting others the free will to choose their beliefs. This principle fosters tolerance, which in turn encourages harmonious coexistence with people of other faiths.

#### **Principle of Common Interest**

In the covenants discussed in the earlier section, the Prophet emphasized this principle when addressing the Christian community, referencing verse 64 from the chapter of Al-Imran: "Say: 'O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we do not erect from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than Allah.' If they turn back, say: 'Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's will).'" (Quran 3:64). This principle of finding common ground is a powerful tool in foreign policy, as it promotes resolution through mutual respect rather than imposition. It serves as a foundation for resolving differences, easing conflicts, and fostering peace and harmony among parties.

#### **The Principle of Autonomy**

The principle of autonomy is evident in these covenants, especially

in the terms outlined for the people of Najran. Prophet Muhammad's letter to them affirms their freedom in matters concerning their wealth, religion, and leadership, allowing them self-governance without interference. They are also guaranteed the right to seek justice and are protected from oppression and forced conscription. This clearly illustrates the principle of autonomy, which upholds the right of individuals or communities to make independent choices and govern themselves without external imposition or control.

#### **The Principle of Negating the Domination of Unbelievers**

The principle of negating domination can be derived from the covenant four, a letter of Prophet Muhammad to Ziyād ibn Jahūr. This letter demonstrates Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) refusal to allow the domination and misleading actions of 'Amr ibn al-Ḥārith in Ziyād ibn Jahūr's land. The Prophet's letter emphasizes that people should fulfill their obligations except for Islam, indicating that they have the freedom to practice their religion without domination or interference. Additionally, the granting of protection to those from the tribe of Abū al-Ḥusayn ibn Qan'a shows a commitment to preventing domination and ensuring the safety of the Muslims. This reflects the principle of the negation of domination, which is the rejection of oppressive or controlling behavior and the promotion of freedom for individuals or communities.

#### **Conclusion**

The covenants of Prophet Muhammad have become a valuable heritage in Islam, serving as a source of inspiration across various aspects of human interactions, including social, moral, and economic spheres. This article has aimed to highlight the principles of foreign policy derived from these profound covenants. The principles found in this heritage are indeed universal and could enhance the current

policies of various nations worldwide. They are grounded in justice and equity, fostering a fair and balanced society. In our next article, we will explore another dimension of these covenants.

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