

Nuclear Weapons and the Moral Compass: Islamic Position on Nuclear Weapons

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Nuclear weapons pose a grave danger to all humanity. There is certainly a great need that various ethical traditions, whether religious or humanitarian, work together to remove this danger from the world. I would like to say few words from the Islamic theological and ethical perspective regarding these weapons.

Islam teaches that God is the Creator, Master and owner of everything in this world. All human beings are one family. Human beings must honor each other and should live in peace and do justice to each other. God has given this earth and all its resources as a trust to human beings. It is the duty of the human beings to use them carefully, not to misuse them or waste them.

Islam emphasizes that aggression and injustice should be removed by proper means only. War must be a limited enterprise. It should be avoided as much as possible and it should be limited only against the aggressors. There are specific rules in Islam about who should declare war, when to wage war and how to conduct warfare, very similar to the Just War Theory in Jewish, Christian and other traditions.

- War is allowed only to resist aggression and remove injustice and oppression. It is primarily defensive in nature. Its purpose is not to convert others to Islam, to increase one's wealth and power, to show off, to subjugate and dominate other people, to possess their resources, or to frighten or terrorize others.
- War is to be declared by legitimate authority with due consultation with scholars of Islamic law.
- Fighting is allowed only against those groups or states that are involved in fighting and oppression. Only combatants should be attacked; non-combatants should not be harmed. Women, children, elderly, disabled and religious people should not be harmed.

- Animals should not be killed; agricultural lands should not be destroyed. Trees should not be uprooted (unless the enemy was hiding behind them). Water, air and other life resources should not be poisoned or polluted.
- The dead should not be mutilated or burned by fire. Prisoners of war should not be tortured or abused.
- War should stop as soon as the enemy inclines to peace.
- Negotiations should be done and whatever agreements and treaties are signed should be observed.

With these basic rules and ethics of war, one can see what would be the Islamic position on nuclear weapons and nuclear wars. It is well known that:

- Nuclear weapons are by nature the weapons of mass destruction (WMD).
- Nuclear Weapons make no distinction between combatants and non-combatants. They cause permanent damage to environment. They may cause damage to neutral states also. They are not a proportionate response to any conventional attack.
- Nuclear Weapons destroy human and animal life, affect and destroy the life of future generations by causing diseases and infections.

There are many other problems with these weapons:

- These weapons are very expensive to develop and maintain.
- There is always a possibility of human or technical error that may cause nuclear disaster.
- They can fall in the hands of rogue elements in the military using such weapons. They may fall into the hands of militants or terrorist groups.
- It is possible that a conventional war may quickly escalate into a nuclear war.
- These weapons are dangerous also for those who own them. WMD are also known as MAD (mutually assured destruction).
- Accidents or natural disasters such as earthquakes or tsunami may also bring nuclear disasters.

Because of any and all these reasons it is Haram (forbidden) to develop and deploy nuclear weapons. The Shari'ah, the ethical and moral law of Islam absolutely prohibits the development of such destructive weapons. We hold that there should be a universal ban on the development, possession and deployment of these weapons. There are no legal and moral criteria to permit some states to

maintain WMD while others are denied. If some nations possess WMD, then there will always be incentive for others to have them.

Islamic law recognizes the doctrine of deterrence in war. Nations are allowed to have forces and weapons that can deter their enemies to attack them. However, the argument for nuclear deterrence will remain as long as some nations would have these weapons. If all nations agree to get rid of these weapons then there will no need for nuclear deterrence. Complete nuclear disarmament is the most appropriate way to achieve nuclear deterrence.

The honest and fair position should be to eliminate these weapons. There is no justification for some to have and others do be denied. These weapons should be de-legitimized and should not be used as a threat. There should be universal ban on these weapons. All countries should be inspected without any exception.