



Between Fitna and Aman: The Failure of Islamic Peace Education in Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

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ABSTRACT

Despite the strong normative foundations of Islamic peace ethics, their influence on interstate conflict resolution remains limited in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Although both states have a strong Islamic identity, border tensions and security challenges have erupted once more, with violence occurring in both areas since 2021. This study focuses on the contrast between the ethical depth of concepts such as *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation), *‘adl* (justice), and *tahkīm* (arbitration) and their sparse institutional expression in interstate politics today. In terms of methodology, the study uses qualitative analysis of policy documents, official statements, and militant discourses generated from 2021 to 2025, alongside an examination of how Islamic pedagogical values are framed. The results show that Islamic ethical discourse continues to be politically relevant but mobilized selectively: state actors use it to legitimize sovereignty and security policies, while militant groups exploit ideological gaps in religious understanding to reinterpret Islamic concepts in favor of violence. Meanwhile, the institutionalization of reconciliation-oriented mechanisms remains hindered by modern interstate securitization and the lack of a structured Islamic peace education framework that bridges normative values with statecraft. The study contends that bridging this gap requires interpretive legitimacy, political willingness, and the revitalization of Islamic education—both formal and informal—to cultivate non-violent conflict resolution and counter militant hermeneutics. These findings contribute to discussions on religion, international relations, and Islamic educational discourse by presenting Islamic ethics as context-sensitive normative resources for peacebuilding.

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1. Introduction

There is a long history of paradox in the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship. Securitization, border tension, and the occasional violence limit bilateral relations, despite the common Islamic background and historical, cultural, and religious ties. This divide has manifested more clearly in the post-2021 regional context, as the two countries have unveiled their commitment to peace and regional stability, which have, however, been accompanied by new tensions, airstrikes, and militant activity, resulting in disproportionate civilian casualties and forced displacement (Dr Nadia Zaheer et al., 2025; Rashid, 2023). Political discourses are dominated by sovereignty, deterrence, and counterterrorism instead of being applied to facilitate reconciliation. The main analytical question that emerges from this is why Islamic peace ethics do not affect interstate conflict resolution in the context of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations despite their normative salience.

This study argues that the marginalization of Islamic peace ethics in the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations cannot be attributed to inherent weaknesses in Islamic normative traditions. Islamic principles like *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation), *ʿadl* (justice), and *tahkīm* (arbitration) have significant ethical consistency and historical value when it comes to the regulation of conflict (Rahman et al., 2025; Wani, 2024). Islamic peace ethics are deeply connected with several related normative concepts that have been historically linked to conflict resolution and social harmony, namely, *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation-based settlement) and *tahkīm* (arbitration through recognized authority structures). Similarly, *ʿadl* emphasizes the moral basis of political order, while *aman* not only connotes physical security but also moral underpinning of social peace. "*Fitna*," on the other hand, describes the disorder, division, and social unrest that endanger the stability of the community. Historically, the prevention of *fitna* and the maintenance of *aman* are related ethical duties, but their understanding has differed based on the political context (Fazaluddin, 2022; Wani, 2023).

But their limited practical effect can be explained by the political and institutional circumstances within which they mobilized. On the basis of this argument, the article constructs a threefold analytic model to comprehend this gap, which entails three dynamic constructs: the instrumentalization of Islamic discourse by political actors, the redefinition by militant organizations, and the structural constraint of the modern international system of states. Together, these processes render Islamic peace ethics institutional, peripheral, and rhetorically salient.

There are three bodies of scholarship that the study intervenes in. First, it questions the normative approaches to Islamic peace ethics, which presuppose transferability of ethical principles into political practice without paying adequate attention to institutional and structural conditions. Although the recent scholarship has focused on the adaptability and modern applicability of the Islamic ethical constructs, especially with the help of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* (Fuadi, 2024; March, 2019), the political contexts in which they are applied are frequently disregarded. Second, the article approaches the conflict transformation theory by conceptualizing religion as a contested and politicized resource as opposed to a neutral, normative contribution. Scholars of conflict transformation (e.g., Richmond, De Coning) suggest that sustainable peace needs to be ethically grounded, as well as embedded, not based on normative discourse alone (De Coning, 2018; Richmond, 2016). Focusing on the conflict transformation theory, Islamic peace ethics are only politically effective if they are part of institutional and relational processes

that can influence interstate behavior. To transcend symbolic discourse, the informal and formal mediation frameworks, the dialogue, and the arbitration recognized by both parties are required to respect the ethical concepts of *ṣulḥ* and *taḥkīm*. When institutionally embedded in the peace process, Islamic ethical principles should not be understood as simply moral ideals but as potential frameworks of operation that can support long-term reconciliation, trust-building, and restorative diplomacy (De Coning, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2022).

Third, it helps to expand the debates on religion and power in the wider context of international relations past simplistic frameworks that consider religion to be either non-violent or purely instrumental. Instead, it relies on the contemporary literature suggesting that the concepts of religion are incorporated into the system of power and strategic importance (Mamedov & Jackson, 2025; Mandaville & Hamid, 2018).

The article, based on qualitative analysis of policy documents, official statements, and militant narratives, is empirically investigating the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the period 2021–2025. It is also analytically important because regional dynamics have been reconfigured with the Taliban reinstated to power, which has heightened discussions on issues of sovereignty, security, and legitimacy (Kaphshuk & Deitch, 2023; Khan et al., 2023). Analysis reveals that the Islamic ethical language continues to be used in political discussion but tends to be selectively employed to justify security policies, defend violence, and is limited by institutions centered on sovereignty (Hegghammer, 2024; Jadoon, 2024).

The central argument that is being presented here is that it is the interplay of the political, discursive, and structural forces that leads to the marginalization of the Islamic peace ethics and not normative inadequacy. The conflict between *fitna* (disorder) and *aman* (peace and security) stands out in this regard, especially: the preventive measures against disorder are often employed to rationalize securitization, whereas the morality of reconciling is postponed. Consequently, Islamic ethics are integrated into the mainstream security paradigms instead of serving as paradigms of transformation to conflict resolution.

This study offers a more nuanced understanding of the interaction between religion and international politics by reformulating Islamic peace ethics as contingent and not inherently operative. It shows that the usefulness of sets of ethics is not only determined by their normative coherence but also by their institutional implementation, interpretive power, and their correspondence to the larger political systems. Through this, the article has helped to advance current discussions on Islamic peacebuilding, transformation of conflicts, and the role of religion in modern international affairs.

This paper contributes in three aspects. First, it criticizes the normative assumptions of Islamic peace ethics by showing that ethical coherence is not enough to have an impact on politics. Second, it elaborates on the conflict transformation theory by developing the concept of religion as a resource in dispute and politicization. Third, it also contributes to the research of international relations, offering a triadic analytical model that explains the mediation of ethical norms through the forces of politics and discursive and structural forces.

Research on Islamic peace ethics, conflict transformation, and religion in international relations has grown in recent years. However, these bodies of literature are still analytically divided, delivering valuable insights but without a sufficient explanation of the enduring gap between the normative saliency of Islamic ethical values and their

lack of institutionalization in interstate conflicts today, like the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The initial body of literature looks at Islamic peace ethics as a normative approach to conflict resolution. Such concepts as *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation), *ʿadl* (justice), *tahkīm* (arbitration), and *maṣlaha* (public interest) are historically based methods of conflict regulation and social harmony (Fazaluddin, 2022). Later literature has elaborated on this framework by incorporating the *maqāṣid al-shariʿa*, emphasizing the flexibility of Islamic ethical reasoning to modern governance and international ethics (Kepplinger, 2025; ullah Al Azhari & Al Azhari, 2025). Existing research has managed to establish the normative richness and flexibility of Islamic traditions; it is inclined to believe that there is an inherent ability of ethical principles to shape political behavior. Consequently, it lacks sufficient theorizing of the institutional and structural prerequisites of the translation of ethical norms in political practice.

The second body of scholarship, which is founded on the conflict transformation theory, directs the focus of the normative ideals to structural and relational aspects of peacebuilding. This approach does not emphasize short-term conflict management but focuses on long-term transformation, which should be achieved by institutional reforms, narrative change, and the reorganization of relationships (Ramsbotham et al., 2011; Richmond, 2016). The recent scholarship also focus on the importance of culturally entrenched and hybrid kinds of peacebuilding that assimilate local normative organizations and formal institutional frameworks (De Coning, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2022). This literature, however, despite being institutional embedding-oriented, tends to view ethical frameworks, especially religious ones, as secondary or alternative sources of norms. It thus fails to properly capture the processes within religious traditions or their politicization and contestation in a dispute.

The third literature is concerned with the impact of religion on international relations and especially how it relates to power, legitimacy, and security. This scholarship ruptures previous beliefs according to which religion is an independent moral restraint and shows how religious discourses are integrated into statecraft and strategic interests (Demir, 2022; Haynes, 2025). Meanwhile, the research of militant movements demonstrates the selective reinterpretation of religious ideas in order to justify violence and build the exclusionary identities (Jadoon, 2024). Although this literature is valuable in offering ideas on how religion has been politicized, it has tended to restrict religious discussion to either instrumentalization or radicalization. This way, it ignores the co-existence of many interpretive processes and does not consider the circumstances in which religious ethics may serve as potent conflict resolution mechanisms.

This research fills this gap by formulating a more comprehensive framework that conceptualizes Islamic peace ethics as context-specific normative resources that are the product of three mutually reinforcing processes: instrumentalization by the state, reinterpretation by militant groups, and structural limitations of the modern interstate system. The article transcends both binary conceptions of religion as being inherently peaceful or inherently conflictual by invoking these strands of scholarship into discussion to provide a more balanced explanation of how ethical frameworks operate and fail in the international politics of the present day.

Despite these contributions, the available literature fails to provide sufficient explanations as to how Islamic ethical principles work in disputed political and discursive spaces, which are influenced by both state and non-state actors. Specifically, the

integration frameworks linking normative Islamic ethics, conflict transformation theory, and political instrumentalization of religion in international relations are lacking. This study addresses this gap by developing a threefold analytical model that demonstrates that Islamic peace ethics are instrumentalized, reinterpreted, and constrained structurally.

2. Method

The current study uses a qualitative research approach that combines document analysis and conceptual analysis of the Islamic normative traditions to gain an understanding of the marginalization of Islamic peace ethics in the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Instead of considering Islamic ethics as abstract normative ideals, the work locates them in the context of the contemporary politics of language, which allows the analysis of the processes of creating, mobilizing, and debating ethical concepts in practice. The methodology employed is based on the tradition of interpretive research in the field of political science and religious studies, which is concerned with the way discourse is involved in the construction of meaning, legitimation, and power (Fairclough, 2023).

The interpretive and critical discourse analysis is the basis for the methodological framework since it is a process through which actors create political reality through language and provide arguments for the formulation of a policy. With respect to this, discourse is not only descriptive but also constitutive, as it shapes the understanding and experience of peace, justice, and security (Van Dijk, 2015). Thus, this paper does not only investigate the presence of Islamic ethical language but also changes in the form of the same language in security-based discourses.

The study does not aim to present a detailed empirical picture of all aspects of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Instead, it approaches the design in a narrow and theory-based way, a way that is more analytical than comprehensive. This will enable a systematic investigation of the role of Islamic ethical concepts in a particular discursive setting without overgeneralization. The blend of conceptual study and empirical study assists the study to bridge the gap between normative theory and political practice (Fairclough, 2023).

The empirical data are purposively chosen policy documents and political statements generated in 2021-2025. This time is also analytically relevant because it was the time when the regional dynamics were reconfigured as the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan, which triggered the arguments on sovereignty, security, and legitimacy. The purposive sampling is used to make sure that the chosen texts can be directly applied to the research questions and are representative of the dominant security discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

This dataset covers around 25-30 documents such as major policy documents, governmental announcements, and militant messages found in publicly available resources in 2021-25. Those are the National Security Policy of Pakistan (2022–2026), the official statements of the Pakistani political and military leaders, official communications and statements of the Afghan Taliban, and some words of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The selection criteria were based on documents that mention or imply Islamic notions, legitimacy arguments, or security arguments, and it was selected so as to be analytically relevant and not statistically representative.

There are four types of sources in the dataset:

(1) The National Security Policy 2022–2026 of Pakistan that defines the strategic priorities of the state such as territorial integrity, economic security, and counterterrorism; (2) official utterances of Pakistani political and military leaders concerning the issue of cross-border militancy and sovereignty; (3) the official positions and foreign policy messages of the Afghan Taliban leaders (2021–2025), especially regarding foreign policy and territory management; (4) statements by Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that were selected that give some insight into the competing religious discourses in the conflict environment.

These sources are chosen according to their discursive interest and explicit or implicit appeals to Islamic legitimacy. The aim is analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness, which makes it possible to find general patterns in the discourse of elites.

Thematic and interpretive reading of the selected texts is used to conduct the analysis. The analytical method consisted of multiple close readings of the texts selected in order to uncover recurring discursive patterns concerning the concepts of sovereignty, reconciliation, legitimacy, security, and religious authority. Special focus was paid to the use and misuse of Islamic ethical concepts in political and militant discourses. The categories of instrumentalization, reinterpretation, and structural constraint did not result from a set of quantitative coding rules but rather emerged as a result of comparing the state documents, official statements, and militant discourse in an iterative process. The interpretive approach enables the study to capture the political meaning of Islamic ethical language in particular conflict contexts.

Instead of using a strict set of coding, the research uses an adaptable analytical framework to draw up common patterns in the ways Islamic ethical concepts are invoked, re-framed, or omitted. This method fits the qualitative discourse analysis paradigm that puts more emphasis on the meaning-making processes instead of frequency. It focuses especially on major Islamic terms that are the main focus of the current work *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation), *taḥkīm* (arbitration), *ʿadl* (justice), *aman* (peace/security), and *fitna* (discord). The review evaluates the nature of these concepts as working principles to the policy or symbolic allusions in security discourse. As an example, the National Security Policy of Pakistan focuses on sovereignty and territorial integrity as the basis of national security (Asia, 2021), whereas the discourse of the Taliban often mentions peace as non-intervention and independence. This type of formulation signifies the change in the paradigm of the relational ethics to the paradigm of security.

The analysis is based on a concerted theoretical perspective, comprising three processes that are interconnected: instrumentalization, reinterpretation, and structural constraint. The aspect of the Islamic language that can be seen as instrumentalization occurs when the Islamic language is used in the justification of the policy priorities without institutionalizing ethical mechanisms. Reinterpretation can be seen in the discourse of militants that selectively adapts Islamic ideas to support violence, which is often unconnected to classical ethical limitations. The structural limitation is examined by the lack of formalized mediation and reconciliation measures of state policies.

This paper demonstrates that though the Islamic peace ethics still exist in contemporary discourse, they are mobilized selectively and are at the same time structurally limited by establishing the connection between the empirical trends and

these analytical categories. This approach highlights the contingency of ethical frameworks, because they only work when they are institutionalised, have interpretive power, and are harmonised with political institutions.

3. Finding and Discussion

The objective of this research paper was to clarify the long-standing gap between the normative saliency of Islamic peace ethics and their poor institutionalization in the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. From the policy documents, the official speeches, and the militant accounts, the findings show that there is no lack of or no point to Islamic moral principles. They are mobilized selectively and re-framed strategically and are structurally limited in a security-centric political context instead. The results are explained in the light of the triadic analytical framework of the study (instrumentalization, reinterpretation, and structural constraint) and placed in the context of wider discussions within Islamic peace ethics, conflict transformation theory, and international relations.

State Instrumentalization of Islamic Ethics

One of the most important results is that Islamic ethical discourse has been found to be prevalent in the state discourse, but it is not closely tied to institutional conflict resolution practices. Islamic identity in Pakistan and Afghanistan is more of a symbolic legitimacy than a functional system to regulate interstate relations (Gurchani et al., 2024). This can be seen as a larger trend in the literature on religion and statecraft in which religious discourse is integrated into existing political logic and does not replace it (Mandaville & Hamid, 2018).

Empirical evidence of the National Security Policy 2022-2026 in Pakistan supports this. The document emphasizes the national security, which is based on the inviolability of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Shafi & Dinakhel, 2022). An example would be the National Security Policy (2022-2026) of Pakistan, which says that security is a non-negotiable objective and Pakistan will never compromise on sovereignty and territorial integrity. Although this kind of language appeals to the Islamic interest in order and prevention of fitna, it cannot be transformed into institutional forms of reconciliation like *ṣulḥ* or arbitration by *taḥkīm*. Rather, it is focused on deterrence and control. This indicates that Islamic ethical discourse does not replace the existing ethics but rather reinforces them and is legitimizing rather than regulating.

While these types of formulations are attractive to the Islamic subject of social order and the prevention of fitna (discord), they do not become institutionalised through the concepts of *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation) or *tahkim* (arbitration). Instead, the security is framed in terms of deterrence, control, and counterterrorism. This is also supported by the fact that the state is determined to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to militancy in its various forms (Asia, 2021), which places more emphasis on coercive interventions rather than reconciliation-oriented strategies.

The same tendency can be observed in the discourse of the Afghan Taliban. Authoritative declarations often appeal to the legitimacy of Islam and underline the idea of sovereignty and non-interference. An example of this is the statement that Afghanistan will not permit its territory to be used against other states, which reflects a desire to control territory as opposed to taking action that seeks reconciliation. Here, peace is not understood in terms of a relationship process based on ethical involvement but as a state that is attained by the maintenance of sovereignty. This is consistent with

the results of recent scholarship, which argues that state actors tend to use religious discourses to support security interests instead of imposing ethical limitations (Kamal, 2021).

Similarly, Taliban statements often claim that Afghanistan will not permit its soil to be used against other nations, and it is based on sovereignty and non-interference. Although this expression of peace is placed in the framework of Islamic legitimacy, it is territorial control over relational reconciliation, which is a security-based understanding of *aman*.

This securitized framing was very apparent during the regular cross-border militant and Pakistani airstrike tensions in Afghanistan after 2021. Both Pakistani and Taliban authorities used the language of sovereignty, territorial defense, and counterterrorism to justify military operations and counterterrorism responses, respectively, as violations of Afghanistan's independence and territorial integrity. In spite of the common Islamic identity of both governments, public discourse on both sides continued to be dominated by deterrence and security arguments rather than reconciliation-oriented mechanisms such as *ṣulḥ* or *taḥkīm*. The above developments are an example of the continued symbolic presence of Islamic ethical language, though now in a subordinate political role in relation to state practices focused on security (Haynes, 2025; Mamedov & Jackson, 2025).

Theoretically, this trend can be characterized as the instrumentalization of religion, whereby the Islamic ethical principles are strategically used to justify the existing policy orientations. Instead of reforming the state behavior, the discourse of Islam becomes assimilated into the securitized model where the priorities are laid on the territorial integrity and the strategic independence. The outcome is a challenge to the normative literature on Islamic peace ethics (Bar-Maoz, 2018; Wani, 2024) that ethical principles have an inherent ability to shape political practice. On the contrary, it suggests that the political impact of the ethical frameworks is related to their institutionalisation and compatibility with states' interests.

Militant Reinterpretation and Fragmentation of Moral Authority

The second important observation is the reinterpretation of the Islamic ideas by militant entities, which adds to the fragmentation of the moral authority in the conflict setting. The Islamic terminology is used by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other groups in an arbitrary manner, detaching it from the classical jurisdictional limits. The process converts concepts of ethics to instruments of ideological mobilization, where violence is justified, and the option of a common normative system is compromised.

Militant narratives are also used to represent this reinterpretation. For example, in TTP statements, jihad is frequently understood as an ongoing duty towards the Pakistani state, meaning that violence is a duty, not an option. In this type of discourse, classical limitations of warfare, including proportionality and legitimate authority, are mostly unimagined, instead being substituted with absolutist interpretations that justify unending conflict. This weakness in interpretive skills makes it more difficult to establish a common moral standard and even more difficult to achieve reconciliation at the level of ideas and institutions.

As we can see, militant discourse often portrays jihad as an ongoing duty, unrelated to classical limitations of proportionality, legitimate authority, and prioritization of peace.

These reinterpretations are consistent with the larger trends present in the literature on contemporary jihadism, in which religious ideas are rationalize violence and to continue conflict (Holtmann, 2014; Marone, 2025). On the same note, takfir (excommunication) used in delegitimizing opposing actors generates exclusionary identities that undermine the ethical principles of reconciliation.

There are important implications of this interpretive process. First, it compromises the integrity of the Islamic ethical discourse by creating rival and sometimes conflicting interpretations. Second, it excludes the traditional religious leaders who preach reconciliation and restraint. Third, it rationalizes violence as a legitimate and ongoing process, which further internalizes dynamics of conflict. According to Svensson (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018), religion may act as a catalyst of escalation of conflict as well as conflict resolution, depending on the interpretation and institutionalization of religion.

Notably, the reinterpretation of Islamic ethics by militant actors is a phenomenon that is not in isolation but is enabled by the lack of institutionalized ethical frameworks. When state actors cannot operationalize ethical principles, a gap arises that enables other interpretations to be spread. This supports the position of Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana (Abu-Nimer, 2022; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2013), who state that the multi-layered institutional fixing of Islamic peacebuilding is necessary to avoid the perversion of ethical ideas.

Structural Constraints and the Limits of Ethical Institutionalization

Although instrumentalization and reinterpretation are at the discursive level, the structural aspects of the modern interstate system are the most important limitation in the institutionalization of Islamic peace ethics. The prevailing principles of organization of contemporary international relations are sovereignty, territoriality, and securitization, which tend to restrict the utility of relational and restorative ethics.

It is a structural condition in the context of Pakistan and Afghanistan, which have their roots in historical backgrounds and in contemporary geopolitical dynamics. The Durand Line, which was created during the colonial era, turned loose social and cultural spaces into hard territorial lines, interfering with the native mediation and reconciliation processes. A new boundary, imposed by the British Empire at the time, the Durand Line, made historically malleable tribal and social spaces into hard lines manageable by modern sovereign states. With the development of communities along the border with strong familial, religious, and economic ties, those communities were subjected to the military control of the border and different national narratives. This change contributed to an undermining of traditional methods of reconciliation, including jirga and local conflict resolution, and a strengthening of security-based methods of controlling territories. This means that in the modern border structure, the surveillance, deterrence, and sovereignty functions predominate at the expense of the relational peacebuilding functions offered by local Islamic and tribal practices.

The security focus of an approach that is more control-oriented than cooperation is heightened by militancy, refugee movements, and regional rivalry today. In addition, these structural pressures are compounded by strategic considerations of regional and global powers in the larger context of Pakistan-Afghanistan security dynamics. The return of the Taliban has reinforced securitized state behavior, China's security concerns in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India's security concerns in the wake of its strategic rivalry with Pakistan, and Russia's quest for regional security. Within this

geopolitical context, the concepts of reconciliation and restorative diplomacy become meaningless in terms of calculations, borders, and security management (Mamedov & Jackson, 2025; Popalzay, 2025).

It is evident in policy discourse all the time. Pakistan says it will not give up over territorial sovereignty, while Afghan officials say they will not negotiate over independence and territorial integrity. The existence of these parallel positions generates a security dilemma between them, in which deterrence and control are more important than relationship dynamics. Such conditions, according to Richmond (Richmond, 2016), are more conducive to conflict management rather than conflict transformation, which leaves little room to allow ethical frameworks to affect the outcomes.

This is an institutional embedding failure in the view of conflict transformation. The ethical principles that belong to religious or secular values also involve the requirement to establish formal structures, such as mediation institutions, arbitration forums, or continuous dialogue platforms that have the capacity to shape behaviors and decisions (De Coning, 2018). In the absence of such mechanisms, ethical discourse remains symbolic rather than operational. Although informal mediation, with *jirga* being one of the most effective forms of mediation at the grassroots level, fails to have a significant influence on interstate relations, there is no connection between the morality at the grassroots level and the formal political institutions.

Integrated Interpretation: Religion as a Contested Normative Resource

Collectively, these results indicate the need to reconceptualize Islamic peace ethics as controversial and context-specific normative resources. Rather than being a pacifying or conflictual force, political interests, discursive practices, and structural constraints influence the Islamic ethical systems. This perspective goes beyond binary thinking in Islamic studies and international relations and offers a more nuanced explanation of the role of religion in conflict dynamics.

This complexity is captured in the threefold framework that emerged during this study: instrumentalization, reinterpretation, and structural constraint. The policies of the state actors are in the name of the Islamic discourse; the ideas of the militant actors are redefined in the religious terms, and the institutionalization of the ethical frameworks is restricted by the structural conditions. The processes reinforce each other, and the Islamic ethics remain rhetorically predominant and practically marginalised.

The struggle between *aman* (peace and security) and *fitna* (disorder) is particularly an example of this. The classical Islamic philosophy is closely associated with the promotion of justice and reconciliation, with *fitna* prevention being a direct consequence of it. The promotion of justice and reconciliation is directly tied to *fitna* prevention in classical Islamic philosophy. However, in the contemporary political discourse the securitisation is justified as an imperative to "prevent disorder" while the moral imperative of "reconciliation" is put to the side. So, "*aman*" is now redefined as a control attitude, not a moral action.

Counterarguments and Limitations

This study focuses on the marginalisation of Islamic peace ethics in interstate relations, but it is important to note contexts where Islamic peace ethics are still working well. Islamic principles like social harmony and *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation) remain relevant in the informal systems of dispute resolution of mediation and community-based

reconciliation, especially in wider regions. All these examples indicate that Islamic peace ethics are not necessarily ineffective but are institutionally distributed unevenly on different levels of political organization.

Also, other reasons explaining why the conflict persists need to be taken into consideration. No religious rhetoric can be used to deny that geopolitical competition, security dilemmas, and strategic concerns are sufficient to explain Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions. While this study does not rule out these factors, it demonstrates that they are nevertheless incorporated into these dynamics and affect the validity and the expression of religious narratives.

This study has methodological limitations too. There is no ethnographic information, interviews, or fieldwork, but rather a purposive sampling of texts on the elite level. Therefore, it is more concerned with the discourse than the experience of the Islamic ethical concepts and may not fully encapsulate the lived experience of the Islamic ethics as experienced within the context of the society. Future studies that include multi-level empirical data would help to give a more detailed picture of the functioning of Islamic peace ethics in various contexts.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored this disparity between the normative salience of the Islamic peace ethics and their under-institutionalization in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. It has been suggested that this gap is not due to a lack in Islamic normative frameworks as such but by incorporating the perspectives of Islamic ethical traditions, conflict transformation theory, and critical approaches to religion in international relations. Instead, it is made by the interactions of political, discursive, and structural forces that shape both the ways of mobilizing and employing ethical principles in interstate contexts today.

The discussion demonstrates that various fundamental principles of Islam such as *sulḥ* (reconciliation), *taḥkīm* (arbitration), and *‘adl* (justice) remain substantially normative coherent but are not institutionalised as practices of conflict resolution. Rather, the state actors are selectively using the Islamic language in the service of sovereignty, deterrence, and counterterrorism, a reflection of the overall trend of instrumentalization. Meanwhile, militant organizations redefine religious ideas that legitimize violence and divide the moral power and the potential of a common ethics. Structural constraints inherent in the modern interstate system support these discursive dynamics and restrict the applicability of relational and restorative ethical approaches by sovereignty, territoriality, and securitization.

The findings show that there is a need to move further than the binary assumptions that portray religion to be either naturally peaceful or naturally conflictual. Islamic peace ethics, as demonstrated by this research, serve as context-specific normative resources, the effectiveness of which is contingent on their institutionalization, interpretive authority, and meeting with political arrangements.

The study contributes to the existing debates in three ways. First, it criticizes normative scholarship on Islamic peace ethics by showing that ethical coherence is not enough to have a political impact. Second, it expands the conflict transformation theory with an anticipation of the politicized and contentious nature of religious norms. Third, it adds to the body of international relations literature by providing a more detailed explanation of the functioning of religion in power and security systems.

The results further indicate the need for institutional arrangements that can integrate Islamic peace ethics into the diplomatic process in the region. These may involve cross-border platforms for dialogue between ulama, hybrid platforms for jirga mediation, and formalized platforms for arbitration based on *tahkim* principles. Regional groups and religious institutions can also play a role, ease ongoing communication and reconciliation and working together to address border issues and militancy. Islamic ethics will be politically underrepresented and symbolically powerful without institutionalization and interpretive authority.

The discussion could be further expanded in future research with ethnographic and multi-level empirical studies of border communities, religious scholars, policymakers, and peace practitioners across the Pakistan/Afghanistan border. Comparative studies on other Muslim-majority interstate conflicts can also be useful in understanding conditions of institutionalization of Islamic ethics or their marginalization from the political process. These would help broaden the understanding of the role of religion, ethical legitimacy, and local peacebuilding in current international relations.

Finally, Islamic peace ethics do not fail because they are normatively weak, but because they remain politically unembedded. They are effective based on institutional embedding, interpretive authority, and political alignment. In absence of these, ethical frames are normatively influential but marginalized politically. This observation can be generalized in its application to the study of the role of religion in international relations today, whereby the ethical systems are increasingly shaped by political power rather than directing it.

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