Is Religion Primary Cause Of Wars And Conflicts? 
Islamic Response On Ideology Of New Atheism 

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Abstract
After 9/11, new atheists writers criticized all the religions of the world especially Islam. They linked world’s major conflicts and terrosrists attacks with religions. Their objective is to defame religion and through this way weaken the belief of masses on the existence of God. Moreover, they want to promote atheist ideology across the world and eradicate the role of religion in all sphere of human life. This study is an historical analysis about the common objection of new atheists that religion is the primary cause of wars and conflicts. This is qualitative research in which data is gathered through secondary sources; books, articles and online sources. The study finds that religion is not primary cause of wars and conflicts across the world. There are other economic and political factors and motives behind the wars, which are neglected by new atheists. Moreover, study explore that religion promotes peace and harmony, atheist overlook this role of religion and emphasize only to attach religion with violence and anarchy. Islam prohibits the killings of innocent people and directs to save the lives of humanity. Muslim rulers have been treating with respect and dignity with non-Muslims in their regimes. Religion is necessary part of human life,
and it develop individual as well as society with strong moral values. History shows that atheist regimes of the 20th century caused more bloodshed than the rest of the nineteen century. Stalin, Tito, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot are responsible for millions of murders. Blaming religion as the sole cause of violence in the world is illogiacal and irrational.

**Keywords:** Wars; Conflicts; Religion; Islam; Christianity; Judaism; New Atheism; Peace; Violence; Terrorism

**Introduction**

The concept of history plays a fundamental role in human thought. It invokes notions of human agency, change, the role of material circumstances in human affairs, and the putative meaning of historical events. It raises the possibility of “learning from history.” It suggests the possibility of better understanding ourselves in the present, by understanding the forces, choices, and circumstances that brought us to our current situation. It is therefore unsurprising that philosophers have sometimes turned their attention to efforts to examine history itself and the nature of historical knowledge. This work is heterogeneous, comprising analyses and arguments of idealists, positivists, logicians, theologians, and others. Traditional atheists didn’t consider history to defame religions; however, new atheists use historical events in their favor without considering other causes of those events.

Sam Harris criticizes religion while providing historical evidence. Similar to Richard Dawkins he also argues that the reason behind the major historical wars in the world was not social or economic but religious. He argues: “It seems that if our species ever eradicates itself through war, it will not be because it was written in the stars but because it was written in our books; it is what we do with words like "God" and "paradise" and "sin" in the present that will determine our future” (Harris, 2004, P. 12). According to him, the concepts like God, paradise, and sin have been compelling the humanity towards wars and unrest among the civilizations. He also provides the same solution which is provided by other atheists that is to abandon the religious beliefs and practices in life.

Harris further discusses that people of different religions attack each other because they consider other beliefs are on error. He says that the main creed of all religions is that other religions are on an error and incomplete. This thing generates intolerance in every religious belief (Harris, 2004, P. 13). Thus according to Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, there is no consensus among the different religions of the world which leads to conflicts and wars. Sam Harris says that religions are more dangerous now than in the previous ages because now we have atomic and chemical weapons. According to him, religions can harm our societies in the presence of these fatal weapons. He argues that different countries of the world now have nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Religious beliefs can cause war at any time in the future. For this reason “Words like "God" and "Allah" must go the way of "Apollo" and "Baal," or they will unmake our world” (Harris, 2004, P. 15). He uses rhetoric to forcefully reject the concepts of God and Allah. With the
same intensity, he attacks divines books and scriptures. He argues that Qur’an and Bible have ample commands to destroy life on earth (Harris, 2004, P. 23).

Sam Harris argues that if religion deals with the real needs of humanity then it should also play its role in the development of science and technology. Moreover, the progress in religious fields should also be the subject of scientific inquiry. But religious doctrines are only the reiteration of past concepts and it is considered ethically wrong to look at religions with skeptic’s eyes. He says that truth is discoverable in the present age. According to him, the ideas of religion are backward now and these ideas are a hindrance in the progress of ethics, culture, science, and technology (Harris, 2004, P.22). Similar to Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris also blames religions for the major wars and existing conflicts in the world with slightly different words. He says:

Religion causes intolerance and violence today as it did in past times. The present unrest in Palestine is because of Muslims and Jews, the Balkans unrest is due to Catholic Croatians, Orthodox Serbians, Albanian and Bosnian Muslims. In Northern Ireland responsible are Catholics and Protestants. Similarly in Kashmir, the conflict is also because of two religious beliefs Muslims and Hindus. In Sudan conflict is among Muslims, Christians, and animists. In Nigeria, conflict is between Muslims and Christians. In Sri Lanka, the conflict is between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus. In Indonesia, the conflict is because of Muslims and Timorese Christians. In the Caucasus, unrest is between Orthodox Russians and Chechen Muslims; Similarly, Muslim Azerbaijanis are conflicting with Orthodox and Catholic Armenians. These are few situations of our present world where religion is centrally responsible for millions of deaths in the previous decade. (Harris, 2004, P. 26)

Through this way, Harris portrays religious ideologies as the main cause of conflict and war worldwide. He ignores all other political, economic, and constitutional factors behind these tensions and solely blames religions as the main cause. While providing this historical evidence he also ignores millions of deaths caused by atheist ideology. He does not mention the features of brutal 20th-century state-imposed atheism by Pol Pot, Mao Zedong, Tito, and Stalin which had the blood of millions of people in their hands. Tens of thousands of Russian Christians were murdered due to their faith by atheists to remove religion from Soviet Union (Woodlock, 2013).

He elaborates that the conflict between India and Pakistan is only for land. Pakistan claims that the Kashmiri population is Muslim so it should be part of Pakistan. The reason for this claim is that Islam is not compatible with Hinduism. He says that both the countries have nuclear weapons and in future the religious war seems inevitable between these two religious countries. Here he declares religion as a bone of contention between India and Pakistan (Harris, 2004, P. 27).

According to Harris, the religion Islam preaches such doctrines which cause terrorism and extremism. He blames Islam for the 9/11 destruction. He argues that “Osama Bin Laden believed in the literal truth of the Koran. Nineteen well-educated men trade their lives for the privilege of murdering thousands of our neighbors because they believed that they would go straight to
paradise due to this” (Harris, 2004, P.29). He argues that the wish to go to paradise urges Muslims to propagate such kind of incident. He says that Qur’an generates hate against the West and Muslims do acts of terrorism because of this (Harris, 2004, P.31). He argues that Muslims portray Islam as a religion of peace but to know this religion one should read himself Qur’an that this statement is not true and Qur’an generates the hate about non-Muslims. In support of his argument he quotes the Qur’anic verses;

“Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate” (Qur’an, 9:73).
“Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that God is with the righteous” (Qur’an, 9:123) (Harris, 2004, P. 32).

Harris quotes frequently Qur’anic verses in his book, The End of Faith’ but has not given a complete reference to the Qur’an in his bibliography. A reader cannot know about the author of this specific Qur’anic translation. Moreover, he generalizes the meaning of these verses for all times and all situations. But in fact, the person who has little knowledge about the principles of the exegesis of the Qur’an knows that these verses are revealed the specific need of time and specific people. These people initiated atrocities and intrigues about the Prophet and Islam. The religion Islam recognizes the rights of non-Muslims and allows living them peacefully even their lands. Allah’s one attribution is justice and he ordered the Prophet to fight those people who forced Muslims to leave their native lands and initiated attacks on Muslims.

Sam Harris says that rioting about 2002, the festival of Miss World in Nigeria caused more than two hundred deaths and people were burned and butchered only for keeping that specific place free of women who were in bikinis (Harris, 2004, P. 46). He also gives the example of Mecca’s religious police who stopped firefighters from saving teenage girls who were confined in a burning and flaming building, for the reason those girls did not wear the Islamic head covering according to Qur’anic law. According to him, fourteen girls died whereas fifty were injured. He argues that such kinds of atrocities are relevant to religious faiths which are harmful to modern society (Harris, 2004, P.46). He argues that on almost every page, the Qur’an instructs hate with non-believers, on nearly every page it urges for faith-based conflict. He claims that the one who reads the Qur’an and does not find the relationship between violence and Islamic faith should consult a neurologist. He blames Islam for the cause of deaths more than any other religion of the world historically (Harris, 2004, P. 23). In these statements, he rhetorically links violence and conflicts with Islam. Qur'an discusses various topics relevant to human life but Harris does not consider them to discuss. Qur’an says the one who saves a single life is as who has saved the whole humanity.

Richard Dawkins, similar to Sam Harris supports his atheistic views by blaming religion for major wars and conflicts in history. He says rhetorically:
Imagine a world with no religion. Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian partition, no Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as 'Christ-killers', no Northern Ireland 'troubles', no 'honour killings', no shiny-suited bouffant-haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money. Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing an inch of it (Dawkins, 2006, P.1-2).

He claims the main motive behind various wars and tensions in society is religion. According to him, the world can be peaceful if people abandon practicing religion. He does not mention millions of deaths in the past under atheist rulers. Muslim scholar Sidi Ali Ataie argues that no one has more blood on their hand than atheists. The big four Chairman Mao, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, and Mussolini killed more than one hundred million people. Hitler was catholic he killed 6 million Jews. Those big four were seventeen times Hitler; they killed more population than Hitler. The reason for the killings by the big four was no God, no Day of Judgment, survival of the fittest, and natural selection (Ataie, 2014). Sam Harris and other new atheists also give that historical evidence against religions and do not mention other economic, political factors behind these wars. They blame solely religion as the main cause; however, the death rate caused by the atheist rulers is quite higher than that of the war caused by religious beliefs.

Dawkins argues that Christianity and Islam spread in the world because of swords and not by peaceful preaching. He claims that:

Muhammad and his followers reverted to the uncompromising monotheism of the Jewish original, but not its exclusiveness, and founded Islam upon a new holy book, the Koran or Qur’an, adding a powerful ideology of military conquest to spread the faith. Christianity too was spread by sword (Dawkins, 2006, P.37).

In this way, Richard Dawkins repeats the old objection of orientalists and atheists thinkers that Islam spread through sword. He borrows most of his arguments from the earlier atheists’ works. A similar argument is also used by orientalists about Islam. Dawkins accepts the role of religion in developing the culture and norms of the societies. He is ready to take historical traditions and customs set by religion for the modern man. He argues that:

An atheistic view presents not any justification for removing the Bible as well as other divine books out of our education system. We can keep a sentimental loyalty to the literary and cultural traditions of Anglicanism, Judaism or Islam, and we can participate in rituals of different religions such as funerals and marriages without buying the supernatural faiths which historically remained
alongside with those customs and traditions. We can end believing in God while maintaining a treasured heritage (Dawkins, 2006, P. 344).

Dawkins attacks on divine books to prove that these books are human-made and not from God. The divine books are a source to know God and provide moral codes to humanity. He creates doubts regarding the authenticity of these books in the minds of his readers to strengthen the atheistic position and world views. Like Richard Dawkins, all new atheists attack vehemently on religious scriptures.

Dawkins argues that we all are atheists about the Gods which humanity has ever believed in and some of us just need to deny one more God (Dawkins, 2006, P. 236). According to religious scriptures, first man on earth was Adam (A.S). He worshiped only one God and told his offspring to worship him. However, as ages passed some people indulge in polytheism. Through the 124000 Prophets, God had sent guidance for humanity in different periods of human history. All the Prophets preached to people to worship only one God. Muslims also believe in only one God which is logical, rational, and consistent with human history.

Like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, Dennett also blames religion for the wars and conflicts in the world. He argues that “religion is in its death throes; today’s outbursts of fervor and fanaticism are but a brief awkward transition to a truly modern society in which religion plays at most a ceremonial role” (Dennett, 2007, P. 35). According to him, in the modern world, the role of religion should be limited to ceremonies and rituals. In this way, he agrees to take some traditional and cultural parts of religion like Richard Dawkins. Moreover, he is also against the involvement of religion in political decision-making for the modern world.

Denial Dennett argues that the world’s major religions will end shortly as many small religious faiths have been ended in the world. He rhetorically adds, “within the lifetimes of our grandchildren, Vatican City becomes the European Museum of Roman Catholicism, and Mecca is turned into Disney’s Magic Kingdom of Allah” (Dennett, 2007, P. 35). New atheists portray religion as a symbol of hate which should end in near future. They do not want to see the holiest places of Christians and Muslims anymore. Dennett argues that if we look at the history of religion, it has left horrible effects on humanity. Religion has terrible negative consequences like oppression, cruelty, bigotry, enforced ignorance, and murderous fanaticism. Religion creates unrest in society and ignorance is forced on people (Dennett, 2007, P. 56).

While tracing the historical background of religion, Dennett argues that as our culture developed and humans began some more reflective, folk religious faiths began converting in organized religions; the rationales of prior designs were developed and often changed via mindful designed rationales and reasons as religious faiths became more domesticated (Dennett, 2007, P.152). From this argument, he considers religions as manmade and carefully crafted rather than attaching any divine link with them. Most new atheists argue on similar lines and call religion as a manmade set of reasons and rationales. Dennett adds that historical evidences
are enough to prove that within the passage of time people’s moral sense developed about good and evil and their beliefs also developed about what God hates and loves. Religion was very severe in old times but at present, those people that consider adultery or blasphemy as a crime are turning into a minority (Dennett, 2007, P.267).

Christopher Hitchens says that philosophy is the alternative to religion. He says that chemistry has taken the place of alchemy and astronomy has ruled out astrology. He favors the modern scientific and technological developments on superstitions and irrationality of faiths (Hitchens, 2007, P155). According to Christopher Hitchens, religion is the product of early humans. That was the time when knowledge was at its premature stage. He says:

Religion emerges from the period of human prehistory where no one, not even Democritus who concluded that matter was made from atoms, had even little idea what was happening. It emerges from fearful infancy of our species, and childish try to meet our inescapable demand of knowledge (Hitchens, 2007, P. 64).

Through this statement, Hitchens is accepting the religious belief that God made the first man Adam as his messenger and religion were present in the history of all humanity. Hitchens attacks Islam and argues that the origins of Islam can be traced to Jewish and Christian traditions. According to him, “Islam is at once the most and the least interesting of the world’s monotheisms. It builds upon its primitive Jewish and Christian predecessors, selecting a chunk here and a shard there, and thus if these fall, it partly falls too” (Hitchens, 2007, P.123).

This is an age-old objection that is used by orientalists to defame Islam and putting doubts about Islam in the mind of Muslims and non-Muslims. The same objection is borrowed by Hitchens. The most of new atheist ideology is based on borrowing the early works.

New atheists use frequently scientific and historical evidences to highlight the weaknesses of religious beliefs. Most new atheists argue that the main reason behind the historical wars and tension among the societies is religion. Every religion claims perfection for it and denies the reality of other existing beliefs. Thus a struggle for power generates which causes wars and chaos in societies. The basic difference between new atheists and the traditional atheist is that the former depended on philosophical arguments meanly whereas new atheists add scientific, historical, and moral argumentation to reject the existence of God and validity of religious beliefs. New atheists also maintain philosophical arguments to strengthen their point of view.

New atheists manipulate the historical results and blame different religions of the world especially Islam for wars and killings. They blame Islam for different terrorist acts in the world and the 9/11 attacks. Through this, they portray all religious faiths as the root cause of war and terrorism in the world and suggest eradicating the role of religion from governments and public life.
While discussing historical evidence, Hamza Andreas Tzortis argues that past reality is a self-evident truth. The reason for its authenticity is that most of the world’s cultures had supernatural beliefs. Everyone who grows up is given information about the past and is told that the past was real. The reality of past knowledge is true and is acquired through personal experience. Even people who hold normal rational faculties know that the past consists of events and things that had happened. If like atheists, all of us believe that the past is simply an illusion and fake stories then this conception will raise more problems for our world than that of solving something (Tzortis, 2016, P.92). Similarly, the idea of God is also a truth because, in past, the most intelligent peoples of different cultures held this belief. However, the presence of atheists in the world does not negate the universal concept of a creator. Because of the recorded history and the practice of people on religion, the numbers of theists are very higher than atheists in the whole world (Tzortis, 2016, P.93).

Abdur Raheem Green argues that history has shown that societies that have claimed that they had no God and had been existing forever on their own had vanished from this earth rather erased in no time. For example, the belief of the Soviet Union claimed that there was no God and wanted to impose it on other people and survived no more than 80 years (Green, 2008).

Muslim scholars conclude that historically atheist regimes have caused more bloodshed than religious regimes. It is factually wrong to blame only religion for such cruelties and authorities. This world is a place of trial in which God tests His people whether they obey God or not regarding different matters of life. God commands for making peace in the world and in exceptional situations God allows Muslims to fight those who fight with them. Qur’an says “If two groups of the believers fight, you [believers] should try to reconcile them; if one of them is [clearly] oppressing the other, fight the oppressors until they submit to God’s command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them: God loves those who are even-handed” (Qur’an: 49/9). Islam mainly promotes peace and justice in the world and dislikes fight and injustice.

Muslim scholars construct their arguments using historical data. The atheist regimes of the 20th century caused more bloodshed than the rest of the nineteen century. Stalin, Tito, Mao Zedong and Pol Pot are responsible for millions of murders. Tens of thousands of Russian Christians were executed by atheists to remove religion from Russia. Atheists conceal the political and economic factors behind the major issues and wars and portray religion as the sole cause. This argument is supported by the Encyclopedia of War. According to the Encyclopedia, out of all 1,763 known/recorded historical conflicts, 123, or 6.98%, had religion as their primary cause (Axelod & Charles, 2004, PP.1484-1885).

All three Abrahamic faiths have contributed for peace keeping efforts that are neglected by atheists. There past cases of peacekeeping and mediation by religious institutions and leaders. For instance, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches mediated the short lived 1972 peace agreement in Sudan. According Sara Silvestri: “We must be careful not to
give undue prominence to religion in all instance; it is not a major factor in every conflict and there is a risk that it can sometimes come to obscure more deeply rooted causes and motivations” (Silvestri, 2015).

According to Karen Armstrong: “The crusades were certainly inspired by religious passion but they were also deeply political: Pope Urban II let the knights of Christendom loose on the Muslim world to extend the power of the church eastwards and create a papal monarchy that would control Europe” (Armstrong, 2014). Before the beginning of modern period, religion permeated all human activities including economics, state-building, warfare and politics. Before, 1700, it would have been impossible to say that where politics ended and religion became.

New atheists link religious teachings with wars and anarchy, however, Zinash Gudissa explores through qualitative research that “religious involvement and spirituality contribute significantly to positive youth development by maintaining the purpose and goal of the youths’ life. Being religious and spiritual promotes positive development and protects against various risk behaviors. As youth become religiously involved, they reduce their risk of being exposed to various harmful environments, because, as research has shown, becoming religious and spiritual requires time spent at church, fellowship with fellow believers, and personal prayer time (Gudissa, 2021).

Generally, the Holy Qur’an prohibits the crime of genocide. The verses of the Qur’an and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) promote the ideology of peace and harmony. Qur’an says: “Whoever kills a person not in retaliation for a person killed, nor (as a punishment) for spreading disorder on earth, is as if he has killed the whole of humankind, and whoever saves the life of a person is as if he has saved the life of the whole of humankind” (Qur’an 5:32). Muslim historical facts and current practices of Muslim countries do not support violence. Throughout the Islamic history, Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims have lived in Muslim states. During the Muslim reign in Spain, the Jews enjoyed their golden era and lived with peace and prosperity. Millions of Sikhs and Hindus, including liberals lived under the rule of Mughal emperors in the Indian sub-continent for centuries. These Muslim rulers did not use violence and treated non-Muslim with respect and gave their due rights.

Conclusion

New atheists add historical arguments to strengthen atheist ideology. They blame religion for the wars in history and present issues between different countries. Encyclopedia of wars shows that religion became a primary cause in only six percent of world wars. Religion is not usually primary or even sole cause of conflict and wars. Atheists only emphasize religion as a source of conflict and overlook the role of religion as a force in peacekeeping and harmony in societies. The atheist regimes of the 20th century caused more bloodshed than the rest of the nineteen century. Stalin, Tito, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot are responsible for millions of murders. Tens of thousands of Russian Christians were executed by atheists in order to remove religion from Russia. Atheists
conceal the political and economic factors behind the major issues and wars and portray religion as the sole cause. Muslim history shows that Muslim rulers treated with non-Muslim in respectful way. The three world’s major religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam have played their great role in promoting and maintaining world’s peace. So, blaming religion as the primary cause of wars and conflicts is illogical and irrational.

References

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