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Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zahra (1898–1974) on international relations: the discourse of a contemporary mainstream Islamist

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The ever-expanding literature on Political Islam has largely focused on radical Islamist figures and movements. The studies on the renowned Egyptian religious reformer Mohammad Abdu (1849–1905) notwithstanding, this literature has not devoted ample space to the intellectual contributions of contemporary moderate Islamists. This article attempts to address this gap by examining the international relations discourse of a twentieth-century Egyptian, Azhar-affiliated religious scholar (*‘alim*) and public intellectual: Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zahra (1898–1974). Despite Abu Zahra’s prominence in the Islamic world – which earned him the appellation ‘Imam of His Era’ – his writings have received scant attention from Arab and non-Arab academics.¹ This article seeks to rectify this situation by presenting a close and critical reading of Abu Zahra’s three principal works on international relations: *al-‘Alaqa al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam* (International Relations in Islam),² *Nazhariyat al-Harb fi al-Islam* (Theory of War in Islam)³ and *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Unity);⁴ as well as a fourth work with a significant bearing on the subject: *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam* (Human Society in the Shadow of Islam).⁵ It contends that Abu Zahra’s international relations discourse is not *sui generis*; but part of a more than a century-old tradition of theorizing on international relations that dates back to the religious reformers Jamal al-Din al-Afghani⁶ (1839–1897), Muhammad Abdu⁷ (1849–1905) and Rashid Rida.⁸

For decades now, Arab publics have been subjected to a plethora of conflicting ideas about the meanings of Islam and the role it should play in Arab politics and societies. While the western literature has tended to focus on the ideas of radical Islamists, this article contends that mainstream Islamists – such as the aforementioned reformers and the scholar-sheikhs Muhammad Abu Zahra, Mahmoud Shaltut, Wahbah al-Zuhaili and Yusuf al-Qaradawi – represented an equally important and competing source of influence on Arab publics. While both radical and mainstream Islamists start from the premise that Islam is a comprehensive way of life and there can be no separation between religion and politics under Islam, they arrive at strikingly different conclusions regarding how Islam should shape politics. Despite their internal differences, mainstream Islamists share a common broad outlook on international relations. This common outlook (1) views peace – rather than war – as the norm in relations with non-Muslims; (2) encourages dialogue and cooperation with non-Muslims, as long as these interactions are mutually beneficial and

are not used as guises to dominate Muslims; (3) categorically rejects the imposition of Islam on non-Muslims through violence; (4) views jihad in the context of defending Muslim lands, lives and freedoms, particularly the freedom to practice and to peacefully call for Islam; and (5) advocates a peaceful and incremental approach to Islamic unity, which need not (but may) take the form of a caliphate.

Painting with a broad brush, Abu Zahra – and his Azharite colleague Mahmoud Shaltut (1893–1963; Sheikh al-Azhar between 1958 and 1963) – can be seen as representing the second generation of this moderate and reformist school in contemporary political Islam. Treading in the path of the founding generation (namely, al-Afghani, Abdu and Rida), Abu Zahra and Shaltut sought to extend the founders' reformist ideas to the increasingly salient realm of international relations. Shaltut's principal contribution to the study of international relations was a short but insightful treatise titled *al-Quran wa al-Qital* (The Quran and Fighting).⁹ The views expressed in it mirror those of Abu Zahra, especially regarding the defensive purposes of fighting under Islam. Of the two scholar-sheikhs, it was Abu Zahra who provided a more detailed and more systematic treatment of international relations. The significance of his views emanates from three overlapping arguments that he effectively advances: (1) peace is the norm in relations between Muslim and non-Muslim states, while war is the exception; (2) it is legitimate to fight but only for just causes and according to ethical norms whose source is the sharia; and (3) restoring Islamic unity should be the goal of all Muslims, but it ought to be pursued incrementally and peacefully. While echoes of these arguments resonate in the more detailed international relations discourses of Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili and Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (who stand for the third generation of moderate-reformist scholars), it was Abu Zahra who first articulated them as part of a conscious effort to incorporate international relations into an Islamist worldview.

Accordingly, Abu Zahra is treated here as an exemplar of what I refer to as the moderate and reformist school in contemporary Islam,¹⁰ in contradistinction to the radical school that is associated with salafi-jihadist figures and movements¹¹ such as the Egyptian radical thinkers Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949),¹² Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966)¹³ and Omar Abdel-Rahman (1938–2017),¹⁴ and the two principal ideologues of *al-Qaeda* and its splinter groups Osama bin Laden (1957–2011)¹⁵ and Ayman al-Zawahiri (1951-).¹⁶ A close analysis of Abu Zahra's international relations discourse thus offers penetrating insights on one pivotal, albeit understudied, dimension of this reformist/moderate current in contemporary Islam (which is often associated with al-Azhar):¹⁷ its perspectives on international relations.

While Abu Zahra's writings on international relations were not the principal reason behind his fame, they represented the first articulations of a moderate-reformist Islamist perspective on international relations. They also clearly influenced the international relations discourses of subsequent mainstream Islamist scholars, particularly Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926)¹⁸ and Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili (1932–2015),¹⁹ as well as Islamic-leaning Arab academics such as the Lebanese 'Adnan al-Sayyed Hussein.²⁰

The article is organized as follows: Part 1 provides a brief biographic sketch of Abu Zahra. Parts 2–4 present his views on (1) the nature and underpinning principles of international relations, (2) war, fighting and jihad,²¹ and (3) the road to Islamic unity, respectively. The conclusion situates Abu Zahra's international relations discourse within its historic setting.

Abu Zahra: a biographic sketch

The few available accounts of Abu Zahra's life narrate essentially the same story.²² He was born on 29 March 1898 in *al-Mahallah al-Kubra*, the largest city in the *Gharbieh* province in Lower Egypt. His schooling was that of a provincial boy from a traditional middle-income family.²³ He studied the Quran at a local *kuttab* and continued his education at the *Madrasa* of al-Ahmadi mosque in Tanta. In 1916, he was the top applicant to the prestigious Cairo-based Institute for Training Sharia Judges (*Madrasat al-Qada' al-Shar'i*), from which he graduated in 1924.²⁴ Three more years of formal education ensued at the equally renowned *Dar al-'Ulum*. Abu Zahra's first teaching assignment was at al-Azhar Faculty of Theology (*Kuliyat Usul al-Din*). It was at Cairo University, though, that he spent most of his academic career. There, he taught oration (*khutba*) and Islamic Law (sharia), eventually becoming the head of the Sharia department.²⁵ After his retirement from teaching in 1958, he was appointed in 1962 to the prestigious Islamic Research Academy (*Majma' al-Buhuth al-Islamiyya*) at al-Azhar, a position he held until his death in 1974.²⁶ A prolific author, Abu Zahra is credited with over forty books and essays.²⁷ While his writings covered a broad range of issues, he is mostly remembered for his eight books on prominent classic and post-classic (medieval) Muslim jurists. Four of these books focused on the lives and thought of the founders of the four principal legal schools in Sunni Islam (Imams Malik, Abu-Hanifa, al-Shafi'i and ibn-Hanbal), while the other books dealt with Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn-Hazm and the Shia Imams Zaid Ibn-'Ali and his brother Ja'far al-Sadiq.²⁸ The detailed and respectful treatment Abu Zahra accorded to the opinions of prominent Shia Imams attest to his ecumenical approach to Islam and his recognition of the Shias as an integral part of the Muslim *umma*.²⁹

The nature and underpinning principles of international relations

In one of a few academic references to Abu Zahra, Ahmed al-Dawoody claims that his 'interpretations of the scriptural sources of Islam provide a universal humanistic Islamic paradigm of international relations'. While not entirely without foundation, this is a rather exaggerated claim; and al-Dawoody himself does little to substantiate it.³⁰ Abu Zahra's undeniable contribution lies in two principal overlapping realms. First, he offers a fresh reading of the Quran, the Sunna and the Islamic tradition in order to shed light on the principal theoretical and substantive issues in international relations during the contemporary era. Abu Zahra is indeed a pioneer among Arab scholarly sheikhs in devoting an entire work to contemporary international relations. Second, and even more importantly, Abu Zahra underscores the significance of law and ethics to the conduct of international relations in a rapidly changing world, and not necessarily for the better (at least from his perspective). This emphasis on law and ethics in international relations emanates from Abu Zahra's legal background, moderate temperament and above all his belief that the aims of the sharia are the promotion of peace, justice, virtue and human well-being.

Abu Zahra's construal of contemporary international relations is informed by four pivotal notions: (1) a negative Hobbesian view of human nature that is pretty much in line with the views of most classic realists; (2) a positive view of religion (particularly Islam) as the only cure for the deficiencies in human nature and the principal guide to ethical conduct; (3) a firm conviction that peace, rather than war, ought to be the norm in relations

between Muslim and non-Muslim societies; and (4) an unequally unshakeable belief that peace derives from – and cannot endure without – justice, virtue and human well-being. The below sections elaborate on these key notions.

On human nature

The limited albeit important references to human nature in the writings of Abu Zahra indicate that he oscillates between two similar positions. On the one hand, he seems to agree with Hobbes (without necessarily having read him) that humans are selfish, prone to violence and driven by their base desires rather than by moral reasoning.³¹ Most importantly, he appears to embrace the Hobbesian/Freudian/classic realist notion that it is intrinsic to humans to seek to dominate other humans. Here and there, Abu Zahra depicts people as motivated by *hub al-ghalaba wa al-sultan*, which literally translates to ‘the love of conquest and domination’³²; but is best captured by the notion of ‘animus dominandi’, which has been recently popularized by Schuett in his work on the influence of Freud on classic realists’ conceptualizations of human nature.³³ Equally important, Abu Zahra makes several references to how powerful states in the contemporary international system strive to dominate and exploit less powerful ones, whether individually or through coalescing with other powerful states.³⁴

On the other hand, there are slightly more references to a more nuanced view of humans as torn between good and evil, due to their composite nature as body and soul. ‘God created man with inclinations towards good as well as with inclinations towards Satan’, he writes. He goes on to emphasize that the struggle between good and evil is an eternal one ‘and takes place within the human soul, the community and amongst states’.³⁵ What needs to be emphasized is that Abu Zahra is clearly not of the opinion that the majority of people are capable of acting morally when simply left to their own devices. Religion and temporal authority both have an indispensable role to play in promoting moral/ethical conduct.

On the positive role of religion

Abu Zahra maintains throughout that Muslims must scrupulously follow the dictates of their religion – as reflected in the Islamic sharia – in their dealings with fellow Muslims and with non-Muslims. In *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, he identifies three arch-principles of the Islamic sharia to guide human interactions, including in the realm of international relations. These are: justice (*al-‘adala*), human virtue (*al-fadila al-Insaniyya*) and human well-being (*al-maslaha al-Insaniyya*).³⁶ In *al-‘Alaqa al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, he presents a more elaborate list, comprising ten principles: (1) *al-karama al-Insaniyya* (human dignity), (2) treating all humans as part of a single *umma*, (3) human cooperation (*al-ta‘awun al-Insani*), (4) tolerance (*al-tasamuh*), (5) freedom, (6) virtue, (7) justice, (8) reciprocal treatment (*al-mu‘amala bi al-mithl*), (9) honoring One’s covenants (*al-wafa’ bi al-‘ahd*), and (10) cordiality and the prevention of corruption (*al-mawada wa man‘ al-fasad*).

While space limitations preclude full treatment of these ten principles and how they impact international relations, a few observations are in order here. First, these principles are the same as, or are logically derived from, the three arch-principles of

the Islamic sharia. Justice, for example, encompasses reciprocal treatment; honoring one's covenants and tolerance are at the core of virtue; and the very broad concept of human well-being subsumes respect for human dignity, individual freedom and treating all individuals as part of one human community (or *umma*). Second, Abu Zahra identifies human dignity as the first of his ten principles, thus underscoring its centrality in all human interactions. Over and over again, Abu Zahra maintains that Islam teaches people to deal with each other on the basis of mutual recognition of human dignity.

Third, Abu Zahra is one of a few contemporary Islamist thinkers to explicitly refer to all of humanity as forming one *umma* originating from Adam.³⁷ While he also uses the term *umma* in the more conventional sense to connote Muslims, the implications – especially for international relations – of unequivocally stating that all humans – irrespective of their religion or country – form one *umma* are indeed profound. A careful reading of Abu Zahra's discourse clearly demonstrates that he believes that what joins humans together is far more important, and far more enduring, than what separates them. In *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, Abu Zahra writes, 'this religion [Islam] views the whole of humanity as forming one *umma*, without any distinction between one sect and another or one color or another; for all are God's creation and all are humans descending from Adam who was from soil'.³⁸ A few pages later, he anchors this principle in Qur'anic verses 10: 19: 'Mankind was not but a single nation but they fell into discord' and 2: 213: 'Mankind was one community...'.³⁹ Abu Zahra's unequivocal support for the United Nations, and for international efforts to develop and institutionalize international dialogue and international collaboration, is clearly grounded in this conception of humanity as forming a single *umma*.⁴⁰ Had Abu Zahra fully developed this pivotal argument, he would have added a voice from the Islamic world to western advocates of international humanitarian law, such as Richard Falk, Andrew Linklater and Michael Walzer.⁴¹ Unfortunately, he does not; and no subsequent Islamist scholar pursued this project in earnest. Fourth, Abu Zahra meticulously anchors each of his ten principles in the Quran, the Sunna of the Prophet and the practices of the first four caliphs, thus lending them credence. Finally, and somewhat tangentially, one wonders whether numbering the principles at ten was purely coincidental; or whether Abu Zahra intended to invoke a comparison with the Torah's Ten Commandments.

Religion plays a positive and indispensable role at three levels. At the individual level, it rectifies the deficiencies in the human self, by 'liberating the self from the control of passions and lusts and placing it under the authority of reason and faith'.⁴² At the societal level, it provides mechanisms for good governance (that is, *shura*) and a comprehensive system of rewards and punishment (as embodied in the sharia); it also cements the social bonds through practices like *zakat* (alms giving) and social solidarity (*al-takaful al-ijtima'i*). At the international system (human society) level, it lays the bases for durable peace, collaboration and dialogue, through its emphasis on the aforementioned ten detailed principles. While Zuhaili's construal of religion is derived from Islam, he recognizes the divine origin of Judaism and Christianity and their contributions to human well-being. For Abu Zahra, all religions, and not just Islam, aim to 'spread virtue and provide people with moral guidance'.⁴³ In a nutshell, international relations must be guided by ethical principles, whose source is religion.

On peace

Abu Zahra adopts a broad construal of peace to mean more than absence of war. Peaceful international relations also entail free trade, free movement of people across state boundaries in search of economic opportunities, and international collaboration in all spheres.⁴⁴ This association of peace with free trade, and free movement of people, is in line with the Kantian-liberal notion of ‘commercial peace’, although we have no evidence that Abu Zahra has read Kant or the works of the classical liberals such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

Most importantly, Abu Zahra is an early champion among contemporary Islamists of the argument that peace – rather than war – is the general principle, or norm, (*al-asl al-‘am*) in the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims.⁴⁵

While there are ample references to this argument in *Nazhariyyat al-harb fi al-Islam*,⁴⁶ it is in *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam* that it receives the most detailed treatment in terms of: (1) properly deriving it from the principles of the sharia; (2) anchoring it in the Quran and the Sunna; and (3) elaborating on its implications for international relations, and specifically relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Clearly, this is not the place to review the massive literature on the sharia⁴⁷ or to determine, with any precision, Abu Zahra’s own understanding of the sharia. Abu Zahra does not identify with any specific legal school, although he has written extensively on each of the main schools, including the Shia mazhabs. Equally important, a close reading of his discourse shows that he adopts a holistic approach to the Sharia, focusing on its intents (*maqasid al-sharia*), particularly the promotion of human well-being and the common good (*al-maslaha al-‘amma*). In his approach to the sharia, Abu Zahra is more ecumenical than arguably the majority of Sunni ‘ulama, seeking to incorporate elements from various legal schools, including Shia mazhabs. Last but not least, Abu Zahra strictly adheres to the mainstream Sunni view that only qualified jurists should opine on legal matters while implementing the sharia is the exclusive jurisdiction of the powers that be (that is, the government) rather than of the ‘ulama or private individuals or groups.

To return to our main argument, Abu Zahra utters this core argument about the centrality of peace right after he presents his aforementioned ten principles to govern international relations.⁴⁸ One can easily discern a logical progression from the three overarching principles of the sharia, to the ten detailed principles to govern social relations (including international relations), culminating in the argument that peace (broadly construed) is the norm in the relationship with non-Muslims, while war is the exception.

Abu Zahra goes beyond deriving his core argument from the principles of the sharia. He also anchors it – as a standalone argument – in the Quran and the Sunna. He starts by drawing a sharp contrast between conditions in Arabia, and in the World, prior to Islam and the teachings of the Quran and practices of the Prophet. Prior to Islam, the ‘law of the jungle’ prevailed as far as ‘the relations amongst states and tribes, for every state transgressed against others’, he writes. ‘Islam came to enlighten the world’, he adds, with its proclamation that ‘the general principle in relations among states is the same as the general principle in relations among individuals; that is peace as stated in the Quran and practiced by the prophet’.⁴⁹ He then identifies the pertinent Quranic verses that call on Muslims to seek peace with non-Muslims as long as they do not commit acts of aggression against them; especially verses 2: 208: ‘O believers! Enter the fold of peace, all of you...’

and 8: 61: 'Should they incline to peace, incline to it also, and put your trust in God'.⁵⁰ He buttresses his argument by noting that the Prophet preferred peace over war even with the polytheists of Arabia. For Abu Zahra, the wars of the Prophet were fought for self-defense and did not aim to forcefully convert the Arabs to Islam. This equally applied to the wars with the Byzantine and Persian empires in the last days of the prophet and during the reign of the first four caliphs. According to Abu Zahra, the wars of the early Islamic state against these two far more powerful empires had two purposes: (1) to protect the nascent Muslim community against the malicious intents of the two empires who sought to crush it and kill the message of Islam in its cradle; and (2) to defend the freedom of the subjects of the two empires who were eager to embrace Islam of their own volition but were prevented from doing so by their tyrannical rulers.⁵¹

Subsequent Islamist scholars – Zuhaili and Qaradawi in particular, and the lesser known Hilmi Zawati⁵² – have expended considerable ink further developing and substantiating the argument that peace is the norm in relations with non-Muslims (following the same method of Abu Zahra of grounding it in the Quran and the Sunna), while unfailingly tracing its origins to Abu Zahra. In all fairness, this central argument needs to be traced back to an earlier reformer: Muhammad Abdu, who influenced Abu Zahra. As Mark Sedgwick notes, shortly after the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, Abdu 'came to the conclusion that cooperation with Europe would produce better results than confrontation'.⁵³ Sedgwick quotes Abdu as stating that 'the interests of the Muslims have become inextricably interwoven with the interests of the Europeans in every country of the World'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Abu Zahra's contribution to mainstreaming and popularizing this argument needs to be underscored; and this is one principal reason behind writing this article.

There is no doubt that Abu Zahra was cognizant that his argument ran contrary to the inherited view that divided the world into two abodes: the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and the abode of war (*dar al-harb*). All those outside the abode of Islam were seen to be in a state of war with non-Muslims, unless they had formally signed peace treaties or non-aggression pacts with them. For most classic and post-classic scholars, these treaties or pacts would expire after a specified period of time.⁵⁵

Unequivocally rejecting the above binary division of the world, Abu Zahra deploys three principal arguments to debunk it. To start with, he traces this binary division to the opinions of the early jurists who were heavily influenced by the political and military conditions of their times, namely the incessant wars between the Islamic state and the Byzantine Empire. Rather effectively, he demonstrates that in rendering this opinion, the first jurists have deviated from the Quran and the Sunna; acting on the bases of their judgment of what was in the interest of the Islamic state, namely to be in a constant state of war-readiness to ward off attacks on its rapidly expanding and vulnerable frontiers.⁵⁶ Equally important, he highlights the dissenting view of Imam al-Shafi'i (767–820) who embraced a more nuanced view by adding (to *dar al-silm* and *dar al-harb*) *dar al-'ahd* to refer to all states and political entities with which the Muslims have peace treaties or non-aggression pacts. Abu Zahra adopts a broad construal of *dar al-'ahd* to also include neutral states and states with no demonstrable hostile intentions towards Muslims. Last but not least, Abu Zahra argues that by voluntarily ratifying the charter of the United Nations, its member states have committed themselves to remain at peace with one another until one commits an act of aggression.⁵⁷ Stated in plain terms, a Muslim state that is a UN member should deal with all non-Muslim states that are members of the Organization as

if they are part of *dar al-‘ahd* as long as they do not act with enmity towards it.⁵⁸ Abu Zahra’s expansive usage of the notion of *dar al-‘ahd* to legitimate peace with all states that do not act with enmity towards Muslims, or harbor hostile intentions towards them, became a hallmark of the discourses of subsequent moderate (mainstream) Islamists, such as Qaradawi and Zuhaili.⁵⁹

Justice, virtue and human well-being

Despite the centrality of peace, Abu Zahra maintains that it cannot endure in the absence of justice, virtue and human welfare (or well-being). If these highly overlapping arch-principles are not defended – including via war – peace turns into surrender. Abu Zahra notes: ‘Islam calls for peace but does not accept surrendering to injustice, there can be no peace while being subjugated to injustice’.⁶⁰

Justice

Abu Zahra views justice as being at the bases of all social relations, including international relations, and the scale by which all actions are to be weighed.⁶¹ He avers: ‘People need to know that the world cannot be fixed unless justice becomes the scale for measuring all social relations...’.⁶² Elsewhere, he notes: ‘It is for certain that international relations in Islam are based on justice, any [international] agreement that is not based on justice is neither valid nor binding; it cannot be accepted in Islam’.⁶³ Basing himself on Quranic verse 16:90: ‘God commands justice, virtue and generosity to kin, He forbids debauchery, abomination and injustice...’, and on two well-circulated hadiths, he affirms that ‘Islam prohibits all forms of oppression’.⁶⁴ In a bleak reference to the Cold War division of the World into two spheres of influence, he deplores the absence of justice in international relations ‘whereby various strong groups unite in tyranny and oppression of the weak groups’.⁶⁵

A number of important principles follow from justice. To start with, reciprocal treatment ‘derives from justice without being separate from it’, he writes.⁶⁶ Reciprocal treatment applies in times of peace and war. In fighting, Muslims must use proportional force, while abiding by all international conventions as long as the enemy abides by them.⁶⁷ Abu Zahra goes a step further, prohibiting certain acts – such as mutilating bodies of killed soldiers or targeting civilians – even when the enemy engages in them on the grounds that these actions contradict virtue.⁶⁸ He notes: ‘but reciprocal treatment is bound by virtue and even if they [the enemies] violate what virtue sanctifies, we do not do the same; for the war that Muslims fight is the war of the virtuous’.⁶⁹

Honoring one’s covenants (or in today’s parlance abiding by the terms of signed treaties and agreements) is also at the core of justice and indeed virtue.⁷⁰ He anchors this principle in: (1) Quranic verses 16: 91–94: ‘Fulfil the compact of God if you enter into a compact and do not renege on your oaths once affirmed...’; and (2) the practices of the Prophet who, according to him, kept his compacts whether with the Jews of Medina, Quraysh or the Arab tribes he made non-aggression pacts with.⁷¹ Abu Zahra, thus, maintains that Islamic justice requires states to implement in good faith all their international obligations. Abu Zahra is quite cognizant that if international relations are to become increasingly based on international law and international

agreements (which he advocates), then states must demonstrate their trustworthiness towards each other. 'Treaties do not draw their power from their provisions but from the resolve of the contracting parties to honor them. That is why the Quran urged honoring [one's covenants]', he avers.⁷²

Virtue

Affirming the centrality of virtue to Islam, Abu Zahra writes: 'One of the bases of human relations in Islam is adhering to virtue whether in relations among individuals or among groups; in time of peace and in time of war'. He goes on to state: 'It is inconceivable for Islam to violate virtue, even in dealings with those who are different, for this religion is God's message to all humans who dwell on earth'.⁷³ Abu Zahra stands out among contemporary Islamists in explicitly identifying virtue as a guiding principle of international relations (other mainstream contemporary Islamists, such as Zuhaili and Qaradawi, emphasize justice, reciprocal treatment and peace). While his treatment of the role of virtue in international relations is rather succinct, it is embedded in a broader discourse on virtue (as delineated in his *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*) that attests to his deep understanding of the meanings of virtue in both the Islamic tradition and Greek philosophy.

The practical implications to international relations of justice and virtue are quite similar; although virtue – in Abu Zahra's construal – is a broader principle encompassing justice as well as other related values such as cordiality – or affection – (*al-mawada*), preventing corruption (*man' al-fasad*), tolerance (*al-tasamuh*) and mercy (*al-rahma*). Cordiality and the prevention of corruption constitute Abu Zahra's tenth principle of international relations.⁷⁴ Abu Zahra expends considerable ink defending cordial relations with non-Muslims as a core principle of international relations on the grounds that 'Islam treats all humans as one *umma*, irrespective of color, religion or nationality'.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, he writes: 'Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are to be based on cordiality, for Islam dictates that all human relations be founded on cordiality and mercy'.⁷⁶

War does not necessarily lead to the severance of ties of cordiality, Abu Zahra maintains. Trade may thus continue with citizens of enemy states as long as it is not in war-related material, namely, armament and iron, the latter being essential to manufacturing weapons.⁷⁷ Abu Zahra traces this view on the permissibility of trade with enemy states to the opinion of Abu Hanifa; thus lending it some credence. More broadly, cordiality entails that civilians are spared the scourges of war, as much as possible.⁷⁸

While Abu Zahra understands tolerance primarily in the context of respecting religious diversity and rejecting the forceful imposition of any religion, he does also address at length the importance of demonstrating tolerance in dealings with those who belong to a different ethnicity or nationality and those who hold a different viewpoint.⁷⁹ In domestic politics, rulers are urged to demonstrate tolerance, albeit not at the expense of justice.⁸⁰

As with all the other principles, tolerance greatly overlaps with, *inter alia*, virtue, justice, dignity, freedom, and especially mercy. While mercy does not appear among Abu Zahra's ten principles, he maintains throughout that Islam urges its followers to demonstrate mercy in their dealings with non-Muslims (especially Christians and Jews), but not at the expense of justice and without compromising their inalienable right to freely practice and peacefully call for Islam. Justice and freedom clearly supersede mercy on Abu Zahra's value scale.

Human well-being

Human well-being (or human welfare) is the broadest – and arguably most fundamental – arch-principle of the sharia. For Abu Zahra, the sharia exists to ensure human well-being. Painting with a broad brush, human well-being revolves around principles such as: (1) preserving human dignity, (2) acting on the basis that humanity constitutes one *umma*, (3) fostering human dialogue and human collaboration in all spheres, (4) respecting individual freedoms, especially freedom of religion, but also the freedom to trade and to move across national borders (as long as these do not damage core state interests), and (5) respecting the freedoms of ethnic/national groups, particularly their right to self-determination including statehood.⁸¹

To sum up this section on the significance of values, Abu Zahra categorically rejects the notion that international relations, or more generally politics, can be separated from ethics. In line with most Islamists, he is equally adamant that religion provides the most comprehensive system of ethics and values to guide individual, group and state action. Throughout his discourse, Abu Zahra strives to demonstrate the continued relevance of the Islamic sharia to address major internal and external challenges facing Muslim societies despite momentous global changes.

War, fighting and jihad

Abu Zahra's emphasis on the ethical dimension of international relations carries into his discussion of war, and the closely related notions of fighting (*qital*) and jihad. His approach to war is highly normative and legalistic, reflecting his preoccupation with distinguishing between just war (*al-harb al-'adila*) and unjust war (*al-harb al-zhalima*).

Just versus unjust war

While cognizant of the multiple causes of war, Abu Zahra does not present us with a general theory of war. This partly emanates from his conviction that just wars result from entirely different reasons than unjust wars. Unjust wars are prompted by the (1) capricious desires of the leaders of powerful states who seek to dominate and exploit the people of other states (especially when they consider them to be of inferior races or colors); (2) the absence of sharia-based laws in almost all modern political systems that prohibit aggression against others; and (3) the lack of an international authority to restrain the strong states and aid the weak ones.⁸² At one point, Abu Zahra suggests that if Islam becomes the hegemonic religion globally, then it can provide such an international authority, but he does not thoroughly develop this argument or advance it forcefully.⁸³ For Abu Zahra, unjust wars are wars of choice, fought for prestige or for economic gain and often associated with power considerations and cost–benefit calculations. Just wars, on the other hand, are wars of necessity that are fought in self-defense or to ward off greater evils than war itself, particularly oppression and the persecution of Muslims for their belief in Islam. There are ample references in Abu Zahra's discourse to war being an option of last recourse; something resorted to by Muslims only after other peaceful means have been exhausted.⁸⁴ Paraphrasing Qur'anic verse 2: 216, 'fighting has been prescribed for you, although it is a matter hateful to you...', he writes: 'War is the most despised thing for the believing soul, for its essence lies in killing the human soul'. He goes on to note: 'War is

hateful to the believers. They do not like it and do not seek it; but they accept it when God commands it and prescribes it on them for their own good'.⁸⁵ A few lines later, he asserts that the 'Qur'anic texts prohibit and ban aggression, commanding forbearance when aggression can be repelled without fighting'. He then reiterates that 'fighting is hated in Islam and only permitted for a pressing need that cannot be postponed'.⁸⁶

This negative view of war is, however, countered by a highly positive (indeed exalted) view of the wars of the Prophet and the first four caliphs. These are depicted as just and merciful wars that were fought against oppressive tyrants.⁸⁷ In essence, they represented 'the war of virtue against vice, a war prompted by virtue and ending with virtue leading to a victory that was virtuous'.⁸⁸ But how can war be so hateful and so virtuous at the same time? Abu Zahra does not address this perplexing question; but in his defense, one may associate the negative view with unjust wars and the positive one with just wars. This is not necessarily a robust defense, though, for Abu Zahra does not offer a clear definition of war and is constantly mixing between the 'is' and the 'ought' when it comes to the reasons Muslims fight.

Jihad

Jihad is clearly associated with the positive view of war, or just war. In line with nearly all Islamists, Abu Zahra maintains that jihad is unique to the Islamic tradition. While cognizant that fighting (*qital*) constitutes only one dimension of jihad, it is this dimension that he focuses on since his discussion is on war and what constitutes valid grounds for fighting. To start with, Abu Zahra maintains that jihad does not aim at imposing Islam on others; for 'there is no compulsion in religion'.⁸⁹ As aforementioned, Abu Zahra is an early champion of the argument that the Prophet did not fight the polytheists of Quraysh (and other Arab tribes) due to their unbelief, but because of their oppression and persecution of the first Muslims and their relentless plotting to turn Muslims away from the new religion.⁹⁰ The wars of the Prophet (which set the model for jihad) were fought to (1) defend the nascent Muslim community in Medina from the attacks of Quraysh and its allies; and (2) punish the polytheists of Quraysh for driving the Muslims from their homes and for persecuting them for their religion.⁹¹ Neither the Prophet, nor his four immediate successors, resorted to war to impose Islam on others, the argument goes.⁹²

For Abu Zahra, the message of Islam has always been (and remains) so forceful, because of its appeal to human reason and human nature, that no fighting was ever needed to spread Islam. On the contrary, it was at times of peace that Islam spread the most. Equally important, violence would have been counterproductive; for hearts cannot be won over through coercion, Abu Zahra maintains.⁹³ While we find this argument in a nascent form in the discourses of other Islamists of his generation – particularly Shaltut and the Syrian thinker and political activist Mustafa al-Siba'i – it was Abu Zahra who advanced it most forcefully (and most convincingly), firmly anchoring it in the Quran, the hadith and the practices of the Prophet and the first caliphs.⁹⁴ This argument became a hallmark of the discourses of subsequent Azhar-affiliated scholar-sheikhs, primarily Qaradawi and Zuhaili, as well as intellectuals with Islamist leanings, such as the Lebanese academic 'Adnan al-Sayyed Hussein.⁹⁵

For Abu Zahra, the sharia defines both the purposes of jihad and the ethical rules that govern its conduct. Thus, based on the Quran and the Sunna (the two principal sources of

the sharia), Abu Zahra identifies two main purposes for jihad: (1) repelling attack on the land of Muslims or on their lives or properties; and (2) protecting the freedom of Muslims everywhere to practice their religion and to call on others via peaceful means to embrace it.⁹⁶ Quite interestingly, he does not recognize preemptive attack as legitimate fighting, or jihad. He bases this minority view even among mainstream reformist Islamists on two grounds: (1) there is no clear Qur'anic verse to justify it; and (2) the Prophet himself did not resort to preemptive attack even when he was told that some polytheists were about to break their non-aggression pact with the Muslims and betray them.⁹⁷ Determined not to be the first to break the peace, the Prophet told the Muslims 'to keep their compact [with the polytheists] and to seek refuge in God's help', Abu Zahra narrates.⁹⁸ A recurrent theme in Abu Zahra's discourse is that the Prophet always resisted being the first to attack, waiting for the enemy to initiate hostilities.⁹⁹ Last but not least, jihad is governed by a number of ethical rules that regulate its conduct, prior to the 'outbreak of hostilities, during hostilities and after they have come to an end'.¹⁰⁰ These rules are the same as the rules of war, which are discussed below.

Rules of war

Abu Zahra's extensive discussion on the rules of war is important in its own right and because of its influence on the discourses of subsequent reformist-moderate Islamists, particularly Qaradawi and Zuhaili,¹⁰¹ who adopt and expand on these rules. His normative-legalist approach to international relations clearly reflects itself in his treatment of the rules of war. For Abu Zahra, war is a highly regulated activity. Not only should it be fought for the right purposes (otherwise, it would be an unjust and oppressive war), but it should be also fought in accordance with certain ethical rules whose source is the sharia. Summarizing a fairly long discussion, these rules prohibit the killing of (1) the elderly, children and women; (2) monks and clergymen; and (3) hired workers (*al-usafa*), irrespective of their trade, whom he describes as the 'builders of any civilization'.¹⁰² In brief, civilians ought to be spared the scourges of war, as much as possible; for 'in Islam, war is waged against oppressive rulers rather than their subjects', Abu Zahra writes.¹⁰³ He reiterates this point a few pages later, noting that the aim of 'war in Islam' is to 'repel attack' for 'war is not against peoples or those who were forcefully driven to combat; but against tyrannical rulers'.¹⁰⁴

These rules further prohibit (1) the destruction of civilian property except when this is necessary for military purposes, or its confiscation by Muslim armies except when this is absolutely needed for sustenance of the Muslim fighters; (2) the torturing of prisoners of war; and (3) the mutilation of the bodies of fallen enemy fighters.¹⁰⁵ Equally important, reciprocal treatment applies in times of peace and of war, which, during war, entails the use of measured – or proportional – force, thus avoiding unnecessary escalation of hostilities. As aforementioned, reciprocal treatment is, however, superseded by the principles of virtue and human dignity.¹⁰⁶ Acts, such as starving prisoners of war or mutilating bodies, are prohibited for Muslims even if the enemy engages in them.¹⁰⁷

The ending of war

According to Abu Zahra, war ends in one of three ways. To start with, it ends any time the enemy embraces Islam (even if just nominally by reciting the two testimonies), agrees to

pay the Jizya (as a sign of fealty and in exchange for protection), or simply surrenders.¹⁰⁸ When war ends in any of the above ways, it is evident that the Muslim side has emerged victorious. Abu Zahra, however, recognizes the legality of two further scenarios, namely: (1) agreeing to a truce that suspends hostilities for a specific period of time after which hostilities resume unless the truce is extended by mutual consent; and (2) agreeing to a permanent peace treaty, that is, one that is not time-bound.¹⁰⁹ Abu Zahra's treatment is very much in line with the traditional view on how wars end, except for his emphasis on the legality of open-ended (or permanent) peace agreements. He bases this view on Quranic verses 8: 61–62: 'should they incline to peace, incline to it also, and put your faith in God. He is indeed All-Hearing, Omniscient. But if they intend to deceive you, God is sufficient for you'; and on the practice of the Prophet who, according to Abu Zahra, was never the first to break a peace agreement even with the polytheists.¹¹⁰ Abu Zahra here consciously distances himself from the view of the majority of classic and post-classic (medieval) jurists who questioned the legality of permanent peace agreements, while recognizing the legality of truces (since they are time-bonded).¹¹¹ While brief, Abu Zahra's treatment of how war ends provided the bases for the more elaborate discussions of subsequent Islamist scholar-sheikhs, particularly Qaradawi and Zuhaili.

The road to Islamic unity

Suhail M. Hashmi notes that 'For the Sunni majority, the Muslim *umma* was viewed as constituting not just a moral or social community, but a body politic as well'.¹¹² Subscribing to the above majority view, Abu Zahra is an early champion of the peaceful-gradual approach to achieving Islamic unity. While this approach has been embraced by subsequent reformist Islamists, such as Qaradawi and Zuhaili, they did not treat the subject with the same rigor and detail as Abu Zahra did. Abu Zahra is one of a few contemporary Arab Islamist scholars to have devoted an entire work to the subject of Islamic unity, the simply titled *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Unity). This section provides a synopsis and short comments on this important and influential text, as far as the discourses of contemporary Islamists are concerned.

The first Islamic state

As with virtually all Islamic thinkers, Abu Zahra maintains that Islamic unity was first realized by the Prophet when he forged the Muslims into a single community under his religious and political leadership. This initial state of communal unity, or first Islamic state, rested on three pillars: (1) total obedience to the Prophet who guided the *umma* and protected it against external and internal threats; (2) brotherhood of the believers irrespective of tribe, kinship or origin; and (3) the Quran. The rest of the book revolves around two principal questions. First, how did the erosion of Islamic unity unfold over the centuries, and what were its causes and consequences; and second, how can Islamic unity be restored in the contemporary era?

The erosion of Islamic unity: manifestations, causes and consequences

Abu Zahra contends that a proper understanding of the causes of division (*asbaab al-tafriqa*) among Muslims is essential in order to restore Islamic unity.¹¹³ Abu Zahra provides a fairly convincing account of the growing fragmentation of the Islamic community

over the centuries, while offering some sound analysis of the causes and consequences of this fragmentation. To start with, he does not shy away from admitting that there were latent divisions within the nascent Muslim community even during the life of the Prophet, as manifested in the scheming of the hypocrites (*al-munafiqin*) to slander the Prophet and to sow discord between the emigrants from Quraysh (*al-muhajirin*) and the local clans of Medina (*al-ansar*).¹¹⁴ These latent divisions almost immediately surfaced following the death of the Prophet, as revealed by the refusal of Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah, a leading figure among the *ansar*, to offer the *bay'a* (traditional oath of allegiance) to either Abu Bakr or Umar, thus breaking the consensus (*ijma'*) among the Prophet's companions.¹¹⁵ More serious examples of the growing fissures in the body of the *umma*, that Abu Zahra recounts, were: (1) the wars of Abu Bakr against the apostate Arab tribes (*hurub al-ridda*, wars of apostasy); (2) the slaying of Othman at the hands of fellow Muslims following a bitter conflict among opposing factions within the still young Muslim community; and (3) the conflicts of Ali with the *wali* of Syria, Muawiyah (which led to the first permanent schism in Islam between the Sunnis and the Shia); and later with the *Khawarej*.¹¹⁶

The vast expansion in the territories of the Islamic state; its incorporation of many non-Arab peoples with their own languages, cultures and traditions; and especially the transition from a caliphate to hereditary rule under the Umayyad and later Abbasid dynasties (whose legitimacy was rejected by many Muslims, especially the partisans of Ali) all weakened the power of the central government, while accelerating the fragmentation process.¹¹⁷ Rightly, Abu Zahra does not attribute the erosion of Islamic unity to a single factor; but to a combination of religious, demographic, cultural and political ones, which are briefly discussed below.

To start with, Islamic unity was clearly weakened by the emergence of sectarianism (*al-ta'fiyah*), leading some sects (such as the *Khawarej* and some extreme voices among the Shias) to excommunicate the rest of the Muslims.¹¹⁸ Unlike many contemporary Sunni scholars, Abu Zahra adopts a very cautious and balanced approach to the question of religious divisions within the *umma*. Not only does he steer clear of anti-Shia polemics, but he refrains from exclusively blaming the Shias for the erosion of Islamic unity. Rather unwittingly, he even adopts the Shia narrative on a few landmark events, such as with his depiction of the rule of Muawiyah as mendacious or unjust rule (*mulkan 'adoudan*), a stance that most Sunnis would reject.¹¹⁹ Abu Zahra is all too cognizant of the interplay between religion and politics throughout Islamic history, and the tendency of ambitious individuals and groups to exploit religion for political gain. A case in point was the legitimation, partially on religious grounds, of the overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty by the Abbasids.

A more serious threat to Islamic unity came from the proliferation of mini-states, which literally detached themselves from the center of the caliphate. Some of these mini-states based their legitimacy on affiliation with one or another of the Shia sects,¹²⁰ as was the case with the Yazidi-based mini-states in Yemen and what he refers to as the 'Land of Daylam and Gilan' (Gilan province in the northwest of modern Iran), and the Fatimids in Egypt, who followed the Ismaili sect.¹²¹ In a nutshell, religious and political divisions went hand in hand, mutually reinforcing each other.

Abu Zahra frequently criticizes the Umayyads for their violent suppression of the followers of Imam Ali (the Shias); and for their harsh and unjust treatment of non-Arab Muslims, such as denying them their fair share of war booty.¹²² For Abu Zahra, this unfair

treatment brought to the surface two related problems, which became permanent fixtures of what became a dynastic-based Islamic state (*al-khilafa al-malakiyya*). The first problem is *al-ʿasabiyya* (partisanship) which refers to Arab feelings of superiority towards the non-Arab elements of the burgeoning state, combined with anxiety over the growing cultural and political influence of the non-Arab element.¹²³ The second problem, *al-shuʿoubiyya*, is essentially the mirror image of *al-ʿasabiyya*; namely feelings of superiority towards the Arabs among the non-Arab elements, especially the Persians (*al-furs*) who, Abu Zahra notes, always felt that they had a more illustrious history and civilization than the tribal Arabs.¹²⁴ Abu Zahra is simultaneously critical of the Umayyads for their *ʿasabiyya* and of the Abbasids for their *shuʿoubiyya*, noting that under the caliph al-Maʿmoun (786–833), ‘the state was Persian in essence, although dressed in an Arab garb’.¹²⁵ One principal manifestation of *al-shuʿoubiyya* was the revival of native languages (such as Turkic and Persian) at the expense of Arabic. For Abu Zahra, linguistic unity is a basic ingredient of the unity of the *umma*.¹²⁶ The failure of Arabic to establish itself as the hegemonic language in the predominantly non-Arab regions of the burgeoning empire was, thus, one factor that contributed to the fragmentation of the *umma*.¹²⁷

We now turn to the consequences of the erosion of Islamic unity. Abu Zahra compares the unity of the *umma* to the immune system of the human body; when it weakens, the body of the *umma* becomes susceptible to many ailments.¹²⁸ Abu Zahra notes that after the Islamic state reached its peak in the early Abbasid period, ‘the power of the Abbasid Caliph waned and parts of his state started pulling away until we ended in the current situation of division among the Muslims, where some [Islamic] provinces are at war with other [Islamic] provinces and the people of one province do not notice the suffering of the people of other provinces; and even when they do they act as if the matter is of no concern to them’. He concludes by quoting a famous hadith: ‘He who does not concern himself with the affairs of Muslims, is not one of them’.¹²⁹

Restoring (reviving) Islamic unity

Abu Zahra’s detailed account of Islamic divisions is primarily intended to draw the appropriate lessons from history in order to re-establish Islamic unity in the contemporary era on firmer grounds.¹³⁰ Writing against the backdrop of a colonial legacy that exacerbated the divisions and the weaknesses of the *umma*, the recent memory of two devastating world wars (World War I and World War II) and highly cognizant of the power disparities between the Capitalist West and the Socialist East, on the one hand, and the Muslim world, on the other, Abu Zahra saw no alternative to a peaceful and gradual approach to reviving Islamic unity.

Abu Zahra’s construal of Islamic unity was influenced by his reading of the renowned Indo-Pakistani Islamist intellectual and activist, Sayyid Abu al-Aʿla Mawdudi (1903–1979), who devoted considerable attention to the subject of reviving Islamic unity.¹³¹ While limitations of space preclude a comparative treatment of Abu Zahra’s and Mawdudi’s conceptualizations of Islamic unity, it is worth highlighting two important differences. First, Abu Zahra is less fixated on the notion of restoring the caliphate than Mawdudi. Second, and more importantly, Abu Zahra eschews violence altogether as a means of reviving the unity of the Muslim *umma*, while Mawdudi is significantly more ambivalent on the appropriateness of using force to realize the Islamic state.¹³² Nonetheless, Mawdudi and Abu Zahra

concur that it is the religious duty of every Muslim to strive to revive the unity of the *umma*.¹³³ Abu Zahra also acknowledges the influence of the religious reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–1897), whom he credits with introducing the notion of the ‘Islamic League’ which he borrows.¹³⁴

In a nutshell, for Abu Zahra, reviving the unity of the *umma*, ‘after a long separation’, should constitute the paramount goal of all Muslims; but this goal is to be pursued incrementally and exclusively by peaceful means, namely through rousing Muslims to live their Islam.¹³⁵ With great passion, he writes:

Islamic unity is our objective, and every Muslim should make it his own goal. The one who does not believe that Muslims are one single nation, he has, indeed, opposed the texts of the Quran and has joined those who have exerted sedition towards God and His Prophet, and He has said: ‘Whoso defies the Messenger after right guidance has become clear to him, and follows a path other than that of the believers, We assign to him a master he chose to obey, and scorch him in hell – and what a wretched place to end!’ [4: 115].¹³⁶

While the first step towards restoring Islamic unity had been accomplished with the liberation of Muslim countries from the yoke of foreign occupation, the road ahead remains a long and arduous one, he notes.¹³⁷ The most immediate obstacle stems from the reluctance of the rulers of most Muslim countries to give priority to political, economic and cultural ties to other Muslim countries over ties to non-Muslim countries, which dates back to the colonial era.¹³⁸ Abu Zahra sounds fairly confident that this obstacle can be surmounted through a combination of popular pressure in support of Islamic unity and the rulers experiencing a change of heart as they start to see the benefits of a closer relationship with fellow Muslim countries. Without really offering a clear roadmap for achieving Islamic unity, Abu Zahra does identify what he believes to be the principal changes – in the political, economic, cultural and, above all, religious realms – that are required in order to bring about Islamic unity.

In the realm of politics and security, Muslim countries are called upon to refrain altogether from (1) waging (or threatening) war against one another; and (2) joining military alliances with non-Muslim countries that are directed against a Muslim state.¹³⁹ Abu Zahra rejects military alliances between Muslim and non-Muslim countries although he supports non-aggression pacts or long-term peace treaties.¹⁴⁰ If war should ever erupt among Muslim states, every effort should be made to resolve it peacefully. If this is not possible, then Muslim states may use force against the aggressor Muslim state, as in Quranic verse 49: 9: ‘If two groups of believers fight each other, make peace between them. If one group transgresses against the other, fight the transgressing group until it returns to the judgment of God’.¹⁴¹

In line with Islamists (such as Shaltut, Zuhaili and Qaradawi), Abu Zahra draws a clear distinction between relations among Muslim states and relations between Muslim and non-Muslim states. While peace is desirable in relations between Muslim and non-Muslim states, war remains an ever-present possibility (due to the conduct of the latter). But in relations among Muslim states, war should be outlawed altogether as a means of resolving differences. For Abu Zahra, it is paramount to establish (ill-specified) mechanisms to peacefully settle disputes among Muslim states and to identify and collectively punish any aggressor.¹⁴² Clearly, there is a strong idealist-normative (indeed utopian) streak in Abu Zahra’s discourse on relations among Muslim states. The Kantian/Liberal notion of ‘pacific realm’ or ‘zone of peace’,¹⁴³

as well as the more recent, albeit similar, concept of 'security community' (or 'no-war zone')¹⁴⁴ best captures Abu Zahra's understanding of how relations among Muslim states should be. It is highly unlikely, though, that Abu Zahra was aware of these western-inspired academic notions.

In the economic sphere, Abu Zahra advocates removing trade barriers among Muslim states, in order for the different Islamic regions to benefit from each other's surpluses.¹⁴⁵ While expending considerable ink on the role that trade historically played in bringing together the various Muslim regions, Abu Zahra does not properly explain the concept of 'surplus' (*al-fa'ed*); nor does he embed it in the theory of comparative advantage (of which he is unlikely to be aware), according to which each country, or region, would specialize in the production of goods in which it has a comparative advantage. Although Abu Zahra does not address the issue of free movement of capital, one can assume it is implied. Most importantly, he maintains that Muslims should have the freedom to migrate to any Muslim country in quest of economic betterment.¹⁴⁶ Abu Zahra's discussion of the economic dimension of Islamic unity is too brief and too general, and he does not seem to appreciate how difficult it would be for Muslim countries to curtail their ties with their former colonizers, and the non-Muslim world in general, in order to give priority to enhancing their ties with fellow Muslim countries.

In the cultural sphere, Abu Zahra is primarily interested in reviving the Arabic language as the lingua franca of the Muslim *umma*. Abu Zahra quotes approvingly the opinion of Imam al-Shafi'i that a working knowledge of Arabic is required of all Muslims in order to properly understand their religion.¹⁴⁷ Abu Zahra maintains that when Islamic power was at its peak, Arabic was the dominant language in the burgeoning Islamic state, including in its non-Arab provinces. The decline of Arabic, as of the late Abbasid period, resulted from the rise of *al-shu'oubiyya* among the non-Arabs and the shift away from classical to colloquial Arabic in the Arab provinces. Restoring the Arabic language to its former dominant position is clearly one ingredient of reviving Islamic power and the unity of the *umma*.

Clearly, though, the most-needed change to surmount the material obstacles in the way to Islamic unity has to take place in the hearts and minds of Muslims. For Abu Zahra, only if Muslims truly embrace Islam, and accept to live by its laws, would they be able to make headway towards reuniting the Muslim *umma* after its long separation.¹⁴⁸ Efforts at reviving Islamic unity will thus come to naught unless they are embedded in a larger project of reviving Islam as a religion and as a way of life. This inexorable link between restoring the unity of the *umma* and reviving the Islamic religion is underscored in the discourses of nearly all contemporary reformist Islamists from Abdu to Abu Zahra, Shaltut, Qaradawi and Zuhaili (among others).

While offering penetrating and original insights, Abu Zahra's discussion of the road to Islamic unity suffers from at least three problems. First, he grossly underestimates the depth of the dependency ties between most Muslim countries and the rest of the World, particularly the West. He seems to think that – once the political will is there – Muslim rulers can with relative ease reduce their economic and political ties with non-Muslim countries in order to give priority to those with Muslim ones. This reflects a limited understanding of the workings of the global economy and hardly any knowledge of the nature of the economies of the various Muslim states. One should not be too harsh on Abu Zahra, for clearly he is not trained as an economist. Rather interestingly, subsequent

economists with Islamist leanings did not take on Abu Zahra's challenge (as they are probably unaware of his work) to develop schemes for promoting Islamic economic unity which are grounded in comparative advantage.

Second, Abu Zahra is fairly ambivalent regarding the final outcome of the Islamic (re)unification project. He oscillates between two possible endpoints: (1) the restoration of the caliphate (or the grand imamate as he sometimes calls it),¹⁴⁹ and (2) the formation of an Islamic League (*Jami'a Islamiya*).¹⁵⁰ Although Abu Zahra at no point explicitly repudiates the notion of restoring the caliphate, he does not insist on it as a condition for realizing Islamic unity. Arguably, the most original idea in *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya* lies in providing a vision (vague as it may be) for realizing Islamic unity that does not necessarily revolve around the universal caliphate.

While a clean break with the notion of restoring the caliphate could have strengthened Abu Zahra's argument, his main problem lies in the equally vague notion of the Islamic League. Clearly, what he envisions goes well beyond what historian Friedrich Meinecke calls a 'heteronymy, a system of multiple relationships of normative obligations that cut across national boundaries'.¹⁵¹ He does not, however, explicitly conceptualize the Islamic League as a confederacy of Islamic states. In a nutshell, Abu Zahra is too short on specifics regarding the Islamic League, and it is not entirely clear how it would be different from the caliphate. Stated more starkly, his notion of the Islamic League remains grossly under-theorized as are the notions of the Islamic State and the caliphate in his own writings and in the discourses of contemporary Islamists.

Most importantly, though, Abu Zahra overstates the case for religion as the strongest and most durable social bond. For Abu Zahra, Islamic unity is founded, first and foremost, on religion. He argues that the unity of the *umma* rests on four overlapping religious pillars: (1) the 'unity of its religion and creed', (2) the 'unity of its vitreous ethical principles' (as elucidated in the Sharia), (3) the 'unity of its social systems' (as in zakat and social solidarity), and (4) the 'unity of its rites of worship' (the daily prayers, the Friday common prayer, fasting Ramadan, and performing the pilgrimage).¹⁵² For Abu Zahra, the strength and durability of the religious bond stem from it being morally superior to ties of ethnicity (that can easily degenerate into racism), common economic interests, or sharing the same territory.¹⁵³ Now, there is a huge difference between acknowledging the importance of the religious bond and claiming (as Abu Zahra does) that it supersedes all other ties. History has not been particularly kind to this latter claim, as evidenced by the eventual collapse of religious-based, multi-ethnic, political entities, such as the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman states in the East and Charlemagne's Empire and the Holy Roman Empire (in the West). To sum up, while moving the discussion on Islamic unity beyond the fixation on the caliphate, Abu Zahra's alternative – the Islamic league – is equally fraught with ambiguities both in terms of how it will be established and how it will operate.

Conclusion

Abu Zahra's principal works on international relations were penned between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s at a time when the Cold War was at its peak and shortly after most Muslim countries achieved political independence. Equally important, throughout this period, Egypt (where he spent his entire life) was ruled by one strong man, Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose regime espoused Arab nationalist ideology and was often at loggerheads

with Islamists, as evidenced by the execution of Sayyid Qutb in 1966. Abu Zahra's international relations discourse ought to be read against the backdrop of four pivotal twentieth-century developments: (1) the division of the Muslim world into separate, often rival, independent states; (2) the proliferation of political, military, economic and cultural ties between these newly independent Muslim states and non-Muslim states, including with the former colonial powers; (3) the emergence of Arab nationalist ideology (Pan-Arabism) as an alternative to Pan-Islamism; and (4) the break out of the Cold War between the US-led Western camp and the Soviet-led Eastern camp. Limitations of space preclude a detailed treatment of the impact of these watershed developments on Abu Zahra's conceptualization of international relations. What is beyond questioning, though, is that Abu Zahra was highly cognizant of each of these developments and felt the need to address them in his writings.

To start with, and for most of his discourse, Abu Zahra sounds as if he has reconciled himself to the historic reality of the permanent division of the Muslim world into several states. He is not totally consistent on this point, though, as he quite frequently lapses into speaking of the universal Islamic state as both a historic and present reality. Equally important – while clearly regretting the division of the Muslim world – Abu Zahra does not blame it exclusively, or even primarily, on the colonial legacy or more generally on the western powers. This allows him to adopt a fairly accommodationist stance towards the West and to embrace dialogue, non-aggression pacts, and close economic ties with its countries as long as these ties are not given preference to ties with fellow Muslim countries. Clearly, though, Abu Zahra runs into some serious self-contradictions, as he simultaneously embraces free trade and close economic ties with non-Muslim countries, while advocating a system of preferential economic agreements among Muslim countries. Abu Zahra's peaceful-incremental approach to Islamic unity closely follows the European project of economic, and later political, integration of which he sounds quite familiar. Abu Zahra is genuinely puzzled and dismayed at the greater success of regional integration schemes outside the Muslim world than among Muslim countries. This sense of bewilderment is undoubtedly due to his unshakable belief that the religious tie, especially the bond of Islam, is stronger than ties of ethnicity, shared borders and shared economic interests.

There are scant references in Abu Zahra's discourse to Arab nationalist ideology despite its strong appeal at the time to Egyptian and Arab publics, and the fact that it was pretty much the official ideology of the Egyptian regime since the 1952 Revolution.¹⁵⁴ While other Islamists, such as Sayyid Qutb and even the more moderate Qaradawi, have rejected pan-Arabism, Abu Zahra acquiesces to it (without wholeheartedly embracing it), as he maintains that it did not constitute a threat to the unity of the *umma*. Abu Zahra's stance is that Islam does not forbid identifying with one's kin, country or nation as long as these ties do not undermine the Islamic tie.¹⁵⁵ While quite aware of the inherent tensions between pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism, Abu Zahra glosses over these tensions by simply assuming that Arab Muslims will always recognize the supremacy of the religious bond over the national bond. This unverifiable assumption no doubt constitutes one of several weaknesses in his discourse.

The equally few, but invariably critical, references to the Cold War reflect Abu Zahra's apprehensions regarding the motives of the two superpowers.¹⁵⁶ For Abu Zahra, neither superpower had the moral caliber to lead the world; or to refrain from using its massive

military arsenal against lesser powers in order to impose its writ on them.¹⁵⁷ While Abu Zahra is supportive of the United Nations, and of international norms and conventions to reduce the risks of war, he is skeptical about their efficacy given the absence of a common moral system that restrains states.

Abu Zahra is a moderate critic of the prevalent international order.¹⁵⁸ He is optimistic, though, about the prospects of its reform, especially if Muslim states (1) grow in power, (2) act in concert (that is, through his proposed Islamic league), and (3) base their foreign policies on the precepts of their religion.¹⁵⁹ Clearly, Abu Zahra does not advocate the withdrawal of Muslim states from the international system; but calls for their full immersion in international relations, albeit as equal partners with the non-Muslim states. Abu Zahra represents an indispensable link in one unbroken chain of reformist-religious thought, which extended for over a century from al-Afghani, Abdu and Rida (the first generation), to Abu Zahra and Shaltut (the second generation) and then Zuhaili and Qaradawi (the third generation), who (as aforementioned) both argue in tones that echo Abu Zahra. It is worth reiterating one last time that this article has aimed at shedding light on a central arena in which this reformist current in contemporary political Islam manifested itself: international relations.

Deploying language from the western academy, Abu Zahra's approach to international relations represents a rather chaotic blend of realism (with its emphasis on state sovereignty and the absence of formal international order) and liberal internationalism (given his enthusiasm about the United Nations and support for fostering and institutionalizing dialogue and cooperation across states and cultures); but above all, it reflects his normative-ethical preoccupations. While it is true that all Islamists have normative preoccupations, this article contends that mainstream Islamists, like Abu Zahra, do not subscribe to the same normative-ethical system as radical Islamists, such as Qutb, Bin Laden and Zawahiri. As aforementioned, Abu Zahra's ethical concerns focus on justice, virtue, reciprocity, non-aggression, peace and human well-being. A principal aim of this article has been to shed light on the centrality of these concerns to the discourse of at least one contemporary Islamist in order to help dispel lingering myths about the monolithic nature of political Islam. Abu Zahra is simultaneously an Islamist and an advocate of values that many in the West (and globally) identify with, although not always faithfully practice.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

1. Most of the academic references to Abu Zahra pertain to his books on the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, rather than his international relations discourse. For brief references to the latter see, however, Yitzhak Reiter, *War, Peace, International Relations in Islam: Muslim Scholars on Peace Accords with Israel* (Portland, Oregon: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), pp.38, 40–3, 45, 46, 50, 51; Ahmed al-Dawoody, *From Tripartite Division to Universal Humanism: Alternative Islamic Global Relations* in Deina Abdelkader, Nassef Manabilang Adiong and Rafaele Mauriello eds, *Islam and International Relations: Contributions to Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.104–23, 111–7. Salmi, Majul and Tanham briefly discuss Abu Zahra's views on international relations in their section on *Modern Islamic Thinkers* in Ralph H. Salmi, Cesar

- Adib Majul and George K. Tanham eds, *Islam and Conflict Resolution: Theories and Practices* (Lanham and New York: University Press of America, 1998), pp.90–1. Hashmi refers in one sentence to Abu Zahra's influence on the study of international relations. Sohail H. Hashmi, *Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace* in Sohail H. Hashmi ed., *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism and Conflict* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp.194–216; p.208. For references by Arab academics, see, in particular, 'Adnan al-Sayyed Hussein, *al-'Alaqa al-Duwaliya fi al-Islam* (Beirut: al-Mu'assa al-Jami'iya lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 2006), pp.50, 170, 187, 234.
2. Abu Zahra, *al-'Alaqa al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1995). First published in 1964.
 3. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyat al-Harb fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Wizarat al-Awqaf, al-Majlis al-A'la lil-Shu'oun al-Islamiya, 2008). First published as an article in *al-Majala al-Masriya lil-Qanun al-Duwali*, 1958.
 4. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 2011). First published by Cairo: Dar al-Jihad, 1958.
 5. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam* (Jeddah: al-Dar al-Sa'udia lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1981).
 6. For an exhaustive account of al-Afghani's life and thought, see Nikki Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani: A Political Biography* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1972).
 7. For a review of the political views of Abdu, which also briefly reviews the influence of al-Afghani on Abdu, see Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966). See also Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1789–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
 8. There are quite a number of writings on the life and thought of Rida. A good start is Rida's own autobiography: Muhammad Rashid Rida, *al-Manar wa al-Azhar* [al-Manar and al-Azhar] (Cairo: Matba'at al-Manar, 1923), pp.133–200. See also Shakib Arslan, *al-Sayyid Rashid Rida aw ikha' Arba'in Sana* [al-Sayyid Rashid Rida or the Brotherhood of 40 Years] (Damascus: Matba'at Ibn Zaydoun, 1937). For academic works in English, see *inter alia*, Simon A. Wood, *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashid Rida's Modernist Defence of Islam* (Oxford, England: One World Publications, 2007); Ahmad Dallal, 'Appropriating the Past: Twentieth Century Reconstruction of Pre-Modern Islamic Thought', *Islamic Law and Society* Vol.7, No.3 (2000), pp.325–48; and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
 9. Mahmoud Shaltut, *Al-Quran wa al-Qital* [The Quran and Fighting] (Cairo: Matba'at al-Kitab al-'Arabi, N.A.)
 10. For works on the reformist current in al-Azhar, and more generally in contemporary Islam, see *inter alia*, Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, and Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age*.
 11. There is an abundance of works on 'salafi-jihadi' thought and movements. See, *inter alia*, Shiraz Maher, *Salafi Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Daurius Figueira, *Salafi Jihadi Discourse of Sunni Islam in the 21st century: The Discourse of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Anwar al-Awlaki* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse Books, 2011). For definitions of *salafi-jihadism*, see, in particular: Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.9–10; and Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.121–2.
 12. For al-Banna's life and thought, see, *inter alia*, Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), esp. pp.20–26, 37, 42, 64, 68, 197, 276; and Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age*, pp.19–20, 23, 114.
 13. Qutb's views are conveyed in a number of works that became the core of the radical Islamist school. See, especially, *Milestones* (Damascus: Dar al-'Ilm, N.A.). For academic references to

- Qutb's political views, see, *inter alia*, James Toth, *Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Emergence of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
14. Omar Abdel-Rahman, *Mawqif al-Qur'an min khusumeh* [The Stance of the Qur'an Towards Its Critics] (Cairo: Dar al-Mahrousa, 2006). This book is based on Abdel-Rahman's doctoral dissertation at al-Azhar. It articulates extremely well the doctrine of offensive jihad, firmly anchoring it in a lengthy exegesis of the *Sura* of Repentance (*al-Tawba*) in the Quran. Abdel-Rahman did not receive much attention in the political Islam literature. He gained notoriety in the West after his conviction in the 1993 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. The US authorities turned down several pleas from his lawyers to release him due to deteriorating health. Subsequently, he died in prison from diabetes and coronary artery disease in February 2017.
 15. For works on Bin Laden, see, *inter alia*, Michael Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Jonathan Randal, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005).
 16. For references to Zawahiri's life and ideas, see, *inter alia*, Fawaz Gerges, *A History of ISIS* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), esp. pp.7, 29, 72, 90, 91, 97, 163, 225, 252, 291; Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi*, pp.1, 15, 39, 72–74, 137, 183, 186.
 17. It goes without saying that each of Abdu, Abu Zahra, Qaradawi and Zuhaili either studied or taught at al-Azhar. The same applies to Mahmoud Shaltut whose views, especially on the lawful causes of fighting, are very close to those of Abu Zahra. For works on al-Azhar in the contemporary era and its influence see, *inter alia*, Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai, *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of al-Azhar, al-Medina and al-Mustafa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), Malak Badrawi, *Al-Azhar and the Arab World: Molding the Political and Ideological Consciousness* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2014), Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).
 18. For reviews of Qaradawi's conceptualization of international relations, see, *inter alia*, Sami E. Baroudi, 'Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi on International Relations: The Discourse of a Leading Islamist Scholar (1926-)', *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol.50, No.1 (2014), pp.2–26 and Rodolfo Ragonieri, *Constructing an Islamic Theory of IR: The Case of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Ummah, Jihad and the World* in Abdelkader, Adiong, and Mauriello eds, *Islam and International Relations: Contributions to Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.184–206.
 19. Zuhaili's principal works on international relations include: *Athar al-Harb: Dirasa Fiqhiya Muqarina* [Effects of War: A Comparative Jurisprudential Study] (4th ed, Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2009); *al-'Alaqa al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam: Muqarana bil-Qanoun al-Duwali al-Hadith* [International Relations in Islam: In Comparison to Contemporary International Law] (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2011); and *al-Qanoun al-Duwali al-Insani wa Huquq al-Insan: Dirasa Muqarina* [International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights: A Comparative Study] (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2012). For a review of Zuhaili's perspectives on International Relations, see Sami E. Baroudi and Vahid Behmardi, 'Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili on International Relations: The Discourse of a prominent Islamist scholar (1932–2015)', *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol.53, No.3 (2017), pp.363–85.
 20. 'Adnan al-Sayyed Hussein, *Al-'Alaqa al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, esp. pp.37–47. Al-Sayed Hussein went on to become a minister in the Lebanese cabinet and then president of the Lebanese University.
 21. For academic treatments of the views of classic and contemporary Islamic thinkers on Jihad, see *inter alia*, Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Ron Geaves, *Aspects of Islam* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), pp.165–89.
 22. The biographical information is drawn from <http://www.arabnews.com/node/216148>; <http://shamela.ws/index.php/author/1153>; <http://www.feqhweb.com/vb/t13390.html>; <http://www.worldlibrary.org/articles/muhammadsunnah.or/history>; <http://www.islamsyria.com/portal/cvs/show/496>. All accessed July 2016.

23. <http://www.arabnews.com/node/216148>. Accessed 5 July 2016.
24. <http://www.arabnews.com/node/216148>. Accessed 5 July 2016.
25. <http://shamela.ws/index.php/author/1153>. Accessed 5 July 2016.
26. In 1961, in a major reform of al-Azhar, the Islamic Research Academy replaced the Committee of Senior Scholars (Hay'at Kibar al-Ulama') as al-Azhar's leading body.
27. A list of his publications is found at <http://www.almeshkat.net/vb/showthread.php?t=125220>. Accessed 10 July 2016.
28. These four books were Abu Zahra's only works to be translated into English under the title *The Four Imams: Their Lives, Works and their Schools of Thought* (translated by Aisha Bewley) (New Delhi: Millat Book Centre, N.A.); Abu Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya: Hayatuh wa-'Asruh: Ara'uh wa Fiqhuh* [Ibn Taymiyya: His Life and Era: Opinions and Jurisprudence] (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 2005); Abu Zahra, *Ibn Hazm: Hayatuh wa-'Asruh: Ara'uh wa Fiqhuh* [Ibn Hazm: His Life and Era: Opinions and Jurisprudence] (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 2005); Abu Zahra, *Al-Imam Zaid, Hayatuh wa-'Asruh: Ara'uh wa Fiqhuh* [Al-Imam Zaid: His Life and Era: Opinions and Jurisprudence] (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 2005); Abu Zahra, *Al-Imam al-Sadiq: Hayatuh wa-'Asruh: Ara'uh wa Fiqhuh* [Al-Imam al-Sadiq: His Life and Era: Opinions and Jurisprudence] (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 2005).
29. For one of dozens of references to the Shias as a sect within Islam, see Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.246–9.
30. Ahmed al-Dawoody, *From Tripartite Division to Universal Humanism*, pp.246–9.
31. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, pp.14, 15, 46.
32. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.14, 17; *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.14.
33. Robert Schuett, *Political Realism, Freud and Human Nature in International Relations: The Resurrection of the Realist Man* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
34. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.25; *al-'Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.51.
35. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.14, 15. See also *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.38.
36. For a detailed discussion of these overarching principles, see Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, pp.63–143.
37. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.45. For similar broad construal of the *umma* in the western academic literature, see, *inter alia*, Ron Geaves, *Aspects of Islam* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2005), pp.75–95.
38. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.13. For a similar view from an Islamist thinker of Abu Zahra's generation, albeit of lesser renown, see Mustafa al-Siba'i, *Nizham al-Silm wa al-Harb fi al-Islam* [The System of Peace and War in Islam] (2nd printing, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Wariq, 1998). First published in 1953, esp. p.17.
39. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, pp.45–6.
40. For his endorsement of the United Nations, see Abu Zahra, *al-'Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.60.
41. Richard Falk, *Humanitarian Intervention and Legitimacy Wars: Seeking Peace and Justice in the 21st Century* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2015); Andrew Linklater, *The Problem of Harm in World Politics: Theoretical Investigations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (3rd ed, New York: Basic Books, 2000).
42. Abu Zahra, *al-'Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.29.
43. Abu Zahra, *al-'Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.41.
44. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, pp.51–6.
45. See, *inter alia*, Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.192. Mustafa al-Siba'i makes the same point. Al-Siba'i, *Nizham al-Silm wa al-Harb fi al-Islam*, p.29.
46. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.37–46.
47. For contemporary conceptualizations of the meaning of the Sharia and its role in Muslim societies, see *inter alia*, Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharia: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Bassam Tibi, *The Shari'a State: Arab Spring and Democratization* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Bernard G. Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law* (Athens, Georgia and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2006); and Robert W. Hefner (ed.), *Sharia*

Politics: Islamic law and Society in the Modern World (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).

48. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.50–5.
49. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.51.
50. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.192; *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.51.
51. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.54. See also *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.29–30.
52. See, in particular, the following works by Zuhaili, *Athar al-Harb*, esp. pp.106, 126, 127, 131, 132, 146, 147, 220, 227, 236; *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.105–6; and *al-Qanun al-Duwali al-Insani*, p.95; See, in particular, Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Wasatiyya al-Islamiyya: Ma‘alem wa Manarat* [The Jurisprudence of the Islamic Moderate and Balanced Approach: Landmarks and Signposts] (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2010), esp. pp.54–6; Hilmi Zawati, *Is Jihad a Just war? War, Peace, and Human Rights Under Islamic and Public International Law* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), p.12.
53. Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh* (Makers of the Muslim World Series) (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), p.58.
54. Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh*, p.58.
55. Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (New Jersey: Law Book Exchange Ltd., 2010); R. Salmi, C. Majul, G. Tanham, *Islam and Conflict Resolution* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), pp.72, 74, 82, 92, 93, 95, 108, 109, 111, 129, 130, 137, 138.
56. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.54–5.
57. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.60.
58. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.54–5.
59. Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Jihad: Dirasa Muqarna li-Ahkamih wa Falsfatih fi Daou’ al-Quran wa al-Sunna* [The Jurisprudence of Jihad: A Comparative Study of Its Rules and Philosophy in Light of the Quran and the Sunna] (Vol.2, Cairo: Wehbe Press, 2009), pp.893–900; Zuhaili, *Athar al-Harb*, pp.220–376–7; and *al-Qanun al-Duwali al-Insani*, pp.152, 155.
60. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.52.
61. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.36–8; *Al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, esp. p.16.
62. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.37.
63. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.16.
64. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.16.
65. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.37.
66. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.38.
67. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.38.
68. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.70–3.
69. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.40.
70. See, *inter alia*, Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, pp.203–9.
71. He also quotes two prophetic hadiths which exhort believers to honor their vows. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.40; *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.203.
72. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.40.
73. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.34.
74. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.44–9.
75. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.44.
76. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.190.
77. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.44–5.
78. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.45.
79. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.26–8.
80. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.39.
81. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.20–6.
82. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.13, 45, 87.
83. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.207.
84. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.52–4.

85. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.95.
86. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.96.
87. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.35; *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.23–46.
88. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.35; *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.22–6, 70–5.
89. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.35; *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, p.23; *al-Muj-tama‘ al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.194. Abu Zahra anchors this view in the often-quoted Quranic verse 2: 256: ‘There is no compulsion in religion. Right guidance has been distinguished from error...’.
90. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.95–8.
91. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.54.
92. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.99.
93. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.67.
94. Shaltut, *Al-Quran wa al-Qital*, esp. pp.10, 15, 22, 35, 36; Mustafa al-Siba‘i, *Nizham al-Silm wa al-Harb fi al-Islam* [The System of Peace and War in Islam] (2nd printing, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Wariq, 1998). First published in 1953, esp. pp.38–9.
95. al-Sayyed Hussein, *Al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, esp. pp.37–47.
96. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.98; *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.54.
97. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.21–30.
98. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.43.
99. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.101; *Al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.56.
100. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.100–23.
101. See in particular the following works by Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Jihad: Dirasa Muqarina li-Ahkamih wa Falsafath fi Daou’ al-Qur’an wa al-Sunna* [The Jurisprudence of Jihad: A Comparative Study of Its Rules and Philosophy in Light of the Quran and the Sunna] (Cairo, Wehbe Press, 2009), pp.743–81; *Al-Islam wa al-‘unf: Nazharat Ta’siliyya* [Islam and Violence: Some Fundamental Views] (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2007), pp.25–6; *Al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya min al-Murahaqa ila al-Rushd* [The Islamic Awakening from Adolescence to Adulthood] (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2002), p.289; Zuhaili, *al-Qanun al-Duwali al-Insani*, pp.88, 89, 98, 99; *Athar al-Harb*, pp.52, 53, 133.
102. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.59–69.
103. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.109.
104. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.121. See also *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, p.18–21.
105. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, esp. pp.59–69.
106. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, p.17.
107. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.109–13; *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.69–79.
108. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.113. *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, pp.95–102. Qaradawi offers a very similar, albeit more detailed, treatment of these three most commonly recognized ways of ending war. Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Jihad*, esp. pp.815–61.
109. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, pp.113–4, 118–9.
110. Abu Zahra, *al-‘Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.113; *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.74.
111. Classic and post-classic jurists (roughly until the early days of the Ottoman Empire) based their objections to permanent peace treaties to the practice of the prophet of limiting the duration of any truce with the polytheists to a maximum of ten years. Contemporary mainstream Islamists like Abu Zahra, Zuhaili and Qaradawi argue that this view was triggered by the incessant struggles between the Islamic state and its non-Muslim neighbors (especially Byzantium) and later on the crusades and the wars between the Andalusian princes and their Christian neighbors who sought (and eventually managed) to drive them out of Spain. A fairly detailed and critical treatment of this traditional view is found in Qaradawi’s *Fiqh al-Jihad*, esp. pp.820–6. In his seminal work on war, Zuhaili notes that ‘the [classic] jurists were in agreement that any truce with the enemy had to be limited in time; since a permanent truce, that is not time-bound, is invalid for it would entail abandoning jihad’. Zuhaili, *Athar al-Harb*, p.670. Like Qaradawi, Zuhaili distances himself from this traditional view arguing repeatedly that open-ended truces, or permanent peace accords, are valid under Islam as long as they serve the interests of

- Muslims and do not include provisions that contradict the sharia. Zuhaili, *Athar al-Harb*, esp. pp.334–42, 655–764. In one of the most comprehensive treatments of the subject, Khadduri writes: ‘The inhabitants of the territory of war were eligible to enter into a peace treaty with Islam, which placed them in a state of temporary peace for a period not exceeding ten years, according to some jurists’. Khadduri argues that it was only in the sixteenth century that the Ottoman Sultan started to explicitly enter into open-ended peace agreements with Christian European rulers. Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybani’s Siyar* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), p.22.
112. Hashmi, ‘Islamic Ethics in International Society’, p.156.
 113. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.143.
 114. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.80–5.
 115. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.100. A few pages later (p.152), he names around 15 of the Prophet’s companions who, according to the Shia tradition, thought that the first Caliph should have been Ali and not Abu Bakr. He neither accepts nor rejects this Shia narrative. See also *Tarikh al-Mazhaheb al-Islamiyya*, pp.13, 23.
 116. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.99–123.
 117. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.172–207.
 118. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.172–4.
 119. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.128.
 120. For Abu Zahra, the Sunnis, whom he usually refers to as *al-jama’ā* form one group, although they belong to different schools of jurisprudence. The Shias, on the other hand, form different sects, primarily the Yazidis, Ismailis, the Twelvers, and the *Batinis*. For him, the sectarian problem in Islam emerged with the Sunni–Shia divide in the caliphate of Imam Ali. He, however, refrains from blaming either group for the schism. While a prominent Sunni, he often adopts the Shia narrative on landmark events in the early history of the schism, such as the conflict between Ali and Muawiyah and the reign of the Umayyads, whom he depicts as unjust. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.204–6.
 121. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.163–71.
 122. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.146; *Tarikh al-Mazhaheb al-Islamiyya*, pp.17, 274–5. His critique of the Umayyad rule as corrupt and unjust echoes that of Mawdudi. See, especially, Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawlana Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.92.
 123. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.144–6.
 124. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.199; *Tarikh al-Mazhaheb al-Islamiyya*, p.14. While there is no English word for *al-shu’ubiyya*, it can be defined as a social and cultural trend in the Abbasid age which claimed the superiority of urban culture, represented by the old nations such as the Persian and Byzantine, over nomad culture, represented by the Bedouin Arabs and the values they represented. This conflict had a significant impact on literature in the Abbasid age, and raised serious religious and political argument.
 125. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.177.
 126. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.195.
 127. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.195–9.
 128. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.150.
 129. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.176.
 130. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.200
 131. See, for example, Nasr, *Mawlana Mawdudi*, esp. Chapter 5, *The Islamic State*, pp.80–106. Other academic works on Mawdudi include Roy Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi and Political Islam: Authority and the Islamic State* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011). Abu Zahra and Mawdudi co-authored a short pamphlet that was translated into English which attests to their intellectual and probably personal affinity. Sayyid Abu al-A’la Mawdudi and Mohammad Abu Zahra, ‘The Role of Ijtihad and the Scope of Legislation in Islam’, *Muslim Digest* Vol.9. No.2 (January 1959), pp.15–20.
 132. Nasr, for example, reads Mawdudi as advocating the use of force to establish the Islamic state. Nasr, *Mawlana Mawdudi*, esp. pp.81–3.

133. Nasr, *Mawlana Mawdudi*, pp.80–2.
134. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.220–1.
135. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.201–16.
136. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.218.
137. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.208–9.
138. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.208–9.
139. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.279–81, 313.
140. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.281–3.
141. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.291.
142. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.213.
143. See, *inter alia*, Michael Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* Vol.2, No.3 (Summer 1983), pp.205–35; and Doyle, 'Kant, Liberalism and World Politics', *American Political Science Review* Vol.80, No.4 (December 1986), pp.1151–69; and Kenneth Waltz, 'Kant, Liberalism and War', *American Political Science Review* Vol.56, No.2 (June 1962), pp.331–40.
144. See, *inter alia*, Karl W. Deutsch, et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).
145. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.269–72.
146. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.277–8.
147. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.254–7.
148. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.225–42.
149. Abu Zahra, *Tarikh al-Mazhaheb al-Islamiyya*, p.19; *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.224.
150. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.220–68.
151. Jack Snyder, *Introduction* in ed. Jack Snyder, *Religion and International Relations Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p.9.
152. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.210–1, 225–42.
153. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.214–6.
154. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.77.
155. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, p.79; *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, p.54.
156. Abu Zahra, *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, p.22.
157. Abu Zahra, *al-'Alaqaq al-Duwaliyya fi al-Islam*, p.51; *Nazhariyyat al-Harb fi al-Islam*, p.22.
158. Abu Zahra, *al-Mujtama' al-Insani fi Dhil al-Islam*, pp.142–3.
159. Abu Zahra, *al-Wihda al-Islamiyya*, pp.279–81.