Journal of Quranic Knowledge
Vol. 17, No.65, P 341 -360
rjqk.atu.ac.ir
DOI: 10.22054/rjqk.2026.94116.3372

ATU PRESS

Original Research
Accepted: 2026/10/13
Revised: 2026/08/17
Received: 2026/07/16
eISSN: 2538-2012
ISSN: 2008-9252

A Qur'anic Theoretical Framework for End-Oriented Proportionality in Armed Conflicts, with an Emphasis on Imami Jurisprudence

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Abstract

In the law of armed conflict, the principle of proportionality prohibits attacks where the expected incidental harm to civilians is excessive relative to the anticipated military advantage. Although the principle is firmly established, its practical application raises difficult questions, particularly about identifying military advantage, assessing incidental harm, and determining what constitutes excessiveness. Drawing on the Qur'anic principles governing the use of force and the relevant doctrines of Imami jurisprudence, this study seeks to develop a goal-oriented analytical framework for examining these issues. The study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, utilizing thematic interpretation of relevant Qur'anic verses, consultation of Qur'anic exegeses and Imami jurisprudential sources, and conceptual comparison with international humanitarian law instruments and literature. The findings demonstrate that the Holy Qur'an does not present the "Principle of Proportionality" as a titled or technical legal rule. Nevertheless, concepts such as transgression, equivalence, justice, equity, repelling aggression, and peace, along with principles including the prohibition of domination, preservation of social order, the no-harm rule, the prohibition of injustice, the prohibition of mutilation, and the immunity of non-combatants, collectively establish a normative framework for limiting the use of force. This framework is structured at three levels: "The grounds for defense, the conduct of defense, and its ends and continuation." The proposed framework does not equate to the technical rule of proportionality nor serve as its substitute; rather, it provides a complementary normative analysis of defense within Islamic sources. The originality of this article lies in this formulation and its systematic comparison with the legal principle of proportionality.

Keywords: Qur'anic Theoretical Framework, End-oriented Proportionality, Armed Conflicts, Imami Jurisprudence, International Humanitarian Law, Legitimate Self-defense.

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How to Cite: Fallah Tafti, F. (2026). A Qur'anic Theoretical Framework for End-Oriented Proportionality in Armed Conflicts, with an Emphasis on Imami Jurisprudence, *Journal of Quranic Knowledge*, 17(65), 341 -360. DOI: 10.22054/rjqk.2026.94116.3372

Introduction

Proportionality is one of the central principles of the law of armed conflict, alongside distinction, military necessity, and humanity (Melzer, 2016: 18). Articles 51 and 57 of Additional Protocol I of 1977, together with the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, establish that an attack is unlawful when the expected incidental harm is excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. In certain circumstances, launching such an attack with the requisite knowledge may also constitute a war crime (Dörmann, 2003: 164; Additional Protocol I, 1977, Arts. 51(5)(b) and 57(2)(a)(iii); Rome Statute, 1998, Art. 8(2)(b)(iv)).

Applying this rule in practice is far from straightforward. Identifying military advantage, estimating incidental harm, and determining when such harm becomes excessive all require commanders to exercise judgement in uncertain situations. Scholarly debates in the ethics of war literature persist regarding the appropriate scope and basis for proportionality calculations, as well as which benefits and harms should be considered (Hurka, 2005: 38).[1] These challenges indicate that the rule is not mathematical but rather evaluative and context-dependent (Sassòli, 2019: 367).

Islamic sources, particularly the verses concerning fighting, set out constraints relating to the grounds for defense, the limits of conduct, and its ultimate purpose. Fighting those who fight against the believers is accompanied by a prohibition on transgression (al-Baqarah:190); permission to defend oneself is linked to having suffered injustice (al-Ḥajj:39); human dignity, affirmed in the verse "Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam," (al-Isrā’:70) informs human conduct as a whole. Fighting is directed toward ends such as repelling corruption (al-Baqarah:251), bringing an end to *Fitna* (al-Anfāl:39), and accepting peace (al-Anfāl:61). Imami jurisprudence has likewise translated these foundations into detailed rulings through principles such as the prohibition of domination, preservation of social order, the no-harm rule, and the prohibition of injustice, the prohibition of mutilation, and the immunity of non-combatants.

This study examines the central issue of whether proportionality under international humanitarian law operates primarily at the level of operational conduct, assessing the relationship between expected incidental harm and anticipated concrete and direct military advantage. In contrast, Qur’anic teachings and Imami jurisprudence approach restrictions on the use of force through principles that address the grounds for defense, the limits of defensive conduct, and the ultimate purpose and continuation of such conduct. Therefore, the research question extends beyond whether the Qur’an contains a rule explicitly labeled as the "Principle of proportionality." It investigates whether these principles can be used to construct a coherent Qur’anic-jurisprudential framework for conceptualizing proportionality, and how that framework relates to the technical concept of proportionality in humanitarian law.

1. Translation of the substance of the cited discussion: In the aforementioned article, Hurka examines proportionality in the ethics of war by assessing the good and harm resulting from military action. He and He also address changes in the formulation of proportionality in AI-based decision-support systems. The present article cites these two works solely to illustrate the calculative tendency in critical literature, rather than to reproduce their arguments in full.

This study is basic research and adopts a descriptive-analytical approach. The relevant Qur'anic verses concerning fighting, defense, and its purposes are first classified according to their conceptual connections. Their normative implications are then examined with reference to authoritative works of Qur'anic exegesis. Finally, the findings are considered alongside the relevant principles of Imami jurisprudence and international humanitarian law and brought together in a coherent three-level model." The article reviews the literature and clarifies key concepts, then analyzes proportionality in the law of armed conflict, its Qur'anic foundations, relevant jurisprudential principles, the comparative analysis, and the proposed model.

1. Literature Review

A review of the existing literature suggests that related studies can broadly be divided into two main groups. The first addresses the general principles of proportionality and the jurisprudential rules governing jihad. For example, Mahmoudi et al. (2021 AD/1400 SH) examines the relationship between military necessity, distinction, and proportionality from an environmental protection perspective. In Islamic jurisprudence, scholars such as Amid Zanjani (2009 AD/1388 SH) and Mesbah Yazdi (2013 AD/1392 SH) have discussed the political and legal foundations of the Qur'an. A significant limitation of these studies, however, is that some remain largely within the framework of international treaties. In contrast, others discuss classical jurisprudential teachings without adequately connecting them to contemporary challenges in international humanitarian law.

The second group consists of more specialized, recent studies, which can be divided into two strands. The first focuses on emerging technologies. Researchers such as Alaeifard et al. (2024 AD/1403 SH), Navari and Khalifeh (2025 AD/1404 SH), and Abbasi and He (2026) have examined how the principle of proportionality operates in the context of artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons and cyberspace. Their analyses, however, concentrate primarily on technical issues and give comparatively little attention to the underlying normative foundations. The second strand comprises case-specific studies, including research on the use of human shields in the Gaza war (Ghalandari Shamami and Sobhani, 2025 AD/1404 SH; Tabibzadeh and Zeinoddini, 2023 AD/1402 SH) and analyses of military objectives in recent conflicts (Mohammadpour and Harsani, 2025 AD/1404 SH). These studies generally retain the conventional harm–advantage approach and do not fully explore the interpretive potential of Islamic sources.

A review of prior research reveals that most studies have either explained the principle of proportionality within international humanitarian law or examined the general foundations of warfare and defense in the Qur'an and Islamic jurisprudence. The relationship between these two domains within a multilevel, end-oriented analytical framework has received comparatively little attention. This study addresses this gap while preserving the conceptual distinction between the technical rule of proportionality and its Qur'anic-jurisprudential foundations.

To the best of the author's knowledge, three gaps can be identified. First, the relationship between the Qur'anic ends of defense, repelling aggression, warding off corruption, and bringing *Fitna* to an end, and the assessment of proportionality has not been systematically

analyzed. Second, the constraining role of jurisprudential principles such as the prohibition of domination, preservation of social order, the no-harm rule, and the prohibition of injustice has not been examined collectively within a unified structure. Third, no clear comparison has been undertaken between the legal rule of proportionality and the limits on the use of force discussed in Imami Qur'anic exegesis and jurisprudence.

The originality of this study does not rest on asserting that the principle of proportionality, under the same title and structure, historically existed in the Qur'an or Imami jurisprudence. Instead, it is found in the analytical formulation of the relationship among the three identified levels and in demonstrating the capacity of Qur'anic and jurisprudential principles to explain the proportionality of defensive actions within an end-oriented framework. Accordingly, the study differentiates between the "Technical rule of proportionality" in international humanitarian law and the "Normative framework of proportionality" derived from Qur'anic and jurisprudential sources.

2. Conceptual Clarification

Four key terms emerge from the article's title: "Proportionality, ultimate purpose, armed conflict, and theoretical framework." To ensure conceptual clarity and consistency throughout the discussion, each term is examined in light of established definitions, and distinctions between concepts such as "Principle," "Theoretical Framework," and "Model" are made explicit.

2.1. Proportionality

In ordinary usage, proportionality refers to a relationship of balance or correspondence. In the law of armed conflict, however, it has a specific technical meaning. Under Article 51 of Additional Protocol I and customary international humanitarian law, the principle prohibits attacks expected to cause incidental civilian harm that would be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage (Additional Protocol I, 1977; Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005).

It is also important to distinguish between two different contexts in which proportionality operates. Under the law governing the use of force (jus ad bellum), proportionality concerns the relationship between defensive force and the initial aggression. Under the law governing the conduct of hostilities (jus in bello), it concerns the relationship between expected incidental harm and anticipated military advantage (Gardam, 2004). This distinction is important when interpreting the Qur'anic verse, "Whoever transgresses against you, respond in the same measure as the transgression against you." (al-Baqara:194) The verse relates more closely to the first understanding of proportionality, whereas the rules protecting persons who do not take part in hostilities relate to the second.

Whenever the term "Principle of Proportionality" appears on its own in this article, it refers to the technical rule governing the conduct of hostilities. By contrast, references to proportionality in Islamic sources denote the broader concept of "Calibrating the use of force according to necessity." Accordingly, the term proportionality is used in this study at two levels: first, in its technical legal sense under international humanitarian law; and second, in the broader sense of the normative framework proposed by this study for limiting the use of

force. Failing to distinguish between these two levels may confuse an established legal rule with the analytical formulation advanced by this research.

2.2. Ghāyat (Ends)

In its lexical sense, the Arabic term *Ghāyat* refers to the end, limit, or ultimate point of something (Ibn Manẓūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: entry under the root gh-y-y). In this study, however, the term is used in a normative sense: "It refers to the desirable state toward which defensive action should be directed and against which its overall legitimacy and continuation are assessed. Examples include ending aggression, preventing corruption and restoring a just peace."

In this respect, *Ghāyat* should not be confused with either a "Military Objective" or "Military Advantage." The latter refers to the specific operational benefit expected from an attack (Sandoz et al., 1987: 684), whereas *Ghāyat* concerns the broader normative purpose that guides defensive action overall. Capturing a bridge, for example, may constitute an operational objective, but repelling aggression is an end that may confer legitimacy on that objective or deprive it of legitimacy. In this study, therefore, an end is distinguished from a "Military Objective": "The latter refers to the immediate object of a military operation, whereas the former concerns the desired normative state against which the legitimacy and continuation of defensive action are assessed."

2.3. Armed Conflicts

Under Common Article 2 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, an international armed conflict is any armed conflict between two or more States. A non-international armed conflict, as described in Common Article 3 and the Appeals Chamber's judgment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in Prosecutor v. Tadić, involves protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups, or between such groups within a State (Geneva Conventions, 1949, Common Arts. 2-3; Prosecutor v. Tadić, 1995, para. 70).[1]

In jurisprudential sources, this same domain is addressed through terms such as fighting, Jihād, defense, war, and rebellion, each subject to its own specific rulings and conditions. This study uses the concept of armed conflict solely to define the subject matter under discussion. It does not imply that the rules governing all types of armed conflict are identical; rather, the rules and sources relevant to each field are considered separately, in accordance with the particular context and circumstances of the case.

2.4. Theoretical Framework, Principle, and Model

In its commonly accepted definition, a "Theory" is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that provides a systematic view of a phenomenon by specifying the

1. Translation of the substance of paragraph 70 of the Tadić judgment: An armed conflict exists whenever there is resort to armed force between States, or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups, or between such groups within a State.

relationships among variables (Kerlinger, 1986: 9).[1]

In law, however, a "Principle" is a rule or norm that directly regulates conduct. These two levels are not identical, and this article clarifies its position. First, the "Principle of Proportionality" is the technical rule governing the conduct of hostilities. This article neither modifies that rule nor claims that it appears in the Qur'an under the same title. Second, the "Qur'anic Theoretical Framework for End-Oriented Proportionality" is a term the researcher uses to designate the analytical system constructed by integrating Qur'anic foundations and jurisprudential principles. It is neither a legal principle nor a theory that exists in traditional texts under this name. The adjective "Qur'anic" refers to the origin of its foundations, not to a claim that the Qur'an itself presents such a structure using this terminology. Third, the "Model" is a structural representation of this framework at three levels. Fourth, in this article, the term "Formulation" means organizing existing materials into a new structure, rather than reconstructing something that previously existed in precisely the same form. For this reason, the term "Reconstruction" is not used, and "Theory" and "Principle" are not used interchangeably in the following sections.

Accordingly, in this study, a "Principle" refers to a normative rule or criterion governing the restriction of conduct; a "Theory" denotes a coherent structure of concepts and relationships proposed to explain a phenomenon; and a "Model" is a concise representation of the relationships among the components of a framework. Thus, the term "Theoretical Framework" in this article refers to the study's proposed analytical structure, rather than asserting the historical existence of a theory bearing this title in Islamic sources.

In light of these clarifications, the operational definition of the proposed framework is as follows: the Qur'anic Theoretical Framework for End-oriented Proportionality is a set of concepts and principles derived from the Holy Qur'an and Imami jurisprudence that assesses the legitimacy of the use of force in defense at three levels: the grounds for defense; the limits and manner of defensive conduct; and the consistency of the continuation of defense with its intended ends. This framework does not reject the assessment of harm in relation to military advantage; rather, it incorporates additional levels of analysis alongside it.

3. The Principle of Proportionality in the Law of Armed Conflict

The principle of proportionality is interconnected with the principles of distinction, military necessity, and precautions in attack, and together these principles establish the normative structure of the law of armed conflict (Dinstein, 2022: 154; Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005: Rule 14). The principle of distinction (Article 48 of Additional Protocol I; Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons, 1996: Para. 78) defines the boundaries of lawful targeting. Military necessity, within the framework of the rules governing armed conflict, refers to the necessity of taking action to achieve a legitimate military objective; it does not, in itself, authorize departure from the prohibitions and restrictions imposed by international humanitarian law (Hayashi, 2010: 41). Proportionality occupies an intermediate position

1. Translation of the substance of the definition: A theory consists of a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that, by specifying relationships among variables, provides an organized view of phenomena for the purpose of explaining and predicting them.

between these principles and assesses probable incidental harm in relation to military advantage (Byron, 2009: 193). A serious violation of this prohibition may constitute a war crime under the Rome Statute (Rome Statute, 1998: Art. 8(2)(b)(iv)). Against this background, it is important to clarify and distinguish four fundamental concepts: The principle of distinction determines what may lawfully be targeted; military necessity concerns the need to act to achieve a legitimate military objective; proportionality assesses the relationship between expected incidental harm and the anticipated concrete and direct military advantage; and precautions in attack concern the measures that must be taken to reduce harm to civilians.

The International Committee of the Red Cross's study of customary international humanitarian law considers this rule applicable in both international and non-international armed conflicts. It requires commanders to conduct a reasonable, ex ante assessment of an attack's effects (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005: Rule 14). The Commentary on Additional Protocol I and the Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research's Manual on International Law Applicable to Air and Missile Warfare maintain that military advantage must be concrete, direct, and foreseeable in the near future, and that remote strategic objectives cannot justify incidental harm (Sandoz et al., 1987: 684; HPCR, 2010: 92). Persian-language legal scholarship has likewise characterized proportionality as a defensive rather than punitive instrument for restraining violence and balancing defensive action against the level of threat (Falak, 2016: 248; Kenani & Siah Rostami, 2004: 170).

From the perspective of its philosophical foundations, the principle of proportionality has been influenced by the ethics of war and the just war tradition, seeking to balance the right of defense with humanitarian considerations (Walzer, 2015: 129). As Hayashi explains, the use of force must, on the one hand, be necessary to achieve a military objective and, on the other, must not exceed the limits imposed by the protection of human dignity (Hayashi, 2010: 43).[1]

Two predominant approaches can be identified in interpretations of proportionality. The restrictive approach treats proportionality as a constraint designed to limit the human consequences of war and prohibits any attack whose incidental harm would be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage (Sassòli, 2019: 370; Sandoz et al., 1987: 678). One weakness of this approach is that it does not provide a criterion for assessing whether defensive action effectively brings aggression to an end. This becomes problematic in asymmetric warfare and in cases involving the use of human shields (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005: Rule 14).

The balancing approach, by contrast, treats proportionality as a case-specific process of balancing military necessity against humanitarian considerations and entrusts the assessment to a reasonable commander operating under the circumstances of the particular operation (Dinstein, 2022: 161; Sandoz et al., 1987: 684). The flexibility of this approach has sometimes created ambiguity about the limits of proportionality (Byron, 2009: 193-194).

1. Translation of the substance of the cited discussion: The relationship between military necessity and humanity in the law of armed conflict is complementary. Force is permissible only to the extent necessary to achieve a legitimate military objective, while humanitarian considerations limit its use.

In this article, these two labels serve as analytical categories for classifying the literature, not as a formal, universally accepted taxonomy within international humanitarian law. Both approaches assess primarily at the level of military conduct, relying on an attack's anticipated effects. The third approach proposed in this article, which must be emphasized as an analytical proposal rather than an established approach in humanitarian law, adds another level of analysis at this point. In addition to assessing harm and advantage, it asks whether the grounds for defense have been established, whether the manner of defense remains within the limits of necessity and justice, and whether the action remains directed toward the legitimate ends of defense.

4. Qur'anic Foundations for Restricting the Use of Force

The analytical approach adopted in this section involves directly deriving normative implications from Qur'anic verses and then examining how these implications are explained in Qur'anic exegesis and Imami jurisprudence. Accordingly, this section does not impose the technical concept of proportionality in international law on the Qur'anic text as a criterion; it uses it only for comparative analysis.

4.1. Semantic Analysis of Key Terms

The Holy Qur'an does not articulate proportionality as a distinct technical term. Nevertheless, concepts relating to the prohibition of transgression, equivalence, justice, and the ends of defense provide a basis for formulating normative constraints on the use of force.

The first term, transgression, derives from the root (ʿ-*d*-*w*) and means exceeding a limit (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 554). The limit intended in the verses concerning fighting is not merely a material or numerical boundary; rather, it is a normative limit that determines the legitimacy of defensive conduct. In the verse, "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress," (al-Baqarah:190) the prohibition of transgression immediately follows the permission to fight. This indicates that authorization to defend one does not remove the constraints governing conduct.

The second term means "Like" or "Equivalent." In the verse, "Whoever transgresses against you, transgress against them in the same measure as they have transgressed against you," (al-Baqarah:194) the qualification "In the same measure" restricts the scope of the response. In this context, equivalence does not mean numerical or mechanical equality; rather, it denotes a normative relationship between aggression and its response. *Ṭabrisī* also observes that the expression "Transgress against them" refers to the defender's response as a form of verbal correspondence and should not be interpreted as legitimizing reciprocal aggression or revenge (Ṭabrisī, 1962 AD/1372 AH: 2, 509). In this sense, equivalence constitutes one of the Qur'anic foundations for constraining a response and is structurally comparable to proportionality under the law governing the resort to force.

Justice and equity underpin this balancing process: "Justice primarily denotes the normative standard, while equity refers to its realization in practice." Three other terms, repelling or warding off, corruption, and peace, indicate the ends of defense. The Qur'an states, "Were it not that Allah repels some people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted," (al-Baqarah:251) and "If they incline toward peace, then incline toward it."

(al-Anfāl:61) Once the grounds for fighting cease to exist, the continuation of war loses its justification.

4.2. Constraints and Ends of Fighting in the Qur'anic Verses

A review of the Qur'anic verses concerning fighting reveals three principal constraints. First, the prohibition of transgression requires defensive action to remain within the limits prescribed by Islamic law (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 2, 61; Tabrisī, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 2, 498). Second, the Qur'anic connection between permission to fight and the injustice suffered by believers provides a basis for the legitimacy of defensive force (al-Ḥajj:39). Third, the inherent dignity of human beings, affirmed in verse 70 of Surah *al-Isrā'*, provides a broader normative standard for conduct during hostilities, requiring that it remain consistent with necessity and justice (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 13, 156). Alongside these constraints, the Qur'an makes the continuation of fighting conditional on achieving certain ends. The most important of these is the removal of *Fitna*: "Fight them until there is no more *Fitna*." (al-Baqarah:193) In this context, *Fitna* does not refer merely to differences in belief; rather, it denotes a condition that undermines just order and religious freedom (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 2, 63).

al-Baqarah:251 likewise identifies preventing corruption as the rationale for defense. The continuation of military operations is therefore consistent with these foundations only when it serves to eliminate *Fitna* and prevent corruption, rather than becoming a cause of their further spread.

These ends are not identical to "Military Advantage" under the legal rule of proportionality. Military advantage refers to a specific operational outcome anticipated from an attack, whereas an end indicates the normative direction of the overall defensive action. Accordingly, introducing the element of ends does not alter the technical definition of proportionality; it simply provides a complementary level of normative analysis for examining defense in Islamic sources.

4.3. Epistemological Foundations of the Framework

The relationship among these concepts yields four foundations for the proposed framework. The first is the primacy of divine legislation and the supremacy of justice. Within the Qur'anic framework, the legitimacy of force does not derive from the will of the state or its military interests; rather, justice is the ultimate criterion for evaluating defensive conduct. No military necessity can suspend the ethical and normative limits established by Islamic law (Mesbah Yazdi, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 145).

The second is the unity of jurisprudence and ethics. The prohibition of transgression, the exhortation to peace, and the emphasis on justice show that compliance with ethical limits is integral to the ruling governing fighting, not an external qualification. Principles such as the prohibition of injustice, the prohibition of mutilation, and the immunity of non-combatants in Imami jurisprudence further elaborate this foundation (Amid Zanjani, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 3, 112).

The third is human dignity and individual responsibility. The verses "Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam" and "No bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another"

indicate that merely belonging to the enemy's side does not justify attacking an individual. Lawful targeting is therefore restricted to those who play a direct role in the hostilities (Taskhiri, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 85).

The fourth is the purposive nature of fighting. The legitimacy of defense must be assessed not only at its outset but throughout every stage of the operation, in light of the ends of repelling aggression, preventing corruption, and restoring a just peace.

5. Imami Jurisprudential Principles in Formulating the Framework

This section addresses whether the Qur'anic structure outlined above has been extended within the system of legal reasoning in Imami jurisprudence. Early and later jurists have invoked general principles to articulate the limits and constraints governing the use of force (Ṭūsī, 1967 AD/1387 AH: 2, 4-12; Najafī, 1842 AD/1262 AH: 21, 10-15; Narāqī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 14, 94-98).

These principles can be divided into two groups: "Those that regulate the objectives and scope of legitimate defense, and those that specify the constraints on conduct and means during hostilities. None of these jurisprudential rules was originally formulated as a rule of proportionality in the technical sense used in international humanitarian law. Their role in this study is therefore analytical: they provide normative principles through which the limits on the use of defensive force can be examined.

5.1. Principles Governing the Objectives and Scope of Defense

The principle of the prohibition of domination is grounded in the verse, "And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers." (al-Nisā':141)

There is disagreement concerning the scope of this verse. Some exegetes have interpreted it as referring to the denial of domination in the Hereafter or the denial of an evidentiary argument, and have expressed reservations about applying it to the operational rules of warfare (Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 3, 198). Most jurists, however, have relied on the verse's generality to interpret it as prohibiting all forms of foreign legislative and legal domination (Najafī, 1842 AD/1262 AH: 21, 15; Narāqī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 14, 95).

If this principle were applied without qualification, it might be used to justify any means and any degree of violence to eliminate domination. The response is that *Sabīl* denotes a means or avenue of domination, and the defender's legitimate objective under Islamic law is solely to close that avenue. An action that exceeds what is necessary to eliminate domination creates a new form of domination and aggression. Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* likewise situates the prohibition of domination within the broader framework of justice and proportionality (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 5, 118-124). Consequently, the criterion of proportionality under this principle becomes "Taking the minimum action necessary to eliminate domination." (Ḥakīm, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 1, 210-215)

The rule of preserving the social order is also related to the ends of defense. Its relationship with proportionality is neither direct nor technical; rather, it matters insofar as a defensive action taken to eliminate a threat must not itself cause greater harm or more serious disruption to public order. There is disagreement concerning the nature of this rule: some regard it as a jurisprudential rule, while others consider it a rational judgment endorsed by

Islamic law. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the necessity of safeguarding society's integrity (Najafī, 1842 AD/1262 AH: 21, 14-15; Narāqī, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 535-542; Khomeini, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 2, 464). This foundation is consistent with the verses concerning the repelling of aggression (al-Baqarah:251; al-Ḥajj:40). Moreover, under the jurisprudential maxim that "Necessities are to be assessed according to their extent," the use of force is permissible only to the extent necessary to remove the threat to public order. The principle of preserving order must be understood within the broader framework of Islamic legal norms; it cannot be invoked to justify unrestricted violence (Muẓaffar, 2009 AD/1430 AH: 2, 245-248).

The rule of the prohibition of harm is based on the hadith "There shall be neither harm nor the infliction of harm in Islam." (Ḥurr ʿĀmilī, 1684 AD/1104 AH: 25, 430) Legal theorists disagree on how this hadith should be interpreted. *Shaykh Anṣārī* considers it to have precedence over primary legal proofs (Anṣārī, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 3, 423-435), whereas Akhound Khorasani interprets it as negating rulings that entail harm (Khorasani, 1978 AD/1409 AH: 380-385).

Regardless of this disagreement, the rule has a dual function: "The rule of non-harm component legitimizes the right to repel harm resulting from aggression. In contrast, the prohibition-of-harm component prevents defense from becoming retaliatory conduct or exceeding the limits of necessity. Defense that exceeds the threshold of necessity constitutes inflicting harm and is not covered by the primary proofs authorizing defense (Narāqī, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 265-272; Fazel Lankarani, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 112-116).

5.2. Rules Governing Defensive Conduct

The first rule governing conduct is the prohibition of injustice and the obligation to uphold justice even in dealing with the enemy. Its Qur'anic basis is the verse: "And do not let the hatred of a people cause you to depart from justice. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness." (al-Mā'idah:8) According to Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī*'s analysis, this verse indicates that injustice is intrinsically reprehensible and that the obligation to uphold justice does not lapse in a state of hostility (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 5, 276-279). The owner of *Jawāhir* likewise considers a response that exceeds what is necessary to repel danger to be unjust and prohibited (Najafī, 1842 AD/1262 AH: 21, 54-60). On this basis, exercising restraint in defense extends justice onto the battlefield.

The prohibition of mutilation and cruel treatment establishes the limits on the means by which force may be used. It is based on numerous narrations and on the conduct of the Prophet Muḥammad and Imam Ali, both of whom instructed their troops accordingly (Ḥurr ʿĀmilī, 1684 AD/1104 AH: 15, 58-60). Citing these sources and emphasizing human dignity (al-Isrā':70), jurists have prohibited mutilation, torture, degrading treatment, and unnecessary suffering (Ṭūsī, 1967 AD/1387 AH: 2, 16; Najafi, 1842 AD/1262 AH: 21, 63). Thus, even when the underlying act of defense is legitimate, methods that go beyond what is operationally necessary to incapacitate the attacking force are not religiously authorized. The immunity of non-combatants is the most tangible manifestation of the limits on targeting in Imami jurisprudence. Its Qur'anic basis is the aforementioned verse al-Baqarah:190, while

the *Nahj al-Balāghah* also contains the instruction, "Fight only those who fight you." (Nahj al-Balāghah, 2000 AD/1379 SH: Letter 12)

Jurists have accepted the general prohibition against attacking those who do not participate directly in hostilities. However, detailed rulings and exceptions have been discussed in emergencies, such as when enemy forces use non-combatants as human shields (Muḥaqqiq Ḥillī, 1277 AD/676 AH: 1, 334-338; Shahīd Thānī, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 3, 22-26; Khomeini, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 1, 482-485). The criterion for the permissibility of fighting is actual participation in hostilities, not mere citizenship or religious belief. Consequently, extending the use of force to non-combatants exceeds the permissible limits and constitutes a transgression.

6. Comparative Analysis: Common Ground and Points of Difference

A comparison of the two systems should begin by identifying their shared foundations, since their differences become clearer when considered against this common ground. The analysis reveals several important points of convergence. First, neither system regards the use of force as unlimited; both impose legal or normative constraints on it. Second, both recognize the need to protect civilians and others who do not participate in hostilities. Third, both link the legitimacy of force to considerations of necessity. Finally, neither reduces the assessment of force to a purely mathematical calculation; both require an evaluation of the circumstances of each particular case.

Several foundational and structural differences must be added to this common ground. The first concerns the underlying basis: "The rule of proportionality in international humanitarian law derives from treaties and State practice recognized as customary law, whereas Islamic principles are grounded in divine legislation and justice." The second concerns the applicable criterion: "International humanitarian law explicitly assesses "Incidental harm in relation to military advantage," whereas no criterion formulated in precisely the same terms can be found in Imami jurisprudence." The latter focuses on prohibiting the targeting of non-combatants and restricting action to what is necessary. Incidental harm is addressed primarily in discussions such as those concerning the use of human shields, on which jurists disagree. This point must be acknowledged candidly: "Imami jurisprudence does not contain an exact equivalent of the proportionality rule as a distinct, independent rule. It is precisely here that the proposed framework serves an analytical function, transforming a dispersed body of principles into a structured framework."

Third, the two approaches differ in the level at which assessment takes place. International humanitarian law evaluates proportionality in relation to a particular attack, primarily based on information available before the attack is launched. Under the proposed framework, by contrast, the continuation of defensive action is also subject to reassessment in light of its *Ghāyat*, or ultimate purpose.

Fourth, they differ in how the relationship between the grounds for using force and the conduct of hostilities is addressed. International law maintains a distinction between jus ad bellum and jus in bello and applies the rules governing the conduct of hostilities equally to all parties. This study does not challenge that distinction. Rather, it offers a separate analysis

from within the Islamic normative tradition, in which the grounds for defense, the conduct of defensive action and its ultimate purpose are examined in relation to one another.

Table 1. Comparison of the Rule of Proportionality in the Law of Armed Conflict and the Proposed Qur'anic–Jurisprudential Framework

Component	Law of Armed Conflict (Rule of Proportionality)	Proposed Qur'anic–Jurisprudential Framework
Nature	A legal rule governing attacks	An analytical normative framework
Subject	A specific attack	The grounds for defense, conduct, and continuation of defense
Principal criterion	Expected incidental harm in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated	Justice, prohibition of transgression, equivalence, necessity, protection of non-combatants, and the ends of defense
Time of assessment	Primarily before an attack, on the basis of available information	At all three levels and throughout the duration of defense
Civilians	A central component of the assessment of incidental harm	Immunity and prohibition of attacks against those who have no direct role in hostilities
Necessity	An independent but related principle	An internal constraint on all components (the minimum necessary)
Legitimacy of initiating war	Distinct from the rules governing conduct	The grounds for defense constitute the first level of the framework
Ends	Not an independent criterion in the technical definition of proportionality	A complementary element determining the direction and continuation of defense
Type of assessment	Legal, context-dependent, and non-mathematical	Normative and multi-level
Relationship	A shared core in limiting harm and the use of force	An analytical extension beyond the technical rule

The comparison shows that the two systems overlap in their efforts to limit the use of force, account for its human consequences, and prohibit exceeding permissible limits. However, they differ in their foundations, scope, and structure. The legal rule of proportionality is technical and governs attacks, whereas the proposed framework encompasses a broader set of normative foundations addressing the grounds, conduct, and ends of defense.

7. A Three-Level Model of the Qur'anic Theoretical Framework for End-Oriented Proportionality

The foregoing analysis yields seven normative components, which can be organized into three distinct but interconnected levels. The verse "Permission [to fight] is given to those who are fought because they have been wronged" (al-Ḥajj:39) grounds the legitimacy of force in the actual occurrence of aggression or injustice. Until such grounds arise, there is no initial basis for resorting to force (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 14, 380-384; Qurṭubī, 1985 AD/1364 SH: 12, 65-70). The second component is the primacy of justice at every stage. Verses 5:8 of the Qur'an demonstrate that justice is not merely an objective of war but a criterion governing all conduct during hostilities; neither considerations of expediency nor prior enmity authorize departing from it (Ibn ʿĀshūr, 1984: 6, 135-140; Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 5, 276-279).

The third component is compliance with necessity. The combined implications of the verses on fighting and rules such as the "Rule of Non-Harmand" and the prohibition of transgression indicate that defense is legitimate only to the extent necessary to repel aggression (Anṣārī, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 3, 423-435; Narāqī, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 265-272). The fourth component is the protection of human dignity, which is not forfeited even during combat. On this basis, jurists have prohibited mutilation and torture (Najafī, 1842 AD/1262 AH: 21, 63; Ḥurr ʿĀmilī, 1684 AD/1104 AH: 15, 58-60). The fifth component prohibits exceeding the limits of defense. The prohibition of transgression does not apply only to initiating hostilities; it also encompasses exceeding permissible limits in the methods and means of warfare. The sixth component is an orientation toward ends. Based on the verses concerning the removal of trial, the repelling of corruption, and the protection of the oppressed (al-Baqarah:251; al-Ḥajj:40; al-Nisā':75), this component makes the continuation of defense contingent on its remaining consistent with the ends for which fighting has been legislated. The seventh component is deterrence, as reflected in the Qur'anic instruction: "Prepare against them whatever force you can muster" (al-Anfāl:60). Such defensive preparedness forms part of the logic of defense only insofar as it serves to prevent war and deter aggression (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 9, 115-120).

These three levels should not be understood as elements of the technical definition of proportionality under international humanitarian law. They constitute the structure of the normative framework proposed in this study for analyzing the limits on the use of force.

Table 2. Three-Level Model of the Qur'anic Theoretical Framework for End-Oriented Proportionality

Level	Components	Qur'anic Basis	Jurisprudential Rules	Function
1. Grounds for defense	Legitimate grounds (1)	al-Ḥajj:39	*Lā ḍarar*; *nafy al-sabīl*	Establishing the initial basis for defensive action
2. Defensive conduct	Justice (2), necessity (3), human dignity (4), prohibition of transgression (5)	al-Mā'idah:8; al-Baqarah:190 and 194; al-Isrā':70	Prohibition of injustice, prohibition of mutilation, immunity of non-combatants, *al-ḍarūrāt tuqaddar bi qadrihā*	Determining the limits and manner of the use of force
3. Ends and continuation	End-orientation (6), deterrence (7)	al-Baqarah:193 and 251; al-Anfāl:60-61; al-Nisā':75	Preservation of the social order; *Nafy al-Sabīl*	Assessing whether defense should continue or cease

These seven components do not operate independently. Legitimate grounds constrain the initiation of defense; end-orientation and deterrence determine its direction and termination; and the four intermediate components define the defender's permissible conduct during hostilities. Accordingly, in the proposed framework, proportionality is less a mathematical equation for the reciprocal distribution of harm than a legal–ethical mechanism that evaluates the legitimacy of defense from the emergence of its grounds until the threat has ceased. This account describes the proposed framework and does not make a claim about existing

international humanitarian law.

To illustrate how the proposed framework might operate, consider a hypothetical case in which an installation serving both military and civilian purposes is selected as a target for attack. A legal assessment of proportionality asks whether the expected incidental harm would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated. The proposed framework adds three further questions: 'Do the grounds for defense still exist?' 'Do the methods and means of attack exceed what is necessary to incapacitate the attacking force, and do they target non-combatants?' Finally, 'Does continuing this series of operations still serve to repel aggression, or does it instead lead to the spread of corruption?' This hypothetical example is intended solely to illustrate how the model works.

The proposed framework also has limitations. It does not claim to replace or revise the technical definition of proportionality in international humanitarian law, nor does it reject the distinction between the law governing the resort to force and the law governing conduct in armed conflict. The three-level structure is also the author's analytical formulation; it should not be assumed that jurists themselves organized the aforementioned rules in this particular way. Moreover, some of the rules employed, including the preservation of the social order and the prohibition of domination, are themselves disputed in terms of their nature and scope. The conclusions yielded by the model therefore depend, to some extent, on how these rules are interpreted.

Conclusion

This study has examined the different dimensions of proportionality through an analysis of Qur'anic verses and the sources of Imami jurisprudence, and has considered their relationship with the framework of international humanitarian law. The findings indicate that, although the expression "Principle of Proportionality" does not appear in the Qur'an in its contemporary technical sense, a coherent body of concepts, including the prohibition of transgression, proportionality in response, justice, equity and the pursuit of peace, provides a normative basis for restraining the use of violence. These principles can be organized into three interconnected levels: the grounds for defense, the limits governing conduct, and the purposes that constrain the continuation of defensive action.

The analysis also shows that jurisprudential principles such as the negation of domination, the preservation of public order and the no-harm principle help explain the broader limits of defensive action. Other rules, including the prohibition of injustice, the ban on mutilation and the protection of non-combatants, provide more specific constraints on conduct during hostilities.

The comparison revealed that the two systems share a common core in limiting the use of force, protecting those who do not participate in hostilities, and linking the use of force to necessity. However, they differ in their foundations, criteria, and levels of assessment. The proposed framework neither replaces the technical definition of proportionality nor claims conceptual equivalence with it. Rather, it offers a comparative and normative formulation of the capacities inherent in existing Qur'anic and jurisprudential sources. The analysis also clarified that "Theoretical Framework," "Principle," and "Model" are three distinct concepts

in this article: "The principle of proportionality is a legal rule; the theoretical framework is an analytical structure derived from Qur'anic and jurisprudential foundations; and the three-level model is a structured representation of that framework".

The study's principal contribution is this three-level model, which organizes dispersed foundations into a coherent structure and makes it possible to examine the grounds for defense, the limits of defensive conduct, and the ends governing its continuation simultaneously. This formulation may provide a basis for future research on the relationship between Imami jurisprudence and international humanitarian law, as well as on contemporary challenges in regulating the use of force, including autonomous weapons and the use of human shields. Applying the model to a specific case and examining contemporary jurists' views on *Tatarrus* and incidental harm are among the avenues for further research.

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How to Cite: Fallah Tafti, F. (2026). A Qur'anic Theoretical Framework for End-Oriented Proportionality in Armed Conflicts, with an Emphasis on Imami Jurisprudence, *Journal of Quranic Knowledge*, 17(65), 341 -360. DOI: 10.22054/rjqk.2026.94116.3372

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