A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF PROTECTING CIVILIANS UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND ISLAMIC LAW IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the multifaceted impact of the protracted Afghan conflict on society, examining its consequences for the environment, children, and individuals with disabilities. It explores how International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Islamic law intersect in addressing the challenges faced by these vulnerable populations. The article highlights the importance of IHL, the complexities of Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello principles, and the significance of safeguarding children, the environment, and persons with disabilities during armed conflicts. It emphasizes the role of international organizations and conflict parties in upholding these principles to protect Afghanistan's vulnerable populations and their rights.

Keywords: Afghan conflict, International Humanitarian Law, Vulnerable populations Islamic law and Child protection
Introduction

The protracted conflict in Afghanistan has had profound and far-reaching consequences, affecting various aspects of society, including the environment, the well-being of children, and the rights of individuals with disabilities. The impact on the environment is evident through extensive deforestation, water pollution, soil erosion, and wildlife destruction. The increased disability rates resulting from injuries during conflict, along with the pervasive psychological trauma, highlight the urgent need for protection and support for disabled civilians. Children, in particular, have been disproportionately affected, facing loss of life, injury, and displacement. The application of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is crucial in addressing these concerns, but it faces challenges in the complex and evolving context of the Afghan conflict.

Islamic law and principles also play a significant role in shaping the responses to these challenges, from the historical concept of dar al-harb and dar al-Islam to the application of Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello principles within the Afghan context. These principles and ethical considerations are essential in guiding the behavior of parties involved in the conflict and ensuring the protection of civilians, the environment, and individuals with disabilities. Efforts to protect children in armed conflict, aligning with both international treaties and Islamic law, emphasize their well-being, education, and reintegration into society. The safeguarding of the environment, a growing concern in modern warfare, is crucial to minimize environmental damage and its long-term consequences. The protection of persons with disabilities during all phases of armed conflict, including evacuations, humanitarian aid, and long-term assistance, reflects a commitment to inclusivity, dignity, and equal rights. The protracted conflict and ongoing security situation in Afghanistan have had far-reaching consequences on the environment, disability, and the well-being of children. The environmental impact is evident in extensive deforestation, water pollution from explosives, soil erosion, and wildlife destruction. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) seeks to mitigate

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these effects but faces challenges in war zones. Disability rates have surged due to injuries from bombings, landmines, and gunfire, while the psychological trauma inflicted on individuals is pervasive. IHL offers provisions for the protection and care of disabled civilians. Children, sadly, have been disproportionately affected, experiencing loss of life, injury, and psychological scars. Many have been displaced, facing risks like recruitment into armed groups.\(^4\) IHL places particular emphasis on safeguarding children in conflict and prohibiting their recruitment into armed forces or groups.\(^5\) The effectiveness of IHL in addressing these critical concerns depends on the commitment of conflict parties to uphold its principles and the ability of international organizations to monitor and enforce compliance.

**Role of IHL in Afghanistan**

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) plays a crucial role in Afghanistan during armed conflicts, providing a comprehensive framework to safeguard the rights and well-being of civilians, particularly vulnerable groups such as children and individuals with disabilities. IHL prioritizes the protection of civilians, prohibiting deliberate attacks on them and emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants. This framework also promotes proportionality in military actions, aiming to prevent excessive collateral damage.\(^6\) Furthermore, IHL recognizes the significance of safeguarding the natural environment, discouraging attacks on natural resources unless militarily necessary, and reducing environmental harm. It sets guidelines for the humane treatment of prisoners of war and prohibits torture and inhumane treatment, extending these protections to individuals with disabilities.\(^7\) Humanitarian access is paramount, ensuring that aid reaches those in need, including medical care, food, and essential services. Cultural property is safeguarded against intentional destruction, and non-discrimination principles are enforced, emphasizing equal protection for all, regardless of their background or disability. IHL places a strong emphasis on preventing child recruitment in armed conflicts, advocating for

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the special care and rehabilitation of child soldiers. In addition to treaty-based IHL, customary international law plays a crucial role in Afghanistan, reflecting established state practice. The effectiveness of IHL in Afghanistan relies on the commitment of conflict parties to uphold these principles and the vigilance of international organizations in monitoring and enforcing compliance. In the challenging context of protracted conflicts in Afghanistan, IHL serves as a critical tool in mitigating the suffering of civilians and protecting their rights.

**Jus ad Bellum Principles**

In medieval Islam, there were two realms: *dar al-Islam* (land of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (land of war). *Dar al-Islam* encompassed territories under Islamic legal sovereignty, including both Muslim and non-Muslim communities accepting the caliph's authority. *Dar al-harb* referred to lands not under the caliph's rule, but not necessarily in active conflict. Islam's goal was to bring peace and justice to all humankind, seeking to incorporate *dar al-harb* into *dar al-Islam* through jihad. The concept of jihad in Islam involves more than just war and violence. It can be exercised in four ways: by the heart, tongue, hands, or sword. Military force is only one means to achieve the ultimate goal of Islam, and it is not always favoured. The Prophet Muhammad emphasized that the best form of jihad is to speak the truth in the face of oppressive rule. There is debate among Islamic jurists regarding whether legitimate war must be defensive or if offensive military force is also allowed, but most jurists favour defensive military operations. The application of Jus ad Bellum principles in the context of the Afghan conflict is complex and has been the subject of debate and controversy, particularly regarding issues of intervention, self-defense, and the extent to which international actors have complied with these principles. The changing dynamics of the conflict, the involvement of multiple parties, and the evolving international legal landscape have

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made the interpretation and application of these principles in Afghanistan a complex and contentious issue.

**Jus in Bello Principle**

In Islamic law, *jus in bello* principles prohibits the intentional killing of civilians.\(^{14}\) The Qur'an commands believers to fight with those who fight them but not to exceed the limits. The "limits" refer to the boundaries set by the sayings and customs of Prophet Muhammad, aiming to prevent excesses in warfare and protect civilian lives. In Afghanistan, where there has been a protracted conflict, the principles of Jus in Bello are of particular importance in safeguarding the rights of civilians and ensuring that combatants adhere to the rules of warfare. These principles aim to minimize the suffering and damage caused by armed conflicts and to promote respect for human rights even in times of war. However, the application and enforcement of these principles can be challenging in practice, and violations have occurred during the course of the conflict in Afghanistan, raising concerns about the protection of civilians and compliance with IHL.

The Protection of Children in Armed Conflict

Children in conflict zones often lack adequate protection, especially in Muslim-majority countries where Islamic law of war may be followed instead of international humanitarian law. Efforts are made to align Islamic law and IHL to enhance child protection in armed conflicts. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a key international treaty that references Islamic law and shares common goals in promoting children's well-being.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has taken a multifaceted interpretation approach, considering Islamic law perspectives and seeking reconciliation between fundamental rights and Islamic texts.\(^{15}\) Customary IHL mandates special respect and protection for children affected by armed conflict, including provisions in the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. Children are safeguarded from sexual violence, separated from adult detainees unless family


members are entitled to education, food, and healthcare, and prioritized for evacuation from combat areas and family reunification. Islamic law also emphasizes protecting children as a vulnerable group, paralleling IHL principles. Classical Muslim jurists prohibited targeting children in armed conflict based on their civilian status and distinct vulnerability, making them a prime example of protected civilians in Islamic law.

The protection of children in Afghanistan during armed conflict is a paramount concern given the prolonged conflict and its profound impact on young lives. International instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, establish a framework for upholding children's rights in times of conflict. Key measures include the prohibition of child recruitment, special care and rehabilitation for child soldiers, protection from direct harm during military operations, and ensuring access to education and essential services. Addressing the psychological trauma resulting from exposure to violence is imperative, as is providing humanitarian access to support affected children. Accountability measures for grave violations and efforts to reintegrate child soldiers into their communities play a crucial role. The clearance of landmines and explosive remnants of war is essential to protect children from accidental harm. The protracted conflict in Afghanistan has presented significant challenges in safeguarding children's rights, but the collaborative efforts of the international community, Afghan authorities, humanitarian organizations, and civil society remain vital in mitigating the conflict's impact on Afghanistan's children and upholding their rights under international law.

Protection of Environment

Protecting the environment amidst armed conflicts is gaining increased focus due to the ongoing climate and environmental challenges. However, this is not a recent concept, as its roots can be traced back to classical and Islamic law.

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18 ibid.
traced back to discussions among Muslim jurists during the 7th and 8th centuries. There are noteworthy parallels between modern international humanitarian law (IHL) and these historical deliberations, particularly concerning the principles underlying the protection of the natural environment and its connections to other legal aspects. The ICRC’s 2020 Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict define it as the interconnected natural world, encompassing living organisms and their surroundings, including the hydrosphere, biosphere, geosphere, atmosphere, and elements affected by human intervention like agricultural areas and drinking water. The Environment of Afghanistan is harmed during the war and the ISA and NATO tested their military equipment’s and released chemicals over the air and agricultural lands. According to the Islamic world view, humans are responsible for preserving and protecting everything in the universe, contributing to human civilization. Both IHL and Islamic law underscore the importance of protecting the natural environment during armed conflicts, considering it a civilian concern. They emphasize principles like distinction, proportionality, and precautions to minimize environmental damage. Islamic law views the environment as having intrinsic value similar to civilians and deems any unlawful environmental harm as a criminal act, reflecting a recognition of the civilian status of the natural world and the avoidance of unnecessary harm unless militarily necessary. Attacking the natural environment in warfare is lawful when it's a military target providing a clear advantage, but both International Humanitarian Law and Islamic law contain rules for protecting the environment. Historical accounts, such as the destruction of date palm trees by Prophet Muhammad, illustrate complexities in determining the legality of such actions. Both legal frameworks prohibit disproportionate or indiscriminate harm to the environment. Islamic jurists historically recognized the need for caution when using fire as a weapon. Prohibiting poison or poisoned weapons helps protect the environment by preventing

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harm to water sources and vegetation. ICRC Guidelines provide practical steps to reduce the environmental impact of armed conflict. Given the worsening climate crisis and environmental degradation, safeguarding the natural environment is more critical than ever in modern warfare.

Recent violations of IHL have been justified by selectively using classical juristic opinions or scriptural interpretations. Some non-State Muslim armed groups follow codes of conduct based on Islamic law and aligned with modern IHL principles, while others misuse Islamic law in contemporary conflicts.

The protection of Afghanistan's environment amidst armed conflict is a pressing concern, and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, offers crucial provisions for safeguarding the natural world. These include the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure, encompassing vital environmental assets like water sources and power plants. Parties to the conflict are obliged to refrain from targeting natural resources unless for military purposes and are barred from wanton environmental destruction. IHL mandates precautionary measures to prevent deliberate environmental damage, including contamination of water sources and harm to ecosystems. Hazardous substances must be managed to avert harm to the environment. Humanitarian access is essential for assistance and environmental relief. Certain weapons causing severe, long-term environmental harm, such as specific landmines, are strictly prohibited. In cases of occupation, a duty arises to protect the environment within the occupied territory. Moreover, post-conflict obligations involve rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, including demining. Implementing these rules can be challenging in the heat of conflict and relies on the parties' willingness, monitoring by international bodies, and enforcement measures.

Addressing the enduring environmental impact of Afghanistan's protracted conflict remains a critical concern, necessitating extensive mitigation and rehabilitation efforts.

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29 ibid.
30 ibid.
Protection of Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities face significant challenges and discrimination during armed conflict, and their protection under both International Humanitarian Law and Islamic law is essential. The number of persons with disabilities in conflict-affected populations is expected to rise, necessitating better data collection. The Six Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict:

i. Recruitment and use of children

ii. Killing or maiming of children

iii. Sexual violence against children

iv. Attacks against schools or hospitals

v. Abduction of children

vi. Denial of humanitarian access

IHL requires distinguishing between civilians and military targets, but the harm civilians suffer is not uniform, with persons with disabilities often facing severe impacts. Islamic law emphasizes protecting life, including that of civilians, but specific attention to persons with disabilities is needed. Classical Islamic law recognizes the vulnerability of persons with disabilities in armed conflict, exempts them from duty to participate in war, and acknowledges their right to non-discrimination and inclusion. However, there are also instances of persons with disabilities choosing to participate in combat, highlighting the recognition of their agency and rights within

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31 Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, ‘Mapping the Paradigm of Disabilities in Afghanistan from the Lens of Law and Policy’ (2023) 6 Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies 51.
33 Hashimy, ‘The Constitutional Failures in Afghanistan’ (n 5).
Islamic society.\textsuperscript{34} Nonetheless, both IHL and Islamic law call for greater attention to ensure sufficient protection for persons with disabilities in armed conflict situations.\textsuperscript{35}

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) shifted the approach to disability from charity and medical models to recognizing persons with disabilities as rights holders. It emphasizes altering societal barriers rather than focusing on individual impairments for the full enjoyment of rights. During armed conflict, persons with disabilities face heightened risks due to various challenges, and the CRPD’s Article 11 applies alongside international humanitarian law (IHL) to ensure non-discrimination and protection. Islamic law acknowledges disabilities and provides for reasonable accommodation, and its influence on armed conflict in Muslim-majority contexts can impact societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities.\textsuperscript{36} Efforts are needed to enhance the protection of persons with disabilities in such conflicts with the application of IHL and consideration of Islamic law.\textsuperscript{37}

Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities safeguards the rights and protections of persons with disabilities during armed conflicts.\textsuperscript{38} However, they still face disproportionate impacts due to a lack of disability mainstreaming in existing protection frameworks. To address this, the inclusion and consideration of Islamic law within military operations, evacuation, humanitarian assistance, and long-term support can enhance the protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflict, particularly within Muslim contexts.

The protection of persons with disabilities in Afghanistan is a matter of paramount importance, particularly within the backdrop of the protracted conflict and the numerous societal and economic challenges that the nation faces. Afghanistan is a signatory to international conventions, notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which it ratified

in 2012, and has enacted national legislation aimed at upholding the rights and privileges of individuals with disabilities. Initiatives have been undertaken to enhance access to education, employment prospects, social services, and healthcare for people with disabilities, and organizations are actively working to raise awareness and advocate for their full inclusion in society. Efforts to improve physical accessibility and adherence to international humanitarian law principles, which protect individuals with disabilities during times of conflict, are also being made. Despite these efforts, considerable challenges persist, including the ongoing conflict, limited resources, and societal stigmatization, which can impede the comprehensive realization of the rights of persons with disabilities. Many individuals with disabilities in Afghanistan still encounter obstacles to education, employment, and social integration, necessitating continued endeavors to implement existing legal frameworks, increase awareness, and ensure the inclusive participation of persons with disabilities in all facets of Afghan society. Moreover, addressing the specific requirements and vulnerabilities of individuals with disabilities in humanitarian and conflict contexts remains a pressing concern.39

Protection for Persons With Disabilities During Evacuations

Evacuations of civilians during armed conflict can be challenging, especially for persons with disabilities who face additional barriers. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) obligates parties to prioritize evacuations for persons with disabilities, but outdated language and lack of data often lead to their neglect. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) provides guidance on ensuring accessibility and inclusion during evacuations. In early Islamic history, there were conscious efforts to ensure the safety of all civilians, including persons with disabilities, during battles. Islamic law emphasizes the protection of life, and evacuations for persons with disabilities are considered an obligation to prevent endangerment.40 However, there is a lack of disaggregated data on persons with disabilities in Muslim-majority contexts for evacuation planning. The involvement of community leaders and invoking Islamic legal and ethical arguments can the protection and assistance provided to persons with disabilities during evacuations.

39 Hashimy, ‘Chronicle Causes for the Failure of the Afghan Government’ (n 7).
Agreements to prioritize their evacuation should be respected both from the perspective of international law and Islamic law.

The safeguarding of individuals with disabilities during evacuations in Afghanistan is an urgent humanitarian imperative, especially in the face of recent crises, such as the evacuation operations following the withdrawal of international forces. To ensure the well-being and security of persons with disabilities, specific and comprehensive measures must be taken:

Inclusive planning is paramount, encompassing accessible transportation, communication, and accommodations tailored to the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities. Prompt identification and prioritization are essential, involving registration, coordination with local disability organizations, and collaboration with healthcare providers. The provision of accessible transportation options, accommodating those with mobility impairments, is imperative.

Effective communication support, such as sign language interpreters and accessible information in various formats, must be made available. Trained personnel should offer assistance, considering the unique needs of individuals with visual, hearing, or mobility impairments. Evacuation shelters must be made accessible, featuring ramps, appropriate restroom facilities, and bedding arrangements. Specialized medical care and support services are a priority, ensuring the availability of necessary medications and medical equipment. Recognizing the potential emotional and psychological challenges, mental health and psychosocial support services should be readily accessible. Engaging families and local communities can provide additional support to individuals with disabilities during evacuations.

Training in disability awareness and the specific needs of individuals with disabilities should be provided to emergency responders and personnel engaged in evacuation efforts. Proper documentation, including specific needs and medical histories of individuals with disabilities, is


indispensable for ensuring continuity of care during evacuations. Collaboration with local and international disability organizations enhances the effectiveness and coordination of the response.

It is of utmost importance for all parties involved in evacuation efforts, be they governmental or non-governmental entities, to be well-prepared and attuned to the needs of persons with disabilities. This involves ongoing consultation with individuals with disabilities themselves and their representative organizations. Ensuring that the evacuation process is not only accessible but also respectful of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities is absolutely imperative, particularly in the context of humanitarian emergencies like evacuations in Afghanistan, where these individuals may be exceptionally vulnerable.

**Humanitarian Aid for Persons with Disabilities**

Humanitarian aid is crucial for civilians affected by armed conflict, and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) recognizes their right to receive assistance. Parties to a conflict must allow and assist in the rapid delivery of aid, without discrimination, to civilians in need, including persons with disabilities. Afghanistan has one of the highest rates of disability per capita globally. About one in five Afghan households includes a person with disabilities stemming from factors like warfare, resulting in amputations, and psychosocial issues like depression and anxiety.\(^\text{43}\) However, persons with disabilities face barriers in accessing aid due to a lack of data and targeted support. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines provide guidance on inclusive humanitarian assistance. Islamic faith, law, and culture also emphasize humanitarian aid, such as zakah and ṣadaqah, which can be directed to support those affected by armed conflict.\(^\text{44}\) Technology can play a crucial role in ensuring inclusive aid delivery, but it should be developed with consideration for the needs and perspectives of persons with disabilities.\(^\text{45}\) Engaging persons with disabilities and their representative organizations is essential to ensure effective and inclusive humanitarian assistance. In the context of Afghanistan, humanitarian aid for individuals with disabilities plays a vital role


\(^{44}\)Hashimy, ‘Analysis of the United States’ Liability for War Crime in Afghanistan’ (n 16).

within the broader relief efforts. These individuals face unique challenges due to the protracted conflict, limited access to healthcare, and societal barriers. Key aspects of this humanitarian aid include a commitment to accessibility and inclusion, ensuring that facilities, transportation, and communication cater to diverse needs. Providing essential medical care, assistive devices, and rehabilitation services is imperative to address the specific health requirements of persons with disabilities. Moreover, psychosocial support, educational opportunities, livelihood programs, and the provision of assistive devices like wheelchairs and hearing aids are integral components of aid efforts. Awareness campaigns, community involvement, coordination, and advocacy for disability rights are equally essential. Protection from harm, ensuring humanitarian access, and comprehensive data collection round out the approach to humanitarian aid for individuals with disabilities in Afghanistan. Ultimately, this commitment not only addresses basic needs but also upholds the dignity and rights of these individuals, fostering a more equitable and effective relief effort in a complex and challenging environment.

**Long-term Assistance and Services for Persons with Disabilities**

As conflicts become prolonged, the impact on civilians needs to be addressed in the long term. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) requires that civilians who are transferred or evacuated receive satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety, and nutrition. This includes equal access to long-term assistance for persons with disabilities, such as medical care, rehabilitation, education, and psychological support tailored to their needs. However, in practice, persons with disabilities often face barriers to accessing long-term assistance due to a lack of data and awareness. The disability-inclusive approach should be institutionalized and systematized by authorities and organizations. In Muslim contexts, the system of waqf (endowments) can be utilized to provide long-term assistance and services for persons with disabilities. Throughout Islamic history, persons with disabilities have held significant roles, emphasizing their right to participate in public life.

Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars Under Classical Islamic Law 46 The civil wars among Muslims after the Prophet's demise continue to influence Islamic thought and democracy in the Muslim

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world. The classical juristic literature of Sunni Islamic law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi‘i, and Hanbali) offers insights into conflict resolution processes. Modern Islamic legal literature may shed light on current differences. Islamic law can help prevent and resolve civil conflicts through negotiations and arbitrations, fostering stability, democracy, and the rule of law in the Muslim world.

Muslim jurists agree that appointing a head of state is a collective duty for the entire Muslim ummah. Obedience to the ruler is an obligation, even if they come to power through usurpation, as long as they do not violate Islamic law. Two attitudes have emerged in history: one excessively emphasizes obedience, even to unjust rulers, supporting dictatorship to prevent civil wars, while the other aims at democratization through consultation. The objectives of the Islamic state are to achieve unity within the ummah and safeguard Islam's practice and laws for the public interest.

Islam allows freedom of expression and obligates Muslims to enjoin good and right wrongs. The question of armed rebellion against rulers is complex and politically sensitive due to conflicting views among Muslim jurists and the historical impact of early civil wars. The permissibility of armed rebellion under Islamic law is discussed in two stages: interpretations of jurists on when rebellion is permissible based on Quranic texts and pragmatic considerations and the situation on the ground where rebels may resort to force under specific conditions. Some jurists misinterpret obedience to rulers, prohibiting opposition even for tyrants, leading to an absence of practical recourse to rebellion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges posed by the protracted conflict in Afghanistan demand a comprehensive approach that combines the principles of International Humanitarian Law, Islamic law, and international treaties to protect the environment, children, and individuals with

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48 Benjamin and Hashimy (n 40).
disabilities. The commitment of conflict parties, international organizations, and the collaborative efforts of the international community are vital in mitigating the conflict's impact on Afghanistan's vulnerable populations and upholding their rights under international law and ethical considerations.
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