



The Islamic Ruling on Protesting

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Introduction

All praise is due to Allah and may peace and blessings be upon our Noble Prophet and his followers until the Last Day. As for what follows:

The ruling on protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, and stikes in Islam is connected to the methodological issue of how to interact with the government/ruler. In Islam, the Qur'an and Sunnah have clearly dictated an etiquette in dealing with those in authority and how to correct their errors. Allah commanded us to obey the Muslim rulers in that which is not disobedience to Him as He says, **"O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority"**.¹ The obedience mentioned in this verse pertains to that which is good and lawful and not that which is prohibited by Allah. Ali bin Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, **"There is no obedience in the disobedience of Allah, obedience is required only in what is good"**.² There are numerous other proofs in the Legislation proving the obligation of obeying the Muslim ruler.

While the above-mentioned texts pertain to the Muslim ruler, they equally apply to the non-Muslim ruler as well in non-Muslim countries. Shaikh Muhammad bin Salih al-'Uthaymeen (d. 1421 H.)—may Allah have mercy upon him—mentioned that a Muslim living in a non-Muslim country has to obey the non-Muslim ruler in that which is good.³

With that being said, the Prophet (ﷺ) taught us how to advise and correct the ruler in the situation that they do something wrong. He (ﷺ) taught us to be patient with them when he said, **"If somebody sees the ruler doing something he disapproves of, he should be patient"**.⁴

He (ﷺ) also taught us to advise them in private. It is reported on the authority of 'Iyyad ibn Ghanam (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, **"Whoever intends to advise the ruler on an issue, then he should not do so publicly. Rather, he**

¹ [4:59]

² Reported by *al-Bukhari* (no. 7527) and *Muslim* (no. 1840)

³ *Sharh al-Arba'een an-Nawawiyah* (Tape no. 14) found [here](#)

⁴ Reported *al-Bukhari* (no. 7053) and *Muslim* (no. 1849)

should take him by the hand and advise him in private. If he accepts the advice, then all is well. If he does not accept it, then he has fulfilled his duty".⁵

Based on these narrations and more, the Scholars of Islam have unanimously agreed on the prohibition of revolting against the ruler⁶ on account of it violating the above-mentioned Prophetic advice and causing harm, such as bloodshed, violence, theft etc. Its harms surely outweigh its good.

Shaikh ul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H.)—may Allah have mercy upon him—said, "**Very rarely did anyone revolt against the ruler except that the evil produced by it was greater than the good that came from it**".⁷

From here, the Islamic Scholars understood the prohibition of revolting against the government whether that be physically or verbally. As well, they viewed protests and demonstrations to be part of revolting against the ruler. This is because it too contradicts the Prophetic method of advising the ruler and often leads to violence, theft, and the violation of the rights of others. Not to mention that this method of correcting the government has no origin in the Islamic sources nor was practiced by the earlier generations.

A large number of Scholars have passed verdicts ruling protesting to be prohibited. From them are:

1. The Permanent Committee of Islamic Research and Ifta⁸
2. The Council of Senior Scholars of Saudi Arabia⁹
3. Shaikh Abdul-Azeez bin Baz (d. 1420 H.)¹⁰
4. Shaikh Muhammad bin Naasiruddeen al-Albani (d. 1420 H.)¹¹
5. Shaikh Muhammad bin Saalih al-'Uthaymeen (d. 1421 H.)¹²
6. Shaikh Muqbil bin Haadi al-Waadi'ee (d. 1421 H.)¹³
7. Shaikh Ahmad bin Yahya an-Najmi (d. 1429 H.)¹⁴
8. Shaikh Sa'd bin Abdurrahman al-Hussain (d. 1436 H.)¹⁵
9. Shaikh Abdul-Aziz bin Abdillah Aal Shaikh¹⁶

⁵ Graded **Saheeh** by Imam al-Albani in his *Dhilaal ul-Jannah fi Takhreej us-Sunnah* of Ibn Abi 'Asim (no. 1096)

⁶ See: *Sharh Saheeh Muslim* of Imam an-Nawawi (12/229)

⁷ *Minhaaj as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah* (2/241)

⁸ *Fatawaa al-Lajnah ad-Daa'imah* (15/367-368) Fatwa (no. 19936)

⁹ *Majallah al-Buhooth* (20/317-320)

¹⁰ *Majmoo' Fatawaa* (6/417-419)

¹¹ *Silsilatul-Huda wan-Nur* (no. 210)

¹² *Liqa al-Baab al-Maftooh* (no. 179)

¹³ *Ghaaratul-Ashritah* (2/451)

¹⁴ *al-Mawrid al-'Ahdab az-Zalaal* (pg. 228)

¹⁵ *al-Mudhaaharaat wath-Thawraat wal-Intikhaabaat Sharr Shar'an wa 'Aqibah*

¹⁶ *Majallah ad-Da'wah*—Issue no. 1916 (pg. 16)

10. Shaikh Salih bin Muhammad al-Luhaydaan¹⁷
11. Shaikh Salih bin Fawzaan al-Fawzaan¹⁸
12. Shaikh Abdul-Muhsin bin Hamd al-‘Abbaad¹⁹
13. Shaikh Abdul-Azeez bin Abdillah ar-Raajihi²⁰
14. Shaikh Yahya bin Ali al-Hajuri²¹
15. Shaikh Salih bin Abdul-Azeez Aal Shaikh²²

And there are others. May Allah have mercy upon our Scholars who have passed away and may He preserve all those who are alive.

The Ruling on Peaceful Protests

Many people claim that peaceful protests or nonviolent resistances are permissible and that the above verdicts of the Scholars are specific to violent protests. They argue that peaceful protests are meant to pressure the government to act and that it is an effective method for change. However, we find the above-mentioned Scholars ruling peaceful protests to be impermissible as well. For example, Shaikh al-Albani²³ (may Allah have mercy upon him), Shaikh Abdul-Mushin al-‘Abbaad²⁴ (may Allah preserve him), and others. There are many reasons behind their ruling. At the heart of it is that peaceful protests are a public expression of objection towards the actions of a government, which opposes the Prophetic method of advising the ruler in private. If a ruler or a government does something wrong, we are taught as Muslims to address that wrong in a specific manner. Attempting to gather people against the ruler to pressure them to change their decision on a matter, or influence them to take action on an issue does not have an origin in the Islamic Legislation.

If we return to our tradition, we find earlier Scholars rejecting this method of correcting the ruler. ‘Allamah Ahmad bin Ibraahim bin an-Nahhaas ad-Dimashqi (d. 814 H.)—may Allah have mercy upon him—said in a discussion on forbidding evil, **“If it is the ruler, then no one can prevent him [from evil] using the force of the hand, nor by brandishing a weapon, nor by gathering helpers/supporters against him because that stirs fitnah, promotes evil, and removes the awe of the ruler from the hearts of the citizens. Perhaps it may lead to them revolting against him, and towards the corruption of the land, and other than that [of harm] which is not hidden”**.²⁵

¹⁷ *Jareedah ar-Riyaadh* Issue (no. 12918)

¹⁸ *al-Ajwibah al-Mufeedah min Asilatul-Manaahij al-Jadeedah* (pg. 129-130)

¹⁹ *Sharh Sunan Abi Dawood* (no. 543)

²⁰ *Sharh al-Mukhtaar fi Usul as-Sunnah* (pg. 376)

²¹ *al-Iftaa min Asilatul-Waaridah min Dawl Shatta* (pg. 112-113)

²² From the Tape: *Fatawaa al-Ulamaa fi Hukm at-Taffeeraat wal-Mudhaaharaat wal-Ightiyaalaat*

²³ *Silsilatul-Huda wan-Nur* (no. 210)

²⁴ See: <https://darussaafi.com/?p=1808>

²⁵ *Tanbeeh ul-Ghaafileen ‘an ‘Amaal al-Jahileen* (pg. 59)

What Imam Ibn an-Nahhaas (may Allah have mercy upon him) mentioned about gathering helpers/supporters against the ruler is nothing short of what happens in peaceful protests. As we are all well-aware, peaceful protests are an effort to garner public opinion in order to force a government to reconsider its position on a matter. This is not how the government is addressed. As the Imam (may Allah have mercy upon him) mentioned, such actions remove the respect for the ruler from the hearts of the citizens and often end up in violence and rebellion, which is what peaceful protests aim to avoid to begin with.²⁶ The statement of the Imam Ibn an-Nahhaas is supported by the following narration from the Salaf.

On the authority of Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with him) who narrated, **"When Abu Dharr went out to ar-Rabadhah²⁷, he was met by a riding group from the People of Iraq. They said: 'O Abu Dharr, it has reached us what was done to you. So set up a flag so that the men can come to you as you wish [i.e. in support of you]. Abu Dharr said, 'Take it easy, take it easy, O People of Islam. I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, 'There will be rulers after me, so support them. Whoever desires to humiliate them, then he is puncturing a hole in Islam. Repentance will not be accepted from him until it [i.e. the hole] returns to how it was before'".²⁸**

As we can see from this narration, Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) rejected the idea of setting up a flag in order to gather the public and support him against Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with him), who was the ruler of Shaam at the time, and who had a difference of opinion with Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) on an Islamic issue. The reason why Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) rejected this action is because of the above Hadith and others that teach us how to deal with the ruler. What is the difference between what the people of Iraq asked Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) to do and between what protesters do today of setting up tents, flags, etc. to gather the people? Had this been a permissible means to advise the ruler and create social change, Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) would not have rejected it.

Some people may further object to this point by arguing that peaceful protests are only prohibited in Muslim countries where it is against the law. However, if it is done in Western countries, where protesting is legal, then there is no harm. They use as evidence verdicts from Shaikh Ibn

²⁶ Shaikh Ibn ul-'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy upon him) acknowledged this point when he said, "... **even if a protest benefited this time, it will cause harm the second time**" [*Liqa al-Baab al-Maftooh* (18/179)]

²⁷ For more details on the reasons why Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) wished to go to ar-Rabadhah, see: *Siyar 'Alaam an-Nubalaa* (2/63)

²⁸ Graded **Saheeh** by Imam al-Albani in *Dhilal ul-Jannah fi Takhreej us-Sunnah* (no. 1079)

ul-'Uthaymeen²⁹ (may Allah have mercy upon him) and a verdict from Shaikh Abdurrahman bin Naasir al-Barrak (may Allah preserve him).³⁰ The response to those doubts is as follows:

In relation to the verdicts of Shaikh Ibn ul-'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy upon him), then we should know that the Shaikh has many verdicts on the subject. The Shaikh has three verdicts where he permits³¹ protesting and five other verdicts where he prohibits³² protesting. While some of these verdicts have dates, others do not which makes it very difficult to determine the Shaikh's final view on the issue.

In one verdict, the Shaikh (may Allah have mercy upon him) says, “. . . **all of it is evil, whether the ruler allows it or not**”.³³

In another verdict he says, “. . . **These non-Muslim lands do not see any harm in it. If a Muslim cannot get his right or the Muslims cannot get their right except through protests, then I hope that there is no harm in it**”.³⁴

Yet in another verdict the Shaikh says, “**If the government is a disbelieving government, then they do not care about these protests and they flatter them outwardly while they are upon evil internally. So due to that, we see protests as an evil affair. As for their statement: these protests are peaceful? Then they are peaceful in the beginning or the first time, then they become destructive. So I advise the youth to hold fast to the way of the Salaf for verily Allah praised the Muhaajiroon and He praised the Ansaar and those who follow them in good**”.³⁵

So the Shaikh's view on the topic is not very clear. Even in the verdicts where the Shaikh permits peaceful protests, he places conditions. From those conditions are:

1. That a people cannot get their rights except through this means³⁶

²⁹ *Liqa al-Baab al-Maftooh* (18/179). There is also a similar fatwa in *Liqaat wa Fatawaa al-Aqiliyyaat al-Muslimah* (pg. 151-152) and *Sharh Saheeh Muslim-Kitab al-Jihaad wa Siyar wal-Imarah*-Tape (no. 9)

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWSdHNdJhno>

³¹ See footnote (28)

³² *Liqa al-Baab al-Maftooh* (18/179), *Hukm al-Mudhaharaat fi Islam* (pg. 179), *al-Mudhaharaat fi Mizeen ash-Sharee'ah al-Islamiyyah* (pg. 181), *as-Sahwatul-Islamiyyah* (Islamic Awakening) (pg. 142-143), *as-Sahwatul-Islamiyyah* (Islamic Awakening) (pg. 143-144)

³³ *Liqa al-Baab al-Maftooh* (18/179)

³⁴ *Liqa al-Baab al-Maftooh* (18/179)

³⁵ *al-Mudhaharaat fi Mizeen ash-Sharee'ah al-Islamiyyah* (pg. 181)

³⁶ *Liqa al-Baab al-Maftooh* (18/179)

2. That it does not lead to any chaos nor rebellion nor is it discredited by the people in any form³⁷
3. That nothing prohibited happens [in it]³⁸

Looking at the conditions the Shaikh mentioned above, it becomes clear that many of the protests in the Western countries do not meet these conditions. Thus, these verdicts of Shaikh Ibn ul-'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy upon him) cannot be cited indiscriminately as evidence for peaceful protesting, considering the fact that he has various views on the topic and stipulated conditions that are rarely met in these societies.

As for the verdict of Shaikh Abdurrahman bin Naasir al-Barrak (may Allah preserve him), then he too has more than one verdict on the topic. In the year (1433 H./2012 CE), the Shaikh passed a verdict permitting peaceful protests in Bahrain where he said, **“Everything which actualizes good, decreases harm, aids in establishing the Religion of Allah is from the permissible, Legislative means. Rather from the legislative means is writing or giving speeches. As for protests and peaceful sit-ins which are permitted by the ruler, then likewise [i.e. they are from the Legislated means]. This is because there is no enmity towards anyone in it nor is it a prohibited action in and of itself. As long as it is allowed and does not lead to fitnah between the ruler and the citizens, then there is no proof for prohibiting and opposing it”**

³⁹

In this verdict, the Shaikh allowed peaceful protests on the grounds that it is a permissible means. However, in a more recent verdict, the Shaikh considered the possibility that the means of protesting is not legislated. On Rabi-ul-Akhir 26, 1439 (corresponding to 01/13/2018) the Shaikh was asked:

Question: There is a foundational issue mentioned by Shaikh ul-Islaam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy upon him) on the ruling of means which are taken by people to forbid evil and detest it. He (may Allah have mercy upon him) said: **'Every means which the Prophet (ﷺ) did not do nor his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) while they were able to do so, then it is not allowed to do it and it is obligatory to abandon'**⁴⁰. So the question is: does this include today's new means, such as educational plays/drama, cinema, and peaceful demonstrations and the likes? What is the principle in this issue?

Answer: "It is possible. Enough, as long as it was not done [in the past] . . ." ⁴¹

³⁷ *Liqaat wa Fatawaa al-Aqiliyaat al-Muslimah* (pg. 151-152)

³⁸ *Sharh Saheeh Muslim-Kitab al-Jihaad wa Siyar wal-Imaarah*-Tape (no. 9)

³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWSdHNdJhno>

⁴⁰ See: *al-Iqtidaa as-Siraat al-Mustaqeem* (2/103)

⁴¹ <https://sh-albarrak.com/article/10449>

So here we see the Shaikh (may Allah preserve him) in a latter verdict entertained the possibility that peaceful protests are not a permissible means because they were not done by the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with him) despite being able to⁴². This puts a question on the Shaikh's earlier verdict where he argued that it is a permissible means. Thus, it is very questionable to rely upon Shaikh al-Barrak's earlier verdict in light of this latter verdict and the numerous other verdicts of the Scholars who prohibit protesting unrestrictedly.

This leads to my last point that some people claim that peaceful protests are simply a means. If it is done for a good purpose then it is recommended and even obligatory, and if it is done for a bad purpose it becomes prohibited etc. They rely on the fiqh maxim: "**The means take the ruling of their purposes**"⁴³. However, this is in regards to a means which is permissible to begin with. The fifteen plus aforementioned Scholars who ruled protesting as being impermissible argued that protesting is not a permissible means because 1) it is an imitation of the disbelievers⁴⁴ and 2) the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with him) did not do so. So to apply this fiqh maxim in the discussion of protests is a misapplication.

What is the Alternative?

With that being said, someone may ask: what is the alternative then to protesting if it is not allowed? The Scholars advise the Muslims to develop and use effective alternatives which are in line with the Islamic teachings, as Shaikh Salih Aal Shaikh (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "**The means are many. It is possible that the intellects can develop [different means], which have no limit**".⁴⁵ Protesting is not the only method of social change nor is it the most effective. As Muslims, we need to be critical and nuanced in this discussion. We must come together to develop effective means to prevent injustice and oppression, which are compliant with our Legislation and pleasing to our Creator.

We ask Allah to aid us all and grant us all success.

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⁴² Peaceful protests existed well before the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions. It first appeared in antiquity in the Chinese and Jewish communities. See: *Protest, Power, and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from ACT-UP to Women's Suffrage* (pg. 74), *Jewish War* (2.175-177), and *Jewish Antiquities* (18.60-62) by Josephus.

⁴³ *Ilaam al-Muwaqqi'een* (3/147-173)

⁴⁴ As mentioned earlier, the practice of protesting originated from the non-Muslims. As well, the Prophet (ﷺ) taught us how to deal with the ruler and correct his mistakes. Protesting is not one of those means.

⁴⁵ From the Tape: *Fatawaa al-Ulamaa fi Hukm at-Tafjeeraat wal-Mudhaaharaat wal-Ightiyaalaat*