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**Cite This Article:** Muhammad, T. & Khan, T. (2026). No War Against Nature: Protection of Environment During Armed Conflict under Islamic Law and International Humanitarian Law. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*. 4 (02), 27-39.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71327/jssrp.42.27.39>

ISSN: 3006-6557 (Online)

ISSN: 3006-6549 (Print)

Vol. 4, No. 2 (2026)

Pages: 27-39

**Key Words:**

Islam, IHL, Armed Conflict,

Natural Environment

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the protection of the natural environment in the context of armed conflict from a dual normative perspective, namely Islamic legal tradition and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). It argues that environmental preservation has become an essential prerequisite for the survival and sustainability of human life in the contemporary world, particularly in light of increasing ecological degradation caused by industrial expansion, military activity, and the pursuit of economic and strategic interests. The study highlights that both legal systems, despite their distinct historical and doctrinal origins, converge on the principle that the natural environment must not be subjected to unnecessary destruction. From the perspective of IHL, the article analyses relevant treaty provisions, customary norms, and interpretive guidance, particularly the principles of distinction, proportionality, and military necessity, as well as the provisions of Additional Protocol I and the guidelines issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross. It demonstrates that modern IHL increasingly recognizes the natural environment as an object of protection during armed conflict, subject to specific limitations on the means and methods of warfare. In parallel, the article explores Islamic teachings derived from the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the practice of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and classical jurisprudence. It shows that Islamic legal thought establishes a strong ethical and legal framework for environmental stewardship, prohibiting wanton destruction of natural resources even in times of war, except to the extent justified by genuine military necessity. The article concludes that both Islamic law and IHL, despite their different foundations, reflect a shared normative commitment to environmental protection, thereby reinforcing the contemporary imperative of safeguarding the natural environment as a fundamental condition for human survival and dignity.*

**Introduction**

The summer of 2025 brought a particularly harsh trial for Pakistan when the country was struck by devastating floods, land sliding and cloudbursts. The Government of Pakistan claimed that this was a disaster in which Pakistan had to pay the price of actions taken by the developed world, because the

calamity was caused by climate change, and Pakistan's contribution to the climate change was not even one percent.

In these floods, nearly 2,000 human lives were lost, more than 20 million people were left in need of humanitarian assistance, and the economy of Pakistan suffered losses of over 30 billion dollars. More than 1.2 million livestock animals died, and thousands of people were displaced (Ruja, 2022). This large-scale disaster was not the first of its kind as in this century alone Pakistan has faced major flood crises in 2006, 2010, 2020, and 2022, with the floods of 2010 and 2022 being particularly devastating compared to the others.

What is worse is that, unfortunately, this may not be the last such tragedy, because until the root causes behind these floods are addressed, this crisis will continue to haunt Pakistan every few years. And that root cause is the damage being done to the natural environment. Since we are observing this situation from within Pakistan, the focus here is on the national context, but in reality, this is not just Pakistan's problem. Many other countries around the world are also facing serious challenges resulting from environmental pollution and climate change.

While environmental degradation driven by industrial activities, population growth, and carbon emissions is an undeniable threat, another significant, and very often underestimated, contributor to ecological destruction is armed conflict. According to a study the share of the militaries in greenhouse emission is 5.5 percent (UN, n.d). Wars and violent hostilities deeply scar the natural environment, leaving behind long term damage that further intensifies environmental crises across the globe. The extensive use of heavy weaponry leads to the destruction of forests and agricultural lands, contamination of soil and water sources, and the displacement or death of wildlife (Human Rights Watch 2022). Bombings and chemical agents can render once fertile lands unusable for decades, while the collapse of infrastructure causes oil spills, industrial leakages, and hazardous waste to poison ecosystems (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Recent conflicts, whether in the Middle East (UNEP, 2024),<sup>1</sup> Africa (CEOBS, 2025),<sup>2</sup> or Europe (Martyshev et al, 2023),<sup>3</sup> have demonstrated that environmental harm in warfare is not merely collateral damage,

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<sup>1</sup> According to a report prepared by UNEP the environmental harm in the Gaza conflict is neither incidental nor short-term, but systemic and enduring. By May 2024, hostilities had generated approximately 39 million tonnes of debris, a 70 per cent increase within four months, much of it contaminated with unexploded ordnance, asbestos and heavy metals. UNEP estimates that around 800,000 tonnes of debris, particularly from refugee camps, potentially constitutes hazardous asbestos waste. The collapse of sewage, wastewater and solid-waste management systems has intensified risks of soil, marine and Coastal Aquifer contamination, while dust and particulate emissions from bombardment have degraded air quality and dispersed toxic residues. UNEP further identifies soil instability and groundwater pollution linked to tunnel destruction and flooding, underscoring how armed conflict can cause long-term environmental degradation that directly threatens civilian survival and post-conflict recovery. Please see United Nations Environment Programme, *Environmental Impact of the Conflict in Gaza: Preliminary Assessment of Environmental Impacts* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2024)

<sup>2</sup> The ongoing war in Sudan, which started in 2023, has inflicted widespread and multifaceted environmental harm with lasting implications for ecosystems and civilian life. According to the Conflict and Environment Observatory, armed hostilities around Khartoum State resulted in 401 reported incidents at industrial and hazardous sites, including repeated fires at the Khartoum oil refinery, which significantly degraded air quality and released toxic pollutants. Urban combat has produced massive amounts of conflict debris: in one 57 km<sup>2</sup> area, over 100,000 tons of rubble were estimated, much of which contains hazardous materials such as asbestos and unexploded ordnance. Destruction of critical infrastructure has crippled water and sanitation systems, leaving only 1 of 13 major water treatment plants functional by March 2024, heightening risks of disease and freshwater contamination. Damage to dams and hydropower installations has increased flood vulnerability. Agricultural and natural landscapes have also suffered. The Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS) estimates at least 6,126 hectares of vegetation lost in Al Gezira State, while sediment from the collapse of Arba'at Dam has smothered coastal reef systems. Collectively, these impacts illustrate how armed conflict can trigger extensive environmental degradation that endangers human health, undermines livelihoods, and complicates post-conflict recovery. For details, please see Conflict and Environment Observatory, "The Environmental Costs of the War in Sudan," CEOBS, May 2025, accessed February 8, 2026, <https://ceobs.org/the-environmental-costs-of-the-war-in-sudan>

<sup>3</sup> The Russia-Ukraine war, which started in 2022 left Ukraine with severe environmental crises. Although since war began, the greenhouse emission has reduced in Ukraine because of low industrial activities, which should have put positive impact on the

rather it is widespread and enduring. Forests have been burned to deprive enemy forces of cover, wells have been poisoned as a tactic of war, and vital water resources have been diverted or destroyed as military strategies. As a result, communities already suffering from the humanitarian consequences of war are further burdened by the devastation of their natural surroundings, which are essential for their survival and future recovery.

Thus, while climate change and environmental negligence threaten our world from one side, armed conflict exacerbates the crisis from the other. If environmental protection is vital for sustainable peace and human survival in times of stability, it becomes even more crucial during war. This realization underscores a fundamental legal and moral question: *Is nature itself a victim of war?* Both International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Islamic law answer this question affirmatively, recognizing that the natural environment must not become a battlefield casualty. The protection of the environment during armed conflict is, therefore, not an optional consideration but a binding principle rooted in both international and Islamic legal traditions

### **The Natural Environment: An Overview and Its Significance**

In this section, two questions are of primary significance that need due consideration. The first question is: What is meant by the natural environment? The second question that needs to be answered is: What is the importance of the natural environment for the survival of human life?

#### **Definition of the Natural Environment**

As far the definition of natural environment is concerned, different authors have defined it in various ways. One definition states: “A natural environment is one relatively unchanged or undisturbed by human culture,” meaning that the natural environment is that which remains unaltered and unaffected by human activity (Johnson et al, 1997).<sup>4</sup> Another definition describes the natural environment as the non-human-made conditions and surroundings in which living and non-living entities exist on Earth (IHBC, 2023). This definition, though less realistic, is more ideal than the previous definition.

Arab scholars have also written extensively on this topic. They use the term ‘*Al-bī‘ah*’ for the natural environment. (Yusuf al-Qarḍawī, 2001) defines it as the domain in which humans live their lives, and even if they travel far, they eventually return to it. While this definition may be valid from a social sciences’ perspective, as Al-Qarḍawī himself notes, it goes beyond the literal and technical meanings, making it scientifically less precise.

A more precise definition in Arabic states that, linguistically, *Bī‘ah* refers to a space, location, or place. Technically, it refers to the environment that includes humans as well as other material and non-material, living and non-living entities. Therefore, it encompasses everything beyond human control, such as water, air, land, and the living and non-living beings within it (Qurad, 2016).

Considering all these and other definitions, the concept of the natural environment can be understood

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environment, new greenhouse gas emissions appeared linked with the military activities. The inland waterways and marine infrastructure are expected to face enduring consequences on the health of human beings and biodiversity because of the damage caused by the munition chemicals and other pollutants. Please see European Commission, Joint Research Centre. “War Worsens Climate and Environmental Challenges in Ukraine.” April 11, 2025. Accessed November 27, 2025. [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/war-worsens-climate-and-environmental-challenges-ukraine-2025-04-11\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/war-worsens-climate-and-environmental-challenges-ukraine-2025-04-11_en). Adding salt to the wound the war has heavily affected the economy of Ukraine in general and agriculture in particular. Please see, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Pavlo Martyshev, Oleg Nivievskyi, and Mariia Bogonos, “Regional War, Global Consequences: Mounting Damages to Ukraine’s Agriculture and Growing Challenges for Global Food Security,” March 27, 2023, accessed November 27, 2025, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/regional-war-global-consequences-mounting-damages-ukraines-agriculture-and-growing-challenges/>.

<sup>4</sup> Here, the author first explains the definition of “natural,” stating that in the context of environmental studies, something is considered natural if it is neither created by humans, nor altered by them, nor affected in any other way. He further clarifies that no environment on Earth is entirely free from direct or indirect human intervention; therefore, the term “*relatively*” is added when defining the natural environment.

as the state of the Earth in which human intervention is either completely absent or extremely limited, and in this state, humans as well as other living and non-living entities exist and maintain their presence on the planet.

### **The importance of Natural Environment for Human Survival**

The natural environment is the very thing capable of guaranteeing the human right to life. For, the right to life does not mean that a person simply keeps breathing until he dies one day; this right is interpreted in such a way that a human has the right to live with dignity, meaning that he lives a quality life.<sup>5</sup> And a human can only live in a healthy environment if he has the opportunity to live within the natural environment. This is because the natural environment provides clean air, clean water, clean food, and other things essential for life.

When the natural environment is polluted, it causes air pollution which reaches the lungs through human respiration and creates various types of diseases. When food becomes contaminated, it causes illnesses instead of contributing to human growth (Nathanson, 2026).

At the most fundamental level, the human body itself is constituted from elements drawn from the natural environment. These elements are approximately thirty in number including, Oxygen, Hydrogen, Carbon, Nitrogen, Calcium, Potassium and Iron. This alone underscores the indispensable role of the environment in sustaining human life (Hall and Hall, 2021). When the natural environment is degraded or polluted, the very elements that make up the human body are adversely affected (Boyd, 2012). As a consequence, any deterioration in these foundational components inevitably undermines the proper functioning of the human organism. If the constituent parts of this complex biological system are impaired, the quality and continuity of human life cannot be maintained at an optimal level (Shah, 2002). It is, thus, established that a clean and pollution-free natural environment is a fundamental necessity for the survival of human life.

### **Protection of Natural Environment During Armed Conflict**

War, and armed conflict for that matter, constitutes a profound and escalating threat to the natural environment. As scientific and technological advancements continue to transform the nature of warfare, the scale and intensity of environmental harm have correspondingly increased. Contemporary weapons systems possess destructive capacities that extend far beyond immediate military objectives, thereby exposing surrounding ecosystems to significant and often irreversible damage. The environmental consequences of such conflicts are neither incidental nor negligible; rather, they are extensive and multifaceted. Among the most serious impacts are the destruction and depletion of wildlife, the degradation and waste of vital natural resources, and widespread environmental pollution, particularly of the atmosphere. These effects not only disrupt ecological balance but also undermine the conditions necessary for human survival and sustainable development. In many instances, the environmental harm caused during armed conflict persists long after hostilities have ceased, compounding its long-term consequences (Jha, 2014).

Against this backdrop, it becomes essential to examine the normative frameworks that seek to regulate such harm. The following discussion explores the extent to which the protection of the natural environment during armed conflict is addressed within Islamic teachings, and how similar concerns are reflected in International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the Supreme Court of Pakistan, in *Ms. Shahla Zia vs WAPDA*, declared that the human right to life means that a person must be provided the opportunity to live a dignified life in a healthy environment. See *Ms. Shahla Zia vs WAPDA, PLD 1994 SC 693*.

### Protection of Natural Environment in Islamic Law

There are a number of verses in the Qur'ān, numerous sayings of the Prophet<sup>6</sup> the famous commandments of the first Caliph of the Prophet and general principles of Islamic law that suggest that Islam forbids causing unnecessary damage to unlawful objects in war, *inter alia*, natural environment during armed conflict. If we look at the teachings of the Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and the famous ten instructions of Caliph Abu Bakr (RA), it becomes clear that Islam forbids causing unnecessary damage to the natural environment during war.

#### The Natural Environment and the Qur'an

The Qur'an contains several verses that highlight the importance, necessity, and benefits of the natural environment, as well as the prohibition against harming it. Some of these verses are mentioned below.

Condemning a person by attributing the bad behavior of him towards environment, Qur'ān says:

*"And once he turns back, he moves about in land trying to spread disorder in it, and to destroy tillage and the stock; And Allah does not like disorder".<sup>7</sup>*

This verse condemns those who strive to spread disorder in the land and, in doing so, destroy tillage and livestock. The verse is significant for its explicit linkage between moral wrongdoing and the destruction of the material foundations of life. By referring specifically to cultivated land and livestock, it identifies key components of the natural environment upon which human survival depends. From an analytical perspective, the verse articulates a normative prohibition against the wanton destruction of environmental resources. The term disorder (referred to as *fasād*) extends beyond social or political disruption to encompass actions that undermine ecological balance and sustainability. The deliberate destruction of agricultural produce and animal life is thus presented not merely as an economic loss, but as a morally reprehensible act that threatens the continuity of life itself. In this sense, the verse may be understood as establishing an ethical framework in which the preservation of the environment forms part of a broader obligation to prevent harm. It reflects an early recognition that the integrity of natural resources is essential to human well-being, and that their destruction, whether in times of peace or conflict, constitutes a form of *fasād* that is expressly condemned. This provides a principled basis within Islamic thought for the protection of the environment and reinforces the idea that ecological harm is not value-neutral, but carries clear moral and legal implications.

The condemnation of spreading *fasād* in the Earth has been given in another verse of the Qur'ān in the tone of commandment. Allah says: *"Do not make mischief on the earth after it has been set in order"* (Qur'ān). The phrasing of the verse is broad and general that prohibits every kind of mischief and corruption in earth which includes, though not limited to, causing damage and harm to the environment as that is also form of *fasād*. This verse is often understood by classical and contemporary scholars as laying down a general prohibition against actions that disturb the natural balance (*mīzān*) established by God. The expression "after it has been set in order" is especially significant, as it implies that the earth has been created in a state of harmony, equilibrium, and sustainability. Any human activity that disrupts this balance, whether through overexploitation of resources, pollution, or destruction of ecosystems, falls within the scope of prohibited *fasād*. From an academic standpoint, the verse may be interpreted as articulating a foundational environmental ethic within Islamic thought. It establishes that the natural world is not a morally neutral domain open to unrestricted exploitation; rather, it is an ordered system that must be respected and preserved. Human beings, as moral agents, are therefore under an obligation to avoid actions that lead to environmental degradation. In this sense, the verse provides a

<sup>6</sup> Whenever there is reference to the Prophet Muhammad appears, the authors intend to offer the salutation of "Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him".

<sup>7</sup> Qur'ān, 2:25. In this research the translation of the verses of the Qur'ān are taken from the work of Mufti Taqi Usmani.

broad normative basis for environmental conservation: it frames ecological harm as a form of moral disorder and, by implication, supports principles of sustainability, restraint, and stewardship. This aligns closely with modern environmental discourse, where maintaining ecological balance and preventing degradation are considered central objectives. Perhaps, having this in mind, Al-Qurṭabī says that *fasād* is general which include smaller and bigger types of *fasād* (Al-Qurṭabī, 1964).

Another verse of the Qurʾān established direct connection between human activities and the conditions in land and sea. Allah says:

“Calamities have appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of the people have earned, so that He (Allah) makes them taste some of what they did.” (Qurʾān)

The classical and modern exegetes the Qurʾān like (al-Zamakhshirī, 1407 AH) and (Usmani, n.d) exemplify the meaning of ‘calamities’ in this verse by, *inter alia*, draught, famine, Earthquake, loss of agricultural yields, spread of death in human and livestock, frequent occurrences of fire and drowning.<sup>8</sup>

This verse is particularly significant because it explicitly links environmental degradation to human conduct. The reference to “corruption on land and sea” can be understood in contemporary terms as encompassing ecological damage across terrestrial and marine environments. Unlike more general prohibitions, this verse identifies human agency as the primary cause of such disruption.

From an academic perspective, the verse provides a powerful conceptual basis for environmental responsibility. It suggests that environmental harm is not accidental or inevitable, but rather the result of human choices and actions. The consequences that follow are portrayed not merely as natural occurrences, but as a form of moral accountability intended to prompt reflection and reform.

In this way, the verse reinforces the idea that the preservation of the natural environment is intrinsically tied to ethical conduct. It establishes a clear cause-and-effect relationship between human behavior and ecological imbalance, thereby supporting a normative framework in which environmental protection becomes a moral imperative.

### **The Protection of Natural Environment and the Sunnah**

There are a number of *Ḥadīths* of the Prophet that deal with the issue of the preservation of natural environment. One such *Ḥadīth* looks at the issue from the perspective of common right on the natural resources. It is reported that the Prophet said: “*People are partners in three things: water, pasture and fire*” (al-Baghdādī, 1992).

From an environmental perspective, this narration establishes a foundational principle of common ownership and shared access to essential natural resources. Water, pasture (which extends to vegetation, grazing land, and ecological resources), and fire (often interpreted as energy and means of survival) are identified as necessities for human life that cannot be monopolized in a way that harms collective welfare.

In contemporary academic analysis, this hadith can be understood as articulating an early concept of environmental commons. It implies that certain natural resources are part of a shared ecological inheritance and must be preserved and made accessible for the benefit of all. Any form of privatization, overexploitation, or degradation that prevents equitable access to these resources runs contrary to the ethical spirit of this principle.

When read in conjunction with modern environmental concerns, the hadith supports the idea of sustainable stewardship. It places moral limits on human interaction with natural resources, requiring that their use does not lead to depletion, exclusion, or ecological harm. Water sources must be

<sup>8</sup> Such as, al-Zamakhshirī says that appearance of calamities in the earth, such as draught, famine, Earthquake, loss of agricultural yields, spread of death in human and livestock, frequent occurrences of fire and drowning, is result of the acts of human. Taqī Usmani also says that apparently the cause of the calamities in the earth is ill acts of human.

protected from pollution and scarcity, grazing lands must not be exhausted beyond regeneration capacity, and energy resources must be used in a manner that avoids destruction and waste.

Thus, the hadith provides a normative framework that aligns closely with contemporary environmental ethics: it emphasizes shared responsibility, restraint in consumption, and the preservation of essential natural resources for present and future generations.

There is another Ḥadīth of the Prophet with emphasizes on the importance and preservation of biodiversity. It is narrated that the Prophet said:

“If a person kills a bird or any larger animal without a valid reason, Allah will question him about it on the Day of Judgment.” When asked what constitutes a valid reason, the Prophet replied: “A valid reason is that it is slaughtered and eaten. Do not merely cut off its head and then discard it.” (Al-Nīshāpūrī, 1990).

This hadith shows that Islam discourages unnecessary killing of animals. It also reflects the Prophet’s teachings on biodiversity and the ethical treatment of living creatures. Its core, the narration establishes a principle of accountability for harm inflicted on living creatures. By declaring that a person will be questioned for killing even a small bird without just cause, the Prophet introduces a moral restraint on human interaction with animal life. This moves beyond mere prohibition of cruelty and extends to a broader requirement of justification and necessity.

From an environmental perspective, the hadith implies that wildlife is not to be treated as expendable or subject to arbitrary destruction. The requirement of a valid reason, which has been defined as lawful consumption, places clear limits on exploitation. It prohibits killing for sport, amusement, or wasteful purposes, all of which are recognized today as contributing factors to biodiversity loss and ecological imbalance.

Moreover, the instruction not to kill an animal only to discard it underscores a principle of non-wastefulness and respect for natural resources. Animals are part of a larger ecological system, and their unnecessary destruction disrupts that system. By linking human action to divine accountability, the hadith creates a strong ethical deterrent against practices that would lead to depletion of species or harm to ecosystems. In this way, this narration may be read as contributing to an Islamic framework of environmental ethics grounded in restraint, necessity, and stewardship. It reinforces the idea that human dominion over nature is not absolute but conditioned by moral limits, thereby supporting principles akin to modern environmental law, such as conservation, sustainable use, and the protection of biodiversity.

The above *Hadīths* dealt with the harming acts towards the natural environment. There is also a *Ḥadīth*, reported by (Muslim, n.d) that shed light on the importance of positive acts towards preservation of natural environment. It is reported that the Prophet said:

“There is no Muslim who plants a tree but that whatever is eaten from it is a charity for him; whatever is stolen from it is a charity for him; whatever is eaten from it by a wild animal is a charity for him; whatever is eaten from it by birds is a charity for him; and no one diminishes it in any way except that it is counted as a charity for him.”

This hadith shows that the Prophet Muhammad placed great importance on planting trees, and that trees play a fundamental role in protecting the natural environment. This *Ḥadīth* establishes a clear ethical incentive for environmental stewardship by framing tree-planting and cultivation as acts of ongoing charity. It encourages the creation and maintenance of green resources that benefit humans, animals, and birds alike, thereby supporting biodiversity and ecological balance. By recognizing value in every form of benefit derived from a planted tree, even when taken by others or wildlife, it promotes a

mindset of sustainability, non-wastefulness, and shared ecological responsibility.

Specifically regarding protection of environment in the situation of armed conflict, guidance can be sought from the sayings of the Prophet and commandment and conduct of his companions. It is reported by (Ḥanbal, 2001) that the Prophet said: “Whoever kills a minor or an elder, or burns date-palms, or cuts down a fruit-bearing tree, or slaughters a sheep merely for its skin, will not return free of loss.” This narration contains clear instructions related to the protection of the natural environment.

Apart from this, other commonly transmitted narrations of the Prophet related to armed conflict include guidance about distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants, and instructions not to mutilate the bodies of the dead.<sup>9</sup>

In this matter, the most foundational guidance in Islamic teachings is the set of ten commandments given by Caliph Abu Bakr<sup>10</sup> when he dispatched an army towards Syria and appointed Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān as the commander of the army. He accompanied the soldiers towards some distance and then he said, as reported by (Mālik, 1412AH).

“I advise you these ten things: Do not kill a woman, a child, or an elderly person. Do not cut down fruit-bearing trees, and do not destroy buildings.

Do not harm goats or camels except when you need them for food. Do not drown or burn palm trees. Do not steal from the spoils of war, and do not behave in a cowardly manner.

From this, it becomes clear that in normal circumstances, Islam forbids causing unnecessary damage to the natural environment. However, if there is a genuine need during war, then causing such damage for military necessity is permitted. For example, during the campaign against Banū Naḍīr, the Prophet Muhammad ordered some date palm trees to be burnt down (Ibn-e-Majah, n.d). The Qur’an also mentions this incident as it reads “Whatever you cut down of the palm trees or left standing, it was by Allah’s permission.”

After examining the Qur’anic verses, hadiths, and historical accounts, the summary of the opinions of Muslim jurists on this matter is as follows: Causing unnecessary damage to trees or the natural environment is prohibited. The renowned Ḥanafī jurist (Ibn al-Humām, n.d) considered such actions as *fasād fil-arḍ* i.e. corruption on earth.

However, cutting trees is permitted under genuine necessity. This principle is clarified in the following three points:

1. Trees whose cutting becomes necessary for example, trees located near enemy forts behind which the enemy could hide or launch attacks may be cut. Cutting such trees is unanimously considered permissible.
2. Trees whose cutting would be disadvantageous for the Muslims for example, when victory is almost certain and the trees will become part of the spoils of war should not be cut.
3. Apart from these two categories, there are trees whose cutting would neither harm the Muslims nor provide them any benefit. On this matter, Muslim jurists differ in opinion: According to al-Awzā’ī and Al-Layth, cutting such trees is prohibited. They base their view on the narration of Caliph Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him). According to Imam al-Shāfi’ī Mālik and Ishāq

<sup>9</sup> For example, in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and many other collections of hadith, it is narrated that when the Prophet Muhammad appointed someone as the commander of an army, he advised him to fear Allah and instructed the army: “Fight in the name of Allah and in His path. Fight against those who reject Him. Engage in jihad but do not cheat, do not betray, do not mutilate, and do not kill any child.”

<sup>10</sup> In this research, whenever the name of any of the companions of the Prophet appears, the authors intended to offer the salutation of “May Allah be pleased with him”.

(may Allah have mercy on them), cutting such trees is permitted. They base their opinion on the incident of the trees cut during the campaign against Banū Naḍir (Raghib Sarjani, 2017).

### Islamic Jurisprudence and the Protection of the Natural Environment

The opinion of Ibn al-Humām has been cited earlier about the prohibition of harming natural environment. For the discussion in hand, however, the most relevant thing from Islamic jurisprudence is what is known as the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* i.e. the objectives of sharī'ah. These are the five highest objectives for which the sharī'ah of Islam serves to achieve them. The Objectives of Sharī'ah (Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah) are commonly articulated through five essential protections, each reflecting a fundamental interest that Islamic law seeks to preserve and promote:

1. **Ḥifẓ al-Dīn (Protection of Religion):** This objective concerns the preservation and continuity of religious belief and practice. A wide range of Sharī'ah rulings are designed to ensure that individuals are able to maintain and practice their faith without coercion or suppression. For instance, the institution of *jihād*, in its defensive dimension, has been understood as a means of safeguarding the religious freedom and security of the Muslim community. More broadly, legal obligations such as prayer and the prohibition of apostasy-related coercion in classical discourse are also linked to the protection of religion as a core societal value.
2. **Ḥifẓ al-Nafs (Protection of Life):** The protection of human life is regarded as one of the most central objectives of Sharī'ah. Numerous legal provisions are aimed at preserving life and deterring acts of violence. A key example is the doctrine of *qiṣāṣ* (retaliatory justice), whereby unlawful killing may be met with a proportionate legal response. This principle is grounded in the Qur'anic assertion that "*in qiṣāṣ there is life for you*," highlighting its deterrent effect and its role in maintaining social order. Through such measures, the Sharī'ah seeks not only to punish wrongdoing but also to prevent the loss of life.
3. **Ḥifẓ al-Māl (Protection of Property):** This objective relates to the protection of individual and collective wealth. The Sharī'ah establishes clear rules governing ownership, transfer, and protection of property rights. To deter violations, it prescribes specific punishments for crimes such as theft (*ḥadd al-sariqah*) and armed robbery (*ḥirābah*). These legal sanctions are intended to create a secure economic environment by discouraging both covert and overt appropriation of others' property, thereby reinforcing trust and stability within society.
4. **Ḥifẓ al-'Aql (Protection of Intellect):** The safeguarding of human intellect is another key objective, reflecting the importance of *al-'aql* in moral and legal responsibility. Sharī'ah addresses this objective primarily through the prohibition of substances that impair cognitive function, such as intoxicants. The ban on alcohol consumption, supported by prescribed penalties (*ḥadd al-shurb*), is aimed at preserving the clarity of thought and rational capacity necessary for individual well-being and social order.
5. **Ḥifẓ al-Nasl (Protection of Progeny):** This objective focuses on the preservation of family structure and lineage. To achieve this, Sharī'ah promotes lawful marriage as the legitimate framework for procreation, while strictly prohibiting adultery (*zinā*) and other practices that could compromise lineage integrity. These regulations serve not only to protect individual rights within the family but also to ensure social cohesion and the clear determination of familial relationships.

Collectively, these five objectives represent a coherent framework through which Sharī'ah seeks to secure essential human interests and maintain an orderly, just, and morally grounded society (Ibn 'Ashur, 2011).

From the perspective of the Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, the protection and preservation of the natural environment can be understood as an integral extension of the classical objectives of Islamic law. Although environmental protection is not traditionally listed as a separate category among the five essential necessities, it is deeply embedded within them. The safeguarding of life (*hifz al-nafs*) cannot be meaningfully achieved in the absence of a clean and sustainable environment, as human survival is directly dependent upon access to uncontaminated air, water, and food. Similarly, the protection of wealth (*hifz al-māl*) presupposes the preservation of natural resources that constitute the basis of economic activity, including agriculture, livestock, and ecological systems. The protection of intellect (*hifz al-'aql*) is also linked to environmental integrity, as pollution and ecological degradation have demonstrable effects on human health and cognitive well-being. Furthermore, the preservation of lineage (*hifz al-nasl*) is tied to environmental stability, which ensures the continuity and well-being of future generations. Even the protection of religion (*hifz al-dīn*) is supported by environmental stewardship, as responsible management of the earth reflects the Qur'anic principle of human vicegerency (*khilāfah*). In this sense, environmental preservation emerges as a foundational condition for the realization of all maqāṣid, positioning it as a cross-cutting obligation within Islamic legal and ethical thought rather than a peripheral concern.

### **International Humanitarian Law and the Protection of the Natural Environment**

The International Humanitarian Law (IHL) has progressively developed a more explicit and structured approach to the protection of the natural environment during armed conflict, moving from implicit safeguards to clearly articulated legal norms. Traditionally, environmental protection was not treated as an independent category within IHL but was instead indirectly covered through general principles such as distinction, proportionality, and military necessity. Under this framework, the natural environment is generally regarded as a civilian object and therefore enjoys protection against direct attack, while any incidental environmental harm must be assessed within the proportionality calculus governing lawful military operations.

A significant doctrinal development in this regard is found in Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, particularly Articles 35(3) and 55. Article 35 (1) of the API denies the unlimited right of the parties to an armed conflict to use means and methods of warfare. The Article 35 (3) goes on to prohibit the use of methods or means of warfare that are intended or expected to cause widespread, long-term, and severe damage to the natural environment. Article 55 (1) further reinforces this protection by obligating parties to warfare to care for the natural environment and to avoid such damage as would prejudice the health or survival of the population. Further, the Article 55 (2) prohibits attack on the natural environment as an act of reprisal. Collectively, these provisions represent one of the earliest explicit treaty-based recognitions of environmental protection within the law of armed conflict, albeit with a relatively high threshold for establishing a violation.

Building on these foundational norms, the international community's concern regarding environmental harm in armed conflict became more pronounced in the late twentieth century. By the 1990s, it was widely acknowledged that modern warfare could inflict extensive and long-lasting ecological damage. In response to a request by the United Nations General Assembly, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) issued its Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict in 1995. These guidelines aimed to consolidate existing legal principles and highlight the environmental dimension of humanitarian law in a more coherent and accessible form.

Since then, the legal framework has continued to evolve through both treaty interpretation and customary international law. The ICRC has further refined and systematized its position, culminating in a

comprehensive set of updated rules and interpretive guidance by 2020.<sup>11</sup> Within this consolidated framework, it is reaffirmed that the natural environment is not a legitimate object of attack and that parties to armed conflict are under a duty to take constant care to avoid or minimize environmental harm in the conduct of military operations. This reflects an increasingly precautionary and preventive approach to environmental protection in warfare.

At the level of operational rules, the ICRC's consolidated guidelines, particularly Rules 19 to 25, explicitly prohibit the use of means and methods of warfare that are inherently harmful to the environment or that are likely to cause significant ecological destruction.<sup>12</sup> This includes toxic, biological, and chemical weapons, as well as any other weapons or tactics that may result in severe environmental degradation. These rules reinforce the idea that environmental considerations must be integrated into military planning, rather than treated as incidental concerns arising after the fact.

Despite these significant normative developments, a persistent gap remains between legal standards and the realities of armed conflict. Contemporary warfare continues to generate substantial environmental damage, often with long-term consequences for ecosystems and civilian populations. This tension highlights a central challenge for International Humanitarian Law: while the legal architecture for environmental protection has become increasingly detailed and sophisticated, its effectiveness ultimately depends on implementation, compliance, and enforcement in practice.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it may be concluded that the protection of the natural environment has become indispensable for the continued survival of humankind on earth. In the contemporary world, unchecked consumerism, coupled with the pursuit of economic and strategic gain, has resulted in significant environmental degradation, the consequences of which are being experienced globally, and with particular severity in countries such as Pakistan and several other developing states.

It further emerges that both modern International Humanitarian Law and Islamic legal and ethical traditions converge on the importance of safeguarding the natural environment, including in situations of armed conflict. In IHL, this concern is reflected through general principles such as distinction, proportionality, and military necessity, as well as through specific treaty provisions and interpretive instruments that recognize the environment as an object requiring protection during warfare. Similarly, the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the practice of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and the broader corpus of Islamic jurisprudence collectively demonstrate a consistent normative commitment to environmental preservation in both peace and war. Within armed conflict, environmental harm is not permitted as an independent objective and is only tolerable to the limited extent strictly justified by genuine military necessity, subject to overarching principles of restraint, justice, and the prevention of *fasād* i.e. disorder in the earth.

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<sup>11</sup> According to the Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict, 2020, there are 32 rules enshrined in the document. These rules collectively provide a robust framework for the protection of natural environment during armed conflict. These rules along with commentary can be accessed at: [https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document\\_new/file\\_list/guidelines\\_on\\_the\\_protection\\_of\\_the\\_natural\\_environment\\_in\\_armed\\_conflict\\_advance-copy.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document_new/file_list/guidelines_on_the_protection_of_the_natural_environment_in_armed_conflict_advance-copy.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> The rule 19 prohibits use of poison and poisonous weapon during international and non-International armed conflict. The commentary, provided by ICRC clarifies that violation of this rule constitute war crime under ICC statute. The rule 20, 21 and 22 prohibit the use of biological weapons chemical weapons and use of herbicides if they are either biological or chemical in nature, respectively. The rule 23 and 24 deal with the care in case of using incendiary weapons and landmine.

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