Rethinking Ethics in International Affairs: Reshaping Civilizational Discourse

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Abstract

The notion and applicability of ethics in the public sphere have become a relatively obscure matter with the prevailing incursion of political secularism. The functioning model of contemporary polity leads us to believe that ethics play no role in politics, whether at the national or international levels. Ethics is not a predominant concept in the leading international relations theories, such as realism and liberalism. Pacing these theories, for which the power struggle is a more central concept, this article argues that ethics play a significant role in politics and remains an essential element in understanding and analyzing foreign policy. Neglecting or ignoring ethics limits our appraisal and hinders us from perceiving the whole picture in analyzing international affairs. This article proposes a way forward through more responsible politics in dealing with and understanding global affairs. Responsible ethical politics means taking the best potentially ethical actions that circumstances permit at the national and international levels. This paper employs an interpretative approach with qualitative research via secondary published materials to engage the debate on ethics. In this study, the theoretical framework is the conception of *al-Murū'ah* (sense of honor), which presents a normative foundation for dealing with others nationally and internationally. Three sub-concepts develop from *al-Murū'ah*, First, *al-Mu'āzarah* (assistance without expecting compensation,) second, *al-Miyāsrah* (relieving others from discomfort or crises,) and third, *al-Ifḍāl* generosity.

Keywords: Ethics, morality, foreign policy, responsible politics, Islam, civilizational discourse

Introduction

Joseph Nye observes how ethics is overlooked in International Relations (IR).[1] He states that "A survey of the top three American academic journals on international relations over fifteen years found only four articles on the subject."[2] Similarly, Richard Price reports that normative theorizing is excluded as normative theory and political theory terrain.[3] Also, Robert McElroy emphasizes that many scholars "do not dedicate serious attention to investigating the influence of moral values on the conduct of nations."[4] As such, it is safe to say that ethics is overlooked in IR. For many, ethics and international relations are two parallel lines that never intersect. This idea emerges from the enormous impact of realism in IR,[5] and the secular notion of interest-based politics of maximization. Nevertheless, I argue that this exclusion of ethics from IR should be reviewed and refuted on theoretical and practical grounds to foreground politics in the epistemology of ethics.

Practically, issues such as the war on Iraq, the Israelis' discriminatory treatment of Palestinians, and the American interventions, reflect ethical feebleness in international politics; however, that does not mean ethics is not intertwined with international politics. The claim that IR theories do not consider ethics is inaccurate; I will demonstrate this is a misconception about IR theories. My core argument is that ignoring or neglecting ethics in international affairs limits our appraisal and prevents us from seeing the whole image when analyzing foreign policy.

The theoretical framework in this study is the conception of *al-Murū'ah* (sense of honor). It offers a normative basis for how to behave and act with others. *Al-Murū'ah's* framework has three sub-concepts. Firstly, *al-Mu'āzarah* (assistance without expecting compensation,) secondly, *al-Miyāsrah* (relieving others from discomfort or crises,) and lastly, *al-Ifḍā* (generosity). These three sub-concepts suggest a

[1] Based on Amitav Acharya's and Barry Buzan's book, I distinguish between International Relations (IR) as a discipline and international relations (ir) as a practice. See Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (2019), *The making of global international relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-7.
[2] Joseph S Nye (2019), *Do morals matter? Presidents and foreign policy from FDR to Trump*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. i.
[3] Richard Price (2008), "Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 62, p. 193.
[4] Robert W. McElroy (1992) *Morality and American Foreign Policy: The Role of Ethics in International Affairs*, Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 3.
[5] McElroy (1992), *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, p. 3.

different approach to dealing with others at the national and supra-national levels, considering *al-Murū'ah* as a normative framework proposing a specific approach to interacting with others, which I call responsible politics. Furthermore, responsible politics offers us a normative behavioral framework at national and international levels. This is not to say that responsible politics will solve international conflicts; instead, the concept of responsible politics indicates taking responsibility in the sense of helping and assisting others with good intentions and means. Thus, this paper is principally normatively oriented.

By ethics, this paper means normative human behavior, behavioral rules of how people normatively ought to act, and how to treat each other. Ethics, in this sense, enlightens how to behave individually and collectively, nationally and internationally.[6] To demonstrate why and how ethics is essential in international affairs, I will first illustrate why ethics is thin in international affairs. Secondly, I will elaborate on how ethics exist in international affairs through the example of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Thirdly, through the works of Hans Morgenthau, I will explain how realists consider ethics in international relations. Fourthly, I will comment on liberalism and its ethical system. Lastly, I will propose a way forward through responsible politics. This paper employs an interpretative approach with qualitative research via secondary published materials as a methodology.

Why Ethics is Thin in International Affairs

Frequently, ethics is seen as irrelevant in IR and (ir) international relations in the geopolitical sphere. Ethics is not a central concept in the main IR theories on the theoretical level. Instead, hegemony, power struggle, the balance of power, survival, and anarchy are the concepts central to the leading IR theories such as realism, structural realism, and liberalism. However, this does not mean that these theories do not debate the issue of ethics. As I will show in the following pages, some leading political theorists, even realist scholars, do consider ethics, just not as a principal issue.

On the practical level, one of the arguments why ethics is weak at the international level is how international institutions[7] and international structures are constituted - for instance, the bodies of the United Nations. Only five permanent member countries in the UN Security Council have the right to veto any substantive resolution[8]. The "veto power" contradicts equality, justice, and morality. For instance, "Israel has been shielded from UN condemnation and economic sanctions numerous times because of the threat or use of the veto by its ally, the USA."[9] The US uses the veto power to defend Israeli's apartheid system and deters the Palestinians from realizing self-determination. More specifically, the veto power hinders the implementation of ethical behaviors and decisions in international relations.

Pragmatism, not ethics, is what prevails in foreign policy. States typically make pragmatic decisions based on national interest. Mervyn Frost argues that pragmatism is a 'conventional rule' governing states' relations instead of ethical reasons.[10] Likewise, self-help is predominant in international politics, and states recognize that they live in a self-help system. For John Mearsheimer, "States operate in a self-help world in which the best way to survive is to be as powerful as possible, even if that requires pursuing ruthless policies. That is not a pretty story, but there is no better alternative if survival is a country's paramount goal."[11] This leads states to 'the security dilemma,'[12] where states seek incessantly to increase their power and security.

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[6] For instance, issues such as refugees' crises and how to deal with them. Is it an ethical obligation to aid poor people in different countries? Do we have a code of ethics in war? Is it ethical to overthrow an elected president or support an illegal coup in a foreign country? Such ethically oriented questions frame foreign policy and necessitate normative answers.

[7] For instance, Stephen Walt states "International institutions are simply a tool that states use to advance their interests, and they inevitably reflect the interests of the most powerful states." Stephen M. Walt (2018), *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of US Primacy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 71.

[8] Horst Pötzsch, "Vereinte Nationen," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, updated December 15, 2009, retrieved July 18, 2021, https://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/deutsche-demokratie/39409/vereinte-nationen?p=1.

[9] Giorgia Papalia (2017), "A critique of the unqualified veto power," *Perth International Law Journal*, Vol. 2, p. 57.

[10] Mervyn Frost (2009), *Global ethics: anarchy, freedom and international relations*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 13.

[11] John J. Mearsheimer (2018), *The Great Delusion: Liberal dreams and international realities*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p. 216.

[12] Robert Jervis states: "the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others." Citied in Charles L. Glaser (1997), "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1, p. 174.

Moreover, double standards are ubiquitous. Consider how Donald Trump is held accountable for the Capitol riots compared to George W. Bush. The latter is directly responsible for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The numbers of dead, wounded, and suffering is uncountable; however, Bush has never been prosecuted or even held responsible for the Iraq or Afghanistan invasions. Richard Lebow states precisely that "Western commitments to democracy and equality, and tolerance of different dissent […] are strikingly at odds with beliefs and practices in most other parts of the world."[13] Double standards mean believing in definite norms and codes of ethics for oneself and applying these differently when it comes to others. States have certain ethical systems for themselves and apply different ethics to others. Humanitarian intervention is a case in point. This clarifies that ethics are thin in international relations practice due to IR theory. In the structure of international order, pragmatism and double standards prevail, especially in interacting with other nations. I claim that ethics is indispensable in analyzing and understanding foreign policy despite the abovementioned reasons.

The War on Iraq: An Ethical Perspective

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 is an example to demonstrate how ethics is inseparable from international politics. Officially, the advocates for the war justified the American invasion of Iraq based on numerous ethical arguments and justifications. There are too many to mention, but a few were that Iraq has an authoritarian system with frequent human rights violations and that minorities are not tolerated. Furthermore, it was claimed that Iraq was guilty of wrongdoing in the invasion of Kuwait and that it posed a threat to neighboring countries. Thus, the American intervention would prevent a future genocide by Saddam Hussein against the Kurdish people and liberate and save the Iraqis, i.e., end the grave humanitarian injustices against the Iraqi people.[14] Lastly, the two (patently incorrect) claims that Iraq has 'weapons of mass destruction' and harbors and assists terrorist organizations. Based on such supposed ethical considerations, President Bush and his team described Iraq as part of the 'axis of evil.'[15]

Likewise, the Iraqi government responded through ethical justifications. For instance, the Iraqi government argued that the Iraqi people have the right to self-determination. It denied hosting and supporting al-Qaida or any other terrorist organization. Furthermore, Iraq denied having weapons of mass destruction. Consequently, it argued that Iraq should not be punished for something it did not do because that would be unethical. Also, the Iraqi government contended that the sanctions against Iraq by the international community were unethical: they harmed innocent people. It is worth mentioning that humanitarian intervention and just war are very controversial topics in international affairs, even before the invasion of Iraq. Mona Fixdal and Dan Smith have maintained that "Humanitarian intervention has become one of the most debated topics in international politics today. It is among a group of problems - civil wars, conflict resolution, and conflict prevention - forming the keynotes of security since the Cold War, much as the arms race, deterrence, and disarmament were until the Soviet Union ceased to exist."[16] Obviously, after the failure of the war and its catastrophic consequences for Iraq and the region, this topic became even more contested. The discussion on just war and humanitarian intervention is central in ethical discourse.

After the Iraq invasion, some of these claims turned out to be deceptions, such as the weapons of mass destruction and hosting and assisting terrorist organizations. Understanding the role of ethics and its implementation in US and Iraqi narratives is crucial to understanding this war.[17] Indeed, similar observations can be made for other international events, interactions, and wars, such as the Israeli wars in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, the American invasion of Afghanistan, and the humanitarian intervention in the Balkans and so on. This is not to argue that ethical considerations were the only motivation for the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Stephen Walt asserts that "Regime change in Iraq was intended to demonstrate U.S. power, send a message to other rogue states, and begin to transform the Middle East from a source of anti-American terrorism to a sea of pro-American democracies."[18]

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[13] Richard Ned Lebow (2020), *Ethics and International Relations: A Tragic Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 28.
[14] David Mellow (2006), "Iraq: A morally justified resort to war," *Journal of Applied Philosophy,* Vol. 23, No. 3 p. 294.
[15] Notice that the term "axis of evil" is also an ethical definition.
[16] Dan Smith and Mona Fixdal (1998), "Humanitarian Intervention and Just War," *Mershon International Studies Review,* Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 283-284.
[17] Frost (2009), *Global ethics*, p. 9.
[18] Walt (2018), *The Hell of Good Intentions*, p. 65.

Realism and Ethics: Hans Morgenthau

Perhaps the most radical classical realists concerning ethics and politics are Machiavelli and Hobbes. Even though Hans Morgenthau is one of the leading realist IR scholars, he dissociates himself from them in many of his writings. Morgenthau was concerned with ethics and its role on the international level. Instead of adopting the moral framework to politics belonging to classical realists such as Hobbes and Machiavelli, he adopted that of Augustinian, which led him to advance his practical morality.[19] Morgenthau warned against being radical in overlooking ethics in politics as Machiavelli did. Morgenthau stated, "It is a dangerous thing to be a Machiavelli. It is a disastrous thing to be a Machiavelli without *virtu'*."[20]

Likewise, Morgenthau distanced himself from Hobbs regarding what he calls "universal moral principles." He articulated, "I have always maintained that the actions of states are subject to universal moral principles, and I have been careful to differentiate my position in this respect from that of Hobbes."[21] For Morgenthau, principles like justice or equality as examples of universal morals could efficiently guide political actions. Thus, it is not unexpected to read him stating that "he [man] is a moralist because he is a man."[22] He further argues that "The history of political thought is the history of the moral evaluation of political power."[23]

Because man is a moralist, Morgenthau reminds us that there should be neither an overemphasis on the significance of ethics in international politics nor a neglect of it. Morgenthau maintains that "A discussion of international ethics must guard against the two extremes either of overrating the influence of ethics upon international politics or else of denying that statesmen and diplomats are moved by anything else but considerations of material power."[24] This is not to say that Morgenthau has a faultless ethical system. Instead, this is to argue that even realist scholars genuinely accept the role of ethics in international politics. And Morgenthau is not the only realist scholar who has written on morality; other names such as George Kennan,[25] Edward Hallett Carr,[26] and Reinhold Niebuhr (in his book *Moral Man Immoral Society*)[27] have contributed to international ethics. Realists have never neglected ethics in international affairs, as one might assume.

Of course, there are critics of the realist's understanding of ethics in international politics. Mark Amstutz rightly contends that "differences between domestic and international politics have been greatly exaggerated and that moral values are far more significant in global society than realists suggest."[28] Ethics is an instrumental element in international politics to pursue national interests. Realists describe good and evil in terms of interest or national interest, not based on normative considerations. The realist's pessimistic understanding of human nature (as immoral, egoist, or corrupt) is problematic since that indicates it cannot make better.

The "corrupt," "egoist," and "immoral" human nature is mirrored destructively also in international politics.[29] Moreover, war is considered merely a continuation of politics, which opens the way consistently for the stronger to find excuses and justifications for war as a normal continuation of politics. The fundamental premise for all realists, including Morgenthau, is that the international order is an anarchic and a self-help system. For instance, with a negative understanding of human nature and the primacy of national interest, states continuously seek power and hegemony to survive. All these premises come before ethics, and ethics exist to serve them. Thus, it is safe to say that the realist ethical system is pragmatic and instrumentalist.

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[19] A. J. H. Murray (1996), "The moral politics of Hans Morgenthau," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 1, p. 81.
[20] Hans Morgenthau (1948), "The political science of EH Carr," *World Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 134.
[21] Hans Morgenthau (1952), "Another" great debate": the national interest of the United States," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4, p. 982.
[22] Hans Morgenthau (1945), "The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil," *Ethics*, Vol. 56, No. 1, p. 1.
[23] Morgenthau (1945), "The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil," p. 1.
[24] Hans Morgenthau (1985), "The twilight of international morality," *Ethics*, Vol. 58, No. 2, p. 79.
[25] For instance, his article "Morality and foreign policy". George F. Kennan (1985), "Morality and foreign policy," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 205-218.
[26] For instance, see chapter nine of his book: Edward Hallett Carr (1981), "Morality in International Politics," *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press LTD.
[27] Reinhold Niebuhr (2013), *Moral Man and Immoral society*, 2nd edition, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
[28] Mark R. Amstutz (2013), *International Ethics: Concepts, theories, and cases in global politics*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 12.
[29] Niebuhr (2013), *Moral Man and Immoral society*, pp. 16-17.

Liberalism and Ethics

In comparison to realism, ethics are more central for liberals. It is difficult to find a liberal contribution to international affairs without – directly or indirectly – considering ethics. For example, Joseph Nye has acknowledged the significance of ethics in foreign policy. He maintains, "To pretend that ethics will play no role is as blind as to imagine that the sun will not rise tomorrow."[30] Also, it is safe to argue that the three main liberal theories of international politics (liberal institutionalism, economic liberalism, and democratic peace theory) are oriented toward ethics[31].

Nevertheless, the central problem with liberals is the excessive belief in the capabilities of human rationality. It is important to note that highlighting rationality as the uniting quality of humanity is empirically unjustified. Human reason is the product of specific tradition, religion, culture, and circumstances; it is not transcendent as in the Kantian sense.[32] Likewise, liberals present their ethical system and rights as universal, which should be applied everywhere. Thus, they give themselves the right to intervene to perform social engineering, promote liberal rights and involve themselves in regime changes, even sometimes through military force like in the case of Iraq in 2003.[33] John Mearsheimer criticizes liberalism, especially as foreign policy, assessing it as "a source of troubles." He articulates, "When you consider that the ultimate aim is to spread liberalism all around the world, it becomes clear that a liberal foreign policy is extremely ambitious and highly interventionist."[34]

Also, the tradition of liberal international relations (IR) believes in the goodness of human nature.[35] In his book, International Ethics: A Critical Introduction, Richard Shapcott elaborates how it is inconceivable and highly complicated to identify a single human nature. He reminds us, "Human beings differ vastly according to their cultural and historical origins. Their preferences, values and basic understandings of life and life's purposes are so vastly different that identifying any single quality to provide the basis for a substantive or robust moral universalism is impossible."[36] Consequently, Shapcott insists that the idea of a single universal morality must be rejected since it is merely a cultural product lacking global legitimacy.[37]

In his book "*Why Liberalism Failed,*" the conservative Catholic Patrick Deneen states that due to the contradiction between the ambitions and consequences, liberalism has failed as a political philosophy. He argues that "A political philosophy that was launched to foster greater equity, defend a pluralist tapestry of different cultures and beliefs, protect human dignity, and, of course, expand liberty, in practice generates titanic inequality, enforces uniformity and homogeneity, fosters material and spiritual degradation, and undermines freedom."[38] Deneen radically supposes that liberalism is not repairable. He emphasizes that "To call for the cures of liberalism's ills by applying more liberal measures is tantamount to throwing gas on a raging fire. It will only deepen our political, social, economic, and moral crisis."[39] Therefore, he concludes his book by strongly assuming that the end of liberalism is within the foreseeable future.[40]

Even though liberals acknowledge the significant role of ethics in international affairs, their belief in the universality of their ethical system and reason leads them to remake the world according to their image. That includes every aspect of life, from the realms of economics, politics, education, and technology to science. Reconstructing the world aims to accomplish the highest and all-inclusive freedom by liberating individuals from places, memberships, relationships, and identities. However, the consequence is that the promise of freedom produces slavery where individuals have no choice but to submit[41]. The liberal ethical system did not accomplish its objectives; instead, it led to the opposite.

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[30] Nye (2019), *Do morals matter?*, p. xii.
[31] Walt (2018), *The Hell of Good Intentions*, pp. 57-58.
[32] Richard Shapcott (2010), *International ethics: a critical introduction*, Cambridge: Polity, p. 56.
[33] Mearsheimer (2018), *The Great Delusion*, p. 120.
[34] Mearsheimer (2018), *The Great Delusion*, p. 123.
[35] Lacin Idil Öztığ (2021), "Liberal IR Theorizing During the Early Twentieth Century: 1900–1939," in Jørgensen, K. E, (ed.) *The Liberal International Theory Tradition in Europe*, Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 32.
[36] Shapcott (2010), *International ethics*, p. 58.
[37] Shapcott (2010), *International ethics*, p. 59.
[38] Patrick Deneen (2018), *Why liberalism failed*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p. 3.
[39] Deneen (2018), *Why liberalism failed*, p. 4.
[40] Deneen (2018), *Why liberalism failed*, p. 180.
[41] Deneen (2018), *Why liberalism failed*, p. 16.

The Way Forward: Towards Responsible Politics

Ethics should be more presented and emphasized in politics and international affairs. Responsible politics is an essential aspect of ethics. However, what does that mean? as David Miller observes, "Responsibility' has proved to be one of the most slippery and confusing terms in the lexicon of moral and political philosophy."[42] Likewise, legally, politically, and morally, responsibility is considered one of the most confusing concepts.[43] The conception of responsible politics refers to the circumstances and framework under which ethical-political actions are implemented and the imaginable or unimaginable means and consequences of an action. Responsibility means a normative framework for assisting us in how things ought or ought not to be.

Responsibility distinguishes human beings from all other creatures. However, there are different levels of responsibilities. On the one hand, there are individual responsibilities, in which the individual is responsible for his actions and deeds and their consequences. Personal responsibilities are the cornerstone of duties; whoever cannot be responsible for himself cannot be responsible for others.[44] On the other hand, there are the collective responsibilities[45], in which the collective performs ethical responsibilities to empower, maintain, and increase stability, social solidarity, and cohesion of their society. It is essential to highlight that the individual must be aware of his responsibility before interacting with others. In his book, "*Islamic Civilization: Its Foundational Beliefs and Principles*," Mawdūdī maintains that to interact with the world properly, everyone must be aware of their responsibility. They should live out life so that they consider themself to be responsible for their actions, notwithstanding any external influences. They must consider that the burden of evil actions must be borne individually, just as the rewards of good actions are also to be enjoyed personally.[46]

Individual and collective responsibilities are indispensable in establishing a state, interstate relations, and international order. If people in society apply only personal responsibilities without paying attention to the collective one, that will lead to the decline and weakening of society. And if the individuals neglect collective responsibilities, the result will be a corrupt political system and institutions. The absence of ethical responsibilities leads to destructive consequences leading to chaos and social disintegration. For such reasons, the Prophet Muhammad has confirmed the idea of responsibility. For instance, he states, "Surely! Every one of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges: The Imam (ruler) of the people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects; a man is the guardian of his family (household) and is responsible for his subjects; {…}."[47] This indicates that each person in society has responsibilities that contain all possible human life aspects, including interstate relations.

Responsible politics or responsible foreign policy indicates that national interest and ethics complement each other rather than contradict each other. In his book entitled "*Ethics and International Relations: A Tragic Perspective*," Richard Ned Lebow argues that "ethical politics are more likely to succeed and unethical ones more likely to fail."[48] Responsible politics might thus lead to more success in foreign policy. The Marshall Plan was seen as noble and ethical support from the US to Europe. Meanwhile, it guaranteed the US influence in Europe and kept the latter in an alliance against communism. So, in this case, the American national interest and ethical politics complemented each other. Likewise, the Federal Republic of Germany made efforts to reform its relations with its neighbors. Lebow endorses that these ethical foreign policies are "extremely successful" since they "fostered belief in the benign intentions of the leaders and states responsible for these initiatives."[49]

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[42] David Miller (2007), *National responsibility and global justice*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 82.

[43] Tomer Shadmy (2022), "The Emergence of Responsibility as a Global Scheme of Governance," in Hansen-Magnusson, H. and Vetterlein, A. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook on Responsibility in International Relations*, New York: Routledge, p. 54.

[44] Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (2010), *Al-Dharī'ah ilā Makārim al-Sharī'ah*, Abu al-Yazid abu Zied al-Ajami (ed.), al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Salām, p. 84.

[45] David Miller considers 'National responsibility,' as a is a sort of 'collective responsibility'. Miller (2007), *National responsibility and global justice*, p. 81.

[46] Sayyid Abul A'lā Maududi (2013), *Islamic Civilization: Its Foundational Beliefs and Principles*, Syed Akif (trans.), Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, p. 24.

[47] Muhammad Ibn Ismaiel al-Bukhari (1997), *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahîh al-Bukhâri*, trans., Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Vol. 9, al-Madina al-Munawwara: Darussalam, p. 160.

[48] Richard Ned Lebow (2020), *Ethics and International Relations: A Tragic Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1

[49] Lebow (2020), *Ethics and International Relations*, pp. 80-81.

"The doctrine of personal responsibility is a cardinal feature of Islam."[50]. Having said that, how can we understand or implement responsible politics on the individual and collective levels? What are the ethical aspects of responsible politics? I will elaborate on three sub-concepts, which are a feature of what al-Māwardī calls *al-Murū'ah* (sense of honor). In his book "*adab al-dunyā wa-al-dīn,*" al-Māwardī[51] proposes three notions that concern how to deal and interact normatively with others.[52] As expected, 'others' here can also be understood as other individuals, nations, states, or civilizations. First: Assistance without expecting compensation (*al-Mu'āzarah*). It is a kind of protection for needy and vulnerable people who ask for assistance. *Al-Mu'āzarah* implies helping people who suffer from calamities. From an ethical point of view, this assistance can be classified into two categories. Firstly, dutiful assistance includes assisting one's own family as sympathy and mercy for kinship, assisting friends for the established friendship and social bonds, and lastly, assisting neighbors for that is their right. Helping these three types of people is an ethical responsibility to carry their burdens and relieve them during calamities. Secondly, the assistance of the rest of humankind, with whom the individual has neither kinship relationships nor is connected to them in any of the three aspects mentioned earlier.[53]

Second: Clemency (*al-Miyāsrah*) indicates relieving others from discomfort or difficulty by pardoning others' faults and relinquishing issues related to personal rights. For al-Māwardī, relinquishing one's rights to relieve others' discomfort is a great virtue. Interacting with others (and states) based on leniency and clemency brings individuals (and states) into a resilient social bond and strong social solidarity and integrity when the individual who has the possibility of helping offers his assistance in relieving other's uneasiness.[54]

Third: Generosity (*al-Ifḍāl*) has two aspects in this concern: on the one hand, generosity is a means not only in acknowledging others but also in bringing different individuals together in social solidarity and hence removing the enmity among them. On the other hand, generosity is a way of protecting oneself from exploiting and misusing people. For al-Māwardī, generosity ought to show people that one gives for the sake of generosity and not for being afraid of insult or threat.[55]

Consequently, responsible politics indicate performing the best possible ethical actions and deeds that the circumstances permit. These mentioned three sub-concepts could be central principles in conducting responsible foreign policy.[56] These normative principles can orient people and nations towards how things ought to be. I will give examples from Turkey's and Japan's foreign policies. This is not to say that Turkey or Japan is thoroughly applying these principles to their foreign policy; rather, the examples are designed to be illustrative rather than definitive.

Al-Mu'āzarah as dutiful assistance, one can think about Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkey's support to Azerbaijan. It was reflected in the speech by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who stated, "friendly and brotherly Azerbaijan with all our means and all our heart."[57] *Al-Mu'āzarah* here is not limited to words, but it includes actual military backing to support Azerbaijan

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[50] Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2004), *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 9th edition, Beltsville: Amana Publications, p. 55.

[51] Al-Māwardī was one of the most famous Shafi jurists in the 11th century and the first Muslim political theorist and social theorist. He was born in Baṣra, and he received his education there and in Baghdād. He served as chief judge, diplomat, political advisor for two ʿAbbāsid caliphs – al-Ḳādir Bi'llāh and al-Ḳā'im Bi-Amr Allāh – and having a strong record of activism and engagement in reforming his society. For more resources on al-Māwardī's scholarship, academic and political professions see Fadi Zatari (2021), "Religion As a Pillar for Establishing a Civilization: Al-Māwardī's Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 241-242.

[52] This study is aware of the criticism that some say resurrecting Middle Age Islamic thought cannot be applied uncritically to avoid anachronism. Many points can be mentioned here as a response to this claim. Firstly, many of the concepts in IR came from classical texts and even from Christianity. For instance, realism's evil perception of human beings originated from the original sin, as mentioned above. Secondly, this claim would be valid if we were talking about the legal concepts, not the normative ones. For instance, it would be inconvenient to apply al-Māwardī's legal thought in modern times; that would be an anachronism; however, borrowing ethical concepts is different. In other words, when al-Māwardī is explaining how *al-Mu'āzarah* as a kind of protection for needy and vulnerable people is decent action and leads to improve human solidarity, such a moral norm would be significant and still valid nowadays even if this notion derived from Middle Ages.

[53] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (2012), *Ādāb al-Dunyā wa-al-Dīn*, Beirut: Dār ibn Kathīr, pp. 526-531.

[54] al-Māwardī (2012), *Ādāb al-Dunyā wa-al-Dīn*, p. 531.

[55] al-Māwardī (2012), *Ādāb al-Dunyā wa-al-Dīn*, pp. 545-546.

[56] No doubt that Non-State Actors are also indispensable players in this regard. Non-State Actors can be portrayed as non-sovereign entities, including institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or even individuals with political influence and power but without being associated with any particular state. For instance, Non-State actors can offer humanitarian assistance and aid the people suffering from natural disasters, civil war, and armed conflict. Therefore, Non-State Actors can play an essential role in clarifying and disseminating moral codes and ethical responsibility on the IR level.

[57] Patrick Keddie (2021), "What's Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?" *Al Jazeera*, retrieved July 18, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/30/whats-turkeys-role-in-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict.

in liberating its occupied territories. Moreover, *al-Mu'āzarah* as a sort of assistance to humankind. In 2020 Turkey contributed to debt relief for Somalia; it has granted approximately $3.4 million in debt relief for Somalia to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)[58]. That is also to be considered as a kind of *mu'āzarah*. It can be argued that some believe that Turkey's engagement with Somalia is motivated by economic, investments, and geopolitical interests. However, the question should be whether this kind of *al-Mu'āzarah* helps relieve Somalis and improve their good life. Strictly speaking, as long the intention is to assist, the means are ethical, and the consequences are decent, then there is no contradiction between *al-Mu'āzarah* and acting in one's own national interest.

Likewise, Japan's support for Palestinian refugees is regarded as *al-Miyāsrah*. For instance, in 2021, Japan donated US$ 2,770,909 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).[59] This humanitarian assistance endeavors to enhance the human security of the Palestinian refugees in the West Bank by providing health care for them. Without a doubt, the Palestinian refugees are suffering from political, economic, and social crises, and supporting them can relieve them from these. Lastly, Turkey has delivered medical aid to many countries after the coronavirus outbreak, including the UK, Italy, Spain, and others. Turkey has even delivered medical assistance to the United States of America to combat the coronavirus;[60] this can be reviewed as *al-Ifḍāl*. It could be argued that the national interests motivate a country to apply these three principles; however, this does not mean that national interest and ethical principles are mutually exclusive.

Who is Politically Responsible?

In his book "*National responsibility and global justice,*" David Miller argues that there are two senses of responsibility. Firstly, 'outcome responsibility,' which is the responsibility that people bear for their actions, decisions, and consequence. Secondly, 'remedial responsibility,' which we might have to aid people in need to help.[61] So, asking who is responsible could include both aspects. It can be argued that none can be accountable and responsible without assigning responsibility to specific people. In the words of Toni Erskine, "Claims to moral responsibility are ubiquitous in world politics."[62] Therefore, it is essential here to elaborate on the Islamic concept of *amānah'* (ethical entrustment) to broaden our understanding of responsibility.

The contemporary Moroccan philosopher Ṭāha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān proposes the principle of *amānah'*, which indicates that human beings are primarily responsible for themselves and their actions. In addition, they are responsible for other people and, lastly, responsible for the world and everything that exists in it. In other words, everything that exists in the world is *amānah',* in that human beings must take care of it.[63] Consider the refugee crisis or climate change; who ought to be responsible? Is it the individual, the state, or the international organization? Thinking through the principle of *amānah'* means that we recognize that everyone is responsible for doing his part. Thus, everybody should act within *amānah'* framework, where we perceive responsibility as 'outcome responsibility' and 'remedial responsibility.'

Following on from the nature of *amānah',* al-Fārūqī reminds us that in Islam, it is expected from every individual to carry his burden in complete consciousness. However, if there is coercion, then the responsibility is absent, which means a violation of morality.[64] Thus, responsibility presupposes the freedom to act and free will. Again, what is the scope of man's responsibility? Al-Fārūqī offers a comprehensive description. He states, "It [responsibility] comprehends the whole universe. All mankind is object of man's moral action; all earth and sky are his theater, his *materiel*. He is responsible for all

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[58] "Turkey pays part of Somalia's IMF debt for relief initiative," *Hürriyet Daily News*, updated November, 06, 2020, retrieved July 18, 2021, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-pays-part-of-somalias-imf-debt-for-relief-initiative-159791.

[59] "UNRWA health department- annual report 2021," *UNRWA*, updated May 24, 2022, retrieved June 07, 2022, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_department_of_health_annual_report_2021.pdf

[60] Aydogan, Merve (2020), "Turkey delivers medical aid to US to help fight virus," *Anadolu Agency*, retrieved July 18, 2021, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-delivers-medical-aid-to-us-to-help-fight-virus/1820956

[61] Miller (2007), *National responsibility and global justice*, p. 81.

[62] Toni Erskine (2014), "Coalitions of the Willing and Responsibilities to Protect: Informal Associations, Enhanced Capacities, and Shared Moral Burdens," *Ethics & International Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 117.

[63] Ṭāha Abd al-Raḥmān (2014), *Buʾs al-Dahrāniyya: al-Naqd al-Iʾtimānī li-Faṣl al-Akhlāq ʿan al-Dīn*, Beirut: al-Shabaka al-ʿArabiyya lil-Abḥāth wa-l-Nashr, p.15.

[64] Isma'il R. al-Fārūqī (1992), *Al Tawhīd: Its Implications on Thought and Life*, Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, pp. 101.102.

that takes place in the universe, in every one of its remotest corners, for man's *taklīf* [responsibility] is universal, cosmic. {…} *Al taklīf* is the basis of man's humanity, its meaning and content."[65]

That is not to say that applying responsible politics and *amānah'* will solve all the ethical questions at the international level; instead, responsibility and *amānah'* teach us many lessons; human action has meaning and is not in vain. A man ought to be responsible for his actions and their consequences. More importantly, political responsibility and *amānah'* do not stop at the national border. Again, responsible politics pay attention to the objective of political actions and potential consequences. Likewise, ethical objectives ought to have ethical means. Hans Küng emphasizes that "good motives" and "good intention" do not guarantee good politics and good consequences. He states, "Anyone who merely wants to act well, with no concern for possible bad consequences and side-effects, is acting irresponsibly, indeed culpably."[66] Thus, responsible politics rejects the idea of the ends justifying the means.

Considering human beings as responsible beings and changing the paradigms we use in IR, and using more ethical principles such as those suggested above can help us pave the way to think more responsibly about politics and foreign policy and perform more responsible politics. Strictly speaking, responsible politics widens our perception of international political analysis instead of seeing foreign policy through narrow national interest. Again, the notion of *amānah'* as a species of responsible politics teaches us to see the world with a more normative orientation and ethical responsibilities.

Conclusion

The notion of responsible politics suggested above illustrates how ethics can be implemented more profoundly in foreign policy. Responsible ethics most probably enhance the stability and order of international affairs and, more likely, be the successful approach of states in the international arena. Ethics ought to be understood as a responsibility, virtue, and human flourishing. Ethics enlighten individuals and collective on how to treat each other nationally and internationally. Consequently, ethics is not a voluntary option to consider while analyzing international affairs. Instead, ethics is an indispensable component of ensuring a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of international politics. Understanding the ethical aspects of IR enables us for more ethical engagement. That is why Mervyn Frost emphasizes what he calls being 'ethically literate,'[67] which means being aware of the centrality of ethics in international affairs to engage in it.

It is worth noting that the lack of research centers, think tanks, and academic journals working on international ethics is a conspicuous reality. This article recommends that more effort be made in this regard. Many research centers focus on conflict resolution, peace studies, terrorism, and geopolitics, while very few are working on developing international ethics and ethical responsibilities. If responsible politics are emphasized and applied in international affairs, there might be less conflicts, violence, and terrorism. Future research can focus on how responsible politics should be accomplished as transnational and not self-interest or national-interest oriented.

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[65] al-Fārūqī (1992), *Al Tawhīd*, p. 62.
[66] Hans Küng (1998), *A global ethic for global politics and economics*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 66.
[67] Frost (2009), *Global ethics*, p. 11.

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