4th ic-PSIRS 2017

4th International Conference on Political Science, International Relations and Sociology

AN ANALYSIS ON THE SULTAN MUHAMMAD AL-FATEH'S MILITARY LEADERSHIP BASED ON THE TRADITIONAL THEORY OF JUST WAR

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to analyse the military leadership skills of Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh (al-Fateh) based on *the Traditional Theory of Just War*. This theory debates on the ethics and approaches that need to be cognized by a nation before declaring war on other states. It focuses on two major phases, which are, the pre-war phase that discuss the *Jus ad Bellum* principle, and second, the at-war phase that elaborates on the *Jus in Bello* principle. To fulfil the objectives of the study, textual analysis method and historical accounts were used to analyse the military leadership skill of al-Fateh. Findings from the research show that the declaration of war on Constantinople by al-Fateh commensurate with the principles and policies as spelt out in this theory.

Keywords: Just War Theory, Muhammad al-Fateh.

1. Introduction

Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh (al-Fateh[1]) (1432-1482) is considered by Muslims as their war hero and regarded as one who was a visionary and possessed a high calibre personality. The superiority of the Ottoman Empire was brought to the fore with the victory of his army in conquering Constantinople in 1453 (Runciman, 1965; Babinger, 1992). Al-Fateh's (1432-1482) real name is Muhammad bin Murad, better known as Sultan Muhammad II, or Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh, referring to his success as the *'pioneer or conqueror of Constantinople'*. He was born in Adrianapoli (at the border of Turkey and Bulgaria) on 29 March 1432. Since young, al-Fateh was highly influenced by his mentor, Shaikh Shemsuddin, and became more influential as he grew up. To reinforce his spiritual devotion towards Islam, al-Fateh was exposed to the Islamic teachings at the early stage of his life, which moulded his thoughts, personality and as a devout Muslim this was expressed through his implementation of Islamic rules in all aspects of his administration (al- Solaabi, 2011).

Al-Fateh's role as the military ruler began with his appointment as the Caliph of Ottoman. In his first year as the ruler of the empire, he overpowered the attacks from the Christian Crusaders that was led by János Hunyadi which violated the *Peace of Szeged* and *Treaty of Edirne*. It was a truce signed by Sultan Murad II and King Vladislaus of the Hungarian Empire. The violation of the treaty took place after the *Cardinal* Julian Cesarini, the representative of *Pope* stressed that it was not a betrayal towards the Ottoman Kingdom (Muhammad Farid, 2006). The dominance of al-Fateh's army was also acknowledged by many scholars, as conquering Constantinople was one of the world's most fascinating war histories due to the strength of the fortress and the strategic location which was deemed impenetrable from foreign threats (Babinger, 1992). Hence, there are cholars who regarded al-Fateh army's victory as the model war (Dougherty (2012).

This study aims to analyse the supremacy of al-Fateh's military skills based *on the Traditional Theory of Just War*. The theory actually originated from *Just War Theory* and it was first formulated out of need to morally justify a war. This theory was chosen as it fit the wars fought in the duration of al-Fateh's reign. In general, the theory has two objectives, to stop or control any form of action that leads to violence; and to justify acts that could lead to brutality (Russell, 1975). The declaration on ending or controlling any form of violence refers to the method of preventing war from erupting, and if it is unavoidable, the theory can be utilized as the guideline to minimize it. Meanwhile, the statement on justifying violence is about judging acts, sentencing and decisions that took place during the war.

It provides a set of guidelines, that war is recognized as a political means to reduce conflicts. Debates on these aspects have been brought forth by a few researchers, including Walzer (2001), who highlighted the theory was based on the Israel and Egypt war in 1967 this also includes pre-emptive war, humanitarian intervention, terrorism, and nuclear deterrence. On the other hand, Russell (1975) discussed the capacity of the guidelines to prevent war from taking place, and in contrast he even projected that the theory could incite the start of a war. Other than that, Christopher (1999) depicted the history of *Traditional Theory of Just War* through his writing and concluded on how the idea was crystalized from

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[1] 'al-Fateh's name will be used in discussing all aspects related to him.

St. Aquinas and Hugo Grotius works[2] to international law. Then, Coates (1997) was among scholars that debated on the principles and concepts of *Traditional Theory of Just War* by focusing on issues related to realism, militarism, pacifism, and the just war.

To fulfil the objectives of the study, textual analysis method and historical evidences were used to gather data related to this theory and the military leadership of al-Fateh. The study also applied a conceptual framework founded upon the theories and concepts based upon past research.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the military leadership skills of al-Fateh based on *The Traditional Theory of Just War*.

3. Research Methods

The study is based on textual analysis by reviewing of previous works and historical evidences. It was then, evaluated based on a conceptual framework, developed on the relationship between military leadership skills, and *The Traditional Theory of Just War*, in order to assess whether the conquer of Constantinople was an ethical war or not.

3.1. The conceptual framework

▪ In brief, from the aspect of terminology, leadership can be defined as a form of art to influence. It is a process where an individual persuades other individuals though a series of communication to achieve certain objectives (Yukl, 2008). It is also defined as one's ability to achieve an objective through attitude and behaviour that appear convincing to others (Thomson, 1968).

▪ With regard to military leadership in particular, it can be described as an art form, which can influence and instruct soldiers to follow certain methods; where they are faithful, loyal, confident, respectful and cooperative in completing and accomplishing any mission. Leadership in the army is a combination of placating the soldiers, so that they would obey commands, even though it might be an order that is not to their liking. To ensure that a mission will be accomplished, force would be employed if they cannot be convinced (Department of The Army, 1990). This shows that military leadership is the determining factor in all army operations (Rahman, 1980). Hence, the main element that will be analysed in military ruling is the qualities of a leader, as this is the main factor that determines the success or failure of a planned operation.

▪ To Muslims, the most successful and superior military leadership model is the Prophet Muhammad PBUH himself. The superiority and prominence of the Prophet was evident through his characters and actions, as he was devout, valiant, steadfast, fair and just (Ibn Furhun, 1995; Rahman, 1980). The Prophet's bravery and perseverance were verified in the battle of Uhud when

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[2] The idea to preserve justice in wars was originally mooted by St. Aquinas and Hugo Gratious. Due to a long period of religious war in Europe both scholars advocated there was a need to establish a judicious procedure in order to achieve justice before a war is declared. A war can only be declared due to specific reasons and should not be triggered by unjustified reasons.

the Muslim army was on the verge of defeat at the hands of the Quraisyh army. Even though most of the Muslim army had retreated, but as the supreme leader, the Prophet firmly continued to fight in the quest to win the battle. The devotion and bravery as exemplified by the Prophet had united and reconciled the Muslim army which was alarmed and worried over their fate (Abdul Khalil, 1982; Rahman, 1980).

In the murder incident of Abdullah bin Sehi by the Jews when he was in the midst of collecting tax in Khaibar, the Prophet was cautious in taking action, even though Abdullah bin Sehi's cousin, Muheesah begged him to act immediately. As the head of state, he did not act rashly by blaming the Jews, instead an investigation was launched by appointing a few personnel to identify witnesses to the murder (Rahman, 1980).

▪ From the western perspective, the criterion in selecting an excellent military leader was to find someone that is courageous and just. Courage should encompass both major aspects, which consist of mental and physical. Mental courage refers to the aspect of one's ability to control himself when faced with tense situations. In the manual *Department of The Army* (1990), the methods in training soldiers to be brave, fearless disciplined, and calm were elaborative. These elements were emphasized on as they were the key ingredients to a successful leadership in the armed forces. Next, the just trait that emphasizes on being fair and just in passing judgements and bestowing awards to lower-ranked officers (*Department of The Army,* 1990).

▪ In a nutshell, the main criterion that should form the basis of a high quality leader is the one that is steadfast, courageous, determined, fair and just.

▪ *The Traditional Theory of Just War* as claimed by Estrella (2012) is a theory that is effective in determining the ethical aspects of a war. Each guideline stated in the theory must be adhered to in order for an ethical war to be launched against an opponent. Estrella's analysis on America's invasion of Iraq in 2003 based on this theory and concluded that it was a baseless and unjustified act of war. The reason given by elaborating the evidence put forward by the coalition led by America that it had to attack Iraq with the objective of preventing the state from building weapons of mass destruction with the assumptions the belief that it could be used to attack the United States of America. Even the United Nations rejected their arguments and reasons as they did not have concrete evidence. Hence, the war was classified as an unethical war. Meanwhile, Kurtulus (2007) analysed the war launched by Israel against Egypt in 1967 based on the *pre-emptive strike,* one of the conditions under the *just cause* guideline. According to Kartulus, one of the factors the Israeli Air Force launched air strikes on the communities of Egypt, Syria and Jordan were due to the threat posed upon them by the barricade imposed by the allies of Egypt. Even though the strike was successful, but it was categorized as unethical as it was launched purely based on personal basis and speculation.

▪ Frazer (2015) used this theory to identify the ethical aspects of the American Revolutionary War and concluded that the war was unethical. It was due to the American army's decision to launch war against Britain with the aim of getting liberty from a foreign power, however, it was not actually a last resort action. Findings show that the United States of America avoided from going to the discussion table or holding any compromise with the British to solve the issues affecting

both parties. It was clear that the guideline states that war can only be proclaimed if all talks and discussions have met the dead end without any resolution.

▪ In general, again this theory is posited on two principles that encompass two main phases. The first phase is the pre-war period that applies the *Jus ad Bellum* principle, while the second phase emphasizes on the while-at-war period, the *Jus in Bello* principle. Both of the principles justify the values of justice of war, before a war begins, and during the war itself (Mcmahan, 2004; Calcutt, 2011; Estrella, 2012; Lemennicier, 2012).

▪ Under the *Jus ad Bellum* principle, six guidelines are specified, that must be observed by any nation before any war could be declared against another state. They include *just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, last resort, probability of success* and *proportionality* (Estrella, 2012). The first one, *Just Cause*, refers to the key factor why a state wants to launch war against another nation. The guideline states that war can only be declared if it is for the purpose of defending itself, with very strong conviction that the enemy is fully prepared to attack the state (*pre-emptive strike*). Thus, a war can be initiated with the aim of preventing an attack from the enemy (*preventive attack*) (Flynn, 2008). Secondly, any declaration of war can only be carried out by the *legitimate authority* that is the government and its leaders as they are the ones responsible for a country's sovereignty (Christopher, 1999).

▪ The third guideline is the *right of intention that* is related to the reason why to resort to a war. To ensure justice, the guideline states that war cannot be declared if the intention is to seize another state's economic resource; to cause forced slavery, ethnic cleansing, and revenge, as it is then classified as a cruel and violent war (Estrella, 2012). The fourth rule is the *last resort*. It means that war can only be launched if both parties failed to find a common ground in resolving their conflict (Lemennicier, 2012). Meanwhile, the fifth rule, *probability of success* denotes that any nation that has the intention to declare war on another, must have the intention to win, or capable of winning it. The last ruling, *proportionality,* it means that a war can only take place if it would benefit the citizen even after the war that causes damage and destruction (Christopher, 1999).

▪ The second phase involves the at-war situations that emphasizes on the principles of *Jus in Bello*. There are three guidelines stated under this principle to ensure that a launched war is ethical. The first guideline is *discrimination* that stresses on the lack of distinction between the army and civilians. Secondly, *proportionality* determines that every ethic must have certain limits, and not just to fulfil the objectives of war alone (Estrella, 2012). For instance, in the quest to win the war, soldiers are prevented from displaying cruelty, and must never irrationally kill the weak, like children, women and the old folks; apart from demolishing public property intentionally. The last guideline is *treatment of prisoners,* which refers to the treatment of prisoners-of-war, whether they are treated fairly or unjustly (Christopher, 1999).

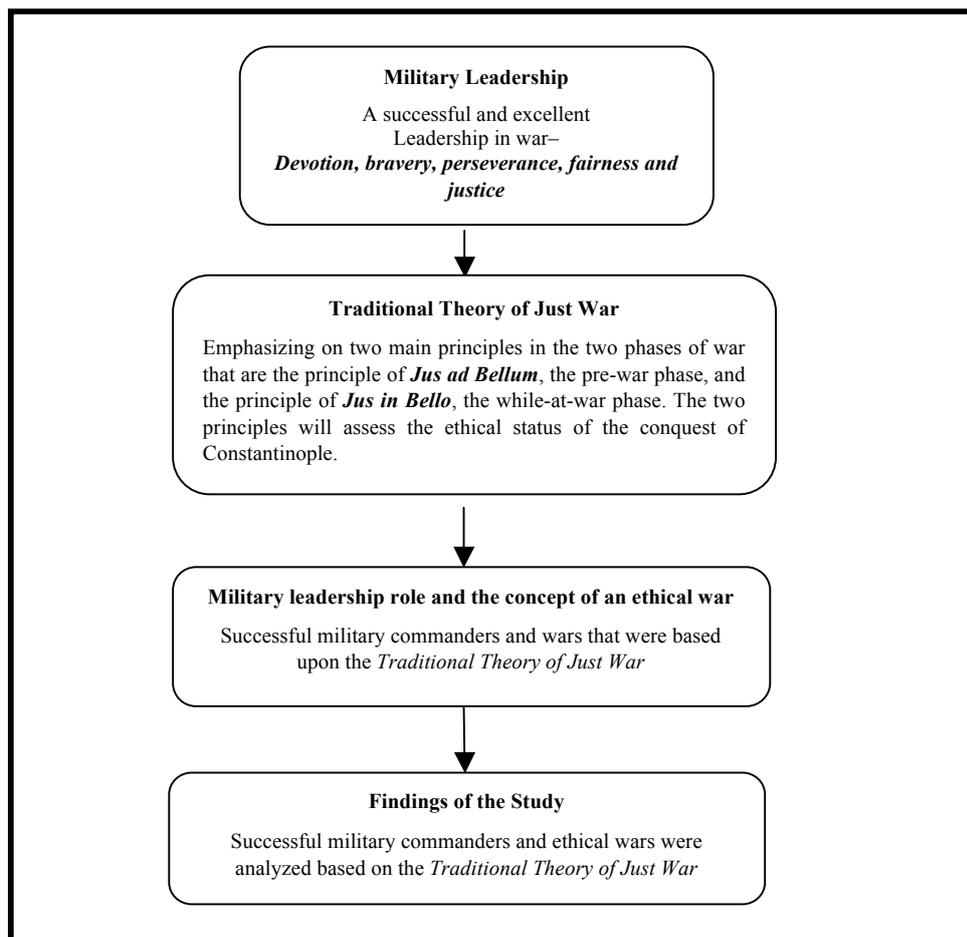The above explanation and the sequence of the analysis of this study has been summarised in figure 1.

Figure 01. The Conceptual Framework of Military Leadership and Ethical Wars based on the
Traditional Theory of Just War

4. Findings - Al-Fateh's Military Leadership based on *Traditional Theory of Just War*

This part will focus on al-Fateh's military leadership as a case study of a successful leader. The debate will generally elaborate on the background, personality, and his military command on the occupation of Constantinople. This analysis will cover both, before, during and after the war.

4.1. The principle of *Jus ad Bellum*

4.1.1 *Just cause*

▪ History has recorded the glory and might of the Constantinople fortress which was built by the Roman Emperor, known better as 'Emperor Constantine', which began in 330. It was the centre of administration of the Byzantine Empire of Eastern Rome that was a bastion for almost 1000 years (Odahl, 2004; Turnbull, 2004; Tomlinson, 1992). From the historical aspect, the Constantinople capital was strategic from the aspects of commerce; political, international and military relations. The prominence of the city was the toast of many prominent figures, where even Napoleon

Bonaparte claimed that if the world were a country, then Constantinople would be its capital. Even though during its years of glory it was attacked 47 times by other empires, 11 times by the Ottoman empire and it was only defeated during the al-Fateh reign (Pears, 1886).

▪ Based on the guidelines where an attack upon another nation is only justified based on two reasons, that are, if the occupied territory were to be attacked (*pre-emptive strike*) and as a form of defence from being attacked in the future (*preventive attack*). Flynn (2008) analysis shows that al-Fateh's feats were in line with the rulings. As soon as al-Fateh took over the reign of the Ottoman government at the age of 19, he continued the effort of his predecessors' in attempting to conquer the city of Constantinople. This was due to Constantine IX's attempt in overpowering and conquering the Ottoman government. Usually, before a war was launched, al-Fateh would try to strike a truce by signing treaties, which took place with Hungary, Bulgaria and Serbia (Kinross, 1977). Through treaties, war and conquest with other nations were avoided.

▪ Other than that, during the reign of Constantine IX, Constantinople was recognized as the centre of the teaching and missionary of the Christian religion. With that position, if the Ottoman Empire fall, the probability of the spread of Christian teachings to the Muslims was possible. Thus, al-Fateh took the initiative of strengthening his army and declaring war against the territory. In fact, al-Fateh had a clear objective to change the city of Constantinople from the centre of Christianity (Dougherty, 2012) to a capital city of the empire, and later, as a centre for the teachings of Islam.

4.1.2 *Legitimate authority*

▪ It only confirmed that a war declaration by one political region towards another was legitimate if it was pronounced by a country's leader, and the government is responsible towards the nation's autonomy (Christopher, 1999).

▪ As the eighth Uthamaniyyah Caliph, al-Fateh always held fast to the diplomatic and amity policies with other countries. The peace strategy built with certain countries indirectly persuaded other countries to take the nonaligned policy, by not taking part in any war that involved his army against other countries. For instance, in the invasion of Constantinople, the leaders of Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary took the nonaligned policy, even though a majority of the citizens were Christians before war took place (Kinross, 1977).

4.1.3 *Right intention*

▪ Under the guideline of *right intention,* it is stated that the main intention of war is to reach peace and resolve conflicts. Hence, any war declared to avenge revenge, to seize economic resource and ethnic cleansing is categorized as violent and cruel (Estrella, 2012).

▪ Al-Fateh's actions in his occupation of Constantinople was aimed towards improving the situations of both parties. Before war was proclaimed upon the Byzantine Empire, al-Fateh first upholding peace in his territory by eliminating local rebels that tried to end his reign. However, Emperor Constantine IX's threat to support the Crown Prince Orkhan, the grandson of King Sulaiman, who demanded for an annual salary to be paid to him, was deemed as an attempt to overthrow the Caliph. As a precaution, al-Fateh built a strong fort, called 'Rumili Hisar'. The

defensive strategies taken by al-Fateh, hinted that war had been declared against the Byzantine Empire (Mahayuddin, 1993). Before the situation became tense, al-Fateh tried to strike a truce with the Byzantine government, and it was a continuation of the peace deal signed by the previous Caliph (Kinross, 1977). However, the effort did not materialize.

▪ Apart from that, al-Fateh also tried to protect the Muslims from any threat and attack from the Christians, and to uphold the sanctity of Islam. With the objective, he invaded Constantinople. In fact, his vision and mission was reinforced by the Prophet's saying that refers to the occupation of the city of Constantinople. The full meaning of the saying according to al-Solaabi (2008);

> *The city of Constantinople will be conquered. The ruler will be the best ruler, and the*
> *army will be the best army.*

▪ Al-Fateh was renowned as an ethical and honest ruler in executing his duties. His personality was the main factor that distinguished him and his predecessors. In fact, his morals was the main determinant in his success in conquering the city of Constantinople (al-Solaabi, 2008; Muhammad Farid, 2006).

▪ Thus, the declaration of war upon Constantinople was found to be aligned to the guidelines of the theory as al-Fateh's actions were considered to be beneficial to both parties. In fact, his proclamation of war was in line with the fourth guideline, that is the ***last resort*** (Lemennicier, 2012), where war was only declared when attempts at truce did not succeed. Even though he had tried to strike a deal with the Byzantine government, but after all plans, it was turned down, and any further discussion was not entertained (Overy, 2014; al-Solaabi, 2008).

4.1.4 *Probability of success*

▪ According to *Traditional Theory of Just War*, a war is only allowed if a country that declares war has the capacity to win in the battle. This is outlined as *probability of success* (Estrella, 2012).

▪ In the process of raiding the city of Constantinople, the early stages of battle showed that victory was leaning towards the al-Fateh army. Among them, al-Fateh had strong conviction that he would win the war, as he was highly ambitious and did not give up easily in battles (Mahayuddin, 1993). In fact, al-Fateh's confidence of winning the battle was obvious through his speech to his warriors, where he stated that if he failed to conquer Constantinople, it means that he had also failed in ruling the Ottoman Empire (Runciman, 1965).

▪ With his intelligence, al-Fateh was also found to have been very meticulous in planning strategies to invade the city, that he was proclaimed as a brilliant and devout Caliph. According to Dolman (2005), al-Fateh had two strategies before invading Constantinople, which involved strategies before and during the battle. The strategy planned before the war was categorized as 'grand strategy', as it involved al-Fateh's intelligence in developing diplomatic policies with foreign nations, where he gathered information on the means to invade the city, equipping his army with military weapons, and preparing his warriors with spiritual and physical strengths in facing ruthless conditions. For example, al-Fateh had trained his soldiers not just as *cavalryman*,

but he had equipped his army with archers, and bombardiers. History records show that the al-Fateh army were the finest of the period (Agoston, 2011).

▪ Other than weapons, al-Fateh also reinforced his defence by building garrison on the western part of the Bosphorus Straits, known as *Rumeli Hissari* (Turnbull, 2004).

4.1.5 *Proportionality*

▪ To guarantee that a war is just and ethical, the guideline outlines that a war can only be launched if it will result in more benefits than harm and destruction (Christopher, 1999). From the annals of history, it was determined that the occupation of Constantinople provided more benefits as al-Fateh successfully protected and defended the passageway to Asia from the threat of Christian ruler (Jons, 1972). Apart from that, the opening of the city had led to greater respect for the Ottoman Empire from the western world, due to the army's force and strength in overpowering the Byzantine Empire. As a result, the Byzantine regime failed to retaliate and reclaim the capital from the Ottoman armed forces. The conquest also led to Constantinople becoming the bridge that linked Muslim and the West, or Asia and Europe (Suraiya, 1999 & 2008).

4.2. The *Jus in Bello* principle

The phase debates on the conduct during the war, or within the duration of war, and it is included as part of the *Jus in Bello* principle

4.2.1 *Discrimination and proportionality*

▪ The *discrimination* guideline states that, every soldier must be kind, fair and just to civilians. Any form of ruthless act can only be inflicted upon the enemy's army, but only if they retaliated (Estrella, 2012). Meanwhile, the ruling of *proportionality* refers to the ethics of war, where the proclamation of war is not only for the sake of going to war, but it must not be atrocious. It means that each soldier must be considerate and do not slay children, women, the old, and do not confiscate properties and damage public assets without reason.

▪ Based on the records on the conquest of Constantinople, it was discovered that al-Fateh army's treatment of the public was in line with both guidelines. For instance, during the invasion, al-Fateh had commanded his army to not harm children, women, the elderly, and the disabled, similar to the stance displayed by the Prophet (al-Solaabi, 2008). He was also fair to the residents of the city, and allowed freedom among children, women and the elderly who were not involved in the war (Felix, 2011).

▪ As a military commander, al-Fateh was always working towards ensuring peace and avoiding conflicts. It was for this reason that he dispatched a letter to the Constantine Emperor, with the hope that Constantinople would be handed over in peace without any need to spill blood and, he issued a guarantee that the Emperor and his family would be escorted out of the city safely, including all of the residents. In fact, the residents were given a choice on whether to remain living in the region, or move to a new territory (al-Solaabi, 2008).

4.2.2 *Treatment of prisoners*

▪ The guideline states that the soldiers must be kind and just towards the prisoners-of-war, as it is ethical and decent (Christopher, 1999).

▪ Al-Fateh's qualities of being a devout Muslim had nurtured him into respecting people of all races. It was evident from his kind treatment towards the defeated Christian crusaders. He even paid a visit to the Hagia Sophia Cathedral to calm the people who had gathered and hid there. In fact, he had commanded a priest to pacify the public, and to inform them to return to their homes in an orderly manner. His compassion and consideration had even convinced a few priests to embrace Islam (al-Solaabi, 2008).

The above explanation and the sequence of the analysis of this study of this part has been summarised in figure 2.
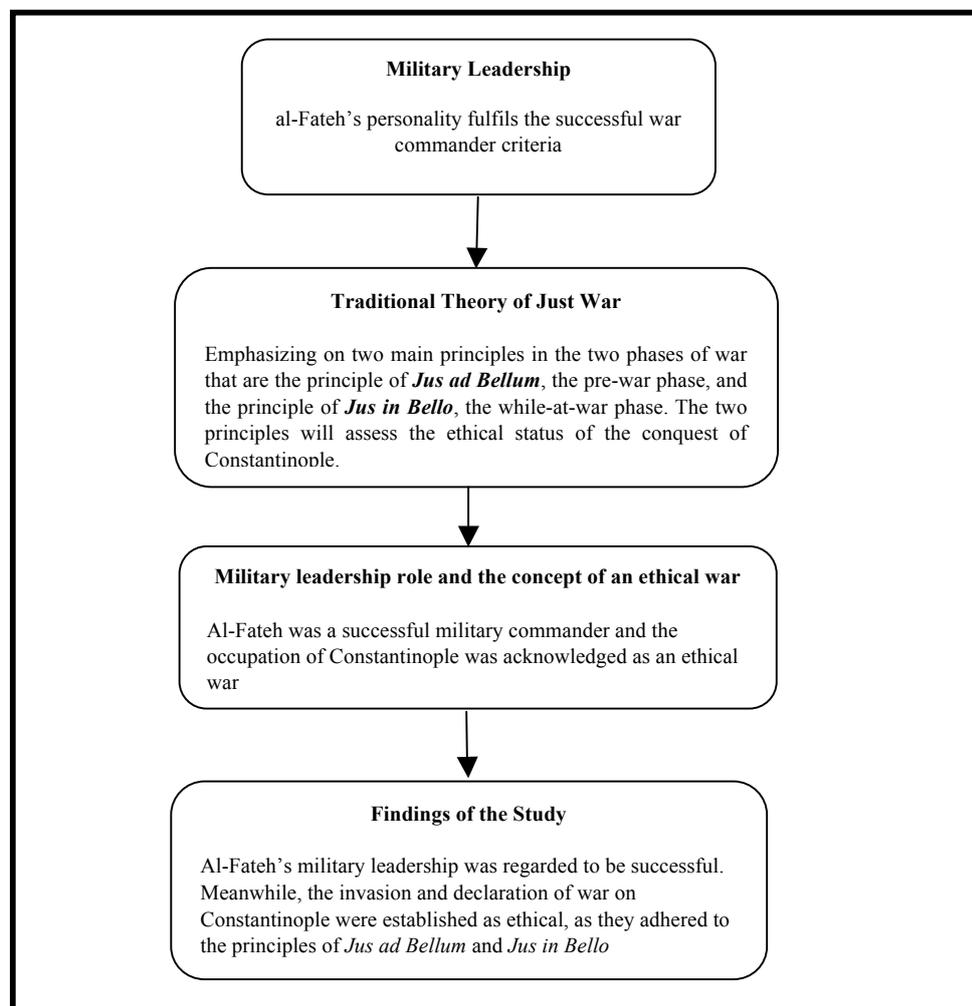

Figure 02. The Conceptual Framework of al-Fateh's Military Leadership based on *The Traditional Theory of Just War*

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Traditional Theory of Just War* has outlined the conditions that must be adhered to by any country when launching war towards another nation, through the terms of *Jus ad Bellum* and *Jus in Bello*. Equipped with excellent military skills and strategies compounded with good personal attributes, the analysis found that all the principles of the theory were properly embraced by al-Fateh in conquering Constantinople in 1453, hence, the war can be regarded as ethical.

Acknowledgments

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