

The Aftermath of the Rebellion

Raising the flag of opposition against the then caliph the first civil war practically initiated in Islam. 'The one community' of Islam divided into different sects. The enmity between the Muslim sects, which began during the early caliphate, has continued up to now. Muslims kill their Muslim brethren and ignore their non-Muslim enemies. The rebellion made the cursed tree in the Holy Qur'an, which the Prophet (S.A.W.A.) saw in his vision,¹ increase.

'Ali's victory at Basra spurred Mu'awiya to action. Soon after his arrival in Kufa, 'Ali sent Jarir b. 'Abd Allah al-Bajali, the former governor of 'Uthman in Hamadan, as an envoy to Mu'awiya with instructions to convey his letter to him and to ask him only for the reply, while indicate him to understand that 'Ali would not accept him as a governor.²

Mu'awiya dilatorily responded, "Let us consider, and I will explore the view of the people of Syria." He immediately wrote to 'Amr b. al-'As the primary accused in 'Uthman's murder. 'Amr followed the invitation. He was sure that he could now strike a bargain, which would satisfy his own wishes. It would be Egypt for life or no deal. 'Amr swore allegiance to Mu'awiya on the basis that he would back the Umayyad in thier fight against 'Ali, while Mu'awiya would help him regain Egypt and guarantee him lifetime possession.³

The alliance between Mu'awiya and 'Amr b. al-'As constituted a formidable political force. 'Amr was a master of planning, and playing on political scenarios. Mu'awiya needed him. He knew he could trust 'Amr at this stage since 'Ali would never make a deal with him at Mu'awiya's expense.

Having gained broad allegiance in Syria, Mu'awiya hoped to draw some of the religious aristocracy in the holy cities to his side by a campaign of letters. 'Amr advised him against it but he insisted. Mu'awiya, however, could get the backing of a member of 'Umar's family without having to deceive him with false promises. 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Umar the threefold murderer, had been after his pardon, granted an estate near Kufa by 'Uthman. When 'Ali came to Kufa, 'Ubayd Allah discretely asked him for amnesty through some mediators, but 'Ali opposed his pardon.

Malik b. al-Ashtar, one of the mediators, informed 'Ubayd Allah, and he promptly fled to Mu'awiya.⁴ He tried to induce him to accuse and denigrate 'Ali in public, but 'Ubayd Allah would not do so.⁵ He, however, participated as one of the leaders of Mu'awiya's army in the battle of Siffin. A client warned him that Mu'awiya was intentionally exposing him to mortal danger. If he were to win, Mu'awiya would get the rule, and if he were killed, he would get rid of him. His wife, Bahriyya, also told him that he would certainly be killed and this is what Mu'awiya wanted. 'Ubayd Allah insisted on obeying his emir; and he was killed.⁶

The Kufans were less united in their support of war. When 'Ali appealed to them, "March against the enemies of God, march against the remnants of the confederates (*Ahzab*), the murderers of Immigrants and the Helpers, Arbad b. Rabi'a stood up and shouted, "Do you want to make us march against our Syrian brothers and kill them for you? By God, we shall not do that."⁷ 'Adi b. Hatim al-Ta'i advised 'Ali to give another chance to letters and messengers before marching.⁸

Others were urging 'Ali to speed up his campaign before the enemy was fully prepared. 'Abd Allah b. Budayl b. Warqa' representing the Prophet's Companions, turning to people, asked, "How could Mu'awiya pledge allegiance to 'Ali when 'Ali has killed Mu'awiya's brother, Hanzala, his maternal uncle, al-Walid and his grandfather, 'Utba in a single stand?"⁹ In Syria, the preparations for war also went ahead. Abu Muslim al-Khawalani took the bloody shirt of 'Uthman which Umm Habiba, Mu'awiya's sister had sent from Medina and toured the garrison towns in Syria with it, inciting the people to revenge.¹⁰

'Ali set out from Nukhayla probably early in Dhu al-Hijja 36/657. When his army put up their camp, they found the watering place at the Euphrates occupied by Abu al-A'war and the Syrians, who prevented them from reaching the water. They looked for another watering place nearby but could not find one. As they complained to 'Ali, he sent Sa'sa'a b. Suhan to tell Mu'awiya that he had come not wishing to fight him before proper warning, summons and argument; Mu'awiya's cavalry and foot soldiers had, however, started to fight them and now they were preventing his men from obtaining water.

He asked Mu'awiya to order his companions to give them access to the water until they had fully considered their conflict. However, if it pleased Mu'awiya, he could let his men fight it out about the water rather than the matter for which they had come. Mu'awiya consulted his advisers, and al-Walid b. 'Uqba urged him to deprive the enemy of water as they had done with 'Uthman. Al-Walid claimed that 'Uthman had been kept without cold water and food for forty days.¹¹

'Ali did not have to rouse his men into action. After they had been without water for a day and night, al-Ash'ath b. Qays came to him asking for permission to attack and requesting that 'Ali order Malik b. al-Ashtar to join him with his equestrians. 'Ammar b. Yasir got up and shouted among the people. A great number of men came to him. Then he said, "By God, even if they defeat us and chase us as far as the palm trees of Hajar¹² again we are right and they are wrong."¹³

Twelve thousand men volunteered, and they swooped down on Abu al-A'war and his men. Malik b. al-

Ashtar had personally killed seven and al-Ash'ath five.¹⁴ At first, they said they would not allow the Syrians to get water. 'Ali ordered them, however, to take their needful and return to their camp.¹⁵

For two days, the armies stayed facing each other. Then 'Ali called for Abu 'Amra and some other of his companions and told them to argue with Mu'awiya and discover his view. Abu 'Amra appealed to him not to split the unity of this community and not to shed their blood in common strife. Mu'awiya interrupted his discourse. "Why don't you recommend that to your master?" Abu 'Amra replied, "My master is not like you. My master is the one most entitled among the creation to this matter by his excellence, religion, early merit in Islam, and close kinship with the Apostle of God." Mu'awiya asked, "What does he say then?" Abu 'Amra replied, "He orders you to fear God and to respond to the summons of your cousin to what is right. That is soundest for you in your worldly affairs and best for your end." Mu'awiya, "Shall we allow 'Uthman's blood to be spilled for nothing? No, by God, I shall never do that."¹⁶

There was now daily skirmishing until the end of Dhu al-Hijja. At the beginning of Muharram 37 a truce was agreed for the month in the hope that a peaceful settlement might be reached. Again, envoys went back and forth between the two camps. The discussion did not go any better than the previous time. As the sun set on the last day of Muharram, 'Ali ordered Marthad b. al-Harith to proclaim to the Syrians that they had failed to respond to his summons to the Book of God and persisted in their falsehood. The time for the battle had arrived.¹⁷

During the first seven days of Safar, prominent leaders on both sides were dispatched to fight each day, with only small retinue, as in a tournament. The all-out battle of Siffin began on Wednesday, Safar 8. The day had evidently gone well for Mu'awiya. The princes of the Umayyad family preferred to let others do the fighting in revenge for their relative. Mu'awiya asked 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Umar to take the command of his heavily armed elite, the *shahba'* and to lead the attack. 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Umar, surprised that he was chosen for the task, felt that some member of the Umayyad family, who were the prime claimants for revenge, would have been more appropriate.

He went ahead, however, in spite of warnings from his client and his wife and he was killed. The tide turned, and the Syrians were pushed back to their camp. Mu'awiya fled from his pavilion and sheltered in one of the tents of his army.¹⁸ Elsewhere on the battlefield, that day 'Ammar b. Yasir, who was above ninety years old, was killed fighting for 'Ali. People cried the Companion of the Prophet was killed. The Messenger of God had predicted that 'Ammar would be killed by the rebel group.¹⁹

An appeal by Mu'awiya that one of his relatives seeks a duel among the Quraysh of Iraq was also met with derision by al-Walid b. 'Uqba and Marwan. Mu'awiya's brother 'Utba b. Abi Sufyan, however, proposed a duel with Ja'da b. Hubayra. 'Utba went out in the morning and called for Ja'da to come forward. They were both ready to fight. 'Utba gathered all his men and horses and came forward with a retinue of Sakun, Azd, and Sadif. Ja'da prepared with every means at his disposal. They met, and for a while, the men stood firm. Ja'da himself fought that day, but 'Utba became frightened, abandoned his equestrians, and fled speedily to Mu'awiya.²⁰

After a crucial, but indecisive battle, fighting continued through the night, which was remembered as the night of the rumble (*laylat al-harir*). The fighting was now mostly by sword, and the number of dead mounted. 'Ali won the battle at that night and recovered many of the dead from his army.²¹ When the morning came, the balance seemed to be moving in 'Ali's favor. Toward noon, some of the Syrians facing the center of 'Ali's army raised the copies of the Holy Qur'an tied to the heads of their lances.²²

The fighting stopped. 'Ali exhorted his men to continue fighting. He told them that Mu'awiya, 'Amr and their chief supporters were not men of religion and the Qur'an, but were raising it for deception and fraud. From many of the Qur'an readers view, however, the appeal to the Holy Qur'an proved irresistible.²³ Facing open mutiny, 'Ali gave in to their demand that he recall Malik b. al-Ashtar, who had advanced far towards the Syrian camp and sensed victory nearby. Malik b. al-Ashtar refused at first to respond and had to be warned that the army would abandon him.

His reproaches to the men that they were relinquishing the battle as he was hoping for victory and allowing themselves to be deputed for worldly motives were answered with curses. 'Ali had to restore order by affirming that he had accepted that the Holy Qur'an be made the judge between the two parties.²⁴

As the implication of Mu'awiya's proposal became evident, however, a substantial minority dissented. A group of about four thousand of men of insight and pious worshippers objected to the principle of arbitration. They evidently realized that Mu'awiya was not sincerely submitting to the Holy Qur'an but intended a game of political wheeling and dealing between two representatives of the opposing parties, which would allow him to hold on to power.

Another, smaller, group abstained from either backing or opposing the proposal. The group opposed to the arbitration came to 'Ali and demanded that he resume the war. 'Ali was in favor of this. Those in favor of arbitration, however, insisted that the proposal was only right, fair and just. The opponents of the arbitration (the Kharijites) went away in anger. Some left for Kufa before the agreement was signed. Others stayed on, saying, "Perhaps he will repent and turn back."²⁵

The radical opponents of the arbitration decided to choose a leader among them. They pledged allegiance to 'Abd Allah b. Wahb al-Rasibi, known as Dhu al-Thafanat, on Shawwal 10, 37. They went to Jisr al-Nahrawan, east of the Tigris and invited the Basran to meet them there. After the Kharijites left Kufa, 'Ali's followers offered him a renewed oath of allegiance on the basis that they would be friends of those he befriended and enemies for those he took as enemies.²⁶

'Ali stipulated adherence to the Book of God and the *Sunna* of the Prophet in the oath. Rabi'a b. Shaddad al-Khath'ami, who had fought for him in the Battle of Camel and Siffin suggested, "On the *Sunna* of Abu Bakr and 'Umar." 'Ali objected that if Abu Bakr and 'Umar had been acting on anything but the Book of God and the *Sunna* of His Messenger, they would have been remote from the truth. The formula of the new oath of allegiance for 'Ali matched the invocation that the Prophet (S.A.W.A) made for

him at Ghadir Khumm: “O God! Be the friend of him who is his friend, and be the enemy of him who is his enemy.”²⁷

It was about this time that 'Ali had the *hadith* of Ghadir Khumm proclaimed in public. He appealed to the crowd assembled on the square (*rahba*) in front of the mosque of Kufa asking those who had heard the words the Prophet (S.A.W.A.) at Ghadir Khumm. Thirteen Companions came forward and witnessed that they had heard the Prophet say, “O God! Be the friend of him who is his friend, and be the enemy of him who is his enemy.”²⁸

'Ali was eager to set out on the campaign as quickly as possible, before Mu'awiya could gather all his forces. He moved north via Shahi and Dabaha to the east bank of the Euphrates and al-Anbar. He had received disturbing news about the murder of 'Abd Allah b. Khabbab b. al-Aratt, his pregnant wife and Umm Sinan al-Saydawiyya by the Kharijites. His men turned to him, pleading that they could not leave their families and property behind at the mercy of such people and they urged him to fight them first. 'Ali sent to the Kharijites demanding the surrender of the murderers. If they did so he would leave them alone until he had fought the Syrians in the hope that they would change their minds in the meantime and return to the course of right.

They answered defiantly that all of them had killed these people and all considered the shedding the blood of 'Abd Allah b. Khabbab and his wife and that of any of 'Ali's partisans as licit. 'Ali asked them by what right they considered it licit for them to leave their community, to draw their swords against their own people, to investigate their views, and to spill their blood. He gave Abu Ayyub al-Ansari a banner of safe conduct for anyone wishing to surrender. Some went to 'Ali and some left the battlefield. Others insisted on their beliefs and were ready to fight 'Ali. He gave the order to let the Kharijites attack first.

Many of the Kharijite leaders were killed. Four hundred wounded were found among the dead in the battlefield. 'Ali ordered them to be handed to their tribes for medical care. On 'Ali's side, only ten or less men were killed. 'Ali wanted to proceed immediately from al-Nahrawan to Syria. His men complained that their arrows were used up, their swords dulled, their spearheads had fallen off their lances, and urged him to return to Kufa so that they might restore their equipment and replenish their forces. Within days, his armies melted away, leaving but a few of the leaders with him. 'Ali realized that he had lost control over them and entered Kufa, abandoning the campaign.²⁹

Mu'awiya was pleased, when they informed him that 'Ali had turned off his route to Syria in order to subdue the rebels in his own rank, and was pleased and waited for further development. He called al-Dhahhak b. Qays and instructed him to attack the Bedouin Arabs loyal to 'Ali. Al-Dhahhak crossed the desert and attacked the pilgrims returning from Mecca, and robbed them of their belongings. 'Ali appealed to the Kufans to avenge the blood of their compatriots. Hujr b.'Adi caught with al-Dhahhak near Tadmur. They fought for a while, and nineteen Syrians were killed as against two men of Hujr. In the cover of the night, the Syrians fled.³⁰ This type of ordinary attack, highway robbery, and murder now became a regular feature of the raids that Mu'awiya dispatched into 'Ali's territories, marking a new low in

the character of inter-Muslim warfare.

Mu'awiya chose Busr b. Abi Artat al-'Amiri to lead a new raid into Arabia. Moving towards Medina, Busr stopped at every watering place to seize the camels belonging to the local tribes and had his men raid them while spearing their horses, along which they led. When they reached the next watering place, they would release the camels which they had and seize the fresh ones available there. As Busr entered Medina, he delivered a blistering sermon of vituperation and menaces to the Helpers, threatening them all.

From Medina, he moved on to Mecca, killing and looting on the way. While passing through the territory of the Banu Kinana, Busr chanced upon the two minor sons of 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Abbas, 'Abd al-Rahman and Qutham. He had entrusted his two sons to a man of Kinana so that they would experience life in the desert in accordance with custom among the noble families of Quraysh. When Busr seized the two boys and threatened to kill them, their Kinani guardian took his sword and went out to face Busr. Mu'awiya's general angrily questioned him, "We did not want to kill you, so why do you expose yourself to being killed?"

The man answered, "Yes, I shall be killed in protection of my guest. That will pardon me better before God and the people." Then he struck at the captors with his sword until he was killed. Busr had the two boys led before him and slaughtered them with a knife. A group of the women of Kinana came, and one of them told the savage, "You kill the men, but what for do you kill the children? By God, it was not the practice for them to be killed either in the Time of Ignorance or in Islam. By God, surely a regime which can find strength by only killing the meek, the humble, and the tottering old, by denying mercy and cutting the bonds of kinship is a regime of evil." Busr shouted, "By God, I wish to put the sword among you." Though challenged by the women to do so, he refrained, recalling that his master had declared Kinana off limits for him.³¹

Reports of brutal savagery of Mu'awiya's general now forced 'Ali to act. Jaria b. Qudama set out from Kufa with a thousand men and recruited another thousand in Basra. Afterwards 'Ali sent another two thousand men under Wahb b. Mas'ud al-Khath'ami to join Jaria in Hijaz. 'Ali gave restrict instructions not to harm Muslims or non-Muslims protected by treaty, not to confiscate property or riding animals even if their own mounts were worn out and they were forced to continue on foot, and to perform their prayers regularly. Jaria moved quickly through the Hijaz to Yemen passing by the towns, the fortified places and stopping nowhere. He pressed on the Hadhramawt in pursuit of Busr b. Abi Artat. On his pursuit, Busr immediately fled leaving Hijaz.³²

The outrages committed by Busr in his raids of Arabia produced shock in Kufa and aided 'Ali in his efforts to mount a new offensive against Mu'awiya. The Kufans blamed each other for their past inaction. A group of the nobles came to see 'Ali and urged him for the campaign to Syria. In preparation for his campaign, 'Ali had written to Qays b. Sa'd b. 'Ubada, now governor of Azarbayjan to proceed speedily to Kufa. A large number of Muslims assembled there now submitting to his command and ready to move

against the mutineer the son of the mutineer ('asi b. 'asi). 'Ali was delaying departure merely in expectation of Qays' arrival.³³

On Ramadhan 19, 40/January 26, 661, as he entered the mosque of Kufa to perform the Morning Prayer, 'Ali was met by 'Abd al-Rahman b. Muljam Muradi, a Kharijite from Egypt with the words, "The judgment belongs to God, 'Ali, not to you." 'Ali b. Abi Talib was struck on the head with a poisoned sword.³⁴

Alas, 'Ali was assassinated at a time when his fortune, after lengthy crisis following Siffin, the failed arbitration and al-Nahrwan, seemed on the ascendant. The mood in Kufa and Basra had changed in his favor as Mu'awiya's vicious conduct of war, especially in Busr's Arabian campaign, had revealed the true nature of his reign. Experience had so far shown that whenever Syrians and Iraqis met in a battle in roughly equal terms, the Syrians usually gave way, first. The Iraqis, resuming the war with the bitter resolve of outwitted political underdogs, might well have triumphed militarily this time.

The loyalist believed that he was the best of Muslims after the Prophet and the only one entitled to rule them. He died on Ramadhan 21, 40. Before his death, he advised the faithful and his sons, "O sons of 'Abd al-Muttalib, you should not shed blood of Muslims shouting the Commander of the Faithful (*Amir al-Mu'minin*) has been killed. Beware; do not kill because of me except my killer. See, if I die with this stroke, then strike him one stroke for his stroke and do not mutilate the man, for I have heard the Messenger of God say, 'Avoid dismembering even though it may be a rabid dog'."³⁵

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1. The Messenger of God saw in his vision that Abu Sufyan's sons or the sons of Hakam b. Abi al-'As go up his pulpit like the monkeys. He was much annoyed and God revealed this verse ﴿We did not appoint the vision that we showed you except as a test for the people and the tree cursed in the Qur'an. We deterred them, but it only increases them in great rebellion.﴾ (Q: 17/60). For more details about the Umayyads or the Hakamids as the cursed tree, see Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 9: 220; Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373), *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'azim*, ed. Muhammad Husayn Shams al-Din, Dar al-kutub 'ilmiyya, Beirut, 1419/1998, 5: 85; Suyuti, *al-Durr al-manthur*, 4: 191.
 2. Nasr b. Muzahim Minqari (d. 212/827), *Waq'at siffin*, ed. 'Abd Al-Salam Muhammad Harun, Cairo, 1382, reprint in Qumm, 1403, 29 – 30.
 3. *Ibid*, 39–40; Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 3: 71.
 4. *Ibid*, 79.
 5. Minqari, 82 – 3.
 6. Ibn Sa'd, 5: 12.
 7. Minqari, 95; Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 3: 77.
 8. Minqari, 98.
 9. *Ibid*, 102.
 10. Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 3: 76.
 11. Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 6: 3264–68; Minqari, 160–2.
 12. A village near Medina or a town in the Yemen. See Yaqut, 4: 953–4.
 13. Ya'qubi, 2: 189.
 14. Minqari, 174.
 15. Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 6: 3269; Minqari, 162.

16. Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3270–2; Minqari 186–8.
17. Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3277–9; Minqari, 200–2.
18. Ibid, 306–7.
19. Ibn Sa'd, 3: 190; Ya'qubi, 2: 188; Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 92; Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3321.
20. Minqari, 462–4.
21. Minqari, 369.
22. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 98.
23. Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3329; Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 99.
24. Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3329–3332.
25. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 112.
26. Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3367.
27. See above, 34.
28. Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 4: 370.
29. Tabari, Ta'rikh, 6: 3385–6.
30. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Thaqafi (d. 283/896), al-Gharat, ed. Mir Jalal al-Din Husayni (Muhaddith) Urmawi, Tehran, 1395, 2: 416–26; Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 197–9.
31. Thaqafi, 2: 614 – 16.
32. Ibid, 2: 621 – 633.
33. Baladhuri, Ansab, 3: 238.
34. Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 356/967), Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, ed. Sayyid Ahmad Saqar, Dar al ma'rifa, Beirut, n.d., 41; al-Mufid, Kitab al-irshad, 12.
35. Nahj al-Balagha, 2: 80.

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