

Mu'awiya's Reign (The Collapse of Caliphate)

A few months after 'Ali's assassination, al-Hasan b. 'Ali, because of the disloyalty of his men, had to make peace with Mu'awiya to avoid further bloodshed. He surrendered reign over to him on the basis that he act in it according the Book of God, the *Sunna* of his Prophet and the conduct of the righteous caliphs. He stipulated that Mu'awiya should not be entitled to appoint his successor but there should be an electoral council; the people would be safe, wherever they were, with respect to their person, their property and their offspring; Mu'awiya would not seek any wrong against al-Hasan b. 'Ali secretly or openly, and would not intimate any of his companions. 'Abd Allah b. al-Harith and 'Amr b.

Salima witnessed the letter and conveyed it to Mu'awiya to take cognizance of its contents and to attest his acceptance.¹

Mu'awiya now moved with his army from Maskin to Kufa, where he first camped between al-Nukhayla and the storehouse for provisions. In his speech to the Kufans at al-Nukhayla, he laid out his vision of proper government. He reminded them that he had stipulated conditions, made promises to them to cut short the war, to persuade the people and calm them. He stated that his promises to al-Hasan b. 'Ali and anyone else were but dirt under his feet, which would not be kept.²

While still camping outside Kufa, he faced a Kharijite rebellion led by Farwa b. Nawfal al-Ashja'i. Al-Hasan had already left for Medina together with his brother al-Husayn and his cousin 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far, accompanied by Mu'awiya as far as Qantar al-Hira. The caliph now returned to the Kufans threatening them that if they would not take care of their turbulent brethren, he would withdraw his pardon of them. He told them that he had not fought them that they might pray, fast, perform the pilgrimage, and give alms, since they were doing that already. Rather, he fought them in order to command them as their emir, and God had granted him that against their will.³

The year 41 came to be known as the year of the community (*'am al-jama'a*). The inter-Muslim war was over, and the unity of the community under a single caliph was restored. Yet it was not the old community that was resurrected; the universal brotherhood of Islam, the respect the sanctity of Muslim blood legislated by the Prophet (S.A.W.A.) would not return. Umayyad government, whose legitimacy

founded on the claim of revenge for the caliph 'Uthman, kept pitting Muslims against Muslims, inciting suspicion, mistrust, hatred and constant strife.

The caliphate itself was transformed. No longer was the principle of early merit (*sabiqa*) and service in the cause of Islam, acknowledged. Instead, swords and soldiers, boots, the natural prop of despotism, determined thenceforth the identity of the vicegerent of God on earth! The caliph became counterpart and successor to the Roman–Byzantine emperor. He ruled Muslims as his subjects, absolute lord over their life and death. He poisoned al–Hasan the grandson of the Prophet (S.A.W.A.) to remove a hurdle to his appointment of his son Yazid to his succession. Many of the disaffected, smarting under the divisive Umayyad despotism, had not forgotten Mu'awiya's recognition of al–Hasan as his legitimate successor and al–Hasan's stipulation of electoral council.

Having acquired the sole role over the world of Islam, Mu'awiya carried on successfully bribing, cheating, extorting, intimidating, and murdering his way through his reign in order to consolidate his grip on money and power and to secure the succession of his unattractive son. Lacking Islamic legitimacy, his reign required the claim of revenge for the wronged caliph as a permanent legitimizing seal.

After the year of the community (*'am al-jama'a*), Mu'awiya wrote a letter to his tax collectors in which he said, “Let the conquered people refrain from mentioning any merit to Abu Turab or his kinsmen.” So in every village and on every pulpit preachers stood up cursing 'Ali, disowning him, disparaging him and his house. In another letter he wrote, “Make search for those you can find who were partisans of 'Uthman and those who supported his rule and those who uphold his merits and qualities. Seek their company, gain access to them and honor them. Write down for me what everybody relates, as well as his name, that of his father and clan.” Thus, they did until they had increased the number of merits and qualities of 'Uthman. In exchange he sent them presents, garments, gifts and [documents of] pieces of land. This was showered over Arabs *mawali* alike and it occurred on a large scale in every city, the people competing in ranks and worldly honors. Every lowly individual who went to any governors of Mu'awiya and related about 'Uthman a merit or a virtue was received kindly, his name was taken down and he was given preferential treatment.⁴

Regular public cursing of 'Ali, identified as the soul of the Prophet,⁵ in the congregational prayers thus remained a vital institution, which was not abolished until sixty years later by 'Umar II ('Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz). Marwan clearly recognized the importance of the cursing as a tool of government. He told 'Ali b. al–Husayn “No one was more temperate (*akaff*) towards our master than your master.” 'Ali b. al–Husayn asked him, “Why do you curse him then from the pulpits?” He answered, “Our reign would not be sound without that.” (*La yastaqimu lana hadha illa bi hadha*).⁶

Particularly useful for Mu'awiya's purposes was the public cursing of 'Ali in Kufa where, he hoped, it would bring out into the open the latent opposition to Umayyad rule, thus facilitating his measures of repression. When he appointed al–Mughira b. Shu'ba governor of Kufa, he instructed him, “Never desist from abusing and censuring 'Ali, from praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for 'Uthman, from

disgracing the followers of 'Ali, from removing them and refusing to listen to them. Moreover, never cease praising the partisans of 'Uthman, bringing them close to you, and listening to them.⁷

Hujr b. 'Adi acted as the representative for the partisans of 'Ali. Whenever he heard that the government abusing 'Ali and praying for 'Uthman in the mosque, he stood up, quoting **﴿O you who have faith, be maintainers of justice and witnesses for the sake of Allah.﴾** (Q: 4/135). Then he gave witness that the one whom they censured and blamed was more worthy of excellence and the one whom they vindicated and extolled was more worthy of censure. Al-Mughira would warn him of the wrath of the ruler but then left him alone. He did not wish to lose the other world by shedding the blood of the best men of the city for the sake securing Mu'awiya's power in this world.⁸

Al-Mughira vainly attempted to persuade Mu'awiya to change his policy. He pleaded that the caliph had now reached an advanced age. If he were to make a show of justice and spread goodness by displaying concern for his Hashimite kin and by strengthening his bonds with them, since he had no longer anything to fear from them, he would gain from that lasting fame and reward. Mu'awiya answered, "Far from it, would it be so. What fame can I hope for that would last? The brother of Taym [Abu Bakr] reigned, acted justly, and did what he did. As soon as he perished, his fame perished, except for someone occasionally saying, Abu Bakr. Then the brother of 'Adi ['Umar] reigned, strove, and put his shoulder to the wheel for ten years, but as soon as he perished, his fame perished, except for someone occasionally mentioning, 'Umar. Yet Ibn Abi Kabsha [Muhammad] is loudly advertised every day five times, 'I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' What work could endure and what fame could last after that? No by God, there is nothing but burying, burying."⁹

Al-Mughira's successor was Ziyad b. Abih, now recognized, as Mu'awiya's illegitimate brother, who had already held the governorship of Basra for some time. He was determined to restore law, order, and ready to kill in order to make his point. The partisans of 'Ali b. Abi Talib with whom he wanted to deal now were, though loudly criticizing the caliph, neither engaged in armed rebellion, nor endangered the life of any Muslim. Ziyad thus had to provoke an incident to justify bloody repression. Pebbles thrown at his deputy in the mosque provided the occasion. He came hurriedly from Basra and delivered a sermon threatening Hujr with exemplary punishment.

Then he sent his police chief to summon him to the governor. Hujr escaped and for a while found shelter moving from one tribal quarter to another. Then he surrendered voluntarily after he had obtained a guarantee of safety from Ziyad with the condition that he would send him to Mu'awiya for judgment. When he appeared before the governor, Ziyad told him that he could not expect pardon after God had placed him in his power. He imprisoned him and swore that he would have killed him immediately were it not for his guarantee. Then he had Abu Burda b. Abu Musa al-Ash'ari draw up a letter of accusation. He testified, "Hujr b. 'Adi has renounced obedience, departed from the community, cursed the caliph, and incited to war and rebellion, gathered the masses to himself summoning them to break their oaths of allegiance and to overthrow the Commander of the Faithful Mu'awiya. He has committed a manifest act

of infidelity towards God.”

He summoned the tribal chiefs to do their duty and thus gathered seventy signatures. The witness of al-Sari b. Waqqas al-Harithi was written down although he was absent in his tax distraction. Shurayh b. Hani' al-Harithi, who did not testify, learned that his testimony had been recorded. He came forward denying it and denouncing the forgery. The Qadhi Shurayh b. al-Harith, whose testimony would evidently have been most useful for the governor, testified that Hujr had been most continuously fasting and praying. Ziyad added his name anyway among the witnesses. The Qadhi Shurayh now wrote to Mu'awiya that his testimony recorded by Ziyad was false and that he testified that Hujr was one of those who perform the prayer, give alms, frequent the pilgrimage and *'umra*, command what is right and forbid what is wrong. His blood and property was inviolable.¹⁰ The caliph ignored this testimony and went back to his business.

Hujr wrote to him from prison assuring him that he and his companions stood by their pledge of allegiance to him and that only their enemies had testified against them. The caliph ruled that the testimony of Ziyad b. Abih was truthful. In the end, he released six of the fourteen accused because their Syrian relatives asked for their pardon. He refused the request of Malik b. Hubayra for the life of Hujr. The eight men were offered pardon if they would declare their dissociation from 'Ali and curse him; they refused; six were executed. The remaining two now asked the executioners to send them to the caliph, promising to say about 'Ali whatever the caliph said.

Led before Mu'awiya, Karim b. 'Afif appealed to him, “Fear God Mu'awiya, you will be transferred from this passing abode to the other, permanent abode and will then be asked what you desired by killing us and why you shed our blood.” Mu'awiya, “What do you say about 'Ali?” He answered, “I say about him what you say. I dissociate from the religion of 'Ali with which he professed obedience to God.” Mu'awiya did not want to release him, but Shamir b. 'Abd Allah asked him for the life of his relatives. Mu'awiya released him on the condition that he would not enter Kufa during his reign. When 'Abd al-Rahman b. Hayyan, the other surviving convict was led before the caliph, Mu'awiya asked him, “What do you say about 'Ali?” He replied, “Leave me and do not ask me, for that is better for you.”

Mu'awiya, “By God I shall not leave you until you tell me about him.” He said, “I witness that he was of those who mention of God often [*al-dhakirin Allah kathiran*], who command what is right [*al-amirin bi al-haqq*], who act with justice [*al-qa'imin bi al-quest*] and forgive the people [*al-'afin 'an al-nas*].” Mu'awiya, “What do you say about 'Uthman?” He answered, “He was the first one to open the gate of oppression and bolted the doors of the right [*awwal man fataha bab al-zulm wa 'rtaja abwab al-haqq*].” Mu'awiya now sent him to Ziyad and wrote to him, “This is the worst one you have sent to me. Kill him in the worst fashion.” Ziyad sent him to Quss al-Natif, where he was buried alive.¹¹ For Mu'awiya the principle that the ruler must have authority to kill and pardon his subjects at his own judgment without being subject to the divine law was a vital tool of government. He had been waiting long for an occasion to establish it. Roman state ideology and tyranny triumphed thus over Islam and Arab tribal laws.

The shock was inevitably profound. Mu'awiya found it again convenient to resort the ruler's privilege of putting the blame on his underlings and subjects. Even 'A'isha, in spite of her aversion to 'Ali and his partisans, sent a noble Makhzumite to Mu'awiya to intercede for Hujr and his companions, but he arrived only after the execution.¹² The Basran 'Uthmanid al-Hasan al-Basri counted the killing of Hujr as one the four pernicious crimes (*mubiqa*) committed by Mu'awiya.¹³

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1. Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 3: 287.
 2. Abu al-Faraj, *Maqatil al-Talibiyin*, 69; Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 3: 291.
 3. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 16: 14–15; Abu al-Faraj, *Maqatil*, 70.
 4. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 11: 44.
 5. See Q 3: 61.
 6. Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 2: 407.
 7. Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 7: 112.
 8. *Ibid*, 113–114.
 9. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 5: 129–130.
 10. Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 5: 264; Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 7: 134.
 11. Baladhuri, *Ansab*, 5: 266; Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 7: 111–143.
 12. Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 145.
 13. Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 146.

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