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The Battle of Badr

The war of nerves between the Quraysh and the Muslims could escalate into open hostilities at any time. Abu Jahl was one of the “hawks” in Makkah who carried on a non-stop private war against Muhammad Mustafa and his followers. His jingoism kept Makkah in a state of constant agitation.

V. C. Bodley

Abu Jahl's monomania about Mohammed had remained at boiling point. He kept raiding parties continually on the move, attacking any isolated parties of Moslems which could be ambushed. He made forays into the suburbs of Medina and damaged crops and gardens. He let Mohammed see that his feelings had not changed, that his intentions were still murderous. (*The Messenger, the Life of Mohammed, New York, 1946*)

In early March 624, reports were received in Medina that a caravan of Quraysh was returning to Makkah from Syria. The caravan was carrying not only merchandise but also weapons. It was estimated that the caravan had made a profit of 50,000 dinars (pieces of gold). The weapons and the newly-acquired wealth were to be used, according to the same reports, to equip an army to fight against the Muslims. The caravan was led by Abu Sufyan, the chief of the clan of Banu Umayya.

Muhammad Mustafa decided to intercept the Makkan caravan. He appointed Abu Lababa as governor of Medina, and left the city with a force of 313 men. Of these 80 were Muhajirs, and 233 were the Ansars. Their destination was Badr, a village in the south-west of Medina where they expected to make contact with the Makkan caravan.

The Muslims did not know it then that they would never see the caravan of the Quraysh, and that they would, instead, be engaged in an encounter, on the battlefield, with the army of the Quraysh.

In the meantime, the Makkan spies also informed Abu Sufyan that a body of Muslims had left Medina, and was rapidly moving toward his caravan. As soon as he heard this, he abandoned the customary caravan route, led the caravan westward to the Red Sea coast, and then turned south toward Makkah

via an off-beat track.

He also sent a messenger to Makkah asking for aid. In Makkah, Abu Jahl was already busy whipping up public fury against the Muslims, following the incident at Nakhla. He eagerly responded to Abu Sufyan's appeal, and led out of Makkah a force of 1000 warriors including a cavalry of 100, against the Muslims. A train of 700 camels carried materials for war and other supplies. The infantry was wearing chain-mail and armor.

Muhammad Mustafa did not know that an army had left Makkah and was marching toward Medina to protect the caravan of the Quraysh, and to challenge the Muslims. When the Prophet arrived in the environs of Badr, he sent Ali ibn Abi Talib to reconnoiter the surrounding country. At the wells of Badr, Ali surprised some water-carriers. In reply to his questions, they told him that they were carrying water for an army which came from Makkah, and which was encamped on the other side of the nearby hills.

Ali brought the water-carriers before the Prophet of Islam. From them he learned that the caravan of the Quraysh had already escaped, and that the Muslims, at that very moment, were confronted by the army of Makkah.

Sir William Muir

On reaching the neighborhood of Badr, Mohammed sent forward Ali, with a few others, to reconnoiter the rising ground above the springs. There they surprised three water-carriers of the enemy, as they were about to fill their sheepskins. One escaped to the Coreish; the other two were captured and taken to the Moslem army. From them Mohammed discovered the proximity of his enemy. There were 950 men; more than threefold the number of the Moslem army. They were mounted on 700 camels and 100 horses, the horsemen all clad in mail. (*The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877*)

This most vital intelligence was received through Ali ibn Abi Talib. His action, on the one hand, alerted the Muslims; and on the other, robbed the enemy of the advantage of surprise. The Muslims were ready to meet him.

Nevertheless, the presence of an active, aggressive and menacing enemy, instead of a rich caravan, within close proximity, had changed the entire situation for the Muslims, and they had to make a fresh assessment of the perils and possibilities of a confrontation with him. They were poorly equipped, and had only two horses and 70 camels with them. Some of them had swords but no shields and others had shields but no swords. The Prophet who was aware of these apparent handicaps, called a council of war, and put the matter before his companions for consideration and decision.

The first man who rose to speak on this critical occasion, was Miqdad. He voiced the feelings and thoughts of the Muhajireen when he said: "O Messenger of God, do what God has commanded you to do. We are with you, now and at all times; and we shall not tell you what the Israelites told Moses: 'You and your Lord should go and fight against the enemy; as for us, we shall stay here, and sit here.' No, we

shall not imitate the Israelites. We shall follow you and obey your orders.”

Muhammad gave his blessings to Miqdad. But Miqdad was a Muhajir, and Muhammad was anxious to know what the Ansar would do. He had assumed that the Ansar would fight in the defense of Medina itself but might not like to fight outside their city.

Sensing his anxiety, Saad ibn Muadh, one of the leaders of the Ansar, rose and said: “We have borne witness that you are the Messenger of God. We have given you our pledge to obey you. Wherever you go, we shall go with you. If there is a showdown with the polytheists, we shall be steadfast in our support to you. In war and in peace, we shall be consistently faithful to you.”

This unequivocal declaration of support by the leader of the Ansar, pleased the Apostle, and he invoked the blessings of God upon them all. He knew that neither the battle of Badr nor any other battle could be fought without the support of the Ansar. The Ansar were, in fact, indispensable for success in the struggle between Islam and paganism, as noted before.

Materially and numerically, the Muslims were at a disadvantage but these disadvantages were offset by their morale. They had faith in the inspired leadership of Muhammad. And they were united. Their unity and singleness of purpose were going to be a source of immense strength to them in the forthcoming contest with the Makkan army.

With the support of the Ansar assured, Muhammad Mustafa took the decision to accept the challenge of the Quraysh. He and the rank-and-file of the army of Medina appear to have been fully aware that the outcome of the contest with the foe on the following day, would be overwhelming in its effects.

Sir William Muir

Mohammed was fully alive to the critical situation. The fate of Islam hung upon the issue of the approaching battle. (*The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877*)

The Prophet ordered the Muslims to pitch their tents on the ground where they had halted. But a young man of the Ansar pointed out the advantages of choosing another campsite where the ground was higher and firmer, and he also suggested that the Muslims take possession of all the wells of Badr. His suggestions were forthwith accepted.

S. Margoliouth

Hubab son of al-Mundhir, the Prophet's junior by twenty years, having ascertained that they were engaged in ordinary warfare, and possessing a special knowledge of the wells in the neighborhood, advised the Prophet to get in front of all except one, round which they should make a reservoir, so as to have a constant supply of water for the troops; the possession of this valuable element would then save the day. The Prophet welcomed the suggestion and placed his force under Hubab's guidance.

(*Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931*)

Events soon proved that Hubab's suggestion was an excellent one, and its acceptance by the Prophet gave the Muslims a great tactical advantage over the enemy.

The battle of Badr was fought in the second year of Hijra, on the 17th of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar (March 15, 624). The Makkan army moved out of its camp early in the morning to meet the Muslims. The two armies ranged themselves in battle formation. The Prophet took a bow in his hand and walked between the lines dressing the rows of the Muslims. His last act before the battle began, was to pray to God to grant victory to His humble slaves.

The battle began in the traditional Arab manner of warfare in which a champion of one side rode or stepped out of his line, and challenged the heroes of the enemy to meet him in single combat. This gave him an opportunity to win personal glory by showing his own bravery, his strength and his skills at horsemanship. The two armies often served as a kind of chorus for combats between a few boastful heroes. After these initial duels, it was customary for the two armies to attack each other, and to engage in hand-to-hand fighting.

From the Makkan side, three warriors, Utbah the son of Rabia; Shaiba, his brother; and Walid, his son; came out into the open space between the two armies, and challenged the Muslims. Their challenge was taken up by Hamza, an uncle of Muhammad and Ali; Obaida ibn al-Harith, a cousin of Muhammad and Ali; and Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Walid bin Utbah was one of the fiercest warriors of Makkah. Ali found himself facing him. They were the youngest pair, and they were the first to engage in fighting. The other two pairs paused, to watch the young warriors in action. The two young men exchanged a few blows, and then Ali struck the blow which killed Walid.

As soon as Walid was killed, the other warriors also charged at each other. Hamza killed Utbah. But Obaida was mortally wounded by Shaiba. When Ali saw Obaida collapsing, he attacked Shaiba, and killed him too. With their opponents dead, and no one in the field, Ali and Hamza carried Obaida back into the Muslim lines where he succumbed to his wounds. He was the first Muslim to be killed in the battle-field.

Sir William Muir

The two brothers, Shaiba and Otba, and Walid, the son of Otba, advanced into the space between the armies, and defied three champions from the army of Mohammed to meet them singly. Mohammed turning to his kinsmen, said: "Ye, sons of Hashim! Arise and fight, according to your right."

Then Hamza, Obeida, and Ali, the uncle and cousins of the Prophet, went forth. Hamza wore an ostrich feather in his breast, and a white plume distinguished the helmet of Ali. Then Otba called on his son, Walid, "Arise and fight." So Walid stepped forth and Ali came out against him. They were the youngest of the six. The combat was short; Walid fell mortally wounded by the sword of Ali.

(The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Sir John Glubb

Three Meccan chiefs, Otba, Shaiba and Waleed, the son of Otba, advanced in front of the line of Quraish and defied three Muslims to meet them in single combat. Mohammed turning to the Emigrants called out: "O Beni Hashim, stand up and fight." Three men in chain-mail stepped from the Muslim ranks. They were Hamza, the Prophet's uncle; Ali ibn Abi Talib, his cousin, and the first male convert; and Ubaida ibn Harith.

The youngest pair engaged first, Ali stepping forward to meet Waleed. After a few moments of fencing, Waleed fell by the sword of his Muslim opponent. Then Hamza engaged Otba and cut him down. Ubaida ibn Harith, the third Muslim champion, received a fatal wound from Shaiba. Ali and Hamza hastily dispatched Shaiba, carrying Ubaida to die in the Muslim lines. *(The Great Arab Conquests, 1963)*

Badr was the first encounter, on the battle-field, between Islam and Heathenism. It was opened on the side of Islam, by Ali ibn Abi Talib, the young lion, and his victory was the signal of the triumph of Islam. All other battles of Islam followed the same pattern; Ali was the victor in every one of them

Quraysh had sent three champions against the Muslims, and all three had been slain. Abu Jahl, therefore, was not very eager to take further chances with Ali and Hamza, and he ordered his troops to advance. The Makkans charged the Muslims but could not break their formations. They charged again and again but the Muslim line held firm under the command of Ali and Hamza.

The Makkans were regrouping for a new attack when the Prophet signaled the Muslims to advance. Ali and Hamza led the counter-charge, and both of them carried slaughter and dismay into the thickest of the enemy ranks. Many of the Makkan leaders and officers were killed, among them Abu Jahl himself. After his death, the idolaters were unable to regroup, and they began to retreat. The Muslims pressed their advantage, and the Makkan retreat soon became a rout.

Islam had won its first and the most important victory!

S. Margoliouth

It certainly appears that the winning of this most important fight was in the main due to the prowess of Ali and Hamza. The Prophet is said to have bestowed especial praise on the valor of Simak s/o Kharashah; Sahl s/o Hunaif; al-Harith s/o al-Simmah; and Kais s/o al-Rabi; all of them Medinese. *(Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)*

Tor Andre

By noon the battle was over. The Quraysh fled. Forty-nine of the enemy had fallen and Ali had killed twenty-two, either alone or with the help of others. An equal number was captured. The believers had

lost fourteen men on the field of battle. (*Mohammed, the Man and his Faith, 1960*)

As noted above, Badr is the most important battle in the entire history of Islam, and one of the most important in world history. Victory guaranteed the existence of Islam, and the physical survival of the Muslim community of Medina which heretofore had appeared, at best, to be precarious.

A. Nicholson

But the importance of Mohammed's success (in the battle of Badr) cannot be measured by the material damage which he inflicted (upon the pagans of Mecca). Considering the momentous issues involved, we must allow that Badr, like Marathon, is one of the greatest and most memorable battles in all history. (*A Literary History of the Arabs, 1969*)

Ali ibn Abi Talib and the Battle of Badr

The architect of the Victory of Islam at Badr, without any doubt, was Ali ibn Abi Talib. M. Shibli, the Indian historian who wrote the most authoritative biographies in Urdu of Umar bin al-Khattab and of the Prophet of Islam, says in his *Life of the Apostle*, that the hero of the battle of Badr is Ali ibn Abi Talib.

F. E. Peters

Badr was a Muslim triumph, as total as it was unexpected; the Muslims lost 14 men and the Quraysh from 50 to 70, including their leader, Abu Jahl. It was an immense psychological victory and there was plentiful booty for the economically distressed Emigrants. This was no mere raid, however. It pitted Muslim against non-Muslim in Holy War, and fathers against sons in civil strife. The Quraysh casualties were extraordinarily high, and since most of them had occurred among the chiefs, *the leadership at Mecca was permanently crippled*. (*Allah's Commonwealth, 1973*)

The leadership of the polytheists of Makkah was indeed permanently crippled at Badr. The hero responsible for this was Ali. He alone killed 22 Makkans, twelve of them being the leading members of the clan of Banu Umayya. The rest of the army of Islam killed another 27 pagans.

Among the spoils of the battle of Badr was a sword which was to become the most famous sword in the whole history of Islam. Its name was *Dhul-Fiqar*.

Washington Irving

Among the spoils of the battle of Badr was a famous sword of admirable temper called *Dhul-Fiqar*, or the Piercer. Mohammed ever afterwards bore it when in battle, and his son-in-law, Ali, inherited it at his death. (*The Life of Mohammed*)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the translator and commentator of Qur'an, says that the battle of Badr is called the *Furqaan* in Muslim theology, because it was the first trial of strength by battle, in Islam, between the

powers of good and evil. *Furqaan* means criterion between right and wrong; decision between the forces of Faith and Unbelief. The battle of Badr is called by this name.

The Prisoners of War

The Muslims captured fifty prisoners of war. They were brought before the Prophet who had to decide what to do with them. He consulted his companions in the matter. Umar advised him to kill them all, but Abu Bakr advised him to set them free for ransom. The Prophet accepted Abu Bakr's advice.

Since there was no house of detention in Medina, the Prophet distributed the prisoners among the Muslim families. These families treated their prisoners as if they were their guests. Some of them fed their own food to their "guests" and themselves went hungry. They actually embarrassed their prisoners by their solicitude for their welfare. The rich prisoners were released for a ransom. Those prisoners who could not pay a ransom but could read and write, were asked to teach these arts to the Muslim children, and when they did, they were also released. Those prisoners who were destitute, were released without any ransom.

Results of the Battle of Badr

Victory at Badr invested Islam with immense prestige. The threat to the security of Medina was averted, and Muhammad Mustafa could now lay the foundations of the first and the last Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

S. Margoliouth

No event in the history of Islam was of more importance than this battle (Badr); Koran rightly calls it the Day of Deliverance, the day before which the Moslems were weak, after which they were strong. Wealth, fame, honor, power, all of them were secured or at any rate brought within reach by the Day of Deliverance. (*Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931*)

One lamentable outcome of the battle of Badr, however, was that Islam's victory kindled new and fiercer fires of hatred and hostility in the breasts of the Banu Umayya against Muhammad Mustafa and Ali ibn Abi Talib. Their hatred and jealousy of Banu Hashim had spanned many generations. But after the battle of Badr, their hostility was focused on Ali and on the children of Muhammad Mustafa.

If to the Muslims, Ali was the symbol of the triumph of Islam, to the Banu Umayya, he was the symbol of the destruction of their polytheism and their privileges. Therefore, they, their generations to come, and their friends and their supporters, never forgave Ali for the role he played before, during and after the battle of Badr. Their hatred is understandable. It was Ali, and Ali alone who had struck, not only at Badr, but in every encounter, at the massive, coordinated and concentrated power of heathendom, and had destroyed it.

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