

Was Muhammad (S) a Prophet of Terror?!

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This brief text aims at clarifying the issue of some historical events regarding the assassination of certain individuals during the time of our Prophet (S). The issues of these recorded incidents are dissected according with the edicts of the Holy Qur'an.

Majority of Muslim historians have reported a few incidents in which the companions of the Prophet of Islam (S), apparently by his command have assassinated some of their adversaries. Historians have also reported at least an incident during which two prisoners of war have been executed by the command of the Prophet of Islam (S). This portrays the holy Prophet of Islam as the mastermind behind terrorism rather than a mercy for the world. This chapter aims at an analysis of these reports.

Examples of Terrorist Activities

Assassination of Ka`ab Ibn Ashraf: after the defeat of Qoraiysh in the battle of Badr, Ka`ab ibn Ashraf who was one of the chiefs of Bani Nadheer (a Jewish Tribe) said; "If this news is true (that Qoraiysh is defeated) death is better for us than life!" Once he was assured about the defeat of Qoraiysh and the defeat of Muslims, he travelled to Mecca and cried over the dead soldiers of Qoraiysh. He also eulogised and provoked the people of Mecca against the Messenger of God. He then returned to Medina and constantly badgered the Muslims. For instance, he was publicly reciting romantic poems about the wives of some Muslims and mentioning their names, explicitly.

The Messenger of God was upset with Ka`ab and finally had asked if any of his companions could

relieve Muslims from the mischief of Ka`ab, i.e. to kill him.

One of the Muslims named Muhammad ibn Maslameh volunteered himself and the Messenger of God permitted him to fix the matter as he deemed appropriate. Thus, some historians have named the incident 'The Battle of Muhammad ibn Maslameh`.

Muhammad ibn Maslameh along with his four Muslim assistants made a plan for the assassination of Ka`ab. Abu Na`eleh one of the four assistants of Muhammad was the foster brother of Ka`ab. Thus Abu Na`eleh went to visit Ka`ab and in order for him to gain the confidence of Ka`ab, expressed his disagreement about the settlement of the Messenger of God in Medina . Ka`a`b in return replied to his foster brother: "I knew all these things from the beginning that`s why I am against him." Following some more conversation Abu Na`eleh asked Ka`ab if he could sell some groceries to him in credit of which Ka`ab refused impolitely. Eventually, he agreed to sell the groceries to Abu Na`eleh on the condition that Abu Na`eleh and his friends leave their arms with Ka`ab as a bond until he paid his debt.

In the evening Abu Na`eleh along with his armed friends knocked on the door of Ka`ab ibn Ashraf. When Ka`ab opened the door they asked him to accompany them on a walk to negotiate the price. Steadily, they took him to the outskirts of Medina in a secluded area. All of a sudden Abu Na`eleh grabbed the hair of Ka`ab and said to his companions, "Kill the enemy of God!" wherein they all attacked Ka`ab ibn Ashraf and stabbed him with their swords and daggers. They then severed his head and took it to the Messenger of God. Ka`ab was the first Jewish man who was assassinated by Muslims thus the news of his assassination spread terror and horror among the Jews. Most Muslim historians have narrated the above story, such as Ibn Atheer in Al-Kamel vol.2, p. 143 and Ibn Hisham in Al-Seera al-Nabawieh vol. 3, p.54 and many others.

Assassination of Abu Ra`feh: Abu Ra`feh Sallam ibn Abil Huqayq was another Jewish man who was assisting Ka`ab ibn Ashraf against the Messenger of God. After the assassination of Ka`ab some of the Muslims of the Khazraj tribe sought the permission of the Prophet to assassinate Abu Ra`feh too. Permission was granted. They entered the Jewish fortresses of Khaybar at night and killed him in his bed.¹

Execution of Two Captives of War – after the Battle of Badr two captives out of seventy were executed by the command of the Messenger of God: the first being Nadh ibn Karith at Safra who was executed by the sword of Imam Ali (a.s) and the second Oqba ibn Abi Mu`eet who was executed under a tree.²

Analysis of the Reports

The above incidents are the main assassinations of the enemies of Islam as reported by historians. Before analysis of the actual incidents I would like to touch upon several established Islamic Principles with regards to the topic.

Principle 1: Essential Human Honour: from the perspective of the Quran, God the Almighty has favoured man and has preferred him over His creations;

“And surely We have honoured the children of Adam and carried them in the land and in the sea and provided them with pure food and preferred them over all of Our creation a special preference.” [19:70]

The honour that the Almighty has granted man is a dignity that man enjoys which His other creations lack. It is due to the understanding of the above Ayah that some Muslim scholars suggest that the status of man is potentially higher than that of the angels.

On the other hand, if man denies the truth and refuses to accept divine guidance his status would be lower than that of the beasts.

“They are like the beasts. Nay! They are more astray. They are the heedless.” [7:179]

Principle 2: Killing of a Human is Illegal Except on Two Occasions: according to the teachings of the Quran every human life matters and is respected except on two occasions. Firstly, if someone has intentionally killed another person and secondly anyone who makes mischief on earth whose mischief begets the killings of innocent people. In this situation although the person has not directly killed anyone they are the cause of the killing of innocent people.

“For that reason We prescribed on the children of Israel that whoever kills a human without (compensation of) another human or mischief on earth it is as if he has killed all mankind and whoever causes one person to live it is as if he has caused all of mankind to live.” [5:32]

Although the above divine law was first prescribed to the children of Israel it is not limited to them. Note that in the Ayah, killing of an innocent person is so vicious as if the murderer has killed all of mankind and causing one life to survive is so virtuous as if one has caused all of mankind to survive for when a murderer allows himself to kill an innocent person he is mentally ready to kill more innocent people. On the other hand, a person who for his humanitarian emotions rescues one life from death is mentally prepared to rescue more lives. Moreover, the expression of “As if he has caused all mankind to survive” is an implicit recommendation that usually forgiveness is better than retaliation.

The following Ayaat explains the two exceptions where the killing of humans is justified with more elaboration.

“Verily the recompense of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and do mischief in the land is only that they shall be killed or crucified or their hands and their feet be cut off from opposite sides, or be exiled from the land. That is their disgrace in this world, and a great torment is theirs in the Hereafter. Except for those who came back with repentance before they fall into your power; in that case, know that Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” [5:33-34]

To wage a war against God and His Messenger includes all military, ideological as well as propaganda wars against the mission of the Messenger of God i.e. Islam. To `do a mischief on earth` includes all types of activities that disturb the security of a human community whether Muslim or non-Muslim such as bandits, burglary and all different terrorist activities. The punishment of such people is prescribed in accordance with their crimes.

For instance, if they have killed innocent people their punishment is to be killed and if they were involved in armed robbery then their punishment is that their hands and feet can be severed. If they only threaten with arms and disturb the public security then their punishment is to be exiled. After all, the Merciful God as usual shows the gate of repentance to all criminals stating that if they repent from their evil works before they are arrested God is Oft-Forgiving for them for He is Most Compassionate Most Merciful.

Principle 3: Assassination is Illegal in Islam: the third principle in respecting human life is that the initial law prohibits assassination of any human. Numerous traditions from Shi`a and Sunni narrations quoted from the Prophet of Islam (S) that terrorist activities are contrary to the faith. In a famous hadith narrated by Shi`a and Sunni narrators it is quoted from the Prophet of Islam to have said, "The faith (Islam) has handcuffed assassination, a believer does not assassinate."³ The practical life of the Prophet and his pure progeny, even his companions and the companions of the companions clearly prove that assassination has always had an ugly face in Islamic culture. The following are some examples of many;

Sa`id ibn Musayyeb said: Mu`awiya visited Ayesha (after the third caliphate Othman was killed). Ayesha said to Mu`awiya "Were you not scared that I would have employed some men to assassinate you here?" Mu`awiya replied; "I knew that you would not do this and I am in a secure house for I heard from the Messenger of God 'The faith has handcuffed assassination.'⁴

Abul Faraj al Isfahani in his book Maqatilu Talibeen narrated the famous story of Muslim ibn Aqeel the noble ambassador of Imam Husain (a.s) in Kufa. Muslim refused to assassinate Obeidulla ibn Ziad the ruthless governor of Kufa who later became one of the main masterminds behind the atrocities in Karbala . When Hani ibn Urweh sought the reason as to why Muslim did not assassinate him, the Ambassador of Imam Husain (a.s) referred to the hadith of the Prophet saying "I heard from the Messenger of God 'Verily faith has handcuffed assassination.' Thus a believer does not assassinate." Hani replied, "By Allah had you killed him you would have certainly killed a sinful arrogant disbeliever."⁵

Abu Sabah al Kanani said, "I complained to Imam Sadiq (a.s) that in our neighbourhood there is a neighbour from Hamdan whose name is Jo`d ibn Abdullah. He is insulting Imam Ali (a.s). Would you allow me to assassinate him? Imam Sadiq (a.s) replied, 'Verily Islam has handcuffed assassination. So leave him. You will shortly be sufficed by other than you.' Abu Sabah said, 'I came back to Kufa and after my morning prayer at the mosque I headed towards my house. As I approached my house I heard people saying my neighbour was just stung by a snake and died.'⁶

The Late Sheikh Sadouk in narrating the story of the Ascension of the Prophet (S) and the vision of the

Prophet about the end of the world including the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (a.j) and the descending of Jesus (S) quoted, “The Messenger of God asked the Almighty ‘O my Lord! When will that happen?’ the Almighty God revealed to him, ‘That will happen when knowledge is removed and ignorance appears. Many will read the Quran but the action (upon it) is so little. And there will be a lot of assassinations. And there will be few guiding scholars but many misguiding and betraying scholars.’”⁷

The above examples, clearly and without any ambiguity, proves that the assassination of humans including enemies is initially prohibited according to the Islamic principles.

Analysis of the Historical Terrors by the Command of the Prophet

1. The first noteworthy to mention is that most of the historical reports narrated in the books of history cannot be jurisprudentially used as valid evidence. Thus, no jurist can ever by merely relying on the historical narrations of Ibn Hisham, Tabbari, Hallabi and so on issue any verdict. The reason for this is that most historical narrations are *mor`sal* (some of the transmitters of the narration are not mentioned). A *mor`sal* hadith is jurisprudentially invalid especially if it contradicts the Ayaat of the Quran and the authentic traditions of the Messenger of God (S). The famous Sunni scholar Al Soyouti quoting the famous saying of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal “Three things are baseless. Tafseer, foretelling of the future and the narrations of the wars of the Prophet.” Soyouti then added, “The students and the followers of Imam Ahmad in explanation of his statement said, ‘What he (Imam Ahmad) means most of the narrations of these three categories do not have authentic and valid chains of transmission or most of them are *mor`sal*.’”⁸

To this end, if one denies the authenticity of the so-called assassinations of people by the command of the Prophet he has not said anything unprofessional.

2. We assume that those historical narrations are authentic yet undoubtedly, those people who were assassinated would well fit into the category of ‘Fighters of God and His Messenger` as they were the best examples of ‘Those who make mischief on earth.’ Ka`ab ibn Ashraf and his assistant Abu Ra`feh according to all historians are the conspirers of the Battle of Uhud (the second most bloody war in Islam). Ibn Hisham in his book *Al-Seerah*⁹ stated that Abu Ra`feh; one of the chiefs of Bani Qorayzeh (one of the Jewish tribes) is the one who mobilized the Battle of Ditch against the Messenger of God.

Execution of only two captives of war out of seventy after the Battle of Badr indicates that it was not the tradition of the Prophet (S) to execute captives of war. The divine law of God with regards to the captives of war is explicitly mentioned in chapter 47 Ayah 4 of the holy Quran. “So when you meet (in fight) those who disbelieve, smite (their) necks till when you have killed and wounded many of them then bind a bond firmly (i.e. take them as captives) therefore, (is the time) either for generosity (i.e. freedom without ransom), or ransom, until the war lays down its burden.”

The tradition of the Prophet (S) was that he was usually either without any ransom or with a ransom in lieu of compensating for the losses that Muslims were burdened with. Thus, exceptional execution of two captives must have a special reason. Issuing the execution of Oqbah was so exceptional that even he with amazement and protest said to his fellow captives: "You groups of Qoraiysh! Why only me among you has to be killed?!"¹⁰ Mus`ab ibn Omayr (one of the Muslim warriors) replied him saying, "Have you forgotten what you used to say about the Book of God and unfair accusations towards the Messenger of God and how much you were torturing the companions of the Messenger of God?!"

Ibn Hisham in his Seerah¹¹ narrates that Oqbah Ibn Abi-Moe`t was amongst a few people who had annoyed the Messenger of God most. His adversary to Prophet Muhammad (S) was similar to Abu-Lahab against whom a Surah (111) is revealed. Oqbah and Abu-Lahab lived at the neighbourhood of the Prophet (S) in Mecca . For several years when the Prophet of Islam was praying at his house, they used to throw the intestines and the bowels of animals onto the Prophet (S). His only response, however, was to say: "O children of Abde-Manaf! What kind of neighbours are you?!"

That attitude did not justify his execution. The main reason for his execution was that he used different tricks to mobilise the Qoraiysh against the Prophet (S) for the Battle of Badr¹². Freeing such captives would result in nothing other than more mischief and causing of bloodshed. The Prophet of Islam (S) refused to forgive such people because forgiving criminals does injustice to the innocent. The following is a good example to prove that such criminals did not deserve forgiveness and freedom.

Amongst the captives of Badr, there was a man called `Abu-Azza`. He pleaded to the Prophet (S) from his poverty and his responsibility for a big family. The Messenger of God (S) let him go free yet took a promise from him that he should never fight Muslims nor should he provoke anyone against the Muslims.

In spite of his promise, Abu-Azza attended the next war against Muslims, i.e. the Battle of Uhud. Amazingly, there too, he was taken as a captive! He again pleaded to the Prophet (S) seeking amnesty. The Prophet of Islam (S) refused to grant him any more amnesty and said: "Verily, the believer (in God) shall not be beaten from a hole twice." Abu-azza was therefore executed by the command of the Prophet (S).¹³

3. To protect the life of humans and avoid any mistakes in identifying `the fighters of God and His Messenger` and `the mischief makers` Muslims were not allowed to kill or assassinate anyone unless by the specific order of the Prophet (S).

All historians narrated that when some Muslim men attacked Abu- Ra`feh in his bedroom, his wife cried out loud seeking help. The Muslim men refrained from harming the wife of Abu- Ra`feh, for "the Messenger of God has only allowed us to kill Abu- Ra`feh".¹⁴

It was for this reason that many years after the demise of the Prophet (S), Muslim Ibn Aqeel; the ambassador of Imam Husain (a.s) refused to assassinate Ibn Ziad. For, he did not want to follow his whim against the Hadith of the Prophet (S) forbidding any Muslim to assassinate.

4. The main principle motive in the character of the Prophet (S) was granting mercy and forgiveness. He was always forgiving `the ignorant people` and those on whom there was any hope for their guidance. He disliked bloodshed and revenge and hence was always avoiding them as much as possible. The following are just a few examples of his character of forgiveness as reported in history:

a) In the month of Safar (the 2nd month in the Islamic calendar) three years after his migration to Medina, the Prophet of Islam (S) was informed that a group from the tribe of `Ghatafan` have united themselves to raid Muslim houses in the outskirts of Medina.

The Messenger of God (S) along with 450 soldiers left Medina to confront and settle down the raiders. Once the people of Ghatafan saw the army of Islam approaching them, they fled to the mountains around Medina. The Muslim army decided to camp nearby to guard the region for a while. At the same time there was heavy rainfall. Prophet Muhammad (S) left the camp to a secluded area to dry his clothes. Incidentally, the commander of the rebels; Do`thour`, who had ambushed there, found the Prophet of Islam (S) alone. Raising his sword he suddenly jumped in front of the Prophet (S) who was lying down under a tree. With an angry voice he said: "O Muhammad! Who can now stop me from killing you?!"

The Prophet (S) very calmly said: "ALLAH". At the same time the angel `Gabriel` hit the man on his chest and his sword dropped into the hand of the Prophet (S). The Messenger of God (S) whilst standing above his head said to him: "Who can now stop me from killing you." Do`thour with a panic voice said: "No one". He then said: "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." The Prophet of Islam (S) returned his sword and let him free. As Do`thour was walking away he said: "By Allah! You are better than me." The Prophet (S) said: "Surely, I am."

Do`thour later invited his tribe to Islam and the Almighty God revealed Ayah 11 of Surah 5 about him.¹⁵

b) As part of the etiquettes of Holy War, the Messenger of God (S) had educated his companions that during the battle they should avoid killing those who were forced to attend the war.

Ibn Hisham narrated from Ibn Abbas that the Messenger of God (S) prior to the battle of Badr said to his army: "I know some of the Bani-Hashem and others have attended this war by force. Thus, we do not need to kill them. If any of you was confronted by any of Bani-Hashem you should not kill them. Whoever sees Abul-Bakhtari should not kill him. If anyone sees Abbas Ibn Abdul-Mottaleb should not kill him."¹⁶

c) As discussed in the previous chapter, after the battle of Honayn the Prophet of Islam (S) granted forgiveness to the commander of the tribe of Hawazen; i.e. Malek Ibn Ouf` although he was the one who had mobilised the war against the Prophet (S).¹⁷

The Messenger of God (S) forgave him and even returned all his property and his soldiers for two reasons; he was regretful and he confessed his testimony.

The extemporaneous poems of Malek well expresses the noble character of the Prophet (S) on the one hand, and how it has touched the heart of the then enemy and a now friend!

I have not seen nor have I heard

Among all people like him (Muhammad)

Most promising and granting the reward when is asked for alms

And when you want he will inform you of what is in the morrow

And when the war gets tough and serious

With spears and fighting with the swords

Then he is as if he is a lion with his lion cubs

*In the middle of the dust, he is a lion in his bush*¹⁸

d) Hamza; the uncle of the Prophet (S) was killed in the battle of Uhud and his body was mutilated. When the holy Prophet of Islam (S) saw the mutilated body of his uncle his heart was deeply broken. The archangel Gabriel descended to him revealing the following Ayah:

***"And if you punish (your enemy), then punish them with the like of that with which you were afflicted. But if you endure patiently, verily, it is better for the patient."* [16: 126]**

The Prophet of Islam (S) said: "O Allah! I endure patience and I do not take revenge."¹⁹

e) When the troops of Islam conquered Mecca ; the hub of the enemies of Islam, one of the commanders of the army of Islam who felt this was the time for them to take revenge from two decades of torture and affliction, chanted loudly: "This day is the day of massacre." Upon hearing that the Messenger of God (S) ordered to change the chant to "This day is the day of mercy"! The Prophet (S) even dismissed him from his position and gave the flag of Islam to Imam Ali (a.s). Thus, the Prophet (S) granted his mercy and forgiveness at the time of his political and military sovereignty.²⁰

f) The history of Islam has recorded some incidents in which the Prophet of Islam (S) had even paid the blood money of those infidels who were not fighting Muslims but were killed mistakenly by Muslims.

Four years after his migration, the Prophet of Islam (S) in response to the request of the chief of the tribe `Bani-`Amer` dispatched forty teachers of the Quran to teach the people of Bani-`Amer in the land of Najd.

Unfortunately, the chief of Bani-`Amer with the aid of some people from neighbouring tribes massacred all the teachers of the Quran. Ka`b Ibn Zaid was the only survivor of the massacre who with a wounded

body managed to reach Medina and informed the Prophet (S) about the atrocity.

Subsequently, one of the Muslims named `Amr Ibn Omayyah` in one of his trips met with two men from the tribe of Bani-`Amer whose chief had killed the teachers of the Quran. `Amr killed the two men with the assumption that they were involved in the atrocity.

`Amr on his return to Medina informed the Prophet (S) about the incident. However, to his surprise, the Messenger of God (S) reproached him and said: "We have to pay the blood money of these two `Ameri men. They were not involved in killing our people." Subsequently, the Prophet (S) went to the tribe of `Bani-Nadheer`; the confederate of Bani-`Amer to pay the blood money.²¹

Unfortunately, in spite of this humanitarian character, the people of Bani-Nadheer also attempted to assassinate the Prophet (S).

The Real Victims of Terrorism

The Almighty God had sent all the Prophets including Prophet Muhammad (S) to guide mankind to salvation and prosperity. They were all the Messengers of mercy. Sadly, very often their communities instead of accepting the Message turned away from it. Nay, they attempted to kill the Messengers as well.

Prophets and their sincere followers have forever been the innocent victims of terrorism. Mobilizing more than 80 wars against Prophet Muhammad (S) in a decade, raiding Muslims day and night and committing atrocities such as the above mentioned massacre of the teachers of the Quran, killing some Muslims such as Khobayb in the most barbaric method of `Sabr`²², various attempts to assassinate Prophet Muhammad (S) such as in the `Night of Mabeet` (overnight stay) in which Imam Ali (a.s) slept in the bed of the Prophet (S) paving the way for the fleeing of the Messenger of God (S) from the hands of murderers, or the unsuccessful attempts of the Jews of Bani-Nadheer, etc. were all examples of a historical fact that Prophet Muhammad (S) and his sincere companions were always the target of terrorism.

Moreover, his noble successors; the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt (a.s) have all been the most innocent victims of terrorism. It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s) to have said: "There is none of us but will be killed; martyred."²³

Today, the Muslim nation in general and the followers of Ahlul-Bayt (a.s) in particular are also the victims of various types of terrorism from character terrorism to state-terrorism.

Looking forward to the quick reappearance of the World Saviour; Imam Mahdi (a.j) in the company of Prophet Jesus (S) I remain enduring in patience.

Amen.

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1. Ibn al Atheer 2:146, Ibn Hisham 3:286.
 2. Halabi 2:440–441, Ibn Hisham 2:298.
 3. Al-Majlesi, Beharul-Anwaar, vol.28, p.359, Abu-Dawood, al-Sonan, Hadith 2388.
 4. Ahmad, al-Mosnad, Hadith 16299.
 5. Al-Majlesi, Beharul-Anwaar, vol.44 p.344.
 6. Ibid, vol.47, p. 137.
 7. Al-Majlesi, Baharul-Anwaar, vol.52, p.277.
 8. Al-Soyouti, Al-Etqan Fi Uloumel-Quran, vol.4 p.205.
 9. Al-Soyouti, Al-Etqan Fi Uloumel-Quran, vol.3 p.286.
 10. Al-Halabi, Al-Seerah, vol.2 p.442.
 11. Ibn Hisham, vol.2 p.57.
 12. Ibid, vol.2 p.261.
 13. Al-Qomi, Tootiyaye Didegan, p.262.
 14. Ibn-al-Atheer, vol.2 p. 146.
 15. Al-Majlesi, Beharul-Anwaar, vol.20 p.3–4.
 16. Ibn Hisham, vol.2 p.281.
 17. Makarem Shirazi, Tafsir Nemooneh, vol. 7 p.342.
 18. Ibn Hisham, vol.4, pp. 133,134.
 19. Al-Soyouti, Al-Dorrul-Manthour, vol. 5 p. 179.
 20. Sobhani, Foroogh Abadiyyat, vol. 2, pp. 337, 338.
 21. Kompani, Rahmat 'Alamiyan, pp. 377–379.
 22. Sabr means long-suffering to death, it was a method of killing a wounded captive by leaving him to suffer until he dies.
 23. Al-Majlesi, Beharul-Anwaar, vol.27 vol.209.

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