

20. The Electoral Convention

The Second Caliph was assassinated while praying to his Lord at the Mosque of the Holy Prophet (in Medina)

By his assassination the life of one of the giants of history came to an end. His reign did not exceed a decade yet it was filled with events that changed the course of history.

His life ended yet his influence did not come to an end. He did not die before he pushed the nation to a future pregnant with important events the key of which was the Electoral Convention which he formed while he was on his deathbed.

Muslim in his Sahih reported that Abdullah Ibn 'Umar said to his father: "They allege that you are not willing to name a successor. If you have a shepherd for your camels or sheep and he came back to you leaving them without a shepherd you would consider him negligent. Shepherding people is more important than shepherding animals."

Abdullah said: "My words seemed to appeal to him. He put his head down for a while then he raised it saying: 'If I do not name a successor I will be following the example of the Messenger. If I name a successor I will be following the example of Abu Bakr.'" ¹

The Caliph refused at the beginning to name anyone.

Al-Tabari and Ibn Al-Athir reported that 'Umar was advised to appoint one after him but he said: "Had Abu-Obediah Ibn Al-Jarrah been alive I would have appointed him. If God questions me I will say: 'I heard Thy Prophet saying: "Abu Obediah is the trustworthy of this nation.""

"Had Salim Mawla Abu Huthaifa been alive I would have appointed him. If God questions me I shall tell Him: 'I heard Thy Prophet saying: "Salim is a strong lover of God.'" 'Umar refused to appoint his son Abdullah for the high office saying: "How can I appoint a man who was unable to divorce his wife or he said does not know how to divorce his wife?"" ²

Six Nominees

Once again he was urged to appoint a successor but he refused saying: "After I said my last word I decided to choose a man who is the most qualified to lead you to the right road (pointing to 'Ali). Then I fainted and in my swoon I saw a man entered a garden. He picked every fresh and ripe of its fruits taking them for himself and putting them under him. I realized that God had decreed something and He will prevail. I did not want to shoulder its responsibility dead and alive.

I recommend to you these six men for whom the Prophet testified to be from the people of Paradise: 'Ali Uthman Abdul-Rahman Saad Ibn Abu Waqass Al-Zubayr Ibn Al-Awam and Talhah Ibn Ubaydullah. These men should select a caliph from among them. If they choose one you should co-operate with him and help him."

When 'Ali and his relatives left the Caliph's house Abbas (the Prophet's uncle) advised 'Ali not to enter into that convention. 'Ali said: "I dislike dissention." Abbas replied:

"And you will have what you dislike." However the Caliph did not elaborate on the matter nor did he define the method by which the caliph should be selected from these six men.

Procedural Instructions

On the second day the Caliph defined the method of election. He said to those who were present of the six men: "When I die deliberate for three days and Suheib should lead the prayer. The fourth day should not come before you elect a leader. Abdullah Ibn 'Umar should attend your meetings as a counselor but he has no part in the caliphate.

Talhah is your partner in this affair (he was absent). If he comes during the three days have him with you. If the three days pass before he comes make your decision... I think that only one of the two men 'Ali and Uthman will be the caliph. If Uthman is selected his weakness is his lenience. If 'Ali is selected his blemish is his jolliness. And he is the most qualified to lead the people to the right road.

The Caliph commanded Abu Talhah (from the Medinites) to select fifty men from the Medinites and to stand in arms on the members of the Electoral Convention insisting that they select a caliph from among them after the burial of the Caliph.

He told them: "If five out of six agree and one disagrees kill him. If four agree and two disagree kill the two. If they are divided equally have Abdullah Ibn 'Umar as an arbiter. If they do not accept his arbitration you should side with the party of Abdul-Rahman Ibn Ouf and kill the rest if they did not agree with what people agree upon."³

It is reported also that he said: "If three days pass before they decide on a leader kill them all and let the Muslims choose for themselves."⁴

The members of the Convention met after the burial of the Caliph. They argued and disagreed. It is reported that Talhah withdrew from the race for Uthman and Al-Zubayr withdrew for 'Ali and Saad Ibn Abu Waqass withdrew for his cousin Abdul-Rahman. Whether this was or was not true it is well known that Abdul-Rahman suggested that he take himself out of the race and that he be authorized to choose one of two men: 'Ali or Uthman.

Uthman authorized him without hesitation. 'Ali did not authorize him until he made him take an oath to side with the truth follow no personal desire prefer no relative and endeavor for the interest of the nation. Abdul-Rahman was Uthman's brother-in-law (he was married to Uthman's sister Om Kulthoum)

Saad Ibn Abu Waqass advised his cousin Abdul-Rahman to choose himself. But Abdul-Rahman said: "I dislike it because I saw in my dream last night a green prairie full of grass. A beautiful camel entered it and passed through it eating none of the grass. Another camel followed and did as the first camel did. A third and huge camel followed and did what the first two did. Then a fourth camel entered the prairie and went on gluttonly eating its grass. (He interpreted the four camels to represent the Prophet and the three Caliphs after him and the prairie to represent the public funds.)

"By God I shall not be the fourth camel " he said: "A man succeeding Abu Bakr and 'Umar will never be able to please people." Abdul-Rahman consulted his friends asking them whom he should choose.

The majority of the Qureshites were in favor of Uthman and the outstanding companions from the non-Qureshites were in favor of 'Ali. He met with 'Ali and Uthman separately. On the third day Abdul-Rahman was determined to bring the matter to a conclusion. People gathered at the Holy Mosque in the morning. They filled it to its capacity.

Abdul-Rahman stood up and said: "People the visitors have to go to their own towns. Counsel me. Ammar Ibn Yasir stood up and said to him: 'If you want to avoid the Muslims division select 'Ali." Al-Miqdad Ibn Al-Aswad another outstanding companion seconded Ammar saying:

"Ammar told the truth. If you select 'Ali we say: We listen and obey."

The two companions were contradicted by Abdullah Ibn Abu Sarh who said to Abdul-Rahman: "If you want to avoid the Qureshites division select Uthman." Abdullah Ibn Abu Rabi-ah from the clan of Makhzoom seconded him saying: "You told the truth. Should Abdul-Rahman select Uthman we say: We heard and will obey."

Ibn Abu Sarh smiled but Ammar said to him: "When were you sincere to the Muslims?" (Ibn Abu Sarh embraced Islam during the time of the Prophet. Then he deserted the faith. The Messenger ordered the Muslims to kill him wherever they find him.)

The Hashimites spoke and so did the Umayyads. Ammar addressed the multitudes saying: "O people certainly God has honored us with His Prophet and strengthened us with His religion. Where do you

divert the caliphate from the members of the House of your Prophet?"

A man from Makhzoom contradicted him by saying: "Son of Sumayah who are you to tell Quraish what to do for themselves?" Saad Ibn Abu Waqass said to his cousin Abdul-Rahman: "Finish it before people fall into dissension."

Abdul-Rahman Selected Uthman

Abdul-Rahman called upon 'Ali. He offered him the caliphate with a new condition: "Will you pledge to God and covenant Him that you will follow the Book of God the teachings of the Messenger and the precepts of the two caliphs (Abu Bakr and 'Umar) after him?" 'Ali replied: "I shall follow the Book of God the teachings of the Prophet and I shall follow my best knowledge and endeavor to the maximum of my ability."

As he did not accept the offered condition Abdul-Rahman turned to Uthman with the same offer and Uthman accepted. It is said that Abdul-Rahman offered it to the two men three times and in each time 'Ali refused the condition and Uthman accepted it.

At this point Abdul Rahman lifted his head towards the ceiling of the Mosque saying: "God be my witness I have transferred the responsibility from my neck to the neck of Uthman. Then he pledged his allegiance to Uthman.

'Ali commented on what took place saying: "This is not the first day you have collaborated against us (members of the House of the Prophet)... By God you gave him the leadership only to return it to you later. God is able to change the situation." Then he turned to both Abdul-Rahman and Uthman saying: "May God plight you with a mutual and lasting hostility." Abdul-Rahman retorted saying: "Ali do not incur trouble upon yourself (reminding him that the Second Caliph ordered them to kill any dissenter)."

'Ali left after he gave his pledge to Uthman saying: 'Ali left after he gave his pledge to Uthman saying:

"What is written of timed events will reach its maturity." Ammar said to Abdul-Rahman: "By God you have left out the man of truth and correct judgement!" Al-Miqdad Ibn Al-Aswad joined Ammar saying: "By God I have never witnessed anything similar to what has been done to the members of the House of the Prophet after his death. I am amazed at Quraish who left out a man unequaled in knowledge piety and justice. If I have supporters I will fight the Qureshites now as I fought them in the battles of Badr and Uhud."

Abdul-Rahman replied: "Miqdad fear God. I am afraid that you will bring about divisions among Muslims." Al-Miqdad retorted angrily saying: "The one who creates division is the one who follows his own selfish interest."[5](#)

Observations

As we have presented the events of the Electoral Convention briefly it would be appropriate to make the following observations: The Second Caliph stated that if Abu Obediah Ibn Al- Jarrah and Salim servant of Abu Hutheifah were living he would have appointed one of them for the Messenger said: "Abu Obediah is the trustworthy of this nation and Salim is a strong lover of God." He refused to appoint 'Ali about whom he heard from the Messenger numerous statements. None of them were made about any other companion.

Assuming the Messenger said that Abu Obediah was the trustworthy of this nation the Messenger also said: "Ali is from me and I am from 'Ali and no one is qualified to represent me but 'Ali."[6](#)

The Messenger did not commission Abu Obediah nor any one else from among the companions to deliver what he had of trusts to the Meccans at the time of his Hijrah. He entrusted only 'Ali to do this on his behalf.

He entrusted him also to deliver the chapter of Bara-ah to the pilgrims and ordered him to take that chapter from Abu Bakr after he commissioned him with its delivery. Gabriel told the Prophet: "No one should deliver on your behalf except yourself or a man from the members of your House."[7](#)

The Messenger according to 'Umar said: "Salim is a strong lover of God " but he did not say that God loves Salim. The passing Caliph should have remembered that the Messenger said: "God has commanded me to love four persons and informed me that He loves them."

Then he said: "Ali is one of them " repeating that three times. If the Caliph did not hear this statement from the Messenger certainly he heard from him at Khaibar a much more important statement. The Islamic army under the leadership of Abu Bakr and then of 'Umar was unable to conquer the fortress of Kheibar.

At that serious moment the Holy Prophet said: "I shall give the banner tomorrow to a man who loves God and His Messenger and is loved by God and His Messenger. God will open the fortresses at his hands."[8](#)

'Umar used to say that he never wished the leadership except that day so that the words of the Messenger would be about him. The Messenger on the following day gave the banner to 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib after he cured his two inflamed eyes miraculously. And on that day the Almighty opened the fortresses at 'Ali's hands.

Yet neither these nor other significant statements about 'Ali could induce the passing Caliph to nominate 'Ali for the high office.

Is the Hadith Accurate?

It is very difficult to believe that the Messenger said that Abu Obediah was the most trustworthy of the nation. Abu Obediah was not more trustworthy than 'Ali or Abu Bakr or 'Umar. The Messenger might have uttered the words jokingly. He might have said that Abu Obediah is one of the trustworthies of this nation and 'Umar misheard the statement and this would not be unusual.

'Umar and his son inaccurately and inadvertently attributed to the Prophet that he said: "The deceased is to be punished for the cry of his family." Muslim in his Sahih recorded that Ayesha denied the attributed statement saying: "Umar and his son are neither liars nor discredited. But the ear sometimes mishears. The Prophet only said that God increases the punishment of the unbeliever by his family's weeping."

Then she cited the Qur'anic verse: ***"And no soul shall bear the burden of another soul."*** (Part 6 pp. 230– 232)

Could a Non-Qureshite be a Caliph?

The passing Caliph was constantly advocating that the caliphate is an exclusive right of the Qureshites. He repeatedly spoke of that during his reign and the reign of Abu Bakr. Yet he wished to have Salim servant of Abu Hutheifa alive. For he would have named him his successor while Salim was neither a Qureshite nor an Arab. He was a man from Ostokhar. He was enslaved and sold several times.

Finally he came to the ownership of Abu Hutheifa and because his father was not known he was called Salim servant of Abu Hutheifa.[9](#)

Thus the passing Caliph was ready to appoint Salim who was neither a Qureshite nor an Arab. But he was not ready to appoint 'Ali who was the cousin of the Messenger and the Messenger made him his brother.

The Medinite Companions Out

The passing Caliph chose six companions from Quraish for the membership of the Electoral Convention. He gave them alone the right of competing for the caliphate and gave them alone the right of selecting the caliph.

He commanded all Muslims to follow them and to abide by their decision. The nation according to him had no right to disagree with them. He added to the six a seventh (Ab- dullah his son) as a consultant and arbiter and that consultant was also a Qureshite.

The Caliph did not admit any Medinite companion as a voter or as a consultant. The new caliph is not a caliph of the Qureshites only. He is the Caliph of all Muslims. The Medinites did not have the right to

elect a caliph from among themselves but they had a right equal to that of the Qureshites in choosing any Qureshite caliph.

Evidently the passing Caliph excluded the Medinites for a reason: The Medinites were predominantly in favor of 'Ali.

Had he included members from them they could have given 'Ali the edge in the election and 'Umar did not want that to happen. The method which he chose for the members of the convention to follow in selecting the caliph was obviously steering the affair in a direction adverse to 'Ali.

The six members to whom he confined the right of seeking the leadership and selecting the leader had their own inclinations which were known to the Caliph. Uthman was seeking the caliphate for himself Abdul-Rahman was his brother-in-law Saad ibn Abu Waqass was Abdul-Rahman's cousin and he would not oppose him.

Talhah Ibn Ubaydullah was from the clan of Abu Bakr who were unfriendly to 'Ali because of the rivalry between him and the First Caliph. Thus the majority of the members of the Electoral Convention were unfavorable to 'Ali.

'Ali immediately noted this when he heard the passing Caliph giving his instruction to the six members on the method of selecting the caliph. When he left 'Umar's house

'Ali told the Hashimites: "If your people (the Qureshites) are obeyed you will never reach the leadership." He told his uncle Al-Abbas: "Uncle the leadership has already been diverted away from us... 'Umar equalized Uthman with me and ordered the people to follow the majority of the six members. If the members are divided equally he told the Muslims to side with Abdul-Rahman and Abdul-Rahman is a brother-in-law of Uthman. Saad is Abdul-Rahman's cousin and they will not disagree with each other. If the other two are with me they will not avail me."¹⁰

Had the Caliph added a few more members who were not self-serving 'Ali could have won the election. While dying the passing Caliph repeatedly stated that 'Ali was the most qualified among the six to direct the nation to the right road.

This testimony is in accordance with the statements of the Prophet in which he declared that 'Ali never parted with the Holy Qur'an and that he was in complete alliance with the truth.

As the Caliph expressed his well-founded confidence in 'Ali he was expected to tip the scale in 'Ali's favor by advising the members of the convention to be on his side in case of division. Contrary to this expectation the passing Caliph commanded the members of the convention to accept his son's arbitration if they were equally divided.

Should they reject his arbitration the Caliph commanded them to follow Abdul-Rahman Ibn Ouf (rather than 'Ali). Needless to say the Caliph's action did not correspond with his professed convictions.

Abdullah Ibn 'Umar

We find in the admission of Abdullah Ibn 'Umar to the Convention as a consultant and arbiter another discrepancy. This righteous companion was according to his father's testimony incapable of making decisions about leaving or living with his wife. A man with such inability should not be made consultant or arbiter in a highly important matter such as the caliphate on which the future of Islam depends.

Abdullah's weakness and hostility towards 'Ali became evident years after his father's death. The whole Muslim World with the exception of Muawiya and his followers in Syria elected the Imam 'Ali after the death of Uthman. But Abdullah refused to cast his vote for the Imam.

The Imam's reign lasted about five years and Abdullah continued for the duration of his reign to withhold his hand from him in spite of his awareness of what the Messenger said about him. The same Abdullah was willing later to give his allegiance to Yazeed Ibn Muawiya. Muslim in his Sahih reported the following:

"Abdullah Ibn 'Umar came to his cousin Abdullah Ibn Mutee when the Battle of Al-Harrah took place. (In this battle the sacred city of the Prophet was defiled by Yazeed's army and its righteous people were massacred.) Spread the cushion for Abu Abdul-Rahman (Abdullah Ibn 'Umar) Abdullah Ibn Mutee said to his aides.

But Ibn 'Umar said to him: "I did not come here to sit down. I came to report a hadith. I heard the Messenger of God saying: Whoever stands in open disobedience (of a caliph to whom he owes obedience) will meet God on the Day of Judgement lacking an excuse. And whoever dies owing no allegiance (to a caliph) dies in a pre-Islamic state."¹¹

By reporting this hadith Ibn 'Umar was trying to prevent Ibn Mutee from revolting against Yazeed urging him to give allegiance to the wicked caliph. This shows that Ibn 'Umar himself was thinking that he would meet a pre-Islamic death if he did not give allegiance to Yazeed.

Yet Yazeed was the killer of the Imam Hussein and the defiler of sanctity of Medina and demolisher of the Kaabah. But Abdullah was not afraid to meet a pre-Islamic death when he refused to give his allegiance to 'Ali the one whom the Messenger "brothered".

The way this companion understood the words of the Prophet is amazing. The Prophet in his reported statement prohibited rebellion against a righteous caliph to whom the rebellious had pledged loyalty. Such a rebellion of course is inexcusable by God.

But Ibn 'Umar thought that the Prophet was commanding the Muslims to obey and give their allegiance to a wicked ruler. Disobedience of such a caliph is not only excusable by God but also desirable to Him. As a matter of fact Islam commands the Muslims to overthrow their wicked rulers and forbids pledging loyalty to them. The Holy Qur'an declares:

"You will not find people who believe in God and the Last Day befriending any one who defies God and His Messenger." The Holy Quran Chapter 58 verse 32.

The attitude of Abdullah towards these events leaves little doubt that his admission to the Electoral Convention represented an additional help to Uthman and an additional problem to 'Ali.

Does Islam Forbid Opposition?

The passing Caliph instructed the Muslims to execute any of the Electoral Convention's six members that disagreed with their majority. If the members were equally divided the party of Abdul-Rahman was to be followed.

The other three were also to be executed if they persisted in their opposition. And all six members were to be executed if they did not reach any decision within three days after his burial and let the rest of the Muslims choose a caliph.

This is astonishing for Islam does not permit killing a believer because he disagrees with the majority or with Abdul-Rahman or with the Caliph. Islam sanctifies the life of all believers. And a killer of a believer is doomed eternally.

The Holy Qur'an declares:

"And whoever kills a believer deliberately his punishment would be his eternal settlement in Hell: and the wrath of God is upon him and he is damned by God and for him God has prepared a dreadful punishment." The Holy Quran Chapter 4 verse 93.

If killing any believer constitutes a major crime killing one of the six is a much bigger crime because the Prophet (according to 'Umar's report) considered them from the people of Paradise.

By his instructions the passing Caliph implicitly recommended the execution of 'Ali if he opposed the majority of the six or Abdul-Rahman. Yet the Messenger said: "God love whoever loves 'Ali and be hostile to whoever is hostile to him." Thus hostility towards 'Ali let alone executing him provokes the wrath of God.

It is difficult to understand how 'Umar recommended the execution of outstanding companions or a member of the House of the Prophet for merely disagreeing with him or with Abdul-Rahman. The Muslims used to disagree with the Messenger and he did not punish them. 'Umar himself opposed the Prophet and prevented him from writing his will and the Messenger did not execute him nor did he penalize him. Was 'Umar's or Abdul-Rahman's desire more sacred than that of the Messenger?

The Caliph probably thought that the endorsement of his appointment received from the Muslims at the beginning of his rule had given him an absolute authority to do whatever he thought to be in the interest

of the Muslims. Upon this he issued his stern measures concerning the six members. But this is obviously erroneous.

The Caliph whose appointment by another Caliph was endorsed by Muslims may have the right to choose his successor or to limit the freedom of his electors or to deprive them of some of their rights. But that endorsement certainly does not give him the right to kill an outstanding companion who was declared by the Messenger to be from the people of Paradise for merely disagreeing with his opinion.

Muslims do not have the right to authorize him to do what is forbidden to him and to them. They neither collectively nor individually have the right to kill a person whose life is sanctified by God. Election of a caliph is never absolute. It is rather conditioned by adherence to the Book of God and the teaching of the Prophet and both prohibit killing a believer.

Unheeded Warning

Two dreams took place during the time of the Electoral Convention:

1. The dream of the passing Caliph who saw in his swoon a man entered a garden and picked all fresh and ripe fruit taking them to himself and putting them under him.
2. The dream of Abdul-Rahman in which he saw a beautiful camel entered a green prairie full of grass. The camel passed through it sparing the grass. A second and a third followed and behaved as the first camel did. Then a fourth entered the prairie and went on gluttonly eating its grass.

Both dreamers understood from their visions that the coming caliph would not be scrupulous about the public wealth. The two men should have been induced by their alarming dreams to choose for the caliphate a man with high integrity who would not allow himself to take what does not belong to him.

But the two dreamers did not heed the warning. They took measures by which they excluded the most scrupulous among the companions and selected a man with a loose policy toward public wealth.

History recorded two statements by 'Umar concerning 'Ali and Uthman. To 'Ali he said: "What a great man you are! Should you be given the leadership you will drive the nation to the straight path." To Uthman he said: "I expect the Qureshites to give the caliphate to you because they love you. Then you will carry the members of your house on the necks of the Arabs giving them the public funds. Then a band of Arab wolves from various places will gather to slay you."¹²

Giving credence to this prophecy we wonder how the passing Caliph favored Uthman over 'Ali. Since he believed or suspected that Uthman would adopt a loose policy towards the public funds he should have excluded him from the Convention. Unfortunately the passing Caliph did not only include him but tipped the scale in his favor through his instructions to the members of the Convention.

Thus the Caliph did everything in his power to promote the cause of the one whom he suspected and to defeat the one whom he trusted. 'Ali's trustworthiness concerning the public funds was evident to 'Umar and the rest of the companions. He was free of greed and material wealth never attracted him. Unlike other companions such as Talhah Al-Zubayr Abdul Rahman Uthman and other companions who accumulated millions of dirhams 'Ali lived modestly. Throughout the days of the Prophet and the first two Caliphs 'Ali was noted for leading a devotional and intellectual life.

The warning which 'Umar and Abdul-Rahman received through their alarming dreams should have prompted them to select 'Ali rather than Uthman for the leadership. Unfortunately they did the opposite.

The Unwarranted Stipulation

The stipulation of Abdul-Rahman which required the would-be Third Caliph to follow the precepts of the first two Caliphs was an unjustifiable addition. The duty of every caliph is to follow the Book of God and the teachings of the Prophet.

He is not duty-bound to follow the footsteps of any predecessor unless selected by the Prophet. When the new caliph is more knowledgeable than his predecessor and finds some of his deeds or rules erroneous he would be duty-bound to disagree with him.

To put the precepts of the first two Caliphs on the same level with the Book of God and the teachings of His Prophet is a grave error. The Book of God is entirely true and the Messenger of God is immune from error in his religious instructions.

On the other hand the first two Caliphs were like the rest of the good companions subject to error. To put their words and deeds on the same level with the Holy Qur'an and the teaching of the Prophet is indeed a heresy in religion.

The caliphate can be based on an appointment by the Messenger of God in reliance on a Divine revelation. It also can be based on an election by a majority or a distinguished minority or on a selection by an elected or appointed predecessor.

The words and the deeds of an elected (or appointed by an elected) caliph do not become sacred Islamic law. Before his election he would be like the rest of the good Muslims unimmune from error. He will remain so after he is elected.

His election does not change his personality; nor does it make him profoundly knowledgeable if he had only a limited knowledge.

At best he can be a mujtahid (a scholar capable of forming an independent opinion about the Islamic law). No other Islamic scholar is required to follow him and it is permissible for laymen to follow a scholar other than him.

If the Messenger (in reliance on God's revelation) were to appoint a caliph all Muslims would be required to follow his appointee. Their disagreement with the Messenger's appointee would be a disagreement with the Messenger himself. The first two Caliphs were not appointed by God's Messenger.

The first was elected by the majority of the companions of the Prophet and the second was appointed by the first. Neither of them can be considered more than a mujtahid unimmune from error. A caliph that comes after them is not required to follow their footsteps.

This shows the baselessness and absurdity of Abdul-Rahman's condition which he imposed on the would-be Third Caliph. The absurdity reached its maximum when Abdul-Rahman tried to exact from 'Ali adherence to the path of the two Caliphs who used to resort to 'Ali as an authority in the Islamic law.

Furthermore it was impossible for any ruler to follow the precepts of the first two Caliphs. The Second Caliph disagreed with the first on many things among which was the method of distribution of the Islamic public funds.

Abu Bakr followed the method of the Prophet and distributed the funds among the Muslims equally. 'Umar classified the companions into categories and preferred some of the categories over the others.

As the two Caliphs disagreed with each other it became impossible for any other caliph to agree with both of them even if he wanted to.

For this we think that the stipulation of Abdul-Rahman was not only an addition in religion and innovation in Islam but also a requirement the fulfillment of which is impossible.

Abdul-Rahman was in fact more kingly than the king. The First Caliph appointed the Second and did not require him to follow his way. He expected him only to follow the Book of God and the teachings of the Prophet. Nor did the Second Caliph instruct Abdul-Rahman to exact from the next caliph to follow his footsteps.

I do not think that Abdul-Rahman was unaware of the unjustifiability of his introduced condition. He was a prominent companion and he was not that naive. Otherwise the passing Caliph would not have given him such an important authority.

The fact is that he added his unwarranted condition only to get rid of 'Ali. It was difficult for him to prefer Uthman over 'Ali without an excuse. Neither Uthman nor any other companion had what 'Ali had of distinctions in knowledge endeavor in Islam and kinship to the Prophet and of being the first male Muslim.

In spite of all these distinctions Abdul-Rahman was determined to give the leadership to Uthman rather than 'Ali in spite of his unequalled record. Uthman is his brother-in-law and giving him the leadership is a profiting deal. Uthman is expected to return to him the favor by appointing him as a successor.

‘Ali on the other hand is not a man of deals. His leadership will slam the door in the face of all ambitious Qureshites.

His children are expected to succeed him. They are the grandchildren of the Prophet and they are by the testimony of the Prophet the leaders of the youth of paradise.

But how can Abdul–Rahman favor Uthman over ‘Ali without risking his whole reputation as a fair and righteous companion? He needed an excuse and he invented his condition as an excuse. He offered the leadership to ‘Ali then to Uthman stipulating their adherence to the path of the first two Caliphs knowing that ‘Ali will reject such an unjustifiable condition.

But the veil was too thin. ‘Ali immediately accused him saying: "By God you gave him the caliphate only because you expect him to return it to you later....".

[A Justification by Hadith](#)

It may be said that Abdul–Rahman's condition is justifiable by two statements attributed to the Prophet. The first is the following hadith: "Follow the example of the two men after me Abu Bakr and ‘Umar..."

But the content of the hadith testifies to its unauthenticity for the following: The hadith indicates that the Messenger had appointed Abu Bakr and ‘Umar to be his successors while it is a well known fact in history that neither was appointed by the Messenger.

When Abu Bakr was arguing against the Medinites at the Saqifat he said to the Medinites: "The Arabs do not acknowledge any leadership unless it is from the Qureshites and the Messenger said: "The Imams are from the Quraish." Had the reported hadith been authentic he should have used it as a decisive evidence.

Abu Bakr called upon the Muslims at the Saqifat to elect either Abu Obeidah or ‘Umar. Had the Messenger called upon the Muslims to follow the example of the two men after him Abu Bakr and ‘Umar it would prohibit Abu Bakr to call for the election of Abu Obeidah because only he and ‘Umar were selected by the Prophet....

Abdul–Rahman was blamed and accused by ‘Ali Ammar and Al–Miqdad with an ulterior motive in his introduced condition. Had this reported hadith been authentic he should have vindicated himself by citing it.

Again had the hadith been authentic ‘Ali would have accepted Abdul–Rahman's condition. The Prophet according to the hadith had called upon the Muslims to follow the two Caliphs. And ‘Ali was the most obedient to God and His Messenger. ‘Ali's rejection of the introduced condition testifies to his unawareness of this hadith. Yet he was the most knowledgeable in the teachings of the Messenger.

Furthermore the failure of all companions to report this hadith at the time of the Convention indicates that none of the companions knew about it. This by itself makes it incredible.

It is a well known fact in history that 'Ali claimed that the caliphate was his exclusive right and that he refused to pledge his loyalty to Abu Bakr and continued his re-fusal until his wife Fatimah died. Had the reported statement been authentic 'Ali would have neither claimed such a right nor refused to give his allegiance to Abu Bakr.

The Second Hadith which may be cited for justifying Abdul-Rahman's condition is the following:

"Certainly God has put the truth on 'Umar's tongue and in his heart..." If this were true it would be mandatory for any caliph after him to follow his lead.

Probably the Holy Prophet made this reported statement on one of the occasions where 'Umar had given a sound opinion and the Prophet was attesting to the soundness of 'Umar's opinion on that occasion. Thus the attributed statement should not be taken as a general declaration for the following reasons:

If we take the hadith as a sweeping statement we have to believe that 'Umar was completely immune of error in words and in deeds whether it is on worldly or religious affairs. But the majority of the Muslims do not believe that the Messenger himself was immune of error. They believe in his immunity from error only in religious instructions.

Another reason for rejecting this hadith is that 'Umar was erroneous on several occasions:

He was not with the truth when he denied the death of the Messenger. Ibn Hisham in his Biography of the Prophet and many other historians reported that 'Umar said on that day: "Certainly there are hypocrites alleging that the Messenger of God has died. By God he shall return as Moses returned and he will sever the hands and the feet of men alleging that the Messenger of God died."

Al-Bukhari in his Sahih recorded that Abu Bakr came on that day while 'Umar was speaking to the people. He commanded 'Umar to sit down but 'Umar refused to sit.

The people left 'Umar and turned their faces to Abu Bakr and Abu Bakr told them: "Whoever among you was worshipping Muhammad should know that Muhammad has died. And whoever was worshipping God should know that He is living and never dies.

The Almighty said: "And Muhammad is but a Messenger; the Messengers before him passed away." 'Umar later said: "By God when I heard Abu Bakr reciting this verse my feet could not carry me. I fell down to earth when I heard him reciting that Muhammad had died."[13](#)

The truth was not with 'Umar when he opposed the Prophet while trying to write his will. He provoked the anger of the Prophet and by his opposition the nation was deprived of the document which was expected

to illuminate the road to the nation after him. [14](#)

Certainly 'Umar was seriously erroneous on this occasion. He prevented the Prophet from writing his will and that is a major sin. He questioned the mental capability of the Prophet while the Holy Qur'an declared:

"And he (the Prophet) does not speak out of a selfish desire. It is only a revelation sent down to Him)." The Holy Qur'an Chapter 53 verses 3-4.

Again the Qur'an declares:

"O you who believe obey God and obey the Messenger..." The Holy Quran Chapter 59 verse 7.

'Umar was not with the truth on the day of Al-Hudeibiyah. Historians unanimously reported that 'Umar argued with the Messenger and objected to the projected truce between the Messenger and the pagans of Quraish. 'Umar said after that "I still pay charity fast pray and free slaves as an atonement for what I had done on that day."

The Second Caliph was not right in setting up his Electoral Convention. His refusal to appoint the Imam 'Ali and his instruction to the members of the Convention in selecting the would-be Third Caliph brought Uthman to power and put the caliphate in the hands of his Umayyad relatives who transformed the caliphate into a despotic and hereditary rule.

These are only a few out of many occasions on which the Second Caliph took erroneous stands. The right word was not always on his tongue nor was the truth always in his heart. Thus the two hadiths cannot justify Abdul-Rahman's invented condition.

'Ali's Unique Dedication

The manner in which 'Ali conducted himself during the crisis of the Convention was unparalleled in the history of Islam after the Prophet. It was the high example of nobility firmness and adherence to the truth. The leadership of the Muslim World was offered to him and its price was only a promise on his part.

He refused to pay the price and turned the offer down because it demanded from him to deviate slightly from his principles. No temptation of any magnitude could influence the man of the truth. The caliphate to him was not an end by itself; it was only a means of establishing justice and realizing the ideals to which he was dedicated and for which he staked his life since his ears heard the call of Muhammad.

He was irritated by the formation of the Convention and viewed it as an ominous event fraught with dangers.

The structure of the Convention was destined to bring Uthman to power. This would put his ambitious

and unscrupulous relatives in a challenging position and make them seek the high office at any cost. Foreseeing these dangers the Imam decided to try to prevent them by seeking the caliphate.

True Prophecies

History recorded that 'Ali made two prophetic statements during the crisis of the Convention forecasting the expected events as if he were reading from a book: Al-Tabari recorded that 'Ali spoke to his uncle Abbas after the Second Caliph gave his instructions about the method by which the Third Caliph would be selected. "I know that they will select Uthman "

He said "and he will bring about innovations and unaccepted changes. And if I live I shall remind you. Should Uthman die or be killed the Umayyads will make the caliphate rotate among them. And if I shall be living they will find me where they dislike."

He spoke also to the members of the Convention when they were trying to select the new caliph: "Praise be to God who from us has chosen the Prophet Muhammad and sent him to us as a Messenger. We are the members of the House of the Prophet the source of wisdom the security of the people of the earth and the haven to the seekers of security (against deviation)

"We have a right. If we are given it we will take it; if we are deprived of it we will take the back seat even if the journey will be long. Had the Messenger given us a directive we would have fulfilled his directive. Had he told us to take an action we would have fought for it until we died. No one will be faster than I in response to a righteous invitation or kindness to a kin.

"Listen to my word and comprehend my presentation. Your leadership after this Convention (if you fail to select the qualified leader) will be violently contended. Covenants will be breached and swords will be drawn until your unity will come to an end. Some of you will be imams of revisions some will be followers of men of ignorance."¹⁵ Both prophecies were realized. Uthman was elected.

He brought unacceptable changes and this brought about his death. By his violent death the Islamic unity came to an end. The Imam was elected after him but prominent companions breached their covenants with him after they pledged to him their loyalty. The leadership was violently contended. Swords were drawn and many battles were fought. Leaders of revisions deviation and ignorance emerged and masses of the people followed them.

Expecting these ugly events the Imam was compelled to enter into the Electoral Convention trying his best to prevent the expected events from taking place. This is what made him disregard the opinion of his uncle Abbas who advised him to stay out of the Convention.

Membership to the Convention was below his dignity but he was duty-bound to enter the race. Had he shied away from the Convention he would have given the other members an excuse for by-passing him or they could have taken his refusal of the membership as an evidence of his disinterest in leadership.

A refusal on his part to enter into the Electoral Convention would have put the Imam in an indefensible position in the eyes of history. It may lead us to think that he deprived himself of the leadership when it was available to him. We may think that he did not do his best to avoid the ugly events which he was expecting.

Furthermore his absence from the Convention could have been considered an irresponsible stand and an encouragement to the members to elect someone else. Thus he would share with them the responsibility of their error.

It was his duty to attend the Convention and remind its members of his right to the leadership and that the members of the House of the Prophet are the source of wisdom a security of the people of the earth against straying and a haven to whoever seeks such a security. And this is what the Prophet meant when he commanded the nation to follow the Book of God and the members of his House and likened them to the Ark of Noah.

The Imam fulfilled his obligation by attending the Convention. He warned the members of the grave consequences of their wrong choice. He reminded them of the right of the House of the Prophet in leadership a right for which the Prophet did not ask his relatives to fight.

History records that a dialogue between 'Ali and the rest of the members of the Convention took place and went as follows:

The Imam: I ask you in the name of God: Is there among you anyone other than I whom the Prophet called his brother?

The Members: None other than you.

The Imam: Is there any among you other than myself about whom the Messenger said: whoever I am his "Mawla " this 'Ali is his "Mawla"?

The Members: None.

The Imam: "Is there anyone among you besides me to whom the Messenger said: You are to me like Aaron to Moses but there shall be no Prophet after me?" The Members: None.

The Imam: Is there anyone among you besides me who was trusted with the chapter of Bara-ah and the Messenger said about him: no one will deliver for me except myself or a man from me?"

The Members: None.

The Imam: "Do you not know that the companions of the Messenger deserted him at more than one battle and I never deserted him?" They said: Yes. [16](#)

The Imam told them all that and they were aware of the truth of what he said. But their personal interests

were in conflict with what they knew about him.

Motives And Consequences

The Imam endeavored through his logic to prevent the members of the Convention from taking an irresponsible direction leading the Muslims to an insane turmoil which would govern the future of the nation for generations to come. Unfortunately the members were unable to rise to the level which the serious situations were demanding.

They were mostly ambitious and unwilling to forget their interest. If 'Ali came to power their personal hope in reaching the leadership in the future would fade out. If leadership returned to the House of the Messenger it would stay in it for a long time. On the other hand giving the leadership to Uthman would keep the door open for people such as Abdul-Rahman who was expecting the aging Uthman to die before him and to name him as a successor.

The members of the Convention were psychologically ready to bar 'Ali from the caliphate in spite of what the Prophet said about him. Why not? The first two Caliphs with all their righteousness did that. The rest of the companions were expected to follow them.

As diverting the leadership from 'Ali at the time of the Prophet's death was unexpected diverting it to him after the two Caliphs had become also unexpected.

The Second Caliph did not view it out of line to give the caliphate to Uthman. Probably he considered it a good deed by which he returned a favor to him.

The readers may remember that Uthman wrote Abu Bakr's will in which he named 'Umar his successor. While dictating his will Abu Bakr fainted before pronouncing 'Umar's name. Fearing the death of the Caliph in his swoon Uthman took it upon himself to write 'Umar's name.

When Abu Bakr woke up he asked Uthman to read what he wrote. Uthman did that and when he read 'Umar's name Abu Bakr happily marvelled. 'Umar of course never forgot what Uthman did for him.

A New Class

As the events which preceded the Electoral Convention brought about creation of the new classes: The Qureshites the preferred companions and the Umayyads the formation of the Convention added a new class.

Talhah Al-Zubayr Saad and Abdul-Rahman became members of a higher class among the companions. 'Umar promoted them and testified for their qualifications to the caliphate by admitting them into the Electoral Convention. This inflamed their ambition for leadership.

It made them feel that they are 'Ali's equals and competitors. This by itself brought about many dangerous consequences. It made Talhah and Al-Zubayr try to hasten Uthman's death after they pledged their loyalty to him.

They conspired against him and each one of them was an aspirant to succeed him. This led to Uthman's violent death and ended the Islamic unity. The same ambition motivated these two good companions to challenge 'Ali's leadership later breaching their covenant with him in which they pledged their loyalty and obedience to him.

The Lost Opportunity

Through the formation of the Electoral Convention the Muslims and the Second Caliph lost the last opportunity for correcting the situation and avoiding incalculable tragedies for the nation.

The passing Caliph wrote for himself and his nation brilliant and glorious pages in history. The caliphate during his and his predecessor's reigns took a righteous path inspired by the guidance of the Holy Qur'an and the precepts of the Holy Prophet.

But the goal of the Heavenly message was not the continuity of the righteous government for only twelve years to be derailed afterwards from the path of justice brotherhood and true democracy.

The leadership was diverted from 'Ali to Abu Bakr then to 'Umar and both were righteous doers. Had 'Ali taken over the leadership after 'Umar his coming to power would not have been too late.

The nation was still healthy ruled by the spirit of brotherhood and placing its religion above its worldly affairs. It was possible for the Imam with his tremendous qualifications to continue the nation on the right road and to add brighter pages to its brilliant record. It was possible for him to prevent the disunity from taking place.

The Umayyad influence started to grow during the days of 'Umar but that influence was not yet developed enough to represent a serious danger to the caliphate. Muawiya's provincial regime was not strong enough to challenge the central authority. Had 'Ali succeeded 'Umar he would have been in a position to uproot the Umayyad plant from Damascus before its roots were deepened and spread in the Syrian soil.

The preferred companions were not capable of challenging the Imam's leadership. Nor were Talhah and Al-Zubayr powerful enough to become a threat to him. They were only two out of scores of good companions.

Had 'Umar given the leadership to 'Ali he would have avoided the nation all those catastrophic events securing the continuity of the unity of the nation along with the continuity of the righteous caliphate for many generations to come.

Had 'Umar done that he would have returned to the members of the House of the Prophet their right in the Islamic leadership and protected these most righteous people from the atrocities of the Umayyads. By doing that he would have brought pleasure to the Holy soul of the Prophet.

With his great wisdom 'Umar was expected to take this righteous course. Unfortunately the Qureshite clannish attachment of this prominent companion outweighed his wisdom. This produced the tragedy of the Electoral Convention.

- [1.](#) Muslim in his Sahih Part 2 p. 206.
- [2.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil Part 3 p. 34. (Printed by Dar Al- Kitab Al-Arabi Beirut Lebanon.)
- [3.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil Part 3 p. 35.
- [4.](#) Ibn Sa'd Al-Tabaqat Part 3 p. 342.
- [5.](#) Ibn Al-Athir in his Al-Kamil Part 3 pp. 32-35 and Ibn Abu Al-Hadid in his Commentaries on Nahjul-Balaghah Vol. 1 pp. 63-65 taken from Al-Tabari's History.
- [6.](#) Al-Tirmidhi Sunan Al-Tirmidhi Part 5 p. 300 hadith No. 3803.
- [7.](#) Al-Hakim Al-Mustadrak Part 3 p. 51.
- [8.](#) Al-Bukhari Sahih Al-Bukhari Part 5 p. 171 and Muslim in Sahih Muslim Part 15 pp. 170-171.
- [9.](#) Taha Hussein Al-Fitnat Al-Kubra Part 1 p. 37.
- [10.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil Part 3 p. 33.
- [11.](#) Muslim Sahih Muslim Part 12 p. 40.
- [12.](#) Ibn Abu Al-Hadid in his Commentaries on Nahjul-Balaghah Vol. 1 p. 62.
- [13.](#) Ibn Hisham Biography of the Prophet Part 2 p. 656; and Sahih Al-Bukhari. Part 6. p. 17.
- [14.](#) Al-Bukhari Sahih Al-Bukhari Part 1 p. 39.
- [15.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil Part 3 p. 37.
- [16.](#) Ibn Abu Al-Hadid Commentaries on Nahjul-Balaghah Vol. 2 pp. 198-199.

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