

29. Was the War of Siffin Inevitable?

"And I am to the Messenger of God like a tree to another tree coming from one trunk and I am to him like a lower arm to the upper arm. By God if all the Arabs combine their efforts in combating me I would not turn my back to them... And I shall endeavor to purify the earth from this inverted person until the soil is separated from the grain."¹

"By God if I confront them while they are filling the land I would not be concerned; nor would I feel lonely. I am with assurance from myself and certainty from my Lord through which I see the falsehoods to which my opponents adhere and the guidance which I follow. I am expecting to meet my Lord and hoping for His reward. I am saddened to expect the affairs of this nation to be administered by its wicked foes. They shall distribute the revenue of God among themselves and enslave His servants. They shall oppress the righteous and befriend the transgressors."²

Had 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib been a politician whose main concern was to come to power and enjoy authority unconcerned with what will happen to the future generations he could have easily gained Muawiya's support by keeping him as governor of Syria and promising him to be his successor. This would have relieved the Imam from combating him and would have secured his loyalty and assistance.

Men who are in love with authority are always ready to pay the price regardless of its magnitude because authority to them is more valuable than any price they pay. Our Imam was not from these Authority by itself did not have in his view any value.

Therefore he was not ready to pay for the authority a price which he considered more valuable than the authority. History witnessed the Imam 'Ali losing the caliphate when it was offered to him at the conclusion of the Electoral Convention because he refused to pay its price.

The price which he refused to pay was not more than one word by which he promises Abdul-Rahman Ibn Ouf to follow the first two Caliphs in matters where he finds no instruction from the Holy Qur'an or the precepts of the Holy Prophet.³

He refused to pay for the caliphate that small price because he believed that he was more knowledgeable in the Islamic Law than the two outstanding companions.

He believed also that their precepts were marred by errors which he did not legalize for himself to follow.

As he refused to offer for the leadership a promise to follow the ways of two brilliant companions he would not be expected to grant Muawiya the man of a terrible past what he seeks in order to enjoy a peaceful leadership.

The Imam was not a conventional politician whose main concern is to come to power. He was rather a unique statesman. Had not 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib existed the Islamic ideals after the Messenger would have remained subjective without being embodied completely in a human being.

Security for all Muslim generations against religious deviation was the goal which the Imam was trying to accomplish through leadership. That goal could be summarized as follows: 1. To make justice prevalent in society regardless of the religious elements from which it may be composed and retrieving for the nation and individuals what was acquired by the elites through exploitations.

To enforce Islamic law so that the adherence to the Islamic principles becomes second nature to the Muslims individually and collectively.

To facilitate understanding of the Holy Qur'an and instructions of the Prophet for the followers of the Faith of Islam.

To try to spread Islam throughout the world by making the true Islamic teaching known to all nations.

In other words the Imam wanted to realize what the Holy Prophet wanted when he tried to dictate a document for his nation that his nation will never stray after it. The political circumstances of the nation had led the nation to deviate from the safe road in the past.

Finally the Imam who represented in the eyes of the Messenger the security for the nation against deviation has come to power. His duty is to realize that security for the nation and this was within his reach if the nation obeys him. He is the most knowledgeable in the Book of God and the teachings of the Holy Prophet.

He was the most concerned person with spreading the teaching of the Faith of Islam and the spirit of adherence to that teaching. He by the testimony of the Messenger and the outstanding companions is the most qualified to direct the nation to the right and clear road after the Messenger. He was after the Prophet the bravest and firmest person who ever walked on earth.

The Imam believed that retaining Muawiya within his regime contradicts what he was trying to accomplish.

Muawiya by his nature was opportunist exploiter materialistic and unprincipled. With his wiliness and power Muawiya was the most dangerous among the opportunists. The Imam was right when he thought that retaining Muawiya in the rule of Syria will enable him to rule the Muslim world. And this was not all the danger.

The bigger danger was the expected continuity of the leadership in the house of Umayyad and rotation of the caliphate in their dynasty. The bigger danger was the expected continuity of the leadership in the house of Umayyad and rotation of the caliphate in their dynasty.

The Umayyad period proved later that the Imam was right in his thinking. The rule of Muawiya and the rest of the Umayyads was the antithesis of the Imam's goal. It represented the usurpation of the people's right their exploitation shedding the blood of the innocent and the defiance of the Islamic Laws. This resulted with the weaken ing of the Islamic Spirit in the successive generations.

The war of Siffin the assassination of Hijr Ibn Uday and his righteous companions for their refusal to repudiate the religion of 'Ali the massacre of Karbala and the defamation of the Imam on the pulpits of the Muslim World for eighty-three years were some of the traits of the Umayyad anti-Islam rule.

Mughirah And Ibn Abbas

History recorded that Mughirah Ibn Shu-abah Al- Thaqafi came to the Imam after he was elected and advised him to keep Muawiya in his office at least temporarily. The Imam refused his advice. On the following day Mughirah came to the Imam admitting that he was mistaken and advised the Imam to dismiss Muawiya.

Ibn Abbas witnessed Mughirah coming out of the house of the Imam while he himself was about to enter the house of the Imam. When Ibn Abbas met the Imam he asked him about Mughirah's visit. The Imam informed him of Mughirah's two contradictory opinions. Ibn Abbas commented that Mughirah was genuine in his first advice deceptive in his second advice. He affirmed that the wise policy is to keep Muawiya in his post at least temporarily and it would be easy for the Imam to dismiss him after he joins his electors. The Imam refused to retain Muawiya in his post because he did not want to deviate from his principles which do not permit him to keep Muawiya in his post for two days.⁴

It appeared to many past and present historians that what Ibn Abbas and Mughirah counseled the Imam to do was right. Had the Imam accepted their advice he would not have had to wage the war of Siffin and he could have dismissed Muawiya later and the reign of the Imam could have been peaceful instead of being filled with civil wars.

Naive Opinion

I believe that those who hold this opinion were not able to estimate the fore-sightedness of the Imam

and his awareness of Muawiya's intention. At the same time they underestimated the wiliness of Muawiya and his alertness. Ibn Abbas and Mughirah both were mistaken.

The Imam had seen through the light of God and his super mental capability years before he was elected that the Umayyads will come to power and that they will rotate the leadership among them. He spoke of that during the days of the Electoral Convention before Uthman was elected. At that time he said to his uncle Abbas. "I know that they will elect Uthman and if he is assassinated or dies the children of Umayyad will rotate the caliphate among them; and if I am alive they will find me where they dislike."⁵

The Progress of the events indicated to the people of wisdom and understanding that the Umayyads were going to come to power. 'Umar appointed Muawiya as governor of Damascus then he widened his authority by adding Jordan to Damascus. He kept him in that post for the duration of his reign.

This made Muawiya so strong that the Caliph after he was stabbed warned the members of the Electoral Convention not to dispute with each other; otherwise Muawiya may prevail against them and take the leadership away from them. Should such a word reach Muawiya it would inflame his ambition towards the caliphate and make him expect the day when he becomes able to snatch the leadership from the hands of the outstanding companions.

Al-Tabari also reported this in his History part 4 p.230.

Muawiya's Long Preparation

Muawiya realized that he could not come to power through a natural course. The caliphate in the eyes of the Muslims was only for the outstanding companions who adopted the faith of Islam at the early stage and offered many sacrifices during the days of the Prophethood when the faith of Islam was at its primary stage of spreading.

Muawiya was not one of those people. As a matter of fact Muawiya and Abu Sufyan the father of Muawiya and the majority of the Umayyads except Uthman Abu Huthifa and Khalid Ibn Al-Aws were the front line of the enemies of the Messenger. They were waging against him and his religion war after war trying to eliminate Islam and its Messenger. They refused to adopt Islam until the Messenger conquered Meccab and Islam became their only means for saving their lives.⁶

For the Muslims to move the caliphate from the early companions of the Holy Prophet to the enemy of the prophet they had to reverse themselves insanely or the enemies of the Messenger would reach the caliphate by force. Muawiya was not nearer to the caliphate than his father Abu Sufyan.

However time was not ungenerous to the son of Abu Sufyan with opportunities. Uthman came to power and his caliphate revived the hopes of the Umayyads and made them nearer to their dreams. Uthman as we mentioned (in chapter 21) through the two sides of his personality represented a potential bridge through which the caliphate may cross from the early righteous companions of the Holy Prophet to the

Umayyads the people of the dark past.

Uthman was from the early companions. At the same time he was an Umayyad and he loved his cousins a great deal. His love for them would cause him to move the caliphate to one of his opportunist cousins and they would use him for reaching their goals.

The wily Abu Sufyan realized that as soon as Uthman was elected. He said to the members of the Umayyad clan while they were meeting at the house of the new Caliph:

"Make the caliphate alternate among you. By the one in whose name Abu Sufyan swears there is no Paradise and no Hell..."[7](#)

It is possible that the new Caliph was not present when Abu Sufyan uttered that profane statement or that the Caliph admonished and chided him but these words actually expressed the thinking of the Umayyads and what they were trying to reach.

The caliphate of Uthman added to the power of Muawiya a much greater power than he had during the time of the Second Caliph. The area of his rule and influence was greatly widened to include Palestine Hums and Qinnisreen.[8](#)

Thus he became the governor of what may be called "The Greater Syria." It is true that the authority of Muawiya was growing during the days of 'Umar but it was under strong supervision of the Second Caliph. When Uthman took over the authority of Muawiya was freed of all supervision and by widening the area of his influence Muawiya emerged as the most powerful ruler in the Muslim World. He became stronger than the Caliph.

The Caliph began to resort to him in punishing his opponents in Hijaz and Iraq by sending them to Syria and putting them under the supervision of the strong man of the Muslim State.[9](#)

Muawiya was not the man who neglects opportunities. He was the kind of person who seizes every opportunity and gets out of it the utmost benefits. He started to establish his rule and lay the foundation of his future since the days of 'Umar. He went on attracting the chiefs of the tribes through his generous gifts and mobilizing whomever he was able to mobilize until he possessed the strongest striking force in the Muslim World. One hundred thousand supported by an equal number from their sons and servants were paid annually from the Islamic treasury in Syria.[10](#)

Muawiya found in Uthman his means to the caliphate. He was his cousin and his beloved. It was very likely that Uthman would appoint him as his successor if peace continued during the reign of Uthman.

When the situation changed and the political atmosphere became grim showing that the signs of violence evil and tragedy were creeping near the Caliph Muawiya wanted to make out of the difficulties of the Caliph a means which would bring him quickly to his goal.

Muawiya Refused to Protect Uthman

Muawiya invited Uthman when the danger surrounded him to move to Damascus ostensibly for the purpose of shielding the Caliph against danger. [11](#) His actual motive was to put the Caliph under his protection. Thus Uthman would keep the name of the caliphate and Muawiya would be the actual caliph and at the end Uthman will appoint Muawiya his successor.

The Caliph did not respond to the invitation. Muawiya however was capable of preventing the tragedy from reaching the Caliph by sending an army to Medina in order to defend the Caliph. He did not do that though the Caliph asked for his military assistance. [12](#) Muawiya chose to hand his cousin to the knife of the revolution. He refused to assist him militarily. [13](#)

He thought rightly that Uthman's death would give him a pretext to seek avenge for the blood of the victim Caliph. By this he would excite the masses of the people and take them out of their sound thinking and transfer the Muslim World to an insane situation which brings Muawiya to what he wanted.

Forecast Rule

In addition to the helpful opportunities and the continuous preparations which made Muawiya close to his goal he heard many prophecies supporting his thinking and made his wish to reach the caliphate strong and full of life.

Ibn Al-Athir recorded that while Uthman was coming back from pilgrimage accompanying Muawiya who was riding a blond mule a man uttered some poetry indicating that the successor of Uthman would be 'Ali then Al-Zubayr.

But Kaab Al-Ahbar (a Rabbi who adopted Islam) said to the poet: You have lied. The one who will succeed the Caliph is the rider of the blond mule. [14](#) Muawiya became ambitious since that time. The fact is that his ambition did not start at that time.

Muawiya heard similar to this from the person who was much truer than Kaab Al-Ahbar. I do not believe that Kaab Al-Ahbar found the caliphate of Muawiya in the Jewish books as he tried to pretend. He actually found that through statements of some companions who heard from the Holy Prophet (one of them was Abu Dharr) who was known for his truth and to this the Holy Prophet had testified. [15](#)

Abu Uthman Al-Jahith in his book Al-Safyaneyah recorded that Jallam Ibn Jandal Al-Ghifari attended a dialogue between Muawiya and Abu Dharr after Uthman exiled Abu Dharr to Damascus.

Muawiya said to Abu Dharr: "Enemy of God and enemy of His Messenger you come every day and do what you are doing. If I were to kill a man from the companions of Muhammad without the permission of the Caliph Uthman I would have killed you."

Abu Dharr retorted saying to Muawayah: "I am not the enemy of God and His Messenger. You and your father are the enemies of God and His Messenger. You showed Islam and concealed disbelief. The Holy Messenger cursed you and prayed to God that you will never be cured of hunger. I heard the Messenger of God saying:

"When the big eyed with the broad throat the one who eats and never gets full becomes the ruler of this nation the nation should be alarmed." Muawiya said: "I am not that man." Abu Dharr said: "Yes you are that man.

The Messenger of God informed me of that and I heard him saying while you were passing: God curse him and make him not feel full except by soil..."[16](#)

Abu Dharr reported in the presence of Uthman that the Messenger of God said: "When the children of Abu Al- Aws (the clan of Marwan from the Umayyads) become thirty men they will distribute the revenue of God among themselves and enslave the servants of God and interpolate the religion of God."[17](#)

'Umar said to Mughirah Ibn Shu-abah (and this man was one eyed): "By God the Umayyads will make Islam one eyed as you are one eyed and they will blind it until Islam is unable to know where to go and where to come."[18](#)

'Umar also reported that he heard from the Messenger of God the following: "The children of Umayyad will ascend to my pulpit. I was shown them in my dream jumping on it like monkeys. About them the revelation came 'And We did not make the vision which you have seen but a trial to people and the cursed tree in the Holy Qur'an..."[19](#)

Fakhr Al-Deen Al-Razi in his commentary on this verse recorded that Sa-eed Ibn Al-Musayab said: "The Messenger of God saw in his dream the children of Umayyad jumping on his pulpit like monkeys and that saddened him."

Al-Razi said: "This is the opinion of Ibn Abbas according to the hadith of Ata."[20](#) He reported also that Ibn Abbas said that the cursed tree is Banu Umayyad meaning Al-Hakam Ibn Abu Al-Aws. Ibn Abbas said: "The Messenger of God saw in his dream that the children of Marwan were alternating on his pulpit and he informed Abu Bakr and 'Umar of his dream while they were with him at his house. When they left the Messenger of God heard Al-Hakam speaking of the dream of the Messenger.

The Holy Prophet became angry and suspected that 'Umar betrayed his secret. Then it appeared later that Al-Hakam was spying on them. The Prophet exiled him..."[21](#)

Al-Hakim reported that Imam Al-Hassan Ibn 'Ali said to a man from his companions: "Blame me not (for abdicating the caliphate); may God have His Mercy upon you. The Messenger of God saw in his dream the children of Umayyad speaking on his pulpit one after the other. This saddened him and it was revealed to him in the chapter of Glory:

"We have revealed it (The Qur'an) during the Night of Glory and what did make you know the Night of Glory. The Night of Glory is better than a thousand months (in which the children of Umayyads rule the nation)." [22](#)

From all this we may understand the meaning of the word of the Imam to his uncle during the days of the Electoral Convention: "I know that they will elect Uthman...if he is killed or he dies the children of Umayyad will alternate it among them..." [23](#)

No doubt the Imam heard from the Messenger concerning Uthman and the Umayyads in general and Muawiya in particular more than 'Umar Abu Dharr and others heard from the Prophet about them.

The Imam said after the Battle of Basra when Marwan was brought to him to renew his pledge of allegiance to the Imam: "What shall I do with his pledge? Did he not pledge in Medina? If he pledges his loyalty to me by his hand he will betray it by his back."

When Marwan left the Imam said: "He will have a rule as short as a dog's licking its nose. He is the father of the four Rams. The nation will have through him and his children a bloody day." [24](#)

Thus Muawiya had prepared himself eighteen years for his goal. He seized every opportunity and acquired out of it its utmost benefits and heard what was conveyed to him of the prophecies of the Holy Prophet concerning the Umayyads and concerning him. It was only naive on the part of Ibn Abbas or others to think that keeping Muawiya in his post temporarily would give the Imam the opportunity to dismiss him easily without a bloody war.

'Ali would not have attempted to deceive Muawiya and if he wanted to do that he would not have succeeded.

Muawiya was too wily to be dissuaded of his goal. Had the Imam 'Ali followed the advice of Ibn Abbas and Mughirah the Imam would have deceived only himself.

I believe that the two advisors with all their intelligence and wiliness had underestimated the knowledge of the Imam about Muawiya and the Imam's wisdom and his farsightedness as they underestimated the wiliness of Muawiya and his determination. Historians who shared Ibn Abbas and Mughirah's opinion committed the same mistake.

The Imam could have earned peace with Muawiya by keeping him in his position for the duration of his life and appointing him his successor. But if the Imam had done that he would have acquired a personal gain at the expense of everything he had stood for.

He was fully aware that Muawiya could not be trusted with the religion of God and the Islamic nation. The Imam said one time. "I have thought about alternatives concerning Muawiya. I found only two of them: either to fight him or to reject what was revealed to Muhammad." [25](#)

Was Umayyad's rule inevitable?

It may be said that if the Holy Prophet had informed his nation that the Umayyads will come to power why did the Imam fight Muawiya while he knew that Muawiya would prevail? What is the benefit of shedding blood if the consequence which the Imam wanted to avoid was the same consequence which God had predetermined for him?

The fact is that the Prophet did not inform 'Ali or the rest of the companions that the rule of the Umayyads was inevitable and predestined from Heaven and that the will of man has no value in that affair. Actually the opposite is true. The Holy Messenger wanted to inform his nation that its failure to protect Islam against the Umayyads' conspiracy shall bring the Umayyads to power and make them rule the nation. This was a warning from the Messenger to his nation aimed at advising the nation to take the necessary measures to prevent this from happening.

The Holy Prophet prescribed to the nation the measures which shield the nation against this danger and all dangers of deviations.

The prescribed measures were the adherence to the Holy Qur'an and the leadership of the members of the House of the Prophet. He said to the nation that this represents the security against deviation. Had the nation followed the prescription of the Prophet the Umayyads could not have come to power and the nation would have been secured against any faith-testing crises.

It was unfortunate that the nation did not heed the Messenger's warnings and did not take the steps which he prescribed. The nation actually disregarded the second part of the advice completely. It took the opposite road which led the nation into what the Messenger warned against.

The Imam was the only leader who wanted to shield the nation against the danger of the Umayyads. Had 'Umar done the least in this field he could have prevented that danger. The Imam 'Ali was required to wage a bloody war against Muawiya in order to protect the nation against his danger.

The Second Caliph could have shielded the nation against Muawiya's danger by avoiding his appointment or dismissing him after he appointed him or selecting 'Ali instead of Uthman who came to power through the arrangement of the Electoral Convention. This is what brought the Umayyads to power.

I would like to add that all these events did not constitute a determining factor in preventing the Imam from subduing Muawiya and reaching a peaceful reign. Even after all these events took place it was possible for the Imam to rid the nation of Muawiya and to subdue him or dismiss him. Had "Om Al-Mu'mineen" (Ayeshah) and the two outstanding companions Talhah and Al-Zubayr co-operated with the Imam and urged the Muslims to help him instead of revolting against him Muawiya would have surrendered to the Imam with humility.

Had the three leaders done that instead of starting the fire of rebellion the rule of the Imam would have been stabilized and the Muslims would have been spared all the civil wars which were inflamed during the first century after the death of the Prophet. Unfortunately the three leaders took the opposite road and led the nation into what the Messenger warned against.

The Battle of Basra made peace with Muawiya unavailable to the Imam as it made the war with Muawiya inevitable unless the Imam denies all his principles. The Battle of Basra made it clear to Muawiya that he was not the only one who was opposed to the Imam and that people outside Syria shared with him his opinion and legalized war against 'Ali and that they did not see it wrong to shed blood for the sake of his opposition.

The Battle itself created to the Imam enemies who were silenced temporarily by his victory but they were ready to rejoin his enemies as soon as the opportunity permitted. This opportunity came after that and they rushed into it.

The Battle of Siffin was truly inevitable. Yet it was not Heavenly predestined because man's will had played a very important role. Had the Iraqi people listened to the Imam and followed him to the end of the road it would not have been necessary for the nation to surrender to the authority of the Umayyads and they would have spared the future generations many terrible evils.

Thus the authority of the Umayyads in spite of being predicted by the Holy Prophet was not a Heavenly predestined event. It was only a result of the refusal of the nation to take the right medicine which was prescribed by the Holy Prophet. Certainly the nation continued to refuse it until the end.

I would like to add that the Imam was duty-bound to take the road which he chose even if the Umayyad authority were predestined. The position of the Imam was like the position of many prophets who endeavored in the way of God and died in their endeavor without reaching their aim of making the word of God triumphant.

I do not believe that the Prophet Muhammad would have discontinued his endeavor if he had known that he would not win his struggle against his pagan enemies. Had he known that he would have entered and continued the battle of truth to its end. This is what he declared to his uncle Abu Talib:

"Uncle by God if they put the Sun in my right hand and the Moon in my left hand to abandon this mission I will not abandon it until God makes it triumphant or I perish in it."

The war which the Imam waged was a preventive measure against the Umayyad danger. It was an imperative duty rested upon his shoulders after he found supporters for his message and mission ready to sacrifice. Had he not done that he would have been negligent in discharging the trust and he would have been an accomplice in the injustice deviation and sins of the Umayyads. For his message and mission ready to sacrifice. Had he not done that he would have been negligent in discharging the trust and he would have been an accomplice in the injustice deviation and sins of the Umayyads.

- [1.](#) The Imam 'Ali Nahjul-Balaghah part 3 p.73.
- [2.](#) The Imam 'Ali Nahjul-Balaghah part 3 p. 120.
- [3.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p.37.
- [4.](#) Ibn Al-Athir, Al-Kamil, part 3, p. 101.
- [5.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p.36.
- [6.](#) Taha Hussein Al-Fitnat Al-Kubra part 2 p. 14.
- [7.](#) Ibn Abu Al-Hadid his Commentary on Nahjul-Balaghah vol 2 p. 411.
- [8.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 57.
- [9.](#) Dr. Taha Hussein Al-Fitnat Al-Kubra part 2 pp. 118-119.
- [10.](#) Abdul-Fattah Abdul-Maqsud Al-Imam 'Ali Abu Talib part 2 p. 120.
- [11.](#) Taha Hussein Al-Fitnat Al-Kubra part 2 p. 57.
- [12.](#) Taha Hussein Al-Fitnat Al-Kubra part 2 p. 59.
- [13.](#) Taha Hussein Al-Fitnat Al-Kubra part 2 p. 59.
- [14.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p.73.
- [15.](#) Al-Tirmidhi his authentic Sunan part 5 p.334.
- [16.](#) Ibn Abu Al-Hadid his Commentary on Nahjul-Balaghah vol.2 p.376.
- [17.](#) Ibn Abu Al-Hadid Commentary on Nahjul-Balaghah vol.2 p.377.
- [18.](#) Ibn Abu Al-Hadid Commentary on Nahjul-Balaghah vol.2 p.115.
- [19.](#) Ibn Abu Al-Hadid Commentary on Nahjul-Balaghah vol.2 p.115.
- [20.](#) Imam Fakhr Al-Razi his Detailed Commentary on The Holy Qur'an part 5 pp.413-414.
- [21.](#) Imam Fakhr Al-Razi his Detailed Commentary on The Holy Qur'an part 5 pp.413-414.
- [22.](#) Al-Hakim Al-Mustadrak part 3 p. 171.
- [23.](#) Al-Tabari his History part 4 p.230.
- [24.](#) Al-Imam 'Ali Nahjul-Balaghah part 1 p. 124.
- [25.](#) Al-Imam 'Ali Nahjul-Balaghah part 1 p.94.

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