

Chapter 4: Political Policies of Quraysh

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴾

Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for sustenance. (Holy Qur’an, 42:38)

Political Practices of the Quraysh Group

After securing the caliphate, the Quraysh group turned its attention to seizing authority of the various regions. Thus, whoever posed a threat or was uncooperative with the new powers was quickly removed from their positions. This meant the removal of competent and experienced people, including members of their own families, such as the removal of ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab’s two sons, Zayd Ibn al-Khattab and Ubaydallah Ibn al-Khattab, as well as the removal of Abu Bakr’s son, Abdul Rahman Ibn Abu Bakr.

In their place, ‘Umar appointed more conforming men, such as Sa’d Ibn Abi al-Waqqas to govern Kufa, Abu Musa al-Ashari to govern Basra, and Mu’awiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan to govern Shaam (Syria). By including non-Quraysh members into the administration, the party reflected an illusionary bi-partisan government.

Before assuming the role of the third caliph, ‘Uthman Ibn al-Affan had agreed to follow all of the policies of his predecessors, Abu Bakr and ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab; however, after becoming caliph, he reverted to the pre-Islamic Arab custom of nepotism.

Fully aware of ‘Uthman’s tendencies to backslide and knowing that the masses despised favoritism, ‘Umar warned him that the Quraysh would lose their power if he did not refrain from nepotism,¹ however ‘Uthman did not heed his warning. Unlike Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, ‘Uthman filled the official positions with his own tribesmen – people who were undeniably incompetent individuals, such as Abu Sufyan, Marwan Ibn al-Hakam, Mu’awiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan, Al-Waleed Ibn Uqbah, Abdullah Ibn Abi Sarh, and Sa’ed Ibn

al-Aas.

In doing so, he incensed many companions of the Prophet – even those who had previously sided with the Quraysh such as Lady Aishah, the wife of the Prophet. Particularly upset were those who lost power – not because of their incompetence, but rather, due to ‘Uthman’s nepotism – people such as ‘Amr Ibn al-Aas, who lost Egypt; al-Mugheerah Ibn Shu’bah, who lost Kufa; and Abu Musa al-Ashari, who lost Basra. To replace them, ‘Uthman appointed other inept and corrupt individuals from the Bani Umayyah.

As a result, some of those townships revolted, and in Kufa for example, the people ousted ‘Uthman’s choice and reinstated Abu Musa al-Ashari.² It appears that ‘Uthman was not interested in restoring order and credibility to the government, but rather, to fill the offices with his own family members, even though they had no qualification, experience, or integrity.

‘Uthman’s nepotism eventually led to his assassination and the awaited succession of ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib to the caliphate in 35 ah. After the Khawarij murdered ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib during his caliphate, the power base once again shifted to the Quraysh group under the rule of Mu’awiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan.

Learning from ‘Uthman’s errors, Mu’awiyah balanced political office by incorporating tribal groups and making use of ‘Umar’s practice of appointing allies from outside his tribe to official positions. Hence, ‘Amr Ibn al-Aas, al-Mugheerah Ibn al-Shu’bah, Abu Huraira, al-Numan Ibn Basheer, and Abdul Rahman Ibn Khalid all found places in the new administration of Mu’awiyah. He went as far as learning how to appease Lady Aishah, a woman who was known to voice her opposition against those whom she deemed as a roadblock in the way of her own objectives, such as ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib and ‘Uthman Ibn al-Affan.

[Selection of the First Six Caliphs](#)

Somewhere along the line of Muslim history, a misconception arose that the caliphate was first instituted by *shura* (free and popular election). Although, this misconception concurs very well with contemporary democratic theories and promotes Islam as being a conventional and democratic religion, the truth of the matter is that the office of “caliphate” was not brought into being by a popular vote, nor was it supposed to be. The office of the caliph, like the governance of prophethood, is not one to be determined by consultation, but rather by Divine ordination.

In Islam, governance encompasses all facets of life – social, religious, political, economical, judicial, etc. and thus, it is based on Allah’s laws and instructions. Hence, the notion that a democratic process (an assembly of men “chosen” by the people) occurred in the appointment of Abu Bakr’s leadership is not accurate.

As mentioned earlier, the first caliph was decided by two people: ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab and Abu Ubayd Ibn al-Jarrah who both declined their bid for election and instead nominated Abu Bakr and coaxed the

others to follow suit at Saqifah.

After Saqifah, ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib said to ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab, “Today you are consolidating and supporting Abu Bakr so that tomorrow he will support you and bring you as his successor.”³ His words rang true since two and a half years later, ‘Umar reaped the benefits of his stance when Abu Bakr appointed him as his successor before his death. Their pact did not escape going unnoticed by others because even Mu’awiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan concluded, “They agreed upon that and there was harmony between them.”⁴

The selection of the third caliph, ‘Uthman Ibn al-Affan also tends to be a subject of some misconception. As the death of the second caliph ‘Umar neared, he called on a council of six people to determine the next leader. On the surface, this may seem like a semi-electoral body; however, ‘Umar instructed his son Abdullah, “If they appoint ‘Uthman as their leader, they will get the most out of it.”⁵

Earlier, when Hudayfah, a scribe of the Qur’an asked ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab who would succeed him, ‘Umar said, “‘Uthman Ibn al-Affan.”⁶ As in the previous accord of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, ‘Uthman Ibn al-Affan allied with his cousin, Abdul Rahman Ibn Auf to mutually support each other for the position of the caliphate during the six council “election” meeting.

As ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib narrates, “There was a council of six, and the Muslims were supposed to choose one out of those six, but Abdul Rahman Ibn Auf favored ‘Uthman, so that tomorrow ‘Uthman would favor him and make him his successor.”⁷

After the appointment of ‘Uthman, and later into his office, Abdul Rahman incited the people to revolt against ‘Uthman, and thus ‘Uthman excluded him from ever being appointed as caliph, which severed their relationship to the point where they never spoke to one another throughout the remainder of their lives.⁸

Due to the subtleties of this arrangement, the appointment of ‘Uthman to the caliphate continues until today to be seen as a form of election by some. History is clear that when Mu’awiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan came into power, he reserved the caliphate exclusively for his own son and began the first dynasty in the history of Islam.

What history reports less of is that he also maintained the same political ties as the Quraysh group who had diverted the flow of political power to their advantage. To that end, he made pacts with ‘Amr Ibn al-Aas, Talha Ibn Ubaydillah,⁹ Zubayr Ibn al-Awam,¹⁰ and Abu Musa al-Ashari, all of whom disfavored ‘Ali, by offering them governorships in exchange for service.

When he asked ‘Amr Ibn al-Aas to fight against ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib for him, ‘Amr Ibn al-Aas replied, “I will not sell my faith to you unless you give me something in this world here.” Hence, Mu’awiyah appointed him as the governor of Egypt.¹¹

Similarly, Mu'awiyah enlisted Talha and Zubayr in the fight against Imam 'Ali in return for rule over some of the other states. ¹² Mu'awiyah also promised Abu Musa al-Ashari, "If you pay allegiance to me and support my position, I will utilize your two sons; one of them will be the governor of Kufa, and the other will be the governor of Basra." ¹³ In this way, Mu'awiyah continued the work that his predecessors had begun in channeling the political authority and wealth of the Muslims into a pre-determined and selected group of hands.

Although the caliphate was the main prize, the Quraysh group did not limit their efforts to it. After installing Abu Bakr as the first caliph, they slowly began acquiring governorships of the outlying provinces. As is the case in the modus operandi of the Quraysh, they appointed their political allies to the governorships. The main objective of their appointments was to enlist individuals that did not oppose them and any inclination of strife towards their leadership would be met with expulsion, even at the expense of their own relatives.

As noted earlier, 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab's two sons, Zayd Ibn al-Khattab and Ubaydallah Ibn al-Khattab were both ostracized, as was Abdul Rahman Ibn Abu Bakr, the son of Abu Bakr. Instead, 'Umar appointed Sa'd Ibn Abi al-Waqqas to govern Kufa, Abu Musa al-Ashari to govern Basra, and Mu'awiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan to govern Syria. Their true intention was to maintain control of the rapidly expanding Muslim empire among themselves. The issue was not one of election or selection; it was one of maintaining political hegemony within a select group of people.

Harmony or otherwise, the important fact to note is that 'Umar was appointed by Abu Bakr, not elected to the caliphate, unlike the case with Abu Bakr.

Despite the sheer number of hadith in both Sunni and Shi'a sources, which declared 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib to be the rightful political successor to the Prophet, still many opponents of the Ahlul Bayt in modern times object to the concept of an appointed successor on the basis that it is nepotistic and undemocratic. If so, then how do they explain and accept the fact that none of the first three caliphs arrived at the caliphate through a "democratic" election?

Muslim history has noted that the Saqifah meeting in itself turned into an ad-hoc assembly, and that the explicit appointment of the three caliphs was a premeditated maneuver by a group to bypass the leadership of 'Ali. Yet still, they argued against the Prophet appointing 'Ali.

Furthermore, if nepotism is cited (because 'Ali was a relative of the Prophet) then the same argument can be posed when 'Uthman's relatives, such as Mu'awiyah, Yazid, and others were chosen as caliphs. Hence, it would be unfounded to claim that the caliphate was first instituted by *shura* (consultation).

Dialogue between Abdullah Ibn al-Abbas and 'Umar Ibn al-

Khattab

Abdullah Ibn al-Abbas (who is from the tribe of Bani Hashim and was the first cousin of ‘Ali and the Prophet) and ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab held many discussions. On one occasion, during the caliphate of ‘Umar they debated whether the Bani Hashim should hold the caliphate. This dialogue is of particular interest, since it highlights the issues at hand. [14](#)

‘Umar, “Do you know why the people did not elect you [the family of the Prophet] to the caliphate?”

Ibn Abbas, “No, I do not know.”

‘Umar, “I know what the reason was.”

Ibn Abbas, “What was it?”

‘Umar, “The Quraysh hated to see the prophethood and caliphate vested in one house. If that would have happened, you would have wronged the people!”

Ibn Abbas, “Can Amir al-Mumineen (‘Umar) control his anger if I want to say something?”

‘Umar, “Feel free to say whatever you want to say.”

Ibn Abbas, “If you say that Quraysh hated to see this [prophethood and caliphate vested in one family] then (know that) in the Qur’an, Allah has said about some of the companions [who had lived during the time of the Prophet],

“That is because they hate the revelation of Allah, so He has made their deeds fruitless.” [15](#)

And if you say that we [Bani Hashim] will do injustice if both the prophethood and caliphate are vested in our family, then if we are supposed to do mischief, we will do mischief even without being caliphs or successors, simply because we are the family of the Prophet and the closest people to him. However, we will not do that because our stance, morality, and attitude mirror the attitude of the Prophet, about whom Allah says,

“Verily, you stand on an exalted standard of character.” [16](#)

Also Allah said, “Lower your wing to the believers who follow you.” [17](#)

We will not depart from him (the Prophet), so why are you worried that if we become caliphs we will do mischief? If you say, “The Quraysh chose Abu Bakr and ‘Umar,” then Allah answers,

“Your Lord creates and chooses as He pleases. No choices have they in the matter.” [18](#)

Plus you know ‘Umar, that Allah has chosen certain people from among His creatures to lead humanity.

If the Quraysh had joined their vision with the plan of Allah, then the community would have been prosperous and successful.”

‘Umar, “Calm down Ibn Abbas. You members of the Bani Hashim, your heart only wanted to deceive the Quraysh permanently, and you hold perpetual hatred and animosity towards the Quraysh.”

Ibn Abbas, “Calm down ‘Umar, do not say that the hearts of Bani Hashim are deceitful. Their hearts are part of the heart of the Messenger of Allah. It is the same heart of the Messenger of Allah that Allah has cleansed and purified, and they are the family of the Prophet whom Allah describes as,

“Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, O members of the family of the Prophet, and to make you pure and immaculate.”¹⁹

If you speak about animosity and grudges in our hearts, this would be natural given that our right has been usurped from us and it is in the hands of a transgressor.”

‘Umar, “What are you saying Ibn Abbas? I have heard some bad things about you, and if I mention them to you, I would lose respect for you in my eyes.”

Ibn Abbas, “What have you heard about me? Tell me. If it is false, I will defend myself. If it is true, I will never lose respect for you in my eyes.”

‘Umar, “I have heard you telling people that this issue [the *khalifah*] was taken from the family of the Prophet out of jealousy and by way of injustice.”

Ibn Abbas, “Regarding jealousy, yes it is true because *Iblis* (Satan) was jealous of Adam and forced him out of Paradise. We are the children of Adam, and there is always jealousy among us. If you say “transgression,” you know better who has the right in this matter [the *khalifah*], and you ‘Umar are the best person to answer this question.

Did you not say that the Arabs are closer to the non-Arabs to the Prophet, and did you not say that the Quraysh are closer than the other tribes are to the Prophet? If you have said that and if you come to the Quraysh, then who among them is closest to the Prophet? Of course, they are the Bani Hashim. I am using the same analogy that you used. We have more right to the caliphate than anyone from the Quraysh.”

‘Umar, “Stand up and go home.”

Ibn Abbas stood up and as he was leaving ‘Umar said, “You who are leaving, come back! Despite what has happened between us, you are still respected in my eyes.”

Ibn Abbas answered, “You who are the caliph now, we also have to preserve your right.”

After Ibn Abbas left, ‘Umar turned to the people around him and said, “I never saw Ibn Abbas discuss

something with anyone and not defeat him.”

- [1.](#) Ibn al-Atheer, Al-Kamil fil-Tarikh, 3:67
- [2.](#) Ibn Sa'd, Al-Tabaqat, 5:33
- [3.](#) Ibn Qutaybah, Al-Imamah wal-Siyasah, 1:11
- [4.](#) Al-Mas'udi, Muruj al-Dhahabi, 3:12
- [5.](#) Ibn Shabah, Tarikh al-Madinah al-Munawarah, 2:148
- [6.](#) Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-Umal, 5:727, hadith 14259
- [7.](#) Ibn al-Atheer, Al-Kamil fil-Tarikh, 3:71
- [8.](#) Tarikh al-Tabari, 3:294
- [9.](#) Talha Ibn Ubaydillah was one of the companions who was known for his strong opposition against 'Uthman. He was killed by his friend Marwan Ibn Hakim in the Battle of Camel, 36 ah and is buried outside Basra.
- [10.](#) Zubayr Ibn Awam was born twenty-eight years before the Hijrah. He embraced Islam at the age of fifteen. He was the son of Saffiah bint Abdul Muttalib, the aunt of the Prophet. He married Asmah bint Abu Bakr. He was killed in 36 ah in the Battle of Camel, which was spearheaded by Aishah against Imam 'Ali. He is buried near Basra, Iraq.
- [11.](#) Waqat Siffeen, p. 34-39; Tarikh Ibn Khaldun, 2:625
- [12.](#) Ibid
- [13.](#) Al-Dhahabi, Sirr Alam al-Nubala, 2:396
- [14.](#) Tarikh al-Tabari, 5:30; Qasas al-Arab, 2:363; Ibn al-Atheer, Al-Kamil fil-Tarikh, 3:63; Ibn Abil Hadid, Sharh Nahjul-Balaghah, 3:107
- [15.](#) Holy Qur'an, 47:9
- [16.](#) Holy Qur'an, 68:4
- [17.](#) Holy Qur'an, 26:215
- [18.](#) Holy Qur'an, 28:68
- [19.](#) Holy Qur'an, 33:33

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