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Ibn Taymiyyah's defence of Yazid

Driven by undisguised hostility against the *Ahl al-Bayt* (as), Ibn Taymiyyah rose in defence of Yazid. He endeavored by all means to exonerate Yazid of all corruption and unscrupulousness including his guilt in the killing of Imam al-Husayn (as). He has done so by shamelessly resorting to guile and deceit to justify Yazid's actions.

Ibn Taymiyyah writes, "Yazid was not pleased with the killing of al-Husayn. He even expressed his displeasure at this action."¹

He also repudiates the truth of the events in which the Sham army carried the head of Imam al-Husayn (as) on a lance to Sham.² At one point, he even denies that Imam al-Husayn's (as) Household, the *Ahl al-Bayt* (as), were taken into captivity by Yazid's soldiers.³

At another juncture, Ibn Taymiyyah says, "Yazid did not issue orders to kill al-Husayn. Yazid's soldiers did not bring the heads of those killed at Karbala on lances to Sham to be presented to Yazid. Yazid did not hit the teeth of al-Husayn with his stick. In fact, it was 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad who did all these actions."⁴

In this section, evidence will be cited to substantiate the fact that when Ibn Ziyad killed Imam al-Husayn (as), he was acting under strict and direct orders issued by Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah.

1. Yazid appointed Ibn Ziyad governor of Kufah

Upon examination of historical evidence, it is apparent that it was Yazid that appointed 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad to the post of governor of Kufah. Before then, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad was the governor of Basrah.

This appointment sheds light upon the view that Yazid intended to confront Imam al-Husayn (as). Appointing Ibn Ziyad to the position of governor of Kufah was a premeditated plan because he was the only person Yazid deemed capable of carrying out the duty of killing al-Husayn (as).

It is worth noting that Yazid did not, previous to that time, have a good relationship with 'Ubayd Allah ibn

Ziyad. He had even considered dismissing him from the governorship of Basrah.

However, because he did not deem Nu'man ibn Bashir, who was the incumbent governor of Kufah, capable of confronting Muslim ibn 'Aqil and Imam al-Husayn (as), Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah was left with no option but to appeal to 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad for help.

He not only expressed his sudden pleasure with Ibn Ziyad, but also appointed him to the governorship of both Kufah and Basrah as well. In a letter to Ibn Ziyad, Yazid wrote, "Put Muslim ibn 'Aqil under strict surveillance. Follow and track him down. If you arrest him, put him to death."⁵

Muslim ibn 'Aqil had come to Kufah as Imam al-Husayn's (as) envoy. His mission was to inform the people that Imam al-Husayn (as) was on his way to Kufah.

2. Yazid and Ibn Ziyad were in constant contact

History bears witness to the fact that when Yazid appointed 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad as the governor of Kufah, he ordered Ibn Ziyad to be in constant consultation with him on every matter, large or small, that involved Imam al-Husayn (as).

From this, one can rightly infer that all the crimes which the son of Ziyad committed, including the killing of Imam al-Husayn (as), were carried out on direct orders from Yazid.

Tabari writes, "After martyring Muslim ibn 'Aqil and Hani, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad cut their heads from their bodies and sent them together with a letter to Sham for Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah. In his reply to 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad's letter, after mentioning various issues, Yazid pointed out, 'News has reached me that al-Husayn ibn 'Ali has set off towards Kufah. Enlist spies to keep anyone allied to al-Husayn under strict surveillance and employ armed men to arrest his followers.

Imprison al-Husayn's followers on any accusation you can trump up, and inform me about everything that takes place. May God's peace, mercy and blessing be upon you'."⁶

We can deduce from this historical evidence that Yazid not only entrusted the city of Kufah and confrontation with Imam al-Husayn (as) to 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, but that Yazid himself was also personally involved in the events that took place and in direct command of all affairs. Consequently, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad kept reporting whatever he did to Yazid.

Additional evidence to substantiate that Yazid had complicity in all the crimes committed by 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad is that Yazid extolled Ibn Ziyad for every decision and action he took.

3. Yazid's order: allegiance or death

History bears witness that Yazid was determined to kill Imam al-Husayn (as) in the case that he refused

to pay him allegiance. In his book of history, "*Tarikh Ya'qubi*", Ya'qubi writes, "In a letter which he wrote to Walid ibn 'Aqabah ibn Abi Sufiyan, his agent and governor in Medina, Yazid commanded,

'When my letter reaches you, summon al-Husayn ibn 'Ali and 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr. Make sure that you get allegiance from them on my behalf. If they refuse to pay allegiance, cut their necks and send their heads to me'."7

It is obvious from this historical record that Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah had a premeditated intention to kill Imam al-Husayn (as) if the Holy Imam (as) refused to pay allegiance.

Question

Of course, it is true that some historians have recorded Yazid's letter in a different manner. For example, Tabari has recorded the letter in this way: "Yazid wrote to Walid, 'Adopt extreme harshness when you confront al-Husayn, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar and 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr. Do not permit them leave until they pay allegiance. May God's peace be upon you'."8

In this version of the letter, there is no talk of killing Imam al-Husayn (as) or his followers.

Response

Firstly, there is no real inconsistency between these two historical texts, because killing Imam al-Husayn (as) has not been explicitly prohibited in the wording of the text recorded by Tabari. Both letters are quite strong except that the ultimate order in the text quoted by Tabari does not mention killing Imam al-Husayn (as).

It is therefore possible that Yazid wrote both letters; the first one was recorded by Tabari while the second and stronger one in tone was recorded by Ya'qubi. Bearing this in mind, we can accept both records.

Secondly, in the letter which Tabari has recorded, the expression that has been used is "adopt extreme harshness". This might mean that the people mentioned in this letter should not be given permission to leave until they have paid allegiance. From this expression, three possibilities come to mind:

- A. That "adopt extreme harshness" means a kind of sharp and hot-tempered verbal encounter with these people to insist on getting allegiance from them.
- B. That the intention was to put pressure on Imam al-Husayn (as) so that he would be left with no option but to pay allegiance, but this encounter should not culminate in killing Imam al-Husayn (as). (Neither of these two possibilities seems logical, because Yazid knew Imam al-Husayn's (as) character and personality well. He knew with certainty that Imam al-Husayn (as) would never pay allegiance to him no matter what the cost.)
- C. The third possibility; the possibility which conforms to what really happened, is that "adopt extreme

harshness” means Yazid had given Walid complete jurisdiction over the issue of Imam al–Husayn (as) and he was free to deal with Imam al–Husayn (as) in whatever way he deemed suitable to get the job done. If Walid felt compelled to kill Imam al–Husayn (as), should he refuse to pay allegiance to Yazid, it would have been acceptable.

This possibility is confirmed by the following points:

1. When Marwan ibn Hakam ordered Walid to kill Imam al–Husayn (as) in the case that he refused to pay allegiance to Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah, Walid excused himself from carrying out this abominable act. The reason he put forth was not that killing Imam al–Husayn (as) was not compatible with orders from Yazid, but because killing Imam al–Husayn (as) was *haram* and therefore forbidden by Islamic dictates.[9](#)
2. When Walid called Imam al–Husayn (as) to the governor’s palace, Imam al–Husayn (as) knew that Walid had been ordered to kill him if he refused to pay allegiance. Therefore, he went to the governor’s palace accompanied by a number of young men from the tribe of Bani Hashim. He also advised ‘Abd Allah ibn Zubayr to do the same.[10](#)
3. In the holy month of Ramadan of the same year in which he ascended to the caliphate, Yazid dismissed Walid ibn ‘Aqabah from his post as governor. It is important to mention that this happened only about two months after Yazid claimed the caliphate. Yazid discharged Walid despite reinstating in their posts all the governors who had worked for his father. The reason for dismissing Walid was that Yazid knew that Walid was not capable of carrying out his orders as regards killing Imam al–Husayn (as). So he dealt with him in the same manner that he had previously dealt with Nu‘man ibn Bashir, the governor of Kufah. Nu‘man ibn Bashir had been ordered to have a harsh and violent encounter with Muslim ibn ‘Aqil. When he did not do this, Yazid replaced him with ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad.[11](#)

Yazid discharged Walid ibn ‘Aqabah just like he had previously dismissed Nu‘man ibn Bashir. Therefore, it can be deduced that Yazid wanted Walid to kill Imam al–Husayn (as) if necessary. Since Walid was not ready to do so, he paid the price and was dismissed.

4. Yazid’s second letter to Walid ibn ‘Aqabah

Ibn A‘tham recounts that Walid wrote a letter to Yazid informing him about the events that had transpired between him and Imam al–Husayn (as) and between him and Zubayr. Yazid was infuriated by what had taken place. In a reply to Walid, he wrote, “When my letter reaches you, get a second allegiance from the people of Medina.

Let ‘Abd Allah ibn Zubayr go free, because he cannot escape us. However, send the head of al–Husayn ibn ‘Ali (as) to me together with the reply of this letter. If you do so, I will provide you with well–bred horses along with greater gifts and better rewards...”[12](#)

5. Exposing Imam al-Husayn (as) to death

Ibn 'Asakir recounts, "When Yazid was informed about Imam al-Husayn's exodus towards Kufah, he wrote a letter to his governor, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, in which he ordered him to battle Imam al-Husayn (as) and send the Imam to Sham."¹³

Ibn A'tham narrates, "Ibn Ziyad addressed the people of Kufah in this way, 'Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah has sent a letter to me. Along with it, he has sent four thousand *dinars* and two hundred thousand *dirhams* for me to distribute among you. Yazid has ordered me to send you to war with his enemy al-Husayn ibn 'Ali. Therefore, follow Yazid's orders and obey him'."¹⁴

Suyuti says, "In a letter to 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, Yazid's governor in Iraq, he ordered him to engage in battle with al-Husayn and kill him."¹⁵

Ibn A'tham writes, "When Ibn Ziyad killed Imam al-Husayn, Yazid paid him a reward of one million *dirhams*."¹⁶

After the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as), the brother of 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, Salam ibn Ziyad, went to visit Yazid. When Yazid saw him, he said, "O household of Ziyad, love and friendship has become obligatory upon you from the household of Abu Sufiyan."¹⁷

When Ibn Ziyad went to see Yazid after killing Imam al-Husayn (as), Yazid came forward to welcome him. He embraced Ibn Ziyad and kissed him on the forehead. Yazid had Ibn Ziyad sit on the throne and even brought him his womenfolk.

He ordered a singer to sing a beautiful song for Ibn Ziyad. Yazid addressed his butler, "Make us drunk with wine!" Then, he gave Ibn Ziyad and 'Umar ibn Sa'd a reward of one million *dirhams* each from the public treasury. He even ceded the revenue of Iraq to 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad for a period of one year."¹⁸

6. While in Mecca, Imam al-Husayn (as) foretold that the enemies of Allah were planning to kill him

Tabari recounts that Imam al-Husayn (as) publicly addressed the people, "Do you know what Ibn Zubayr says?" The people said, "No, we don't know. May Allah sacrifice us for you!" Imam al-Husayn (as) said, "Ibn Zubayr says, 'Stay in this mosque. I will gather a group of fighters for you'."

Then the Imam (as) said, "I swear upon Allah! It is better for me to be killed an inch outside Mecca than to be killed an inch inside it. I swear upon Allah! Even if I hide and seek refuge in caves, they will never rest until they pull me out and do to me what they have already decided to do."¹⁹

We can conclude from this historical information that Imam al-Husayn (as) was aware of Bani

Umayyah's malicious intentions. He knew that the government headed by Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah had no other objective but to kill him.

7. Yazid issued the order to put Imam al-Husayn (as) to death

Ya'qubi recounts, "By the time al-Husayn started off towards Iraq, Yazid had appointed 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad to be the governor of that land. Yazid wrote to his newly appointed governor, 'News has reached me that the people of Kufah have written a letter to al-Husayn inviting him to come to them. At this very moment as I write, he is moving towards Kufah...

If you kill him, then so much the better; there will remain no more duty on you. However, if you do not put him to death, I will send you to join your dead ancestors. So beware, and do not lose this opportunity'." [20](#)

From this historical text, we can conclude that Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah had charged 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad with the duty of killing Imam al-Husayn (as). He had even gone so far as to intimidate Ibn Ziyad with death if he dared disobey his orders.

8. Ibn Ziyad's letter to Imam al-Husayn (as)

Ibn A'tham narrates that Hurr ibn Yazid and his companions had descended upon Imam al-Husayn with the intention of encountering him at war. Hurr wrote a letter to 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad informing him that Imam al-Husayn (as) had arrived at Karbala. The son of Ziyad decided to write a letter to Imam al-Husayn (as), in which he said, "... and after this, O al-Husayn!

News has reached me that you have arrived at Karbala. Amir al-Mu'minin Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah has written a letter to me ordering that I should not be content with anything save sending you to the Omniscient one or dealing with you in whatever way I wish..." [21](#)

This is yet another document that shows that Yazid himself had given 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad the responsibility of killing Imam al-Husayn (as) if he refused to pay allegiance.

9. Ibn 'Abbas's letter to Yazid

One of the documents which serves as evidence to prove that Yazid played a direct role in the killing of Imam al-Husayn (as) is a letter which 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas wrote to Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah. In this letter, Ibn 'Abbas admonished Yazid to kill Imam al-Husayn (as). A Part of the letter reads, "From 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas to Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah. And after this...

O illegitimate child! It is you who killed al-Husayn with your contaminated and filthy hands. Do not suppose that I have forgotten that you have blood on your hands and that you have martyred al-Husayn

and the youths of Bani Hashim who were bright shining lights and stars of guidance for those in darkness...”[22](#)

It is important to note that Ibn ‘Abbas was known as a man that would not accuse any person falsely.

10. Yazid publicly boasted about killing Imam al-Husayn (as)

Ibn Athir narrates, “After al-Husayn’s martyrdom, Yazid called for a general meeting. The people of Sham were coming in to meet him while the blessed head of Imam al-Husayn (as) was placed next to him. He had a wooden stick in his hands with which he was hitting Imam al-Husayn’s throat (as) while reciting poems composed by al-Husayn ibn Hamam. These actions made his arrogance and pride at killing Imam al-Husayn (as) obvious.”[23](#)

If Yazid were in fact not pleased about killing Imam al-Husayn (as), why would he hit the throat, and according to narrations of other historians the lips and teeth, of the severed head of Imam al-Husayn (as)? Moreover, why would he recite poems which alluded to his pride at having done such a deed?

Suyuti writes, “After al-Husayn (as) and his father’s progeny were massacred, ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad sent their heads on lances to Sham for Yazid. At first, Yazid became very happy, but when he realized that the Muslims had started to regard him as their enemy and had begun to hate him with all their hearts for what he had done, Yazid showed superficial remorse and regret.

It was appropriate that the people had every right to hate him.”[24](#)

Sibt ibn al-Jawzi recounts, “When they brought the head of Imam al-Husayn (as) to Yazid, he invited the people of Sham to come to his palace. He then started hitting Imam al-Husayn’s (as) head with a staff while reciting poems composed by Ibn Zab‘ari.

The purport of these poems was: By killing the elders of Bani Hashim, we have taken revenge for our forefathers who were killed in the Battle of Badr. By killing the elders of Bani Hashim, we have gotten even.”[25](#)

11. Ibn Ziyad, highly regarded after killing al-Husayn (as)

Ibn Athir writes, “When Imam al-Husayn’s (as) head was brought for Yazid, ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad gained high esteem before Yazid. Yazid bestowed numerous favors upon him. He was extremely pleased with him. However, it did not take long before Yazid learnt that the people had been angered by what he had done, and were cursing and insulting him. He subsequently feigned remorse about Imam al-Husayn’s (as) killing...”[26](#)

Tabari narrates, “When ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad killed al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali (as) and his father’s progeny, he sent their heads on lances to Sham for Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah. Yazid was initially pleased by this and the

son of Ziyad acquired an excellent position before Yazid..."²⁷

12. Declaration of one present in Yazid's court

Tabari recounts, "Then Yazid gave permission to the people to come to visit him. The people entered the king's court and saw Imam al-Husayn's (as) head placed opposite Yazid. Yazid was hitting Imam al-Husayn's (as) head with a wooden stick in his hands. A man from among the Prophet's (S) companions named Abu Bazrah Aslami addressed Yazid protestingly, 'Are you hitting the throat of al-Husayn with your staff?

Be aware that your stick is hitting a place that I personally saw the Holy Prophet (S) kissing. O Yazid! You will arise on the Day of Resurrection without an intercessor save Ibn Ziyad, but al-Husayn will come on the Day of Resurrection with Muhammad (S), Allah's Prophet, as his intercessor.' Then, Abu Bazrah Aslami rose up, turned his back to Yazid and left the gathering."²⁸

13. Yazid was informed about everything

History testifies to the fact that Yazid was completely aware of everything Ibn Ziyad did regarding Imam al-Husayn (as) even after his martyrdom. Ibn Athir narrates, "When the *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) of Imam al-Husayn reached Kufah, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad imprisoned them and sent the news of what had taken place to Yazid... Afterwards, a reply letter came from Yazid to Ibn Ziyad containing orders that the captives should be brought to Sham..."²⁹

From this historical information, along with other information previously mentioned, we can deduce that the son of Ziyad did not perform any significant action without Yazid's permission.

14. Yazid's son admitted his father's guilt

Ya'qubi relates from Mu'awiyah ibn Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, Yazid's son, that after inheriting his father's position and ascending to the caliphate, he addressed the people in this way, "And after praising Allah...

Be informed that my grandfather Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufiyan had quarrelled and disputed about the caliphate with a person who was more deserving and worthy of it as regards blood relationship and proximity to the Holy Prophet (S).

Then, after him, my father got the reigns of power while he did not possess an acceptable moral character at all. In fact, he was overridden by his carnal desires." Then, Mu'awiyah, the son of Yazid, started crying and said, "One of the hardest things for us to bear is that we know what affliction and tragedy he was caught up in, and what a terrible fate he has endorsed for himself. He killed and disregarded the honor of the Holy Prophet's (S) progeny with impunity and set the Ka'bah on fire..."³⁰

This historical text is excellent evidence to substantiate that Yazid had total involvement in the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as). There was no one closer to Yazid than his own son, and he publicly announced that his father was Imam al-Husayn's (as) killer.

15. Ibn Ziyad was not censured for killing Imam al-Husayn (as)

If one were to assume, as some people say, that Yazid did not issue orders to kill Imam al-Husayn (as) and that Imam al-Husayn (as) was in fact killed as a result of 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad's independent actions and that Yazid was displeased by Ibn Ziyad's deeds, Yazid should have confronted him strongly with intense opposition to his insubordinate behavior. He ought to have reproached him in a way that suited his appalling act.

Even in the case that Yazid was opposed to Imam al-Husayn (as), if he in fact did not issue orders to kill the Imam and 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad committed this hideous crime without Yazid's authorization, he should have been sharply censured for overstepping his authority and defying the central government. However, what historians have recorded is that not only Ibn Ziyad was not rebuked by Yazid in the slightest, but was instead rewarded handsomely on many occasions.

Yazid's unanticipated behavior under the circumstances casts grave doubt on the veracity of the idea that Ibn Ziyad was acting independently rather than under direct orders from Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah.

16. Ibn Ziyad retained his high governmental post

History bears witness to the fact that even after killing Imam al-Husayn (as), 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad was retained in his position of authority as the governor of both Kufah and Basrah. This in itself demonstrates that Yazid was satisfied with the actions of 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad.

Ibn Athir writes, "When Yazid died, news of his death was brought to Ibn Ziyad... a call for congregational prayer was made. The people gathered for prayer, and 'Ubayd Allah went on the pulpit and informed the people about the death of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah."³¹

This shows that 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad remained in his position of authority as the governor of Kufah and Basrah up to the time of Yazid's death. We also know that if 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad had acted in an independent manner when killing Imam al-Husayn (as), a manner which was displeasing to Yazid, he certainly would have relieved him of his post just as he had previously dismissed Nu'man ibn Bashir and Walid ibn 'Aqabah. Yazid had dismissed Nu'man ibn Bashir from the governorship of Kufah and Walid ibn 'Aqabah from the governorship of Medina because he was displeased with both of them.

17. Yazid sent rewards for 'Ubayd Allah in Ziyad

After the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as), Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah sent numerous rewards for 'Ubayd

Allah ibn Ziyad and he gained a very special proximity to Yazid.

1. Ibn Athir recounts, “When the head of al–Husayn ibn ‘Ali was sent for Yazid, ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad was raised in stature. He was now regarded with high esteem by Yazid. A lot of rewards and gifts were bestowed on him by the son of Mu‘awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan. Yazid made strenuous efforts to be sure that ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad was happy with his rewards for killing Imam al–Husayn (as).”³²

2. Tabari narrates, “When ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad killed al–Husayn ibn ‘Ali (as) and his father’s progeny, he sent their heads on lances to Sham for Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah. At first Yazid was pleased and held ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad in great esteem.”³³

18. Yazid protected ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad from criticism

Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah not only did not reprimand ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad for killing Imam al–Husayn (as), he even went so far as to prevent others from reproaching him.

Tabari and other historians recount “When the captives were brought to Yazid, Yahya ibn Hakam verbally reproached ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad for what he had done in two verses of poetry... but Yazid punched him on the chest and said, ‘Keep Quiet!’”³⁴

This behavior, along with his obstinate defence and support of ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, is a sign of approval that Yazid was pleased with him for killing Imam al–Husayn (as) and that it is highly likely that the crime of killing Imam al–Husayn (as) was carried out under direct orders from Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah.

19. ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad was Yazid’s courtier and advisor

Mas‘udi and other historians have recounted, “Yazid was always a pleasure–seeking man... One day after killing al–Husayn Ibn ‘Ali (as), he was seated in a gathering where liquor was being served with ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad on his right hand side. Yazid said to his bartender in verse,

إِسْقِنِي شَرِبَةً تَرَوِّي مَشَاشِي ثُمَّ مِلْ فَاسِقٍ مِثْلَهَا ابْنَ زِيَادٍ

صَاحِبَ السِّرِّ وَالْإِمَانَةِ عِنْدِي وَلِتَسْدِيدِ مَغْنَمِي وَجِهَادِي

“Give me liquor that is strong enough to completely satisfy my whole being.

After you have served me, turn to Ibn Ziyad, and quench his thirst in the same way.

He is the possessor of my secrets and trusts.

And do it for the purpose of confirming his awards and endeavors.”[35](#)

Sibt ibn al-Jawzi writes, “Yazid called for the son of Ziyad and gave him many rewards. He made him a close companion and elevated his position. Yazid even brought his womenfolk for Ibn Ziyad and gave him his goblet of wine. Then, he said to his private musician, ‘Play a song.’ Then, he himself recited the two previous verses.”[36](#)

Ibn A‘tham recounts that Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah gave a reward of one million *dirhams* to ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad for killing Imam al-Husayn (as).[37](#)

20. Choosing one of two options

In his book “*Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*”, Ibn Athir narrates that ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad addressed Musafir ibn Sharih Yashkari thus, “I killed al-Husayn because Yazid made it clear that I had to choose between killing al-Husayn or myself being killed. I preferred killing al-Husayn to being killed.”[38](#)

Ya‘qubi writes, “In a letter addressed to ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, Yazid wrote, ‘News has reached me that the people of Kufah have written to al-Husayn inviting him to come to them. I have been informed that right now, as I write, he has left Mecca and is traveling towards Kufah in order to join them.

Your territory, from among all other territories, is being put to the test and your life is on the line. If you kill al-Husayn, there will be no problem. However, if you do not kill him, you will join your forefathers. So beware that you do not lose this opportunity’.”[39](#)

21. Imam al-Sajjad (as) made the truth clear

On various occasions, Imam al-Sajjad (as) made it clear that Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah was Imam al-Husayn’s (as) killer.

1. When they brought Imam al-Sajjad (as) to Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah, the son of Mu‘awiyah addressed Imam al-Sajjad (as) in this way, “Are you the son of that man who has been killed by Allah?” Imam al-Sajjad (as) replied, “I am ‘Ali, the son of the man whom you have killed.” Then, Imam al-Sajjad (as) recited this verse,

﴿... وَمَنْ يَقْتُلْ مُؤْمِنًا مُتَعَمِّدًا فَجَزَاؤُهُ جَهَنَّمُ خَالِدًا فِيهَا﴾

“And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is hell; he shall abide in it forever.”[40](#)[41](#)

2. At another time, Imam al-Sajjad (as) said, “O Yazid! It is enough of your shedding our blood...”[42](#)

3. Ibn A‘tham relates, “Imam al–Sajjad (as) addressed Yazid as follows, ‘If only you could perceive what you have done against my father, if only you could comprehend what you have done against my Household, and if only you could understand what you have done against the rights of my brothers and uncles, then you would run away to the hills and mountains. There, you would spread gravel stones and roll yourself upon them. You would raise your voice high weeping for yourself. How is it possible that the head of al–Husayn (as), the son of Fatimah (as) and ‘Ali (as), has been hung on the city gates when he was Allah’s trust among you, the people?’”[43](#)

4. There is also Imam al–Sajjad’s (as) address to Yazid in his famous sermon in Damascus, when he said, “Is the Muhammad that you talk about your ancestor or my ancestor? If you want to pretend that he is your ancestor, you have undoubtedly lied and become a disbeliever. And if you say that he is my ancestor, then why have you killed his progeny?”[44](#)

22. Yazid expressed pleasure at killing Imam al–Husayn (as)

When we pay careful attention to diverse historical documents, it becomes clear that Yazid was very happy with killing al–Husayn (as). There are many historical documents which provide evidence beyond doubt that Yazid was pleased with what had transpired. We also have to pay attention to the *hadith* which says, “Anyone who is pleased with an action of a group of people is one of those people.” Let us now refer to some evidence to prove our assertion.

1. While talking to Nu‘man ibn Bashir, Yazid said, “Praise Allah because He has killed al–Husayn.”[45](#)
2. Ya‘qubi writes, “Yazid was in his garden when the news that Imam al–Husayn had been killed was brought to him. He shouted out aloud, ‘Allah–u Akbar!’”[46](#)
3. When the captives were brought to Sham, Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah called the elders of Sham to come and congratulate him for the victory.[47](#)
4. Maqrizi and other historians have recounted that when ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad placed the head of Imam al–Husayn ibn ‘Ali (as) before Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah, he started hitting Imam al–Husayn’s (as) teeth with a rod. He was doing this while reciting poetry. Then, he gave orders that Imam al–Husayn’s (as) head should be hung in the palace for three days.[48](#)

Many Sunni scholars have opposed Yazid due to his pleasure at killing Imam al–Husayn (as), and even cursed him.

5. Suyuti narrates, “May Allah curse al–Husayn’s (as) killers. May Allah curse Ibn Ziyad and Yazid.”[49](#)
6. Some people asked al–Jawzi what his opinion was regarding cursing Yazid. He answered, “Ahmad ibn Hanbal permitted cursing him, and we say that we do not like Yazid because of what he did to the son of the Prophet’s daughter (as) and because he sent the Prophet’s (S) Household in a state of

captivity to Sham aboard camel litter.”[50](#)

7. Dhahabi says, “Yazid was a cruel and hardhearted man. He used to drink wine and commit forbidden acts [*munkarat*]. His reign began with killing al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali and ended with the event of Harrah.”[51](#)

8. Ibn Khaldun recounts the killing of Imam al-Husayn (as) thus, “Without doubt, Imam al-Husayn was killed by Yazid. Killing Imam al-Husayn (as) is an action that underscores Yazid’s immoral nature. In this event, al-Husayn is a martyr in Allah’s way.”[52](#)

23. Yazid’s actions correspond with his personality

For anyone who examines historical accounts, it becomes clear that Yazid had a treacherous personality. When one understands Yazid’s real personality, he can easily see why he could not refrain from killing such a revered person as Imam al-Husayn (as), and why doing so was an easy task for him.

Mas‘udi narrates, “Yazid was a pleasure-seeking person who owned slave girls, dogs, monkeys, leopards and drunken jesters. Whatever ugly act he committed was imitated by those close to him.

During the three years of his caliphate, music became widespread both in Mecca and Medina.

Instruments of pleasure and amusement were commonplace. The people openly and publicly engaged in wine drinking.”[53](#)

A group of people from Medina, among them ‘Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah and other noble men of Medina, went to see Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah. Yazid agreed to meet them. When they returned to Medina, some of the people of the group began talking ill of and castigating Yazid.

They announced that they were returning from the presence a man who lacked religion, drank wine and played the tambourine. They said that Yazid played with dogs. They reported to the people that Yazid also had singers who sang seductive music for him...[54](#)

‘Umar ibn Sabi‘ah says, “During his father’s reign, Yazid went to Mecca for the *hajj*. When he reached Medina, he sat at a wine drinking gathering and recited poetry.”[55](#)

Suyuti writes, “The reason the people of Medina retracted the allegiance they had made to Yazid was that he used to exceed limits in committing transgressions.”[56](#)

24. Yazid in the viewpoint of Sunni scholars [‘ulama’]

As previously mentioned, many Sunni scholars have strongly criticized Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah for killing Imam al-Husayn (as) and for numerous other crimes he committed. We will now mention some of these scholars and some of their criticisms:

1. Alusi says, “Anyone who says that Yazid did not sin, and hence cursing him is not permissible, should

be considered as one of Yazid's helpers and partisans."[57](#)

2. Ibn Khaldun writes, "Ibn al-'Arabi Maliki erred when he said, 'Al-Husayn was killed by his grandfather's sword.' By making such a statement, he openly declared his consent to Yazid's iniquitous and immoral life."[58](#)

3. Taftazani writes, "Yazid's satisfaction and pleasure at the killing of Imam al-Husayn (as), and his contempt towards the *Ahl al-Bayt* (as), are among his many vices detailed in the traditions. We have no hesitation about his true status. On the contrary, we do not hesitate in saying that he was a man who lacked faith. May Allah's curse be on him and his partisans."[59](#)

4. Jahiz says, "The crimes Yazid committed including killing al-Husayn ibn 'Ali, taking the members of his household into captivity, hitting Imam al-Husayn's (as) teeth and severed head with a staff, intimidating and terrorizing the people of Medina, and destruction of the Ka'bah are all evidence of his cruelty, wickedness, hypocrisy and apostasy. Without doubt, he is corrupt and cursed and anyone who prevents the damning of such a man is damned himself."[60](#)

5. Doctor Taha al-Husayn, the Egyptian author, writes, "Some people suppose that Yazid is exonerated from the heinous massacre of al-Husayn (as). They make 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad the scapegoat for the savage killing. If Yazid is innocent of wrongdoing and Ibn Ziyad the guilty party, why did Yazid not reproach 'Ubayd Allah? Why did he not punish him? Why did he not relieve him of his post?"[61](#)

Responses to doubts

Now that Yazid's role in killing Imam al-Husayn (as) has been examined, we will now analyze some of the objections put forth by Yazid's supporters.

1. Mu'awiyah's last will and testament to Yazid

Some people say that Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan had ordered his son in his last will and testament not to offend al-Husayn (as) nor to interfere with him in any way whatsoever because al-Husayn (as) had a greater right of kinship and nearness to the Holy Prophet (S). They believe that it is therefore impossible and unreasonable to imagine that Yazid would have dared act against his father's wishes.

Response

Firstly, the text of Mu'awiyah's reads, "... If al-Husayn revolts against you and you become triumphant over him, forgive and overlook because he has ties of relationship and kinship to you, and hence has a great right due from you..."[62](#)

We can deduce from this text that Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan requested his son to forgive al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (as) if Yazid were to be militarily victorious over the Holy Imam, but we cannot conclude that

Yazid was ordered not to have any conflict with Imam al-Husayn (as) at all.

Secondly, we have previously cited abundant evidence to substantiate that Yazid was responsible for Imam al-Husayn's (as) martyrdom. Therefore, there is no room left for doubt or skepticism about who Imam al-Husayn's killer is.

Thirdly, when we refer to history with special attention paid to Yazid's corrupt personality, it is obvious that Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah was not at all bound or obligated to act according to his father's will. There is no historical evidence to substantiate that Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah felt a strong obligation to act according to his father's last wishes.

It is worthy reminding skeptics that Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan had commanded his son Yazid in his last will and testament to consent to the people's wishes if they asked him to dismiss and change the governor of Iraq. Yazid did not act according to his father's wishes in this case.

2. Yazid exonerated himself of the killing of al-Husayn (as)

According to some texts, Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah claimed himself to be innocent of killing Imam al-Husayn (as). They say Yazid cursed 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad and laid the blame on him for this heinous crime.[63](#)

Response

Firstly, according to evidence previously cited regarding this issue, there is convincing testimony to substantiate that Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah played a direct role in killing Imam al-Husayn (as). It has already been pointed out that some people have made intense efforts to deceive others by inventing stories for the sake of justifying Yazid's despicable actions.

The fantasy that Yazid was not responsible for killing Imam al-Husayn (as) must be regarded as an effort by ill-intentioned people to deceive others because, after the event of Karbala, there were numerous public disclosures of Yazid's flagrant atrocities given by eye witnesses.

These public disclosures caused the people to become disgusted with Yazid. As a result, they rebelled against him. Yazid therefore found himself forced to lay the blame on another. By making Ibn Ziyad the scapegoat, he intended to exonerate himself from this savage crime and dissipate the people's anger.

Secondly, according to historical documents, a number of the Prophet's (S) companions such as Imam al-Husayn (as), 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas, 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah and most of the nobles of Medina have associated Yazid with moral corruption and debauchery. When we have indubitable testimony from such a group of highly respected companions of the Holy Prophet (S) confirming Yazid's immoral and corrupt nature, baseless claims of his innocence cannot be accepted.

3. The long distance between Sham and Kufah

Some opponents say that because there is a long distance between Kufah and Sham, which was then the administrative centre of the Umayyad government, it is unreasonable to imagine that Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah could have been getting accurate reports and detailed accounts of the events that were taking place. For this reason, they claim that Yazid was not able to issue direct orders to Ibn Ziyad.

Response

Firstly, abundant historical testimony has already been presented to substantiate that Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah did in fact receive regular reports from Kufah and write direct orders to Ibn Ziyad regarding the killing of Imam al-Husayn (as), such that there can remain no room for doubt about his role as the main player in this hideous crime. So, although there was a considerable distance between Sham and Kufah, Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah was in fact in constant consultation with his agents through letter carriers and deliverers and in this way was able to issue all the necessary orders.

- [1.](#) Ra's al-Husayn, p. 207.
- [2.](#) Ibid., p. 206.
- [3.](#) Minhaj al-Sunnah, vol. 2, p. 226.
- [4.](#) Su'al fi Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, p. 16.
- [5.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 258; Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 268; Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 8, p. 164.
- [6.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 285.
- [7.](#) Tarikh Ya'qubi, vol. 2, p. 241; Al-Futuh, vol. 5, pp. 10-11.
- [8.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 250.
- [9.](#) Ibid., vol. 4, p. 251; Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 264; Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 8, pp. 157-158; Al-Akhbar al-Tawal, p. 228.
- [10.](#) Ibid.; Al-Muntazam, vol. 5, p. 323; Al-Futuh, vol. 5, pp. 15-18.
- [11.](#) Ibid.
- [12.](#) Ibn A'tham, Al-Futuh, vol. 3, section [bab] 5, p. 18.
- [13.](#) Mukhtasar Tarikh Damishq, vol. 14, p. 208.
- [14.](#) Ibn A'tham, Al-Futuh, vol. 3, section [bab] 5, p. 89.
- [15.](#) Tarikh al-Khulafa', p. 193.
- [16.](#) Ibn A'tham, Al-Futuh, vol. 3, section [bab] 5, p. 135.
- [17.](#) Ibid., p. 136.
- [18.](#) Tadhkirah al-Khawass, p. 290; Muruj al-Dhahab, vol. 3, p. 67.
- [19.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 289; Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 276.
- [20.](#) Tarikh Ya'qubi, vol. 2, p. 242; Mukhtasar Tarikh Damishq, vol. 28, p. 19.
- [21.](#) Ibn A'tham, Al-Futuh, vol. 5, p. 150; Khwarazmi, Maqatal al-Imam al-Husayn (as), vol. 1, p. 140.
- [22.](#) Tarikh Ya'qubi, vol. 2, p. 248; Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 318.
- [23.](#) Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 298.
- [24.](#) Tarikh al-Khulafa', p. 208.
- [25.](#) Tadhkirah al-Khawass, p. 235.
- [26.](#) Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 300.
- [27.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, pp. 388-389; Tadhkirah al-Khawass, p. 238.
- [28.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 356; Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 298.
- [29.](#) Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 298; Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 254.

- [30.](#) Tarikh Ya'qubi, vol. 2, p. 254.
- [31.](#) Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, pp. 319–320.
- [32.](#) Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 300; Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 388; Tarikh Khulafa', p. 208; Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 8, p. 254; Kitab al-Futuh, vol. 5, p. 252.
- [33.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 288.
- [34.](#) Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 301; Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 252; Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 8, p. 209.
- [35.](#) Muruj al-Dhahab, vol. 3, p. 77.
- [36.](#) Tadhkirah al-Khawass, p. 260.
- [37.](#) Kitab al-Futuh, vol. 5, p. 252.
- [38.](#) Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 324.
- [39.](#) Tarikh Ya'qubi, vol. 2, p. 242.
- [40.](#) Surat al-Nisa' 4:93.
- [41.](#) Tadhkirah al-Khawass, p. 63, as narrated by Ghazali.
- [42.](#) Maqatil al-Talibiyin, p. 120.
- [43.](#) Ibn A'tham, Al-Futuh, vol. 3, section [bab] 5, p. 132.
- [44.](#) Ibid., p. 133; Khwarazmi, Maqatal al-Imam al-Husayn (as), vol. 2, p. 242.
- [45.](#) Khwarazmi, Maqatal al-Imam al-Husayn (as), vol. 2, p. 59.
- [46.](#) Tarikh Ya'qubi, vol. 2, p. 222.
- [47.](#) Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 8, p. 197; Siyr A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 3, p. 309.
- [48.](#) Maqrizi, Al-Khitat, vol. 2, p. 289; Siyr A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 3, p. 319.
- [49.](#) Tarikh al-Khulafa', p. 207.
- [50.](#) Mir'at al-Zaman, vol. 8, p. 496; Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, vol. 2, p. 634.
- [51.](#) Shadharat al-Dhahab, vol. 1, p. 69.
- [52.](#) The Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, p. 181.
- [53.](#) Muruj al-Dhahab, vol. 3, p. 77.
- [54.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 368; Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 307; Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 8, p. 238.
- [55.](#) Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 317; Mukhtasar Tarikh Damishq, vol. 28, p. 24.
- [56.](#) Tarikh al-Khulafa', p. 209.
- [57.](#) Ruh al-Ma'ani, vol. 26, p. 73.
- [58.](#) The Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, p. 254.
- [59.](#) Sharh 'Aqa'id Nasfiyyah, p. 181.
- [60.](#) Risa'il Jahiz, p. 298.
- [61.](#) Al-Fitnah al-Kubra, vol. 2, p. 265.
- [62.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 238.
- [63.](#) Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 300.

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