

The Number Of The Army

The number of the army that was in Kufa in the middle years of the first century, A.H. was forty thousand fighters. Every year ten thousand fighters of it made a campaign (against the enemies of Islam). (This is what the reliable books have mentioned).

We have known that the Commander of the faithful (Imam 'Ali), peace be on him, prepared forty thousand or fifty thousand fighters according to two different reports– to attack the Syrians. However, he had died before he made an attack with them. We think that al-Hasan's army was a group of the army which the Commander of the faithful prepared to fight against Mu'awiya.

Then we know nothing about the attitude of these armies towards al-Hasan b. 'Ali, peace be on them, when he summoned them to jihad (armed struggle). Besides we have known, from more than one reference book, that the vanguard which al-Hasan sent to meet Mu'awiya at Maskan was estimated at twelve thousand fighters. The acceptable idea is that this vanguard was from the groups of the army which the Commander of the faithful formed before he died. So some of these groups supported al-Hasan while the rest refused that.

Then, from another reference, we have known that the Kufans became excited on the day of al-Hasan, so they called up other four thousand fighters.^{[1](#)}

Thus these are sixteen thousand fighters whom the unquestionable text have shown.

There also are other figures concerning the number of the army.

The historians have mentioned them, and the important declarations have included them. However, their correctness is liable to test and discussion.

The following are some texts about these different figures. First we will mention these figures as they are. Then we will check them properly.

1. In his book (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 10, p. 110), he (i.e., Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi) said: "Then he (i.e., al-Hasan) dispatched to him (i.e., Mu'awiya) a leader with four thousand (fighters). He (the leader) was

from Kinda. He (al-Hasan) ordered him (the leader) to camp in Anbar² and not to do anything till his (al-Hasan's) order came to him. When he (the leader) headed for Anbar and stopped there, Mu'awiya knew of that.

Thus he sent messengers to him, and wrote to him: 'Indeed, if you came to me, I would appoint you as a ruler over some districts of Sham (Syria) and of the Island (al-jazirah), and the like.' He (Mu'awiya) sent him (the leader) five hundred thousand dirhams. So al-Kindi took the money. He deserted al-Hasan. He went to Mu'awiya with two hundred men from his notables and the member of his family. Al-Hasan heard of that. So he rose and delivered a sermon:

'Al-Kindi went to Mu'awiya. He deserted me and you. I told you a time after a time (that) you have no faithfulness. You are the slaves of this world. I am going to send another man to replace him. I know that he (the man) will do towards you and me as your friend (i.e., al-Kindi) did. He will never fear Allah concerning me and you.' So he (al-Hasan) sent him (Mu'awiya) a man from (the tribe of) Murad with four thousand (fighters).

He (al-Hasan) came toward him (the man) before the very eyes of the people, confirmed him, and told him that he (the man) would desert as al-Kindi did. So he (the man) took a solemn oath before him (al-Hasan) that he (the man) would not do that. So al-Hasan said: 'He will desert.' When he (the man) headed for Anbal, Mu'awiya sent him messengers. He wrote to him as he (Mu'awiya) wrote to his (the man's) companion. He sent him five thousand (maybe he, the reporter, meant five hundred thousand) dirhams. He made him desire for any district he liked from the districts of Sham and of the Island. So he (the man) deserted al-Hasan, went to Mu'awiya, and did not keep his word."

After this text, al-Majlisi mentioned that al-Hasan took al-Nukhayla as a camp for him, and that al-Hasan went there.

2. In his book (Sharh Nahj al-Balagha, vol. 4, p. 14), b. Abu al-Hadid said: "The people went out. They became active for going out. Then al-Hasan went out to the camp. He had appointed al-Mughira b. Noufal b. al-Harth b. 'Abd al-Muttalib as a successor over Kufa. He ordered him to urge and dispatch the people to him. So he (i.e., al-Mughira) began urging and dispatching them to the extent that the camp was full (of people). Then al-Hasan went with a great army and good equipment till he stopped at Dir 'Abd al-Rahman. He stayed there for three (days) till the people gathered. Then he summoned 'Ubayd Allah b. al-'Abbas b. 'Abd al-Muttalib, and said to him: 'Cousin, I am going to send with you twelve thousand (men) from the horsemen of the Arabs and (the Qur'an readers) of the city.'"

3. Al-Tabari (vol. 6, p. 94.) reported on the authority of al-Zuhri, who said: "When Mu'awiya got rid of 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Abbas and al-Hasan, peace be on him, he came to plot against a man who was the most important of the people in plotting against him (Mu'awiya). There were forty thousand (fighters) with him. Mu'awiya, 'Amru, and the Syrians met them."

4. In his book (Sharh Nahj al-Balagha, vol. 4, p. 6), b. Abu al-Hadid has mentioned the following on the

authority of al-Mada'ini³ on the authority of al-Musayyab b. Nujayya, who said to al-Hasan when he blamed him for his Peace Treaty with Mu'awiya `My astonishment at you does not end. You have made peace with Mu'awiya, (while) you have forty thousand (fighters). Or he (al Musayyab) said: `You have pledged allegiance to (Mu'awiya)', due to different reporters."

5. In his book (al-Kamil fi al-Ta'rikh, vol. 3, p. 61), Ibn al-Athir said: "Forty thousand fighters pledged allegiance to the Commander of the faithful ('Ali). They were ready to die for him when he told them about something concerning Sham (Syria) and they appeared. While he was getting ready to advance towards (Syria), he was killed. If Allah wills a thing, no one is able to repulse it (the thing). When he was killed, the people pledged allegiance to his son, al-Hasan. He (al Hasan) heard of the advance of Mu'awiya and the Syrians towards him. So he (al-Hasan) and the army that had pledged allegiance to 'Ali got ready and left Kufa to meet Mu'awiya, who had stopped at Maskan. So al-Hasan arrived in al-Mada'in. There he appointed Qays b. `Abbada al-Ansari over his vanguard with twelve thousand (fighters). It was said that al-Hasan appointed `Abd Allah⁴ b. `Abbas over his (al-Hasan's) vanguard. So he (al-Hasan) appointed `Abd Allah b. `Abbas over his vanguard in the advance guards of Qays b. Sa'd b. `Abbada."

I (the author) say: Ibn Kathir followed such a tradition. Apparently he has taken it letter by letter from the book `al-Kamil.'

6. Al-Mada'ini⁵ has reported the words of al-Hasan, peace be on him, in response to the man who said to him: "Were you right in what you have done?" So al-Hasan said: "Yes, but I am afraid that seventy thousand or eight thousand (fighters) will come on the Day of Resurrection. Their jugular veins will bleed. So they will ask Allah why their blood had been shed."

7. In his book (al-Imama wa al-Siyasa, p. 151), b. Qutayba al-Dinawari has reported: "They mentioned that the people pledged allegiance to Mu'awiya. Then he (Mu'awiya) came back to Sham (Syria). Afterwards Sulayman b. Sirt al-Khazai, who was absent from Kufa and was the master and chief of the Iraqis, came to al Hasan and said to him: `You who have humiliated the believers, al salamu `alayka' !

Al-Hasan said: `wa `alayka al-salam, sit down, may Allah have mercy on your father.' He (b. Qutayba) said: Sulayman sat down and said: `Now then, our astonishment at you does not end because of your pledge of allegiance to Mu'awiya. You have one hundred Iraqi fighters who receive salaries. You have a similar number to them from their sons and friends. Moreover, you have followers (Shi'a) in Basrah and Hijaz."

I (the author) say: In his book (Tanzih al-Anbiya') al-Murtada, in his book (al-Manaqib) Ibn Shahrashub, and in his book (al-Bihar) al Majlisi have reported the complete text of what happened between Sulayman b. Sirt and his companions and al-Hasan, peace be on him. No one of them (the authors) have narrated on the authority of Sulayman and his companions that the number of the army was more than forty thousand (fighters).

So only b. Qutayba has reported on the authority of Sulayman that the number of the army was one hundred (fighters). Also only he used the word 'pledge of allegiance' (al-bay'a) instead of the word 'Peace' (Sulh).

8. Ziyad b. Abih, who was the governor of al-Hasan over Persia, said the following in response to Mu'awiya's threat: "Indeed, the son of she who ate the livers (i.e., Hind), of the shelter of hypocrisy, and of the rest of the allies (ahzab) has written to me to threaten me. Between me and him are the two grandsons of the Apostle of Allah. They have ninety thousand (fighters) {according to a report seventy thousand (fighters)}, who have put the hilts of their swords under their chins. No one of them turns till he dies. Indeed, by Allah, if he (i.e., Mu'awiya) came to me, he would find me stronger (than him) in hitting with the sword."[6](#)

Discussion

In this manner, these texts with various forms have suggested different figures about the number of the army. The large figures in these texts are forty thousand, eighty thousand, and one hundred thousand (fighters).

Indeed, all these three figures are liable to doubt and check, even the smallest of them. Now, you read the following explanations:

1. The largest figure is one hundred thousand or ninety thousand (fighters). Ziyad b. Abih referred to this figure. Only al-Dinawari has attributed it to Sulayman b. Sirt al-Khaza'i. This figure is unacceptable for several reasons:

The most important ones of these reasons are:

A. Both leaders (i.e., Sulayman and Ziyad) did not attend the pledge of allegiance to al-Hasan. They did not take part in the jihad of al-Hasan. They were not present during the succession of al-Hasan in Kufa. Generally speaking, they left their homeland in Iraq for two years.[7](#)

Thus they did not attend the situation that prevailed Kufa at that time. Namely, they did not witness the strong formation of the parties and the ignoble tardiness that spread all over Kufa, and with which the Kufans faced their Imam to whom they pledged allegiance. Therefore the figures they have mentioned are worthless.

When Sulayman and Ziyad mentioned these figures of the fighters, they compared the present period of Kufa with its past.. They thought that the Kufans mobilized fighters during the time of al-Hasan as they did during the time of his father, the Commander of the faithful, in the years 37 and 38 A.H.

B. The attitude of both men (i.e., Sulayman and Ziyad) at the emotional moment when they mentioned these figures indicate that they inclined to exaggeration. This exaggeration about the number of the army

resulted from Sulayman's strong anger. Thus he censured Imam al-Hasan, peace be on him, for making peace with Mu'awiya. Also it resulted from the threat Ziyad made in response to Mu'awiya's threat.

Therefore there is nothing correct in these two figures. Thus we must not rely on them to determine the number of the army.

Besides we have known that Sulayman was the friend of al-Musayyab b. Nujayya. In other words Sulayman had ties with al-Musayyab other than the personal friendship. In text no. 4, you have read that al-Musayyab admonished al-Hasan for making peace with Mu'awiya: "You have forty thousand (fighters)." It is undeniable that these two friends did not differ over the affairs of the members of the House (Ahl al-Bayt) peace be on them, as they differed over these figures.

Accordingly, the reason for these unusual figures of Sulayman b. Sirt is that al-Dinawari, only, who reported such reports about the matter of al-Hasan, did not check them out.

Fate had decided to punish these two leaders (Sulayman and Ziyad) before they left the life in this world. For they recklessly blamed Imam Abu Muhammad (i.e., al-Hasan), peace be on him, for making peace with Mu'awiya.

So in the year 65 A.H., eighteen thousand people pledged allegiance to Sulayman and Ziyad to avenge the blood of al-Husayn, peace be on him. When the Battle of `Ayn al-Warda took place, most people deserted them. Thus suffered from the desertion of the people.

Such kind of desertion reminded them of the attitude of the people towards the matters of the members of the House (Ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them.

Then Sulayman and al-Musayyab, who were the leaders of the Movement of the Repentant, were killed at the Battle of `Ayn al-Warda. Also most of their followers were killed on that day.

2. As for the number eighty thousand or seventy thousand fighters, it was mentioned by al-Hasan when he answered the man who asked him: "Were you right in what you have done."

The words of al-Hasan, in fact, indicate that he had not more than twenty thousand fighters according to the greatest assessment. That is because when al-Hasan mentioned those "whose jugular veins will bleed on the Day of Judgment," he ranged their number from seventy thousand to eighty thousand persons. By this number, he did not mean his soldiers in particular. Rather he meant the total number of the two fighting armies. Moreover, we have known that the number of the Syrians during their advance against al-Hasan was sixty thousand fighters. So the rest was the number of al-Hasan's private army.

Al-Hasan's hesitation in determining the number is clear in what we have mentioned. That is because if he had meant his army with the exception of the army of the others, he would have mentioned its number without hesitation. For he was the most knowledgeable of the people in the number of his army.

3. As for the number forty thousand fighters, it has been mentioned more than one historian. Also al-Musayyab b. Nujayya has mentioned it. We have nothing concerning this number but two ideas:

A. This number disagrees with al-Hasan's words with which he referred to the number of the army. You have known that his words do not mean more than twenty thousand fighters according to the greatest estimation. Also this number disagrees with his other words with which he described the attitude of the people towards him. Namely, he described their attitude as: "Sluggishness in fighting."⁸ Thus if al-Hasan had forty thousand fighters, the people would not have been sluggish in fighting alongside him. So the number is still liable to doubt.

B. The doubt imposed the number on those who believed in it. So they thought that the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, prepared forty thousand fighters for his final campaign against Sham (Syria). Then his holy life had ended before he advanced against Sham with this army. So they thought that the soldiers of the father (i.e., Imam 'Ali) were added to the soldiers of the son (i.e., al-Hasan). However, they forgot to mention the number of the people who deserted the new Successor in Kufa.

Therefore, the figure based on these errors is worthless.

Al-Zuhri's report is very unusual. For it denotes that there were forty thousand fighters with Qays b. Sa'd b. 'Abbada al-Ansari. They belonged to the army of al-Hasan. Namely, they were with Qays who became the commander of the vanguard in Maskan when 'Ubayd Allah and his followers had escaped. This means that only the vanguard of al-Hasan had forty- eight thousand fighters before the events of escaping.

Thus this idea is incorrect in history.

The reports of al-Zuhri concerning the matters of the members of the house (Ahl al-Bayt) are the weakest of all reports, and the most confused of them all in subjects. The author of the book (Dirasat fi al-Islam) regarded al-Zuhri as a mercenary for the Umayyads. This is enough evidence for the weakness of his reports.

Al-Zuhri said: "Mu'awiya, 'Amru, and the Syrians stopped at them." Now, we want to act freely with this narration of his. We want to correct this intentional confusion as follows: the above-mentioned words contain a pronoun that is 'them.' If we attribute the pronoun to Mu'awiya's army and exclude Qays' army, then the number will concern Mu'awiya's soldiers with whom he met Qays. The concerned ones of them were those who received salaries. The concerned ones of the Syrians were the volunteers other than those who received salaries. In this way there will be coherence between this narration of his and the other narration that has added the soldiers of Mu'awiya to the vanguard of al-Hasan.

4. Ibn Abu al-Hadid has used the phrase 'the great army' to describe the movement of al-Hasan from al-Nukhayla to Dir 'Abd al-Rahman on his way to his camps. These words, as you see, are brief. They agree with the number that we have already mentioned. Indeed, sixteen thousand fighters were a great

army. If you refuse that; then they were twenty thousand fighters.

5. The narration in the book 'Bihar al-Anwar' is the best of all reports which we have mentioned to understand what has been reported about this matter. There is an order in the frequent events of this narration so that such an order imposes doubt on it.

When this narration shows the same events, it ignores the names of the two leaders (i.e., al-Kindi and al-Muradi). For this narration indicates that they met Mu'awiya before 'Ubayd Allah. Also they deserted al-Hasan before him. In the history of such an event, the people do not know that ignoring the names of two leaders during two events is among the ugliest events of man in history.

Apart from ignoring the names of the two leaders, this narration which is in Bihar al-Anwar underlines that the Imam (al-Hasan) insisted on accusing the two leaders (of desertion) before he dispatched them. Moreover, this narration underlines that the Imam sent them to meet Mu'awiya though he was aware of their desertion.

Some of this (explanation) is enough so that we will not go on discussing this narration, for it is very easy to understand.

I (the author) say In spite of this discussion, we have not gotten any result about the matter which we have mentioned under the topic: The Number of the Army. These texts, though many, are some examples about the fabrications from which the matter of al-Hasan suffered. No wonder when we mention this fact (matter), repeat it, regard its danger as great, condemn it, and draw the attention of people to its results. These are eight texts. Not one of them is able to resist the discussion, so we cannot use them as historical proofs.

Then we have nothing except the number of the army of the vanguard, that was twelve thousand fighters, and the number of the volunteers in Kufa that was four thousand fighters. Then we have to mention the groups of the people who came to al-Hasan at Dir 'Abd al-Rahman when he stayed there for three days. They were about twenty thousand fighters. All these groups of people were the army of al-Hasan when he headed for his two camps at Maskan and al-Mada'in.

As for the fighters from al-Mada'in itself, they did not tarry from the battlefields headed by 'Ali, peace be on him. We have already mentioned that, so it was impossible for them to desert his son (al-Hasan) when he camped among them.

This is what makes us believe that the number of the army at both camps was twenty thousand fighters or little over.

This number was 'the great army' which b. Abu al-Hadid meant. Also it is the number that agrees with the foregoing words of al Hasan, peace be on him. There is no proof better than al-Hasan's words concerning his matters.

Then we do not know whether al-Hasan, peace be on him, received any help from any party when he was in al-Mada'in.

- [1.](#) Al-Rawandi, al-Kharaj wa al-Jaraih, p. 228.
- [2.](#) A city was on the bank of the Euphrates (west of Baghdad). Anbar was ten leagues far from Baghdad. It was called so, for the stores ('anabir) of wheat and barley were gathered together in it during the days of the Persians. Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffih al-'Abbasi resided in it till he died. He rebuilt palaces and house in it, but they have become extinct.
- [3.](#) He was Abu al-Hasan b. Muhammad b. Abu Sayf al-Basri. He lived in al-Mada'in, then moved to Baghdad, and died there in the year 215 A.H. Ibn Abu al-Hadid reported many traditions on his authority. He, may Allah have mercy on him, has about two hundred books on various matters.
- [4.](#) He was 'Ubayd Allah, neither 'Abd Allah nor Qays. We have already mentioned the reasons for the error in mentioning each of them.
- [5.](#) Ibn Abu al-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balagha, vol. 4, p. 7. Ibn Kathir, al-Kamil fi al-Ta'rikh vol. 8, p. 42.
- [6.](#) Al-Ya'qubi, Ta'rikh, vol. 2, p. 194. Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi al-Ta'rikh, vol. 3, p. 166. The former has narrated that the number of the army was ninety' thousand fighters, while the latter has mentioned that it was seventy thousand fighters.
- [7.](#) Ibn Qutayba (in al-Imama wa al-Siyasa), and al-Murtada (in Tanzih al-Anbiya') have mentioned that Sulayman was not in Kufa for two years. As for Ziyad, he was the governor of Basrah. Then 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbas dispatched him to Persia, to be a governor over it in the year 39 A.H. In the events of the year 39 A.H, al-Tabari mentioned that Ziyad was in Basrah before the year 39.
- [8.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 10, p. 113.

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