

War Preparations

Many letters had been exchanged between Imam Hasan (as) and Muawiya who thought that through his cunning and threats he would be able to force the grandson of the Holy Prophet (saws) to resign, but he was very surprised when the Imam (as) did not take any notice of his tactics.

Rather, he in turn put political pressure on Muawiya to give up the rebellious approach and pay allegiance to him. After being defeated politically, Muawiya decided to take up arms and planned for a large scale attack on Iraq. He sent the following letter to his agents in Egypt, Jordan and various areas in Syria:

"Almighty God in His grace gave the chance to one of His bondsmen to assassinate 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as). So, he assassinated him. After him, his followers are suffering from disturbed conditions and division. We have received letters from their respectable personalities wherein they have sought protection from us for themselves and their tribes.

As soon as you receive this letter of mine, you should come to me with your total army and armament. For sure, you have taken revenge of your blood, have got your wishes fulfilled and Almighty God has killed the rebellious and our enemies. My compliments and may God's blessings be on you." [1](#)

On Muawiya's orders, the armed forces started gathering from different areas, and when all, said to have numbered sixty thousand, had assembled, he marched towards Iraq. [2](#)

Doctor Husayn Muhammad Jafri writes that he had two main objectives in this attack:

- (1) Through the demonstration of armament and his army's strength, he wanted to force Imam Hasan (as) to abdicate the caliphate.
- (2) On the failure of his above plan, he wanted to attack the Iraqi army before it could get well prepared for war. [3](#)

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) was regularly receiving messages regarding the planned attack and the people of Kufa had realized that Muawiya was coming with a large army to attack them. Though it had been the

family tradition of the Hashmi tribe that they would not be the first to attack, Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) had a different motive for not trying to fight Muawiya, which was due to the attitude of the residents of Kufa itself.

In the circumstances, the Imam (as) did not want to initiate the war, but now the situation was quite different. Muawiya had given him the ultimatum for war and was marching towards his territory. Therefore, he had to save the Islamic government and the caliphate. The leader of the faithful Hazrat 'Ali (as) had advised him to follow this principle i.e. "Do not start a war, but if someone wages war against you, then face the challenge. This is because the initiator of war is a rebel and the punishment for a rebel is death." [4](#)

If his father was 'the lion of God', then he was the lion of the lion of God. That is why he urgently ordered all his governors to prepare for war. He ordered Hujr b. Adi, the Companion of the Holy Prophet (saws) to instruct all the governors to get ready for war and for him to prepare the war plan. The people were asked to assemble in the 'Jame' (main congregation) mosque. After they had gathered and the mosque was full, he gave a very remarkable sermon.

He said: "For sure, the Glorified God has made 'jihad' (holy war) obligatory for His bondsmen and has called it an act not liked by them. Afterwards Almighty God, the Most Sacred, directed the faithful to 'be patient and steadfast as Almighty God is with those who are patient.' So, O men! You cannot achieve your desired aim except by being patient about what you do not like. May God be merciful to you; you all should join the army which is gathering at Nakhaila so that we and you should collectively think and plan what we can do next." [5](#)

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) was well aware that the people of Kufa, as always, would not welcome this decision of his. He was also aware of the intriguers who were constantly spreading false rumors' and were thus fulfilling the aims of the enemy.

So, he further said: "We are that party of Almighty God which is always successful. We represent the most prominent personalities of the household of the Holy Prophet (saws) and are his pure and chaste 'Ahlul Bayt' (pbuth). We are one of the two most valuable things which the Holy Prophet (saws) left after him.

We are the peers of the Holy Book of God which contains the explanation of everything, and in which falsehood cannot enter any way (from the front or back). So, in the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an, reliance has to be on us, as we have not suffered from doubt or conjecture in its exegesis rather we have full faith in its truth."

"Therefore, (O people!) Submit to me, as submission to us is near the submission to God and the Holy Prophet (saws). Almighty God has commanded thus:

"O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those vested with authority (from

among you and then if you quarrel concerning any matter, refer it to Allah and the messenger if you believe in Allah and the last day ... " (4:59)

Almighty God further commands:

"...and if they had referred it (the issue in dispute) to the messenger, and (to) those vested in authority amongst them, then they, who could discover the truth, would have known it ..." (4:83).

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) further said: "I warn you against listening to the Satan as he is your sworn enemy. But if you do so, then you would be considered as his friend to whom he had said: 'today no one can overcome you and I am your shelter.' However, when two groups came face to face, then he ran away, saying that he was disgusted with them and his view was different from theirs.

Thus, you will be the target of the spear and sword of the enemy and would be in the range of their arrows. In such a situation, the faith of one would not help him unless he had entered the fold of religion earlier or had done any virtuous deed according to his faith."

Soon after Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) had finished his speech, awesome stillness prevailed, as if the people had become dumb. Their faces became pale and they were perspiring. The reason for all that was that they had got tired of war and had bitter experience at the hands of the rebellious Syrian group.

Soon after, Adi b. Hatim, a respected Shia leader of the Imam (as) broke the silence. The brave son of Hatim Ta'i, who was the leader of 'Tae' tribe and had a thousand soldiers under his command, shook the conscience of the people. He said: "I am the son of Hatim. God be glorified. How shameful it is, why don't you come forward and put yourself at the service of your Imam, the grandson of the Holy Prophet (saws)?"

Where are those orators of Egypt who talk so fluently, but when the situation of trial comes they run away like a fox? Are you not afraid of the wrath of God, are you not ashamed of this condition and are you not realizing its harmful effects?"

Turning towards the Imam, Adi b. Hatim said: "May Almighty God keep you as the guide for a long time, protect you from mischief and may grant you success in the act which may have a good beginning and a happy ending. For sure, we listened to you; we will whole heartedly carry out your command and will support your directions.

I am immediately going to join the camp as directed by you and anyone who wants to come with me may do so." Saying this, Adi b. Hatim came out of the mosque and riding his horse, moved towards Nakhaila so that he could join the camp of the Imam (as) there. He ordered his servant to take his luggage to the camp.

After Adi b. Hatim, the well known personalities like Qais b. S'ad b. Abadah, Muqil b. Qais Riyahi and Zaid b. S'as'ah Tamimee delivered strong speeches wherein they encouraged them to fight and

admonished them for showing weakness towards war. On this occasion, the grandson of the Holy Prophet (saws) prayed for God's blessings for them in the same manner as sought by the Holy Prophet (saws) for Miqdad and S'ad b. M'az for their speeches on the occasion of the Badr war.

History records the following words of gratitude of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as):

"You have proved to be just; May God's mercy be upon you; I have always observed you acting with obedience, love, advice and sincerity. May the Gracious God grant you the best reward for the same."⁶

With great effort by this sincere and religious group, the residents of Kufa felt ashamed and they became ready for a defensive war against Muawiya. Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) appointed Warqa b. Noful as his representative in Kufa and strongly advised him to keep encouraging the people to get ready for war, to collect them and move them towards his camp in Nakhaila.

The same day, soon after attending to other important matters, he went, along with a small army of men from Kufa, to Nakhaila, located at a short distance from the city towards Syria. We are not sure how many men were with Imam Hasan (as) at the time of his departure from Kufa. The recorded versions present a very disappointing situation.

Anyway, the historians have no doubt that the people of Kufa did not welcome the decision of Imam Hasan (as) for war. After great effort and persuasion, a small army moved with the Imam (as). Although we intend to discuss the number and the condition of the army of the Imam (as) in later chapters, yet it may be mentioned that Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) was facing a shortage of soldiers, though the researchers estimate that at least forty thousand soldiers were present in Kufa at the time.

An Objection and Its Reply

After analysing the above facts, the objection raised by some historians that when the messengers of the esteemed Imam (as) went to Muawiya with his letter and saw the war preparations in Syria, they advised him to attack Muawiya before he could attack the Imam (as) but he did not give much importance to this advice, does not hold good.

When this was the situation about the defensive war, if he had declared on his own to attack, it is quite likely that they might have opened a front against him. There was no shortage of such intriguers and supporters of Muawiya in Kufa. That is why the Imam (as) had warned the people in his sermon to beware of the intriguers and to ignore the rumours which he considered as 'the voice of Satan'.⁷

The Second Objection

In the disturbed conditions of Kufa where the Ummayads and the Khawarij were active and the agents of Muawiya and his spies were also busy, why did Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) observe kindness and a policy of tolerance when a ruler uses full force to suppress his adversaries?⁸

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) was very carefully watching the conditions in Kufa, and like an alert and well informed guide he understood the problems of the people better than them. He was not unaware of the activities of the intriguers, but he also realized that the hearts of the soldiers of his army were for worldly benefit.

He had noticed these tendencies from close quarters since the time of Hazrat 'Ali (as). So, he tried to solve these problems through kindness and love. If we go back to his sermons, we would realize that he tried to revive their conscience and religious sense of honour. He made them realize the adverse consequences if they would not follow the leader completely and would listen to rumours.

On the other hand, if they would remain completely loyal to the grandson of the Holy Prophet (saws) and would not shirk in his obedience, they would get associated with the 'party of God' which is always successful and which could never be defeated.

Moreover, by indicating his very close relationship with the household of the Holy Prophet (saws), he wanted to make it clear to the people that according to the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah it was obligatory on the people to submit to him and not to show the slightest disagreement with his decision either to fight or not to wage a war.

At this critical hour, if the Imam (as) had adopted an aggressive policy, his capital would have become the centre of intrigue and rebellion a front would have opened against him in Kufa itself. The danger of the rebellion and intrigue was not less than that from Muawiya. In fact, Muawiya himself wanted to get him involved in these problems.

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) camped at Nakhaila for ten days. During this period, he waited for more men to join his army. His sincere commanders arrayed his army there for battle. During the allegiance time, there was so much activity and the people were showing so much love, affection and spirit for the Imam (as) as if they would never abandon him. However, when the time of trial came, the situation changed completely.

So much so, that a majority of the soldiers of the brigade which Hazrat 'Ali (as) had prepared before his martyrdom for attack on Muawiya, and which was said to consist of forty thousand soldiers, had also left him. All the remaining ones also did not obey the command of the Imam (as) for war as if they had lost the spirit and enthusiasm for war.

It was not for the first time that their attitude of disobedience and indifference to the Imam (as) had been noticed, as they had adopted the same approach earlier towards Hazrat 'Ali (as) and, as history records, continued the same later. There is an adage: 'the people of Kufa do not honour their word'. Anyway, Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) started the march from Nakhaila with the small army and went up to the area of 'Dair Abdul Rahman'.

There some more soldiers, whose number is not known, joined him. The Imam (as) camped there for

three days. It is certain that he would not have been unaware of the movement of Muawiya's army and he must have been getting the latest information about the same.

So, he decided to send a vanguard unit of twelve thousand soldiers under the command of Ubaidullah b. Abbas towards the northern borders of Iraq so that it may halt the advancement of the army of Muawiya at the Iraqi border. Before their departure, he gave a war command to Ubaidullah, his father's cousin, i.e. his uncle, a part of which has been recorded by the historians.

"O my uncle! I am giving twelve thousand Egyptian reciters of the Holy Qur'an and brave Arab warriors under your command. One soldier among them is equal to a battalion. Along with them, you should keep marching along the Euphrates River till you reach Maskin after crossing over Euphrates. Continue to march further till you come face to face with Muawiya.

You should treat these soldiers with humility, listen to them cheerfully, treat them well and do not allow them under any circumstances to keep away from you as these are the trusted ones of the leader of the faithful, Hazrat 'Ali (as).

If you face Muawiya, hold his advance till I reach you. I am following you soon. You should keep me informed daily. Continue to consult the two i.e. Qais b. S'ad and S'aed b. Qais and do not take any action without their consent. When you face Muawiya, do not be the first to attack, but if he starts the battle then you should also fight. If something happens to you, then Qais b. S'ad will be in command and if he is also disabled in any way, then S'ad b. Qais (will be in command)."[9](#)

With this war command he ordered Ubaidullah b. Abbas to march on. This way, the army of the Imam (as) had become divided into two from 'Dair Abdul Rahman' area. The vanguard unit continued to move under the command of Ubaidullah and reached 'Falooha' and thence to 'Maskin'.

The other unit, under the command of the Imam (as) marched from 'Dair Abdul Rahman' to Madain, which was established as the garrison headquarter. Before writing about the subsequent events, it is advisable that the significance of the military and geographic location of these areas is briefly mentioned for the benefit of the readers.

Maskin: Near Samra, it is the city surrounded by fertile, lush green area. During the caliphate of Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) it was considered as the northern end of the Iraqi border. From an agricultural point of view, it was the most rich, lush green area. The armies of the Imam (as) and those of Muawiya had fought in this very area.

Madain: Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) had decided to make Madain as his garrison headquarter. From a geographic and military point of view, Madain had a very important location. It is located 30 km. from the southern end of Baghdad on the bank of Tigris River. The strategic location of Madain became more important as it was linked with the routes from Persia, Basra and Kufa.[10](#)

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as) was facing two main problems at that moment:

- (1) The advancing army of Muawiya which could enter the Iraqi cities and occupy them, which would further demoralizes the Imam's army, which was already fearful of the Syrian army.
- (2) He was facing a shortage of army personnel to face the fully armed sixty thousand soldiers of the Syrian army. The Imam (as) had stopped the advance of the army of Muawiya by sending the vanguard unit under the command of Ubaidullah b. Abbas, which encamped at the border town 'Maskin'.

Secondly, he made Madain as his garrison headquarter and was awaiting reinforcements from Kufa, Basra and Persia, the three important areas of his government. He directed Hajar b. Adi to contact his governors in various areas to prepare for war. In addition, he instructed Varqa b. Noful, his representative in Kufa, to induce the people and to propagate for war on a massive scale.

In his vast state of Persia, Ziyad b. Ubaid was his governor, who was still loyal to him and the Imam (as) was hopeful of reinforcement from there. Therefore, the Imam (as) decided to stay at Madain personally for some time and intended to join his vanguard unit at Maskin, which was not more than 120 km. away from him, as soon as the army had gained sufficient strength. That is why he had assured Ubaidullah that he would join him very soon with the rest of the army.

Thus, the heir to the leader of the faithful had planned his defensive strategy very intelligently and proved to the world that he was an expert in war tactics, and was in no way less than Muawiya in war planning. However, his was a defensive war strategy. If only the war-command of the Imam (as) is deeply analysed and presented to any successful and capable general, he would have to acknowledge that the Imam (as) was a successful and experienced commander-in-chief.

Imam Al-Mujtaba (as), in his war command to Ubaidullah, had given particular attention towards his companions or Shi'a. He praised them, appreciated their bravery and steadfastness and thus provided moral support to them, encouraged them, enhanced their spirit and zeal for war.

Then, in four sentences which have deep meaning, he instructed their commander that he should treat them with kindness and humility and should not alienate them. Through these guidelines, he wished to maintain trust between the soldiers and their leadership. In those days, when the army personnel were not given today's extensive military discipline and training, this mutual trust was an important aspect of the army's strength. [11](#)

Now, if outwardly he did not succeed in the battle field, it was not his fault but that of the elements which constituted his army. Muslims remember well their defeat in Ohad when they lost the war, which had been won, by disobeying one of the instructions of the Holy Prophet (saws). A similar condition was prevailing here.

A particular group respected the Imam (as) and completely followed him, but they constituted a small

number and could not face the Syrian army alone. This was the group about whom the Imam (as) had informed Ubaidullah that one soldier among them was equal to a battalion, and they were the trusted men of the leader of the faithful, Hazrat ‘Ali (as). Therefore, the commander should treat them with love, affection and should not alienate them.

1. Ibn. Abi al Hadid, ‘Sharh al-Nahjul Balaghah’, Cairo: Dar Ahya al Kutub al Arabia, 1963, vol. 16, p.37; Baladhuri – ‘Ansab al Ashraf’, Beirut, Dar al Ta’aruf, 1977, vol. 3, p.30; Abul Faraj – ‘Maqatil al Talibin’, Najaf, Maktaba al Haidariya, 1965, vol.1, pp.38–39; Husayn Muhammad Jafri – ‘The Origins and Early Development of Shia Islam’, Persian translation, Ayet Ilahi, Tehran, Islamic Culture Centre, 1993, p.162; Hashim Ma’aruf – ‘Sirat al Aimma Ithna Ashar’ Beirut, Darul T’ar uf, 1986, vol. 2, p.511; Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’, Qum, Manshuraat al Sharif Razi, 1993, p.93.
2. Husayn Muhammad Jafri – ‘The Origins and Early Development of Shia Islam’, p. 162; Ibn. Atham – ‘Al Futuh, Hyderabad: Daira al M’arif al Uthmania, 1971, vol. 4, p. 153; Abul Faraj – ‘Maqatil al Talibin’, vol.1, p.39; Ibn. Abi al Hadid, ‘Sharh al-Nahjul Balaghah’, vol. 16, p.26.
3. Dr. Husayn Muhammad Jafri – ‘The Origins and Early Develop ment of Shia Islam’, Tashay'o dar Maiser-e-Tarikh p.162.
4. Sheikh Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’, p.90.
5. Baladhuri – ‘Ansab al Ashraf’, Beirut, Dar al Ta’aruf, vol. 3, p.32; Abul Faraj – ‘Maqatil al Talibin’, vol. 1, p.39; Ibn. Abi al Hadid, ‘Sharh al-Nahjul Balaghah’, vol. 16, p.38; Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’, p. 100; Hashim Ma’aruf – ‘Sirat al Aimma Ithna Ashar’ vol. 2, p.511; Baqar Qarshi – ‘Hayat al Hasan bin ‘Ali’, Najaf, Matba al Ilmiah, 1954, vol.2, p.44
6. . Abul Faraj – ‘Maqatil al Talibin’, vol.1, p.39; Ibn. Abi al Hadid, ‘Sharh al-Nahjul Balaghah’, vol. 16, p.38–39; Baladhuri – ‘Ansab al Ashraf’, vol. 3, p.32; Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’, p.100–101; Hashim Ma’aruf – ‘Sirat al Aimma Ithna Ashar’ vol. 2, p.512; Baqar Qarshi – ‘Hayat al Hasan bin ‘Ali’, vol.2, p.45; Jawwad Fadhlullah – ‘Sulh al Imam al Hasan (as)’, Qum, Darul Musaqqaf al Muslim, p.82; ‘Adil al Adib – ‘Daur-e-Aimma Ahlul Bayt’, Mashhad, Majma al Buhoos al Islamia, 1408 A.H., p.177.
7. . Baladhuri – ‘Ansab al Ashraf’, vol. 3, p.32; Abul Faraj – ‘Maqatil al Talibin’, vol.1, p.37; Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’, p.90–94.
8. Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’, pp.90–94.
9. Abul Faraj – ‘Maqatil al Talibin’, vol.1, p.40; Baladhuri – ‘Ansab al Ashraf’, vol. 3, p.33; Ibn. Abi al Hadid, ‘Sharh al-Nahjul Balaghah’, vol. 16, p.40; Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’, p. 107; Yaqubi – ‘Tarikh al-Yaqubi’, Beirut, Dar Sadir, vol.2, p.214; Hashim Ma’aruf – ‘Sirat al Aimma Ithna Ashar’ vol. 2, p.512.
10. . Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’, p.107; Louis M’alof – ‘Al Munjid fi al a'allam, Beirut, Dar ul Mashriq, 1976
11. Razi Ale Yasin – ‘Sulh-ul Hasan’.

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