

WARS DURING THE COMPANIONS' ERA

The political nature of fighting did not change during the era that followed the Prophet's death. The political nature of war became even clearer. During this era, several wars erupted. These wars are usually categorized into the following groups:

1. Battles against the apostate tribes.
2. Battles against the breakaway tribes.
3. Conquests in Persia, the Middle East, and Africa.
4. Battles between Muslim factions.

Let us examine the nature of these wars to try to understand its motivations and objectives. Were these wars politically or religiously motivated? And what objectives did the different warring factions hoped to achieve.

The War against the Apostates during the Prophet's Life

Just before the death of the Prophet (pbuh), several tribal

leaders in the Arabian Peninsula claimed that they were “prophets.” They declared independence and recanted on their allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh) as a leader of the Islamic State. The political nature of the revolt was quite clear. The revolt was against a unified state governed by a “prophet.” These were tribal rebellions which aimed at breaking up the unity of the newly formed Arabic state which chose Islam as a way of life. Since this state was headed by a prophet from the tribe of Quraish, these rebels claimed that they are also prophets. They supported their claim by introducing few changes to the new faith. However, it is difficult to imagine that whatever changes that these self-proclaimed prophets made to Islam or whatever “revelations” they brought could convince the Arabs of the time of the legitimacy of their claims. Why then they were able to garner the approval and support of their tribes to challenge the newly formed Muslim state? The answer lies clearly in the tribal nature of the society in the Arabian Peninsula at the time. The tribal society is a class society based on the superiority of the tribe. Some of these tribes were not able to comprehend and accept the message of equality which Muhammad (pbuh) was calling them to. They always thought of Muhammad (pbuh) as a prophet from the tribe of Quraish who was able to form a new united state. In their mind, this was a move by the tribe of Quraish to gain superiority over the rest of the tribes. To gain equal status with Quraish, each tribe had to have its own prophet. Clearly, these rebellions were politically motivated. Religion was only used as a facade for the political aims.

Some of these self-proclaimed prophets included

- Alasswad Ala'nsi was nick-named the "one with the face cover." He was the first to break away. He arose from a place called "Khaban's Cave" in Yemen and lead his tribe "A'ns" . He was able to conquer and control the area between Sana'a, Oman, and Taieef. His rebellion continued for three months before his followers were defeated and he was killed. His rebellion ended one day before the death of the Prophet (pbuh).
- Tuliaha Bin Khuwailid Alassadi from the tribe of Assad Khuzaima. He too started his rebellion during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and continued after his death. He was able to control the tribes of Assad, Ghatfan, Watei, A'bs, and Zebian. He escaped to Syria after his defeat, but repented later and came back to the fold of Islam.
- Musailimah Bin Habeeb (the liar) was a priest from the large Christian tribe of Bani-Haneefa who lived in a place between Najd and Alahqaf called Alyamameh. Bani-Haneefa had converted earlier to Islam. His rebellion also started during the life of the Prophet (pbuh) but was quashed by Muslims after the death of the Prophet (pbuh).
- Sagah Bint Alhareth Bin Swaid Bin Aaqfan was a woman from the tribe of Bani-Taghleeb. She was a Christian scholar and converted to Islam with her Christian tribe. She was able to control the land of the tribe Bani-Tameem, moved towards Alyamameh and

formed an alliance with Musailimah. Some believe that she married Musailimah. However, she retreated after they were defeated. She reverted back to Islam at the time of Moa'awiyah Bin Abi Sufian.

These were the known self-proclaimed prophets who recanted their allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh) and lead rebellions against the Islamic state. We need to ask the question whether these rebellions were against Islam as a religion or were they against the Islamic state as a political authority. To answer this question, let us consider the following:

- None of these self-proclaimed prophets actually criticized the belief in the oneness of God, which is the hallmark of Islam.
- None of these self-proclaimed prophets actually denied that Muhammad (pbuh) was a messenger of God. They merely considered him a prophet for the tribe of Quraish. They wanted to share the prophet hood with him as prophets to their individual tribes.
- None of these self-proclaimed prophets denied the legitimacy of the divine revelation as a method of communication between God and His messengers. They even tried to concoct pieces of revelation which they claimed were given to them.

Several of the documents written by the self-proclaimed prophets show clearly the political aims of their rebellions.

When Alasswad Ala'nsi proclaimed himself a prophet and a leader in Yemen, he sent a letter to the Muslim governors of the area around Yemen who were appointed by the Prophet (pbuh). In that letter, he did not ask them to forsake their religion and convert to his religion, but he asked them to leave the land and wealth of Yemen to its people. In his letter he said: "O you who came to our land, you can remain on your religion but leave whatever land and wealth you took from us. The land and wealth is ours and you have no right to it." This is a political request that the members of the tribe of Quraish who came to Yemen, and whom he considers as outsiders, should leave and let the people of Yemen enjoy their own land and wealth. He wanted to destroy the political unity of the state. The political unity and the religious unity were simply two sides of the same coin. We can see that his movement was more of a political rebellion than a religious apostasy.

In case of Musialimah, we find that he declared openly that his political ambitions were to divide the state and the control over the land between his tribe, Bani-Haneefa and the tribe of Quraish. He did not want Quraish to have control over the land of the Arabs. When it became obvious to him that this would not happen, he declared his apostasy. An apostasy against the administration and political unity of the state. These ambitions were expressed in a short prose that he wrote, metaphorically addressing a frog: "O frog, make your sound in your pool, you do not prevent people who want to drink, nor you are able to spoil the water. To us belongs half the land and the other half belongs to Quraish,

but Quraish are transgressors." When he signed his alliance with Sagah Bint Alhareth, he offered her control over the land that belongs to Quraish. He said:" To us belong half the land, and had Quraish been fair to us, the other half would have been their fair share. But they refused this fair division. So, we claim their share as ours. It could become rightfully yours, if you accept." When the Muslim leader Khalid bin Alwaleed was negotiating with Bani-Haneefa before he engaged them in battle, he asked them:" can we settle this conflict peacefully?" They suggested that the control of the state be divided between two leaders:" a prophet from you and a prophet from us." This dialogue shows that this was a power struggle along tribal lines. A man by the name of Talha Alnamri went to meet with Musialimah. The following dialogue is reported to have taken place between the two: Talha asked: Are you Musialimah?, Musialimah said:"yes" Talha then asked Musialimah from whom does he get his revelation. Musialimah indicated that he gets his revelation from "the compassionate one." Talha probed further; he wanted to know whether the revelation comes to Musialimah in the darkness of the night or in day light. The answer was that he gets the revelation in the darkness of the night. At which point Talha indicated that he believes that Musialimah is a liar, but that he preferred to follow him than to follow Muhammad. His reason was that although he believes that Musialimah is a liar and Muhammad is telling the truth, but the fact that Musialimah belongs to the tribe of Rabea'h and Muhammad belongs to the tribe of Moddar makes all the difference.

These rebellions were the product of political games and tribal ambitions (Altabari,). Their aim was to garner a share of the power in the newly formed state. Religion was simply a smoke screen to hide the real objective and to manipulate people during this struggle. This argument is supported by historical evidence from documents similar to the one that recorded the dialogue between Talha and Mus'ālimah. This historical evidence became ever so clear in the era after the death of the Prophet (pbuh) and during the battles that ensued between the rebels and the Muslims. In this era, the phenomenon of self-proclaimed prophets died out and the political objectives of the rebels were no longer hidden. This was a logical development. Since there was no prophet at the helm of the Muslim state then, there was no need for other "prophets" to confront the state.

The War against the Apostates after the Prophet's Death

The companions moved quickly after the Prophet (pbuh) was declared dead to choose a successor. They choose Abo Bakr Alssiddique (573-634). This was an excellent move on their behalf because it settled the disagreement between the Ansar⁽¹⁾ (the original inhabitants of Medina) and the Migrants who came from Mecca. They all pledged their allegiance to Abo Bakr before the Prophet (pbuh) was even

(1) The word Ansar in Arabic means the supporters. It was used to describe the inhabitants of Medina who supported the Prophet and invited him to settle in Medina.

buried. This was a critical move taking into account the news of tribes which started to renege on their allegiance to the Muslim state. Representatives of these tribes started arriving at Medina, the capital of the Muslim state, declaring their independence and negotiating new terms for their relationship with the Islamic state of Medina. They indicated that they would continue to believe in Islam and observe all its tenets with the exception of paying the poor dues to the state in Medina. They simply did not accept that the successor of the Prophet should have the same authority that once belonged to the Prophet (pbuh).

Most of the Arabs of the Peninsula, or more accurately, most of the Bedwains (desert dwellers) recanted on their allegiance to the successor of the prophet. Only people living in the cities: Mecca, Medina and Taieef continued to pledge allegiance to the state. This meant that only the tribes of Quraish and Thaqeef stayed within the fold of the new state. In the words of Alnuwairi “when the Prophet (pbuh) died, all Arabs reneged on their allegiance to the state except the tribes of Quraish and Thaqeef. Representatives of the other tribes came to tell Abo Bakr that they would observe prayers but would stop paying the mandatory poor dues to the state. They would collect the money and spend it as they saw fit.”

The new Khaleefa⁽¹⁾ refused to grant the request of these tribes, and insisted that the political integrity of the Muslim

(1) The word Khaleefa means the successor. It is usually translated as Caliph and used to indicate a ruler for all Muslims.

state should be protected, since the political integrity of the state and the belief in the oneness of God are but two sides of the same coin. It may have even occurred to him that the protection of the political integrity of the state is more critical to his duties as a head of state, since he was a normal man and not a prophet. He then decided to fight the rebels in spite of the objections raised by Omar Bin Alkhattab (584-644) when he first heard of Abo Bakr's decision. Omar thought that it is not right to fight the rebels as long as they did not declare that they no longer believe in Islam. The wisdom and foresight of Abo Bakr protected the Muslim state from disintegration. His response to Omar was "By God, I will fight them until they pay all the poor dues that they used to pay the Prophet (pbuh)." This was not a holy war. They were still Muslims, believing in all the articles of faith and performing all the rituals except that they will not deliver the poor dues to the state treasury as they used to do during the time of the Prophet (pbuh). Thus, there is no justification for a religious war. The war is a political one. It aims at protecting the political integrity of the Muslim state. Abo Bakr saw that collecting the poor dues by the state treasury is a symbol for the political integrity of the state. It is a guarantee for the development and progress of the Islamic state.

Abo Bakr took all measures to fortify the Medina so that it would not be vulnerable to the rebels' attacks. He then marched with his soldiers to a place called "Zi Alquissa." There he formed eleven battalions and appointed a leader for each battalion. The leaders and their assignments were as follows:

1. Kahled Bin Alwaleed to fight Tuliha Alassadi and Malek Bin Nuwaira.

2. Eikrema Bin Abijahl to fight Mussialimah, the liar.

3. Almuhajjer Bin Omaiya to fight Alasswad Alansi and the tribe of Kinda, and to assist in the fight of Quaiss Bin Almashkooh.

4. Khalid Bin said Bin Alas to fight the people of Alhamqtain near Alsham.

5. Amr Bin Alas to fight Quodaa, Wadeaa, and Alhareth.

6. Huzaifah Bin Mouhsan Alghalphani to fight the people of Dabba

7. Ibn Herthemah to fight Moohrah

8. Sharhabeel Bin Hassanah to assist Eikrema Bin Abijahl and Amr Bin Alas

9. Moan (Turaifah) Bin Hagez to fight Selim and teir supporters from Hwazen.

10. Suwaid Bin Moquren to fight Touhamah.

11. Alalaa Bin Alhadrami to fight the people of Bahrain.

The fight between Kahlid Bin Alwaleed and Malek Bin Nuwaira is another example of how this war was thought of as a political struggle rather than a religious war. Malek Bin Nuwairah had earlier dissolved his alliance with Sagah

Bint Alhareth. This was a short term political alliance that he used to get retribution from the tribe of Bani Dubbah. Malek kept the poor dues he collected from his tribe and did not send it to the state treasury in Medina. Although, Malek's poetry expressed his feelings as a Muslim and his commitment to Islam Khaled fought and killed Malek against the advice of many of the companions of the Prophet (pbuh), who were under the leadership of Khalid and who heard Malek's poetry.

Alkhateel Bin Awaz wrote poems to emphasize the political nature of this war. The poems indicate that the main reason behind the refusal to send the collected poor dues to the state treasury was that they were not consulted in the choice of the new head of state. The poems indicate clearly that they are committed Muslims but they feel that they have no obligation to follow a leader that they did not chose. The renegade tribes cited verse 103 in Chapter 9: "In order to cleanse and purify them [Prophet], accept a gift out of their property [to make amends] and pray for them- your prayer will be a comfort to them. God is all hearing all knowing," as an excuse for their actions. They argued that the Quran commanded the poor dues to be given to the Prophet (pbuh) and since he is no longer there, they no longer have an obligation to give it to the state treasury.

It is fair to ask why this war was termed the "war of the apostasy" and why the term "apostate" was used to describe the renegade tribes without discrimination between political rebellion and religious apostasy. This question has been raised before and a number of earlier scholars dealt with it

in the literature. Ibn Abi Alhadeed (1190-1257) posed the question and provided a rationale for using these terms: "and why did we say that those whom Abo Bakr fought were apostates? Certainly an apostate is a person who rejects the tenets of Islam after he had accepted it. These tribes did not reject Islam, they simply thought wrongly that the verse : "In order to cleanse and purify them [Prophet], accept a gift out of their property [to make amends] and pray for them- your prayer will be a comfort to them. God is all hearing all knowing," means that once the Prophet (pbuh) has died they are exempt from giving the poor dues to the state treasury. They argued that the verse indicates that the money should be paid to the person whose prayers are a source of security for them, and that person no longer exists. My answer is that they were called metaphorically apostates because the sin they committed was of a magnitude that measures up to apostasy."

Considering these facts, is there any doubt that these wars were political in nature? And that the armed conflict was politically motivated? Is the usage of the term "apostasy" to describe these wars enough to cover up the nature of the armed struggle? We certainly believe the answers to these questions are all negative.

The Conquests:

The political nature of the conquests that the Islamic state undertook especially during the reign of Omar Bin Alkhattab (584-644) is quite obvious. These conquests pushed the

borders of the Islamic state beyond the Arabic Peninsula. However, it did not impact the freedom of religion for the indigenous people. On the contrary, the people living in the conquered land never enjoyed more freedom of religion at any other time. Non-Muslims living in these countries were allowed to practice their religions freely. They were exempted from service in the army in return for paying a tax to the state. Non-Muslims who choose to serve in the army were exempted from this tax (Emarah, 1979a).

A conquest that allows the indigenous people to practice their own religion and a war that does not force the conquered to convert to the religion of the conqueror cannot be considered a religious war. This is certainly an armed struggle to establish political goals. The liberation theme that motivated these wars confirms its political nature.

This period of human history was a period during which the continuous struggle between the east and the west was at its peak. The Byzantine and the Persian empires were two adversaries that were engaged in a series of wars resulting in alternating victories and defeats for each of them. However, since the time of the conquests of Alexander (356-323 B.C.) which gave the Byzantine Empire the edge over its enemy, a leadership vacuum befell the eastern camp. Persia could no longer protect Egypt, Syria and North Africa against the aggression of the Byzantine Empire. The fledgling Muslim state had to fill that vacuum and take up the role of liberating these countries from the Byzantine occupation. This role was readily accepted by the occupied countries who suffered under the Byzantine occupation. They

welcomed the Muslims and even helped them against the Romans. On the eastern flank, the Muslims were able to end the unjust occupation of Iraq by the Persian Empire. This war ended a corrupt social system that prevented the Persian Empire from taking the leadership role that it was qualified to play.

These conquests were brought about by the logical sequence of historical events that took place at that time and the need to protect the fledgling Muslim state against the threats from the east and the west.

War among Muslims

The rebellion that ended the reign of the third Khaleefa, Othman Bin Affan (577-656) was the first time that Muslims resorted to violence and armed struggle in settling their internal disputes. This rebellion ended with the assassination of the Khaleefa. No Muslim scholar declared either of the two parties who were involved in this violent struggle to be non-Muslim. The struggle itself was not classified as a "religious struggle." The consensus was that this was a socio-political struggle that was used to correct perceived injustices. The rebels objectives were to remove a leader they perceived to be powerless and his agents who were unjust.

The first real civil war among Muslims happened during the reign of the fourth Khaleefa, Ali Ibnabitaleb (600-661). The highlight of this war was in the battle of the Camel. In

this battle Ali and his supporters on one side fought against Talha Bin Obaidullah (596-656) and Zubair Bin Alawaam (596-656) and their supporters on the other side. The mother of the believers, Aisha (613-678) was on Talha and Zubair's side. No scholar ever claimed that any of them were a non-Muslim. The consensus, again, was that this was a political struggle that used violent means. The fight was over who should be the Khaleefa and how the problems that surfaced after the death of Othman could be best dealt with. Even the fighting parties themselves treated each other as Muslims. Those who won performed funeral prayers for those who were killed from the other side. Dead soldiers from both sides were buried as Muslims.

In the fight between Ali Ibnabitaleb and Moa'awiyah Bin Abisufian (603-680), a majority of Muslims agreed that Moa'awiyah is the transgressor and that it is the duty of all Muslims to unite under the banner of Ali against him, however nobody accused him of becoming non-Muslim. This was a political strife supported by armed struggle among people that belong to the same faith. Even Ali himself never claimed that Moa'awiyah became a non-Muslim as a result of this war. The following dialogue between Ali and one of his companions: Abo Salama Aldalati, which took place before the battle had erupted, illustrates this point. Abo Salama asked:

"O' Leader of the Believers! If they were seeking justice, do you think that they have the right to ask that Othman's death be avenged?" Ali answered: "Yes." Abo Salama continued: "and do you see that it is right for you to

delay acting on the matter of avenging Othman's death?" Ali answered: "Yes, it is impossible under the present circumstances to get justice done, in such case it is better not to rush." Abo Salama then asked: "what if tomorrow war erupted between us and them?" Ali's answer was: "I hope that God grant paradise to those who would be killed having pure hearts, whether they belong to our group or to their group."

It is a fight between people of the same faith, each defending their viewpoint to the death. Ali never doubted the faith of his opponents. Ali knew that Islam does not allow humans to judge the faith and beliefs of their fellow human beings. He spoke of the battle saying: "We met on the battleground, we both believe in the same God, and we claim the same religion, we did not claim that our faith is stronger than theirs and they did not claim that their faith stronger than ours. The disputed point was avenging Othman's death." The fight was not about the belief in the oneness of God, nor was about the prophet hood of Muhammad. It was about settling a political dispute that they were not able to settle with negotiations and peaceful dialogue.

Ali defended his opponents against the accusation of an extremist group called the "Khawarej⁽¹⁾" who accused Ali's opponents of being apostates and non-believers. Ali said: "We did not fight the people of Alsham⁽²⁾ because we

(1) Khawarej means those who exited. These were rebels who went against mainstream Islam.

(2) Alsham is the land that Syria and Lebanon now occupy.

thought they were non-believers. The fight was over the strategy of government. They are our brothers in Islam, we face towards the same point in our prayers, however we thought that our political view is the correct view.”

Ali stated that this was a fight among brothers having the same religion and it was not a fight about religion or faith, it was a fight about a political stand.