

## Thematic Centrality of the Battle of Badr in the Islamic Concept of War

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### *Abstract*

*This article aims to analyse the concept of war in Islam with special reference to the Battle of al-Badr. What is the nature of Islamic war? Is it defensive or offensive? How should Muslims behave in the war? These kinds of subjects are the current topics for discussion and debate in the media, particularly after the attacks of 9/11. Islamic scholars claim that Islam is a peaceful religion and wants to establish peace, stability and coexistence with all members of other religions and communities. On the other hand, at present, Islam is perceived as an extremist, aggressive, hostile and violent religion by some of the media in western societies. In this perspective, it seems necessary to analyse the war policy of Islam to establish its true nature. The Battle of al-Badr is very significant in this respect because it was the first battle in Islamic history. It provides the foundational rules for Islamic war policy. This article attempts to study the Battle of al-Badr because of its thematic centrality in the formation of Islamic war policy and its application.*

**Keywords:** Islamic Law of war, Islamic History, Terrorism, Battle of Badr.

### I- **Introduction and Historical Perspective:**

Muslims believe that Islam is religion of peace. It has a glorious history and civilization. It denounces terrorism and propagates peace and prosperity among the different factions of mankind. It is also believed that Islam is not a new religion. It is an extension and continuity of the Semitic religions and it unites all the predecessor religions on the basis of their common ground. Its manifestation in practice is not very much different from this. We should examine Muslim traditions and their claims in the perspective of Muslim history. This is because misunderstanding leads to misconception and misconception sometimes produces terrible effects on the lives and relations between people. The battle of al-Bader was the first regular battle between the Muslims and the pagans of Makka.<sup>1</sup> Avoiding the details of this battle, this article aims to analyse the strategies of the war and how the Muslims treated prisoners of war. Through this analysis, an attempt will be made to understand the behaviour of Muslims towards their opponents in the war.

After their migration from Makka, many Muslims settled in Medina where they made various treaties with the different factions in the city. As a result, their power became concentrated in Medina. The polytheists Quraysh of Makka became anxious about the possible threat to their trade route to Syria. In a letter addressed to <AbdAll[h b. Ubayy b. Sa]l], the leader of Jewish community of Medina, the Quraysh threatened to kill all the men and enslave their women unless they expelled Mu+ammad (peace be upon him) and his companion from Medina.

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However, Muhammad (peace be upon him) put a timely end to this, and IbnUbayl did not pursue the matter. Next, when Sa'd Ibn Muadh went to Makka to perform the minor pilgrimage (Umra), he was stopped at the Ka'ba's entrance and prevented from performing the circumambulation. The Makkans also sent quite regular invading parties. In these circumstances, the Muslims had to extend their control over the Syrian trade route to force the Quraysh and other unfriendly tribes to stop their expeditions and hostilities.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of 624 C.E., a large Quraysh caravan route to Makka from Syria, and escorted by no more than forty security guards, arrived at a place within reach of the Muslims. It contained goods that had been purchased with the emigrants' property. Naturally Abu Sufyan, the leader of caravan, feared a Muslim attempt to retrieve their stolen property. Consequently, he sent a messenger to Makka asking for help and reinforcements.<sup>3</sup> The Makkans made plans to take severe measures against the Muslims of Medina. They prepared themselves and all tribes except Banu Adiyah participated in the meeting and sent their men off to battle.<sup>4</sup> They set off from their homes with pride and arrogance. The Qur'an relates that the men went: "Boastfully and to be seen of men, and hinder (men) from the path of Allah".<sup>5</sup> When the prophet learned the news of the preparation and departure from Makka, he called a meeting to consult the opinion of the emigrants and the helper (Ansur). After long discussions, they decided to retaliate against the assault of the Quraysh with full force. The messenger of God and his companion departed for Badr. Meanwhile, Abu Sufyan inclined his caravan towards the sea and sent a message to the Quraysh that the caravan was out of danger and they should turn back. But the leader of the Quraysh Army, Abu al-Akhnas (known as Abu Jahl in the Islamic tradition) refused to turn back and said: "By God, we will not go back until we reach Badr and stay there and feed who come to us and give them wine to drink. The singing girls will make music for us and the Arabs will hear of us and they will continue to dread us and fear us always." At this stage, al-Akhnas b. Shurayq al-Thaqafi who was an ally of the Quraysh, turned back along with his troops of Banu Zuhrah. Banu Hashim wanted to go back, but Abu Jahl said: "This troop will not leave us until we return and so they went on".<sup>6</sup>

Both parties gathered at the Badr, some ninety miles from Madina. The Quraysh army was about one thousand soldiers and well equipped. They were full of pride and superiority.<sup>7</sup> Gulen describes that 'the Makkans consisted of one thousand fighters, including six hundred soldiers in coats of mail and two hundred cavalrymen, and was accompanied by singers and dancers. Dancing and drinking parties were held whenever it halted. The soldiers arrogantly vaunted their military power and numerical strength to the tribes and settlements it passed, and boasted of their invincibility. Even worse, they were fighting for no lofty ideal; rather, they sought to defeat the forces of belief, truth, justice, and good morals. The Muslim army was made up three hundred and thirteen fighters: eighty six emigrants and two hundred and twenty seven Ansur. Only two or three Muslims had horses, for resources were scarce. There were no more than seventy camels, so three or four

persons took turns riding each camel. The Messenger took turns with two others. When they asked him to ride the camel and exclude them from the turns, the Messenger answered: "you are not stronger than me. And as for reward, I need it just much as you do".<sup>8</sup>

The army of the pagan Makkah (in contrast to the Muslim army) was dominant in all respects and when the Prophet saw their army he said: "O Allah! Quraysh have come with their conceit and arrogance rejecting You and belying Your Messenger! O Allah! Give the help which you promised! O Allah! Destroy them this morning! O Allah! Fulfil Your Promise to me! O Allah! I await your fulfilment! O Allah! If this band («of Muslims» is destroyed, You will not be worshipped in the land afterwards."<sup>9</sup> The Muslims fought with full devotion and commitment. The Prophet organised them and the war started. Ibn Is+q notes that the first Muslim that fell was Mihja< b. @li+, a freedman of <Umar, who was shot by an arrow. Then while | ritha b. Sur[qa, of Ban] al-Najj[r, was drinking from the cistern an arrow pierced his throat and killed him. Then apostle went forth to the people and incited them saying, 'By God in whose hand is the soul of Mu+mmad, no man will be slain this day fighting against them with steadfast courage advancing not retreating but God will cause him to enter Paradise'. <Umayr b. al-Hum[n, brother of Ban] Salma was eating some dates which he had in his hand. 'Fine Fine!' said he, 'is there nothing between me and my entering Paradise save to be killed by these men?' He flung the dates from his hand, seized his sword, and fought against them till he was slain.'<sup>10</sup>

With this devotion, Muslims fought and, according to the historians won the battle. Seventeen Muslims were killed in this war. On the other hand, seventy Quraysh\ fighters were killed. Many of them were their leaders and seventy fighters were captured. The details of the martyrs and dead are preserved in the books of Magh[z\ and Sayar.<sup>11</sup>

## **II- The Strategic Lessons of the Battle of Badr:**

The battle of Badr was the first battle in the history of Islam. Many instructions, rules and regulations were commanded by God and the Prophet devised and formulated strategic lessons from this battle. Some rules are related to the situation which should be observed before the battle, some of them are related to observations during the war and some of them are related to observations after the war. Being a Muslim, one should not transgress the limits of God. The believers must observe His rules relating to fighting. These rules are deduced directly from the Qur->[n and Sunnah and are as follows:

- 1- A believer is "one from whom God has bought his or her life and wealth in exchange for paradise."<sup>12</sup> They are dedicated solely to His cause and seek only His good pleasure. Therefore, whoever fights for other causes (e.g. fame, and wealth, racial or ideological consideration) is excluded from God's good pleasure.
- 2- Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. God does not like transgressors.<sup>13</sup> Believers are told

not to fight neutral parties, and to reject unscrupulous methods or indiscriminate killing and pillage, which characterize all wars waged by non-Muslims. The excesses alluded to consist of, but are not limited to, fighting women and children, the old and injured, and other acts of injustice and brutality. Force is to be used only when unavoidable, and only to the extent absolutely necessary.

- 3- When fighting cannot be avoided, the Qur'an tells believers not to avoid it. Rather, they must prepare themselves, both morally and spiritually and take precautions. Muslims should equip themselves with the latest weaponry. Force is vital to obtaining the desirable results, so believers cannot ignore it. Rather they must be further advanced in science and technology than unbelievers so that the latter cannot use their superiority for their own selfish benefit. As Islam states that 'right is might', believers must be able to prevent unbelievers and oppressors from showing that might is right. God says: "Make ready for them all you can of armed force and tethered horses, that thereby you may dismay the enemy of God and your enemy and others beside them whom you do not know; God knows them. Whether you spend in the way of God will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged."<sup>14</sup>

4- During the war it is necessary to observe these conditions: The key rules are as follows:

- i- Fight only those people who are fighting with you.<sup>15</sup>
- ii- Do not kill any child.<sup>16</sup>
- iii- Do not kill any old man, or women or children.<sup>17</sup>
- iv- Do not start a war unless you have called the opponent to the peace<sup>18</sup>
- v- Try to reconcile and accept their offer of peace.<sup>19</sup>
- vi- Anas narrated: when the Prophet reached a destination of battle, he never started the battle until the morning.<sup>20</sup>

### III- The Treatment of Prisoners and their Freedom:

The Muslims won the battle of Badr and they captured many soldiers of the Quraysh of Makka. The treatment of the prisoners before Islam was very severe. The prisoners of war were treated very badly and brutally and there was no respect for them. There was not any concept of the rights of prisoners of war. Thomas A. Walker describes how Persia, which was considered very civilized at that time, treated the captives of war very badly. They had no kindness for them. They cut the hands and legs off the prisoners; sometimes they injured their eyes, teased them in different ways, and killed and hanged them brutally.<sup>21</sup> But Islam claims that it is a religion of peace. It is necessary to evaluate this claim in the light of historical facts. How did Muslims treat the captives of war at the time of the Prophet, and how much compatibility was there between claim and reality?

The Muslims captured seventy fighters of the Quraysh army. The details of these prisoners and their names are preserved in the book of Magh[zi] and Sayar. Ibn

Is+[q, a great historian of Islamic early history, gives details of forty three prisoners. Ibn Hish[m adds some more names to the list of prisoners.<sup>22</sup> Theoretically Muslims were ordered to fight the opposing army with full commitment and they should not aim to take prisoners during the war. As God says: "It is not for a Prophet that he should have prisoners of war (and frees them with ransom) until he had a great slaughter (among his enemies) in the land."<sup>23</sup> And in another place He reveals: "And fight them until there is no more *fitnah* (disbelief and worshipping of others along with Allah)."<sup>24</sup> In another place this is commanded very comprehensively: "When you meet (on the battlefield) those people who did not believe (in God) so you must cut the throats when battle is going on and then you should capture them and then release them either by forgiveness or by taking ransom when the war is over."<sup>25</sup>

These were basic commands regarding captives. The Prophet applied all these instructions to those taken captive on the battlefield. Naturally, there was not any prison or other institution where these prisoners could remain or be kept safely in Madina. Muslims were still in the process of rehabilitation in Madina. The Prophet (peace be upon him) made an innovative plan for the prisoners. He distributed them all to the soldiers and they remained under their custody. Ibn Is+[q narrated from Nubayh b. Wahb that when the prisoners of war were brought to the Prophet, he distributed them among his companions and said: "Treat the prisoners very gently." Ab] Uzyz was one of the prisoners of war and he was the man who held the flag of polytheists in the battle. He revealed:

I was in a tribe of An-[r when they brought me from Badr. When their dinners meal were brought, they persuaded me for eating the bread and they ate dates (they preferred him because bread was in a small quantity), because of the advice of the messenger of God and every man who had even a small piece of bread, offered me.<sup>26</sup>

According to the Arab tradition, opponents gave money to release their prisoners. Although the polytheists of Makka were the grave enemies of the Muslims and their soldiers were in the hands of the Muslim army, they believed firmly that the Muslims would treat them gently, as Ibn Is+[q revealed:

Quraysh wept on their lost soldiers and then they said: "do not weep on the lost soldiers because it will make Muhammad and his companions happy and do not send ransom for your prisoners immediately. Muhammad and his companions do not treat harshly in the matter of ransom."<sup>27</sup>

Al-R[z] revealed the Prophetic tradition which describes the rights of prisoners. He writes: the Prophet sent the prisoners to the companions to look after them and advised them to treat them gently and give them food and shelter as for your dependents. Al-R[z] writes many rules and regulations from this tradition. Among them, the following can be derived:

1- In the early times of Islam, there were not any specific places for prisoners where they could be locked up. Therefore, they were given in the custody of individuals for look after. Sometime the prisoners put in the mosque where they

observe Muslims performing the obligatory prayers and some time they get inspired from them.

2- According to the advice of the Prophet, it is obligatory to treat them in the best manner and the companions cared them in all respect, giving them the best food and accommodation which they had. They tried to give them proper respect and dignity. It is the obligation of Muslims to protect the esteem and dignity of the prisoners and to save them from all kind of disgust and disgrace.

3- The advice of Prophet includes providing them food, drinks, shelters and all means of goodness and easiness.<sup>28</sup>

Muslim scholars deduced many rules from the different events of the battle of Badr. For example, Im[m al-Sh[fi\ writes how Muslims should behave towards prisoners of war in the light of the battle of Badr. He writes:

The people of book (Ahl al-Kit[b) should pay the *jizya* (a kind of tax). And Muslims have a right to forgive them or take from them ransom or exchange the prisoners with the Muslim captives.... The Prophet of God (peace be upon him) caught many prisoners in the battle field of Badr and he killed <Uqba b. Ab\ Mu<% and al-Na#r b. al-| [rith, and he forgave Ab\ <Uzz[ al-Ja< and Tham[ma b. Ath[I al-| anaf\ without taking anything and he exchange a Muslim in place of two pagan men and took ransom from some of them.<sup>29</sup>

#### **IV- Measures for the Freedom of Prisoners:**

The Qur>[n clearly describes the right of ransom and, at the same time, persuades believers to forgive the prisoner without taking anything, as described in the S]r[ al-Anf[I (8: 68). It is moral duty of Muslims to protect and feed the prisoners as Qur>[n reveals: "They (good Muslims) give the food to poor, needy and prisoners".<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the Prophet took different measures to liberate the prisoners of war.

1- *Freedom with ransom:* Ibn Hish[m narrates: "The ransom of the polytheists was, at that time, from four thousand to one thousand *dirham* except those who have nothing and Prophet released them with kindness."<sup>31</sup>

The rate of ransom was very high in the Arab tradition. Ibn Hish[m writes the rate of ransom was four thousand *dirham*. He recorded the names of many people who were released after getting ransom for them. For instance there was Ab] Wad[<a b. \$abayra al-Sahm\ who was a trader and a very rich man. His son al-Mut%alib b. Ab\ al-Wad[<a came to Madina and he gave four thousand *dirham* as a ransom for his father. Ibn Is+[q writes that the Quraysh sent the ransom for the freedom of their captives. Mikraz b. | af# came to pay the ransom of Suhayl b. <Amar. The Prophet took the ransom from his uncle <Abb[s. M]s[ b. <Uqba reveals this event in his S\rah and Ibn Is+[q also narrates this event in his book. He reveals from the following chain: Ibn | am\d from Salama from Ibn Is+[q from Kalb\ from Ab] @[li+ from Ibn<Abb[s who told that the Apostle said to al-<Abb[s when he was brought to Madina, Redeem yourself, O <Abb[s and your two nephews <Aq\l b. Ab] ^[lib and Naufal b. al-H[rith and your ally <Utba b. <Amr b. Ja+m, a brother of the

Ban] | [rith b. Fih, for you are a rich man'. He replied: ' I was a Muslim but the people compelled me (to fight). He answered, 'God knows best about your Islam. If what you say is true God will reward you for it. But to all outward appearance you have been against us, so pay us ransom'. Now the Apostle had taken twenty *oqiya*s of gold from him and he said, O Apostle of God, credit me with them in my ransom'. He said: 'I have no money'. Then where is the money which you left with Umm al Fa#l. al- | [rith when you left Mecca? You two were alone when you said to her, 'If I am killed so much is for al-Fa#l, '<Abd Allah and Qutham and <Ubayd Allah'. By Him who sent you with the truth, he exclaimed, 'none but she and I knew of this and now I know that you are God's apostle'. So he redeemed himself and the three men named above.<sup>32</sup>

2- *Freedom with various methods:* The exact figure is not available for those who got the freedom with paying the ransom. The Prophet persuaded his companions on the freedom of prisoners who had nothing to pay the ransom. Ibn Hish[m revealed many event in this respect. For instance he reveals that Ibn Is+[q said: after the battle of Badr, <Umayr b. Wahb accepted Islam and he was in Madina in the company of the companions of the Prophet and the Prophet said to his companions: "educate the teaching of religion to your brother. And teach him Qur>[n and free his captive for him". Ibn Is+[q says: the companions released him".<sup>33</sup>

The Prophet introduced another entirely different method for the freedom of those prisoners who had no money and their pagan tribes were also not in a position to liberate them from the Muslims. This was the method of teaching. The art of writing was not very common in Arabian society in those days. For those prisoners who had knowledge of writing, their ransom was to teach the art of writing to ten Muslims. Al-H[kim narrated this prophetic tradition that many prisoners of the battle of Badr were discharged on condition that they teach the art of writing to ten Muslim adults.<sup>34</sup> In this way the prophet integrated the two different opponents into a very respectable relationship. This step has great significance for understanding the wisdom of the prophet. He joined two enemies in the relationship of knowledge and affection. On the other hand, each group took maximum advantage of the capabilities and facilities of the other.

## **V- Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Battle of Badr was the first regular war against non-Muslim in the history of Islam. Its impact was very profound on the subsequent Muslim history. Pagan Arab and Jews and other inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula recognised the identity and authority of Muslims in the region. At the same time, the Battle of Badr provides the basic rules for the Islamic war system. S]r[ Anf[I was revealed in this context, which described the leading rules for war. The Prophet described various rules and regulations to be observed during a battle.

The Muslims captured seventy prisoners of war and the Prophet formulated the rules to deal with them as described and analysed above. These rules and regulations have a great importance in formulating the ethics of war. This is the best

example in this respect. The Pagan Arabs killed their prisoners of war and sometimes burned them. The Prophet of Islam restored the dignity of captives and ordered his followers to deal with the prisoners with affection and care. He strictly ordered them not to kill any captives and later he released all the captives respectfully.

These rules and regulations describe the nature and spirit of Islamic teaching. Islam is a religion of peace and reconciliation. Muslim militant groups should understand the nature of Islamic war and they should not attack civilians in the different communities because war is permissible only against the oppressive forces in the battlefield. They should get inspiration from the Battle of Badr and review their policy. Islam strictly denies attacking civilians. Even during the battle, Muslim fighters can fight only against the fighter. All women, children and old people are excluded from attack. The attacks on the world Trade Centre or the attacks of 7/7, for example, are not permitted in the teaching of the Islamic tradition of war. Similarly, the Battle of Badr has great significance not only for Muslims but also for the dominant western powers. What happened in the First and Second World Wars is not permissible in any religion. The modern world can take its guidance from the Battle of Badr and should review its policy. Particularly, the United States of America should revise its policy on *the war on terrorism*. The USA should further reconsider its policy on prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and drone attacks. A moderate policy can save humanity from sufferings and miseries.

#### References:

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<sup>11</sup>(cf. Mu+ammadA+madB[shml, *Gazwa al-Badr*, (Saudi Arabia: Wiz[rat al-Ma<[rif, 1964), pp. 183, 191.

<sup>12</sup>*Al-Qur[n*, al-Tawba, 9: 111.

<sup>13</sup>*Al-Qur[n*, al-Baqara, 2: 190.

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<sup>24</sup>*Al-Qur[n*, al-Baqrah 2: 193.

<sup>25</sup>*Al-Qur[n*, al-Anf[I 8: 68.

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