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Military Policies of Muaviyah in the Battle of Siffin

Dr. Sadeghi Samarjani, Hasan¹; Abbasi Nia, Ahmad²

¹Faculty member of Hakim Sabzevari University ²MA student of Islam History

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ABSTRACT

Despite many available sources investigating Islam history and caliphs' traditions, most of the researchers have studied battle of Siffin, usually by considering it from point of view of Ali's Forces.

In present study, we investigated Muaviyah' policies with a different approach and reviewed his military strategies and political tactics against Imam Ali (pbuh) precisely.

The findings have shown that Muaviyah was attempting to change the battle into a Fitna (insurrection) so he can fight in a field other than the real battle field. He chose the Fitna (insurrection) policy and he won the battle finally, using that.

KEYWORDS: Imam Ali, Muaviyah ibne Sofian, Amr ibn al-As, Siffin, umpirage

INTRODUCTION

Battle of siifin was one of the major civil wars in Islam history happened between Ali (pbuh) ibne Abi Talib and Muaviyah. This lead to significant results for Islam world, affecting politic, economic and military aspects of Muslims' life and dividing the Islamic government into two parts. As a result of that, the caliphate was turned into reign and islam history was deviated from its primary goals. So, based on its importance, we attempted to investigate its beginning' causes and military strategies and policies of Muaviyah during that.

The battle' causes

After the Battle of the Camel, Ali (pbuh) returned to Kufa in Rajab of 36 A.H. (January 657) and moved the capital to Kufa (Yaghubi, Yaghubi History, 2nd Vol, 82). Because, firstly, most of his advocates were Iraqis, secondly, Kufa was the closest military base to Sham and lastly, Iraq's economy was better than any other place for preparation. So, Ali (pbuh) who was going to punish Muaviyah for his disobedience, from the very beginning of his caliphate and wanted to invade Sham even before the Camel battle, once again prepares his forces to fight against Sham forces.

In addition to not pledging loyalty, the revenge of Uthman was another reason for Muaviyah to start the battle. The two forces fought in a land named Siffin. The battle was named after the land.

Although there are plenty of reports about the number of forces and wounded ones, it seems that Mozahem's report would be closer to the reality. He reported Ali's forces about ninety thousands and the Muaviyah' ones about 85 thousands. The casualties of Ali's forces were 25 thousand and Muaviyah ones were 45 thousands (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 773; Naviri, Nahaye al-Rab fi Fonoon al-Adab, 5th vol, 204).

Psychological warfare before the battle

Ali (pbuh) was the bravest man of due time; no one could defeat him. Being aware of that, Mouaviyah was afraid of a direct military battle against him. So, he ran a psychological warfare prior to the battle. We review that in the following:

Presenting the suspicion of Uthman' revenge to mobilize the forces and taking its advantage

Muaviyah took Uthman's death into account as an excuse and gathered forces using that. "Muaviyah gave the people lecture and said: "O people, I am the representative of Omar ibne Khetab and Uthman ibne ofan and I've never forced you to do evil deeds. I am the guardian of Uthman's blood who was killed guiltlessly. "Whoever is killed unjustly - We have given his heir authority" (Al-Isra, 33rd Ayah)". Hence, people agreed on Uthman' vengeance and swore him into allegiance and made him sure that they devote their lives and properties to do so (Nasr ibne Mozahem, 31-32).

Abu moslem Khoolani along with another man came to Muaviyah and asked him "why do you want to fight with Ali? You had no kinship or communication with Prophet Mohammad and of course no background or immigration like him". "I don't fight with Ali (pbuh) cause of having claim of being a companion or having an equal background and immigration. But, tell me was uthman killed unjustly?" said Muaviyah. "Yes" they said. "So, he has to deliver us the murderers in order to retaliate them. Then there'll be no battle between us" said Muaviyah (Nasr ibne Mozahem, 85; Ibne Abi Hadid, Description of Nahj al-balagha, 15th vol, 73). In his letters to Imam Ali, Muaviyah accused Imam Ali (pbuh) of murdering Uthman and sheltering his murderers (Ibne Abi Hadid, 78).

Muaviyah was about to separate people and prevent public inclination to Imam Ali (pbuh) using that suspicion in order to express his intentions.

"Your intentions are not hidden. You are about to disguise people to dominate them. There is no other excuses than Uthman's vengeance for gathering ignorants. By the way, it is clear for us that you prefer him to be dead to have an excuse for a battle" Sheis Ibne Robei told Muaviyah (Nasr Ibne Mozahem, 210; Ibne Abi Hadid, 1st vol, 342; Amini, Alghadir, 9th vol, 179).

Muaviyah was about to take the caliphate after the death of Uthman, so he used it as an excuse to eliminate the rivals (Amini, 9th vol, 179).

"The claim of Uthman' vengeance was a trick of Muaviyah to get to his intentions (taking the caliphate)" (Asgari, Aieshe' role in Islam history, 3rd vol, 124).

Vast Propaganda

Muaviyah has started a vast propaganda war against Imam Ali (pbuh) prior to the exact battle. After Uthman's death and Talhe-Zobair' riot, there was a good opportunity for him to propagandize against Imam Ali.

Muaviyah instigated people of Sham; put the blood-soaked shirt of Uthman and sliced finger (stolen and brought by Na'man ibne bashir) of his wife, Naele, in a mosque and forced many of common people's old men giving lecture around it. This propaganda affected people such that they said loudly "we take revenge of Uthman and swear you into allegiance (Nasr ibne Mozahem, 32; Iben Abi Hadid, 3rd vol, 78).

"I am the guardian of Uthman's blood who was killed guiltlessly. What do you say about his blood?" said Muaviyah after he named Sham "Sacred Land". All people supported him to take Uthman's revenge. Another time, he told "why is Ali (pbuh) would better than I to take the caliphate? If Hijaz swore him into allegiance, Sham swore me into allegiance, too" (Ibne A'tham Kufi, Al-Fotuh, 2nd vol, 380).

Muaviyah could encourage vast number of people to support him by disguising Sharhbil ibne Samt Konda (the ruler of Yemenis of Sham) and accusing Ali (pbuh) of murdering Uthman (Ibne A'tham Kufi, Al-Fotuh, 2nd vol, 406-407-411; Dinouri, Ekhbar al-Taval, 160).

Attempting to attract society's leaders

Muaviyah have used subornation policy to attract elites; he wanted Amr al-As to swear him into allegiance. "No, swear to God! I don't do that unless you give me of your property" said Amr al-As. "What you want?" said Muaviyah. "Egypt' government" said Amr al-As. Muaviyah accepted that and gave him a written document (Masoudi, Moravej al-zahb, 2nd vol, 354; Nasr ibne Mozahem, 38-40).

Furthermore, Muaviyah repeated all those in Medina and Mecca, as well. He wrote to the people of Medina that he was about to take revenge of Uthman. In case of victory, we arrange things as Omar's council did. But, they got angry by seeing him and Amr al-As claiming the caliphate and warned him about the fact that he didn't have the right to think of caliphate (Nasr ibne Mozahem, 63; Ibne A'tham Kufi, Al-Fotuh, 2nd vol, 386). Muaviyah tried to instigate Sa'd ibne Vaghas, Abdollah ibne Omar, Mohammad ibne Mosleme and Osameh ibne Zeid who didn't swear Ali (pbuh) into allegiance or did'nt follow him in Camel battle. But none of them answered him yes (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Yaghubi, Yaghubi History, 2nd Vol, 187).

Intimidation of Iraqis invasion

Muaviyah cleverly made Sharhbil go to Sham and instigate them against Ali.

Sharhbil went all around Sham, town to town and told them "O people, indeed, Ali (pbuh) has killed Uthman and the lords of Camel battle, too. He has conquest all cities but yours. Now, he wants to do that. Ali (pbuh) sharpened his steel, killed almost everyone and came to you. There is no one stronger than Muaviyah to fight with him. Now, it's time to fight for the vengeance of your innocent caliph". All of them accepted his invitation (Dinouri, Ekhbar al-Taval, 166-168).

Increase his forces' morality by pretending them to be more than those of Ali

Muaviyah consulted Amr al-As when Imam Ali (pbuh) has moved toward Siffin. Since Ali (pbuh) himself was attended at the battle, Amr told Muaviyah to attend personally to increase forces' morality. Muaviyah gathered people in mosque and prepared them for the battle. Then, Amr encouraged them by telling them that they were more than Ali's forces. "Iraqis were scattered and got dispersed. Basra (has blood ties with them) was also against Ali (pbuh) cuase he killed some of them. In the battle of camel, their leaders have been killed. Ali (pbuh) has a few groups of them, killed your caliph. For God sake, don't let him infringe your right and your blood" said Amr (Tabari, Tabari history, 6th vol, 2-25).

Forces organization and arrangement

Muaviyah moved toward Siffin after separating infantries and cavalries.

According to Ibne khaldoon, muaviyah's arrangement was the common one of Persia and Byzantine. The forces were divided into groups (who knows each other) and arranged in four direction. The commander in chief was at the heart of the forces (Ibne Khaldoon, Ibne Khaldoon' History, 2nd vol, 336).

In front of the commander in chief, there was an independent arranged force, having its exclusive flag, slogan and commander, which was called forepart. At its left, there was a force named Meysara and at its right, there was a force named Meymana. The fourth force was at the following named Saghe. Commander in chief and his companions was at the center of the latter one named Heart (George Zeidane, civilization history of Islam, 141-149).

Muaviyah arranged his forces in Siffin as follows:

He had Abd allah (Amr al-As' son)' cavalries at his front, Abid allah ibne khitab's at his right and Habib ibne Moslemeh's at his left. The main flag was in hands of Abd al-rahman (Khalid' son). He put Amr al-As as the commander of cavalries and Zahak ibne Gheis as the commander of infantries. He divided forces into seven rows; two in right, two in left and three in the center (Dinouri, Ekhbar al-Taval, 213; Nasr ibne Mozahem, 283).

Amr al-As arranged his forces into five rows; armored ones in front and infantries and unarmored ones following them. He was in front of them all and shouted "the armored ones move in front of the infantries and unarmored ones" (Dinouri, Ekhbar al-Taval, 213).

Choosing strategic spots for forces

One military important tactics to be done in every battle is choosing the right spots for the forces so as to take domination over enemy's forces and watch their moves. Also, the spots should be selected somehow that, in case of necessity, forces can protect it against enemy's progress and push them back.

During Siffin battle, Muaviyah' forces encamped in a village near Forat river. On the shoreside of the Forat, there was just a stone pass. The rest was brushwoods and everglades (Dinouri, Ekhbar al-Taval, 168). Muaviyah ordered Abu A'var Salmi to block the way to Forat with 10 thousands of forces and prevent every Iraqis who wants to take water ((Dinouri, Ekhbar al-Taval, 208-209).

It seemed that he was about to do the following:

- a- Kill Ali's forces by thirst
- b- Force them to change their place as a withdrawal

Psychological warfare and spreading rumors

Imam Ali (pbuh) send Ash'as ibne Gheis and Malik Ashtar to take back the way to Forat. They pushed Sham' forces back and made their way to Forat. Muaviyah has used a stratagem to take back the way; sent few spies amongst the Ali's forces to spread rumors about his new plan. They rumored that Sham forces want to change the direction of river after midnight towards Ali's forces to sink them all. Having heard sounds like digging (the sounds were actually sound of their drums and stomp, many Iraqis believed those lies and fled. Hence, the forces got scattered. Malik's attempts had no effect on them. Although, Sham' forces got to the water using this stratagem, Imam Ali (pbuh) sent some forces again and take back the position (Ibne A'sam Kufi, 528).

Comprehensive Invasion

Since the battle last long, neither having got the better, Imam Ali (pbuh) and Muaviyah, both changed their thoughts and sent all of their forces to the battlefield.

After months of fighting, both armies did their best to bring the war to an end. This time, the fight has begun in Thursday and continued all night. Both sides had many casualties; sound of wounded ones could be heard even the other night. As a result, that night was named Laylat al-harir (the night of clamor) (Masoudi, Moravej al-zahb, 2nd vol, 386; Tabari, Tabari History, 6th vol, 256).

The next day, Muaviyah forces swore that they will win or all be dead. Then, the fight began once again; first by archers (till the last array), then by spearmen (till all spears were broken). After that, some the cavalries came down to the ground and attacked with their swords till their scabbard were crumbled. Cavalries have fought with their pikes and blades. Nothing could have been heard but death screams, swords crushing heads and shattering teeth. Dusts have been risen to the air so that the flags couldn't be seen. Four Salat times had passed but no one could performed prayer without Takbir.

After all that, facing the defeat, Muaviyah has to think for a solution in order to survive (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 658-659).

Muaviyah' attempts to get away of the defeat

A- Presenting a seductive compromise to handle the defeat

After having defeated many times, Muaviyah and Amr al-As did their best to escape from the war. First, they sent some messages to Iraq' leadres to stop the battle. Muaviyah ordered his brother, Otbeh to meet Ash'as and convince him to bring the battle to an end. However, his spies have met him several times.

Otbeh met Ash'as. "You are the ruler of Iraq and Yemen. Also, you have kinship with Uthman and be his commander, too. You, unlike the other forces of Ali, merely fight for tribal zeal and honor" said Otbeh to him as an appreciation (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 408-409).

At last he presented his offer. "The battle is getting so risky; we don't want you to leave Ali. We just want to bring the battle to an end and prevent more casualties" said Otbeh.

Thanking Otbeh's kind words, Ash'as emphasized on that he fights for the sake of his land and told him that he will aware him of his opinion about the war (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 408-409).

Otbeh as a highly influential envoy has succeeded to set up the ground floor for the peace and make him ready to accept the next offers and encourage the Iraqis.

In addition to that, Muaviyah asked Amr al-As to write a letter to Ibne Abbas. "The situation that you and I are at, is not the only risky one. You are the second leader of Iraqis after Ali. So, be careful of what has been to come to be better than what went on before. Swear to God, this battle challenged our lives as well as yours. If Sham has been destroyed, the whole Iraq will be destroyed. The same will happen vice versa. We are mutually good for each other. We don't wish the war to come back. We wish it would have never happened (Ibne Ghatibeh Dinouri, Imamat and Politic, 142).

Ibne Abbas gave the letter to Imam Ali. Ali (pbuh) has laugh at it and said "God kill Amr al-As, what has forced him to dare you? Answer him". "You exchange your faith for nothing. You put people in a hard situation without any evaluation in order to take the caliphate. You bring the trouble and pretend yourself to be a good man. Muaviyah is no way equal to Ali. Ali (pbuh) began the battle in jjustice. But he began as disobedience. Iraqis swore him into allegiance (knowing that he is better than them) and Sham swore Muaviyah into allegiance (knowing that they are better than him). You and I, either are not equal. I want God. You want the caliphate of Egypt. You know what keeps you away from me, but I don't know what keeps you close to Muaviyah. If you are in danger, you can't seduce us and if your intention is not bad, you can't go far from us" Ibne Abbas Answered Amr al-As (Ibne Ghatibeh Dinouri, Imamat and Politic, 143).

After that, Muaviyah sent Imam Ali (pbuh) a letter. "The battle has long been last, many have been killed. I have begged you one time, just wanting to have the caliphate of Sham provided that you don't make me swear you into allegiance and obey you. I emphasize on those yet. If you leave the caliphate of Sham to me in order to bring the battle to an end and let the forces not to be killed anymore, that'll be kind of you and this hardship will go away. The goods have been killed and the evils are still out there. If this situation will last for just two more days, there will be no one alive. There should not be any conflicts between us. So, do us a favor; all of us are of one antecedents (sons of Abd E Manaf). None of us is preferable than the other" (Ibne Ghatibeh Dinouri, Imamat and Politic, 148; Ibne Abi Hadid, Nahj al-balagha Sharh, 1st vol, 340).

Imam Ali (pbuh) answered him as follows:

"I haave received your letter. You wrote that the battle lasts long and many have been killed. In this case you see, the battle is going to last even longer and lead to event, making you forget what happened already. It was just a drop of a sea and a flame of hell. You requested Sham without swearing me into allegiance. That's impossible. You have begged it already and heard the "no"; now, what brings you to beg once more? We, both are the sons of Abd E Manaf. Yes it is true. But, Ummaya never be the same as Hashim. Harab was never be equal to Abd al-Motaleb. Neither Abu Sofyan to Abu Talib and Taligh to Mohajer. The invalidated will not be like the rightful. You are the son of Abd E Manaf. But I have the excellence of prophecy (which makes the inferior superior). If I write my other

virtues, it'll be burdensome, so that's be enough" (Ibne Ghatibeh Dinouri, Imamat and Politic, 148; Ibne Abi Hadid, Nahj al-balagha Sharh, 1st vol, 340).

B- Instigating Ali's commanders

Muaviyah tried to disperse Iraq's troops by means other than the battle. He sent letters to Abu Ayoob Ansari, Abd alllah ibne Abbas and many others to brainwash them against Ali, by the excuse of preventing of more casualties and granting them the caliphate (Belazari, Ansab al-Ashraf, 2nd vol, 3-7). In addition, his bribes have instigated many of weak-minded ones so that it suffered Imam Ali (pbuh) ((Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 435; Ibne A'tham Kufi, Al-Fotuh, 3rd vol, 221-222).

Muaviyah told Ziad ibne Hofse "I want you to join us with all your family. In case of victory, I will give you any of the two town." Ziad told him "i=I have a bright evidence of what God gave me. I don't want to support the false (199).

When Rabiah tribe attacked Sham troops harshly so that reach too the Muaviyah' tent. Muaviyah fled and sheltered in one their shelters. Then he sent a message to Khalid ibne Moamar. "Indeed, you beat us today, but if you leave the battle unfinished, I'll give you the caliphate of Khorasan." Muaviyah wrote him. Khalid was instigated and left the battle unfinished. Thereafter, Muaviyah grant him the caliphate of Khorasan, but he died before that (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 417).

C- Frightening of Byzantines and Persians' invasion

On Laylat al-harir, Ash'ath ibne Kondi told his kondi fellows: "O' Muslims, did you see what happened yesterday? And how many Arabs were killed? Swear to God, I've never seen such a bad day in my life. Behold, tell to those who absent right now; indeed, if we don't stop the battle, the Arab generation will be lost tomorrow and the reverences to be hold, as well. Swear to God, I don't say these cause of fear. I concern women and children' future. If we are going to be dead tomorrow, then what will happened to them" (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 661).

Muaviyah' spies told him what ash'ath has said. He told: "Swear to God, He was right. If tomorrow would be the same as today. Then what if Byzantines and Persians' attack our women and children (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 662).

Psychological warfare in case of danger

At the peak of the battle, Ali's troops rushed towards Muaviyah tent and Muawiyah's army were on the point of being routed. Imam Ali (pbuh) lectured his troops on Laylat al-harir as follows:

"O' people, did you see the situation? Nothing remained for them. They fight against you without any religious aim till now. If God willing, we will attack them tomorrow morning and set their trial on God presence."

As Muaviyah heard that, asked Amr al-As to think about a solution as they had only the night to do something. As told him: "your army can't cope with his, nor you are him. He fight for martyrdom and you fight for survival. On the other hand, if you beat them, Iraqis will be frightened of you. But, if he wins, they'll not be frightened of him. So, you have to offer them something; they'll have disagreement whether they accept it or not. Make Quran the judge between you and them, then you'll get what you want. I have this trick from the very beginning, but I have hide it from you to use it when there would be no other option". Muaviyah accepted that and ordered troops to do so (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 217).

Early in the morning, his soldiers hoist Qurans (about 500 Qurans (200 ones in Meymana and 200 ones in Meysara and 100 in the center of troops) including the big one of the Congregational mosque of Sham) on their spearheads (three ones tied together, carried out by 10 soldiers) in order to cause disagreement and confusion in Ali's army. Then they shouted loudly: "O' Iraqis, what will happen to our women and children (Byzantines and Persians' attacks) tomorrow, if we kill each other today? Quran be the judge between us.

Imam Ali (pbuh) said: "O' Lord, you know so well their intention is not Quran. You yourself would be the judge between us. You are the clear valid judgment" (Nasr ibne Mozahem, Battle of Siffin, 220-221).

Close to be defeated absolutely, Muaviyah and Amr al-As succeeded to scatter Ali's forces by using that trick. Iraqis forces didn't listen to Imam Ali's orders. Then, they were misled by the trick, even though they had few steps remaining to the final victory (Ibne A'tham Kufi, Al-Fotuh, 3rd vol, 672).

At the end, Iraqis have chosen Abu Musa Ash'ari as the judge. But, Amr al-As deceived him and made Muaviyah the winner ((Ibne A'tham Kufi, Al-Fotuh, 3rd vol, 701).

Conclusion

The battle of Siffin was one of the major ones in Islam history, happened between Imam Ali (pbuh) and Muaviyah. This battle requires special strategies and tactics, because it was different from those battles of Prophet

Mohammad (PBUH) and other caliphates. This was not a battle between Islam and Kofr (Heresy). It was happened between two armies of Muslims.

Muaviyah have used different tactics to win this battle, because he knew that he couldn't cope with Ali (pbuh) (cause of Imam Ali's experiences from battles of Prophet Mohammad and those of other caliphates in which he was the consultant).

He began psychological warfare from very beginning of the battle and tried to show that Ali (pbuh) has killed Uthman. Using that, He present himself as the guardian of Uthman's blood. He also had other tricks such as: frightening of Iraqis invasion, selecting strategic spots for his troops, instigating Iraqis leaders, scattering Ali's forces, frightening of Byzantines and Persians' invasion and the last but not the least, hoisting Qurans on Spearheads and judgment.

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