Military Department of the Muslim State.



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صلى الله (صلى الله) The Battlefields of Prophet Muhammad

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in the Time of the Prophet

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his short study, by a non-professional, may usefully be brought to an end by a brief expose of the military department in the time of the Prophet, how it developed and how it worked?

Muslim State came effectively into existence when the Holy Prophet came to Madinah and settled there. In the beginning there was no organization for military purposes, be that for defence or for offence. It was natural, since there was no State in Madinah before Islam which the Prophet could appropriate along with its organisms; and the Prophet had also not come as a conqueror, to annex Madinah to his State territory and its existing administration. On the contrary he had come to Madinah as a refugee—if one may say so—without any material means. He came there and saw there chaos and anarchy. So he proposed creation of a political organization, a sort of city-State. Local people agreed to it. But everything was to create anew, and to ameliorate with trial and experience.

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What is remarkable is that scarcely six months after his arrival in the chaotic agglomeration of Madinah, he was able to start sending military expeditions against his enemies, enemies of his newly founded State.

Substitute of a Standing Army

There was no standing army, and there were no material means to organize one such: the State was poor and had no regular revenues, yet the Quran solved the problems: military service was declared to be part of the religious duties. God had purchased Muslims' persons and properties in exchange of Paradis; so they should fight in His path, to kill and be killed (Quran- 9/111, among many other verses, earlier and later) The entire Muslim population became the standing army of potential combatants. Everybody was to undergo military training, which in fact they did even before conversion to Islam. The government encouraged to develop it by all possible ways, military and moral. In so far as I could see, the Quran permits only a defensive (including preventive) war:

"And combat in the path of God those who combat you, and do not transgress; verily God does not like the transgressors. And kill them wherever you find them ..." (Quran. II., 190-191 ; *cf.* also XXII. 39-41: "Permission [of combat] is given to those who are combated . . "). The second part of the first quotation viz., II, 191, as also the other Quranic passages which speak of killing the enemy wherever he may be found concern the combatant subjects of a State with whom war is already in existence.

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Recruitment for Expeditions

The method Was as follows: In his cavacity as the head of the State and supreme commander, the Prophet used to decide — may be in consultation with trusted and experienced friends — what number was necessary for a given expedition, and then he announced, apparently in the mosque at the time of the service of prayer that those who were prepared to volunteer should inscribe their name in a special register that was opened for the purpose, apparently in the mosque itself. Nobody knew beforehand the destination. When the required number was reached the Prophet nominated a commander, and it was to him that he gave confidentially all instructions, including the rules of military conduct. There are cases when for further security and secrecy, the Prophtrt handed over a sealed letter to the commander and added:

"Go in the direction of highlands (apparently meaning: not towaards the sea shore but in the opposite direction) and after three days of march open the letter and comply with the instructions."

Each volunteer had his private arms, the government also aided when necessary.

As we have seen above, the first military actions were intended for barrirg caravan route to the pagan Meccans. Once the interference began, action and reaction and counter-reaction had to succeed in chain. And sometimes it was necessary to despatch at a minute's notice, naturally for minor actions. For this purpose the residential university of the Suffah, housed in the very Mosque of the Prophet, and next door to the living quarters of the head of the State, constituted a sufficient source. The inmates of the Suffah were the most pious and enthusiastic young men, generally very poor and with no attachment to the soil for

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agriculture, commerce or industry. They did do some job work just to earn the minimum necessary for subsistence, and spent their time in learning, praying and leading a life of spiritual avocation. At any time during day or night, the Prophet could count on them, and they at once sat out as the Prophet would direct them.

Our sources (Bukhari, *jihad* 140, Muslim, *hajj* 424, etc.) speak on the one hand of volunteers inscribing (*iklitab*) their names in special registers, and they also mention sometimes (Bukhari, *Maghazi*, 79; Muslim, *Taubah* 53, 55) that at occasions the volunteers surpassed all registation. This happened not only during the expedition of Tabuk, to which these sources refer, but presumably also in expeditions like that of the conquest of Mecca: the Prophet wanted to surprise the enemy, and had sent word to various townships and tribal settlements of the Muslim territory: "Be ready to join the army at a minute's notice", and he himself followed a zig-zag path from Madinah to Mecca, and en route the said tribal contingents one after the other swelled the forces the Prophet was leading. Naturally a central register of all the volunteers was unthinkable.

Distribution of Booty

In pre-Islamic Arabia there was a customary rule that the chief commander of an expedition had the right to the fourth of the entire booty caotured by his men; the capture before the general plunder and also the indivisible fractions also went to the same personality. Soon after his arrival in Medinah, ths Prophet had to promulgate rules in this connection, and here is what he did:

He abolished the Biblical law *(deuteronomy* XIII, 16 etc.) to put to fire all booty captured from an enemy, as he suppressed the pre-Islamic

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Arabian custom concerning the part of the commander, who received thenceforward in the same proportion as an ordinary soldier, and substituted the central government for the ancient commander. Further he reduced the share of the central government, and from the ancient fourth, he brought it down to fifth only, the rest (the four-fifths) going to the members of the expedition. This increase in the share of the volunteers, at the expense of the government, could become a source of attraction to neutral mercenaries, who instead of siding with the enemies of Islam would prefer offering their services to the Prophet. And we know that there have been non-Muslim participants in the Muslim expeditions. Another important reformed military law was that, unlike pre-Islamic days, when booties captured in Arabia were individual, ancf other comrades did not share tone's booty,—with the result that combatants thought more of captures than of discipline, more o? personal gain than of the general interest of the army, of the tribe or the community, Muslim law provided that all the captures would be centralized and would be distributed equally among the members of the army irrespective of the quantity of each person s capture, 'Respective also of the fact whether a soldier did actually fight remain in reserve or did some other duty by order of the commander.

The fifth of the booty of each expedition went, as said to the coffers of the central government, if there was fighting. There were other rules in cases of movable property coming from the enemy without fighting. An unwritton law said that of every booty a choice gift was to be presented to the commander. This pre-Islamic practice was retained in Islam momentarily, and went to the Prophet. We need not enter into these details here (for which see my *Muslim Conduct of State*).

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What is important to note is that the Quran also laid down rules as to beneficiaries of the government share of the booties. The poor, the needy, the families of the Muslim soldiers killed in the battle had naturally the prior rights (*cf.* Quran VIII, 41) to this income. But the Security of the State territory could on no account be neglected. And of both the civil revenues of the State as well as the irregular and non-recurrent income from booty, the Prophet attributed a considerable part to defensive measures. The Quran (IX, 60) laid down in clear terms the principles of the budget, and included the military preparations among the beneficiaries of the State income. A very interesting passage of the *Imam Muhammad ash-Shaibaniy* (Sharh as-Siyar al Kabir. II, 255-6, or new edition § 1978) gives details of the organization of a sort of semi-permanent army corps, a system which the Caliph 'Umar would later develop, under the famous name of diwan, with increased income and increased needs of the Muslim State. Here is what Shaibaniy reports:

"The basis of this rule is that the Prophet had nominated *Mahmiyah ibn Jaz' az-Zubaidy* to be in charge of the booties of the expedition of the *Banu 'l-Mustaliq*, as it was this same officer who had to take care of all the governmental fifths of booties. The civil revenues of the State were separated and had their men (ahl, officials? beneficiaries?) and for income from enemies were also men (officials? beneficiaries?) From the civil revenues the Prophet accorded aid to orphans, old-weaklings, and poors. However when an orphan reached the age of puberty and military service became his duty, he was transferred (from the beneficiaries of civil revenues) to those of the military income. Yet if this (orphan) disliked military service, he no more received anything even from civil revenues of the State, and he was ordered to earn his livelihood himself. The Prophet never refused demands. Once two persons came to him demanding aid "from the governmental fifth received from the booty of

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the Banu 'l-Mustaliq, and he replied, if you like. I shall give you something from it, but (you should know that) any rich and able-bodied person capable of earning has no right to benefit from this income."

Means of combat

In the armies of the time of the Prophet, we come across names of following arms, but the list cannot be considered exhausted; bow and arrow, lance and spear, sword, catapults (*manjaniq*), covered movable cars of different kinds (*dabbabah*, *dabur*, *arradah*), shield, coats of mails. The Negroes sometimes seem to dispose of their particular weapons, for instance, Wahshiy had killed Hamzah, uncle of the Prophet, during the battle of Uhud, by throwing on him from away a certain whirling weapon. The covered cars, just referred to, were used to demolish walls: people inside these cars did the digging work and were protected by these covered cars from stones, arrows or lances thrown by the enemy. We have seen above that not only the Prophet had resorted to digging a ditch around his camp, but also to throwing artificial thorned balls and even branches of thorn-trees to cause difficulty of movement to the enemy coming out to attack Muslims. Night attacks are also known in those times.

There was a local industry to provide these needed things. Of course the material was also imported if possible, in spite of the embargo on such exports for instance from Byzantine territory. The tribe *Banu 'l-Qain* is proverbial as ironsmiths. The arrows of Yathrib (Madinah) are also of some rePute. Swords have two preferable names, Mashrafiy (from Syria) and Muhannad (from India).

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Horse was the animal of combat par excellence and was used attack and for flight. Camel was used for transport both of men and material, and was abundant. Its force and extraordinary qualities or endurance gave Arab armies a mobility which was unsurpassed by the neighbouring empires of Persia and Byzantium.

It goes without saying that gradually the stocks of arms and horses were accumulated, both by booty and purchase.

Training

To encourage military training, there are numerous exhortations of the Prophet. But he took also practical measures. Races were frequently organized both for men and beasts, and the Prophet attended in person these occasions and distributed prizes. The Mosque of the Races (*Masjid as-Sabaq*) commemorates his seat to this day in Madinah wherefrom he observed which horses won the race. He attached great importance to shooting practice and reaching the target. Other exercises are also mentioned by his biographers, such as pelting stones, wrestling and the like. Swimming too is also very much recommended, and the Prophet had himself learned swimming when young.

Administration

An information system was developed to procure useful data on actual or prospective enemies. Correspondents in different enemy centres; occasional eye-spy also came across in the life of the Prophet of Islam.

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Commanders were selected for their experience and sagacity. Military capacities, and not ascelism were taken into consrderation. The commanders changed from expedition to expedition, and thus the number of experienced and seasoned officers increased. When the Prophet himself led an army, he had a military council to consult on measures to be taken. His instructions to commanders—several of which are recorded by historians—are full of Islamic sagacity, blending spiritual and temporal aims of the religion he was teaching. For instance unnecessary bloodshed was forbidden.

Propaganda was also much resorted to. Arabs loved poetry, and satires spread like wild fire. Knowing its importance in the country, the Prophet employed talented official poets against the enemies of Islam, and his saying is well-known: When Hassan ibn Thabit employs his gift to defend Islam and the Prophet, the Holy Spirit animates him, and his verses are more piercing in the enemy than the arrows.

Human element seems to have played a major role in the military life of the Holy Prophet. For he wanted to set an example which any other human being could also imitate. One such point to note is that he pardoned at times, and punished at others. Of the numerous instances of pardon, with good result, we have already mentioned his behaviour at the conquest of Mecca. One more example may be cited here: It was a certain *Ghaurath ibn al-Haritn al- Muharibiy* in the expedition of ar-Raji' (according to Bukhariy, Ibn Hisham, Tabariy and Ibn Hazm), or *Du'thur Ibn al-Harith al-Muharibiy* in the expedition of *Dhu-Amr* according to *Ibn Sa'd*, *Baladhuri* and*Maqrizi*), —whatever be the name of the person or place—the Prophet was taking rest one day alone, after the dispersal of the enemy. When the enemy chief saw thls from a hiding place on the nearby mountain, he came Stealthily, and with a sword unsheathed

shouted: "O Muhammad, who will save thee now from me?" The Prophet woke up and Quietly replied: "God! " This calm and confidence so much upset the rude Bedouin that he began trembling and the sword fell from his hand. The Prophet seized it, and said: "Now, who will save thee from me?" "None" was the reply. This Prophet pardoned him and returned him his sword also. This impressed so much the Bedouin mind of the enemy that he forthwith embraced Islam, and spontaneously became a missionary of the new faith. Of course the Prophet was acting in such cases on the great Quranic precept (41/34): "Good and evil are equal; react with what is the best and lo! the one between thee and whom there was enemity turns as if he is a friend full of warmth." This was so to say a psychological warfare, and like all other warfares, in this also risks were to take, with success sometimes and failure at others.

The Prophet did that sometimes even without the enemy knowing it. So *Ibn al-Jauziy* (Al-Wafa', P. 696) records: *Salamah ibn ai-Akwa'* had persued single handed and on foot a whole cavalcade of the bandits of the Fazarah, and had already recovered half of their pillage when the Prophet rejoined him in succour along with some men. Salamah asked for an horse, and promised to exterminate the whole band of robbers who were already exhausted and suffering from thirst and fatigue. The Prophet replied: "You have subdued (them), so do indulgence". Let us now cite an example of clemency with not so good results is that of *Abu 'Azzah* (*cf.* Ibn Hisham, p. 471, 556, 591): He was made prisoner of war at Badr. He was so poor that he could not pay his ransom, and had no rich friends either to help him. The Prophet had pity of him, and let him go gratis, on the parole that he would never again take up arms against Islam. Violating his pledge, he participated again in the ensuing battle of Uhud. He was again captured, and this time the Prophet ordered him to

be beheaded. Of the examples of punishment, we may cite the case of 'Uqbah ibn Abu Mu'ait. He was a most stupid enemy of Islam, persecuted relentlessly the Prophet, and attempted several times even to murder him. Captured in the battle of Badr, he was punished with death by order of the Prophet, (*cf.* Ibn Hisham etc. in loco). Although we have no possibility to know how this person would have reacted if he had obtained clemency, but Muslim jurists and military commanders have a precedent in the *sunnah* of the Prophet to say that they are free to pardon or punish according to occasions.

Filling the soldiers with enthusiasm, so that becomes to them not a mere professional duty but one's own and personal affair of the greatest possible importance, such is another point which we can easily add to this list, on basis what the Prophst did before the commencement of the battle, and in the course of the battle, promising divine reward in the Hereafter, and setting personal example of bravery at the most critical moment. Touching scenes have been recorded on the part of his yet sincer companions. A Turkish friend, a retired officer of the army, Mahmud Gunduz has very kindly suggested a work on the battles of the Prophet with the modern principles of war. the so-called MOSSCOMES (*i.e.*, movement, offensive, surprise, security, co-operation, objective, mass, economy of forces, and simplicity) applied to them. Further how the Prophet estimated the situations, took prompt decisions and proceeded to lead the troops? The material,-the raw materialcollected in the foregoing pages would easily convince the reader that even a modern trained and experienced general would not have done better than what the Holy Prophet has done. We can add, on the basis of the life-history of this "lay and improvided general" that the Prophet was—sal-lal-lahu-alaihi-wa-sallam—other principles of military science

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for couping with perillous situations, particularly at times of apparent defeat in the battles of Uhud and Hunain, and how he restored at once or very soon the situations. The result was that the Prophet could himself say confidently and without least exaggeration: "I vanquish (the enemy) by mere terror wich attains as far as the distance of month's journey". Wars less bloody, more decisive, transforming more profoundly have never seen in the records of human history. The wars of the Prophet of Islam were not intended as military exploits, of conquests or domination, but to cure ailing humanity. Thereupon must one judge the grandeur of these "battles" and greatness of the man who gave us the model battles!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah is an eminent Scholar. Born in 1326 H. [1908 CE] in Hyderabad, India, he obtained MA, L.L.B in International Islamic Law from Osmania University, Hyderabad.

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