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Pakistan

Battle of Yarmuk

An Epitome of Tactical, Operational
and Strategic Brilliance

By

Brigadier Ghulam Jilani, retired



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On the Cover: Cavalry charge of Muslim army
(Source: masrynet.com)

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PREFACE

Military history may equip us to deal with problems that we are likely to confront on the future battlefield, but it does certainly afford an opportunity to understand the interplay of forces, to draw lessons which can be applied in any future war. Weaponry may change, but the application of principles of war, argueably, will not. The Pakistan Army is responsible to defend the country against an avowed enemy, which has the ability and wherewithal to field a huge army in any future war. In this context, the battle of Yarmuk, fought in August 636 CE is significant for what can be learnt from it.

No war happens all of a sudden, and there is a trail of events that leads to a particular occurrence. In this monograph, an effort has been made to link all the events that eventually resulted in a face-off between the Byzantine and Muslim armies near Yarmuk River. The six days of war have been excellently explained in great detail by eminent authors. Therefore those events have been dealt with generally, to ultimately move towards important lessons relevant and pertinent for Pakistan Army. The main thrust of the monograph remains on the factors that led to a Muslim victory in the Battle of Yarmuk, and the lessons drawn from important events that took place before and during the battle.

Khalid Bin Al Waleed (RA) in this battle displayed acumen as a brilliant soldier and leader of men, with a deep insight of events leading upto, and during the battle. He demonstrated that faith in ALLAH, righteousness of the cause and ideology, has to be bolstered with the fighting ability, discipline, leadership and imagination, to defeat a stronger and well-equipped army. This monograph is not an effort to glorify the soldierly skills of Khalid bin Al Waleed, but to learn from his actions. We must remain conscious of the fact, that we have to learn from history, and not live in history.

Brigadier Ghulam Jilani
(retired)

Battle of Yarmuk—An Epitome of Tactical, Operational and Strategic Brilliance Lessons that can be Learnt

Strategic Vision and Leadership of Muhammad ﷺ and first Righteous Caliph Abu Bakar (RA)

The camel-riding nomadic Bedouin warriors of the seventh century CE were neither well-armed, nor had the social organisation to form strong enough armies to overcome tribal associations.¹ Throughout the pre-Islamic centuries, there had been several attempts to unify the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula. However, the unification of Arabia by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his immediate successor—first righteous caliph Abu Bakar—was something different, something far more important.² All Muslims were now bound by a common religion that went beyond just blood relations. By creating a new tribe, he ﷺ was able to bring this coalition towards *jihad* against foreign invaders and, as at Badr, for offensive operations. This cultural welding together of the tribes through religion, was perhaps the most critical component of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ overarching strategy.³ The visionary leadership of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ infused the creed of living and dying for the cause of

ALLAH alone. This belief dissuaded the Muslims from pursuing personal worldly gains. The spirit of jihad for ALLAH, and being ready to lay down lives for ALLAH and his Prophet's ﷺ commandments, was the only objective and tenet of Muslim forces, which kept them united and fiercely aggressive. As a result, the Muslim armies in the first hundred years, (after the migration of the Prophet ﷺ of Islam from Mecca to Medina), went on to capture not only territories, but hearts and minds of the peoples of three continents. They did it despite paucity of resources and manpower, against much bigger armies.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in 632 CE⁴, his closest confidant, Abu Bakr (RA) became the first caliph of the *Rashidun Caliphate* (632–661 CE).⁵ Abu Bakr (RA) faced an open rebellion from all corners of Arabia—no sooner he assumed the caliphate. Various tribes, who had bowed before the Prophet ﷺ, declared that their covenant with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had ended with his life. Abu Bakar (RA), owing to his impeccable strategic vision, decided not to budge from the principles laid

1 David Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750* (UK: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 18.

2 Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750*, 18.

3 Major John K. Martin, "Islam's First Arrow: The Battle of Badr as a Decisive Battle In Islamic History and Its Significance Today," Grad thesis, (School Of Advanced Air And Space Studies, Air University, Alabama, 2011), 45, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1019421.pdf>.

4 Prof. Dr. Nazeer Ahmed, "The Death of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH)," History of Islam : An encyclopedia of Islamic History, accessed October 2, 2022, <https://historyofislam.com/contents/the-age-of-faith/the-death-of-prophet-muhammed-pbuh/>.

5 "Rashidun Caliphate Timeline," soft school. Com, accessed on October 7, 2022, https://www.softschools.com/timelines/rashidun_caliphate_timeline/333/.



Map: The Spread of Islam, 622-750 CE

(Source: quora.com)

down by his mentor Muhammad ﷺ, and used a strong arm against all those tribes who refused to pay Zakat—payment made annually under Islamic law on certain kinds of property, and used for charitable and religious purposes, one of the five pillars of Islam. He also declared war on all apostates and imposters, and crushed them with an iron hand. The biggest of them was Musailima the Liar.⁶ These apostates confronted the full might of the Muslim army in a series of engagements, later called the *Ridda Wars* (632–633 CE).⁷ Under Abu Bakr’s (RA) firm leadership, Islamic control was established across

the Arabian Peninsula, during *Ridda Wars*.⁸ By the time *Ridda Wars* were over in June 633, Muslims had suffered appalling casualties, but the Islamic state had demonstrated its cohesion, and for the first time was united under one ruler. The wars against apostasy set the tone that there would be only one Muslim state (caliphate) under one ruler (the caliph) and the Muslims broke from the nomadic, decentralised past of the Arabs.⁹ This cohesion and unanimity of ideas gave Muslims new vigour and strength to be able to beat any army far stronger than theirs. The Muslim army was ready to burst onto the world stage.¹⁰

6 Abdullah Akhtar, “Musaylimah the liar and his lie,” Islamic Story, December 2021, accessed July 3, 2022, abdullahakhtar.com

7 “Ridda Wars”, Study Smarter, accessed on July 20, 2022, <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/school/history/spread-of-islam/ridda-wars/>

8 Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750*, 23

9 Firas AlKhateeb, *Lost Islamic History*, p 37

10 Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750*, 25



Map: Ridda Wars

(Source: [mapas.owje.com](https://www.mapas.owje.com))

Musailima (the liar) in the *Ridda Wars*.

In 633—during Caliph Abu Bakr's (RA) reign—Khalid Bin Al Waleed took his army from Arabia into Iraq. Khalid was still in Iraq when he was informed that Caliph Abu Bakr (RA) needed his assistance, and wanted him to move immediately from Iraq to Syria to reinforce the Muslim army deployed in Syria against a Byzantine army. There

Run-up to the Battle of Yarmuk

Khalid bin Al Waleed (RA) was a true military genius, with very few equals in military history. Muslims had their first encounter with the Byzantine army in the Battle of Mu'tah (Sep 629 CE), on the northern borders of the Arabian Peninsula. Due to the critical nature of the battle, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ chose three commanders to succeed one another.¹¹ All three commanders fell during the battle, and then Sabit bin Arqam (RA) handed over to Khalid the standard of the Muslim army. His astute move to orderly disengage with the Byzantine army saved the day for the Muslims.

He was then appointed commander of the army by Caliph Abu Bakr (RA) to crush apostasy and he was the one who eliminated

were several routes, that could avoid the enormous desert of death, which led directly to Syria in the shortest possible time, but each of these routes would have delayed him from immediately reaching his Muslim brethren for help. It was pointed out to Khalid that crossing this shortest route through the desert is a sure death. Khalid took the advice of the locals on the logistical intricacies, to emerge out of the desert of death successfully. Consequent to detailed discussions, Khalid decided to take an extremely daring action, he used camels and made them drink water to their fullest, then tied their mouths so that they could not eat or chew cud. Camels were slaughtered every night to feed and drink the force and camels. He and his army went through a dangerous course, and arrived in Syria within five days—like a flash to reinforce—the Muslim army.¹²

11 "Khalid ibn Al-Waleed," Islamic History—Companions, accessed on July 12, 2022, <https://islamichistory.org/khalid-ibn-al-waleed/>

12 Sharwar Yoonos, "Khalid Ibn Al -Waleed (RA) the Undeclared Leader," LinkedIn, May 22, 2021, accessed on July 26, 2022, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/khalid-ibn-al-waleed-ra-undefeated-leader-sharwar-yoonos>.

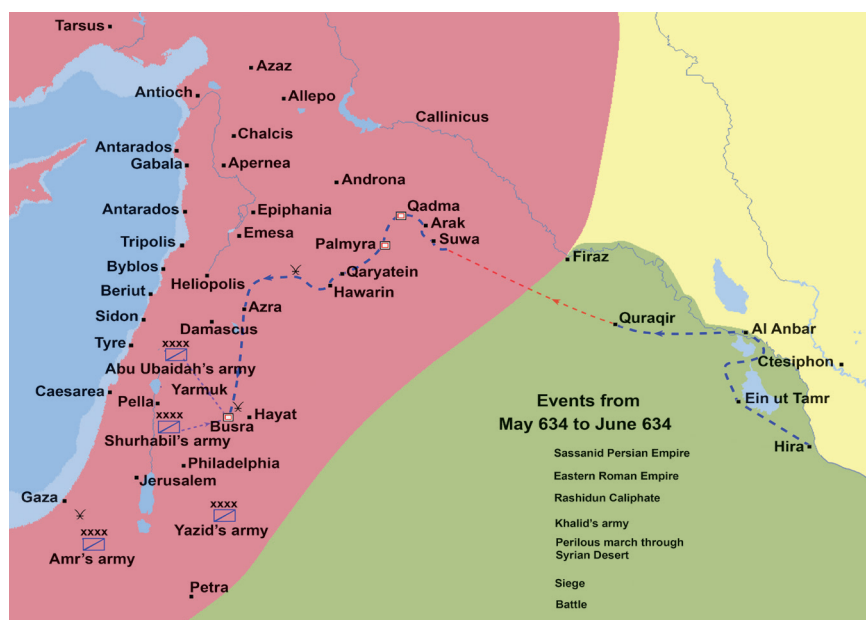


Fig 1: Khalid ibn al-Walid's Invasion of Syria¹⁷

(Source: worldhistory.org)

His swift move, and an ingenious strategic manoeuvre to appear in the rear of Byzantine defensive lines in Syria, took them by complete surprise.¹³ The Muslim invasion of Syria was a series of carefully planned and well-coordinated military operations to deal with Byzantine defensive measures that employed strategy instead of pure strength. Khalid ordered a general assault, and 32,000 Muslims fell upon 90,000 Romans.¹⁴

Khalid defeated a Byzantine army at Ajnadayn.

The fall of Damascus alerted Heraclius, the Eastern Roman Emperor (610–641 CE)¹⁵, who reorganised and strengthened the imperial administration and armies, to take the danger that the Arab invasions posed to Byzantine authority in the east.¹⁶ He wanted to recapture lost territory, and to this end, he made an effort for a

13 James Houser, "August 20, 636 - The Battle of Yarmouk & the Arab Conquest", Jun 12, 2021, accessed on July 12, 2022, <https://www.unknownsoldierspodcast.com/post/august-20-636-the-battle-of-yarmouk-the-arab-conquest>.

14 Naem Ali, "The Battle of Yarmuk - Khalid Bin Al-Waleed's Greatest Victory - Epilogue," Forgotten Islamic History, October 26, 2014, accessed on September 9, 2022, <http://www.forgottenislamichistory.com/2014/10/the-battle-of-yarmuk-khalid-bin-al.html>

15 Enno Franzius, "Heraclius - Byzantine emperor," Britannica, last modified on Feb 7, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Heraclius-Byzantine-emperor>

16 James Hardy, "Battle of Yarmouk: An Analysis of Byzantine Military Failure," History Cooperative, September 15, 2016, accessed on September 16, 2022, <https://historycooperative.org/the-battle-of-yarmouk-river/>.

17 Mohammad Adil, "Khalid ibn al-Walid's Invasion of Syria - Illustration," World History Encyclopaedia, December 12, 2019, <https://www.worldhistory.org/uploads/images/11593.png?v=1644670803>

coordinated and simultaneous attack with the Sassanids on the Muslim army. This did not materialise as planned and thus delayed the Byzantine attack against the Muslim army.

Deployment of the Belligerents before the Battle

By May 636 CE, the Byzantines had put under arms an army of 150,000 men, and concentrated in the area of Antioch and in parts of northern Syria.¹⁸ This powerful military force consisted of contingents of Russians, Slavs, Franks, Romans, Greeks, Georgians, Armenians, and Christian Arabs. No people of the cross living in the Byzantine empire failed to send warriors to the new army, to fight the Muslim invaders, in the spirit of a Christian crusade.¹⁹ The force was divided into five armies of 30,000 troops each led by Mahan the king of Armenia, Qanateer a Russian prince; Gregory; Deirjan and Jabla bin Elham, the king of Ghassan Arabs.

The Byzantine field commander Mahan was an Armenian and had formerly served as the *Magister militum per Orientem* (master of the soldiers in the east; top military commander) of Emessa.²⁰

In the summer of 636 CE the Muslim army was not only heavily outnumbered by the Byzantines, but was also deployed under four different groups, far and wide. At Palestine,

led by Amr bin Al Aas, Shurahbeel in Jordan, Yazid at Caesarea, and Abu Ubeida and Khalid Bin Al Waleed at Emessa and to the north.



Fig 2: Muslim Deployment in the summer of 636 ²¹
(Source: forgottenislamichistory.com)

Heraclius' Plan to Destroy the Muslim Army before Deployment at Yarmuk

Heraclius did not want to confront the Muslim army concentrated against him. He therefore desired to deal with it piecemeal and defeat it by amassing a large force before the Muslims could seam together as a formidable force, and consolidate their position. Circumstances guided him to annihilate the Muslim army, and recapture lost territory. The Byzantine army planned to isolate each Muslim corps and attack as follows (ref Fig 5).²²

18 Lt Gen A.I Akram, *The Sword of ALLAH: Khalid Bin Waleed – His life and Campaigns*, (Islamabad: Poorab Academy, 2014), 405.

19 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 405.

20 Hardy, "Battle of Yarmouk: An Analysis of Byzantine Military Failure".

21 Ali, "The Battle of Yarmuk - Khalid Bin Al-Waleed's Greatest Victory – Epilogue".

22 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 406.



Fig 3: Roman plans for a counter offensive²³
(Source: forgottenislamichistory.com)

- **Jabla's** lightly armed Christian Arabs would march to Emessa from Aleppo via Hama and hold the main Muslim army at Emessa.
- **Deirjan** would make a flanking movement—moving between the coast and Aleppo's road—and approach Emessa from the west, striking at the Muslims' left flank while they were being held frontally by Jabla.
- **Gregory** would strike the Muslims' right flank, approaching Emessa from the northeast via Mesopotamia.
- **Qanateer** would march along the coastal route and occupy Beirut, from where he was to attack weakly defended Damascus from the west, to cut off the main Muslim army at Emessa.

- **Mahan's** (King of Armenia and commander of the army) force would act as a reserve and approach Emessa via Hama.

Muslim Response to Byzantine Army's Plan

The Muslims learnt about Heraclius' plan at Sheizar through Roman prisoners.²⁴ Muslims were wary of the likelihood of being trapped as a dispersed force, which would have been a sure recipe for destruction. Khalid therefore advised Abu Ubaida in the meeting of the council for war to pull the troops back and concentrate the entire Muslim army at one place. On Khalid's advice, the Muslim forces withdrew to Dara'ah (or Dara) and Dayr Ayyub, covering the gap between the Yarmuk gorges and the Harra lava plains, and

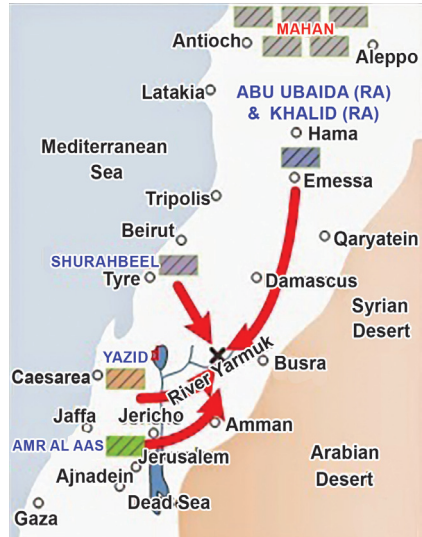
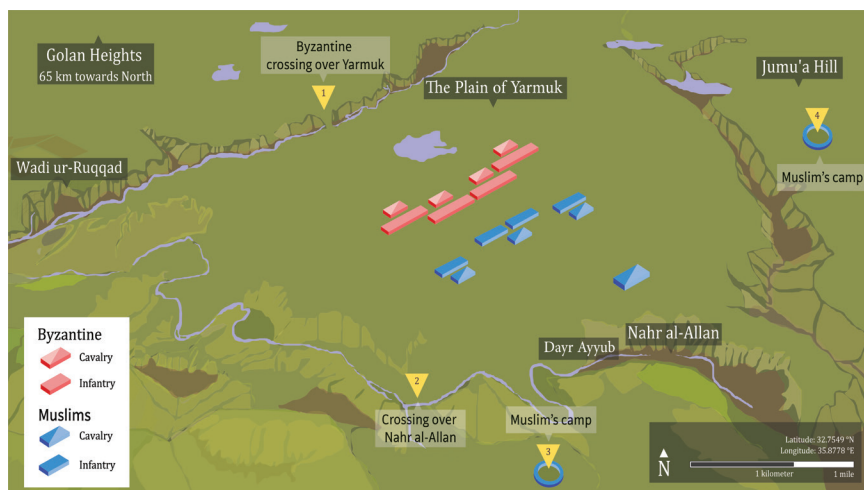


Fig 4: Muslim retreat to the plains of Yarmouk²⁵
(Source: forgottenislamichistory.com)

23 Ali, "The Battle of Yarmuk - Khalid Bin Al-Waleed's Greatest Victory -Epilogue".

24 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 407.

25 Ali, "The Battle of Yarmuk - Khalid Bin Al-Waleed's Greatest Victory -Epilogue".



Map: Deployment of opposing forces

(Source: defence.pk)

established themselves on the eastern part of the plain of Yarmuk. This was an adroit defensive manoeuvre and put the Muslim army in a strong defensive position for a decisive war which the Byzantines wanted to avoid. Khalid kept his elite light cavalry in the advance guard, for a clean disengagement with the enemy during its withdrawal. The whole army was regrouped and withdrawn southwards to the Yarmuk Plateau. There, they were further reinforced by fresh combatants who arrived from Medina.

Salient Features of Zone of Battle

The battle was fought on the plains of Yarmuk, which was about 65 kilometres south-east of the present-day Golan Heights, enclosed on its western edges by a deep ravine known as *Wadi-ur-Raqqad*, around 200 meters deep, which joined the Yarmuk River (ref Fig 5). The most noteworthy feature of the battlefield was the existence of two ravines—

Wadi-ur-Raqqad and the Yarmuk River—the banks of which were about 1000 feet high.²⁶

The battlefield was so selected that ahead of the Muslim army there would be a plain. This would make it suitable for the manoeuvre of both infantry and cavalry, more so light cavalry which was the dominant arm of the Muslim army, and accounted for its strength. Whereas behind the Muslims stretched the eastern extension of the plain of Yarmuk—where Muslims could withdraw safely when vulnerable—behind the Byzantine army was the forbidding, deep and precipitous ravine of Wadi-ur-Raqqad. The selection of ground served well both for charge of the light Muslim cavalry initially to launch counter attacks. On the final day of the battle when Khalid decided to launch a counter-offensive, the deep ravine of Wadi-ur-Raqqad acted as an anvil for the hammer of Khalid's cavalry, for the destruction of Byzantine army.

26 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 414.

Disposition of Both Armies for the Final Engagement at Yarmuk

The Byzantine army followed the Muslim army to reach plains of Yarmuk. Mahan used his numerical superiority and deployed on a front of approximately 13 kilometres. The Byzantine forces were placed in front of the Allan River, with their right anchoring on the gorge to the south, and their left bordering the Jabiya hills (ref Fig 5). Mahan arranged his forces as follows:

- Ghassanid light cavalry, under Jabla, acted as the vanguard for screening and skirmishing.
- The left flank consisted of the Slavic infantry under Qanateer (facing the Muslim right).
- Armenian infantry (under Mahan) and the army of Deirjan made up the centre.
- Greek infantry manned the right flank under Gregory (facing the Muslim left). This army used chains to connect its 30,000 troops.
- Cavalry, mostly consisting of *cataphracts*—elite heavy mounted troops—were stationed behind each flank and the two central armies.

During the time of the battle of Yarmuk, Khalid wasn't the actual commander of the Muslim army; he

had been removed from this position after the death of Caliph Abu Bakar, who had originally chosen him to lead the Muslim army. Caliph Umar (RA) the second righteous caliph (who became caliph after the death of Abu Bakar (RA) on 6th August 634 CE)²⁷, appointed Abu Ubaida (RA) in the position. Abu Ubaida, recognised for his piety and strength of character, knew that he did not have the tactical and strategic skills to lead the Muslim army against the Byzantines. Abu Ubaida valued the expertise and military mind of Khalid therefore he virtually handed him the command of the entire army, from the planning stage to execution of operation.

Unlike the multi-ethnic Byzantine forces, the Arabs were united not only in their nationalist sentiment, but also by a common faith.²⁸ Khalid, as defacto commander of the Muslim army, organised his four corps—with nine infantry regiments each formed on tribal and clan basis²⁹—under Shurahbeel, Yazid, Amr bin Al Aas and Abu Ubaida, in a fashion similar to the deployment of the Byzantine army, with three light cavalry regiments of two thousand horsemen each positioned behind the line of each corps. One larger cavalry reserve of four thousand horsemen under his command, as a mobile guard was in the rear.

The Muslim army though less in numbers stretched thinner but

27 Asma Rasheed, "Governance of Umer Farooq – The 2nd Caliph of Islam," Al Quran Classes, Mar 2019, accessed on September 8, 2022 <https://alquranclasses.com/governance-of-umer/>.

28 Syed Muhammad Khan, "Battle of Yarmouk," World History Encyclopedia, June 4, 2020, accessed on Sep 14, 2022, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1563/battle-of-yarmouk/>.

29 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 417.

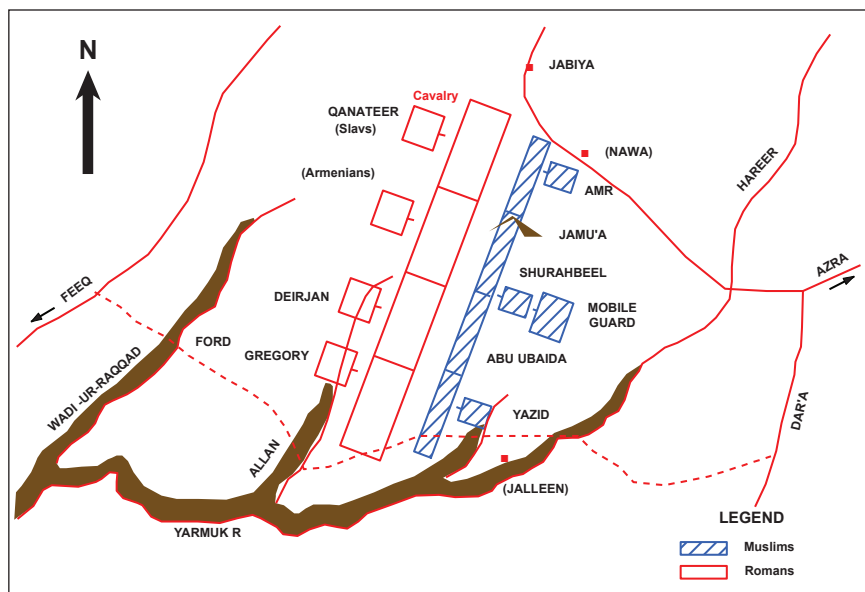


Fig 5: The Disposition at Yarmouk

(Source: Book—The Sword of Allah)

covered a front of twelve kilometres to face them. Both armies consisted mainly of infantry and although the Muslims lacked men and materials, they made up for this shortcoming by higher mobility of their light cavalry, and unparalleled skill in hand-to-hand combat.

Jolts of the Battle

The battle was fought with full might of the belligerents, for six days. The Byzantines initiated the offensive, and in the process also pushed back Muslims, but were unable to attack the main Arab encampment, neither could they force the Muslim army to retreat, nor subdue it. The Muslim army held firm and successfully regained its lost ground on the second, third, and fourth days of battle through timely counter

attacks from enemy flanks. The decisive moment came on 20th August 636, when the Muslim army launched its counter-offensive.³⁰

• Day 1 of the Battle

The battle started at dawn on 15 August 636 CE, when both armies assembled themselves against each other at a distance of less than a mile apart. As narrated by A I Akram in *The Sword of Allah*, a Roman general by the name of George converted to Islam after asking certain questions, which Khalid fittingly replied in the light of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Quran.³¹ The battle began as the Byzantine army sent its champions to duel with the Muslims, who were specially trained swordsmen and lancers. By midday, Mahan discerned the superiority

30 Hardy, "Battle of Yarmouk: An Analysis of Byzantine Military Failure".

31 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 423.

of the Muslim army in the duel of champions. He knew that he had overwhelming superiority in force, and fearing that these duels might lower the morale of his army, he ordered a general assault on the Muslim army. The assault was planned where Muslim battle lines were weak. However, the Byzantine assault was short of requisite determination and failed to create a breakthrough, or any impact on the Muslim army. At sunset, both armies broke contact and returned to their respective camps.

• Day 2 of the Battle

Mahan had all events of the last day fresh in his mind. He therefore wanted to do something different to achieve the desired effects. On 16 August 636 CE, Mahan desired to achieve surprise in the morning, while the Muslims would be offering their morning prayers. He decided to launch his attack just before dawn, to catch the Muslim force unprepared. Though the Muslims were not fully prepared at that time but Khalid had planned for such an eventuality and placed outposts (just like present-day screens) to cause sufficient delay on the enemy and gain time. The Muslims got ready with speed, and surprised the Byzantine army with their instant response.

Mahan had planned to engage his central armies with the two Muslim central corps to stall them, while the main assault was planned towards the two wings of the Muslim Army on the flanks. The Byzantine army's assault could not pin down Muslims in the centre which remained

stable. But on the flanks, Qanateer who was leading the Slavs, forced the Muslim infantry on the right and pushed it back (ref Fig 6). The Muslim commander Amr bin Al Aas launched a counter attack with his cavalry to stabilise the situation, but the sheer weight and superiority in numbers of the Byzantine army forced the Muslims to retreat towards camp.

Khalid, was overseeing developments taking place on the flanks, so far, he had not been drawn into the battle, at this point he decided to first restore positions of the right wing. He immediately ordered a counter attack, and with one cavalry regiment of his mobile guard struck at the left flank of Qanateer's army, whereas at the same time Amr counter attacked from the front (ref Fig 6). This two-pronged counter attack forced the Byzantine left wing to abandon the Muslim positions they had gained. Amr Bin Al Aas regained his lost ground and began reorganising his troops for another round.

The situation of the force commanded by Yazid on the left of the Muslim army was more serious. Muslim positions were overrun, owing to the numerical superiority of the enemy. Muslim soldiers started retreating toward their camp. Yazid used his cavalry regiment to counter attack but it failed to regain lost ground. Despite stiff resistance, the warriors of Yazid on the left flank finally fell back to their camp, and for a moment Mahan's plan appeared to be succeeding. The retreating Muslim

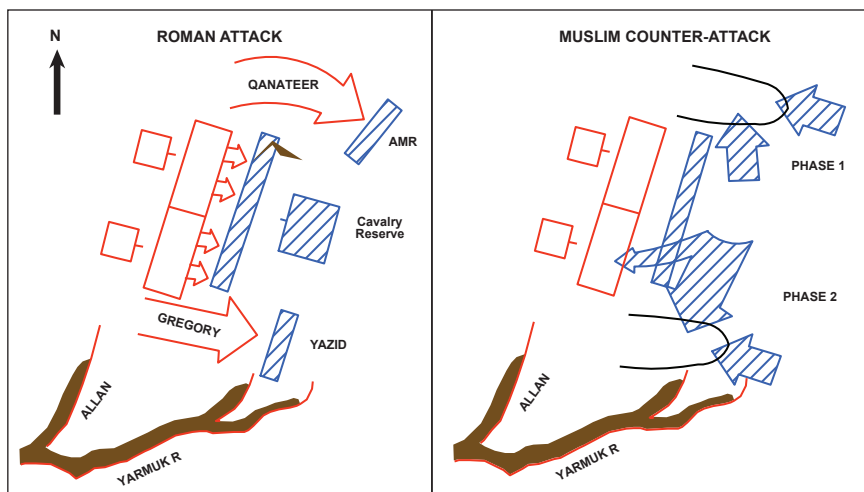


Fig 6: Day-2 of the Battle

(Source: Book–The Sword of Allah)

army met ferocious Arab women in the camp. They were led by Hind, wife of Abu Sufyan, who sang songs and threw stones at them, and a few were attacked with tent poles, to reignite in their men, the flame of courage to fight back. The Byzantine army failed to maintain the momentum they achieved so far, to further progress in the attack. The corps of Yazid could not take this disgrace, and the wrath meted out by their women in the camp. This gave new strength to the retreating Muslims, and they returned to the battlefield. Yazid began his counter attack from the front to push the Romans back.

Khalid in the meanwhile detached one regiment under command of Zarrar bin Al Azwar, who attacked from the front of the army of Deirjan, to create a diversion and threaten the Roman withdrawal of the right wing. With rest of the cavalry reserve, Khalid attacked Gregory's flank (ref Fig 6). Under simultaneous attacks from the front

and flanks, the Byzantines fell back. Zarrar in an attack killed Deirjan commander of the army. By the time the day was over the two flanking armies had been pushed back and the positions were restored. Failure to achieve the objective on the second day demoralised the Byzantine army. Muslim morale was boosted due to successful counter attacks and restoration of original positions.

• Day 3 of the Battle

On 17 August 636 CE, the third day of the battle, Mahan gave a serious thought to his failure to defeat the Muslim army the previous day, despite initial success. Mahan now deliberated on a more workable plan to break the Muslim army at their weak and vulnerable position. He decided to exert pressure on their relatively exposed right flank, where they could generate more combat power as compared to the rugged terrain at the Muslim army's left flank. It was planned to launch an assault at

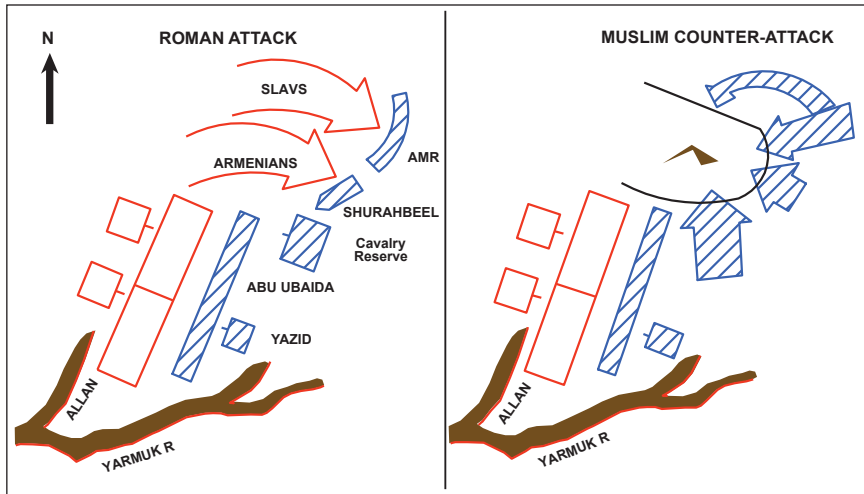


Fig 7: Day-3 of the Battle

(Source: Book-The Sword of Allah)

the junction of the two Muslim corps (led by Shurabeel and Amr bin Al Aas respectively), in the centre and at the right wing (ref Fig 7).

The battle restarted with planned attacks by the Byzantine army on the Muslim right flank and right centre. After giving initial resistance to the Byzantines the Muslim right wing fell back, followed by the right centre, (ref Fig 7). They were again greeted with scorn by their women in the camp, who abused and shamed them. The corps however, managed to reorganise themselves at some distance from the camp and stood their ground for a counter attack to restore their position.

Khalid who had an intrinsic offensive spirit infused with strategic vision, understood that the focus of the Byzantine army was the Muslim right flank. He thus decided to launch a counter attack with his mobile guard against the flank of Qanateer, At the same time Amr's cavalry in unison

with the cavalry of the right flanking corps struck on the left flank of Qanateer's army. While the infantry of Shurahbeel and Amr counter attacked frontally. (Ref Fig 7). The combat soon developed into a bloodbath, resulting in casualties on both sides. Khalid's timely counter attack on the flanks again restored the Muslim position, and the Byzantine army was pushed back to where it started the day.

• Day 4 of the Battle

18 August 636 CE, the fourth day, was to prove decisive. The Muslim army and especially Khalid feared an attack on a broad front by the enemy, and as a safeguard wanted Abu Ubaida and Yazid on the left centre and the left wings respectively, to attack the Byzantine armies on their respective fronts. He thought this would deter the general advance of the enemy. But the Byzantine army decided to persist with the preceding day's plan, wherein it had been successful in inflicting damage on the Muslim right. Qanateer

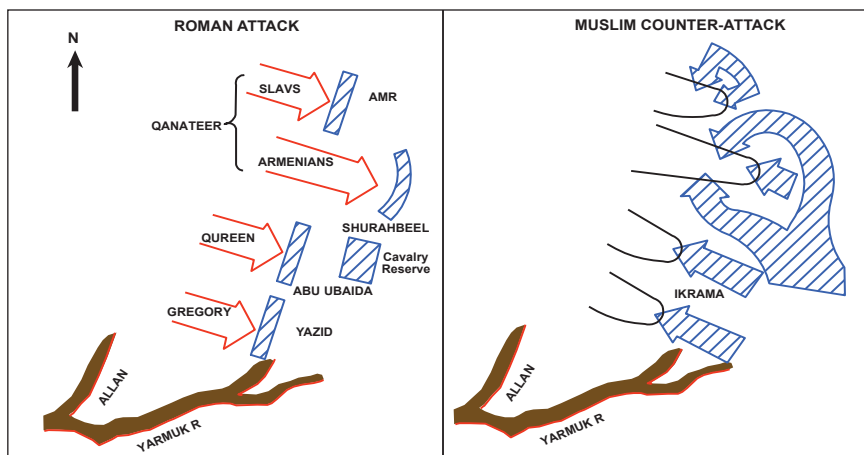


Fig 8: Day-4 of the Battle

(Source: Book—The Sword of Allah)

led two armies of Slavs against the Muslim right wing and right centre, with some assistance from the Armenians and Christian Arabs led by Jabla. Amr held his ground against the Slavs. However, in the sector of Shurahbeel, the Muslim right wing and right center again crumbled under pressure. Khalid again entered the fight with mobile guard. Khalid divided his mobile guard into two, and attacked the left flank of the Byzantine army with Qeis bin Hubeira, and himself from the right flank, while the infantry under Shurahbeel attacked from the front. Under this three-pronged flanking manoeuvre, the Byzantine army fell back (ref Fig 8). The Slavs, who were denied support of the Armenians, also fell back under the pressure of Amr bin Al Aas.

The situation, despite Khalid's attack with his mobile guard on the

left flank of the Byzantine army, was getting worse. The Byzantine horse archers launched a vicious attack on the troops of Abu Ubaida and Yazid. Intense attacks by the archers prevented them from breaching the Byzantine line. A withering shower of arrows resulted in the loss of the sight of 700 Muslim soldiers³², including a veteran of many battles Abu Sufyan.³³ It was also called the *day of lost eyes*. As a result, the Muslims Army fell back, except for the regiment of Ikrama who covered their retreat. Fearless Ikrama refused to retreat and decided to launch a fierce attack on Romans, all of Ikrama's four hundred men, who had taken oath of death³⁴, either got seriously injured, or embraced shahadat. He himself was mortally wounded and later embraced shahadat.³⁵ This time the corps of Yazid and Abu Ubaida did not have to face the wrath of their

32 Dr S.M. Rahman, Colonel Bashir Hussain and Major Qamar ul Haq, *Early Battles of Islam* (Rawalpindi: Army Education Press, 2001), 192.

33 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 435.

34 Ibid, 437.

35 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 437.

women, who themselves reached out to their men, and started fighting alongside them. This sight turned the Muslims furiously against their enemy. The generals fought alongside their men hand to hand. Every corps commander proved himself to be the real leader of men. By the time the day was over, both armies were standing from where they started the day.

- **Day 5 of the Battle**

The Byzantine army during the first four days remained in an offensive mode, and launched nonstop attacks. They failed to achieve success due to the quick movement of reserves and their application at the right time and point of impact by Khalid, which inflicted huge losses on Mahan's forces. This forced Mahan to reconsider his options and apply for a truce with the Muslim army, for a few days. He sent an emissary to the Muslim camp, who met with Abu Ubaida, who had apprehensions of fighting against a much larger and well-equipped army. He felt it would be appropriate to settle terms without much ado, because despite heavy odds, the Muslim army had so far held the enemy. The offer looked tempting to the Muslim army commander; he was inclined towards its acceptance, but the strategic mind of Khalid could visualise, that if a largely defensive manoeuvre of the Muslim army had forced the enemy to ask for a truce, then the Muslim army has a chance to defeat the enemy through an offensive manoeuvre, for which according to him, the time was ripe. He therefore,

advised Abu Ubaida to decline any offer of a truce.

Consequently, Khalid planned to regroup all the cavalry regiments, and assembled them as one entity to make it a potent offensive force. Khalid's mobile guard was at its core. The total strength of this group now was 8,000 mounted warriors. Khalid planned to entrap the enemy by cutting off their route of withdrawal through *Wadi-ur-Raqqad*, the ravine with steep banks. Wadi-ur-Raqqad was strategically most important to achieve the objectives of an offensive and total destruction of the enemy. This manoeuvre was to prove decisive the next day.

- **Day 6 of the Battle**

On 20 August 636 CE, the final day of the battle, at dawn one of the army commanders of the Byzantines, Gregory, appeared from the centre of the imperial army, dared Muslim Army commander Abu Ubaida to fight a duel as he wished to kill him. Khalid tried to dissuade Abu Ubaida from accepting this challenge, and instead offered himself to take him on. But Abu Ubaida accepted the challenge, and despite Gregory's deceptive overtures, killed him.

Khalid, decided to execute a well thought out, and one of the most audacious and bold plans of the battle, with the cavalry that he was commanding. Initially to push the Byzantine cavalry off the battlefield, denuding its infantry of cavalry support, exposing the flanks and rear of the Infantry of the Byzantine army. Then deliver a final blow to the

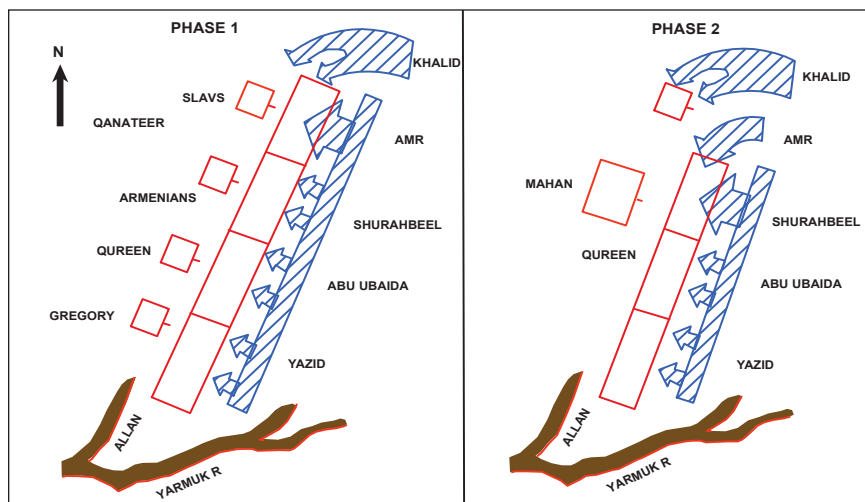


Fig 9: Phase-1 and Phase-2 of Day-6 of the Battle (Source: Book-The Sword of Allah)

enemy at Wadi-ur-Raqqad, for its final destruction.

Mahan had amassed his cavalry in the rear as a mobile guard, for an eventual counter attack, but he failed to start his manoeuvre before the Muslim army attacked it from front and rear. Muslim cavalry led by Khalid pressed the front and left wing of the Byzantine army (ref Fig 9). In this speedy move, the heavy Byzantine cavalry failed to match the light but fast moving Muslim cavalry, which struck, disengaged, manoeuvred and struck again. The Byzantine cavalry could not survive the attack, and escaped to the north.

The Armenians put up stiff resistance against Amr and Shurahbeel's attempt to annihilate them, thus the two corps could make some progress, but not much. At this stage, Khalid who had driven the Roman cavalry off the battlefield, turned on to the Armenians and attacked them from the rear. The

Armenians collapsed under this attack from three sides, forsook their position and ran in a southwestern direction (ref Fig 9). They were surprised that the Muslim cavalry did not follow them in their direction of safety. Little did they know that Khalid wanted them to go in that direction by design.

After the collapse of the Armenians, the Slavs of Qanateer's army ran toward Wadi-ur-Raqqad. The remaining Byzantine army realised that their situation was becoming desperate, consequently the army was on the retreat well before midday. They were fleeing towards Wadi-ur-Raqqad, but were not interfered with by Khalid. The Slavs and Armenians did manage to get away with destruction at the hands of Muslim cavalry at that point in time. Their only desire was to be as far away from the Muslims, and as early as possible, knowing that the only route to escape was possible through Wadi-ur-Raqqad.

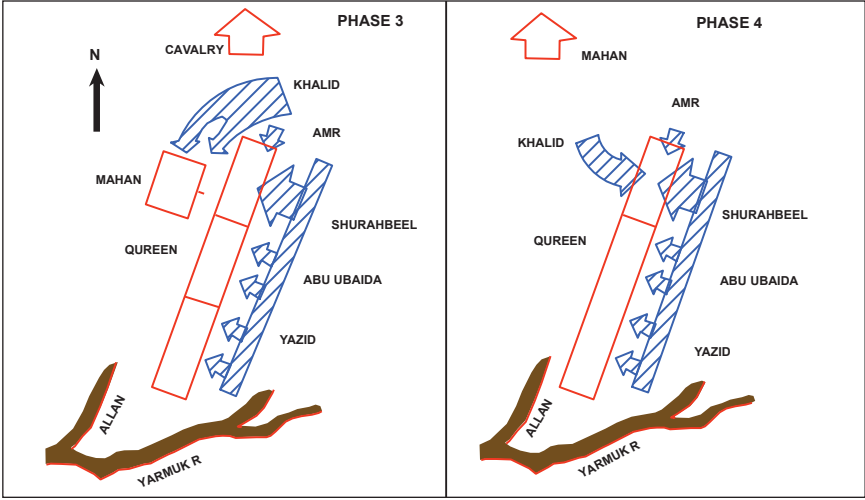


Fig 10: Phase-3 and Phase-4 of Day-6 of the Battle
(Source: Book-The Sword of Allah)

The retreating troops were happy to achieve a break with the Muslim army. But Khalid had already made his ultimate move. Khalid had envisioned the outcome of the counter offensive, and wanted to destroy the enemy which he failed to achieve at Ajnadayn. For the first time in those days in a night operation, Zarrar with his 500 horsemen was sent a night before, by Khalid, to establish a blocking position and seize the only crossing point into the Yarmuk valley, which was the only route for the Byzantines to escape. As the Byzantines got close to the ravine, they found the blocking position.

Remaining one third of the Byzantine army was encircled by the Muslim Army. For the last time, the Romans broke and ran in disorder. It was like a hammer crushing the Roman army against an anvil. Approximately 70,000 fell in this battle.³⁶

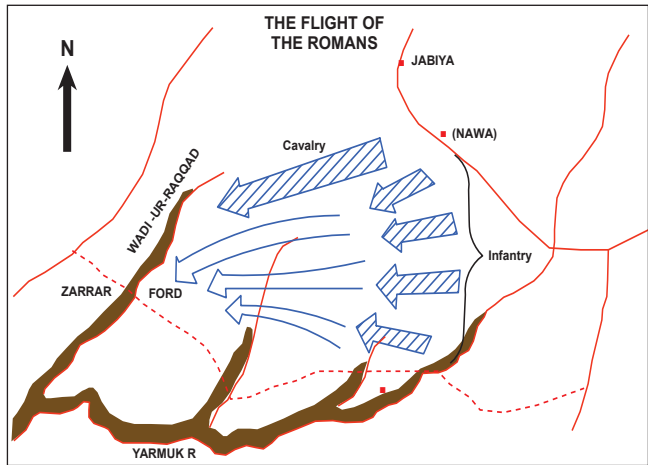


Fig 11: The Flight of the Romans on Day-6 of the Battle
(Source: Book-The Sword of Allah)

³⁶ Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 453.

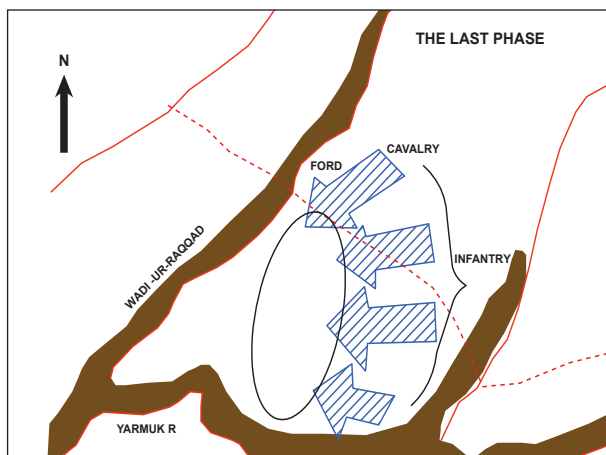


Fig 12: The Last Phase of Day-6 of the Battle
(Source: Book–The Sword of Allah)

Factors that Contributed to the Muslim Victory

How did a small army of nomads manage to humiliate the biggest and strongest army in the world, at the time? There were numerous factors behind this victory, ranging from the change brought about in the lifestyle, culture and world view of the nomadic Arabs by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and above all the strategic minds of the righteous caliphs and Khalid.

- As sons of the desert, the Arabs won their victories largely because they fought their decisive battles against Persia and Byzantium, in the desert. “The key to all the early operations against Persia and against Syria alike, was that the Persians and Byzantines could not move in the desert being mounted on horses. The Muslims in the desert were like sea power cruising offshore.”³⁷ It

always suited the Arab Muslims to fight in the desert, except for once when they crossed over a river and were defeated in Battle of Bridge or Markaa-al-Jasar.³⁸

- The camel was the mainstay of mobility and logistics for the Arabs. The camel provided strategic mobility over long distances in inhospitable terrain.

This served the logistics of Khalid while crossing forbidding *desert of death*, and was the main source of Muslim logistics in the Battle of Yarmuk.

- The nomadic Bedouins, for obvious reasons, always moved light in deserts. Therefore, their cavalry was also light as against the Byzantine army, which moved with heavy cavalry, carrying *cataphracts*. Superior skills and mobility of the light cavalry vis-a-vis heavy Byzantine cavalry with *cataphracts*, gave the Muslim Army a distinct advantage. The Muslim cavalry could move with speed, and had the ability to out manoeuvre their Byzantine counterparts. This was an ultimate factor in outcome of the battle.
- The Arabs, due to tribal traditions and rivalries were warring tribes, living in incessant conflict over food and water, making warfare a lifelong custom. Therefore,

37 Gerard Chaliand, *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age*, First edition (Berkeley – California: University of California Press, 1994), 27.

38 Battle of the Bridge explained, accessed on January 23, 23.

a volunteer Muslim army always had this advantage in their military organisation and training. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ nurtured inimitable brotherhood among the Muslims, and those Arabs who were divided into tribes showed exceptional *esprit de corps*, which created loyalty towards only one cause, and that was their obligation toward ALLAH and his Prophet ﷺ. The Arab culture, its way of life, and the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ had enormously affected the soldierly qualities of an ordinary Muslim. Those factors were critical in the Muslim victory against much larger and stronger enemy.

- Influences like soldiering and Muslim brotherhood were superbly bolstered by the superior strategy of the righteous caliphs and the generals of the Muslim army, especially Khalid Bin Al Waleed. Caliph Abu Bakr (RA) planned every move on merit. His astute moves at the right time to deal with apostates and those who defied payment of zakat not only nipped the evil in the bud, but also enabled Muslims to flex their muscles beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Superior strategic thinking allowed the caliph to determine the right time to take on two great military powers of the time, just a few years after the brutal and prolonged war between the Byzantines and

Sassanians from 602 until 628 CE.³⁹ Eventually the Muslim army reached its pinnacle in the battle of Yarmuk in 636 CE.

- The Byzantines maltreated their subjects, whereas Muslims treated them with respect. On the conquest of Emessa, Muslims collected *jizya* (tax collected from non-Muslims to guarantee their protection, and exempt them from military service) as per tradition and law. While Muslims were leaving the city to reposition for the battle of Yarmuk, Abu Ubaida returned the *jizya* to locals, because the Muslims were no longer in a position to protect them.⁴⁰ It was for this reason that the locals were inclined not only to welcome the Muslims, but even assist them.⁴¹
- The Byzantine army lacked effective and coordinated leadership because they were not commanded by Heraclius, himself but by an Armenian king, Mahan. The army was comprised of soldiers from different nationalities like Slavs, Armenians and Ghassanids. During the battle, the Armenians seemed to have refused to support Byzantine troops when they attacked, while the Ghassanid Arabs remained largely passive towards their fellow Arabs.⁴² On the other side, the superb generalship of Khalid was a key factor in the outcome of the battle.⁴³

39 Andrew Marshal, "What was Byzantine- Sassanid War 602-628," Boot Camp & Military Fitness Institute, December 12, 2020, accessed on October 6, 2022, <https://bootcampmilitaryfitnessinstitute.com/2020/12/12/>.

40 Akram, *The Sword of Allah*, 409.

41 Khan, "Battle of Yarmouk".

42 Hardy, "Battle of Yarmouk: An Analysis of Byzantine Military Failure".

43 Hardy, "Battle of Yarmouk: An Analysis of Byzantine Military Failure".

- The Byzantine army waited for the Sassanids to open another front against the Muslims, and therefore delayed their offensive between May and August 636. The delay wreaked havoc on the overall morale and discipline of Byzantine troops; the Armenian contingents in particular grew increasingly agitated and mutinous.⁴⁴ This long pause allowed the Muslim army to regroup, reorganise, reinforce and withdraw to the area and ground of their choosing. The Byzantine army was trapped by following the Muslims. This was finally a critical factor in the outcome of the battle.
- According to Peter Frankopan, word soon began to spread among Jewish communities that Muhammad ﷺ and his followers were allies. Arab advances were being welcomed by Jews in Palestine because it meant a loosening of the Roman-Christian grip on power in the region.⁴⁵
- captured almost the entire Middle East including Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Egypt. Muslims began to appear on the world map, beyond the Arabian Peninsula, as a force to reckon with. This resulted in shrinking boundaries of the Byzantine empire, which was largely Christian.
- Victory in the battle of Yarmuk enabled the Muslims to expand outside the Arabian Peninsula, with an opportunity to spread their perspective to the rest of the world. Muslim culture, ethos, higher standards of character, and spartan ways of living, impressed people of the conquered areas. Consequently Islam—a religion of nature and peace—spread much faster in those areas.
- The Battle of Yarmuk brought a huge change, and reshaped the ways and living styles of the Muslims. The Arab Bedouins became city dwellers, altering their nomadic culture. In Syria, where Muslims took over Roman and Byzantine cities, they learnt a great deal about urban planning as they started building their own new cities.⁴⁷ Ibn Khaldun writes in *Muqaddimah* or “introduction” to a world history, that desert nomads, in aspiring to the physical comforts of sedentary life, created the original dynamic for urbanisation that was then captured by powerful rulers and dynasties.⁴⁸

Upshots of the Battle

The Battle of Yarmuk was the greatest battle of the century, one of the most decisive battles of history, and perhaps the most titanic battle ever fought between the crescent and the cross.⁴⁶ It had enormous consequences for both Muslims and Byzantines.

- It resulted in the beginning of the great era of Muslim conquests, wherein Muslims subsequently

⁴⁴ Hardy, “Battle of Yarmouk: An Analysis of Byzantine Military Failure”.

⁴⁵ Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads*, p 80.

⁴⁶ Akram, *Sword of Allah*, 421.

⁴⁷ Hardy, “Battle of Yarmouk: An Analysis of Byzantine Military Failure”.

⁴⁸ Robert. D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2013), 121.

Lessons

Pakistan is located in a region within which it has faced, and will continue to face, challenges concerning its security. A much larger neighbour to its east with huge resources, both economic and military, never accepted Pakistan as a reality, but has always schemed and planned to undo it. Added to this are disputes which both the countries inherited at independence and are still ongoing. On the western border, two superpowers landed as extra-regional forces and stayed for several years each. Therefore, the Pakistan Army has in the past, and shall in the future, always deal with armies much stronger, both in manpower as well as resources. The battle of Yarmuk has some extraordinary lessons for the Pakistan Army, on how to deal with a much larger force. Subsequent paragraphs will deal with lessons applicable to the Pakistan Army.

• Nationalism

The teachings and guidance of the Prophet ﷺ created social norms which gelled everyone into a homogenous entity. Personal revenge and tribal rivalries were a thing of the past, and Muslims were ideologically in unison for the cause of ALLAH, his Prophet ﷺ, and fellow Muslims. The Muslim brotherhood created by Muhammad ﷺ was through the process of self-sacrifice. This training transformed a deeply divided tribal society, instilling a unique nationalism that could be termed *Islamic nationalism*, for the glory of Islam alone. This was a crucial factor in the Battle of Yarmuk and victories of the Muslim army across the globe in next one hundred years.

Pakistan though, created in the name of Islam, is divided by the curse of sectarianism, ethnic sub-nationalism and political polarisation. The most important counter to upset the aggressive designs of our enemies, would be to put up a unified stand. The lesson of the battle of Yarmuk is to create a Pakistani nationalism in which the whole nation, integrated as an alloy, stands behind its armed forces to thwart the aggressive designs of a much larger enemy.

• Appreciation of Ground—a Decisive Factor

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had shown an exceptional power of appreciation, regarding ground and weather, in the early battles of Islam. He ﷺ always selected the most suitable ground to pitch his forces against the enemy and showed remarkable tactical and operational understanding, irrespective of the outcome of the battle. Perhaps with all the worldly and spiritual teachings, he developed this capability in his followers also. As a great leader of men, he ﷺ created more leaders than just followers.

Khalid had carried out appreciation of the ground and therefore, advised Abu Ubaida to redeploy the entire army at Yarmuk, because it would be easier for the caliph to send reinforcements, where there was a plain ahead of them suitable for the charge of cavalry, thus more combat power would be generated through the light Muslim cavalry. Behind the Muslims stretched the eastern extension of the plain of Yarmuk where the Muslim army could withdraw safely, when vulnerable. Whereas behind the Byzantine army

lay the deep and precipitous ravine of *Wadi-ur-Raqqad*.

The most important lesson from the Battle of Yarmuk is to *canalise the enemy into ground of one's own choosing. Force the enemy to fight against one's strength by exploiting ground and weather, and create opportunities to strike the enemy at its weakest.*

• Information Gathering—The Battle of Yarmuk Reinforces its Importance

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ guided Muslims on every facet of life, including actions to be taken before and during the war. He gathered intelligence about the Quraish through patrols sent to find out the strength of the trade caravan of Abu Sufyan, as well as in the south towards Yemen, before his first encounter with the Quraish at Badr.

Taking cue from the deeds of the Prophet ﷺ, Muslims had conceived and put into practice an excellent intelligence network in Syria. It was efficient to the extent that no major military movement could go unnoticed. Before the Battle of Yarmuk, Muslims got information through prisoners about Heraclius' plan of attacking Muslims, while they were deployed at Palestine, Jordan, Caesarea, and at Emessa. This allowed Muslims to carefully assess Heraclius' strategy to deal with them piecemeal and humble them. Thus, Khalid advised Abu Ubaida to concentrate his widespread army, to give an organised and cohesive response.

In 1986/87 Indian Army planned a major manoeuvre under the code name Brass Tacks. According to Ravi Rikhye the covert part of the exercise, was to remind Pakistan that its existence was dependant on India's tolerance.⁴⁹ Pakistani intelligence confirmed that India might cross over the border under the garb of this exercise, which was being carried out with ammunition. So instead of Indian strike corps rolling into Pakistan something very odd happened.⁵⁰ Pakistan did something which in retrospect appears quite clever. It shifted 1Armoured Division and 37 Infantry Division which had been exercising in south around Rahim Yar Khan- Sukker, to north from where it could strike Pathankot, Ferozepur or Fazilka, with very little warning.⁵¹ This concealed move at a very short notice, surprised India and General Sunderji (The Indian Army Chief and architect of the concept of simultaneity). Instead of Pakistan getting coerced India got coerced.⁵² Useful intelligence information in this case averted a war.

In our war against miscreants in the last decade many disasters were prevented due to timely intelligence.

• Orderly Withdrawal can Avert Rout

When Abu Ubaida and Khalid received intelligence about the Byzantine army's plan to attack the Muslim army at Emessa and Damascus, Khalid planned an orderly withdrawal from, Palestine, Jordan,

49 Ravi Rikhye, *The Militarization of Mother India*, p 21, 22.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

Caesarea and Emessa under Amr Bin Al Aas, Shurahbeel, Yazid, Abu Ubaida and Khalid respectively⁵³, to the valley of Yarmuk, to concentrate. The Planned withdrawal was given protection by Khalid's mobile guard. Had it been done under enemy pressure, it would have turned into a rout, as happened with the Byzantine army during the counter-offensive of Khalid on the 6th day of the Battle of Yarmouk.

Pakistan Army in October/November 1971 in erstwhile East Pakistan initially deployed troops all along the international border in anticipation of an Indian attack. The defences were thinly held all along the border to deny Indians any space which they could capture and declare as a Bangladesh state. The subsequent plan was to withdraw the force after the initial attack and breakthrough, by the enemy to concentrate at strong points around strategic locations and later make a compact defence around Dacca. However, the formations deployed in erstwhile East Pakistan failed to first plan their withdrawal as elaborately as was done by Khalid nor execute it properly, it turned out to be a rout under enemy pressure and ultimately the battle was lost in ignominy.

- **Never Underrate your Enemy**

Arab Bedouins were a race that Romans had detested, despised, and regarded as too backward and too wretched, to constitute any kind of military threat to their empire.

Heraclius looked down upon the Arabs as petty raiders looking to snatch camels, goats, and sheep; the modern-day equivalent of pickpockets.⁵⁴ But all Byzantine manoeuvres against the Muslims, though strategically flawless, had ended in defeat.⁵⁵

In World War 2 Germans lost war against the USSR that they felt sure to win because they underestimated basic Soviet resilience. The faulty estimate resulted from inaccurate assumption about low fighting quality of the Soviet soldier. And even more misleading perception about own military prowess after Blitzkrieg in the west. German euphoria overtook them that nobody could stop them in a war on land.⁵⁶

A wrong percept caught the imagination of Pakistan Army after Rann of Kutch crisis in April/May 1965. Planners in Pakistan grossly under-assessed the preparedness of the Indian government and its army to take the war to the international border, while planning OPERATIONS GIBRALTAR and GRAND SLAM, which resulted in an all-out attack on the 6th of September.

In modern times US Army was well equipped and understood the nuances of strategy. They were not just the most powerful but the richest nation on planet earth. US Army thought of the Afghans with disdain and underestimated their will. But the Afghans subdued them—just like the Soviets and the British before them—with their patience and resilience.

53 Akram, *Sword of Allah*, 405.

54 Ali, "The Battle of Yarmuk - Khalid Bin Al-Waleed's Greatest Victory - Epilogue".

55 Akram, *Sword of Allah*, 404.

56 Klauss Knorr, Strategic Military Surprise Incentives and Opportunities, p 39.

- **Regimentation- Motivation Based on *Espirit de Corps* and *Camaraderie***

Khalid organised his infantry regiments and formed them on the basis of tribes and clans, so that men knew each other and developed camaraderie. The concept of regimentation much talked about now and is considered to have been initiated and introduced by the British in the Indian Army. Virtues of this were well known to the master strategist Khalid who organised his force accordingly, to achieve the best results.

The Pakistan Army has shown remarkable results in the recent War on Terror (WoT), owing to this concept of regimentation, despite the false narrative of jihad initiated by the terrorists.

- **Timely Employment of Reserves is a Battle Winning Factor**

The Muslim army was far weaker than Byzantine, in strength and equipment, but the genius of Khalid worked. His strategic foresight foretold that numerical weakness can only be counterbalanced by a bold action. He maintained an offensive spirit through local reserves with each corps and also kept his mobile guard in the centre. Whenever defences relented under the attack, Khalid displayed unique patience to read the battle and did not get embroiled at the wrong place. He exactly knew how, where and when to strike a decisive blow to restore the positions. There are important lessons in it: -

- It is worth its while to note that almost all the counter attacks executed by Khalid were

successful. His flair to carry out a mental appreciation to the point of counter attack, and staff checks about timings and force required were exceptional. Staff and command of reserves in Pakistan Army have important lessons to learn from this. Application of reserves at right time as a sequel to detailed staff checks always bear fruit.

- Khalid in all counter attacks clearly designed his strategy to concentrate the force at the decisive point with utmost mobility of his reserves to roll up the enemy either from rear or flanks. The commander's judgement call on the timing to launch reserves should be instinctive and based on correct visualisation of the battle. Timing and mobility, more than relative strength is a key factor to achieve a positive outcome in a counter attack.

Before the 1971 war, it had always been avowed that the defence of East Pakistan lied in the strategic capability of the armed forces deployed in West Pakistan. It is still a mystery why the most important strategic asset of the Pakistan Army deployed in the south of West Pakistan was never employed across the international border to reduce pressure on the weaker forces in East Pakistan.

- **Role of Women—What can be Learnt**

Women accompanied the Muslim army and were in the camp basically for administration, and

to treat the wounded. Abu Ubaida had directed them to welcome their men with stones and tent poles if they retreated from the battlefield. On the second day of the battle, when Yazid's corps was pushed back by the Byzantine army, those who retreated under pressure, were met with contempt by the Muslim women, including Hind (wife of Abu Sufyan). Yazid's corps returned to battle and regained their lost ground. The same thing happened on the third day of the battle, with similar action by Muslim women in the camp, and identical results.

Elements of motivation and retribution are essentially required to achieve best results. In the 1965 War Pakistan army received special treatment from the civilians in Lahore. The support which they received motivated them to produce results in the battlefield. Similarly, the heart-warming songs of Noor Jahan are still a source of inspiration for men in uniform. In this age of information, free and independent electronic, print, and social media may act in the same manner as was the role played by the women in the Muslim camp during the battle of Yarmuk, to ensure that the troops do not relent from their assigned tasks under any pressure or persuasion, both during peace and war.

• **Probing Attack—A Useful Stratagem that Failed**

Mahan (commander of the Byzantine army) in order to ascertain the extent of the Muslim deployment, and test the strength of the Muslim army at Yarmuk, sent Jabla (one of

his generals), with the bulk of his Arab army, to launch probing attacks before the start of the battle in July 636 CE.⁵⁷ But the Muslim cavalry under Khalid was ready, and gave a stunning reply. Jabla after some resistance, fell back. This reinforced Mahan's fears that it would not be easy to subdue these Muslims on the battlefield. Probing attacks were launched to get information, and establish strength of Muslim army, but an alert Muslim force sent a strong message to the enemy.

• **Protective Detachments—Their Efficacy to Thwart Element of Surprise**

On the second day of the battle, Mahan decided to launch a surprise attack, while the Muslims would be preparing to offer morning prayers. But here too, he was neutralised by the superior planning of Khalid, who had placed strong outposts for such an eventuality. Deployment of protective detachments at tactical level, and covering troops etcetera at the operational level, are thus a necessity not only to avert being surprised, but also to gain time and wear out the enemy. These protective detachments and positions bring the offensive element into the defensive battle.

6th of September 1965, when the Indian army launched its offensive on Lahore, its army chief **General Jayanto Nath Chaudhry** desired to have his drink in Lahore Gymkhana that evening.⁵⁸ But protective detachments of 10th Pakistan Army division delayed and attrited the XI Indian Corps before it contacted main

57 Akram, *Sword of Allah*, 412.

58 <https://tribune.com.pk/article/56351/india-couldnt-beat-us-in-1965-cant-beat-the-stronger-pakistan-of-today-either>.

defence along BRBL Canal. Indian Army failed to cross BRBL canal to have their drink at Lahore gymkhana club, in the same evening as was dreamt by their chief.

- **Maintenance of Aim**

Maintenance of aim is an important principle of war. On the second day of the battle, the Byzantine army almost reached the camp of the Muslim army, but failed to thrust further, and positions were restored after the Muslim army repulsed the enemy through timely counter attacks. Had the Byzantine army reinforced the troops of Qanateer on the second day of the battle to maintain the momentum of attack generated by him, the Muslim army may have landed in trouble.

On the other hand, Khalid was determined to defeat and destroy the enemy from the moment he conceived his plan to withdraw forces from Emessa to Yarmuk. He relentlessly pursued his aim and achieved it on the sixth and final day of the battle.

- **Application of Time Space and Relative strength (TSR) Matrix**

The Muslim caliphate decided to engage with the Byzantine army on the battlefield at an appropriate time, when it was sufficiently exhausted, and low in morale after twenty six long years of warring with the Sassanids Army, 602-628.⁵⁹ Which ultimately led to the Battle of Yarmuk, a classic case of the

application of time, space, and relative strength matrix.

Khalid planned to utilise time and space, to achieve superiority in relative strength, by concentrating his forces at a defensible place near Yarmuk river. Here he could counter the enemy's superiority in relative strength with the help of his light cavalry, by generating maximum combat power. He caused sufficient attrition to the Byzantine army, after it failed to create a dent in the Muslim army's defences and when it had run out of steam, out manoeuvred the enemy with his mobile guard and caused destruction, at the place of his choosing.⁶⁰

- **Separating Infantry from Armour**

Khalid's plan for the counter offensive on sixth day of the battle, was to separate infantry from cavalry. Khalid was determined to drive a wedge between the Roman infantry and cavalry. The bulk of their army was infantry, he wanted the infantry deprived of the support of their cavalry, so that when he attacked from the flank or rear the infantry should be at a disadvantage.⁶¹ He attacked from the flank only after he had stripped infantry from cavalry, pressing the infantry at Wadi-ur-Raqqad, where Zarrar's force completed its destruction.

In Indo-Pak scenario, mainstay of the Indian Army in the desert are Reorganised Army Plains Infantry Divisions (RAPIDS).

59 "The Byzantine-Sassanid War (602-628)," Historia Rex, accessed on July 29, 2022, <https://historiarex.com/e/en/245-byzantine-sassanid-war-602-628>.

60 Rahman, Bashir and Qamar, *Early Battles of Islam*, 185.

61 Akram, *Sword of ALLAH*, 443.

The organisation of RAPIDs warrants them to move with speed. But for the shortage of Infantry, if they are forced to launch frequent infantry attacks the speed of their move can be sufficiently reduced. Khalid's tactics and strategy of separating infantry from cavalry, could deliver rich dividend, if planned well.

- **Muslim Resilience**

Heraclius amassed a huge army before the battle started. He seemed to have expected the Arabs to be fatigued and drift homeward. Instead, they received reinforcements and held their positions.⁶² The hallmark of leadership provided by Muslim generals in all battles they fought including Yarmuk, was to never give in nor get impressed by overwhelming strength of the enemy. Starting from the Battle of Badr, right up to the Battle of Yarmuk and later also, Muslims always faced a much bigger enemy, but due to their ideology and belief in the cause of ALLAH, superior tactical and strategic planning and finally physical strength and expertise in fighting skills, the Muslims always subdued their enemies.

Without real introspection, a soldier of the Pakistan Army has been made to believe that he is taller and stronger than non-believers of the enemy due to his faith. Men in khaki can learn from Battle of Yarmuk that faith in cause, ideology and superior skills both physical and intellectual give strength even to a smaller army against much bigger force. The caveat

added to it is, competence leads to courage and superior thinking of leader leads to novelty of ideas. Self-discipline, rigorous training and able leadership can win wars against larger and stronger armies. ALLAH's help is subject to altruistic professionalism.

- **Construction of a Narrative**

It is assumed that construction of a narrative to further the ambition of a state or states, is a phenomenon of the late 19th century, evolving into the 20th century, its two great wars, and then through the Cold War. It is now maturing in this information age, with the concept of hybrid warfare. According to David Nicolle, Heraclius used his propagandists to portray Byzantine wars in a religious light, using the most potent of Christian relics; the wood of the Holy Cross, to inspire the fighting fervour of his troops.⁶³ It had a practical manifestation. As per Lieutenant General A I Akram, no people of the cross living in the Byzantine empire failed to send warriors to the new Army, to fight the invaders in the spirit of a Christian crusade.⁶⁴ The narrative constructed by the Byzantines, was a *war of cross against a rising crescent*.

In the last two decades narrative constructed by the west on the war on terror was almost on similar lines wherein Muslims were equated with the spur of terrorism in the whole world disregarding incidents in New Zealand and France. Hitler killed hundreds of thousand

62 Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750*.

63 Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750*, 49.

64 Akram, *Sword of Allah*, 405.

Jews; the narrative put together against him was not Christian terrorism but was declared a fascist. Berlin, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were razed to the ground but it was just an act of revenge. It was not narrativised as terrorism. History guides us that the narrative of the victor always prevails. Therefore, Pakistani nation must work hard to rise to become an economic, cultural, and social power.

• Unity of Command

Unlike the multi-ethnic Byzantine forces, the Arabs were united not only in their nationalist sentiment, but were also bound by their common faith; a strong relation created by the eternal leadership of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Muslims, despite their different clans, were united under the command of Abu Ubaida and Khalid the de facto commander-in-chief. Whereas the Byzantine army was composed of an Armenian army commanded by Mahan, Qanateer a Russian prince commanded Russian Slavs, the remaining European contingents were placed under Gregory and Deirjan, and Jabla, the King of Ghassan Arabs, had Christian Arabs under his command.

The Byzantine force was much larger, better equipped and better trained. But morale was low, as numerous rivalries and quarrels caused friction in the ranks.⁶⁵ It is difficult to comprehend how commanders of the same stature and different ethnicities, could produce good results on the battlefield as a

unified force. Unity of command as a principle of war is therefore, extremely important.

• Accomplishment of Favourable End State is Essential to any Operational Plan

A good strategist always sees the end state, and constructs its realisation into his plans accordingly. Khalid, while strategising the plan for the battle, had destruction of the Byzantine army in sight. How and where to strike a decisive blow to the Byzantine army were essentially the two aspects that Khalid may have considered and pondered over. His selection of the site for the battle after withdrawal from Damascus—keeping Wadi-ur-Raqqad, at the back of the Byzantine army—was part of his larger vision and plan. It was therefore, on the fifth day, when Mahan sent his emissary for a truce for the next few days, and Abu Ubaida was inclined to accept the offer. Khalid discouraged his commander, smelling that he had sufficiently worn out the enemy, its will to fight had been effectively eroded in the first four days. The Byzantines were not ready for further battle. Khalid had envisioned destruction of the enemy as end state, and thus he planned and strived for it.

At the peak of War on Terror (WoT) in the summer of 2009, Operation *Rah-e-Nijat* in Swat was conceived with ultimate end state in the minds of the planners. The plan was executed with precision, and was comprehensively accomplished with complete peace in the area.

65 Firas Alkhateeb, *Lost Islamic History: Reclaiming Muslim Civilisation from the Past* (London: Hurst, 2014), 41.

• Destruction of the Enemy—An Objective

During the first large scale battle between Muslims and Byzantines, the two armies had already clashed at Ajnadayn in late July 634 CE, where the Byzantines suffered a crushing defeat—although the bulk of their army had managed to escape avoided complete destruction.⁶⁶ Thus, the Byzantine army was ready again with a larger strength to defeat Muslim army in the summer of 636 CE.

According to Clausewitz, *indeed if the destruction of the enemy's main force is the **strategist's main objective**, he believes that a single concentrated battle is the optimum means of achieving this. The destruction of the enemy forces in a decisive battle is not merely contributory to the final objective of the strategist; rather, it is an intrinsic part of that objective.* Moreover, Clausewitz believed that victory in a decisive battle must be achieved at any cost in lives and materiel. To emphasise this point, he described a decisive battle as *die schlacht*—slaughter.⁶⁷

Khalid had planned complete cycle of the battle which he completed and finalised during their effort to escape through Wadi-ur-Raqqad.

• Surprise

According to Klaus Knorr and Patrick Morgan, throughout

history, belligerents had been able to achieve surprise on the battlefield by introducing new tactics, adopting bold strategies, employing deception and developing exceptional troop discipline.⁶⁸ Khalid had been able to surprise the enemy by demonstrating all these means.

- He introduced bold tactics of launching counter attacks to restore defences, after relentless attacks by the Byzantine army, throughout the four days of the battle.
- He deceived the enemy by allowing them to drift towards Wadi ur Raqqad, to achieve a break from the Muslim army after the initial attack on sixth day of the battle, where he had already placed his cavalry regiment in a blocking position.
- Introduced new tactics of moving Zarrar's regiment at night to establish a blocking position. Night operations were never undertaken at that time.
- His troops' discipline was excellent in all the counter attacks that he launched simultaneously, from different directions.

In the planning stage of the Blitzkrieg, conservative planners considered it inviting too many risks to and the success excessively depended on surprise. But it proved

⁶⁶ Nicolle, *The Great Islamic Conquests AD 632-750*, 50.

⁶⁷ Scott Fitzsimmons, "Evaluating the Masters of Strategy: A Comparative Analysis of Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Mahan, and Corbett," *Innovations: A Journal of Politics* 7, (2007): 27-40, https://prism.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/handle/1880/112877/innovations_vol7_3_fitzsimmmons-evaluatingthemastersofstrategy.pdf?sequence=1.

⁶⁸ Klaus Knorr and Patrick Morgan, *Strategic Military Surprise- Incentives and Opportunities* (UK: Routledge, 1982), p 2.

ultimately that to achieve surprise and ultimate success, the plan had to be bold and innovative.

Initial success of OPERATION GRAND SLAM, launched by Pakistan Army in May 1965 was due to the fact that the plan, its timing and execution surprised the Indian army and her government.

• Logistics

Khalid as a great leader and commander exhibited his acumen in finding out bold solutions to logistic problems and putting logistical constraints on enemy in lead up to and during the Battle of Yarmuk.

- He knew that fighting in the wastes of desert is their forte, wherein they could stretch their minimal logistics upon camels.
- Khalid advised Abu Ubaida to redeploy near Yarmuk river because the Muslims realised that they could withdraw to the edge of the desert, but for the Romans loss of space would be too damaging. In Caesarea, which was not far from Jabiya there were 40000 Romans under Constantine (son of Heraclius).⁶⁹ They could reinforce the Byzantine Army.
- Innovation in planning and bold initiatives give enormous help in operations as has been seen through military history, but daring actions to deal with logistical issues were rare as was accomplished by Khalid while

crossing the *desert of death* in late 634 CE. As a result, the enemy was taken by a surprise when attacked from the rear. Had he not reached in time, the Muslim army, he was going to reinforce, may have been defeated.

- Khalid's strategy of withdrawing from the occupied areas and concentrating his troops at Yarmuk for a decisive battle forced the Byzantines to concentrate their five armies in response. The Byzantines had, for centuries, avoided engaging in large scale decisive battles, and the concentration of their forces created logistical strains, for which the empire was ill-prepared.⁷⁰ Damascus was the closest logistical base, but Mansur, commander of Damascus, could not fully support the massive Byzantine army that was gathered at the Yarmuk plain. Several clashes were reported with local citizens over the requisition of supplies, as summer was at an end, and there was a decline in pasturage.⁷¹
- Khalid advised Abu Ubaida to be at Yarmuk, because of the availability of green pasture for horses. At Yarmouk it was easier for the caliph to send reinforcements, and logistics was also easier to manage.

Elaborate logistic planning is an essential lesson of not only the

69 Akram, *Sword of Allah*, 410.

70 "Battle of Yarmouk - Tensions in The Byzantine Army," liquiSearch, accessed on Nov 22, 2022, https://www.liquisearch.com/battle_of_yarmouk/tensions_in_the_byzantine_army.

71 "Battle of Yarmouk," Military Wiki - Fandom, accessed Nov 24, 2022, https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Battle_of_Yarmouk.

Battle of Yarmuk, but a key element in the outcome of all important campaigns in military history. In order to manage the North West borders of India, the British spent 20,000 Pounds sterling per mile (present day value comes to billions of dollars), to lay a railway track in Balochistan and North West Frontier with Afghanistan in 1894, to facilitate logistics and brisk movement of troops to keep a check on the tribes and borders with Afghanistan and Iran, and deter other powers, especially Russia.⁷² The track is still the logistic lifeline of Pakistan for north-south transportation.

• Leadership

Morale is a state of mind. It is that intangible force which will move a whole group of men to give their last ounce to achieve something without cost to themselves.⁷³ As leader of the men, Khalid knew the capabilities of his undercommand and therefore before every battle, he said to his opposing commander, while giving him three options, *“become Muslim, pay jizya, or be ready to fight, For I bring the men who desire death as ardently as you desire life”*.⁷⁴ To convince the men that they were part of the whole it has always been the business of the leaders to visit their undercommand to show an interest in them and to express that how the outcome of the battle depends on their high morale and moral values.

- On the third day after a hard battle, both Khalid and Abu Ubaida went around their troops, asked about the wellbeing of the wounded and motivated them for the next day. The fourth day of the battle of Yarmuk was the toughest for the Muslim army. Due to the extensive firing of arrows, many Muslims lost their eyes. Normally Abu Ubaida would nominate a general to monitor the vigilance of the army at night. That night he himself was so tired, but still he decided to act as a duty officer. Along with a few companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, when he went round the camp, everywhere he found the generals up and mounted, going about talking to the wounded and sentries.⁷⁵ When the hierarchy of the army has such leadership qualities, morale of the troops remains high. A leader has to be more fit and determined than his subordinates to lead them from the front. Such a force then never loses from an army many times bigger.
- During a battle, as the operation progresses undercommand stay on course, a leader must continuously carry out planning for the future. This was amply manifested by Khalid who was not only leading his troops in

72 Ilhan Niaz, The state During the British Raj, 132.

73 Serve to Lead (An Anthology) compiled by royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, 3.

74 Moomtaz Emrith, “Islamic History: Khalid ibn al-Walid, a great military commander,” Lemaucien, Dec 3, 2019, <https://www.lemauricien.com/le-mauricien/islamic-history-khalid-ibn-al-walid-a-great-military-commander/314266/>.

75 Akram, *Sword of Allah*, 440.

counter attacks during the first four days of battle, he was also planning ahead for the counter offensive. *If you want a decision, go to the point of danger,*" said General James Gavin.⁷⁶ Khalid proved it in the Battle of Yarmuk.

- Military leadership is not restricted to one's performance in an operation, but how efficiently the capabilities of the command are utilised. Abu Ubaida knew the brilliance of Khalid in the art of war, thus despite the fact he was a nominated commander of the Muslim army, he appointed Khalid as the commander, to plan and execute his skills against the Byzantine army.
- Abu Ubaida also learnt from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that important decisions were taken after detailed discussions, and seeking advice from colleagues. Abu Ubaida heeded the advice of Khalid, first to withdraw to Yarmuk, and then despite his inclination towards a truce with the Byzantines, he spurned it at the behest of Khalid. Both pieces of advice paid rich dividends. The importance of discussion before the final decision, following merit alone, are the virtues of great leaders.
- An efficient and capable leader always thinks 360 degrees. Khalid knew that Mahan might

achieve surprise. Therefore he, placed protective detachments well in advance, to avert such an eventuality. He attached and detached to command his troops frequently. The cavalry regiment of Zarrar was detached not only for a counter attack but also deployed as a blocking position in advance.

Conclusion

In a series of encounters that continued for six days in August 636 CE, the battle that took place between the cross and the rising crescent, near the Yarmuk River, was a complete Muslim victory, which concluded the Byzantine era in Syria. This victory permanently transferred the dominion in Syria from the Byzantine Empire to the Muslims, and marked the beginning of Muslim rule. The Battle of Yarmuk began the process of the Arab conquest that created the modern Middle East.⁷⁷ Moreover, this was the finest moment of Khalid, who has been immortalised in legends for his triumph.⁷⁸

Heraclius said while leaving Syria *"Salutations to thee, O Syria! And farewell from one who departs. Never again shall the Roman return to thee except in fear. Oh, what a fine land I leave to the enemy!"*⁷⁹ The Battle of Yarmouk is regarded as one of the most decisive battles in military history, and ushered in Muslim culture on the world stage.

76 David Mccammon, "Command and Leadership – Fit to Fight," Grounded Curiosity, July 30, 2017, accessed on Dec 7, 22, <https://groundedcuriosity.com/command-and-leadership-fit-to-fight/#.Y70PqXZBwdU.0>.

77 Houser, "August 20, 636 - The Battle of Yarmouk & the Arab Conquest".

78 Khan, "Battle of Yarmouk".

79 Ali, "The Battle of Yarmuk - Khalid Bin Al-Waleed's Greatest Victory –Epilogue".

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