

Imam ‘Alī’s Methods of Interaction with his Ideological and Political Adversaries in Nahj al-Balagha

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Abstract

An interaction is a reciprocal relation between two individuals or two groups. In his political practice, Imam Ali (a) engaged in constructive interactions with his opponents based on shared principles. In different circumstances, he always sought to find rational and accurate solutions through direct talks. He always treated his opponents with patience and tolerance. Imam ‘Ali never allowed his companions and associates to insult the enemy. He advocated for the unity of the Islamic nation and always underlined charitable and passionate advice. On some issues, he unveil the true face of the enemy by dispelling confusion and answering their accusations. He always aimed to guide his opponents towards the truth. However, when they refused to accept his arguments and insisted on fighting him, he reluctantly engaged in war.

Keywords: Imam ‘Ali, Nahj al-Balagha, interaction with opponents, Nākithūn, Qāsiṭūn, Māriqūn.

Introduction

Interaction is a kind of exchange or reciprocal relationship (Mahyar, n.d., 61). It is a mutual relationship between two individuals or two groups. The way Imam ‘Alī treated, and interacted with, his ideological and political opponents is indicative of his remarkable competence in management. An extraction of his interaction methods in the face of various groups and individuals can provide us with solutions to many problems concerning management and political relationship (in both domestic and international policies). Some Islamic countries today suffer from problems at three levels of interactions: the government’s interactions with people, the government’s interactions with other governments, and the government’s interaction with non-Islamic governments. An updated version of the interaction methods adopted by Imam ‘Alī (a), as an acceptable figure among all Muslims, can serve as a constructive model. The Imam was so chivalrous that he did not do injustice even to his enemies and never

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initiated to destroy his adversaries. He believed that even his enemies had certain rights; hence, his command to his appointed ruler in Egypt Mālik al-Ashtar: “Never deceive your enemy and never break your pledge” (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 53).

The present article aims to discuss the following main question: What solutions and methods were used by Imam ‘Alī in his interactions with his adversaries? In other words, what was his approach to his opponents under various circumstances? As it will turn out, the Imam underlined soft methods of interaction and highlighted the role of dialogue in interactions with his opponents. This will be an insightful inspiration for contemporary interactions of governments. The Imam’s methods can determine the priorities of the main governmental bodies. They can offer stage-by-stage suggestions, which provide Muslim people and officials with a clear prospect to adjust their relationships. In his approach, peace and compromise are prioritized to any hostile interactions. Although it may seem that these methods can simply be derived through reasoning, and no reference to Imam ‘Alī’s practice is needed, it should be considered that, first, these methods were adopted centuries ago by Imam ‘Alī, which was unprecedented at the time, and second, the Imam’s practice provides Muslims with an example to follow.

In this article, when we refer to the Imam’s adversaries, we mean the three caliphs, Nākithūn, Qāsiṭūn, Māriqūn, as well as some of the Qā‘idūn. Our main focus is on Nahj al-Balagha, which is a collection of Imam ‘Alī’s sermons, letters, and sayings. We have carefully read through Nahj al-Balagha from beginning to end, extracted the relevant parts, and classified them under various titles.

As for the background of this research, various works were written on the subject, including:

1. The book *Mawāḍi‘ siyāsī haḍrat ‘Alī (a) dar qibāl mukhālifīn* (Imam ‘Alī’s political positions towards his adversaries) by Jalal Derakhsheh (1390 Sh). It outlines Imam ‘Alī’s life before and after his caliphate, particularly when treating his opponents.
2. A master’s dissertation titled “Shīwahāyi muqābala-yi Imam ‘Alī (a) by jang narm mukhālifān” (Imam ‘Alī’s counteraction methods against his adversaries’ soft wars) by Ahmad Forudi (1393 Sh). This work identifies methods of soft war and certain methods to counter them.
3. The article “Freedom of political adversaries in ‘Alī’s government” by Mohammad Hasan Saedi (1379 Sh). It discusses Imam ‘Alī’s position on freedom of thought and expression.
4. The article “Pedagogical principles and methods of encountering the adversaries in Imam ‘Alī’s communication ethics” by Mohammad Ali Latifi and Hossein Zarifian Yeganeh (1391 Sh). It emphasizes communication ethics and its principles.
5. The article “Imam ‘Alī’s reasoning styles against his adversaries in Nahj al-Balagha” by Ali Akbar Abbasi (1392 Sh). It discusses the Imam’s treatment of the three caliphs, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, Mu‘āwiya, and al-Ash‘ath.

6. The article "A study of Imam 'Alī's treatment of the domestic adversaries of the Islamic government" by Masoumeh Shirdel et al. (1396 Sh). It provides statistic information about the Imam's treatment of his opponents.
7. The article "Imam 'Alī's interaction methods with his adversaries" by Seyyed Mohammad Emam and Gholam-Hossein Moharrami (1396 Sh). It highlights the verbal methods (such as dialogues, preaching, correspondence) and non-verbal methods (such as tolerance and fight) of interacting with the adversaries.

A survey of the literature reveals that, despite the efforts made by these scholars, certain aspects of the issue remained unnoticed, as these works are mainly concerned with historical issues. The present article adopts an applied method to establish a model for Islamic societies. Unlike the other works, it focuses on Nahj al-Balagha. Moreover, it classifies Imam 'Alī's opponents and degrees of their opposition. It presents the issues in a careful, purposeful, and clear way.

Drawing upon our careful reading of Nahj al-Balagha and extraction of instances of Imam 'Alī's interaction with his opponents, we classify the methods into three general approaches: ethical, didactic, and military. Under each category, we discuss their subdivisions and instances. A main method of interaction is constructive dialogue. The Quran states that a proper method to guide people is to have dialogues with various strata of people, including the opponents: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best. Indeed your Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best those who are guided" (Quran 16:125). However, when dialogues fail to be effective, other methods should be adopted, as we discuss in this article.

1. The Ethical Approach

1.1. Kindness and Respectfulness

The Quran says, "Do not abuse those whom they invoke besides Allah, lest they should abuse Allah out of hostility, without any knowledge" (Quran 6:108). Throughout Nahj al-Balagha, Imam 'Alī (a) offers criticism of the practices of the three caliphs, particularly Abū Bakr and 'Umar. However, it is noteworthy that he does so without resorting to insults or explicitly mentioning their names. Various theories have been proposed to explain why Imam 'Alī (a) refrains from mentioning the names of the three caliphs, but one widely accepted reason is that he was being polite and diplomatic to avoid potential consequences. Nevertheless, he is explicit and forthright in his criticisms of their errors. Imam 'Alī (a) frequently discussed the conduct of unjust rulers during his own time and in the future, identifying the indicators of misguided leadership and incompetence on their part (see Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 144).

When some of his companions cursed the army of the Levant during the Battle of Şiffin, Imam 'Alī (a) responded by explicitly stating that he does not approve of cursing. Rather, he suggested that the enemy's behavior should be explained and

guidance should be sought for them (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 206). This highlights the Imam's belief in treating adversaries with respect and politeness.

1.2. Patience, Leniency, and Tolerance

Imam 'Alī demonstrated great tolerance on numerous occasions, thanks to his status, foresight, and commitment to seeking guidance. He had learned from the Prophet that Islam's crucial objectives could be achieved through tolerance. Despite facing ridicule and harassment from many hypocrites towards the Prophet (s) and his companions in Medina, the Prophet never responded harshly to them. When the Prophet confronted a hypocrite named 'Abd Allāh b. Nufayl about gossiping behind his back and received a promise from him not to do it again, the Prophet readily accepted his apology. However, 'Abd Allāh went to his friends and boasted, "Muḥammad is too gullible. He believed me when I denied gossiping." It was at this point that verse 61 of Sura al-Tawba was revealed (see Soltani 1394 Sh, 53-54). This shows that the Prophet (s) and 'Alī (a) were tolerant people.

During his encounter with Mu'āwiya, Imam 'Alī did not resort to war and force. Instead, he made every effort to prevent bloodshed. For example, he dispatched Jarīr b. 'Abd Allāh al-Bajālī to the Levant to urge Mu'āwiya to pledge his allegiance to the Imam. When Jarīr, the Imam's envoy, did not return promptly, and there was a possibility that he might have colluded with Mu'āwiya, some of the companions of Imam 'Alī suggested waging a war against Mu'āwiya. However, the Imam refused to take that path, noting that initiating war would impede the prospects of peace, and instead suggested waiting for the outcome while the envoy was still present (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 43).

Throughout the period when the Kharijites acted as the Imam's political adversaries, he demonstrated patience towards them. He responded with leniency to their harsh words and consistently upheld principles of tolerance (Delshad 1394 Sh, 60). In his dialogues with the Kharijites, the Imam employed a realistic approach, grounded in reasoning, kindness, and the hope for their correction. Imam 'Alī also demonstrated tolerance towards the Nākithūn and Qāsiṭūn (Delshad 1394 Sh, 74-75), as well as the Qā'idūn (Delshad 1394 Sh, 70), to the extent possible. This was in contrast to the prevailing practice of executing those who broke their allegiance or refused to pledge allegiance to the caliph. In fact, any opposition to the caliph would often lead to dire consequences.

1.3. Benevolent Advice

Imam 'Alī employed a compassionate and benevolent approach when dealing with his opponents. When people gathered around him (a) and complained about 'Uthmān's corrupt practices, they asked him to intervene with the caliph. The Imam approached 'Uthmān and offered him compassionate and benevolent advice. For example, he

advised him, "Do not allow Marwān to manipulate and lead you wherever he wishes" (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 164). Imam 'Alī warned 'Uthmān that the people were becoming increasingly agitated and that it was likely they would soon riot against him and kill him. He offered him compassionate advice, urging him to take action "lest you become the slain leader of this nation" (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 164). As the Quran recommends, admonition and advice can benefit the faithful (Quran 51:55).

1.4. Forgiveness

Imam 'Alī (a) was known for his forgiving nature, saying: "If you capture your enemy, let his forgiveness be your gratitude for having captured him" (Nahj al-Balagha, hadith no. 11). According to al-Sayyid al-Raḍī, during a talk 'Alī was giving to people around him, one of the Kharijites said: "May Allah kill this heretic! How logical he is!" People then leapt towards him to kill him, but 'Alī (a) said, "He has only cursed, and he should be cursed in response, although it is worthier to forgive him." He then forgave the man (Nahj al-Balagha, hadith no. 420).

Imam 'Alī demonstrated tolerance towards the Kharijites, even though they were his political opponents. He advised his companions not to kill the Kharijites after his death, noting that although they were mistaken, they were seeking the truth. However, he also acknowledged that there were those who were seeking falsehood, including Mu'āwiya (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 61).

Following the Battle of Jamal, Imam 'Alī released Marwān upon the intercession of his sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, even though Marwān had requested their help. However, the Imam did not accept Marwān's allegiance, referring to him as a man of deception and tricks, and stating that his hand was "a Jewish hand" (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 73). This act of forgiveness exemplifies how it can soften hearts and lead to friendship and empathy.

1.5. Silence and Restraint

Imam 'Alī chose to remain silent towards the three caliphs, but he made it clear that this was not out of fear of death. He explained that his silence was due to the secret truths he knew that others did not (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 5).

Imam 'Alī responded differently to rumors and critiques of his actions in society. At times, he chose not to take a position on baseless claims made about him (Adyani 1388 Sh, 148-49).

When Imam 'Alī (a) overheard al-'Ammār's conversation with Mughīra b. Shu'ba, he advised al-'Ammār to leave Mughīra to his own devices, noting that he was not simply an innocently mistaken man, but someone who sought to use religion for worldly gain (Nahj al-Balagha, hadith no. 405). Additionally, the Imam stated that those whom God has left to their own devices are the worst kind of people (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 103). This divine procedure can be applied to interactions with people.

2. Didactic Approach

2.1. Preservation of Unity and Avoidance of Divisions

Imam 'Alī placed a great deal of importance on maintaining unity within the community. He once declared that no one was more concerned with the unity of the Prophet's nation than he was (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 78). Despite facing conspiracies and destructive efforts by oath-breakers and Nākithūn, he chose not to respond harshly and instead remained patient, stating that he would only take action if social unity was endangered (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 169).

Imam 'Alī was deeply troubled by the slow response of his troops when Busr b. Arṭāt, a brutal commander of Mu'āwiya, attacked Yemen. He observed that while the enemy was united in their falsehood and obedient to their illegitimate leader, his own troops were divided over the truth and disobedient to their rightful Imam (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 25). Similar themes are also present in sermon 27. The Prophet (s) had established fraternity relationships between people, emphasizing the importance of unity within the community (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 96).

In order to protect Islam, Imam 'Alī even pledged allegiance to the caliphs (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 62). In one of his sermons, the Imam emphasized the importance of unity, stating that it is better to unite over an unpleasant truth than to be divided over a pleasant falsehood. Furthermore, he asserted that throughout history, God has never blessed people who were divided (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 176). In other words, reluctant unity is preferable to pleasant division.

Imam 'Alī believed that people from different linguistic, color, and racial backgrounds should be able to coexist peacefully, with their shared agreement being Islam. He emphasized that one should never prioritize blood relations over faith. The Imam referred to the early years of Islam when people fought against their disbelieving relatives, with their ultimate allegiance being to God and the religion (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 56).

2.2. Cooperation and Assistance

Imam 'Alī recognized the importance of safeguarding Islam and sometimes offered his assistance to the caliphs when necessary. For instance, when 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb sought the Imam's advice about invading Iran, he explained the exigencies of the caliph and the Islamic state to him (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 146).

During the reigns of the three caliphs, Imam 'Alī (a) cooperated with them to the best of his ability. Even when he was frequently exiled by the third caliph, he always complied. In fact, he once remarked that he had defended the caliph so often that he feared he might be held accountable for it (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 240). The Imam advised those who asked him to take up the position of caliphate to look for someone else, as he would support any ruler they chose (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 92).

Furthermore, the Imam urged his companions to support and pledge their allegiance to the caliphs. He also regularly attended Friday Prayers and encouraged others to do the same (Ahmadpour 1386 Sh, 124-25).

2.3. Responding to Accusations and Rumors

Imam 'Alī (a) held the belief that when the society harbors suspicions about the ruler, it is the responsibility of the ruler to clarify matters and provide transparency to the public. By doing so, the ruler can dispel any grounds for suspicion (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 53).

Imam 'Alī's willingness to clarify matters to his opponents demonstrates two things: first, that there was a culture of free speech under his rule, and second, that he was fully engaged with the people and intimately familiar with the realities of society (Adyani 1388 Sh, 149).

When asked why he was deprived of immediate succession of the Prophet despite his qualifications, Imam 'Alī attributed it to narrow-mindedness and monopolization (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 162).

Imam 'Alī consistently denied any involvement in the murder of 'Uthmān and even asserted that he had helped him (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 30). He expressed bewilderment as to why Banū Umayya, who were familiar with his character, would make such false accusations against him (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 75). In a letter addressed to Mu'āwiya, the Imam declared that he was more outraged by 'Uthmān's murder than anyone else (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 8).

When Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr angrily complained to him, Imam 'Alī responded by asking them what they were referring to: a right that he had deprived them of or a matter in which he had prioritized himself over them. He went on to explain that he was not interested in the caliphate and did not seek to rule, but they had persuaded him to accept it and left the responsibility to him (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 205). The Imam criticized them for being angry with him for enforcing divine rulings and following the Prophetic tradition.

In addition to their fundamentalist views, the Kharijites committed heinous crimes, such as the tragic murder of 'Abd Allāh b. Khabāb b. al-Aratt (a companion of the Prophet and 'Alī) and his pregnant wife, as well as three other women. Upon hearing of this event, Imam 'Alī (a) sent al-Ḥārith b. Murra to investigate the matter, but the Kharijites killed him too. The Imam was forced to take action and moved against the Kharijites, demanding that they surrender the murderers to be executed. He then proposed to join forces with them to fight against Mu'āwiya in the Levant. However, the Kharijites rejected his offer and declared war against him. Despite this, 'Alī continued to try and dissuade them from war and clarify matters to them. After his enlightening speech, many people from the Kharijite army joined the Imam's army. Around 2,800 or 1,800 people remained, and they were killed in the ensuing battle. Only eight people from the Kharijites survived (Delshad 1394 Sh, 98-104).

According to al-Sayyid al-Raḍī, when Imam ‘Alī (a) approached Basra, the people of the city sent an Arab envoy to learn the truth about the army of Jamal. The Imam explained the situation to him until he was convinced of the Imam’s rightfulness. The Imam then asked him to pledge allegiance, but the envoy declined until he could report back to those who had sent him. The Imam posed a hypothetical scenario to him: if people asked him to find a land where rain had fallen, and he found such a place with plants and water, but they rejected his report and insisted on going to an arid land, what would he do? The envoy replied that he would try to dissuade them and go to the green place with water. The Imam then asked him to extend his hand, and the man pledged allegiance to him because he had been convinced by the Imam’s explanation. The envoy’s name was Kulayb al-Jarmī (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 170).

After the Prophet’s passing, when Imam ‘Alī (a) learned of the event of Saqīna wherein Abū Bakr was appointed as caliph, he inquired about the Anṣār’s stance on the matter. He was informed that they had requested a ruler from among themselves and a ruling from among the Muhājirūn. The Imam questioned why no one had reminded them of the Prophet’s recommendation to do good to the good among the Anṣār and forgive the bad among them. When asked how this could be an argument against them, he explained that if they were truly worthy of governance, the Prophet would not have felt the need to make such a recommendation regarding them (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 17).

Although Imam ‘Alī did not believe that blood relation should be the primary factor in determining superiority, he frequently reminded others of his blood relation to the Prophet (s) because his adversaries often used this factor to justify their claim to governance (Ahmadpour 1386 Sh, 93).

In response to the Kharijites, who believed that Imam ‘Alī was a sinner and therefore a disbeliever, the Imam argued that the Prophet (s) punished wrongdoers but still considered them Muslims. For example, when an adulterer died, the Prophet performed funeral prayer on his corpse. The Imam posed a rhetorical question to the Kharijites, asking whether they believed that wrongdoers were no longer Muslims (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 127). Although the Imam himself was not a wrongdoer, he assumed this stance for the sake of argument. He made these remarks in an attempt to convince the Kharijites before the Battle of Nahrawān.

In response to the narrow-mindedness of the Kharijites, Imam ‘Alī always remained restrained and would speak logically, never initiating any acts of violence against them. In response to the Kharijite slogan, “Command behoves only Allah,” he accepted its core idea but criticized the wrong intention behind it. He asserted that a society requires a benevolent or malevolent government to issue commands in order to maintain physical and psychological security, and for people to live under governance and justice (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 40). When the Imam sent Ibn ‘Abbās to negotiate with the Kharijites, he advised him not to debate with them using

the Quran, but instead to make recourse to the Prophetic tradition, since the Quran has multiple interpretations and layers (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 77).

Although Imam 'Alī did not force anyone to pledge allegiance to him, he always used reasoning to counter any misinterpretations and heresies. When al-Zubayr broke his pledge of allegiance to him, the Imam pointed out that al-Zubayr had pledged his heartfelt allegiance, and could not now claim that it was merely a gesture of hands. The Imam insisted that if al-Zubayr wished to retract his pledge, he must provide sufficient evidence to support his claim or return to his commitment of allegiance (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 8).

Imam 'Alī was known for always speaking the truth. He told Mu'āwiya that he did criticize 'Uthmān, the third caliph, because of his heresies, and he does not need to apologize for this (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 28). Furthermore, he wrote to Mu'āwiya that the same people who had pledged allegiance to Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān had also pledged allegiance to him (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 6). This was a type of reasoning based on the interlocutor's assumptions, designed to compel him to accept the conclusion.

2.4. The Virtues of the Prophet's Household

Imam 'Alī sometimes referred to the virtues of Ahl al-Bayt, including himself, to inform people, particularly his opponents, about his status and virtues in hopes of convincing them to abandon their hostile acts. Some individuals who opposed 'Alī under threats or allurements of the enemies did not truly understand whom they were fighting against. Therefore, the Imam explicated his status to show that he and the rest of the Prophet's Household were the most qualified for the position of caliphate (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 74). He also warned that those who deny Ahl al-Bayt would end up in hell (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 152). The Imam sometimes referred to his close relationship with the Prophet as well as the Prophet's love for him (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 192). He characterized the Prophet's Household as "firm in knowledge," and therefore, worthy of leadership (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 144).

2.5. Disclosing the Enemy's True Face

Imam 'Alī condemned the seditionist oath-breakers of Jamal as the party of Satan. In a sermon, he warned, "Beware! Satan has certainly started instigating his forces" (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 22). He also characterized Ṭalḥa as a peevish man, likening him to a wild bull. On the other hand, he described al-Zubayr as an affable man. For this reason, he advised Ibn 'Abbās to negotiate with al-Zubayr but advised against meeting with Ṭalḥa (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 31). Moreover, in another sermon, he explained that both Ṭalḥa and Zubayr had such heated tempers that they would stop at nothing to gain power, even eliminating each other (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 148). When Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr waged a war against 'Alī under the pretext of avenging

‘Uthmān, ‘Alī confronted them and accused Ṭalḥa himself of murdering ‘Uthmān, asserting that no one was more passionate about killing the third caliph than Ṭalḥa (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 174).

In sermon 108 of Nahj al-Balagha, Imam ‘Alī compares the Umayyad rulers to animals and hard rocks due to their ignorance and lack of knowledge. He believed that the Umayyad dynasty committed injustice against all people, violated divine prohibitions, and broke their promises and agreements (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 98). Additionally, he describes the Umayyad sedition as exceedingly dreadful and engulfed in darkness (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 93). Imam ‘Alī viewed Mu‘āwiya as a misguided, shallow, pleasure-seeking, and hypocritical individual (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 7). Furthermore, in his letters, he refers to Mu‘āwiya as someone who embraced Islam under duress (Nahj al-Balagha, letters 17, 20), as one who is captivated and influenced by Satan (letter 10), deviated (letter 28), lacking reason (letter 64), deceitful (letter 65), and devilish (letter 44). The Imam considered the Umayyad government to be a repulsive liquid that leaves a bitter taste, warranting its rejection (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 87).

‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ joined forces with Mu‘āwiya and pledged his allegiance to him, with the condition of being granted the reign over Egypt. Imam ‘Alī highlights this, supplicating, “May the endeavors of this buyer of allegiance be unsuccessful, and may the agreement of the seller bring forth disgrace” (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 26).

When Mu‘āwiya obstructed access to the Euphrates for Imam ‘Alī’s army, the Imam expressed that Mu‘āwiya manipulated people’s ignorance to govern them deceitfully, keeping them in the shadows (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 51).

Once there was a dispute between Imam ‘Alī and ‘Uthmān. Mughīra b. Akhnas, a known hypocrite, arrogantly offered his support to ‘Uthmān. However, Imam ‘Alī refused to let Mughīra exploit their disagreement. In response, Imam ‘Alī exposed Mughīra’s true nature as a vile individual and commanded him to depart (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 135).

During his caliphate, Imam ‘Alī (a) exposed the deceitful tactics and treachery of al-Ash‘ath, condemning his actions. Al-Ash‘ath b. Qays¹ cunningly incited hostility against the Muslims and fueled discord (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 19). Moreover, Imam ‘Alī revealed Mu‘āwiya’s policies and true nature: “By Allah, Mu‘awiyah is not more cunning than I am, but he deceives and commits evil deeds” (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 200).

After the arbitration (*ḥakamiyya*) process during the Battle of Ṣiffīn, Imam ‘Alī delivered a speech in which he emphasized that the emergence of sedition begins

1. Abū Muḥammad al-Ash‘ath b. Qays al-Kindī (d. circa 40 AH) held a prominent position within the Kinda tribe and served as a representative of both ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān and Imam ‘Alī in Azerbaijan. He played a pivotal role in halting Imam ‘Alī’s advancing army at the Battle of Ṣiffīn, just as victory seemed within reach, ultimately instigating the subsequent arbitration process.

with individuals following their own desires and deviating from the right path. He stated that the enemy employs a strategy of mixing elements of truth and falsehood to bewilder those seeking the truth (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 50).

Imam 'Alī criticized the actions of the People of Jamal, highlighting the flaws in their beliefs and behaviors (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 13). Despite Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr claiming to seek justice for 'Uthmān's death, they were actually involved in his assassination. They instigated a conflict and manipulated the situation to encourage people to revolt against Imam 'Alī's government (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 137).

3. The Military Approach

When ethical and didactic approaches proved ineffective, Imam 'Alī (a) resorted to employing military strategies against his adversaries. It is natural that when all reasonable methods are exhausted in dealing with an enemy who persistently causes insecurity, engages in violence, looting, and assault, the government is obligated to respond with force in order to protect the public interest. However, even in his military approach, Imam 'Alī always prioritized taking preventive measures first. Only when these measures failed, he issued warnings, threats, and ultimately engaged in warfare. Even during times of conflict, the Imam adhered to moral obligations, as elucidated in the following subsections.

3.1. Negotiations to Prevent the War

During Imam 'Alī's government, the freedom of speech was greatly respected and upheld. He welcomed constructive criticism and allowed his opponents, and even enemies, to openly approach him and express their thoughts without fear. The Imam never imposed his opinions on others, recognizing the autonomy of individuals. In fact, he conveyed to the people of Kufa, "I do not have the authority to compel you to do something you do not desire" (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 208).

Imam 'Alī demonstrated great magnanimity towards the Kharijites as long as they had not resorted to violence. He not only continued to provide them with their salaries, but also allowed them the freedom to express their opinions and hold gatherings. The Imam recognized the Kharijites' fundamental rights, including their unrestricted access to mosques for worshipping and remembrance of God. Furthermore, as long as they contributed to collective defense efforts, they were entitled to a share of public revenues and war gains. Imam 'Alī maintained that the Kharijites should not be fought unless they initiated aggression against his forces (Delshad 1392 Sh, 305).

In an attempt to engage in dialogue and negotiations with the Kharijites, Imam 'Alī initially dispatched three of his companions, Ibn 'Abbās, Ṣa'ṣa' a b. Ṣawḥān, and Ziyād b. Naḍr. Their efforts to guide the Kharijites and find common ground proved unsuccessful (Karimi 1389 Sh, 246). Subsequently, the Imam personally initiated negotiations with them. He visited the military headquarters of the Kharijites

and inquired about who among them were willing to join him in the Battle of Şifḫīn, conducting separate talks with each group (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 122; Delshad 1394 Sh, 85-90). Upon the conclusion of these discussions, approximately six thousand individuals from the Kharijite camp pledged their support to the Imam (Karimi 1394 Sh, 250). However, it should be noted that a more accurate estimate suggests that around two thousand Kharijite individuals, specifically those in Ḥarūrā, decided to rejoin the Imam's army (Delshad 1394 Sh, 93).

3.2. Postponing the War in Hope of Guidance

For Imam 'Alī, the priority was always placed on peace over war. During his leadership, he actively sought to avoid violence and bloodshed. Recognizing that power and governance should be utilized for the betterment of society, Imam 'Alī believed that justice should prevail and that the weak should have the freedom to assert their rights against the powerful within the established political framework (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 53). This mindset is evidenced in Imam 'Alī's correspondence with Mālik al-Ashtar, where he emphasized the significance of avoiding unjustifiable bloodshed. He conveyed the message that shedding blood without valid justification invites severe divine retribution, leading to negative consequences, the decline of prosperity, and the shortening of lives. On the Day of Judgment, Allah will begin the judgment process with cases of bloodshed. Thus, Imam 'Alī instructed against strengthening one's authority through the shedding of forbidden blood, as it would ultimately weaken and undermine that authority, leading to its destruction and alteration. No excuse can be made before Allah or himself for the deliberate act of killing, as it carries the weight of accountability and the potential for revenge (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 53).

On the verge of the Battle of Şifḫīn, Imam 'Alī chose to delay the issuance of the command for war. Although some people objected to the postponement, the Imam explained that his reason for the delay was the hope of guiding some of his enemies. He expressed that it was more pleasing to him to provide guidance rather than engaging in warfare against the misguided people of the Levant (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 55). Additionally, he prophesized that the Umayyad dynasty would witness a transfer of power to the hands of its enemies in the near future (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 105). In a letter addressed to Mu'āwiya, Imam 'Alī advised him to practice piety and reflect on his actions in order to avert the impending destruction (Nahj al-Balagha, letters 30 and 31).

In Imam 'Alī's approach, prioritizing peace is of utmost importance. If the enemy seeks peace or proposes a compromise that remains within the boundaries of divine laws, then it becomes obligatory to establish peace in order to ensure security and safety within society. However, even in times of peace, one must remain cautious of the enemy's actions to prevent any unforeseen surprise attacks. Therefore, peace should not be misconstrued as a reason to become overly optimistic about the intentions

of the enemy (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 53). Additionally, the Imam advises against entering into ambiguous contracts or agreements with the enemy, as the enemy is always ready to strike. He emphasizes that if one sleeps before an enemy, one should be aware that the enemy does not rest (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 62).

Throughout the Battle of Jamal, Imam 'Alī engaged in frequent discussions with Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, exerting all possible efforts to guide them towards the right path. While Ṭalḥa remained firmly resolute despite the Imam's words, al-Zubayr was deeply impacted by their conversation. The Imam reminded him of a hadith from the Prophet (s), which ultimately led to a change of heart and caused al-Zubayr to reconsider his decision to continue the battle (see Delshad 1392 Sh, 610-12, quoting *Ansāb al-ashrāf* and *Murūj al-dhahab*).

3.3. Admonition and Threatening

In response to the uprisings and betrayals of the people involved in the Battle of Jamal, Imam 'Alī (a) made it clear that if they chose to wage war against him, he would fearlessly confront them. He expressed unwavering confidence in his beliefs and proclaimed that he would fight them with absolute conviction in God's support (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 22). In his encounter with the dissenting group, Imam 'Alī emphasized his profound insight and asserted that no one could mislead or confuse him about the truth. Furthermore, he warned that if they initiated hostilities against him, he would prepare a well from which only he would draw water, a well that they would neither be able to avoid nor return to (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 10).

In a letter addressed to Mu'āwiya, Imam 'Alī expressed that it would have been wiser for him not to have responded to Mu'āwiya's letters. The Imam metaphorically stated that Mu'āwiya was in a deep sleep, insinuating his vulnerability, and emphasized that he had the capability to strike him with such force that Mu'āwiya's bones would shatter and flesh would melt (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 73). Responding to a boast from Mu'āwiya, Imam 'Alī rhetorically questioned whether Mu'āwiya had ever witnessed the children of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib retreating in fear from the battlefield and swords (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 28). Furthermore, in another letter to Mu'āwiya, Imam 'Alī enumerated the negative characteristics and background of 'Amr b. al-Āṣ, cautioning Mu'āwiya about his choice to have him as an advisor (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 39). The Imam asserted that if he were to remain alive, he would dispose of the Umayyad dynasty as one would discard a repugnant rumen (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 77).

Furthermore, in an encounter with Burj b. Sihr al-Ṭā'ī, a Kharijite individual who shouted, "Command behoves only Allah," Imam 'Alī responded sharply, commanding him to remain silent. The Imam expressed his strong disapproval, invoking Allah's displeasure upon him and describing him as ugly and with a broken tooth. He emphasized that even when the truth was evident, the individual lacked strength and a voice. However, when falsehood arose and loudly proclaimed itself,

the individual emerged like the horns of a young goat (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 184). In a passionate speech directed towards the Kharijites, Imam 'Alī warned them to contemplate the repercussions of their actions and urged them not to throw themselves into inevitable destruction (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 36).

3.4. Battle

One of the methods employed by Imam 'Alī in addressing his armed adversaries and enemies was through engaging in warfare. When it came to his dealings with Mu'āwiya, Imam 'Alī explains that he carefully considered the matter, to the extent that it caused him sleepless nights. After much deliberation, he found two paths before him: either to combat the enemies or to renounce Islam and the teachings of the Prophet (s). In his resolve, he chose to engage in war (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 54). Therefore, Imam 'Alī resorted to defensive warfare only when all other alternatives proved inadequate in confronting a misguided and oppressive adversary.

In a renowned sermon on jihad, Imam 'Alī offered a response to those who claimed that he was unfamiliar with war tactics. He posed a rhetorical question, asking if they could name anyone who possessed greater experience in warfare than him (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 27).

In the face of Mu'āwiya's conspiracy, Imam 'Alī showcased his unwavering courage in times of war (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 29) and firmly addressed Mu'āwiya's military threats (letter 28). Furthermore, when Mu'āwiya launched raids and plundered certain regions of the Islamic territory, 'Alī declared to his brother 'Aqīl that he would fight against them relentlessly, until his very last breath (letter 36).

During instances where 'Alī found himself compelled to participate in military actions, he openly rallied and motivated his troops, ensuring their preparedness for warfare (Nahj al-Balagha, sermons 26, 34). Despite his inclination towards peace, he recognized the necessity of imparting humanitarian principles, military strategies, and the requisites of war to his soldiers (Nahj al-Balagha, letters 11-16).

3.5. Minimizing War Losses

Imam 'Alī issued specific orders to his troops, strictly forbidding them from initiating warfare, harming those seeking refuge in war, and targeting women and disabled individuals (Nahj al-Balagha, letter 14). For him, the intent of war was not centered around killing, but rather guiding people. However, in response to the unrest caused by the people involved in the Battle of Jamal, who had breached their oath of allegiance, Imam 'Alī delivered a speech wherein he fearlessly declared his readiness to engage in combat if those who broke their pledges (Nākithūn) initiated war against him (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 22).

When individuals pledged their allegiance to Imam 'Alī as the caliph, some of his companions suggested punishing the rioters. However, the Imam expressed his

intention to address the issue without resorting to warfare. Nonetheless, he made it clear that he would be prepared to fight if the situation demanded it, as sometimes “cauterizing is the last remedy” (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 168).

Furthermore, Imam 'Alī felt a deep sadness upon witnessing the death of his adversaries in battle. As he passed by the lifeless bodies of Ṭalḥa and others who lost their lives in the Battle of Jamal, he mournfully remarked that Ṭalḥa had fallen in a desolate place and expressed his wish that the noble men of the Quraysh would not meet their demise beneath the heavenly lights of the stars (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 219).

Additionally, Imam 'Alī held the belief that the spoils obtained from the enemy should not be divided, strictly forbidding his army from seizing the possessions of the enemy (Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd 1337 AH, 1:250). This stance of his often faced objections from within his own ranks. The Imam was deeply committed to avoiding conflicts and minimizing the losses incurred during warfare. Consequently, when he found himself engaged in battle, he made every effort to commence the fighting in the afternoon. This strategic decision aimed to shorten the duration of the battle by taking advantage of the impending darkness. By doing so, the number of injuries and casualties could be reduced, allowing some individuals the opportunity to escape the battlefield (see Delshad 1392 Sh, 620).

Conclusion

Throughout his life, and notably during his reign, Imam 'Alī (a) actively fostered constructive engagements with both his ideological and political opponents. He firmly believed in the importance of political freedom, recognizing that even those who stood against him had inherent rights that ought to be respected. The Imam consistently upheld the values of humanity, dignity, and the freedom of expression. In his commitment to the preservation of Islam and the unity of the Islamic ummah, he worked in cooperation with and provided assistance to the three caliphs to the best of his abilities. He consistently avoided actions that could sow divisions within the Islamic community, willingly relinquishing his own rights if it meant preserving unity. His ultimate goal was to guide all individuals, even those who opposed him, utilizing his utmost capabilities. In pursuit of this objective, he actively engaged in negotiations and debates with various factions of his adversaries, including the Nākithūn, Qāsiṭūn, and Māriqūn. In these exchanges, he elucidated matters with logical arguments, drawing from premises that were accepted by his opponents, and effectively refuted unfounded accusations. While Imam 'Alī advocated for peace over war, there were instances where he was compelled to resort to military action only after exhausting all possibilities for peaceful negotiations. His goal during battles was to safeguard the principles of Islam, ensure the security of the Islamic ummah, and prevent the spreading of heretical beliefs and injustices. By following the order of approaches outlined in this article, it is possible to create new opportunities for constructive interactions between the government and its people, as well as between Islamic and non-Islamic governments.

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