

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - Raids of Muawiyah

Consequences of the raids of Muawiyah

As a consequence of his raids, Muawiyah was not able to acquire any territory. Because of these raids a greater part of the country was ravaged, and many persons had been killed. Basr the Commander of the forces of Muawiyah acted as a savage brute, and let loose a reign of terror. When Basr killed the young children of Ubaidullah, the Alid Governor of Yemen, and Ali came to know of this atrocity he invoked the curse of God on Basr. Back in Syria, Basr was struck with insanity. In the fits of madness that came to seize him he would shriek for his sword whereby he could kill the people. He was provided a wooden sword, and a stuffed animal skin on which to practice his skill. He wielded his sword with such mad fury that he died of exertion and the world was rid of him.

Apart from the ravaging of the countryside and the massacre of the people these raids led to the grave consequence of the demoralization of the people. The people lost the sense of values, and judgement. One day they took the oath of allegiance to one person and the other day they recanted and took the oath of allegiance to another person. Islam came to sit lightly on the people, and instead of fighting in the cause of God as enjoined by Islam, the people fought to seek worldly ends, a course repugnant to Islam.

That set both the sides thinking. According to the accounts that have come down to us, it is not clear what happened exactly after the failure of the raids undertaken by the forces of Muawiyah in the territory held by Ali. According to some authorities it was Ali who made overtures for peace. According to other authorities, it was Muawiyah who took the initiative in starting negotiations for peace. According to Tabari, the Caliphate was partitioned, and it was agreed that Muawiyah was to be the Caliph for Egypt and Syria, while Ali was to be the Caliph for the rest of the territories under the control of the Muslims. The details of such agreement are not available. It may be recalled that prior to the Battle of Siffin, Muawiyah had proposed such partition but Ali had not agreed thereto because he held such partition to be repugnant to Islam. Since then things had turned out to go in favor of Muawiyah, and according to the decision of the umpires, howsoever obtained, Muawiyah had manipulated to secure the sovereignty of the whole of the Muslim world. Muawiyah was not the man to lose the advantage that he had once secured. It appears to me that there was no regular agreement about the partition of the caliphate. The agreement was merely about a truce on the status quo basis "hereunder Muawiyah held Syria and Egypt, and the rest of the Muslim territories were under the control of Ali. This view gets support from the fact that a few months after this agreement, Muawiyah declared himself to be the Caliph for the entire Muslim world. If there had been a previous agreement for the partition of the caliphate Muawiyah could not so soon go back upon such an agreement and declare himself to be the Caliph for all the Muslim lands. According to the political thought that obtained at the time, the caliphate was indivisible and there could not be more than one Caliph. That is why in spite of the decision of the umpires in his favor Muawiyah had refrained from declaring himself as the Caliph so far. After the failure of his raids he made a truce to gain time and gather more strength. With the lapse of time the position of Ali grew weaker and that of Muawiyah grew stronger. By mid 660 C.E. Muawiyah saw that the position of Ali had become sufficiently weak and his best supporters like Abdullah b Abbas had forsaken him. At that stage he felt himself to be strong enough to declare himself as the Caliph. This declaration stunned Ali. He could not remain quiet at such declaration, and yet he was not strong enough to undertake military action against the pretender. At this stage Ali was the most distressed man, who did not know what to do. He felt that God was putting him to test, and as a true Muslim he decides to resign himself to the will of God.

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