

## UNDERSTANDING THE EXACT NATURE OF THE “WAR OF NERVES” GUIDING THROUGH THE LESSONS CONCEALED IN THE BATTLE OF THE CONFEDERATES

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### Abstract

The battle of the Confederates (AL-AHZAB) is a battle fought by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his brave companions in the year A.H 5. In that year, a network of intrigues and alliances besieged Madinah, with a brute force of 10000 men to crush the truth. This military blockade lasted over three to four weeks, and it caused much suffering from hunger, extreme cold, an unceasing shower of arrows, and constant general or concentrated assaults. The conditions tested the nerves and patience of the beleaguered Muslims. Ghazwa Ahzab is an ideal example of a modern warfare which is known as “War of Nerves”. It's a form of warfare that focuses on disrupting the enemy's morale and will to fight rather than direct military action. It also involves psychological pressure like propaganda, threats and rumors to demoralize or intimidate the opponent. Chapter 33 of the glorious Quran covers the main lessons of the Ghazwa and guides the Muslims how to deal with such a warfare. I have summarized those lessons and modern guidelines in my article employing qualitative research methodology. Therefore, keeping in view all that, this paper is being presented to understand the Sixth-generation warfare (6GW), its tactics, intricacies and defence mechanism inspired by the military strategies of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

### INTRODUCTION

#### The hard Facts of Life

In perfect agreement with Thomas Carlyle, I begin this paper with a quote of this great admirer of the Holy Prophet:

“I grow daily to honor **Facts** more and more, and theory less and less.” (1)

Now my spiritual guide, Dr Allam Muhammad Iqbal, who talks to the audience in his book Zarb-e-Kaleem in these lines:

جب تک نہ زندگی کے حقائق پہ ہو نظر  
تیرا رُجاج ہو نہ سکے گا حریفِ سنگ  
یہ زور دست و ضربتِ کاری کا ہے مقام  
میدانِ جنگ میں نہ طلب کر نوائے چنگ  
خُونِ دل و جگر سے ہے سرمایہ حیات  
فطرت، لہو ترنگ، ہے غافل! نہ، جل ترنگ

Your glass can never match the stony rock,  
 Unless of facts with care you take the stock.  
 Give proof of strength and strike a dreadful blow,  
 When war is waging strains of harp forego.  
 The wealth of life is due to blood in veins,  
 O man remiss! love pain, shun melodious strains. (2)

The world is a stage and men and women merely players is an outdated saying. The new fact about the world, as it looks now, is that it is a battlefield and men and women are merely sufferers who must fight and die. Currently, war drums are being

### War of Nerves

According to Merriam-webster dictionary "war of nerves" means:

*"a conflict characterized by psychological tactics (such as bluff, threats, and intimidation) designed primarily to create confusion, indecision, or breakdown of morale."* (3)

Let's look up another dictionary. Collins gives this meaning.

*"a situation in which two opposing people or groups are trying to weaken each other psychologically, for example by frightening each other, in order to get what they want without taking any direct action."* (4)

The impact of such a war is apparent anywhere we look. People are living under fear, anxiety and tensions. They are suffering from psychological issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues. Along with mental disorders there are physical complications as well. The constant strain and stress of war can lead to physical fatigue, muscle aches, and joint pain. It may cause isolation of families and breaking off the community. In essence, a "war of nerves" can have a profound and lasting impact on the mental and physical health of individuals, families, and entire populations.

However, keeping in mind an adage, "Fear is no policy, surrender is no option", we have in the life of Prophet Muhammad a great battle "Battle of the Trench" which provides us unique and practical

lessons to fight with courage and fortitude the fears and dangers of modern wars. In this regard, we will mainly focus on the Quranic commentary of the battle.

beaten almost in every part of the world. Humanity is pinned down in the intricate business of modern warfare, the "war of nerves". Let's understand its meaning and impact.

### Battle of the Trench/ Ghazwa Al-Ahzab

The new state of Madinah came under siege in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Hijrah. Al Ahzab or the Confederates tried to surround and annihilate the Muslim community of Madinah. It was a well-organized and formidable attack, but the Muslims had made preparations to meet it. One of the preparations, which took the enemy by surprise, was the Trench (Khandaq) dug round Madinah by the Prophet's order and under the supervision of Salman the Persian. Karen Armstrong, a renowned British writer writes in her book: "The whole Umma set to work to build a huge trench or moat around the northern part of the oasis. The trench did not need to be continuous, because in some places there were fortresses which gave adequate protection, but to get it finished in time required a mighty concerted effort. Each family group was responsible for a certain section of the trench and Muhammad worked alongside the others, singing the verses that they had sung while they had built the mosque after the Hijra. Morale seems to have been high: some companions recalled Muhammad looking extremely beautiful and vigorous as he laboured, joking and laughing with the other men. He led them in a new song:

Lord but for Thee we had never been guided  
 Never had given alms or prayed the prayer.  
 Send then serenity upon us,  
 Make firm our feet for the encounter.

Those foes oppressed us, sought to prevent us  
But we refused. (5)

The defence of the state was the duty of every member of the community and everybody did it marvelously. The details of the events of the battle as summed up in Surah-33 of the glorious Quran,

**In God have I put my Trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto Me:**

The first lesson is the lesson of trust. Tawakkal alalaaah is the essential part of Faith. In the most adverse circumstances, in the midst of assaults of Evil, the plots of treason and hypocrisy, the darts of false charges and fake news, the believers are ordered to put trust in Allah to overcome the difficulties. There are two verses in the chapter for this:

*And put thy trust in Allah, and enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs. (6)*

*And obey not (the behests) of the Unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and heed not their annoyances, but put thy trust in Allah. For enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs. (7)*

Abdullah Yousuf Ali, the commentator of the Holy Quran explains:

*"If we trust to people who are not true, they are more likely to hinder than to help. But Allah is All-Good as well as All-Powerful, and all our affairs are best entrusted to His care. He is the best Guardian of all interests. Therefore, we should not trust the lip professions of hypocrites, but trust in Allah. Nor should our confidence in Allah be shaken by any secret plots that enemies hatch against us. We should take all human precautions against them, but having done so, we must put our trust in Allah" (8)*

Let's analyze the two entirely different attitudes of the combatants (The Hypocrites and the true Believers) as portrayed in the Surah:

*"And behold! The Hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease (even) say: "Allah and His Messenger promised us nothing but delusions! (9)*

The Hypocrites taunted the Muslims with having indulged in delusive hopes. They sowed defeatist rumors and pretended to withdraw. They acted

let us throw light on some of the lessons we can learn to stay cool, calm and collected in situations of fear and tension.

cowardly and ran away. Their punishment is terrible. As the Holy Quran mentions:

*"Accursed, they shall be seized wherever found and killed with a (terrible) slaughter. (10)*

Hypocrites or the propagandists will be deprived of the blessing and guidance of Allah. They seek to cause disorder in Allah's world-moral as well as material, but they will themselves be destroyed.

On the other hand, when the Believers saw the enemy in huge size and numbers, they acted boldly and immediately showed their true faith by putting trust in Allah.

*"When the Believers saw the Confederate forces, they said: "This is what Allah and His Messenger had promised us, and Allah and His Messenger told us what was true." And it only added to their faith and their zeal in obedience. (11)*

**Abdullah Yousuf Ali, the commentator of the Holy Quran explains:**

*"The divine promise of help and success is contingent upon our striving and faith. Nothing comes to the poltroon and the skeptical idler. Dangers and difficulties, and conflict with Evil, are foretold us, and we must meet them with fortitude and courage" (12)*

The nature of attacking innocent people in the war of nerves is softly destructive. The weapons are not seen but they are more lethal than traditional weapons like knives and pistols. In these highly insecure conditions, the true Muslims are guided only by their trust in Allah's Protection which is recommended and ensured to them in these magical words:

*"Allah (alone) is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs". (13)*

The following Hadith proves it thus:

**Narrated Ibn `Abbas:**

'Allah is Sufficient for us and He Is the Best Disposer of affairs," was said by Abraham when he was thrown into the fire; and it was said by Muhammad when they (i.e. hypocrites) said, "A

great army is gathering against you, therefore, fear them," but it only increased their faith and they said: "Allah is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer (of affairs, for us)." (14)

**The Commander and the Combatants:**

The second lesson to be learnt from the battle of Trench is the role of the Commander in the personality of the Holy Prophet. It is mentioned in verse 21:

*"Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah."* (15)

In the battlefield, the commander stands for the virtues of wisdom, sincerity, benevolence, courage and strictness. The other traits include decisiveness, communication skills, and the ability to inspire and motivate their team. He must also demonstrate reason, judgment, integrity, and be able to effectively implement a vision. During the siege of Madinah, while the Khandaq (Trench) was being dug by the companions of the Prophet the Messenger of Allah was also actively taking part in that. *Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) went towards the Khandaq (i.e. Trench) and saw the Emigrants and the Ansar digging in a very cold morning as they did not have slaves to do that for them. When he noticed their fatigue and hunger*

*he said, "O Allah! The real life is that of the Here-after, (so please) forgive the Ansar and the Emigrants." In its reply the Emigrants and the Ansar said, "We are those who have given a pledge of allegiance to Muhammad that we will carry on Jihad as long as we live."* (16)

The combatants, companions of the Prophet had a motto of Jihad. They were loyal and devoted to the cause. In addition, they were determined to face all odds because they had perfect confidence in Allah and in the cause for which they were fighting. For the people and soldiers of Ummah a number of Muslim virtues are specified in verse 35 of the Surah. It says:

*"Indeed the muslim men and the muslim women, the faithful men and the faithful women, the obedient men and the obedient women, the truthful men and the truthful women, the patient men and the patient women, the humble<sup>1</sup> men and the humble women, the charitable men and the charitable women, the men who fast and the women who fast, the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, the men who remember Allah greatly and the women who remember [Allah greatly] –Allah holds in store for them forgiveness and a great reward."* (17)

**Abdullah Yousuf Ali, the commentator of the Holy Quran explains:**

"The virtues referred to are:

- 1) Faith, hope and trust in Allah, and His benevolent government of the world.
- 2) Devotion and service in practical life.
- 3) Love and practice of Truth, in thought and intention, word and deed
- 4) Patience and constancy, in suffering and in right endeavor.
- 5) Humility, the avoidance of an attitude of arrogance and superiority.
- 6) Charity, i.e., help to the poor and unfortunate ones in life
- 7) Self-denial, typically in food, but generally in all appetites
- 8) Chastity, purity in sex life, purity in motive, thought, word and deed.
- 9) Constant attention to Allah's Message, and cultivation of the desire to get nearer to Allah." (18)

The companions led by the Prophet had all the virtues as they showed in the battle of Al-Ahzab. The commander of Muslim Armies and the

soldiers need to adopt these qualities to win the battles with the grace and assistance of God. They must know that they are different from ordinary fighters of war. They are chosen and very special because they just fight in the cause of Allah to

establish His Order and to eradicate Fitnah. As Muslims are commanded in the Quran:

*“And fight them until there is no more Fitnah, and the religion (worship) will be for Allah alone (in the whole of the world). (19)*

The third and the most important lesson has got three parts, namely, Dhikr-e-Allah (remembering Allah; glorifying and praising Him), Salat-o-Salaam upon Prophet Muhammad and the dearest wish of a believer as combatant martyrdom.

### **Praise the Lord and Venerate His Prophet. (Indirect Method to secure Victory)**

Indirect methods in warfare, as opposed to direct military action, focus on undermining an enemy's strength and capabilities through non-military means like diplomacy, economics, and information. This approach, often rooted in the principle of avoiding the enemy's strengths and attacking their weaknesses, aims to achieve victory without necessarily engaging in direct combat. ▲

### **Remembering and Glorifying Allah**

For the genuine Muslims the indirect method to win a battle is neither diplomacy nor economy, in fact, it is to remember and glorify Allah constantly throughout the war period.

*“O you who believe! Celebrate the praises of Allah, and do so often.”*

*“And glorify His Praises morning and evening.” (21)*

About the superiority of Dhikr Allah (remembering Allah; glorifying and praising Him) the Holy Prophet has said:

*“The example of the one who celebrates the Praises of his Lord (Allah) in comparison to the one who does not celebrate the Praises of his Lord, is that of a living creature compared to a dead one.” (22)*

### **The ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu has said:**

*“In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory. Indirect tactics, efficiently applied, are inexhaustible as Heaven and Earth, unending as the flow of rivers and streams; like the sun and moon, they end but to begin anew; like the four seasons, they pass away to return once more. (23)*

### **The glorious Quran gives an example of such a situation:**

“When they crossed the river, he (Talut) and the faithful ones with him, they said: “This day we cannot cope with Jalut (Goliath) and his forces. But those who were convinced that they must meet Allah, said: “How oft, by Allah’s will, hath a small force vanquished a big one? Allah is with those who steadfastly persevere. When they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they prayed:

Our Lord! Pour out constancy on us and make our steps firm: Help us against those that reject faith.” (24)

According to the ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu : “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” Allah gave the victory to the Muslims without fighting in the Battle of Ahzab. The

### **Quran, therefore, mentions it in the following verse:**

*“And Allah turned back the Unbelievers for (all) their fury: no advantage did they gain; and enough is Allah for the Believers in their fight. And Allah is full of strength, Able to enforce` e His will.” (25)*

Thus, Dhikr Allah (remembering Allah; glorifying and praising Him) ulteriorly strengthened the Believers to stay calm and finally be victorious.

### **As-Salat-o-Salaam upon Prophet Muhammad:**

Dhikr Allah is not complete without Salat-o-salam upon Prophet Muhammad. It gives the Muslims spiritual, intellectual and motivational strength throughout their life. Specifically, in the battlefield it is the token of victory. So the Quran orders the Muslims to keep sending Salat-o-Salam Upon the Prophet:

*“Allah and His Angels, send blessings on the Prophet; O ye that believe! Send ye blessings on him, and salute him with all respect. (26)*

Abdullah Yousuf Ali, the commentator of the Holy Quran explains:

*“Allah and His angels honor and bless the Holy Prophet as the greatest of men. We are asked to honor him all the more because he took upon himself to suffer the*

sorrows and afflictions of this life in order to guide us to Allah's Mercy and the highest inner life." (27)

### Martyrdom

"Among the believers are men who have been true to their Covenant with Allah: of them some have completed their vow (to the extreme) and some (still) wait but they have never changed (their determination) in the least: (28)

In the fight for Truth there were (and are) many who sacrificed their all-resources, knowledge,

influence, life itself-in the Cause, and never held back. Their aim was to fight courageously and embraced martyrdom. Such a one was Sa'd ibn Mua'dh, the chief of Aws tribe, the fearless-standard bearer of Islam, who died of a wound he had received in the Battle of the Trench. Other heroes do wait to fight valiantly. They are ready to lay down their lives in the Cause of Allah as they promise. They never change or waver. In the Prayer of Tariq ibn Ziyad, the Conqueror of Spain, Allama Iqbal praises the spirit of Martyrdom: (29)

یہ غازی، یہ تیرے پر اسرار بندے  
These warriors, victorious, these worshippers of Thine,  
جنہیں تُو نے بخشا ہے ذوقِ خدائی  
Whom Thou hast granted the will to win power in Thy name;  
دونیم ان کی ٹھوکر سے صحرا و دریا  
Who cleave rivers and woods in twain,  
سمٹ کر پہاڑ ان کی بیبت سے رائی  
Whose terror turns mountains into dust;  
دو عالم سے کرتی ہے بیگانہ دل کو  
They care not for the world; They care not for its pleasures;  
عجب چیز ہے لذتِ آشنائی  
In their passion, in their zeal, In their love for Thee, O Lord,  
شہادت ہے مطلوب و مقصودِ مومن  
They aim at martyrdom,  
نہ مالِ غنیمت نہ کیشور کشائی  
Not the rule of the earth.

Praising the Lord Almighty, constantly and sincerely sending Salat-o-Salaam on Prophet Muhammad, having passion and zeal for martyrdom are the praiseworthy traits of Muslim warriors. They generate strength and energy from them and by applying them they just fight for the cause of Allah. No worldly gains they aim at except a blissful life in Heaven.

### Spiritual Democracy of Islam under the Global Leadership of Prophet Muhammad:

War is the science of destruction, and its very essence is brutality and violence. Since the second world war till today millions and millions of people have been crushed and annihilated for this abominable business. As Martin Luther quotes:

"War is the greatest plague that can afflict humanity, it destroys religion, it destroys states, it

destroys families. Any scourge is preferable to it." (30)

After all killings and massive destruction unfortunately, humanity is grappling with existential threat. This is the pitiable position of modern man in the world ruled by lethal technologies. To survive honorably let me quote Allama Muhammad Iqbal:

"Humanity needs three things today-a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis." Iqbal continues.

"In view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth. Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life

in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam". (31)

This spiritual democracy is need of the time to save humanity from total destruction, and it is only possible under the global leadership of Prophet Muhammad. As Surah Al-Ahzab declares:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا  
وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا  
وَيَشِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِأَنَّ لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَضْلًا كَبِيرًا

O Prophet! Indeed We have sent *you* as a witness, as a bearer of good news and as a warner and as a summoner to Allah by His permission, and as a radiant lamp.

Announce to the faithful the good news that there will be for them a great grace from Allah. (32)

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