ISIS's Takfīrī Ideology in the Light of Historic Context

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Bachelor of Science in Intelligence Analysis, James Madison University, 2014

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures

University of Virginia

May, 2018 Degree will be Conferred

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I. Introduction:

Since the onset of the Syrian Civil War, two violent extremist organizations in particular have risen to widespread notoriety, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shām (ISIS) and its al-Qaeda linked offshoot Jabhat al-Nuṣra, now referred to as Tahrīr al-Shām. These organizations were initially the same, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) or the Islamic State of Iraq; however, as AQI expanded into the Syrian Civil War, Jabhat al-Nuṣra was formed. When AQI, under the leadership of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, sought to reunify the group under the banner of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shām, the merger failed and both groups officially segregated in a bloody split. Although the failed merger was largely a result of leadership disagreements, the split also highlighted significant ideological differences, namely in the realm and application of *takfīr*, or the act of one Muslim declaring the other as an apostate.

Al-Qaeda linked groups like Jabhat al-Nuṣra are known for their indiscriminate targeting of civilian, government, and military personnel with terrorist tactics. However, for the most part, al-Qaeda did not actively and broadly use the idea of *takfīr* to also indiscriminately, yet deliberately, target fellow Muslims from a variety of backgrounds, loyalties, and sects. ISIS's broad and liberal use of *takfīr* has therefore been a differentiating aspect of their extremist ideology as compared to many other contemporary movements. Furthermore, as a result of ISIS's initial military success in Iraq and Syria and their emphasis on propaganda and information operations, ISIS's *takfīrī* ideology has spread throughout the world and can now be increasingly seen in other violent extremist organizations from North Africa, to Afghanistan, and even in the Philippines.

Yet despite the recent growth of *takfīrī* ideology, *takfīr* is not a new idea or practice within Islam. Some of the earliest cited examples of *takfīr* occurred during the reign of the first and fourth caliphs and it is from this history that ISIS claims legitimacy and authority. It is likely no coincidence that the leader of ISIS also decided to take Abū Bakr as the first part of his *nom de guerre*, for it was the first caliph Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq who initially fought against apostasy in what are now known as the Riddah Wars. ISIS claims the basis of its legitimacy in Salafist doctrine that attempts to emulate and replicate the rules, governance, and principles of Islam's earliest founders (i.e. the Prophet and his Companions). Furthermore, it looks to the works of some exalted fundamentalist Islamic scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, to lend extra credibility to its legal argumentation and justifications.

This thesis seeks to review and critique ISIS's application and argumentation of *takfīr* in the context of these sources that ISIS claims to derive its legitimacy from. In doing so, the paper will not only provide a better definition and understanding of the historical application of *takfīr*, but it will also strive to show that ISIS's widespread use of *takfīr* is misguided and not supported in the same sources and history that ISIS attempts to utilize.

II. Sources and Methodology:

As previously referenced, this thesis will focus on the same sources and historical contexts that ISIS proclaimed scholars look to for guidance on law and authority. Specifically, the paper will provide detailed analysis of three historic and foundational uses of takfīr in early Islamic history. The first two case studies come from the time of the *Rashidūn* or "Rightfully Guided" caliphs and focus on the reigns of the first caliph Abū Bakr

aṣ-Ṣiddīq and the fourth caliph ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. In particular, the paper will focus on Abū Bakr's Riddah Wars and ʿAlī's struggle against two concurrent rebellions and his ultimate death at the hands of his own followers, the Khārijites. The third case study is from later in Islamic history and revolves around Taqī ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah's[1] (d. 1328) famed *fatwas* against the Ilkhān Mongols or Tartars.

All three of these cases are integral components of ISIS's argument for its application of *takfīr*. In ISIS publications such as *Dābiq* and *al-Rumiya* magazines, the group specifically references each of these cases. Ibn Taymiyyah is one of ISIS's preferred scholars and he is usually referenced within ISIS works as "the Great Sheikh." Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah's own legal argumentation for the use of *takfīr* is founded on the precedents set forth by Abū Bakr and ʿAlī during the formative years of Islam.

In order to provide a thorough and objective analysis of each of these case studies, a variety of sources will be used. Looking at the lives of Abū Bakr and ʿAlī, a number of prominent biographies and compiled histories, such as those of al-Ṭabarī and Sayf ibn Umar, will be used in addition to secondary literature and works from scholars such as Madelung, Shoufani, Lewis, and Donner.

However, before discussing each of the case studies in detail, it is important to first establish a basic understanding of *takfīr* and its origins in scripture and the Arabic language. To this end, verses of the Qur'ān and reliable Ḥadith will be presented in order to contextualize the idea of apostasy and disbelief as it appears within the scripture. *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* will be the two primary collections of Ḥadith used throughout

[1] Taqī ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah was a prominent Hanbali jurist and theologian during the 13th and 14th centuries.

this paper, but Ḥadith that are cited by ISIS or others, such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Taymiyyah will also be used as presented within these texts.[2]

III. Defining *Takfīr* from Scriptures and Language

A. *Takfīr* Linguistically

Takfīr (تكفير) is a derivation of the Arabic root *kafr* (ك - ف - ر), which literally means "disbelief" or "to cover." Although the root can diverge in meaning to form words such as penance or atonement, in this context we will be focusing on the words surrounding *kafr* that relate to its meaning of disbelief. *Takfīr* is the verbal noun (الـمـصدر) of the second verbal form[3] of the root *kafr*, which gives the meaning of "making someone a disbeliever" or essentially excommunicating someone. Understanding this verbal pattern and its meaning is important because the word does not only deal with disbelief, but necessitates one's prior belief or adherence to Islam. *Takfīr* therefore, does not apply to all disbelievers, but only those who reverted or turned away from Islam after already accepting it.

The word *takfīr* does not appear in the Qur'ān or in the Ḥadith. As Ibn Taymiyyah claims, *takfīr* was one of Islam's earliest innovations (*bidʿah*), and the first examples of its application came during the times of the Rightfully Guided Caliphs. However, even though *takfīr* itself does not appear in the Qur'ān or Ḥadith, it can be argued that the principle ideas of *takfīr* are somewhat present. Within the Qur'ān and Ḥadith, words of the same root and of related meanings do appear quite frequently. For example, from the root *kafr* comes the active participle (ا سم الـ فاعل) *kāfir* (كـافـ ر), which literally means one who disbelieves.

[2] *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* are two of the most respected and authoritative collections of Ḥadith in Sunni Islam.

[3] The second pattern of Arabic verbs, based off the pattern فَعَّلَ, usually carries a meaning of making someone do something, or forcing someone to do something. Here the second verbal for of *kafr* (كـ فر) is *kaffr* (كَفَّرَ)

Furthermore, words and phrases that mean or imply the meaning of apostate are relevant and important in understanding how the idea of *takfīr* developed in early Islam. In both the Qur'ān and Ḥadith apostasy is most often associated with the notion of a believer "turning his back from Islam" (*irtidād*) or returning to his old practices or religion. For example, the Qur'ānic verse 47:25 states that: "Indeed, those who reverted back after the Guidance had become clear to them - Satan enticed them and prolonged hope for them."

B. *Takfīr* in the Qur'ān & Ḥadith

Throughout Islamic scripture, the punishment for apostasy is mostly clear. If the accused fails to repent, then they should be met with death. For the most part, however, the criteria of apostasy remains somewhat undefined, except in clear cases of polytheism and/or reverting to other religions. In some instances, apostasy can be synonymous with oath-breaking or brining warfare or violence to a fellow Muslim. One of the most telling chapters of the Qur'ān in regards to apostasy is the ninth *Sūrah* or the Chapter of "*at-Tawbah*."

1. *Sūrat at-Tawbah*: The Repentance

Sūrat at-Tawbah or the "Chapter of The Repentance", is one of the last chapters to be revealed to Muḥammad according to al-Wāḥidī's *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*.[4] As al-Wāḥidī suggests in his work, the majority of this chapter was likely revealed around the time of Muḥammad's expedition to Tabūk, after a number of Arab tribesmen refused Muḥammad's call to arms. The chapter largely deals with how to treat and engage polytheist tribes/armies, but it also addresses oath-breakers, like those who refused to accompany Muḥammad on his

[4] al-Wāḥidī's *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* is an early work of Qur'ānic exegesis that focuses on the historical contexts and chronology of the Qur'ānic revelations.

expedition. For these reasons, this chapter is often referenced in order to justify warfare or hostilities, with the following verse being one of the most utilized:

> Kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give *zakāt*, let them go on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (9:5)

It should be noted, however, that in this verse Muḥammad is specifically referencing polytheists (المشركين) and not necessarily apostates. The verse is therefore only relevant to apostates in so much as one associates polytheism with apostasy. As shown in the following verse, competing ideas are also present within the chapter that complicate the guidance offered in 9:5 and suggest that verse 9:5 is specifically referencing polytheists and not apostates. "And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know."(9:6)

The above verse implicitly suggests that the mentioned polytheists have not yet heard "the words of Allah" and therefore cannot be apostates. Later in the chapter, however, Muḥammad reveals the first clear guidance concerning oath-breakers, which are often associated with apostates as a result of the historical context that this chapter was revealed in. The verse states, "And if they break their oaths after their treaty and defame your religion, then fight the leaders of disbelief, for indeed, there are no oaths [sacred] to them; [fight them that] they might cease." (9:12)

Throughout the vast majority of this 129 verse chapter of the *Qur'ān*, God extols the believers and warns/denounces polytheists, oath-breakers, and hypocrites. Within the Sūrah,

the path to repentance and acceptance is revealed along with the punishments for failure to do so. In multiple places, verses call the disbelievers or hypocrites to accept Islam, prayer, and the *zakāt*[5]; the last of which, would play a significant role in Abū Bakr's Riddah Wars.

2. *Takfīr* in the Ḥadith

Similar to its presentation in the Qur'ān, apostasy for the most part carries the same punishment in the Ḥadith. As related in *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* from 'Abdullah b. Masʿūd, "The blood of a Muslim...cannot be shed except in three cases: In *Qiṣas*[6] for murder, a married person who commits illegal sexual intercourse, and the one who reverts from Islam (apostate) and leaves the Muslims."[7] Another example in the Ḥadith comes from Ibn 'Abbas and records Muḥammad as saying, "He who changes his religion (i.e. apostates) kill him."

However, while the punishment is clear in the Ḥadith, the enforcement of Muḥammad and God's prescription is somewhat more varied. According to Bernard Lewis's interpretation of the traditions of the Prophet, outward performance is a sufficient determination of faith as God alone can judge a man's sincerity. This belief is echoed in the works of famed scholars al-Ghazālī[8] and even Ibn Taymiyyah. Furthermore, there are examples in the Ḥadith of the Prophet and his Companions that suggest the above prescriptions should not necessarily be dealt with as absolutes. For example, in two Ḥadith that ISIS itself references, Muḥammad does not kill known apostates or hypocrites because

[5] The *zakāt* is an obligatory tax within Islam. During Islam's earliest years, the *zakāt* was payable to the reigning Caliph.
[6] *Qiṣas* in this context essentially means retribution or justice for a murder, or a life for a life.
[7] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 9:83:17 | *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 16:4152 and 16:4154
[8] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī was a famed and respected Islamic philosopher and theologian.

he does not want it to be said that he kills his own companions. There are multiple versions and accounts of these instances in which Muḥammad prevents his loyal companion ʿUmar from killing hypocrites or apostates; even if according to Muḥammad's own words, "They leave the religion like the arrow leaves the bow."

The complexities and nuances present in the examples above were extended into the time of the *Rashidūn* or the Rightfully Guided Caliphs, as will be shown in subsequent sections. Furthermore, the treatment and punishment of apostates would remain a problematic dilemma for Islamic jurists due to the inherent polemic difficulties surrounding the excommunication and killing of a fellow Muslim. The problem becomes ever more salient with the reliable Ḥadith that warns, "If a man says to his brother, O Kāfir (disbeliever)! Then surely one of them is such (i.e. a Kāfir)."[9] As Bernard Lewis points out, "A dictum of the jurists lays down that in a trial for apostasy any legal rule or precedent which would give an acquittal must be followed. The accused was often brought before a court prior to punishment and asked to repent, often given multiple opportunities which were typically not dependent on sincerity."[10] This norm or common operating procedure of jurists, ranging from al-Ghazālī to Ibn Taymiyyah, is not a stance that ISIS would likewise support.

IV. A Primer to ISIS's *Takfīr*

[9] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 8:73:125
[10] Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History: Ideas, People, and Events in the Middle East,* 290

Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Salafism/Wahhabism[11] more broadly all accept and have applied *takfīr* throughout their respective histories; and there is creedal and historical support for the fighting against apostates. However, ISIS's broader definition of and emphasis on the practice of *takfīr* differentiates it from other groups. ISIS has broadcasted declarations against a number of neighboring Muslim states, calling their governments and the people under them apostates. It has faced those who do not support their radical ideology with the sword and seemingly does not accept competing ideological positions. Not only has ISIS fought against those whom they have proclaimed as apostates, but the manner in which they enact their poorly construed justice for *takfīr* has been extreme and in many cases gruesome. Videos of burning proclaimed apostates, such as Jordanian pilot Lt. Muath Al-Kaseasbeh, are just a few examples of the harsh punishments that ISIS carries out against those it targets or captures.

ISIS has propagated and exported its *takfīrī* ideology outside of Iraq and Syria to lone-wolf terrorism and foreign extremist groups and cells throughout the world, leading to violent acts of indiscriminate targeting. These attacks have occurred in all corners of the globe, from the U.S. to France, to Morocco to Southeast Asia, and most notably and frequently throughout the Middle East. These attacks do not only target non-Muslims, but have had the highest impact and casualties amongst fellow Muslims, primarily those in the Middle East and South Asia. Furthermore, in some of the attacks, the attackers test their victims on their religion, making them profess or recite certain parts of Islamic scripture; those who fail are met with death.

[11] Salafism and Wahhabism are distinct fundamentalist ideologies within Islam that call for a strict adherence to the Qur'ān and Sunnah to the exclusion of all else. Salafist and Wahhabi doctrine and groups can vary by country and area.

In addition to utilizing some parts of Islamic scripture, ISIS claims to derive its authority and legitimacy in its *takfīrī* actions primarily from the historical examples of Abū Bakr and ʿAlī, and the theological/ideological works of Ibn Taymiyyah. ISIS lays out its legal argumentation and justification for these actions in public formats, such as its *Dābiq* and *al-Rumiya* magazines. Furthermore, ISIS's authoritative executive branch, the Delegated Committee, has also released memos and *fatwas* clarifying ISIS's official position on the subject.

Despite its attempts at justification, however, ISIS has faced widespread criticism for its board definition and application of *takfīr*, even by its own former organization, al-Qaeda. Interestingly enough, within ISIS itself there is an internal discussion and debate regarding the correct application of *takfīr*. Much of this debate revolves around the extent to which *takfīr* should be applied to fellow Muslims, with the most extreme stance suggesting that *takfīr* should be applied to all Muslims who choose not to follow the self-proclaimed caliphate. On the other hand, evidence suggests that a contingent within ISIS advocates for a more tempered application of *takfīr,* focusing only on those deemed to be polytheists or "clearly in the wrong." While a significant number of Muslims still seemingly fall under the latter definition of *takfīr*, there is an important distinction between the two camps surrounding those Muslims who are themselves not in the wrong, but choose to do nothing in regards to those around them that are. This internal debate surfaces in a series of memos and response letters issued by ISIS's authoritative Delegated Community and a few of its other most prominent scholars at the time.

It should be noted that despite this internal dialogue, ISIS's official stance on *takfīr* remains solitary, as is evident through its official media and leadership's comments. Furthermore, the most prominent of the few ISIS scholars who argued openly against the Delegated Committee and its official stance on ISIS's *takfīrī* ideology have since been silenced through death. That said, the internal debate around *takfīr* within ISIS is evidence of competing ideological positions within the self-proclaimed Islamic State, and the outcome of these discussions also provides us with extremely useful insight into the official stance of ISIS on the subject of *takfīr*.

A. The Delegated Committee's Memo

On 17 May 2017, ISIS's Delegated Committee released a memo that sought to end ideological discussions on *takfīr* within ISIS and firmly cement ISIS's official position on the matter. The memo claimed to take a moderate position on *takfīr* and lambasted those within the organization who sought to dilute or in some way fabricate ISIS's stance. However, the memo seems to fall in line with the more extremist ideological camp within ISIS and it makes a clear stance against the more moderate position of delayed or postponed judgment (i.e. God's judgment on the Day of Resurrection). This memo was further propagated in ISIS's online media and publications, such as *al-Rumiyah Vol. 10*.

Early in the memo and as related in *al-Rumiyah*, the Delegated Committee states that the matter of *takfīr* is neither obscure nor disputable. The guidance that is to follow must therefore be accepted and adhered to by all of ISIS's supporters. The memo then goes on to delineate who is subject to *takfīr* by stating:

> Everyone knows that we acknowledge the heresy of the tawaghit [false gods, tyrants] who legislate and those who elect them... It [ISIS] rejected the tawaghit of the land, their laws, their borders, their norms and rituals. It waged war on polytheists of every kind: the rafidha [Shi'ites], secularists and democrats, after pronouncing them to be unbelievers and showing hostility to them. It also proclaimed to be infidels all those who defend them, and today it continues to fight for this cause, and is fought because of it.

In *al-Rumiyah*, the same position is put forth as, "[The Islamic State's official opinion] is that of making *takfīr* of the tawaghit and whomever [sic] defends them and does not make *takfīr* of them, without exception." These words make it clear that ISIS's official position, as supported by its self-proclaimed caliph and executive body of the Delegated Committee, is that all leaders and traditional nation-states outside of the self-proclaimed Islamic State are guilty of apostasy and subject to *takfīr*. Furthermore, those who protect and support these governments (i.e. citizens or the general public) without rising up against them, are likewise guilty of disbelief and apostasy. The punishment for this crime and/or inaction is violence and fighting, with no exceptions.

The committee continues to reaffirm that ISIS has not and will not stop in its application of *takfīr*. Furthermore, the memo elevates the practice of *takfīr* to an "utmost principle of Islam," going as far as suggesting that *takfīr* comes before the obligations of prayer, fasting, etc.

> Everyone knows that the Islamic State has not hesitated for a single day to acknowledge the heresy of polytheists, and that it regards this use to be one of the clear principles of the religion, which must be known [to a Muslim even] before he knows [the

rules of] prayer and other religious obligations that are necessarily known.

ISIS would eventually clarify its position on *takfīr* as a central principle of Islam in a series of videos/radio broadcasts by rephrasing its claim and stating that *takfīr* is an extremely important obligation rather than one of the primary principles or tenets of Islam, such as the oneness of God.

The memo continues with ISIS distancing itself from claims and accusations that ISIS is like the Khārijite or Muʿtazila[12] movements. It rejects the notion that the Khārijites and Muʿtazila have influenced their religious ideology and methodology. It accuses those who claim this as being "ignorant of the beliefs of the people of the Sunna[h]," and goes on to say that ISIS is simply "espousing stances which are pure stances of the people of the Sunna[h]." Furthermore, the Delegated Committee accuses those who turn away from ISIS and their *bayʿat* or pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdādī of "[Khāwarij-like] behavior." In these later comments, ISIS refers to its self-proclaimed religious authority and legitimacy in its mentioning of "the people of the Sunnah," meaning those that follow the path of the Prophet and his Companions for guidance.

B. *Dābiq* Magazine

Another of the most important mediums that ISIS used to disseminate and clarify its *takfīrī* ideology was *Dābiq* magazine, particularly *Dābiq's* 8th iteration. Released in early 2015, the 8th issue of *Dābiq* laid out some of ISIS's earliest argumentation for the application of *takfīr* against its enemies. Furthermore, as a primer to its discussion on *takfīr*,

[12] The Muʿtazila were a popular movement between the 8th and 10th centuries that differed from other ideological sects in their stance on the createdness of the Qur'ān.

ISIS included an article titled "From the Pages of History: Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq's Monumental Stance." In this article ISIS presents a number of Ḥadith from Abū Bakr that explain and legitimize the first Caliph's Riddah Wars.

Elsewhere, ISIS recalls ʿAlī's fighting of the Khārijites as an example of *takfīr* against those who allow and support innovation. ISIS says that, "He [ʿAlī'] carried out the Sunnah of Rasūlullāh[13] upon these claimants of Islam whose hearts were diseased with innovation and hypocrisy." ISIS makes it clear that it despises and rejects all forms of innovation or *bidʿah* in Islam. To further stress and advocate this point, ISIS refers to the "Great Sheikh" Ibn Taymiyyah by citing a line from his work *Minhāj as-Sunnah*. "Bida' [sic] (innovations) are derived from *kufr* (disbelief), for there is no innovated opinion except that it entails a branch of the branches of *kufr*." It is somewhat ironic that the same Ibn Taymiyyah also claims in another of his works that *takfīr* is one of the first innovations in Islam.

Throughout the rest of the eighth issue of *Dābiq*, ISIS makes its goals, ambitions, and perspective on *takfīr* clear. As ISIS's self-proclaimed caliph al-Baghdādī declares:

> The Muslims today have a loud, thundering statement, and possess heavy boots. They have a statement that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy, and uncover its deviant nature.

This statement not only asserts ISIS's desire to topple foreign governments, but also equates those types of government to idols, making those who support them idolaters. This notion is

[13] The Prophet/Messenger of God, which means Muḥammad.

further reinforced in a quote from Abū Musʿab az-Zarqāwī, one of the initial founders of AQI, who states, "Everyone who opposes this goal or stands in the path of this goal is an enemy for us and a target for our swords, whatever his name may be and whatever his lineage may be." In quotes such as these and throughout ISIS's media publications, its leaders advocate for a brutal absolutism that is not supported in the historic sources that it cites and is in seemingly direct contradiction to the nuance and flexibility of the Sunnah.

V. Abū Bakr and the Riddah Wars

Abū Bakr's wars against the apostates are perhaps the most relevant case study to compare to ISIS's application of *takfīr*. Not only does the leader of ISIS notionally attempt to emulate the first caliph, but Abū Bakr's Riddah Wars were the first true precedent of an Islamic ruler declaring other Muslims apostates in order to wage war against them. Furthermore, Abū Bakr's Riddah Wars are somewhat similar to ISIS's application of *takfīr* in the sense that Abū Bakr applied *takfīr* in a relatively broader fashion. However, as will be shown, Abū Bakr's Riddah wars were not monistic and require a more nuanced explanation, which when achieved, will highlight distinct differences and contradictions between Abū Bakr's application of *takfīr* and that of ISIS.

A. The First Caliph: The *Bayʿat* of Abū Bakr

The case of Abū Bakr and the Riddah Wars truly begins with the death of the Prophet Muḥammad and Abū Bakr's subsequent ascendance to the title of Caliph or Successor. It is imperative to understand how Abū Bakr was selected as the political successor of Muḥammad because it is from this authority as appointed Caliph that the issue of the Riddah Wars originates. Furthermore, it is possible that the first case of some form of

takfīr occurred during and as a result of Abū Bakr's ascension to Caliph, as will be shown in the case of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah.

1. The Succession of Muḥammad

During his life, Muḥammad successfully consolidated a number of disparate tribal Arab communities in the Ḥijāz under himself and the umbrella of Islam. The future and direction of the emerging Islamic polity following Muḥammad's death, however, was largely uncertain, as Muḥammad did not provide clear guidance on the manner of succession to his rule. As a result of this uncertainty, when Muḥammad did pass, there was a scramble by his Muhājirūn[14] followers to secure the authority and continued unity of the Islamic community built under Muḥammad.

As reported in al-Ṭabarī's histories and other reliable Ḥadith and biographies, the initial discourse over the succession of Muḥammad came between the Anṣār[15] and the Muhājirūn in Medina shortly after Muḥammad's death in 632. When the Anṣār learned of the death of the Prophet, they reportedly gathered together at the portico of Banū[16] Sāʿidah to select a leader from amongst themselves. Upon hearing news of this meeting, ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb[17] headed to the house of the Prophet and summoned Abū Bakr from within, so that they could interdict the Anṣār together. There is some scholarly debate as to who all accompanied Abū Bakr and ʿUmar to the portico, but according to most sources the

[14] The Muhājirūn, or "the Emigrants," were the followers of Muḥammad and Islam that emigrated from Mecca to Medina with Muḥammad.
[15] The Anṣār, or "the Helpers," were the tribes and people from Medina that invited and helped Muḥammad with his immigration to Medina.
[16] Banū in this context means tribe. Therefore, in Arabic, Banū Sāʿidah means the tribe of Sāʿidah.
[17] ʿUmar was one of the closest Companions of the Prophet and would go on to be the second Caliph after Abū Bakr.

Muhājirūn contingent included at least: Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, Abū 'Ubaydah, and a few other family members and clients. Madelung suggests in his work on the early history of the caliphate that the contingent of Muhājirūn was rather small and limited and thus could not truly be representative of the wishes of the Muhājirūn as a whole. This is Madelung's explanation for ʿUmar's comment later in life, as reported by Ibn 'Abbas, that the *bayʿat*[18] of Abū Bakr was somewhat flawed.[19]

Regardless, according to ʿUmar's account of the events, Abū Bakr delivered an eloquent speech upon arrival at the portico that gracefully asserted the right of the Muhājirūn to rule over the Anṣār and the rest of the Islamic community. Despite Abū Bakr's oratory skills, however, both the Anṣār and Muhājirūn then engaged in an impassioned debate that was so heated at times that ʿUmar would shout, "Then may God kill you!" Ultimately a variety of opinions were presented and discussed, including a suggestion that each group (i.e. the Anṣār and Muhājirūn) elect separate leaders from amongst themselves. However, it was not until Abū Bakr said, "This is ʿUmar, and this is Abū 'Ubaydah; render the oath of allegiance to whichever of them you wish," that a solution began to emerge. Both ʿUmar and Abū 'Ubaydah rejected Abū Bakr's support and instead, ʿUmar got on one knee and pledged allegiance to Abū Bakr as the political successor of Muḥammad. From that point, others came forward to swear allegiance. As related in al-Ṭabarī, Bashīr b. Saʿd was the first of the Anṣār to make his pledge to Abū Bakr, which precipitated the *bayʿat* of the

[18] The *bayʿat*, which sometimes appears as *bayʿah* depending on its grammatical appearance in Arabic, is an oath of allegiance.
[19] Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, p. 1-28.

large Banū Aws. According to ʿUmar, though, it was not until the Banū Aslam[20] took to the streets in mass to reinforce Abū Bakr's claim that ʿUmar was sure of victory.

2. The Issue of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah

Even with a majority of the *shūrā*, or consultative assembly, between the Muhājirūn and Anṣār agreeing to Abū Bakr's leadership, there were still some who refused to give the *bayʿah*. Most notable amongst these dissenters present at the meeting was Saʿd b. 'Ubādah, leader of the Khazraj tribe, who initially laid claim to the rule of the Muslims himself. Accounts differ somewhat over the issue of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah's continued refusal to pledge allegiance to Abū Bakr, but the story and fate of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah may be the first instance of something similar to *takfīr* occurring in Islam after the death of Muḥammad.

From the various accounts, three distinct versions of the story of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah emerge as presented in al-Ṭabarī. However, in each version of this story, Abū Bakr seems to have played a more ancillary role in 'Ubādah's fate/treatment than ʿUmar or perhaps Bashīr b. Saʿd. Throughout the various accounts, the story begins the same. As Banū Aslam and others arrive to offer their allegiance to Abū Bakr, the crowd tramples Saʿd b. 'Ubādah to varying degrees.

In the first version or narrative, Saʿd b. 'Ubādah's followers yelled for no one to step on Saʿd as people swarmed to support Abū Bakr.[21] In response, ʿUmar yelled, "Kill him; May God slay him!" He then proceeded to step on Saʿd b. 'Ubādah's head. It was at this

[20] Banū Aslam was a large tribe that was reportedly fiercely loyal to Muḥammad and the Muhājirūn, and was even awarded honorary status as members of the Muhājirūn.
[21] At this time, Saʿd b. 'Ubādah was reportedly lying on the floor because of his age and some illness or weakness.

moment that Abū Bakr stepped in and urged restraint, telling ʿUmar, "Take it easy, ʿUmar; compassion would be more effective at this point." Saʿd's followers then carried him off to safety. Saʿd b. 'Ubādah forever maintained his rejection of Abū Bakr, even after members of his own tribe advocated for his pledge of allegiance to the new caliph. Sometime after the *shūrā* at the portico, ʿUmar advises Abū Bakr again to "pester [Saʿd] until he renders the oath of allegiance," but Abū Bakr remains restrained in his actions toward Saʿd and they leave him in peace on the advice of Bashīr b. Saʿd.[22]

The alternative version of the issue of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah ends in a more violent outcome. According to this second narrative, Ḥubāb b. al-Mundhir, who advocated for the Anṣār to select a leader from amongst themselves, draws his sword in protest of the *bayʿat* of Abū Bakr. At that moment ʿUmar strikes his hand and takes the sword from him. Sword in hand, ʿUmar and others of the Muhājirūn then set upon Saʿd b. 'Ubādah, again trampling him. However, in this telling, someone notices that Saʿd b. 'Ubādah died in the attack and they exclaim that, "You have killed Saʿd." ʿUmar's response is, "God killed him, for he is a hypocrite." ʿUmar then strikes the sword against a stone, breaking it in two.[23]

This second tale is one that is more striking, as ʿUmar believes that Saʿd b. 'Ubādah's death was justified and ordained as a result of his proclaimed hypocrisy and failure to support Abū Bakr. However, there is some ambiguity and disagreement over this telling of the story as related by al-Ṭabarī. As shown in Donner's translation of al-Ṭabarī's 10th Volume of his histories, this story may have been related to ʿAlī and al-Zubayr b. al-

[22] Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 10 : The Conquest of Arabia: The Riddah Wars A.D. 632-633/A.H. 11*, 8-10.
[23] Ibid, 10.

'Awwam, rather than Ḥubāb b. al-Mundhir and Saʿd b. 'Ubādah. As Tayeb el-Hibri points out in his work on the *Rashidūn*, "The use of the Ḥadith in question, however, did not end with the depiction of Saʿd, but spilled over into the depiction of al-Zubayr's final loss to ʿUmar. When ʿUmar ordered people at the end to 'seize the sword of al-Zubayr and strike it on a stone.'" This version of the tale of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah may therefore not be truly representative of the events of the day in which Abū Bakr became the first caliph, and instead may reflect that of another time or general sentiment held toward those who rejected Abū Bakr's rule.

A third and shorter narrative presented in al-Ṭabarī, as related by Jābir, is that Saʿd b. 'Ubādah and his followers do pledge allegiance to Abū Bakr, but claim that they have been coerced into doing so. In this third telling, the Muhājirūn respond with a warning to Saʿd b. 'Ubādah that seems to foreshadow what was to come in the form of the Riddah Wars:

> If we had compelled you to division and then you had come to unity [of your own accord] you would be in a comfortable position; but we forced [you] to unity, so there is no going back on it. If you withdraw a hand from obedience, or divide the union, we will strike off your head.[24]

The story of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah is indicative of a wider phenomenon occurring during the beginning of Abū Bakr's rule. Other rulers, individuals, and communities now had to decide whether or not to pledge allegiance to Abū Bakr and accept the implicit obligations that came along with it. According to most accounts, ʿAlī and his family, to include Fāṭima,

[24] Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 10 : The Conquest of Arabia: The Riddah Wars A.D. 632-633/A.H. 11*, 11.

withheld a pledge of allegiance to Abū Bakr for a period of up to six months (until after Fāṭima's death).

For some of the dissenters, Abū Bakr seemed to tolerate their refusal to acknowledge him as Caliph, such as in the case of ʿAlī's family and the first account of Saʿd b. 'Ubādah. For others, their rejection of Abū Bakr's right to rule or the obligations that he tried to levy on them was tantamount to treason, or as Abū Bakr would proclaim, apostasy. Nowhere else is this more evident than in a narrative told by Sayf b. ʿUmar, who recorded a discussion between Sa'īd b. Zayd and ʿAmr b. al-Ḥurayth. When al-Ḥurayth asks, "Did anyone oppose him [Abū Bakr]?" Sa'īd responds, "No. Only apostates or those about to apostize."[25]

B. The Riddah Wars

The Riddah Wars arose primarily over three main issues: the rejection of Abū Bakr as political successor to Muḥammad, the refusal to pay the *zakāt*, and false claims of prophethood. Abū Bakr categorized each of these issues as acts of apostasy, which therefore made it his duty to carry out war against guilty tribes or communities. However, according to many contemporary scholars, Abū Bakr's Riddah Wars were not really so much about apostasy, but were instead about wealth, expansion, and the consolidation of power. This claim is largely based on the notion that some of the tribes targeted in the Riddah Wars continued to practice Islam, but simply did not pay the *zakāt* because they had for the most part not paid any tax during the life of Muḥammad. Additionally, a significant number of "apostate" tribes that Abū Bakr attacked were in fact not yet Muslims and therefore could

[25] El-Hibri *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs*, 48

not be apostates.[26] That said, there were genuine cases in which Abū Bakr faced insurrection, rebellion, and legitimate apostasy, typically in the form of false prophets. In these cases, as will be discussed, Abū Bakr's first course of action was to send out messages to all at risk of *riddah* or turning back.

1. The Letter to the Apostates

Upon succession, Abū Bakr followed through with one of Muḥammad's final wishes, a military expedition into Syria lead by Usāmah b. Zayd. In doing so, Abū Bakr left Medina relatively unguarded for a short time. During this period of vulnerability, a number of Arab tribes sent delegations to Medina to pledge allegiance to Abū Bakr, but some amongst them refused to pay the *zakāt*. Elsewhere, alliances were being struck between Arab tribes opposed to Abū Bakr's leadership, and a number of coalitions were forming around leaders who would later be accused of claiming false prophethood. As Usāmah returned from his successful raids to the north with the main Muslim army, Abū Bakr reportedly wrote a letter that was to be dispatched by his various commanders to those who "turned their back" on Islam.

Al-Ṭabarī provides an extent version of Abū Bakr's letter to the apostates as ultimately reported by al-Raḥmān b. Ka'b b. Mālik.[27] The letter begins by extolling Islam, the Prophet, and eternal loyalty to God. It then proceeds to present the Qur'ānic telling of Iblīs or the devil and his fall from grace, as a result of turning his back on God's request that he bow before Adam. Abū Bakr raises the issue of Iblīs for the purpose of conflating Iblīs

[26] M. Lecker, "al-Ridda," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*
[27] Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 10 : The Conquest of Arabia: The Riddah Wars A.D. 632-633/A.H. 11*, 55

with those who are now in open rebellion or opposition to Abū Bakr's rule. Furthermore, through this association, Abū Bakr makes it clear that those who are apostates are enemies in the same vein as Iblīs; and he demonstrates this with the Qur'ānic line, "The devil is an enemy to you, so take him for an enemy." It is at this point in the letter that Abū Bakr begins to directly address the apostates and lay out the groundwork for his treatment of them. He states that he has sent to them messengers, in the form of military commanders, to invite the apostates back to Islam. Furthermore, he ordered his commanders "not to fight anyone or to kill anyone until he has called him to the cause of God."[28] Those who acknowledge God and renounce unbelief are then offered peace. However, those who continue to refuse God, shall be fought and killed in any manner. Abū Bakr then clarifies his stipulations by saying that his messengers will read his letter to the apostates before sounding the call to prayer. If the apostates then do likewise and pray, they are to be left alone.

Within this letter, Abū Bakr lays out the basic fundamental criteria that he considers for a Muslim to be a Muslim (i.e. the recognition of God and the obligation of prayer). He also sets a precedent and provides guidance on how his commanders in the field should approach the apostates. He tells them to go to the accused apostate, offer them a chance of repentance and an opportunity to demonstrate their faith. If they accept, leave them in peace. If they refuse, then fight them as enemies. From this letter alone, it appears that Abū Bakr is advocating for the easy inclusion and reintegration of those who turned away from the authority of Medina and Abū Bakr after Muḥammad's death.

[28] Ibid, 57.

However, it should be mentioned that there were likely other implicit meanings within his message. Firstly, Abū Bakr does not specifically mention the *zakāt* or any other tax or obligations in al-Ṭabarī's recording, but he does include a stipulation for the apostates to "do good works," which could be interpreted to mean a variety of things. Furthermore, a similar treatise from Abū Bakr to his famous commander Khālid b. al-Walīd makes mention of "[the duties] that are incumbent upon them," when referring to the pronounced apostates. [29] It is likely that these phrases implicitly mean that the apostates also had to acknowledge the authority of Abū Bakr and accept the obligations that he bestows upon them, such as the *zakāt*. Furthermore, another important distinction within Abū Bakr's requirement of the apostates to accept the call to prayer or the adhan, is that incumbent within the adhan is the acknowledgment of Muḥammad as the true prophet of God. As a result, those who proclaimed belief in the oneness of God and performed the prayer, but followed another as prophet, were still considered apostates as they were not truly accepting the call to prayer.

2. The False Prophets

Of the apostates that Abū Bakr sent armies to fight, those who consolidated under the leadership of false prophets proved to be among the most successful and potentially dangerous. However, it should be mentioned that some of these coalitions under false prophets were actually already in open rebellion or conflict prior to the death of Muḥammad. Abū Bakr's expeditions against them were therefore not so much new, but were instead reinvigorated by the efforts of Abū Bakr and his commanders. Most notable among these

[29] Ibid, 58-59

cases were those that would become known as the false prophethoods of al-ʿAnsī the Liar, Ṭulayḥah the Soothsayer, and Musaylima of al-Yamāmah.

a. Al-ʿAnsī the Liar

According to Islamic sources, most of which have labeled al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī as "the liar," al-ʿAnsī claimed to be a prophet in a similar fashion as Muḥammad, receiving eloquent scripture and words directly from God. Even more, according to al-Ṭabarī's narratives, al-ʿAnsī claimed to have found his prophetic power and momentum in Khubbān cave, which is similar to how Muḥammad first received his revelations in a cave outside of Mecca. However, more contemporary scholars argue that al-ʿAnsī may not have even been a Muslim at the time of his rebellion and was instead a tribal soothsayer who practiced monotheism in the vein of Christianity or Yemenise Judaism.[30]

Either way, traditional sources state that al-ʿAnsī began his rebellion and self-proclaimed prophecy in the province of Yemen during the last years of Muḥammad's life, specifically after Muḥammad made his final hajj or pilgrimage and fell ill upon his return to Medina. Al-ʿAnsī's rebellion also coincided with the decentralization of power in Yemen. Following the death of Yemen's governor at the time, Bādhām, Muḥammad fragmented Yemen into several different polities under the rule of administrators deemed loyal to him.

Al-ʿAnsī, with the backing of his Madhḥidj tribe, was relatively successful in his rebellion, quickly seizing control over large swaths of Yemen and expelling some of Muḥammad's trusted leaders and allies. Among those killed in the early onset of fighting was the son of former governor Bādhām, who at that time ruled what is modern day Sana'a.

[30] W. Montgomery Watt, "al-Aswad," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*

With most of Yemen secured, al-ʿAnsī began his rule but, it proved to be short lived. Only a few months after al-ʿAnsī's sweeping victories, a Muslim by the name of Fayrūz killed al-ʿAnsī as he slept, strangling him and then beheading him as proof of his deed.

There is some dispute over whether al-ʿAnsī's death came before or after the death of Muḥammad. Some of al-Ṭabarī's accounts suggest that the prophet was still alive when news reached him of al-ʿAnsī's death, but others claim that it was one of the first victory's of the reign of Abū Bakr. According to Donner, Abū Bakr sent two commanders to Yemen to combat al-ʿAnsī sometime after Usāmah's raid into Syria, therefore after the death of Muḥammad. However, even in the case that al-ʿAnsī's murder came before the death of Muḥammad, al-ʿAnsī's rebellion had a lasting effect on the province of Yemen, as shown in Fayrūz's own account[31]:

> We killed al-Aswad, and our affairs returned to what they had been...but by God Mu'ādh only led us in prayer three times, when news reached us of the Apostle of God's death; whereupon matters became unsettled and we came to disavow many things we used to acknowledge, and the land became disturbed.

In Fayrūz's telling of the events after al-ʿAnsī's death it appears that Yemen returned to relative normalcy under Islam for a short period of time, but then as soon as the Prophet died, it reverted into chaos. A further explanation for this "disturbance" as Fayrūz phrases it, may have been that members of al-ʿAnsī's faction survived after their leader's death.[32] This is supported by evidence that al-ʿAnsī had a direct successor. Fayrūz's account may

[31] Ibid, 34.
[32] Ibid 35-38.

therefore also provide evidence and explanation for Abū Bakr sending messengers, commanders, and soldiers to secure Yemen early in the period of the Riddah Wars.

b. Ṭulayḥah and Ghaṭafān

Similar to the case of al-ʿAnsī, Ṭulayḥah's rebellion and proclaimed prophecy came during the latter portion of Muḥammad's life. Ṭulayḥah, whose tribe was a subsection of the larger Banū Asād, was initially just resistant to Muḥammad's taxes. He continued to refuse to pay, even when Muḥammad sent a special emissary, Ḍirār b. al-Azwar, as a tax collector. According to Abū Jaʿfar's account, those loyal to Ṭulayḥah and those loyal to Ḍirār b. al-Azwar and Muḥammad split into two separate camps. After some time, when Ḍirār believed his numbers to be sufficient, battle ensued between the two parties. It is said that the vast majority of Ṭulayḥah's followers surrendered almost instantly to Ḍirār's larger force, but it was in this quasi-battle that stories of Ṭulayḥah's prophethood emerged. As Ḍirār confronted Ṭulayḥah on the field, Ḍirār reportedly managed to land a blow on his body, but Ṭulayḥah remained unphased and unharmed. As Ja'far reports, "The sword shrank away from him, at which [news of this] spread among the army." People in the Muslim army in the area began to say, "Weapons will not affect Ṭulayḥah."

Ṭulayḥah seized upon the spreading rumor of his invincibility, which coincided with the death of Muḥammad. Ṭulayḥah's ranks grew as the idea that he was the next prophet was propagated and spread. A big gain for Ṭulayḥah came when the nearby tribe of the Ghaṭafān renewed an alliance with Ṭulayḥah's Banū Asād from the time of

jāhiliyyah[33]. The Ghaṭafān took the death of Muḥammad as a sign that their treaties and boundaries agreed upon with Muḥammad originally were now void. As the leader of the Ghaṭafān supposedly exclaimed, "It is preferable for us to follow a prophet from our two allies than to follow a prophet from Quraysh."[34]

Ṭulayḥah's prophecy and the rebellion of Banū Asād and Banū Ghaṭafān came to a head when Abū Bakr dispatched armies under the overall command of Khālid b. al-Walīd. Khālid's armies, reinforced with loyal Muslims from Banū 'Ṭayyi, met Ṭulayḥah and his faction at the Battle of Buzākhah. According to Islamic sources, Ṭulayḥah sat removed from the battle for its entirety, waiting for the angel Gabriel to come to him and provide him with a revelation. As things started to go poorly for Banū Asād and Banū Ghaṭafān, an Asādi commander by the name of 'Uyaynah returned to Ṭulayḥah on multiple occasions. Each time he returned from battle, however, Ṭulayḥah had no true answer for him. Finally, at Ṭulayḥah's recitation of an already recited line, 'Uyaynah recognized Ṭulayḥah as a liar and Ṭulayḥah's forces were routed.

The outcome of the battle is rather poignant and significant. Ṭulayḥah fled without circumstance almost immediately after his forces were defeated. Those who remained and survived the battle, surrendered to Khālid and submitted themselves again to Islam and the judgment of the Caliph. An important distinction surrounding the Muslim's victory as presented in al-Ṭabarī is that, "At Buzākhah Khālid did not capture a single family." In Islamic law, certain rewards or booty are prescribed and allowed to

[33] The period before Islam that is considered to be the time or period of ignorance.
[34] Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 10 : The Conquest of Arabia: The Riddah Wars A.D. 632-633/A.H. 11*, 67-68

armies fighting against their enemies; this includes women and children as captives/slaves. In Abū Bakr's own letter to the apostates, as recounted by al-Ṭabarī, the new Caliph threatened for his soldiers to "slaughter [the apostates] by any means, and take women and children captive." However, despite this guidance, when the men, women, and children of Banū Asād and Banū Ghaṭafān surrendered and accepted Islam, Khālid and Abū Bakr left them in peace and afforded them all the protections and guarantees of fellow Muslims.

This treatment was extended to other nearby tribes who had not yet given in to the rule of Abū Bakr until after the Battle of Buzākhah. Furthermore, it is said in al-Ṭabarī and other sources that Abū Bakr even forgave Ṭulayḥah, who had fled all the way to Syria. As the story goes, Ṭulayḥah repented upon arriving in Syria and at some point during Abū Bakr's life passed by Medina en route to Mecca. Abū Bakr heard news of his transit and Abū Bakr's loyal followers asked him what they should do with Ṭulayḥah. Abū Bakr's response was, "What should I do to him? Leave him alone; for God has guided him to Islam." Later, during the rule of ʿUmar, Ṭulayḥah came to formally pledge allegiance to the new caliph. Yet even ʿUmar, who had a reputation of being hot-headed, accepted Ṭulayḥah's oath of allegiance and eventually employed him in future battles and campaigns.

c. Musaylima of Yamāmah

Similar to the two cases above, Musaylima's proclaimed prophethood began in the time of Muḥammad. However, from Musaylima's point of view, his prophethood was not initially in direct opposition to Muḥammad. In fact, Musaylima believed that he was a

prophet alongside Muḥammad, an idea that was later erroneously reinforced by Nahār "al-Rajjāl" b. 'Unufwah who was sent to Musaylima and the people of Yamāmah as a teacher by Muḥammad. Nahār reportedly told Musaylima that Muḥammad had told him that "[Musaylima] was made a partner with him (i.e. Muḥammad)."[35] Musaylima went as far as adapting the call to prayer to include recognition of himself alongside Muḥammad as joint prophets, and also claimed to receive guidance directly from God. Furthermore, according to Islamic sources, he attempted to perform miracles that Nahār claimed Muḥammad had already achieved.

Although these "miracles" did not come to fruition, Musaylima managed to organize a following and army around him, primarily from the large Banū Ḥanīfah. In response, Abū Bakr sent out expeditions and raiding parties targeting his faction, but Musaylima initially had success fighting some of the smaller and less experienced armies of Muslims. However, the apex of Musaylima's rebellion came with the arrival of the renowned Khālid b. al-Walīd and his army of Muhājirūn, Anṣār, and Arabs or "desert people." The battle that was to come, the Battle of al-Yamāmah, would prove to be one of the largest and bloodiest encounters for the Muslims to date.

The affair began with Khālid's interdiction of an enemy raiding/scouting party under the command of local tribe leader Mujjā'ah. Under Khālid's orders, the entire raiding party was killed with the exception of Mujjā'ah because of his status as an influential chieftain. From there, Khālid marched until he met Musaylima's forces at Yamāmah. Unlike the previous battles recounted here, the Battle of al-Yamāmah was not an easy and

[35] Ibid, 107.

straightforward victory for the Muslims. Musaylima's army initially had the upper hand, successfully repulsing the Muslims and sending them fleeing beyond their army's camp. However, as a result of strong leadership and brave deeds, a few Muslim commanders were able to rally the routing Islamic forces and the battle was renewed. During this portion of the fight, both sides suffered significant losses, with the Muslims losing a great number of prominent Qur'ān reciters and commanders from amongst the Anṣār and Muhājirūn. As recounted in al-Ṭabarī, "No day [of battle] more intense or greater in casualties was ever seen than that day."[36]

Ultimately, even the great commander Khālid b. al-Walīd entered the fray with his own private bodyguard. With Khālid in the front lines and momentum shifting toward the re-inspired Muslim forces, it was Musaylima's army that broke next, fleeing to what would become known as the "Garden of Death." Musaylima and his forces made their final stand within an area of walled gardens, but in the end they were defeated. Musaylima and Nahār were both killed in the fighting, and the rest of their army either died in the fighting or was taken captive after surrendering.

Following the battle, Khālid proceeded to secure the surrounding area, which was dotted with a series of strong fortresses. However, Khālid's army was exhausted and depleted, making the prospect of drawn-out or bloody sieges daunting, which is where Mujjā'ah re-enters the story. Mujjā'ah acted as an authoritative intermediary between Khālid and the fortress garrisons, which, unbeknownst to Khālid, were primarily made up of women and children by this point. Mujjā'ah designed and negotiated terms for surrender and

[36] Ibid, 123-124.

submission under Abū Bakr. After some discussion and craftiness on the part of Mujjā'ah, the terms were agreed upon at a lower cost to Mujjā'ah's people than initially put forth by Khālid. In exchange for peace and the reintegration of Mujjā'ah's people into the Islamic polity, Mujjā'ah and the fortress garrisons had to pay gold, silver, suits of mail, and a quarter of the captives taken in the battle (i.e. the Muslims only got to keep 1/4 of those that surrendered during the battle).[37]

C. Abū Bakr and the Apostates

One of the clearest takeaways from Abū Bakr's application of *takfīr* and approach toward apostates was that it was hardly consistent and could be quite nuanced. For some, such as ʿAlī and his family and potentially Saʿd b. 'Ubādah, they were left alone and not officially declared as apostates, despite similar offenses committed by others who were consequently called apostates. However, another important takeaway is that Abū Bakr appears to have been rather accepting and readily forgiving of those who "turned their backs." According to his own words, he set the standard for repentance rather low (i.e. the recognition of God and the acceptance of the call to prayer). Furthermore, Abū Bakr was for the most part surprisingly forgiving when dealing with those who actually raised arms against him. The most striking example of this was his perspective and treatment of Ṭulayḥah when he passed through Medina on his way to Mecca. Ṭulayḥah was left alone and in peace, despite the fact that he had raised arms against and killed fellow Muslims.

Not all instances of *riddah* or apostasy in this time had to be resolved under the boot of Khālid b. al-Walīd or other Muslim commanders; many of the other smaller cases of

[37] Ibid, 130.

riddah were resolved in a less dramatic fashion than war. For example, the story of Qurrah provides useful insight into how some of these matters were resolved. Qurrah was allied with Banū ʿĀmīr during Ṭulayḥah's rebellion and was in open opposition to Abū Bakr, in the sense that he had not yet made the pledge and was refusing to pay the *zakāt*. There are multiple accounts of Qurrah's story, with varying degrees of his apostasy, but they all end with Abū Bakr's pardoning of Qurrah with no mentioned punishments or consequences.[38] There are numerous stories similar to this, where someone or some tribe refused the *zakāt*, but then later accepted Abū Bakr's rule either as a result of meeting with Abū Bakr or receiving a new tax collector directly from the caliph or his allies. In one particular incident, Abū Bakr even goes as far as releasing and pardoning an individual who claimed that he had never even believed in God, when asked why he apostatized.[39] From these examples, it becomes clear that Abū Bakr did not judge or act with the brutal *takfīrī* absolutism that ISIS espouses today.

Another important distinction to be made about Abū Bakr's Riddah Wars is that the most prominent battles and instances of violence were as a result of full-fledged rebellion or war, under the leadership of those who often began their insurrection before Abū Bakr even ascended to the status of Caliph. The majority of these cases also dealt with the issue of false prophethood, something that is not really present today. For Abū Bakr, his wars against "apostates" primarily focused on those who were a part of the Islamic community during Muḥammad's life and then left following his death. This is evident in a number of Ḥadith attributed to Abū Bakr that ISIS presents in its article in *Dābiq* volume 8 that it uses to

[38] Ibid, 72
[39] Ibid, 73

justify its own application of *takfīr*, "From the Pages of History: Abū Bakr as-Siddīq's Monumental Stance."

In relation to the Riddah Wars and the obligation of *zakāt*, ISIS quotes Abū Bakr as having said, "By Allah, if they were to resist giving me a short rope that they used to give to Rasūlullāh, I would fight them over their resistance to giving it." In this Ḥadith and in the others that ISIS cites, Abū Bakr's justification for fighting these "apostates" is reliant upon the guilty parties' prior inclusion in the early Islamic polity under the leadership of Muḥammad, before turning their backs and resisting Abū Bakr's rule. This is similar to the guidance given in the Qur'ān in regards to oath-beakers in Sūrat at-Tawbah. Under these guidelines, ISIS's *takfīr* would only be justified in the same manner if it was targeting or fighting those who had already accepted or recognized the legitimacy of the self-proclaimed Islamic State and then reneged or turned their back on it later. Unlike the historic context of Abū Bakr's Riddah Wars, the vast majority of people subjected to *takfīr* by ISIS are not turning their backs or reneging on some prior agreement or something that had already been levied upon them.

VI. ʿAlī the Last of the *Rashidūn*

Much like the reign of Abū Bakr, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's time as caliph was tumultuous and dominated by conflict. ʿAlī ascended to the rank of Caliph following the assassination of ʿUthmān by rebels opposing his rule. ʿAlī therefore became the fourth and final of the *Rashidūn* Caliphs. However, ʿAlī's rule was not uncontested and upon his succession to ʿUthmān the Islamic polity found itself facing its first true civil war or *fitnah*. ʿAlī faced two concurrent rebellions, both of which initially had to be handled militarily. In the end, ʿAlī's

death came at the hands of his own supporters, when the Khārijites assassinated him under the justification of *takfīr*.

A. The Path to Civil War

The caliphate of ʿUthmān, especially the second half, was plagued with accusations of corruption and favoritism toward members of his own tribe and family. Complaints against ʿUthmān grew over time, fostering an environment of dissent amongst some outside tribes. Ultimately, the mounting opposition came to a crescendo when a rebellious mob besieged his residence in Medina. This rebel faction was reportedly comprised of tribal elements from outside of Medina, with the largest contingent of rebels composed of Egyptians under the leadership of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿUdays or al-Ghāfiqī ibn Ḥarb, as claimed by Sayf ibn Umar.

The siege ended after some time with ʿUthmān's death, leaving the position of caliph temporarily vacant. According to Sayf ibn Umar, al-Ghāfiqī ibn Ḥarb took on the role of 'amīr[40] of Medina during this period of vacancy, which lasted five days until ʿAlī became caliph.[41] However, the manner in which ʿAlī became caliph remains a contentious issue as sectarian divides, perspectives, and loyalties have influenced the historiography of the issue. What appears to be consistent throughout the competing perspectives is that following the death of ʿUthmān, a number of influential Muslims fled the city, most notable amongst them, the members of the Umayyads[42] who were in Medina. Additionally, according to various accounts, some influential Companions of the Prophet also tried to leave the city, but were

[40] In this context, commander or governor/leader
[41] Al-Ṭabarī. *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 16: The Community Divided: The Caliphate of 'Ali I A.D. 656-657,* p. 6 and Sean Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba and the Origins of Shi'ism*.
[42] The Umayyads would go on to establish a dynasty over the Islamic Empire following the death of 'Alī.

stopped by the rebel forces that had killed ʿUthmān. After some time, a *shūrā* was convened and ʿAlī was selected as the next caliph.

Some scholars and historians, such as Madelung and Sayf ibn Umar, argue that the *shūrā* that appointed ʿAlī was not as straight forward and uncontested as some may attest. Sayf ibn Umar emphasizes the influence of the rebels, particularly the pro-Alī sect of the Sabaʿīyya[43], in the decision to ultimately appoint ʿAlī as caliph. According to Sayf's account, the Sabaʿīyya compelled the people in Medina to participate in the *shūrā*. Going further, it is also suggested that the Sabaʿīyya and other rebels pressured some participants into voting specifically for ʿAlī. Madelung's argument on the matter is reminiscent of his own point pertaining to the legitimacy of Abū Bakr's election. Like with the case of Abū Bakr, Madelung argues that ʿAlī's election was somewhat faulted because it was not fully representative of the voting body of the umma,[44] as a result of those who fled the city prior to the *shūrā* being called. These disagreements or disputes are possible explanations for some of the opposition that ʿAlī would come to face, but two other factors also proved to be detrimental to ʿAlī's prospect of an uncontested rule.

The first of these factors is mostly concerned with ʿAlī's treatment and attitude toward the murderers of ʿUthmān, whereas the second factor revolves around the corruption, nepotism, and preferred status of the 'Umayyad family and clients during ʿUthmān's rule. As one of a number of the accounts presented in al-Ṭabarī shows, ʿUthmān had a contingent of loyalists that continued to support him following his death because ʿUthmān had "gave

[43] The Sabaʿīyya were a pro-Alīd group formed by Ibn al-Sawdāʾ or Ibn 'Saba in Egypt. The group is often accredited as one of the first and earliest extreme Shi'ite sects.
[44] The umma is the Islamic community of believers.

[them] many date palms."[45] Bluntly put, those who benefited under the rule of ʿUthmān, did not want to lose their status, position, and wealth as a result of ʿAlī's rule. Ultimately these distinct factors coalesced into two separate rebellions challenging ʿAlī's authority, leading to what would become known as the First *Fitnah* or civil war in Islam.

B. The First Fitnah

1. ʿĀ'isha and the Battle of the Camel

The first direct challenge that ʿAlī faced toward his rule was a collation of forces unified under the leadership of some of the most prominent and well-known of Muḥammad's surviving Companions. The three primary leaders of the faction that would soon confront ʿAlī's forces on the battlefield were ʿĀ'isha, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr. For Islamic scholars and historians, this became a major theological and philosophical problem, for it was one of the first instances of such prominent Companions shedding each other's blood.

Even though Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr were among those who gave their *bayʿah* to ʿAlī at the *shūrā* in Medina, according to most accounts, they found themselves allied with ʿĀ'isha over the issue of punishing the murderers of ʿUthmān. Following the election of ʿAlī, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr traveled to Mecca where they found support from some of Mecca's wealthiest leaders, such as Ibn 'Āmir, who reportedly gave them a large sum of money and over 400 camels.[46] After a period of around four months in Mecca, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr traveled to al-

[45] Al-Ṭabarī. *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 16: The Community Divided: The Caliphate of 'Ali I A.D. 656-657*, p. 6
[46] Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 16: The Community Divided: The Caliphate of 'Ali I A.D. 656-657*, p. 43

Baṣrah with ʿĀ'isha. According to al-Ṭabarī and Sayf ibn Umar, al-Baṣrah was known at the time to be highly supportive and loyal to al-Zubayr.[47]

Along their way, there is a telling tale as to their motives, described in al-Ṭabarī. When met on the road by 'Irq Sa'īd b. al-Āṣ, one of Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr's companions says that, "Hopefully we will kill every one of the killers of ʿUthmān."[48] Later in the conversation, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr make it clear that their intention after killing the murderers of ʿUthmān is to allow the elders of the Muhājirūn to select a new leader from amongst themselves.[49] The latter section of this conversation indicates that Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, according to this version of history, did not believe in the legitimacy of the *shūrā* that elected ʿAlī. In fact, in later stories they clearly state that they were forced to give their pledge of allegiance to ʿAlī and the decision was not of their own free will.[50] As al-Zubayr says in regards to giving his pledge of allegiance, "I did -- but with the sword against my neck." It should be noted, however, that in other versions of this history, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr appear to be amenable to ʿAlī's continued rule.[51]

The question of the legitimacy of ʿAlī's election is just one of many highly debated issues during this historical period of Islam. Another important and divisive issue is the culpability of ʿAlī in the murder of ʿUthmān. Most scholars ultimately agree that ʿAlī was not directly involved in ʿUthmān's death, however some claim that ʿAlī's inaction toward the

[47] Ibid, and Sean Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba and the Origins of Shi'ism*.
[48] This companion was Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, who would later become a Caliph himself.
[49] Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 16: The Community Divided: The Caliphate of 'Ali I A.D. 656-657*, p. 44
[50] Ibid, 45.
[51] Ibid, 59.

murderers of ʿUthmān subsequently make him guilty as well. In fact, most argue that this was the main reason behind Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, and ʿĀ'isha's rebellion.

Furthermore, scholars are often split between two camps in addressing the blame and agency of the Muslim on Muslim violence that occurred in the Battle of the Camel. One camp maintains that ʿAlī was the driving force behind the violence and that it was he who sought to end the influence of Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr by way of force. Conversely, the other primary perspective is that Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr were rebels and oath-breakers who were trying to assert their own power over the caliphate. Apologists often take a more nuanced and tempered approach by either claiming that fault was on both sides, or that it was not the companions but their followers who forced the violence.[52]

These differing historical accounts become ever more apparent in the descriptions of how the Battle of the Camel began and who was guilty of primary agency, meaning who drew first blood. Almost all accounts begin with some meeting between ʿAlī and Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr. Most recollections paint the outcome of this pre-battle negotiation as an amicable encounter, with some suggesting that both sides came to an agreement for mutual peace. However, despite overtures of peace, the battle nonetheless commences. In the first telling that al-Ṭabarī presents, the meeting between both sides went relatively well and a consensus was reached that hostilities were not the proper path forward. According to this particular account in al-Ṭabarī, both sides then had the best sleep of their lives, except for a small band of men from ʿAlī's camp. Instead of resting, these men launch a pre-emptive sneak attack on Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr's forces, leading both sides into conflict. In this tale, Ṭalḥa and al-

[52] Sean Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba and the Origins of Shi'ism*, p. 106

Zubayr and ʿAlī had no role in the beginning of hostilities. In other versions of the story, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr or ʿAlī are described as the primary aggressors behind the outbreak of violence.

Stark differences appear in the other primary account of the battle that al-Ṭabarī records. In this alternate version, the meeting between ʿAlī and Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr again goes well, with al-Zubayr offering an oath to ʿAlī that he will not fight him. However, matters turn bleak from here after al-Zubayr's son re-hardens his father's will to fight. Following further discussions, ʿAlī sends forward a young boy holding the Qur'ān high in the air in one of his hands. According to this version of the tale, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr's forces attack the boy, cutting off his hand. As instructed by ʿAlī, the boy then grabs the Qur'ān in his other hand and again holds it high in the air. Once more he is attacked and the boy loses his second hand; so he grips the Qur'ān between his teeth. When the boy is finally killed, ʿAlī exclaims that, "Battle is now justified, so fight them!"[53] In this narrative, the blame of aggressor is clearly put on Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr's forces, who not only drew first blood, but also killed a child who was carrying the Qur'ān. This tale, which has been retained through multiple chains of transmission, is also important because it explicitly demonstrates ʿAlī's opinion for what justifies communal violence amongst Muslims, a bar that is set considerably high.

The battle proceeds from here with the fiercest fighting being centered around ʿĀ'isha and her personal guard, who entered into the fray to rouse their troops. In time, the battle would aptly become named after her bravery, as she charged forward into combat on

[53] Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 16: The Community Divided: The Caliphate of 'Ali I A.D. 656-657,* p. 126-127

her camel and stood as a symbol of inspiration for her men. Despite her recorded bravery and the intense fighting of her personal guard, ʿAlī's forces proved to be triumphant. Ṭalḥa was killed in combat when an arrow lodged itself into his back. ʿĀ'isha was taken captive and some reports suggest that she was injured in the fighting. Meanwhile, al-Zubayr was reportedly killed while fleeing from combat.

Although Ṭalḥa's death was a typical casualty of war and therefore not very useful in contextualizing ʿAlī's perspective of these rebels, the subsequent treatment of ʿĀ'isha and ʿAlī's opinion on the death of al-Zubayr both prove to be quite insightful. Following the battle, ʿAlī came to the tent of ʿĀ'isha and declared her guilt and offenses, "You roused the people, and they became excited. You stirred up discord among them such that some killed others..." Her response was a plea of submission and for mercy, "Ibn Abī Ṭālib! You have gained your victory. Give me an honorable pardon. You have put your forces to the test very well today." Not only did ʿAlī let her go, but he sent with her men, women, equipment, and money.[54] ʿAlī let her return to Mecca to live the rest of her life freely and nobly.

As for the death of al-Zubayr, it is said that the killer of al-Zubayr came to ʿAlī's tent and asked permission to enter and meet with the Commander of the Faithful. ʿAlī's telling response was, "Let him in and give him the good news that he is going to hell."[55] The majority of the accounts of al-Zubayr's death are quite consistent. While al-Zubayr was fleeing, he passed the army of al-Aḥnaf and in one account al-Aḥnaf orders him to be allowed to pass freely. Whereas in another version, al-Aḥnaf asks for one of his men to keep an eye on al-Zubayr. Ultimately, Ibn Jurmūz of Aḥnaf's army follows al-Zubayr and kills

[54] Ibid, 127.
[55] Ibid, 128.

him. In one retelling of the story, Ibn Jurmūz kills al-Zubayr as he is participating in the obligatory prayers. Across all versions of al-Zubayr's death, ʿAlī is upset and angry with what he perceives to be the unjust killing of a noble Muslim.

In fact, ʿAlī generally shows a significant amount of distress, sadness, and regret over the deaths of those who lost their lives in the Battle of the Camel. When passing through the battlefield, he would lament the deaths of "strenuously devout Muslim[s]."[56] He would proceed to pray over and honorably bury all those who died, regardless of their allegiance. Furthermore, and of great note, ʿAlī collected all the bounty/booty from the battle and brought it to the mosque in al-Baṣrāh.[57] From the mosque, ʿAlī returned everything to its rightful original owner, even if that individual, tribe, or family had raised arms against him and his people. This treatment of enemy combatants largely broke with traditional norms, precedents, and even jurisprudence. However, it made apparent ʿAlī's feelings toward this first *fitnah* and the status of its participants as fellow Muslims. No clearer is ʿAlī's stance on this matter than in an address to some of his troops when asked about the permissibility of fighting, but not plundering, looting, or enslaving. "Those who fought you are like you. Those who make peace with us are one with us, and we are one with them, but, for those who persist until they are struck by us, I fight them to the death. You are in no need of their fifth."[58]

2. Muʿāwiyah and the Battle of Ṣiffīn

[56] Ibid, 163.
[57] Al-Baṣrāh is a city in Southeastern Iraq.
[58] Ibid, 167.

Muʿāwiyah[59]was in open rebellion and was busy trying to subvert ʿAlī's authority in Egypt, during the time in which ʿAlī was dealing with the rebellion of ʿĀ'isha, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr. Muʿāwiyah and his ally ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ managed to capture and execute Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥudhayfah, who was Egypt's governor at the time and was loyal to ʿAlī. Following the Battle of the Camel, ʿAlī sought to reign in Muʿāwiyah and consolidate power over his other regional governors. To this end, ʿAlī sent messengers calling for the oath of allegiance to him as Caliph. To Muʿāwiyah, ʿAlī sent his governor of Hamadhān, Jarīr b. 'Abdallāh al-Bajalī.

Muʿāwiyah rejected ʿAlī's request and instead sought to solidify local support against ʿAlī by blaming him for ʿUthmān's death. Muʿāwiyah wanted to enflame the local populace and he went so far as raising a bloodied shirt, claiming it to be the one that ʿUthmān was wearing when he died, onto Damascus's highest minbar. Along with the shirt were severed fingers alleged to be those of one of ʿUthmān's wife. Muʿāwiyah's efforts were successful and behind him rallied the Syrians, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ, and even Jarīr b. 'Abdallāh al-Bajalī following his failure to subdue Muʿāwiyah.

Consequently, ʿAlī set off toward Muʿāwiyah and both sides proceeded to raise their armies. Muʿāwiyah gave this task to ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ who tried to instill optimism into his troops by emphasizing that now was the time to strike because of the losses and damages that ʿAlī and his followers suffered in the Battle of the Camel. His words ring of opportunism and the proclaimed weakness of the Muslim community. The armies eventually met alongside the Euphrates river in Syria, near the modern day city of Raqqa.

[59] Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, a prominent member of the Umayyad clan, was governor of Syria from the time of ʿUmar to the Caliphate of 'Ali

The first bouts of fighting were reportedly over access to water. Muʿāwiyah's forces held a coveted watering hole and ʿAlī sent troops to secure it. The fighting escalated as both sides continued to deploy additional reinforcements. Unlike the Battle of the Camel, the Battle of Ṣiffīn was a prolonged affair that consisted of a number of skirmishes and clashes. A few days after the initial bout, ʿAlī sent messengers to Muʿāwiyah, again offering him peace and calling him to allegiance. Despite ʿAlī's efforts, Muʿāwiyah remained obstinate, claiming that he must avenge ʿUthmān. It is at this moment that one of ʿAlī's messengers vocalizes the belief of many: Muʿāwiyah was exploiting the death of ʿUthmān for his own personal gains and ambition.[60] Negotiations degrade after these comments, as both sides begin arguing and insulting one another. Small clashes continued thereafter, with some of the fighting conducted in single-combat so that mass causalities would not be incurred.

After some time, more messengers were sent to Muʿāwiyah and a period of back-and-forth negotiations resulted in the declaration of a month long truce. During this period of peace, both sides met and tried to come to acceptable terms, but Muʿāwiyah and ʿAlī remained firm in their claims of leadership/authority over the Muslim polity. ʿAlī attacked Muʿāwiyah's religious credentials and illegitimate claim to the office of Caliph, while Muʿāwiyah maintained that ʿAlī was culpable in ʿUthmān's death and therefore should not rule. Again negotiations broke down and violence ensued when the month of truce expired. One of ʿAlī's commanders ushered in the renewed violence with these words:

> The Commander of the Faithful announces to you: 'I have given you time so that you might revert to the truth and turn to it in

[60] Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol. 17 : The First Civil War: From the Battle of Ṣiffīn to the Death of 'Ali A.D. 656-661/A.H. 36-40,* p. 17-18

> repentance. I have argued against you with the Book of God and have called you to it, but you have not turned away from oppression or responded to truth. Now I have cast back to you [the covenant between us] in a just manner, for God does not love the faithless.'[61]

Fierce daily fighting continued inconclusively for several days. According to al-Ṭabarī's narrative, the fighting climaxed in what would be called the "Night of Howling," when both sides fought through the night until sunrise. During this fighting, ʿAlī's forces were reportedly making gains against the Syrian opposition, leading to one of the most memorable and important moments of the Battle of Ṣiffīn. As the fighting drew on and the number of dead increased drastically, the Syrians raised Qur'āns on their spears and held them in front of ʿAlī's forces. According to al-Ṭabarī's account, this was the idea of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ in order to incite disagreement and division within ʿAlī's forces and give them pause. Other versions of this event detract the agency of the raising of the Qur'āns from ʿAmr and instead attribute the idea to others. Regardless, the effort worked as ʿAmr possibly envisioned. As argued by an influential portion of ʿAlī's followers, the Syrians' raising of the Qur'ān was a reminder that they were all Muslims living under one faith and not in fact apostates. ʿAlī eventually came to accept this ideological position as right, despite the urging of some of his commanders to press the attack. Consequently, ʿAlī's forces were recalled and the Battle of Ṣiffīn finally ended in arbitration.

ʿAlī's leadership and guidance throughout this prolonged encounter is significant and must be unpacked before moving on further to the topics of arbitration, the Khārijites, and

[61] Ibid, 29.

ʿAlī's eventual death. As related in most traditional Islamic sources, ʿAlī often seemed to pursue avenues of peace whenever possible and constantly urged restraint to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. According to one account, ʿAlī would command his troops before every battle to:

> Not fight them unless they attack you first...If you fight them and defeat them, do not kill the fugitives, do not finish off the wounded, do not uncover their nakedness, and do not mutilate the slain. If you reach their abodes, do not tear aside a curtain, enter a dwelling without permission, or seize any of their property apart from what you find in the army camp. Do not do harm against any woman, even if they utter abuse against your honor and vilify your leaders and righteous men...[62]

In short, this quote serves as guidance for ʿAlī's troops' behavior on the battlefield. When examined piecemeal, however, this quote reveals a number of key concepts and guiding principles that ʿAlī set forth for the treatment of these rebels or, according to some sources, apostates. First, only engage in combat after being attacked yourself, therefore placing the agency of the aggressor on ʿAlī's opponents rather than his own men. This guidance is in line with ʿAlī's actions in the Battle of the Camel, where he supposedly made Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr draw first blood. His second command is to spare the wounded and defeated, another departure from some previous precedents. The third idea, deals with the "uncovering of nakedness" and the "stripping of curtains." This guidance is an even greater departure from precedent as it tells the men not to loot the dead and wounded and not to pillage the villages and homes of the enemy. Leaving the enemy's property intact is then

[62] Ibid, 30.

extended to the treatment of women associated with the enemy. They are to be left alone, even if they prove to be insolent, meaning that none were to be enslaved. In essence, these directives provide the enemy with a level of protection and status that is similar or equal to that of ʿAlī's fellow Muslims. This would suggest that ʿAlī did not consider these enemies to be apostates and instead viewed them as fellow members of the Islamic community.

C. The Death of ʿAlī: Arbitration and the Khārijites

1. The Beginning of a Movement

With arbitration came further divisions within ʿAlī's caliphate. Although ʿAlī hoped to reintegrate the Syrians into the Islamic polity through negotiations, the Khārijites separated as a result of the same negotiations. The Khārijites desired continued warfare against Muʿāwiyah and did not accept the principle of appointing human arbitrators over a matter that they believed should be settled through God's will, meaning combat. Furthermore, when pressed by ʿAlī's loyal commander and governor Ibn Abbas the Khārijites exclaimed, "Do you consider Ibn al-'Āṣ a 'just man,' given that yesterday he was fighting us and shedding our blood?... You have appointed men as arbitrators in the affairs of God."[63]

For a short time, ʿAlī managed to reign in the Khārijites, but eventually their separation from ʿAlī became permanent. Followers of the Khārijite movement openly accused ʿAlī of sinning, as a result of his agreement to arbitrate. The slogan, "Authority belongs to God alone," became the rallying cry of the Khārijites and an ultimatum was given to ʿAlī: abandon the negotiations or face the Khārijite threat in combat. ʿAlī agreed that their slogan was true in words alone, but the application of those words by the Khārijites was

[63] Ibid, 101.

misguided. He is reported to have said, "God is most great! Their words are true, but they use them to mean something false!" ʿAlī then went on to state that he would only move against them if they rebelled and made "the first move against us."[64]

It is at this point that the Khārijites earned their name, as the ones who go out or leave. The Khārijites left ʿAlī at al-Kūfah and headed for the town of al-Nahrawān.[65] A few garrison commanders loyal to ʿAlī harassed the Khārijites, but for the most part they remained unmolested and intact. Along the way, the vanguard of the Khārijites of al-Baṣrāh attacked people indiscriminately, practicing *isti'rād*, or "the subjection of individuals to an inquisition and their execution if they failed to answer correctly."[66] This action by the Khārijites of al-Baṣrāh is extremely important because not only did it account for the Khārijites making "the first move against us," but it was also one of the earliest examples of the practice of *isti'rād*, which would become something commonly associated with extremist applications of *takfīr*, such as the version of *takfīr* used by ISIS and ISIS-inspired groups today. Al-Ṭabarī provides reports of a few specific instances of *isti'rād*, the most notable being the tale of 'Abdallāh b. Khabbāb, the son of one of the Companions. 'Abdallāh was interdicted beside a canal by the Khārijites of al-Baṣrāh as he was traveling with his pregnant wife or concubine, depending on the version of the account. The Khārijites tested his faith by asking him to recite Ḥadith as reported from his father. Although 'Abdallāh was successful in his recitation of Ḥadith, when tested on his opinion of ʿAlī, he failed in the view of his Khārijite attackers. In all versions of the tale as presented by al-Ṭabarī, the event

[64] Ibid, 112.
[65] Al-Nahrawān was a town and canal system in the lower Diyālā (Tāmarrā) region east of the Tigris River in Iraq. (ei2)
[66] Ibid, 118 and Pellat, "Istiʿrāḍ", *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman

ends the same. 'Abdallāh is taken down beside the canal and slaughtered, so that his blood ran freely into the waters. Next the Khārijite attackers take his wife and strike her in the womb; al-Ṭabarī's accounts graphically describe this.

2. The Battle of the Canal

News reached ʿAlī of the Khārijites' violence and after a short period of deliberation and fact finding, ʿAlī decided to set out against them. ʿAlī and the Khārijites consolidated their respective forces at the canal beside al-Nahrawān. Despite the offenses of the Khārijites, ʿAlī attempted to reconcile his differences with the Khārijites and reintegrate them into his army. He wrote to the Khārijite leaders Zayd b. Ḥuṣayn and 'Abdallāh b. Wahb and also called upon the Khārijites to, "Surrender to us those among you who killed our brethren so that we may kill them for what they have done. Then I will leave you alone and refrain from action against you..."[67] Others amongst ʿAlī's loyal followers also implored the Khārijites to revert from their *riddah* or turning away. In one of ʿAlī's addresses to the Khārijites he lambasted their *isti'rād* and claimed that the Khārijites' actions were something that was "clear depravity."[68] However, ʿAlī and his followers' efforts were to no avail and the Khārijites remained adamant in their denunciation of ʿAlī, as someone guilty of "unbelief."

The stage for the Battle of the Canal or the Battle of al-Nahrawān was therefore set, as each side organized into their respective battle formations. Some of ʿAlī's commanders called out to the Khārijites in a last ditch effort to offer peace, safe-conduct, and pardoning for their betrayal. According to al-Ṭabarī, a number of Khārijites took advantage of this offer: 500 horsemen following Farwah b. Nawfal al-Ashjaʿī withdrew, another group

[67] Ibid, 127.
[68] Ibid, 130.

returned to al-Kūfah, and a further 100 joined ʿAlī's lines. Again, like all previous encounters reported by al-Ṭabarī, ʿAlī ordered his men to refrain from attack until they were first attacked.[69] Once attacked, the battle was not prolonged and ʿAlī's forces quickly found victory. Only 400 of the Khārijites who stayed to fight ʿAlī survived. ʿAlī commanded that those 400 fighters be returned to their families and nursed back to health. Once healthy, they could then return to al-Kūfah to reclaim their belongings. Similarly, the slaves, women, and children captured as a result of the battle were returned to their respective owners and families.

3. The Assassination of ʿAlī

Despite their military defeat at al-Nahrawān, the Khārijite movement would not die alongside the Canal. Instead of the battle quashing the movement, the Battle of the Canal exhausted ʿAlī's troops and led to further questions surrounding ʿAlī's rule. ʿAlī had hoped to continue on after al-Nahrawān to renew jihad against Muʿāwiyah, but his forces were not up to the task and many of them abandoned their camps and returned to their homes, primarily in al-Kūfah. The extremely one-sided nature of the Battle of the Canal would go on to haunt the rest of ʿAlī's rule, as it became a more commonly held opinion that many who died in the battle were in fact devout Muslims. In addition to the issue of the Battle of the Canal, ʿAlī's arbitration with Muʿāwiyah came to a verdict that was not in ʿAlī's favor. The ruling essentially justified Muʿāwiyah to some extent and suggested that neither ʿAlī nor Muʿāwiyah are rightful caliphs and that a new election should be held.[70] Consequently, ʿAlī

[69] Ibid, 131.
[70] Ladewig Petersen, *Ali and Muʿāwiyah in Early Arabic Tradition*, p. 12

rejected the results of the arbitration, as he was not prepared to stand down from the office of the Caliph.

Muʿāwiyah, now militarily uncontested by ʿAlī because of desertions, continued to expand his influence and took Egypt by force. Simultaneously, he also managed to receive oaths of allegiance from his followers in Jerusalem in the summer of 660.[71] Muʿāwiyah's momentum, the complicating arbitration verdict, and the issue of the Battle of the Canal all negatively impacted ʿAlī's support base and perceived religious legitimacy. Ultimately, on 27 January 661 (19 or 20 Ramaḍān AH 40), ʿAlī was attacked after his prayers at the Great Mosque in al-Kūfah by the Khārijite Ibn Muljam and some of his companions. In al-Ṭabarī's narratives of the events and discussions leading up to ʿAlī's death, these Khārijites deemed ʿAlī's death justified and necessary based upon the loss of life at the Battle of the Canal and their belief that ʿAlī has apostatized from Islam.

D. ʿAlī in Review: Apostates and Rebels

ʿAlī's caliphate was plagued with constant insurrection and threats to his power. Even from the beginning, there were those who went out against him, either literally or figuratively. Dissenters of ʿAlī held differing beliefs and opinions of the Caliph, which can be found abundantly within the source material. No other case is potentially as contested and problematic for early Islamic history than the reign and death of ʿAlī. Yet despite these differences and competing perspectives, a number of trends emerge throughout all reliable historical accounts of ʿAlī's reign, especially in regards to his interactions and battles with the rebel forces that he faced.

[71] Ibid, 11.

First and foremost, ʿAlī almost always appears reluctant to engage in hostilities. Before each battle and even in general practice, ʿAlī would send messengers or envoys to his opponents in order to try to come to terms without bloodshed. This could be seen in his negotiations with Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, his messengers to Muʿāwiyah, and his letters to the Khārijites. Although these efforts failed in all the cases presented above, ʿAlī would still take a notionally defensive posture in battle, according to most accounts. ʿAlī tried to avoid the notion that he was an aggressor by evoking or forcing his enemy's hand. In doing so, ʿAlī sought to achieve justification and validation for the ensuing violence against fellow Muslims. Against Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr in the Battle of the Camel, we are presented with the gruesome story of the death of the boy carrying the Qur'ān as a justification for battle. At the Battle of Ṣiffīn following the initial skirmishes, a commander of ʿAlī delivers an address from the Commander of the Faithful authorizing war on the basis that Muʿāwiyah refused all efforts at peace and reconciliation based on the Qur'ān. Finally, for the Khārijites, their inquisitional rampage through the countryside proved to be enough justification for bloodshed after the Khārijite leadership refused to turn over those responsible.

Another important distinction is the regret and sadness that ʿAlī supposedly felt for those who fell in combat amongst the enemy forces. Even in the case of al-Zubayr, ʿAlī was angry upon learning of his death, even though al-Zubayr led forces against him. Although it may be common to lament death in all forms, ʿAlī not only despaired at the loss of life, but he went further to treat the dead honorably and the survivors nobly. Following the Battle of the Camel, ʿAlī buried and prayed for all those who died on his side and the enemy's. Furthermore, those who survived the lopsided victory at the Battle of the Canal were not

only spared, but cared for and returned to their families. Likewise, in the case of ʿĀ'isha, she was sent home with property and honor despite the fact that she was one of the most adamant and inspiring forces against ʿAlī. ʿAlī's compassion toward his enemies as presented here is quite different from ISIS's treatment of their enemies and prisoners, who are often degraded even after death.

Yet, the most distinguishing and rather surprising aspects of ʿAlī's interactions with defeated rebels was his attitude toward looting, prisoners, and women and children. In Islamic law and scripture, there are clear guidelines set down that establish the permissibility and distribution of loot or booty earned in battle or war. In essence, these laws permit or allot a portion of the booty to each and every man in the army following a victory, so long as the violence was justified and against those outside the Islamic community and the Dhimmi.[72] It is a practice that has been applied throughout Islamic history from the time of Muḥammad until now with ISIS, although ISIS arguably skews some of the stipulations set forth in the scripture.

In the cases presented above, however, ʿAlī treats the matter of loot quite differently. In the Battle of the Camel, ʿAlī released all prisoners and allowed his enemies to reclaim their property at the mosque in al-Baṣrāh. Likewise, in the Battle of the Canal ʿAlī returned the property of the fallen and wounded to their respective families or tribes, pardoning those who lived in the process. These actions would somewhat violate the Islamic laws of booty as prescribed in the Qur'ān, unless ʿAlī did not fully consider these individuals/opponents as apostates or disbelievers. Although ʿAlī sometimes explicitly claimed that some of the

[72] The Dhimmī are protected "People of the Book," which typically includes Christians, Jews, and even Zoroastrians according to the Caliph ʿUmar.

leadership of these factions had turned away or lost their religion, ʿAlī still affords his enemies the protections and rights of fellow Muslims. It is possible that through defeat and reintegration, ʿAlī considers his opponents to have repented; or perhaps these are instances of abrogation. Regardless, ʿAlī as one of the Rightfully Guided caliphs set an authoritative precedent in his treatment of the defeated following these battles.

In addition, ʿAlī settled another ideological issue in his decision to cease hostilities during the Battle of Ṣiffīn. Although in most historical accounts of the battle ʿAlī and some of his commanders wanted to continue to press the attack, ʿAlī ultimately decided to recall his forces after the Syrian opposition raised Qur'āns. Whether or not it was a ruse to stem the turn of the battle, ʿAlī and the majority of his advisors concluded that the raising of the Qur'āns was enough of an indication of the Syrian opposition's religion that fighting was no longer justified and arbitration as laid out in the Qur'ān should be pursued. In this example, the bar is set rather low for one's demonstration of faith and sincerity is not called into question.

In stark contrast to ʿAlī are the Khārijites, whose version of *takfīr* appears to be more in line with ISIS's application of it today. Unlike ʿAlī, the Khārijites believe that violence and battle is the only solution and that arbitration is not only ineffective, but also against the will of God. This belief is founded in their motto at the time, "Authority belongs to God alone," meaning that only God's will can determine one's fate/faith. For the Khārijites, God's will was revealed through the course of battle, as He would ordain the winners and losers. Notably, this is a sentiment often voiced in ISIS propaganda. However, this belief did not

work out well for the Khārijites, as was seen in their battle against ʿAlī where they lost in grave fashion.

Despite the constant challenges to ʿAlī's authority, his reign as caliph proved to be significantly influential, not only for the development and growth of Islam, but also for setting foundational guidelines in Islamic law. Although it could be strongly argued that ʿAlī did not consider the rebel factions that he faced entirely as apostates, his battles against insurrection would go on to be used by other scholars and movements as justification for communal violence even within the same sect of Islam, such as in the cases of Ibn Taymiyyah and ultimately ISIS. However, after analyzing ʿAlī's reign more carefully, it becomes abundantly clear that ʿAlī's treatment and attitude of *takfīr* was vastly different from ISIS's application of it today.

VI. Ibn Taymiyyah and the Ilkhāns

Among Islamic scholars today, Ibn Taymiyyah is one of the most renowned, influential, and debated medieval Islamic scholar. From his numerous and extensive works in Islamic law (fiqh), jurisprudence, and theology to public discourse surrounding his status as a Sufi, Ibn Taymiyyah remains a topic of much interest.[73] However, it is his strict Hanbalī jurisprudence and works on just jihad and *takfīr* that have made him one of the most widely sourced Islamic scholars by Wahabbi and Salafist groups like ISIS. Furthermore, some go as far as referring to Ibn Taymiyyah as the father of modern day Salafism, jihadism, or Wahhabism in conjunction with Ibn al-Wahhab. It should be noted, however, that Ibn Taymiyyah's ideological discourse and legal works were not monistic and they varied over

[73] For more on this, see Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed's *Ibn Taymiyyah and his Times.*

time. As a result, there are some competing ideological positions within Ibn Taymiyyah's works that warrant further analysis and discussion.

Ibn Taymiyyah's famous anti-Mongol *fatwas* and position on *takfīr* are more nuanced and complicated than is often presented in contemporary commentaries or views. As will be shown, at the apex of the Ilkhān Mongol crisis in the Middle East and Islam more broadly, Ibn Taymiyyah's works can be more heated and inflammatory. Conversely, his works later in life, outside the context of the Ilkhān invasion, appear to be more tempered and restrained, advocating for stability and peace rather than war and bloodshed. Across the entirety of his works, it can be argued that a constant primary theme is that those who bring discord and upheaval to the Islamic world or community are among the worst and most guilty people.

A. The Ilkhānate & Conversion

From early on, Ibn Taymiyyah knew firsthand the impact of the Mongol Ilkhāns. Born in the village of Ḥarrān in modern day Turkey on 22 January 1263, Ibn Taymiyyah at the age of six was forced to flee with his family to Damascus as the Ilkhāns under Hülegü Khān advanced into southern Turkey and Greater Syria. Although the Ilkhān invaders were halted by Mamlūk forces at the famed Battle of 'Ayn Jālūt, Ibn Taymiyyah and his family remained in Damascus, where he began and completed his studies in Islamic law and jurisprudence.

During this time, hostilities continued between the Mamlūks and Ilkhāns, as raids and skirmishes were relatively common and the Ilkhāns continued to undertake larger endeavors to conquer Greater Syria. By this point, the Ilkhāns had sacked Baghdad, were in

control of Mesopotamia and Persia, and had subjugated a number of principalities and states in the Caucuses and modern day Turkey. Meanwhile, the Mamlūks remained in control of the majority of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. Warfare against the Ilkhāns was initially not problematic for the Muslim majority Mamlūks as they were defending themselves against a heathen or non-Muslim aggressor. However, by the time of the 7th Khan of the Ilkhānate, war against the Ilkhāns would become more complicated.

After a period of upheaval and assassinations amongst the Ilkhānate's ruling class, Ghāzān Khān overthrew and executed the ruling Baydu Khān. Under Ghāzān, the Ilkhānate was ushered into a new era, one under the religion of Islam. Just prior to Ghāzān's ascension to the title of Khān, he converted to Islam, which was the dominant religion in the Ilkhānate's lands. Despite the Khān's conversion to Islam, however, expeditions and aggression continued against the Mamlūks and Syria. Ghāzān Khān attempted to present himself as a renewer of the Islamic faith and went so far as to refer to himself as the "King of Islam." He tried to further instill this notion into the people of Damascus after the Ilkhāns conquered it. Not only did Ghāzān Khān try to cement himself as the leader of the Islamic faith, he also claimed to be saving and freeing the people of Syria and Damascus from oppressive Mamlūk rule.

Although Ghāzān Khān continued to attack the Muslim Mamlūks, his conversion solidified support amongst his geographic base and also led to a number of Mamlūk subordinate commanders and governors to join his armies. Furthermore, as a result of the Ilkhāns' conversion, the Mamlūks were finding it increasingly difficult to convince their followers and base in Egypt to combat the Ilkhān aggression out of religious obligation. As a

remedy to this ideological and religious problem, the Mamlūks turned to religious scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah for legal justification to fight.

B. *Fatwas* Against The Ilkhans

Ibn Taymiyyah issued three *fatwas* primarily directed at the Ilkhān aggressors. There is no critical version of these *fatwas* in existence, but the 30 volume Riyadh edition serves as the authoritative version today.[74] Although the Riyadh version lists the *fatwas* in a particular order, the exact timing of the issuance of the *fatwas* is still debated. The first of the *fatwas* presented in the Riyadh version is the most docile of Taymiyyah's anti-Ilkhān *fatwas*, while the second is the longest and most far-reaching in terms of those whom it targets. Each *fatwa* sought to provide legal argumentation and justification for fighting against the Ilkhāns and their allies for a variety of reasons.

Ibn Taymiyyah attempted to classify the Ilkhāns in groups that had historical precedents for being justly attacked. To derive the legitimacy and findings for his rulings, Ibn Taymiyyah relied upon the Qur'ān and Ḥadith, but also drew heavily from the lives and experiences of the *salaf* (Companions of the Prophet) and *Rashidūn*, specifically Abū Bakr al-Ṣaḍḍīq and ʿAlī b. Abī Talib. Amongst the groups that Ibn Taymiyyah references are the Khārijites, the people of *riddah*, the Mamlūk turncoats, and those forced to fight alongside the Ilkhāns. There is some overlap between these various classifications, but to each of these groups, Ibn Taymiyyah ascribes varying levels of guilt or apostasy. Taymiyyah viewed the turncoats as the worst apostates of all, while those forced or impressed into the Ilkhān armies were granted some respite.

[74] Denise Aigle. "The Mongol Invasions of Bilād al-Shām by Ghāzān Khān and Ibn Taymīyah's Three "Anti-Mongol" Fatwas." p. 94

In Ibn Taymiyyah's first *fatwa,* he does not deny the Ilkhāns' status as Muslims, but maintains that they must be fought if they refuse to accept repentance for their crimes. Throughout his *fatwas,* Ibn Taymiyyah makes references to the battles that ʿAlī fought during his caliphate and goes to great lengths to associate the Ilkhāns with the Khārijites. Taymiyyah argues that there was not a religious consensus in regards to ʿAlī's fighting in the Battle of the Camel and the human arbitrators that ended the Battle of Ṣiffīn. He admits and allows that opinion is divided around those two particular issues, but claims that all agreed upon ʿAlī's fighting of the Khārijites. Ibn Taymiyyah claims that since the Khārijites "called for obedience to the prescriptions of the Qur'ān, they could not be excluded from the Islamic community." However, according to Taymiyyah, "they asserted what was not allowed [in the religion]" and a consensus was reached in regards to fighting them, so ʿAlī justly fought them. Along this line of reasoning, Taymiyyah claims legitimacy in attacking the Ilkhāns because the Ilkhāns continued to follow the traditions/laws of Chinggis Khan, despite converting to Islam, and the ulama[75] agreed that fighting them was permissible.

Ibn Taymiyyah goes a step further in his association of the Ilkhāns with the Khārijites by stating that both parties were new entities that entered into and disrupted Islam with divisive innovations that created disorder. This is a damning accusation, as Aigle presents in her work, because Ibn Taymiyyah believes that "every community which is a cause of disorder on the earth must be fought, on the basis of the principle that disorder is more to be feared than death."[76] Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah points to the fact that despite converting to Islam, the Ilkhāns continued to plunder, kill, and enslave other Muslims

[75] Islamic scholars
[76] Ibid, 98.

without regard. For some of the Ilkhān, their crimes are similar to the people of *riddah* from the time of Abū Bakr and his Riddah Wars, meaning that they have ignored or turned their back on some essential component of Islam. In Ibn Taymiyyah's eyes, however, the worst of these were the Mamlūks who willingly went to the Ilkhānate court to pledge their allegiance to the Ilkhāns and fight against their fellow Muslim Mamlūks.

The seemingly never-ending aggression of the Ilkhāns against the Mamlūks would likely have been enough for Ibn Taymiyyah to argue a solid case justifying warfare against the recent converts by itself. However, another aspect of the Ilkhāns' attempts to expand and secure Greater Syria provided even more fire for Ibn Taymiyyah's argumentation. The Ilkhāns reached out to other European and Christian powers seeking alliances against the Mamlūks; this included letters to the Pope and Frankish crusader kings. Additionally, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, the Ilkhāns allied themselves with deviant sects within Islam and the Shi'ah. For Ibn Taymiyyah, the Ilkhāns' "collusion with—in his view—all these infidels"[77] against fellow Muslims compounded the guilt and degree of apostasy of the Ilkhānate.

C. Ibn Taymiyyah in Review

Ultimately, Ibn Taymiyyah's *fatwas* were relatively successful, as the Mamlūks were able to continuously defeat and resist Ilkhān incursions. However, the ideas presented in Ibn Taymiyyah's *fatwas* are not wholly representative of his overall ideology, especially in his later years. It is therefore important to remember the rationale and historical context in which the *fatwas* were issued. Ibn Taymiyyah and the Mamlūks were facing a constant and

[77] Ibid, 102.

serious threat in the Mongol aggressors, who were renowned for their brutality and conquests. Comparatively, none of the modern Middle Eastern states that ISIS denounces fit the mold, scale, or behavior of the Ilkhān Mongols.

Ironically, Ibn Taymiyyah, who like ISIS is a strong advocate against *bidʿah*, called *takfīr* "the first *bidʿah* in Islam" in *al-Fatawa Ash-Shar'iyyah*.[78] Furthermore, he is often quoted as saying toward the end of his life that he "will not declare anyone from this nation to be an unbeliever."[79] In fact, it should be mentioned that in *Majmu' al-Fatwa*, the same work in which one can find Ibn Taymiyyah's anti-Mongol *fatwas*, Ibn Taymiyyah clearly states that even the Khārijites were never excommunicated or declared to be disbelievers by ʿAlī or any of the other Companions. He states that ʿAlī "fought them to repulse their aggression and their unlawful rebellion, not because they were disbelievers."

This comment along with Ibn Taymiyyah's belief that one should always follow the examples of the *salaf*, would suggest that it is inappropriate to use the case of the Khārijites as justification for *takfīr*, but instead to use it as justification for repulsing aggression or unlawful rebellion. Under these restrictions, the argument for communal violence would therefore necessitate either aggression against the Islamic community/state or unlawful rebellion on the part of one actor. This would suggest that in the case of ISIS, it would have had to have been an established body/community (e.g. the Muslims under the Mamlūks) that was aggressed upon or rebelled against from within, in order to justify their fighting of fellow Muslims according to this line of argumentation. On the other hand, if ISIS were the

[78] Abū Khalil, As'ad. "The Incoherence of Islamic Fundamentalism: Arab Islamic Thought at the End of the 20th Century." p. 676-679
[79] Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam An-Nubula*, 15/88

aggressors or rebels, as many view them to be, then they would be in the wrong according to Ibn Taymiyyah's reasoning.

This point is further supported by Ibn Taymiyyah's continued train of thought following his discussion of the Khārijites. In referencing various Muslim groups of differing opinions, he goes on to state that:

> Indeed, it is absolutely impermissible for any of these groups to anathematize or excommunicate the other, nor to make permissible the shedding of their blood or the transgression upon their wealth/property, even if such groups exhibit clear misguidance. Verily, could it not also be that the accusers themselves could also be misguided in some ways? Indeed, the latter's misguidance may actually be worse (in the eyes of God), and it is usually the case that they are all ignorant of the fact that they do not differ on the basic truths.[80]

From here, after pronouncing a number of Ḥadith prohibiting the killing and looting of fellow Muslims, Ibn Taymiyyah returns to his historic examples in which the *salaf* fought against one another, such as in the Battle of the Camel and the Battle of Ṣiffīn. He reiterates that in these contexts all participants remained Muslims and believers. It therefore becomes clear that Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion is that all Muslims remain Muslims so long as they continue to practice the bare minimum of the Islamic faith. This belief is in line with the examples set by Abū Bakr and ʿAlī, who established precedents for what constituted the bare minimum of being a Muslim.

[80] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmuʿ al-Fatawa* 3: 282-288.

A final point that should be mentioned in regards to Ibn Taymiyyah's ideology comes from his *fatwa* on the region of Mardin, the area in Turkey that Ibn Taymiyyah's birth city of Ḥarrān is located. At the time, the area was under the control of the Ilkhāns and Ibn Taymiyyah was asked about the status of the Muslims living under their rule. The questions posed were in regards to whether or not the Muslims of Mardin were hypocrites or apostates. Ibn Taymiyyah's response, in the form of the *fatwa*, was direct and unambiguous. The people of Mardin are not hypocrites or apostates, even though they are living under the subjugated rule of those considered to be. Furthermore, so long as the Muslim population is able to practice their religion freely, then there is no need to emigrate or seek safe-haven. Lastly, the area of Mardin is not to be considered dar al-Islam (land of Islam) or dar al-Ḥarb (land of War), but rather a composite of the two. The significance of the proper reading of this *fatwa* is monumental in reviewing ISIS's stance on the status of those under government regimes that it deems to be un-Islamic. Unlike the position of ISIS, Ibn Taymiyyah apparently believed that even if the government or rulers are apostates, the people under them are not, so long as they continue to practice the basic tenants of the Islamic faith.

VII. Conclusion: *Takfīr* in the Light of History

ISIS's rationale for *takfīr* becomes suspect when analyzed against the historical contexts and sources that it claims to derive guidance and legitimacy from. Similar to how ʿAlī criticizes the Khārijites, while some of ISIS's words may be true, their actions are clear depravity. ISIS's use of *isti'rād* and its wide reaching *takfīrī* denunciations are not at all supported in the case studies presented above, the Sunnah, or the Qur'ān. One of the main reasons that ʿAlī fought the Khārijites was for their violent practice of *isti'rād*, suggesting

that those who subject others to *isti'rād*, like ISIS, are in the wrong and should be held accountable for their actions. As shown in the cases of Abū Bakr and ʿAlī, neither of the two Caliphs subjected their followers to tests of faith, even when reintegrating those accused of "turning their backs." For example, in the Battle of Ṣiffīn, the raising of the Qur'āns was sufficient evidence of the Syrian opposition's faith to cease hostilities. ISIS's use of *isti'rād* is therefore inconsistent with these historic precedents, except for the example set by the Khārijites.

Furthermore, *takfīr* was not and should not be a process of blanket accusations, as ISIS has applied it. Throughout Islamic history, *takfīr* has been a delicate matter that has traditionally been dealt with sparingly because of the severity of the accusation and the punishment if said accusation proves to be false. Despite this, ISIS's Delegated Committee and self-proclaimed caliph have made it explicitly clear that ISIS's unambiguous stance is that those under foreign governments, which they deem as apostate regimes, are also consequently apostates. Ibn Taymiyyah's Mardin *Fatwa* is in direct opposition to this stance, as he claims that those living in Mardin were not apostates or hypocrites, even though they were living under the rule of the Ilkhāns. Similarly, ʿAlī referred to Muʿāwiyah and the other leaders of his faction as individuals without religion. In spite of this, ʿAlī still believed that those fighting under Muʿāwiyah were good and devout Muslims. When ʿAlī came to face the Khārijites, it is reported that he first pled with the Khārijites to return to the fold and asked only for those guilty of *isti'rād* to be turned over for judgment. Even when the Khārijites refused and battle formations were drawn up, ʿAlī and his forces remained receptive of the Khārijites and pardoned those who wished to avoid battle.

These case studies all include incidents of communal violence, some of which were conducted clearly under the practice of *takfīr*. It should be noted that in these historic examples, however, Abū Bakr, ʿAlī, and Ibn Taymiyyah were all facing some form of aggression toward their established community or followers. Abū Bakr faced a number of rebellious tribes and coalitions that left the Muslim polity following Muḥammad's death. According to his own words, Abū Bakr wished to retain all the authorities and resources that were afforded to Muḥammad as leader of the community in his time. ʿAlī faced two concurrent rebellions and an eventual mutiny that challenged his rule and the integrity of the Islamic empire. While ʿAlī dealt with Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, Muʿāwiyah was consolidating his influence in Syria and attempting to conquer Egypt. Yet despite this aggression, ʿAlī never appeared to treat these rebels as actual apostates. Even in the case of the Khārijites, as Ibn Taymiyyah also argues, ʿAlī never declared them apostates or cast them out of the Islamic community. Finally, Ibn Taymiyyah and the Mamlūks were facing a constant aggressor in the Ilkhāns. Despite their conversion to Islam, the Ilkhān armies continuously waged war against their Muslim neighbors, killing and pillaging along the way.

Conversely, in modern times ISIS operates as an aggressor, fitting somewhat in line with Ibn Taymiyyah's description of the Khārijites and the Ilkhāns. ISIS emerged as a new disruptive force within Islam and the lands of Islam. Like the Khārijites and the Ilkhāns, ISIS then spread disorder through the land with terrorist attacks and violent offensives against their surrounding neighbors and the established Islamic base or community. Despite ISIS's overtures of acting in accordance with the Sunnah and the guidance of the *Salaf*, ISIS practices a brutal absolutism that cannot be found in the source material. Even in the case of

Abū Bakr, who perhaps applied the broadest definition of *takfīr* during the Riddah Wars, violence was not the only recourse. As shown in a number of examples from his time, the application of *takfīr* was varied and Abū Bakr often pardoned many of the accused, even if they had raised arms against him.

In reality, Abū Bakr and ʿAlī both practiced a more tempered approach to dealing with apostates or those challenging their rule. By contrast, ISIS proclaims in its *al-Rumiyah* magazine that *takfīr* should be carried out without exception, even as the guidance and examples of the *Salaf* and *Rashidūn* would seem to suggest otherwise. In addition to Abū Bakr's many pardons, he also did not use *takfīr* against ʿAlī, his family, or Saʿd b. 'Ubādah, even though they refused the pledge of allegiance to Abū Bakr and all the obligations incumbent with it (e.g. the *zakāt*). Additionally, there were an even greater number of other individuals and tribes that Abū Bakr did not set out against or fight despite his consideration of them as apostates, such as Qurrah and his tribe. Ibn Taymiyyah also gave exception to those living in Mardin and the Muslims that were impressed into the Ilkhān armies and forced to fight against fellow Muslims. In fact, Ibn Taymiyyah went as far as calling the latter martyrs.

It would be inaccurate to say that *takfīr* did not exist in Islamic history and that there was no violence as a result of it. However, the correct usage of *takfīr* is nuanced, complicated, and something that was not to be dealt with lightly. As is shown throughout these case studies and Islamic history more broadly, *takfīr* appears to have been avoided when possible and all avenues of reconciliation were first sought. For as Ibn Taymiyyah argues, the most dangerous and detrimental thing to the Islamic community is that which

causes disorder and leads fellow Muslims into killing one another. This is a notion that falls in line with the prophetic verse as presented in el-Hibri:

> The prophet orders that when the times of the *fitnah* arrive, a believer should abandon the scene of conflict and tend to his camels, sheep, or land. When someone asks the Prophet, "And what if a man did not have camels, sheep, or land?" the answer was: "Then he should take hold of his sword and strike till it's blunt on a stone.[81]

Yet despite guidance like this, ISIS continues to maintain a misguided absolute stance on *takfīr*. Like the Khārijites' encounter with 'Abdallāh b. Khabbāb, ISIS accepts only its ideological position and attempts to cast out or kill all others who disagree, even if they are from within their own organization. In this brutal absolutism, ISIS's form of *takfīr* is most reminiscent of the Khārijites usage of *takfīr*, rather than the examples of the *Salaf* and ulama. Ultimately, ISIS's understanding of and argumentation for *takfīr* is perverted and poorly supported; yet it has resonated somewhat among susceptible populations who lack the education and understanding about these matters. Additional work and publications on subjects such as these, may help to disseminate more accurate depictions of Islamic history during its formative years, thereby undermining the legitimacy of violent *takfīrī* ideologies, such ISIS's.

[81] El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History : The Rashidun Caliphs*, p. 48.

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