

STRATEGIES OF
**PROPHET
MUHAMMAD**

صلى الله عليه وسلم



OMAR KHAYYAM SHEIKH



Strategies Of Prophet Muhammad

(Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)

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THE GENIUS OF MUHAMMAD (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)

The Quran:

“We have indeed, in the Messenger of God, a good example of conduct for anyone whose hope is in God and the Final Day.” (Quran 33:21)

Karen Armstrong:

If we could view Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) as we do any other important historical figure we would surely consider him to be one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever known. To create a literary masterpiece, to found a major religion and a new world power are not ordinary achievements. But to appreciate his genius to the full, we must examine the society into which he was born and the forces with which he contended. When he descended from Mount Hira to bring the Word of God to the Arabs, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) was about to attempt the impossible.

W. Montgomery Watt:

The more one reflects on the history of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) and of early Islam, the more one is amazed at the vastness of his achievement. Circumstances presented him with an opportunity such as few men have had, but the man was fully matched with the hour. Had it not been for his gifts as seer, statesman, and administrator and, behind these, his trust in God and firm belief that God had sent him, a notable chapter in the history of mankind would have remained unwritten.³

Maxime Rodinson:

In the strange atmosphere of Makkah, on the edge of the magnificent civilized world of the great powers, just then engaged in an apocalyptic struggle, the faith was growing up which was later to overflow into the world at large and endeavor to mould it. All this was taking place within the brain of a single man, but stirring within it were the reflected problems of a whole world; and the historical conditions were such that the results of all this mental activity were calculated to shake Arabia and beyond.⁴

Tor Andrae:

A genuine prophet is one who really has a message to deliver, one in whose soul some of the great questions of his age have stimulated a restlessness which compels him to speak, the natural and inevitable expression of a strong lasting conviction and a genuine passion.⁵

M. K. Gandhi:

I become more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers and his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle.⁶

H. G. Wells:

Islam prevailed because it was the best social and political order the times could offer. It prevailed because everywhere it found politically apathetic peoples, robbed, oppressed, bullied, uneducated and unorganized and it found selfish and unsound governments out of touch with any people at all. It was the broadest, freshest and cleanest political idea that had yet come into actual activity in the world and it offered better terms than any other to the mass of mankind.

Winwood Reade:

Instead of repining that Mahomet [sic] did no more, we have reason to be astonished that he did so much. His career is the best example that can be given of the influence of the Individual in human history. That single man created the glory of his nation and spread his language over half the earth.

Regis Blachere:

Neither indifference, nor wounds to his self-respect, nor wrong done to his material interests, nor intrigues nor threats, nor above all, the many offers of compromise made by the pagans, were able to deflect him from his mission. In the gravest hour – the Quran bears witness – he could retain his balanced judgment, revive the courage of his followers, and close his eyes to slight faults in order the better to destroy treason. As a true leader of men, he knew how to choose his advisers, turning to account the faithfulness of Ali, the moderation of Abu Bakr, the energy of Umar and the resilience of Uthman. He had no illusions about men, and never failed to remind them of their duty and their vocation. Better than anyone, too, he knew the faults and virtues of the people among whom he was born. This inspired man, who never for a day had thought of succeeding without God's help, yet knew how to look into the future and to measure the strength and weakness of his adversary.

Napoleon Bonaparte:

“In a few years, the Muslims conquered half of the world. They snatched away more souls from false gods, pulled down more idols and demolished more pagan temples in fifteen years than the followers of Moses and Jesus did in fifteen centuries. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) was a great man.”

Dr. Michael Hart:

“[The Prophet] was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.”

Preface

Ever since I began my minors in Religion and History at Columbia University in 1983, I have been fascinated by the personality and achievements of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him). For the last twenty-nine years, I have reviewed biographies on the Prophet from Muslim writers as well as Western scholars. I have personally been impressed by the Prophet's genius, managerial sophistication, leadership capabilities and strategic brilliance.

Most of the literature I have reviewed to date does not fully address these aspects of the Prophet's achievements. Most writing by Muslim scholars on the Prophet's life and achievements, understandably, adds devotional aspects and spiritual language. However, this undermines the quality of the research in the eyes of the Western students of Islam. Many Western writers, on the other hand, are skeptical of the Islamic claim to be the final and definitive monotheistic religious tradition after Judaism and Christianity, which puts Muslim students on a defensive any time a particular issue is debated out of context of the ultimate veracity of Islam. Other Western writers are not deferential towards Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) and underplay his and Islam's achievements. Many Western scholars consider Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) a controversial historical figure – a number of them think of him as a charlatan and a deceitful, lusty character.¹² However, several Western writers such as W. Montgomery Watt, Martin Lings, Karen Armstrong, and Barnaby Rogerson have made valuable and, on the whole, balanced contributions to developing an understanding of the Prophet's life and achievements.

There is a fundamental difference of opinion about the Prophet's source of inspiration. It is a basic tenet of Islam that the Prophet received divine guidance from God that inspired him and guided him throughout his life. Muslims believe that the Quran, the revelation of which took twenty-three years to complete, is the word of God and that the Prophet's achievements are not his personal accomplishments. Rather, they constitute the realization of a divine plan. On the other hand, Western scholars, who do not believe in Islam, maintain that Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him), in essence, was the right man at the right place at the right time. They attribute great sagacity to him in analyzing the state-of-affairs in Arabia and in coming up with a unique solution to this problem that worked. It is beyond the scope of this book to argue the divinity of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)'s inspiration which is a matter of faith for Muslims. However, the Prophet accomplished his mission through the values he imparted to others, his personal behavior that was very visible to the people around him (since he lived an open-book kind of life) and through his words which were ably recorded by many of his companions during his lifetime and afterwards (a large number of the Prophet's companions actually devoted their lives to becoming scribes). This book is focused on developing an understanding of the strategies the Prophet pursued that help explain his dramatic success.

With the above in mind, I began this writing project with the intention of making its approach and contents equally accessible to Muslim and non-Muslim readers. This essay intentionally does not add devotional language and also does not refer directly to the miraculous aspects of the Prophet's life. Muslim readers should say the words *Sallal laho alaihe wassalum* (May Peace be Upon Him) each time the words Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) or the Prophet appear in this text. Similarly, they should utter the words *Razi Allah Ta'ala Anhah* when name of one of the Prophet's Companions appears in this text. My goal is to keep both the language and the approach of this paper both analytical and accessible for the general reader who is interested in understanding the Prophet's accomplishments regardless of their faith.

The Prophet's life is a rewarding subject for any sophisticated, intelligent and curious mind because of the impact Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) has had on world history. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) himself said: "The superiority of the learned man over the

devout worshipper is like that of the full moon to the rest of the stars (i.e. in brightness).” Many Western scholars have considered Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) the most influential man in world history. Not only did he change the world-view of a society, he practically molded a nation out of a disparate group of warring tribes such that today, after 1400 years, more than one and a half billion Muslims now live all over the world and try to follow in the foot-steps of the Prophet in their daily routines. In many parts of the world, Islam is the fastest growing faith. Many demographers calculate that Islam will become’s the world’s largest religion by 2050. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) did not achieve his success through any miraculous powers; he repeatedly stated that he was an ordinary human being. If he had employed miraculous powers to achieve his goals, his life would not have been considered *uswah hasanah* (“the beautiful example”) by Muslims through centuries. It is quite natural that only a human being (and not an angel or other super-natural being) can truly serve as an example for other human beings. An ordinary mortal cannot aspire to follow the miraculous examples of a religious leader – that would be beyond his power, by definition. Unless the very human aspect of cause and effect is put before the common man – who does not and cannot rely on miracles– he will not find the conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) a worthy and a practical example to imitate in his daily struggle of existence. I have tried to glean such cause-and-effect relationships from the Prophet’s conduct that can provide us with meaningful insights regardless of our religious beliefs.

This book is specifically focused on the brilliance of the Prophet as a strategist. The Webster New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines strategy as “a plan, method or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining a specific goal or result”. A stratagem can be defined as a plan or scheme devised or used to attain a goal or to gain an advantage over an adversary. Brilliant is defined by the same dictionary as “having or showing great intelligence, talent or quality”. In light of the above and in the specific context of this paper, I define strategy as “the voluntary and consistent pursuit by Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) of a coherent plan aimed at the propagation of Islam in Arabia and beyond.”

The Prophet’s life history is termed the *uswah hasanah* (“the beautiful example”) by Muslim writers. This is because practicing Muslims try to follow the Prophet’s example in their daily lives. His biography (his *seerat*), his actions (his *sunnah*) and his sayings (his *hadith*) are studied in great detail with the purpose of following his ‘beautiful example.’ This book, then, is an attempt to understand the strategies he adopted in the pursuit of his goal – the propagation of Islam in Arabia and beyond. The Prophet’s genius and brilliance cannot be doubted since he was successful at molding a disparate, disorganized, and backward group of tribes into a world super power in a matter of three decades. He founded a powerful world religion which now counts every fifth human being as a Muslim and is the fastest growing world religion at this time.

It is important for the purpose of this study to distinguish between what the Prophet received as revelations and what he informed his companions to be his own personal views. The Prophet was always very careful about differentiating the two. Our concern in this study is with voluntary and consistent actions of the Prophet that help explain his dramatic success. Naturally, it is also a purpose of this study to glean what the average reader can ‘take home’ from a study of the Prophet’s life. Arguably, this paper has a narrow focus and is, clearly, not meant to be a biography of the Prophet. Several excellent works on the Prophet’s life are generally available in a decent bookstore; some of which are recommended in the bibliography at the end of this paper. In writing this paper, I have reviewed a number of the major publications on the Prophet. Surprisingly, this specific aspect of the Prophet’s life does not seem to have been thoroughly explored in any biography of the Prophet that I have encountered to date. The bibliography at the end lists many of the eminent works of biography on the Prophet of Islam.

The paper has been divided in two sections. Section I presents the various strategies the Prophet pursued in the attainment of his goals. It has been a challenge to organize the information in this section. One of the difficulties has been the context in which the strategies have to be understood. To fully understand the context, one needs to review the Prophet's biography, but that is a subject that can overshadow the main objective of this study. Yet without the context, the raw power of some of the actions does not come out in full color. On balance, I decided to provide a summary of the Prophet's biography after the discussion on the strategies employed by him. I have been assisted by valuable comments from several close friends as well as a number of my professors at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) where I completed my Executive MBA in 2005.

I have divided Section I into the following three chapters:

A. Personality Strengths

I have grouped a number of the Prophet's strategies together that I believe emanated from the strength of his personality. The Prophet had a unique personal history. As an orphan, his childhood was devoid of parental love, attention and personality grooming. While his humility, impeccable integrity and softness of character might have emanated from his unique personal background and history; he, undoubtedly, matured at an early age and had to learn to fend for himself in a hostile world. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) exhibited an independence of thought and action and made decisions in his adult life that charted a unique life path for him. The star of the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraish, to which he belonged, was on the wane. Further, his uncle Abu Talib, who had agreed to take care of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him), faced financial difficulties. This forced Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) to contribute financially to the house-hold of his uncle while growing up.

The Prophet was known as As-Sadiq (the "truthful one") and Al-Ameen ("the trustworthy one") from early adulthood. One can easily argue that these two were really personality traits and not strategies. Some of this relates to the never ending nature versus nurture debate in psychology / sociology. Even though one's genetic make-up predisposes a person towards certain directions, one's upbringing also plays an important role in one's future orientation. While there is tremendous merit in considering these two as personality traits, the Prophet very effectively put these traits to use in achieving his goals, and as such I have considered these to have been strategies of the Prophet. Smart individuals sometimes do give meaning to their lives at an early age. Many similar examples exist in history where a particular trait in an individual ends up defining the course he takes in order to achieve certain goals at an early age. Mozart was a genius as a musician at the age of five when he could compose entire symphonies. Picasso was a boy wonder as a painter. Churchill had prepared his entire life for a chance to lead his nation.

The Prophet's humility was legendary and even when he had become the leading Arab chieftain of his time, new-comers found it difficult to distinguish him from his companions. He wore simple clothes, sat on the floor most of the time and ate what his companions ate. He spoke softly and was almost shy in his demeanor. The Prophet was always careful not to jeopardize his life unnecessarily. To the extent possible, he planned his moves carefully and stayed ahead of his enemies' designs. He had a finely-tuned self-preservation instinct partly because he had a very long-term perspective. It was most important for him to be able to give form and shape to a large Muslim state that could then take on the leading super-powers of the time and expand Islam much beyond Arabia. A review of the Prophet's biography reveals that he was immensely proactive in his approach to events around him. He proactively tried to mould events to influence the outcomes; he was a doer and not a taker. He was not one who would let events, political or otherwise, unfold around him without his imprint.

B. Interactive Strategies

The Prophet was clearly not an ascetic; neither was he an introvert. Although he enjoyed his moments of solitude and quite very much, he spent his entire life as a Prophet surrounded by individuals and events. His ministry was based on communication and interaction and he could not have succeeded without pursuing effective strategies aimed at making his interactions with others a great success. Further, he was keenly aware that he was being constantly watched by friends and foes. His life was an example to his companions. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) leveraged his capabilities and turned small successes into great victories. He chose his targets judiciously and waited for opportunities to arise for him to achieve maximum leverage. While the whole world was, by definition, in his circle of concern, he focused his energies and resources on his circle of influence. He built large victories on top of small wins and, within a matter of years, became invincible in the eyes of his enemies partly because of his successful interactive strategies. His status changed dramatically in a matter of seven years – from a fugitive on camel-back in 622 AD who had barely avoided being murdered by his own tribe to the undisputed leader of a successful Muslim community that had conquered Makkah, the religious, political and business capital of Arabia, in 629 AD.

This section reviews the Prophet's interactive strategies that relate to how he dealt with others – friends and foes. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) was an excellent reader of human nature. In a sense he was one of the best human resource managers the world has known. He was very interested in how they should conduct themselves on their travels, how they should conduct diplomacy, how they should lead in battle, and how they should groom their subordinates. Time and again, we find him instructing his companions on managerial issues. Even a cursory reading of the differing personalities of his close companions is a testament to Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)'s brilliance as a manager of human resources. In one sense, the four first caliphs of Islam, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali could not have been more different from each other purely in terms of their personalities. However, they were closely bound to each other through their close personal bond with the Prophet.

Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) also had a sharp understanding of the political landscape around him. He seems to have had an encyclopedic understanding of Arab tribal histories, clashes and inter-tribe rivalries and their relative strengths and weaknesses. He shows an amazingly nuanced understanding of tribal alliances. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) left Makkah in 622 AD in the dark of the night as a refugee. Seven years later, in 629 AD, he returned to Makkah as the undisputed leader of Arabia. This shows his sharp understanding of tribal politics and his ability to develop and nurture alliances while leaving his adversaries with fewer and fewer alliance options. In this area, he was probably helped by his travels to distant lands, beginning as a companion to his uncle Abu Talib, continuing as an international trade agent for his future wife Khadijah (May Allah be pleased with her) and rounding it off as a very successful Makkan trader. His travels probably gave him a breadth of experience and depth of understanding of human nature that he put to excellent use in his later life.

Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)'s pursuit of alliances and collaborations of various kinds meant that a good deal of his success was predicated on his success in managing human relationships. Clearly, he was most careful in choosing appropriate interactive strategies for maximum leverage and for best results. In a way, these strategies would not have been as effective without the personal strengths of the Prophet mentioned earlier.

C. Diplomatic and Military Strategies

It was in the diplomatic and military spheres, more than in any other, where the Prophet ultimately prevailed over his hardened enemies. Several of his enemies, especially the Quraish notables, understood the language of power and military might more than the language of reason, love and faith. After a thirteen year long unsuccessful attempt at converting the Quraish notables to Islam, the Prophet gave up

and migrated to Madina. He founded the first Islamic state in Madina and took up arms both to protect the small Muslim community and to increase his circle of influence (which eventually enveloped all of Arabia).

The Prophet's understanding of balance of power considerations assisted him tremendously in achieving his diplomatic goals. He first advised a number of Muslims to migrate from Makkah to Abyssinia to escape persecution from the Quraish. He judged correctly that Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia, would grant asylum to the Muslim contingent despite the pressure put on him by the Quraish. Upon his arrival in Madina, he called the chiefs of the Muslim tribes of Aws and Khazraj, as well as the pagan tribes and Jewish tribes to agree on a joint defense of Madina. He explained to them that if they did not agree to a joint defensive strategy, a foreign enemy could easily divide them and conquer them one by one. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) carefully developed and expanded his intelligence networks while in Madina to gain early information about the diplomatic and military moves of his enemies. He first developed Madina into a proper city-state and then negotiated peace treaties with a number of pagan tribes that lived around Madina. Thus, he developed actually two lines of defense for the Muslim community in Madina. The Prophet steadily expanded his circle of influence around Madina to the detriment of his adversaries. A major goal of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) diplomatic strategies was to achieve a bloodless takeover of Makkah which was to be the pivot of the pan-Arab Muslim state. The Prophet needed all of the administrative, diplomatic, and military capabilities of the Quraish working for Islam. While he was patient in achieving this goal, he was also persistent and most creative.

It is most important to appreciate that the Prophet actually spilled very little blood in all the battles he fought to achieve his goals. Exhibit 8 provides summary information on the major battles of Islam during the Prophet's life-time and the estimated loss of life on both sides. Historical sources indicate that perhaps a total of fewer than 400 individuals on both sides perished in the eight major battles that took place during the Prophet's life time.

The Prophet believed in preserving the element of surprise, presenting his enemy with overwhelming force, and in retaining significant strategic advantage against the adversary. These were important means to minimizing actual fighting and loss of life in battle. On many occasions, Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) presented his enemies with a *fait accompli* (such as on the occasion of the conquest of Makkah). On other occasions, he withdrew (at Hudaibiya) when not prepared for battle or avoided head-on confrontation (at Battle of Ahzaab) when facing a well-prepared, much larger and united enemy force. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) was brilliant in creative use of martial tactics. He was most practical (and least emotional) in waging warfare. He was quite comfortable hearing (and not responding to) the taunts of the Quraish notables (for instance, on the occasion of Battle of Ahzaab when the Quraish challenged him to a dual), or in hiding his own persona (he did not respond to Abu Sufyan when the latter wished to know whether he was alive or dead at Battle of Uhud, the Prophet was wounded and hiding in a cranny in Uhud mountain).

The Prophet also made sure that his forces waged warfare under a strict code of conduct. The Muslim forces were under strict orders not to harm children, women, the elderly or non-combatants on a battlefield. Generally, crops and trees were not destroyed. Contrary to Arab custom that preceded Islam, captured prisoners of war were not put to death. He was brilliant at utilizing his limited range of assets against much larger and deadlier forces.¹⁷ While he was never trained as a warrior, as has been the case of many a famous victors in history, once again it was his keen understanding of human nature, his clear grasp of the political landscape and the personality strengths that he was able to make his military strategies a success. He chose his battle commanders very intelligently and entrusted the leadership to able-bodied, able-minded commanders. He clearly defined the chain of command in the battlefield and

appointed a deputy to run the affairs of the state in his absence in the event he himself led the military campaign.

Section II presents an abridged life history of the Prophet. The simple aim here is to introduce the Prophet's life history and highlight the major events of the Prophet's life. This should help the reader not familiar with the Prophet's biography to develop a basic framework in order to appreciate the strategies Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) pursued in the pursuit of his lifelong goal. Section I is the heart of this paper while Section II is a useful refresher of the Prophet's personal biography.

Historical Sources

The earliest written source of information on the Prophet is naturally the Quran, the collection of revelations, which was dictated and compiled under the supervision of the Prophet himself. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) received his first Quranic revelation at the age of 40 in 610 AD. The revelations continued to arrive for the next 23 years, in fragments and at intervals, until about 81/82 days before the death of the Prophet in 632 AD, concluding with the following verse: "Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me [i.e., definition of Islam] shall be your religion".

In addition to the Quran, massive amounts of information is available on the Hadith or Sunnah of the Prophet – extensive records of what the Prophet said and did, as related by his companions. The collection of Hadith verified by Imam Al-Bukhari is called the Sahih Al-Bukhari and is generally considered to be the most reliable source of Ahadith (the sayings of the Prophet). Many scholars consider this collection of Ahadith second only to the Quran itself in terms of authenticity. It is said that Imam Bukhari collected over 300,000 Ahadith and sifted through them to record only the ones that he was absolutely comfortable authenticating through historical and circumstantial evidence. His collection, Sahih Al-Bukhari, is comprised of 2,230 Ahadith which are considered the most authentic sayings of the Prophet. The two most authentic compilers of the Prophet's saying are Imam Al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim. For the most part, this book refers to sayings of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) that have been authenticated and verified both by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

The life of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) is known as the Seera (also Seerat) and was lived in the full light of history. Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) was constantly served by a group of forty-five scribes, at different times, in the Madina period who wrote down his sayings, his instructions and his activities. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) himself insisted on documenting his important decisions. Nearly three hundred of his documents have come down to us, including political treaties, military enlistments, assignments of officials and state correspondence written on tanned leather. Thus, we know a great deal about his life down to very minute details: how he spoke, sat, slept, dressed, walked; his behavior as a husband, father, friend; his attitudes towards women, children, slaves and animals; his business transactions, his stance towards the poor and the needy; his negotiations with other tribal leaders; his military strategies and achievements; his exercise of political authority and negotiating style; and his personal habits, likes and dislikes.¹⁹

From a very early date (a few decades after the Prophet's death), Muslim scholars and historians had started to write down a biography of the Prophet. Some biographies were even prepared during the time of his companions: at first, accounts of his campaigns and his expeditions, and then works of a wider interest.

Dates

With regards dates, I have chosen to stay with the Gregorian calendar in citing dates as opposed to the Muslim calendar. This, naturally, causes some problems as the exactness of some Gregorian dates pertaining to the Prophet's life is contested by different scholars. Therefore, I have tried not to become too specific with exact dates and have been comfortable in citing years. In general, I have probably been more influenced by the dating scheme followed by W. Montgomery Watt in his eminently well-received studies of the Prophet. Exhibit 4 provides a summary chronology of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)'s life history for quick reference.

I have received valuable comments from many friends, writers and scholars for which I thank them. I seek forgiveness for any inadvertent mistakes in the text.

Omar Khayyam Sheikh

November 21, 2012,

Lahore, Pakistan

STRATEGIES PURSUED BY MUHAMMAD (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)

The Prophet of Islam, was the most brilliant strategist the world has seen. Many western scholars consider him the most influential man in world history because of the impact he has had on billions of people in the last fourteen hundred years. Today, more than one and a half billion people (or one out of six living human beings) claim to follow in his foot-steps. Many demographers calculate that Islam will become's the world's largest religion by 2050.

The world has seen many brilliant strategists in the last roughly 2,500 years of recorded history. Alexander and Julius Caesar were brilliant military strategists and conquerors. Sun Tzu and Von Clausewitz were brilliant military strategists. Aristotle and Plato were brilliant intellectual theorists. Augustus Caesar, Machiavelli and Gandhi were brilliant administrative and political strategists. Count Richelieu and Henry Kissinger were considered brilliant diplomatic strategists. Jack Welch and Steve Jobs are generally considered brilliant business strategists. Warren Buffet is considered an unmatched financial strategist.²⁰ However, the Prophet of Islam operated in a very wide realm of strategy. His influence has been profound on all aspects of human existence: personal, social, religious, spiritual, intellectual, political, diplomatic, military, administrative and commercial. No other single strategist in world history continues to have a dramatic influence on the total gamut of human existence on such a large scale.

The Prophet's field of activity ranged far and wide. Not only did he change the world-view of a people, he practically molded a nation out of a disparate group of warring tribes to the extent that more than one and a half billion Muslims now live all over the world. Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) did not achieve his success through any miraculous powers. He himself stated many times that he was an ordinary human being. If he had employed miraculous powers to achieve his goals, his life would not have been considered *uswah hasanah* ("the beautiful example") by Muslims through centuries. Unless the very human aspect of cause and effect is put before the common man – who does not and cannot rely on miracles– he will not find the conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) a worthy and a practical example to imitate in his daily struggle for existence.²¹

This essay is specifically focused on the brilliance of the Prophet as a strategist. The Webster New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines strategy as "a plan, method or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining a specific goal or result". A stratagem can be defined as a plan or scheme devised or used to attain a goal or to gain an advantage over an adversary. Brilliant is defined by the same dictionary as "having or showing great intelligence, talent or quality". In the specific context of this paper, I define strategy as "the voluntary and consistent pursuit by Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) of a coherent plan of action aimed at the propagation of Islam in Arabia and beyond."

It is important for the purpose of this study to distinguish between what the Prophet received as revelations and what he informed his companions to be his own personal views. The Prophet was always very particular about differentiating between the two. Our concern in this study is with voluntary and consistent actions of the Prophet that help explain his dramatic success. Naturally, it is also a purpose of this study to glean what the average reader can 'take home' from a study of the Prophet's life. The next section discusses the elements of the Prophet's strategy in detail.