Review Article

Comparative Analysis of Gulzar Ahmed and Richard Gabriel on the Military History of the Prophet (peace be on him)

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Abstract

The scholarship on Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) in the West and the Muslim world has developed in a completely different framework over the centuries. The present study is an attempt to compare and examine the mind-set of both kinds of scholarship through a critical analysis of two books of modern times written on the battles of the Prophet, one by a non-Muslim Western author and another by a Muslim. Interestingly both of them were ex-military officers and their works depict a particular mentality which influences their own social and cultural settings. Gulzar Ahmed, being a Muslim Pakistani ex-military officer declared the military campaigns of the Prophet as completely defensive and emphasises on the strict observance of the moral principles throughout the battles. On the other hand, Richard Gabriel, a non-Muslim US ex-military officer not only portrayed Prophet’s battles as offensive but declared them as an insurgency and interpreted the war strategies of the Prophet as immoral and inappropriate. Through historiographical analysis of the two military men writing on the battles of the Prophet, the present study will particularly highlight the different outlook and approaches adopted by them.

Keywords

sīrah, military history, battles of the Prophet, ghazawāt, sarāyā.

Several historians narrated and analysed the military history of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) and created interesting debates about different aspects of his warfare. The motives, nature and conduct of the wars fought by the Prophet have been taken into account. The present study deals with two authors of modern times who have exclusively discussed the military life of the Prophet; one Western author and another Muslim. Interestingly both of
them are primarily military commanders and have chosen military history as their field of research. Both of them lacked the professional training of historians, and relied on translated primary sources, yet they have produced interesting analysis due to their expertise in warfare. Gulzar Ahmed, a Pakistani ex-military officer, wrote *The Prophet’s Concept of War*,¹ which will be examined in this study. He has been a prolific writer and wrote some other books as well including a two volume book named *The Battles of the Prophet of Allah*.² On the other hand, Richard A. Gabriel, a retired U.S Army officer, enjoys almost the same status however he has also been formally associated with the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario, in the capacity of Adjunct Professor. His work *Muhammad: Islam’s First Great General*³ will be analysed here. Gabriel is famous as a military historian and is an author of forty other books as well.⁴ The present study will try to explore the different outlook and approaches, the historical references and the expert opinion of these two scholars about the military campaigns of the Prophet.

Ahmed has taken the military campaigns of the Prophet as completely defensive and emphasises on the strict observance of the moral principles throughout the battles. Ahmed has focused more on justifying the wars of the Prophet, instead of focusing purely on the military activity. He argues that the Charter of Madinah was not a pact between Jews and Muslims, instead it was a charter or a constitution provided by the Head of the State to the members of the state. He also admits that Prophet had an “excellent system of Military Intelligence.”⁵ He further argues that Muslims had not initiated the battle of Badr and all the early raids were also defensive. Likewise, the subsequent raids on tribes like Banū Sulaym and Ghaṭafān⁶ were carried out only because of

⁴ For instance, see Richard A. Gabriel, *Military Incompetence: Why the American Army Does’nt Win* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986); *The Military History of Ancient Israel* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003); And *Subotai the Valiant: Genghis Khan’s Greatest General* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2004). Along with military history he also wrote some books focusing on religious history, for instance, the book on Jesus is not a military history; instead Gabriel tried to prove that the principles of the theology of Egypt are identical with Christian principles in “content and application.” The whole work thus covers a lot of discussion on religious doctrines of Christianity. See *Jesus the Egyptian: The Origin of Christianity and the Psychology of Christ* (New York: iUniverse, 2005).
⁶ Banū Sulaym was a branch of North Arabian federation of Qays ‘Aylān and it was settled in Ḥijāz. Sulaym were divided into three major sub-tribes, Imru’ al-Qays, Banū Hārith and Tha’labah. Imru’ al-Qays and particularly Tha’labah had very close relations with the Makkans.
their participation in Badr against the Muslims. Similarly, in the battle of Ditch too, the Quraysh on the instigation of Jews had come up with all their allies and force. Ahmed further advocates that after having won the battles, the Prophet went to Makkah for visiting Ka’bah, however the real intention was the search for peace⁷ and Makkah was attacked only when Quraysh broke the peace of Hudaybiyyah. Thus according to Ahmed, under the command of the Prophet, the Muslims fought with steadfastness and determination, although almost in all battles, they were lesser in numbers. The work discusses in detail almost all of the military campaigns of the Prophet declaring this military activity as defensive, moral and justified.

Gabriel, on the other hand, builds his argument by making a detailed comparison of the warfare of Arabia and the ways through which Muhammad revolutionised it. The author talks about the totally unconventional style of Muhammad in warfare. First, the moral basis of the Arab warfare was completely changed from sport and entertainment to a religious and ideological warfare. Then Muhammad fully equipped his army with expansive weapons,⁸ equipments and properly used the transportation facilities.⁹ He transformed the methods and techniques of war, introduced new tactics¹⁰ and paid extra attention to formulating war strategies.

Gabriel further argues that a community of believers was built up in Madinah in which loyalty to the community precedes “loyalty to clan or

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⁷ Ahmed believes that after the battle of Khandaq (battle of Trench), the Prophet was in a position to attack Madinah but victory and conquest was not his mission or desire. Thus he went unarmed to Makkah in search of peace. The treaty of Hudaybiyyah was concluded which protected Muslims from many disasters. Ibid., 158–59.
⁸ According to Gabriel, when the Prophet began war, he hardly had any weapons but with the passage of time, he was able to supply weapons, helmets, armours, and shields to almost all members of his army. Gabriel, Muhammad, xxiv.
⁹ Gabriel give details that before Prophet, horse was not considered very important for warfare, and traditional Arab warfare largely relied on infantry but the Prophet introduced a large number of horses in the battlefield. For logistics, the Prophet made a good use of the camels. Ibid., 39–41.
¹⁰ Muhammad organised his infantry in disciplined groups of sword infantry. He also attempted integration between cavalry and infantry. Ibid., 33.
Muhammad undertook smaller military operations against the Makkah caravans which were not a reversion to the old Arab practice of raiding but it was done for “large strategic objectives.” For Gabriel, the Prophet had adopted the techniques of an insurgency. He spread his revolutionary ideology and recruited devoted and faithful men in his army. He protected himself through the Covenant of Madinah. Afterwards he started smaller raids against the Makkans. In the meanwhile, he made pacts of friendship with several neighboring tribes of Madinah. Continuing his argument to treat Prophet’s wars as offensive, Gabriel provides the details of several raids and battles.

The authors agree on certain points, for instance, both claim that Muhammad changed the concept of warfare in Arabia. In the words of Gabriel, Muhammad introduced ideology in war and in the words of Ahmed “Islam has its own philosophy of War, which was put into practice by the Prophet.” Gabriel further argues that change in ideology resulted in creating unity of leadership during battles and the supreme authority was that of the Prophet. However, on the whole, both the scholars disagree with each other and interpret the military activity of the Prophet in complete different connotations. One of the issues which are usually debated by the Western as well as the Muslim authors on the battles of the Prophet was its defensive or offensive stance. The supporters of both the stances have found logic and some historical proofs. Ahmed demonstrates Prophet’s battles essentially as a tool for defense. He finds the basis of these battles in securing and defending the Muslims. Gabriel is totally different on this issue and he has seen the battles of the Prophet mostly as planned offensive attacks against the enemy. However both of the authors have taken extreme positions and probably have not fully appreciated the actual war strategy of the Prophet.

Ahmed argues that the Quraysh were not happy with the migration of the Prophet and the Muslims to Madinah, thus they kept on troubling. Finally this attitude of the Quraysh led to wars. Ahmed explicates that the Makkans were the first to declare war against Muslims as was evident from the letter of the Makkans to ‘Abdullāh b. Ubayy. The resultant raids were an effort by the Muslims to equip themselves for the upcoming threat of the Makkans. While

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11 Ibid., 71.
12 Ibid., 73.
13 Here Gabriel agrees with the argument of Ahmed who has called earlier raids as friendship visits to different tribes but Gabriel believes that there were raids as well. Ibid., 80–81; see also Ahmed, *The Prophet’s Concept of War*, 123–24.
criticising the sources, Ahmed declares earlier Muslim historians mistakenly terming the friendly visits of the Prophet as raids.\textsuperscript{17} He interprets the treaties with the neighboring tribes as defensive treaties and these were formed in order to counter possible attacks from Madinah.

Continuing his argument to call the Prophet’s battles as defensive, Ahmed declares the territory of Badr as part of Madinah as Prophet passed from this territory several times. Thus, the presence of Makkans in that territory meant an offense which had to be retaliated. He further argues that the presence of Banū Sulaym and Banū Ghaṭafān in the Makkan army shows a huge preparation and the army had not moved in emergency from Makkah. Furthermore, Ahmed in his other book \textit{The Battles of the Prophet of Allah} gives an interesting analysis on this point. He believes that an army of 300 Muslims was not prepared only to attack caravan. It was a common practice to send 30–40 men for raiding caravans. If the Prophet had taken 300 men and some were reluctant to fight, it means they already knew that they were going to fight an army.\textsuperscript{18}

The opinion of several other Muslim authors contradicts the assertion of Ahmed. Badr has never acclaimed as part of Madinah. For instance, Muhammad Hamidullah describes in detail the physical location of the places but he considers Badr as a separate far off terrain from Madinah as he comments that “caravan coming from Syria could have been stopped by the Muslims west or even north, of Medina” and then goes on and suggests that “The terrain of Badr may also have been a recommendation for opportunities of hiding and laying ambush.”\textsuperscript{19} Ibn Isḥāq, has also clearly declared Badr as outside Madinah. He narrates that on the way from Madīnah to Badr, when the Prophet was staying at Dhafrān, the Prophet asked Ānṣār about their willingness to accompany him for war as they were not bound to protect him outside Madinah. If Dhafrān was considered a place outside Madinah, then Badr, where the Prophet reached after crossing Dhafrān, Aṣāfīr, al-Dabba and al-Ḥannān, was definitely a place outside Madinah.\textsuperscript{20}

Ahmed probably focused more on the defensive stance of the battles of the Prophet due to which he could not give his attention to several other important historical facts. Ahmed has rightly pointed out the existence of treaties with neighbouring tribes as several Muslim authors now accept the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 123–24.
\textsuperscript{19} Muhammad Hamidullah, \textit{The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad} (Karachi: Huzaifah Publications, 1979), 17.
veracity of peace treaties and they have been preserved in Wathā'iq by Hamidullah, yet the fact cannot be denied that it was probably a combination of raids and resultant peace treaties, and were not only “the friendly visits of the Prophet. Similarly, Ahmed has unnecessarily highlighted the threat of the Makkans and has ignored many other factors behind the raids and the battles of the Prophet against the Quraysh. Ahmed has been unable to appreciate the Prophet’s wise policy to hit the trade of the Quraysh to subdue them. Although he has talked about the peace treaties, but was unable to find that majority of these peace treaties were made on the trade route of the Makkans to the north, and thus were mainly concluded in order to curtail the trade of the Quraysh. Furthermore, the conquest of Makkah and the further battles clearly explicates a well-planned war strategy probably aimed at capturing more areas and enhancing political control. Ahmed has also failed to appreciate the spirit of the medieval age during which conquest was usually used as a tool to gain political authority. The prophet might have viewed the spread of Christianity under the Roman Empire and would have thought it invincible to gain political authority in order to deliver the message of Islam in a better way. The historians have also discussed several other reasons behind the raids of the Holy Prophet. For instance Shaban believes that the Prophet wanted the Makkans to conclude an *ilāf* agreement (security pact) with them. *Ilāf* agreements were trade treaties which were concluded by the Quraysh with tribes on their route to Syria. Thus, the war activity of the Prophet cannot simply be reduced to a defensive war strategy.

On the other hand, Gabriel portrayed Prophet’s battles as offensive and declared it as an insurgency and deliberately interpreted the war strategies of

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22 For instance, treaties were concluded with tribes of Juwaynah, ‘Udhrah, Bali, Bahra’, Kalb, Jurham, Lakhm, Muzaynah and Ashja’. All of these tribes were residing on the trade route of Makkans to the north. A few of these treaties were concluded in the earlier period of the Prophet’s *ḥijrah*, for instance the treaty with Juwaynah was concluded immediately after the *ḥijrah* of the Prophet. Ibn Sa’d has also mentioned that Juwaynah were in alliance with the Muslims. Juwaynah became the major supporters of the Prophet and helped him on various occasions. The prominent members of Juwaynah who supported the Prophet were Jundab b. Makith and Ma‘bad b. Khalid al-Juhani. Muhammad Ibn Sa’d, *al-Ṭabaqat al-Kubra*, ed., Ḥamzah al-Naṣrānī, ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiz Farghâli and ‘Abd al-Hamid Müṣṭafâ (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Qāyûmâ, n.d.), 6; ‘Umar al-Waqidi, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* (Beirut: Alam al-Kitāb, n.d.), 2:571 and 3:990.

the Prophet as immoral and inappropriate. While talking about the battle of Badr, Gabriel believes that Muḥammad was interested in a political war with the Makkans, which was why he had not moved back to Madinah after the failure to capture the caravan of Abū Sufyān. He acknowledges the better strategy adopted by the Muslims due to which Makkans suffered from “heat, thirst and fear” and the battle was won by the Muslims. Gabriel further elucidates the details of Uhud and argues that the cavalry did not attack them from rear; instead it attacked from the front gap which was left open as the archers left the hill. Gabriel further states that the Quraysh realised the need to destroy the Muslims after Uhud as Muhammad had become a problem for their economic interests so they raised a huge army with all their allies and besieged Madinah. The battle was ultimately lost as the Muslims had dug a ditch which was unconventional in Arab warfare. Quraysh and their allies, on being unable to cross the ditch and to sustain cold weather and shortage of food, left after a few days. The truce of Hudaybiyyah made Muḥammad more powerful, and was followed by an attack on Khyber, battle of Mu’ṭah and finally the decision to capture Makkah. Gabriel has also discussed in detail the battle of Hunayn and the expedition to Tabūk. He finally concludes that the battles of riddah after the death of the Prophet followed his legacy.

Many of the Western as well as a few Muslim authors have portrayed prophet’s battles as offensive. Watt has considered it a chief point to notice that “the Muslims took the offensive.” Likewise, Martin Lings has associated this offensive stance with the divine permission or in fact command to fight against the infidels which could definitely not be executed in the form of direct attack on the enemy however raids were possible thus only raids were

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25 Gabriel thinks that the traditional view which stated that Khālid’s army being unable to attack from front gap rode completely around mount Uhud and attacked Muslims from rear, is incorrect. He argued that it a distance of one hour and the cavalry would have reached with tired horses, unfit to fight. He instead plead that the cavalry was only there hoping to kill any fleeing forces but when the archers left their position and the front gap was left open, the cavalry attacked. Ibid., 119.
26 Riddab wars were fought by different tribes of Arabia against the state of Madinah. They are generally considered as apostasy wars however the research of Shoufani negates this concept. He believes that the war of riddab was not a war fought for religious reasons or to punish those who apostatised. It was a war of expansion, the first stage of the conquests and there were several worldly and political reasons behind these wars. At times, they were fought for refusal of some tribes to pay taxes who before accepted to pay it, in some other occasions it was simply a war to subjugate the Arab tribes and to get control over them. See for details, Shoufani, *al-Riddab*.
planned initially.\textsuperscript{28} The work of Gabriel however is different as he has used a theoretical framework in his study and applied the modern notion of insurgency on the battles of the Prophet. He argues that all important elements of insurgency were present in the military activity of the Prophet. Gabriel called Mu╒ammad as the founder of guerrilla warfare and insurgency. In his opinion, Muhammad’s insurgency fulfills all criteria of modern insurgency, for instance the community found a charismatic leader in the person of Mu╒ammad; the Muslim community itself became a loyal and faithful army for its leader and Madinah was used as a base for revolutionary activity. The insurgency saw the gradual growth of manpower like the modern insurgencies and acquired weapons from the forces of the enemy. The insurgency became popular with the passage of time and it had the ability to guard its power from challenges. For this purpose, effective intelligence, propaganda,\textsuperscript{29} treachery and terror tools like murders and assassinations were employed by Mu╒ammad. Gabriel also believes that the Prophet established Suffah a centre of religious study but it was used as a secret police to terrorise and assassinate some of his opponents.\textsuperscript{30} He however has not quoted any evidence for this assumption. He could not even prove by naming one of the members of Suffah who were involved in any kind of policing activity.

Gabriel calls the Prophet a “fiery religious guerrilla leader who created and led the first genuine national insurgency.”\textsuperscript{31} Treating insurgency and guerilla warfare as synonym seems misleading. Although Gabriel calls it a theory but he has not referred to any descriptive study or theoretical framework. Insurgency has been defined by Neill as a “struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses political resources.” These political resources can be organisational expertise, propaganda, violence etc.\textsuperscript{32} Again it has been defined in CIA pamphlet, as “a protracted political-military activity directed towards completely or partially controlling resources of the country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations.”\textsuperscript{33} Thus according

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Martin Lings, \textit{Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources} (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1983), 135.
\item The public message and propagation of religion has been termed as propaganda by Gabriel. He explains that Prophet always remained in public, made his message widely spread, sent missionaries to other clans and tribes and hired different poets to praise him to oppose his opponents. Gabriel, \textit{Muhammad}, p. xxvi.
\item Ibid., 75.
\item Gabriel, \textit{Muhammad}, xx.
\item Bard E O’Neill, \textit{Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare} (Virginia: Brassey’s, 1990), 13.
\item Daniel Bayman, \textit{Understanding Proto-Insurgencies} (Sana Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2007), 4.
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to this definition, the concept of insurgency seems to be a struggle between the state and the non-ruling group. The situation at Makkah and Madinah was quite different from it. In Arabia tribes were independent political units although they formed alliances and pacts with each other. Makkah and Madinah both were independent states and fought battles against each other. The battles of the Prophet was never a struggle between state and the non-ruling group, thus it can hardly be termed as an insurgency.

On the other hand, guerilla warfare could be explained as a form of warfare in which there are certain common elements, and the most common element is the struggle of the people to liberate them. Moreover, guerrilla warfare is employed by majority comprised of oppressed masses and they have lesser number of arms. They enjoy full support of the people, and have good knowledge of the area. However the strategies of guerrilla warfare can be different according to different environments and terrains. The leader of the guerilla fighter could also be called as a social reformer. The fact is that the guerrilla warfare is one of the forms of warfare resorted to by many insurgents. The other forms of warfare are conventional warfare and terrorism. According to Daniel Byman, Insurgencies are composed of three components; political mobilisation, guerilla warfare and terrorism but all of three components are not presents in all insurgencies. In some of the insurgencies, terrorism is used and guerilla war and political mobilisation is not used like the Greek November 17 Organisation only used terrorism. Similarly Hamas relied only on terrorism. Like the case of insurgency, the concept of guerrilla warfare is also inappropriate for denoting the battles of the Prophet as the battles were never a struggle of the people to liberate them of any outside or unjust rulers. Moreover, it was not a struggle of the majority oppressed masses. The Muslims remained in minority in all major battles against the Quraysh. The difference of arms was also not too striking as it is in the case of modern guerilla warfare. Although Quraysh had better cavalry and comparatively well-armed army but ultimately the same technology of shields, swords and arrows was used by both sides. Muslim army may be lacking in some armors, helmets or shields but it was not a remarkable difference.

As far as the use of intelligence, propaganda and terror tools like murders and assassinations are concerned; it is a fact that the Prophet used and heavily relied on intelligence and spy system which was an essential requirement of medieval warfare. Intelligence system is acknowledged by many other writers on Prophet’s battles, for instance, Hamidullah has discussed in detail the spy

system and the intelligence of the Prophet.36

However, in order to validate his theoretical framework Gabriel wrongly accuses the Prophet of heinous war crimes. For instance, Gabriel accuses Prophet of treachery. According to him, Muslims went to Khaybar as official diplomats and convinced their leader Usayr b. Rüzim to come to Madinah to negotiate with Muḥammad. Muslims had guaranteed the security of his life but they went against their words and killed all Jews accompanying them.37 Gabriel has not given any source for this incident. This incident has neither been mentioned by Ibn Ishaq nor by al-Ṭabarī in this way. On the contrary, Ibn Ishaq’s narration mentions the bad intention of Usayr b. Rüzim when he was about to attack his Muslim protector ‘Abd Allâh b. Unays, who took timely action and killed him.38 In general, the Prophet was very particular about fulfilling his promises and respecting alliances and treaties. Gabriel, on the other hand, has not given importance to the incidence of treachery of Banû ‘Amir and the killing of several Muslims in the incident of Bîr Ma‘ūnah. Even after that incident, when one of the Muslims killed two members of Banû ‘Amir without knowing that they were in protection of the Prophet, the Prophet was sorrowed over the incident and decided to pay blood money to the two men.39

In the same manner Gabriel has accused the Holy Prophet of committing murders and assassinations. In the opinion of Gabriel, Muḥammad ordered assassination of some of his political enemies, he ordered the assassination of whole of Banû Qaynuqā‘ and strangely enough he also mentions another Jewish tribe without giving it a name which was ordered to be killed by the Prophet. According to the author, Muḥammad also ordered the assassination of the chief of Hudhayl, Sufyān b. Khālid [sic] when he betrayed Muslim missionaries and killed them while taking them to his land. Similarly Abū Rāfī‘, chief of Banû Nadir tribe was murdered by a group of assassins.40

Gabriel has failed to understand the realities and demands of a particular age. The warfare of medieval times had different moral standards and it is incorrect to apply the terminology of murders on the killing of enemies. Murder implies intentionally killing a human being whose life is legally protected. The Oxford Dictionary of Law defines “murder” as “homicide that is

36 Muhammad Hamidullah, The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad, 53–57.
37 Gabriel, Muḥammad, 129.
39 Ibid., 434–35; It will be interesting to see Watt here, who, while responding to the allegation of treachery on the Prophet, argues that the Prophet acted according to the moral standards of Arabia of his days in which there were no duties and obligations outside the tribe except agreements. Watt, Muḥammad at Medina, 327–28.
40 Gabriel, Muḥammad, xxvi–xxvii, 125, 129.
neither accidental nor lawful...

Killing the enemy combatants in a state of war is homicide but not murder and that is why it brings no criminal liability. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, for instance, mentions “murder” in the list of the “crimes against humanity” when it is directed against civilian population. Similarly, it mentions “willful killing” of “protected persons” in the list of war crimes. The Prophet never committed any murder. All those “willfully” killed were legitimate targets under the law of armed conflict. It must be remembered that in Arabia, only tribal laws were respected and followed. Thus all of these people who were killed were enemy and were not protected by law, by one way or other; they tried to hurt the Muslims. Some of them were involved in physical fight against the Muslims, thus killing an enemy combatant in the battlefield is not murder.

As far as assassinations are concerned, all of these were political assassinations which were inevitable in order to establish and retain political control. The parameters, demands and requirements of medieval polity are totally different from modern state structures. Assassinations were always practiced during warfare since ancient times. Assassination implies precise, swift and surprise attack on the enemy. The life of such an enemy will either be protected by the law or not. The latter of its form is also used nowadays and is called a commando action or a swift surgical strike. An example of this is the raid of the Israeli commandos on the Entebbe Airport in Uganda in 1976 to kill the hijackers and to release the passengers.

Gabriel has portrayed assassination as a new evil practice in Arab politics and argued that “Muhammad’s use of political murder was truly an innovation in Arab politics, and went well beyond the blood feud. In blood feud it was not the custom to assassinate enemies.” Contrary to his statement, it is found that surprise attacks at enemy were not new for Arabs, and were practiced in Arabia even before prophet. Some scholars believed that the Arabs had a powerful tool of al-qatl al-ghilah, (secret murder) and al-ighārah (sudden night attacks taking the enemy by surprise and causing terror). Another of the

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42 On 17 July 1998, a conference of 160 States established the first treaty-based permanent international criminal court. The treaty adopted during that conference is known as the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, see Article 7 and 8 of the Statute.
most evident examples is that of Prophet himself when Quraysh attempted at his life before he migrated to Madinah. Similarly see the example of Dhū Nuwās, a member of the Himyarite royal family who surprisingly killed Lakhnia, an illegitimate descendant to the throne. Contrary to Gabriel, Armstrong believes that pre-Islamic Arabs were violent and easily provoked. In her own words, “because of his exalted sense of honor, he [Arab in pre-Islamic times] tended to respond violently to any perceived threat or slight. He did not simply act in self-defense; true courage lay in the pre-emptive strike.” She also quotes a poet Zuhayr b. Abī Salmah who advised the Arab to be an aggressor and to attack first, even when no one wrongs him.

Thus, Ahmed and Gabriel have taken extreme defensive and offensive stances respectively while talking about the battles of the Prophet. The conflicting arguments of Ahmed and Gabriel can further be explored by the different portrayals of the personality of the Prophet. Ahmed argues that the Prophet was a merciful and gentle person and did not take part in wars before Islam due to his mild nature. He earned the reputation of a kind, trustworthy person and “one cannot expect such a person to have aspired for power and wealth in later days.” Ahmed has also talked about the miseries of the Muslims at Makkah and used it as an argument of the non-violent nature of the Prophet. Gabriel on the other hand always refers to these miseries in context of Prophet’s nature to take revenge. He has always portrayed Prophet as a revenge seeking person and “a man with a reputation for not suffering insults easily.” While narrating the details of different battles, Gabriel sought out the reasons of killings in the revengeful nature of the Prophet. According to him, the Prophet started warfare due to the “insults and taunts Muhammad had suffered as an orphaned child in Mecca” that resulted in a “psychology of personal revenge.” Then he killed prisoners of Badr because they had mocked him in his early life and he wanted to settle “some personal score with his enemies.” Muhammad killed Ka‘b as it was his “personal matter.” And after

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49 Ibid., 54.
50 Ibid., 54–60.
51 Gabriel, Muhammad, 107.
52 Ibid., 74.
53 Ibid., 101–02.
the conquest of Makkah, Muhammad took “personal revenge” and several personal enemies of the Prophet were killed.  

On the battle of Badr, Gabriel has diminishes the importance of general amnesty and highlights the few assassinations, asserting that they were mainly done to avenge personal insult of the Prophet. The exact words of Gabriel thoroughly reflects his biases, “The mercy and holding for ransom that had characterised traditional warfare in Arabia for centuries were almost completely absent at Badr. A number of prisoners were beheaded by men who had personal grudges against them.” He continued, “Other prisoners were executed for no apparent reason” and then he quotes the words from the translation of Ibn Ishâq, that “They hewed them to pieces with their swords until they were dead.” This sentence quoted from Ibn Ishâq, refers only to the incident of the killing of Umayyah b. Khalaf and his son by Bilâl. Umayyah was the former master of Bilâl and a staunch non-believer. This might be apparently interpreted as personal grudge as Umayyah used to torture Bilâl but there are hardly any other incidents of personal grudges. Only two other prisoners were ordered to be killed, and all others were ransomed even some of the prisoners were left without ransom.

Moreover, Gabriel has twisted the facts in order to prove his thesis. For instance, on the killing of Ka’b b. al-Ashraf, he has wrongly attributed his murder on a poem lamenting the death of Makkans at Badr. Ka’b b. al Ashraf in fact wrote an insulting poem for the Muslim women, but was not executed for this reason. He actually had relations with Makkans. He went to Makkah and instigated them to attack Madînah. It was against the pact of Madînah in

54 Ibid., 104, 107, 176.
55 A general amnesty was given after the conquest of Makkah but a small number – ten according to Armstrong – of staunch enemies of Islam “who were put on the black list” and were ordered to be killed. See Armstrong, Muhammad: Prophet for Our Time, 201. Afterwards, however, even majority out of these ten were also forgiven. For instance, ‘Ikramah physically resisted against the army of the Prophet, but he was forgiven. Similarly ‘Abdullâh b. Sa’d was a person who had renounced Islam. Earlier when he became a Muslim, he gained the confidence of the Prophet but he renounced Islam and fled to Quraysh, still he was forgiven. Ibn Hishâm, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah, 4:23–24; al-Ṭabarî, Ta’rîkh al-Rusul wa’l-Mulûk, 3:59–60.
56 Gabriel, Muhammad, 101.
57 Ibn Ishâq, The Life of Muhammad, tr., A. Guillaume, 303, 308–318; for Umayyah b. Khalaf see Ibn Hishâm, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah, 2:223, and for prisoners who were ransomed see 2:242–46 and 2:252–53. Al-Ṭabarî provides a similar description of the prisoners of war. According to him, the Prophet decided to take ransom from all prisoners, however, the Prophet reminded the people that the earlier Prophets had shown mercy as well as wrath against infidels. He particularly gave the example of Noah who prayed to Allah not to keep any non-Muslim town on earth. However, on his part, he decided to show mercy only, al-Ṭabarî, Ta’rîkh al-Rusul wa’l-Mulûk, 2:463–74.
58 Gabriel, Muhammad, 107.
which all Jews agreed not to help any enemies of the Muslims. The evidence shows there were no personal reasons of the Prophet for ordering to kill Ka‘b.\(^{59}\) Moreover, Muḥammad was reported to have forgiven many of his personal enemies. He has shown mercy towards Suhayl, ‘Ikramah, Hind, the worst of his enemies because they accepted Islam. He was kind towards the prisoners of Badr and allowed them to be ransomed.\(^ {60}\)

Likewise, Gabriel does not seem to give due value to the importance of tribal traditions when he was portraying the Prophet as a poor orphan boy who due to his silent attitude was not considered worth of any military activity and faced the taunts and insults of people.\(^ {61}\) In a tribal social structure, the group feeling of a family is very strong and in which Prophet was part and responsibility of a respectable tribe and loved and protected by his uncles. There are several examples when he was protected by his uncle Abū Ta‘lib and there is an incident when his insult was retaliated by Hamzah, another of his uncle.\(^ {62}\) Moreover, the insults and taunts only followed when Prophet openly preached Islam. Ahmed on this point emphasises that all of the sufferings were patiently borne by the Prophet during the Makkān period. Ibn Hishām has discussed in detail about the harsh treatment of the Makkans towards the Muslims, and how it was patiently bore by the Prophet.\(^ {63}\) It’s surprising that Gabriel completely omits this detail.

While Ahmed argues that the wars fought by the Prophet were “in accordance with sound moral principles,”\(^ {64}\) Gabriel has taken completely opposite position. He presents Muḥammad as a ruthless political leader whose “decision to annihilate Banū Qurayzah was rooted in cold-blooded politics,” for instance.\(^ {65}\) On the issue of the killing of Jews, Gabriel has omitted very important causes behind this decision. Banū Qurayzah had the plans to attack the Muslims from rear during the battle of Ditch or bring member of Banū Nadir to slaughter the women and children of the Muslims in the fortresses. Although they were not successful in their designs, but for three weeks Muslims remained terrified about the lives of their women and children. There are recorded incidents where they sent their spies to find out if there are men in the fortress or not. All of this tension was created along with the help of a

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\(^{63}\) Ibn Isḥaq, *The Life of Muḥammad*, tr., A. Guillaume, 142–5, 155; also see an incident when the Prophet was teased. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, 1:318–19.

\(^{64}\) Ahmed, *The Prophet’s Concept of War*, 27.

\(^{65}\) Gabriel, *Muḥammad*, 141.
chief of Bani Nadir, thus after the battle, it was irrational and extremely dangerous for the Muslims to let Banu Qurayyah migrate as other two tribes were allowed. The decision was accepted by the Arabs and it was traditional punishment for such a huge betrayal, even the Banu Qurayyah themselves were not surprised. The slaughter and killing was practiced in pre-Islamic times as well. For instance, the same Jews of Madinah were slaughtered by Malik b. al-'Ajlân of Khazraj, after which they became weaker in Madinah and became the clients of Aws and Khazraj tribes.

While the Prophet has been portrayed as never following the old Arab values of morality and mercy, Abu Sufyân, 'Abdullah b. Ubayy and Khâlid b. Walid have been shown as experienced, moral and fair Arab chiefs. On the incident of capture of Makkah, Gabriel claims that a secret pact was already made between Abu Sufyân and Muhammad. For that reason, Abu Sufyân played an important role in convincing the Makkans of the powers of Prophet’s army and managing a peaceful surrender of the city. There is no historical evidence to prove the existence of any secret pact; however the relationship between the Prophet and Abu Sufyân has been explained in a very simplistic way with historical data by Hamidullah. This almost explains the logic of the attitude of Abu Sufyân. Hamidullah relates that in the early days of his preaching, the Prophet used to seek asylum in the house of Abu Sufyân when he was harassed by street boys and other commoners in Makkah. This makes it clear that Abu Sufyân was only following the desires of his tribe but was never a staunch opponent of Islam. Thus, when Abu Sufyân was captured, he was given forgiveness in order to reward his earlier sympathetic attitude towards the Prophet and his house was declared as an asylum.

Gabriel reflects his own mental bias by trying to deform Prophet’s personality and his arguments can never be taken seriously even by the Western academic circles. Many of the renowned Western authors accept and acknowledge excellent character of Prophet Muhammad. For instance, Armstrong shows how the Prophet patiently bore the insults and physical assaults of the Quraysh. Quraysh used to throw filth over the Prophet but he never reacted to such physical assault. His charming personality and other

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68 Muhammad Hamidullah, The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad, 39.
69 Armstrong, Muhammad: Prophet for our Time, 89; non-Muslims in all ages have acknowledged the exalted manners and the merciful nature of the Prophet. For instance, see the works of Satish Ganjoo, Prophet Muhammad, The Greatest Benefactor (New Delhi: Anmol Publications,
qualities made him extremely loveable and respectable for the Makkans. He had a beautiful smile, was of an extremely mild nature and used to do his household chores himself; mending his shoes and clothes and tending the family goats.\textsuperscript{70} There has always been a group of scholars in the West who not only appreciates the positive aspects of the life of the Prophet, but also responds to scholars who negatively portray the personality of Muhammad. In fact there was a gradual movement, from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, in the West “towards acceptance of Muhammad as sincere and moral, and not deluded or worse.”\textsuperscript{71} For instance, Thomas Carlyle looked at Prophet from a sympathetic view, he was also believed to be “reacting to the same negative images against which Stubbe, Boulainvilliers, Sale, Higgins and Forster had all reacted.”\textsuperscript{72} Watt believes that these prejudices about the Prophet in the West developed due to the enmity of Christendom with Islam in the early days of Islam. The moral criticism inherited from the medieval times alleged Muhammad to be insincere, sensual and treacherous, however after the Crusades, Western scholars tried to disseminate more accurate information about the Prophet.\textsuperscript{73} However, this positive portrayal of the personality of the Prophet could not completely erase the critical and negative approach and “many of the old prejudices linger on”\textsuperscript{74} of which Gabriel is one such example.

Finally, again putting the works together Gabriel gave more importance to the discussion of the location, position and strategies of the Muslim army as well as of the army of the enemy at the battlefield. Conversely, Ahmed occasionally mentioned the brilliant military strategy, tactics, the knowledge of movement of armies and intelligence that the Prophet had acquired however he did not focus his work on exploring those military strategies. This task has been taken up to some extent in his earlier work on \textit{The Battles of the 2004) and Barnaby Rogerson, \textit{The Prophet Muhammad: A Biography} (London: Little Brown, 2003).
\textsuperscript{70} Armstrong, \textit{Muhammad: Prophet for our Time}, 139–40.
\textsuperscript{71} Clinton Bennett, \textit{In Search of Muhammad} (New York: Cassell, 1998), 133. See pages 93–135 of this book for a detailed discussion on the attitude of different western scholars on Muhammad from the Renaissance to the twentieth century.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 108. Bennet further argues that two approaches towards the historiography of the Prophet always existed in the West. Authors like Voltaire and Humphrey Prideaux were very critical of Muhammad, but George Sale was sympathetic and tolerant. Similarly, William Muir’s stance to reject any morality in Islam and its Prophet was contrasted by scholars like Bosworth Smith who tried to lessen the controversy between Islam and Christianity and Watt who tried to analyse the events of the life of the Prophet from a historical perspective. Ibid., 93–135.
\textsuperscript{73} Watt, \textit{Muhammad at Medina}, 324.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Prophet of Allah. However at very few places he tried to explain the tactical position of Muslims. Gabriel on the other hand, focused more on exploring the casual chain behind the events and gave equal importance to geographical location and strategic position of both armies during the battlefield.

Ahmed and Gabriel both corresponded to their social and cultural values and have produced completely different historical narratives on a single historical episode. This explains the importance of historian’s job to imagine and analyse the motives of the historical characters and occurrences. Ahmed and Gabriel both were depicting, along with their conscious biases, unconscious differences of approach characterised by their different social and cultural outlook. Ahmed has over emphasised the defensive aspect of the Prophet’s battles as he wanted to assert Islam as a religion of peace. Gabriel on the other hand questioned this assumption and emphasised on the use of terror tools and killings in the battles of the Prophet. Although none of the historical versions are ever final, yet probably the battles of the Prophet represented more of a spirit of balance and justice, instead of peace or terror.

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75 Ahmed analyses the military strategy of the Prophet. Still he provides lesser information about strategy and location of the battlefield and focuses more on principles of warfare. However, he produced a table enlisting the Ghazwahs and Saraya of the Prophet, analysing in detail the geographical information, and details of enemy forces. Similarly, he attached annexure explaining the location of battlefields of Badr, Uhud and Trench with proper maps and pictures, thus these annexure reveal his real potential of a military commander. Ahmed, The Battles of the Prophet of Allah, Annexure II-V.