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Worldview, Strategy, and Strategic Principles in Three Muslim Military Treatises◆

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Abstract
This study looks into the origins of strategy in Islām and its development from metaphysical, historiographical, and textual perspectives. Corresponding "strategy" with the terms *siyāsah*, *hiyal*, and *tadbīr* in Muslim lexicology, it uses semantic field analysis to examine how the term and concept have been used by the Muslims, particularly within the Sunnī-Ashʿarite metaphysical framework. Historiographical method is used to examine the development of strategy from pre-Islamic times, during the Prophetic period, and in the significant periods of the ʿAbbasid-Ayyūbid partnership and the beginning of the Timūrid era. The study also examines the text of three Muslim military treatises, each representing a different Muslim era in order to postulate the existence of an

◆ This short essay is a reworked version of a paper entitled "The Strategic Mind: Gleaning Wisdom from the Muslim Manuals of Warfare" which was read the first time alongside the module presentation "The Strategic Mind" in a 3-day 6-module programme *Thinking with Wisdom* held inaugurally on Thursday, 17 November 2022, at IKIM Grand Hall, Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), Kuala Lumpur, and read the second time the programme was offered in the same venue on Thursday, 11 May 2023.

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Islamic military tradition. Finally, the study analyses interpretatively the recurrent themes across the selected works and summarises them into strategic principles.

Keywords
Art of war, intellect, governance, *maghāzī*, military strategy and tactics, Muslim historiography, politics, *sīrah*, strategic principles, *Ṣūfī* metaphysics.

Introduction

Prior to the advent of Islām, Arabs of the Jazīrah had already formulated their own military doctrine.[1] According to 'Abdel Rahman Zaky, some have opined that due to the tribal nature of the Arabs and that since historical records point to the localised nature of their battles therefore their arts of warfare served the general purpose of engaging in "small battles and skirmishes among the tribes."[2]

Yet, as ancient people the Arabs have long associated and acculturated with the Greeks and the Romans, with relations going back as early as several decades before the start of the Christian Era.[3] Three contributing factors gave the Arabs the edge to deal with the Byzantines and the Persians when, as Muslims, they emerged as a world power in the seventh century: (1) the knowledge and experience of living as vassals under the suzerainties of Rome and Persia; (2) the eyewitness and participation in the wars between the Romans and the Persians as early as 54 CE; and (3) the skills and expertise gained in fighting against both empires in battles in the third century

1. Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 328–1278 (London: Greenhill Books, 1991),vol. I: A.D., 209.
2. A. Rahman Zaky, "A Preliminary Bibliography of Medieval Arabic Military Literature," *Gladius* 4 (1965): 107.
3. Irfan Shahîd, *Rome and the Arabs* (Washington D.C.: Dumberton Oaks, 1984), 10 and 43–48.

and later in the fifth century.[4] The Byzantine Emperor Leo VI (r. 886–912 CE), to whom the authorship of another manual of war entitled *Taktika* (*Tactics*) was attributed,[5] observes that the Arabs were "the best advised and most prudent in their military operations," noting remarkable similarities between Byzantine and Arab armies "in most of their military practices, both in arms and strategy."[6]

The Origins of Strategy

When the Roman Empire collapsed in the third century, its Eastern half emerged as Byzantium and fought to recover lost territories in Anatolia and North Africa for the next 300 years. The emerging Byzantines, who considered themselves to be the successor of Hellenic culture and civilisation, adopted Greek as the language of office and liturgy.[7] The Greek terms *stratēgia* (generalship) and *strategemata* (the art of leading the armies) capture the aforementioned cultural experience, from which the English word "stratagem" finds its origins thus explaining the origins of "strategy" from Greek military experience. Closely accompanying both terms is *taktikē*, the deployment and combination of skill and cleverness on the battlefield out

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4. That is, circa 290 CE and 549 CE respectively. See Shahîd, *Rome and the Arabs*, 23, 25–30, and 51–63. For an exposition of Arab involvement in the Roman-Persian wars of the said periods, see Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. 1, 12–28 and 62–143; Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: AD 395–600* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), 112.
5. Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge: Belknapp Press, 2009), 305.
6. Leo VI, *The Taktika of Leo VI: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, trans. George T. Dennis (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), 475–479; Oman, *History of the Art of War*, 209.
7. Translator's introduction, *Maurice's Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1984), vii; Kershaw, *Roman Empire*, 7–11; Graham Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries A.D.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 4–9.

of which come the word "tactics."[8] In fact, the title of one of the earliest Roman treatises on military strategy and tactics was *Strategemata*, written in the first century by Roman engineer and senator Frontinus (c. 40–103 CE).[9]

It is for the aforementioned reasons that the divinely revealed Scripture of the religion of Islām, the Holy Qur'ān, identifies the Byzantines as *al-Rūm* (The Romans),[10] that is, the Eastern Roman Empire which was engaging in warfare with Persia in the first quarter of the seventh century, around the same time God revealed the Qur'ān in stages to His Prophet and Messenger, Muḥammad (c. 570–632 CE).[11]

Although the respective military exploits of the Macedonian *vasiliás* (king) Alexander III (r. 336–323 BCE), otherwise known commonly as Alexander the Great, and the Roman consul-turned-dictator Gaius Julius Caesar (100–44 BCE) were undoubtedly impressive as history would have it, they left no surviving written military treatises that could be examined properly. Furthermore, the early Byzantine writing on the art of warfare, *Stratēgikon* (Strategy), could only be *attributed* to Emperor Mauricius (r. 508–602 CE).[12]

Similarly, Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus II Phocas (r. 963–969 CE) was known to have only *commissioned* the writing of *Peri Paradromis* (Concerning Hit-and-Run Warfare).[13] In spite of that, the identity of the real author could not be exactly determined.[14] Even in the case of Eastern military traditions, the historicity of Sun Tzu (544–496 BCE), the Chinese general

8. Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 43.
9. Ibid.
10. *Sūrat al-Rūm* (30):1–6.
11. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr aw Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, ed. Sayad 'Imrān, 16 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2012), vol. 13, 95–96.
12. Translator's introduction, *Strategikon*, xii & xv.
13. Translator's introduction, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, trans. George T. Dennis (Washington D.C.: Dumberton Oaks Texts, 1985), 137–139.
14. Ibid., 139.

of the Wu dynasty who was attributed with the authorship of the well-known military treatise, *Bīng-Fâ* (*The Art of War*), has remained uncertain at best and disputed at worst.[15]

The Origins of Military Strategy in Islām

In his formative years, the Prophet Muḥammad received "some training in the use of weapons of war."[16] The early chronicler Ibn Hishām (d. 833 CE) notes that in his youth Muḥammad possessed "marked aptitude for archery" and had travelled on tours of duty with his paternal uncles Zubayr (d. c. 590–610 CE) and Abū Ṭālib (d. 619 CE) during *Ḥarb al-Fijār* (the Sacrilegious War).[17] Divine guidance, particularly in the form of the Holy Qur'ān, and the Prophet Muḥammad's personal conduct, which would eventually be known as *sīrah*, laid the foundation for *siyar*, a branch of the *Sharī'ah* (divine way of the religion) which encompasses and regulates the Muslim conduct of the political State including warfare. The Prophet Muḥammad's divinely-guided policies established the gold standard in the rules of engagement: warfighting is neither to be prosecuted in excess and treachery nor should it involve killing the infirm, people who seek peace and protection, women, and children, or the mutilation of any one belonging to the categories.[18]

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15. Roger T. Ames states that the details of Sun-Tzu's life are lost for the most part. See translator's introduction, *Sun-Tzu the Art of Warfare: The First English Translation Incorporating the Recently Discovered Yin-ch'üeh-shan Texts* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 35. According to Ralph D. Sawyer, there are uncertainties with regard to dates and authorships of many Chinese military writings. See translator's introduction, *Sun Tzu's Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 62.
16. Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām, or known as Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1990), vol. 1, 210–211; Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2006), 31.
17. Ibid.
18. *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):190. See also Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwattā'*, ed. Muhammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1985), 447.

The *sīrah* and *maghāzī* (expeditions) literatures immortalise the Muslim Campaigns wherein the Prophet Muḥammad and his illustrious Companions planned strategies, organised and led military forces, and executed "hard-headed military tactics" in the conflict with the Qurayshite *mushrikīn*, polytheistic overlords who used to persecute and oppress the Muslims in Makkah before God permitted their migration (*hijrah*)[19] to Yathrib in 622, their Confederates (*al-Aḥzāb*),[20] the hostile Jewish tribes–Banū Nadīr, Banū Qurayẓah, and Banū Qaynuqāʿ–which occasionally sought to undermine the Prophet Muḥammad's authority while the city-state Madīnah was still being established, and the local Arab tribes. The early sources can be explored further to examine the various situations and occasions which required military responses of the early Muslims.[21]

Between the seventh and twelveth centuries, there were more than two hundred battles fought in the first 500-year history of Islām. The battles in the Muslim Campaign (624–630 CE), the ʿAbbāsid Civil War (809–813 CE), and the Siege of Jerusalem (1187 CE) are significant not only for the fact that they forever changed the course of history, but also for the many lessons in strategy and tactics contained in them, which would eventually find way into treatises on warfare composed by Muslim military thinkers, three of which shall be the foci of this study.

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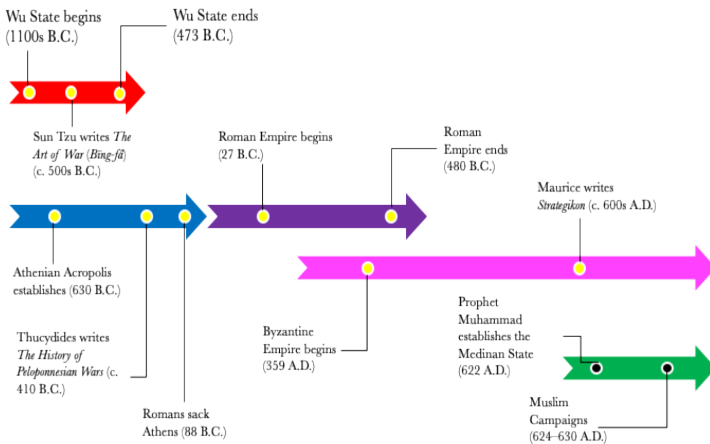
19. *Sūrat al-Naḥl* (16): 41–42.
20. Zakaria Bashier, *War and Peace in the Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, hereinafter cited as *War and Peace* (UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2007), 5.
21. Among the prominent source works (in chronological order) are:
    1. *Maghāzī Sayyidinā Muhammad* by Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah (c. 665–758 CE). See Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah, *Maghāzī Sayyidinā Muhammad*, ed. Muhammad al-Ṭabarānī, 3 vols. (Fez: Manshūrāt al-Bashīr bi-Naʿtiyyah, 2022).
    2. *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* by Abū ʿUrwah Maʿmar ibn Rashīd al-Baṣrī (714–770 CE). See Maʿmar ibn Rashīd, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. & trans. Sean W. Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2014).
    3. *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* by Abū ʿAbd-Allāh Muhammad ibn ʿUmar ibn Waqid al-Aslamī, or known as al-Wāqidī (747–823 CE). See al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (London: University of London, 1965–1984).
    4. *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* by Abū Muhammad ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hishām, or known as Ibn Hishām (d. 833 CE). See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1990).

The Muslim Campaign (624–630 CE) can be broken down to several major military engagements and battles,[22] each representing the martial form of what the Holy Qur'ān terms as *jihād*, whose Arabic root word *jahada*, its morphological permutations, and its Qur'ānic connotations convey the meaning of "struggle," "striving," and "exerting effort" therefore best understood as armed struggle in defence of the religion and its people.[23] Among the strategic significances of the battles was the gradual build-up of tension and momentum that culminated in *Fatḥ Makkah* (the Liberation of Makkah) in 630 and the starting of a new chapter in the expansion of Islām.

Figure 1 Historical Timelines: 1100's BCE– 600s CE



22. For in-breadth and in-depth scholarly treatments of the Muslim Campaigns, please see the following works: Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2017); Lings, Muhammad; and Bashier, *War and Peace*.
23. Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn ʿAlī ibn Ahmad ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 9 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2003), vol. 2, 239–240. See also the following verses of the Holy Qur'ān: *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* (4):95; *Sūrat al-Māʾidah* (5):35; *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (9):20; *Sūrat al-ʿAnkabūt* (29):69; *Sūrat Muhammad* (47):31; *Sūrat al-Saff* (61):11. See also Ahmed Mohsen al-Dawoody, *The Islamic Law of War: Justifications and Regulations* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2011), 62–66.

The Three Muslim Military Treatises

Sunnī Muslim scholars such as Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Mawardī (974–1058 CE), Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1058–1111 CE), and Abū Ḥafs ʿUmar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (1067–1142 CE) have rationalised the importance of the military arts in Muslim culture, particularly as governmental incumbency to defend Islām and the Muslims.[24] As can be found in *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab* (*The Ultimate Aim in the Arts of Erudition*), the multivolume encyclopaedic work compiled by the historian Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī (1279–1333 CE), the importance of the military arts is also well-documented in the transitional period between Ayyūbid and Baḥrī Mamlūk dynasties during the Mongol invasions in the 13th century.[25]

As alluded in the previous section, the Muslim world has produced more than a dozen works under the theme of *tadbīr al-ḥurūb* or *siyāsat al-ḥurūb*; Zaky lists 12 works in his preliminary evaluation while George T. Scanlon (1924–2014) lists 15.[26] This study avoids replicating what Zaky and Scanlon have done respectively, but chooses and discusses, in a preliminarily non-exhaustive manner, three works for four main reasons, namely

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24. See the following:
    1. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Mawardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah wa al-Wilāyah al-Dīniyyah*, ed. Aḥmad Jād (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), 297.
    2. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-Bāṭiniyyah wa Faḍāʾil al-Mustaẓhiriyyah*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Quṭb (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2005), 161–165.
    3. Saʿd al-Dīn Masʿūd ibn ʿUmar al-Taftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, trans. Earl Edgar Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 141–147; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th century Malay translation of the ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafī*, (Kuala Lumpur: Department of Publications, University of Malaya, 1988), 73–74.
25. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, eds. Mufīd Qumayhah et. al., 33 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2004), vol. 6, 130–204.
26. See Zaky, "Preliminary Bibliography," 107–108; Translator's introduction, *A Muslim Manual of War* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1961), 14–19.

that they: (1) indicate the existence of an Islamic military tradition whose fountainhead is the Prophet Muḥammad himself; (2) are each a major work and landmark representative of military treatises produced in three significant eras in the history of Islām; and (3) overlap in the lists by Zaky and Scanlon, and (4) share recurrent themes which can be summarily condensed into what can be identified as strategic principles.

The first work is one of the earliest known Muslim military treatises on strategy entitled *Mukhtaṣar Siyāsat al-Ḥurūb* (Conspectus on the Management of Warfare)[27] by Abū Saʿīd al-Shaʿrānī al-Harthamī (fl. c. 848 CE). Not much information could be gleaned on his background from the historical sources other than the fact that he was an advisor to Abū Jaʿfar ʿAbduLlāh al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–833 CE) and that he wrote *Mukhtaṣar* in dedication to the seventh ʿAbbāsid caliph.[28] This work is important because it is an early record of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate, particularly during the reign of Caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775 CE), in the expansion of Muslim territories, its clash with the Byzantine Empire, and its strategy in handling insurrections since its rise after the overthrow of Umayyads in 750 CE.[29]

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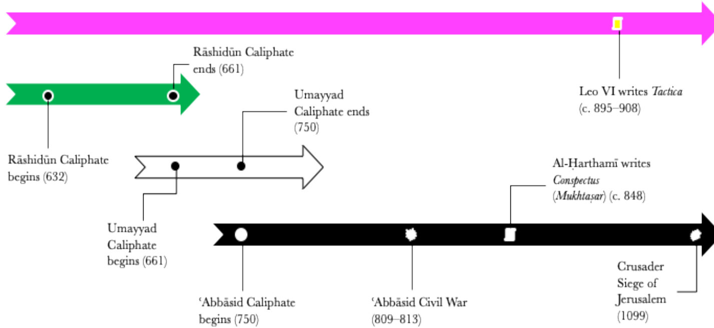
27. An Arabic edition was published in 1964. See editor's introduction, *Mukhtaṣar Siyāsat al-Ḥurūb li'l-Harthamī Ṣāḥib al-Maʾmūn*, ed.ʿAbd al-Raʾūf ʿAwn (Cairo: al-Muʾassasat al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿAmmah li al-Taʾlīf wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 1964), 5–9.
28. Zaky, "Preliminary Bibliography," 107. See also J. Schacht, "Ḥiyal," *Encyclopaedia of Islām*, eds. B. Lewis, V. L. Ménage, C. H. Pellat, and J. Schacht, 2nd ed., 12 vols. (Leiden: E. J, Brill; London: Luzac & Co., 1986), vol. 3, 510.
29. Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, (New York: Dover Publications, 2001), 158; Amikam Elad, "The Rebellion of Muhammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan (known as al-Nafs al-Zakīyah)," *ʿAbbasid Studies: Occasional Papers of the School of ʿAbbasid Studies*, ed. James E. Montgomery (Cambridge, 6–10 July 2002), 172–180. See also Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*, 3 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), vol. 1, 473–480; Tayeb el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Narrative of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74–76 and 203–204.

Figure 2 Historical Timelines: 600's–1000's CE



The second work is *Kitāb al-Tadhkirah al-Ḥarawiyyah fī al-Ḥiyal al-Ḥarbiyyah* (al-Harawī's Book of Counsel on the Stratagems of War).[30] It was written by Shaykh Taqiyy al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Bakar al-Ḥarawī (1145–1215 CE), one of the advisors of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, the military leader of Kurdish descent who liberated Bayt al-Maqdis from the Crusaders in 1087 CE and defended it until his death in 1193 CE.[31] Described as a "very thorough study of the Muslim army in the field and under siege,"[32] the *Tadhkirah* appears to be the sub-genre of a larger genre of literature on political administration, governance, ethics, strategy, and tactics. Apart from addressing the military aspect of statecraft that covers conventional warfare, the distinct quality of *Tadhkirah* can be found in the fact that it "deals with special stratagems and tricks of warfare," making it a unique

30. Janine Sourdel-Thomine has edited, annotated, translated into French, and introduced al-Harawī's *Tadhkirah* in her article "Les Conseils du Šayh al-Harawī a un Prince Ayyūbide (*The Counsels of Shaykh al-Harawī to an Ayyūbid prince*)." Accordingly, her edition was based on four manuscripts preserved in Istanbul and Konya, Turkey. See Janine Sourdel-Thomine, "Les Conseils du Šayh al-Harawī a un Prince Ayyūbide," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 17, (1961–1962): 205–268.

31. Zaky, "Preliminary Bibliography," 108.

32. William J. Hamblin, "Saladin and Muslim Military Theory," *The Horns of Haṭṭīn: Proceedings from the Second Conference of the Society of the Crusades and the Latin East Jerusalem and Haifa*, 2–6 July 1987, ed. B. Z. Kedar (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi & Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 228.

compendium on military strategy and tactics that distinguishes it from works that are derivative or summary of larger works such as *Mukhtaṣar*.

The third and last work is *Tafrīj al-Kurūb fī Tadbīr al-Ḥurūb* (Removal of Woes in the Governance of Warfare). Compiled by ʿUmar ibn Ibrāhīm al-Awsī al-Anṣārī (1353–1408 CE), he was a military judge (*qāḍī al-ʿaskar*), who lived in Aleppo, Syria during the reign of the Mamlūk sultan al-Malik Faraj ibn Barqūq (r. 1399–1411 CE) and the height of the Mamlūk-Timurid War 1400–1402 CE.[33] As a military judge, al-Anṣārī possessed deep knowledge about military leadership and logistics.[34] Furthermore, prior to his capture by the Turco-Mongol army under the command of Amīr Timūr (also known as Tamerlane, 1336–1405 CE) he had been involved in operations in the vicinity of Aleppo and his experience being held as prisoner certainly provided him with the understanding on the arrangement, strategy, and tactics of the Timurid army as recorded in *Tafrīj*. [35]

Mukhtaṣar Siyāsat al-Ḥurūb (**_Conspectus on the Management of Warfare_**)

Siyāsah, is usually translated as "management," "governance," or even "politics." According to Ibn Manẓūr, it means "watching over something with what could bring about its betterment (*al-qiyām ʿalā shayʾin bi-mā yuṣliḥuhā*),"[36] while according to Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Tahānawī, it is "the betterment of people by guiding them to the path of salvation in this world and the Afterlife (*istiṣlāḥ al-khalq bi-irshādihim ilā al-ṭarīq al-munjī fī al-dunyā wa al-ākhirah*)."[37]

33. Translator's introduction, *Muslim Manual*, 26.
34. Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-Malāyīn, 2002), vol. 5, 39.
35. Translator's introduction, *Muslim Manual*, 26.
36. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 4, 747.
37. al-ʿAllāmah Muḥammad ʿAlī Al-Tahānawī, *Mawsūʿah Kashshāf Iṣṭilaḥāt al-Funūn wa al-ʿUlūm*, ed. ʿAli Dahrūj, 2 vols. (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān Nāshirūn, 1996), vol. 1, 993.

The political objectives of *Mukhtaṣar* become clear when the circumstances surrounding its composition is examined, especially the history of al-Ma'mūn's rise to power and the *siyāsah* which was employed in the civil war of succession between al-Ma'mūn and his half-brother Caliph Muḥammad al-Amīn (r. 809–813 CE) and in the wars against Byzantium.

During the reign of his father, Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809 CE), the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate had become an expanding empire, with armies "on the frontiers of Spain" launching incursions into the Byzantine Empire.[38] However, within a year of his death trouble was brewing again in Baghdad: the weak leadership of al-Rashīd's immediate heir and successor, al-Amīn; the crisis that developed between the two sons of al-Rashīd;[39] the growing political support among the local elites of Khurasan for the better leadership of al-Ma'mūn; and the exchange of a series of political offences between 810 CE and 811 CE which ultimately precipitated the decision by both parties to fight a war.[40]

On the side of al-Ma'mūn was Ṭāhir ibn Ḥusayn (755–822 CE), a skilful general and military strategist who, despite having a small force of only 4,000–5,000 men, unexpectedly managed to defeat the army al-Amīn fielded—a considerably ten times larger force of 40,000 men under the command of ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā (fl. 799/800–811 CE), the governor of Khurasan.[41] Al-Amīn's fate was sealed in September 813 CE when al-Ma'mūn's supporters took control of Mosul, Egypt, and the Hejaz, paving the way for al-Ma'mūn to supplant al-Amīn as caliph later that year.[42]

38. Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, 158.
39. el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, 59–62. For an exposition on the ʿAbbāsid reliance on foreign soldiers, see Kennedy, *Armies of the Caliph*, 148–152.
40. Amira K. Bennison, *The Great Caliphs: The Golden Age of the ʿAbbasid Empire* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 32.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid. For a historical account of the event, see Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Tāʾrīkh al-Tabarī or Tāʾrīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, 6 vols. (Beirut & Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2012), vol. 5, 121–122.

Al-Ma'mūn had to contend with disturbances in Iraq in the early years of his caliphate, but his twenty-year reign ultimately demonstrated the triumph of his *siyāsah* over al-Amīn's. It was during the aforementioned period of political turmoil that al-Harthamī composed the military treatise *Mukhtaṣar Siyāsat al-Ḥurūb*. His *nisbah* indicates a relation with one of the *mawālī* ʿAbbāsid army commanders, Harthamah ibn Aʿyan al-Jabalī (d. 816 CE), who previously served under Hārūn al-Rashīd and, after the Caliph's death, later threw in his support behind al-Ma'mūn, fighting alongside his two other commanders including Ṭāhir ibn Ḥusayn (d. 822 CE) during the civil war.[43]

Kitāb al-Tadhkirah al-Ḥarawiyyah fī al-Ḥiyal al-Ḥarbiyyah **(*al-Ḥarawī's Book of Counsel on the Stratagems of War*)**

The Qur'ānic usage of *ḥīlah*[44] (pl. *ḥiyal*) is in reference to the act of finding a way out, although it has also been translated as "a means in power,"[45] "means (to migrate),"[46] and "to devise a plan."[47] Ibn Manẓūr (1233–1312 CE) traces the early Muslim usage of this term to the Prophet Muḥammad himself, who in his supplications addressed God as the Possessor of Great Power (*dhū al-Ḥayli al-Shadīd*).[48] In the Islamic formula *lā ḥawla wa-lā quwwata illā biLlāh* (no power and strength save with God), the word *ḥawl* denotes power, strength, faculty, and a force that has the potential to break things. Therefore, *ḥiyal* can be understood as a manifestation of power, in the manner of an object's breaking away from its customary behaviour or present condition (*ḥāl*).

43. Abū Saʿīd al-Shaʿrānī al-Harthamī, *Mukhtasar Siyāsat al-Hurūb*, ed. ʿArif Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghanī (Damascus: Dār al-Kanān, 1995), 8.
44. *Sūrat al-Nisā'* (4):98.
45. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation.
46. Muhammad Taqi Usmani's translation.
47. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's translation.
48. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 2, 688.

Theoretically speaking, *ḥiyal* means "artifice," "ruse," "stratagem," "manoeuvre," and "trick." According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1108 CE), the terms *ḥawl* and *ḥiyal* used in the Holy Qur'ān are used in the positive context to denote the ingenuity and ability to overcome obstacles.[49] According to ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (1339–1414 CE), *ḥīlah* is "that which turns a man away from whatever he hates to whatever he prefers (*hiya allatī taḥūlu al-mar'a ʿammā yakrahuhu ilā mā yuhibbuhu*)."[50]

Practically speaking, as can be found in the early Muslim encyclopaedia *Mafātīḥ al-ʿUlūm* (*The Keys of the Sciences)* compiled by Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Khawārizmī (fl. c. 900's CE),[51] *ḥiyal* is the engineering science concerned with the design of mechanisms in burden-lifting engines such as the *shādūf* and siege weapons such as the mangonel and the ballista (Gr. *mánganon*; Ar., *al-manjanīq*) and the catapult (Ar. *al-ʿarādah*).

According to al-Ghazālī, the ability to conceive strategies (*idrāk al-ḥiyal*)[52] through which man can entrap, capture, subdue, and gain mastery over other animals larger in terms of size and more vicious in terms of savagery stems from the intellectual faculty of the human soul called *ʿaql*.[53] Al-Ghazālī himself would

49. al-Rāghīb al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kaylānī (Lebanon: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 2008), 137–138.

50. ʿAlī ibn Muhammad al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Muʿjam al-Taʿrifāt*, ed. Muḥammad Siddīq al-Minshāwī (Lebanon: Dār al-Faḍīlah, 2004), 83.

51. C.E. Bosworth, "A Pioneer Arabic Encyclopedia of the Sciences: Al-Khwarizmi's Keys of the Sciences", *Isis* 54, no. 1 (Mar., 1963): 80.

52. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, "*Kitāb al-ʿIlm*," *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 1st ed., 10 vols. (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011), vol. 1, 305.

53. The proponents of the Sunnī-Ashʿarite metaphysical system—chiefly represented by al-Ghazālī and his teacher, Imām al-Haramayn Diyā' al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Mālik ibn Yūsuf al-Juwaynī (1028–1085 CE)—hold that God created Man as a noble being composed of physical body (*jasad*) and subtle spirit (*rūḥ*), a proposition which both al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī refer to *al-Ḥijr* (15):28–29 as the basis. Al-Ghazālī states that the intellect is the: (1) noble and unique attribute which separates the human being from animals, allowing scientific understanding and organisation of disciplines; (2) science based on evidence which discerns possibilities and impossibilities; (3) science based on the study of empirical evidence and conditions from which they originated; and (4) faculty of the soul which

demonstrate what he understood to be the meaning of *ḥiyal* in at least two separate literary occasions, namely in his autobiography of sorts *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl wa al-Mufṣiḥ bi al-Aḥwāl* (*Deliverance from Error and Illumination of Spiritual States*) which was written in 1106 CE, and his "mirrors for princes" work *al-Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* (*Melted Ingot in the Counsel for Rulers*) which was written "before 1106 CE or soon after 1109 CE."[54]

In the *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī describes his own experience acting "with the subtleties of stratagems (*bi-laṭā'if al-ḥiyal*)" after an episode of introspection and spiritual awakening formed and strengthened within him the resolve to relocate to Damascus, Syria, effectively leaving the spotlight of his stellar academic career. He did so in order to escape the attention of the caliph, his associates, and the religious leaders of Iraq, all of whom could not allow him to give up his prestigious position and critically acclaimed career thus presented an obstacle for him to pursue his intended life of anonymity, seclusion, and self-realisation.[55]

In *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, al-Ghazālī addresses the Saljūq rulers with a pacifistic undertone;[56] the context of the advice is that the internecine conflict of rival Turkish factions which played

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discerns the consequences of actions. See Diyā' al-Dīn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Yūsuf al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāti' al-Adillah fī Usūl al-I'tiqād*, eds. Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā & 'Alī 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Egypt: Maktabat al-Khānijī, 1950), 302–307; al-Ghazālī, "*Kitāb al-'Ilm*," *Iḥyā'*, vol. 5, 26–27. See also Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islām* (Kuala Lumpur: The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), 1995), 143–150.

54. George F. Hourani, "A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 2 (1984): 301.

55. al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl wa al-Mufsih bi al-Ahwāl*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2021), 92. The translation of *bi-latā'if al-hiyal* as "subtle stratagems" is taken from *al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: his Deliverance from Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*), trans. R. J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2006), 55.

56. Based on the date which Ann K. Lambton argues to be the time al-Ghazālī composed the *Nasīhat al-Mulūk*, it can be postulated that among the Saljūq rulers addressed was Sultan Aḥmad Sanjar of the Great Saljūq Empire. See George F. Hourani, "A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 104, no. 2 (1984): 301.

out in his lifetime and the devastation the Crusaders brought in their conquest of northern Syria in 1095 CE presenting a mortal danger to the person of the *Imām*—the appointed titular ruler whose charge is to protect the interests of Islām and the Muslims— were disrupting the orderliness of worldly and religious affairs.

Realising the deadly consequences should the Muslims let the Crusader threat continue to play out and having returned to resume teaching at the Niẓāmiyyah, al-Ghazālī counselled the Muslim rulers against fighting unnecessary wars or deliberately providing *casus belli*[57] and the viziers and government functionaries against inciting the ruler's selfish desire for war.[58] Rather, the vizier is obliged to conduct warfare through correspondence and diplomacy (*bi al-kutub*), resorting to strategy and governance [of military affairs] (*bi al-iḥtiyāl wa al-tadbīr*) only after having exhausted all other options.[59]

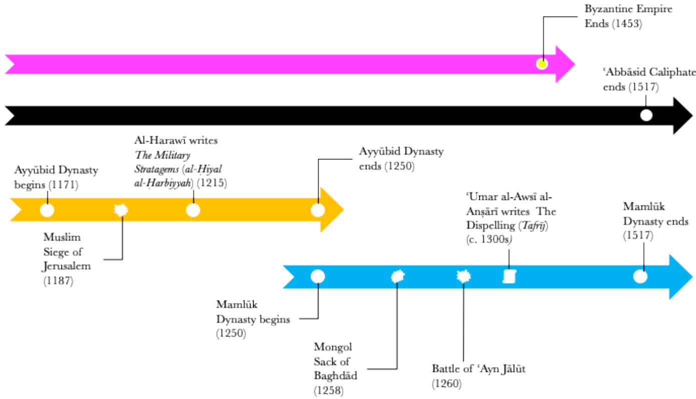
The *Tadhkirah* was primarily composed as a reminder for the Ayyūbid Sulṭān, but its political objectives become clear with the realisation that al-Ḥarawī was operating at a time when the call for military *jihād* was at its strongest against the Crusaders occupying the Muslim lands and that the treatise was prepared as part of the military reforms instituted by the Ayyūbid rulers, particularly Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.[60] Central to this call was the mission to liberate Jerusalem, a city which the Muslims knew as Bayt al-Maqdis,[61] the third holiest city after Makkah and Madīnah, whose precincts of al-Masjid al-Aqṣā God has blessed,[62] and which they have had control over since its liberation by the Second Rightly-Guided Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb from the Byzantines in 637 CE.

57. al-Ghazālī, *Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1988), 87.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Hamblin, "Saladin and Muslim Military Theory," 228.
61. al-Ṭabarī, *Tāʾrīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 2, 448.
62. *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* (17):1.

In order to accomplish the mission, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, upon deposing the Fāṭimids and consolidating his power in Egypt he then liberated Syria, thereby cutting off the support that the Crusaders might receive from Christendom in Europe.[63] Around the same time, he secured diplomatic approval of the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Nāṣir li-DīniLlāh, who then supported him by sending supplies and reinforcements.[64] By strategically capturing and subjugating several Muslim strongholds—Aleppo, Sinjār, Ḥārim, Mayyāfāriqīn, and Mosul—and integrating their leaders and armies with his own forces,[65] Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was able to increase the size of his original Syrian military command of 12,000 men to a combined army of 40,000 troops. Confident with his numbers, he drew out the 20,000-strong Crusader army from Jerusalem and annihilated them at Ḥaṭṭīn.[66] Bereft of its garrison, the city defences became so severely weakened,[67] therefore allowing him to lay siege upon it for thirteen days and finally liberate it on 2nd October 1187 CE.[68]

63. Amin Maalouf, The Crusades through Arab Eyes, trans. Jon Rothschild (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 180–181 and 188; Malcolm Cameron Lyons and D. E. P. Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 192–194.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibn Shaddād, *al-Nawādir al-Sultāniyyah wa al-Mahāsin al-Yūsufiyyah*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn Shayyāl (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Khānajī, 1994), 105–119.
66. Lyons and Jackson, *Saladin: The Politics*, 264.
67. ʿAlī ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tāʾrīkh*, ed. Sayyid bin Muhammad al-Sannārī, 8 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2010), vol. 8, 156–157.
68. Ibid., vol. 8, 66.

Figure 3 Historical Timelines: 1000s–1500s CE



Tafrīj al-Kurūb fī Tadbīr al-Ḥurūb (***Removal of Woes in the Governance of Warfare***)

Among the meanings of the Arabic word *dabbara* are "to arrange," "to plan," "to prepare," and "devise," all of which connects it conceptually with the aforementioned terms *siyāsah* and *ḥiyal*. According to Ibn Manẓūr, the verbal noun (*maṣdar*), *tadbīr*, shares the root with *dubr*, which refers to the "back," "end," "tail-end," "outcome," and "consequence," therefore denotes the act "to follow through something or some affairs to its end or conclusion (*an tanẓura ilā mā taʾūlu ilayhi ʿāqibatuhu*)."[69]

Al-Jurjānī states that *tadbīr* is "the act of examining the outcomes by means of knowing what is good (*al-naẓr fī al-ʿawāqib maʿrifat al-khayr*),"[70] while al-Tahānawī "one's disposing of, or reflection, pertaining to the outcomes of the affairs (*al-taṣarruf aw al-tafakkur fī ʿāqibat al-umūr*)."[71] Therefore, in accordance

69. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 3, 289.
70. Al-Jurjānī, *Muʿjam al-Taʿrīfāt*, 49. The English translation is taken from Mohd Zaidi Ismail & Mohd Sani Badron, *Good Governance: Adab-Oriented Tadbīr in Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit IKIM, 2011), 82.
71. al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*, vol. 1, 402. The English translation is taken from *Good Governance*, 83.

with what al-Ghazālī intended, *tadbīr al-ḥurūb* in the Islamic intellectual tradition can be defined as the discipline of knowledge in managing or governing warfare to its conclusion, that is, the prevention or ending of war or conflict. If warfare or conflict could not be avoided, then with *tadbīr al-ḥurūb* it might be handled in the way that produces victory thus shortens the period of conflict, minimises losses, and reduces the number of casualties.

The political objectives of *Tafrīj* are much more difficult to prove, since it was written sometime after the Mamlūk-Timurid War and the release of al-Awsī from Timūr's prison. Furthermore, Scanlon believes that it belonged to the genre of literature (*ādāb*) rather than the arts of war (*funūn al-ḥarbiyyah*), citing the abundance of "platitudes and amusing stories" rather than "concrete strategy or more varied tactical analysis" as the deficiency of the text.[72]

However, rather than accepting Scanlon's dismissive annoyance, this study finds what he later summarises to be the text's "utility of deception and stratagems so as to avoid war" as the matter that catches the eye and runs more congruently with the aforementioned concept of *tadbīr al-ḥurūb*. It could be said also that *Tafrīj* signals the Mamlūk's wake from their complacency since the destruction of the Ayyūbids 140 years prior with their defeat by Timūr at the Siege of Aleppo (where al-Awsī was captured and made prisoner of war) and Siege of Damascus in November 1400 CE. Ultimately, it must have been a relief for the Mamlūk in 1402 CE when Timūr turned his attention instead to the Sultan Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402 CE) of the Ottomans. Suffice to say the Mamlūk learned their lessons the hard way, but as a result of the conflict they began to tighten the organisation of "the various elements of the army, more concern for the infantrymen and a wiser use of their capacities."[73]

72. Translator's introduction, *Muslim Manual*, 27.
73. Ibid., 31.

Worldview of Islām in the Three Muslim Military Treatises

Mukhtaṣar opens by reminding that the orderly state of affairs depends on the ruler or commander being conscious of God and acting in obedience towards Him (*niẓām al-amr fī al-ḥarb taqwāLlāh wa al-ʿamal bi ṭāʿatihi*).[74] It then states that constant remembrance of God is the weapon of the believer (*fa-yanbaghī li-ṣāḥib al-ḥarb an yajʿal raʾsa silāḥihi fī ḥarbihi taqwāLlāhi waḥdahu wa kathratu dhikrihi*). The army general (Ar. *ṣāḥib al-ḥarb*, literally: "master of warfare" or "war master") is reminded that it is God Who elevates and relegates whomever He wants, and there is no strategy, power, or even number of armies that could change the outcome of any engagement. For that reason, the commander is adjured to leave wrongdoing and vengeance, to practice magnanimity, and to be always just in order to safeguard the welfare and wellbeing of those under his care or protection.[75]

The opening chapter of the *Tadhkirah* counsels leaders, particularly sultans, to exercise mercy and forbearance towards the subjects, stating that were the ruler to do just that, then God would preserve His bestowals and become his Guardian (*fa-idhā faʿala abqā Allāh ʿalayhi mā aʿṭāhu wa-kāna lahu ḥāfiẓan*).[76] This is in accordance with the Prophetic *ḥadīth*: "All creatures are dependants of God and the dearest to God amongst them are those who benefit His dependants (*al-khalq ʿiyālu'Llāh fa-aḥabbahum ilā'Llāh ʿanfaʿahum li-ʿiyālihi*)."[77]

Tafrīj starts off by reminding the ruler that he is the supporter of Islām through the power and victory of God Who Determines all affairs.[78] It then declares the articles of faith, which, among others, are: the unity of God; the prophethood of Muḥammad; and destiny.[79]

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74. *Mukhtaṣar*, 14.
75. Ibid.
76. "Les Conseils," 263.
77. Ḥadīth related by Abū Yaʿlā 65/6, al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr* 86/10, al-Quḍāʿī in *Musnad al-Shihāb* 255/2, al-Ḥārith in *Musnad* 857/2.
78. *Muslim Manual*, 39.
79. Ibid, 39–40.

Each of the Three Muslim Treatises starts off with restatement of the Islamic creed (*'aqīdah*), what the metaphysician and profound thinker of our time Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas terms as "the worldview of Islām,"[80] therefore establishes a continuity which could only be surmised as the existence of an Islamic military tradition whose fountainhead of principles and values is the Prophet Muḥammad himself.

Strategic Principles in the Three Muslim Military Treatises

While each treatise can be construed respectively as a unique approach towards military stratagem, a brief interpretative analysis would reveal a number of recurrent themes which can be condensed into a number of strategic principles, among them: contemplating reality, assessing situations, exercising caution, consulting people, considering consequences, winning hearts, taking action, and managing outcomes.

In contemplating reality, al-Ḥarawī states that the leader or commander should realise, by knowledge, his authority and privilege come from God's blessings, but the most precious of these blessings encompasses Islam and the Muslims.[81] Understanding the Qur'ānic notion that man can plan but it is God Who is the Best of Planners,[82] al-Harthamī states that both the means and ends must be in obedience to God Who determines outcomes, not for disobedience which invites Divine Wrath.[83]

However, in maintaining power, the leader must always exercise caution, the lessening of which would otherwise reduce readiness and give the opponent the upper hand. The *Mukhtaṣār* goes further by stating that an abundance of caution against these dangers will not be wasted but rather provide adequate protection and sufficient deterrence.[84]

80. Ibid.
81. "Les Conseils," 263–264.
82. *Sūrat Āli 'Imrān* (3):54.
83. *Mukhtaṣar*, 14.
84. *Muslim Manual*, 43–44.

In this respect, al-Ḥarawī's doctrine agrees with that of al-Harthamī's when he advises the liberal exercise of caution, but he goes further to state that it is part of the sufficient preparation against being chanced upon by the dangers of making mistakes, infiltration by enemy spies, and being attacked or ambushed.[85]

In consulting people, the three treatises agree that the ruler's advisors and members of council must always be people who are intelligent and far-sighted, possess expertise, reliable, and demonstrate leadership qualities.[86] The council made up of such people guarantees the quality of discussion, but it also can bring out all in the minds of the discussants, whose discourses are products of individual thought processes through which the ruler may discern lines of reasoning therefore determine the consequences of things from the established principles of causality.[87]

In thinking the consequences of actions, consideration (*naẓar*) is an intellectual component shown to protect from adverse consequences, enumerated as error, harm, and impulsiveness.[88] In the view of al-Ḥarawī, the signs that a person possesses *naẓar*, thus capable of exercising *tadbīr*, are discernible from the demonstration of certain qualities within him: propriety, resistance to delusion, love of good, firm opinion, pursuit of justice, and the opposition to whim.[89]

Conclusion

The aforementioned strategic principles can ensure that the leader is guided to right actions in the governance of warfare and the management of politics, including the employment of psychology when dealing with subordinates and enemies alike.

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85. "Les Conseils," 250.
86. *Mukhtaṣar*, 21; "Les Conseils," 258; *Muslim Manual*, 66–71.
87. *Muslim Manual*, 66–67; "Les Conseils," 258.
88. "Les Conseils," 258.
89. Ibid.

However, their importance is more pronounced when it comes to managing a conflict which requires responses that coincide with the real and complete picture of reality as opposed to conjecture and imagination regarding the situations on the ground.

Based on the preliminary survey above, there is a need for these works to be studied further and the knowledge contained therein to be benefited at academic and public levels. For example, studying al-Ḥarawī's milieu and text revealed the connections between military thought and the Sunnī intellectual tradition. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's policies, informed partly by al-Ḥarawī's doctrine, show that managing warfare is the art of governing conflicts. The combination of overall strategy, proper governance, and adjustable tactics can shorten wars, cut losses, and produce victory. Such a desirable outcome, therefore, is evidence of strategic thinking as the fruit of intellectual activity.

The intended questions hover around especially the assessment of policy effectiveness in the three eras thus would prove some utility in deriving lessons for contemporary times, such as: How much of the *Mukhtaṣar* played role in al-Maʾmūn's *siyāsah* during war against the Byzantines? Did al-Malik al-Ẓāhir include the doctrine of the *Tadhkirah* in his military policies upon his ascension as the *amīr* of Aleppo? What was the impact of *Tafrīj* on Mamluk military development in post-Timurid conquest?

I am confident that such questions can open up new avenues in research in the areas of military strategy and tactics, policy research, or even leadership and organisational ethics, but in the practical sense of it *siyāsah* or *tadbīr al-ḥurūb* can be adapted to be a subject of study and learning at a high level, especially for future officers and military commanders, and students at defence universities and war studies programs and also students of business science, in addition to the study of works such as *The Art of War*.

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