

The Lesson of the Battle of Ayn Jalut is that the Large Armies of the Ummah, Need a Brave Khaleefah Rashid

By the end of 1258 CE, Hülegü, a Mongol leader and grandson of Genghis Khan, had sacked Baghdad and executed the last Abbasid *Khaleefah*, Caliph al-Musta'sim. Under the instructions of his brother Mongke – the Great Khan - Hülegü turned his army's attention to ash-Sham and Egypt al-Kinanah, with the goal of subjugating the entire region under Mongol rule. By early 1260, Mongol forces had crossed the Euphrates, seizing Aleppo and later Damascus with minimal resistance.

Sadly, many of the Muslim commanders in the region had formally submitted to Hülegü before his invasion, humiliating themselves through defeatism. In his book, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War (1260-1281)*, Professor Reuven Amitai writes that Al-Nasir Yusuf, the *amir* of Syria:

"...had formally submitted to the Mongols many years before Hülegü's arrival on the scene. As early as 641/1243-4, there is information that al-Nasir, still only prince of Aleppo, as well as the current Ayyubid ruler of Syria...sent an envoy to Arghun Aqa, the newly arrived Mongol viceroy in the conquered areas of the Islamic world, then at Tabriz. It is reported that from the subsequent year (642/1244-5), al-Nasir Yusuf was paying tribute to the Mongols. This may or may not be identical with the annual tribute which he paid to Baiju, commander of Mongol forces in western Asia since 1241. In 643/1245-6, al-Nasir sent a relative as an envoy to Guyuk Qa'an in Mongolia, who returned with yarliges defining al-Nasir's obligations to the Qa'an. Some years later, in 648/1250, al-Nasir Yusuf dispatched another mission to the Mongol capital of Qaraqorum. The mission, which was to express submission to the soon-to-be-elected Mongke Qa'an, was led by al-Zayn al-Hafizi, who later played an important role in dissuading al-Nasir Yusuf from resisting Hülegü in 1260. It was probably at this time that al-Zayn al-Hafizi began secretly serving the Mongols. The mission returned to Damascus late in 649/1251, bringing tokens of Mongke's recognition of al-Nasir's submission and his confirmation as a Mongol vassal."

This submission to the Mongols was a result of the defeatism that had settled amongst the elites of ash-Sham and Egypt. As Professor Amitai later writes:

"It appears that al-Nasir hoped, at least for a while, to prevent a Mongol attack by tendering his submission, although in an equivocal manner. Al-Nasir's ambivalent policy and his frequent changes of heart were a mixture of his own indecisive nature plus the divided opinions of those around him. On the one hand, there were the "defeatists", who counselled a submissive policy to the Mongols. Prominent members of this group were the Ayyubid al-Salih Nur al-Din Isma'il b. Shirkuh and the high bureaucrat al-Zayn al-Hafizi, both secretly loyal to the Mongols. Other members of this "peace-party" were the previously mentioned Ayyubid al-Ashraf Musa, also in contact with the Mongols, Najm al-Din Muhammad b. al-Iftikhar Yaqut, the amir hajib (Chief Chamberlain), and the merchant, Wajih al-Din Muhammad al-Takriti. The Kurdish amirs (probably the Qaymariyya) were also known for their "defeatist" opinions. On the other hand, the militant approach was represented by Baybars al-Bunduqdari (at least from mid-657/1260, when he returned to al-Nasir's service), the amir Imad al-Din Ibrahim b. al-Mujir, and the amirs from Nasiriyya, that is, al-Nasir Yusuf's own mamluks."

It was only after the fall of Damascus, that al-Nasir made attempts to resist the Mongol expansion. However, his initial defeatism cost him and his troops. They were defeated by the Mongols at Nablus in Palestine. He was later captured and executed by Hülegü.

With al-Nasir's forces dismantled, this left the Mamluks of Egypt as the only force that could possibly put an end to the Mongol expansion. Instead of waiting for the Mongols to come to them, the Mamluks of Egypt – led by the brave commander, Sayf ad-Din Qutuz, and his general Baybars - took the initiative against the enemy. They mobilized out of Egypt to confront the troops of Kitbuqa (the most trusted general of Hülegü). The army camped at Acre, where Qutuz:

"...again took the opportunity to whip up the enthusiasm of the amirs, whose fear must have been increasing as the battle drew closer. Qutuz's speech contains two main motifs: the amirs

must fight to protect their families and property...and the need to defend Islam against the infidels. The speech was effective: the amirs wept and swore to each other to drive the Mongols out of the country.”

The Mamluk army met the Mongol army at Ayn Jalut, where the Mongols had established a strategic position against the Mamluks.

“For the Mongols, this was a logical place to await the Mamluks. Along the northern foot of the Gilboa runs Wadi or Nahr Jalut, which would have provided watering for the horses, and the adjacent valley offered both pasturage and good conditions for cavalry warefare. Other advantages are evident. The Mongols could exploit the proximity of the Gilboa to anchor their flank. It also offered an excellent vantage point, as did the nearby Hill of Moreh.”

The battle of Ain Jalut took place on 3rd September 1260, 25 Ramadan 658 H.

“The battle initially did not go well for the Mamluks. The Mongols responded to the Mamluk approach by attacking them. The extent of their attack is unknown but it must have at least included the Mongol Right, since the Mamluk Left was defeated and disintegrated. Qutuz was able to rally his troops and launch a counter-attack which shook the Mongols. The Mongols attacked a second time, and again the Mamluks were close to defeat. But Qutuz was not disconcerted, and he again rallied his troops...with several cries of “Oh Islam! {wa-islamah} Ya Allah, help your servant Qutuz against the Mongols.” He then launched a frontal attack, which led to a Mamluk victory. It was probably at around this time that Kitbuqa was killed, leading to the final disintegration of the Mongol army.”

The victory at Ayn Jalut was only the beginning of a war that was to last until 1313, when the Mongols would fail to lay siege to the fort of Rahbat. However, the Battle of Ayn Jalut marked the first major Mongol defeat in open battle, and halted their westward expansion into the Islamic world. It released the Mamluks from their defeatist mentality and emboldened them to continue with their confrontations against the Mongols. The great Islamic scholar, Ibn al-Nafis, who lived during the war between the Mongols and Mamluks, wrote:

“This country was very far from that land which those infidels had conquered, but then it became their neighbour. And thus, the people of this country had to fight the infidels and resist them. In order to do so, they had to obtain two things: a large army and a brave sultan to lead them. Without this, it is impossible to fight these infidels with all their conquests over the many lands, and their numerous men and armies.”

O Armies of the Ummah!

Ibn Nafis spoke of the need of a large army and a brave Sultan. We have large armies, but where is our brave Sultan?! If Saif al-Din Qutuz had thought with the mentality of some of the military commanders and rulers today, marked by defeatism, pleas of unfavourable balance of power, attempts to send reassuring messages to the enemies, pledging to abide by laws made by the kuffar, there would not have been victory in Ain Jalut, and Islam and Muslims would have become a thing of the past.

However, Qutuz saw the world through the lens of the Deen. He understood the sources of ideological strength in the Ummah. So he led his weak, fledgling military formation to a historic victory against the fiercest civilization in human history, repelling the Mongol invasion from the lands of Muslims, despite the great differences in power between them.

O Military Officers of the Ummah!

Allah (swt) said, ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَنصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ﴾ **“If you support Allah (swt), He will support you and make your foothold firm.”** [TMQ Surah Muhammad 47:7]. Supporting Allah (swt) is by supporting His Deen, applying His (swt) Shariah Law, establishing Islam’s Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly-Guided Caliphate) and mobilizing armies under the leadership of a brave Khaleefah Rashid. So, respond.

O Allah (swt)! Bear witness that the message is conveyed!

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