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Research paper

Al-quwwah: The Core of Leadership in Islam

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Abstract

This article discusses the concept of Al-Quwwah as the core of leadership in Islam, as well as the crucial elements in Al-Quwwah in instilling this concept in the present leadership. The elements of Al-Quwwah are strength of mind ('aqliyyah), strength of soul (nafsiy-yah), knowledge and physical strength.

Keywords: *Al-Quwwah; Elements of Al-Quwwah; Islamic leadership; Core of Leadership*

1. Introduction

In a hadith narrated by Imam Muslim, from Abu Zar, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:
"*O Abu Zar, verily I see you as a weak person, verily I like for you of what I like for myself. So, do not be a leader of two and should you never manage the properties of orphans*".
In this hadith, Abu Zar was not given any post by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) although Abu Zar was a companion who Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) loved very much. This was due to the qualities that Abu Zar did not quite possess. This shows that even though Abu Zar was a good companion and being loved by Rasulullah (SAW) and he was pious and zuhd, the post needed more than just the qualities that Abu Zar had. Not all companions were able to carry out duties in politics or siyasah. Not all those who are pious are able to manage politics matters. Hence, Syeikh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyyah, a sunni ulama had debated this issue in which he proposed that Muslims were not supposed to appoint or give authority in politics to those who were not capable even though the persons had religious qualification or the persons were pious and Muslims should not lose their focus in this issue [1].
Other than that, this hadith also explain about the importance of the responsibilities of a leader in management and not any Tom, Dick or Harry can carry out such huge responsibilities.It is crucial for a leader to have the right capabilities to carry out the duties as a leader because if he or she does not have that, it will cause damage to the society and ummah in general. Prophet Muhammad often reminded us about the responsibilities and their detrimental effects if the responsibilities were not carried out successfully. Leadership post is a responsibility, thus it needs careful selection or ownership and failure to do so is considered a traitor. Hence, what is the fundamental in selecting and appointing leaders who are capable for a post? Based on Al-Qasas surah, ayah 26, Allah SWT says:
"*One of the women said, "O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy*."(Surah Al Qasas, 28:26).
In this ayah, Prophet Moses was inherited with two attributes which were Al-Qawwiy (strong) and Al-Amanah (trustworthy). Therefore, the task or the responbility of a post given to a person must be based on these two attributes. As stated by Syeikh al-Islam Ibn Taimiyyah in the as-Siyasah asy-Syar'iyyah fi Islah ar-Ra'i wa ar-Ra'i yyah, the two main attributes in Islamic leadership are Al-Quwwah which is the strength, the capability and the skill in carrying out a task or a responsibility and Al-Amanah which means can be trusted or responsible (having integrity and accountability). Both of these attributes are crucial for a true Muslim leader [2-4]. In this article, Al-Quwwah will be discussed as the core or the fundamental of leadership.

2. Definition

Muslims and Islamic scholars [1, 5] have defined Al-Quwwah based on these factors.
Based on the understanding of syarak, Quwwah refers to strength and competency. Al-Quwwah is assessed based on the context or the situation in leadership. For example, when a leader is given a post which is related to economy, then the concept of Al- Quwaah in his leadership will be on his expertise, knowledge, skill and experience in economy. In other words, a leader has to have authority in the area that he or she is managing or administering. To illustrate, a judge has to have expertise, knowledge, skill and experience in laws and regulations. A person should have an authority which have been mentioned (expertise, knowledge, skill and experience) so that he or she is capable in being a leader and carrying out all duties as Allah's servants. Al-Quwwah can also be defined as having the ability and capability in managing and executing all given tasks. It also has important elements which can be divided into four. They are mind (aqliyyah), soul (nafsiyyah)[6], knowledge and physical strength.

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3. Elements of Al-Quwwah

As stated by [7] in an article titled Al-Quwwah and Trustworthiness The Core of Today's Islamic Leadership and in a thesis report by [8] titled Leadership from The Quran Relationship between Taqwa, Trust and Business Leadership Effectiveness, there are four crucial elements in the concept of Al-Quwwah which are 'aqliyyah, nafsiyah, knowledge and physical as illustrated in Figure 1. According to Ibnu Taimiyyah [7], strength refers to the strength of the mind (aqliyyah) and the soul (nafsiyyah). Al-Quwwah also means the capability to implement. Hence, the important elements in Al-Quwwah are knowledge and physical strength [8].

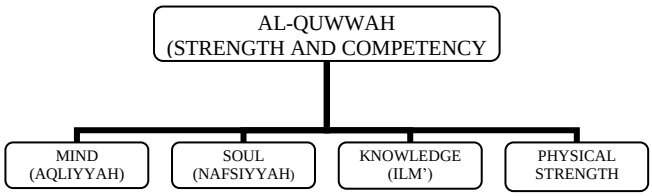


Fig. 1: Elements of Al-Quwwah

3.1. Mind (Aqliyyah)

In term of estimology, mind means to think about something and to understand it. In term of terminology, there are four levels of mind which is illustrates in Figure 2. The first level is 'al-aql al-hayulani' which is the mind that has the potential to think but is yet trained. The second level is 'al-aql bi al-malakah' which the trained mind to think about things in abstract forms. The third level is 'al-'aql bi al-fi'li' which is the mind that is bale to think about abstract forms and finally, 'al-'aql al-mustafad' which refers to the mind that is able to think about abstract form of things easily and it can easily absorb information or knowledge form the active mind'al-'aql al-fa'al'[9]. In addition, according to [10], there are four types of minds. The first mind is the mind that only thinks about the worldly things. The second mind is the mind that thinks about the various questions on the world hereafter, the third mind is the mind that thinks about the spirituality and the final mind thinks about the universe or it is called the universal mind.

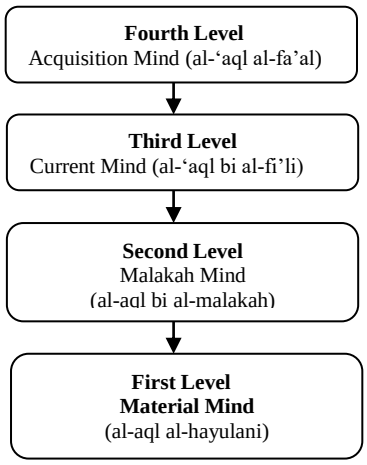


Fig. 2: Level of Mind

A leader must have a strong mind. A strong mind will enable a leader to make wise and smart decisions, based on the syariat of Islam. This is described in a hadith narrated by Abu Nu'aim in his book Hilyatul Auliyaa:

'There is no main gift to mankind from Allah except for the gift of mind. A mind-ful person's sleep is more meaningful than a foolish's consciousness. A mind-ful person who is left behind is more important that a foolish who has gone. Allah did not send a prophet nor a Rasul before He perfected the mind, and his mind is more important than all his ummah's mind'

The above hadith illustrates the importance of having a strong mind especially among the leaders. Should a leader have a weak mind, he or she is not able to solve problems faced by the followers or subordinates especially those which need quick solutions or actions. A leader with a great mind usually has a great soul that is able to protect people and make them feel secure and safe. As stated by [11], leadership in Islam refers to process of inspiring and coaching voluntary followers in an effort to achieve a clear and defined shared vision. For example, Prophet Muhammad was successful in unifying two groups which were the Aus and the Khazraj that became the catalyst to the unity and understanding in his administration and leadership [12].

One of the traits that show a leader has a strong mind is they have a good communication skills or in the context of Islam, they practices consultation (Shura) [6]. Shura means sharing views and exchange of opinions in any important issue [13]. In Islam, leaders must consult with their followers before making any decision. Besides, they also must discuss with their followers in formulating or planning any strategy or policy [14]. For example Prophet Muhammad practiced Shura all the times. For example, he consulted his followers before going to the battles of Badar, Uhud and Khandak [8]. As Allah S.W.T says in Surah Al-Shura:

"*And those who have answered the call of their lord and establish prayer and who conduct their affairs by consultation and spend out what we bestow on them for sustenance*" (Surah Al-Shura: 38).

And, in Surah Ali' Imran, Allah says:

"*And ask for His forgiveness for them; and consult with them in affairs. Then when you made a decision, put trust in Allah*." (Surah Al'Imran:159).

Other than that, a leader with a good aqliyyah also encourages freedom of thought. In the context of an organization wise, practicing managers or executives should form such practices in the organization so that the staff members can easily contributes and give opinion on any issue [14]. For example, a wise leader like Prophet Muhammad SAW was able to get his fellow followers to communicate and express their concerns and he established a center where they could get together and discussed their concerns and had activities conducted there. This center is what we now call masjid, a place that has multifunctions and centralized activities so that the ummah can interact well with one another in carrying out their duties as the servants of Allah [12].

3.2. Soul (Nafsiyyah)

The concept of soul has been explained by a great scholar Ibnu Sina [9]. A soul comes from the mind. A person's soul comes from his or her mind. Ibnu Sina has divided the concept of soul into three which are souls of plants (an-nafs an-nabatiah), souls of animals (an-nafs al hayawaniyyah) dan souls of mankind (an-nafs an-nathiqah). All these souls present in us and the kind of soul that we have will depend on how or what we want it to be. Should we have and choose to be more like the animals, then our soul is the soul of animals. In this study, the concept of souls of mankind will be discussed due to their association with leadership. Meanwhile, Imam Ghazali [15] found seven different levels of soul which is shown in Table 1. According to [6], among the attributes of leaders who have the strength of the soul are patience and perseverance. These leaders are also courageous, do not give up and they are willing to make sacrifices. According to [13], patience (sabr) is one of the essential quality for a leader. This quality helps a leader to do something with great care. By having this quality, the leader are able to overcome criticism of opposition, failure in desired success and debate in the decision making. An outstanding example of a leader who possesses this quality is shown by Prophet Muhammad during his suffering at the hands of the people of Ta'if in the tenth year of his mission in Makkah. Instead of seeking revenge, the Prophet prayed for their guidance [16]. This also

proved that Prophet Muhammad not only patience but also a lenient and forgiving leader. As Allah says in Surah Al-Imran,

"*It was by the Mercy of Allah that you were lenient with them, for if you had been stern and fierce of heart, they would have dispersed from you. So pardon them and seek forgiveness for them and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs. And when you are resolved, then put yourrust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who put their trust in Him*" (Surah Al-Imran: 159).

Table 1: Level of Souls

Level of Soul	Description
The first level is the desire to do evil things.	This is the lowest level of soul because this desire breeds attributes such as arrogance, greed, jealousy, lust,etc. This desire must be fought.
The second level is nafs al-lawwamah.	At this level, there is a better conscience among people than those in the first level. This is because, at this level, Allah has whispered to people's soul and the soul is conscious of the weaknesses that it bears and eventually, it would return to goodness.
The third level is nafs al-mulhamah which means inspired souls.	This is the highest level of soul that has the most needs and requires the most actions. This level of soul wants to absorb all principles. The soul is able to identify that it needs to have pristine actions and intentions.
The fourth level is nafs al-mutma'innah or the calm soul.	At this level, the soul has unshaken faith or imaan, thus it is not prone to bad behaviours. The calm soul will not put material as the main priority.
The fifth level is nafs al-radhiyah or the contented soul.	At this level, the soul is able to accept the way it is. Its wants for Allah is huge. This soul is the one that is depicted in the du'a "*O Allah, you are my destiny and my purpose and your complacent is my need*".
The sixth level is nafs al-mardhiyyah or the delighted soul.	At this level, there is no more sighing, anger, regret and all behaviours are calm and composed.
The seventh level is nafs al-safiyah or the sincere and pristine soul.	A person is attributed to be a perfect human to have this level of soul. He or she relies only on Allah and always seeks for and receives His guidance. His or her actions result from pure conscience.

Besides that, showing courage and the ability to take calculated risks is also one of the characteristics of having strong soul. To inspire others to execute great feats, a leader must be seen as someone who is not afraid to face danger [17]. Examples of courage can be seen in the battle of Badr, Prophet Muhammad was clearly taking a great risk to defend Medina with only 330 Muslim as compared to 3000 Quraish but he won that battle which an ordinary leader will retreat. As similar with the expedition to Tabuk, they taking a great risk as only 30 000 Muslims marched across the desert to confront a Roman army of 100 000.

In addition, other example of a leader who also possessed this attribute is Saidina Ali Bin Thalib. This could be seen when Rasullulah S.A.W. took a hijrah to Madinah together with Saidina Abu Bakar Al-Siddiq, and it was Saidina Ali who was asked to stay at the Prophet's house and slept on his bed to deceive the Quraisy so that they believed that the Prophet was still at home as they planned to assassinate him. Saidina Ali was able to carry out the duty without any fear or doubt and he had helped Prophet Muhammad SAW and Saidina Abu Bakar Al-Siddiq to leave Mekah safe and sound and without the Quraisy knew about it. Saidina Ali was also known for his bravery and he was a great warrior who was feared by his enemies. He inherited a sword from Rasullullah SAW that was named 'Zulfikar'. He was known to join all wars during the reign of Prophet Muhammad SAW and he was always in the front line.

Lastly, a leader who has strong soul also possessed spirit of sacrifice. Sacrifices are yet other traits which a leader cannot be exemplary. A Muslim leader must be seen to be making sacrifices; only then the followers will make greater sacrifices. Sacrifices consist of both material and physical sacrifices. The Prophets never did anything that give advantage to themselves or their families. In fact, they made great personal sacrifices for Allah SWT and their followers. It can be seen when Prophet Ibrahim received command from Allah SWT to sacrifice his son, Ismail whom he loved so much. Prophet Ibrahim was willing to make a personal sacrifice for Allah and was honoured for his faithfulness to Allah as stated in Surah As-Saafat,

"*And when he reached with him [the age of] exertion, he said, "O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think." He said, "O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast." And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead, We called to him, "O Abraham, You have fulfilled the vision." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was the clear trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice, And We left for him [favorable mention] among later generations.*" (Surah As-Saafat: 102-108).

A leader must also be strong in term of his or her soul. A strong soul will help a leader or a person to make the right and smart decision, without any prejudice and being rationale and patient. Should a leader has a weak soul, he or she is inclined to be anxious, emotional and make hasty decisions. Such a leader will definitely cause trouble to his or her fellow subordinates. In a haith narrated by Abu Hurairah, Rasulullah S.A.W said:

"*A mukmin who is better loved by Allah is the one who has the strength than those who do not, and each has advantages. Be more enthusiastic in things which are beneficial for you and seek Allah's help and don't feel lazy and should something happen to you, say "Qodarulloh wa maa syaa'a fa'al, It has been fated by Allah and what He wants will surely happen*" (Hadith narrated by Muslim).

3.3. Knowledge and Physical Strength

Knowledge can divided into three types [10] which are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2.

Types of Knowledge	Explanation
Syariat	Refers to the knowledge that is related to the life in this world, rules and regulations which have physical consequences.
Batiniah	Refers to the knowledge on causes and effects.
Wisdom of the Rohaniah (Spiritual)	Refers to the knowledge that is related to spirit or the knowledge on self through the spirit which brings us to know Allah (makrifatullah)

Among the important elements in the concept of Al-Quwwah as the core in Islamic leadership are to have much knowledge and physical strength. Knowledge is power and any leader who desires to excel in his leadership process must acquire knowledge. In Islam, the acquisition of knowledge was given high priority even at the very inception of the religion. In the Quran it has been mentioned that a leader must have knowledge prior to his followers. Knowledge can be developed through study and hard work. It is also mentioned in the Quran that a leader must acquire the knowledge and seek guidance directly from Allah as mentioned in the Surah of Al-Baqarah, Ayah 247,

"*And their prophet said to them, "Indeed, Allah has sent to you Saul as a king." They said, "How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than him and he has not been given any measure of wealth?" He said, "Indeed, Allah has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allah gives His sovereignty to whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing [in favor] and Knowing.*" (Surah Al-Baqarah: 247).

This ayah also states that knowledge and physical strength are important in being appointed as Thalut (A name for King used at that time). This too was mentioned by [18] in which he stated that Thalut should have knowledge and physical strength especially

prior to a war. Meanwhile, in the Surah of Yusuf, ayah 55 also explains that,

"[Joseph] said, "Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian". (Surah Yusuf: 55).

To have knowledge about a matter that is under one's authority is crucial in being a leader. [18] explained that knowledge in this ayah refers to information and understanding which are sufficient about the responsibilities that are going to be carried out.

Besides, Prophet Muhammad was a great developer of knowledge culture. In many of his sayings, he has repeatedly advised his followers to acquire knowledge. For example, Prophet Muhammad says "Whoever follows a path in the pursuit of knowledge, Allah (SWT) will make Paradise easy for him." (Sahih al-Bukhaari), "The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr", and "seek knowledge even if it is in China "are just a few of the sayings which strongly recommend the acquisition of knowledge and learning. In addition, Umar was also knowledgeable. He was capable of acquiring nine of ten disciplines. With this acquisition, Umar was able to spread Islam by conquering several regions such as Persia, Egypt, Syam, Iraq, Burqah, West of Tripoli, Azerbaijan, Jurjan, Basrah, Kufah and Cairo. Although he had wisdom and physical strength, he was very humble and lived a simple life. He was zuhud too [12].

Saidina Ali also knowledgeable in many disciplines in Islam. Prophet Muhammad SAW said,

"*I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gateaway*".

Due to this, Saidina Ali's advice and fatwa were accepted and respected by the caliphs and he was often stationed at the office of Kadi or Mufti. In fact, Saidina Ali's wisdom in politics could be observed when he was appointed officially as the caliph. All officials who were appointed by Saidina Uthman including Mu'awaiyah were replaced and new offices were set up. The lands that were provided to the family of Saidina Uthman were also taken back and he kept a close monitoring on his officials so that no corruption or deviance could take place. These were carried out by him in 36 Hijriah. Saidina Ali's reign was also successful in expanding their government to other regions and seized the rebellion in Kabul and Sistan. New occupancies were built in Syria and strong fort was established in Parsi.

4. Conclusion

All in all, it can be said that Al-Quwwah is important as the core of Islamic leadership. The elements such as the strength of soul (nafsiyyah), strength of mind (aqliyyah), physical strength and knowledge should be applied in today's leadership.

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