The Development of Muslim Military Thought to the Liberation of Jerusalem in 1187 AD

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Abstract

This study examines the development of Muslim military thought from the early military encounters to the liberation of Jerusalem in 1187 A.D. Through historical and textual analysis, comparative conceptual mapping, and close reading of five key texts—*Mukhtaṣar fī Siyāsat al-Ḥurūb*, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*, *Nahj al-Maslūk fī Siyāsat al-Mulūk*, *Tabṣirat Arbāb al-Albāb*, and *al-Tadhkirah al-Ḥarawiyyah fī al-Ḥiyal al-Ḥarbiyyah*—the research traces how military ethics, governance, logistics, and strategy evolved in response to Byzantine, Crusader, and internal challenges. Drawing on manuscript sources and critical editions, the study highlights the integration of religious legitimacy, administrative order, and tactical adaptation in figures like Nūr al-Dīn Zangī and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī. Key findings include the role of the Sunnī revival in renewing strategic coherence and the layered interaction between legal theory, statecraft, and technical expertise. Limitations include uneven textual preservation and gaps in commentary, but the analysis affirms the strategic depth of Islamic military tradition during the aforementioned periods.

Keywords: Premodern strategic literature, military ethics, institutional reform, tactical innovation, administrative legitimacy

Introduction

The present study examines the intellectual evolution of Muslim military thought from the early military engagements through to the liberation of Jerusalem in 1187 A.D. It investigates how warfare was conceptualised and articulated within an Islamic worldview, which was influenced by legal authority, political legitimacy, strategic adaptation, and religious duty. The interactions with the Byzantine Empire, the Crusader invasions, and the institutional consolidation of the Sunnī revival all contributed to the development of a complex tradition in which warfare was perceived not only as a means of defence and expansion but also as a component of just governance and civilisational stewardship. While the study considers key figures such as Nūr al-Dīn Zangī (1118–1174) and Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, styled Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (c. 1137–1193), as exemplars of this tradition, its primary focus lies in the close reading and comparative analysis of five key texts: *Mukhtaṣar fī Siyāsat al-Ḥurūb* (*The Conspectus of War Management*) by Abū Saʿīd al-Shaʿrānī al-Harthamī (fl. early 9th century),[1] *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah* (*The Ordinances of Government*) by Abūʾl-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Māwardī (widely known as al-Imām al-Māwardī, 975–1058),[2] *Nahj al-Maslūk fī Siyāsat al-Mulūk* (*The Path Adopted in the Governance of Kings*) by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shayzarī (d. 1194),[3] *Tabṣirat Arbāb al-Albāb* (*Insight for the Discerning Minds*) by Murḍā ibn ʿAlī al-Ṭarsūsī (d. 1193),[4] and *al-Tadhkirah al-Ḥarawiyyah fī al-Ḥiyal al-Ḥarbiyyah* (*Al-Harawī's Counsel on Military Stratagems*) by Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Abī Bakr al-Harawī (c. 1145–1215).[5]

These works reflect different yet interrelated dimensions of Muslim military thinking—from command ethics and legal frameworks to logistical systems and tactical ingenuity. Despite their significance, such treatises remain understudied as a unified tradition, often examined in isolation or without attention to

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[1] Abū Saʿīd al-Shaʿrānī al-Harthamī, *Mukhtaṣar Siyāsah*, hereinafter cited as *Mukhtaṣar*, ed. ʿĀrif Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghanī, 1st ed. (Damascus: Dār Kanān, 1995).
[2] Abū-ʾl-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Mawardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah waʾl-Wilāyāt al-Dīniyyah*, hereinafter cited as *Aḥkām*, ed. Aḥmad Jād (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006).
[3] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Naṣr al-Shayzārī, "Nahj al-Maslūk fī Siyasat al-Mulūk," hereinafter cited as "Nahj," in *Kitāb al-Siyāsah*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd and Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2002), 71–200.
[4] Claude Cahen, "Un Traité d'Armurerie Composé pour Saladin," hereinafter cited as "Un Traité," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 12 (1947–1948): 103–163, accessed 17 November 2013, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41603236.
[5] 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," hereinafter cited as "Les Conseils," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 17, (1961–1962): 205–268.

their strategic coherence. This study addresses that gap by analysing how these texts collectively illustrate the evolution of military thought within a broader Islamic worldview shaped by both normative ideals and historical realities.

Literature Review

Recent contributions have broadened the scope of inquiry into Muslim military thought by approaching military treatises not merely as technical or juridical works, but as texts situated within evolving intellectual traditions. Muḥammad Husni Mohd Amin's "Worldview, Strategy, and Strategic Principles in Three Muslim Military Treatises" examines works such as *Mukhtaṣar* and *Tadhkirah* through the conceptual lenses of *tadbīr* (governance), *siyāsah* (policy), and *ḥiyal* (stratagems),[6] arguing that these categories reflect a broader epistemic framework shaped by Sunnī-Ashʿarī principles. This position is extended in "Solidification of Worldview, Liberation Strategy and Revival of Sunnism," where the author situates twelfth-century military reform within the theological consolidation of the eleventh century, particularly through the contributions of al-Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (1028–1085) and Ḥujjatuʾl-Islām al-Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (c. 1058–1111).[7] The argument advanced is that this doctrinal environment provided the normative and institutional basis for strategic activity under figures such as Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. Together, these studies provide the methodological and conceptual framing for the present analysis.

Other recent works have contributed complementary insights. Felix Oyosoro, in "Beyond Jihad: The Islamic Contributions to the Field of Strategic Studies," questions the exclusion of Islamic sources from modern strategic theory and highlights the significance of thinkers such as al-Māwardī and al-Ghazālī for state-centred approaches to warfare.[8] Hugh Kennedy's "The Evolution of the Term Sulṭān in Early Islam" traces shifts in political vocabulary,[9] offering useful context for understanding administrative perspectives embedded in works such as *Nahj*. On the Crusader side, Ayşe Çekiç's "Manifesting the Crusaders' Instinct for Violence in the Context of the Capture of Antioch" examines how theological justifications for violence shaped Crusader conduct,[10] reinforcing the asymmetry of ideological worldviews across the frontier.

Meanwhile, Khalif Muammar and Rizky Febrian's "Post-Ghazali Islamic Philosophy in the Sunnī and Shiʿite Traditions" challenges the persistence of the "decline narrative" by demonstrating continued activity in *kalām* (discursive theology), logic, politics, and epistemology.[11] Collectively, these works support a view of the five treatises under study—*Mukhtaṣar*, *Aḥkām*, *Nahj*, *Tabṣirat*, and *Tadhkirah*—as reflective of a wider tradition of strategic reasoning informed by metaphysical, legal, and administrative thought. While further investigation is required to map intertextual linkages and institutional uptake, the literature increasingly enables a more integrated reading of premodern Muslim military texts.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a historical-analytical approach grounded in close textual reading and contextual interpretation of primary sources. It focuses on five key Arabic treatises—*Mukhtaṣar*, *Aḥkām*, *Nahj*, *Tabṣirat*, and *Tadhkirah*—selected for their thematic diversity and historical relevance across the ʿAbbāsid, Saljūq, and Ayyūbid periods. Rather than applying a rigid typology, the study traces strategic and conceptual developments through comparative textual analysis and alignment with historical conditions. The research involved direct consultation of Arabic source texts, with critical editions prioritised where available; English translations and secondary literature were used selectively to

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[6] Muhammad Husni Mohd Amin, "Worldview, Strategy, and Strategic Principles in Three Muslim Military Treatises," hereinafter cited as "Worldview," *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 16, no. 2 (2023): 33–60.

[7] Muhammad Husni Mohd Amin, "Solidification of Worldview, Liberation Strategy and Revival of Sunnism Leading to the 12th Century A.D. / 6th Century A.H. Muslim Liberation of Jerusalem," hereinafter cited as "Solidification," *AFKAR: Journal of ʿAqidah & Islamic Thought* 26, no. 1 (2024): 121–166.

[8] Felix Idongesit Oyosoro, "Beyond Jihad: The Islamic Contributions to the Field of Strategic Studies," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 24 (2023): 44–52.

[9] Hugh Kennedy, "The Evolution of the Term Sulṭān in Early Islam," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 11, no. 1 (2024): 1–17.

[10] Ayşe Çekiç, "Manifesting the Crusaders' Instinct for Violence in the Context of the Capture of Antioch," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 2 (2024): 267–276.

[11] Khalif Muammar and Rizky Febrian, "Post-Ghazali Islamic Philosophy in the Sunni and Shiʿite Traditions," *Afkar: Journal of ʿAqidah & Islamic Thought* 25, no. 2 (2023): 459–498.

support interpretation. Particular attention was given to recurring concepts and terms such as ʿadl (justice), amānah (trust), wilāyah (delegated authority), imāmah (leadership), and ḥiyal (stratagems), examining their usage and significance within each treatise. Contextualisation was key: *Mukhtaṣar* was considered within early ʿAbbāsid administrative tensions; *Aḥkām* within the Buwayhid era's centralised legalism; *Nahj* in relation to late Saljūq and early Ayyūbid governance; *Tabṣirat* against Ayyūbid logistical and industrial reforms; and *Tadhkirah* within the strategic climate of the Sunnī revival and Crusader conflict. Textual coherence, conceptual clarity, and historical alignment guided interpretation. Limitations included the fragmentary manuscript status of *Tabṣirat* and *Tadhkirah*, the obscure biographical record of figures like al-Harthamī and al-Ṭarsūsī, and the scarcity of critical editions or commentaries for lesser-known works. Despite these challenges, the study aims to contribute to a more integrated understanding of Muslim military thought, treating these texts not as isolated manuals but as historically embedded responses to shifting political and strategic realities.

Results and Discussion

Early Expansion and the Institutional Foundations of Muslim Military Thought

The first significant military engagement between Muslims and the Byzantine Empire occurred in 629, following the killing of a Muslim envoy by a Ghassānid governor, a Byzantine client.[12] In response, the Prophet Muḥammad (c. 570–632) dispatched an expeditionary force of 3,000 men. Though defeated by a much larger Byzantine army at the Battle of Muʾtah, the Muslims, under the leadership of Khālid ibn al-Walīd (d. 642), executed a tactical withdrawal that preserved the force.[13] While limited in scale, the battle signalled a growing Muslim willingness to engage imperial powers and adapt to conventional military pressures.

By the early seventh century, decades of conflict between Byzantium and the Sāsānian Empire had left both exhausted.[14] After consolidating authority in the Arabian Peninsula during the Riddah Wars, Caliph Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (r. 632–634) launched campaigns in Iraq and Syria under Khālid's command.[15] These incursions were aimed at stabilising frontiers and addressing the vulnerability of Muslim populations in contested territories.[16] The early Muslim army, though lightly equipped, demonstrated high mobility and tactical responsiveness. Cavalry units (katāʾib)[17] wielded the *sayf* (sword), *ḥarbah* (spear), and *rumḥ* (lance) and were supported by reconnaissance (ṭalīʿah) and raiding detachments (sariyyah).[18] Their organisation reflected influences from Persian and Byzantine cavalry formations. Armour consisted of chainmail (diriʿ), iron helmets (bayḍah), and mail hoods (mighfar).[19]

Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–644) oversaw a significant expansion of these campaigns.[20] In 636, Khālid led Muslim forces to a major victory at the Battle of Yarmūk, defeating a superior Byzantine force[21] and securing Damascus.[22] Jerusalem surrendered peacefully in 637 following a lengthy siege by Abū ʿUbaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 639).[23] In 639, Egypt was targeted by ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. 664), whose campaign benefited from Coptic disaffection with Byzantine rule.[24] Egypt was secured

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[12] For an exposition on the vassalage-alliance between the Ghassānids and Byzantines, see Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, Volume 1, Part I: Political and Military History* and *Volume 1, Part II: Ecclesiastical History* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995); Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hishām, commonly known as Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, hereinafter cited as *Sīrah*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1990), 4:11–16; Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tāʾrīkh al-Ṭabarī* or *Tāʾrīkh al-umam wa-ʾl-mulūk*, hereinafter cited as *Tāʾrīkh*, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2012), 2:149; Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, hereinafter cited as *Muhammad*, 1st ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983); this ed. (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2006), 297.

[13] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, 4:16; al-Ṭabarī, *Tāʾrīkh*, 2:149–50. See also Zakaria Bashier, *War and Peace in the Life of the Prophet Muḥammad* (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 2007), 218–22; Walter E. Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 99.

[14] Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, hereinafter cited as *Grand Strategy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009), 198–199.

[15] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tāʾrīkh al-Khulafāʾ*, hereinafter cited as *Tāʾrīkh*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2014), 157–161.

[16] Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In*, hereinafter cited as *Great Arab Conquests* (Boston: De Capo Press, 2007), 74–80.

[17] Ibid., 57–59.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Abdel Rahman Zaky, "Medieval Arab Arms," in *Islamic Arms and Armour*, ed. Robert Elgood (London: Scolar Press, 1979), 203.

[20] Al-Suyūṭī, *Tāʾrīkh*, 237–238.

[21] Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 199.

[22] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tāʾrīkh*, 2:443. See also Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 82–83 and 87; Hoffman Nickerson, *Warfare in the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003), 84.

[23] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tāʾrīkh*, 2:448.

[24] Ibid., 2:448–512.

by 641 and defended successfully against a Byzantine counteroffensive in 646.[25] These campaigns were characterised by calculated manoeuvres and timely diplomacy. Under Caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (r. 644–656), Muslim expansion continued westward, culminating in the conquest of Sufetula in 647. These early efforts reflected a transition from raiding to sustained territorial acquisition, supported by emerging administrative mechanisms.

By the Umayyad period (661–750), military activity was increasingly formalised.[26] The need to manage sieges, defend cities, and operate across vast distances necessitated greater reliance on mechanical innovation. Siege weapons such as mangonels, catapults, and trebuchets became standard.[27] By the tenth century, scholars like Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Kātib al-Khawārizmī began categorising military sciences into two main fields: *ʿilm al-handasah* (engineering) and *ʿilm al-ḥiyal* (mechanics), reflecting a growing interest in systematic approaches to warfare.[28] The ʿAbbāsid era (from 750) intensified this intellectual turn. Scientific institutions such as Bayt al-Ḥikmah in Baghdad fostered the development of mechanical and military knowledge. The Banū Mūsā brothers (d. 873), known for their *Kitāb al-Ḥiyal* (*Book of Ingenious Devices*), produced a range of mechanical inventions, some of which had military applications.[29] Their work reflects an environment in which scientific and strategic thought were increasingly integrated. These developments coincided with the peak of ʿAbbāsid military reach under caliphs such as al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775) and Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809), whose forces operated across diverse frontiers from al-Andalus to the Byzantine borders.[30] By the mid-10th century, the regional military balance began to shift again. The Ḥamdānid dynasty, particularly under Sayf al-Dawlah (r. 945–967), confronted a revitalised Byzantine army strengthened by the reforms of Emperor Leo VI (r. 886–912).[31] His military manual, *Taktika* (*Tactics*),[32] contributed to Byzantine tactical resurgence. Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969) led several successful campaigns into Muslim-held territory,[33] illustrating the re-emergence of Byzantium as a capable adversary. Muslim responses to this pressure were mixed. Some regions faced internal instability, while others—such as Aleppo—attempted doctrinal and logistical adaptation.

Within this broader context of political fragmentation, Islamic legal and political theory evolved. One of the most influential scholars of this period was Imām al-Māwardī, a jurisconsult who served as chief *qāḍī* under Caliph al-Qāʾim (r. 1031–1075). Operating during the dominance of the Buwayhids—a Shīʿī military dynasty that overshadowed the Sunnī caliphate—al-Māwardī authored *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*, a key treatise on Islamic governance. The work delineates the responsibilities of the leader (*imām*), including provisions for military leadership, internal security, and the regulation of force.[34] Al-Māwardī's discussions of *imārah ʿalā al-jihād* (military command in offensive warfare) and *wilāyah ʿalā ḥurūb al-maṣāliḥ* (authority over internal campaigns against rebels or bandits)[35] reflect a comprehensive understanding of strategic responsibility. The emphasis on *maṣlaḥah ʿāmmah* (public interest), lawful delegation, and accountability underlines his broader objective of safeguarding Sunnī political continuity within a fragmented polity.

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[25] Ibid., 594 & 598.

[26] Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 295–296; Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1954; repr. New York: Dover Publications, 2001), 155–58; W. Montgomery Watt and Pierre Cachia, *A History of Islamic Spain*, 1st ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 13–16.

[27] Edmund Bosworth, "Armies of the Prophet: Strategy, Tactics and Weapon," in *Islamic Warfare in Islam and the Arab World*, ed. Bernard Lewis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 202. See also Donald R. Hill, "XIX: Trebuchet," in *Studies in Medieval Islamic Technology: From Philo to al-Jazarī – from Alexandria to Diyār Bakr*, ed. David A. King (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, Variorum Reprints, 1998), 99–101.

[28] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf al-Kātib al-Khawārizmī, *Mafātīḥ al-ʿUlūm* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyah, 1981), 266. Not to be confused with the polymath Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khawārizmī (d. c. 850), he authored one of the earliest encyclopaedias in Islam, *Mafātīḥ al-ʿUlūm* (Keys of the Sciences), completed in 977 CE at the behest of a vizier. See C. E. Bosworth, "A Pioneer Arabic Encyclopedia of the Sciences: Al Khwarizmi's Keys of the Sciences," *Isis* 54, no. 1 (1963): 80; Amjad M. Hussain, *A Social History of Education in the Muslim World: From the Prophetic Era to Ottoman Times* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd., 2011), 133–34.

[29] Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf al-Qifṭī, *Ikhbār al-ʿUlamāʾ bi Akhbār al-Ḥukamāʾ*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2005), 238.

[30] Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, 158.

[31] Translator's introduction to *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, trans. George T. Dennis (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Texts, 1985), 137–38.

[32] Ibid. See also translator's introduction in Leo VI, *The Taktika of Leo VI: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, trans. George T. Dennis (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), ix.

[33] Translator's introduction to *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 137–39; John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, trans. John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 257–260.

[34] Al-Mawardī, *Aḥkām*, 39–41.

[35] Ibid., 69–105.

The Saljūqs rose to prominence as de facto protectors of the caliphate, initially entering Baghdad as allies of the Sunnī cause.[36] Ṭughril Beg's (r. 1037–1063) seizure of Baghdad in 1055 restored nominal Sunnī authority and marked the end of Buwayhid control.[37] Though the caliph remained a symbolic figure, Saljūq sultans exercised real power. This shift enabled greater administrative coherence and military centralisation. Alp Arslān's (r. 1063–1072) victory at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 decisively weakened Byzantine control of Anatolia and opened a new frontier for Muslim expansion.[38] The consequences were far-reaching: the Saljūq court became a centre for administrative and legal development, while new pressures emerged from the Crusader advance by the end of the century.

Taken together, the developments reveal a gradual but discernible evolvement in Muslim military thought. What began as small-scale frontier engagements became increasingly systematised through legal codification, technical innovation, and strategic planning. Military doctrine was no longer shaped solely by charismatic leadership or improvised tactics; by the eleventh century, it had come to reflect more complex institutional realities. Treatises such as *Mukhtaṣar*, *Aḥkām*, and later works like *Nahj*, *Tabṣirat*, and *Tadhkirah* emerge against this backdrop. They reflect not only historical pressures but also an intellectual framework in which warfare was understood as a component of just governance and social order.

The Twelfth-Century Strategic Revival: From Disunity to Coordinated Liberation

The Byzantine defeat at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 marked a shift in the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean. The loss of much of Anatolia compelled Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118) to seek Western military support. Pope Urban II (c. 1035–1099) responded by calling for a Holy War at the Council of Clermont in 1095.[39] His appeal led to the mobilisation of large numbers of Latin Christians, with an estimated 300,000 Crusaders from France, Italy, England, and Germany arriving in Constantinople by 1096. Their objective was the recovery of Jerusalem, but their route took them through Anatolia and Syria,[40] intensifying pressure on the already divided Muslim world.

At this time, the Islamic polity was marked by political fragmentation.[41] The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate retained symbolic religious authority but lacked real political power, which had shifted to Turkish military elites. Although Ṭughril Beg had restored the caliphate in Baghdad in 1055, power remained dispersed among regional rulers, such as ʿImād al-Dīn Zangī (r. 1127–1146), who governed autonomously.[42] The *iqṭāʿ* system, intended to ensure loyalty through land grants, often entrenched decentralisation.[43] Sectarian divisions between Sunnī and Shīʿī communities—especially with the rise of Ḥanbalī traditionalism and the Nizārī Ismaʿīlīs[44]—further destabilised the Muslim response.[45] Although the Crusaders faced early setbacks, such as at Xerigordon, they defeated Sulṭān Qilij Arslān I (r. 1092–1107) at Nicaea in 1097 and soon captured Antioch and Edessa.[46] Efforts at Muslim resistance were weakened by a lack of coordination, as illustrated by Karbughā (d. 1102) of Mosul's failed attempt to retake Antioch.[47] In June 1099, a Crusader force of approximately 13,000 besieged Jerusalem.[48] Despite determined resistance by the Fāṭimid governor Iftikhār al-Dawlah,[49] the city fell

[36] For further elucidation on the origins and establishment of the Saljūqid state, see Aziz Başan, *The Great Seljuqs: A History*, hereinafter cited as *Great Seljuqs* (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 21–27; translator's introduction to "Mission to the Volga," in *Two Arabic Travel Books*, trans. and eds. Tim Mackintosh-Smith and James E. Montgomery (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 167–177.

[37] Başan, *Great Seljuqs*, 26–27.

[38] Bennison, *Great Caliphs*, 44–45; Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 162. For a historical account of these events, see Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 6:601–602.

[39] Steven Runciman, *The Eastern Schism: The Study of the Papacy and the Eastern Churches during the XIth and XIIth Centuries*, 1st ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1955; repr. 1956), 78–79.

[40] Hillenbrand, *Crusades*, 20 & 54; Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, hereinafter cited as *Crusades*, trans. Jon Rothschild (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), xiii.

[41] Riley-Smith, *Crusades*, 63.

[42] Maalouf, *Crusades*, 113.

[43] R. C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097–1193*, hereinafter cited as *Crusading Warfare*, (first published Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956; this 2nd ed. 1995), 64–65; Yaacov Lev, "Infantry in Muslim Armies," in *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades*, ed. John H. Pryor (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 207; A. R. Azzam, *Saladin: The Triumph of the Sunni Revival*, hereinafter cited as *Saladin* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2009; repr. 2014), 2; Bennison, *Great Caliphs*, 97–98.

[44] Azzam, *Saladin*, 10.

[45] Ibid., 11; Mājid ʿIrsān al-Kaylanī, *Hakadha ẓahara jīl Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn wa hakadha ʿādat al-Quds*, hereinafter cited as *Hakadha* (Dubai: Dār al-Qalam, 2002), 39–42/

[46] Ibid., 148. See also Maalouf, *Crusades,* 15–17; Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders*, 18.

[47] Runciman, *History of the Crusades I*, 191.

[48] Ibid. See also Riley-Smith, *Crusades*, 47.

[49] Runciman, *History of the Crusades I*, 231–232.

on 15 July.[50] The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was established under Godfrey de Bouillon (r. 1099–1100).

The fall of Jerusalem in 1099 exposed the extent of Muslim disunity, but it also served as a catalyst for political and intellectual reform. Over the following decades, a Sunnī revival emerged that combined theological consolidation with military reorganisation.[51] This revival was shaped by the efforts of figures such as Nūr al-Dīn Zangī and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, who sought to bridge sectarian divides and mobilise the Muslim world under a unified vision of *jihād*. Drawing on the legal and theological frameworks of scholars like al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī, this renewal linked military obligation with religious legitimacy and administrative order. *Jihād* was reframed as *farḍ kifāyah*—a collective duty—and deployed strategically as a tool of unification and reform. Nūr al-Dīn supported the institutionalisation of Sunnī learning and jurisprudence, encouraging the founding of *madrasah*s and promoting religious orthodoxy as a stabilising force. His military policies included both defensive and offensive preparations, with investments in logistics, frontier security, and military training. In 1164, he dispatched Shīrkūh (d. 1169) and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to Egypt, recognising its strategic significance as both a political and economic centre. Egypt's reorientation from Fāṭimid to Sunnī control would prove decisive for the consolidation of Muslim military capacity.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's rise following Shīrkūh's death marked a turning point.[52] His manoeuvres dissolved the Fāṭimid Caliphate in 1171 and restored Sunnī governance in Egypt. Over the following decade, he successfully unified Egypt and Syria, balancing military campaigns with diplomatic initiatives.[53] His policies reflected both pragmatism and ideological commitment to the principles of just leadership. His military engagements were often paralleled by treaty-making, echoing precedents set by the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) at Khaybar, Ḥudaybiyyah, and Tabūk.[54] Under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, warfare was framed as part of a broader ethical project aimed at restoring political order and religious legitimacy. This revival was not limited to battlefield success. It was also characterised by a strategic turn toward formalised doctrine. Treatises such as *al-Tadhkirah al-Ḥarawiyyah*, *Nahj al-Maslūk*, and *Tabṣirat Arbāb al-Albāb* were composed or circulated during this period, providing frameworks for leadership ethics, military logistics, and operational tactics.[55] These texts suggest that military reform was supported by intellectual efforts to articulate a coherent strategy rooted in both religious and administrative thought.

Meanwhile, divisions within the Crusader states began to undermine their position. Following the deaths of Baldwin IV (r. 1174–1185) and Baldwin V (r. 1185–1186), succession disputes divided the Latin Kingdom. Tensions emerged between Guy of Lusignan (r. 1186–1192), supported by his court faction, and Raymond III of Tripoli (d. 1187), who represented an older nobility.[56] Reynald de Châtillon's (d. 1187) unauthorised attacks on Muslim caravans and his provocative Red Sea expedition further destabilised relations.[57] These internal tensions weakened the Crusaders' defensive capacity and provided Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn with the opportunity to act. Through a series of targeted campaigns, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn captured key strongholds including Acre, Nablus, and Jaffa. These victories set the stage for the decisive Battle of Ḥaṭṭīn on 4 July 1187, where he successfully encircled the Crusader army, denied them access to water, and secured a comprehensive victory.[58] Jerusalem surrendered on 2 October 1187 after a short siege.[59] In contrast to the events of 1099, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn offered terms that included ransoms and the protection of civilians, avoiding mass slaughter and reinforcing his reputation for magnanimity.

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[50] Ibid., 237–238.
[51] Muhammad Husni, "Solidification," 125–128 & 134–139.
[52] Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 8:25–26.
[53] Ibn Shaddād, *al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyyah wa-ʾl-Maḥāsin al-Yūsufiyyah*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn Shayyāl, 1st ed. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Khānajī, 1964); this 2nd ed. (1994), 105–106.
[54] Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 7:376.
[55] William J. Hamblin, "Saladin and Muslim Military Theory," in *The Horns of Ḥaṭṭīn: 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.
[56] Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin*, 146 & 247.
[57] Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades II: The Kingdom of Jerusalem*, hereinafter cited as *History of the Crusades II*, (first published Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952; this ed. London: Penguin Classics, 2016), 351; Maalouf, *Crusades*, 184–186.
[58] Maalouf, *Crusades*, 190–191; Runciman, *History of the Crusades II*, 374.
[59] Lyons & Jackson, *Saladin*, 309.

The military resurgence under Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn thus constituted more than a sequence of campaigns. It represented an integrated effort to recover political agency and moral legitimacy. The trajectory from disunity after Manzikert to the liberation of Jerusalem in 1187 illustrates the interplay of religious conviction, administrative reorganisation, and military planning. The revival was not an improvised response to external aggression but a calculated project of civilisational reconstruction. Warfare was reframed as a function of good governance, ethical responsibility, and communal stability. Therefore, the strategic texts produced during this period should be read as part of this broader project. *Tadhkirah*, *Nahj*, and *Tabṣirat* did not merely serve technical purposes; they reflected the intellectual aspirations of an elite seeking to stabilise and rationalise military activity. These texts integrated jurisprudential concerns with practical imperatives, proposing a vision of warfare that was structured, purposeful, and bounded by moral constraints. In sum, the twelfth-century Sunnī revival constituted a strategic recalibration grounded in religious reform and institutional renewal. It bridged previously disparate domains—law, ethics, administration, and tactics—into a unified vision of legitimate rule and disciplined force. The leadership of Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn exemplified this synthesis, offering a model in which military strength was subordinated to higher principles of justice and order. Their campaigns, supported by a body of strategic literature, marked the culmination of a century-long evolution in Muslim responses to Crusader incursion and internal fragmentation.

Analysis of the Five Key Treatises

Al-Māwardī's *Aḥkām* distinguishes between the command of *jihad* (*imārah ʿalā al-jihād*) and the leadership of campaigns against apostates, rebels, and brigands (*wilāyah ʿalā ḥurūb al-maṣāliḥ*).[60] Al-Māwardī articulates the responsibilities of military commanders (*umarāʾ al-juyūsh*) and outlines the procedures for dealing with rebels (*ahl al-baghy*), apostates (*murtaddūn*), and highwaymen (*qaṭṭāʿ al-ṭarīq*),[61] grounding these in a juristic framework that emphasises lawful delegation, accountability, and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). Military preparedness, border defence, and the regulation of the armed forces are presented not as ad hoc measures but as structured policies under the authority of a legally accountable leader (*imām*). The conceptual vocabulary—*imāmah* (leadership), *wilāyah* (delegated authority), *amr biʾl-maʿrūf wa-nahy ʿan al-munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), and *bayʿah* (pledge of allegiance)—demonstrates how al-Māwardī integrated Sunnī legal theory with practical political administration.

Al-Harthamī's *Mukhtaṣar* offers one of the earliest attempts to articulate a distinctly Islamic framework for military leadership. Composed in forty brief chapters, the treatise is not merely a code of conduct but a principled meditation on the moral, strategic, and organisational architecture of warfare. It opens with ethical and theological imperatives: the legitimacy of military action rests on divine obedience (*ṭāʿah*), God-consciousness (*taqwā*), justice (*ʿadl*), and rejection of tyranny (*ẓulm*).[62] These qualities are not presented as abstract ideals but as strategic assets that shape the commander's judgement and public legitimacy. Consultation (*shūrā*) and trust in God (*tawakkul*) appear alongside directives for troop discipline and tactical planning,[63] reflecting a vision in which personal virtue and strategic foresight are inseparable.

What distinguishes *Mukhtaṣar* is its integration of this moral universe with a practical doctrine of command. Al-Harthamī outlines procedures for route security, battlefield selection, encampment safety, and phased combat deployment.[64] His recommendation to avoid hasty confrontation, ensure secrecy (*ḥifẓ al-sirr*), and employ scouts (*ʿuyūn*) shows an early strategic logic rooted not in conquest for its own sake[65] but in calculated responsibility. When he advises commanders to act cautiously, assume the enemy's strength, and avoid the humiliation of subordinates, he frames military leadership as stewardship rather than domination. This emphasis on restraint and moral clarity prefigures later treatises, yet it remains grounded in the personal ethics of the commander, not in institutionalised command structures. The tactical material—such as the five stages of combat manoeuvre, the role of cavalry, flanking, duelling, and the use of night raids (*bayāt*)[66]—demonstrates familiarity with fluid battlefield conditions. Yet these are never discussed in isolation from their moral consequences. For

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[60] Al-Mawardī, *Aḥkām*, 69–93.
[61] Ibid., 94–105.
[62] Al-Harthamī, *Mukhtaṣar*, 14.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 28–32.
[65] Ibid., 22–23 and 49.
[66] Ibid., 50–52.

instance, even the acceptance of surrender is cast as preferable to unnecessary bloodshed,[67] showing how victory is subordinated to ethical governance. In this way, *Mukhtaṣar* conceptualises war not only as defence or expansion, but as a reflection of divine order entrusted to human discretion. Its vision of leadership is decentralised but rigorous—rooted in scriptural principles, yet responsive to the shifting demands of military reality.

While *Nahj* is not a military manual in the strict sense, it contributes meaningfully to Muslim military thought by outlining the infrastructural and moral preconditions for sustained state power. Al-Shayzarī frames governance as a strategic enterprise: justice (*ʿadālah*), public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and trustworthiness (*amānah*) are not abstract virtues but operational principles that ensure cohesion, bureaucratic integrity, and public loyalty.[68] The ruler (*sulṭān* or *ḥākim*) is cast as a steward of divine order whose legitimacy depends not only on lineage or might but on his ability to suppress corruption, uphold the *Sharīʿah*, and regulate markets.[69] What distinguishes *Nahj* from juridical texts like *Aḥkām* is its attention to mechanisms of rule—particularly the institution of *ḥisbah*,[70] which serves not just as market oversight but as a moral instrument of public order.

In contrast to *Mukhtaṣar*, which treats military leadership as an ethical burden borne by individuals, *Nahj* frames statecraft as systemic wherein the army is part of a broader engine requiring functional bureaucracy, just taxation, and loyal subjects.[71] Chapters on military administration, *jihād*, and frontier defence describe armies as moral institutions that cannot function without ethical provisioning, fiscal discipline, and public trust.[72] Discussions on rebels, apostates, and highwaymen demonstrate how internal security depends on calibrated coercion and legal clarity.[73] Warfare, in this model, is a projection of internal order. *Nahj* thus occupies a structural tier in Muslim strategic thought: not tactical like *Tadhkirah* or operational like *Tabṣirah*, but foundational—outlining the kind of polity that can sustain war without collapsing from within.

Murḍā al-Ṭarsūsī's *Tabṣirat* is a technical treatise that offers a rare window into the era's material infrastructure of Islamic warfare. Distinct from ethical or legal works, *Tabṣirat* is concerned with the manufacture, maintenance, and tactical application of military equipment—from personal arms to complex siege engines. Terms such as *asliḥah* (weapons), *ʿaddah* (equipment), *manjanīq* (catapult), *midhfaʿ* (ballista), and *fūlād* (steel) are deployed within a procedural framework focused on assembly, storage, and preservation (*taʿmīr*, *ḥifẓ al-ʿaddah*).[74] What marks *Tabṣirat* as significant is not just its cataloguing of implements but its implicit conception of warfare as an industrial and logistical enterprise. The text presupposes a functioning military infrastructure capable of producing and distributing arms at scale—a reality increasingly apparent in the Ayyūbid period. While theology and jurisprudence are largely absent, the text's alignment with the logic of *jihād* is clear in its stated intent to aid in the protection and equipping of the Muslim forces against enemies.

The tone of *Tabṣirat* suggests an audience of quartermasters, engineers, or state functionaries involved in the provisioning of war—not commanders or jurists, but artisans and technicians. Strategically, the treatise reflects a shift in emphasis from ethical deliberation to technical reliability. It is not concerned with why war is fought but with how it is sustained. In contrast to *Mukhtaṣar*, which envisions military command as an ethical burden, or *Nahj*, which presents governance as a moral precondition for strategic coherence, *Tabṣirat* focuses on the physical tools that translate strategic will into material force. Compared to *Aḥkām*, which defines the offices that oversee war, *Tabṣirat* offers a ground-level view of what those offices must produce and maintain. It does not theorise war—it enables it. In doing so, it completes the architecture of Muslim military thought: where other treatises codify law, justify legitimacy, or instil discipline, *Tabṣirat* equips the army with the means to act.

Al-Harawī's *Tadhkirah* is a comprehensive treatise on the theory and application of military stratagems. Structured in twenty-four chapters, the text addresses rulers, governors, and commanders, offering a

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[67] Ibid., 20, 40–42, and 68.
[68] Al-Shayzārī, "Nahj," 152.
[69] Ibid., 152–158.
[70] Ibid., 160.
[71] Ibid., 165-168.
[72] Ibid., 165–171.
[73] Ibid., 172–175.
[74] Cahen, "Un Traité," 106–124.

broad array of directives spanning diplomatic protocol, operational deception, intelligence gathering, and siege warfare. Its aim is not only to instruct but to equip leadership with a model of warfare as a disciplined instrument of governance framed by religious legitimacy and political continuity. Unlike *Mukhtaṣar*, which grounds military leadership in ethical restraint and personal accountability, *Tadhkirah* expands the focus to systemic leadership—integrating moral authority with strategic manipulation of terrain, time, and psychology. Al-Harawī advocates for a repertoire of non-conventional tactics: feigned retreats, false correspondence, misinformation campaigns, water poisoning, and the use of diseased carcasses as biological weapons.[75] This operational inventiveness reflects not only battlefield ingenuity but a recognition that victory requires more than brute strength—it depends on timing, subterfuge, and situational awareness.

Conceptually, *Tadhkirah* builds on the assumption that state security is inseparable from public order. It reinforces this through an emphasis on *kitmān al-sirr* (secrecy), *ḥifẓ al-thughūr* (border security), and *siyāsat al-raʿiyyah* (subject governance),[76] binding military power to administrative competence. While *Aḥkām* delineates military offices and procedural legitimacy, *Tadhkirah* translates that institutional logic into applied wartime counsel. Its content is technical but always framed by the larger imperative of political stability. In contrast to *Tabṣirat*, which focuses on the material production of war—engines, armour, and steelworking, *Tadhkirah* contextualises those tools within a broader strategic doctrine. It is not a manual for engineers but for decision-makers who must weigh risks, mask intentions, and manage perception as part of the military process.[77] Similarly, where *Nahj* details economic justice and bureaucratic discipline as internal safeguards, *Tadhkirah* emphasises the management of external threats and the moral calibration of stratagems.[78] Its strategic logic does not abandon ethical constraints but incorporates deception as a permissible means under specific conditions of legitimate *jihād*. Rather than replicating the methods of early commanders such as Khālid ibn al-Walīd, whom it references with reverence, *Tadhkirah* draws upon their legacy to assert the continued relevance of adaptive leadership.[79] The result is a treatise that treats war as a form of governance under duress, where moral legitimacy and tactical ingenuity converge to defend, sustain, and expand Islamic rule. In the genealogy of Muslim military thought, *Tadhkirah* marks the transition from ethical and institutional theorising to a fully integrated model of political warfare.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Five Muslim Military Treatises

Author/Era	Treatise	Focus	Key Concepts	Strategic Level	Audience	Moral-Religious Frame
Al-Harthamī/ 9th century	*Mukhtaṣar fī Siyāsat al-Ḥurūb*	Ethical-moral leadership and tactical command	*Ṭāʿah, Taqwā, ʿAdl, Shūrā, Ḥifẓ al-Sirr*	Tactical-ethical	Commanders, Field Leaders	Virtue ethics and divine obedience
Al-Māwardī/ 11th century	*Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*	Legal-administrative structure of *jihād* and internal campaigns	*Imārah, Wilāyah, Maṣlaḥah, Imām, Bayʿah*	Institutional-legislative	*Imām*s, Jurists, Military Governors	Sunnī jurisprudence and public accountability
Al-Shayzarī/ 12th century	*Nahj al-Maslūk fī Siyāsat al-Mulūk*	Governance, economic regulation, and bureaucratic ethics	*ʿAdālah, Maṣlaḥah, Amānah, Ḥisbah, Sulṭān*	Governance-structural	Rulers, Bureaucrats, Judges	Public morality and systemic justice
Al-Ṭarsūsī/ 12th century	*Tabṣirat Arbāb al-Albāb*	Logistics, engineering, and equipment provisioning	*Asliḥah, ʿAddah, Taʿmīr, Ḥifẓ al-ʿAddah*	Operational-logistical	Engineers, Artisans, Quartermasters	Instrumental alignment with *jihād*

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[75] Sourdel-Thomine, "Les Conseils," 247–257.
[76] Ibid., 252–253, 261–266.
[77] Ibid., 254–255.
[78] Ibid., 242.
[79] Ibid., 250–251.

| Al-Harawī/ 12th century | *Al-Tadhkirah al-Ḥarawiyyah fī al-Ḥiyal al-Ḥarbiyyah* | Strategic doctrine and application of military stratagems | *Kitmān al-Sirr, Ḥifẓ al-Thughūr, Siyāsat al-Raʿiyyah* | Strategic-doctrinal | Commanders, Strategists, Rulers | Moral calibration within strategic deception |

Conclusion

This study has addressed a critical research gap by demonstrating that five key works—*Mukhtaṣar*, *Aḥkām*, *Nahj*, *Tabṣirat*, and *Tadhkirah*—form a coherent Islamic military tradition rather than isolated technical or legal texts. Close textual analysis and historical contextualisation have shown how Muslim military thought developed as a multidimensional response to internal fragmentation and external threats, particularly during the build-up to the 1187 liberation of Jerusalem. The findings reveal a layered intellectual architecture: ethical leadership and personal virtue in *Mukhtaṣar*; juridical and administrative legitimacy in *Aḥkām*; economic and bureaucratic infrastructure in *Nahj*; logistical and technical implementation in *Tabṣirat*; and strategic doctrine and situational awareness in *Tadhkirah*.

The aforementioned works collectively frame *jihād* not merely as a legal or theological imperative but as a principle of mobilisation, legitimacy, and institutional coherence. The study further demonstrates how figures like Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn operationalised this synthesis, integrating political theology with administrative reform and military innovation. By bringing these treatises into dialogue, the present study affirms the strategic depth of premodern Muslim military thought and its capacity to align spiritual, legal, and material dimensions into a unified doctrine. Future research should examine continuities and shifts beyond 1187, especially in the Mamlūk, Tīmūrid, and Ottoman periods, while also pursuing comparative analysis with Byzantine, Latin Christian, or Mongol traditions to better understand the convergences and divergences that shaped premodern strategic cultures.

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