



## The Pattern of Interaction of the Islamic Government in Dealing with Opponents: An Analysis of Ethical, Educational, and Military Strategies in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

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| Article Info                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| <p><b>Article type:</b><br/>Scientific Research</p> <p><b>Article history:</b><br/>Received:<br/>2025-09-20<br/>Received in revised form:<br/>2025-10-14<br/>Accepted :<br/>202512-23<br/>Available online:<br/>2026-07-25</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/>Imam Ali (AS), <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i>, Political Opponents, Islamic Government, Interaction Model, Governmental Strategies.</p> | <p><b>Objective:</b> The present study aims to explain the pattern of interaction between the Islamic government and its opponents, based on the conduct of Imam Ali (AS) as reflected in <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i>. The government's interaction with political opponents, as a foundational principle of governance in Islamic political theory, plays a decisive and central role in consolidating the legitimacy of the political system, preserving sustainable social cohesion, ensuring national security, and strengthening public consensus and political stability. The main question addressed is: What strategies and methods did Imam Ali (AS) employ in his interactions with opponents?</p> <p><b>Method/Approach:</b> This paper was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, adopting a text-centered interpretive approach and drawing on an integrated theoretical framework that combines Islamic foundations with modern political theories.</p> <p><b>Results/Findings:</b> The findings derived from the text of <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i> indicate three broad approaches, ethical, educational, and military, in dealing with opponents. Imam Ali (AS), relying on the guiding principles of Islamic governance and taking temporal and spatial circumstances into consideration, developed a systematic typology of opponents and employed diverse, context-sensitive strategies for constructive engagement.</p> <p><b>Conclusion:</b> The most important strategies of interaction include active tolerance, forgiveness, and rational dialogue with nonviolent opponents, alongside conditional, proportionate, and Sharia-based coercive measures against armed insurgents. This advanced model is founded upon a structural distinction between "Legitimate lawful opposition" and "Violent armed rebellion," emphasizing that the ethical and legitimate use of coercive force is permissible only in cases involving severe violations of national security and existential threats to the integrity of the Islamic system. By presenting a systematic, indigenous, and practical framework derived from the Alavid Sirah, this study offers an innovative model as well as practical and policy-oriented recommendations for conflict management in the contemporary Islamic political system.</p> |

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## Introduction

Interaction is exchange and reciprocal engagement (Mahyar, n.d.: 61). It is inherently bilateral and occurs between two individuals or two groups. Imam Ali's (AS) manner of dealing with ideological and political opponents reflects his capacity, greatness, and elevated status across various fields, particularly in governance and administration, especially when confronting different groups and personalities under diverse circumstances. If the methods of this interaction are extracted and analyzed accurately, they can contribute significantly to solving numerous challenges in management and political relations (both domestic and international politics).

Today, in some Islamic countries, challenges exist in trilateral interactions (government-people relations, relations between Islamic governments, and relations between Islamic and non-Islamic governments). The interactional methods of Imam Ali (AS), as a figure respected among all Muslims, may play a constructive role if adapted to contemporary contexts. Imam Ali displayed such chivalry and magnanimity that he did not act unjustly even toward his enemies and did not initially seek the destruction of his opponents or adversaries. He recognized rights even for enemies and, on this basis, instructed *Mālik al-Ashtar*:

"Do not betray your covenant, do not violate your pledge, and do not deceive your enemy." (Letter 53)

The present study aims to answer the central question:

- What strategies and methods did Imam Ali (AS) employ in his interactions with opponents?
- In other words, what were his approaches in dealing with opposition under different circumstances?

If it becomes clear to what extent Imam Ali (AS) emphasized soft methods and the role dialogue played in his engagement with opponents, this could provide guidance for contemporary interactions among governments. Reaching clear conclusions may help determine the priorities of governmental institutions and, by presenting a phased set of recommendations, provide a clear horizon for both citizens and officials of Islamic countries, enabling them to regulate their relationships and interactions according to the proposed framework. Naturally, the principle of peace and rational reconciliation takes precedence over interactions rooted in hostility and enmity.

Although some of these methods may appear to be derived from reason alone, it should be noted that such judgments are made from a contemporary perspective after

centuries of historical development; otherwise, these methods were unprecedented and unparalleled in their own time. Furthermore, the exemplary nature of Imam Ali's (AS) conduct establishes the application of such methods as normative principles. In this article, the term opponents includes the first three caliphs, the *Nākihīn* (those who broke allegiance), the *Qāsiṭīn* (the unjust faction), the *Māriqīn* (the seceders), and part of the *Qā'idīn* (those who remained neutral). Since the central source of this study is *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the main focus has been placed on the text of this work. Accordingly, the entire text was examined from beginning to end, relevant passages were extracted, and the extracted materials were subsequently categorized and organized under thematic headings.

### **Literature Review**

A number of studies have addressed this topic in scattered form. Some of the most relevant works include:

- The book "Political Positions of Imam Ali (AS) toward Opponents" by Jalal Derakhsheh generally discusses Imam Ali's life before and after the caliphate, including his encounters with opponents.
- The thesis "Methods of Confronting Soft Warfare by Opponents in Imam Ali's Conduct," by Ahmad Foroudi (Master's thesis, University of Yazd, 1393 SH), examines examples of soft warfare and some methods of responding to it.
- The article "Freedom of Political Opponents under the Government of Ali (AS)" by Mohammad Hasan Saeidi (Islamic Government Quarterly, No. 19) discusses freedom of thought and belief and Imam Ali's position regarding them.
- The article "Educational Principles and Methods for Dealing with Opponents in Imam Ali's Ethics of Communication" by Mohammad Ali Latifi and Hossein Zarifiyan Yeganeh (Ethics Research Journal, No. 15, Spring 1392 SH) emphasizes communication ethics and its underlying principles.
- The article "The Styles of Imam Ali's Argumentation against Opponents in *Nahj al-Balāghah*" by Ali Akbar Abbasi (Shi'a Studies Journal, No. 44, Winter 1392 SH) addresses Imam Ali's encounters with the caliphs, *Talhā*, *Zubayr*, *Mu'āwīyah*, and *Ash'ath*.

- The article "Behavioral Analysis of Imam Ali (AS) toward the First Internal Opponents of the Islamic Government" by Masoumeh Shirdel, et al., (Alavi Studies Journal, No. 2, Autumn–Winter 2017 AD/1396 SH) provides statistical data from Imam Ali's statements concerning his interactions with opponents.
- The article "Methods of Interaction of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (AS) with Opponents" by Sayyid Mohammad Emam and Gholamhossein Moharrami (Lifestyle Studies Journal, No. 4, Spring–Summer 2017 AD/1396 SH) discusses verbal methods (such as dialogue, exhortation, and correspondence) as well as nonverbal methods (such as tolerance and military confrontation) in engaging with opponents.
- The article "The Pattern of Communication with Opponents during the Rule of Imam Ali (AS) (A Case Study of the Sermons and Letters of *Nahj al-Balāghah*)" by Meysam Farrokhi and Batoul Ahmadi (Alavi Studies Journal, No. 2, Autumn–Winter 2017 AD/1396 SH) examines the methods, tools, and etiquette of Imam Ali's communication with opponents.
- The article "The Rights of Opponents Before and During War from the Perspective of *Nahj al-Balāghah*" by Kazem Ghazizadeh and Fatemeh Nikkhah Monfared (Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies, Spring 2014 AD/1393 SH, No. 21) discusses issues including the rights that Imam Ali observed in warfare against Muslims, negotiation, and the completion of proof with the enemy before the commencement of war, and refraining from violent methods.

The above-mentioned studies, relying on historical sources, have addressed subjects such as Imam Ali's (AS) approach to governance, ethics of communication with others, and examples of opposition among the Companions. They have reached conclusions regarding the etiquette of dialogue with opponents, methods of confronting soft warfare, Imam Ali's intellectual openness, and his commitment to ethical principles in dealing with opponents.

A review of the existing literature shows that despite the efforts undertaken, many dimensions of the topic remain unexplored, and most studies have focused primarily on historical discussions. Unlike previous works, the present article focuses on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, making it distinctive in its own right. Adopting an applied perspective, it also specifies the levels and categories of opponents and their corresponding

examples, so that the discussion is presented in a precise, purposeful, and transparent manner. Consequently, it has the potential to serve as a model for Islamic societies.

The innovation of this study lies in presenting a threefold model of interaction with opponents (ethical, educational, and military) that systematically integrates the principles of Islamic governance with modern political theories, particularly Easton's systems theory (1965) and Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984). For the first time, the present study employs a text-centered interpretive method to extract and systematize Imam Ali's (AS) strategies of interaction as reflected in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, while providing an indigenous framework that enables the application of this model within contemporary Islamic governance.

Another innovative aspect of the study is the development of criteria for distinguishing among categories of opponents by integrating Islamic standards and modern political theories, as well as the presentation of a hierarchical model of interaction that prioritizes peaceful strategies.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology employed in this study is based on a qualitative interpretive approach (Taylor, 1971), with a focus on textual analysis of *Nahj al-Balāghah* as the primary data source.

Within this approach, *Nahj al-Balāghah* is regarded not merely as a historical source but as a "Living Text" possessing multiple layers of meaning (Ricoeur, 1971), requiring deep interpretation and hermeneutic engagement. The interpretive approach adopted emphasizes understanding beyond the text's surface meaning, uncovering implicit concepts, and extracting the socio-political implications of Imam Ali's (AS) discourse.

Drawing on textual hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1960), this method analyzes the text's discursive structure, contextual setting, and core messages.

Data collection was conducted through documentary analysis, focusing on the complete text of *Nahj al-Balāghah* (*Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*'s commentary edition). Using purposive sampling, all sections relevant to the research topic (engagement with opponents) were extracted and analyzed through a deductive-inductive approach.

During the analytical process, the data were first subjected to close reading, and initial concepts were identified. Subsequently, by integrating textual findings with the study's theoretical framework, the final model was derived.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Research**

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to analyze Imam Ali's (AS) interaction with opponents. The theoretical framework of the research rests upon three principal foundations. First, the theological-jurisprudential foundations of Islamic governance, including the principles of justice, consultation, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and the preservation of human dignity, constitute the study's theoretical basis.

Second, the theory of differentiation among opponents, developed through integrating Easton's (1965) perspective on levels of political support with Islamic criteria, which classifies opponents into three categories: intra-systemic opponents, armed extra-systemic opponents, and ideological opponents.

Third, Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984) emphasizes constructive dialogue and the creation of an ideal communicative environment for interaction. The theological-jurisprudential foundations governing interaction with opponents in Islamic political theory are based on principles derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic reason.

First, the principle of justice (al-Ḥadīd: 25), as the most central pillar of governance, emphasizes the necessity of fair judgment and equitable conduct even toward opponents. Second, the principle of consultation (al-Shūrā: 38) requires collective participation in decision-making and consultation with knowledgeable individuals. Third, the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil (Āli 'Imrān: 104) defines the supervisory responsibility of both government and society in confronting deviations. Fourth, the principle of preserving human dignity (al-Isrā': 70) insists upon the intrinsic worth of all human beings, including political opponents. Fifth, the principle of public interest, inferred from jurisprudential sources, serves as a criterion for evaluating governmental decisions.

Together, these principles establish a comprehensive framework for Islamic governance that simultaneously respects individual rights and secures the collective interests of society. Unlike secular theories of government, these foundations emphasize the divine and ethical dimensions of governance and regard the ultimate objective as attaining nearness to God by establishing justice and equity within society.

Within the framework of Easton's systems theory (1965), the political system is viewed as an open system interacting continuously with its environment. In this

model, political opposition is considered one of the inputs to the political system and may manifest as either demands or support.

By distinguishing between specific support and diffuse support, Easton provides a framework for analyzing different levels of opposition. Accordingly, opponents may be classified into three main groups:

1. Intra-systemic opponents, who maintain diffuse support while demanding changes in policies;
2. Nonviolent extra-systemic opponents, who reduce diffuse support but refrain from violence;
3. Armed extra-systemic opponents, who completely reject the legitimacy of the political system and resort to violence.

This classification facilitates a deeper understanding of the nature of opposition and assists in selecting appropriate strategies of engagement.

Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984) emphasizes the importance of rational dialogue and achieving mutual understanding within the public sphere. From Habermas's perspective, communicative action stands in contrast to instrumental action, in which parties seek to impose their will upon one another.

In this theory, communicative rationality serves as the foundation for constructive interaction with opponents and rests upon four components: "Comprehensibility, truth, sincerity, appropriateness."

Through the concept of the ideal public sphere for dialogue, Habermas outlines conditions under which all participants enjoy equal opportunities to express their views, and none are subjected to domination or coercion.

This theoretical framework for interacting with opponents emphasizes rational argumentation, transparency, sincerity, and the pursuit of shared understanding while rejecting force and deception as illegitimate means.

Accordingly, the model of interaction in the Alavid tradition is based on a threefold system:

- The ethical approach, centered on respecting opponents, exercising tolerance, forgiveness, and avoiding insult;
- The educational approach, emphasizing guidance and clarification through rational dialogue, responding to doubts, and promoting transparency;

- The military approach, observing the principle of proportionality, avoiding excess, and prioritizing the public interest.

This tripartite framework operates according to a clear hierarchy that prioritizes peaceful methods and permits coercive action only as a last resort.

The concepts of the present study are formed within the proposed theoretical framework around the central notion of the "Interaction model of the Islamic government with opponents."

The core concept of Islamic governmental interaction is a dynamic, multi-layered process comprising deliberate, systematic strategies for addressing political opposition.

This concept stands in contrast to approaches based exclusively on either coercion or excessive accommodation and, by integrating Islamic foundations with modern political theories, emphasizes proportionality between strategy and the type of opposition.

Within this framework, opponents are not viewed as uniform threats but rather as multidimensional phenomena possessing varying degrees of legitimacy and distinct modes of engagement.

The subsidiary concepts of the study include:

Ethical approach (including tolerance, forgiveness, and avoidance of insult);

Educational approach (including rational dialogue, clarification, and transparency);

Military approach (including conditional and proportionate coercive confrontation).

These three concepts constitute the building blocks of the interaction model and operate within a hierarchy of engagement that prioritizes peaceful strategies and permits coercive measures only as a final option.

Furthermore, Islamic government, as the principal context of this model, is defined by principles such as justice, consultation, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and the preservation of human dignity, thereby distinguishing it from secular models of governance.

#### **4. Ethical Approach**

Imam Ali (AS) consistently made ethics the foundation of governance and did not depart from ethical principles even under the most difficult circumstances. That a religious and political figure could navigate numerous and diverse governmental challenges while maintaining ethical conduct, even toward opponents and enemies, offers a valuable model for others.



#### **4.1. Good Conduct and Refraining from Insults**

God forbids insulting opponents in the Qur'an:

"And do not insult those they invoke besides God..." (al-An'ām: 108)

The Prophet Muhammad also discouraged abusive speech and considered it a cause of hostility:

"Do not insult people, lest you create enmity among them." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 2, 360)

Imam Ali (AS) likewise prohibited abusive language and regarded habitual insult as a sign of low character: "Whenever two people exchange insults, the baser of them prevails." (Āmidī, n.d.: 224; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, n.d.: 19, 24)

Throughout *Nahj al-Balāgha*, when speaking about the first three caliphs, especially *Abū Bakr* and *ʿUmar*, and while offering sincere criticism of some of their methods and conduct, Imam Ali does not resort to insult or humiliation. In various places, he explains the actions of unjust and unqualified rulers of his own era and the future, yet often avoids naming them directly and instead describes the signs of deviation and unfitness (cf. Sermon 144). During the Battle of *Ṣiffīn*, some of Imam Ali's companions insulted the people of Syria (the Syrian forces). Imam Ali (AS) responded firmly that he disliked such behavior. Rather than cursing opponents, he advised describing their actions objectively, praying for reconciliation, and seeking reform and guidance even for one's enemies:

"I dislike that you should become people who curse. Instead, if you describe their actions and mention their condition, that would be more accurate in speech and more convincing as an excuse." And instead of cursing them, say: "O! God, spare our blood and theirs, reconcile them and us, and guide them out of their error..." (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 206)

Accordingly, one may speak to opponents with respect and civility.

#### **4.2. Forbearance, Gentleness, and Tolerance**

As Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali (AS) demonstrated patience at various stages of life because of his position, his long-term perspective, and his ultimate goal of guidance. He had learned from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that practicing forbearance helps achieve the fundamental objectives of Islam. Although many hypocrites in Medina mocked and harassed the Prophet and his companions, the Prophet did not

respond harshly toward them; thus, both the Prophet and Imam Ali (AS) are portrayed as exemplars of tolerance.

In his dealings with *Mu'āwīya*, Imam Ali did not immediately resort to war or coercion. Instead, he consistently pursued different means to prevent bloodshed. He sent *Jarīr ibn 'Abdullāh al-Bajallī* to Syria to seek *Mu'āwīya*'s pledge of allegiance. At that time, some of Imam Ali's companions, pointing to the envoy's delay and suspecting deception or a possible enemy attack, proposed beginning military action. Imam Ali (AS) rejected this suggestion and stated that because his envoy was still among them, initiating war would close the door to peace and push the Syrians away from any possibility of reconciliation. Therefore, patience was necessary until the outcome became clear: "My preparing for war against the people of Syria while *Jarīr* is still among them would close the way to Syria and turn its people away from any good they may intend. Yet I have set a time limit for *Jarīr*; if he remains beyond it, then he is either deceived or disobedient. In my view, the proper course is patience, so proceeds calmly." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 43)

These statements reflect Imam Ali's spirit of tolerance, patience, and composure in dealing with opponents (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, n.d.: 2, 322).

As long as the *Khawārij* remained merely political opponents, Imam treated them with tolerance and responded to their harshness with gentleness. He never dealt with them aggressively and consistently prioritized kindness and accommodation (Delshad, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 60). Accordingly, his manner of speaking and engaging with the Kharijites, while realistic, was filled with reasoned argument, gentleness, and hope for their reform.

He also exercised restraint and tolerance toward the *Nākihīn* (those who broke allegiance), the *Qāsiṭīn* (those considered unjust/oppressive) (ibid: 74-75), and likewise the *Qā'idīn* (those who remained inactive) (ibid: 70), as far as circumstances allowed. This occurred despite the prevailing customs and political culture of the time, according to which refusing allegiance to the caliph or breaking one's pledge could result in execution and severe punishment (for further discussion, cf. Delshad Tehrani, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 107-113).

#### 4.3. Benevolent Admonition

One of Imam Ali's methods in dealing with opponents was compassionate and sincere counsel. When people gathered around Imam Ali and complained about *Uthmān ibn*

'*Affān*'s misconduct, they asked him to speak with the caliph. Imam Ali (AS) visited '*Uthmān*' and offered sincere and compassionate advice, including:

"Do not become an instrument in Marwan's hands, allowing him to drive you wherever he wishes." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 164)

Imam Ali warned '*Uthmān*' that if he continued on that course, people would revolt against him and ultimately kill him. Therefore, out of concern, he told him: "Do not become the slain leader of this community..." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 164) Thus, well-intentioned advice can sometimes resolve serious conflicts, as the Qur'an states that reminders benefit believers (al-Dhārīyāt: 55).

During '*Uthmān*'s caliphate, when others remained passive, Imam Ali (AS) fulfilled what he regarded as his duty by offering constructive criticism of the caliph (Sermon 37). On several occasions, he attempted to prevent rebellion, unrest, and '*Uthmān*'s downfall, and he became so concerned for '*Uthmān*'s welfare that he said:

"By God, I defended him until I feared that I might become blameworthy [before God]." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 240)

#### **4.4. Forgiveness**

Imam Ali (AS) was known for forgiveness and advised: "If you gain power over your enemy, make forgiveness of him an expression of gratitude for having power over him." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying 11)

According to the account of sayyid *Raḍī*, one day Imam Ali (AS) addressed a gathering. A man from the Kharijites exclaimed:

"May God kill this unbeliever, how knowledgeable he is in religion? People rose to kill the man, but Imam Ali said: "Remain calm. He has merely uttered an insult, and its proper response is only an equivalent reply, though forgiving him is better. He then pardoned the man." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying 420) Throughout his life, Imam Ali dealt with the Kharijites with considerable restraint. He even advised his followers not to fight them after his death, explaining that they were mistaken but apparently sought truth, unlike those who intentionally pursued falsehood and attained it, referring to Mu'āwīya: "Do not fight the Kharijites after me, for one who seeks truth but misses it is not like one who seeks falsehood and finds it."

(Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 61) After the Battle of the Camel, Imam Ali (AS) released *Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam* through the intercession of *Ḥasan* and *Ḥusayn*, which Marwan himself had requested. Imam Ali also declined Marwan's pledge of

allegiance and remarked: "His hand is a Jewish hand; if he pledged allegiance with it, he would betray with his backside [i.e., immediately break it]." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 73)

#### 4.5. Silence and Non-Engagement

In dealing with opponents, wise silence can sometimes be an effective method. Imam Ali stated: "Many words are answered by silence" (Āmidī, *ibid*: 215) and elsewhere: "Silence toward the foolish person is the best reply." (Āmidī, *ibid*: 77)

Although Imam Ali (AS) sometimes chose silence in the face of opponents, he explained that this silence did not stem from fear of death; rather, it arose from hidden realities known to him but unknown to others (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 5). However, absolute silence is not considered desirable. Imam Ali criticized silence in certain circumstances, stating: "There is no good in remaining silent about the truth." (Āmidī, *ibid*: 70)

He adopted different approaches toward the rumors and criticisms circulating in society against him. At times, he would not react to rumors and futile remarks that had only a limited reach (Adyani, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 148-149).

When Imam 'Ali (AS) heard about the conversation between 'Ammār and Mughayra ibn Shu'ba, he advised 'Ammār to leave Mughayra alone, because he sought from religion only that which served worldly gain, not because the matter was unclear to him:

"Leave him, O! 'Ammār, for he has taken nothing from religion except what brings him closer to worldly benefit. Deliberately he has confused the matter for himself, so that doubts may serve as an excuse for his lapses." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Wisdom 405)

"He also states elsewhere that the worst of people is the one whom God leaves to himself." (Sermon 103) Therefore, this approach can be learned from God: in situations where speaking has no effect on the other party, one may resort to leaving them to themselves.

#### 5. Educational Approach

Alongside the ethical approach, Imam Ali (AS) sometimes sought to explain conditions, issues, and his own positions. Through different methods, he clarified his intentions and aimed to raise awareness. These positions are grouped under the educational approach.

### 5.1. Preserving Unity and Avoiding Division

Imam Ali (AS) placed exceptional importance on unity. He declared that no one was more committed than he was to preserving the unity of the Prophet's community (Letter 78). Even in the face of conspiracies and destructive actions by oath-breakers, he refrained from harsh reactions and announced that as long as social unity was not endangered, he would remain patient (Sermon 169).

After the campaign of *Busr ibn Arţāt*, one of *Mu'āwīya*'s commanders, in Yemen, Imam Ali criticized the sluggishness of his supporters and remarked: "Your enemies are united upon falsehood and obey their leader, while you are divided despite standing upon truth and disobeying your leader." (Sermon 25)

Similar themes appear in Sermon 27. For the sake of preserving Islam, Imam Ali even gave allegiance to the caliphs (Letter 62), although the details and political context require broader discussion. He further stated: "Unity in something unpleasant is better than division in something desirable.

He added that God granted no good to past or present people through division." (Sermon 176)

In other words, reluctant unity is preferable to preferred division. People of different languages, races, and backgrounds should live together peacefully, united by Islam rather than by tribal or familial loyalties. Imam Ali (AS) refers to the early period of Islam and notes that Muslims fought even against some of their own non-believing relatives. What mattered to them was God and religion (Sermon 56). Faith was their common bond and source of unity; they did not favor their kinship ties over belief. Their movement along the path of guidance was firm and steadfast, though accompanied by hardship and endurance (Ibn Maytham, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 2, 149).

### 5.2. Cooperation and Assistance

To advance the ultimate objectives of Islam and prevent harm to the foundations of the religion, Imam Ali (AS) sometimes assisted the caliphs when he considered it in the public interest. When opposition and criticism against *'Uthmān* intensified, Ali (AS) spoke to the caliph on behalf of the people and advised him in hopes of resolving the crisis. Then, acting on behalf of *'Uthmān*, he addressed the people and called for calm (Sermon 164).

When *'Umar ibn al-Khaţţāb* consulted Imam Ali (AS) about personally participating in the war against Persia, Imam Ali sincerely offered detailed advice

aimed at protecting both the caliph's interests and those of the Islamic government (Sermon 146).

During the caliphate, Ali (AS) demonstrated close cooperation with the caliphs. Even when the third caliph repeatedly ordered him into exile, he accepted it.

According to Sayyid Raḍī's introduction to Sermon 240, when *ʿUthmān* was under siege, *ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās* brought a letter from *ʿUthmān* to Imam Ali (AS) asking him to go to *Yanbūʿ* so that people would speak less of Ali (AS) as a candidate for the caliphate. *ʿUthmān* had made the same request before.

Imam Ali responded: "*Uthmān* wants nothing except that I should be like a water-carrying camel, coming and going with a large bucket. He sent me away, and then sent for me to return, and now he sends me away again. I defended him so much that I feared I had become blameworthy (or sinful)." (Sermon 240)

The Imam also told the people: "Leave me and seek someone else; I will support whichever ruler you choose." (Sermon 92)

He even encouraged his followers to show solidarity and pledge allegiance to the caliphs (Ahmadpour, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 124-125). Likewise, he participated in Friday prayers and congregational prayers and encouraged others to do the same (ibid: 154-155).

### 5.3. Clarification and Responding to Doubts and Accusations

The Commander of the Faithful (AS) maintained that whenever suspicion develops within society toward a ruler, the ruler should clearly explain matters to the people and remove the grounds for mistrust, because such conduct is closer to justice (Letter 53).

The fact that Imam Ali responded publicly to some of the claims and statements of his opponents indicates, first, that freedom of expression existed to a considerable degree, and second, that the Imam remained regularly present among the people and directly experienced social realities (Adyani, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 148-149).

In response to one companion's question regarding why he had been passed over for the caliphate despite his qualifications, Imam Ali explained that greed and monopolization of authority had caused it (Sermon 162). He repeatedly rejected accusations that he had been involved in *ʿUthmān*'s death and explicitly stated that not only was he not the killer, but that he had actually helped and defended *ʿUthmān* (Sermon 30).

He further emphasized: "Does not the knowledge that the sons of *Umayyah* possess about me prevent them from attributing faults to me?" (Sermon 75) In a letter to

*Mu'āwīya*, he declared: "I was among the people most opposed to shedding *'Uthmān's* blood." (Letter 8) In response to the complaints and anger of *Ṭalḥa* and *Zubayr*, Ali (AS) stated: "Will you not tell me in what matter I withheld one of your rights from you, or in what affair I gave preference to myself over you? I had neither desire for the caliphate nor need for governance, but you compelled me toward it and placed that responsibility upon me." (Sermon 205)

He criticized them for becoming angry because he implemented God's rulings and followed the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah). The Kharijites, in addition to their rigid and dogmatic mindset, committed acts of violence. They brutally killed *'Abdullāh ibn Khabbāb ibn Aratt* along with his pregnant wife, and in addition, murdered three other women. After hearing of these events, Imam Ali (AS) sent *Hārith ibn Murrah* to verify the reports and obtain accurate information from the Kharijites, but they killed him as well.

As a result, Imam Ali (AS) was compelled to move toward them. At *Nahrawān*, he first demanded that they surrender the murderers so they could face legal retribution (*Qīṣaṣ*), after which he proposed that they proceed together toward Syria for battle. However, the Kharijites not only rejected his proposal but also declared war against him. Even then, Ali (AS) continued dialogue and clarification in an attempt to dissuade them from fighting.

After Imam Ali's explanatory address, a large number abandoned the Kharijite camp and joined his army. Approximately 2,800 (or, according to another report, 1,800) remained; those remaining were killed in battle and only eight Kharijites survived (Delshad, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 98-104).

Although in Imam Ali's view, blood relationship alone did not confer superiority; his political rivals and opponents had relied heavily on lineage and used it effectively to obtain power. Therefore, in order to remove their pretexts and argue on their own terms, Imam Ali repeatedly referred to his kinship with the Prophet (PBUH) (Ahmadpour, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 93).

In responding to the Kharijites, who regarded him as sinful and even unbelieving, Imam Ali argued: The Prophet (PBUH) punished those who committed wrongdoing but still regarded them as Muslims; even when an adulterer died, he performed the funeral prayer over them. On what basis, then, do you declare a sinner an unbeliever? (Sermon 127)

Naturally, Imam Ali (AS) was not presenting himself as a sinner; rather, he was reasoning hypothetically for argumentative purposes. These remarks were delivered

before the Battle of *Nahrawān* during debates with the Kharijites. In confronting the Kharijites' narrow-mindedness and impulsiveness, Imam Ali (AS) consistently maintained composure and relied on reason and logic. He never resorted to unilateral violence against them and instead engaged them in discussion (Sermon 40).

When sending *Ibn 'Abbās* to debate the Kharijites, Imam Ali advised him not to argue with them primarily from the Qur'an, but rather to rely on the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah), because Qur'anic interpretation allows multiple readings (Letter 77).

Although Imam Ali allowed people the freedom to choose whether to pledge allegiance to him, he continually used rational arguments to oppose incorrect interpretations and religious innovations.

Reacting to *Zubayr's* breaking of allegiance, Imam Ali (AS) explicitly declared that *Zubayr* had pledged allegiance sincerely and inwardly; therefore, he could not later claim that his pledge had merely been formal. If he wished to make such a claim, he must provide evidence, otherwise he should return to his pledge (Sermon 8). Imam Ali (AS) consistently spoke what he regarded as the truth. He informed *Mu'āwīya* that his criticisms of the third caliph concerned religious innovations and were not matters requiring apology (Letter 28).

He also wrote to *Mu'āwīya*: "The same people who pledged allegiance to *Abū Bakr*, *'Umar*, and *'Uthmān* have pledged allegiance to me." (Letter 6) This statement illustrates an argument based on the opposing side's assumptions and accepted premises: if they accept those premises, they are logically compelled to accept the conclusion as well.

#### 5.4. Presenting the Virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)

As part of raising public awareness, Imam Ali (AS) emphasized his own virtues and those of the Ahl al-Bayt at various points in time. Presenting these virtues gave audiences, especially opponents, a perspective that, if they did not properly understand who he was, they might refrain from hostile actions upon recognizing the status of the Ahl al-Bayt.

A portion of those who opposed Ali (AS) had been influenced through intimidation, inducement, or deception by his principal adversaries and lacked a proper understanding of whom they were opposing. Therefore, Imam Ali clarified his and his family's status. Among his statements were that the Ahl al-Bayt were the most



deserving of the caliphate (Sermon 74), and that whoever rejects the Ahl al-Bayt will enter Hell (Sermon 152).

At times, he referred to the closeness of his relationship with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Prophet's affection for him (Sermon 192). He also described the Ahl al-Bayt as those firmly grounded in knowledge and, by pointing to their exalted rank, regarded them as worthy of leadership (Sermon 144).

### **5.5. Revealing the True Face of the Enemy**

Imam Ali (AS) described the oath-breaking instigators of the Battle of Jamal as the party of Satan, opening one of his sermons with: "Indeed, Satan has mobilized his party..." (Sermon 22)

Elsewhere, he characterized *Ṭalḥa* as hot-tempered and *Zubayr* as mild-tempered, advising Ibn Abbas to negotiate with *Zubayr* but not to meet *Ṭalḥa* (Sermon 31). In another statement, while discussing their personalities and ambitions, he asserted that each was willing to eliminate the other to gain political power (Sermon 148). When *Ṭalḥa* and *Zubayr* confronted him under the banner of avenging 'Uthmān's death, Imam Ali (AS) stated that *Ṭalḥa* himself was implicated in responsibility for 'Uthmān's killing and that no one had shown greater eagerness for 'Uthmān's death than *Ṭalḥa* (Sermon 174).

From Imam Ali's perspective, the *Umayyads* oppressed everyone, made unlawful things lawful, and violated their covenants (Sermon 98). In another statement, he identified the tribulation of the *Umayyads* as the most dangerous of all trials and described it as a blind and dark fitna (Sermon 93).

Imam Ali (AS) portrayed *Mu'āwīya* as misguided, ill-intentioned, lacking insight, driven by desire, and hypocritical (Letter 7). In his letters, he also referred to *Mu'āwīya* as:

- One whose religion had been adopted under compulsion (Letters 17 and 20),
- One pampered while bound to Satan (Letter 10),
- Deviant (Letter 28),
- Lacking sound judgment (Letter 64),
- Deceptive (Letter 65),
- And even as "Satan." (Letter 44)

He likened Umayyad rule to someone tasting only a little water and then spitting it all out (Sermon 87). When *Mu'āwīya* blocked access to the Euphrates River for Imam Ali's forces, Imam Ali stated that *Mu'āwīya* withheld necessary knowledge from the people and ruled through exploiting their ignorance and deceiving them. Through cunning, he misled groups of people and maintained authority over them (Sermon 51).

On another occasion, during a dispute between Imam Ali (AS) and *'Uthmān, Mughayra ibn al-Akhnas*, described as one of the hypocrites, boldly told *'Uthmān* that he alone was sufficient to defend him against Ali. Imam Ali (AS) did not allow him to exploit the disagreement; instead, he exposed his true nature, calling him accursed and cut off, and ordered him to leave their gathering (Sermon 135).

During his caliphate, Imam Ali (AS) also exposed the intrigues, plots, and true character of *Ash'ath. Ash'ath ibn Qays*, through manipulation, deceived people, encouraged enemies against Muslims, and was continually involved in sowing discord (Sermon 19).

Likewise, regarding *Mu'āwīya* and his policies, Imam Ali (AS) famously declared under oath: "By God, *Mu'āwīya* is not more clever than I am; rather, his method is treachery and sin." (Sermon 200)

After the arbitration following the Battle of *Ṣiffīn*, Imam Ali (AS) delivered a sermon in which he identified following personal desires and introducing religious innovations as the starting point of social discord. He explained that the enemy takes a portion of truth and a portion of falsehood and mixes them together; when truth and falsehood become intertwined, some seekers of truth can no longer distinguish between them (Sermon 50).

Imam Ali (AS) condemned the actions of the People of *Jamal* and clarified their beliefs and conduct for the public (Sermon 13). *Talḥa* and *Zubayr* claimed to seek vengeance for *'Uthmān's* blood, while, according to Imam Ali's view, they themselves had been implicated in his killing. Yet they stirred unrest and confused the public's understanding to incite people against the Imam (Sermon 137).

## 6. Military Approach

Following the ethical and educational approaches, another method Imam Ali (AS) adopted in dealing with opponents was the military approach.

Naturally, when all reasonable and peaceful means of engagement with opponents and enemies had been exhausted, yet the opposing side continued with sabotage, insecurity, killing, looting, and aggression, the government had a duty to protect the

interests of the broader public by confronting armed adversaries through the exercise of coercive authority.

However, even within the military approach, Imam Ali consistently prioritized measures to prevent military confrontation. Only if such efforts failed would he proceed to warnings, deterrence, and ultimately armed conflict. Even during and after warfare, he continued to observe the ethical principles of war, as discussed below.

### **6.1. Dialogue to Prevent War**

Under Imam Ali's government, freedom of belief and expression was understood to have a broad scope, and tolerance of criticism was extensive. Accordingly, opponents, and even enemies, could speak with him directly and express their views without fear, and he did not seek to impose his opinions upon others.

Addressing the people of Kufa, Imam Ali stated: "I have no right to compel you to do something you do not wish to do." (Sermon 208)

Imam Ali (AS) even treated the Kharijites with notable magnanimity, as long as they had not taken up arms. Not only did he refrain from curtailing their rights, but he also granted them freedom of expression and assembly.

Regarding the Kharijites, he stated: "They have three rights over us: "We do not prevent them from entering the mosques where God's name is mentioned; we do not deprive them of public revenues and war gains as long as they fight alongside us; and we do not fight them unless they fight us." (Delshad, 2012 AD/1392 SH: 305) To engage in dialogue with the Kharijites, Imam Ali (AS) first sent three of his companions, *Ibn 'Abbās*, *Ša'sa'ah ibn Šuhān*, and *Zīyād ibn Naḍr*, to guide and persuade them. However, they were unsuccessful, and the Kharijites remained firm in their positions (Karimi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 246).

Afterward, the Imam personally went to them and entered into direct negotiations. He visited the Kharijite military encampment and asked them to divide themselves into two groups according to whether or not they had participated in the Battle of *Šiffīn*. He then spoke separately to each group in a manner suited to their circumstances (Sermon 122; Delshad, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 85-90).

Following extensive explanation and discussion, approximately six thousand people reportedly left the Kharijite camp and rejoined Imam Ali's side (Karimi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 250).

However, another interpretation puts the more accurate figure at around 2,000 Kharijites from *Ḥarūrā* who returned to the Imam's army (Delshad, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 93).

## 6.2. Delaying War for the Purpose of Guidance

From the perspective of Imam Ali (AS), the fundamental principle is peace, and reconciliation should always take precedence over war (Ṭabarī, 1979: 4, 479; Ibn Athīr, 1965 AD/1385 AH: 3, 224).

During his rule, Imam Ali (AS) strongly avoided violence and bloodshed. War and bloodshed were not compatible with his intellectual and moral foundations, because his aim in exercising power and governance was to build a prosperous society marked by abundance, where justice would prevail throughout society and the political system, and where even the weak could claim their rights from the powerful without hesitation or fear (Letter 53).

For this reason, he wrote to *Mālik Ashtar*: "Beware of bloodshed and shedding blood unlawfully, for nothing invites divine punishment more quickly, magnifies sin more severely, destroys blessings more completely, or shortens life more surely than unjust bloodshed. On the Day of Resurrection, God will begin judgment among His servants concerning the blood they have shed. Therefore, do not strengthen your government by shedding forbidden blood, for unlawful killing weakens and undermines authority and may even transfer rule from one person to another. Neither before God nor before God will there be any excuse for killing unjustly, for retaliation is required for it." (Letter 53)

On the eve of the Battle of *Ṣiffīn*, Imam Ali (AS) delayed issuing the order to fight. Some criticized this decision. The Imam explained that the reason for postponing the battle was to allow an opportunity for the guidance of some opponents and enemies, stating: "This is more pleasing to me than killing the Syrians while they remain misguided." (Sermon 55)

He also predicted that before long, the *Umayyads* themselves would see this rule pass into the hands of others and ultimately into the homes of their enemies. (Sermon 105) In letters addressed to *Mu'āwīya*, Imam Ali (AS) advised his opponent and urged him to remain mindful of God, reflect on his actions, and save himself from the precipice of misguidance and loss (Letters 30 and 32).

If an enemy seeks peace, and if that peace accords with God's pleasure, peace should be accepted because it brings security and tranquility to society. However, one

should remain cautious afterward so that the enemy does not exploit proximity to launch surprise attacks. Therefore, naïve trust toward an enemy is not advisable (Letter 53).

Imam Ali (AS) also recommended that treaties with enemies should never contain ambiguous or double meanings, because an enemy is always prepared to strike. Thus, he said: "Whoever sleeps should not assume his enemy sleeps." (Letter 62) Meaning: "If someone becomes complacent toward an enemy, they should remember that the enemy remains alert. During the Battle of *Jamal*, Imam Ali (AS) repeatedly entered into dialogue with *Ṭalḥa* and *Zubayr* and spared no effort to guide them. His words had no effect on *Ṭalḥa*, but they influenced *Zubayr* to the extent that, by reminding him of a saying of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Imam persuaded him to withdraw from continuing the war (cf. Delshad, 2012 AD/1392 SH: 610-612; citing *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 3, 51-52; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, 2, 362-363).

### 6.3. Warning and Deterrence

In response to the unrest and sedition created by the People of *Jamal* after they broke their pledge of allegiance, Imam Ali (AS) declared that if they chose to fight him, he would have no fear and would fight courageously. Affirming that he had no doubt regarding his religion, he stated that he would fight them with certainty in God (Sermons 22 and 10).

In a letter to *Mu'āwīya*, Imam Ali (AS) wrote that he considered it a mistake to continue responding to *Mu'āwīya*'s letters because *Mu'āwīya* was immersed in heedlessness. He added that he was capable of delivering blows so forceful that they would crush bone and melt flesh (Letter 73).

Responding to *Mu'āwīya*'s boasts, Imam Ali remarked: "When have you ever seen the sons of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib turn their backs on enemies or fear the sword?" (Letter 28)

In another letter, after recounting the negative characteristics and poor record of 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, Imam Ali (AS) warned him directly (Letter 39).

He also declared that if he remained alive, he would cast the *Umayyads* aside like dirt-covered entrails (Sermon 77). In one of his forceful speeches addressed to the Kharijites, Imam Ali warned them to reflect on the consequences of their reckless actions and not drive themselves toward destruction (Sermon 36).

#### 6.4. Combat

In confronting armed and oppressive opponents, when no other avenue proved effective, Imam Ali (AS) resorted to defensive warfare. Regarding his approach toward *Mu'āwīya*, he states that he examined the matter thoroughly, both outwardly and inwardly, until sleep left his eyes. He found only two options before him: either to fight the enemies or to deny Islam and disbelieve in the Prophet (PBUH). Therefore, he chose war (Sermon 54).

Accordingly, in the famous sermon on jihad, responding to the accusations of some ignorant individuals who claimed that Ali did not understand warfare, he declared: "Is there anyone who has spent more time than I on the battlefield?!" (Sermon 27)

In response to *Mu'āwīya*'s conspiracies, Imam Ali (AS) emphasized his courage in battle (Letter 29) and answered *Mu'āwīya*'s military threats firmly and decisively. (Letter 28) When *Mu'āwīya* launched raiding attacks against the territories of the Islamic state, Ali (AS) stated clearly to his brother *'Aqīl* that as long as he remained alive, he would continue fighting them (Letter 36).

Whenever Ali (AS) was compelled to choose the military option, he encouraged and prepared his troops for courage and steadfastness in battle (Sermons 26 and 34). At the same time, while maintaining the principle that peace is preferable to war, he instructed them in humanitarian principles, military ethics, and the proper conduct of warfare, offering guidance on what should and should not be done in war (Letters 11-16).

#### 6.5. Reducing the Costs of War

The Commander of the Faithful (AS) instructed his soldiers not to initiate combat, not to kill fleeing enemies, and not to harm women or vulnerable individuals (Letter 14). The objective of war, in his view, was not killing but guidance and reform. At the same time, in response to the sedition and rebellion of the People of *Jamal* after they broke their pledge of allegiance, Imam Ali declared publicly that if the oath-breakers chose to wage war against him, he had no fear and would certainly fight them because he had certainty in God and no doubt concerning his religion (Sermon 22).

Therefore, there was no place for hesitation or fear. After people pledged allegiance to him, some companions urged him to punish the rebels immediately. Imam Ali (AS) explained that he would try to resolve the matter without war, and only if no alternative remained would he fight, because: "The last remedy is cauterization." (Sermon 168)

This expression means that coercive force should be treated as a last resort, not a first response. Imam Ali (AS) also grieved over the deaths of his opponents. Passing by the body of *Talḥa* and other casualties of the Battle of Jamal, he expressed sorrow and said: "*Talḥa* lies here as a stranger. By God, I did not wish that the men of *Quraysh* should lie beneath the stars." (Sermon 219)

Imam Ali (AS) also opposed distributing the enemy's property as spoils of war and did not permit his soldiers to seize the enemy's possessions (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *ibid*: 1, 250). This position led some of his own troops to object.

His effort to avoid war and minimize its destruction went so far that, when battle became unavoidable, he tried to begin fighting later in the day so that it would end sooner and darkness would reduce casualties and allow fleeing combatants to escape the battlefield (cf. Delshad Tehrani, 2012 AD/1392 SH: 620).

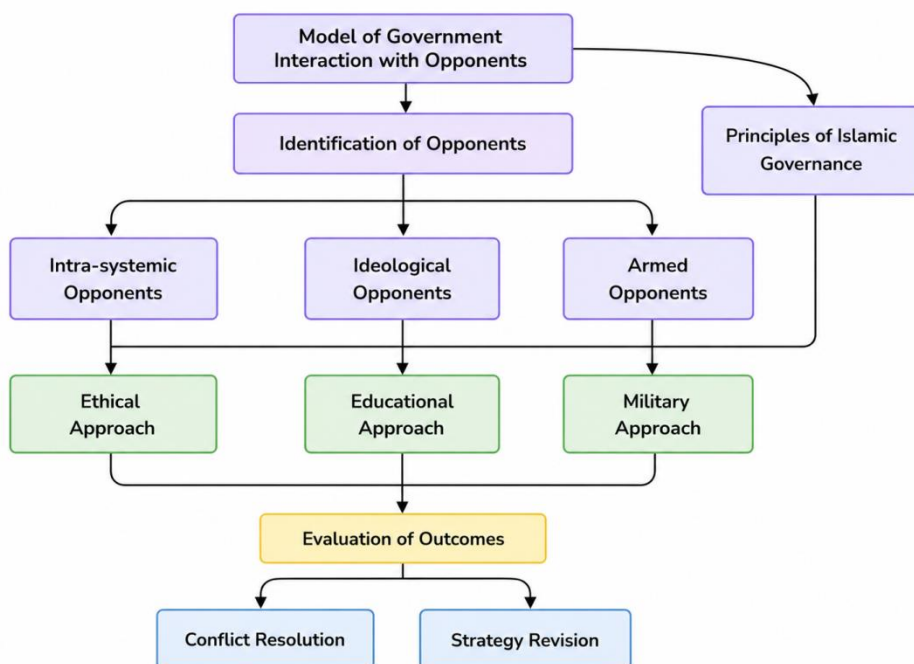
## **7. Model of Interaction Between the Islamic Political System and Opponents Based on the Conduct of Imam Ali (AS)**

The model proposed in this study, derived from the conduct of Imam Ali (AS), presents a hierarchical and dynamic framework for engaging with opponents. The process begins with identifying and classifying opponents into categories, including: "Intra-systemic opponents, ideological opponents, armed extra-systemic opponents."

Based on this classification, an appropriate response strategy is selected, either: "An ethical-educational approach, or a conditional military approach." Inspired by Islamic principles of governance such as justice, consultation, enjoining good and forbidding wrong, and preserving human dignity, this model prioritizes peaceful strategies, including: dialogue, tolerance and accommodation, and clarification and public awareness.

It permits coercive measures only as a final resort, and only under compliance with religious and ethical constraints, including avoiding excess and respecting the rights of noncombatants.

A defining feature of this model is its flexibility, cyclical engagement process, and capacity for continuous feedback and reassessment, making it a potentially effective framework for contemporary Islamic governance.



### **The Model of the Islamic Government's Interaction with Opponents Based on the Conduct of Imam Ali (AS) in *Nahj al-Balāghah***

#### **Conclusion**

This study, through an examination of Imam Ali's (AS) conduct as reflected in *Nahj al-Balāgha*, demonstrates that he adopted a threefold model of engagement, ethical, educational, and military, as a systematic and prudent approach to dealing with opponents. The findings indicate that, while adhering to the theological-jurisprudential principles of Islamic governance such as justice, consultation, and preservation of human dignity, Imam Ali (AS) maintained a balanced and rational course even toward those who opposed him. By distinguishing among categories of opponents (intra-systemic opponents, armed extra-systemic opponents, and ideological opponents) and applying proportionate strategies to each, he consistently prioritized dialogue, forbearance, and rational clarification. Only in necessary circumstances, and only after exhausting peaceful methods, did he resort to legitimate coercive action. The model derived from this study not only offers an indigenous and religious framework for conflict management in Islamic governments, but, through integrating Islamic



foundations with modern political theories (such as Easton's systems theory and Habermas's theory of communicative action), also possesses the capacity to adapt to the complexities of contemporary political conditions.

This model may serve as a foundation for developing a strategic framework for engagement with opposition in Islamic political systems. By emphasizing the proportionality of strategy to the type of opposition and prioritizing peaceful methods, it aims to contribute to the realization of just and rational governance in public policymaking. I've translated and arranged the references into an APA-style reference list (7th edition format, adapted for translated Persian/Arabic sources and with missing publication details preserved where unavailable).

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