AL-AASAR Journal
Quarterly *Research Journal*
www. al-aasar.com

Vol. 3, No. 1 (2026)
Online ISSN: 3006-693X
Print ISSN: 3006-6921

The Diplomatic Year: Tribal Envoys and the Making of Islamic Statecraft in 9 AH

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Abstract

In the ninth year after the Hijrah (630-631 CE), a wave of tribal envoys — the Sīrah literature records more than seventy delegations across the Prophetic period, many in 9–10 AH — travelled to Madīnah to work out the terms on which their communities would relate to the newly dominant Islamic polity. Muslim historiography remembers this period as ʿĀm al-Wufūd, the Year of Delegations. This paper examines how the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ conducted this diplomacy: the strategies he used, the values that underpinned them, and the political results that followed. Working from a qualitative, historical-analytical reading of the classical Sīrah corpus, Qur'anic commentary, hadith literature, and later scholarship, the paper isolates four recurring strategies — peaceable negotiation, gradual and flexible agreement-making, tolerance of religious difference, and the deliberate cultivation of alliances through correspondence, envoys, and treaties. Underneath these strategies sat an ethical core: justice (ʿadl), mercy (raḥmah), reliability in keeping commitments (al-wafāʾ bi al-ʿahd), and a practical wisdom (ḥikmah) expressed as patience (ṣabr), situational judgment (al-fiqh bi al-wāqiʿ), and emotional restraint (dhakāʾ ʿāṭifī). Taken together, these strategies and values consolidated Arabia politically, curbed the intertribal violence that had long characterised the peninsula, and set patterns for how Muslims would deal with non-Muslim communities for generations afterward. The paper argues that Prophetic diplomacy offers a model in which moral obligation and strategic advantage are not at odds but reinforce one another — a model with something to say to present-day conflict resolution, diplomacy, and cross-cultural engagement.

Keywords: Prophetic diplomacy, ʿĀm al-Wufūd, ethical statecraft, Sīrah, international relations, conflict resolution, Islamic political thought

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the year following the Hijrah that historians number as the ninth (630-631 CE), Arabia witnessed a diplomatic episode without real precedent. Generations of Muslim historians have called it ʿĀm al-Wufūd — the "Year of Delegations" — because of the sheer number of tribal representatives who made their way, often across punishing terrain, to the growing town of Madīnah. They did not come as conquered people begging for mercy, nor as conquerors dictating terms; they came to negotiate. Al-Mubārakpūrī records more than seventy delegations across the Prophetic period, with many arriving in 9 and 10 AH. The concentration of visits marks a decisive shift in the peninsula's balance of power [1].

1 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, Riyadh: Darussalam, 2005, "The Delegations".

2. The Historical Setting of ʿĀm al-Wufūd

2.1 Arabia before Islam

Grasping why the Year of Delegations mattered requires first understanding the political map it redrew. Pre-Islamic Arabia had no central authority comparable to its northern neighbours. Where Byzantium and Sasanian Persia could field standing armies, run bureaucracies, and enforce written law, much of central Arabia's political life ran along tribal lines. Southern Arabia and the imperial frontier regions also had established kingdoms and forms of administration [2].

Several structural features defined that tribal order. Tribal solidarity, ʿaṣabiyyah, was the organizing principle of social and political life — one's chief loyalty ran to one's tribe, since desert survival depended on collective defense. Disputes were settled, or perpetuated, through blood vengeance (thaʾr/qiṣāṣ): a killing by one tribe against another obliged retaliation, sometimes dragging conflicts on for generations. Hospitality (ḍiyāfah) carried something close to religious weight, given how completely desert travellers relied on strangers' generosity. And the sacred months (ashhur ḥurum) offered recurring windows of enforced truce, making pilgrimage and trade possible [3].

The empires flanking Arabia — Byzantium and Sasanian Persia — projected influence mainly through client tribes on the frontiers: the Christian Ghassanids serving Byzantine interests in Syria, the Lakhmids serving Sasanian interests in Mesopotamia. These border kingdoms blended Arabian custom with borrowed imperial administration and religion (Christianity or Zoroastrianism), but the peninsula's interior stayed largely outside either empire's grip, leaving indigenous Arabian political forms intact [4].

2.2 Madīnah's Rise as a State

The Hijrah of 622 CE, and the community that formed around it in Madīnah, broke sharply with this older pattern. A modest band of emigrants (muhājirūn) and their Madīnan hosts (anṣār) grew, over time, into a centralized authority able to field armies, collect revenue (zakāh and jizyah), dispense justice, and conduct diplomacy across the peninsula [5].

2.2.1 The Madīnan Charter (Ṣaḥīfah)

Soon after the migration, the Constitution of Madīnah (Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīnah) laid the legal groundwork for this new order. Scholars still debate its precise date, the circumstances behind it, and exactly who was party to it, but its foundational importance is not seriously contested. It opens by describing itself as "a written agreement from Muhammad, the Prophet, between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who follow them, join them, and struggle with them" [6].

The document introduced several innovations. It bound previously separate tribes and clans into a single political community (ummah) with shared duties and rights — the text states that

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2 Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, London: Routledge, 2001.

3 Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

4 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

5 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

6 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, Translated by Alfred Guillaume. London: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 231–233, the agreement of Madīnah.

"the believers and Muslims … are one community to the exclusion of other people" [7], a formula that overrode tribal divisions in political terms while leaving them intact for administrative purposes.

The charter also accommodated religious plurality. In Guillaume's translation, the Jews of Banū ʿAwf form a community with the believers while retaining their own religion.[8] The wording, membership, and implications of this arrangement remain debated; it should not be taken as an uncontested description of all Jewish groups in Madīnah.

It set up a central mechanism for settling disputes, directing that disagreements "be referred to Allah and to Muhammad" [9], offering an alternative to the older cycle of blood vengeance. And it created shared obligations of defense, requiring every signatory to contribute to Madīnah's protection according to fixed formulas, with the additional stipulation that "the believers shall not leave any destitute person among them without providing for him in kindness" [10]. Modern scholarship disagrees over the charter's terminology and membership. Lecker's reconstruction, for example, offers a different reading of the security relationship between the participating groups [11].

2.3 Why the Conquest of Makkah Mattered

The largely bloodless conquest of Makkah (Fatḥ Makkah) in Ramaḍān 8 AH (January 630 CE) was a hinge point in Arabian politics. For roughly two decades the Quraysh of Makkah had led the resistance against the Prophet ﷺ and his community, drawing on their trading networks, their custodianship of the Kaʿbah, and their web of tribal alliances to coordinate opposition across the peninsula [12].

Facing an army of roughly ten thousand, the Quraysh could not realistically resist, and the city fell with little fighting. Rather than settling old scores, the Prophet ﷺ declared a general amnesty, telling the Makkans simply, "Go, for you are free" [13] — a statement transmitted in the Sīrah tradition, with the wording attributed to the Prophet ﷺ in that tradition [14], and one almost unheard of in the customs of Arabian warfare. It set a tone that would carry directly into the delegations that followed.

Beyond the military outcome, the conquest carried heavy symbolic weight. Makkah was Arabia's religious center as much as its commercial one, home to the Kaʿbah toward which Arabs across the peninsula oriented their worship. Clearing the idols from the Kaʿbah marked, in a visible way, the eclipse of polytheistic practice that had shaped Arabian religious life for generations — a shift the Qur'an captures in the line "truth has come and falsehood has perished" [15] [16].

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7 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, p. 231.
8 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, p. 233.
9 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, p. 233.
10 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, p. 231.
11 Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document*, Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2004, discussion of the charter's wording and participants.
12 Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*, New York: HarperOne, 2007.
13 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Conquest of Makkah".
14 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Conquest of Makkah," the reported amnesty; a Sīrah report.
15 Qur'an 17:81.

2.4 Ḥunayn and What Followed

The Battle of Ḥunayn, fought in Shawwāl 8 AH (630 CE), matters here because it sat directly before the Year of Delegations and shaped how Arabian tribes calculated their options. After Makkah fell, the Hawāzin and Thaqīf — tribes that had not yet submitted and were among Arabia's more formidable military forces, known especially for archery and cavalry — mobilized to meet the Prophet ﷺ in the field [17].

Fighting broke out in the valley of Ḥunayn, roughly twenty kilometers from Makkah. Under Malik ibn ʿAwf, the Hawāzin set an ambush, hiding archers in the surrounding passes to strike as the Muslim column advanced — a tactic that briefly worked, throwing the Muslim ranks into confusion and retreat. The Qur'an later reflects on that moment, noting that confidence in numbers had counted for nothing [18] [19].

The tide turned when the Prophet ﷺ, together with a handful of companions including his uncle al-ʿAbbās, called the retreating fighters back. Al-ʿAbbās, whose voice carried, cried out: "O Companions of the Tree! O People of the Pledge of Good Pleasure!" — an appeal to earlier covenants that rallied the Muslims back to the field. The Hawāzin were defeated, leaving behind a substantial haul of captives (six thousand) and camels (twenty-four thousand) [20].

What happened next showed the diplomatic instincts that would define the coming year. The Prophet ﷺ arranged the return of the Hawāzin captives after their delegation requested it. When a Hawāzin delegation came asking for the return of their women and children, he put the question to the Muslims and asked them to give up their shares voluntarily. This consultative process — grounded in the Qur'anic principle of shūrā found in Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3:159) and Sūrat al-Shūrā (42:38) — produced a consensus that turned the Hawāzin from adversaries into allies [21].

2.5 The March to Tabūk

The expedition to Tabūk, launched in Rajab 9 AH (October 630 CE), extended the Madīnan state's reach further still and set the immediate stage for the Year of Delegations. Word had reached Madīnah that Byzantium was massing forces, drawing on its Arab client tribes along the Syrian border, for a possible move against the Muslim state. In response the Prophet ﷺ called up the largest Muslim army assembled to that point [22].

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16 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*, Translated by Ismail K. Poonawala. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

17 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

18 Qur'an 9:25-26.

19 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Battle of Hunain"; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*, events of 8 AH, Ḥunayn.

20 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 2539–2540 and 4318–4319 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:2539; https://sunnah.com/bukhari:2540; https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4318; https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4319).

21 al-Wāqidī, *The Life of Muhammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi*, Edited by Rizwi Faizer; translated by Rizwi Faizer, Amal Ismail, and Abdul Kader Tayob. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011; W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*.

22 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*, events of 9 AH, the expedition to Tabūk.

The expedition matters for several reasons. It showed that the Muslim state was willing and able to project force beyond the peninsula, signalling to Byzantium that it now faced a power to be reckoned with. It also tested the loyalty of recently converted tribes — those who stayed home drew criticism in the Qur'anic revelations of the period [23] [24].

No battle actually took place, and the expedition did not encounter a Byzantine army, but the campaign produced treaties with several Christian frontier tribes, under which they paid tribute (jizyah) in return for protection and exemption from military service. The Christians of Aylah (today's Aqaba), for instance, sent envoys to the Prophet ﷺ during the campaign and secured a treaty guaranteeing their safety [25].

The campaign belongs to the context in which Sūrat al-Tawbah discusses treaty obligations and relations with non-Muslim communities. Qur'an 5:75 describes the Messiah, son of Mary, as a messenger.[26] Qur'an 9:29 concerns fighting certain People of the Book until payment of jizyah,[27] while 9:4 requires fulfilment of treaties with those who have honoured their commitments. These passages require attention to their distinct wording and historical contexts.[28]

2.6 A Changed Political Landscape

Together, these military and diplomatic developments reshaped Arabian tribal politics at a fundamental level. Tribes that had once governed themselves independently now had to reckon with Madīnah's power. The old menu of choices — alliance, neutrality, hostility — was still technically open, but the price attached to each had shifted dramatically [29].

Tribes weighing hostility had ready examples of where that led: the Quraysh, once Arabia's dominant power, had been defeated and absorbed; the Hawāzin had lost on the battlefield and only got their captives back through negotiation; the Thaqīf withstood a siege but still ended up sending envoys to Madīnah. Outright military victory over the Muslim state no longer looked plausible to anyone [30].

Alliance, by contrast, offered real advantages: protection from tribal rivals, a share in the growing Muslim economy, and access to charitable redistribution (zakāh). Tribal leaders in particular stood to gain, since the Prophet ﷺ typically confirmed existing chiefs as his own representatives (ʿummāl), tasked with collecting contributions and administering justice locally [31]. By this point, nearly every tribe in Arabia found its calculations tilting toward engagement with Madīnah rather than resistance to it.

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23 Qur'an 9:38-39.

24 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)*, Edited by Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī. 10 vols. Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000, commentary on Qur'an 9:38–39.

25 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Invasion of Tabuk," the Aylah covenant.

26 Qur'an 5:75.

27 Qur'an 9:29.

28 Qur'an 9:4; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)*, commentary on Qur'an 9:4 and 9:29.

29 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.

30 Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, 3rd ed. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

31 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf and other tribal appointments.

3. What the Delegations Were and Why They Mattered

3.1 The Word "Wufūd"

The Arabic wufūd (singular wafd) carries meaning worth unpacking. Its root, w-f-d, conveys arriving, presenting oneself, or being sent to represent others. Before Islam, a wafd could describe any group travelling together for a purpose; in a political setting the term narrowed to mean a delegation sent by a tribe or community to deal with a ruling power [32].

Classical lexicons support the basic sense of arrival and representation. Ibn Manẓūr's Lisān al-ʿArab describes a wafd as people who come to rulers on a visit or to seek assistance.[33] Al-Fīrūzābādī's al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ records the root's meanings of coming and arriving and identifies wafd as a group.[34] These definitions explain the term's use for visiting representatives; they do not by themselves establish political subordination or a particular motive for every delegation.

3.2 When the Delegations Arrived

The visits extended across several years. Al-Mubārakpūrī places many in 9 and 10 AH but also records earlier missions, including the first visit of ʿAbd al-Qays before the main Year of Delegations. The label ʿĀm al-Wufūd therefore identifies a concentration of visits rather than the date of every mission.[35]

Several tribes near Madīnah had established relations with the Prophet ﷺ before 9 AH. A sound report praises Aslam and Ghifār,[36] but does not establish an Aslam delegation in early 9 AH. The Thaqīf mission is specifically placed after Tabūk, illustrating how later military developments formed part of the context for negotiation.[37][38]

3.3 Where They Came From

Sources trace the delegations to every corner of the peninsula [39].

The accounts cover different regions and forms of contact: tribes of the Ḥijāz such as Aslam, Ghifār, Juhaynah, and Muzaynah;[40] Tamīm in central Arabia;[41] ʿAbd al-Qays in eastern Arabia;[42] and Kindah, Hamdān, and other southern communities.[43] They include both visits

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32 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*, 7th ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1987.

33 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 3rd ed. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1414 AH, entry w-f-d (وفد).

34 al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, Edited by Maktab Taḥqīq al-Turāth, under Muḥammad Naʿīm al-ʿArqasūsī. 8th ed. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 2005, entry w-f-d (وفد).

35 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," chronology and ʿAbd al-Qays.

36 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, hadith 2514a (https://sunnah.com/muslim:2514a).

37 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf.

38 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf.

40 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 3512 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3512).

41 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, the deputation of Banū Tamīm.

42 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 53 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:53).

43 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Kindah and Hamdān.

to Madīnah and missions sent by the Prophet ﷺ to tribes.[44] Christian communities such as Najrān and Aylah entered treaty relationships, although their circumstances and dates were not identical.[45]

3.4 Who Made Up These Delegations

Delegations reaching Madīnah during ʿĀm al-Wufūd showed a fairly consistent shape, adapted to each tribe's own customs and circumstances. Almost all included their leading figures — chief (sayyid), war leader (qāʾid), orator (khaṭīb), and poet (shāʿir) — a composition that itself signalled the group's authority to commit their tribe to whatever was agreed in Madīnah [46].

Poets were far from incidental. In pre-Islamic Arabia they functioned as propagandists — celebrating tribal triumphs, mocking rivals, and preserving collective memory — so a delegation travelling with a poet came prepared for verbal performance as part of the diplomatic exchange. The verses composed on these visits — praising the Prophet ﷺ, recounting the trip, announcing conversion — served as a way of relaying commitment back to the tribes at home [47].

Delegation size varied a great deal, from as few as three or four representatives up to several dozen. The Christian delegation from Najrān, numbering sixty and including senior bishops and scholars, was clearly meant to underline Najrān's stature as a Christian centre and to make room for serious theological exchange [48].

3.5 Why Tribes Sent Delegations

The motives behind these missions resist any single explanation; a closer look reveals several objectives running alongside one another [49].

Political motives came first for most tribes: securing a place in the emerging order once it was clear that armed resistance to Madīnah offered no realistic hope. Delegations gave tribes a way to negotiate submission on terms that preserved as much autonomy as possible while acknowledging Madīnan supremacy [50].

Economic motives mattered too — control of trade routes, access to pilgrimage sites, and a stake in the growing Muslim economy. The zakāh system offered real material benefit, and the Qur'an itself lists categories of recipients entitled to it, including "the poor, the needy, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled" [51] [52].

Religious motives ran the gamut from genuine conviction to pragmatic calculation. Some Western scholarship has suggested that many tribes joined Islam out of convenience rather than conviction, and that the emerging state treated a verbal profession of faith and payment

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44 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Hamdān and the mission of ʿAlī.

45 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Najrān; "The Invasion of Tabuk," Aylah.

46 Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*.

47 Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*.

48 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*.

49 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.

50 Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*.

51 Qur'an 9:60.

52 Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

of zakāh as sufficient for admission [53] — an observation that fits the Prophet's ﷺ evident preference for political incorporation now, trusting that deeper religious commitment would follow with time and exposure.

Social and psychological motives played a part as well: delegations let tribal leaders size up the Prophet ﷺ and his community directly, gauge their strength, and gather intelligence, while also raising the delegates' own standing back home once it became known they had met him personally [54].

3.6 The Religious Framing of the Delegations

Qur'anic revelation from this period gave the delegation phenomenon theological meaning. Sūrat al-Naṣr (Chapter 110), traditionally dated to this time, declares: "When comes the Help of Allah and Victory, and you see the people entering Allah's religion in crowds, then celebrate the praises of your Lord and ask His forgiveness, for He is Oft-Returning" [55] — casting the wave of conversions as a divine outcome rather than simply a human achievement [56].

Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt (Chapter 49), much of it also linked to this period, set out expectations for how believers should conduct themselves toward the Prophet ﷺ and toward one another. The line rebuking "those who call you from behind the private quarters, most of them do not understand" [57] addressed individuals who had behaved disrespectfully, while the instruction to "make peace between your brothers" [58] made conflict resolution a religious duty in its own right [59].

4. How the Prophet ﷺ Received the Delegations

4.1 The Ethical Backbone of Reception

The way the Prophet ﷺ received tribal envoys reveals the moral commitments underlying his diplomacy. This was not simply calculated tactics; it flowed from his character and from divine instruction on treating guests, respecting human dignity, and dealing justly. The Qur'anic affirmation of human dignity [60] gave theological grounding to treating every visitor with respect, whatever their background or belief [61].

Accounts of reception show hospitality adapted to particular circumstances. Thaqīf's representatives stayed in a tent in the mosque, while other visitors asked questions in an audience with the Prophet ﷺ and his companions. These reports support attention to guests without establishing an identical ceremonial welcome for every delegation.[62]

4.2 Where Delegations Were Received

The mosque in Madīnah served as a venue for audiences and instruction. In the report of Ḍimām ibn Thaʿlabah, a visitor asks which of the seated men is Muhammad ﷺ, then

53 Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 10th ed. London: Macmillan, 1970.
54 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," tribal representatives.
55 Qur'an 110:1-3.
56 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)*, commentary on Qur'an 110:1–3.
57 Qur'an 49:4.
58 Qur'an 49:10.
59 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*.
60 Qur'an 17:70.
61 Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*.
62 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 63 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:63).

questions him about the obligations of Islam. The report shows accessibility and a modest setting, rather than a formal seating hierarchy.[63]

Accommodation varied. Al-Mubārakpūrī reports that a tent was erected in the mosque for Thaqīf's representatives, enabling them to hear Qur'anic recitation and observe prayer. It is therefore more accurate to identify the accommodation recorded for a particular delegation than to assume all visitors stayed on the ṣuffah.[64]

4.3 A Leader Without Trappings

Given his position as Arabia's leading political figure, the Prophet's ﷺ modesty in receiving delegations stands out. He was often seated among his companions in a way that made it hard for newcomers to pick him out at all. In the report concerning Ḍimām ibn Thaʿlabah of Banū Saʿd ibn Bakr, the visitor asks which man is Muhammad ﷺ; the companions identify him [65].

This was not weakness but confidence of a different kind — authority resting on moral standing and demonstrated character rather than on the trappings of kingship. His plainness, rather than diminishing his stature, set him apart from the kings and chiefs delegations had encountered elsewhere and, if anything, reinforced his authority [66].

4.4 Gifts and the Ethics of Giving

The Sīrah accounts record gifts to visiting representatives. Such gifts could express hospitality and sustain relations, but the reports do not justify assuming that every delegation brought presents or that every gift followed an identical protocol.[67]

Al-Mubārakpūrī records gifts to the representatives of Banū Ḥanīfah, including a share for the man left to guard their belongings. The episode illustrates practical attention to delegation members without requiring an unsupported claim that all gifts came from a formally established state treasury.[68]

4.5 How He Communicated and Persuaded

Several communication habits stand out. He shaped his message to the audience in front of him: with Christian delegations he stressed shared monotheism and cited Qur'anic verses honouring Jesus and Mary [69]; with polytheistic tribes he leaned on rational argument for monotheism and the social benefits of Islamic law [70].

The agreements show selective flexibility. Thaqīf was allowed to have others destroy al-Lāt. A report in Sunan Abī Dāwūd also records an initial concession concerning charity and military service, with the expectation that the tribe would later undertake these duties. This does not establish a general policy of postponing all religious obligations.[71]

He listened, genuinely. Accounts describe him hearing out delegations' concerns and demands without interruption or dismissal, even when the requests seemed hard to grant. The

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63 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 63 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:63).

64 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf.

65 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 63 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:63).

66 Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*.

67 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Banū Ḥanīfah.

68 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Banū Ḥanīfah.

69 Qur'an 19:16-34.

70 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, the Christian deputation of Najrān.

71 Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, hadith 3025 (https://sunnah.com/abudawud:3025).

Najrān delegation illustrates this well: rather than cutting short an extended theological argument, he engaged each point patiently and respectfully [72].

Theological discussion could draw on shared religious narratives. The Najrān account, for example, connects discussion of Jesus with Qur'an 3:59–61. This is a specific instance of communication through familiar religious concepts, rather than evidence for a universal use of stories in every negotiation.[73]

4.6 Consultation (Shūrā) in Diplomacy

The Qur'anic instruction to settle affairs through mutual consultation [74] grounded consultation as a practice of governance generally, and it served several purposes specifically in dealing with delegations [75].

It drew on real expertise: companions with detailed knowledge of particular tribes, their internal politics, and their leadership helped assess delegations and shape appropriate responses. It built consensus: consulting companions on how to handle a delegation ensured broad buy-in for the resulting decision, as when the Hawāzin's request for their captives was put to the community and produced unanimous agreement more durable than any top-down order could have been [76]. And it prepared the ground for succession, since institutionalizing consultation set a precedent that would guide governance after the Prophet's ﷺ death [77].

5. Notable Delegations and Their Results

5.1 Thaqīf

The Thaqīf delegation, representing the city of Ṭāʾif, ranks among the most consequential of the year. Thaqīf had resisted fiercely, and the siege of Ṭāʾif following Ḥunayn had shown both their fighting capacity and their staying power [78].

Thaqīf sought concessions concerning al-Lāt and religious obligations. The Sīrah account records rejection of retaining the idol and exemption from prayer, while permitting outsiders to demolish al-Lāt. Sunan Abī Dāwūd 3025 separately records an initial concession concerning charity and military service. The reports therefore require a distinction between the requests refused and the accommodations granted.[79]

His representative al-Mughīrah ibn Shuʿbah accompanied the delegation back to Ṭāʾif and carried out the idol's destruction under Khālid ibn al-Walīd's leadership. ʿUthmān ibn Abī al-ʿĀṣ was appointed as the Prophet's ﷺ representative there, and the city stayed loyal to the Muslim state after his death [80].

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72 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*; W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*.

73 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, the Christian deputation of Najrān; Qur'an 3:59–61.

74 Qur'an 42:38.

75 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*; Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*.

76 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 4318–4319 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4318; https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4319).

77 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.

78 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*.

79 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, hadith 3025 (https://sunnah.com/abudawud:3025).

80 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.

5.2 Banū Tamīm

The Tamīm delegation, from a large and powerful northeastern tribe, is notable both for its confrontational tone and for the Qur'anic revelation it prompted. On arrival, its members engaged the Quraysh and the local Madīnans in a contest of boasting (mufākharah) [81].

Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt (49:1-5) addresses this episode directly, rebuking those who raised their voices above the Prophet's ﷺ. The same sūrah, separately in verse 13, states: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you in peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" [82] — a wider ethical principle relevant to the assumptions behind tribal boasting, replacing tribal rank with moral standing as the true measure of worth [83].

Despite the rocky start, Tamīm accepted Islam, bringing considerable military weight to the Muslim side given their numbers and fighting strength; the tribe went on to play a significant role in the early conquests [84].

5.3 The Christians of Najrān

The Najrān delegation, representing a Christian community in the south, is the most fully documented encounter of the year. Sixty Christians — including senior scholars, bishops, and notables — travelled to Madīnah for theological discussion with the Prophet ﷺ [85].

When their prayer time came, he let them pray inside his mosque, facing east as their tradition required — a gesture of tolerance that set an important precedent for Muslim-Christian relations and reflected the Qur'anic principle that "there is no compulsion in religion" [86] [87].

The discussions on the nature and status of Jesus ran long, eventually reaching the point where the Prophet ﷺ proposed mutual imprecation (mubāhalah), per Qur'an 3:61. The Christians declined, evidently recognizing the sincerity of his conviction, and asked instead to negotiate a treaty arrangement that would let them keep their faith while accepting Muslim political authority [88].

The result was the Treaty of Najrān, guaranteeing religious freedom, protection for their churches, exemption from military service, and security of property in return for jizyah — with the added stipulation that no bishop, monk, or priest would be removed from his post [89]. This treaty helped set the pattern that would later govern Muslim relations with religious minorities more broadly [90].

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81 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*.
82 Qur'an 49:13.
83 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*.
84 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.
85 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, the Christian deputation of Najrān.
86 Qur'an 2:256.
87 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, the Christian deputation of Najrān; Qur'an 3:61.
88 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Najrān.
89 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*.
90 Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam*.

5.4 ʿAbd al-Qays

The ʿAbd al-Qays delegation, from eastern Arabia, is remembered for prompting a request for simple, portable religious instructions. Because hostile tribes made regular visits difficult, they asked for guidance they could act on without frequent access to the Prophet ﷺ [91].

The report describes commands concerning faith and explains faith through obligations including: belief in one God, the five daily prayers, payment of zakāh, fasting in Ramaḍān, and handing over one-fifth of any war spoils. He also barred them from certain vessels used for fermenting drinks [92].

5.5 Kindah

The Kindah mission is associated with al-Ashʿath ibn Qays. The Sīrah account describes the delegation's appearance and an exchange concerning lineage. Kindah therefore provides an example of engagement with a prominent southern tribal leadership.[93]

5.6 The Northern Christian Tribes

The northern arrangements should be distinguished individually. During Tabūk, the ruler of Aylah came to the Prophet ﷺ, and communities including Jarbaʾ and Adhruḥ entered tribute arrangements. The surviving Aylah text promises security. These accounts do not justify treating every northern Christian tribe as a single delegation with identical terms.[94]

The treaty with the Christians of Aylah (modern Aqaba) survives in the sources: it guaranteed their safety on land and sea, protected their vessels, and set an annual tribute, opening with the statement that "this is a covenant from Allah and His Messenger" [95]. Treaties of this kind on the northern frontier also served the practical purpose of securing the border against Byzantine influence.

5.7 The Yemeni Delegations

Southern contacts included delegations and missions sent by the Prophet ﷺ. In al-Mubārakpūrī's account, Hamdān's conversion followed ʿAlī's mission to Yemen; the Prophet ﷺ responded with a greeting of peace upon Hamdān.[96]

6. Strategies of Prophetic Diplomacy during ʿĀm al-Wufūd

6.1 Peaceable Negotiation as the Default

The Prophet's ﷺ diplomacy consistently favoured resolution over confrontation. The Qur'anic directive to "incline to peace" [97] provided the theological basis for this stance, and throughout the Year of Delegations he showed a steady preference for talking rather than fighting, even when force remained an option [98].

Several threads run through this preference. Conversion was never made a condition for a treaty relationship — Najrān's Christians kept their faith while accepting his political authority. His letters and addresses used language of genuine invitation — "I invite you," "if

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91 al-Wāqidī, *The Life of Muhammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi*.

92 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 53 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:53).

93 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Kindah.

94 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Invasion of Tabuk," Aylah, Jarbaʾ, and Adhruḥ.

95 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Invasion of Tabuk," the text of the Aylah covenant.

96 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Hamdān and the mission of ʿAlī.

97 Qur'an 8:61.

98 Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*.

you accept" — leaving room for refusal or further discussion rather than issuing ultimatums [99]. He showed real patience with hesitant or objecting delegations, continuing the drawn-out Najrān discussions across multiple sittings rather than cutting them short. And his persuasion aimed simultaneously at intellect, conscience, and self-interest [100].

6.2 Gradualism and Room to Adjust

The principle of gradual implementation (tadarruj) marks much of his diplomatic method during this period. Rather than insisting on immediate, total compliance with Islamic practice, he set a pace tribes could realistically sustain [101].

The limits of accommodation depended on the agreement. Thaqīf was permitted to leave the destruction of al-Lāt to outsiders, and Abū Dāwūd records an initial concession concerning charity and military service. These examples show flexibility on particular requests without establishing that prayer, fasting, and zakāh were generally introduced only after conversion.[102]

This flexibility reflected sophistication rather than weak conviction — a recognition that applying religious law well requires accounting for the circumstances of those bound by it, in keeping with the Qur'anic statement that "Allah intends ease for you, not hardship" [103] [104].

6.3 Tolerating Religious Difference

By the standards of his era, the Prophet's ﷺ openness to religious diversity was striking. The Qur'anic line "To you, your religion, and to me, my religion" [105] set the tone for dealing with non-Muslim delegations [106].

Najrān's Christians offer the clearest example: allowed to pray inside his mosque facing their traditional direction, engaged in theological debate on equal terms, guided by the instruction to "argue with the People of the Book only in the best manner" [107] [108]. The Treaty of Najrān turned this tolerance into binding commitment — guaranteeing freedom of worship, protecting churches, and keeping religious leaders in their posts — establishing a template for Muslim-non-Muslim relations that would outlast this period by centuries [109].

6.4 Building Alliances, Preventing Conflict

This diplomacy was not merely reactive but deliberately forward-looking, aimed at heading off conflict before it started. By formalizing relationships with tribes across Arabia, the

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99 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*; W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*.

100 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*.

101 Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*.

102 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, hadith 3025 (https://sunnah.com/abudawud:3025).

103 Qur'an 2:185.

104 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.

105 Qur'an 109:6.

106 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*.

107 Qur'an 29:46.

108 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*; Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*.

109 Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam*.

Prophet ﷺ wove an alliance network that isolated would-be opponents and made large-scale resistance to the Muslim state increasingly impractical [110].

The reception process itself discouraged violence: by offering tribes a clear channel for negotiating their standing, it removed much of the incentive to fight for it instead. Genuine hospitality and respect toward visiting delegations advertised the benefits of engagement, drawing further tribes into the same pattern [111]. The Tabūk campaign, though not itself part of the delegation phenomenon, functioned as a strategic show of force that encouraged northern tribes toward diplomacy rather than resistance [112].

6.5 Letters, Envoys, and Treaties as Tools of Statecraft

Correspondence: the Sīrah literature records letters sent by the Prophet ﷺ to rulers and tribal leaders during the Madīnan period, with recurring features — opening with the basmalah, identifying the sender as Muhammad the Messenger of Allah, inviting the recipient to Islam, and noting the consequences of continued opposition [113]. The letter to Heraclius opened: "Peace be upon him who follows the guidance. I invite you to accept Islam. Accept Islam and you will prosper and Allah will give you double rewards" [114]. The letter to the Negus of Abyssinia was pitched with particular sensitivity to Christian belief: "I bear witness that Jesus, son of Mary, is indeed a spirit of God and His word… He created Jesus through His word just as He created Adam with His hands" [115].

Envoys: he used envoys to carry letters and open early negotiations, and set firm protocol around their treatment — forbidding the killing of ambassadors even from hostile powers [116].

Treaties and covenants created obligations beyond immediate political advantage. In Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān reports that he and his father were released by Quraysh before Badr after promising not to fight alongside the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ honoured their promise and did not take them into the battle.[117]

6.6 Military and Diplomatic Tools Working Together

Though the Year of Delegations was chiefly a diplomatic phenomenon, it unfolded against a backdrop of military reality, and the Prophet's ﷺ approach let each dimension reinforce the other. Earlier victories — Makkah, Ḥunayn, Tabūk — created the conditions under which diplomacy could work. Demonstrations of military capability were used deliberately to encourage negotiation. And the distribution of spoils from campaigns gave tribes further reason to seek alliance with the Muslim state [118].

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110 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.
111 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Invasion of Tabuk".
112 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, the section on letters to kings and princes.
113 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*; Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*.
114 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 7 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7).
115 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, the letter to the Negus.
116 Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, hadith 2761 (https://sunnah.com/abudawud:2761).
117 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, hadith 1787 (https://sunnah.com/muslim:1787).
118 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*; Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*; Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*.

AL-AASAR Journal
Quarterly *Research Journal*
www. al-aasar.com
Vol. 3, No. 1 (2026)
Online ISSN: 3006-693X
Print ISSN: 3006-6921

7. The Ethical Foundations of Prophetic Diplomacy

7.1 Justice and Equal Treatment

The Qur'anic command to "be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just" [119] made justice (ʿadl) a non-negotiable principle of governance, one applied consistently throughout the Year of Delegations [120].

In dealing with delegations, this meant treating tribes alike regardless of size, wealth, or military strength. The general amnesty after Makkah's fall — "Go, for you are free" [121] — exemplified it, as did the well-known case of a woman from the noble Makhzūm tribe accused of theft: when some companions suggested leniency because of her status, the Prophet ﷺ refused, saying that even his own daughter Fāṭimah would face the same punishment were she in that position [122].

The Farewell Pilgrimage account in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim stresses the inviolability of life and property and the abolition of inherited blood claims. Qur'an 49:13 separately grounds human dignity in a common origin and makes piety, rather than tribal descent, the measure of distinction. These are complementary sources for the paper's discussion of justice and equality.[123]

7.2 Mercy in Practice

His role as "a mercy to the worlds" [124] shaped his diplomacy at its core; mercy (raḥmah) was not an afterthought but a governing orientation [125].

The compassionate reception of delegations — including those from tribes that had fought against him — bears this out. Rather than humiliating former enemies, he received them with dignity and set terms that respected their situation; Thaqīf's leaders, for instance, were spared the indignity of destroying their own idol [126].

The treatment of captives after Ḥunayn tells the same story: despite the Hawāzin's earlier ambush, the Prophet ﷺ eventually freed all six thousand captives, many without ransom, once their tribe asked for their return. His mercy reached even those who had directly wronged him — when Wahshī, the man who had killed his uncle Ḥamzah, later sought to become Muslim, the Prophet ﷺ received him without punishing him for that killing, though he asked Wahshī to keep his face out of sight [127]. The Qur'an frames this disposition as practically as well as morally significant: "It was by the mercy of Allah that you were gentle with them. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you" [128] [129].

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119 Qur'an 5:8.
120 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*.
121 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Conquest of Makkah," the reported amnesty.
122 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 3475 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3475).
123 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, hadith 1218a (https://sunnah.com/muslim:1218a); Qur'an 49:13.
124 Qur'an 21:107.
125 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*.
126 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*.
127 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 4072 and 4318–4319 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4072; https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4318; https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4319).
128 Qur'an 3:159.

7.3 Reliability and Keeping One's Word

His reputation for honesty — he was known before his mission as al-Amīn, "the trustworthy" — underpinned his diplomatic success. The Qur'anic command to "fulfill the covenant of Allah when you make a covenant, and do not break your oaths after you have made them" [130] made keeping treaties a matter of religious obligation [131].

The Badr episode involving Ḥudhayfah and his father illustrates the point: the Prophet ﷺ instructed them to honour the promise they had given Quraysh rather than join the battle. It provides a concrete example of covenant-keeping under military pressure.[132]

This extended to agreements with non-Muslims as well. The Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah contained terms that looked unfavourable to Muslims, including an obligation to return any Muslim migrant who came from Makkah without permission. When Abū Jandal came from Makkah to the treaty site at Ḥudaybiyah, the Prophet ﷺ sent him back in keeping with the treaty — an act that cemented his reputation as someone whose word could be trusted [133].

7.4 Wisdom (Ḥikmah) in Leadership

Ḥikmah — practical judgment, ethical discernment, and the ability to apply understanding to particular circumstances — shows up repeatedly in his diplomatic conduct [134].

Strategic patience (ṣabr): he waited for the right moment with each tribe, recognizing timing as central to success, and accepted the seemingly unfavourable terms of Ḥudaybiyah because he saw the longer-term payoff [135].

Situational judgment (al-fiqh bi al-wāqiʿ): he assessed each tribe on its own terms rather than applying a single formula — the Thaqīf agreement included specific accommodations, while Najrān's Christians were engaged differently than polytheistic tribes [136].

Long-term thinking: he favoured gradual, durable integration over rapid, superficial conformity, and his practice of appointing local leaders as his own representatives built local investment in the new order [137].

Emotional restraint (dhakāʾ ʿāṭifī): he managed both his own reactions and those of his companions, keeping pride or anger from derailing outcomes — the Tamīm account describes a response through Muslim speakers and poets, while when the Hawāzin asked for their captives back, he asked companions to volunteer rather than command, leading by giving up his own share first [138].

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129 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 7, the testimony concerning truthfulness and keeping agreements (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7).

130 Qur'an 16:91.

131 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, hadith 1787 (https://sunnah.com/muslim:1787).

133 Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*.

134 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf and Najrān.

135 Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*.

136 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," Thaqīf and the appointment of ʿUthmān ibn Abī al-ʿĀṣ.

137 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*; Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*.

138 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, the deputation of Banū Tamīm.

7.5 Ethics and Strategy as One Thing

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this diplomacy is how thoroughly ethics and strategy fold into each other rather than pulling apart. He did not treat moral commitments as costs to be minimized when inconvenient but as the basis on which effective statecraft rested [139].

His ethical conduct made his overtures more credible and, in turn, more effective. His strategic decisions were shaped by ethical reasoning — the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah was wise strategically and, separately, the right thing to do in honouring the Quraysh's request to negotiate. And where his principles constrained his options, he accepted those constraints as part of his commitment to justice. The overall pattern suggests ethical conduct can strengthen strategic effectiveness just as strategic thinking can sharpen ethical practice [140].

8. What the Delegations Achieved for the Stability of the Islamic State

8.1 Political Unification of Arabia

The most visible result of the delegations was the political unification of the peninsula under Madīnan authority. What had been a scattering of competing tribes became, in effect, a confederation with a single centre — the first time in Arabian history that one authority could plausibly claim jurisdiction from Yemen in the south to the Syrian border in the north [141].

This unity came mostly through negotiation rather than conquest: the delegation accounts include tribes that negotiated their relationship with Madīnah without a recorded prior battle against them. They do not provide a secure numerical basis for classifying all delegations as voluntary or compelled [142]. Madīnah's establishment as Arabia's political centre also laid the institutional groundwork for the state's later expansion under the Rightly Guided Caliphs — the governors, tax collectors, and judges sent back with delegations built an administrative structure that outlasted the Prophet ﷺ himself [143].

8.2 Less Tribal Warfare

Pre-Islamic Arabia had lived with more or less constant intertribal conflict — the forty-year Basūs War between Bakr and Taghlib, and the Dāḥis and Ghabrāʾ War between Banū ʿAbs and Dhubyān, illustrate how destructive this could become [144]. The Year of Delegations helped break this pattern.

Madīnah's emergence as an overarching authority gave tribes access to conflict-resolution mechanisms that reduced the need for war. The Constitution of Madīnah's central arbitration principle was, in effect, extended outward to tribes across the peninsula through their delegation agreements [145]. And the shift from tribal to religious identity (ummah) subordinated old tribal fault lines to a wider shared identity — a dispute between two Muslims from different tribes was now a matter for community procedure rather than a

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139 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith 4318–4319 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4318; https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4319).

140 Tooba Khalid, Shahzada Imran Ayub, and Tahira Munawar, *Duties of Muslim Diplomats in Contemporary Era (A Scientific Review in the Light of Prophetic Hadiths)*, Al-Mahdi Research Journal 5, no. 1 (2023): 570–588, discussion of diplomatic duties and Prophetic ethics.

141 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.

142 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State*.

143 Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*.

144 Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*.

145 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*; Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*.

potential trigger for tribal war [146]. By appointing tribal leaders as his own agents (ʿummāl) for collecting zakāh and resolving disputes, the Prophet ﷺ did not dismantle tribal leadership but folded it into the new state, giving chiefs a direct stake in its stability [147].

8.3 A Shared Identity and Peaceful Coexistence

The delegations helped foster identity that crossed tribal lines. The annual pilgrimage (ḥajj), fully established during this period following the Farewell Pilgrimage of 10 AH, gave tribes a recurring, peaceful occasion for contact — pilgrims from different tribes praying, performing rites, and exchanging news and goods together, building relationships that cut across old divisions [148].

The Farewell Sermon distilled the new order's principles for an audience estimated above 100,000 pilgrims, proclaiming human equality and Muslim brotherhood as the culmination of everything the delegation process had been building toward [149].

The same system extended to relations between Muslims and non-Muslims within the state: the treaties with Christian Najrān and the northern frontier tribes set out frameworks for coexistence that would later be applied elsewhere — non-Muslim communities that accepted Muslim political authority and paid tribute received guarantees of religious freedom, protected property, and communal self-governance, an arrangement stable enough that some such communities persisted within Islamic states for centuries afterward [150].

8.4 A Model That Outlasted Its Author

One measure of the delegations' impact is that the state survived the Prophet's death in 11 AH (632 CE) — an event that would have collapsed most pre-Islamic political structures, which depended almost entirely on their founder's personal authority. Though some tribes did rebel during the Apostasy Wars (Riddah), the institutional groundwork, diplomatic precedent, and ethical principles established largely during the Year of Delegations proved sturdy enough to see the transition through. Within a decade of the Prophet's death, the Islamic state had expanded into major Byzantine and Sasanian territories; the Byzantine Empire itself continued to exist [151].

9. Conclusion

9.1 Summary

The Year of Delegations (ʿĀm al-Wufūd, 9 AH/630-631 CE) stands as a pivotal moment both in Arabian history and in the emergence of Islamic diplomatic practice. This paper has argued that the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ diplomacy rested on four recurring strategies — peaceable negotiation, gradual and flexible agreement-making, tolerance of religious difference, and deliberate alliance-building through letters, envoys, and treaties — all grounded in an ethical framework of justice (ʿadl), mercy (raḥmah), reliability in keeping covenants (al-wafāʾ bi al-ʿahd), and practical wisdom (ḥikmah) expressed through patience, situational judgment, long-term thinking, and emotional restraint.

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146 Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

147 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, "The Delegations," tribal appointments.

148 Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum).*

149 Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*.

150 Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam*.

151 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*; Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*.

9.2 Key Points

Several conclusions follow. First, negotiation consistently took priority over confrontation, establishing peaceable engagement as the default posture of Muslim statecraft, consistent with the Qur'anic instruction to "incline to peace" (8:61). Second, gradualism and flexibility let tribes integrate at a pace their circumstances could bear, while still holding to essential principles, echoing the divine intent that "Allah intends ease for you, not hardship" (2:185). Third, religious tolerance was not simply convenient accommodation but a principled stance written into binding treaties protecting non-Muslim communities, in line with the Qur'anic statement that "there is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). Fourth, an absolute commitment to keeping covenants, rooted in the command to "fulfill the covenant of Allah" (16:91), made the Prophet's ﷺ word a dependable currency in a region where broken agreements were common — and, by that very reliability, made engaging with him diplomatically attractive.

9.3 What This Means Theoretically

This model challenges the realist assumption, common in international relations theory that ethics and state interest necessarily pull against each other. The treaties with the Quraysh, with Christian communities, and with Thaqīf show ethical commitment functioning not as a constraint on strategy but as the very foundation of its success — a meaningful alternative to purely coercive or transactional diplomacy.

9.4 Practical Relevance Today

For scholars and practitioners working in international relations, conflict resolution, and intercultural dialogue, ʿĀm al-Wufūd offers a substantial, non-Western case study in diplomacy grounded in ethics. Patient negotiation, contextual flexibility, respect for religious difference, and unwavering reliability in keeping agreements remain as relevant now as then. The period stands as a lasting example of how political integration can be built through justice, mercy, and persuasion rather than coercion alone.

9.5 Limits of This Study and Directions for Further Research

This study is constrained by the nature of its sources, compiled decades after the events they describe and shaped by particular theological and political viewpoints. Future work might compare Prophetic diplomacy with diplomatic practice in other pre-modern civilizations, examine how these principles apply within contemporary Muslim-majority states, or explore what gradualism and religious tolerance might offer conflict resolution in today's multicultural societies.

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Print ISSN: 3006-6921

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