

## The Role of Women in the Military: Analysis of Selected Cases from the *Rahiq Al-Makhtum* Scripture

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### Abstract

In Malaysia, the official participation of women in the armed forces began in early 1964. This was also the beginning of women's involvement in the other branches of the military, such as the navy and air force. During their involvement in these services, they were burdened with heavy responsibilities as well as high positions in the armed forces. This differs with the role of women involved in the army based on the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture. Hence, what was the role of women in the army according to the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture? Were they also in the front lines during war and holding high positions in the army? Therefore, this study aimed to achieve two objectives. First, identify the selected cases related to the role of women in the army mentioned in the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture; and, second, analyse the role of women in the army according to selected cases. This exploratory study used secondary data that were analysed using the content analysis method. The study found that the role of women in the army based on selected cases in the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture were namely assistants in the army, provide food and water, treat the wounded, army reserves during the war, supporters of the army as well as to protect the Prophet SAW. Although during the Prophet's SAW time women did not hold high positions in the military, it was not forbidden for women to do so provided they could safeguard the religion and culture.

**Keywords:** Role, Women, Military, Cases

### Introduction

Currently, the involvement of women in the military field is nothing new. This is evident as the number of women involved in this field has been increasing from time-to-time. In Malaysia, women are also involved in all three branches of the military, namely the armed forces, navy and air force (Police and Military Archives, 2008). In addition, the involvement of women in the police and military is one field that has been accepted by the society at large (Zulaikhah, 1982). This shows that women have been given a place in the field of law enforcement, either in the field force, traffic police, marine police, police reserves or the anti-

corruption unit. This includes their involvement in the military as well, whether in the armed forces, navy or air force.

According to an article 'American Women Soldiers Joining the Combat Unit' (2013), women need to perform heavy tasks such as climbing walls and carrying tank ammunition weighing as much as 25kg. This also shows that the role of women in the military currently is increasing. Besides that, there are women in the military who are holding high ranks in the organisation, such as a Commander in training centres and the administration (Police and Military Archives, 2010).

The involvement of women in the military actually began a long time ago. History has shown that Muslim women during the time of the Prophet SAW had also directly joined the war, for example the Battle of Uhud (Zulaikhah, 1983:34). Nevertheless, their involvement was limited to only assisting male army personnel at that time. But they were allowed to carry weapons if the situation warranted as such. Besides that, the involvement of women at the war front according to the Prophet SAW was solely for *jihad* in the name of Allah SWT and the Prophet SAW (Abdul Ghani, 1993:41). During the time of the Prophet SAW, the capability of women was astonishing as they had proven their worth by portraying the truth regarding the promises of Allah SWT and His Messenger.

From a Malaysian context, the early involvement of women in the military world began in the 1980s. Their involvement was in the form of the first intake in one of the branches of the military, namely the Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM) (Police and Military Archives, 2008). In reference to the involvement of women, this working paper intended to examine whether the role of women in the military today was in line with a similar role according to the biography of the Prophet SAW. In addition, this working paper also examined the suitability of women to hold high positions in the military organization based on selected cases in the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture.

Hence, this working paper contained several sections. First, the definition of the army. Second, justification for choosing the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture; third, the role of women in the military based on selected cases in the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture; fourth, selected cases based on the role of women in the military found in the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture; fifth, analyse the role and position of women holding high positions in the military based the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture; and sixth, conclusion.

### **Definition of the Military**

According to Muthiah (2001), the army is a profession and has three main characteristics, such as expertise, responsibility and cooperation. It also deals with specific knowledge and expertise in the field related to humans and has an objective to achieve.

The definition adduced by Kennedy and Neilson (2002) was different from that of Muthiah (2001). Kennedy and Neilson (2002) had defined the army as a group of humans that form an activity, operation or organization. They were also of the view that the army referred to an organization associated with work on land, sea or air. The military is an organization that trains humans through preparations in the battle field. Besides that, the military also refers to a group of people working together to achieve something that they believe in.

### Justification for Chosing the *Rahiq Al-Makhtum* Scripture

The researcher in this study had used the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture as the main scripture for reference. The *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture was written by al-Mubarakfuri (2004) during a writing competition about the life of the Prophet SAW in 1979. This scripture was chosen as the main scripture for this study because it was believed that the quality of the study would benefit Muslims.

There were researchers who used the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture as a guide for substantiating an argument. For example, Asri (2010) had used the scripture as reference when arguing on the topic "Muharam was not the month the Prophet SAW migrated".

Besides that, this scripture also contains a complete biography about the life of the Prophet SAW, beginning from his birth to the time of His demise. In addition, this scripture also tells the complete story about the battles throughout the life of the Prophet SAW (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004). Based on the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture, there are various types of information related to battles, some involving the Prophet SAW.

### Selected Cases Based on the Role of Women in the Military Found in the *Rahiq Al-Makhtum* Scripture

There are cases that indicate the role of women in the military found in the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture. Table 1 shows the role of women in the Battle of Uhud based on the excerpts from the scripture.

Table 1

*Selected Cases Based on the Role of Women in the Military According to the Rahiq al-Makhtum Scripture*

Num.	Selected cases in the <i>Rahiq al-Makhtum</i> scripture	Role of Women
1.	"Several mukminah women were present at the battle zone after the war ended. Anas said: "I saw Aisyah binti Abu Bakar r.ah and Ummu Sulaym r.ah, and while shifting the robe, I saw their leg bracelet and they were carrying water containers on their backs and poured water into the mouth of Muslim soldiers. Then, they went back to refill the containers only to return and give water to other soldiers." Umar Sa'id: "Ummu Sulaym gave us a container of water on the day of Uhud" (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).	Assisting the army to prepare food and water
2.	"Among these women included Ummu Ayman r.ah. When she saw a group of Muslim army soldiers running into Madinah, she grabbed a handful of soil and threw it in their direction while saying to some of them: "Go weave your cloth, give me your sword." Then she quickly ran to the battle front and gave water to the wounded." Hibban Ibn al-Ariqah shot an arrow in her direction and she fell to the ground. The enemy of Allah SWT then laughed. This brought great sorrow to the Prophet	Assisting the army to prepare food and water

	SAW and He gave a headless arrow to Sa'ad while saying: "Shoot him". Sa'ad then shot the arrow, which hit Hibban's neck until he fell. Then the Prophet SAW laughed until His teeth showed, saying: "Sa'ad has revenged Ummu Ayman r.ah. Allah has answered her prayers" (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).	Assisting the army to treat the wounded
3.	"Ummu Umarah r.ah also fought the war. She fought Ibn Qami'ah with the help of the Islamic army, but Ibn Qami'ah had hit her shoulder and left a deep wound. She managed to stab Ibn Qami'ah several times with her sword but since Ibn Qami'ah was wearing an iron vest, she was saved. Hence, Ummu Umarah r.ah had carried out fighting and was wounded 12 times" (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).	Army reserve at the battle zone
4.	"After settling the burial of the syuhada' and extolling as well as praying to Allah SWT, the Prophet SAW returned to Madinah. It was clear to the Prophet that the love and relentless expressed by the mukminah women were similar to the mukmin men at the battle front" (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).	To encourage the fight
5.	"A woman from the Dinar tribe came to where her husband, relative and father were killed during the war. When she was told about their deaths, she said: "So, what happened to the Prophet SAW is that he is safe, well Ummu Fulan, <i>Alhamdulillah</i> , it is how you wanted it." The woman said, "Show him to me, let me see him." Then the Prophet SAW was brought to her and when she actually saw Him, she said: "All the misfortunes, after seeing Him, are only trivial" (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004)."	To Protect the Prophet SAW
6.	Sa'ad bin Mu'adh's mother came running to the Prophet SAW and at that time Sa'ad was holding the rope around his horse. Then Sa'ad said: "Ooh Prophet, it is my mother." The Prophet SAW said: "Welcome to you", then the Prophet SAW stopped. After his mother arrived, the Prophet SAW expressed His condolences on the death of her son 'Amru bin Mu'adh, and she then replied: "When I see that You are safe, I think that is a small misfortune." Then the Prophet SAW prayed for the families of those killed. After that the Prophet SAW said: "Mother of Sa'ad, receive this good news and spread it to their families that their kin who were killed have become friends in heaven and they are allowed to give syafaat to their family members." Sa'ad's replied: "We relent, our Prophet SAW, who else should cry for them upon receiving this news?" She then added: "Ooh Prophet SAW, pray for those who have been left by them". Then the Prophet SAW prayed: "Oh Allah, alleviate their sadness, fill the emptiness left by their misfortunes and	To Protect the Prophet SAW

	fill it with something better for those who have left them.” (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004)	
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### **Role of Women in the Military According to the *Rahiq Al-Makhtum* Scripture**

According to the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture, women were also involved in war. Women were directly and indirectly involvement in the military during the time of the Prophet SAW. The spirit and sacrifices shown by them were extraordinary. Their sacrifice and spirit of *jihad* must be an example for women today. Various roles were played by women long ago to uphold the glory of Islam. Hence, according to the information gathered, there were several roles of women mentioned in the biography of the Prophet SAW. This is conclusively indicated according to the excerpts from the selected cases from the scripture.

#### **a) Assist the Army to Prepare Food**

Women had the role of carrying water for thirsty soldiers. An excerpt from the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture refers to this role.

“Several mukminah women were present at the battle zone after the war ended. Anas said: “I saw Aisyah binti Abu Bakar r.ah and Ummu Sulaym r.ah, and while shifting the robe, I saw their leg bracelet and they were carrying water containers on their backs and poured water into the mouth of Muslim soldiers. Then, they went back to refill the containers only to return and give water to other soldiers.” Umar said: “Ummu Sulaym gave us a container of water on the day of Uhud.” (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).

The role portrayed Sayyidatina ‘A’isyah r.ah and Ummu Sulaym r.ah shows a strong fighting spirit in efforts to disseminate Islamic dakwah at that time. Other than the involvement of Sayyidatina ‘A’isyah r.ah and Ummu Sulaym r.ah, Ummu Aiman r.ah was also involved in playing a role, as follows:

“Among these women included Ummu ‘Ayman r.ah. When she saw a group of Muslim army soldiers running into Madinah, she grabbed a handful of soil and threw it in their direction while saying to some of them: “Go weave your cloth, give me your sword.” Then she quickly ran to the battle front and gave water to the wounded.” Hibban Ibn al-Ariqah shot an arrow in her direction and she fell to the ground. The enemy of Allah then laughed. This brought great sorrow to the Prophet SAW and He gave a headless arrow to Sa’ad while saying: “Shoot him”. Sa’ad then shot the arrow, which hit Hibban’s neck until he fell. Then the Prophet SAW laughed until His teeth showed, saying: “Sa’ad has revenged Ummu ‘Ayman r.ah. Allah has answered her prayers” (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).

The excerpt from the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture shows that Ummu ‘Aiman r.ah had also assisted the Islamic army. She and other women soldiers had arduously prepared food and water for the Islamic army. Hence, although Ummu ‘Aiman r.ah was old, she and several other women became medical assistants and prepared food for the army during the Battle of Uhud (al-Misri, 2014).

Moreover, Safiyyah r.ah was also involved in preparing water for the Islamic army during war. As evidence, Safiyyah r.ah had also joined the war during the Battle of Uhud together with several other Muslimah women (al-Misri, 2014).

The role of women during the time of the Prophet SAW was not only to assist the army but some among them had brought along weapons to save themselves from the enemy. For example, Ummu Salim r.ah had brought along weapons during the Battle of Hunain in order to save herself from attacks by the Musyrikin. During the Battle of Uhud, the Muslim women had served as military assistants in the mornings. Meanwhile at night, the Muslim women fought along with the Islamic army because the war at that time was critical and the strategies were in disarray. Among the women involved in the army at that time were Umm al-Mu'minin 'A'isyah r.ah, Ummu Salamah r.ah several other Muslim women. At that time, they used weapons to counter-attack and defend against enemy attack and preventing the enemy from reaching the Prophet SAW. For example, Nusaybah binti Ka'ab r.ah had emerged as a formidable warrior. She used the sword and arrow to counter the attacks by the Musyrikin. Besides that, she also fought beside the Prophet SAW (Masnah, 1999). According to the biography of the Prophet SAW, women in the military played a role in safeguarding goods as well as enhancing the glory of Islam (Ahmad, 1989).

Although Ummu 'Aiman r.ah was old, she still wanted to jihad together with the Prophet SAW and wished to see the Islamic flag flying with honour when defeating the kafir army (al-Misri, 2014). The perseverance shown by women in the military was evident, especially when they were willing to sacrifice in the struggle to uphold the religion of Allah SWT even by just preparing drinks for the mujahid (al-Misri, 2014). For example, Ummu 'Umarah r.ah received severe injuries during the Battle of Uhud but she still fought with the army. This was because she wanted to show that her physical injuries did not weaken her spirit to fight in the path of Allah SWT. For her, the strength in her came from Allah SWT (al-Misri, 2014).

#### **b) Assist the Army to Treat the Wounded**

According to the excerpt from the scripture, the role of women was not just to provide water and food to soldiers but also to assist in treating the wounded soldiers. There were many women who had also treated the wounded in the Islamic army. For example, Ummu Sulaim r.ah was one of them who was tasked to prepare food and water for the mujahid and treat the wounded. She, together with some Ansar women, were part of the *jihad* in the Battle of Uhud. She carried a small axe as a precaution against any attack by the enemy (al-Misri, 2014).

There were also women from the Ghafiri tribe who jointly fought in the Khaibar Incident. She was the youngest woman to be involved in the incident. Besides that, Anas r.a had narrated a hadith whereby during the Battle of Uhud, she had seen Sayyidatina 'A'isyah r.ah and Ummu Salim r.ah running in the battle zone carrying water for the wounded soldiers (Ismail & Zuber, 1986). In addition, Safiyyah r.ah also made arrows and treated the wounded soldiers in the battle zone (al-Misri, 2014).

The role of assisting the army was evident when Ummu 'Atiyyah r.ah joined the fight together with the Prophet SAW on as many as seven occasions where she did the work of the

health services (Masnah, 1999). Similarly, Ummu Aiman r.ah also joined the fight together with the Prophet SAW during the Battle of Uhud.

### c) Army Reserve in the Battle Front

According to the excerpt from the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture, women were also army reserves in the field of war when the situation warranted. Women had to carry weapons if the situation forced them to do it. This is evident when Ummu 'Umarah r.ah was on duty at the supply and treatment section. Nevertheless, when the Islamic army was desperate, Ummu 'Umarah r.ah also went to war and killed the enemy who hurt her son, 'Abdullah bin Zaid (al-Misri, 2014). Moreover, Ummu 'Umarah r.ah also took up the sword and decapitated the enemy during the Battle of Yamamah (al-Misri, 2014).

The involvement of women in war was also caused by the courage and bravery of the Muslim women when confronting the enemy. This is evidenced according to the excerpt from *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture as follows:

“Ummu 'Umarah r.ah also fought the war. She fought Ibn Qami'ah with the help of the Islamic army, but Ibn Qami'ah had hit her shoulder and left a deep wound. She managed to stab Ibn Qami'ah several times with her sword but since Ibn Qami'ah was wearing an iron vest, she was saved. Hence, Ummu 'Umarah r.ah had carried out fighting and was wounded 12 times” (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).

Based on the excerpt above, it is clear that the struggle and determination of Ummu 'Umarah r.ah was extraordinary. The spirit shown by her was difficult to match by the others Muslim heroines. Other than her involvement in the Battle of Uhud, she was also involved in the Battle of Yamamah. She grabbed a sword and decapitated the enemy in that battle (al-Misri, 2014). In addition, Ummu 'Umarah could not contain her anger upon seeing the Islamic army being killed by the kafirs. She then grabbed a sword from a dead soldier and eventually met her *syahid* in the battle (Ashiqqa, 1996).

Besides that, Khaulah r.ah had also portrayed the role of always being cautious in the battle front. Khaulah r.ah had invited Muslimin women to use the tent poles and rope as weapon to free themselves from the Romans. They had combined their resolve and asked Allah SWT to bless their efforts. Armed with immense courage, they were all saved from all sorts of calamities. The Romans were in utter fright because of the sudden attack by these women. Hence, Khaulah r.ah was known as the Sword of Allah SWT among the Muslim women (Fatimah, 1995).

Muslim women at this time had waged war with the kafirs. The involvement of women was due to emergencies (*dharurat*), which means that they waged war because they were sincere solely because of Allah SWT (Muhammad, 1979).

### d) Encouraging the War Effort

Women played the role in encouraging the struggle based on the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture. The mothers always gave encouragement and support to their spouses and children to carry on the fight for upholding the glory of Islam.

“After settling the burial of the syuhada' and extolling as well as praying to Allah SWT, the Prophet SAW returned to Madinah. It was clear to the Prophet that the love and

relent expressed by the mukminah women were similar to the mukmin men at the battle front” (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).

This excerpt shows that women play the role of encouraging their family members to fight in the name of Allah SWT. The resignation showed by the women towards death of their family members indicated that they relented with the demise.

This quality was also found in a woman named Nusaybah r.ah. She was happy when she received the news of her husband’s *syahid* at the battle front. She also asked her son, ‘Ammar, who at that time was 15 years old, to follow his father’s footsteps in the war for the sake of Islam. Like his father, ‘Ammar also faced *syahid* during the Battle of Uhud. At the beginning, Nusaybah r.ah was at the back line during the war, which was playing the role of a nurse and assisting the wounded but she could not withstand the anger when she saw the Islamic army being killed by the kafirs. She then took a sword from a fallen soldier and eventually met with *syahid* during the battle (Ashiq, 1996).

#### **e) To Protect the Prophet SAW**

According to the biography of the Prophet SAW, woman also played the role of protecting the Prophet SAW by willing to stake their own life (al-Misri, 2014). This is evidenced in an excerpt from the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture as follows:

“A woman from the Dinar tribe came to where her husband, relative and father were killed during the war. When she was told about their deaths, she said: “So, what happened to the Prophet SAW is that he is safe, well Ummu Fulan, Alhamdulillah, it is how you wanted it.” The woman said, “Show him to me, let me see him.” Then the Prophet SAW was brought to her and when she actually saw Him, she said: “All the misfortunes, after seeing Him, are only trivial” (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004).”

“Sa’ad bin Mu’adh’s mother came running to the Prophet SAW and at that time Sa’ad was holding the rope around his horse. Then Sa’ad said: “Ooh Prophet, it is my mother.” The Prophet SAW said: “Welcome to you”, then the Prophet SAW stopped. After his mother arrived, the Prophet SAW expressed His condolences on the death of her son ‘Amru bin Mu’adh, and she then replied: “When I see that You are safe, I think that is a small misfortune.” Then the Prophet SAW prayed for the families of those killed. After that the Prophet SAW said: “Mother of Sa’ad, receive this good news and spread it to their families that their kin who were killed have become friends in heaven and they are allowed to give syafaat to their family members.” Sa’ad’s replied: “We relent, our Prophet SAW, who else should cry for them upon receiving this news?” She then added: “Ooh Prophet SAW, pray for those who have been left by them”. Then the Prophet SAW prayed: “Oh Allah, alleviate their sadness, fill the emptiness left by their misfortunes and fill it with something better for those who have left them.” (al-Mubarakfuri, 2004)”

The excerpt above shows that Muslim women soldiers at that time had given priority to the safety of the Prophet SAW compared to the lives of their own children. For example, Ummu Sa'ad r.ah had shown priority for the safety of the Prophet SAW when she left the house together with other Muslimah women to ensure the safety of the Prophet SAW. Her concern for the safety of the Prophet SAW was due to the news that several Muslims had fallen in the Battle of Uhud. For Ummu Sa'ad r.ah, the safety of the Prophet SAW was paramount compared to others. As evidence, she said that the omen that befell her was trivial after she saw that the Prophet SAW was safe and well (al-Misri, 2014), although at that time she had just lost her son 'Amr bin Mu'adh r.a, who had met *syahid* in the name of Allah SWT.

### **An Analysis of the Roles and Positions Held by Women Holding High Posts in the Military According to the Selected Cases in the *Rahiq Al-Makhtum* Scripture**

Generally, there are six roles for women in the military according to the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture. First, assisting the army by providing food and water; second, assisting the army by treating the wounded; third, becoming army reserves during times of war; fourth, supporting the war effort; fifth, protecting the life of the Prophet SAW; and sixth, *jihad* in the name of Allah SWT.

Based on the selected cases from the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture, it was found that there were no cases that told of women holding high posts in the military. According to history, women were never appointed officially as the chief of the army or led any war (Masnah, 1996). Nevertheless, this does not mean that women are not allowed to hold high posts in the army. Women can also hold high positions in the military, such as the rank of Commander, but they should safeguard syariat Islam as well as the culture and etiquette (Police and Military Archive, 2010).

After examining the role of women in the military based on the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture, the dominant role of women is to provide food and water as well as treat the wounded during war. According to history, women have never been appointed officially as the head of the army or led any war (Masnah, 1996). Nevertheless, from a contemporary perspective, the involvement of women in war is of increasing concern to society. Before Malaysia achieved its independence, the role of women in state or national organizations was not given any serious thought. However, after independence, the role of women in the military had contributed towards peace and harmony in the country (*Utusan Online*, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

Hence, according to previous studies, the involvement of women in the military had numerous positive effects. This study had used the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture to show that women had jointly battled to assist the main Islamic army. Although women are not as strong physically compared to men, they could contribute by providing other forms of assistance. Thus, by possessing a strong faith (*iman*) and high level of piousness (*taqwa*), women followed suit to fight the enemies of Islam when the situation arises (emergency).

As a conclusion, this study found five roles played by women based on the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture. First, assisting the army to prepare food and water; second, assisting the army by treating the wounded; third, being army reserves during the time of war; fourth, supporting the war effort; and fifth, protect the life of the Prophet SAW. Therefore, based to

the analysis, the role of women according to the *Rahiq al-Makhtum* scripture was predominantly to provide water and food as well as treat the wounded. In addition, women could also hold or act in high positions in the military, however, they should safeguard syariat Islam as well as the Islamic culture and etiquette.

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