128708 - Is there a hadith that speaks of a trade embargo on Iraq, Syria and Egypt?

the question

There is a hadith that speaks of a trade embargo on Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Has that actually happened, or is it what we see happening before our eyes?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It seems that the hadith referred to in the question is the report narrated by Muslim in his Saheeh (2896) from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Iraq will withhold its dirhams and qafeez (a measurement of grain), Syria will withhold its mudds and dinars, and Egypt will withhold its irdabb and dinars, and you will return to where you started, you will return to where you started, you will return to where you started.” The flesh and blood of Abu Hurayrah bear witness to that.

Al-Bukhaari (3180) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: How will you be when you are not able to collect any dinars or dirhams? It was said to him: On what basis do you say that will happen, O Abu Hurayrah? He said: By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Abu Hurayrah, (I learned that) from the words of the most truthful one (i.e., the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)). They said: What did he say? He said: “The covenant granted by Allah and His Messenger (to the dhimmis) will be transgressed, so Allah will make the hearts of ahl adh-dhimmah so bold that they will withhold the jizyah they are supposed to pay.”

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

There are two views as to what is meant by Iraq and the other regions withholding (money and grains). The first view is that what is meant is that they will become Muslim, so the jizyah will be waived from them, and this is something that already happened.

The second view – which is more well-known – is that what is meant is that the Persians and Romans (Byzantines) will seize control of these lands at the end of time, and they will prevent the Muslims from obtaining these things. A few pages after this, Muslim narrated that Jaabir said: Soon there will not be brought to the people of Iraq any qafeez or dirham. We said: Why is that? He said: Because the non-Arabs will prevent it. And he mentioned how the Romans would do likewise in Syria. This has happened in our own time in Iraq; it is going on right now.

And it was said that it is because they will apostatise at the end of time, so they will withhold what is required from them of zakaah and so on. And it was said that what is meant is that the disbelievers from whom jizyah is required will grow stronger at the end of time, so they will withhold what they used to pay of jizyah, kharaaj and so on.

With regard to the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), “and you will return to where you started”, this means the same as the other hadith, “Islam began as something strange and will go back to being as it began.” End quote.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The words “They will withhold what is in their hands” mean: they will refuse to pay the jizyah. Al-Humaydi said: Muslim narrated a similar hadith via another isnaad from Suhayl from his father from Abu Hurayrah, which was attributed to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): “Iraq will withhold its dirhams and qafeez…” And he quoted the hadith using the past tense, but what is meant is the future, so as to emphasise that it will surely come to pass. Muslim also narrated from Jaabir in a marfoo‘ report: “Soon there will not be brought to the people of Iraq any camels or dirhams. We said: Why is that? He said: Because the non-Arabs will prevent it.” This is one of the signs of Prophethood and is advice to fulfil the covenant with ahl adh-dhimmah, in return for the jizyah that is taken from them, which benefits the Muslims. It is also a warning against mistreating them, and indicates that if that happens, then ahl adh-dhimmah will break the covenant and the Muslims will not be able to collect anything from them, which will cause hardship to the Muslims.

Ibn Hazm stated that some of the Maalikis quoted the words in the hadith of Abu Hurayrah, “Iraq will withhold its dirhams” as evidence that land seized as booty is not to be divided or sold, and that what is meant by withholding is withholding of the kharaaj. But he refuted that by noting that the hadith contains a warning of a bad fate, and that the Muslims will ultimately be deprived of their rights, and this is what happened. End quote.

See: Nayl al-Awtaar by ash-Shawkaani (8/118); an-Nihaayah by Ibn al-Atheer (1/262)

From the above we may conclude that the more likely interpretation of the hadith is that the disbelievers, namely the Romans and Persians, will take authority from the Muslims in these lands, after they had been subject to the Muslims’ authority, and they will withhold its resources and kharaaj from the Muslims. This has happened repeatedly throughout history, the most recent case being the colonisation of these lands and the abolishing of the authority of the Ottoman caliphate over them, and the disbelievers’ domination of their people and resources.

As for the present situation, where the disbelievers are controlling Iraq and have taken over its resources, we cannot be certain that this is exactly what is meant in the hadith, and to state that this is definitely what is meant by the hadith is risky. Many people are hasty in jumping to conclusions with regard to such matters, but it soon becomes clear that they are mistaken and were too audacious regarding this issue.

This does not rule out the idea that such a thing could happen repeatedly, and that the present case is one such instance. In fact they have done something that is even worse than that, by preventing the resources of Iraq from reaching the Muslim lands, then besieging Iraq and its people, preventing goods from reaching them, and preventing them from benefitting from their own resources, until many children died, let alone women and men.

And Allah knows best.