
**Trade and Security using Political diplomacy in late Arabia by Quresh:
Reinterpreting the Historical significance of Quran's term Elaaf**

Muhammad Bilal Qadri

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Karachi /
Visiting Lecturer, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Karachi
Email: bilalrazaqadri13@gmail.com

Ahmed Wawdiwala

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Karachi /
Visiting Lecturer, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Karachi
Email: ahmedwawdiwala1@gmail.com

Received on: 02-01-2026

Accepted on: 15-02-2026

Abstract

The treaties under the name Elaaf occupy an important position in the economic, political and social history of pre-Islamic Makkah. Our study examines the role and multifaceted significance of Elaaf in facilitating the commercial activities of the Quraysh in contributing to the security and prosperity of Makkah. Attention is given to the traditional accounts concerning Hashim ibn 'Abd Manāf, whose commercial initiatives, organization of seasonal caravans and diplomatic relationships are presented as important foundations for the development of Quraysh's trade networks. The study explores the relationship between Elaaf, and trade journeys of summer and winter mentioned in Sūrah Quraysh (106:1-4), as well as the wider network of tribal agreements, political and commercial interactions connecting Makkah with Syria, Yemen, the Red Sea region and neighboring powers. Classical Islamic sources associate these arrangements with security, freedom of movement, and the continuity of Quraysh's commercial activities in dominating position. The study further examines the economic, security, social, cultural, and political implications attributed to this bunch of treaties, including the consolidation of Quraysh's position in Makkah with the development of commercial relationships across the Arabian Peninsula. At the same time, modern scholarship raises questions concerning the extent of Meccan long-distance trade and the precise historical nature of the agreements traditionally associated with Elaaf. Accordingly, this study brings together Qur'anic evidence, classical Islamic historical biographical sources and modern academic scholarship to provide a critical examination of Elaaf treaties as a base for commercial security and diplomacy in pre-Islamic Arabia. It argues that, whether understood as a specific treaty or as a broader network of agreements and treaties. Elaaf, the bunch of treaties which provide an important framework for understanding the interaction of trade, security, diplomacy and social organization in early Makkah.

Keywords: Elaaf; Quresh; Makkah; pre-Islamic Arabia; Hashim ibn Abd Manāf; trade; caravan routes; diplomacy; commercial security; Surah Quraysh.

Introduction

The Treaty of Elaf is an ancient bunch of accords that date back to the pre-Islamic civilization in the Arabian Peninsula which own the significance role in history. This treaty was primarily an economic and security pact led by the tribes of Mecca, notably the Quresh Tribe. It was signed with different Tribe Leaders and kings, like Negus of Aksum Empire in Ethiopia (treaty was revised by Abd Shams after the death of Hashim), Caesar of Rome and other empires. Main reason was the cultivation of safety to their trade caravans which used to travel far territories for trade purpose.

The trade routes across the region, particularly those connecting Mecca to Syria, Yemen and Africa.¹

This agreement played a crucial role in stabilizing and promoting the economic prosperity of Mecca throughout the region even beyond the boundaries of Peninsula. As due to the sacredness of Ka'aba it was a center of Holiness for many practiced religions in the pre-Islamic era, among which also was a real HANEEF religion of Hz.Abraham (Peace Be Upon Him), The Father of Prophets. As much people from different regions used to visit Ka'aba which made Makkah a prominent center of trade and culture in the Arabian Peninsula during that period.

Since the advent of Prophet Adam (Peace Be Upon Him), Ka'aba had a divine and sacred value, even before the Last of Prophets, SAYEDUNA TA'HA Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him)

These economic activities of huge level were practiced in Makkah since long but were expanded throughout the region using this (bunch of treaties under the title of "Elaaf") as a mean to pave a way for trade with security.

This bunch of Treaties with great importance impacted in following multifaceted dimensions.

The multifaceted impact of the Elaaf Treaty:

(Encompassing economic, security and cultural dimensions)

1. Historical Context:

- The Treaty of Elaf based upon the strong pillars of morality, social independency and Arab (mainly Quresh) Supremacy.
- It emerged in a time when territorial conflicts, loot raids upon trade caravans were common which posed threats to trade.

2. Key Parties Involved:

- The main tribe involved in the treaty was the Quraysh, the dominating tribe of Mecca.
- Other participating tribes were also involved, particularly those which were along the trade routes to Syria and Yemen.

3. Purpose of the Treaty:

- The primary goal was to ensure safety with the security of trade caravans and beneficial economic practice.
 - It aimed to facilitate peaceful trade by establishing mutual agreements among tribes and with other dynasties.
4. **Economic Impact:**
- With protection of the trade routes, this treaty helped in the uninterrupted flow of business.
 - This led to the economic prosperity of Arabs, making them trade lord of Arabian Peninsula.
5. **Security Provisions:**
- The treaty included mutual protection pacts, ensuring that tribes or people from other dynasties will not attack caravans.
 - It also established guidelines for safe passages through different territories.
6. **Trade Routes:**
- The agreement was particularly significant for routes connecting Mecca to major trade centers like Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Jordan and continent of Africa.
 - These routes were crucial for the trade of spices, textile and other valuable goods.
7. **Cultural and Social Impact:**
- The economic stability brought by the treaty also contributed to Mecca's cultural and social development.
 - It facilitated the exchange of ideas, promoted trade of goods with the influence on cultural landscape of the region.
8. **Legacy:**
- The treaty sets a precedent for future agreements and alliances in the region.
 - It is remembered as a key factor in the pre-Islamic history of the Arabian Peninsula, contributing to the rise of Mecca as an influential city.²

Role of Quraysh Tribe, other Tribes and Dynasties which impacted the treaty is as follows.

Role of Dynasties:

The Treaty of Elaf was primarily an agreement among the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and dynasties particularly focused on the safety of their Trade Caravans. But it was more than a formal treaty signed with external empires, like the Aksum Empire and Roman Empire, both played a vital role in this trade process. The

economic and political environment of the time in which the treaty was operated did involve interactions with external powers. The following points discuss the involvement of external powers:

1. Tribal Agreement:

- The Treaty of Elaf was a pact among the tribes within the Arabian Peninsula to ensure the safety and security of trade routes.
- It primarily involved the Quraysh tribe of Mecca and other regional tribes who had stakes in the trading activities.

2. Economic Interactions with Empires:

- Although the treaty itself was not signed with empires directly but involved them indirectly, the trade routes protected under this treaty connected Mecca to larger empires like the Romans. Caesar of Rome favored these trades as he wanted Arabs to bring their trade goods to his lands.
- These empires were significant trading partners, and the goods traded through these routes often ended up in the large markets of their land.

3. Indirect Influence of External Powers:

- While the treaty was local, the stability it provided was beneficial to the economic interests of distant empires. A stable and secure Mecca meant a reliable flow of goods to and from these empires.
- The Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum, as mentioned earlier, played a role in maintaining the maritime trade routes, supporting the objectives of the Treaty of Elaf by ensuring safe passage across the Red Sea.

4. Diplomatic and Trade Relations:

- The Arabian tribes, including the Quraysh, maintained diplomatic and trade relations with various external powers, which helped facilitate trade.
- These relations were not formalized through the Treaty of Elaaf but were crucial in creating a favorable environment for trade.

5. Strategic Alliances:

- While the Treaty of Elaf was not a direct alliance with empires but the tribes of Arabia often formed strategic alliances/agreements with neighboring powers to safeguard their interests.
 - Such alliances and agreements would have complemented the objectives for the Treaty of Elaf by providing broader regional stability.³
-

Role of Hashim Ibn Abd Munaf

Hashim ibn Abd Manaf, Great grandfather of Prophet (Peace and Blessings be upon him) had a foundational role in establishing secure trade networks and agreements that later be formalized in the Treaty of Elaaf.

His efforts in initiating trade routes, negotiating protection pacts and organizing caravans were crucial in creating the economic stability with prosperity that benefited Mecca and its surrounding.

His role as key participant of this treaty is classified in the following subheadings:

1. Initiator of Trade Routes:

- Hashim ibn Abd Manaf is credited with initiating the trade routes which connected Mecca to Syria, Yemen and Africa.
- He established strong commercial ties with these regions, by approaching empires like Roman and Aksum empire, these agreements laid the groundwork for the safe economic prosperity of Arab.

2. Securing Trade Agreements:

- Hashim successfully negotiated treaties/agreements with various tribes and regional powers to ensure the safety of the caravans.
- His efforts in securing these trade agreements were pivotal in maintaining uninterrupted trade flow, which later benefited Arab's economy.

3. Establishing Trade Caravans:

- He first organized then led trade caravans to Syria during the summer and to Yemen during the winter.
- This seasonal trade pattern was essential for maximizing the economic benefits for Mecca, ensuring a steady flow of goods and wealth.

4. Mutual Protection Pacts:

- Hashim's diplomatic skills were instrumental in forming mutual alliances with other tribes and Dynasties.
- These pacts ensured that the caravans would not be attacked, fostered a climate of security and trust among the communities.

5. Foundation of the Elaaf:

- Hashim initiated relationships with other tribes and regional powers which were the precursors to the formalization of the Treaty of Elaaf.
- The Elaaf treaty can be seen as an extension of the alliances and agreements that Hashim had put in place.

6. Enhancing Mecca's Status:

- Through his successful trade ventures and diplomatic efforts, Hashim significantly enhanced the status of Mecca as a central trade hub.
-

- His actions contributed to the city's prosperity and its reputation as a safe thriving center for commerce.⁴

Role of Aksum Dynasty in the Treaty of Elaaf:

The Aksumite Empire played a vital role in the success of this Treaty by ensuring the security of key maritime trade routes. Maintaining political and diplomatic relations, it provided economic and cultural support that benefited the trade activities of Mecca. In the following points, the vital role of the Aksum dynasty is mentioned:

1. Control of Maritime Trade Routes:

- The Aksumite Empire controlled key maritime trade routes across the Red Sea, linking the Arabian Peninsula with Africa, India, and beyond.
- Their control ensured a stable and secure passage for Caravans, benefiting Meccan trade routes protected by the Treaty of Elaaf.

2. Political Stability and Protection:

- The Aksumite rulers maintained a powerful kingdom with stability, which helped reduce piracy and ensured safe passage caravans.
- This stability indirectly supported the objectives of the Treaty of Elaaf which ~~providing~~provided a secure environment ~~to~~ Quresh for trade.

3. Trade Partnerships:

- The Aksumites engaged in trade with the Arabs, which involved exporting and importing goods such as spices, textiles, and precious metals.
- These trade partnerships were crucial for the economic prosperity of Mecca.

4. Diplomatic Relations:

- The Aksumite kings were Christians and maintained diplomatic relations with Arabian tribes, significantly with the Quraysh of Mecca.
- These diplomatic ties helped foster a climate of mutual respect with cooperation and securing trade routes.

5. Economic Support:

- The economic interactions between Aksum and Meccans involved the exchange of goods and services, contributing to the wealth of both regions.
- This economic support was vital for the sustainability of trade routes.

6. Cultural and Religious Influence:

- The Aksumite Empire, being an early adopter of Christianity, influenced the cultural and religious landscape of the region.
-

- This cultural exchange helped in creating a broader network of alliances and understandings with the facilitation of smoother trade relations.

7. Strategic Geographic Position:

- Aksum's strategic location along the Red Sea made it a crucial intermediary in trade between the Arabian Peninsula and other parts of the world.
- The secure and efficient passage through Aksumite-controlled areas ensured that goods could move freely to and from Mecca.

8. Reduction of Banditry and Piracy:

- By maintaining control over the Red Sea and surrounding regions, the Aksumite Empire helped reduce the threat of banditry and piracy.
- This reduction was essential for the safe movement of caravans, aligning with the security objectives of the Treaty of Elaaf.⁵

Quranic View of Elaaf:

Quran mentions the term Elaaf in 106th chapter with the reference of two business trips of Quresh, the main theme presented in this Chapter is to accept ALLAH alone is glorified and WE as humans should stay thankful to ALLAH.

In this chapter Elaaf is discussed as a gift from ALLAH specifically for Quresh as they were the Guardians of Holy Kaaba, another group of scholar says this was to remind Quresh that all these blessings and honor bestowed upon you is because of Prophet Muhammad Peace and Blessings be Upon Him, following is the translation for all 5 verses from this chapter.

1. Due to the Elaaf of Quresh.
2. Due to this Elaaf, caravans of summer and winter move.
3. Worship God of this home (KA'ABA) alone.
4. Who fed them at the time of hunger.
5. And provided with peace at the time of fear.⁶

Significance of the Treaty of Elaaf:

The Treaty of Elaaf was more than just a trade agreement, it was a multifaceted pact that influenced social cohesion, economic stability, cultural exchange, political power, and the legal framework of pre-Islamic Arabia.

Here are some aspects of the Treaty of Elaaf that highlight its significance and impact:

1. Social Cohesion and Tribal Unity:

- The Treaty of Elaaf helped foster a sense of unity and cooperation among the tribes of Arabian Peninsula. By agreeing to protect each other trade caravans, the tribes reduced internal conflicts and built stronger alliances.
-

2. Economic Stability and Growth:

- The agreement provided a stable environment for trade, which was crucial for the economic prosperity of Mecca. This stability attracted merchants and traders, contributing to the growth of local markets with benefiting the overall economy.

3. Religious Pilgrimage:

- Mecca was already a significant religious center due to the Kaaba, which attracted pilgrims from various tribes. The economic stability brought by the Treaty of Elaaf also supported the annual pilgrimage (Hajj), further integrating economic and religious activities.

4. Cultural Exchange:

- The safety of trade routes facilitated cultural exchange. Ideas, languages, customs, and goods from different regions flowed through Mecca, making it a melting pot of diverse cultures and traditions.

5. Political Influence of the Quraysh:

- The Quraysh tribe, being the main architects and beneficiaries of the treaty, gained significant political and economic power. Their leadership in ensuring the safety of trade routes enhanced their influence across the Arabian Peninsula.

6. Pre-Islamic Legal Framework:

- The Treaty of Elaaf can be seen as an early example of a legal framework governing trade and security. It set precedents for future agreements or treaties, including those that emerged with the advent of Islam.

7. Impact on Islamic History:

- The economic and political environment shaped by the Treaty of Elaaf laid the groundwork for the emergence of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad, who was born into Quraysh tribe, later led on the trade networks and alliances established by the treaty.

8. Strategic Geographical Positioning:

- Mecca's strategic location at the crossroads of major trade routes was a significant factor in the success of the Treaty of Elaaf. The city served as a critical juncture for caravans traveling between Yemen, Syria, and other regions.

9. Reduction of Banditry and Piracy:

- By establishing mutual protection pacts, the treaty significantly reduced the incidents of banditry and piracy along the trade routes.
-

This reduction in crime was beneficial for both traders and local populations who depended on the safe passage for trade.

10. Long-term Legacy:

- The principles and alliances established by the Treaty of Elaaf continued to influence Arabian trade and politics long after the treaty was initially conceived. It is the legacy which is visible in the cooperative and strategic relationships that persisted throughout the region.⁷

The treaty which was signed in pre-Islamic era **today** also have teachings for us, which provide lessons that can also be applied in modern era with contemporary contexts, particularly in the realms of trade, diplomacy and community cooperation. The following are some valuable **lessons** driven out of this Accord.

1. Cooperation and Alliances:

- The Treaty of Elaaf demonstrates the importance of forming alliances and cooperation among different groups to achieve common goals. By working together, the tribes were able to ensure the safety and prosperity of their trade routes.

2. Economic Interdependence:

- The success of the treaty underscores the significance of economic interdependence. The tribes recognized that their economic well-being was interconnected and that securing trade routes benefited everyone involved.

3. Security and Stability:

- Ensuring the safety and security of trade routes was a primary goal of the treaty. This highlights the importance of a stable and secure environment for economic activities to flourish, a principle that remains relevant today.

4. Diplomacy and Negotiation:

- The treaty illustrates the effectiveness of diplomacy and negotiation in resolving conflicts and achieving mutually beneficial agreements. It shows that peaceful negotiations can lead to sustainable solutions.

5. Inclusivity and Fairness:

- By involving multiple tribes in the agreement, the treaty promoted inclusivity and fairness. It ensured that the benefits of trade security were shared among all participating groups, preventing monopolization by any single tribe.
-

6. Long-Term Vision:

- The leaders who established the Treaty of Elaaf had a long-term vision for economic prosperity and stability. This forward-thinking approach can serve as a model for modern leaders aiming to create sustainable policies.

7. Adaptability for Changing Circumstances:

- The treaty adapted to the needs of the time, addressing the specific threats and challenges faced by the trading communities. This adaptability is crucial for modern agreements to remain relevant and effective in changing environments.

8. Cultural and Economic Exchange:

- The treaty facilitated not only economic exchange but also cultural interactions. It highlights the importance of cultural understanding and exchange in fostering peaceful and prosperous relations.

9. Leadership and Initiative:

- The role of leaders like Hashim ibn Abd Manaf in initiating and securing the agreements shows the impact of proactive leadership. Strong and visionary leaders can drive positive changes and create lasting legacies.

10. Foundation for Future Agreements:

- The Treaty of Elaaf set a precedent for future trade agreements and alliances. It illustrates how foundational.

References

¹ . Al Tarikh Lil Yaqubi (1/272-282)

² The Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam" by Patricia Crone

Al Munammaq Fi Akhbari Quresh Lil Ibn Habib (d. 245 Hegira / 858 A.D.)

⁴ Tabqat Ibn Saad (Europe Edition, Volume 1, Chapter 1, page 43-48)

⁵ Ibn Habib, Kitab Al Muhabbar (Page 260-270) Printed: Hyderabad Deccan.

⁶ Dr. Hameedullah (Magazine Al-Balagh, 23rd Zil Haj, 1387 Hijri)

⁷ Ahmed, Qalqashandi, Ni'hayatu Al-Arab (Page 64), Printed: Egypt.
