After the drowning of Haritha b. Badr, 'Ubaidullah b. Bushair continued in Nahr Tirā for three months (1) during which period he collected the taxes of the districts of al-'Alwāz around him and established his sway over them. Then after three months he dispatched his cousin, al-Zubair b. 'Ali b. al-Mubāz, at the head of a detachment to al-Furāt (2). Al-Zubair b. 'Ali subdued the land lying along the eastern bank of the Dijlatu 'l-Awrā and levied taxes from it. Having thus firmly established a foothold on the eastern bank, he fixed al-Baṣra on the other side of the river as the next objective before him.

Al-Zubair b. 'Ali advanced towards al-Baṣra till he arrived at the point where the river was to be crossed. Neither the people of al-Baṣra flocked in tens of thousands ' on foot, on beasts and in boats till they covered the whole ground.' The Basrans knew full well that the river formed their only line of defence. Once the 'Azāriqa were allowed to cross it, their doom was sealed. Spurred on by this grim realisation they put up a stout resistance, hewed

(1) Kam. 626, 5; cf. also Anon. 101.

(2) Used for the joint stream of Dijla and al-Furāt, also called Dijlatu 'l-Baṣra or Dijlatu 'l-Awrā. The district extending from Maisān and al-Madhār up to al-Baṣra was known as 'Furātu 'l-Baṣra' (Yaq. 1/770).
down the bridge and succeeded in keeping the enemy to the other side of the river. In one account (1), it is even asserted that the \textquotesingle Azāriqa had actually crossed the river when they were overwhelmed by the Basrans and compelled to cross it back to the eastern side.

The situation was extremely critical. The districts had already capitulated to the \textquotesingle Azāriqa. The authority of the government of al-Ḥasra was confined to the city itself. Even the city was threatened with a siege followed by utter destruction and ruin. The Basrans, however, proved equal to the occasion and acted with courage and determination. Immediately they set about to marshall their forces and to give battle to the enemy. Al-Ḥānaf went to al-Qubā and impressed upon him the gravity of the occasion saying, "the enemy has already deprived us of our districts and our income. It only remains for him to lay a siege to us in our own city till we die of exhaustion."

Al-Qubā invited suggestions as to who should be appointed to the command. Al-Ḥānaf's prompt reply was that he could see none for the task except al-Muhallab b. Ḥabīl ʿufra. As a further indication of the high reputation that al-Muhallab had built for himself, it is even stated that al-Ḥānaf rejected a request of the people to take the command.

\begin{flushright}
(1). Anon. 101.
\end{flushright}
himself for, he said, al-Muhallab was more competent for the task (1). Al-qubāʾ, however, left the choice to the people themselves and deferred a decision till the following day.

Three names were put forward on behalf of the people:
1. Al-Muhallab.

Al-qubāʾ found Mālik and Ziyād not very enthusiastic about the affair and in the meantime their supporters too changed their mind and acknowledged the superior merits of al-Muhallab. The other two names having been withdrawn, al-Muhallab was chosen by the unanimous will of all the people of al-Basra.

Fortunately enough, it was just at this juncture that al-Muhallab returned from his visit to Mecca (2). Soon the chiefs of the city approached him with a view to obtaining his consent. Al-qubāʾ informed him of the unanimous choice of the people in that grave hour of impending danger and impressed upon him the confidence reposed and the high hopes placed in him by his countrymen.

(1). Tab. 2/590.

(2). Obviously Dain. (281) is wrong in saying that al-Muhallab was at the time acting as wali of Anurān on behalf of 'Abd al-Qubai' who ordered him to proceed to al-Basra and take up the command of the campaign against the Azāriqa.
He said that all eyes were uplifted to him and that all hearts fondly entertained the hope that Allah may clear the overshadowing clouds of calamity through him. Al-‘Ahnaf further urged that there was no substitute for him and that it was he alone who could capably shoulder the stupendous task. Al-Muhallab politely thanked them for the compliments that they had paid him which he did not consider himself worthy of. As far his response, he was not the man to shrink from onerous responsibility or be daunted by dangers and difficulties. But at the same time he was too conscientious and dutiful to throw out, of his own arbitrary will, the obligation that he had just entered into with Ibn al-Subair. So, he put forward the plea that he had already been invested with the governorship of Khurasan and, hence, was not free to undertake any other responsibility so long as Ibn al-Subair did not absolve him of his previous obligation. Al-‘Ahnaf further urged that the governorship of Khurasan could not be of much value if the Azāriqa were allowed to continue to threaten the city of al-Basra. But all of them fully understood that the plea of al-Muhallab was reasonable enough not to be brushed aside so lightly. They, therefore, suggested that they as well as al-Muhallab should immediately write to Ibn al-Subair representing to him the needs of the situation and asking him to authorise al-Muhallab to lead the campaign against the Azāriqa. Al-Muhallab agreed to the suggestion. It is doubtful, however, whether the proposal was honestly carried into effect. According to one of the two versions, al-Qubā‘, al-‘Ahnaf and the other people agreed among
themselves to forge a letter purporting to come from Ibn al-Zubair and to concede what they desired. Ibn al-Zubair learnt of this forgery later on and is reported to have kept silent.

The wisdom of the course adopted by al-Muhallab is also proved in another way. Apart from the fact that it absolved his conscience from all taint of insubordination and dereliction of duty, it also meant a great change in his formal status. Now that he was duly commissioned by Ibn al-Zubair, he derived his authority not only from the people of al-Basra but also directly from the Caliph himself.

On the letter being shown to al-Muhallab, he expressed his willingness to undertake the campaign but only on certain terms and conditions. His terms were:

1. that he shall have authority to recruit for service whomever he liked from among the nobles and distinguished warriors (1),

2. that he shall have at his disposal a sum from the Baitu 'l-Mal with which to provide for his troops,

3. that he shall be given authority over all the lands that he subdued, and

4. that he shall be entitled to the taxes levied from all such lands that he reduced (2).

(1) According to Bain, 281, al-Muhallab expressed his intention to recruit soldiers from the middle classes because the rich were too sluggish and the poor too unprovided to be useful to him.

(2) It does not seem to be in the fitness of things that al-Muhallab should have specified any particular *
Al-'Abbās readily accepted the first three items as they stood. As for the fourth, he pointed out to al-Muhallah that 'Fay (taxes)' was the common possession of the whole Muslim community and none was entitled to appropriate it to himself or to authorise its appropriation by others. Al-Muhallah would be no better than an enemy of theirs in case he insisted on it. It was, however, possible to authorise him to spend as much out of the revenue of the subdued lands as he deemed fit on the maintenance of his troops as well as all other requirements of the campaign (1). The argument was cogent and al-Muhallah seems to have proved amenable to it.

Finally, the terms were incorporated in a document composed by al-Salt b. Muraith b. Jābir al-Anafi and guaranteed to quite willingly and unreservedly by all the elders except Malik b. Mesma and a few others of Bakr b. Wā'il. It was really surprising that the leader of a tribe which had for a long time been bound with the ḫad by strong

* period (three years, Tab. 2/590; one year, Isa. 3/536) during which he was to have exclusive control over the revenue of the lands reduced by him.

(1). As to the amount left over after disbursing the pay of the soldiers and other necessary outlay on equipment etc., al-'Abbās in Kam. 627 is reported to have said that it was to go to the Muslim community. But according to Anon. 103 where the words are put into the mouth of al-Quba', the amount could be taken over by al-Muhallah. This at least seems to have been the practice in subsequent days.
ties of alliance and friendship should oppose the granting of a few privileges to an Azdite. This discordant note, which could only be explained by a personal weakness for haughtiness in Mālik’s character, evoked general disapproval from all quarters. Al-Āhnaf and al-Mundhir b. al-Jarūd indignantly questioned Mālik whether the privileges which he sought to deny to al-Muhallab were actually possessed by him or his enemy. And when Mālik was forced to admit that he did not possess what he denied to al-Muhallab they took him to task for the apparent injustice that he should ask al-Muhallab to protect his blood and his honour and then grudge him what he had already been dispossessed of by the enemy. They further taunted him by offering him that he should take upon himself to crush the enemy on exactly the same terms that al-Muhallab demanded. Mālik, however, refused to take up the gauntlet and thus his motives were fully exposed (1).

No doubt, the unfriendly attitude of Mālik affected al-Muhallab deeply. He could not forget it for a long time afterwards. But the solitary note of dissent could not at all influence the course of events. Al-Muhallab was assured by al-Āhnaf, ‘Ubaidullāh b. Ziyād b. Zabyān and all the chiefs that Mālik and his party could not withhold what all the people of al-Baṣra had agreed to bestow on him. Ultimately, al-Muhallab took over the command and promptly set about making necessary preparations. The terms of the agreement were also ratified by ʿAbdullāh b. al-Ṭubair later on.

(1). Yq b. 2/316.
Let us pause awhile to assess the true significance of the terms put forward by al-Muhallab. Really, the terms are far more important than they at first appear to be. They are of immense value to us in the assessment of al-Muhallab's military genius. It is true, indeed, that the commanders before him did not insist on any terms at all. But, can al-Muhallab be accused of bargaining at a critical time when the fate of his own hearth and home hung in balance? Was it a mere haggling designed to secure some personal advantage for himself? No, the very terms are a sufficient refutation of any such insinuation. The terms were absolutely necessary for the successful prosecution of the campaign. The reason why others in his position did not think of any such terms is that al-Muhallab's method of warfare was radically different from theirs. Al-Muhallab did not believe, as they did, in one decisive stroke in which all the available forces were hurled against the foe and which resulted in a few hours either in victory or in defeat. Al-Muhallab could foresee from the very start a prolonged campaign extending over many years. Hence, it was the height of prudence on his part to assure himself beforehand that his troops did not suffer for lack of provisions or deficiency in equipment on which, of course, he set a greater value than others.

The first condition gave him a free hand in the choice of his soldiers. Al-Muhallab was yet to form his own army and, as a general, it was his first care to see that it included the finest flower of the soldiery of al-Baṣra.
Next came the question of equipment to which al-Muhallab attended with much more care and earnestness than his colleagues and rivals. It was but necessary that there should be some provision for initial expenses. Hence the second condition.

Items three and four were designed only to ensure continuity of supplies unhampered by interference from any other authority. No doubt, the stipulation that to him should belong the governorship as well as the revenue of the lands that he subdued, brought a personal honour and a very great personal advantage to himself. But was it not, at the same time, necessary for the smooth working of his plans? It was in the interests of the campaign itself that al-Muhallab should be able to conduct it independently of any other authority. That independence of action formed the cherished object of al-Muhallab is borne out by the account in Dain. (281-82) where it is mentioned that al-Muhallab expressly stipulated that he should be given unfettered discretion in the conduct of the campaign and that there should be absolutely no interference with his plans from any quarter whatsoever. As a further proof of his sincerity of purpose he also expressed his willingness to serve under any other general in case the Basrans were not prepared to accede to his terms. And even if it meant a personal gain, it was, as pointed out by al-Āhnaf and al-Mundhir, but a just reward for the invaluable services rendered by
him. It will be remembered that it was made perfectly clear that the major portion, if not the whole, of the revenue was to be spent on the requirements of a campaign which was no less than a fight for existence.

Thus we see that the terms only reveal the calm and calculating mind of al-Mihallab. To foresee the nature of the coming struggle is one of the essential attributes of a military general and al-Mihallab amply proved it.

References:

Anon. 101-3.
Kam. 626-7.
Tab. 2/583-4.
Yqb. 2/316.