

Deconstructing the Concept of Jihad By the Radical Islamic Movements

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to criticize the religious understanding that becomes the basis of argumentation for radical Islamic movements. This study focuses on studying important issues about jihad (martyrdom) which were often misunderstood by the radical groups. Using a historical approach, it traces the historical roots of radicalism in Islam, examines its re-emergence in the modern time, and explore the basic characters of both classical and modern Islamic radicalism. This paper also uses a doctrinal-normative approach, focusing on verses of the Qur'an about jihad, in order to understand the core arguments used by them in carrying out their actions. The existing studies argued that the earliest radical group in Islam dated back to the 1st century Hijra (7th century), by the rise of the Khawarij group. Yet, in modern times, it is Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun and Jama'at-i Islami that have provided much inspiration for the emergence of contemporary radical movements, both of which use the concept of jihad, as a response to the hegemony of modern Western civilization. But unfortunately their reading of the jihad concept is too literal, partial, and not context-sensitive.

Keywords: *Islamic radical movement, Khawarij, jihad, modernism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Radicalism, which is often associated with Islam, is a topic widely discussed in the current era. Scholars use different terms to refer to it. Martin van Bruinessen called it fundamentalism[1, p. 88] [2]; James Barr, revolutionary Islam[3, p. 2]; R. Hrair Dekmejian, Islamic revivalism[4, p. x]; Oliver Roy, Islamism or Neo-Fundalism, and other scholars called it Islamist[5, p. 3] to refer to some radical Islamic movements such as al-Qaeda, Jama'ah Islamiyah, and ISIS. In general, these groups tend to understand Islamic teachings literally and partially, with less room for accommodation and compromise with other Muslim groups' point of views.

According to Azyumardi Azra, the Khawarij group, which emerged at the first century Hijra (7th century), following their disappointment at the Caliph Ali's decision with regard to how to end the Shiffin war, is the first radical movement that emerged in the history of Islam. This group held the belief that it is allowed to disregard, and even kill other groups who are different from them. In the modern era, Oliver Roy argues that some radical movements of today's era were a splinter of al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun in Egypt and Jama'at-i Islami in Pakistan[6, p. 35]. It is from both Islamic organizations that the radical movement of Islam in various parts of the world have developed in different forms and patterns, including in Indonesia.[5], [7]–[10]

This paper aims to study these radical movements, especially on the aspects of their historical roots and

common characteristics, along with the theological bases underlying their movements, before finally reinterpreting the theological arguments upon which their movements are predicated.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. The Roots of Radicalism in Islam

Historically, the emergence of radical religious movements was triggered by political issues, which were cloaked with religious sentiments. The so called Khawarij movement, in the case of Islam of its early years, provides an interesting example.[11, p. 47] Khawarij is a group that broke away from the troops of Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth Caliph of Islam, because of their disappointment at Ali's decision to accept *tahkim* (peace agreement) with Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan's group, during the Shiffin war. The Khawarij, not liking the *tahkim*, considered those involving in it including Ali and Mu'awiyah as unbeliever and allowable to kill, and they justified their opinion upon the Qur'an of Al-Maidah number 44. The Khawarij's resistance was extended beyond the *tahkim*, as they refused to admit the existence of the following Islamic emperors, both the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, and went on to chose an Imam and government of their own rights.

The Khawarij tended to lean toward a literal understanding of Islamic texts and insist upon blunt implementation of

their understanding without further thinking of the texts' contextual meanings. Dull accusations of infidels and polytheists were shot by the Khawarij people toward anyone who disagreed with them, or those who agreed but refused to convert into their perspective. They believed that areas outside their control is a *dar al-harb*, meaning allowable to attack. As such, according to Azra, is not a jihad, but as *isti'rad*, or religious persecution.[12, p. 141], [13]

Azra argues the extremity of this group becomes a prototype for many other radical groups, appearing recently. Their establishment consists of three major steps: *takfir*, *hijrah* and *jihad*. The *takfir* step is referred to any group considered deviating from the 'right' Islam or no longer obeying God's law, which in contemporary times is called by al-Maudūdī as the "*modern jahiliyah*". Therefore, the radical group must separate themselves (*hijrah*) from the 'deviating group, and the group is encouraged to wage a war (*jihad*) against them. Nowadays, despite the radical groups have their own *raison d'etre*, in general, they are formed through these three stages.[12, p. 141]

Many experts associated the contemporary rise of the radical movements around the world with two religious organizations in Egypt and Pakistan, namely al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun (IM) and Jamaat-i Islami (JI).[6, p. 35] Esposito said, both organization shared similar ideological principles, as follows:

1. Islam is a total and encompassing path of life (*kaffah*) that guides each individual, society, and political entity.
2. The Qur'an, the Sunnah and the *Salaf al-salih* are used as a guidance to carry out daily activities.
3. Islamic law (sharia) becomes a blueprint for modern Islamic societies, not relying on Western models.
4. Straying from the path of Islam and leaning toward that of the West is the cause of Muslims' moral decadency. Returning to the right path of Islam will restore Muslims' identity, pride, success, power, and wealth, both in the world and the hereafter. 5. Science and technology must be used for good purposes, and how to get it must be in line with Islamic teachings, and not relying on Western culture, in order to avoid westernization and secularization.
5. Jihad, both individually and in groups, both in the field of thought and action, in order to implement Islamic reform and revolution, is a means to deliver successful process of Islamization.

Both IM and JI have become an inspiration for the rise of other radical Islamic movements in various parts of the Muslim world, which in turn are commonly called trans-national movements. Therefore, it is safe to say that radical thinkers and ideologists of the Islamic movements in Egypt and Pakistan have exerted strong influence toward the emergence of radical Islamic activists, including in Indonesia. Still, it should be noted, that not all movements that took inspiration from both IM and JI, have developed radical ideologies and activism of Islam. Many also fought peacefully and are actively involved in modern political institutions.[7], [9], [10, p. 33]

The contemporary rise of radical movements in many parts of the Muslim world is a response to modernity imposed by Western civilization. They paid their attention at least to two major issues. First, secularism is considered as dangerous and threatening to Islam. Secondly, there is a strong desire among them to govern Muslim community under the law of the Qur'an and sharia, legitimized as a state's law.[14, p. ix], [15, pp. 16–49],[16] Their religious discourses revolved around the concepts of God's sovereignty, jihad, Islamic revolution, and social justice, which are oriented toward the early periods of Islam, or Islam of the prophet and his companions era, deemed as the purest form of the religion. According to them, the Islamic community is currently experiencing a setback, because it no longer holds pure teachings of Islam. Therefore, agendas of their movement must be carried out to counter Western hegemony, while believing that the only way to make Islam good again is by returning to the era where Islam is in its full glory.

There are five fundamental aspects that are characterized today's radical movement,[17] namely:

- Absolute truth claims. It is a claim of the most righteous adherents of Islam, and judgment of others' misguidance. At an extreme point, such an understanding can generate conflict
- Blind obedience. Blind obedience to their leaders is the next characteristics of the radical movement. Such obedience is needed to pave the process of indoctrination, and brainwashing will be the foundation for blind obedience.
- Desire to build an 'idealistic' era. When a group of a religion is unable to dialogue their religious thoughts with their reality, they will be surprised by the irreconcilable gaps between the faith and the reality. They will also fall into the trap of binary opposition, forcing them to change the reality - because it is considered wrong - by formulating a new "ideal" era that is a blunt imitation of the assumed ideal past.
- Putting the purpose above the means. This means, they will justify any means, however wrong it is according to commonsense, to realize and implement their beliefs.

- Declaration of the holy war. The declaration places other parties (both internal and external of their religion) as enemies. At this stage, the jihad concept which has a broad and positive meaning in Islam is degraded to only scuffling against different parties.

2.2. Deconstructing the Interpretation of Radicalism Verses

Violent acts that are associated with Islam usually utilize religious arguments that are understood partially. Therefore, one of the efforts that can be done to counter Islamic radicalism and terrorism is by deconstructing the understanding of the Qur'anic verse that the radical groups have so far used to justify their radical movements.

Actually, the concept of jihad is functioned in such a way to help Islam and its believers to respond the challenges of an era. Yet, the jihad teachings must be studied comprehensively by considering to its specific contexts of time and space. In this regard, the Qur'an contains a few number of verses that discuss jihad, such as the QS. 29: 69, which means: *"And those who strive for Us - We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good"*; as well as the Q.S. 2: 190, which means: *"Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors"*.

These verses emphasize that jihad is as an internal struggle with difficulties and complications towards a better life. In this regard, jihad can be understood as a self-struggle against worldly desires for the sake of achieving virtue, spreading good deeds, and improving the quality of society's lives. At this point, it is interesting to examine Asghar Ali Engineer's view of jihad in Islam, as he said: [18, p. 121]

"As far as the Qur'an is concerned, the concept of "jihad" has nothing to do with violence. The Qur'an does not use this word in any sense of war at all. It is much later usage with which we are not concerned here. It is highly regrettable that not only non-Muslims, but also even Muslims themselves, in general, think that the Qur'an uses the term jihad for war, and that it is the duty of Muslims to wage jihad (i.e. in the sense of war) in the name of Allah. The word jihad, unfortunately, has been so misused in the history of Muslims that even an Arabic dictionary al-Qamus al 'Asri by Elias Antoon (Cairo, 1972) gives its meaning as "militancy, fighting" and "jihad fi sabil al din" as "holy or religious war". This is how original meanings are distorted through popular practice".

Engineer's explanation above confirms that the conception of jihad in Islam is not identical to violence and radicalism. The distortion of meaning of jihad has been done by Ellian Antoon in his dictionary, which defines jihad as the holy war in the name of religion. However, if explored deeper, the word "jihad" (which comes from the word *jahada*) with its various derivative meanings has more to do with the non-war struggle. As such is

evidenced by the Qur'an, in the part of al-Taubah number 24. It reads:

"Say, [O Muhammad], "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your relatives, wealth which you have obtained, commerce wherein you fear decline, and dwellings with which you are pleased are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and jihad in His cause, then wait until Allah executes His command. And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people." Or the Qur'an of al-Hajj part, number 78, which means: "And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. [It is] the religion of your father, Abraham..."

The word jihad is also found in Chapter al-Mumtahanah verse 1 which means: "...If you have come out for jihad in My cause and seeking means to My approval, [take them not as friends]. You confide to them affection, but I am most knowing of what you have concealed and what you have declared...". Chapter at-Tawbah verse 19, also talks about jihad, as follows, "Have you made the providing of water for the pilgrim and the maintenance of al-Masjid al-Haram equal to [the deeds of] one who believes in Allah and the Last Day and strives (jihad) in the cause of Allah? They are not equal in the sight of Allah. And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people"

Another Qur'anic verse of jihad is found in al-Hujarat number 15, which means: "The believers are only the ones who have believed in Allah and His Messenger and then doubt not but strive (jihad) with their properties and their lives in the cause of Allah. It is those who are the truthful", surat al-Ankabut ayat 6: "And whoever strives (jihad) only strives for [the benefit of] himself. Indeed, Allah is free from need of the worlds"

From the above verses, it is clear that instead of inviting to war, these verses tend to underline the significance of both vertical and horizontal workshops, which are mainly intended to reach God's grace.

This is where the whole misinterpretation of jihad started from, which in its turn is used by many people for justifying an act of religious radicalism. As told by al-Qardawī, the main triggering factor to the rise of radical religious attitudes is the lack of a true and deep understanding of the essence of Islamic teachings. Islam is understood superficially and partially. [19, pp. 59-67]

Yet, on the other hand, the Qur'an also discusses and allows the practice of war, indicated by its using of the words *qatala* (to kill), *qital*, (war) and several words closely related to their meanings. In the following, we will examine one by one the Qur'an verses relating to religious radicalism.

The first is al-Hajj number 39-40, which means: "Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory. [They are] those who have been evicted from their homes without right - only because they say, "Our Lord is Allah". This is the first revealed verse of the Qur'an that deals with war doctrine and violence in Islam. Yet, according to the Egyptian historian Syalabi, the verse, if explored explore

much deeper, is not revealed to justify the act of war. This can be seen from the use of passive sentence, or *mabi majhul*, at the beginning of the verse, that is, *udzina* whose *fa'il*, in this case, God as the subject of the sentence is made unseen. This indicates that God is not pleased with any acts of war. This verse, to many Muslim scholars, was only a permission (to an act of violence) from those who are oppressed, as indicated by the phrase "*bi annahum dzulimu*" (because they are persecuted). Therefore, when this verse was revealed, some Muslims were not convinced enough of this verse to be an excuse for battle.

Thus, Allah sent down another verse which emphasized the permissibility of war as a reinforcement of the above verse. This is contained in al-Baqarah number 190, which means: "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors". Nevertheless, in this verse, the granting of permission is not absolute, but conditional, that is, a war is only allowed for a self-defense, and absolutely not exceeding the limits of humanity, a transgression of which will cause God's anger. In the contexts of warfare, and from the historical perspective, the basic principles in which Islam allows an act of war is, if the war is done under the pretext of self-defense, one's honor protection, security of *dakwah*, and security of one's opportunity to embrace Islam, and protection of Muslims from the attacks by, by that time, Persian and Roman forces.[19]

The next verse, often used to justify radical actions al-Taubah number 5, which means: "And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give *zakah*, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful".

When viewed from the historical perspective and with the *munasabah* theory, the order to kill, capture and spy the enemy is not obligatory. This order is only a permission from God that such act of violence is permissible in particular situations only. This is because, the command to kill the enemy only came after the prohibition of killing during the unlawful months, which is contained in the previous verse. As the scholars of the principle of Islamic jurisprudence said, *al amru ba'da al nahyi li al-ibāhah* (the order that came after the prohibition, (its legal status) is only permissible). Therefore, this instruction of killing that come in the above verse has no "mandatory" value, unless the 'enemies' are highly dangerous and have no remorse.

Thus, peace is every human being's desire. As long as peace is equitable, and there is no obstacle for Muslims to consent peace, it is even recommended to offer peace to enemy, as long as it is advantageous. Islam indeed forbids hostility, hatred and prejudice (Q.S. 49: 11-12). Therefore, methodologically, the supporters of radicalism in Islam are only care about, wrongly, the superficial meanings of the Islamic texts (both al-Qur'an and Hadith), and have partial understanding of Islamic teachings.

3. CONCLUSION

Contemporary radical groups of Islam tends to be based their movements on radical ideologies, which in turn allow them to do violent actions at practical levels. Such movements regard modernism as a modern form of "*jahiliyah*" (state of ignorance), which in fact would slow down the progress of Islam itself. Thus, they draw a demarcation line between Islam and modernity. Their targets were shifted to reconstruct modern political ideology, wherever Muslims were shackled by modernism. Their rigid understanding of the concept of *jihad* has made it justifiable for them spread their radical ideology in violent manners. This paper concludes that one of the effective ways to stop radicalization of Islam is that by deconstructing the understanding of Islamic texts that are used by the radical groups, such as verses on the conception of *jihad*, for justifying any acts of radicalism in Islam.

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