

An Analysis of Robert Spencer's Views on Jihad

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Abstract

The meaning and treatment of jihad are often misunderstood by ordinary people starting from the confusion caused by various parties, Muslims and non-Muslims. An explanation of the true meaning of jihad needs to be made public especially in rejecting the false accusations and statements of Western scholars. In addition, the issue of malignancy which is increasingly widespread in all corners of the world has made the issue of jihad an important and often debated issue. In fact, there are those who link the violence and war that is currently in force with the personality of the Prophet Muhammad, as Robert Spencer did in his writings. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to analyze and explain the views of the orientalist Robert Spencer in his book, "The Truth about Muhammad." regarding the misunderstanding of this issue of jihad. Through the method of text analysis which focuses on the theme of jihad in the book. This article has identified several errors and elements of propaganda spread in his writings. All of these negative views may make ignorant and naive readers to hate the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for practicing jihad and alienating non-Islamic people instead of knowing Islam through its true perspective.

Keywords: Orientalists, West, Prophet Muhammad, Terrorism, Jihad

Introduction

In the present era, the countries that are experiencing economic, political and administrative turmoil are now the target of the big European powers, especially in Arab countries. Europe wants to control countries such as Iran, Iraq, Syria and others for the sake of economic interests.¹ Stemming from weaknesses in the aspects of education, legislation, culture, and the economy, various forms of oppression prevail in these weak countries. As a result of that, a number of the people of these countries rose up to defend their country and their culture from being colonized and oppressed by forming jihadist groups who fought in the name of religion. The violence that the world community is currently experiencing has sacrificed many innocent Muslim and non-Muslim communities such as the middle class and children. This act worries the world community because it threatens the security of the whole world. It is a fact that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. The extreme or ferocious treatment of jihadist groups has invited condemnation and ridicule by citizens of the world. This is because their actions have crossed the line and violated human rights and thus polluted them someone's anger. Among the violence committed by this group includes slaughter, murder, and bombings which are carried out in crowded places.² Their actions were very contrary to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.³ In fact, there are many passages in the Qur'an which prohibit humans from causing damage to the earth ⁴and killing other people in a criminal manner.⁵ The wrong interpretation of this extreme jihadist group has also defamed the good name of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad in the eyes of the world. This is because the effort to maintain the good name of Islam according to Abdullah ibn Bayyah (2018) is one of the pillars of objectives of Shari'ah that needs to be maintained and defended.⁶ At the same time, Western orientalists such as Robert Spencer and the Western media were very active in labeling this radical jihadist group as practicing war jihad as the Prophet had done during his life. In tracing the actions of Islamic jihadists, Robert Spencer has recorded events that occur today and compared them

with the life of the Prophet Muhammad. This paper is written with the aim of understanding and analyzing Spencer's views on the actions of radical jihadists based on his book.

Methodology

This paper uses qualitative, descriptive and text study methods in which library research and original texts are used. This involves using primary reference sources as the main reference, namely the Qur'an and Robert Spencer's book. Among the secondary materials used as references for this paper are books, academic journals and articles related to Western orientalist issues, jihad, malignancy and the involvement of the Prophet Muhammad as a role model for all Muslim life.

Discussion

Robert Bruce Spencer is an anti-Islamic American writer. He was born on February 27, 1962 and has a Christian Catholic background, after a long time being baptized as a Greek Orthodox. He began to be known by many because of his scathing criticism and belittling of the Islamic religion which became the guide and reference for all Muslims. His research on terrorism and jihad is receiving increasing media coverage, where he is also a director for a website sesawang which he controls namely Jihad Watch. He often gets invited as a speaker and often writes as a columnist in various magazines and articles in America. Spencer was also very active and aggressive in exposing the emerging jihadist movements in the West and internationally. He, along with Pamela Geller, was active in the movement Stop Islamization of America (SIOA) and American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI) which seeks to prevent the entry of Muslim immigrants, especially from Arab countries and its surroundings.⁷ Jihad Watch was created to capture as much public attention as possible regarding the ideology and treatment of jihad which is increasingly worrisome in the West.⁸ Even the Jihad watch also acts as a medium to reveal the goals behind the jihadist movement that wants to implement Islamic law and eradicate non-Muslim communities. News of the violence that occurred in the West that was not disclosed in contemporary

newspapers will be disclosed on this website. Various methods were used by Spencer in attracting attention and providing information to the common people in Europe in general regarding the dangers of jihadism and radical Islam prevailing around them. His actions are also a bit outrageous when his efforts have created fear and hatred of Muslims and the religion of Islam among non-Muslims. According to one of his followers on the page Jihad watch, the involvement of Spencer as the main voice in defending the American people rather than the Islamisation movement is a noble endeavor. Spencer is also considered an American who is not frustrated and has high convictions in voicing the issue of modern jihad. ⁹In addition to virtual writing, Spencer has published 20 books since 2002.

Review and Understanding the Concept of Islamic Jihad

This is one of the controversial & provocative books written by Spencer who has caused anger and displeasure among Muslims. This applies when Spencer presents the dark, baseless sides of Holy Prophet (PBUH) as his argument against the viciousness that society is suffering from in the West. Because of Spencer's actions, this book was prevented from selling and distributing it in Pakistan.¹⁰ “The Truth about Muhammad “is a book among other controversial works written by Robert Spencer. This book is full of condemnation, accusations and wrong interpretations. This book, which traces the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, was written as an assessment of several aspects of the life of the Prophet Muhammad that Spencer found problematic and did not like, such as the issue of the Prophet's marriage, Islamic legislation that was considered cruel, the issue of jihad, preferring men to women and others. This is not liked by many people and is considered as contrary to human rights and human dignity according to the Western understanding.¹¹ This discomfort they face applies because today's jihadists accuse their actions of being carried out in imitation of the actions of the Prophet Muhammad. Spencer ironically remarks that “it is still common place to hear Islam called a religion of peace”.¹² Focusing on Islamic laws of war and moral principles he writes: “...good became identified with anything

that redounded to the benefits of Muslims, and evil with anything that harmed them, without any reference to larger moral standard. Moral absolutes were swept aside in favor of the overarching principle of expediency.”¹³ In Robert Spencer’s views, an women and innocent non-Muslim children suffer the same lot at the hand of Muslim soldiers as the actual combatants do.¹⁴ In his book Spencer linked the issue of jihad and violence with the teachings and deeds of Holy Prophet (PBUH). Spencer brought many arguments against Sirah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) which involves matters of war chaired by Rasulullah (SAW) himself. So on, Spencer linked all the lessons about war in the Prophet's Sirah with the actions of the jihadists who accused them of following these actions in order to realize Darul Islam who use the Khilafah system in their administration.¹⁵ Looking at current issues involving jihadist ferocity, Spencer questioned and doubted the true attitude of the Prophet Muhammad. Is it true that Islam is the only religion that exists in this world? This problem arises from the actions of jihadists who accuse of following the morals and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad in the wrong way. Although this writing is based on the Qur'ān, Hadith and Sīrah the main reference¹⁶ but the arguments for the facts he included are unclear, confusing the reader and distorting the true meaning of the interpretation of the Qur'an and prophetic history. Spencer manipulated the verses of the Quran and Hadith that he took by picking texts that were incomplete in the context of their meanings so that they could be adapted to circumstances in order to support his argument. This can be seen especially when he links the ferocious acts of radical groups today with the involvement of the Prophet Muhammad in the battlefield. According to Spencer, the spread of these vicious acts of jihadists arose as a result of following elements of Islamic teachings and the Prophet Muhammad who contributed to the enthusiasm of the jihadists to form extreme attacks. In the end, the actions of these extremists and transgressors of religions have invited hatred and criticism from the world community against Islam and its adherents. According to Islam, the concept of Jihad is different from terrorism. It aims

at striking terror and fear in people's mind and endangering their life, freedom and peace. The types of terrorism are as follows: to wreak havoc on the environment, to annihilate public and private properties, and to devastate natural resources.¹⁷Islamic Jihad is an anti-terror ideology. It is a war against oppression and persecution as the prophet of Islam (SAW) categorically declared that he who knowingly strengthens and supports an oppressor; he gets out of the fold of Islam.¹⁸It is forbidden to kill woman, children, aged people, the crippled, the blind, and those who have their hand or leg amputated, idiot, monk in the monastery, he who lives in seclusion on the mountains and does not mix up with people, people in their house and church who have shut the doors behind them.¹⁹In summary, violence and jihad are the main themes in his book when Spencer questions the call of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad as a religion that promotes peace and tolerance. This is because a part of Western society does not like Islam. Spencer is of the view that the Prophet Muhammad was so passionate in hunting down and killing infidels, Jews and Christians and incited his followers to hate Jews and Christians and justifying the violence committed against them based on verse 60 of suraal-Anfal. The facts and logic brought by Spencer in his book are completely wrong and false. Robert Spencer's wrong interpretations and understandings are indirectly able to form bad thoughts and understanding of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad in the eyes of the world, especially in the eyes of non-Muslims. Many Islamic congress scholars have answered about all the misunderstandings like this. According to Islamic scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi the actions of these jihadist groups have diminished the truth of religious teachings with their exaggerated attitudes and actions even though their true purpose is to protect themselves.²⁰ A strategic and continuous effort is made through this paper to ensure that all misunderstandings about Islam and the personality of the Prophet Muhammad can be properly tackled. All Muslim scholars of the world should make an objective review of influential orientalist publications like Spencer's book and provide factual responses.

Conclusion

Robert Spencer is a Western writer who is clearly anti-Islamic and seeks to poison people's minds by instilling hatred in the hearts of those who are impressed by the violent treatment of jihadists directly or indirectly. This left-leaning orientalist is very active in attracting public attention by presenting issues of violence prevailing in Europe and America through his website. A strategic and continuous effort is made through this paper to ensure that all misunderstandings about Islam and the personality of the Prophet Muhammad can be properly controlled. The writings of Western scholars like this need to be refined and properly researched, in order to maintain the sanctity of the Islamic religion and respect the rights of the Prophet Muhammad.

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