

## Reinventing jihad's meaning: A discourse on jihad among Salafist figures in Indonesia

Moh. Rofqil Bazikh\*

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

### Abstract

The jihad discourse can never be separated from the Islamic intellectual tradition. This doctrine partly causes negative views of Islam. Because Islam has a doctrine of jihad, quite a few people think that Islam is closely related to violence. This study aims to examine one group that is often considered to be closely linked to violence in Indonesia, namely the Salafi group. Several Salafi figures have even received much rejection in various regions, plus there is a simplistic perception of Salafi groups, which varies. Methodologically, this study uses a type of qualitative research where data is obtained through observation of the social media channels of three Salafi figures related to discussing the topic of jihad, namely Syafiq Riza Basalamah, Khalid Basalamah, and Firanda Andirja. All three are Salafi figures with authority and influence, especially on social media. This study shows that they are trying to cleanse the meaning of jihad. This is proven by their opposing position to acts of violence in the name of jihad. However, they do not deny that jihad is synonymous with war. They are just trying to ensure that jihad does not always mean war. This effort is a step in reinventing the pejorative meaning of jihad. This also provides clarification that not all Salafis support acts of violence as understood so far. This study implies that new media can build new discourse about the identity of splinter groups (Salafi) in the public sphere.

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### Abstrak

Diskursus jihad tidak pernah bisa dilepaskan dari tradisi intelektual Islam. Pandangan-pandangan negatif terhadap Islam di antaranya disebabkan oleh doktrin ini. Sebab Islam memiliki doktrin jihad, tidak sedikit pihak yang menganggap Islam lekat kaitannya dengan kekerasan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji salah satu kelompok yang kerap dianggap lekat dengan kekerasan di Indonesia, yaitu kelompok Salafi. Beberapa figur Salafi bahkan banyak mendapat penolakan di berbagai daerah, ditambah terdapat persepsi yang simplistik terhadap kelompok Salafi yang

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### \*Corresponding

**author:** Moh. Rofqil Bazikh, email: [rofqiljunior@gmail.com](mailto:rofqiljunior@gmail.com), Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. Jl. Laksda Adisucipto, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 55281.

sejatinya bervariasi. Secara metodologis, studi ini menggunakan jenis penelitian kualitatif dimana data diperoleh melalui observasi terhadap saluran media sosial tiga figur Salafi terkait pembahasan topik jihad, yaitu Syafiq Riza Basalamah, Khalid Basalamah, dan Firanda Andirja. Ketiganya merupakan figur Salafi yang mempunyai otoritas dan pengaruh, utamanya di media sosial. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa mereka melakukan upaya pembersihan terhadap makna jihad. Ini dibuktikan dengan posisi kontra mereka terhadap aksi kekerasan yang mengatasnamakan jihad. Kendati demikian, mereka tidak membantah bahwa jihad identik dengan perang. Mereka hanya mencoba agar jihad tidak senantiasa berarti perang. Upaya ini merupakan langkah menemukan kembali (*reinventing*) makna jihad dari yang peyoratif. Ini sekaligus memberikan klarifikasi bahwa tidak semua Salafi mendukung aksi-aksi kekerasan sebagaimana dipahami selama ini. Studi ini mengimplikasikan bahwa *new media* dapat menjadi sarana untuk membangun diskursus baru tentang identitas kelompok sempalan (*salafi*) di ruang publik.

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## INTRODUCTION

Jihad is one of the essential topics on the path of Islam. In Islamic discourse, the term has not been ignored to this day. The bloody tragedy on September 11, 2001, affected the emergence of a jihad term. Not only did the incident shock many people, but it also prompted a change of order and a new trend: terrorism. Many people, commonly in the non-Muslim world, have the perception that jihad is equated with terror (Latif & Munir, 2014). This view is understandable because both are closely linked to violence, although jihad has its own rules. Historically, jihad has no precedent but has a solid theological argument. At that time, the Umayyad and later Ottoman empires used this doctrine to expand their territory (Bennet & Kunkel, 2004). In other words, this doctrine emerged earlier in Islamic tradition. Given Islamic theology, many verses in the Qur'an and the hadith literature frequently refer to this doctrine (Parrot, 2020). Jihad is a measure of political expansion and an implication of theological belief. The arising question is based on the flexibility of terminology. As a result, scholars from varied perspectives, such as Quranic, legalistic, and even philosophical overviews, gave great applause to this motto (Knapp, 2003). The unique terminology, like Clashes of Definitions by Mostfa, can be described (Mostfa, 2021).

John L. Esposito, for example, put forward two standard classifications of jihad. Both are derived from Badar's famous prophecy. The prophet said that Muslims would face great and small jihads. Esposito explores that this motto has a varied digestion. In addition, many Muslim leaders used this term to legitimize imperial expansion in their eras. As mentioned in the previous section, it was used by the Umayyah and Ottoman

empires. According to Esposito, jihad terminology can be found among extremist and terrorist movements. This movement believes that jihad is the call of religion to submit the world wholly to the law of God (Esposito, 2011). This digestion is understandable, although it makes the jihad term more pejorative than its root. Therefore, the outsiders' assumptions that jihad or terror are alike are not entirely misleading. The recent movement of Islam itself strengthens their assumptions. Many incidences of violence make this term legitimate for the movement. One of Indonesia's most phenomenal movements is Laskar Jihad, a semi-militaristic group. They associate themselves with Salafi, a movement that submits the precedents of *Salaf al-ṣālih* (Hasan, 2006).

Based on the illustration, we can conclude that one of the groups involved in disseminating extreme movements is the Salafi group. Moreover, there are many movements using violence as a spectrum. It means that the extreme group is more comprehensive than one group that claims itself to be Salafi. However, the Salafi group can be considered to be a part of a movement that spread Islam in Indonesia by using violence. There are many young preachers affiliated with Salafi ideology. It begins with Syafiq Riza Basalamah, Khalid Baslamah, and Firanda Andirja. They are the figures who have many experiences and receive some rejections in various areas of the country (Zaenuri & Yusuf, 2019). The rejection can be understood because of a reductive perception toward them. They are often mentioned and claimed to be rigid exponents of Islam.

This article seeks to clarify the general view of the Salafi group. On a more specific topic, the paper attempts to analyze and criticize their view of jihad. Previously, comprehensive research discussing the Salafi movement in Indonesia was conducted by Noorhaidi Hasan (Hasan, 2007; Hasan, 2018). Hasan discussed the origins of Salafi and their connection to a broader context (Hasan, 2018; Hasan, 2022). Some discussions described Salafi ideology (Cui & Glinert, 2016), their movements in social media (Abdulmajid, 2023; Aidulsyah, 2023; Sorgenfrei, 2021), institutions (Hassan, 2010; Makruf & Asrori, 2022; Muthohirin & Kamaludin, 2022), and attachment to the agendas of violence (Blanc & Roy, 2021; Muthuswamy, 2021). The discussion of Salafi and its socio-political movements also arose (Bano, 2021). Many scholars have discussed the Salafi and jihad movements. Quintan Wiktorowicz is one of them who discusses this topic. He talked about the transnational Salafi and the jihadi movements (Wiktorowicz, 2001).

This article has similar topics to Rusli's writing dealing with Salafi group (not individual) perceptions of jihad and suicide bombs (Rusli, 2014). As a distinction, this article focuses only on specific Salafist figures. However, the article deals with the belief that there are varied movements within the Salafi group. However, they are under the same creed command, the tauhid. This aligns with what Wiktorowicz revealed in

Anatomy of the Salafi Movement. Three classifications made by Wiktorowicz should be used here. They are purists, politicians, and jihadists classifications, that is, to judge the three figures being chosen (See Salafist movement in Wiktorowicz, 2006). This article reviews the third perception in one breath while clarifying the public perception. This is meant to evoke the fact that the complexity of the Salafi movement, including its fractions, has been regularly reduced. He chose the theme of jihad to assess the perception of the three figures because this term is close to military movements. In line with the factual reality that this topic is frequently associated with violence, the question arises whether these three Salafi figures support a full-fledged jihad that is exclusively confrontational or vice versa.

## **METHODS**

The type of research is qualitative, which obtains the data from an observation. The author selected those figures because they have a broad audience on social media. Observations were made in their preaching, especially in their videos on YouTube.

To make it more specific, the author only selects many lectures they held that discuss and talk exclusively about jihad. Their videos discussing jihad were watched, and the conclusion was made by looking at the typical patterns. Thus, this article presents the content analysis of the video lecture held by those figures.

By using the concept or view that not all Salafi movements are violent, this study seeks to offer a new discourse regarding the Salafi position in interpreting jihad. This study can strengthen the view that Salafi da'wah does not support violent acts in the name of jihad.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Jihad in Islam**

It cannot be understood to separate jihad terminology from the expansion of Islam. Not only was Islam historically close to jihad, but Islam also theologically developed this doctrine. Many verses in the Qur'an explicitly address this subject. The hadith literature coming from Muhammad also strengthens what the Qur'an said about the topics. The word of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) involves some prescriptions relating to jihad. These prescriptions are to regulate and restrict the proportionate performance of jihad. The discourse of jihad also relates to the invention of *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* offered by traditional Muslim scholars. While the first term refers to a territory under Islamic control, the second is the opposite (Hillenbrand, 2015). As Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi put it, "Before discussing the Islamic concept of war concerning jihad, it is important to ask one basic question: What is the original and

natural relationship between two countries, particularly between one Muslim country and the adjoining or neighboring non-Muslim country?" Ghazi gives two reasons why putting it forward before discussing jihad is essential. In the beginning, many scholars argue that the relationship between the two regions is a war. Ghazi insulted Khudduri, who quoted Abu Hanifah, saying it was a natural relationship. Khuddiri argued that since the classification of *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* emerged, the relation between them was war (Ghazi, 2008). Even though terminology does not have a solid normative foundation, jurists make classifications to discuss their time's social realities and situations (Eris, 2000). Ghazi's second argument relates to its natural relationship with non-Muslim territories by finding that there is indeed a third classification, namely *dār al-aḥad*, the treaty territory. Regardless of their beliefs, everyone in this region is guaranteed security or tranquility (Ghazi, 2008).

Talking about war and jihad will never forget those classifications of land. Furthermore, how true jihad was understood in classical and contemporary times is essential to describe in this section. If we refer to classical references, this discussion will invite contradiction. Some say that jihad is beyond the understanding of many people. Yusuf Qaradhawi, a prominent and prolific Muslim scholar, submitted this view (Al-Qaddawi, 2009). Michael Bonner explains the literal meaning of jihad, which means hard work. Comparing it with the phrase *fi sabil Allāh*, it is supposed to be a battle in the name of God (Bonner, 2006). As Mark Gould mentioned, Rudolph Peters submits the perspective that in the early Islamic phase and literature, the term jihad refers to holy war. He adds that in this topic, the positions and verses of the Qur'an are ambiguous. The ambiguity is located in allowing Muslims to fight as a defensive attempt in certain circumstances or all situations without exception. According to Peters, the verses associated with this topic suggest that Muslims should fight against non-Muslims unconditionally. In the classical exegetical tradition, the sword verses have abrogated previous verses emphasizing a harmonious relationship with non-Muslims (Gould, 2005). This description clarifies Islam's different perceptions of jihad and its normative basis. On the one hand, some scholars argue that jihad does not exclusively relate to war. At the same time, there is a perception that jihad necessitates a war. In medieval books, such as *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid*, and contemporary books, one of them is *al-Fiqh al-Islām wa Adillatuhu*, the term jihad is closely associated with war (Kamali, 2002). Many classical scholars have agreed that this act is legal, although it is only a *fraud kifāyah* (Rusyd, n.d.). It is not surprising that Islamic fundamentalist groups have adopted the term jihad to legitimize their actions (Martinez, 2003).

## **Jihad and violence**

As discussed in the previous section, the terminology of jihad is flexible. The jihad motto can be drawn according to the will of the people who use it. The emergence of a group that takes the jihad term as the basis for their legitimacy of violence is necessary (Tahir, 2017). One of the most famous examples is the statement proclaimed by Osama bin Laden. His attitude can be found in two important documents, such as the *Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places* and *The Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Christians*. Although these documents are seemingly influenced by the socio-political conditions of the time, they make precise positions and connect jihad with violence. Osama bin Laden is not the only one who uses jihad terminology while implementing his actions. Previously, some Muslim scholars had the same position and perception (Porter, 2002). The 9/11 tragedy in America has increased jihad terminology. It is undermined by the assumption that behind the tragedy is an Islamic doctrine as fuel (Abdulla, 2007).

A year after the 9/11 tragedy, Indonesia faced a similar situation. A bomb exploded in Bali's nightclub, killing approximately 202 people. Most of them are foreigners who are vacationing (Khomaini, 2017). As a consequence, the term jihad is connected and linked with violence. It is understandable because one of the promoters of tragedy is the Islamic Jamaah (JI). JI is one of the Salafi-Jihadist organizations, a faction of Dar al-Islam (DI) (Hwang, 2012). Historically, DI performed insurgence in some regions of Indonesia. The involvement of JI in the Bali tragedy is undeniable, although Abu Bakar Baasyir (an essential figure in the organization) denies it. Interestingly, Baasyir stated in an interview that those who bombed Bali were mujahid. Their actions are regarded as jihad in the way of God (Cianflone et al., 2007). At least two things can be drawn from this description of tragedy. It describes both a connection between jihad and acts of violence and Salafist individuals who become exponents and practitioners. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the perspective of preachers is associated with the Salafi movement. They are famous preachers in Indonesia and are also known as Salafist figures. Syafiq Riza Basalamah (Romadhoni, 2022), Khalid Basalmah (TVOne, 2023), and Firanda Andirja (DetikSulsel, 2022) are sometimes rejected in various areas. Some rejections are understandable because those preachers are considered exponents of radical groups in the country (Sugihartati et al., 2020).

## **Jihad discourse among salafist figures**

All the figures discussed here are alums of the Islamic University of Madinah. There was no doubt how close they were to Salafi's understanding of Islamic teaching. Not only do they have an intimate relationship with Salafi's teaching, but they also spread



their understanding of Islamic teaching to Indonesian Muslims. Saudi Arabia's counterpart in spreading the teaching has been repeatedly offended by Noorhaidi (Hasan, 2020). Syafiq, Khalid, and Firanda can be classified as the younger generation of Salafists. Previously, some Salafist preachers were over three years old, such as Abu Nida and Yazid Abdul Qadir Jawwas. The emergence of young Salafists must give fresh ideas to the movement. Their ingenuity in using technology also opens a broader opportunity for spreading their teaching. All of the Salafist figures mentioned and discussed here use social media. In their expeditions, they preach and teach actively on social media, including YouTube. Their adaptability makes their interpretations easy to accept among people, mainly urban middle-class Muslims. Talking about the adaptability of the Salafi movement, it is not just these figures who use social media. The existence of social media is well accommodated by Salafist preachers in general (Sunaryanto et al., 2023). Their existence then created a new religious authority through several followers or subscribers. Khalid is in the highest position at 2.76 million, followed by Syafiq at 1.39 million and Firanda at 698 thousand subscribers. It became a mark that their lectures became popular on various social media platforms. They are not only famous, but they must also be able to influence their audiences (Muttaqin, 2020).

As stated in the previous section, the digestion of jihad looks very flexible. Thus, the understanding of it can vary according to the interests of each interpreter. A group that opposes violence will interpret jihad as a defensive effort. On the contrary, offensive calls for jihad are put forward by those who are militant in spreading Islam. Both can be understood as a wealth of understanding related to discussion. In an attempt to participate in the controversy of discourse, the three Salafist figures will be presented here in connection with the topic. This starts with Syafiq Riza Basalamah, who explicitly discussed jihad in some of his preachings; furthermore, he has a series that deals with terrorism. Syafiq's video discusses a range of topics of jihad—such as the teaching of Al Wajiz section Kitab Al-Jihad—law of jihad until jurisprudence of prophet history (sīrah al-nabawiyyah) about jihad extensively. Those topics stated in some videos reach thousands of viewers. The jurisprudence of Prophet History's video dominated qualitatively more than others. In addition, two other videos with rhetorical titles question why war verses are in the Quran. Unlike Syafiq, Khalid Basalamah's video of jihad is not comprehensive. His videos are only short fragments, such as videos questioning how Islam is spread with the sword, the meaning and rules of jihad, and moderate suggestions for understanding jihad. Meanwhile, Firanda Andirja's teachings about jihad are even more enjoyable. Some of them do not specify jihad as a war.

We will see how the content presented in the video relates to the jihad theme. In the beginning, we are going to discuss two Syafiq videos teaching the book *Al Wajiz*:

*Encyclopædia Fiqih Islām in the Qur'ān and As-Sunnah As-Ṣaḥīḥah*, specifically chapters of the *Kitāb Al Jihād* and the *Law of Jihad*. Another video is a study of prophet history jurisprudence (*fiqh Sirah nabawiyah*) that discusses the shariatization of jihad. Speaking about the content, in this section, Syafiq still links jihad to war against the enemy. Quoting the author of the book he discussed, he defined jihad as a genuine effort at combating the enemy. According to him, it is true that jihad is one of the most frightening and disturbing terminologies. Jihad terminology, seen as frightening and disturbing, is a great mercy from God. The jihad understood by the Syafiq in this section is not far away from war. His comprehensive reading of one book influences this view. Syafiq also emphasized that the mujahid would be bound for a tremendous reward. According to him, winning or losing, a man who goes to jihad still wins. When he loses, he will go to heaven because he belongs as a martyr; otherwise, he will receive a spoil of war. These two positions in Syafiq's testament are equally beneficial. Interestingly, Syafiq always describes that there is a code of ethics in war that must be obeyed. In his teaching about jihad, he stated that jihad has many forms: oral, written, and treasury.

Unlike Syafiq, Khalid defines jihad more broadly and not exclusively regarding war. According to him, the meaning of jihad, in general, is any attempt made by Muslims to defend their religion. In line with the Prophet's speech (PBUH), Khalid states that everyone who asks for knowledge walks in the way of God and earns a living. The reward of these two models is equal to those who fight in the way of God. It illustrates that Khalid gave the jihad a more extensive digestion. However, it can be understood that he rejects jihad in war form comprehensively. In another video, he explicitly stated that the sword spread Islam. According to him, worship and war are two ways of expanding Islamic doctrine. On the other hand, Firanda Andirja, in some of his videos, emphasized jihad without war. At the same time, he does not deny that there is a jihad with the sword. In Firanda's view, studying and preaching are classified as jihad. In order to strengthen it, he quoted QS. At-Taubah (9:122) equalized jihad by the sword with those searching for knowledge. In many other videos, Firanda uses the term jihad to refer to fight bad things, like *riyā'* and *'ujub*. Based on this description, it is clear that the term jihad, understood by Salafi figures, still cannot be freed from war, although they have gone further by improving jihad without a sword. In their view, many non-militaristic acts are also classified as jihad.

The interesting topic in this section lies in their differentiation between jihad and terrorism. Although they are still in a position where jihad can be described as war, they have a strong opinion against terrorism. As an example, Syafiq hopes for a comprehensive understanding of jihad. It is aimed at clarifying common misunderstandings about jihad as a terrorist. As discussed in the previous section, he suggests and shows some ethical



codes of war that must not attack non-combatants. Implicitly, he is very contrary to everyone who attacks and bombs many places of worship and claims that their attack is jihad. He believes that this view is a misunderstanding of jihad because it is not by the Qur'an and hadith. Khalid also takes the same position as him by stating that sometimes there are many misinterpretations of jihad. He rejects some attacks claimed to be jihad, such as suicide bombs and all terrorist attacks. According to him, as citizens, we are in the same position despite different beliefs. In this case, he leaned on the classical classification associated with infidels (*dhimmiy* and *ḥarbiy*). Firanda quotes a scholar (*ulama*) and makes an interesting analogy: "Do not aspire to build a house by destroying the kingdom." He wants to say that it is not appropriate for anyone to build an Islamic state by using violent attacks. Firanda also allows the killing of rebels that disrupt the stability of the country. According to him, rebellion disturbs public security and kindness (*maṣlahah*).

Based on these findings, it is true that the efforts made by the Salafi figure above are purification efforts. In the classification carried out by Wiktorowicz, all three, in this case, can be classified as Salafi-Purists and not Jihadists. They are trying to rediscover the meaning of jihad, which has been misunderstood and misused. Their rejection of jihadist groups and suicide bombers is an argument for rediscovering jihad's meaning. It cannot be denied that jihad is connected with war and violence, but not exclusively in that direction. These Salafist figures use the terms of jihad extensively, like jihad against lust and evil. In one breath, they are still holding on to the fertilization of jihad that is closely linked to war while attempting to expand its scope. Furthermore, the above exposure provides clarification to the general perception that Salafi is guilty of harsh acts of militarism. Not all Salafists endorse violent movements, in line with Wiktorowicz's classification. Only one faction of Salafis approves of violence: the Salafi-Jihadists. The article might clarify misunderstandings of jihad and the Salafist movement, which has many factions. It will also enrich communication studies on how discourse is spread in social media. Not only do the discourses spread on social media but they are also received and performed by audiences.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study provides clarification that not all Salafis support acts of violence and terror. Their interpretation does not necessarily link jihad with war. There are sections where the efforts of those Salafist figures to broaden jihad performance. According to them, many other acts can also be categorized as jihad, such as being unselfish. This kind of jihad digestion returns jihad to its original and extensive digestion. They still hold the jihadist command under certain circumstances and

conditions. Their attempt is not to abolish jihad wholly with a war. They cannot do so because jihad has a normative basis. By broadening jihad's meaning, it is a form of progressivism. Furthermore, reality confirms that the Salafi itself has many varieties.

This study must have its limits, and the figures studied are still very few. To extend the study, it would be essential to raise samples of Salafist figures in Indonesia. It is not just about the quantity of samples but the data source used. If this research is still based on video on social media (YouTube), further studies can be developed based on interviews and documents produced by the Salafist circle.

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