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Revisiting the Meaning of Jihad: A Critical Analysis of Istishhād Hadiths through the Perspective of *Ma'āni al-Ḥadīth*



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Abstract

This study aims to correct the distorted understanding of the concept of jihad having often been misinterpreted textually by radical groups legitimizing violence through hadiths of istishhād (reports concerning martyrdom through suicide operations). Using the Ma'āni al-Ḥadīth approach, this research explores the semantic and linguistic structure of the hadiths, their historical context (asbāb al-wurūd), and their contemporary social relevance. The study employs a qualitative library research method, supported by interviews with two former terrorism convicts, Ali Imron and Khairul Ghazali, to reveal the ideological framework behind radical interpretations of jihad and istishhād. The findings reveal that the distortion of jihad stems from a rigid textual-literal approach neglecting the objectives of Islamic law (maqāṣid al-syarī'ah) and the socio-historical context of the prophetic traditions. In fact, jihad in the hadith perspective extends beyond physical warfare (qital) to encompass moral, social, and humanitarian struggles promoting justice and peace. Using the Ma'āni al-Ḥadīth approach, this research underlines the need for a comprehensive reconstruction of jihad interpretation, the one avoiding extremist readings and restoring its true essence as an ethical struggle for the well-being of humanity.

Keywords: *Jihad, Istishhād Hadiths, Radicalism, Ma'āni al-Ḥadīth, Contextualization of Hadith.*

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the Prophet's hadith constitutes one of the most complex aspects of Islamic studies. This complexity is closely related to the fundamental position of hadith within the structure of Islamic teachings, both in theological and normative dimensions. Hadith functions not only as the second primary source of Islamic law after the Qur'an, but also as an explanation and elaboration of Qur'anic verses that are general ('ām), concise (mujmal), or absolute (muṭlaq). Within this framework, hadith becomes an essential instrument in the process of *istinbāṭ al-aḥkām*, as it provides practical details of teachings often expressed in general terms in the Qur'an. (Khairatun et al., 2024: 198)

Furthermore, the position of hadith is closely connected to the principle of prophetic authority in Islam. Qur'an affirms that obedience to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) constitutes an integral part of obedience to Allah. Therefore, the Prophet's sunnah is understood as the practical manifestation of revelation guiding the lives of Muslims. From this perspective, hadith functions not only as a source of law but also as an ethical, social, and spiritual guide for Muslim communities throughout history (Og̃lah, 2025: 97).

However, complexity arises when hadith texts are interpreted rigidly and detached from their social, historical, and linguistic contexts. An overly textual approach often neglects the circumstances of the hadith's emergence (*asbāb al-wurūd*), the social conditions surrounding it, and the moral objectives behind the Prophet's statements. Consequently, some hadiths may be interpreted literally without considering their contextual dimensions, potentially leading to biased or even extreme understandings. Contemporary hadith scholars emphasize that a contextual approach is necessary to avoid the absolutization of texts that originally emerged within specific historical situations (Sattar et al., 2026: 127). By considering historical contexts and the normative objectives of Islamic law, hadith can be understood more proportionally and remains relevant to the evolving dynamics of society.

In the modern context, the significant issue arising from a textual reading of hadith is, among others, the distortion of the true meaning of jihad. Certain radical groups interpret the Prophet's traditions on jihad literally without considering their historical, social, and normative contexts. This narrow interpretation is then used as theological justification for acts of violence, including terrorism and the extreme understanding of martyrdom (*istishhād*) (Rahman & Maulasa, 2021: 43)

In classical Islamic scholarly tradition, however, the concept of jihad encompasses a

much broader spectrum of meanings and is not limited to physical warfare only. Scholars of Islamic studies emphasize that reducing jihad merely to warfare represents an oversimplification not aligning with the normative framework of Islamic teachings. In many contemporary studies, jihad is comprehended as a comprehensive effort involving moral, spiritual, social, and intellectual struggles aimed at upholding justice and promoting the welfare of society (Khoirul & Akino, 2025: 108).

Such a purely textual approach also tends to neglect the principles of *maqāṣid al-syarīʿah*, the overarching objectives of Islamic law emphasizing the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Within this *maqāṣid* framework, acts of violence harming human life clearly contradict the fundamental objectives of the *Sharīʿah*. Therefore, many scholars highlight the importance of contextual approaches in interpreting hadiths on jihad so that their normative meanings remain aligned with the humanitarian and peaceful values constituting the essence of Islamic teachings (Islam, 2020: 18-19).

Misunderstandings of the concept of jihad not only affect internal religious practices among Muslims but also influence global perceptions of Islam. Narratives that exclusively associate jihad with violence have strengthened negative stereotypes portraying Islam as a religion inherently linked to conflict. In the prophetic perspective, however, jihad is more broadly comprehended as a sincere endeavor to improve oneself, uphold social justice, and promote the welfare of society as a whole (Pangestu & Mubarak, 2025: 98).

In this context, hadiths concerning jihad, including those related to *istishhād* (martyrdom), need to be studied through the approach of *Maʿānī al-Ḥadīth*. This approach integrates linguistic analysis, socio-historical context, and the moral function of hadith in the life of the Muslim community. Through this perspective, jihad is not merely comprehended as physical warfare (*qitāl*), but as a comprehensive human endeavor to uphold justice, eradicate poverty, resist oppression, and promote peace (Suryantoro, 2025: 194).

This study gains its significance recalling the growing phenomenon of religious radicalism, stemming from a narrow reading of hadith texts. Previous research has explored the concept of jihad from the perspectives of Qurʾanic exegesis and Islamic jurisprudence; however, only few have specifically studied *istishhād* (martyrdom) traditions through the lens of *Maʿānī al-Ḥadīth*. Therefore, this study seeks to realign the understanding of jihad by contextualizing the *istishhād* traditions so that the universal values of Islam—such as compassion, justice, and

humanity—may once again become the central spirit in interpreting jihad.

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research method. The primary sources consist of major hadith collections such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, and *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, focusing on hadiths concerning jihad and istishhād. Secondary sources include classical and contemporary works on hadith interpretation, as well as relevant academic books, articles, and journals. The research applies the *Ma’ānī al-Ḥadīth* approach giving emphasis on understanding the meaning of hadiths through linguistic, historical, and contextual analysis. Using this approach, the study examines hadiths on jihad and istishhād from three perspectives:

1. *Asbāb al-nurūd* (the circumstances of the hadith’s narration),
2. Linguistic meaning and historical context, and
3. Contemporary relevance of the message.

Data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical and *matan* (text) criticism method, by identifying, classifying, and interpreting hadiths in light of their contexts. The goal is to achieve a comprehensive and proportional understanding of jihad, viewing it not as a justification for violence but as a moral and social struggle aimed at promoting justice and human welfare.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Science of Ma’ānī al-Ḥadīth

Terminologically, Ilmu Ma’ānī al-Ḥadīth (the Science of the Meanings of Hadith) can be defined as a discipline exploring the methodological factors involved in comprehending the Prophet Muhammad’s traditions (hadith) accurately and systematically. This discipline enables readers to comprehend hadith by taking into account the historical and contextual background where it was conveyed, allowing them to identify the similarities and differences of its application between the past and the present, with a particular emphasis on historical aspects. Ilmu Ma’ānī al-Ḥadīth, according to Mustaqim, is a study of the *matan* (text) of hadith focusing on how a hadith should be interpreted and understood. In conveying a hadith, one must be able to connect its textual meaning with the contemporary context in order to obtain a clearer and more relevant understanding. Hence, this methodological approach ensures that the essential message of the Prophet’s sayings remains meaningful and applicable within the realities of the modern era (Al-Jurjaniy, n.d.: 22).

The study of Maʿānī al-Ḥadīth essentially began during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), particularly after he was appointed as the Messenger of Allah and became the role model for his Companions (sahabat) and the entire Muslim community. Owing to their linguistic competence and intimate association with the Prophet, the Companions were generally able to grasp and comprehend his sayings directly. During the Prophet's lifetime, the Companions could obtain a precise understanding of hadith from the Prophet himself, and whenever they encountered difficulties in interpreting a particular saying, they could immediately seek clarification from him. However, after the Prophet's passing, challenges in comprehending hadith began to emerge. The Companions and the subsequent generations no longer had direct access to the Prophet for explanation, compelling them to interpret the hadith based solely on the available textual form. These difficulties became increasingly complex as Islam expanded to various regions across the world—both Arab and non-Arab—introducing new linguistic, cultural, and intellectual contexts that further complicated the understanding of hadith.

This situation arose because, over time, many Companions and later generations were no longer familiar with the linguistic style and rhetorical expressions used by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when delivering his sayings. Words and expressions once clear and commonly understood gradually became obscure or obsolete, making them difficult to comprehend in later periods. In addition, there emerged a theoretical paradigm regarding the status and role of the Prophet Muhammad as explained by Imam al-Qarāfī, who differentiated the Prophet's position as a Messenger (Rasūl), a legal authority (Muftī), a military leader, and an ordinary human being. Such distinctions were necessary to correctly interpret his sayings according to the context in which they were uttered. Faced with these interpretive challenges, Muslim scholars made significant efforts to develop a systematic discipline—now known as ʿIlm Maʿānī al-Ḥadīth (the Science of the Meanings of Hadith). This field seeks to explain and interpret the Prophet's sayings through various approaches, including linguistic analysis, examination of asbāb al-wurūd (circumstances of narration), consideration of the Prophet's situational role when delivering the hadith, and connecting the textual meaning of hadith from the past with contemporary contexts. Using this methodological approach, scholars aim to achieve accurate understanding without losing the relevance of hadith in the present time (Abdul Mustaqim, 2008: 1-13).

The issue of understanding the Prophet's hadith is an important subject requiring serious attention in Islamic studies. This is because hadith occupies a strategic position as the second primary source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an. Within both normative and practical frameworks, hadith functions as an explanation (bayān) of Qur'anic verses that are general or universal in nature. Through hadith, various religious prescriptions mentioned briefly in the Qur'an—such as the procedures of prayer, zakat, and other acts of worship—can be comprehended in a more detailed and operational manner. Therefore, hadith plays a central role in the formation of Islamic law as well as in the development of Islamic intellectual tradition throughout history (Jafar, 2021: 13385).

Nevertheless, compared to the Qur'an, hadith possesses different characteristics of transmission. Historically, the Qur'an was codified relatively close to the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad and transmitted through collective transmission (mutawātir), granting it the status of qaṭ'i al-wurūd, meaning a certainty of origin unquestioned within Islamic scholarly tradition. Moreover, the authenticity of Qur'an is believed to be divinely preserved, making it the primary foundation for the entire structure of Islamic law and teachings. In contrast, the hadith corpus demonstrates a more diverse pattern of transmission. Hadith are transmitted through various forms of narration, including mutawātir and āḥād traditions differing in their epistemological levels of certainty. The majority of hadith fall into the category of āḥād, epistemologically considered ḏannī al-wurūd (probabilistic in transmission), thus requiring scholarly verification through the study of both sanad (chains of transmission) and matan (textual content). Consequently, hadith studies involve not only the interpretation of textual meanings but also the analysis of transmission chains, the reliability of narrators, and the historical context in which the hadith were transmitted (Maulana, 2002).

Furthermore, the codification of hadith occurred over a longer historical period compared to the codification of Qur'an. In the early period of Islam, hadith developed primarily through oral transmission before eventually being compiled systematically in various hadith collections during the second and third centuries of the Hijri era. This complicated transmission process led to the development of rigorous scholarly methodologies in hadith studies, such as sanad criticism and matan criticism, aiming to ensure the authenticity of reports transmitted to subsequent generations (Rohman, 2025). Therefore, the intellectual development of hadith studies differs in character from Qur'anic exegesis. While Qur'anic studies tend to focus

primarily on the interpretation of the meanings of verses, hadith studies encompass two major dimensions simultaneously: the verification of transmitted report authenticity and the interpretation of their textual meanings. This complexity makes hadith studies one of the most dynamic fields within the Islamic intellectual tradition while simultaneously demanding critical and comprehensive methodological approaches in comprehending the Prophet's sayings.

The issue of authenticity becomes one of the most fundamental concerns in hadith studies. This is closely related to the position of hadith as the second primary source of Islamic teachings following the Qur'an and as a crucial foundation for the formation of Islamic law, theology, and religious practice among Muslims. Due to its significant normative role, questions regarding the authenticity of reports attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) have consistently been a central focus in hadith scholarship, both in the classical Islamic intellectual tradition and in modern academic studies. Debates over the authenticity of hadith intensified when Islamic studies began to be examined critically within Western academic traditions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Muazar, 2025: 1616).

In orientalist scholarship, two figures frequently regarded as central to the debate on hadith authenticity are Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht. Goldziher argued that many hadiths found in classical Islamic literature do not necessarily represent the Prophet's sayings in a strictly historical sense but reflect the social, political, and theological dynamics of Muslim societies that developed after the Prophet's death. In his view, hadiths were often employed as instruments of legitimacy by various groups within early Muslim communities to support particular theological or political interests (Fathila et al., 2024: 259).

This perspective was later confirmed by Schacht through his studies on the history of Islamic law. He proposed the theory known as *projecting back* suggesting that certain legal doctrines developed by later jurists were retrospectively attributed to earlier authorities and ultimately to the Prophet to obtain authoritative legitimacy. Therefore, according to Schacht, some hadiths—particularly those related to legal matters—should be comprehended as historical constructions that emerged during the development of Islamic jurisprudence in the second and third centuries of the Hijri era (Rahim et al., 2025: 1582).

Such skeptical views prompted responses from many Muslim scholars emphasizing that the tradition of hadith transmission had already developed during the era of the Prophet's companions through a rigorous system of narration. The discipline of hadith studies subsequently developed scientific methodologies, such as *sanad criticism* and *matan criticism*,

to assess the authenticity of transmitted reports. Moreover, several contemporary studies indicate that the practice of recording hadith had begun in the early period of Islam, suggesting that the assumption that hadith literature only emerged several centuries following the Prophet's death is not entirely accurate (Kharis, 2022: 11-12; Nawafil & Suparwany, 2021: 116).

Moreover, not all of the Prophet's hadiths have an explicit *asbāb al-wurūd* (context of utterance) often leading to ambiguity regarding whether a hadith is general (*‘ām*) or specific (*khāṣṣ*). Considering the circumstances surrounding the emergence of a hadith, it may sometimes be interpreted textually and, at other times, contextually. Another important aspect to recognize is the multifaceted roles and functions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). At times, he acted as an ordinary human being, a private individual, a husband, a messenger of God, a head of state, a community leader, a military commander, or a judge. Therefore, it is essential to put the comprehension of hadith in a proportional framework — determining when a hadith should be interpreted textually, contextually, universally, temporally, situationally, or locally. A rigid, literalistic, and static comprehension of hadith would in fact undermine Islam's nature as *ṣāliḥ li kulli zamān wa makān* (relevant for all times and places). This is why Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988 CE) refers to the Prophet's hadith as a “*living Sunnah*,” a “*formalization of the Sunnah*,” or a “*verbalization of the Sunnah*,” emphasizing that it must remain dynamic. Hence, the Prophet's hadith should be interpreted situationally and adapted to contemporary contexts (Hidayat, 1996: 136).

In addressing the challenges of comprehending the Prophet's hadith, particularly in contemporary contexts, it is crucial to engage in hadith criticism—especially *matan* criticism—in the sense of revealing accurate comprehension, interpretation, and exegesis of the hadith text. In the present era, both Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals have contributed to this discourse. Among Muslim intellectuals, notable figures include *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Adabī*, *Muṣṭafā al-Sibai*, *Muhammad Ajjaj al-Khātib*, *Muhammad al-Ghazālī*, *Yusuf al-Qaradhawī*, *M.M. A'zhami*, *Fatima Mernissi*, *M. Syuhudi Ismail*, and others. Broadly speaking, their approaches can be categorized into three typologies:

1. Typology emphasizing the formulation of methodological principles for comprehending the Prophet's hadith, as exemplified by *Muhammad `Ajjaj al-Khātib* and *M. Syuhudi Ismail*.
2. Typology focusing on countering orientalist critiques, as undertaken by *Muṣṭafā al-Siba`i* and *M.M. A'zhami*.

3. Typology specifically emphasizing the comprehension of the matan (text) of hadith, including al-Adabi, Muhammad al-Ghazālī, Fatima Mernissi, and Yusuf al-Qaradhawi. In this context, Fatima Mernissi particularly concentrates her analysis on issues of gender and feminism.

Hadith Istishhād

The term *istishhād* (إِسْتِشْهَاد) literally means “to seek martyrdom” or “to hope for death as a martyr.” If it is preceded by the word ‘amaliyyah (operation or action), forming the phrase ‘amaliyyah *istishhādiyyah* (عَمَلِيَّةُ إِسْتِشْهَادِيَّة), it denotes “an act or operation carried out in the hope of attaining martyrdom.” In Arabic, the term for “suicide” is *intihār* (انتحار), and in English, it is rendered as suicide. The person committing it is called a suicide, and the act of suicide or martyrdom itself, depending on the ideological framing. Opponents of radicalism and their affiliated groups generally describe such terror acts—where the perpetrator kills themselves intentionally—as suicide attacks, in modern Arabic referred to as ‘amaliyyah *intihāriyyah* (عَمَلِيَّةُ اِنْتِحَارِيَّة). However, radical groups, activists, and supporters of ISIS or its affiliates label such acts as ‘amaliyyah *istishhādiyyah* (عَمَلِيَّةُ إِسْتِشْهَادِيَّة) or, more simply, *istishhād* (إِسْتِشْهَاد)—an operation carried out with the expectation of achieving martyrdom (Hornby, 1995: 1234; Webr, 1976: 968).

The definition of *shahid* (martyr) according to:

First, the Hanafis (the followers of Madhhab Hanafi): A *shahid* is a person killed by polytheists or found dead in battle, and bearing a wound of any kind—whether a visible wound or an invisible one, such as the shedding of blood from the eyes or a similar form (Al-Kūfī, n.d.: 2: 142). They also state that anyone killed in battle against disbelievers, rebels (*bughat*), or robbers is considered a *shahid* (martyr). In other words, a person who dies at the hands of the enemy, whether directly or indirectly, qualifies as a *shahid*. Conversely, anyone who dies for reasons unrelated to an enemy cannot be considered a *shahid* (Al-Zaila’i, n.d.: 1: 248).

Secondly, according to the Maliki School (Madhhab Maliki), a *shahid* (martyr) is someone killed in battle against the enemy. This includes those who die in Islamic lands when the enemy attacks Muslims, even if the person is not actively fighting—such as being caught off guard, asleep, or mistakenly killed by a fellow Muslim thinking that they were an enemy. It also encompasses deaths caused by accidents during battle, such as being trampled by a horse, a weapon backfiring, falling into a well, or falling from a height (Al-‘Adawi, n.d.: 1: 425).

Thirdly, the Shafi'i school (Madhhab Shafi'i) holds that a shahid (martyr) is someone killed while bravely fighting against the disbelievers, without fleeing and with sincerity (Al-'Asqalani, n.d.: 4: 129). In the book Mughni Al-Muhtaj, a shahid is described as a person who dies in battle against disbelievers, courageously without retreating, in order to uphold the supreme word of Allah and to ensure that symbols of disbelief are defeated, without any worldly motives (Al-Sharbinī, 1997: 1: 350).

Fourthly, according to the Hanbali school (Madhhab Hambali), a shahid (martyr) is anyone who dies in battle against disbelievers, whether male or female, mature or not, whether killed directly by the enemy, accidentally by their own weapon, falling from a horse, or found dead even without visible signs of being killed, provided that they are sincere (ikhlas) (Al-Buhaiti, n.d.: 2: 113-115).

Among the Hadiths on Martyrdom (Istishhad) are:

1. The Hadith narrated by Sa'id bin 'Amr and Suwaid bin Sa'id, both of whom heard from 'Amr, who heard Jabir say: "A man asked the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), 'O Messenger of Allah, where will my place be if I am killed (in battle)?' He replied, 'In Paradise.' The man then threw away the dates that were in his hand and went forth to fight until he was killed. In Suwaid's narration, this event occurred during the Battle of Uhud" (An-Nisābūrī, n.d.: 2361).
2. The Hadith narrated by Anas bin Malik Radhiyallahu anhu (may Allah be pleased with him): The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) sent Basīṣah bin 'Amr to spy on the trading caravan of Abu Sufyan. Basīṣah came to the Prophet's house, where no one else was present. The Prophet came out saying, "Know that we seek those whose horses are ready; whoever has his horse prepared should come with us." Some companions asked for permission to fetch their horses from the hills around Madinah, but the Prophet said, "No, only those whose horses are ready." Then the Prophet and his companions set out and managed to reach Badr before the idolaters. When the enemy arrived, the Prophet said, "Let none of you go ahead unless I am with him." As the idolaters drew near, the Prophet said, "Advance toward Paradise, whose width is as vast as the heavens and the earth." A companion, Umair bin al-Hammam al-Ansari, asked, "O Messenger of Allah, is a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth?" The Prophet replied, "Yes." Umair said, "Excellent! Excellent!" The Prophet asked, "What made you say that?" He replied, "By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, nothing but my hope of being among its people." The

Prophet said, “Indeed, you are among them.” Umair then took out some dates and began to eat. He said, “If I live long enough to finish these dates, it will be too long a life.” He threw them away, charged into battle, and was killed (An-Nīsābūrī, n.d.: 2365).

3. The Hadith was narrated by Abu Bakr bin ‘Abdullah bin Qais having heard his father (‘Abdullah bin Qais) say while facing the enemy: “The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, ‘Indeed, the gates of Paradise lie beneath the shades of swords.’” Then a disheveled man stood up and said, “O Abu Musa, did you truly hear the Messenger of Allah say that?” He replied, “Yes.” The man then went to his people and said, “I bid you farewell.” He broke the sheath of his sword, threw it away, and advanced toward the enemy until he was killed (An-Nīsābūrī, n.d.: 1902; At-Tirmidzi, n.d.: 1659).
4. The Hadith narrated by Anas bin Malik (may Allah be pleased with him): During the Battle of Uhud, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was separated from seven of his Ansar companions and two of the Quraysh. When the disbelievers surrounded him, he said, “Whoever stands against them will have Paradise or will be my companion in Paradise.” One of the Ansar advanced and fought until he was killed. The disbelievers again drew near, and the Prophet repeated, “Whoever stands against them will have Paradise or be my companion in Paradise.” Another Ansari advanced and was killed. This continued until all seven were martyred. The Prophet then said, “How true to their promise were our companions” (An-Nīsābūrī, n.d.: 1789; Asy-Syaibānī, 2001: 14056).
5. During the Battle of Yamamah, when the people of Banu Hanifah had taken refuge in the fortress within Musaylimah’s garden—known as the Garden of al-Rahman or the Garden of Death—al-Bara’ bin Malik said to his companions, “Lift me up and throw me over the wall toward them.” They did so, and he fought the enemy until the gate was opened for the Muslims (Bek, n.d.: 31).
6. An event during the confrontation between the Muslims and the Persian army, in the Battle of al-Jisr: The Muslims’ horses panicked at the sight of elephants. One of them managed to train his horse until it no longer feared them. In the next battle, he advanced directly toward one of the elephants. Someone said to him, “You will be killed.” He replied, “There is no loss if I am killed, so long as it opens the way for the Muslims” (Bek, n.d.: 57).

In the hadiths above, jihad and the desire to obtain shahid are the most noble and

important actions in Islam. However, in the current context, from the changing times of the time of the Prophet SAW until today, jihad and its methods have certainly changed and it must be understood why the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad SAW came out (asbāb al-wurūd) or the revelation of this verse about jihad (asbāb al-Nuzūl).

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, in comprehending these hadiths, stated that aspiring to be a martyr (shahid) and intending for it is an act beloved and recommended for every Muslim. There are still many authentic hadiths related to the matter of jihad (Al-Bukharī, 1987: 1452).

Can these hadiths about jihad be applied when Muslim-majority countries are already independent and at peace? The hadiths regarding the virtues of jihad and of becoming a *shahīd* were revealed in the context of warfare with disbelieving opponents of Islam and during the territorial expansion of the Islamic polity. When Muslim lands remain colonized and occupied by foreign powers, jihad can still serve as the spirit of resistance. But is there no method other than ‘amaliyyah istishhādiyyah (suicide attacks / martyrdom operations) to attain shahāda (martyrdom)? Therefore, a comprehensive corrective understanding is needed regarding the meaning of jihad as intended in the Qur’an and the hadith. This is necessary so that the fundamental issue of violent actions in the name of jihad — aimed at achieving martyrdom through bombing — does not create a terrible precedent in the world’s eyes, and particularly so that radical groups do not treat such attacks as a legitimate or canonical realization of jihad.

Thus, in the present time, when Islam is being cornered and associated with terrorism, this perception grows continuously as radical acts carry out bombings through ‘amaliyyah istishhādiyyah (martyrdom operations) around the world, and the mass media constantly highlights these incidents, thereby marginalizing Muslims. Contemporary acts of terrorist violence, such as bombings in the West, Europe, the Middle East, and Indonesia, are suspected to have been carried out by radical Muslims seeking martyrdom. However, according to the author, their understanding of the texts of the Qur’an and hadith does not correspond with the present context.

Jihad through warfare involving violent bombings in the name of Islam in the contemporary era is highly inappropriate. Khaled Abou el-Fadl emphasizes that, in Islamic teachings, jihad today means rising from adversity, gaining strength through perseverance, working diligently, and achieving success. Thus, the symbol of jihad channels enthusiasm and motivation into various productive activities.

M. Quraish Shihab positions jihad as one of the significant challenges confronting the

Muslim community and emphasizes its multidimensional nature. In the contemporary context, jihad is expressed through efforts to combat ignorance, poverty, and disease—struggles no less noble than armed engagement or acts of martyrdom. Thus, jihad today is embodied in scholars advancing knowledge, employees performing their duties with integrity, teachers dedicating themselves to education, leaders upholding justice, entrepreneurs practicing honesty, and individuals contributing positively within their respective fields (Shihab, 2009: 500-519).

In light of this broader understanding, it becomes essential to study critically the interpretations advanced by Muslim fundamentalist groups, particularly regarding their claims of religious legitimacy for violent actions framed as jihad. Such study requires rigorous methodological tools within Islamic studies, including a critical analysis of jihad-related hadith texts to contextualize their meaning and application.

Theologically, jihad in Islam includes a broad spectrum of spiritual, moral, and social dimensions and cannot be reduced to war or physical violence alone. However, contemporary discourse frequently narrows its meaning, both among radical groups and within Western narratives. Muslim scholars, including Azyumardi Azra, assert that jihad is not synonymous with *qitāl* (armed combat), but includes the struggle against one's lower desires (*jihad al-nafs*), self-development, and constructive social engagement (Syafi'i & Fikriawan, 2020: 109).

In the modern era, violent acts committed in the name of jihad—including those associated with groups such as Islamic State—have reinforced the perception that jihad is inherently militant. Azra contends that such actions constitute a distortion of Islam's essential teachings. Moreover, global media representations equating jihad with "holy war" further entrench the stereotype of Islam as a violent religion, despite the fact that both classical and contemporary Islamic traditions comprehend jihad as a constructive moral and social struggle (Darajat, 2016: 4-5).

Accordingly, a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of jihad is indispensable. Only through such an approach can the concept be disentangled from extremist appropriations and restored to its normative foundations within the Qur'an, Hadith, and the broader Islamic intellectual tradition (Darsimon & Al-Azhar, 2024: 243).

An analysis of the understanding held by terrorist actors indicates a tendency toward textualist and reductionist interpretations of the Prophetic traditions related to jihad. Hadith are often used as normative legitimization by referring to the practice of jihad during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. However, such interpretations are frequently conducted in a literal

manner without considering the historical context (*asbāb al-wurūd*), the socio-political circumstances, or the ethical framework surrounding these texts.

In contemporary hadith scholarship, this type of approach is considered problematic because it neglects the methodology of *matan* criticism and contextual analysis, both of which are essential components of modern hadith studies. Through a contextual semantic approach, the meaning of the term *jihad* in hadith is inseparable from the social and political context of the Prophet's time. Lexically, the term *jihad* derives from the root *jahada*, meaning to strive or to exert effort. Therefore, its meaning is not always synonymous with physical warfare (*qitāl*). Semantic analysis thus demonstrates that reducing *jihad* solely to armed violence represents a narrowing of meaning inconsistent with the use of the term in both the Qur'an and the hadith.

Moreover, the methodological approach known as *tafsīr al-ḥadīth bi al-ḥadīth* (interpreting hadith through other hadith) also shows that traditions concerning *jihad* cannot be understood in isolation. A number of Prophetic traditions emphasize the moral and social dimensions of *jihad*. For example, one hadith states that "the best form of *jihad* is speaking the truth before a tyrannical ruler." Such traditions demonstrate that *jihad* is not always manifested in warfare but also includes moral and social struggle aimed at upholding justice. Accordingly, a thematic comprehension of hadith (*al-ḥadīth al-mawḍūʿī*) reveals a broader spectrum of meanings of *jihad* beyond merely armed conflict.

Ali Imron's (2021) testimony indicates that during the time of the Prophet, *jihad* was understood primarily as armed struggle involving the use of swords. In the modern context, this logic has been analogically extended by radical groups through the use of more advanced weapons technology, such as bombs and other destructive devices. In this interpretation, bombs are positioned as a contemporary substitute for swords. Consequently, *jihad* is no longer understood as an open war with legal legitimacy but rather as acts of violence that may be carried out anytime and anywhere, including in peaceful regions such as Indonesia. This perspective reflects a detachment of the concept of *jihad* from the legal restrictions governing warfare in classical Islamic jurisprudence. In the Islamic legal tradition, warfare is regulated by strict rules, including legitimate authority, clearly defined targets, and the prohibition of attacking non-combatants. However, within modern jihadist ideology, these limitations are often ignored.

From the perspective of critical discourse analysis, the analogy between swords and bombs illustrates a process of ideological meaning construction. Certain hadith texts are

selectively chosen to construct a militant narrative of jihad, while other traditions emphasizing the protection of human life and the prohibition of killing non-combatants are overlooked. In this framework, religious texts function not only as normative sources but also as instruments used to legitimize an ideology of violence.

This perspective also reflects a detachment of the concept of jihad from the legal limitations governing warfare in classical Islamic jurisprudence. Within the Islamic legal tradition, warfare is regulated by strict rules, including legitimate authority, clearly defined targets, and the prohibition against attacking non-combatants. However, in modern jihadist ideology, these limitations are frequently ignored.

Ideologically, some radical jihadists also employ Ibn Taymiyyah's thought selectively to justify acts of violence. In classical Islamic literature, terms such as *Dār al-Islām* and *Dār al-Ḥarb* were closely related to the political context of the medieval period and emphasized the importance of legitimate authority in determining matters of war and peace. Radical groups, however, extract fragments of these texts to support their actions without considering their historical context or the broader objectives of Islamic law. They regard any government not fully implementing Islamic law as a “non-Islamic” authority (*ṭāghūt*) and equivalent to *Dār al-Ḥarb*, thereby legitimizing armed struggle against it as a form of religious “warning.” Contemporary research demonstrates that such interpretations are partial and selective. Ibn Taymiyyah himself introduced the concept of a “composite territory” (*Dār Murakkabah*), acknowledging the complexity of political and social relations and emphasizing the importance of social stability and loyalty to legitimate authority. By ignoring this context, extremists reinterpret religious texts to justify violence (Maghribi et al., 2023: 24).

In addition to narrow interpretations of jihad, some radical groups also adopt the doctrine of *takfīr*, namely the tendency to declare others unbelievers if they are perceived to deviate from their understanding of Islam. Within this ideological framework, those holding different views—including fellow Muslims, state officials, or governments—may be positioned as legitimate enemies to be fought (Widya, 2020: 83). In the Indonesian context, this approach can be seen in the narratives constructed by terrorist actors such as Imam Samudra and Khairul Ghazali. Both figures utilized the framework of *takfīr* to categorize certain parties as *kāfir ḥarbī*. Nevertheless, in practice, internal debates occurred regarding the boundaries of these categories, for example the distinction between *kāfir ḥarbī* and *kāfir zimmi* (Asrori, 2019: 19).

This phenomenon can be analyzed through the living sunnah approach, examining how hadith are practiced and interpreted within the social life of Muslim communities. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, the interpretation of hadith is never entirely neutral but is influenced by social, political, and group identity contexts. In the case of radical groups, hadith concerning jihad are reproduced within an ideological culture emphasizing militancy and the exclusivism of religious identity.

The process of *takfīrī* justification, according to Ali Imron's (2020) testimony, does not always occur without debate within radical circles. He acknowledged that different opinions exist regarding the serious consequences of declaring governments, security forces, or the general public as unbelievers, since such accusations could ultimately lead to the justification of their killing. On several occasions, he even criticized the attitude of *ghulum* (excessiveness) in the practice of *takfīr*, particularly when the label of unbelief was broadly applied to presidents, police officers, and soldiers without adequate juristic consideration.

The tendency to declare others as unbelievers (*takfīr*) has historical roots dating back to the emergence of the Khawarij in early Islam. In the modern era, similar tendencies can be observed in various radical movements such as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and certain Islamist political movements. Some of these ideas are also influenced by the thought of Sayyid Qutb of Ikhwanul Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood), particularly the concept of *tauḥīd ḥākimiyyah*. This concept asserts that the only legitimate source of law is God's law, rendering human-made political systems illegitimate. Such thinking has influenced the ideology of global jihadist groups, notably Al-Qaeda, particularly in their rejection of governments not implementing Sharia formally (Arromadloni et al., 2022: 233).

A narrow ucomprehension of jihad is also reflected in the interpretation of certain hadith. Some radical figures, such as Ali Imron and Khairul Ghazali, interpret jihad exclusively as *qitāl* (physical combat). This comprehension is confirmed by selective use of specific hadith. One often-cited hadith is the Prophet's statement that "whoever kills a protected non-Muslim (*abl al-dhimmah*) will not smell the fragrance of Paradise, even though its fragrance can be sensed from a journey of forty years" (Asy-Syaibānī, 2001: 6745).

This hadith, in its proper context, emphasizes the strict prohibition against killing non-Muslims under an Islamic state's protection. However, in the narratives promoted by radical groups, it is often framed within a binary opposition between Muslims and perceived enemies of Islam, thereby neglecting the plural social and political realities of modern society.

Several contemporary studies indicate that the reductionist understanding of jihad and the exclusive use of takfir doctrine are key factors driving radicalization and religiously motivated violence (Akil et al., 2023: 75). Many hadith narrations describe the Prophet's statements regarding jihad, qitāl, and the virtues of dying as a martyr (*shahid*). Some of these narrations, read selectively, are interpreted by certain groups as legitimizing extreme actions involving self-sacrifice. However, modern Islamic jurisprudence emphasizes a distinction between legitimate defensive warfare and intentional suicide. Principally, suicide is considered forbidden (*haram*) and a major sin because it violates the trust of life granted by God (Azizullah & Alfajry, 2023: 106). Classical scholars clarify that a warrior risking his life in a legitimate, authorized war for the welfare of the community is not considered a perpetrator of suicide. Nevertheless, hadith explicitly prohibiting suicide indicate that ending one's life without legitimate authority is impermissible.

Literal readings of these narrations have influenced the perpetrators of *'amaliyah istishbādiyyah* (martyrdom operations or suicide bombings). They interpret jihad narrowly as *qitāl* and adapt it to the modern context using explosives as "weapons of jihad." Jihad is thus perceived as permissible anytime and anywhere, including in peaceful areas, because the government is regarded as *tāghūt*. As a result, the narrative of battlefield sacrifice in the hadith is detached from the legal framework of warfare and sociopolitical reality, serving to justify acts of violence. Ali Imron (2021) and his associates also employed a *takfirī* approach, declaring others—fellow Muslims, state officials, and governments—as unbelievers, based on literal interpretations of verses such as Quran, Surah At-Tawbah (9):5, to justify violence against those considered enemies of Islam.

Based on research findings and interviews with former terrorism inmates, there are four main factors driving radicalism:

1. Ideological factor – exclusive and literal interpretations of Quranic verses and hadith regarding jihad without considering the *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *asbāb al-wurūd* contexts.
2. Political-religious factor – the desire to establish an Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) implementing Sharia law comprehensively and formally.
3. Doctrinal factor – blind obedience to radical group leaders who hold strong religious authority.
4. Psychological-social factor – group fanaticism that fosters the mentality of "only our group is correct" and justifies violent actions.

In summary, suicide bombing practices are often referred to by some Islamist groups as *al-'amaliyyāt al-istishbādīyyah* (martyrdom operations). This phenomenon became prominent in the late 20th century, particularly during the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, when militant groups used self-detonation as an asymmetric warfare strategy (Yusuf, 2003: 1).

Some scholars reject the legitimacy of this practice because it contradicts the fundamental principles of Sharia, forbids harming or taking one's own life. Within the framework of *maqāṣid al-shari'ah*, the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) is a primary objective of Islamic law (Busyro, 2016: 100).

However, other scholars provide limited justification under certain conditions. One frequently cited figure is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, distinguishing suicide from martyrdom operations. He thought that suicide arises from personal despair, whereas martyrdom operations involve self-sacrifice to defend the Muslim community from oppression, particularly in the context of the Palestinian conflict (Fajriana, 2025).

Similar views are also found among some Middle Eastern scholars, arguing that such operations may be permissible if they meet specific conditions: they must occur within the context of a legitimate war, target parties actively fighting against Muslims, and be conducted for a greater public good (Daipon, 2020).

Nonetheless, this legitimacy remains debated in contemporary fiqh literature. Many scholars argue that analogies to the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd* in the Qur'an cannot justify suicide bombings, as the believers in that story did not actively take their own lives but were victims of oppression.

In contrast to the narratives of radical groups, moderate scholars emphasize that jihad is not limited to armed conflict. Classical scholars such as Al-Khatib al-Shirbini, Zayn al-Din al-Malibari, and Abu Bakr al-Shatta explain that jihad encompasses various forms of struggle to uphold goodness and societal welfare. From a contemporary perspective, jihad can be realized through the dissemination of knowledge, the development of civilization, economic empowerment of communities, and the protection of humanitarian values. Understanding jihad solely as warfare contradicts Islamic principles upholding peace (*salām*) and compassion (*rahmah*) (Al-Dimyati, 1999: 205-212; Syafi'i & Fikriawan, 2020).

Therefore, contemporary jihad should be comprehended as a multidimensional struggle to uphold social justice, welfare, and human values. This approach aligns with the primary

objectives of Sharia (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), emphasizing the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Opponents of extreme violence base their arguments on Quranic verses, such as QS. an-Nisā' [4]:29, and hadiths condemning suicide. In practice, suicide bombings are often counterproductive because they strengthen the repressive stance of the opposing side and are not always politically effective. Conversely, the proponents of extreme actions refer to texts praising self-sacrifice in defense of religion or in saving the oppressed, as well as hadiths encouraging Muslims to seek *shahādah* (martyrdom).

Classical and contemporary scholars emphasize strict criteria for granting the status of martyr. Muhammad ibn Salih al-Uthaymin and other scholars underline that specific conditions must be met to attain *shahīd* status and prohibit assigning this title arbitrarily, because claiming martyrdom implicitly asserts one's assured salvation before God—a serious consequence that cannot be determined without clear evidence. At the same time, many authentic hadiths highlight the virtue of seeking and achieving martyrdom, leaving normative space for intention and aspiration toward martyrdom as long as Sharia provisions are fulfilled.

Conceptually, it is important to reconceptualize jihad. Jihad is not merely *qitāl* (physical warfare) or a means of seeking a noble death; rather, it is a multidimensional struggle encompassing civilizational development, justice enforcement, and the protection of human rights. Thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ziauddin Sardar, and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi emphasize the broad spectrum of jihad, including the struggle of the heart, speech, and action; the pursuit of knowledge; socio-economic empowerment; and the pursuit of justice as forms of jihad relevant in the modern era. (Sardar, 1998: 20)

The discourse on suicide bombings or martyrdom requires a balance between textual analysis—including the study of *sanad* and *matan*—and historical-social context (*asbāb al-nuzūl* and *asbāb al-wurūd*) (Fikri & Hasanah, 2023: 125). Reconstructing the meaning of jihad by prioritizing humanitarian values, public welfare (*maṣlahah*), and international legal norms as guiding principles can help prevent distortions that legitimize violence. In practice, some individuals carry out suicide attacks believing their actions constitute martyrdom operations, even though the legitimacy of such acts remains debated among scholars.

Terrorism causes massive harm, including the loss of innocent lives and the destruction of public facilities. Therefore, the Council of Saudi Ulama and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) have issued fatwas declaring terrorism a serious crime. The Saudi fatwa states that

perpetrators destroying public facilities, hijack aircraft, or commit similar acts fall under *fasād fi al-ard* (corruption on earth) and can be sentenced to death according to QS. al-Māidah [5]:33, while still observing due process and the presumption of innocence. MUI regards terrorism as *jarimah* hirābah because it causes loss of life, threatens public security, and violates Quranic principles and fiqh rules that forbid harm (*mafsadah*). MUI emphasizes the distinction between jihad and terrorism: jihad is a struggle to defend oneself and uphold the religion of Allah, whereas terrorism is destructive, anarchic, and lacks legitimate Sharia objectives (A. B. Yusuf & Yakub, 2025: 87-88).

The MUI's fatwa differs from the Saudi Council of Ulama's fatwa giving more emphasis on the punitive aspect, as MUI focuses on normative-legal considerations. The North American Council of Muslim Ulama also prohibits acts of terrorism, particularly those targeting civilians, and obliges Muslims to cooperate with law enforcement to combat it. Yusuf al-Qaradawi explicitly condemned the Bali Bombing as an act of *hirabah* that cannot be justified by Sharia, as it contradicts the primary objectives of Islam in safeguarding religion, life, property, lineage, and intellect.

MUI (2004) distinguishes suicide bombings from *'amaliyyah istishhādiyyah* (martyrdom operations). Suicide bombings are carried out out of despair and constitute self-harm (*ihlāk al-nafs*), whereas *'amaliyyah istishhādiyyah* occurs in the context of jihad on the battlefield with the sincere intention of seeking Allah's pleasure. Therefore, suicide bombings in peaceful areas—such as Indonesia—are prohibited because they do not take place under conditions of war (*dār al-ḥarb*). Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), through its *baḥth al-masā'il* forum in 2002, affirmed the prohibition of suicide bombings except if three conditions are met: they aim to protect fundamental rights (*al-ḍarūriyyāt al-khams*), there are no alternative methods with lower risk, and the target is clearly an oppressing party.

In the case of the Bali Bombing, Imam Samudra's (2020) claim of conducting *'amaliyyah istishhādiyyah* cannot be equated with jihad in Palestine. There is a misgeneralization in assuming that all Westerners or tourists are enemies of Islam, even though they are non-combatants. Furthermore, the act killed civilians, including Muslims themselves. QS. al-Māidah [5]:32 emphasizes that killing a single soul without a valid reason is equivalent to killing all of humanity. Therefore, the Bali Bombing cannot be justified under Islamic law, moral reasoning, humanitarian principles, or theology.

The comprehension of jihad in the Indonesian context needs to be reconsidered through the *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* approach, emphasizing moral substance and public welfare rather than merely the formal aspects of religious texts. Jihad is understood as a comprehensive struggle to uphold justice, humanity, and well-being (Busyro, 2016: 85). Jihad is not identical to violence or war (*qitāl*); rather, it is a process of dakwah through amar *ma'rūf nabi munkar*, aimed at cultivating individual and social piety. Etymologically, *dakwah* derives from the root words *da'ā-yad'u-da'wah*, meaning “to call” or “to invite”. (Hardian, 2018: 42) In the Indonesian social context, calling to goodness implies inviting people toward a peaceful and civilized life, as emphasized in QS. Yunus [10]:25 and Al-Anfāl [8]:24.

A hermeneutical approach to these verses requires jihad to be comprehended as an active call to build a life embodying *ḥayāh ṭayyibah*—a good, moral, and socially productive life. Contemporary jihad is more appropriately comprehended as a non-military struggle to improve social, political, economic, and cultural systems in alignment with Islamic values (Ahmad, 1983: 2; Rohman & Rustiana, 2024: 254). True jihad within the framework of contextual dakwah is carried out through three main channels, as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad: verbal preaching, written communication, and action (*qauliyyah, kitābiyyah, fi'liyyah*). Together, these form a comprehensive dakwah strategy, combining moral communication with social praxis. In pluralistic societies like Indonesia, *jihad* and *dakwah* must adhere to the principle of freedom of religion, as stated in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:256: *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* (there is no compulsion in religion).

Dakwah aligned with the principles of *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* should be conducted with an approach emphasizing wisdom, ethical communication, and respect for human dignity. This principle is reflected in Allah's command in QS. an-Naḥl [16]:125, instructing that dakwah should be carried out with *ḥikmah* (wisdom), *mau'izḥah ḥasanah* (good counsel), and *mujādalah bi al-lati ḥiya aḥsan* (dialogue in the best manner). (Mujahid et al., 2024: 779) This method demonstrates that *dakwah* in Islam is not a process of coercion or confrontation, but a moral communication process gradually cultivating social awareness and transformation. From a contemporary *dakwah* perspective, this approach forms the basis for comprehending jihad as dialogical, persuasive, and transformative—a jihad oriented toward moral development and the resolution of social problems through peaceful and constructive means.

Within the framework of *maqāṣid al-shari'ah*, *dakwah* aims not only to convey religious teachings but also to realize social welfare. Therefore, jihad in the modern context can be

comprehended as an ethical struggle to improve social structures and public life. This dimension includes efforts to defend the rights of vulnerable groups, empower communities economically, enforce social justice, and eradicate various forms of social corruption such as corruption, collusion, nepotism, violence, drug abuse, natural resource exploitation, and terrorism. Thus, jihad is not merely a military activity, but a collective effort to build a just and civilized society (*masyarakat madani*) in accordance with Islamic moral values (M. F. Hidayat et al., 2025: 3-5).

This principle also aligns with the teaching of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, which is central to the mission of Islamic dakwah. Prophet Muhammad emphasized the social dimension of this principle in his saying: “Whoever among you sees wrongdoing, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of faith” (*An-Nīsābūrī*, n.d.: 78).

This hadith illustrates that jihad in Islam is not limited to physical struggle but also includes moral and spiritual efforts to improve social life. In practice, *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* can be implemented through various actions—whether through social policy, moral education, or constructive dakwah communication. Scholars and dakwah activists regard this principle as an ethical mechanism to maintain social order, because societies that neglect the obligation to enjoin good and forbid evil risk moral and social decay (Batubara & Sikumbang, 2025: 922).

Building on this understanding, jihad from a contemporary *dakwah* perspective should be seen as an integrative process combining individual reform and social transformation. The moral improvement of the individual forms the foundation for broader societal change, while social reform helps create structures supporting a just and dignified life. In this context, jihad functions as a moral force motivating Muslims to build a society grounded in justice, welfare, and peace.

This understanding becomes increasingly relevant when situated within the framework of national life. In modern and pluralistic societies like Indonesia, contemporary jihad needs to be integrated with humanitarian and state ideals. It can be manifested through strengthening education, social empowerment, community economic development, and the enforcement of fair laws. In line with this, Mohammad Moniruzzaman argues that contemporary jihad can be comprehended in three main dimensions: (1) eco-political jihad, which seeks to uphold ecological and political justice; (2) humanist jihad, the struggle to defend human rights and universal humanitarian values; and (3) jihad against international terrorism, aiming to combat global violence through peaceful and rational approaches (Moniruzzaman, 2008: 8-10).

In studies of jihad and battlefield struggles, the Prophet's hadiths need to be comprehended comprehensively and contextually. Some hadiths recount stories of the companions fighting enemies in war and being promised great rewards, even paradise. One popular hadith expresses that the statement "Paradise lies under the shade of the sword," is recorded in several hadith collections such as *Sahih Muslim* and *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*. This statement is essentially a metaphor illustrating the proximity of a warrior to the risk of death on the battlefield while defending truth and justice (Irwansya, 2023: 114). Thus, the hadith is more appropriately understood as moral motivation for the companions facing real threats in the context of defensive warfare, rather than as a license to commit violence without limits.

However, if such hadiths are interpreted literally without considering historical context and the objectives of the shari'ah, their meaning can be misused. Interpretations divorced from historical context may be employed to justify acts of violence outside the framework of Islamic law and ethics, including modern terrorism. Therefore, hadith scholars emphasize the importance of understanding hadith texts through contextual and methodological approaches accounting for the social, political, and historical situation during the Prophet's era. This approach also allows for metaphorical (*majāzī*) interpretations of certain expressions in hadiths not intended as literal commands but as rhetorical expressions containing moral and spiritual messages (A'yun & Perbawati, 2022: 194).

In academic hadith studies, several analytical approaches can be used to comprehend hadith texts more comprehensively. *First*, the contextual semantic approach interprets the meaning of words or terms in hadiths by considering the social and historical context in which they were spoken (Susilowati & Syahid, 2024: 441). This is important because many terms in hadiths have meanings that depend on the communication situation during the Prophet's time. *Second*, the structural approach analyzes the narrative patterns of hadiths, including the relationships between companions' questions, the Prophet's answers, the companions' actions, and the consequences of those actions. This analysis helps uncover the moral messages conveyed in a narration (Namang & Naitili, 2025: 148). *Third*, the semiotic approach seeks to interpret symbolism in hadith language—for instance, terms such as "sword," "martyr," or "paradise"—as symbols of struggle, sacrifice, and moral commitment to the values of truth (Syarif, 2018: 95). *Fourth*, critical discourse analysis examines how religious texts are used in various social and political contexts while identifying potential manipulation of meaning for ideological purposes (Silaswati, 2019: 7).

From a historical perspective, hadiths depicting the courage of the companions in battle are inseparable from the context of conflicts during early Islam. Some narrations emerged during major battles, such as the Battle of Badr (624 CE) and the Battle of Uhud (625 CE). At that time, the Muslim community in Medina was politically and militarily vulnerable, facing pressure from the Quraysh of Mecca and their allies. Several Islamic historians explain that warfare in this period was essentially defensive, aimed at protecting the survival of the Muslim community from tangible military threats and political oppression (Akhter & Munir, 2016: 158).

Therefore, various hadiths promising great rewards or paradise for fighters are better understood as spiritual motivation to defend justice and the safety of the community, rather than as theological justification to commit violence against the innocent. In this context, the concept of *shahadah* (dying as a martyr) is closely related to moral sacrifice and the courage to face risk in defense of truth. Hadith scholars emphasize that the status of a martyr is not only related to dying on the battlefield but also to sincere intention and a righteous purpose—namely, upholding justice and protecting society from oppression (Basyar, 2020: 24-25).

Thus, the promise of paradise in jihad-related hadiths is understood as a spiritual reward for sacrifice within the framework of ethically sanctioned warfare in Islam, not as a justification for unrestrained aggression or violence.

One frequently cited example in hadith literature is the story of the companion Umair ibn al-Humam during the Battle of Badr. In a narration found in Sahih Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad said to the companions:

“Rise toward Paradise, as vast as the heavens and the earth.”

Upon hearing this, Umair ibn al-Humam, who was holding a few dates, said that if he had to finish eating those dates before going to battle, it would mean he was living too long. He then threw away the dates he was eating and advanced to the battlefield, ultimately being martyred (Al-Bukharī, 1987: 3820; An-Nīsābūrī, n.d.: 145). This event is not meant to glorify violence but rather to provide a spiritual illustration of a believer’s readiness to sacrifice when the community faces a real threat.

Contemporary studies on jihad emphasize that the concept of jihad in Islam cannot be reduced merely to physical warfare. Many modern Muslim scholars stress that jihad has a broad dimension, encompassing moral, intellectual, social, and spiritual struggle (Ahmad & Wafiq, 2023: 57). From this perspective, armed conflict is only considered a last-resort option, justified when aggression or oppression occurs and all peaceful efforts have failed.

From a semiotic perspective, several terms appearing in jihad-related hadiths can be understood as symbols carrying moral and spiritual meaning. *First*, the sword can be interpreted as a symbol of self-defense and moral responsibility in facing threats to the community (Rafida, 2022: 190). In Islamic ethics of warfare, the use of armed force is justified only under specific conditions and is strictly limited by humanitarian rules, such as prohibitions against killing non-combatants, including women, children, and the elderly. *Second*, the concept of *shahid* (martyrdom) in Islamic tradition does not refer solely to death in battle but also symbolizes spiritual and moral sacrifice to uphold justice and defend truth. In both classical literature and contemporary studies, *shahid* is understood as the highest symbol of a believer's commitment to ethical and faith values, not as glorification of death or violence (Yaman, 2021: 1). *Third*, paradise in hadith narratives often serves as a symbol of moral reward for actions conducted legitimately and meaningfully within the framework of Islamic ethics. In this context, the promise of paradise is not intended as a reward for acts of violence, but as spiritual reinforcement for individuals who defend truth, justice, and the safety of the community in high-risk situations (Ismail et al., 2023: 317).

Misinterpretation often arises when hadith texts are detached from their historical context and narrative structure. Under such circumstances, the texts can be exploited to construct manipulative discourse seemingly legitimizing violence against anyone. In reality, the core message of the hadith emphasizes adherence to ethics, legitimate self-defense, and community solidarity in the face of real threats.

Through this contextual and methodological approach, jihad-related hadiths can be understood more proportionally. Struggle in Islam should be grounded in values of justice, the protection of human life, and the objectives of Shariah, positioning peace as the foundational condition for social relations (Noerkholis & Alif, 2025: 86). Once again, war and martyrdom hadiths are not tools to legitimize terrorism; rather, they emphasize consistency in moral and spiritual sacrifice, courage in upholding truth, ethical awareness in action, and historical contextualization as prerequisites for the validity of action.

From a contemporary perspective, this concept aligns with the views of Wahbah al-Zuhaili positioning defensive jihad as part of the right to self-defense recognized under modern international law. Thus, jihad is not interpreted as military expansion but as an effort to uphold justice, protect freedom of religion, and maintain global peace. Its implications include contributing to the strengthening of religious nationalism, national resilience, youth

empowerment, and Muslim participation in global agendas such as international diplomacy, sustainable development, and peacekeeping. Theoretically, this concept can even be seen as an alternative paradigm in Islamic international relations studies, placing justice and peace as the primary ethical foundations (Royhan, 2025: 231).

CONCLUSIONS

The contextualization of jihad within the Indonesian framework shows that true jihad is not armed struggle or acts of violence that cause terror, but rather a spiritual, intellectual, and social process aimed at upholding justice, humanity, and public welfare. Jihad, in the sense of *amar ma'rūf nahi munkar*, is the actualization of faith manifested through concrete efforts to improve life, strengthen social solidarity, and build a peaceful civilization.

Understanding jihad contextually and through *maqāṣidiyyah* emphasizes that Islam rejects all forms of coercion, violence, and extremism in the name of religion. The call for jihad is instead directed toward moral and social struggles that foster freedom of thought, respect for diversity, and a balance between rights and duties as citizens. Within this framework, jihad becomes a manifestation of the ethics of *tawḥīd*, placing humanity at the center of devotion to Allah SWT.

In the contemporary era, jihad must be understood as a transformative effort to address the challenges of modernity, such as social inequality, poverty, corruption, environmental degradation, and moral crises. Thus, jihad becomes a social energy of transformation that motivates Muslims to actively participate in national development, strengthening the values of justice, welfare, and public benefit.

This model of jihad is not only aligned with the universal spirit of Islam but also resonates with the values of Pancasila and the principles of Indonesian nationhood, which uphold humanity and social justice. Therefore, the contextualization of jihad in Indonesian *dakwah* emphasizes that the struggle in the path of Allah does not stop at ritualistic or dogmatic dimensions but is realized in concrete praxis — building a peaceful, civilized society that brings mercy to all creation (*rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn*).

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