

Jihadist Group's Criticism of Bassam Tibi's Thoughts

Dudi Permana

UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
permanadudi11@gmail.com

Mila Melyani

Institut Agama Islam Persis Bandung
millamelyani@iaipibandung.ac.id

Neli Alawiah

UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
nelialawiah@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This study examines the ideological tension between Bassam Tibi's reformist Islamic thought and the responses of jihadist groups in Indonesia. The research aims to explore how these groups interpret Tibi's rejection of the Islamic state and his call for contextual reinterpretation of Islamic teachings as a threat to the purity of Islam. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach and content analysis method, the study draws on primary sources, including Tibi's works and jihadist writings, as well as secondary academic literature. The findings reveal that while Tibi promotes an ethical and contextual understanding of Islam aligned with democratic values, human rights, and pluralism, jihadist groups oppose these interpretations and perceive them as part of a Westernization agenda. They assert that Islam must remain a comprehensive system that includes political and military dimensions, rejecting secularism and reinterpretation as forms of deviation. This study concludes that the conflict between reformist and jihadist Islamic perspectives reflects a broader epistemological struggle within contemporary Islamic discourse. The research contributes to academic debate by offering a deeper understanding of the ideological contestation surrounding Islam and modernity. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for a contextual and dialogical approach to Islamic teachings as a means to foster moderation and coexistence in plural societies.

Keywords: Islamic reform; jihadism; political Islam; Secularization; textualism.

INTRODUCTION

One of the main problems facing Indonesia regarding jihadism is radicalization, which often leads to acts of violence. Groups espousing jihadist ideology are often involved in acts of terror and violence with the aim of establishing a caliphate or Islamic state (Chalmers, 2017). Radicalization is a major challenge in Indonesia, where groups embracing jihadist ideology are often involved in acts of violence and terrorism. They aim to establish a caliphate, or Islamic state, in accordance with their interpretation of Islamic teachings. According to M. Imdadun Rahmat in *Islam and Radicalism in Indonesia*, the process of

radicalization occurs not only among individuals but also spreads to broader social groups. This indicates that radicalization is a phenomenon affecting many levels of Indonesian society (Rahmat, 2005a).

This radicalization has led to tensions between jihadist groups and Indonesia's more pluralistic society. Jihadist groups tend to view the existing system as incompatible with their version of Islamic principles, creating friction with the diversity within society. This tension is exacerbated by jihadist groups feeling alienated from Indonesia's multicultural society while attempting to introduce a more exclusive ideology. A study published in the *Journal of Islamic Studies* by Ahyar Yani shows that radical groups often exploit social and political discontent to recruit new members. According to Ahyar Yani's article in the *Journal of Islamic Studies*, jihadist groups exploit dissatisfaction with social and political conditions as a means to attract new members. This tension ultimately complicates efforts to create a more inclusive and harmonious society (Yani, 2014).

Jihadist groups in Indonesia often adopt a textual and literal understanding of religious texts, resulting in a very rigid interpretation of Islamic teachings. This approach ignores the social and historical context in understanding religious texts. This textual and literal understanding of religion causes jihadist groups in Indonesia to ignore the context of the times and developing social conditions. Azyumardi Azra, in his book *Liberal and Fundamental Islam: The Struggle for Thought in Indonesia*, criticizes this approach for ignoring the importance of historical context in interpreting Islamic teachings. In *Liberal and Fundamental Islam: The Struggle for Thought in Indonesia*, Azyumardi Azra argues that an overly textual and literal understanding of religious texts causes jihadist groups in Indonesia to become trapped in narrow interpretations, ignoring the social and historical context factors that should be part of the process of religious interpretation (Azra, 2002a).

This textual and literal understanding has sparked tensions with more moderate groups and presented challenges for the government in maintaining religious diversity and tolerance in Indonesia. Jihadist groups often demand strict implementation of Islamic teachings, which contradicts the principles of diversity upheld by the state. Tensions between jihadist groups and moderate groups have intensified due to this rigid understanding of Islamic teachings. The government also faces significant challenges in creating space for religious diversity and tolerance. A study published in the *Ulumuddin Journal* by Muhammad Iqbal shows that jihadist groups view secularization as a threat to their pure and literal understanding of Islam. In the study, published in the *Ulumuddin Journal*, Muhammad Iqbal highlights how jihadist groups perceive secularization as a major threat to their textual and literal understanding of Islam. This tension impacts the government's efforts to maintain diversity and maintain harmony between religious groups in Indonesia (Iqbal, 2019).

One of the major problems associated with jihadism is the tension that arises between these groups and the state, which they perceive as secular or insufficiently implementing Islamic law. Jihadist groups in Indonesia often view the existing government system as inconsistent with their Islamic principles and demand stricter implementation of Sharia law. This tension between jihadist groups and the state often leads to open conflict. In **Radicalization of Islam in Indonesia** by Noorhaidi Hasan, it is explained that jihadist groups are not only involved in conflicts with security forces but also seek to establish a caliphate, or Islamic state, as an alternative to what they consider a secular state. In **Radicalization of Islam in Indonesia**, Noorhaidi Hasan explains that jihadist groups frequently clash with security forces and continue to seek to establish a caliphate, or Islamic state. This conflict reflects their dissatisfaction with the Indonesian government system, which they perceive as not fully reflecting Islamic law (Hasan, 2010).

The ideology of jihadism in Indonesia not only creates conflict with the government but also poses a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the Pancasila-based state. This group seeks to replace the existing system of government with a system based on Islamic law in its entirety. In the *Indonesia Law Review Journal*, Endang Turmudi explains that jihadism challenges the existence of Pancasila as the foundation of the state, by demanding the implementation of a comprehensive Islamic government system. This indicates that jihadist groups view Pancasila as an obstacle to the implementation of Islamic law in national and state life. The study in the *Indonesia Law Review Journal* by Endang Turmudi also explains that jihadist ideology actively opposes the legitimacy of the Indonesian state, by advocating the implementation of an Islamic government system. This approach poses a threat to the principles of pluralism and tolerance embodied in the values of Pancasila (Turmudi, 2018).

The development of technology and social media presents new challenges in combating the spread of jihadist ideology in Indonesia. Jihadist groups utilize online platforms to widely disseminate their

propaganda and recruit new members. In the book "Media and Radicalization: The Influence of the Internet in Jihadism" by Dian Novita, it is explained that the internet and social media play a central role in disseminating extremist narratives. Through these platforms, jihadist groups are able to reach a wider audience and mobilize support for terrorist acts. Dian Novita, in "Media and Radicalization: The Influence of the Internet in Jihadism," also highlights how social media is used to organize and plan terrorist acts. The ease of access and anonymity of cyberspace make these platforms effective tools for jihadist groups in spreading their ideology and strengthening their networks (Novita, 2015a).

Social media has become an effective tool for jihadist groups in recruiting members, especially among young people who are susceptible to radical ideologies. The easy access and interactive nature of these platforms allow for the rapid and widespread spread of ideology. In the Journal of Islamic Communication, Siti Nurjannah revealed that jihadist groups actively utilize social media to attract the attention of young people. They use compelling narratives, such as the struggle against injustice or the defense of religion, to arouse emotions and build sympathy for radical ideologies. The article in the Journal of Islamic Communication by Siti Nurjannah also shows that social media is not only a channel for spreading ideology but also a strategic tool for recruiting young people. Jihadist groups target individuals who are highly susceptible to radical narratives, often through a personalized and systematic approach (Nurjannah, 2017).

Facing the challenges of jihadism requires the development of moderate thinking capable of providing solutions to the issues raised by radical groups. Bassam Tibi, in his book *Jihad and Islamism: The Violence and the New Islamic Terrorism*, suggests that Islam be reformed to align more closely with modern values such as democracy and human rights. However, this idea often meets with strong opposition from jihadist groups, who consider such reforms to threaten the purity of Islamic teachings. Jihadist groups view reform as an attempt to weaken the Islamic principles they believe in. In his *Al-Bayan Journal*, Burhanuddin Daya highlighted that this group rejects all forms of reform that are considered westernization. They believe that reform efforts could diminish the role of Islam as a holistic system of life, encompassing spiritual, social, and political aspects. In his study in the *Al-Bayan Journal*, Burhanuddin Daya explained that jihadist groups reject reform on the grounds of maintaining the comprehensive authority of Islam. For them, reforms that integrate modern values are considered contrary to pure Islamic principles and a threat to Islam's position as a comprehensive system (Daya, 2016).

Several academic works have highlighted jihadist groups' criticism of Bassam Tibi's thinking. In the study (Islamiyati, 2019) in a paper titled "Bassam Tibi's Critique of the Purification of Islam in the Islamic Fundamentalist Movement," published by Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Tibi criticized Islamic fundamentalist movements that focus on purifying religious teachings. He argued that such an approach tends to ignore complex social and historical dynamics. In response, jihadist groups rejected Tibi's critique, arguing that the purification of Islam is an attempt to restore the purity of teachings in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah. They argued that Tibi's critique actually undermines their efforts to uphold Islamic law in its entirety.

In addition, in the article (Spoerl, 2023), Tibi portrayed the ideology of Islamism as a new form of totalitarianism that could potentially threaten the global order. Jihadist groups criticized this view, stating that their efforts were to establish God's sovereignty on earth and rejecting the label of totalitarianism applied to Tibi. They asserted that their struggle was based on sincere religious conviction, not merely political ambition.

Bassam Tibi's ideas on democracy and pluralism are often criticized by jihadist groups, who consider them a form of westernization that weakens Islam's position as a comprehensive way of life (Tibi, 2024b). Of the several studies that discuss jihadist groups regarding Bassam Tibi's thoughts, what is different in this writing is that it presents the main criticisms of jihadist groups regarding Bassam Tibi's thoughts.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a content analysis method to examine in depth the criticism of jihadist groups towards Bassam Tibi's thoughts (Sheydayi & Dadashpoor, 2023). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically explore the texts, documents, and ideological statements of jihadist groups, as well as Tibi's thoughts, scattered throughout his academic works and publications. The primary data sources in this study include books, journal articles, and research reports related to jihadism in Indonesia and Bassam Tibi's reformist thoughts, particularly regarding the concepts of jihad, secularization, the Islamic state, and modernity. Furthermore, this study also utilizes secondary data in

the form of analyses by moderate Muslim academics and relevant previous research. The collected data are analyzed qualitatively by identifying the main themes of Tibi's jihadist critiques, comparing these ideas, and examining the socio-political context behind them. With this approach, the research is expected to uncover the ideological dynamics between reformist and fundamentalist thoughts in contemporary Islamic discourse in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Jihad and Jihadism

Jihad in Islam is defined as a serious effort or struggle to uphold and implement religious values. This concept is not limited to physical aspects but also encompasses spiritual and social dimensions (Mostfa, 2021). Traditionally, jihad involves various forms of effort, such as fighting against lust, upholding justice, and protecting Muslims from various threats that endanger the survival of religion and society (Ottuh, 2025). As a broad concept, jihad encompasses more than just warfare or physical conflict. In Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi's view, as outlined in his book *Jihad and Terrorism: An Islamic Perspective*, jihad encompasses aspects of self-development and social contribution. This demonstrates that jihad aims to improve the quality of the individual and create a better society, and is therefore not solely associated with acts of violence. Traditional understandings of jihad emphasize the importance of struggle undertaken with the aim of improving spiritual and social conditions. In this context, jihad is relevant not only to the individual but also to the Muslim community as a whole. Collective efforts to improve morality, justice, and the welfare of society are integral to true jihad, as Zarkasyi explains in his work (Zarkasyi, 2012).

Jihadism refers to a radical political ideology, often associated with militant action, that uses the concept of jihad to justify violence (VandenBerg, 2021). In contrast to the broader traditional meaning of jihad, encompassing spiritual and social aspects, jihadism focuses on a narrow interpretation involving the use of force to achieve specific goals. According to Dian Novita in her book *Media and Radicalization: The Influence of the Internet in Jihadism*, groups adhering to this ideology utilize religious teachings as a tool to support their political agenda. Jihadism often disregards Islamic ethical values, replacing them with narratives oriented toward political domination. One of the primary goals of jihadism is to establish an Islamic state based on their interpretation of sharia. Dian Novita explains that these groups do not hesitate to use violence as a means to realize their political vision, using religion as the primary justification for such actions (Novita, 2015a). Jihadism removes the spiritual dimension from jihad and replaces it with a focus on a political agenda that tends to be exclusive.

Jihad in Islam places greater emphasis on the spiritual dimension and ethical values in its practice. This concept encompasses efforts to improve oneself morally while simultaneously striving for good in social life, making it a principle that supports harmony and justice (H. Amin, 2024). In his book "Islam and Radicalism in Indonesia," M. Imdadun Rahmat explains that jihad has the primary goal of realizing a just and peaceful life. This can be achieved through individual struggle against desires and collective efforts to uphold social justice within society. Jihad encompasses various forms of struggle, both internal and external, all directed toward creating a better life. Imdadun Rahmat emphasizes that jihad is not only about physical action, but also involves efforts to build a harmonious social order based on the values of justice and peace (Rahmat, 2005a). In contrast, jihadism focuses on the political dimension which often ignores ethical values and tends to use violence to achieve certain ideological goals.

The meaning of jihad is always closely related to the social situation and historical dynamics that surround it, so that its interpretation adapts to the needs of the times (Daruhadi, 2024). On the other hand, jihadism tends to ignore these contextual factors, using them as a tool to support radical approaches. In his book, *Liberal and Fundamental Islam: The Struggle for Thought in Indonesia*, Azyumardi Azra explains that true jihad involves an understanding that takes into account social realities and the challenges faced by society. This differs from jihadism, which prioritizes a literal reading of religious texts without considering their relevance to contemporary conditions. Jihadism's rigid approach is often exploited to support political agendas and militant ideologies. In contrast, jihad in the traditional sense demands contextual interpretation and aims to bring good to both individuals and society as a whole (Azra, 2002a). This causes jihadism to tend to be a rigid and non-inclusive doctrine.

Jihad is often seen as an important aspect of universal religious practice, which includes the struggle to achieve goodness and maintain moral values in life (Askhatuly et al., 2024). In contrast, jihadism is considered

a serious threat to world peace and stability because of its extreme approach and often involves violence (Czornik, 2024). In his book, *Radicalization of Islam in Indonesia*, Noorhaidi Hasan highlights that jihadism not only poses a threat to non-Muslim communities but also negatively impacts Muslims themselves. This ideology creates a negative image of Islam, giving rise to stereotypes that are detrimental to the religion and the Muslim community in the eyes of the world. The existence of jihadism, which associates violent acts with Islamic teachings, contributes to a misunderstanding of the true meaning of jihad. In contrast, jihad in the traditional sense aims to fight for peace, justice, and the well-being of humanity, making it very different from the radical approach espoused by jihadism (Hasan, 2010). Therefore, distinguishing between jihad and jihadism is important to straighten out public understanding.

Redefining Jihad as a Political Ideology

The term jihad in Islamic literature originally referred to a sincere effort to uphold and uphold religious values, encompassing spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects. In this sense, jihad encompasses the struggle against desires (*jihad al-nafs*), moral development, and active involvement in creating social justice within society (Ritonga et al., 2023). However, along with historical developments and political dynamics, the meaning of jihad has undergone a significant shift, particularly in the contemporary context when it is used to justify radical political ideologies. This is where Bassam Tibi takes a critical stance and clearly differentiates between jihad as a spiritual and moral doctrine in Islam and jihadism as a political ideology that tends to be militant and violent (Rojaya & Rahman, 2025).

Bassam Tibi views jihadism as a distortion of Islamic teachings. He believes that radical groups espousing jihadist ideology have transformed jihad from a moral struggle into a political tool that utilizes violence. In "The Totalitarianism of Jihadist Islamism and its Challenge to Europe and to Islam," he writes, "in the words of the author, 'The Totalitarianism of Jihadist Islamism and its Challenge to Europe and to Islam,'" he explains, (Tibi, 2007b) He argued that true jihad must be based on Islamic ethical principles that uphold peace and humanity. Jihadism, according to Tibi, not only ignores these principles but also undermines them by portraying Islam as a religion of violence and intolerance. He even called jihadism a new form of religion-based totalitarianism, one that ignores the social dynamics and plurality of modern life.

In the Indonesian context, Tibi's views have met with strong resistance, particularly from those affiliated with a literalist and scripturalist understanding of jihad. Jihadist groups in Indonesia, as explained by M. Imdadun Rahmat in *Islam and Radicalism in Indonesia*, reject the separation between the spiritual and military dimensions of jihad. They believe that jihad cannot be separated from the context of physical struggle, particularly in defending Islam from what they perceive as external and internal threats. This view stems from the notion that Islam is a comprehensive system (*syumul*), encompassing political, military, social, and spiritual aspects. Therefore, they argue, removing the military element from jihad is a deviation from the complete and comprehensive teachings of Islam (Rahmat, 2005b).

Rejection of Tibi's views is not merely reactive but also accompanied by ideological arguments. Jihadist groups accuse Tibi of westernizing or liberalizing Islam, threatening the purity of Islamic teachings (Tibi, 2014). From their perspective, jihad is not merely a spiritual endeavor or moral reform, but rather a collective obligation to uphold the Islamic system in its entirety, including through force if necessary. Therefore, their criticism of Tibi stems not only from the content of his ideas, but also from his orientation, which is considered too accommodating to Western values such as democracy, secularism, and human rights.

(Mauliza, 2018) provides a more moderate and contextual view of jihad. In *Terrorism in Islamic and Christian Perspectives*, he explains that jihad has complementary spiritual and physical dimensions. However, he argues that the use of force in jihad must meet strict moral and ethical requirements and only be undertaken under conditions truly justified by sharia. Zarkasyi emphasizes that jihad cannot be used as a pretext for indiscriminate violence or destructive radicalism. For him, jihad must remain within the framework of Islamic morality and aim to uphold justice, not merely political domination (Zarkasyi, 2012).

Meanwhile, Burhanuddin Daya, in an article published in the *Studia Islamika Journal*, highlighted the defensive aspect of military jihad. According to him, in classical Islamic history, military jihad was carried out as an effort to protect the Muslim community from real threats, not as a means of political or ideological expansion. He cautioned that in the current context, many groups misuse the meaning of jihad for the sake of exclusive and radical ideologies. Daya emphasized that the military dimension of jihad should not be separated from its historical context, namely protection and justice, not conquest and violence (Daya, 2004).

The shift in the meaning of jihad to jihadism was greatly influenced by various factors, such as disappointment with the national political system, social marginalization, and dissatisfaction with Western civilization which was considered to be hegemonizing the Muslim world (Matusitz, 2020). Within this framework, jihadism becomes a kind of confrontational ideological response. Bassam Tibi calls this phenomenon a form of defensive cultural identity, where Muslim groups, feeling their identity threatened, engage in a violent and militant ideological reaction (Tibi, 2014). Unfortunately, this reaction did not result in dialogue or intellectual *ijtihad*, but rather a total rejection of modernity and pluralism.

One of the crucial points in Tibi's critique of jihadism is his rejection of a literal reading of religious texts. Tibi asserts that Islamic teachings must be read contextually, taking into account changing times and social dynamics (Tibi, 2020). He emphasized the importance of a hermeneutic approach to understanding the Quran and Hadith, so that Islamic values are not trapped within a narrow doctrine of violence. In his view, jihadism fails to understand Islam as a religion capable of coexisting with democracy and human rights, because it is too fixated on literal interpretations that are irrelevant to current conditions.

Tibi's critique of jihadism has received support from some progressive Muslim thinkers, who see that a revitalization of Islamic understanding must be in line with universal human values (Kazmi, 2022). This is where jihad, in its spiritual and social sense, becomes highly relevant for building a just, tolerant, and peaceful society. In this context, jihad can be realized through strengthening education, fighting poverty and structural injustice, and actively engaging in building a civilized civilization (Choir & Aziz, 2024). This view is clearly in contrast to jihadism, which tends to use violence as a tool of political legitimacy and power.

In Indonesia itself, jihadism has demonstrated destructive impacts, both socially and politically. Acts of terrorism carried out in the name of jihad not only tarnish Islam's image as a religion of peace but also instill fear in society. This is exacerbated by the use of social media as a means of propaganda and recruitment. As (Novita, 2015b) noted, Jihadist groups are using the internet to spread violent ideologies and build global networks. In situations like this, redefining jihad is crucial to prevent society from falling into misunderstandings.

In an effort to rectify the meaning of jihad, it is crucial for Muslims to reaffirm the values of Islam as a religion of mercy for all the worlds. This means rejecting all forms of violence and intolerance disguised as religious justification. Redefining jihad does not mean erasing the meaning of struggle in Islam, but rather redirecting it in a more constructive and humane direction (Haruna, 2025). In this context, Bassam Tibi's thinking makes an important contribution to opening up a space for dialogue between Islam and modernity, between tradition and renewal, between local values and global principles.

The battle of meaning between jihad and jihadism is a battle of narratives. The narrative of violence constructed by jihadist groups must be countered with an Islamic narrative that is inclusive, contextual, and oriented toward the welfare of the community. Redefining jihad as an ethical and spiritual ideology is a crucial step in saving Islam from destructive ideological hijacking (Abdulmajid, 2024). This task is not only the responsibility of academics and scholars, but also of all components of the Muslim community who care about the future of this religion in the life of the nation and state.

Rejection of the Concept of an Islamic State

One of the most fundamental points of difference between Bassam Tibi and jihadist groups lies in the idea of an Islamic state or caliphate. For Tibi, the idea of establishing an Islamic state is both theologically and politically irrelevant and problematic in the context of the modern world. He argues that Islam, as a spiritual religion and value system, has the capacity to integrate into a pluralistic, democratic political structure, without having to be realized in the form of an exclusive theocratic government. In his view, an Islamic state is not only an unrealistic utopia but also has the potential to lead to the domination of power in the name of religion, which is contrary to Islamic principles that respect justice, freedom, and equality (Tibi, 2009).

Bassam Tibi rejects the idea of the caliphate as the ideal form of Islamic government because, in his view, this concept lacks a clear normative basis in the modern political context. He argues that the Qur'an and Sunnah do regulate the basic principles of social life, but do not explicitly establish a specific form of government, especially in the form of a religious state like the caliphate. In Tibi's view, efforts to establish the caliphate in the modern era are more a project of politicizing religion than an embodiment of authentic Islamic teachings. He proposes that Islamic values such as justice, deliberation (*shura*), and trustworthiness can be implemented in a modern democratic system that values pluralism, rather than in a theocracy that denies diversity and claims a single truth in the name of religion (Tibi, 2008c).

Tibi's rejection of an Islamic state is also based on historical experience and the socio-political realities of modern Muslim countries. He points out that the experiments with establishing Islamic states carried out by various political Islamic groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood and other radical groups, have instead resulted in authoritarian states that do not uphold civil liberties or human rights (Al Haidary & Zamzami, 2022). According to Tibi, this demonstrates the failure of the Islamic state concept to address the complex and multicultural needs of modern society. Furthermore, he believes the caliphate project is a form of political utopia that has the potential to give rise to exclusivism, discrimination, and prolonged inter-group conflict (Tibi, 2001).

In Indonesia, Bassam Tibi's ideas have drawn sharp criticism from jihadist groups who view the caliphate not merely as a political project but as a religious obligation rooted in classical Islamic tradition. In his book, *Islam and Radicalism in Indonesia*, M. Imdadun Rahmat emphasizes that radical groups in Indonesia view rejection of the caliphate as a betrayal of Islam itself. For them, the caliphate represents the past glory of Muslims and a political ideal that must be fought for to uphold God's law on earth. Rejection of the caliphate is seen as part of a project of secularization and westernization of Islam aimed at diminishing the role of religion in public life (Rahmat, 2005b).

Groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) explicitly state that the caliphate is a system of government commanded by Allah and exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. They believe that the only way to unite Muslims worldwide is to re-establish a caliphate based on sharia (A. R. Al Amin et al., 2025). Therefore, any thought that rejects the caliphate or offers it as merely one of many possible systems of government is considered to have deviated from the pure teachings of Islam. In their rhetoric, the caliphate is the sole solution to all of the ummah's problems, from corruption and social injustice to Western domination of the Islamic world.

The Al-Bayan Journal explains that jihadist groups view the caliphate as the highest form of authority in Islam, possessing both historical and theological legitimacy. They reject the modern nation-state system, considering it a Western product that divides Muslims into small and weak political units. For them, the caliphate is not only a political system but also a manifestation of the unity of the ummah (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*) and a means to uphold God's law comprehensively (Ahmad, 2016). Therefore, any thought like Tibi's that prioritizes the integration of Islamic values in democracy is considered an attempt at compromise that weakens the identity and authority of Islam.

Bassam Tibi's rejection of the concept of an Islamic state does not mean he denies the role of religion in public life. Rather, he acknowledges that Islam plays a crucial role in shaping the social ethics and moral orientation of Muslim society (Tibi, 2023). However, Tibi emphasized that religion should not be the exclusive basis for legitimizing political power. He proposed the concept of Euro-Islam, a form of Islam capable of coexisting with modern values such as democracy, human rights, and pluralism (Tibi, 2008b). Within this framework, Islam remains a source of moral inspiration, but does not become an instrument of political domination.

Tibi's Euro-Islamic ideas also respond to the rise of identity politics in the Muslim world, which often gives rise to social polarization and sectarian conflict. Tibi seeks to build an inclusive model of Islam, open to dialogue, and upholding the principles of universal justice. He argues that Islam should not be pitted against democracy but rather should be included in the democratization process to create a just and humane society (Tibi, 2008b). In this view, Islam does not conflict with modern values, as long as it is interpreted contextually and with an open spirit of *ijtihad* (Bushra & Pakeeza, 2022).

On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that the appeal of the caliphate idea for some Muslims, including in Indonesia, is not only theological, but also related to social and political frustration. Disappointment with the liberal democratic system, economic inequality, and rampant corruption have led some to feel that the existing system of government has failed to fulfill aspirations for justice. In this situation, the caliphate is seen as a more just and moral alternative (Bar, 2016). Jihadist groups are exploiting this situation to spread the narrative that only the Islamic system, namely the caliphate, is capable of overcoming the multidimensional crisis facing the Muslim community.

However, this claim is not entirely in line with historical or empirical reality. Throughout its history, the caliphate institution has not been free from political problems, internal conflicts, power struggles, and even the oppression of minority groups (Mohammed & Jureidini, 2022). This fact reinforces Bassam Tibi's argument that romanticism about the caliphate often overlooks its historical complexity. Furthermore, in today's global era, a caliphate-based governance model would be difficult to implement within an international political structure

already governed by the nation-state system, international law, and the principle of national sovereignty (Isani et al., 2024).

Tibi's critique of the concept of an Islamic state actually encourages Muslims to think realistically and progressively. He does not reject Islam as a source of values, but rather rejects its use as an ideological tool by groups pursuing a powerful agenda. Within this framework, (Tibi, 2024a) trying to return Islam to its function as a moral force that guides the people towards justice and peace, not as a political project that actually destroys the unity of the people and gives rise to prolonged conflict.

The debate between the concept of an Islamic state and pluralistic democracy is not merely about the political system, but about how to understand Islam itself (Hashas, 2021). Should Islam be realized in the form of a theocratic state that rejects pluralism, or can it be presented as a living value that inspires an inclusive and humanistic democratic system? Bassam Tibi chooses the latter, and in the context of the modern world full of diversity, this approach seems more relevant and sustainable.

Westernization and Secularization of Islam

Bassam Tibi's ideas for Islamic reform arose from anxiety about the Islamic world's lagging behind in responding to modernity. In his various works, Tibi emphasized the need for Islam to adapt to universal values such as democracy, human rights, religious freedom, and plurality. For him, this adaptation does not mean betraying Islamic teachings, but rather an effort to maintain Islam's vitality and relevance amidst the dynamics of the times. He believes that Islamic religious texts need to be reinterpreted contextually, not simply repeated literally. The goal is for Islam to actively contribute to building an inclusive and civilized modern society (Tibi, 2014).

Bassam Tibi rejects the view that modern values such as democracy and human rights are solely Western products. He believes that these values are universal and can be found in the fundamental spirit of Islam (Tibi, 2008a). Therefore, pitting Islam against modernity will only perpetuate the alienation of Muslims from global discourse. Tibi sees no need to maintain the dichotomy between Islam and the West, as both can engage in dialogue and mutually enrich each other (Rojaya & Rahman, 2025). He proposed a renewal of Islamic thought that could bridge Islamic identity with global humanitarian values without feeling inferior or threatened.

However, this idea has drawn strong reactions from jihadist groups in various countries, including Indonesia. For these groups, modernity is often narrowly understood as a westernization project that seeks to replace Islamic law with a liberal secular system. In this context, modernity is positioned as a threat to the authority of revelation and the Islamic order, which is considered perfect and comprehensive. Azyumardi Azra, in his book *Liberal and Fundamental Islam*, explains that radical groups tend to reject secularization because they see it as part of a systematic effort to reduce Islam to a purely private matter. For them, secularization is understood not only as the separation of religion from the state, but also as the complete removal of religion from the public sphere (Azra, 2002b).

Jihadist groups in Indonesia often accuse ideas like Tibi's as a compromise to corrupting Western influence. Secularization, in their view, not only contradicts sharia but also destroys the holistic social structure of Islam. They reject a contextual approach to religious texts, preferring a purer, literal interpretation. A study published in the *Ulumuddin Journal* explains that textualist groups consider secularization a serious threat to the integrity of Islamic teachings. For them, a contextual understanding of religious teachings actually opens up opportunities for moral relativism and the degradation of values (Iqbal, 2019).

Reactions to the ideas of secularization and Westernization cannot be separated from the broader global context. In many Muslim countries, economic inequality, political crises, and global injustices have fueled anti-Western sentiment (Dana, 2018). United States military intervention in the Middle East, support for authoritarian regimes, and double standards on the Palestinian issue and Islamophobia reinforce the belief that the West is hostile to Islam (Aziz, 2023). In this context, rejection of secularization often becomes part of the anti-Western rhetoric used by radical groups to strengthen their ideological identity. They spread the narrative that Islam is under systematic attack, both physically and culturally.

This phenomenon occurs not only in Muslim-majority countries but also in diaspora Muslim communities in the West. In various European countries, there is a tug-of-war between efforts to integrate Muslims and the rejection of dominant values considered secular and individualistic. Some Muslim intellectuals in the West, such as (Ramadan, 2009), attempts to offer an inclusive European model of Islam. However, such efforts are often viewed by radical Islamists as a form of assimilation and adjustment that sacrifices Islamic principles.

Bassam Tibi himself recognizes that his approach will face opposition from two sides: from radicals who reject pluralism and from radical secularists who reject the presence of Islam in the public sphere (Tibi, 2012).

In the Euro-Islamic concept he developed, Tibi suggested that Muslims in Europe and other democratic countries integrate Islamic values into the framework of modern civil society (Tibi, 2008b). Islam, in this view, remains a source of ethics and spiritual inspiration, but it is not used as a basis for building an exclusive political system that rejects plurality. Euro-Islam does not seek to subordinate Islam to the West, but rather offers a middle ground between Islamic identity and democratic citizenship (Tibi, 2007a). In this way, Islam can play an active role in the public sphere without giving rise to identity conflicts or ideological domination.

The rejection of secularization by jihadist groups is also often accompanied by a rejection of individual rights, freedom of expression, and the principle of gender equality (Mancini & Cohen, 2020). They view all these concepts as Western products that have no place in an ideal Islamic system. In their narrative, the Islamic system is the only legitimate system, while other systems are considered fragile and misguided man-made products (Rahman, 2021). Therefore, any attempt to dialogue between Islam and modernity is considered a form of betrayal of religion.

Ironically, groups that reject secularization are actually utilizing modern instruments such as information technology, social media, and transnational networks to spread their ideologies. The internet has become a space they use to spread propaganda, recruit supporters, and construct counter-narratives against democracy and pluralism (Ummah, 2020). In this case, they reject modernity ideologically, but they utilize it practically (Morris, 2022). This phenomenon shows that resistance to modernity is not always consistent, but is often selective and ideological.

Tibi's idea of the need for Islamic reform based on a modern context cannot be separated from the greater mission of avoiding a clash of civilizations. In an increasingly interconnected world, Tibi believes that Islam must not withdraw from global discourse. Instead, through active engagement and a critical attitude toward modernity, Islam can be part of the solution to various global crises. However, this engagement requires an open mind, a willingness to engage in dialogue, and the courage to overhaul old narratives that are exclusive and suspicious of those who differ (Tibi, 2024a).

Thus, the debate about the westernization and secularization of Islam actually reflects a tug of war between the need to survive in a changing world and the desire to maintain religious identity. (Tibi, 2008a) chose to be open to change while remaining grounded in Islamic moral principles. This choice was unpopular among scripturalist circles, but it was precisely therein that his intellectual contribution lay. He sought to demonstrate that Islam need not be reactive to modernity but can be an active partner in shaping a more humane civilization.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examines the ideological differences between Bassam Tibi's reformist thinking and the responses of jihadist groups in Indonesia. Bassam Tibi emphasized the importance of a contextual reinterpretation of Islam so that it could interact constructively with modern values such as democracy, human rights, and pluralism. He rejected the concepts of the Islamic state and the caliphate, and considered jihadism a deviation from the authentic meaning of jihad, which should be rooted in Islamic moral ethics and spirituality.

In contrast, jihadist groups viewed Tibi's ideas as a threat to the purity of Islamic teachings. They rejected secularization, contextual interpretation, and democratic values, believing them to undermine Islam's position as a comprehensive system of life. In their view, Islam encompasses inseparable political and military aspects, thus deeming any attempt at reform a dangerous form of Westernization.

Using a qualitative descriptive approach and content analysis methods, this study successfully identified the most fundamental points of difference between Tibi's ideas and those of jihadist groups, particularly in the definition of jihad, the concept of the Islamic state, and Islam's relationship with modernity. This research makes a significant contribution to deconstructing the narrative of religious extremism through an academic approach that prioritizes dialogue between Islam and universal human values.

These findings emphasize the importance of developing open, contextual, and inclusive Islamic thought, especially amidst increasing conservative and radical tendencies in contemporary Muslim societies. This research also enriches the discourse on Islamic thought by demonstrating that Islam does not have to be in opposition to modernity but can be an active partner in building a more just, pluralistic, and humane civilization.

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