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Politicizing the Sacred: Conflict and Power in Contemporary Qur'anic Interpretation

Politikasi Teks Suci: Konflik dan Relasi Kuasa dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Kontemporer

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Abstract

This study examines how political conflicts in the Middle East have shaped contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. Using a qualitative library-based approach, it integrates critical hermeneutics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze major exegetical works across different ideological traditions. The findings reveal three dominant patterns of interpretation: revolutionary (haraki), pro-regime apologetic, and extremist jihadist exegesis. These interpretations function not only as theological expressions but also as instruments of political legitimacy, reflecting a reciprocal relationship between conflict and religious discourse. The study further demonstrates how power relations, ideological interests, and socio-political contexts influence the production and dissemination of Qur'anic meaning. By combining Qur'anic studies with political Islam and discourse analysis, this research contributes to a more contextual and critical understanding of tafsir. It also highlights the importance of developing inclusive, context-sensitive interpretations as part of broader efforts toward deradicalization and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Qur'anic Hermeneutics; Political Conflict; Political Islam; Critical Discourse Analysis; Ideological Exegesis

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana konflik politik di Timur Tengah membentuk tafsir Al-Qur'an kontemporer. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan hermeneutika kritis dan Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) untuk menganalisis karya-karya tafsir dari berbagai tradisi ideologis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga pola utama tafsir, yaitu tafsir revolusioner (haraki), apologetik pro-rezim, dan jihadis ekstrem. Tafsir tersebut tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai ekspresi teologis, tetapi juga sebagai instrumen legitimasi politik, yang mencerminkan hubungan timbal balik antara konflik dan wacana keagamaan. Studi ini juga menunjukkan bahwa relasi kuasa, kepentingan ideologis, dan konteks sosial-politik sangat memengaruhi produksi dan penyebaran makna Al-Qur'an. Dengan pendekatan interdisipliner, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan studi tafsir yang lebih kontekstual dan kritis, serta mendukung upaya deradikalisasi melalui interpretasi yang inklusif.

Kata Kunci: Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an; Konflik Politik; Islam Politik; Analisis Wacana Kritis; Tafsir Ideologis



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INTRODUCTION

The Middle East has been a stage for unrelenting political conflict for more than seven decades. From the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, to the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, to the Arab Spring waves that swept the region from 2010 onward, complex geopolitical dynamics have continuously reshaped the social, political, and religious order of the Islamic world. What is particularly striking is that behind every escalation of these conflicts, there has always been a massive production of religious narratives by ruling regimes and armed opposition groups alike to construct legitimacy for their actions. This phenomenon is not merely an incidental correlation, but rather a reflection of how sacred texts, including the Qur'an, have been systematically instrumentalized as ideological justifications in armed conflict and power struggles. Reports from various conflict research institutions note that more than 60 percent of conflicts in the post-1979 Middle East have involved the use of religious narratives as tools for mass mobilization, a figure that confirms how deeply religion and politics are intertwined in this region.¹

An equally striking social fact is the profound transformation in the character of Qur'anic interpretation as a direct response to existing political pressures. Before the era of modern conflict, the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis tended to be academic and philological in nature, emphasizing linguistic analysis, historical context, and the elaboration of Islamic jurisprudence. However, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, a new wave of interpretation emerged, one oriented toward *haraki* (movement-based), revolutionary, and even jihadist purposes, explicitly linking Qur'anic texts to contemporary political agendas. Organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Palestine each developed its own Qur'anic hermeneutics tailored to its respective struggles. More striking still, when authoritarian regimes such as Nasser's Egypt or Iran's Wilayat al-Faqih system employed similar approaches, selectively citing Qur'anic verses to justify their consolidation of power, it became evident that the politicization of interpretation had become a cross-ideological strategy universally practiced across the Middle East.²

Recent academic scholarship has empirically confirmed that the relationship between political conflict and Qur'anic interpretation is a phenomenon that can be systematically verified. Thekkuveetil (2025), in a study on the contemporary relevance of Sayyid Qutb's exegesis, affirms that *Tafsir fi Zilal al-Qur'an* was a direct response to Egypt's socio-political conditions under the Nasser regime, in which Qutb's interpretation of the concept of *hākimiyyah* (divine sovereignty) functioned simultaneously as a critique of state secularism and as a legitimation of armed resistance.³ Purnomo, in a study on the politicization of religion in the Middle East before and after the Arab Spring, documents how the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt underwent a dramatic ideological transformation, from a moderate reformist movement to a revolutionary force, driven in large part by the reinterpretation of Qur'anic texts under intensifying political pressure.⁴ Sani critically analyzes elements of radicalism in the *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* and finds that Qutb's radical views did not emerge from an intellectual vacuum, but were a direct product of

1 Hoshmand A Azeez and Haidar Lashkry, "The Rise of Religious Conflicts in the Islamic World and Its Effects: The First Three Centuries AH," *Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2024): 118–31.

2 Are John Knudsen, "Political Islam in the Middle East," *CMI Report* 2003, no. 3 (2003).

3 Muhammed Afsal Thekkuveetil, "The Relevance of Sayyid Qutb's 'Tafsir Fi Zilal Al-Quran' in the Modern Context," *Al-Bunyan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 62–71.

4 Mush'ab Muqaddas Eka Purnomo, "Dinamika Politisasi Agama Di Timur Tengah Pra Dan Pasca-Arab Spring: Studi Kasus Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun Di Mesir" (Maarif, 2018).

his experience of physical torture in Nasser's prisons and his profound disillusionment with the politically subjugated condition of the Muslim world.⁵

A study published in *At-Taisir: Journal of Indonesian Tafsir Studies*, specifically traces antisemitic undertones in the exegeses of two major figures, Sayyid Qutb from the Sunni tradition and Sayyid Husayn Fadlallah from the Shia tradition, and finds that both produced ideologically charged interpretations of verses concerning the Children of Israel as a direct response to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.⁶ Maram, in a study of Hasan Al-Turabi's political-ideological reasoning, demonstrates how a leader of Sudan's Islamic movement employed a *tawhid*-based Qur'anic hermeneutic to build legitimacy for an Islamic revolution while simultaneously offering an alternative to the Western political order.⁷ Rohman examines efforts to de-radicalize the concept of jihad in Al-Qushairi's exegesis and finds that this Sufi commentary effectively offers a counter-narrative to jihadist interpretations, though its reach remains limited as it is overshadowed by politically oriented exegeses.⁸ Mostfa, in a comprehensive study on the relationship between violence and jihad in the Qur'an, finds that radical Islamist movements have distorted the historical memory of jihad verses by reducing them exclusively to arguments for war and combat, thereby making political interpretation a shortcut for legitimizing military agendas, a pattern directly linked to the dynamics of political conflict across the Middle East.⁹

Based on the social facts and literature reviewed above, this research is designed to achieve three interrelated primary objectives. First, to systematically analyze the correlation between the dynamics of political conflict in the Middle East, encompassing the Arab-Israeli Wars, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the Arab Spring of 2010–2013, and the development of Qur'anic interpretive trends over the same period, to identify patterns of causality that can be academically verified. Second, to identify and classify new interpretive tendencies that emerged in response to these conflicts, including revolutionary exegesis legitimizing armed resistance, apologetic exegesis defending the political status quo, and reformist exegesis offering moderation amid polarization. Third, to assess the impact of the politicization of Qur'anic interpretation on the religious understanding of Muslim communities more broadly, including measuring its potential to drive either radicalization or moderation, while considering the practical implications for deradicalization programs and the construction of inclusive religious narratives in the contemporary Muslim world. In this way, the research is not merely descriptive but explicitly critical, aiming to expose the mechanisms of power relations operating behind the production of exegetical texts in conflict situations, as well as to provide concrete recommendations for purifying interpretation from ideological biases.

This research rests on two mutually reinforcing foundational assumptions. The first assumption holds that Qur'anic interpretation is not an intellectual activity conducted in a vacuum, but is always shaped by the socio-historical context of the interpreter, including the political pressures he or she faces. This assumption draws on the premise of contemporary hermeneutics that every text acquires its meaning through interaction with the reader's situation, and that asymmetrical power relations, such as those present in armed conflict or political repression, can

5 Azwar Sani, "Radikalisme Dan Ekstremisme Dalam Pemikiran Sayyid Qutb: Tinjauan Kritis Atas Tafsir Fi-Zilalil Qur'an," *Al-Misykab: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 2 (2023): 157–78.

6 Mohamad Mualim, Muhammad Ulinnuha, and Hamdani Anwar, "Antisemitisme Dalam Tafsir Haraki: Studi Kritis-Komparatif Tafsir Pergerakan," *AT-TAISIR: Journal of Indonesian Tafsir Studies* 6, no. 2 (2025): 283–95.

7 Ahmad Nabilul Maram, "Nalar Ideologi Politik Hasan Al-Turabi Dalam Tafsir Al-Tawhidi," 2023.

8 M Minanur Rohman, "De-Radicalization of Interpretation the Concept of Jihad in Tafsir Al-Qusyairi," *Jurnal At-Tibyan: Jurnal Ilmu Alqur'an Dan Tafsir* 5, no. 2 (2020): 325–44.

9 Ali Mostfa, "Violence and Jihad in Islam: From the War of Words to the Clashes of Definitions," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 966.

systematically distort the interpretive process. The second assumption holds that there is a significant positive correlation between the intensity of political conflict and the degree of politicization of religious interpretation: the more acute and prolonged a conflict, the greater the likelihood that ideologically laden Qur'anic interpretations will emerge. Based on these two assumptions, the research advances the following working hypothesis: political conflicts in the Middle East since the mid-twentieth century have given rise to at least three variants of ideologically oriented Qur'anic interpretation, namely *haraki*/revolutionary exegesis, pro-regime apologetic exegesis, and extremist jihadist exegesis, each representing a distinct response to prevailing power relations; and that these interpretive variants, if allowed to dominate religious discourse without adequate counter-narratives, risk deepening internal polarization within the Muslim community and impeding efforts toward reconciliation and peace in the contemporary Middle East.

Method

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical library research design, as its primary object consists of contemporary Qur'anic exegetical texts requiring in-depth interpretive analysis rather than quantitative measurement. A qualitative approach is essential for examining the complex interplay between religious discourse, political conflict, and underlying power structures.¹⁰ The research integrates two complementary frameworks: critical hermeneutics, used to interpret texts within their historical and socio-political contexts, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), used to uncover embedded ideologies and power relations within linguistic constructions. This combined approach enables not only an examination of what interpretations state, but also why they emerge in specific political contexts and whose interests they serve, positioning the study at the intersection of Qur'anic exegesis and political Islam.

Data sources are divided into primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include major contemporary exegetical works shaped by conflict contexts, such as *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* by Sayyid Qutb, *Tafsir al-Manar* by Muhammad Rashid Rida, and *Min Wahyi al-Qur'an* by Sayyid Husayn Fadlallah, selected based on their temporal proximity to political events and ideological relevance.¹¹ Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, and institutional reports. Data were collected through systematic searches in databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and DOAJ, using purposive sampling based on temporal relevance, ideological diversity (Sunni, Shia, reformist), and academic credibility.

Data analysis follows three integrated stages. First, textual analysis using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model (micro, meso, macro levels) to examine linguistic features, discursive practices, and socio-political contexts.¹² Second, comparative-historical analysis to trace shifts in interpretation across different conflict periods.¹³ Third, intertextual analysis to identify how interpretations are transmitted, adapted, or contested across exegetical traditions.¹⁴ The findings are interpreted through Foucault's theory of power relations and Gramsci's concept of hegemony, enabling the study to reveal how certain interpretations gain dominance in conflict settings and how alternative, moderate narratives may emerge as counter-discourses.

10 Aris Munandar, "Dynamics of Islam and Politics in the Middle East Region:(Analysis of Conflicts, Roles, and Future Challenges)," *An-Nur International Journal of Islamic Thought* 2, no. 1 (2024): 23–33.

11 Muhammad Yusry Affandy bin Md Isa and Muhammad Syahmi bin Shakhruddin, "Sayyid Qutb's Interpretations: A Focus on Political Concepts," *Ma' alim Al-Qur'an Wa Al-Sunnah* 20, no. 1 (2024): 45–64.

12 Munif Zariruddin Fikri Nordin, "Ilm Al-Tafsir and Critical Discourse Analysis: A Methodological Comparison," *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies* 15, no. 1 (2015): 129–42.

13 M Munawan, "A Critical Discourse Analysis Dalam Kajian Tafsir Alquran: Studi Tafsir Al-Azhar Karya Hamka" (Tajdid, 2018).

14 Mostfa, "Violence and Jihad in Islam: From the War of Words to the Clashes of Definitions."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Influence of Political Conflict on Qur'anic Interpretation

Political conflict in the Middle East has resulted in the systematic politicization of Qur'anic verses, particularly those relating to jihad, the caliphate, and the concept of *ummah*. Verses that were originally revealed within specific socio-historical contexts have been stripped of those contexts and deployed as rhetorical weapons in political struggles. For instance, QS. At-Taubah: 29: “فَاتُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ” (*Fight those who do not believe in God*), which speaks of defensive warfare in the context of the Prophet's relations with the People of the Book during the Medinan period, is frequently cited in partial form by militant groups to legitimize conflict against non-Muslims in the modern era. Similarly, Q.S. Al-Anfal: 60, concerning the preparation of military strength, is often interpreted literally without consideration of its *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). Mostfa demonstrates that radical Islamist movements distort the historical memory of jihad verses by reducing them to mere arguments for war, while ignoring their ethical and spiritual meanings, which are, quantitatively speaking, far more dominant throughout the Qur'an.¹⁵ This politicization creates a dangerous paradox: the Qur'an, which functions as a universal book of guidance, is instead instrumentalized as propaganda by warring parties, thereby aggravating conflict rather than alleviating it.

At least three distinct interpretive tendencies in Qur'anic exegesis have emerged as direct responses to political conflict in the Middle East. The first is the ideological-revolutionary exegesis pioneered by Sayyid Qutb through his work *Fi Zilāl al-Qur'an*. This exegesis became the blueprint for political Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir, which interpreted verses concerning *shūrā* (consultation) and Q.S. Al-Ma'idah: 44 as proof of the obligation to establish an Islamic state. Sani affirms that Qutb's radical views did not emerge from an intellectual vacuum, but were a direct product of his experience of physical torture in Nasser's prisons and his profound disillusionment with the political condition of the Muslim world, clear evidence that the context of conflict directly distorts religious hermeneutics.¹⁶ The second is the reformist exegesis developed by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, which distinguishes between the universal message of the Qur'an and its historical interpretation, and advocates for reconciliation between Islamic teachings and the principles of human rights. The third is the literalist-fundamentalist Salafi-Jihadist exegesis, which adheres rigidly to the literal meaning of verses relating to violence without regard for contemporary context or the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (higher objectives of Islamic law). These three tendencies reflect the fragmentation of religious understanding in the post-conflict Muslim world.¹⁷

The divergence in interpretations of Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 190–193 on warfare constitutes the most illustrative case study of the influence of political conflict on Qur'anic hermeneutics. Militant groups emphasize the phrase *wa qātīlū fī sabīlillāh* (and fight in the path of God) as legitimization for offensive attacks against secular governments or groups deemed enemies of Islam, while moderate scholars interpret it within the framework of defensive jihad, which must conform to the ethics of Islamic warfare. The Syrian conflict in particular has shown how the concepts of *fitnah* (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 191) and *bughāt* (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 9) became contested grounds of interpretation between the two warring sides. The Syrian opposition interpreted *fitnah* as the tyranny of the Assad regime that must be resisted, while government supporters labeled the

15 Mostfa, “Violence and Jihad in Islam: From the War of Words to the Clashes of Definitions.”

16 Sani, “Radikalisme Dan Ekstremisme Dalam Pemikiran Sayyid Qutb: Tinjauan Kritis Atas Tafsir Fi-Zilalil Qur'an.”

17 Thekkuveetil, “The Relevance of Sayyid Qutb's ‘Tafsir Fi Zilal Al-Quran’ in the Modern Context.”

opposition *bughāt*, rebels against a legitimate ruler. El-Refaee, drawing on Abu Zayd's methodology, explains that the Qur'an is in essence a discursive battlefield in which every conflicting party seeks to place its political position under the authority of the sacred text, a dynamic that has been empirically verified in the Syrian case.¹⁸ This phenomenon reveals that Qur'anic interpretation is not only shaped by conflict but also actively constructs the narratives and justifications of the warring parties.

The tension between textual and contextual approaches to Qur'anic interpretation has become the central issue underlying hermeneutical polarization in the contemporary Muslim world. The textual-literal approach, dominant among Salafi-Wahhabis, adheres to the authority of classical scholars and rejects any form of contextual interpretation as *bid'ah* (reprehensible innovation). This approach is particularly vulnerable to political instrumentalization because of its inability to distinguish between the universal message of the Qur'an and its specific responses to seventh-century historical conditions. By contrast, the contextual approach, championed by Fazlur Rahman through his *double movement* method, and by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd through his theory of *naṣṣ lughawi*, emphasizes the importance of reading the Qur'an within the socio-historical context of its revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) while extracting its universal principles for application to contemporary challenges. Purnomo documents how the Muslim Brotherhood transformed a moderate reformist movement into a revolutionary force, driven largely by a methodological shift in exegesis from the contextual to the literal-ideological under Qutb's influence, a pattern that has recurred across various political Islamic movements throughout the Middle East.¹⁹

This methodological rivalry between textual and contextual exegesis carries very real geopolitical implications. The textual approach is exploited by militant groups to justify violence, while the contextual approach provides the intellectual foundation for reform and moderation.²⁰ The contrast between Qutb's ideological exegesis and Al-Qaradawi's moderating exegesis, despite both emerging from the Muslim Brotherhood tradition, reflects the full spectrum that exists between these two poles. Studies on the theoretical foundations of contextual exegesis within the Islamic tradition demonstrate that contextualization is not a foreign modern innovation, but in fact has roots in classical Islamic theological tradition, including the schools of *kalam* and philosophical Sufism.²¹ From a broader perspective, Qutb's *haraki* exegesis has proven to be a reference point for the construction of antisemitic narratives in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a phenomenon documented in considerable detail in the *At-Taisir* study.²² Accordingly, efforts to deradicalize interpretation, such as those developed in Al-Qushairi's exegesis, which employs a Sufi approach to reconstruct the meaning of jihad as spiritual struggle, become increasingly urgent as a counter-narrative to the politicization of the Qur'an.²³ These findings affirm the central argument of this research: that political conflict in the Middle East has structurally transformed the hermeneutical landscape of Qur'anic interpretation, and that

18 E EL-REFAEE, "Islam And Women's Rights: Abu Zayd's Hermeneutical Reading Of The Quran," *ROWAQ ARABI* Ученые.м.: Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies 29, no. 1 (2024).

19 Purnomo, "Dinamika Politisasi Agama Di Timur Tengah Pra Dan Pasca-Arab Spring: Studi Kasus Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun Di Mesir."

20 Pratama, Muhammad Yusuf, Luthfi Rahman, Mokh Sya'roni, Yasser Mulla Shadra, and Muhammad Alwi HS. 2025. "Aestheticizing Coexistence: Public Perceptions of the Istiqlal-Cathedral Tunnel on Social Media". *KARSA: Jurnal Sosial Dan Budaya Keislaman (Journal of Social and Islamic Culture)* 33 (2), 453-80. <https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v33i2.20836>.

21 Halim Calis, "The Theoretical Foundations of Contextual Interpretation of the Qur'an in Islamic Theological Schools and Philosophical Sufism," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 188.

22 Mualim, Ulinnuha, and Anwar, "Antisemitisme Dalam Tafsir Haraki: Studi Kritik-Komparatif Tafsir Pergerakan."

23 Rohman, "De-Radicalization of Interpretation the Concept of Jihad in Tafsir Al-Qusyairi."

without serious methodological intervention, interpretive polarization will continue to deepen the internal divisions within the Muslim community.²⁴

Global Responses to Middle Eastern Conflict

The prolonged conflicts afflicting Muslim communities across the world — in Palestine, among the Rohingya, and among the Uyghurs — have consistently reinforced interpretations of Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 10, *innamā al-mu'minūna ikhwah fa-aṣliḥū bayna akhawaykum* (The believers are but brothers, so make peace between your brothers), as a binding mandate for transnational solidarity. This verse has been reinterpreted not merely as a theological statement, but as a politico-humanitarian command requiring all Muslims to respond to the suffering of fellow Muslims wherever it occurs. Zayyadi and Ubaidillah document how economic boycott movements carried out by Muslims in various countries in response to the Palestinian conflict explicitly invoke interpretations of Qur'anic verses on justice and unity (*ukhunnwāb islamiyyah*) as their theological justification.²⁵ Alharbi affirms that the concept of *ummah* in Islam is inherently trans-spatial and trans-temporal, transcending national borders and integrating social responsibility with theological obligation, such that the suffering of one Muslim community is normatively a shared responsibility of all Muslims worldwide.²⁶ This interpretation has been translated into tangible action in the form of humanitarian donations, diplomatic pressure, public awareness campaigns, and boycotts of products from countries deemed complicit in the oppression of Muslims.

Nevertheless, there exists a highly significant gap between the idealism of Qur'anic interpretation regarding brotherhood (*ukhunnwāb islamiyyah*) and the political reality of a Muslim world segmented by national interests, sectarian rivalries, and diplomatic and economic calculations. Haruna empirically demonstrates that sectarian fragmentation and geopolitical dynamics within the Muslim world have structurally weakened the capacity for collective *ummah* solidarity. Wealthy Muslim-majority countries in the Gulf region prioritize economic alliances with global powers over Qur'anic obligations toward Palestine, Yemen, and Somalia.²⁷ The most illustrative case is the Muslim world's response to the Uyghur crisis in China: despite the Qur'an's injunction to defend oppressed fellow Muslims, the majority of Muslim-majority governments have chosen silence to preserve their economic ties with Beijing. Missbach and Adiputera, in their study of ASEAN countries' treatment of Rohingya refugees, demonstrate that declarations of Muslim solidarity made by politicians function more as tools for domestic voter mobilization than as sincere expressions of *ummah* conviction grounded in consistent and holistic Qur'anic interpretation.²⁸

Social media has dramatically transformed the way Qur'anic interpretations regarding *ummah* solidarity are disseminated and activated in the context of contemporary global conflict. Digital campaigns such as #FreePalestine, #SaveRohingya, and #StandWithUyghur function not only

24 Munandar, "Dynamics of Islam and Politics in the Middle East Region: (Analysis of Conflicts, Roles, and Future Challenges)."; Salum Mussa Haruna, "Sectarianism and Fragmentation in the Muslim World: A Qur'anic and Hadith Perspective on the Causes, Consequences, and Path to Unity," *Dirasah International Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 42–63.

25 Ach Zayyadi and Ubaidillah Ubaidillah, "Boycott in the Perspective of the Quran: Interpretation of Rejecting Actions That Reflect Justice and Unity of the Ummah," *AL-WIJDĀN Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 9, no. 3 (2024): 434–57.

26 Ahlam Alharbi, "Spatiotemporal Solidarity Discourses and Practices in Islam: Mobilizing Identity in Crisis," *Critical Research on Religion* 13, no. 2 (2025): 164–83.

27 Haruna, "Sectarianism and Fragmentation in the Muslim World: A Qur'anic and Hadith Perspective on the Causes, Consequences, and Path to Unity."

28 Antje Missbach and Gunnar Stange, "Muslim Solidarity and the Lack of Effective Protection for Rohingya Refugees in Southeast Asia," *Social Sciences* 10, no. 5 (2021): 166.

as political advocacy but also as vehicles for popular interpretation that connect Muslim suffering with Qur’anic verses and hadiths on brotherhood. Viral content combining images of conflict victims with quotations from sacred texts generates profound emotional responses and drives cross-border engagement on a scale previously unprecedented in history. Meiliani et al. (2024) find that Twitter/X, in the context of the 2023 Palestinian conflict, transformed from a mere communication channel into a strategic space linking online activism with real-world action, street demonstrations, boycott campaigns, and cross-border fundraising.²⁹ This phenomenon marks a paradigmatic transformation: Qur’anic interpretation is no longer the exclusive domain of religious scholars in academic institutions, but has been fully democratized through digital platforms, enabling anyone to become an agent of production and distribution of religious exegesis, a development that brings both enormous opportunities and serious risks to the quality of religious understanding within the community.

Digital platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, and TikTok enable *ummah* solidarity narratives grounded in Qur’anic interpretation to spread across geographical and political boundaries at a speed unprecedented in the history of Islam. Attaallah (2022) demonstrates that hashtag activism constitutes an effective alternative pathway for the transnationalization of protest movements — a dynamic that directly influences how Qur’anic verses on justice and resistance to oppression are cited, popularized, and reinterpreted in global public discourse.³⁰ However, the negative dimensions of this phenomenon cannot be overlooked. The algorithms of social media platforms, designed to maximize user engagement, have been scientifically shown to encourage the formation of echo chambers, situations in which users are exposed only to information and religious interpretations that confirm pre-existing beliefs, without adequate contextual understanding of the true complexity of the conflicts in question. Cinelli et al. empirically demonstrate, using data from Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, that the echo chamber effect on social media reinforces opinion polarization and significantly facilitates the spread of disinformation, findings highly relevant to the dissemination of ideologically charged Qur’anic interpretations among the global Muslim community.³¹

The dynamics of disinformation and discursive fragmentation within the social media ecosystem carry serious implications for the quality and accuracy of Qur’anic interpretations circulating in the digital public sphere. Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson explain that disinformation on social media circulates as adversarial narratives embedded within identity-based controversies, a pattern highly relevant to Muslim conflict contexts, in which selective quotations of Qur’anic verses, stripped of adequate theological context, are frequently weaponized as propaganda by various interested parties.³² This condition widens the gulf between methodologically rigorous academic interpretation and emotionally reactive popular exegesis, thereby deepening the polarization of religious understanding within the Muslim community. Khan et al. affirm that although sentiments of *ummah* solidarity toward the Uyghur community continue to grow on social media, the absence of adequate knowledge about the geopolitical context means that such solidarity frequently fails to translate into concrete and sustained political pressure.³³ Mohammed and

29 Adinda Meiliani, Putri Ayu Zahra Dewi, and Wardah Destia Urfa, “The Effectiveness of Twitter-Based Social Movements in the 2023 Attack on Palestine,” *Journal of Politics and Democracy* 4, no. 1 (2024): 65–78.

30 Nisreen Attaallah, “Hashtag Activism: An Alternative Pathway for the Transnationalization of Protests a Case Study Of# SaveSheikhJarrah,” *Journal of Alternative & Community Media* 7, no. 2 (2023): 157–77.

31 Matteo Cinelli et al., “The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 9 (2021): e2023301118.

32 Carlos Diaz Ruiz and Tomas Nilsson, “Disinformation and Echo Chambers: How Disinformation Circulates on Social Media through Identity-Driven Controversies,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 42, no. 1 (2023): 18–35.

33 Shahd Fulath Khan et al., “Uniting the Ummah: Strategies to Foster Solidarity with Uyghur Muslims,” *Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research*, 2023, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.65061/JGBC7523>.

Jureidini conclude that the modern nation-state system has structurally undermined the principles of *ummah* as taught in the Qur'an – a reality that demands contextual reinterpretation of the concept of Islamic brotherhood within the framework of international law and contemporary geopolitical order, rather than relying solely on emotionally driven social media mobilization that remains vulnerable to manipulation and distortion.³⁴

The Impact of Conflict on Contemporary Qur'anic Interpretation

Political conflict in the Middle East has created sharp polarization in Qur'anic interpretation, particularly concerning the concept of jihad and the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Militant groups consistently cite Q.S. Al-Anfal: 60 — *wa a'iddū labum mā ista'atū min quwwah* (Prepare against them whatever force you are able), as legitimization for offensive violent action, disregarding the historical context of the verse, which was revealed in a defensive atmosphere following the Battle of Badr, and the principle of proportionality in Islamic warfare. Mostfa (2021) demonstrates that radical Islamist movements have distorted the historical meaning of jihad verses by reducing them exclusively to arguments for war (*ḥarb, qitāl*), thereby seeking military solutions for contemporary political agendas.³⁵ On the opposing side, moderate scholars emphasize verses of peace and coexistence, such as Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13 — *inna akramakum 'indallāhi atqākum* (Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous), affirming that human dignity is measured by piety, not cultural identity or military strength. This dichotomy between literalist-militant and contextual-adaptive interpretation is a direct consequence of the politicization of sacred texts in the context of armed conflict, and the central challenge lies in preserving the authenticity of Islamic teachings while preventing the exploitation of those texts to justify political violence.³⁶

The dynamics of Middle Eastern conflict have driven the emergence of more historically and contextually grounded approaches to Qur'anic hermeneutics as an intellectual response to the crisis of interpretation. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd pioneered a methodology that views the Qur'an as a *naṣṣ lughawī* (linguistic text) fundamentally tied to the cultural and socio-historical context of its revelation, an approach that enables a rereading of war-related verses within the framework of universal human ethics. El-Refaee explains that Abu Zayd regarded the Qur'an as a “discursive battlefield” in which every interpreter positions their political stance under the authority of the text — a critical awareness that serves as the foundation for deconstructing violence-biased interpretations.³⁷ Meanwhile, Fazlur Rahman, through his *double movement* method, proposed a two-stage reading: first, understanding the Qur'anic message within its seventh-century socio-historical context; and second, extracting its universal principles and applying them relevantly to modern challenges. Ahmad maps how Rahman and Arkoun together offer a reformist hermeneutics emphasizing social justice, peaceful conflict resolution, and the rereading of war-related verses as historical documents inseparable from their political context.³⁸

34 Hossameldeen Mohammed and Ray Jureidini, “Umma and the Nation-State: Dilemmas in Refugee Ethics,” *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 7, no. 1 (2022): 17.

35 Mostfa, “Violence and Jihad in Islam: From the War of Words to the Clashes of Definitions.”

36 Asep Sulhadi, “Recontextualizing Maqasid Al-Shariah in Contemporary Qur'anic Exegesis: A Comparative Study of Jasser Auda and Classical Scholars,” *SAMAWAT: Journal Of Hadith and Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2024): 29–39.

37 EL-REFAEE, “Islam And Women's Rights: Abu Zayd's Hermeneutical Reading Of The Quran.”

38 Humaira Ahmad, “Mapping Neo-Modern and Postmodern Qur'anic Reformist Discourse in the Intellectual Legacy of Fazlur Rahman and Mohammed Arkoun,” *Religions* 14, no. 5 (2023): 595.

Global media plays a role that is both crucial and problematic in shaping Muslim perceptions of Qur’anic verses relating to conflict. Western media’s systematic association of the term “jihad” with terrorism has been shown to significantly influence the understanding of both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. Bleich and van der Veen (2021), in an empirical study of 784,000 newspaper articles spanning 21 years, find that the average article mentioning Muslims or Islam in Western media is more negative than 84 percent of articles about other groups — a figure confirming the existence of systematic bias that directly shapes public perception of religious concepts such as jihad.³⁹ This representational bias provokes defensive reactions from segments of the Muslim community who feel their religious teachings are being misrepresented, which in turn gives rise to two conflicting interpretive currents: first, an apologetic exegesis that seeks to rehabilitate the image of Islam by selectively emphasizing the peaceful aspects of the Qur’an; and second, a reactive-defensive exegesis that instead adopts the conflict narrative as confirmation of the systematic persecution of Muslims. Both currents produce interpretations that are incomplete and distorted by external agendas.

Conflict in the Middle East has also strengthened Muslim feminist movements seeking to deconstruct traditionally gender-biased exegesis as part of a broader hermeneutical reform. This movement is grounded in the argument that it is patriarchal bias — not the Qur’anic text itself — that has produced unjust interpretations of women, particularly in matters such as family law, women’s roles in conflict, and political leadership. The *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* (objectives of Islamic law) approach developed by Yasser Auda offers an alternative framework emphasizing the protection of life, intellect, lineage, property, and honor as the universal purposes of Islamic law — a framework that enables inclusive reinterpretation without abandoning the authenticity of the Qur’an. Zomorod demonstrates that *maqāṣid*-based exegesis is not a foreign modern innovation, but has roots in the classical Islamic exegetical tradition, making it more readily accepted by a broader audience than Western hermeneutical frameworks.⁴⁰ Nadia and Faoziah, in their critical study of gender justice in the Qur’an, affirm that Muslim feminist exegesis, pioneered by Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Fatima Mernissi, constitutes a legitimate intellectual response to the hermeneutical exclusivism that has dominated the production of exegesis for centuries, including in conflict contexts that position women simultaneously as victims and as actors whose rights are contested.⁴¹

The protection of human life as a universal Qur’anic principle — explicitly enshrined in Q.S. Al-Ma’idah: 32, *man qatala nafsān biḡhayri nafsīn aw fasādin fī al-ardī fa-ka’annamā qatala al-nāsa jamī’an* (Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption in the land, it is as if he has slain all of mankind) — constitutes the most powerful theological foundation for interfaith dialogue and the reconstruction of a more humanistic interpretation. Abdel and Tarshany affirm that this verse unequivocally declares the universal value of human life by equating the killing of one soul with the killing of all humanity, a principle that is not only theologically compelling but also compatible with international human rights standards.⁴² Akbar and Saeed, in their critical examination of Abu Zayd’s approach to the concept of *hākimiyyah*, demonstrate that contextual-hermeneutical methodology is capable of deconstructing the ideological use of the concept of

39 Erik Bleich and A Maurits van der Veen, “Media Portrayals of Muslims: A Comparative Sentiment Analysis of American Newspapers, 1996–2015,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 9, no. 1 (2021): 20–39.

40 Faridah Zomorod, “The Fundamentals (Usul) of Maqasidi Tafsir: An Investigation of the Concept and Its Applications in the Views of Early and Modern-Day Scholars,” *Journal of Contemporary Maqasid Studies* 2, no. 1 (2023): 1–34.

41 Zunly Nadia and Niswatin Faoziah, “Gender Equality within Family in Islamic Perspective: Insights from The Hadiths of Ummul Mukminin,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Hadis* 25, no. 1 (2024): 161–86.

42 Yasser Mohammed Abdel and Rahman Tarshany, “Protection of Life in Islamic Law,” *Int J Bus Econ Law* 9 (2016): 45–51.

divine sovereignty, which has long been exploited to justify political violence — a significant contribution to efforts at deradicalizing religious discourse.⁴³ Rohman confirms that the Sufi exegetical approach, as applied in *Tafsir Al-Qushairi*, offers an effective counter-narrative to jihadist interpretation by reconstructing the meaning of jihad as an inward spiritual struggle (*jihād al-naḥsī*), rather than offensive warfare. All of these approaches ultimately converge on a single conclusion: that authentic and contextual Qur’anic interpretation, grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī’ah* and responsible hermeneutics, is an absolute prerequisite for the attainment of peace and justice in the contemporary Muslim world.⁴⁴

The Role of International Islamic Organizations in Contemporary Exegetical Discourse

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Al-Azhar are the two most influential institutions in shaping the official religious discourse of the Muslim world, including in the context of utilizing Qur’anic interpretation to respond to global political conflicts. The OIC, as the second-largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations, with 57 member states, consistently employs Qur’an-based religious narratives to reinforce the legitimacy of Muslim struggles. In various resolutions, the OIC cites verses of justice such as Q.S. An-Nisa: 135 — *yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū kūnū qawwāmīna bil-qist* (O you who believe, be persistently standing firm in justice) — to urge collective action in protecting oppressed Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, and Myanmar. Ayumia, Andini, and Mahardika document how the OIC specifically responded to Israeli aggression and the relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem by using the religious legitimacy of the Qur’an as the foundation of its juridical-international argumentation.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Al-Azhar, as the world’s oldest center of Sunni scholarship, plays an equally significant ideological role by issuing fatwas that affirm the principles of Islamic justice, reject oppression carried out in the name of religion, and provide hermeneutical guidance to Muslims on how to understand Qur’anic verses within the context of contemporary conflict.⁴⁶

Al-Azhar’s role as a religious authority in the context of conflict-related Qur’anic interpretation reveals a complexity that transcends the simple dichotomy between a moderate institution and a political one. Almarakeby, in an in-depth ethnographic study of Al-Azhar’s Lajnat al-Fatwa, finds that the relationship between Al-Azhar and the state is far more varied and complex than the labels of “instrument of the state” or “guardian of independent orthodoxy” would suggest — its fatwas reflect an ongoing negotiation between classical scholarly authority, state political pressures, and the expectations of the global Muslim public.⁴⁷ Mohiuddin, in a critical study of the relationship between Islam, religious authority, and the state in Egypt, affirms that since Al-Azhar’s nationalization by Nasser in 1961, the institution has faced a deepening crisis of moral authority — it must maintain a balance between appearing independent in the eyes of the global Muslim public and meeting the expectations of Egypt’s ruling regime. This tension directly

43 Ali Akbar and Abdullah Saeed, “A Critique of the Concept of Ḥākimiyya: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd’s Approach,” *Religions* 13, no. 11 (2022): 1100.

44 Rohman, “De-Radicalization of Interpretation the Concept of Jihad in Tafsir Al-Qusyairi.”

45 Afifah Ayumia, Putri Andini, and Raden Muhamad Mahardika, “Organization of Islamic Cooperation Responses on the Israel Aggression and the United States Embassy Relocation to Jerusalem,” *Lampung Journal of International Law* 4, no. 2 (2022): 97–108.

46 Zennanta Agustia, Iswahyudi, Muhammad Rohman Rifai, and Rinda Puspita Ayu Purnamasari. 2025. “Contextualizing the Qur’an on Contemporary LGBT Issues: Applying Fazlur Rahman’s Double-Movement Hermeneutic”. *Dirasat Qur’aniyyah Wa Hadithiyyah* 1 (1): 1-20.

47 Muhammad Al-Marakeby, “Rethinking Modern Fatwa Typology: An Ethnographic Study on Al-Azhar Fatwa Council,” *Islamic Studies Review* 1, no. 2 (2022): 197–216.

shapes the way Al-Azhar interprets and communicates Qur’anic verses on justice and resistance to oppression, rendering it not merely a scholarly institution but also a complex political actor.⁴⁸

One of the most representative examples of the OIC’s use of Qur’anic interpretation as an instrument of international diplomacy is the Al-Quds Declaration (Istanbul Declaration), adopted at the OIC Extraordinary Summit in December 2017 in response to the United States’ recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This declaration explicitly references Q.S. Al-Isra: 1 — *subhāna alladhī asrā bi-’abdihī laylan min al-masjid al-ḥarāmi ilā al-masjid al-aqṣā* (Glory be to Him who took His servant on a night journey from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest mosque), to affirm the spiritual and theological dimensions of the Muslim community’s bond with the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem as an inalienable waqf heritage. Ali and Sultan, in a comprehensive study of the OIC’s role in global governance since 1969, demonstrate that while the OIC has not always been able to enforce change through international legal mechanisms, its use of Qur’an-based interpretive arguments in diplomatic forums has consistently succeeded in preserving the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause in the eyes of the global Muslim community and in influencing member states’ voting positions at the United Nations.⁴⁹ In 2023, the OIC formally submitted a written statement to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that combined international legal argumentation with references to Qur’anic values of justice — a step marking the increasingly intensive integration of religious hermeneutics with multilateral diplomacy.⁵⁰

The effectiveness of the Qur’an-based religious narratives championed by the OIC and Al-Azhar faces its most severe test when the realities of realpolitik collide directly with religious idealism. The Abraham Accords, signed in September 2020 — which formalized the normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco — starkly revealed that economic, security, and geostrategic interests can override religious commitments that are always rhetorically foregrounded. Winter and Barak note that Al-Azhar’s response to the Abraham Accords was deeply divided and inconsistent — while some Al-Azhar scholars issued statements rejecting normalization in the name of Islamic solidarity, others — including figures close to the Egyptian government — defended the right of UAE citizens to worship at Al-Aqsa without restriction.⁵¹ Vakil and Quilliam, in a thorough analysis of the Abraham Accords and Israeli-UAE normalization, find that the agreement was based primarily on shared security interests concerning the Iranian threat and economic opportunities, rather than on a convergence of religious values — a finding that exposes the limits of Qur’anic narratives in shaping the strategic decision-making of Muslim-majority states.⁵²

The tension between Qur’an-based religious idealism and the diplomatic pragmatism of Muslim-majority states opens a fundamental debate about the independence of Islamic religious authority from political pressure. Winter and Guzansky analyze the religious dimensions of the Abraham Accords and find that religious instruments, including interpretations of Qur’anic verses, are used pragmatically by various parties to legitimize opposed positions: the OIC

48 Asif Mohiuddin, “Islam, Religious Authority and the State: The Case of Egypt,” *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 16, no. 2 (2022): 165–88.

49 Tajwar Ali and Haseena Sultan, “Emerging Role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in the Global Governance since 1969,” *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2023): 2202052.

50 International Court of Justice, “Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” vol. 31, 2024, <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/186>.

51 Ofir Winter and Michael Barak, “From Moderate Islam to Radical Islam ? Al- Azhar Stands with Hamas,” 2023, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/al-azhar/>.

52 Sanam Vakil and Neil Quilliam, “The Abraham Accords and Israel–UAE Normalization,” *Chatham House* 84 (2023).

employs them to reject normalization, while several signatory states employ them to justify openness to dialogue and coexistence.⁵³ Rosidi, in a comparative study of fatwa governance in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia, and Indonesia, affirms that the institutionalized fatwa models in these countries are vulnerable to political co-optation, thereby weakening scholarly independence and critical thinking in the production of official exegesis.⁵⁴ Belhaj, in a study of religious authority as political action, concludes that contemporary Islamic scholars, including those within institutions such as the OIC and Al-Azhar, operate with a dual legitimacy: the legitimacy of scholarly tradition (*'ilm*) and the legitimacy of political action (*ḥarakah*) and that it is precisely the tension between these two that determines the extent to which Qur'anic interpretation can function effectively as a universal moral guide in navigating complex political conflict.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that political conflicts in the Middle East have significantly transformed the landscape of contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics by generating three dominant forms of ideologically driven exegesis: revolutionary (*haraki*), pro-regime apologetic, and extremist jihadist interpretations. These interpretive trends not only reflect responses to geopolitical pressures but also function as strategic instruments of legitimacy for both state and non-state actors. The findings highlight a reciprocal relationship between conflict and religious interpretation: political conflict shapes the production of meaning, while politicized exegesis, in turn, reinforces and perpetuates conflict through the mobilization of religious narratives in public and digital spheres.

From a theoretical and methodological perspective, this study contributes to the field by integrating critical hermeneutics with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the study of Qur'anic interpretation. This interdisciplinary approach enables a shift from purely textual and philological analysis toward a more contextual and power-sensitive framework that accounts for ideology, socio-political conditions, and discursive practices. By bridging Qur'anic studies with political Islam and the sociology of religion, this research expands the analytical scope of tafsir studies and offers a conceptual foundation for developing hermeneutics-based deradicalization strategies grounded in contextual interpretation, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and inclusive religious narratives.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As a library-based analysis, it does not incorporate empirical field data, and therefore cannot directly measure the impact of ideologically driven interpretations on social attitudes or behavior. Its geographical focus on selected Middle Eastern contexts also limits broader generalization, while the role of digital media, although addressed, remains exploratory. Future research should incorporate empirical methods such as surveys, interviews, and big data analysis of social media to assess the real-world effects of politicized exegesis on radicalization and moderation. Comparative cross-regional studies and the development of applied deradicalization models rooted in Islamic intellectual traditions are also recommended to enhance both the academic and practical relevance of this field of inquiry.

53 Ofir Winter and Yoel Guzansky, "Islam in the Service of Peace: Religious Aspects of the Abraham Accord," 2020, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/israel-uae-deal-and-islam/>.

54 Mohd Harifadilah Rosidi, "Navigating Fatwa Governance: A Comparative Study of Institutional Centralisation and Religious Legitimacy," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, IX, 2025.

55 Abdessamad Belhaj, "Beyond the Global Mufti: Religious Authority as Political Action," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 100.

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