

CHAPTER II

THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF ROBERT SPENCER AND HIS BOOK: *THE TRUTH ABOUT MUHAMMAD: FOUNDER OF THE WORLD'S MOST INTOLERANT RELIGION*

2.1 Introduction

Purpose of this second chapter is to provide an overview about Spencer's background in order to answer the first research question; to know about Robert Spencer's biography including his intellectual background, achievements, and contributions.

First and foremost, this second chapter describes the background of Robert Spencer, the writer of *The Truth about Muhammad: Founder of The World's Most Intolerant Religion*. It covers his personal and intellectual background as the important information to know about him. This study also exposes his career along with a list of his published writings. The researcher also includes brief chapter reviews for the overview about the book.

2.2 Personal and Intellectual Background of Robert Spencer

Robert Bruce Spencer is a well-known contemporary American author, a prolific blogger, and a key figure in the United States. He was born on February 27th, 1962⁸⁷ and has shown an interest in Islam since his young age. He now joins Greek Catholic

⁸⁷ n. a. n.d. "About Robert Spencer and Staff Writers". *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/about-robert>>.

Church and has become one of the members of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church which is an Eastern church that is in communion with Rome and similar to the orthodox church⁸⁸. His interest in learning the Islamic religion according to him, sparked after the exile of his grandparents who used to stay in Turkey with other Christians for so long. They refused to accept Islam and chose to be exiled⁸⁹.

Knowing his ancestors have to move away from their land of birth, being involved with some violence, and even the death of family members yet, his ancestors were still able to positively speak about life over there that makes Spencer want to know about Islam. He says that through these experiences, it makes him more eager to learn Islamic studies. He took the very first opportunity he could as he went to college to read the al-Qur'ān and begin studying Islamic theology and history. In his younger days during the Cold War, he worked at Revolution Books, a Maoist bookstore in New York City founded by Robert Avakian. There, he grabbed the chance to read various books related to Islam⁹⁰.

Since 1980, he has been studying about Islamic theology, law, and history. He then receives Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts both in Religious Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1986 he received his master's degree with the research thesis on the Catholic history⁹¹.

He actively spends most of his time digging and exposing the radical movements that have emerged in the West and worldwide. He is also seriously involved in the

⁸⁸ n. a. 21 July. 2006. "Q&A with Robert Spencer". *C-SPAN*. <<https://www.c-span.org/video/?193778-1/qa-robert-spencer#>>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ n.d. n. a. "About Robert Spencer and Staff Writers". *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/about-robert>>.

attempt to counter-jihad movements in the United States along with his co-partner, Pamela Geller.

2.3 Robert Spencer's Career and His Published Writings

Robert Spencer has been working for more than 20 years in searching, understanding, and producing writings on Islam⁹². He has been involved in various projects and seminars related to radical movements in order to raise public awareness about the invasion of particularly the Western countries and generally other parts of the world, by Islamist jihadists.

Up until now, Robert Spencer has published a total of 27 books as updated in his website Jihadwatch.org⁹³. His three latest publications in 2023 are titled (1) *The Sumter Gambit: How the Left is Trying to Foment a Civil War*, (2) *Who Lost Afghanistan?* and (3) *The Church & The Pope: The Case for or Thodoxy*.

Among his 27 publications, two were nominated as New York Times bestsellers. They were: *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)* and *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* published by Regnery Publishing. *The History of Jihad from Muhammad to ISIS* published by Bombardier Books on the other hand, was awarded as a bestselling book⁹⁴.

He has been appointed as a Shillman Fellow at the David Horowitz Freedom Center⁹⁵ while serving as an adjunct fellow with the Free Congress Foundation, one of

⁹²n. a. n. d. "Robert Spencer: American Journalist, Author and Blogger". *Peoplepill.com*. <<https://peoplepill.com/people/robert-spencer-2/>>.

⁹³n.a. n.d. "Robert Spencer's Book." *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/robert-spencers-books>>.

⁹⁴n.d. n. a. "About Robert Spencer and Staff Writers". *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/about-robert>>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

subdivisions of the Heritage Foundation⁹⁶. He also participates in a weekly columnist for PJ Media and FrontPage Magazine. Spencer has written hundreds of articles on jihad and Islamic terrorism in all media platforms where he involved in. His articles on Islam and other topics have been published in the Los Angeles Times, the New York Post, the Washington Times, the Journal of International Security Affairs, WorldNet Daily, just to name a few⁹⁷.

Besides appointed as a writer to the Investigative Project on Terrorism, he is also invited as a speaker at non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and featured speaker in many universities and colleges in the Western countries. Apart from that, he also discussed about jihad, Islam and terrorism at a workshop sponsored by the U.S. State Department and the German Foreign Ministry⁹⁸.

With the popularity he has, various television and radio programs invite him to give talks about radical movements that have arisen in Europe following the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001, attacks⁹⁹. The TV programs involved were namely the BBC, CNN, Fox programs. While radio programs like The Sean Hannity Show, Bill O'Reilly's Radio Factor, The Mark Levin Show, and so on¹⁰⁰.

His efforts in digging, writing articles, and giving evidences regarding the imposition of jihadist ideology against Islamist extremists and domestic extremists around the globe make him more well-known and could expand his influence on other

⁹⁶n. a. n. d. "Robert Spencer: American Journalist, Author and Blogger". *Peoplepill.com*. <<https://peoplepill.com/people/robert-spencer-2/>>.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸n.d. n. a. "About Robert Spencer and Staff Writers". *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/about-robert>>.

⁹⁹Zaki Mehta. 2011. The Rise of Radical Islam and Effectiveness of Counterterrorism in a Global Age. *E-International Relations*. <<https://www.e-ir.info/2011/09/20/the-rise-of-radical-islam-and-effectiveness-of-counterterrorism-in-a-global-age/>>.

¹⁰⁰n.d. n. a. "About Robert Spencer and Staff Writers". *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/about-robert>>.

people. Most of his works are related to political issues in the United States alongside with his major concerns about the political ideologies of radical groups. His work has been translated into many languages including Spanish, Italian, German, Finnish, Korean, Polish, Portuguese and Bahasa Indonesia¹⁰¹. Below is the Robert Spencer's books as listed in Jihad Watch¹⁰².

1. <i>Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith</i> (Encounter Books, 2002)
2. <i>Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2003)
3. <i>Inside Islam</i> (with Daniel Ali) (Ascension Press, 2003)
4. <i>The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: How Islamic Law Treats Non-Muslims</i> (Prometheus Books, 2004)
5. <i>The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2005)
6. <i>The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2006)
7. <i>Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2007)
8. <i>Stealth Jihad: How Radical Islam is Subverting America without Guns or Bombs</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2008)
9. <i>The Complete Infidel's Guide to the Koran</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2009)
10. <i>The Post-American Presidency: The Obama Administration's War on America</i> (with Pamela Geller) (Threshold Editions/Simon & Schuster, 2010)
11. <i>Did Muhammad Exist? An Inquiry into Islam's Obscure Origins</i> (ISI Books, 2011)
12. <i>Not Peace but A Sword: The Great Chasm Between Christianity and Islam</i>

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰²n.a. n.d. "Robert Spencer's Books". *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/robert-spencers-books>>.

(CA Press, 2013)
13. <i>Arab Winter Comes to America: The Truth About the War We're In</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2014)
14. <i>The Complete Infidel's Guide to ISIS</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2015)
15. <i>The Complete Infidel's Guide to Iran</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2016)
16. <i>The Complete Infidel's Guide to Free Speech (and Its Enemies)</i> (Regnery Publishing, 2017)
17. <i>Confessions of an Islamophobe</i> (Bombardier Books, 2017)
18. <i>The History of Jihad from Muhammad to ISIS</i> (Bombardier Books, 2018)
19. <i>The Palestinian Delusion: The Catastrophic History of the Middle East Peace Process</i> (Bombardier Books, 2019)
20. <i>Rating America's Presidents: An America-First Look at Who Is Best, Who Is Overrated, and Who was an Absolute Disaster</i> (Bombardier Books, 2020)
21. <i>Mass Migration in Europe: A Model for the U.S?</i> (Center for The Security Press, 2020)
22. <i>Islamophobia and The Threat to Free Speech</i> (Center for Security Policy Press, 2021)
23. <i>Did Muhammad Exist? An Inquiry into Islam's Obscure Origins; Revised and Expanded Edition</i> (Bombardier Books, 2021)
24. <i>The Critical Quran; Explained from Key Islamic Commentaries and Contemporary Historical Research</i> (Bombardier Books, 2022)
25. <i>The Church & The Pope: The Case for or Thodoxy</i> (Uncut Mountain Press, 2022)
26. <i>Who Lost Afghanistan?</i> (Center for Security Policy Press, 2022)
27. <i>The Sumter Gambit: How the Left is Trying to Foment a Civil War</i> (Bombardier Books, 2023)

Table 2.1: List of the books¹⁰³

2.4 Issues Related with Counter Jihad Movements

Spencer's life is full of colors. He is surrounded with people who support and defend him in his career. As well as people who criticize him as they do not agree with

¹⁰³ n.a. n.d. "Robert Spencer's Books". *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/robert-spencers-books>>.

his statements in his writings and his works that criticize Islam and his contribution in disseminating Islamophobia¹⁰⁴. This fearmongering brings about intense feelings among Muslims specifically to Muslims in the Western countries. Therefore, knowing the issues related with him and how people reacted on his present is crucial as part of the objectives of this study.

His passion in criticizing radical Islam and its violent movements drive several Muslim countries to ban his publications like Pakistan. Due to religious sentiments being downplayed and the nobility of Prophet Muhammad PBUH being tarnished, Pakistan made a step forward in showing protest towards Spencer in December 2006. Pakistan banned his book *The Truth about Muhammad: Founder of The World's Most Intolerant Religion* as an objectionable material from being published and used in Pakistan¹⁰⁵. Besides, Malaysia also has banned his book in 2007 namely *Onward Muslim Soldiers* due to its contents, which might influence Muslims to stray from Islamic principles and possibly risk readers' morals¹⁰⁶.

Clearly, in 2011, a domestic violence has happened in Norway by a Norwegian known as Anders Behring Breivik due to the Spencer's attack on Islamic jihad. Breivik bombed government buildings and killed a number of innocent teenagers¹⁰⁷. This attack is deeply influenced by counter jihad movements of American activists including Robert Spencer in his Jihad Watch, Atlas Shrugs blogger Pamela Geller and the

¹⁰⁴Duss, M. 2011. "Horowitz and Spencer's Islamophobia". *Center for American Progress*. <<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/ext/2011/10/19/10540/horowitz-and-spencers-islamophobia/>>.

¹⁰⁵De Russy, C. 2007. "Pakistan: Book Closed on Muhammad". *National Review*: <<https://www.nationalreview.com/phi-beta-cons/pakistan-book-closed-muhammad-candace-de-russy/>>.

¹⁰⁶n. a. 12 July 2007. "Ministry Bans 14 Books". *Internet Archive*. <<https://web.archive.org/web/20160303221210/http://www.bernama.com.my/bernama/v3/printable.php?id=272915>>.

¹⁰⁷Shane, S. 24 July 2011. "Killing in Norway Spotlight Anti-Muslim Thought in U.S.". *The New York Times*. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/25/us/25debate.html>>.

pseudonymously written blog Gates of Vienna who portrayed Islam as a threat to the West¹⁰⁸. He quoted Spencer's criticism of global jihad for more than 60 times either from his books or website, *Jihad Watch*¹⁰⁹. Unfortunately, Breivik saw Muslim immigration to Norway and other parts of Europe as a threat to the indigenous civilization and culture. Therefore, according to the judge who presided Breivik's indictment, his actions in this mass murder is due to xenophobia, also known as Islamophobia and alienation that fuels anti-Islamic sentiments. Breivik on the other hand believes his actions to be one of the efforts in saving Norway from Muslim domination and Marxism¹¹⁰.

As a result, from this issue, Spencer received criticism from readers and societies especially in the United States and Europe. As mentioned in The New York Times, outspoken critics of Islam and the intense spotlight towards the threats of Islamic militants from anti-Islamic activists like Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller and others have unfairly vilified Muslims while playing down the threat of attacks from other domestic radicals¹¹¹.

While in the United Kingdom in 2013, the Home Office banned Spencer and Pamela Geller, his co-founder of *Stop Islamization of America* and *Freedom Defense Initiative* from entering the UK¹¹². This is because their appearance in the United Kingdom could worsen the fragile situation and foster hatred there. According to the

¹⁰⁸Hudson, J. 25 July 2011. "The Roots of Breivik's Rage: Is he a wright-wing Christian fanatic? Which group will he be assigned?". *The Atlantic*. <<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/07/roots-breiviks-rage/353232/>>.

¹⁰⁹Robinson, E. 25 July 2011. "Anders Behring Breivik and the influence industry of rage". *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/anders-behring-breivik-and-the-influence-industry-of-rage/2011/07/25/gIQASd2WZI_story.html>.

¹¹⁰Shane, S. 24 July 2011. "Killing in Norway Spotlight Anti-Muslim Thought in U.S.". *The New York Times*. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/25/us/25debate.html>>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² n. a. 2013. "US bloggers banned from entering UK". *BBC NEWS*. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-23064355>>.

UK anti-extremism, the decision of barring them both was due to Spencer's viewpoint about Islam that urges Muslims to wage war between infidels in order to build an example to the community¹¹³.

These spotlight introductions on his biography and issues related with him are part of the first objectives of this study in introducing Robert Spencer. With these, researcher could view how he is persistent and committed in countering jihad movements and spreading awareness to the public. Therefore, the next subchapter is about Spencer's understanding and views about Islam, radical attacks in the name of religion, and what people's views about him.

2.5 Robert Spencer's View about Islam and Radical Attacks in the Name of Religion

Radical jihad movements that have happened today, give a bad impression and negative impact towards both Muslims and non-Muslims around the globe. Bloodshed is perpetrated everywhere among people worldwide where the sanctity of human life is no longer valued in their eyes. Numerous attacks by radical groups have emerged particularly in 2001 with the attacks in the United States, heightened by further killings in Madrid on 11th March 2004 which killed 191 people, the bombing in London and Amsterdam, and further fueled by frequent stories of numerous other threats planned or prevented¹¹⁴. These attacks have become one of the prominent and controversial issues.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Egerton, F. 2011. *Jihad in The West: The Rise of Militant Salafism*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.1; Zulkifli Hasan. n.d. "Memahami Isu Islamofobia: Antara Persepsi dan Realiti." *Zulkifli hasan.wordpress.com*. <<https://zulkiflihasan.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/memahami-isu-islamophobic1.pdf>>. p. 1.

These situations have worsened the image of Islam in the eyes of the world. From these situations, emerged the Islamophobia phenomenon causing fear among communities in the United States and other Western nations. Many Americans are afraid that Islam would impose its own values and ideals, thus threatening Americans and their traditions¹¹⁵.

The impact of their worries caused a tendency to discriminate Muslim societies by exclusion and social rejection¹¹⁶. Thereby, mass media and writer including Robert Spencer plays important roles in addressing and stressing the causes of Islamophobia to cast into the society's hearts and minds in addition with the implementation of jihad movements by Islamists.¹¹⁷

Alongside with this, there are also groups of conservative foundations and wealthy donors who are the lifeblood of the Islamophobia network in America whom among them supported the carrier in counter jihad like Robert Spencer.¹¹⁸ He is one of the five men including Frank Gaffney, David Yerushalmi, Daniel Pipes and Steven Emerson according to the *Americanprogress.org*¹¹⁹. They are actively promoting Islamophobia and responsible for orchestrating the misinformation about Islam and Muslims in America particularly.

Some people consider Spencer as anti-Islam as he obviously utters and writes radical statement to frame Islam as an intolerant religion with no peace within it. Up to

¹¹⁵Karipek, A. 2020. "Portrayals of Jihad: A Cause of Islamophobia." *Islamophobia Studies Journal*. Vol. 5(2). <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/islstudj.5.2.0210?seq=1>>. p. 210.

¹¹⁶Evardson, L. 2008. *Islamophobia: Features of Islamophobia and Strategies against It*. (Master Thesis) Malmö University. p. 35.

¹¹⁷Karipek, A. 2020. "Portrayals of Jihad: A Cause of Islamophobia." *Islamophobia Studies Journal*. Vol. 5(2). <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/islstudj.5.2.0210?seq=1>>. p. 210.

¹¹⁸n.a. n.d. "The Islamophobia Misinformation Experts." *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia_chapter2.pdf>. p. 27

¹¹⁹Ibid.

the extent where Spencer depicts Islam as an inherently violent religion¹²⁰. *Americanprogress.org* quoted Spencer in saying that the traditional Islam is not a moderate and peaceful religion hence, it is only a religion with a developed doctrine and tradition in warfare against unbelievers¹²¹. He has mistreated the Qur'ān and found a lot of evidence in the al-Qur'ān and prophet's tradition which urge Muslims to engage in war and hold warfare against non-Muslims.

Nonetheless, some people still consider Robert Spencer as an expert scholar in the Islamic religion. As one of the leading writers and director of *Jihad Watch*, Spencer has become an influential writer on the issues relating to Islam. *Jihad Watch* is one of the websites he manages aside from other webpages he is involved in, where he reveals the role of Islamic jihad ideology in the modern global conflicts¹²².

Spencer sums up his views of Islam as, "the only religion in the world that has a developed doctrine, theology and legal system that mandates violence against unbelievers and mandates that Muslims must wage war in order to establish the hegemony of the Islamic social order all over the world"¹²³. This could be seen in *Jihad Watch*, the righteous attitudes of Muslims in the other side of the world regarding the issues of Indian Muslims throwing Hindus with stones. He miscalculates that radical issue with an argument quoted from Qur'ānic verses in the chapter *al-Mumtahanah* verse 4 that says hatred and enmity between Muslims and infidels would last forever

¹²⁰Wangsness, L. 2013. "Catholic Event Cancels Talk by Islam Critic". *Boston Globe Magazine*. <<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/01/31/roman-catholic-diocese-worcester-cancels-speech-critic-islam/i7ncz8xftp8p8xxquact1j/story.html>>.

¹²¹n.a. n.d. "The Islamophobia Misinformation Experts." *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia_chapter2.pdf>. p. 27.

¹²²Bridge Initiative Team. 2018. "Factsheet: Robert Spencer." *Bridge: A Georgetown University Initiative*. <<https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-robert-spencer-2/>>.

¹²³n.a. n.d. "The Islamophobia Misinformation Experts." *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia_chapter2.pdf>. p. 27.

and should be an example whilst forgiveness is explicitly declared not to be exemplary¹²⁴.

2.6 Review of *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of The World's Most Intolerant Religion*

The Truth About Muhammad is one of Robert Spencer's treatises firstly published in the United States by Regnery publishing, Inc in 2006. It is a bibliographical reference of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH with Islamic historical and controversial literature. To sum up, this book contains 224 pages starting with the chronology of Prophet Muhammad's PBUH life, names, and places as in the directory of historical events captured in this book and closed with acknowledgements, notes and an index. He dedicates this book to those who persevere in the face of tyranny that must be faced and borne due to jihadist radicalism. This book consists of 10 chapters as listed below.

Chapter	Contents
1.	<i>Why a biography of Muhammad is relevant today?</i>
2.	<i>In search of the historic Muhammad</i>
3.	<i>Muhammad becomes a prophet</i>
4.	<i>Muhammad's revelations and their sources</i>
5.	<i>"A warner in the face of a terrific punishment"</i>
6.	<i>Muhammad becomes a warlord</i>
7.	<i>"War is deceit"</i>
8.	<i>Casting terror into their hearts</i>

¹²⁴Spencer, B. R. 2020. "India: Muslims Including Women and Children Pelt Hindus with Stones Ten People Seriously Injured." *Jihad Watch*. <<https://www.jihadwatch.org/2020/12/india-muslims-including-women-and-children-pelt-hindus-with-stones-ten-people-seriously-injured>>.

9.	<i>Victorious through terror</i>
10.	<i>Muhammad's Legacy</i>

Table 2.2: Book Contents¹²⁵

The Truth About Muhammad is a general outline about the life of Prophet Muhammad's PBUH. For Spencer, knowing the biography of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH is relevant for today's use in finding which aspects of his PBUH life drive to the acts of violence. And so does to some people who considered this book is a required reading substances as it is correlated with the years of the militant Islam¹²⁶.

In this book, Spencer throws out his pondered whether Islam is a peaceful religion despite the acts of violence committed in the name of Islam. And why it matters now and why the majority of peaceful Muslims show no signs of resisting and condemning the global jihad that is being fought in their name¹²⁷. However, the researcher believes Muslim's scholars have been strongly opposed the fake global jihad and condemned the disturbing events that takes place in the name of Islam from various ways like *fatwa* from *mufti*, published writings and others.

Initially, Spencer refused to write this book due to the rage that erupted worldwide over the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in early 2006. But still according to him, this book had to be written following to the freedom of speech and the quest for truth. As he believes ones should not be cowed into silence by the

¹²⁵ Spencer, B. R. 2006. *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of The World's Most Intolerant Religion*. Washington: Regnery Publishing.

¹²⁶ Samuel, A. N. 2015. Book Review *The Truth About Muhammad*. *Journal of Psychology and Clinical Psychiatry*. <DOI:10.15406/jpcpy.2015.03.00153>.

¹²⁷ Spencer, B. R. 2006. *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of The World's Most Intolerant Religion*. Washington: Regnery Publishing. p. 10.

intimidation of violence or the acceptance of half-truths. If no one is willing to take such risks, freedom of speech will become a relic of history¹²⁸. However, the researcher believes that not all the Muslims are to be blamed. There are some who wrongly adhere to some verses of the Qur'ān. Therefore, to claim Muslims in general is not right.

Moreover, some non-Muslims finds that few aspects of the Prophet's legacy are problematic. And worsen, it is being used by some Muslims today to justify violent actions or other behaviors which lucidly do not correspond to Western notions of human rights and the dignity of the human person¹²⁹. Despite this, most non-Muslims in the West also do not know much about the Messenger of Allah; Prophet Muhammad PBUH, in contrast, most Westerners know more about Jesus Christ or even Gautama Buddha better than him PBUH¹³⁰. So, this book is presented to people who are eagerly want to know who are the Prophet of Islam, Prophet Muhammad PBUH. This is perhaps the very answers why this book could get award the best-selling book.

In searching about Prophet Muhammad PBUH, Spencer referred to the same sources as jihadists which are the al-Qur'ān, Hadith and *Sirah Nabawiyyah*. In al-Qur'ān, Spencer found that there is no continuous narrative about the Prophet Muhammad PBUH even though it contains in detail about particular incidents in his life. He analyses that the Qur'ānic verses that frequently refer to many people and events in a time, is without explanation on what situation that the verses are referring to¹³¹.

Therefore, Spencer says, whenever jihadists quote the Qur'ānic verses out of context about jihad, people cannot blame them as the al-Qur'ān itself often offers little

¹²⁸Ibid. p. 16.

¹²⁹Ibid. p. 11.

¹³⁰Ibid. p. 19.

¹³¹Ibid. p. 21.

context and are not straightforward verses¹³². For example, Spencer refers to verse 1-5 in *Surah al-Tahrim* in which he concludes, “*it is impossible to tell from this passage what the Prophet has held forbidden that Allah has made lawful for him, or how he tried to please his consorts, or under what circumstances Allah permits oaths to be broken, or what secret the consort told that Allah later told Muhammad, or even which two consorts are being admonished, warned to repent and not to band together against Muhammad, and threatened with divorce. The entire passage and there are many like it in the al-Qurʿān is completely opaque to anyone who was not directly involved in the proceedings.*”

Generally, the Qurʿānic verses are related. From one verse to another and one chapter to another chapter. Ones need to comprehend the al-Qurʿān vehemently from its methodologies construed by *mufasssir*. So that one could understand and capture the essence and knowledge contained in the Qurʿān. The high level of the Arabic word and the beauty of its verses, makes lay people possibly misunderstand the essence meaning of the Qurʿānic verses if literal understanding is used.

Indeed, *tafsir* and Hadith are important sources in Islam, but for Spencer, he hard to believe the knowledge from these two sources of knowledge as he regards it is impossible to tell with certainty its authenticity in the mass amounts of information now as it came from hundreds of years ago¹³³. He referred to the collections of Hadith from Al-Bukhāriyy and Muslim, as well as other hadith that are reliable to Muslims. Besides that, Spencer referred also to the *Sirāh Nabawiyyah* concerning the life of Prophet

¹³²Ibid. p. 20.

¹³³Ibid. p. 24.

Muhammad which he relied on Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad Ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar¹³⁴ in the versions of Ibn Hisyam, and Ibn Sa'd¹³⁵.

Even though he refers to these sources that authentic for Muslims, but he still has doubts on these main sources in Islam that he pondered on how to ultimately know about the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, the one who according to him has shaped and continues to shape the lives of so many Muslims worldwide. As he said “*historical certainty is not easy to ascertain with a text as sketchy as al-Qurʿān, as overwhelmed with false information as the Hadith and as late as the Sirah*”¹³⁶. To the extent, he also doubts the existence of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. He notes that, if the Prophet PBUH did exist, did he do much or any of what is ascribed to him that are acutely embarrassing for Muslims today?¹³⁷

In spite of that, his doubt continues on the Islamic revelation as a convenience revelation as it arises due to the two main issues relating on women. The first concerns are on Prophet’s marriage with Zainab Binti Jahshi, who was the former wife of Zaid bin Harithah. Second, is about the slander against Aisha.

Albeit, these two big issues during the prophecy period gave new laws and regulations in Islam, but, some people in the modern century seems embarrassed by these issues, according to Spencer. For example, he views Muhammad Husayn Haykal in *The Life and Work of Muhammad*¹³⁸ and Yahiya Emerick in his *Life of Muhammad*¹³⁹ are only elucidating in general in their books respectively concerning these issues

¹³⁴Ibn Hisyam, Abu Muhammad Abdul Malik bin Hisyam Al-Muafiri. *Sirah Nabawiyyah Ibn Hisyam*. (trans.) Fadhli Fahri, Lc. Jakarta Timur: Darul Falah. p.7.

¹³⁵Spencer, B. R. 2006. *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of The World’s Most Intolerant Religion*. Washington: Regnery Publishing. p. 27.

¹³⁶Ibid. p. 32.

¹³⁷Ibid. p. 31.

¹³⁸Emerick, Y. 2002. *The Life and Work of Muhammad*. Indianapolis: Alpha Books

¹³⁹Haykal, M. H. 1976. *The Life of Muhammad*. United States: American Trust Publications

without much explanation which they seem do not want their readers know much about it. For Spencer, it was regarded as a stain to the convenience of Islam and resulted negative view on the image of Islam. In this situation, orientalist and other missionaries also take advantage to besmirch his reputation by arduously painting negative picture and misunderstanding about the Prophet of Islam¹⁴⁰. For example, the Dominican monk, Riccoldo da Montecroce (d. 1320) who condemned the Prophet PBUH as a deliberate imposter and a downright diabolical figure, while could also be found in the work of William Muir (d. 1905), Emile Dermenghem (d. 1971) and others.

The Truth About Muhammad continues with the period of Prophet's PBUH revelation before people made him a leader who inspires them in all the jihad actions. His life with his wife, Khadijah. As Spencer notes that without Khadijah, "*Muhammad might never have become a prophet at all*"¹⁴¹. At the first stage during the early prophecy, Rasulullah PBUH secretly preached or made *da'wah* to the Mecca people. In conveying this new religion, he faced difficulties in dealing with the *Quraysh* tribe to believe in Allah SWT.

At the beginning, Rasulullah PBUH was commanded to preach peacefully and patiently. He was to forgive their actions even though Muslims at the time received many threats, oppression, mockery, and other violent attacks from the *Quraysh*. But Spencer posits that even though Prophet Muhammad PBUH did not begin his career as a warrior, but he already started to threaten the pagan Meccans with annihilation in his preaching. And Spencer strengthens this fact with the Qur'anic verses from 11-15 in *Sura al-Hajj*¹⁴².

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 69.

¹⁴¹ Spencer, B. R. 2006. *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of The World's Most Intolerant Religion*. Washington: Regnery Publishing. p. 45.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 75.

The evolution of the Qur'ānic teachings on war against the unbelievers started as the awful coercion on Muslims at that time can affect their faith. Therefore, from this awful situation, a permission was revealed to the Muslims to defend themselves. Hence, Prophet Muhammad PBUH received a command and permission to fight back¹⁴³. *Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 193; fight the one who make the ill-treatment and defend the Muslim's faith until the devotion is to Allah alone*¹⁴⁴.

Some of the historical events that occurs in the life of Prophet Muhammad PBUH like the treaty between Muslims and Jews, the conversion of Abdullah bin Salam and tensions with the rabbis, the *Nakhla* attack was regarded as the beginning of Islamic violence. Along with the split with Jews and the change of *qiblat* (direction of prayer). Along with the Prophet's involvement in the battles makes Spencer regards him PBUH as a warlord.

With more revelations were sent down and contained sharp distinction between Jewish and Islam, it differentiates Muslims with other adherents. In Spencer eyes, this distinction divides the culture, ideas of mercy¹⁴⁵ and justice which make things more difficult for non-Muslims¹⁴⁶. For example, the new command for new direction of prayers, the punishment on a couple who has been accused of adultery, and so on. This command indeed differentiates the Islamic teaching from the Christianity which eventually has shaped the Muslim and Christian history.

Muslims at the time after *hijrah* have reached their final breaking point with the *Quraysh* while their relationship with the Jews steadily worsen. The raids on *Quraysh*

¹⁴³ Al-Qur'ān. Al-Hajj, 22: 39-41.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. Al-Baqarah, 2:193.

¹⁴⁵ Spencer, B. R. 2006. *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of The World's Most Intolerant Religion*. Washington: Regnery Publishing. p. 102.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 91.

caravans in *Badr* precipitated the Muslims first major battle namely the battle of *Badr*. According to Spencer, the battle of *Badr* was the first practical example of what later known as the doctrine of Islamic jihad that continue to resonate throughout history¹⁴⁷.

Based on the Qur'ānic verses chapter 3: 123-125, Spencer concluded that the victory of *Badr* was obtained with the help of Allah and similar help would come to Muslims who remain faithful to Him¹⁴⁸. From a series of clashes between Muslim, Jewish and Christian groups for instance Abdullah bin Ubayy, *Bani Nadir* and the *Quraysh* tribe, Spencer analyses that the success of Muslims is due to their obedience to Allah while on the other hand their failure is due to their neglect of Islam. With these analyses, Spencer arises a theological connection between success with obedience and defeat with disobedience. And it became the reinforcement to the success of Muslims in the next encounter which is in the Battle of Trench in 627¹⁴⁹.

This book then continues discussed about the Battle of Trench or *Khandaq*, the betrayal of the *Bani Qurayzah*, the stories of the women of *Bani Muṣṭaliq*, the story of Abdullah bin Ubayy, the treaty of *Hudaybiyyah*, the invasion and conquest of the *Khaybar* war which he concluded these events as casting terror into disbeliever hearts.

After the expulsion of the *Bani Qaynuqa* and *Bani Nadir* a year later, the humiliation and disgrace from being exiled, urged the Jews from this tribe to start a new stage of conspiracy. With help from the *Quraysh*, *Bani Qatfan*, *Bani Murrah*, and others, they prepared a deadly blow against the Muslims. Prophet Muhammad PBUH and Muslims who were forewarned of this new alliance had a trench dug around Madinah. Digging forty yards to each group of ten yet gave rise of tensions among

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 111.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 105.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 120.

Muslims from severe hunger, starvation, and exhaustion¹⁵⁰. Spencer asserts that some slip away from this command, while others offer trifling excuses. Due to this situation, Prophet Muhammad PBUH received another revelation that was stated in chapter 24 verse 62-63, warning them not to take the commands of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH lightly¹⁵¹.

Such incidents emphasize the divinely commanded and exalted states of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH among the Muslims, which reminds Spencer of the riots over the Danish Muhammad cartoons when many non-Muslims were puzzled by the anger of the Muslims. He says, “*that anger must be ascribed in the Qur’ān and Allah is quite solicitous of his prophet and ready to command what will please him*”¹⁵².

The massacre of the *Bani Qurayzah* has been understandably a source of embarrassment to the Muslims. The betrayal of the *Bani Qurayzah* and the death penalty given to their men, became a powerful weapon for Spencer to discredit Islam and the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. He later said that Muslim scholars were only looking for a reason for a massacre “*finding excuses for a massacre*”. And he added that despite all the incidents in Muhammad’s life, he is still raised by Muslims around the world as “*an excellent model of conduct*”¹⁵³.

Later, Spencer writes about the events that occur in the conquest of Mecca. He also includes the punishments upon apostates, the story of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in the Ka’bah, the battle of *Hunayn*, the invitation of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to other nations to convert to Islam, the invasion of *Tabuk*, the gathering of *Jizya*,

¹⁵⁰Al-Mubarakfuriyy. Raheeq al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar). Issam Diab. (trans.). n.pl. n. pb. p. 169.

¹⁵¹Spencer, B. R. 2006. *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of The World’s Most Intolerant Religion*. Washington: Regnery Publishing. p. 124.

¹⁵²Ibid. p. 124.

¹⁵³Ibid. p. 132.

the rights of the women, the expulsion of the pagans, the murder of poets, the illness of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, and the events after the death of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Spencer also emphasizes about “striving hard” in the raid of Tabuk, which in the context of the Prophet Muhammad’s PBUH circumstance is to command Muslims to wage war, an unmistakable military command¹⁵⁴. This command was strengthened by the fact that Allah was guaranteeing Paradise to those who would fight on the path of Allah, as they shall slay or be slain, along with the command from the prophet Muhammad PBUH to fight against people till they testify *shahādah*, there is no god, but Allah and the Prophet Muhammad PBUH is the messenger of Allah. Therefore, those people who refuse to wage jihad would face terrible punishment as Spencer writes down these Qur’ānic verses that were stated in chapter 9 pages 38-39, 42, 44-45, 73, 98 and 111¹⁵⁵.

At this stage, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was determined to wipe out any leftover opposition in his rule for instance the two poets; Abu ‘Afa’ and ‘Asma bint Marwan who have mocked him in their poetry to be killed. When the men of Banu Khatma; ‘Asma bint Marwan’s tribe saw the power of Islam in killing, they immediately acknowledged Muhammad PBUH as the Prophet of Allah¹⁵⁶. From these stories, Spencer implies to people that the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was victorious through the actions of terror, not through the truth and blessings of Islam. Therefore, he categorizes these events in the chapter named “victorious through terror”.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 158.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 154-158.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 82.

In addition to the general outlines of *sirah*, various discussions and arguments are discussed in the final chapter. For example, on the terror of war, the prophet that he described as pedophile, cruel punishments, and inequalities toward women. The doubts on Prophet Muhammad PBUH continues, and religion of Islam as a tolerant religion. He pondered on how jihadists imitate the Prophet and what to do to prevent jihad war. Spencer raised many questions and discussions on the deeds and words of Rasulullah PBUH that are being exemplified by the terrorists in their actions.

Among of the discussions is Spencer believes that the prophet's involvement in 27 battles and in 9 engagements¹⁵⁷ gives the opportunity for jihadists to emulate him especially in the battles of *Badr* and *Khaybar*. Due to this, according to him, it is hard and difficult to realize and maintain Islam as a peaceful religion, if the head of state and the prophet of Islam himself was also involved in wars¹⁵⁸.

Besides that, he also criticizes on the exclusiveness of Islam as a religion among others. He posits that a fundamental component of Islam is often repeated in shows the exclusive of Islam and strongly believed as an absolute truth about oneself and not to be compared by other belief systems. He refers to the *surah al-Mā'idah* verse 19 which says, "*Religion before Allah, is Islam*" as well as various other quotations in the Qur'anic verses. Elucidated from these verses, he believed its pointing to the intolerance in Islam¹⁵⁹.

He collected many ideas in the Qur'ānic verses and Hadith which he considered that there is no peaceful coexistence in Islam. Spencer claims that Islam is being intolerant by criticizes and hates Jews and Christians. One of the reasons is he based on

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. pp. 175-176.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 176.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 177.

to the prohibition of taking Jews, Christians, and enemies of Islam as friends, along with the Prophet Muhammad's exhortations to fight against Jews and Christians in his PBUH combative jihad. These conditions he believed could stripping away all the legitimacy from Judaism and Christianity. However, from the Islamic perspectives, the restriction mandated to not befriend with some of the non-Muslims in order to protect Muslims from diseases like hypocrisy, hesitancy, and uncertainty¹⁶⁰. This is the very reasons that Allah taking care of His servants. Yet, Spencer blatantly suggests that Islamic world has always been at conflict with Jews and Christians due to this order¹⁶¹.

In addition, for the most part, Prophet Muhammad PBUH is often pictured by Spencer as a cruel, intolerant, and immoral person. Despite immense acts of goodness and morality shown by him PBUH either to Muslims or non-Muslims, none of the goodness were inserted into this book. In contrast, Spencer adds that the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was just like any other man in the world, multifaceted. While the charm and personal magnetism he PBUH has, is to command fierce loyalty among his followers. Moreover, Spencer claims that many scholars who quoted about the Prophet's PBUH life only mention on the good sides of him, without mentioned on the joys of the Prophet PBUH at the assassinations of his enemies which he himself ordered¹⁶².

In relation to this, the previous attacks from jihadists who caused severe damage to the world community, frightening many non-Muslims, until they cannot accept what the Prophet Muhammad PBUH taught and did. Therefore, Spencer made a few

¹⁶⁰Ibn Kathir, Abu al-Fida Ismail. 2003. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*. (Trans). Riyadh: Maktabah Dar al-Salam. p. 204.

¹⁶¹Spencer, B. R. 2006. *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of The World's Most Intolerant Religion*. Washington: Regnery Publishing. pp. 178-180.

¹⁶²Ibid. p. 184.

suggestions on what non-Muslim governments can do to encounter the jihad terror issues at the end of the book. Above all, Spencer links all the mistakes of jihadists in committing acts of violence to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH through his deeds and words as an example to the war¹⁶³.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, Robert Spencer, is a Christian Catholic who is interested in the Islamic studies and its relation on radicalism. He is one of the active activists who focus on the crucial issues regarding radical actions from Muslims towards non-Muslims around the globe. Spencer brought a general historical explanation in this book and links it with the current situations as evidence for what is happening today in the West.

In his perspective, the origin of jihad actions carried out today by radical jihadists are mainly centered on the actions of Rasulullah PBUH and the command from Allah. Hence, in the next chapter, this study discusses Spencer's views about jihad and on how his arguments and interpretations can be misleading and contradict to the real concept of jihad in Islam.

¹⁶³ Ibid. p. 194.