

Jonathan Matusitz, *Global Jihad in Muslim and non-Muslim Contexts* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 349 pp., US \$ 84.99 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-3-030-47043-2.

Reviewed by Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin

In *Global Jihad in Muslim and non-Muslim Contexts*, Jonathan Matusitz offers ten reasons why the Global Jihad Movement (GJM) has been so rampant since the dawn of the twenty-first century. Some of the reasons, for example, include radicalization, religious motivations, and outbidding other movements, and internal rifts, among others. Organized in 13 chapters, Matusitz integrates the ten reasons into a coherent framework that sheds light on the driving forces and streams behind the proliferation of jihadism. This is not to say that all ten reasons occur at the same time or are even included in every major terrorist incident within the GJM landscape. In fact, the author makes it clear that “it is crucial not to engage in reductionism and not to essentialize all jihadist groups into organizations or factions that all have the same tactics and meanings” (p. 3). Fundamentally, he says, there is “no single explanation for jihad” (p. 9).

Readers will appreciate the numerous up-to-date theoretical applications, statistics, and case studies regarding the GJM today, which are buttressed with evidence and more than 1,000 endnotes. I note in particular the detailed case study of the Sri Lanka Easter bombings that took place on April 21st, 2019, where “two-and-a-half” main reasons were suggested to explain the development of this mass casualty attack that cost the lives of about 260 civilians: political motivations, religious motivations, and, *possibly*, economic conditions affecting the Muslim attackers. One of the stamps of purist Salafism is its preoccupation with the “us vs. them” dichotomy. This is why most of the targets of the Sri Lanka Easter bombings were churches and posh hotels.

From my point of view, Jonathan Matusitz, an Associate Professor at the Nicholson School of Communication and Media, University of Central Florida, is one of the few scholars that has thoroughly and comprehensively applied the field of communication to the subject matter of Islam and jihad. This is demonstrated by his discussion of “group communication” driven jihad, which is covered in Chapter 4 (“Group Dynamics and Socialization”) and Chapter 5 (“Social Alienation”). In Chapter 4, long-established theoretical approaches – like groupthink, Social Identity Theory (SIT), and psychological resilience – serve to illustrate how a significant minority of European Muslims and Muslim Palestinian youths have resorted to jihadi attacks on both soft and hard targets in Western Europe and Israel. In Chapter 5, the Durkheimian notion of social alienation is shored up by the “failed integration” model, Social Closure Theory, and structural discrimination. Yet, at the end of some chapters, Matusitz also includes academic studies and official reports that question mainstream positions in the discipline, such as the cross-examination of the so-called “Problems of Social Integration” found in Chapter 5.

In the last chapter (Chapter 13), the author presents four overarching conclusions that were deduced from the ten reasons for the profusion of the GJM today: “(1) A global war against both Muslims and non-Muslims, (2) diverse forces of convergence, (3) Salafism as Fascism, and (4) reformation in Islam: two opposing directions” (p. 316). As for “Salafism as Fascism,” it was interesting to observe the analogy of Matusitz’s conclusion with Umberto Eco’s general characteristics of fascist ideology – one being the “one-state system led by a totalitarian leader [or the Caliphate].” In the second part of the chapter, Matusitz summarizes his conclusion by creating his own theory: Global Divergence Theory (GDT). As such, he writes that “the growing threat that jihadis pose to humankind indicates the ever-increasing demarcation and polarization that the global jihad movement is creating *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world” (p. 322). This newly coined theory is an essential gap-filler in the current literature in the sense that it underscores how a social movement disassociates from the rest of the world to elevate its own and protect it from threatening outside forces. GDT also represents a slight deviation from Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” thesis in that global jihad today is not about “civilizational conflicts over culture” (p. 324). It is “not only about an East-West confrontation, or even a Muslim–Christian conflict. It is not a treatise on the West’s superior values” (p. 324). Rather, it represents a paradigm shift in the interpretation of jihadism as one that is independent of a clash with other civilizations.

The two gaps in the literature, that I had hoped Jonathan Matusitz would have filled, were, first, the one related to the notion of shame and honor culture in Muslim society and how this contributes to jihadist thinking (though some detractors would consider it more of an anthropological view). Second, though a section on “Gender Considerations” was included in Chapter 3, one that accurately explains how no true profile exists for the typical jihadi because groups like ISIS have encouraged – and employed – women in their terrorist endeavors, I would have liked to see one or two paragraphs on early childhood development in relation to the mother as influencers on the development of Muslim terrorists.

Nevertheless, with his *Global Jihad in Muslim and non-Muslim Contexts* book, Jonathan Matusitz has written an extremely important text. It is, indeed, a *tour de force* that students and scholars in the disciplines of political science, international relations, religious studies, and communication – but also professionals and experts in state and national security agencies, local law enforcement, as well as local and national media outlets – should read to stay abreast with an ever-increasing phenomenon that is definitely real, but that seems to remain a controversial and sensitive topic for far too many.

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