Post 9/11 Portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the Western Literature: An Analysis of Prejudiced and Sane Voices

Dr. Rafia Riaz
Assistant Professor, Department of History and Pakistan Studies,
International Islamic University Islamabad: rafia.riaz@iiu.edu.pk

Abstract

The incident of 9/11 changed the practical politics and international relations of the world. At the same time, it influenced the thinking patterns and intellectual movements around the world. Thus, it exerted its influence on different sort of scholarships as well. A general survey of the historiography on Prophet Muhammad PBUH in the West reveals the influences of the incident of 9/11 on this genre of historiography too. On a closer examination it was revealed that some of the works produced after 9/11 are focused on inherent differences and enmity between the Christian and the Muslim community and have built their new narratives based on that old hatred. These works began to level new kind of sacrilegious charges against the Prophet PBUH and associated him with the phenomenon of terrorism. The present study has critically analyzed this literature by evaluating the biased views of the western authors along with pointing out and highlighting the weaknesses in the sources and arguments of these writings. The analysis has been further strengthened by adding some sane western works produced in the same period highlighting the merciful nature of the Prophet PBUH and treating his teachings as a continuity of the legacy of all earlier prophets. The study is based on the methods of historiographical research and has analyzed particular works from the western sīrah writing. The analysis has been done by using primary sources of sīrah and tārīkh along with consulting secondary literature.

Keywords: incident of 9/11, effects, Portrayal of Prophet Muhammad PBUH

Introduction

Since centuries the western world seems to be curious about the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, thus it has kept on collecting and disseminating information about the Prophet PBUH. Most of the early western authors on Prophet PBUH were either unable to understand the proper religio-cultural context and value system of the Muslim world or they were extremely critical and biased due to their own religious affinities with Christian faith. However, since the wave of crusades went cold and

the West came in closer contact with the Muslims, many of them grew to be more tolerable towards the Prophet PBUH.[1] A group of scholars like Thomas Carlyle, Stubbe, Boulainvilliers, Sale, Higgins and Forster[2] emerged who were willing to learn and to understand the philosophy of Islam and to find out true facts about the life of the Prophet PBUH. Still, a majority remained highly critical, thus the western scholarship on Prophet PBUH in the West since Renaissance can be roughly divided into two categories. A group of scholars who tried to explore the life of the Prophet PBUH with minimum biases and in a more scientific way; they were more sympathetic towards the Prophet PBUH and appreciated the achievements of his life. The others only looked at him from the eyes of an orthodox Christian, were highly critical of him and highlighted controversial aspects of his life in order to demean his character; they tried to study his life in the light of their own value-systems and were unable to appreciate the spirit of an Age.[3]

The incident of 9/11 changed the practical politics and international relations of the world. It exerted its influence on different sort of scholarships. A general survey of the historiography on Prophet PBUH in the West reveals the influences of the incident of 9/11 on this genre of historiography too. However, it has been found that the general division of two different trends in historiography on Prophet PBUH in the West has continued even after 9/11. The biased and sympathetic views continued to be represented by different scholars. The major shift was thus the inappropriate harshest tones adopted by the biased scholars and a new trend was to wrongly associate Prophet PBUH with the phenomenon of terrorism.

The present study is an effort to critically look into the prejudiced portrayal of the Prophet PBUH presented in the western historiography

[1]See a detailed view of the historiography on Prophet PBUH in the West from seventh century to present in Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad* (New York: Cassell, 1998), p. 67-135; Also see how gradually the images of the Prophet PBUH changed in the west from very negative to the positive images of Reformer and Legislators created in the period of enlightenment and of lawgiver, Statesman and Hero in the times of Romanticism finally leading to the acceptance of the Prophet PBUH as Prophet of Abrahamic faith in John V. Tolen, *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[2] Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad*, p. 108.

[3]See a detailed discussion on the attitude of different western scholars on Prophet PBUH from Renaissance to twentieth century in Clinton Bennett, who concluded that there is a gradual movement in the west "towards acceptance of Muhammad as sincere and moral, and not deluded or worse". Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad*, pp. 93-135.

after 9/11. The present study has pointed out the weaknesses in the sources and arguments in the selected works and has tried to unravel the deliberate twisting of facts and any hidden or open biases. The analysis has been strengthened by adding some western works produced in the same period highlighting the merciful nature of the Prophet PBUH and eventually promoting tolerance, harmony and peace amongst the different religious communities of the world. The study is based on the methods of historiographical research. The analysis has been done by using primary sources of sīrah and tārīkh along with consulting secondary literature.

Nature of Inappropriately Placed New Allegations on Prophet PBUH after 9/11: The Prejudiced Literature

The present study has critically analyzed the works of Richard Gabriel and Robert Spencer whose studies on the Prophet PBUH depicted a deep misappropriation of the authors. Richard Gabriel, a retired US military general wrote several other books on military history[4] while his work on the Prophet PBUH *Muhammad: Islam's First Great General* (2007)[5] focuses on the military achievements of the Prophet PBUH. Robert Spencer wrote *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* (2007)[6]. Spencer has been generally mentioned as "an American anti-Muslim author and blogger"[7] and is alleged for spreading intolerance and extremist views.[8]

Watt believed that the earlier prejudices about the Prophet PBUH in the West developed in the context of differences of Christianity and Islam and the earlier works prejudiciously alleged Prophet PBUH to be insincere, sensual and treacherous.[9] Similarly a few of the scholars distorted facts to

[4] See some details in Rafia Riaz, "Comparative Analysis of Gulzar Ahmed and Richard Gabriel on the Military History of the Prophet (peace be on him)" in *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1/2, (Spring-summer 2016): pp. 131-147, p.132.

[5]Richard A. Gabriel, *Muhammad: Islam's First Great General* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

[6]Robert Spencer, *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most intolerant Religion* (Washington: Rognery Publishing, inc, 2007).

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_B._Spencer (accessed on 13/10/23)

[8] Robert Spencer has been accused by an investigative report published by *The Tennessean* (Daily) to earn money from an anti-Islam foundation "on spreading hate and fear about Islam". The hatred that Spencer was able to spread could only be seen from the incident of Norway Attacks whose perpetrator mentioned Robert Spencer 64 times in his manifesto. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_B._Spencer (accessed on 13/10/23)

[9] Montgommery Watt, *Muhammad at Madinah* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 324.

fallaciously portray Prophet PBUH as an opportunist, suffering from hallucinations and "consumed with ambition and lust".[10] However the new negative images of the Prophet PBUH were slightly different from those which were created earlier. The most important aspect of the new image created by the biased scholarship in the West was to relate the military campaigns of the Prophet PBUH with the popular phenomenon of terrorism after 9/11. Hence the authors wrongly portrayed the Prophet PBUH as a harsh military leader who introduced terror tools and bloodshed in warfare. The Prophet PBUH was unfairly alleged to obliterate old Arab morals in order to achieve his worldly goals. Gabriel has apparently adopted an academic style while in actual misinterpreting the military campaigns of the Prophet PBUH as an insurgency and erroneously accusing him of using secret force, assassination and treachery as tools of war which according to Gabriel was a deviation from the custom of the Arabs. Robert Spencer was more disrespectful. He rejected the claims of Prophet PBUH to the Prophethood, considered his warfare as immoral and falsely derives a close analogy between the Prophet PBUH and the present terrorists. He also improperly argued that the Prophet PBUH was intolerant towards members of other faiths and since Muslims follow his example, thus they too are equally intolerant.

In order to relate the Prophet PBUH with the phenomenon of terrorism, the authors have deliberately maligned the personality of the Prophet PBUH and have falsely attributed the character of violence in his nature. Gabriel has ungraciously called the Prophet PBUH as "a man with a reputation for not suffering insults easily".[11] His list of allegations was a long and unfair one. While analyzing the details of different battles, Gabriel has repeatedly and falsely called Prophet PBUH as revengeful.[12] Similarly Spencer also erroneously inferred the nature of the Prophet PBUH and his followers as violent. He argued that the Muslims started their violent actions in Makkah and the Prophet PBUH "frustrated over his failure to convert the Quraysh" threatened to bring slaughter to them. The persecution of Quraysh was only retaliation.[13]

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[10] Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad*, p.97.

[11] Gabriel, p. 107.

[12]For instance, Gabriel argued that Prophet PBUH was an Orphan in Makkah thus suffered insults and taunts. It made him revengeful. Gabriel, p.74;.For the same reason, he killed the Prisoners of Badr and several other personal enemies. Gabriel, pp. 101-2, 104, 107, 176.

[13] Spencer, pp.75-6.

Gabriel presented his own framework and found similarities between modern insurgencies and the battles of the Prophet PBUH. He signified certain war strategies of the Prophet PBUH as terror tools. In his opinion, like the leader of the guerilla warfare, the Prophet PBUH enjoyed the complete obedience of his followers, mass popularity and legitimacy. The Prophet PBUH started his insurgency with a smaller group of men and lesser number of weapons; he gradually increased his followers and equipped them with effective weapons and equipments[14], exactly as insurgencies grow in power and size. Certain terror tools like secret police, murders and assassinations were employed by the Prophet PBUH to make his insurgency successful. Wrongly considering Prophet PBUH as an impetus, Gabriel claimed that the practice of assassinations is now followed in the Muslim countries.[15]

Spencer on the other hand argued that the emergence of real Islam began when the Prophet PBUH became a military leader in Madinah. He created some very ridiculous analogies of the Prophet PBUH and the terrorists, for instance he commented that in the raid of Nakhla, Abdullah "used the word 'martyrdom' just as modern day Jihad terrorists do."[16] Similarly, he argued that the event of battle of Badr influenced the Jihidis of modern world. He quoted the words of Iraqi jihad leader, Abu Mu'ṣab al-Zarqawi who beheaded an American hostage and provided the justification that Prophet PBUH had also killed some prisoners after Badr.[17] Spencer is worried that Khyber has become a watch-word for jihadis which simply means the destruction of the state of Israel.[18] Spencer also accused Prophet PBUH of committing assassinations and deceit. Gabriel and Spencer both have further accused the Prophet PBUH of treachery and murders of the poets.

Prophet PBUH as Mercy for all Mankind: The Sane Voices

In order to reflect the sane voices within West, the present study has used the works of Barnaby Rogerson and Karen Armstrong, both studies

[14]When Prophet PBUH started up with battle, he hardly had any weapons but with the passage of time, he was able to supply weapons, helmets, armors, and shields to almost all members of his army. Similarly before the times of the Prophet PBUH horse was not considered very important for warfare, traditional Arab warfare largely relied on infantry but the Prophet PBUH introduced a large number of horses in the battlefield. For logistics, Prophet PBUH made a good use of the camels. Gabriel, pp. xxiv, 39-41.
[15]Gabriel., p.126.
[16]Spencer, p.98
[17]Spencer, pp.108-9.
[18]Spencer, pp.138-9, 143.

written after 9/11. Rogerson's work *The Prophet Muhammad: A Biography* (2003)[19] and Armstrong's book on *Muhammad: A Prophet For Our Time* (2007)[20] acknowledges the high moral standards of the Prophet PBUH of Islam. Rogerson, a traveler, was basically inspired by the stories about Prophet PBUH which he happened to listen in some part of Africa. He became interested in the life and personality of Prophet PBUH as he found it a true and fascinating story. He himself writes, "I have striven to talk and write about the Prophet as a heroic figure for all mankind to cherish – not just for those who define themselves as Muslims".[21]

Karen Armstrong, already a prolific writer on the history and Prophet PBUH of Islam particularly realized the changing patterns of western thought on Jihad after 9/11 and understood the increasing doubts of the western society about the Prophet PBUH. In her book she devoted a full chapter in her book on "Jihad" to justify the need of the battles of the Prophet PBUH and its relevance with his time period. She wrote in her introduction that after 9/11, members of the Christian Right and western media have portrayed Prophet PBUH negatively. While continuing with her argument, she proposed the West to change this attitude and to get out of "this type of bigotry, because it is a gift to extremists". She further argued that "Muhammad was not a man of violence. We must approach his life in a balanced way, in order to appreciate his considerable achievements".[22]

A Critical Reappraisal of the Prejudiced Literature by the Sane Voices of the West

Both the scholars, Gabriel and Spencer have apparently prepared a fairly well-argued case however there were some serious flaws in these works. Both of the authors have used weak sources and have not consulted the Arabic primary sources. Moreover Gabriel has often twisted the facts in order to fit it in his own framework. Similarly Spencer has also misquoted and misinterpreted different events according to his own convenience.

The theoretical structure of Gabriel calling the battles of the Prophet PBUH as insurgency and using the word guerilla warfare interchangeably is a poorly constructed framework. The modern definitions

[19]Barnaby Rogerson, *The Prophet Muhammad: A Biography* (London: Little Brown, 2003).
[20] Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet For Our Time* (London: Harpercollins, 2007).
[21]Barnaby Rogerson, "Looking for a Hero for all Mankind", *emel magazine*, 2006.
[22]Armstrong, pp.17-18.

of insurgency calling it a struggle of the non-state actors within a state was an incorrect analogy used for the battles of the Prophet PBUH.[23] Similarly the concept of guerrilla warfare usually associated with the efforts of liberation of one's land from foreigners is again an inappropriate terminology which was erroneously and confusingly applied on the battles of the Prophet PBUH.[24]

In order to make his theory applicable on the battles of the Prophet PBUH, Gabriel argued that certain individual killings signify the terror tools of the insurgency. He wrongly called the political killings during the war as murders and assassinations. He has ignored the fact that the modern notion of 'murders and assassinations' cannot be applied on Arabia of 6th century.[25] Gabriel further argued that Prophet PBUH used political murder which was an innovation and was never practiced in the previous battles of Arabs. The allegation is based on weaker sources and assumed facts. The matter of the fact is that surprise attacks at enemy were not new for Arabs; it was practiced in Arabia even before Prophet PBUH. The most evident example is that of Prophet PBUH himself when Quraysh tried to assassinate him before he migrated to Madinah. Similarly to give one of the examples out of many, in the times before Prophet PBUH, a member of the Himayrite royal family in a surprise attack killed an illegitimate usurper to the throne of Yemen.[26]

Contrary to Gabriel, Armstrong argued that Muslims were more patient and tolerant and violence was the characteristic of pre-Islamic Arabs. She believes that pre-Islamic Arabs were violent and easily provoked. The Arabs in pre-Islamic times used to respond violently even to perceived threats. She also quoted a poet Zuhaīr Ibn Abi Salma who

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[23] Rafia Riaz, "Comparative Analysis of Gulzar Ahmed and Richard Gabriel", 138-9.

[24] Rafia Riaz, "Comparative Analysis of Gulzar Ahmed and Richard Gabriel", p. 139.

[25]For instance Umayyah bin Khalaf, Al-Naḍr and Uqbah were the only prisoners of war of Badr, who were killed but these were not only the staunch enemies of the Muslims but were also involved in active warfare against the Muslims. The general practice in the medieval times was either to kill the male combatants or to enslave them, thus the general rules of warfare of that time were not violated. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat-un-Nabwiyya*, ed., Sheikh Adil Ahmed Abdul Mojud and Sheikh Ali Muhamad Moad, vol, 2 (Ar-Riaz: Maktubat-ul-Abikan, 1998), pp.223, 236-7; Also see more details in Rafia Riaz, "Comparative Analysis of Gulzar Ahmed and Richard Gabriel", p. 140-2.

[26]Ibn Hishām , al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah, ed., Sheikh Adil Ahmed Abdul Mojud and Sheikh Ali Muhamad Moad, 4 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Abīkān, 1998),1: 85-6, for Dhū Nuwās, 2: 78-9 for assassination attempt on Prophet PBUH; Also see, Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh-ul-Rusul wal-Malūk*, vol. 2 (Cairo, Dar-ul-Ma'ārif, 1977), pp.370-372.

advised the Arabs to be aggressors and to attack first, even when no one acts unjustly.[27] Armstrong further talked about the differences in the value-system of *Jahāliyya* and of Islam. The *jahalī* Arab took pride in *muruwah*, a traditional set of Arab values, and *muruwah* is generosity, fatalism, egotism etc. Islam, on the other hand, urged Muslims to behave with *hilm* and *salām*. *Hilm* is forbearance, patience and mercifulness and *salām* is peace. Prophet PBUH believed that Quraysh had left good aspects of *muruwah* and were only following the morally destructive recklessness, arrogance and egotism.[28] Armstrong related these two set of values as representatives of the attitudes of the two groups. Quraysh rejected the message of Islam due to their arrogance and instead treated Muslims harshly in order to reveal their arrogance. Muslims in response bore all the insults, physical assaults and economic set-backs with patience and forbearance.[29]

Likewise, it is incorrect on part of Gabriel to accuse Prophet PBUH of illegal murders of Jews. Jews had entered into a treaty with the Muslims. They were the members while the charter of Medina was formulated. Thus, certain Jewish leaders were murdered because of their betrayal. For instance Gabriel has mentioned the case of Kaʻab bin al-Ashrāf and Abu Rafʻī. Gabriel claimed that Kaʻab was murdered because he invented a poem lamenting the dead of the Quraysh at the battle of the Badr. However the primary sources mention that he wrote an insulting poem about the Muslim women, still he was killed not only on this allegation. He had infact formed ties with the Makkans and he visited Makkah to instigate them to attack Madinah. Same was the case with Abu Rafʻī, who was a constant supporter of the Makkans.[30] Rogerson has just referred to the incident of Kaʻab bin al-Ashrāf, who wrote satirizing verses against the Prophet PBUH, hurt the Prophet PBUH greatly and thus was assassinated.[31] The whole allegations of killings and murders on Prophet PBUH by Gabriel are based on a very weak assumption that Prophet PBUH bore sufferings in the form of taunts and insults in his early childhood which made him a revenge-seeking person[32] the assumption for

[27] Armstrong., p.27.
[28] Armstrong., pp.39-80.
[29] Armstrong., pp.80-82.
[30] Ṭabarī, vol. 2, pp.487-492 for Kaʻab , pp.493-495 for Abu Rafʻī; Ibn Hishām , vol. 2, pp.342-6.
[31] Rogerson., p.153.
[32] Gabriel, p. 65.

which Gabriel has no solid grounds and has not provided any historical evidence. Although Prophet PBUH was an orphan child but he was highly loved and valued both by his grandfather and later his uncle Abu Talib. Martin Lings wrote,

> Abd al-Muttalib entrusted his grandson to Abu Talib, who was full brother to the boy's father; and Abu Talib prolonged the affection and the kindness that his nephew had received from the old man. Henceforth he was as one of his own sons, and his wife Fatimah' did all she could to replace the boy's mother. In after-years Muhammad used to say of her that she would have let her own children go hungry rather than him.[33]

Thus there were actually no such insults and taunts which Gabriel assumes. Infact this baseless assumption is making a sharp contrast with the original merciful nature of the Prophet PBUH. Even in his earlier days in Makkah, the Prophet PBUH never developed any negative traits instead he was famous with the titles of *al-Sadīq* and *al-Amīn* which Gabriel has never mentioned. Similarly Gabriel has given no other details of Makkan period including the insensitive treatment of the Muslims by the Makkans, neither he talked about the patience of the Prophet PBUH on all those atrocities.[34] Thus Gabriel deliberately omitted the historical facts and based his negative assessments on mere assumptions.

Gabriel has also highlighted the killings of Banu Quraīẓah without relating it with proper contextual framework. He presented Prophet PBUH as a merciless chief whose wanted to destroy Banu Quraīẓah "in cold-blooded politics".[35] Ibn Hishām has clearly stated the position and intentions of the Jews during the battle of Ditch. Banu Quraīẓah was tempted by Ka'ab bin Hayy of Banu Naḍīr to betray Muslims and to attack them from rear. They were even planning to attack Muslim women and children.[36] This Jewish tribe was also bound to Muslims by the charter of Medina. The punishment for such betrayal was death even in the Jewish law of Torah. The Jews were given mild punishments on their earlier betrayals but they have proved themselves to be a constant source of trouble for the Muslims. Thus it was decided to give harsh treatment to the

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[33]Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life based on the Earliest Sources* (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1991), p. 28

[34]Ibn Ishāq has discussed in detail the harsh treatment of the Makkans, Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, tr., A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 142-5, 155; Also see an incident when the Prophet was teased. Ibn Hishām , vol. 1, pp. 318-9.

[35]Gabriel, p.141.

[36]Ibn Hishām has noted down the anxiety and concern of Muslims for the safety of their women and children during the battle. See Armstrong, pp.160-1; Ṭabarī,vol. 2, pp.581-594; Ibn Hishām , vol. 3, pp.191-200.

Jews of this tribe. On the event of the killing of Banu Quraīẓah, Rogerson remarked, "Muhammad (peace be on him) was fully aware of the traditions of war. If a fortified place was stormed in battle, it was normal practice for the men to be slaughtered",[37] still the Muslims spared the lives of earlier Jewish tribes which kept on creating problems for them, however at the end of discussion he concluded that "The brutality of this act sent shock waves throughout Arabia" He also wrongly believed that the practice of exterminating the whole tribe was new for Arabia.[38] However this practice was not new. Seargent has rightly pointed out in his study that Prophet PBUH changed very few customs and traditions of Arabia, "Muhammad acted in accordance with Arabian political patterns in existence from the remote past". Killing was practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia as a strategy. For instance the same Jews of Madinah were slaughtered by Mālik b. al 'Ajlān of Khazraj. Prophet PBUH instead had improved the status of Banu Quraīẓah. The bloot-wit of Quraīẓah was half of that of Banu Naḍīr but the Prophet PBUH raised it to that of Banu Naḍīr.[39]

On the matter of Jews, Armstrong pointed out that they were given full religious freedom provided they act as faithful members of the community and observe the clauses of the pact of Madinah of which they themselves were signatories. Thus Banu Qaynaīqa and Naḍīr were expelled from Madinah. Yet the problem was not solved and Jews kept on troubling Muslims. Banu Quraīẓah had the plans to attack the Muslims from rear in the battle of Ditch. They also asked support of Banu Naḍīr to massacre the women and children of the Muslims in the fortresses. The Quraīẓah in fact "started to attack the fortresses on the southeast of the settlement". Thus after the battle, it was very menancing for the Muslims to let Banu Quraīẓah migrate as other two tribes were allowed. The decision of their killing was expected even by Banu Quraīẓah. Armstrong highlighted that Quraīẓah were not killed due to religious or racial reasons and Islam respects the freedom of other religions, instead the "the men of Quraīẓah were executed for treason".[40]

Gabriel at various occasions has deliberately twisted the facts. While discussing the battle of Badr, Gabriel claimed that all of the

[37]Rogerson, p.165.
[38]Rogerson, 166-7.
[39]See R.B. Seargent, "The Sunnah Jamiah, Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the Tehrim of Yathrib: Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprised in the so-called Constitution of Medina", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studie*s 41 (Oxford, 1978), pp.1-42, 1-4.
[40]Armstrong, pp.160-64.

prisoners of the battle of Badr were killed. He quoted a line from the translation of Ibn Ishaq in order to verify his claims. On cross-checking Ibn Ishaq, it was revealed that Ibn Ishaq was only talking of two prisoners, Umayyah bin Khalf and his son who were murdered by Bilāl. Two other prisoners were reported to be killed after Badr. All the other prisoners were freed after giving ransom or without any money.[41]

Gabriel did not appreciate the historical event of amnesty of the Prophet PBUH for the Makkans and he attributed it to the diplomatic efforts of Abu Sufyān.[42] He did not mention the event of forgiveness of Prophet PBUH to many of his arch rivals. People like ‘Ikrimah, ‘Abdullah bin Sa‘ad, and Hind were forgiven by the Prophet PBUH. Rogerson on the other hand talks about the forgiveness of the Prophet PBUH, specially after the conquest of Makkah. He specially related the incident of the forgiveness of the Prophet PBUH towards Hind, who had mutilated the body of Hamza, and Suhayl who was one of the oldest persecutors of the Prophet PBUH. He even referred to the case of Abdullah ibn Sa’ad who turned a Muslim and was trusted by Prophet PBUH to that extent that he was allowed to write some of the revelation. He however later renounced Islam and deprecated the revelations. The Prophet PBUH even pardoned such a man.[43]

Spencer like Gabriel has also made almost similar allegations in a different framework. He begins his argument very smartly by accepting the views of Muslim authors who claim that Prophet PBUH lived in his own times. However then he himself contradicts his own arguments and while accepting the noble character of the Prophet PBUH, he rejects the claim of Prophet PBUH to the prophet hood. He further wrongly places his objection on the Muslims who follow the example of the Prophet PBUH as ‘an excellent model of conduct’[44] in the twentieth century and thus try to introduce medieval ways of life in modern times. He quoted a reference from “a writer on a British Muslim Internet forum” who wished all Israeli soldiers to be killed like Banu Quraīẓah.[45] He further argues that the conduct of the Prophet PBUH is encouraging the Muslims to indulge in

[41]The inaccurate depiction of the treatment with the prisoners of war reflects the extreme prejudiced approach of Gabriel, see Gabriel, p.101; For treatment with the prisoners of war, see Ibn Ishaq, pp.303, 308-318; Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, p. 223 for Umayya bin Khalaf and vol. 2, pp.242-6, 252-3 for prisoners who were ransomed.
[42]Gabriel, p.169-177.
[43]Rogerson, p.191.
[44] Spencer, 132
[45] Spencer, 133

terrorist acts. Spencer has also misinterpreted several events from the life of the Prophet PBUH.[46]

The life and practice of the Prophet PBUH is relevant and will be a source of strength for all the Muslims to come thus it is very important to challenge and deconstruct the negative images of the Prophet PBUH. Prophet PBUH was never an extremist and he could not be. His one of the famous sayings was "choose the middle path". Spencer has completely misunderstood the concept of Jihad during the times of the Prophet PBUH. The battles of the Prophet PBUH were meant to create balance of power. The Muslims of Makkah had suffered the hardships and difficulties created by the infidels of Makkah for almost 10 years. Even after the migration of the Prophet PBUH to Madinah, a few of the Muslims were left behind or the new converts were tortured. Creating balance of power amongst societies is considered extremely important in world politics and is the only mean to ensure justice. Prophet's PBUH warfare definitely provides an important lesson for the Muslim rulers and heads of the states who in modern times have lost the balance of power. Warfare is important for self-defense as one may learn this during the massive brutal killings of children, women and elderly by Israel bombing houses and hospitals.[47]

Moreover, Spencer has also failed to provide a proper definition of terrorism and terrorist groups. It is a complicated concept of political science to differentiate terrorist organizations from freedom fighters.[48]

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[46] Spencer, pp.75-6, 119; for the correct factual position of these events see Ibn Ishaq, 130-131; Ibn Hishām , vol. 1, 318-9.

[47] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/17/israel-bombs-homes-in-southern-gaza-kills-more-than-70-people (accessed on 21/10/23); https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/18/gazas-ahli-arab-hospital-after-the-attack-that-killed-at-least-500-people (accessed on 21/10/23)

[48] According to Charles Townshend , the essence of terrorism is the use of violence by the armed against the unarmed. He has differentiated it with the concept of war which is based on combat. He also considers that even during a war, the people who are innocent and are targeted, it is terrorism. Charles Townshend, *Terrorism: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.7-8; Also see the views of Eqbal Ahmed, who argued that how Zionists were initially called terrorists but later on termed as freedom fighters, similarly *Majahideen* of Aghanistan when met President Ronald Reagen were called freedom fighters. Thus he believes that it due to these changing conceptions of political needs that terrorism becomes difficult to define. He also accused the western government to tolerate the terrorism of the dictators of their friendly governments. Similarly, during the cold war, America supported the terrorist regimes. Thus he identified five kinds of terrorism, state terrorism, religious terrorism, criminal terrorism, political terrorism and oppositional terrorism. Eqbal Ahmed, *Terrorism: Theirs and Ours* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001).

Spencer has often quoted examples of Hamas as a terrorists group. In his view Hamas is following the conduct of the Prophet PBUH thus it has turned violent, completely ignoring the large number of political and social factors behind the development of Hamas. Moreover, if Hamas was following the Prophet PBUH, Israeli forces were following whom when they created and promoted violence? Similarly America was not following the example of Christ when they were bombing and killing innocent men, children and women in Iraq and Afghanistan.[49] Spencer has also ignored the role and importance of intelligence agencies of different countries in funding and promoting some radical groups within the Muslim community.

The military struggle of the Prophet PBUH was a combination of peace and war strategies[50] teaching his people the ethics of war in which children, women and even cultivated land was not allowed to be damaged. Thus anyone following this code cannot be a terrorist but every community should keep the right to defend them. Similarly anyone violating the rules established by the Prophet PBUH cannot be regarded as following the example of the Prophet PBUH. Anyone can misuse or misinterpret the actions of the Prophet PBUH to suit their own interests. The group, responsible for the killings of more than a hundred Muslim children at a School at Peshawar, Pakistan[51] also claims to follow the example of the Prophet PBUH but the reaction of the state and the society depicts the general unacceptability of such claims in a Muslim society.

Talking about the battles of the Prophet PBUH Rogerson and Armstrong, both highlighted the peaceful nature of the Prophet PBUH in order to contrast him from the terrorists. Rogerson has clearly tried to develop a distinction of the Prophet PBUH from the terrorists. In one of his articles, he discussed the apparent similarities between Osama and the Prophet PBUH and concluded that Osama deviated from the teachings of the Prophet PBUH. In his words,

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[49]see Randall law, who argues that terrorism was always existent in the world in different forms, tracing its roots from ancient world, he talks of the terror in the early modern Europe, revolutionary terror, Ethno-national terror and state terror and has divided them historically. He also believes that terrorism is a rational, consciously chosen strategy with political aims. Randall D. Law, *Terrorism: A History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

[50] See a detailed discussion how war and peace both were used as a strategy by the Prophet PBUH in Siama Gul, *Muhammad: The Greatest Strategist: An Analysis of War and Peace Strategies of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) towards the North of Arabia* (Islamabad: Auraq Publications, 2023)

[51] More than 100 children were brutally killed at Army Public School, Peshawar, Pakistan by an extremist religious group on Dec, 16, 2015.

He (Osama) began to dream of reviving the Caliphate, a world-wide Islamic state, and had lost all sight of the goals of the Prophet, whose lifetime struggle had just one purpose: to reconnect mankind with the divine. All his life the Prophet taught that the only way to honour God was to serve mankind.[52]

Discussing the battles of the Prophet PBUH, Rogerson argued that it was the Prophet PBUH who started the economic blockade of the Quraysh however he further argued that he did this only "for the survival of God's word".[53] Armstrong was of the view that the motive behind the battles of the Prophet PBUH was his realization of the importance of Makkah for the development of Islam as well as of the peninsula. Thus, Prophet PBUH tried to seek reconciliation and before it was important that he made the Quraysh to "take notice of him".[54] Thus Muslims decided to attack the trade caravans of the Makkans and it surprised no one as "ghazw" was a normal practice in those days of Arabia. The Prophet PBUH instead, "tried to give his ghuzw ethical grounding".[55] Moreover, the Muslims were expelled from their hometown just because they wanted freedom of worship, thus it was the right of the Muslims to fight back in order to retain their hometown.[56] Similarly, while explaining the incident

[52] Barnaby Rogerson, "Osama's T-Shirt and the Prophet's Mantle", *Guardian*, Febraury, 2003.

[53]Rogerson., p.146.

[54] Armstrong, p.126.

[55] Armstrong, 129; Also See Gulzar Ahmed, who forcefully argues that the Prophet's PBUH battles were following high conduct of morality. He argued that Islam has accepted war as the lesser of the two evils and a tool for defense. The history of the mankind reveals that war has always remained a part of the life of men and societies. The solution in the opinion of Ahmed lies in accepting this truth and formulating laws and regulations for war in order to lessen its miseries. This, for the first time, was practiced by the Prophet PBUH and the war fought by him was "in accordance with sound moral principles". However he differs with Armstrong while narrating the motives of the battles and he has mentioned in his introduction that Prophet "took defensive measures" in "reaction to the declaration of war by Mecca". He further in his discussion mentioned that "in spite of the diplomatic journeys performed by the Prophet PBUH he was not able to persuade the Makkans from their determination to attack Madina". He also devoted a full chapter on "Declaration of War by Makkah and His Reactions" in which he argued that Makkans wrote a letter to 'Abdullah bin Ubayy and threatened to attack Medina if the Prophet PBUH and his companions were not killed or sent out of Medina. Ahmed, *The Prophet's Concept of War*, (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1986), 22, 27, 29, 67-8.

[56]See Leila Azzam and Aisha Gouverneur, who also believe that Muslims had left their houses and property in Makkah which was taken over by the polytheist Makkans, thus making raids on Makkan caravans was actually to make up some of their losses. Leila Azzam and Aisha Gouverneur, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)* (ideas4islam, n.d.), p.46.

of Nakhlah, Armstrong highlighted that the revelations emphasized on the just cause of this war.[57] Armstrong further argued that after facing the trauma of *hijrat*, Muslims were a bit serious about warfare. Still the battle of Badr was started by the war cry of the Quraysh and the Prophet PBUH fought a defensive battle. [58] Contrary to Gabriel and Spencer, Armstrong confessed that the prisoners of Badr were "released or ransomed"; the practice which was never followed in tribal warfare where "captives were either slain or tortured".[59]

While talking about the character of the Prophet PBUH, Rogerson has highlighted the charm of his personality. Rogerson has further remarked that the acceptance of his own mistake and amendment in what he has earlier accepted "is testimony to Muhammad's remarkable personal honesty".[60] He has also given due importance to explaining in detail the opposition of the Makkans and the tolerant attitude of the Prophet PBUH.[61] He mentioned the exalted manners of the Prophet PBUH, his habit to visit the sick and houses of the dead, working along with his fellows and considering himself equal even when he got political authority. Thus he was humble in his nature, and respectful and kind for his companions and slaves.[62] Rogerson was not very enthusiastic to talk about Prophet's PBUH battles, he instead by emphasizing the personal life of the Prophet PBUH[63] tried to revert the militant image of the Prophet PBUH. He was portrayed as a peaceful, loving and joyous person who likes the company of women and perfume.[64]

Armstrong, like Rogerson praised the personality of the Prophet PBUH. She argued that Prophet PBUH had a charming personality and he was much liked in Makkah. She wrote,

When he did turn to speak to somebody, he used to swing his entire body around and address him full face. When he shook hands, he was never the first to

[57]Armstrong., 130; See the verses of Quran 2: 217
[58]Armstrong, 135.
[59]Armstrong, 136.
[60]Rogerson, p.100
[61] Rogerson, pp.98-115.
[62]Rogerson, pp.128-135.
[63]Rogerson, pp. 135-9.
[64]Rogerson, 135; Prophet PBUH was a merciful person and been kind to women, children and orphans. For more details of the marriages and the family life of the Prophet PBUH see, Shamim Aleem, *Prophet Muhammad (s) and His Family: A Sociological Perspective* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2007).

withdraw his own. He inspired such confidence that he was known as Al-Amīn, the Reliable One.[65]

She further wrote how Prophet PBUH patiently bore the insults and physical assaults of the Quraysh. In contrast to the negative images created by Gabriel, Armstrong highlighted the mental and physical torture of the Quraysh towards extremely nonviolent Prophet PBUH. Quraysh used to throw filth over Prophet PBUH and he never reacted to such physical assaults.[66] Prophet PBUH used to do his household chores himself, mending his shoes and clothes and ending the family goats. He allowed greater freedom at his household.[67] Thus, the positive traits of the personality of the Prophet PBUH were highlighted both by Rogerson and Armstrong.

Conclusion

The prejudiced literature in the West continued to be produced after 9/11, however there were radical changes in the views and allegations of this literature. This new kind of literature wrongly levels the charges of introducing violence in Islam on Prophet PBUH and tried to associate him with terrorism. Hence the authors wrongly portrayed the Prophet PBUH as a harsh military leader who introduced terror tools and bloodshed in warfare. Gabriel has misinterpreted the military campaigns of the Prophet PBUH as an insurgency and erroneously accused him of using secret force, assassination and treachery as tools of war. Robert Spencer was more disrespectful. He rejected the claims of Prophet PBUH to the Prophethood, considered his warfare as immoral and falsely derives a close analogy between the Prophet PBUH and the present terrorists. The present study argues that the charges leveled against Prophet PBUH were extremely biased, wrongly placed, misquoted and misinterpreted greatly. Some ridiculous analogies have been created based on lack of information and understanding of the proper socio-cultural context. In order to refute the allegations of Gabriel and Spencer, apart from using primary sources and some Muslim literature, the study has also used the works of western authors on sīrah produced in the same period that represents the sane voices. These works also support the stance of the present study and invalidates the facts, arguments and misinterpretations of the prejudiced

[65] Armstrong, p.37.

[66] Armstrong., p.89; There were some other non-Muslim works who highlighted the merciful nature of the Prophet. For instance, See the work of Satish Ganjoo, *Prophet Muhammad, The Greatest Benefactor* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2004).

[67] Armstrong, pp. 139-140

literature. Rogerson and Armstrong both acknowledged the merciful nature of the Prophet PBUH. Rogerson praises the noble character of Prophet PBUH and was amused by the reverence Muslims give to their Prophet PBUH. Armstrong also presented the Prophet PBUH as a merciful, mild and noble person and also highlighted the morality which he followed during warfare. Thus the prejudiced literature stands invalidated by the refutal of the sane voices within the western society. Hence the charges of aggression and violence were wrongly associated with Prophet PBUH who was sent as a mercy to all mankind. All people Muslims or non-Muslims can learn peace, love, patience, and justice from the life of the Prophet PBUH.



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