

AL-MUSTAD 'AFĪN AND AL-MUSTAKBIRĪN IN THE QUR'AN

A Critical Thematic Exegesis of Asymmetric Power in the Iran-Israel-United States Conflict

AL-MUSTAD 'AFĪN DAN AL-MUSTAKBIRĪN DALAM AL-QUR'AN

Tafsir Tematik-Kritis atas Kuasa Asimetris dalam Konflik Iran-Israel-Amerika Serikat

المستضعفون والمستكبرون في القرآن

تفسير موضوعي نقدي لعلاقات القوة غير المتكافئة في الصراع بين إيران وإسرائيل والولايات المتحدة

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Abstrak

Konflik geopolitik antara Iran, Israel, dan Amerika Serikat menunjukkan relasi kuasa yang timpang, kompleks, dan sarat legitimasi ideologis. Masalah utama penelitian ini ialah bagaimana Al-Qur'an dapat dibaca secara tematik untuk memahami konflik global tanpa terjebak pada pembelaan partisan. Penelitian ini penting karena wacana *mustadh'afin* dan *mustakbirin* sering digunakan dalam politik kontemporer, tetapi belum selalu dikaji secara kritis sebagai kerangka etik dan eksegetis. Tujuan penelitian ini ialah menganalisis konsep *mustadh'afin* dan *mustakbirin* dalam Al-Qur'an serta mengaitkannya dengan konfigurasi konflik Iran, Israel, dan Amerika Serikat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan metode tafsir tematik, hermeneutika double movement Fazlur Rahman, dan analisis wacana kritis. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsep *mustadh'afin* dan *mustakbirin* tidak hanya bersifat historis, tetapi juga menjadi tipologi transhistoris untuk membaca ketimpangan kuasa. Narasi Fir'aun berfungsi sebagai arketipe mustakbir yang relevan untuk menganalisis hegemoni global, ekspansionisme politik, dan penggunaan istilah Qur'ani untuk legitimasi kekuasaan. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa etika perlawanan dalam Al-Qur'an bertumpu pada keadilan, proporsionalitas, perlindungan jiwa, dan pembebasan, bukan kekerasan sektarian. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan tafsir tematik kontekstual dan tawaran kerangka etis berbasis *maqāshid al-syari'ah* bagi diplomasi Islam kontemporer.

Kata Kunci : *Mustadh'afin; Mustakbirin; Tafsir Maudhu'i; Geopolitik; Iran-Israel-Amerika Serikat; Muqawamah*

Abstract

The geopolitical conflict involving Iran, Israel, and the United States reflects an asymmetric power relation shaped by military, ideological, and theological claims. The main problem this study addresses is how to interpret the Qur'an thematically to understand global conflict without falling into partisan reductionism. This study is important because the Qur'anic concepts of mustadh'afin and mustakbirin are frequently invoked in contemporary political discourse, yet they require critical exegetical examination. This research aims to analyze the concepts of mustadh'afin and mustakbirin in the Qur'an and relate them to the triangular geopolitical conflict among Iran, Israel, and the United States. It employs a qualitative library research method by combining tafsir maudhu'i, Fazlur Rahman's double movement hermeneutics, and critical discourse analysis. The findings show that mustadh'afin and mustakbirin are not merely historical categories, but transhistorical typologies for examining asymmetric power structures. The Qur'anic narrative of Pharaoh serves as an archetype of the mustakbir, remaining relevant for analyzing contemporary global hegemony, political expansionism, and the instrumentalization of Qur'anic terminology for political legitimacy. The study also finds that the Qur'anic ethics of resistance are grounded in justice, proportionality, protection of life, and liberation, rather than sectarian violence. This research contributes to the development of contextual thematic exegesis and offers an ethical framework,

grounded in maqāshid al-sharī'ah, for contemporary Islamic diplomacy oriented toward global justice and humanitarian solidarity.

Keywords: *Mustadh'afin; Mustakbirin; Thematic Exegesis; Geopolitics; Iran–Israel–United States; Muqāwamah*

ملخص

يعالج هذا البحث الصراع الجيوسياسي بين إيران وإسرائيل والولايات المتحدة بوصفه نموذجًا لعلاقات القوة غير المتكافئة التي تتداخل فيها المصالح العسكرية والسياسية والأيديولوجية. وتتمثل مشكلة البحث في كيفية قراءة القرآن قراءة موضوعية لفهم هذا الصراع العالمي دون الوقوع في الاختزال الحزبي أو التبرير الأيديولوجي. وتنبع أهمية البحث من كثرة توظيف مفهومي المستضعفين والمستكبرين في الخطاب السياسي المعاصر، مع الحاجة إلى دراستهما دراسة تفسيرية نقدية. يهدف البحث إلى تحليل مفهومي المستضعفين والمستكبرين في القرآن الكريم وربطهما بتكوين الصراع الثلاثي بين إيران وإسرائيل والولايات المتحدة. يعتمد البحث على المنهج النوعي من خلال الدراسة المكتبية، مستخدمًا التفسير الموضوعي، ومنهج الحركة المزدوجة عند فضل الرحمن، وتحليل الخطاب النقدي. وتوصل البحث إلى أن مفهومي المستضعفين والمستكبرين لا يقتصران على سياق تاريخي معين، بل يشكلان نمطًا عابرًا للتاريخ لفهم اختلافات القوة. كما تظهر قصة فرعون في القرآن بوصفها نموذجًا للمستكبر، ويمكن الاستفادة منها في تحليل الهيمنة العالمية، والتوسع السياسي، وتوظيف المصطلحات القرآنية لأغراض الشرعية السياسية. ويبين البحث أن أخلاق المقاومة في القرآن تقوم على العدل، والتناسب، وحفظ النفس، والتحرر، لا على العنف الطائفي. ويسهم البحث في تطوير التفسير

الموضوعي السياقي، ويقترح إطارًا أخلاقيًا قائمًا على مقاصد الشريعة للدبلوماسية الإسلامية المعاصرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المستضعفون، المستكبرون، التفسير الموضوعي، الجيوسياسة، المقاومة.

A. Introduction

The geopolitical conflict between Iran, Israel, and the United States (US) has become one of the most chronic epicenters of global tension in the contemporary international order. Since the events of October 7, 2023, the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East has undergone a fundamental transformation from a mere proxy-based *shadow war* to a direct military confrontation involving ballistic missile attacks, systemic economic sanctions, and proxy wars stretching from Syria and Yemen to Lebanon.¹ Iran's direct attacks on Israel through *Operation True Promise I* in April 2024 and *Operation True Promise II* in October 2024 marked the first direct military engagement between the two states in nearly five decades,² which culminated in *Operation Epic Fury* a joint US-Israeli coordinated multi-domain strike campaign launched on February 28, 2026, targeting Iranian military installations, nuclear enrichment facilities, and key regime officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the

¹ Tri Adianto and Moh Dulkiah, "The Escalation of the Iran–Israel Conflict and Its Implications for Middle East Geopolitical Stability," *Candidate: Jurnal Sains Politik* 3, no. 2 (December 2025): 116–43.

² "Target Iran - Air Strikes," accessed May 20, 2026, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/israel/iran.htm>. See also, "Operation True Promise," accessed May 20, 2026, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/operation-true-promise-20240413.htm>.

opening hours of the operation.³ The two-month campaign, which concluded on May 5, 2026, was assessed by the U.S. Department of State as a continuation of an already existing international armed conflict, with the International Energy Agency reporting the largest oil supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.⁴ This triangular conflict configuration represents not merely a military-strategic struggle, but also a manifestation of the ideological clash between Zionism, *American exceptionalism*, and Shi'ite Pan-Islamism codified in the *axis of resistance* doctrine,⁵ demanding a deeper rereading not only from an international relations perspective, but also from a theological and exegetical perspective rooted in sacred texts.

The Qur'an as a *holy book* contains a very rich narrative about the dialectic of asymmetric power, especially through the conceptualization of *mustadh'afin* (the oppressed) and *mustakbirin* (the oppressors).⁶ The concept of *mustadh'afin* in the Qur'an refers to groups that are weakened structurally and culturally, either through political, economic, or ideological oppression, as documented in QS. al-Nisa ' [4]: 75, QS. al-Qashash [28]: 5, and QS. al-A'raf [7]: 137 (Hidayatullah, 2019, p. 58). On the other hand, *mustakbirin* represents the archetype of tyrannical power personified through the figure of Pharaoh, a symbol of *istikbar* who claims divinity and

³ "2026 Iran War | Explained, United States, Israel, Strait of Hormuz, Map, & Conflict | Britannica," May 20, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/event/2026-Iran-war>. See also, The White House, "Operation Epic Fury: Decisive American Power to Crush Iran's Terror Regime," *The White House*, March 12, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/releases/2026/03/operation-epic-fury-decisive-american-power-to-crush-irans-terror-regime/>.

⁴ "Operation Epic Fury and International Law," *United States Department of State*, n.d., accessed May 20, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-legal-adviser/2026/04/operation-epic-fury-and-international-law/>. Kenneth Watkin, "Operation Epic Fury: Reports of the Death of International Law Are Greatly Exaggerated," *Just Security*, March 10, 2026, <https://www.justsecurity.org/133579/operation-epic-fury-international-law/>.

⁵ Arooba Abbasi, "Proxy Wars and Regional Instability: Israel-Iran Conflict in the Middle East," *Fitrah*, no. 01 (July 2025): 1418–27.

⁶ Muhammad Alwi et al., "Al-Mustadh'afin: Reflection of the Qur'an on Social Inequalities," *FITRAH: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 8, no. 2 (December 2022): 327–44, <https://doi.org/10.24952/fitrah.v8i2.5633>.

oppresses the weak systematically.⁷ The dialectic between these two concepts is not only a theological category, but also a sociological-political framework that can be used as an analytical lens for understanding contemporary power relations.⁸ The theological-political question that arises is: how does the Qur'an provide ethical guidance in understanding global conflicts characterized by power asymmetries such as Iran-Israel-US?

Based on this background, this study formulates three main questions which are the focus of the study. *First*, how does the Qur'an define and narrate the concepts of *mustadh'afin* and *mustakbirin* terminologically, contextually, and theologically?. *Second*, how can the dialectical paradigm of *istidh'af-istikbar* be used as an analytical framework to read the Iran-Israel-United States triangular geopolitical conflict objectively and academically? *Third*, what are the theological, ethical, and political implications of this thematic reading for the development of contemporary Islamic discourse and the ethics of global resistance (*muqawamah*)? The academic objective of this research is to contribute to the development of contextual thematic interpretations that are able to respond to contemporary geopolitical issues, while also offering a Qur'anic ethical framework for understanding global conflict without getting caught up in ideological-partisan reductions.⁹

A review of the existing literature reveals that studies on *mustadh'afin* and *mustakbirin* have been pursued through three distinct yet

⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Tafsir Fi Zhilalil Qur'an: Di Bawah Lindungan Al-Qur'an*, Trans. Oleh Asad Yasin Dkk (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2001), 132.

⁸ Hasbi Nawi Ashidiki, "Konsep Mustadh'afin Dalam Kajian Tafsir Kontemporer (Studi Atas Tafsir Farid Esack)," *Al-Kaunyah* 2, no. 2 (March 2022): 21, <https://doi.org/10.56874/alkaunyah.v2i2.707>.

⁹ Abdullah Saeed, "Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach," Routledge & CRC Press, 2013, 178, <https://www.routledge.com/Reading-the-Quran-in-the-Twenty-First-Century-A-Contextualist-Approach/Saeed/p/book/9780415677509>. Akhmad Aidil Fitra and Yousuf Aboujanah, "Gadamerian Hermeneutical Analysis of Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy's Interpretation of QS. Luqman (31):6 in the Context of Contemporary Entertainment Discourse," *Al-Karim: International Journal of Quranic and Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2025): 59–78, <https://doi.org/10.33367/al-karim.v3i1.6839>.

uncomplementary trajectories, each leaving an analytical residue that this study aims to address. The first trajectory is classical-theological, exemplified by Sayyid Quthb's *Fi Zhilal al-Qur'an* which developed a theology of resistance against modern *jāhiliyyah*,¹⁰ and further radicalized by Murtadha Muthahhari and Ali Shari'ati who reconfigured *mustadh'afin* as a revolutionary axis in the discourse of the Iranian Revolution yet these works remain bounded within the historical-ideological context of the 1970s-1980s revolutionary movements and do not engage with the post-2023 escalation of the triangular conflict.¹¹ The second trajectory is liberation-theological, advanced by Hamid Dabashi (2008) and Farid Esack who developed *Islamic Liberation Theology* as a response to imperialism and apartheid by positioning *mustadh'afin* as the principal epistemic subject of Qur'anic reading;¹² however, while this approach is methodologically robust in critiquing imperial structures, it has been primarily applied to Palestinian, South African, and South Asian contexts, leaving the triangular Iran-Israel-US configuration analytically underexplored.¹³ The third trajectory is geopolitical-Islamic, represented by the works of Vali Nasr particularly *The Shia Revival* (2006) and *Iran's Grand Strategy* (2025) and Mohsen Milani, which have substantially enriched the analysis of Iranian foreign policy and Shi'a political resurgence;¹⁴ nevertheless, these studies operate within secular

¹⁰ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsir Fi Zhilalil Qur'an: Di Bawah Lindungan Al-Qur'an*, Trans. Oleh Asad Yasin Dkk, 132–135. A. Hidayatullah, "Mustadh'afin Perspektif Sayyid Quthb Dalam Tafsir Fi Zhilalil Quran" (Skripsi, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2019), 60.

¹¹ Mahmood T. Davari, "The Political Thought of Ayatullah Murteza Mutahhari," ICIT Digital Library, RoutledgeCurzon, Dhu al-Qa'dah 1425, 112–21, <https://www.icit-digital.org/books/the-political-thought-of-ayatullah-murteza-mutahhari>.

¹² Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (Routledge, 2008), 195–217.

¹³ Ashraf Kunnummal, "The Politics of Post-Essential Islamic Liberation Theology: The Difference and Intersection between Farid Esack and Hamid Dabashi," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 36, no. 1 (July 2023): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3027/2023/v36n1a3>.

¹⁴ Max Weiss, "The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 3 (2011), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00210862.2011.556405>. Vali Nasr,

international relations paradigms and do not systematically engage with Qur'anic exegetical resources as analytical frameworks.¹⁵ More recent contributions from Indonesian and global scholarship have advanced thematic interpretations on cognate themes such as globalization, fundamentalism, and social justice,¹⁶ yet none has explicitly bridged the *mustadh'afīn-mustakbirīn* paradigm with a comprehensive analysis of the triangular Iran-Israel-US conflict in its post-2023 configuration. This study therefore positions itself at the intersection of these three trajectories, offering an original contribution by employing thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhu'i*) as the primary analytical lens, integrating Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics with contemporary geopolitical analysis to generate what we propose as *Qur'anic Geopolitics* an academic sub-discipline that synthesizes theological, ethical, and strategic dimensions previously treated in isolation.

This research employs a qualitative approach with *library research* as the principal methodological framework, operationalized through a three-tiered analytical procedure that integrates *tafsir maudhu'i* (thematic exegesis), Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).¹⁷ The first tier applies the *tafsir maudhu'i* methodology of al-Farmawī and al-Ghazālī through eight sequential steps: theme determination, verse compilation, chronological arrangement based on *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *munāsabah* analysis, consultation with classical (al-Thabārī, al-Razī, Ibn Kathīr) and contemporary (Quthb, Thabathaba'i, Muthahhari) commentaries, pattern identification, normative-descriptive

Iran's Grand Strategy (Princeton University Press, 2025), 1–24, <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691268927/irans-grand-strategy>.

¹⁵ Abbasi, "Proxy Wars and Regional Instability," 1418–27.

¹⁶ Nur Zen Hasanah et al., "Contemporary Traditions and Challenges: Tafsir Maudhu'i's Study of Islam and Fundamentalism," *ResearchGate* 2, no. 2 (2024): 131–52, <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v2i2.7>.

¹⁷ Akhdad Aidil Fitra and Novizal Wendry, "Penafsiran, Ideologi, dan Afiliasi Politik: Kritik Buya Hamka (1908-1981 M) terhadap Nasakom Era Demokrasi Terpimpin (1959-1966 M)," *Istinarah: Riset Keagamaan, Sosial dan Budaya* 6, no. 2 (December 2024): 234–49, <https://doi.org/10.31958/istinarah.v6i2.13607>.

categorization, and thematic synthesis.¹⁸ Verse selection is governed by three filters: (a) terminological relevance verses containing derivations of the roots (*istad'afa*) and (*istakbara*), totaling thirteen verses for *mustad'afin* and forty-eight for *mustakbirin*; (b) contextual significance priority given to QS. al-Nisā' [4]: 75, al-Qashash [28]: 4-6, al-A'raf [7]: 137, al-Anfāl [8]: 26, al-Isrā' [17]: 4-7, and Saba' [34]: 31-33; and (c) typological transferability to contemporary geopolitical configurations.¹⁹ The second tier applies Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* through two operations: extracting moral ideals (*maqāshid*) from the historical-revelatory context, then projecting these universal principles onto the contemporary Iran-Israel-US triangular conflict to ensure both textual fidelity and contextual relevance.²⁰ The third tier deploys Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to dissect:²¹ (i) the textual dimension (lexical and rhetorical structures of primary verses); (ii) the discursive practice dimension (the production and circulation of *mustad'afin-mustakbirin* terminology in classical exegesis and post-1979 Iranian revolutionary discourse); and (iii) the social practice dimension (the ideological function of these terms within *Pax Americana*, Zionist expansionism, and the *axis of resistance* doctrine).²² Source criteria are stratified hierarchically: primary sources comprise the Qur'an and *tafsir* works selected for methodological diversity (Sunni-Shi'a, traditional-

¹⁸ Abd Al-Hayyi Al-Farmawi, *Metode tafsir maudhu'iy: suatu pengantar* (Raja Grafindo Persada, 1994), 41–52.

¹⁹ Alwi et al., "Al-Mustadh'afin," 327–44. Ahmad Nurrohim, Hanik Khodinatul Ma'rifah, and Obydur Rahman, "Qur'anic Semantics of Arrogance: A Synonymity Study of Istikbar Mukhtalan Fakhur and Marahan," *Solo International Collaboration and Publication of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 03 (December 2024): 355–68, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sicopus.v2i03.293>.

²⁰ Akhmad Aidil Fitra et al., "Wa Lā Taḡlū Fī Dīnikum" in Q.S. An-Nisā' (4):171: A Hermeneutic Analysis of Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement in the Context of Religious Moderation in the Post-Truth Era," *FOKUS Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Dan Kemasyarakatan* 10, no. 2 (November 2025): 185–202.

²¹ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Routledge, 2013), 132–60.

²² Fathyieh Fattahizadeh and Fereshteh Motamad Langrodi, "Application of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis Model to Quranic Verses Discussing Peaceful Dealing with Hypocrites," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 1 (2022): 184–200, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.121.13>.

revolutionary, textualist-contextualist), while secondary sources are peer-reviewed journal articles from the past five years (2021-2026) in Qur'anic studies, Islamic political thought, and Middle Eastern geopolitics. The integration of the three tiers is non-sequential but mutually reinforcing: *tafsir maudhu'i* supplies the textual corpus, the *double movement* furnishes the hermeneutic bridge, and CDA provides the critical lens to interrogate the ideological deployment of Qur'anic terminology together producing a *triangulated exegetical-critical methodology* for analyzing contemporary global conflicts.

B. Conceptualization of Mustadh'afin and Mustakbirin in the Qur'an

The term *mustadh'afin* in the Qur'an comes from the root word *dba'afa-yadb'ufu-dba'fan* which lexically means "weak," "fragile," or "powerless," and in the derivation form *istaf'ala* becomes *istadh'afa-yastadh'ifu* which contains the meaning of "making weak," "looking at weak," or "oppressing until weak."²³ The *ism maf'ul* form of this verb is *mustadh'af* (singular) and *mustadh'afin/mustadh'afun* (plural), which terminologically refers to a subject weakened by another party through a repressive power structure. In contrast, the term *mustakbirin* comes from the root word *kabara-yakburu-kibran* which means "big," "great," which in the derivation form *istakbara-yastakbiru* contains the meaning of "arrogating oneself," "feeling superior," or "looking down on others."²⁴ This linguistic distinction is important because the roots *kāf-bā-rā'* in the Qur'an contain a theological paradox: the attribute of majesty (*al-Mutakabbir*) is an exclusive attribute of God, so that when humans claim this majesty, they commit a violation of tawhid as well as social oppression. Thus, *istadh'af* (the process of structural weakening) and *istikbar* (arrogance of power) are two dialectical sides of an oppressive relationship that is

²³ Alwi et al., "Al-Mustadh'afin," 330–33.

²⁴ Nurrohm, Ma'rifah, and Rahman, "Qur'anic Semantics of Arrogance."

fundamentally different from *dha'f* (personal-natural weakness) which is an inherent human condition.²⁵

A direct verification through the Qur'anic lexicon (*mu'jam Qur'āni*) particularly *al-Mu'jam al-Mufabras li Alfāz al-Qur'an al-Karīm* by Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Bāqī, cross-referenced with the *Quranic Arabic Corpus* of the University of Leeds reveals a more precise quantification of these terms than previously reported in secondary literature.²⁶ The trilateral root *ḍād-‘ayn-fā’* occurs 52 times in the Qur'an across 11 derivational forms, of which the morphologically critical *istaf'ala* pattern (*istad'afa*) appears 8 times as a Form X verb, and the passive participle *mustad'afūn* the principal referent for the oppressed occurs 5 times, specifically in QS. al-Nisā' [4]: 75, 97, 98, 127, and QS. al-Anfāl [8]: 26.²⁷ Similarly, the trilateral root *kaf-ba'-ra* occurs 161 times across 18 derivational forms, with the Form X verb *istakbara* appearing 40 times and its active participle *mutakabbir* appearing 6 times, while the verbal noun *istikbār* appears twice and the active participle *mutakabbir* seven times.²⁸ This morpho-quantitative distribution reveals two methodologically significant findings: first, the *istaf'ala* pattern denoting either "to make someone weak" (*istad'afa*) or "to deem oneself great" (*istakbara*) is the dominant Qur'anic mode for articulating power asymmetry, indicating that the Qur'an conceives oppression and arrogance not as passive states but as agentive processes; second, the strikingly higher frequency of *k-b-r* derivations (161 versus 52) suggests that the Qur'an directs greater paradigmatic attention to critiquing the structures of arrogant power than to merely describing the condition of the oppressed.²⁹ This empirical foundation is further reinforced by the semantic study of

²⁵ Hasbi Nawi Ashidiki, "Konsep Mustadh'afin Dalam Kajian Tafsir Kontemporer (Studi Atas Tafsir Farid Esack)," 18.

²⁶ Muhammad Fuad Abdel-Baqi, *al-Mu'jam al-mufabras li-alfāz al-Qur'an al-karīm* (Darul Hadits, 1988). "The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Quran Dictionary," accessed May 21, 2026, <https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=kbr>.

²⁷ "The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Quran Dictionary," accessed May 21, 2026, <https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=DEF>.

²⁸ "The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Quran Dictionary," accessed May 21, 2026, <https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=kbr>.

²⁹ Nurrohim, Ma'rifah, and Rahman, "Qur'anic Semantics of Arrogance," 355–368.

Nurrohim, Ma'rifah, and Rahman, who demonstrate that *istikbār* constitutes the core term within a synonymic cluster including *mukhbāl*, *fakbūr*, *ṭughyān*, and *'ulumw* each carrying distinct nuances yet converging on the institutionalization of tyranny.³⁰ The verses are distributed across both Makkiyyah and Madaniyyah revelations,³¹ confirming oppression as a transversal Qur'anic theme that traverses chronological-revelatory phases, and substantiating Safari and Amini's claim that *mustakbirūn* function not as perpetrators of mere personal arrogance, but as agents of power who institutionalize tyranny in a systemic and structural manner.³²

The conceptual distinction between *istidh'af* (structural weakness) and *dhaf* (personal weakness) is a hermeneutic key to understanding the theological position of the Qur'an towards the oppressed. Alwi emphasized that the Qur'an does not criticize *dhaf* as a natural human condition such as the physical weakness of babies, the elderly, or sick people, but rather highlights *istidh'af* as a product of unjust power relations and is socially constructive.³³ In this framework, *the mustadh'afin* are not inherently weak subjects, but rather subjects who are "made weak" (*passive voice*) by a repressive socio-political order.³⁴ The theological implications of this distinction are fundamental: first, oppression is a condition that can and must be changed through human endeavor; second, God explicitly sides with *the mustadh'afin* as affirmed in QS. al-Qashash [28]: 5.³⁵ This terminological understanding becomes the basis for reading asymmetrical power relations in the contemporary geopolitical context, because it

³⁰ Khusnul Khatimah Al Mudassir et al., "The Use of the Word 'Kabura' (كبر) and Its Derivatives in the Qur'an: A Morpho-Semantic Study," *Asalibuna* 9, no. 02 (2025): 89–105, <https://doi.org/10.30762/asalibuna.v9i02.6997>.

³¹ Hidayatullah, "Mustadh'afin Perspektif Sayyid Quthb Dalam Tafsir Fi Zhilalil Quran," 58.

³² A. A. Safari and M. A. Amini, *Qur'anic Documents Struggle against Arrogance [Istikbar] in the Supreme Leader's Viewpoint*, 15, no. 29 (2022): 47, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22034/qve.2022.6634>.

³³ Alwi et al., "Al-Mustadh'afin," 246.

³⁴ Abdullah Saeed, "Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century," 145.

³⁵ Vini Hidayani and Doli Witro, "Membangun Umat Antroposentris Di Tengah Pandemi COVID-19," *QOF* 5, no. 2 (December 2021): 152, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v5i2.9>.

provides an analytical framework that distinguishes between natural weakness and structural oppression that can be resisted.

Furthermore, understanding *the istidb'af-istikbar dialectic* requires a semantic-contextual approach that goes beyond mere lexical analysis. Nurrohim, in his study of semantic synonymy, found that *istikbar* in the Qur'an differs in nuance from similar terms such as *fakbur* (pride in achievement), *mukbtal* (arrogance in walking), and *angry*. (arrogance in action).³⁶ *Istikbar* is the most fundamental category because it is rooted in the rejection of truth and claims of superiority over others, as demonstrated by Iblis and Pharaoh in various Qur'anic narratives. In the socio-political context, Safari and Amini argue that *istikbar* manifests itself in three dimensions: (1) internal *istikbar* (personal arrogance); (2) social *istikbar* (oppression of weak groups); and (3) global *istikbar* (imperial hegemony over other nations).³⁷ This categorization is highly relevant to analyzing the configuration of power in contemporary geopolitical conflicts, where the practice of *istikbar* is no longer limited to individual figures such as the Pharaoh, but has evolved into a system of transnational hegemony. Thus, the conceptual framework of *mustadb'afin-mustakbirin* can function as a critical analytical tool to dismantle asymmetric power relations in the contemporary international order.

C. The Narrative Paradigm of the Qur'an: Pharaoh, Moses, and the Oppressed People

The figure of Pharaoh in the Qur'an occupies a central position as the perfect personification of *istikbar* (arrogance of power), the manifestation of which is manifested in three fundamental characteristics: claims to divinity, systemic oppression, and structural corruption (*fasada fil ardh*). Pharaoh's claims to divinity are explicitly documented in the QS. al-Nazi'at [79]: 24 through his expression “*ana rabbukum al-a'la*” (I am your most high god), a statement that represents the peak of theological and

³⁶ Nurrohim, Ma'rifah, and Rahman, “Qur'anic Semantics of Arrogance,” 22.

³⁷ Safari and Amini, *Qur'anic Documents Struggle against Arrogance [Istikbar] in the Supreme Leader's Viewpoint*, 53.

political transgression because it displaces divine attributes that should be exclusive to Allah.³⁸ The second characteristic, namely systemic oppression, is clearly narrated in QS. al-Qashash [28]: 4 which states that “*inna fir'auna 'ala fil-ardhi wa ja'ala ablaha syi'a'an yastadb'ifu tha'ifatan minhum*” (indeed, Pharaoh acted arbitrarily on earth and divided its inhabitants, by oppressing a group of them). The third dimension, the facade of fil ardh (damage on earth), is emphasized at the end of the verse with the phrase “*innahu kana minal-mufsidin*” which shows that structural damage is an inherent consequence of the istikbar regime.³⁹ These three characteristics are intertwined and form the anatomy of tyrannical power that transcends the historical context of ancient Egypt.

Pharaoh's political strategy, manifested in three main modus operandi of community division, selective genocide, and propaganda, shows the sophistication of the istikbar regime in maintaining its dominance. The phrase *ja'ala ablaha syi'a'an* (making the people divided) in QS. al-Qashash [28]: 4 is technically a *divide et impera strategy* which divides society into conflicting groups to facilitate power control (Alwi et al., 2022, p. 248).⁴⁰ The second strategy, selective genocide, was carried out through the systematic killing of the male children of the Children of Israel while sparing the female children, a tactic that demographically aimed to weaken the resistance base and maintain a source of forced labor. Sayyid Quthb (2003, p. 142) in *Fi Zhilal al-Qur'an* interpreted this strategy as a form of *al-tankil al-jasadi wa al-ma'nawi* (physical and psychological oppression) designed to create permanent fear among the oppressed.⁴¹ The third strategy, propaganda, is documented in QS. al-Mu'min [40]: 26 when Pharaoh accuses Moses of changing religion and causing corruption on earth, a narrative inversion that positions the victim as the threat and the

³⁸ Safari and Amini, *Qur'anic Documents Struggle against Arrogance [Istikbar] in the Supreme Leader's Viewpoint*, 49.

³⁹ Nurrohim, Ma'rifah, and Rahman, “Qur'anic Semantics of Arrogance,” 19.

⁴⁰ Alwi et al., “Al-Mustadh'afin,” 248.

⁴¹ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsir Fi Zhilalil Qur'an: Di Bawah Lindungan Al-Qur'an*, Trans. Oleh Asad Yasir Dkk, 142.

perpetrator of oppression as the protector of order. This triad of political strategies makes Pharaoh the perfect archetype of a totalitarian regime that combines structural violence with discursive manipulation.

The narrative of Moses and the Children of Israel in the Qur'an is a paradigmatic representation of the *mustadh'afin* who achieved liberation through *sunnatullah* (God's law) in history. QS. al-Qashash [28]: 5-6 explicitly states the divine promise: “*wa nuridu an namunna 'alal-ladzina-studh'ifu fil-ardhi wa naj'alabum a'immatan wa naj'alabumul-waritsin*” (We intend to bestow favor on those who are oppressed on the earth, and to make them leaders and make them inheritors of the earth). This verse is a theological declaration that positions the liberation of the oppressed not as a contingent possibility but as a historical inevitability guaranteed by divine authority.⁴² In his commentary, Sayyid Quthb emphasized that this promise is universal and transhistorical, not limited to the Children of Israel alone, but applies to all oppressed people who fulfill the conditions of the law of patience (*shabr*), faith (*iman*), and collective struggle (*jihad*). This concept of *the law of God* is also reinforced by QS. al-A'raf [7]: 137 which narrates the inheritance of the eastern and western parts of the earth to people who were previously oppressed, as a direct consequence of their patience in facing injustice.

The stages of resistance in the Musa-Banī Isrā'īl narrative reveal a systematic theological pattern involving three progressive phases awareness (*wa'y*), unity (*ittiḥād*), and exodus (*hijrah*) each substantiated by distinct Qur'anic textual and exegetical evidence. The awareness phase is inaugurated through a transformative episode documented in QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 15-17, in which Musa intervenes against an Egyptian aggressor and subsequently makes the pivotal covenant: “*qāla rabbi bimā an'amta 'alayya falan akūna ḡābiran lil-mujrimīn*” (“My Lord, by the favor You have bestowed upon me, I shall never be a supporter of the wrongdoers”) a

⁴² Hidayani and Witro, “Membangun Umat Antroposentris Di Tengah Pandemi COVID-19,” 62.

verse that Ibn Kathir interprets as the moment of moral self-recognition where Musa transitions from being a passive beneficiary of Pharaonic privilege into an active subject of resistance, decisively repositioning his allegiance toward the oppressed.⁴³ Saeed, in his contextual approach, reinforces this reading by identifying this episode as a *consciousness-raising moment* marking the dialectical shift from *mustad'af* (the oppressed) to *muqāwim* (the resister), wherein consciousness emerges not as abstract reflection but through embodied confrontation with structural injustice.⁴⁴ This phase is further corroborated by QS. Ṭāhā [20]: 25–28, where Musa's prayer "*rabbi isbraḥ li ṣadri wa yassir li amri*" ("My Lord, expand for me my breast and ease for me my task") signals the deepening of consciousness into prophetic vocation, transforming personal awareness into a divinely sanctioned mission of liberation. The unity phase is articulated through a sustained dialectical process portrayed across QS. Ṭāhā [20]: 47, QS. al-Shu'arā' [26]: 16–17, and QS. al-A'rāf [7]: 105, in which Musa demands Pharaoh "*arsil ma'anā banī isrā'īla*" ("send forth the Children of Israel with us") a phrase Sayyid Quthb interprets as the formal articulation of collective identity and political demand, marking the transformation of scattered oppressed individuals into a coherent community of struggle.⁴⁵ The internal complexity of this phase is documented in QS. al-A'rāf [7]: 129, where Banī Isrā'īl complain to Musa: "*ūdhinā min qabli an ta'tiyānā wa*

⁴³ Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an al-'Azīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1419), 6:222–224. Abdul Khaliq, "The Oppression of the Pharaohs of Egypt and the Children of Israel and the Movement of Prophet Moses (PBUH) for Reforms and Liberty: A Fact or a Myth? فراعنه عمصر كا بنى اسرائيل پر جبر و استبداد اور حضرت موسىٰ", *The Islamic Culture "As-Saqafat-Ul-Islamiya"* "الثقافة الإسلامية - Research Journal - Sheikh Zayed Islamic Centre, University of Karachi 43 (June 2020), <https://theislamicculture.com/index.php/tis/article/view/696>.

⁴⁴ Abdullah Saeed, "Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century," 156. Akhmad Aidil Fitra and Oktasandi Oktasandi, "Pembacaan Hermeneutis: Penafsiran Buya Hamka Tentang Lahw al Ḥadīṣ (Studi Pemikiran Hans George Gadamer)," *Syariat: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Hukum* 10, no. 2 (November 2024): 147–62, <https://doi.org/10.32699/syariat.v10i2.7707>.

⁴⁵ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsīr Fi Zbilalil Qur'an: Di Bawah Lindungan Al-Qur'an*, Trans. Oleh Asad Yasīn Dkk.

min ba'di mā jī'tanā" ("We were harmed before you came to us and after you came to us"), revealing the psychological inertia of the oppressed and the non-linear nature of mobilization a dynamic that Alwi et al. theorize as the *internal dialectic of liberation*, in which the disciplining of the oppressed community is often as challenging as confronting the oppressor itself.⁴⁶ This phase further encompasses the consolidation of communal identity through ritual and law, exemplified in QS. Yūnus [10]: 87 with the command to establish houses of worship (*waj' alū buyūtakum qiblatan*) as spaces of clandestine solidarity prior to the exodus. The exodus phase culminates in the dramatic intervention of QS. al-Shu'arā' [26]: 63: "*fa-anḥaynā ilā mūsā ani-drib bi- 'aṣāka al-baḥra fa-nfalaqa fa-kāna kullu firqin ka-l-tawdi al-'azīm*" ("Then We inspired Musa: 'Strike the sea with your staff,' and it parted, each portion like a great towering mountain"), an event that classical mufassirūn including al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathir interpret as the paradigmatic moment where human striving (*sa'y*) meets divine intervention (*tadakhkhub ilāhī*) not as a substitute for human action, but as its eschatological completion.⁴⁷ Significantly, the Qur'an deploys the lexeme *najjaynā* (We saved) rather than *kharajū* (they exited), as evidenced in QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 50 and QS. Yūnus [10]: 90, theologically grounding liberation in divine agency while preserving the necessity of human courage and unity that preceded it.⁴⁸ This tripartite pattern *wa'y* as the rupture of false consciousness, *ittiḥad* as the construction of collective subjectivity, and *hijrah* as the transformative crossing toward freedom functions as a transhistorical theological blueprint that has been appropriated and reactivated by contemporary movements within *Islamic Liberation Theology*, providing a Qur'anic grammar of emancipation that

⁴⁶ Alwi et al., "Al-Mustadh'afin," 327–344.

⁴⁷ Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir ath-Thabari, *Jami' al-Bayan Fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Yayasan Ar Risalah, 2000). Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azḥim* (Beirut: Dar Thayyibah, 1999).

⁴⁸ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Miṣṣān fi tafsir al-Qur'an* (1984), 191–195.

continues to inform analyses of asymmetric power relations in the modern world.⁴⁹

The narrative of the Pharaohs in the Qur'an is not a historical account confined to the geographical locus of ancient Egypt, but rather a transhistorical typology that serves as a universal archetype for every tyrannical power across time. Ibn Kathir explains that "Pharaoh" is actually a generic title for the rulers of pagan Egypt, just as "Caesar" was for the rulers of Rome or "Kisra" was for the rulers of Persia—an etymological observation that opens up space for typological interpretation.⁵⁰ The universality of this narrative is reinforced by QS. Yunus [10]: 92 which states that the body of Pharaoh is preserved as a father (sign) for the next generation, indicating a pedagogical-eschatological dimension that goes beyond the particular context.⁵¹ In the contemporary exegetical tradition, especially that developed by Iranian revolutionary scholars such as Murtadha Muthahhari and Ali Shari'ati, Pharaoh is understood as a symbol of a system of power that combines political despotism, economic injustice, and false transcendental claims.⁵² This typology provides an analytical framework that allows for a rereading of various forms of modern power that display similar *istikbar* characteristics.

The relevance of the Pharaonic narrative in reading contemporary global hegemony becomes even more significant when examined through the lens of Islamic Liberation Theology. Dabashi argues that the characteristics of the pharaohs (Pharaonic traits) namely claims of absolute

⁴⁹ Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 195–217.

⁵⁰ Gilang Eksa Gantara, Fiqriadi, and Muhammad Suaidi Yusuf, "Relevansi Kisah Nabi Musa Dan Fir'aun Menurut Al-Qur'an Dengan Islamofobia," *Izzatuna: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 2 (December 2023): 9–25, <https://doi.org/10.62109/ijiat.v4i2.44>.

⁵¹ Raisa Zuhra Salsabila Awaluddin and Lukmanul Hakim, "Mumi Fir'aun Dalam al-Qur'an: Studi QS. Yunus [10]:92 Perspektif Tafsir Al-Mishbah," *Studia Quranika* 8, no. 1 (2023): 39–60.

⁵² Davari, "The Political Thought of Ayatullah Murteza Mutahhari," 121.

superiority, exploitation of resources, and the deliberate division of society are identifiable patterns in the configuration of modern imperial power, both in the form of classical colonialism and contemporary neocolonialism.⁵³ This typological approach is not merely an analogical exercise, but a legitimate hermeneutic methodology within the context of contextual interpretation because it maintains the integrity of the text while opening up space for contemporary application. In the context of contemporary geopolitics, a number of scholars have expanded this typology to read global hegemony to include economic domination through unilateral sanctions, control of energy resources, and the instrumentalization of regional conflicts as mechanisms of divide and rule on a global scale.⁵⁴ The universalization of the Pharaoh narrative, thus, becomes a powerful heuristic tool for dismantling the structure of modern *istikbar*, including in reading the dynamics of the Iran-Israel-United States triangular conflict as a contemporary manifestation of the *mustadh'afin-mustakbirin dialectic* that continues to repeat itself in human history.

D. Reading the Iran-Israel-United States Conflict through a Quranic Lens

The configuration of the Iran-Israel-United States triangular conflict has historical roots rooted in three fundamental events: the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948,⁵⁵ the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979,⁵⁶ and the Carter Doctrine of 1980.⁵⁷ The establishment of the State of Israel through UN Resolution 181 became the starting point of a

⁵³ Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 203.

⁵⁴ Jefri Geovani and Tera Saputra, "Social Justice and The Qur'anic Perspective: A Study of The Social Implications of The Qur'anic Verses," *Al - Mujaddid: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Agama* 5, no. 1 (June 2023): 12–30, <https://doi.org/10.51482/al mujaddid.v5i1.113>.

⁵⁵ "Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office of the Historian," accessed May 6, 2026, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/creation-israel>.

⁵⁶ "Iranian Revolution (1979) | Summary, Causes, Effects, Islamic Republic, Ayatollah, & Facts | Britannica," April 13, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iranian-Revolution>.

⁵⁷ "Historical Documents - Office of the Historian," accessed May 6, 2026, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v18/d45>.

demographic-political shift in the Middle East that triggered the Nakba for the Palestinian people and a structural transformation of the region's geopolitics. The Islamic Revolution in Iran under Khomeini's leadership radically transformed Iran's political orientation from a Western ally to an anti-systemic actor simultaneously opposing American and Israeli hegemony.⁵⁸ Ideologically, this conflict represents a clash of three metaphysical-political projects: Zionism, which claims historical-religious rights to Palestine; Shiite Pan-Islamism, which constructs universal solidarity with *the mustadh'afin*, with Palestine as its primary symbol; and American exceptionalism, which views the US as an actor with a historical mission to maintain global order.⁵⁹ Geopolitically, this conflict also encompasses a struggle for energy control (the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf oil fields), regional hegemony, and proxy wars that escalated after October 7, 2023, in Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon.

The Iranian discourse on *mustadh'afin* represents the most systematic articulation of the use of Qur'anic terminology in contemporary revolutionary discourse, introduced by Khomeini as a revolutionary axis replacing the Marxist terminology of oppressor-oppressed relations.⁶⁰ In Khomeini's construction, *mustakbirin* encompasses three main categories: the despotic Pahlavi monarchy, American imperialism as Sheytan-e Bozorg (The Great Satan), and Israeli Zionism as Sheytan-e Kuchak (The Little Satan), while *mustadh'afin* encompasses the Iranian people, the Palestinian nation, and all the oppressed people of the world.⁶¹ The most obvious manifestation of this discourse is the establishment of Yaum al-

⁵⁸ Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari, Prof Dr Amir Ullah Khan, and Mr Inam Ul Haq, "Cracking the Enigma: Iran-Israel Relations Unveiled A Provocative Exploration into Global Geopolitics," *Spry Contemporary Educational Practices* 3, no. 1 (April 2024), <https://journals.sprypublishers.com/index.php/Contemporary-Educational-Practic/article/view/86>.

⁵⁹ Brendon O'Connor, Lloyd Cox, and Danny Cooper, "The Ideology of American Exceptionalism: American Nationalism's Nom de Plume," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 29, no. 3 (September 2024): 634–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2022.2112126>.

⁶⁰ Davari, "The Political Thought of Ayatullah Murteza Mutahhari," 112.

⁶¹ Kunnummal, "The Politics of Post-Essential Islamic Liberation Theology," 12.

Quds (Quds Day) on the last Friday of Ramadan as a form of global solidarity with Palestine, which functions as an instrument of mobilization of the axis of resistance consisting of Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthi, and pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria.⁶² However, this discourse has not escaped academic criticism regarding the instrumentalization of Qur'anic terminology for domestic political legitimacy and expansion of regional influence. This kind of criticism is important to maintain the integrity of thematic interpretation analysis so that it does not get trapped in ideological apologetics that reduces theological complexity to particular political interests.

Reading Israel's position in the Qur'anic discourse requires a fundamental methodological distinction: criticism of the policies of the State of Israel and political Zionism should not be confused with antisemitism or hostility towards Jews as a religious entity.⁶³ The Qur'anic narrative about the Children of Israel is dialectical, presenting them as *mustadh'afin* who were freed from Pharaoh (QS. al-Qashash [28]: 5-6), as well as a people who transgressed (*'ulum*) when they later held power, as emphasized in QS. al-Isra' [17]: 4: "*latuhsidunna fil-ardhi marratayni wa lata'lunna 'ulumwan kabira*" (Hidayatullah, 2019, p. 67). Ibn Kathir explains this verse as documenting the historical cycle of corruption and arrogance of the Children of Israel that ended in divine punishment through external forces,⁶⁴ while Sayyid Qutb interprets it as a universal *sunnatullah*: when a previously oppressed people gain power, they risk repeating the pattern of *istikbar* they previously suffered.⁶⁵ In the contemporary context, a number of scholars interpret the occupation of Palestine as a manifestation of this

⁶² "Hari Al Quds: Refleksi Peran Republik Islam Iran Dalam Upaya Pembebasan Palestina," Politics, *Indonesia Center for Middle East Studies*, May 9, 2020, <https://icmes.org/politics/hari-al-quds-refleksi-peran-republik-islam-iran-dalam-upaya-pembebasan-palestina/>.

⁶³ Abdullah Saeed, "Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century," 162.

⁶⁴ Imaduddin Abulfida Ismail bin Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Adzim*, 1999, (Riyad: Dar Tayyibah Li Nasyr wa Tauzi', 1999).

⁶⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *Tafsir Fi Zbilalil Qur'an: Di Bawah Lindungan Al-Qur'an*, Trans. Oleh Asad Yasir Dkk, 158.

cycle in which the State of Israel as a modern political entity carries out the practice of *istikbār* towards Palestine, which is positioned as the new *mustadh'afīn*. This reading, it should be emphasized, is a political-theological critique of the practices of occupation and apartheid, not of the Jews as a religious community, as explained in the framework of Islamic Liberation Theology.

The hegemony of the United States in the contemporary international order can be analyzed through the Qur'anic framework as a form of systemic *istikbār* that manifests itself multidimensionally politically, economically, militarily, and culturally. Pax Americana as a paradigm of the post-Cold War global order contains pharaonic characteristics in the form of claims of civilizational superiority (American exceptionalism), the imposition of unilateral order, and military capacity that exceeds global standards, which typologically parallel the Qur'anic description of *mustakbirin*: arrogance (*kibr*), claims to exclusive majesty (*'ulūm*), and coalitions of oppression (*mala' pharaoh*) as described in the QS. al-Qashash [28]: 8.⁶⁶ US economic sanctions against Iran, which escalated post-2018, can be understood as an instrument of structural *istidh'āf* targeting the civilian population through financial mechanisms, Massoumi and Koduri document the significant impact of these sanctions on Iran's healthcare system in the form of drug shortages and casualties among chronically ill patients, a form of structural violence that in Qur'anic terminology can be categorized as *idh'āf jamā'i* (collective weakening).⁶⁷ In addition to sanctions, US hegemony is also manifested in support for authoritarian regimes, unilateral policies such as the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017, and the use of the UN Security Council veto to protect Israeli policies in Palestine. This configuration of power, analyzed within the framework of thematic interpretation, shows significant parallels with the characteristic triad of

⁶⁶ Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 217.

⁶⁷ Roxanne L. Massoumi and Sumana Koduri, "Adverse Effects of Political Sanctions on the Health Care System in Iran," *Journal of Global Health* 5, no. 2 (n.d.): 020302, <https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.05-020302>.

mustakbirīn in the Qur'an: ideological arrogance, control over resources, and the formation of coalitions of oppression—a typology that helps to place geopolitical analysis within a broader ethical-theological framework without ignoring the empirical complexities of each case.

E. Critical Reflection: Between Qur'anic Ideals and Political Reality

A thematic reading of the Iran-Israel-United States geopolitical conflict through the framework of *mustadb'afin-mustakbirin* requires methodological vigilance against the dangers of theological reductionism that can simplify political complexity into an ahistorical binary dichotomy. An overly rigid binary reading of *mustadb'afin* versus *mustakbirin* risks becoming a Manichaean theology that fails to capture the empirical nuances of each geopolitical actor, where it is not uncommon for a state to simultaneously be an oppressor in one context and oppressed in another. Auda emphasizes the importance of a systemic approach in contemporary interpretation to avoid reducing the meaning of the text to a single dimension isolated from the complexity of reality.⁶⁸ Furthermore, criticism of the use of Qur'anic verses to legitimize partisan violence by both state and non-state actors constitutes an ethical dimension that cannot be ignored, as emphasized by Saeed who reminded that "the instrumentalization of sacred texts for particular political interests is a form of betrayal of hermeneutic integrity."⁶⁹ In this framework, maqashidi interpretation (interpretation based on the objectives of sharia) becomes very relevant because it places universal goals such as justice (*'adl*), preservation of the soul (*hifz al-nafs*), and peace (*salam*) as an ethical framework that transcends ideological partisanship.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Asep Sulhadi, "Recontextualizing Maqasid Al-Shariah in Contemporary Qur'anic Exegesis: A Comparative Study of Jasser Auda and Classical Scholars," *SAMAWAT: Journal Of Hadith and Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 2 (December 2024): 29–39.

⁶⁹ Abdullah Saeed, "Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century," 178.

⁷⁰ Iqbal Kholidi, "Tafsir Maqasidi Muhammad Talbi dan Abdul Mustaqim sebagai Pendekatan Alternatif dalam Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an," *Al-Qadim: Jurnal Tafsir dan Ilmu*

The main hermeneutic challenge in applying *the mustadh'afin-mustakbirin paradigm* to contemporary geopolitical reality is how to actualize the text without distorting it, namely finding a balance between fidelity to the text and relevance to the context. Fazlur Rahman's double movement approach offers a methodological solution by requiring the interpreter to first move from the contemporary context to the historical context of the revelation to extract ideal morals, then move back to the contemporary context to apply these universal values.⁷¹ The second challenge is to balance the normative and descriptive dimensions of the Qur'an where the verses about *mustadh'afin* not only describe the reality of oppression, but also provide normative imperatives for resistance, so that the interpreter must be careful not to reduce either one.⁷² The third challenge is the importance of *ijtihad jama'i* (collective ijtihad) in complex geopolitical issues, considering the limitations of *ijtihad fardi* (individual ijtihad) in responding to global problems involving multidisciplinary sciences.⁷³ Khan in his review of Othman's work emphasized that *maslahah-based ijtihad jama'i* is the most adequate epistemic instrument to respond to the challenges of postnormal times where contemporary geopolitical issues exceed the capacity of traditional individual interpretation.⁷⁴

Tafsir 1, no. 1 (January 2024),
<https://ejournal.nurulqadim.ac.id/index.php/jtit/article/view/12>.

⁷¹ Kharis Nugroho, Muhammad Zawil Kiram, and Didik Andriawan, "The Influence of Hermeneutics in Double Movement Theory (Critical Analysis of Fazlurrahman's Interpretation Methodology)," *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies* 2, no. 3 (August 2023): 275–89, <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v2i3.2531>.

⁷² M. Nurdin Zuhdi and Sahiron Syamsuddin, "The Contemporary Qur'anic Exegesis: Tracking Trends in The Interpretation of The Qur'an in Indonesia 2000-2010," *JAWI* 1, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.24042/jw.v1i1.2840>.

⁷³ DR Maqbool Hassan, "The Concept of Collective Ijtihad, Its Need and Role in the Development of Islamic Law and Legislation in Modern Era," SSRN Scholarly Paper no. 4905704 (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, January 6, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4905704>.

⁷⁴ Shiraz Khan, "Collective Ijtihad: Regulating Fatwa in Postnormal Times: (By Hossam Sabry Othman)," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 41, nos. 3–4 (December 2024): 102–7, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v41i3-4.3561>.

The ethical implications of *the mustadb'afin-mustakbirin paradigm* for global Muslims in responding to the Iran-Israel-United States triangular conflict are rooted in three interrelated fundamental principles: moral responsibility, a neutral-critical position, and non-sectarian solidarity. Moral responsibility towards *mustadb'afin* is a collective obligation (*fardh kifayah*) affirmed by QS. al-Nisa '[4]: 75 which commands Muslims to fight for the oppressed regardless of the victim's religious or ethnic affiliation, as interpreted by Sayyid Quthb as a universal principle of human solidarity.⁷⁵ However, this responsibility must be balanced with a neutral-critical position in which Muslims do not automatically side with one geopolitical bloc simply because of its religious identity, but first evaluate each actor based on its practices towards the oppressed. Ultimately, global solidarity towards the oppressed must be built on a non-sectarian foundation that transcends Sunni-Shia, Arab-Persian, or other particular identities—a universal ethic that makes humanity the common ground, as articulated in the concept of *ummah wabidah* (one people) in the Qur'an.⁷⁶

The critical-constructive synthesis offered by this research is a reading of *the mustadb'afin–mustakbirin paradigm* as an analytical-ethical framework that goes beyond descriptive and partisan functions, becoming a reflective instrument for reading global power configurations objectively and justly. This approach recognizes that the Iran-Israel-United States triangular conflict cannot be reduced to one party being completely *mustadb'af* or completely *mustakbir*; each actor contains internal paradoxes that must be analyzed with methodological care. Furthermore, this approach also demands a hermeneutic of suspicion towards every theological claim used to legitimize power, whether by modern nation-states or non-state movements. At the practical level, this synthesis opens up space for the development of an ethic of resistance (*muqawamah*) based on the principles of *maqashid al-shari'ah* such as distributive justice, protection of life, and maintenance of human dignity, which can form the

⁷⁵ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsir Fi Zbilalil Qur'an: Di Bawah Lindungan Al-Qur'an*, Trans. Oleh Asad Yasir Dkk, 152.

⁷⁶ Abdullah Saeed, "Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century," 184.

basis for constructive contemporary Islamic diplomacy.⁷⁷ Thus, Qur'anic ideals and political reality do not have to end in unbridgeable contradictions, but can be synthesized through *ijtihad jama'i* which is reflective, multidisciplinary, and oriented towards realizing more substantive global justice.

F. Conclusion

This study has shown that the paradigm of *mustadh'afin-mustakbirin* in the Qur'an is a comprehensive theological-sociological framework for reading the dialectic of asymmetric power in contemporary geopolitical conflicts. Through the *maudhu'i* interpretation approach combined with Fazlur Rahman's *double movement contextual hermeneutics*, this study finds that the concepts of *istidh'af* and *istikbar* not merely a normative category confined within the historical context of revelation, but rather a transhistorical typology that can be applied to analyze the configuration of power in the Iran-Israel-United States triangular conflict. The narrative of Pharaoh as a *mustakbir archetype* with the characteristic triad of divine claims, systemic oppression, and *fasad fil-ardh* finds typological parallels with contemporary global hegemonic practices, both in the form of *Pax Americana*, Zionist expansionism, and which must also be criticized reflectively in the form of instrumentalization of Qur'anic terminology by revolutionary actors for partisan political legitimacy. This finding methodologically contributes to the development of contextual thematic interpretations that are able to bridge the sacred text with contemporary geopolitical analysis, while offering an ethical framework based on *maqashid al-shari'ah* that goes beyond partisan binary dichotomies towards a more substantive critical-constructive synthesis.

However, this study has several limitations that open up space for further study: first, the limited geographical focus on the Iran-Israel-United States triangular conflict has not accommodated the dynamics of

⁷⁷ La Jamaa, "Dimensi Ilahi Dan Dimensi Insani Dalam Maqashid Al-Syari'ah," *Ayy-Syir'ab: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah Dan Hukum* 45, no. 2 (July 2011), <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajish.v45i2.15>.

other regional actors such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and China which also play a significant role; second, the Sunni-Shi'a sectarian dimension in the *mustadh'afin discourse* has not been analyzed comparatively and in depth; and third, the *library research approach* used needs to be complemented by empirical studies on the reception and implementation of this paradigm among global Muslim communities. For further research, it is recommended to develop comparative studies of Sunni-Shi'a interpretations of *mustadh'afin*, empirical research based on discourse analysis on the use of Qur'anic terminology in the diplomacy of Muslim countries, and the formulation of a theoretical framework of "*Qur'anic Geopolitics*" as an academic sub-discipline that integrates the study of interpretation, international relations, and global ethics. At the practical level, the paradigm of *mustadh'afin-mustakbirin*, read critically and reflectively, can become an ethical foundation for contemporary Islamic diplomacy that is oriented towards global justice, sustainable peace, and humanitarian solidarity that transcends sectarian, ideological, and geopolitical boundaries —a contribution that is relevant not only to the internal discourse of Muslims, but also to the collective efforts of the global community in building a more just and civilized world order.

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