



# Networking Radical Islamic Group in Indonesia

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This paper argues that networking radical Islamic groups, in Indonesia since of the 1980s, and anti-American sentiments following the events of September 11, 2001 have led to the strengthening of political Islamism in Indonesia. The Indonesian context is interesting because some radical Islamic groups have emerged in the region-*Pondok Pesantren Ngruki*, *Front Pembela Islam (FPI)*, *Laskar Jihad (LJ)*, *Jamaah Islamiyah (JI)*, and others. This paper explores and maps the nature of Islam, especially radicalism. Some historical and sociological accounts of the cities are also necessary to study and thoroughly understand this phenomenon. This paper examines the equally important Islamic media in Indonesia which continues to play a significant role in disseminating Islamic ideology and influence. This paper presents the conclusions that the development of radical Islamic groups in Indonesia is due to the inability of the state and government to enforce law and justice.

**Key words:** *Networking, Radical Islamic Group, Indonesia, and historical Background.*



## Introduction

The spread of radical Islamic groups in Indonesia is associated with groups that made their appearance in the region in recent decades, such as the *Jamaah Islamiyah* (JI), *Laskar Jihad* (LJ), *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI) supports the establishment of a pan-Islamic caliphate, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Other extremist groups surfaced in Indonesia in the immediate post-Soeharto period. The most notorious of these, but by no means the most dangerous, was the *Forum Komunikasi Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah* and its paramilitary wing, the *Laskar Jihad* (LJ) which is inspired by Saudi-style Wahhabi teachings.

*Laskar Jihad* achieved notoriety by recruiting fighters for an armed jihad in the Moluccas. In the summer of 2000, the *Laskar Jihad* dispatched several hundred fighters from their training camp in Bogor, in West Java to Ambon, the epicentre of the communal violence, and were unhindered by the authorities, despite Presiden Abdurrahman Wahid (Gusdur) orders to stop them. In Ambon and later in Poso, central Sulawesi, the *Laskar Jihad* militiamen participated in conflicts that pitted Muslims against Christians (Rabasa & Chalk, 2001).

In addition to the *Laskar Jihad*, there were sinister groups operating in the areas of conflict in eastern Indonesia. They are *Laskar Jundullah* and the *Laskar Mujahidin*, both linked to terrorist organizations. These irregulars' some-times clashed with the *Laskar Jihad* Militiamen (Abuza, 2004).

There is evidence of early contact between the *Laskar Jihad* leader Ja'far Umar Thalib and Osama bin Laden, whom Ja'far met in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1987. However, the *Laskar Jihad* refrained from joining bin Laden's movement and, after the September 11 terrorist attacks, Ja'far took pains to distance his group from al-Qaeda. He criticized bin Laden for lacking proper understanding of Islam and characterized al-Qaeda as *Khawarij* (Seceders who in the orthodox Sunni view have defected from religion and unsheathed the sword against the rightful ruler (Tempo, 2001; Abdullah, 2016). *Laskar Jihad*'s leaders disbanded the militia after the Bali bombings of October 12, 2002, although the group was not linked to the attack (Davis, 2002).

Some Indonesian scholars have noted that Islamic extremism in their country has been associated with clerics of Arab and more specifically Hadrami (Yemeni) origin, such as *Laskar Jihad* leader Ja'far Umar Thalib, *Jamaah Islamiyah* (JI) founders Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abdullah Sungkar, and the Islam Defenders Front chief Muhammad Habib Rizieq, among others. This is not to suggest that individuals of Arab origin are more prone to Islamic radicalism than other Muslims. The majority of the Arab-Indonesian community includes



such luminaries as former foreign ministers Ali al-Atas and Alwi Shihab. Nevertheless, the Arab diaspora, particularly its newer elements, might serve as either a liaison or a camouflage for missionaries or terrorists arriving from the Middle East. There is considerable evidence that Middle Eastern influences have shaped the ideology of most, if not all, of the Indonesian militant movements. Some Indonesian Muslim scholars attribute the moderate character of Indonesian Islam to their perception that Indonesia is the least “Arabized” of the major Muslim countries.

## **Method**

**Heuristic as a collection of sources.** Here researchers conducted a search for historical sources.

**Criticism (verification).** This phase aims to verify the authenticity and validity of historical data. The criticism is divided into two parts, namely internal and external criticism. Internal criticism, asks the source authenticated it asks if the source is accurate, was the writer or creator competent, honest, and unbiased? How long after the event happened until it was reported? Does the witness agree with other witnesses? External criticism, asks if the evidence under consideration is authentic. The researcher checks the genuineness or validity of the source. Is it what it appears or is claims to be? Is it admissible as evidence?

**Interpretation.** After the data is verified, then researchers conducted interpretation to see causal link, and then made a reconstruction of the historical events studied. After that, the data was tested again, until ready to be displayed in writing to the reader. The facts generated through external and internal criticism, should be connected with one another.

**Historiography.** Historiography is the final stage of the study of history. In historiography, a fact that is collected, criticized and interpreted or constructed. The facts are then presented in a logical systematic and meaningful way. This is where the researchers presented the background, chronological events, analysis of cause and effect, as well as deep dives into the research results (Busha and Harter 1980; Denzin & Lincoln 1988).

The historical method comprises the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidence, such as secondary sources and tertiary sources, to research and then to write history. The questions of the nature, and indeed the possibility of sound historical methods, raised in the philosophy of history, are presented through external criticism and internal criticism.



The historical method is employed by researchers who are interested in reporting events and/or conditions that occurred in the past. An attempt is made to establish facts in order to arrive at conclusions concerning past events or predict future events.

Harter and Busha defined history as “the systematic recounting of past events pertaining to the establishment, maintenance, and utilization of systematically arranged collections of recorded information or knowledge. A bibliography of a person who has, in some way, affected the development of libraries, library science, or librarianship is also considered to be part of library history. In this study, the source material used as the writing is in the form of Books, magazines, newspaper, articles, scholarly journals, encyclopaedias, and research reports.

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***The Historical background***

Most of the leaders behind Indonesia’s transnational militant organizations are young Islamist who became acquainted with various transnational ideas and experiences through their interactions with members of the global *ummah* (or Muslim community). Some of them participated in the global jihad in Afghanistan, where they made contacts with jihadist fighters from different parts of the world and explored ideas and ideologies in an environment based on the ethos of jihad. This experience stimulated their spirit of combat as well as their militant opposition to what they perceived as the Western-inspired secular tyranny threatening the Muslim world. Extolling the slogan *al-amr bi’l-ma’ruf wa nahy ‘an’l-munkar* (a Qur’anic phrase meaning “enjoining good and opposing vice”), they sought to frame their discourse and activism by placing the domestic issues of Indonesian Islam more coherently within the context of global conflicts in the Muslim world. The emerging radical Islamist groups attempted to mobilize their members to stage protest against what they claimed to be the enemies of Islam who were perceived as destroying the supremacy of the *shari’a*.

### ***The Ideology of Jama’ah Islamiyah***

As with all radical organization, religious study is an integral part of the training and indoctrination process in *Jama’ah Islamiyah* (JI). The Singapore Government’s White Paper describes this process in the case of JI recruitment: The *first* stage involves religious classes organized for a general audience. A JI teacher would employ the tactic of inserting into their lectures quotations from the Qur’an and hadith discussing jihad and the plight of Muslims. *The second*, stage involves identifying those who want to find out more about the plight of Muslims in other areas, such as Bosnia, the Moluccas, and Mindanao. Those would be

engaged in a more intense and focused discussion, and those who were deemed suitable were invited to join the organization. Esoteric language and code names are then used in the indoctrination process, which helps to create a strong sense of group identity and commitment (Jakarta Post, 2002).

A second source of ideology was the Middle Eastern Islamic radicalism. Contacting with *Jama'ah al-Islamiyah*, a terrorist splinter group of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood could have influenced the Indonesian radicals to move beyond the goal of an Islamic state in Indonesia to the concept of a pan-Islamic caliphate (ICG, 2003). The third and most decisive source of ideology was the Afghan Jihad and the influence of Afghan war veterans, of whom Hambali was the most prominent, but by no means the only one. The Afghan connection infused the organization with the al-Qaeda concept of the global jihad and its method of terrorist attacks against U.S. and Western targets. (Ahmed, Umrani, Qureshi & Samad, 2016; Ali & Haseeb, 2019; Haseeb, Abidin, Hye, & Hartani, 2018; Haseeb., 2019; Suryanto, Haseeb, & Hartani, 2018).

### ***Goals of Jamaah Islamiyah (JI)***

The goals of *Jamaah Islamiyah* in seven stages (ICG, 2003).

- (1) Formation and development of a *Jamaah Islamiyah* (which within the document it more clearly defines as a *jamaah min-al-Muslimin* - a *jemaah* within the larger Islamic world)
- (2) Developing the strength of *Jamaah Islamiyah*
- (3) Using the strength of the *Jamaah Islamiyah* (through *dakwah* and *jihad*)
- (4) Establishing the Islamic State
- (5) Organizing the Islamic State
- (6) Strengthening the Islamic state
- (7) Coordinating and collaborating with other Islamic states to re-establish the Caliphate.

### ***Structure of Jamah Islamiyah***

The head of *Jamaah Islamiyah*, *amir* (Abdullah Sungkar), is alleged to have given *bai'at* to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden (ICG, 2003). The *amir* is supported by four councils:

- (1) The *Qiyadah* (Leadership) Council, consisting of the leadership of three other councils:
  - a. The *Qiyadah Markaziyah* (Central Leadership) Council
  - b. The *Qiyadah Mantiqiyah* (Territorial Leadership) Council
  - c. The *Qiyadah Wakalah* (Representative Leadership) Council



- (2) The *Syuro* (Consultative) Council (seven members)
- (3) The *Fatwa* (Legal Advice) Council
- (4) The *Hisbah* (Internal Judiciary) Council.

### ***Strategic Importance of Sulawesi***

Geographically, the island of Sulawesi is the natural logistical supply and trading route between the southern Philippines and Indonesia; either indirectly via ports in East Kalimantan or directly through ports in northern Sulawesi (ICG, 2001:18-19). Probably for this reason the Jamaah Islamiyah had included Sulawesi, as well as all of Borneo along with the southern Philippines in Mantiqi III, which it created in 1997. Northern Sulawesi, however, is a largely Christian area, whereas Southern Sulawesi is primarily Muslim, while Central Sulawesi, the Palu-Poso corridor that cuts through the middle of the island, is a mixed Muslim-Christian region, and Poso, on the east coast of Sulawesi, is a natural jumping-off point for supporting military operations in Maluku. Like Maluku, although Christians and Muslims in Sulawesi have lived harmoniously for centuries, following the collapse of the Suharto regime in May 1998, outbreaks of Christian-Muslim violence in central Sulawesi have become increasingly common. Unlike Maluku, however, there was no discernible separatist movement among the Christians of Sulawesi. The central issues centred around land disputes and competition among the militias of various contending political strongmen, but also resentment toward the large numbers of recent transmigrants from other parts of Indonesia, especially Java, that had settled in Sulawesi with the encouragement of the Suharto regime.

### ***Government Intervention (The Malino Accords)***

In early December, additional police and army units sent to Sulawesi “to protect vulnerable areas”, separate the two sides, conducting mobile patrols, and securing roads (Human Right Watch, 2002). At the same time, a high-level delegation was appointed to open negotiations with the conflicting parties in an effort to end the fighting. The delegation was headed by the Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, retired General Susilo Bambang Yudoyono (later elected President of Indonesia in September 2004), and Coordinating Minister for Public Welfare, Yusuf Kalla (later elected Vice President of Indonesia in 2004). A key role was played by Kalla, a native of Makassar in southern Sulawesi, where he was the owner of large Toyota auto dealership that would become the target of a *Laskar Jundullah* retaliation one year later, on December 5, 2002 (ICG, 2001: 13).

The result of this effort was the so-called Malino Declaration (Human Right Watch, 2002:25-26) signed by various leaders involved in the central Sulawesi conflict on December 20,



2001, in the South Sulawesi resort town of Malino. Satisfied with the process, the two ministers went on to apply it in Maluku, reaching the so-called Malino II Agreement on February 12, 2002 (Malino II Agreement, 2002; Nxumalo & Naidoo 2018). Although the two parallel agreements succeeded in reducing the level of violence in both conflict areas, they did not eliminate it altogether. A feature of the negotiation process was the inclusion of only local leaders of both sides and the exclusion of the outside groups, whom all agreed should be disarmed, but who were permitted to continue residing in the conflict zones. This last provision was sufficient to gain the acquiescence of *Lasar Jihad* and *Jamaah Islamiyah* leaders, the latter having come to see Poso as fertile ground for the building of a new *al-qaeda-al-aminah* (secure base), “a refuge much like that which Medina became for the Prophet” in early Islamic history and as called for in the PUPJI document. A period of peace would facilitate this development.

## Conclusion

Indonesian is generally associated with a peaceful and tolerant form of Islam. However, the recent rise in militant Islamist groups in post-Suharto Indonesia, and the alleged links of some of these groups to Southeast Asian terrorist network, the *Jamaah Islamiyah* (JI), raises concerns. This paper assesses the current status of networking radical Islamic discourse in Indonesia, in general, and Indonesian Islamic militant groups, in particular, examining their impact on Indonesia’s socio-political and conflict dynamics. Indonesian Islam is seen as increasingly infused with transnational Islam and does not currently pose a significant threat to Indonesia’s security, as many have shifted their strategy of violent jihad toward nonviolent Islamic missionary work and grassroots “Islamization from below.”

The collapse of Suharto’s regime and Indonesia’s transition towards democracy gave impetus to the emergence of various radical Islamic groups competing for the liberated public sphere. The most radical among these groups, the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI), the *Laskar Jihad* (LJ), *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI), *Laskar Jundullah* (Lasjud), and *Jamaah Islamiyah* (JI), rejected participation in the existing system, calling instead for violent jihad. The radical and militant group’s success, waging jihad in Indonesia’s conflict areas, paralleled the phenomenal development of the Islamic media in the country, which played a crucial role in disseminating propaganda and directing public opinion. The pressures of the Indonesian government and pro-democracy Muslim groups against violent Islamic discourse and jihadist activism, however, have gradually forced the radical Islamic groups to leave behind their high profile politics and shift towards a strategy of implementing the *shari’a* from the grassroots level. No longer seeing violent jihad as a relevant means for realizing their goals, many groups now argue that *da’wa* is more appropriate to foster Indonesian Muslim’s





awareness of their duty to uphold the supremacy of the *shari'a*. These groups also believe that nonviolent endeavours are more suitable to Indonesia's current situation and are crucial to defending Muslim solidarity and the long-term struggle for comprehensive Islamic order.

The implications of this policy are as follows. *First*: organizationally, Indonesia's radical Islamic groups are largely broken, their leaders and members are mired in debates and conflicts. However, as social movements, embedded in interpersonal networks and informal nodes of activism, they retain deep roots and visions of establishing an Islamic state. Some seek to consolidate themselves by fanning the flames of sensitive Islamic issues, but they have to first confront the Indonesian government and the pro-democracy alliances that firmly reject jihadist. *Second*, the one hope for the radical Islamic groups depends on the mushrooming *da'wa* groups which designate Indonesia's youth as the main target for Islamizing society at the individual level. Although such groups seemingly delegitimize the jihadists' struggle, their growing influence among youths no doubt broadens the Islamic constituencies that can potentially be drawn into jihadist orbits. This is an accountability and systemic campaign for democracy and human rights.

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