Will jihadist-salafism present a security challenge to law and order in Indonesia in the next ten years?

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MAY 2016
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Abstract

This paper addresses the question of whether jihadist-salafism, an extreme and violent wing of militant Sunni Islam, will present a security challenge to law and order in Indonesia in the next ten years. It acknowledges that the Indonesian government has made great strides against jihadi-salafists but that their threat arguably poses a greater challenge than at any time in Indonesia’s history, as recently demonstrated in the Jakarta attacks of January 2016.

The paper articulates the link between ideology and violence within the jihadi-salafist movement and charts its penetration into Indonesia. It outlines some policy and operational responses that would assist the Indonesian government to successfully mitigate the challenges posed by jihadi-salafists. The paper concludes that if it makes the right decisions in the years ahead, Indonesia may well emerge stronger at home and abroad, respected for leading the way against a global threat.
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Introduction

Jihadist-salafism, an extreme and violent wing of militant Sunni Islam, currently presents a serious security challenge to law and order in Indonesia, as recently demonstrated in the Jakarta attacks of January 2016. Indeed, global events since the September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington suggest the Indonesian government will need to invest considerable effort in tackling jihadist-salafism in the next ten years and beyond.

This paper will explain what jihadist-salafism is, and its rise since the events of September 2001. It will address the link between ideology and violence within the jihadi-salafist movement and chart its penetration into Indonesia. The security challenge to law and order will be defined and discussed before the paper outlines some policy and operational responses that would assist the Indonesian government to successfully mitigate the challenges posed by jihadi-salafists.

What is jihadist-salafism?

Jihadist-salafism emphasises the importance of returning to a ‘pure’ form of Islam, that of the Salaf, the pious ancestors. Further, this ideology propagates the notion that violent jihad (or struggle) is a personal religious duty. Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the respective leaders of al Qa’ida and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), can be categorised as jihadi-salafists. In Indonesia, there are a number of other groups that pre-date the infiltration of ISIL, which also subscribe to the jihadist-salafism ideology, including Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid and Mujahidin Indonesia Timur.

What is a ‘security challenge to law and order’?

There is dense theoretical debate about what ‘security’ means in international relations and many versions are values laden, representing one political view or another. For the purposes of this paper, the context in which security will be used is the ability for a state to maintain control of its territorial borders, provide a decent level of services for its people, such as health and education, sustain a functioning economy, and maintain law and order. A key component of a secure state, therefore, is its ability to maintain law and order. This requires the state to effectively regulate the conduct of its citizens and, in return, provide the basic arrangements that allow it to protect the life and property of those citizens.

Jihadist-salafism’s theological justification for violence

Jihadist-salafism promotes revolutionary violence to establish a caliphate (or Islamic state). In other words, the jihadi-salafists believe they are authorised to commit violent acts in the name of Islam. Further, jihadist-salafism challenges Western norms and liberal democratic values, and its followers reject religious and moral pluralism.

To be clear, this is not an assertion that Islam and democracy are incompatible in Indonesia or elsewhere. Indeed, since 1998, Indonesia has demonstrated that a majority-Muslim nation can be democratic. Islam and democracy are not mutually exclusive. However, this paper argues that jihadist-salafism is a manifestation of Islamic practice—an extremely dangerous and pervasive manifestation—and one that poses challenges for any nation-state, democratic or otherwise. If coupled with tribal, ethnic or geo-political divisions, as is often the case, it is even more dangerous.

The preceding paragraph argues that jihadist-salafism provides a theological justification for violence. However, as British Prime Minister David Cameron stated in a speech on extremism in July 2015, ‘you don’t have to support violence to subscribe to certain intolerant ideas which
create a climate in which extremists can flourish'. He went on to say that ‘the extremist world view is the gateway, and violence is the ultimate destination’. There is a certain logic to this assertion by Prime Minister Cameron, that is:

No-one becomes a terrorist from a standing start. It starts with a process of radicalization. When you look in detail at the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were first influenced by what some would call non-violent extremists.

What this means for Indonesia is that not only the violent jihadi-salafists require attention from authorities but so do those who promote the ideology.

**Jihadist-salafism in Indonesia**

Islam was introduced into Indonesia by traders from India and the Middle East more than 700 years ago. It was an accommodating form of Islam and blended with local customs. It has become known as ‘Archipelago Islam’ or Islam *Nusantara* and was initially influenced by Hinduism and ancient Javanese religions. At the end of the 19th century, waves of ‘reformist’ conservative Islam came from the Middle East seeking to ‘modernise’ Islam in Indonesia.

That has produced a tension between a local, more tolerant Islam and an imported, conservative and pious Islam. Since Indonesian independence in 1945, the tension has often resulted in a violent radical fringe seeking the imposition of *sharia* law. Over the last 20 years, in particular, conservative Islam has increased in importance in the daily lives of many Indonesians, whether this is reflected in the increasing popularity of Islamic dress or growing sales of Islamic literature. Strikingly, this same period of increasing adherence to imported Middle Eastern practices has witnessed a number of murderous jihadi-salafist attacks.

*JI*, arguably the most well-known Indonesian jihadi-salafist group, was responsible for a string of attacks in the 2000s, including the Bali bombings of 2002 that killed over 200 people, as well as many other attacks, including on Christian churches across the country, and the Marriot Hotel and Australian Embassy in Jakarta. Following these attacks, Indonesian authorities had some success in cracking down on jihadi-salafist groups, and Indonesia experienced several years of relative calm, not least because *JI* apparently had renounced violence in 2007 and wanted its followers to focus on religious outreach and education.

However, since the rise of ISIL in Syria and Iraq, Indonesian authorities have again had cause to worry about the jihadi-salafists in their midst. Notably the January 2016 attack on a Starbucks café in Jakarta by a suicide bomber and the related shootings that day appear to have links to ISIL. Thus, in addition to *JI*, which may still have violent intentions notwithstanding its recent peaceful hiatus, Indonesia now must face the prospect of increasing attacks by ISIL-linked or -inspired groups. Furthermore, *JI* and ISIL are not the only jihadi-salafist groups operating in Indonesia. Notably, *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* and *Mujahidin Indonesia Timur* have committed lethal attacks on police since 2011.

**The effects of jihadist-salafism on Indonesia’s nascent democracy**

The Indonesian state is founded on a philosophical concept known as *Pancasila*, which is based on five principles that can be summarised as promoting religious and cultural freedoms, human rights and social justice. Since the 1998 pro-democracy street demonstrations that led to the fall of the military-backed, authoritarian Suharto regime, Indonesia has transitioned to democracy and is considered to provide a glowing example of a majority-Muslim nation transitioning from dictatorship to democracy. In the year of the Arab Spring in 2011, then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made this very point.

While there is no inherent bias in Muslim-majority nations against democracy, a moderate and tolerant version of Islam is key. *Pancasila* provides the framework for such moderation in an Indonesian context, noting that extremists can undermine any democracy. Therefore, when analysing the threats posed by jihadi-salafists in Indonesia, it is important to consider what effect, if any, there is on *Pancasila* and democracy when there is an overlap of beliefs between
violent and non-violent groups, beliefs such as a desire to implement sharia law or the establishment of a caliphate. To draw this out further, should democracy start to falter, perhaps undermined from within by so-called non-violent groups, governance may weaken and, in turn, the ability for the state to maintain law and order may suffer.

There are two jihadist-salafism challenges that threaten to undermine law and order in the years ahead, these being the influence and infiltration of ISIL, and jihadi-salafists in prisons.

**The influence and infiltration of ISIL**

The existence of ISIL has had an invigorating effect on jihadist-salafism in Southeast Asia, raising fears about more violence, shifting tactics and the potential for new cross-border alliances. Estimates of how many foreign fighters have left Indonesia to fight with ISIL in Syria and Iraq vary. Sidney Jones, a Southeast Asia security expert who specialises in the study of terrorist groups in Indonesia, has suggested the number was most likely 250 to 300 as at January 2016, albeit some of these have been killed and many do not intend to return to Indonesia.

Since June 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced his caliphate, a number of Indonesians—like many jihadi-salafists from all over the world—have been drawn to Syria and Iraq believing the Middle East is the place where they can best defend and expand the caliphate. The Internet and social media have been important in drawing these fighters from Indonesia but face-to-face recruitment from within groups that existed before the formation of ISIL has been critical.

While it is difficult for Indonesian foreign fighters to return home, estimates as of late 2015 suggest around 60 may have already done so. This figure could increase markedly if ISIL’s leadership in Syria and Iraq tasked members of its Indonesian cadre to return home. Their leadership credentials, ideological commitment and combat experience would pose a high-level of threat to law and order in Indonesia. In any event, the Indonesian Police believe the January 2016 Jakarta attacks were masterminded from Syria by Bahrun Maim, an Indonesian previously convicted of terrorism in Indonesia—thus demonstrating that ISIL can reach in from afar and motivate home-based jihadi-salafists to murder.

**The problem of jihadi-salafists in prisons**

Prisons in Indonesia have proved a breeding ground for jihadi-salafists. This has occurred due to corruption, overcrowding, limited intelligence gathering and poorly-trained and -paid staff. Indeed, the grave law-and-order challenges posed by releasing convicted terrorists back into the community, possibly more radicalised than when they entered, was on display during the recent Jakarta attacks. Police have confirmed that not only was the mastermind a former convicted terrorist operating out of Raqqa (Syria) but the financier was released from prison in 2012 and is also in Syria; moreover, one of the attackers had only been released from prison in 2015.

This event raises a series of questions about these men and the operation they carried out, as well as broader policy questions about radicalisation in prisons. These questions include but are not limited to what contact with jihadi-salafists did each of the three have when in prison; if they had contact with jihadi-salafists, was it being monitored and why was it allowed? Also, what, if any threat assessments are done prior to the release of convicted terrorists, and what ongoing monitoring and intelligence activities do Indonesian police undertake once a convicted terrorist is released from prison?

**How can Indonesia respond to these challenges?**

As the country with the world’s largest population of Muslims—and a rare example where a majority-Muslim nation has embraced democracy—how Indonesia addresses the rise of ISIL, and jihadist-salafism generally, is important to Indonesia and the international community at large. Since September 2001 and the declaration by President George W. Bush of a global war on terror, successive Indonesian governments have been careful not to appear to be doing the bidding of Western nations when tackling jihadist-salafism, and not to appear as anti-Islam generally.
Yet Indonesian presidents have nevertheless been able to argue strongly that jihadi-salafists pose a threat to Indonesia. Further, some of Indonesia’s largest religious organisations have added their weight to campaigns against jihadist-salafism, arguing that this ideology is alien to Indonesia’s Islamic traditions. Indonesian authorities are, therefore, well placed to continue the fight against jihadist-salafism. However, a larger question arises, that is, is Indonesia confident enough to do more than fight jihadist-salafism within its own borders but go further and inspire Muslims throughout the world to practise a more tolerant version of Islam, an ‘Archipelago Islam’, instead of the version being offered by the likes of al Qaeda and ISIL? The answer to this question will unfold over the next decade and beyond.

A paper of this size cannot describe in adequate detail the panoply of responses required by the Indonesian government to combat jihadist-salafism. Nevertheless, there are three broad areas where Indonesia should continue to invest further time, intellectual endeavour and resources if it is to maintain law and order and ultimately defeat jihadist-salafism. They are strong and nuanced policy and legal responses, including tackling the ideology itself; robust and clearly-delineated police, corrective services and military responses; and an enhanced diplomatic effort in Southeast Asia and beyond.

The legal, policy and ideological responses

Adam Fenton and David Price assess that Indonesia’s legal and policy response to the threat of jihadist-salafism has been slow and piecemeal. Indonesia has not given its police the same level of intrusive powers as many other countries, including Malaysia, the US and France. Further, no laws have yet been passed to outlaw support for jihadist-salafism, and it appears that authorities are limited in relation to the actions they can take when ISIL supporters conduct rallies or meet at mosques. Indonesia needs to react sooner rather than later to put in place a strong legal and policy framework to tackle jihadist-salafism.

The operational response of the Indonesian police, corrective services and military

While Indonesia’s national police counter-terrorism unit, Detachment 88, has had operational successes against both JI and ISIL, it has an immensely challenging job and less legislated powers compared to police forces elsewhere. The corrective services authorities in Indonesia also have a myriad of challenges, not least the training and professionalism of their workforce; there is also room to exercise greater controls over the activities of inmates. Finally, the Indonesian military needs to complement the police in the area of counter-terrorism. This is especially important for an emerging democracy, not long out of the grip of military dictatorship, that needs to maintain social harmony.

International cooperation and diplomacy

Jihadist-salafism is an international problem that crosses borders and threatens many nations. Therefore, Indonesia would benefit from cooperating more closely with other countries in Southeast Asia and further abroad as well. Cooperation can take many forms, such as the sharing of operational information and intelligence on target groups and individuals. Enhanced cooperation between national financial intelligence units to stop the flow of terrorist funding is also important. Indonesia already does some of this but further efforts would benefit Indonesia itself and its international partners.

Conclusion

The Indonesian government has made great strides against jihadi-salafists but faces considerable challenges. While there was a brief lull in attacks after 2007, jihadi-salafists are active again and arguably pose a greater challenge than at any time in Indonesia’s history. Not only do home-grown groups and al Qaeda affiliates endure but ISIL has a following that appears to be growing. Indonesian authorities need to continue their hard work to defeat jihadist-salafism, operationally, policy-wise and ideologically. Imprisoning individuals and degrading the more violent groups will not be enough to confront the poisonous ideology.
The spread of the ideology must be contained, and failure to do this will result in more attacks, more deaths and law and order will be undermined. The stability of the state and the principles of Pancasila may even be threatened. Events in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia provide an important warning for Indonesia. Yet the future need not be viewed from only a negative perspective. There are opportunities in this fight, as in any war, and if it makes the right decisions in the years ahead, Indonesia may well emerge stronger at home and abroad, respected as a young democracy that is leading the way against a global threat.

Notes


2 Jones, A Persistent Threat, p. 2.

3 Also known as Islamic State, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham.


7 Jonathan Russell and Alex Theodosiou, Counter-Extremism: a decade on from 7/7, Quilliam: London, 2015, p. 20.


11 Cameron, ‘Extremism’, p. 4.

12 Cameron, ‘Extremism’, p. 4.


16 Bubalo and Fealy, ‘Joining the caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia’, p. 6.


26 Jones, ‘Understanding the ISIS threat in Southeast Asia’, p. 2.

27 Fealy and Funston, Indonesian and Malaysian Support for the Islamic State, p. 1.

28 Carl Ungerer, ‘Scale of propaganda is real challenge’, The Australian, 18 January 2016; Fealy and Funston, Indonesian and Malaysian Support for the Islamic State, p. 20.


30 Alford, ‘Islamic State-aligned mastermind of Jakarta terror attacks revealed’.


32 Alford, ‘Islamic State-aligned mastermind of Jakarta terror attacks revealed’; Brummitt and Rahadiana, ‘Jokowi under pressure to revamp terror laws after Jakarta attack’.


Brummitt and Rahadiana, ‘Jokowi under pressure to revamp terror laws after Jakarta attack’.


Brummitt and Rahadiana, ‘Jokowi under pressure to revamp terror laws after Jakarta attack’.


Chalk, ‘Black flag rising’, p. 17.


